

FAULKNER'S USE OF APERTURE
IMAGERY IN ABSALOM, ABSALOM!



JEAN PINSON ASKEW

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IN ABSALOM, ABSALOM!

An Abstract
Presented to
the Graduate Council of
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In Partial Fulfillment
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Master of Arts

by
Jean Pinson Askew
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ABSTRACT

William Faulkner uses door, gate, and window images to an extraordinary degree in his writing. Little note has been taken of them by critics, but close reading of Faulkner reveals that they contribute to structure, style, and meaning in many of his works, and are especially effective in Absalom, Absalom!.

The apertures function as both accesses and barriers, a dual role lending them ambivalence, ambiguity, or paradox. These qualities complement Faulkner's literary style as well as the multiple points of view employed in the novel; this technique allows only brief glimpses of actual fact and character, while insinuating much, and withholding more. Their ambiguity also makes the images relevant to the author's basic theme of "the human heart in conflict with itself," and to such major themes in Absalom, Absalom! as the denial of the "Central I-AM," the influence of the past on the present, and the theme of "communal blood." All of these themes involve ideas of both barrier and access, which doors, gates, and windows appropriately symbolize.

In addition to complementing style, technique, and theme in Absalom, Absalom!, aperture images, particularly doors, can symbolize a person, group, or way of life; and

Faulkner's characters can reveal personality traits and states of mind through the actions involving them. The images also provide focal points for the development of plot; these often contribute simultaneously to setting or effect.

An intriguing aspect of a close study of the images involves the emergence of typical patterns in Faulkner's use of them. Certain incidents relating to one or more of the images are repeated, with variations, by several characters in Absalom, Absalom!, or time after time by a single character. Some of these meaningful and consistent incidents form parallels within the novel, giving unity to its structure; others parallel actions within the wider context of the Faulkner mythology.

Reasonable assumptions afford possible explanations for Faulkner's generally wide use of aperture imagery; and an analysis of the text shows how--and how effectively--he uses these images in Absalom, Absalom!. Faulkner's full exploitation of aperture imagery in Absalom, Absalom! helps to heighten interest and drama, to unify the novel, and to demonstrate the author's command of patterned detail within an overall design.

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Jean Pinson Askew entitled "Faulkner's Use of Aperture Imagery in Absalom, Absalom!". I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

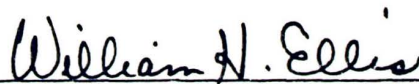

Major Professor

We have read this thesis and
recommend its acceptance:


Second Committee Member


Third Committee Member

Accepted for the Graduate
Council:


Dean of the Graduate School

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Images of doors, gates, and windows appear in William Faulkner's writing frequently and with significance; he makes wide and effective use of them in the Yoknapatawpha series, the early novels representing some of his best work. Beginning with Sartoris (1929), the first of the series, they serve as versatile tools in the construction of his fictive county. He widens their application as he enlarges on his Southern scene in the novels that follow: The Sound and the Fury (1929), As I Lay Dying (1930), Sanctuary (1931), and Light in August (1932); and he fully exploits their potential in Absalom, Absalom! (1936) as devices which complement the style and subject matter of the novel and unify its structure.

Absalom, Absalom! represents Faulkner's most extensive use of aperture imagery, with doors in particular given sufficient significance to make them integral to the work. In a simplistic sense, the novel tells the story of the door at Sutpen's Hundred; the chronicle of the door's origins, useful years, and eventual destruction both parallels and symbolizes those of Thomas Sutpen, the Southern planters who were his models, and the South itself. However, Absalom, Absalom! is not a simple story, but a

complex novel with universal applications, and in it Faulkner employs apertures with subtle skill, not only to symbolize a person, group, or way of life, but variously throughout the novel--in plot, theme, setting, effect, and characterization--where they function to draw the meaning together, often through consistent and interrelated patterns of use.

The paradoxical nature of these apertures--they function as both access and barrier--is consistent with the paradox observable at many levels within Faulkner's work, to some critics, even within the man himself. This ambiguous quality also gives the images added symbolic and connotative potential, which increases their value to the author as a literary tool.

Ambiguity also makes these images very appropriate to Faulkner's style and technique in this novel. In their ambivalent roles as both access and barrier, they have elements in common with the limited revelations of character and action he permits the reader. The gradual accretion of factual information gleaned from the long sentences, and from the stories told out of chronological order and by four different narrators, is gained with difficulty and from a distance, as if seen briefly through a window, or heard from behind a door.

The structure of the novel achieves unity through the repetition of parallel or contrasting images involving doors, gates, and windows. For example, the opening

paragraphs of all chapters but one feature aperture imagery which alternates between the doors and windows of Rosa's house and Quentin's window at Harvard.

At the level of plot, aperture images function as focal points for the successive stages of Thomas Sutpen's "design" for his life, beginning at the white front door of the Virginia planter and ending with his death outside the door to Wash's cabin. Afterwards, they continue to serve as a framework for the remainder of the narrative action. Some of these images also contribute to setting or effect: the cold Massachusetts air which comes into Quentin's Harvard window calls up vivid memories of a contrasting setting--a hot and dusty night in Mississippi; and in an image series fostering an effect of terror, the child Rosa hovers just outside the door of her sister's room.

The foremost theme of Absalom, Absalom!, a prevailing one in much of Faulkner's work, involves the hunger to be minimally recognized. The nature of the "Central I-AM" encompasses both the desire for communication or access between human beings and the barriers which prevent this access. Faulkner plays on the functional ambiguity of apertures in presenting both aspects of the theme. In addition, the close ties of his Southern characters to their traditions, environment, and families conflict with the ever-present barriers of caste, color, and too-close kinship, setting up tensions which

make his enveloping theme of "the human heart in conflict with itself" inevitable. The paradoxical nature of aperture imagery aptly expresses the paradox inherent in such circumstances, just as it does for such themes as the influence of the past on the present and "communal blood," a phrase often used in Absalom, Absalom!, which emphasizes the strength of family ties.

Patterns in the use of aperture imagery emerge in Absalom, Absalom! through repetition of significant interactions of characters with doors, gates, and windows. Although relevant at other levels of the novel, the primary purpose of these images is to characterize the people involved. Faulkner's characters demonstrate their convictions, their emotions, and the changes they are undergoing by their typical and consistent actions with or reactions to apertures. Faulkner attaches no unique or startling significance to these actions, attributing to them only the ordinary meanings they hold for any writer or any reader; but the frequency of their occurrence and the maintained consistency of significance make them notable.

Faulkner employs four principal character-action patterns in the Yoknapatawpha series. The first consists of the retreat behind a door or window for a temporary or permanent haven from the world; typical of Rosa Coldfield, among others, it indicates weakness of some sort. An extraordinary use of apertures makes up a second pattern,

most commonly involving the substitution of a window for a door, but also including other unusual actions such as the locking in of oneself or another, as Mr. Coldfield does. This pattern indicates high emotion, desperation, or a character's difference from the norm: the family, the group, or society in general. A third pattern typifies Thomas Sutpen and consists of the taking of a stand before a gate or door. It signifies courage, self-assurance, bravado and pride.

Faulkner probably attaches most importance in Absalom, Absalom! to the aperture image pattern consisting of the approach toward a door or gate, with subsequent acceptance or rejection. The approach typically includes variations on a rhetorically dramatic four- or five-part series involving some or all of the following: gates, drive, walkway, steps, porch, and door. More than any other pattern the approach interrelates plot, theme, and character and helps to unify the novel's structure through its varied recurrence. The taking of a stand and the approach are usage patterns not noticeable in earlier works, apparently originating with Absalom, Absalom! and peculiarly appropriate to it as expressions of pride and paradox.

Faulkner typically uses the aperture as a frame or backdrop; with it he makes striking dramatic accents of certain incidents. The device appears in Absalom, Absalom! and heightens the interest and drama of the novel. The

concept of the forbidden door also heightens the mystery, temptation, and fascination of the taboo and lures several of the novel's characters.

All aperture images rely for meaning on the inherent roles of access and barrier, but a widely accepted range of connotation and implication is equally important to their literary usefulness. To these Faulkner gives his own stamp, from Sartoris onward. Close reading reveals that aperture images help to express a Southern point of view while retaining universal connotations. It also reveals the differing significance he typically attributes to each aperture.

To Faulkner, windows seem to imply personal, rather than public values, and qualities traditionally thought of as feminine. At once concealing and revealing, they connote luxury, beauty, the senses, the imagination, and the emotions; they infer dreamy, reflective thought rather than action.

Doors have somewhat masculine characteristics and connotations. More centrally placed in a house or building than windows and more solid, they function as its single most important aperture, intended primarily for purposeful use rather than for ornamentation and reflection. The door publicly projects the character of its owner for society's judgment. It comprises his main avenue of communication with the world, while at the same time representing his right to the inviolable privacy

behind it.

As extenuations of doors, gates carry door-functions to extremes. They call up vaguely threatening connotations of confinement, exclusion, and challenge, and represent the extent and power of authority. A man's gate is the highly visible evidence of the mark he has made on the world.

In addition to concepts of function and connotation noted above, apertures symbolize man's pride: pride of possession, of position, and of power. Such symbols have particular appropriateness to Absalom, Absalom! because the subject of pride lies always so near the surface of the novel. Driven by pride, Thomas Sutpen achieves heroic stature; many of his interactions with apertures reinforce this image. Other characters demonstrate pride by involving apertures in a variety of arbitrary ways.

In his most subtle use of aperture images, Faulkner merely implies them. Forms of verbs meaning to watch, to enter or exit, and to seclude or exclude appear frequently in Absalom, Absalom! and closely associate characters with apertures, in the mind of the reader, though the author does not name them. Along with the four character-action patterns discussed earlier, these verbs define characters chiefly as spectators, participants, recluses or prisoners, by describing character-interaction with implied apertures.

This paper proposes to examine the scope and

variety of Faulkner's use of aperture imagery in Absalom, Absalom!. It also cites earlier works to point out Faulkner's typical uses of doors, gates, and windows, and notes the heavy concentration of their usage in this novel. It suggests a combination of given conditions which make them viable images for his purposes, and analyzes the meaning of certain patterns of repeated actions involving apertures. It concludes that these images are peculiarly appropriate to Absalom, Absalom!, and that Faulkner's full exploitation of them at many levels of the work heightens interest and drama, unifies the novel, and demonstrates the author's command of patterned detail within an overall design.

Chapter II, "Background," refers to occurrences of door, gate, and window images in earlier works and proposes some reasons for Faulkner's liberal use of them. Both Chapter III, "Thomas Sutpen and His Design," emphasizing plot, and Chapter IV, "Rosa and Others," emphasizing characterization, elaborate on the variety of Faulkner's other uses of aperture imagery, including the patterns of image usage noted in this chapter. Chapter V contains a summary of conclusions.

Chapter II

BACKGROUND

Several conditions combine to make doors, gates, and windows useful images for Faulkner. Certain aspects of the Southern life he writes about lend themselves quite naturally to the use of aperture imagery. One of these aspects is the close relationship of the people with the land and the outdoors. Faulkner says, "[The South's] the only really authentic region in the United States, because a deep indestructible bond still exists between man and his environment."¹

It certainly exists in Yoknapatawpha County and the people he created. In The Sound and the Fury, Quentin Compson's bond with the environment is strong; it is so natural for him to be outdoors that he spends the last full day of his life wandering through the Massachusetts countryside, and as he does so he notes the differences between the delicacy of spring in Massachusetts and its lushness in Mississippi. He thinks,

¹"Interview with Loic Bouvard (1952)," Bulletin de l'association amicale universitaire France-Amerique (January 1954), trans., Henry Dan Piper, rpt. in Modern Fiction Studies, 5 (Winter 1959-60), rpt. in James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, eds., Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962 (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 72.

Only our country was not like this country. There was something about just walking through it. A kind of still and violent fecundity that satisfied ever [sic] bread-hunger like. Flowing around you, not brooding and nursing every niggard stone. Like it were put to makeshift for enough green to go around among the trees and even the blue of distance not that rich chimaera.²

Southerners, especially of Faulkner's time, live more intimately with their environment--the land and the weather--than do other Americans, simply because it is pleasant outdoors in the South over a longer season, often more pleasant than indoors. Consequently their doors and windows play a more important part in daily life, in the role of access to the outdoors.

The economy of Faulkner's area--both the actual and the fictive--largely depends on the environment, and strengthens the Southerner's bond with it. Many of the people work the land, and people from every stratum of Yoknapatawpha County know about crops and their cycles. Rich soil and high humidity combine to promote not only crop growth but the proliferation of trees, vines, and flowers, whose fragrance and blossoms figure importantly in many Faulkner works. In his writing Faulkner emphasizes the fecundity of the land and the softness and warmth of the climate, often linking them with human sexuality, as in Quentin's musings about spring. Hardly anyone remains

²William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury (New York: Modern Library, 1946), p. 132.

immune to the sensual influences coming in from outside. In As I Lay Dying, Darl Bundren luxuriates in the feel of soft night air on his naked skin, as the summer breeze flows through the open windows.³

The open windows in all the houses of Yoknapatawpha County allow for free passage of moonlight, soft air, the song of mockingbirds, and the aroma of honeysuckle and wistaria: all the windows except Miss Rosa Coldfield's, whose sexuality is admittedly stunted and whose doors and windows have almost always stayed closed, as Faulkner makes clear in the opening paragraphs of Absalom, Absalom!.⁴

In general, Yoknapatawpha people are small-town or country people who live in easy familiarity with their environment. Their livelihood, their emotions, and the tempo of their lives are tied to the cycles of land and climate, and their open doors and windows provide access to their surroundings as their daily life moves naturally between indoors and out, and from life to death.

Faulkner's own strong sense of place, of roots and of belonging, reflects itself in a number of ways and influences his use of aperture images. He demonstrates this sense of place in his own life by choosing to live most of it where he was born, and he endows the majority of

³William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying (New York: Modern Library, 1946), p. 344.

⁴William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (New York: The Modern Library, 1951), pp. 7-8.

his characters with the same expectation. Anse Bundren expresses this attitude in typically exaggerated fashion in As I Lay Dying. He tells Addie that

the Lord put roads for travelling: why He laid them down flat on the earth. When He aims for something to be always a-moving, He makes it long ways, like a road or a horse or a wagon, but when He aims for something to stay put, He makes it up-and-down ways, like a tree or a man. (page 362)

Those people who own property tend to "stay put" in the rural South, and in Yoknapatawpha County as well; those who do not, move about only within a small area. Everybody belongs somewhere, and the transient is suspect, like Joe Christmas of Light in August, who has never belonged anywhere, who moves in and out of many doors and on occasion peers wistfully through windows from outside, but who has no door of his own.

For men without doors such as Joe Christmas, Popeye, the French architect, even Sutpen before his fortunes turn, the hat substitutes for the door as a symbol of pride or self-worth. As long as a man owns a hat which he can set upon his own head at the angle he chooses, he indicates that he has control over his existence and can cope with the world, come what may.

A feeling for "the family" is strong in the South, and a family's pride in home and land accounts in part for the Southerner's bond with the environment. The owning of land and the right to control land as one sees fit remains today as part of Southern tradition. Perhaps

a family's pride in home and land is greater in the South--and the bond more indestructible--because in many cases an ancestor "had fought for four honorable years for soil and tradition," as Faulkner writes that Sutpen had done (page 19). Also, the land has often passed down from generation to generation complete with main house and other buildings. These buildings are tangible links between past and present, and their doors and windows constitute actual and symbolic access or barrier between living family members. In The Sound and the Fury, for instance, the children observe important family events such as funerals and weddings through the windows.

In Faulkner's rural South the home is the hub of family life. The homes are widely separated, and the property's gates point up this insularity. The people care greatly about living their lives in their own way; behind their own gates they make their own rules. Their gates symbolize the boundaries of their authority.

Faulkner's grasp of physical detail demonstrates his sense of place. Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate comment on this skill:

Faulkner's details are right . . . he is a passionate and meticulous observer . . . a Southern tenant farmer . . . could find no flaw in his knowledge of country ways. . . . This kind of mastery comes as the result of a lifelong devotion to a particular scene. The writer has to contemplate the objects or persons described over a period of years . . . before he can unerringly select the

detail which will convey their essence.⁵

To "convey their essence" he frequently turns to apertures, especially doors. His own small-town and rural background in Mississippi apparently imbued him with a sense of the significance of the close relationship between a community of people and their buildings, a family and their home, a man and his door. Where a man lives, and what and where he springs from are almost inordinately important to Faulkner in defining and delineating character; in Yoknapatawpha County a man's neighbors judge him by his door.

The type of door on a house--its grandeur or lack of it, its state of repair, its customary condition of being open, closed, or locked--make comments to the world at large about the nature of its owner or the head of the house. Faulkner himself must have felt there was a very close relationship indeed between a man and his door, and his mind turned naturally to the door as a symbol for a person's face or his essence: what Faulkner terms his "Central I-AM." In Light in August, fearless do-gooder Joanna Burden's door (before Joe Christmas comes into her life) is "open to all at all times";⁶ and in the later

⁵Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate, "Commentary on 'Spotted Horses'," The House of Fiction, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), p. 332.

⁶William Faulkner, Light in August (New York: The Modern Library, 1959), p. 200.

book, Intruder in the Dust (1948), the front of Lucas Beauchamp's house, we presume the door, too, is "gray and weathered, and not so much paintless as intractable to paint."⁷ Both of these comments tell a great deal about the person living behind the door, but the actual comments are about the doors, not the people.

In addition to their importance in a Southern way of life, a second possible source of influence on Faulkner's frequent use of aperture images rises from an inherent interest in architecture; and regardless of other significance, apertures are undeniably architectural features. With affectionate attention he details for the reader the houses, barns, churches, offices, jails, and town squares of Yoknapatawpha County, and in Sanctuary and Absalom, Absalom! he describes similar sections of Memphis (Miss Reba's) and of New Orleans (the Octaroon's) primarily in terms of their doors, gates, and windows. His interest lies partly in architecture as art, design, and construction, but also in architecture as it relates to characters and situations in his narratives, such as the baffled innocence of the Snopes boys when confronted by the fancy door at Miss Reba's, and of Henry's "Puritan" reactions to the exotic and mysterious iron gate Bon leads him through. The language used in the descriptions of

⁷William Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 9.

doors, gates, and windows could almost have been written to describe the women and the way of life going on behind them; it also helps to characterize both Henry and Bon.

Faulkner's interest in architecture as art, design, and construction per se also reflects in his work. He displays a proclivity toward design in his prose at many levels, in patterns ranging from simple word repetition to the construction of a complete mythology in which shared characters and settings link several novels and stories. Taken as a whole, the four-person narration of Absalom, Absalom! is schematic and balanced, and incidents occur throughout the book, as in others, which parallel and repeat each other according to the author's overall plan, not his whim. In addition, the protagonist actually lives by a design, which in turn influences the design of the plot.

Another architectural feature, the house, is important in many Faulkner works, and can be seen as an obvious symbol in Absalom, Absalom! of the South and its disintegration. But images of doors, gates, and windows are more subtle symbols of the same phenomenon and, therefore, more appropriate to Faulkner's oblique and suggestive style. They can also represent, as houses cannot, the barriers of race and class underlying the South's collapse.

Two statements by Faulkner reveal the ambivalence present in his own feeling about the South, an

ambivalence proposed here as a third possible source of influence on his wide use of apertures, which are the embodiment of ambivalence. Faulkner says, "I love the South and hate it." He emphasizes the ambiguity which he sees in all human nature when he comments that in his writing, "I was doing the best I could to show man's soul in conflict with his evil nature or his environment."⁸ Along with pride, such ambivalence (or ambiguity, or paradox) is the underlying subject of Absalom, Absalom!. The paradox present in Faulkner's own make-up may be responsible for his sensitivity to it in given situations, and for its prevalence in his work. He reveals a quality of division in himself when he says to Jean Stein,

I seem to react violently to personal questions. If the questions are about the work, I try to answer them. When they are about me, I may answer or I may not, but even if I do, if the same question is asked tomorrow, the answer may be different.⁹

These statements indicate a natural desire for privacy, but also a willingness to deal with a problem in a way many people are incapable of bringing themselves to do:

⁸"Interviews in Japan (1955)," in Faulkner at Nagano, ed. Robert A. Jelliffe (Tokyo, 1956), rpt. in James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, eds., Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962 (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 94, 101.

⁹"William Faulkner: An Interview," Paris Review, Spring, 1956, rpt. in Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery, eds., William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1960), p. 67.

a type of double-dealing, or at least double-speaking, closely related to the ambiguity, ambivalence, paradox and oxymoron which some critics say characterize his style.

Among the critics who have commented about division or paradox in Faulkner's manner of writing or in his temperament is Walter J. Slatoff. He suggests that the self-contradiction in Faulkner's quoted remarks and written Forewords indicates "that his literary use of ambiguity may be a matter of temperament as well as of conscious artistic intent" and goes on to suggest that "the relationship between his art and temperament is a far more immediate, direct, and pervasive one than is true for most novelists."¹⁰

The foregoing comments, written during Faulkner's lifetime, are echoed in part in some very recent criticism. Malcolm Cowley, a long-time Faulkner friend and advisor, has written recently that Faulkner's works, which date from 1924 to 1962, comprise what is "truly an autobiography . . . not in their contents, which may or may not embody episodes from his life, but in their style, their structure, their changing moods."¹¹

¹⁰"The Edge of Order: The Pattern of Faulkner's Rhetoric," Twentieth Century Literature, October, 1957, rpt. in Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery, eds., William Faulkner Three Decades of Criticism (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1960), pp. 184, 198.

¹¹Review of William Faulkner: His Life and Work, by David Minter, New York Times, VII, February 22, 1981, p. 9.

Faulkner has referred to himself as "an obscurantist," and Conrad Aiken bears him out, as he comments on the correlation of style to form in Faulkner:

These queer sentences . . . parallel in a curious and perhaps inevitable way . . . the whole elaborate method of deliberately withheld meaning, of progressive and partial and delayed disclosure, which so often gives characteristic shape to the novels themselves. It is a persistent offering of obstacles, a calculated system of screens and obtrusions, of confusions and ambiguous interpolations and delays. . . .¹²

In their double role of access and barrier, doors, gates, and windows seem particularly appropriate images for representing Faulkner's "calculated system," and "ambiguous interpolations."

The aperture combination of access and barrier roles also symbolize what Faulkner has to say about the paradox inherent in the structure of the South, which helped to weaken it from the inside. He has Rosa say in Absalom, Absalom! (about Sutpen),

Oh, he was brave. I have never gainsaid that. But that our cause, our very life and future hopes and past pride, should have been thrown into the balance with men like that to buttress it--men with valor and strength but without pity or honor. Is it any wonder that Heaven saw fit to let us lose? (page 20)

¹²"William Faulkner: The Novel as Form," The Atlantic Monthly, November, 1939, rpt. in Robert Penn Warren, ed., Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966), p. 48.

Finally, these actual apertures which may be opened or closed are fitting symbols of the old universal taboos. The fascinating and forbidden doors of incest, fratricide, miscegnation, homosexuality and suicide are popular topics in Faulkner; he touches on all of them in Absalom, Absalom!.

The tracing of Faulkner's use of aperture imagery prior to Absalom, Absalom! cannot be undertaken here; some representative instances must suffice. As far back in his writing career as Sartoris, the first book of the Yoknapatawpha series, he settles on a general pattern which later becomes typical through continued use. The following incident--the first of this kind--contains a truly remarkable amount of aperture imagery description.

Old Bayard comes home from the bank and approaches his house: "Simon swung between the iron gates and into a curving drive." He goes inside, and "with the entrance behind him . . . folding doors on his right . . . opposite him checkered sunlight fell in a long slant across the door." Elnora "came in the back door." They talk, then he goes upstairs and stops in the hall as he did downstairs. There, "the western windows were closed." At the opposite end stands "a door framed by narrow windows of leaded panes of vari-colored glass . . . his mother's deathbed legacy to him, which her youngest sister had brought from Carolina in a straw-filled

hamper in '69."¹³

Eight-and-a-half pages later, Faulkner completes the story of the wild "anchovy incident" by returning to Old Bayard in the hall via this paragraph, with its heavy use of open- and closed-door images:

But the door was closed now, and what light passed through the colored panes was richly solemn. To Bayard's left was his grandson's room, the room in which his grandson's wife and her child had died last October. He stood beside this door for a moment, then he opened it quietly. The blinds were closed and the room had that breathless tranquillity of unoccupation, and he closed the door and tramped on with that heavy-footed obliviousness of the deaf and entered his own bedroom and crashed the door behind him, as was his way of shutting a door. (page 32)

Faulkner uses doors and windows in these passages frequently enough for them to be labeled a motif. In the first they serve most appropriately as an introduction to his anchovy story, and connect Aunt Jenny with it. The glass-framed door not only represents Bayard's heritage, it is his heritage, and it has been placed, symbolically, above his front door, where it looks out over the countryside, including the Sartoris land, drive, and gates already mentioned in the story.

The second passage tells what "now" is like, after the "then" of the anchovy story. The reader assumes that Bayard reflects briefly on the state of affairs in his

¹³William Faulkner, Sartoris (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1929), pp. 23-24.

family as he stands outside his grandson's door. He looks in at the unoccupied room behind it--no living great-grandchild--and "closed," not "crashed" that door; in reverence? or regret? Then he "tramped" on and "crashed" his own door--a gruff old man who is thinking of the past and coping with the present in his own way, and who is not without feeling. Doors, gates, and windows form a structural frame for the story, a literary balance; and they accent the theme of the effect of the past on the present. They also contribute to the characterization of Bayard, as well.

Another kind of frame, an actual one, appears often as a dramatic accent, one of Faulkner's favorite aperture-devices. It consists ordinarily of an aperture as a frame or backdrop for one or more characters and usually entails no action, speaking, or revelation of thought. The dramatic effect comes from the brevity of the image and from its vivid concentration within an outline. In Light in August, Gail Hightower's thoughts as he prepares for his daily vision express the visual fillip the frame gives to a scene: "Now the final copper light of afternoon fades; now the street beyond the low maples and the low signboard is prepared and empty, framed by the study window like a stage" (page 408).

An example of Faulkner's use of the dramatic accent pattern of aperture images comes from Sanctuary. It features the jail window: "Nightly the Negro murderer

leaned there, his face checkered by the shadow of the grating in the restless interstices of leaves, singing in chorus with those along the fence below."¹⁴ He repeats the image regularly throughout the book; it contributes to the build-up of tension in the story.

In "A Rose for Emily," the narrator creates a picture of Emily and her father, making no attempt to read their thoughts or to interpret the significance of their respective postures, but simply reporting them in a picture so vivid it might have been flashed on a screen:

We had long thought of them as a tableau; Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of₁₅ them framed by the back-flung front door.

The picture remains in the reader's mind, in part because it is framed by an aperture.

Faulkner uses the device of the dramatic accent for an insightful glimpse of character to great effect in Sartoris. Young Bayard, guilt-ridden and alienated from the post-war world he has come home to, searches for the stability (now missing) of his earlier life. He rides out to the McCallum place to hunt, and his last hopes seem reflected in the wistfully optimistic attitude

¹⁴William Faulkner, Sanctuary (New York: Random House, 1958), p. 122.

¹⁵William Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily," These Thirteen (New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1931), p. 172.

generated by his first sight of the house:

At last a pale and windless plume of smoke stood above the trees ahead, and he emerged from the woods and in the rambling wall of the house a window glowed with ruddy invitation across the twilight. . . . A door opened on jolly leaping flames; a figure stood squatly in it. (page 249)

About twenty pages later, the reader senses Bayard's resignation to not fitting in anywhere, when he takes his last look at the house and the two brothers standing in the doorway:

Perry moved on, and he looked back. They still stood there, quiet and grave and steadfast. . . . He looked back again. The house sprawled its rambling length in the wintry afternoon, its smoke like a balanced plume on the windless sky. The door was empty, and he shook Perry into his easy, tireless fox trot. (page 271)

Bayard moves on toward the death he seeks; and Faulkner's sense of design links these two dramatic accents with the repeated image of the windless plume of smoke, in addition to the door and window images which point up Bayard's attitudes.

In order to demonstrate the versatility of aperture imagery in Faulkner's hands, an example follows from each of the earlier books (except Sartoris, in which it does not occur) of the extraordinary use pattern--the most interesting or imaginative group. Desperation and/or desire most often characterize the pattern. It is desperation which drives Caddy's daughter, Quentin, to escape from her locked room through the window, climb

down the gutter and enter Jason's window, rob him, and escape again through the window to join her carnival-lover below, in The Sound and the Fury.

In Light in August, Lucas Burch also uses a window for a door when he finally deserts Lena. Faulkner sums up the desperation which motivates most of his characters to take this action in the following scene between Lena and Lucas:

She watched him as he looked at the window in the rear wall. Then he looked back at the closed door behind him. Then he looked at her. . . . 'I got enemies here. . . . So I am going to' . . . he went on tiptoe to the window and opened it without a sound. . . . Then he was gone, through the window, without a sound, in a single motion almost like a long snake . . . he began to run. (page 379)

In another instance from Light in August, the extraordinary use pattern indicates the extremely high emotional level characterizing the relationship between Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden, at least on her part. She instructs him to enter her room by climbing in the window at night. The window used as door accents Joanna's sexual journey into nymphomania; apparently the action heightens the desire of the middle-aged spinster (page 227).

In Sanctuary, Temple Drake's inner conflict between her desire for sexual experience and the desire to preserve the appearance of innocence reveals itself in her pointless running in and out of doors at the

Frenchman's place, instead of making a serious effort to escape; and later, at Miss Reba's, she chooses not to lock her door but merely to shut it.

Often Faulkner's characters are wounded, warped or otherwise abnormal from birth; others become so with the passing of time. Faulkner sometimes signals the reader through auspicious use of apertures in the extraordinary use pattern. As I Lay Dying opens with a memorable example in which Darl and Jewel--the bastard, therefore different, and (in Faulkner) expected to behave in extraordinary ways--approach the cotton-house:

When we reach it I turn and follow the path which circles the house. Jewel, fifteen feet behind me, looking straight ahead, steps in a single stride through the window. Still staring straight ahead . . . [he] steps in a single stride through the opposite window. . . . In single file and five feet apart and Jewel now in front, we go on up the path. (page 339)

In Sanctuary, Horace Benbow's crippling lack of courage and his incestuous feelings toward his sister increase with the passing of time. He shows this in the gradual closing-up of all the doors in his house, until he is living in just half of one room. From there it is only a short step for him to be persuaded to return to Narcissa's for the night. This retreating action signals the beginning of his betrayal of Ruby's faith in him. To his sister and Aunt Jenny he rationalizes aloud as follows:

'What? No. No. I'll--I told her I'd come for her at the jail and. . . .'
He sucked at his pipe. 'Well, I don't suppose it matters. I hope it doesn't. . . . I could even tell her I had a puncture . . . I think I'll stay.'
(page 177)

Although he is the intellectual opposite of Lucas Burch of Light in August, he betrays another person in the same base way, both of them reacting to events by means of an extraordinary use of apertures, a device Faulkner continues to use effectively in Absalom, Absalom!.

Chapter III

THOMAS SUTPEN AND HIS DESIGN

In simple terms, man's role in society is created through the cooperation of self-love (the egoistic drives that motivate us) and social love (our dependence on others, our inborn benevolence). Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! concerns itself with man in society, limited though that society may be. It is about human relationships, alienation, and the obstacles to understanding and communication between people. The novel's plot tells the story of one man's ambitions and failings and their effect on himself and others, in part by using a series of incidents based on doors, gates, and windows. More than half of these plot-images follow a pattern of image usage identified in these pages as the approach, which is deeply involved with how people relate to each other--man's humanity or inhumanity to man.

At some point, nearly every youth takes a look at how the world goes. His experiences in his particular set of circumstances (usually including parental guidance) prompt him to endorse a certain way of life; he will support certain practices and ideals and reject others. Some persons are mistaken in the conclusions they reach because their prior experience

may have been atypical or otherwise limiting. The majority of people are flexible enough to change, but because of the strength of the egoistic drive, some are unable or unwilling to admit their mistake in judgment or to change; and they warp or ruin their lives and often the lives of others in a single-minded attempt to validate their aims.

Such was the case with Thomas Sutpen and, to a lesser extent, with Rosa Coldfield, two strong-willed but different characters, whose differences Faulkner accentuates through the use of aperture imagery. Both are motherless from babyhood, and perhaps both are, in Rosa's words, "doomed to contemplate all human behavior through the complex and needless follies of adults" (page 21). Miserable at home, each tries to fit himself and real events into preconceived, false notions of life, better lives than the ones they have known but only a surface representation of life--an image of life. For Sutpen it is the easeful one of the Southern planter; for Rosa, a romanticized world of loving family and brave Confederate soldiers. Sutpen achieves the outward show and material possessions he is determined to have, but he has no understanding of human compassion, our inborn benevolence. Rosa's constant "astonishment" and "outrage"--the two words Faulkner uses most frequently in portraying her--arise from a continual series of disillusioning and unexpected outcomes to her encounters

with others; her dependence on others is too great.

After struggling throughout life to follow their chosen courses, one of the statements they make about themselves is the one told by their front doors--Sutpen's grand and fading, Rosa's permanently closed. The front door, symbolic of its owner, is at the same time its owner's chief aperture for communication with the world and with others, and is at the core of the approach, the predominant usage pattern in the book. The approach consists of a series of preliminary actions culminating in acceptance or rejection of people by people at a doorway.

Part of the desired climax of the approach is the crossing of a threshold, a highly symbolic and significant event in this book. The right to step freely and with assurance across the threshold representing a group or a person is the goal of the one making the approach; denial of this right can be a traumatic experience, often constituting the denial of the "Central I-AM," the preeminent theme in Absalom, Absalom!. The necessity for human communication and recognition and for making approaches to others in spite of barriers--barriers self-imposed or inherent in the Southern system--plays a large part in the book. Rosa expresses this need in the following words:

living is one constant and perpetual
instant when the arras-veil before

what-is-to-be hangs docile and even
glad to the lightest naked thrust if
we had dared, were brave enough (not
wise enough: no wisdom needed here) to
make the rending gash. (pages 142-43)

These words summarize the spirit of the approach; like the arras-veil, doors, gates, and windows hang closed and are barriers to communication; but they can be made to open to a knock, "the lightest naked thrust."

Recognition, the final part of the climax of the approach, comes with touching; and touching destroys all barriers, according to Rosa:

Because there is something in the touch
of flesh with flesh which abrogates,
cuts sharp and straight across the devious
intricate channels of decorous ordering
. . . touch and touch of that which is
the citadel of the central I-AM's private
own . . . let flesh touch with flesh,
and watch the fall of all the eggshell
shibboleth of caste and color too.
(page 139)

Thomas Sutpen finds touching a difficult thing to do throughout his life.

In the series of approaches making up a large share of the plot, great suspense is created through Faulkner's style and method; something always seems about to happen. In the long, involved sentences and the delaying of action (it takes Faulkner's narrators a long time to tell about it), the build-up of tension is terrific, is all, almost. The details of the approach and the entering are myriad, to use another of Faulkner's favorite words, while the details of the resultant action

are (1) almost nil, as when Bon comes to Sutpen's Hundred and Sutpen says and does nothing at all; (2) omitted entirely: Faulkner ignores Ellen's and Sutpen's wedding ceremony itself, but describes the entrance and exit through the church door in dramatic detail; or (3) anti-climactic, as when Rosa bursts in on Judith and Clytie the day Bon is shot. It is the degree of commitment expressed in the allowing in or the keeping out, the permitted or forbidden intimacy of the relationship with the people the door symbolizes that is important to plot, theme, and characterization in Absalom, Absalom!.

In the development of plot, the rising action can be followed through images taken in chronological order in Thomas Sutpen's grand design, from its inception to its apparently successful peak when his children are young adults. The appearance of Bon at the door initiates the falling action, which corresponds to the disintegration of the design, the family, and, coincidentally, the South. One notices that Faulkner varies the usage patterns of the images, but that each one furthers the plot by acting as a focal point for the development of successive stages in the Sutpen design; also, that the incidents are made complete and satisfying by Faulkner's balancing of them--bounding, matching or separating them with other aperture images--in a pattern of repetition which satisfies the reader, much as a melody satisfies by coming back to a familiar four-note phrase, for instance,

or as a building, by its repeated angles of roof-line; and, finally, that most of the incidents add to the characterization of Sutpen along with contributing to the plot.

The plot begins with a series of images of utmost relevance. They tell of Sutpen's experience as a motherless and wretchedly poor half-grown boy of thirteen or so, when he watches and admires a wealthy planter taking his ease in a hammock with his shoes off while a Negro slave does nothing but fan him and refill his glass. In the midst of this description of luxurious idleness, Faulkner inserts the following lines:

He would lie there all afternoon while the sisters would come from time to time to the door of the cabin two miles away and scream at him for wood or water, watching that man who not only had shoes in the summertime, too, but didn't even have to wear them. (page 228)

Throughout the relating of this episode, which comprises ten pages, Faulkner balances images of contrasting extremes--the boy's life versus the planter's--in a series of images appearing as parallels or antitheses. When the boy's father sends him to the big house with a message, the boy is eager and excited, and makes a high-hearted approach to the door:

turning in at the gate and following the drive up past where still more niggers with nothing to do all day but plant flowers and trim grass were working, and so to the house, the portico, the front door, thinking how at last he was going

to see the inside of it. (page 229)

Instead, he receives a rebuff at the door, and runs blindly and instinctively to his "own place" in the woods, seeking sanctuary and privacy in the pattern of the retreat behind:

He went into the woods . . . his feet just went there--a place where a game trail entered a cane-brake and an oak tree had fallen across it and made a kind of cave where he kept an iron griddle that he would cook small game on sometimes . . . He sat with his back against the upturned roots, and thought. (page 233)

Here, Faulkner demonstrates a skillful subtlety of design; none of the words "door," "gate," or "window" appears, but when compared with the preceding approach image (which appears four pages earlier): woods = gate, game trail = drive, canebrake = portico, oak tree = front door, cave = house, and the inside of the planter's front door = the boy's safest spot, the upturned roots he could put his back against; a very satisfying pattern to the reader, whether or not he is actually aware of it as such.

Instinct prompts the boy in this "backing up," a prevention against attack from the rear which is later a typical reaction of the man Sutpen in times of danger; but only in the weakness of boyhood and age does he follow the pattern of retreat behind as he does here.

In his "own place" in the woods the demoralized boy looks for answers, and the planter's world of caste, color, and inequality contrasts poorly with the democratic

mountain-background which forms the moral standard for the boy's outlook as shown in the two aperture-related passages which follow. The boy reflects on his experience:

And now he stood there before that white door with the moneky nigger barring it and looking down at him . . . and he never even remembered . . . how it was the nigger told him, even before he had time to say what he came for, never to come to that front door again but to go around to the back. (pages 231-232)

He then reflects on his own heritage:

He had been told to go around to the back door even before he could state his errand, who had sprung from a people whose houses didn't have back doors but only windows and anyone entering or leaving by a window would be either hiding or escaping, neither of which he was doing. (page 233)

Here Sutpen voices the spirit of the extraordinary use pattern.

The final part of the major image episode consists of three minor ones in succession, with apertures not named but inferred by the verbs meaning "looking at," "approaching," "entering," and "exiting" which Faulkner employs frequently in telling this story and which have close associations in the reader's mind with doors, windows, and gates. These three incidents indicate that Sutpen is a participant; typically he acts, rather than reacts. The images further the plot by firming up Sutpen's design as well as his character.

In the first, "he came out of the woods and

approached it [his home] and looked at it--the rough partly rotten log walls, the sagging roof whose missing shingles they did not replace. . . ." (page 236) Then he goes into the house and lies on his pallet-bed, reliving the door incident. He conceives his design:

I went up to that door for that nigger to tell me never to come to that front door again and . . . there ain't any good or harm either in the living world that I can do to him . . . So to combat them you have got to have what they have . . . land and niggers and a fine house. . . . (page 238)

Then, aged thirteen, he leaves to begin it:

He left that night. He waked before day and departed just like he went to bed: by rising from the pallet and tiptoeing out of the house. He never saw any of his family again. (page 238)

Barred from the planter's impressive white door, the boy and all he stands for have been rejected, rather than accepted; his "Central I-AM" has been denied. This makes the incident crucial to the plot and molds the boy's character, not for better, but for worse; for in his lifetime, Thomas Sutpen in turn denies the "Central I-AM" of all those who try to love him.

The second step of Sutpen's design also involves aperture imagery. It occurs in Haiti, where Sutpen nearly dies. Later he relates the story to Quentin's grandfather; he begins by talking about crouching behind a window in the dark with his employer, the sugar-planter, and his daughter, and firing through the window at

rebellious native workers who have burned the cane crop. Quentin tells Shreve about

the seven or eight nights while they huddled in the dark and watched from the windows the barns or granaries or whatever it is you harvest sugar into, and the fields too, blazing and smoking: he said how you could smell it, you could smell nothing else, the rank sweet rich smell as if the hatred and the implacability, the thousand secret dark years which had created the hatred had intensified the smell of the sugar. (page 249)

This emotional, highly sensory image involves the open window which brings in the sights and smells from outside and mentions the girl he later marries, following typically Faulknerian window-significance. Along with furthering plot, the image contributes toward effect in the atmosphere of terror it helps to sustain, and toward setting, in its framing of the Haitian scene, with the history of native exploitation implied in it.

In the second part of the incident, Sutpen demonstrates his bravery, and Faulkner uses the door as focal point in emphasizing this quality. Here, the role of the door as barrier is made explicit through the use of the words "bar" and "unbar," just as, earlier, with "the monkey nigger barring it." Quentin continues:

On the eighth night the water gave out and something had to be done so he put the musket down and went out and subdued them . . . he just had someone unbar the door and then bar it behind him, and walked out into the darkness and subdued them. (page 253)

The incident exemplifies the image pattern most typical of Sutpen, the taking of a stand, and proves his truly remarkable courage. His willingness to face the odds and meet any opposition characterizes him, again, as a participant, rather than a spectator or recluse and contributes to the view of him as a hero.

Quentin goes on to surmise that Sutpen lived through the torture he received because he was able to stand so much that the natives became fearful of him and ran, recognizing in him "an indomitable spirit" (page 254) greater than theirs. The images in the novel are not arranged chronologically, and the reader learns many harsh things about Sutpen before Faulkner reveals these poignant or sympathetic views of him. The author deliberately erects barriers before finally presenting these long-delayed glimpses of Sutpen's admirable traits, in order to hold the reader's conclusions about Sutpen in suspension, to keep the reader's "human heart in conflict with itself." In this way, the patterned use of apertures--even the nature of the apertures--relates style to theme and story and typifies Faulkner's grasp of design.

Sutpen's appearance in Jefferson follows the Haiti incident chronologically in his design. The town has had a look at his exotic caravan on its way to Sutpen's Hundred; and when he returns later and takes a room at

the Holston House, he arouses the curiosity of the townspeople. Again he backs up to something and takes a stand:

So they would catch him, run him to earth, in the lounge between the supper table and his locked door . . . whereupon he would move gradually and steadily until his back came in contact with something--a post or a wall--and then stand there and tell them nothing whatever as pleasantly and courteously as a hotel clerk. (page 34)

Window-images define the next stage of the design and illustrate the qualities Faulkner attributes to them. Sutpen's "fine house" is built during the next two years, "save for the windowglass and the ironware which they could not make by hand" (page 38). Following its completion, the house "whose threshold no woman had so much as seen," stands for three years "without any feminized softness of window-pane or door or mattress" (page 39). During this period Sutpen pits his Negroes against each other in bloody battles for strictly masculine entertainment. Faulkner contrasts the "feminine" elements of beauty and ornamentation which windows imply with the extreme of traditional masculinity in Sutpen's way of life, as "he lived [alone] in the Spartan shell of the largest edifice in the county" (page 39). Apertures contribute toward showing that Sutpen has now taken several steps closer to his boyhood goal of having "land and niggers and a fine house."

After the arrival of fine imported furnishings

for his house comes the next planned step: a wife, for respectability and progeny. Sutpen comes to Jefferson and is met by a suspicious "committee" who follow him to the Holston House. Faulkner's diversity in aperture image characterization shows up at this point. This one emphasizes Sutpen's growing pride, and his changing status:

Sutpen was talking to them over his shoulder and those eyes . . . maybe contemptuous even then. He pulled up at the door . . . and mounted the steps, and I heard how he turned there and looked at them again where they huddled on their horses, . . . and he saluted them with that florid, swaggering gesture to the hat. Then he went on into the house and commanded a chamber. (page 46)

This incident also makes a fine dramatic accent. The door of the Holston House--symbolic as a center of commerce, Jefferson style--figures here also as a frame for the tableau of the man and his gestures. These two uses of the door combine to dramatize Sutpen's changing status. He is now a force to be dealt with; he knows it and so does the town.

The same men follow him as he leaves the Holston House, and two variations on the approach pattern of aperture imagery make up the incident which ensures. It constitutes one of the few light moments in the novel, while it adds to the plot. Mr. Compson tells Quentin,

They say he did not even look back. He just walked on, erect, with the new hat cocked . . . and ladies and children and women slaves coming to the doors and

windows of the homes as they passed to watch as they went on in grim tableau, and Sutpen . . . entered Mr. Coldfield's gate and strode on up the brick walk to the door, carrying his paper cornucopia of flowers. (page 47)

They waited for him again . . . watching Mr. Coldfield's door until he emerged . . . When he returned to the gate, he was engaged to be married. . . . they arrested him. They took him back to town, with the ladies and children and house niggers watching from behind curtains. (page 47)

He enters gate, enters door, he is engaged; he comes out of door, comes out of gate, and is arrested. The drama is obvious, the repetition is pleasing, the image amusing, and once more the focal points are doors, accented by windows and gates. Another step in the design is completed, in one of the few approaches ending in acceptance rather than rejection; and Faulkner once more demonstrates his sense of design.

Two months later, Sutpen and Ellen Coldfield marry. After a whole chapter devoted to preparations which lead up to Ellen's entering the church door in tears in the pattern of the approach, the only description Faulkner gives of the ceremony is to say that the church is almost empty when the party comes into it, and "It was still empty even after the ceremony started and concluded" (page 56). But outside, where "The banquette before the Church door was a sort of arena lighted by the smoking torches which the negroes held above their heads" (page 56), Sutpen again takes a stand before a

door--the church door--a phrase repeated many times here, and an aperture which symbolizes the way of life or the group that the couple wants to be part of. Sutpen and Ellen have made their approach to the townspeople by inviting them to the wedding; this incident at the door is the townspeople's rejection of their "Central I-AM" and a repetition of Sutpen's boyhood experience at the planter's door, in variation.

The image is a vignette of controlled strength, as Sutpen again faces danger and protects others. Mr.

Compson narrates:

What the others saw from the halted carriages across the street--the bride shrinking into the shelter of his arm as he drew her behind him and he standing there, not moving even after another object . . . struck the hat from his head, and a third struck him full in the chest. (page 57)

When Sutpen is away from his own door, the symbol of his self-worth and pride, his hat serves as substitute. At the door of the Holston House, on the approach to Mr. Coldfield's, and here before the church door he is in the enemy camp so to speak, and his hat is his talisman.

About ten years later, Sutpen and Ellen arrive once more at the church door, where Sutpen gets revenge against the town for its treatment of him at the wedding by his arrogant arrival at "ten o'clock on Sunday morning, the carriage racing on two wheels up to the very door to the church" (page 24). Sutpen now has wealth and

authority enough to be a law unto himself, apparently. The church door, which he violates in this way, represents the town's united rejection of him, and he insists on being taken on his own terms, or not at all, never returning after the minister begs him not to race to church.

Faulkner inserts another dramatic accent image at this point. Miss Rosa describes her impression--at age three--of the Sutpen family's arrival at church. She says it was

my first sight of them which I shall carry to my grave: a glimpse like the forefront of a tornado of the carriage and Ellen's high white face within it and the two replicas of his face in miniature flanking her . . . all in a thunder and a fury of wildeyed horses and of galloping and of dust. (page 23)

The frame of the carriage window helps to make an indelible impression of the emotional moment.

The final image use before Charles Bon comes and the design falters concerns Sutpen's resumption of Negro-fighting, with large numbers of men coming out from town to watch the spectacle of violence, which takes place in a barn out of sight of the house. Rosa describes the scene as it would be seen by "the two Sutpen faces this time--once on Judith and once on the negro girl beside her--looking down through the square entrance to the loft" (page 30). The loft entrance frames the faces of Judith and Clytie, who are apparently able to bear the

spectacle below: their father fighting brutally, and for pleasure, while their brother Henry screams and vomits in reaction to it and Ellen plaintively calls for Judith. It is an insightful glance into the characters of all the Sutpens, and the emotion and drama of the scene are heightened for the reader, as he looks down through the loft entrance "window" along with the two girls.

The coming of his son Bon is an ironic repetition of Sutpen's own boyhood experience at the planter's door. In the pattern of the approach Bon and Henry come to Sutpen's Hundred three times, and the imagined state of mind of Bon varies with the narrator; for, as Quentin tells Shreve, "Nobody ever did know if Bon ever knew Sutpen was his father or not" (page 269)--illustrating Faulkner's typical and deliberate erection of barriers to the reader's access to the facts. But all of the narrators' accounts variously imagine them to be extremely important events in Bon's life, and Faulkner builds up the suspense of Bon's physical approach to the front door of the house, matching it with the anxiety Bon is presumed to feel as he thinks about the past and his increasingly complex relations with the Sutpen family--father, son, and daughter.

Their first trip definitely has an effect on Sutpen's design--a devastating effect. Quentin reports that Henry said,

'Father this is Charles' and he saw the face and knew . . . that he stood there at his own door, just as he had imagined, planned, designed, and sure enough and after fifty years the forlorn nameless and homeless lost child came to knock at it . . . he must have felt and heard the design--house, position, posterity and all--come down like it had been built out of smoke. (page 267)

The reader never knows the whole truth about Sutpen; he merely absorbs what the four narrators say about him. But Sutpen's character comes through via episodes and incidents with apertures which form a composite picture; almost without exception, these telling incidents involve Sutpen with doors rather than windows. This fact makes a compelling argument that Faulkner considered apertures versatile images for characterization and verifies the differing significance which Faulkner assigns to apertures. A strong, authoritative person has been shown striding through doors, defending them, and flaunting his disdain for them. In the episode above, this American version of the Greek hero now reveals his tragic flaw--his inability to love--through his actions at a door.

As previously noted, Sutpen fails to acknowledge Bon on all three of his visits to Sutpen's Hundred. On the second approach, as Shreve and Quentin imagine it, "they [Henry and Bon] rode the forty miles again, into the gates and up the drive to the house. And this time Sutpen wasn't even there" (page 239). The third and last time, "Christmas came and they rode again to Sutpen's Hundred and this time

Sutpen was not there again . . . and Bon knew he had not expected him to be there" (page 332). The utter denial of Bon's "Central I-AM" by his father is the culmination of three door images in the approach pattern.

Henry chooses Bon over his father that same Christmas, leaving his home and giving up his birthright. Faulkner expresses this event in typically oblique style, through a door image: "Henry closed the library door for the last time behind himself" (page 294). He elaborates on it, using a window: "Through the window behind his father's head," while his father tells him that he and Bon are brothers, Henry has seen

the sister and the lover in the garden,
pacing slowly, the sister's head bent
with listening, the lover's head leaned
above it while they paced slowly on in
that rhythm which not the eyes but the
heart marks and calls the beat and measure
for. (page 295)

Faulkner accents the difference in temperament between father and son by associating the gentler, more emotional Henry with a window-image of great beauty and feeling in this incident, and repeats it in the next.

In their next meeting four years later in a tent in Carolina, Henry "stoops through the entrance" and salutes (page 354). When his father says, "He cannot marry her, Henry," he finds himself

seeing behind his father the window above
the garden where Judith and Bon strolled
in that slow rhythm where the heart matches
the footsteps and the eyes need only look

at one another. (page 354)

But when his father tells him of Bon's Negro blood, the lover-image fades and Henry leaves, "stooping through the entrance again," and thinking "not what he would do, but what he would have to do" (page 354). Apparently Henry can accept incest, but not miscegenation.

The significance Faulkner attaches to Henry's closing the library door and his stooping through the tent entrance reflects the author's perception of apertures as logical starting points for action, the quality which makes them useful in plot progression. Here they also signal a change; Henry has determined on new courses of action in both cases.

These incidents are specifically important as steps in plot development because they show the cracks appearing in Sutpen's design; he is forced to goad Henry into killing Bon in order to preserve the design. Their parallelism also helps to unify the structure of the narrative.

In the tragic climax of the book, Henry kills Bon at the gate of Sutpen's Hundred. It occurs, symbolically, outside the gates which represent the outer limits of Sutpen's authority, and it comes at the end of the most suspense-filled approach to the novel--Bon and Henry's long journey home at the end of the war. Shreve surmises that

maybe they left together and rode side by side . . . all the way back to Mississippi and right up to that gate; . . . and maybe Wash Jones was there to help Clytie and Judith carry him into the house and lay him on the bed, and later . . . [Rosa] finds Judith standing without a tear before the closed door. (page 358)

The gate represents both the literal and symbolic barrier to Bon's acceptance by the Sutpen family. The front door of the house represents the still-absent Sutpen. Judith's door symbolizes the virginity Judith will choose to preserve, and the deep feeling she carefully represses. Only as a non-threatening corpse can Bon take a place behind these forbidden doors, because of the incest he threatens, the miscegenation he represents.

Faulkner describes the urgency involved in Sutpen's return from the war in terms of his entering and exiting quickly (with apertures implied, not named)-- through the front door and out the back, in the next stage of the design he is trying to bolster:

His problem now was haste, passing time, the need to hurry . . . in that passage through the house which was an unbroken continuation of the long journey from Virginia. . . . (page 278)

Rosa recounts two final aperture images reflecting the "indomitable spirit" of Sutpen, referred to earlier by Quentin. In both, he assumes the typically courageous stance before his own threshold. Working desperately to restore his land, he does not join in with other

landowners, "men with pistols in their pockets" (page 161), and gives a definite "No" when a deputation calls, urging him to join the vigilantes:

He ushered them from the room and from the house and stood plain in the doorway holding the lamp above his head while their spokesman delivered his ultimatum: 'This may be war, Sutpen,' and answered, 'I am used to it.' (pages 161-62)

Rosa goes on to describe him as "holding intact that ten-mile square while he faced from the brink of disaster, invincible and unafraid, what he must have known would be the final defeat" (page 163). The word "brink" corresponds here with "threshold"--the figurative threshold of Sutpen's Hundred before which Thomas Stupen figuratively takes a heroic stand--his last.

Sutpen's failure to recoup and his subsequent disillusionment and moral disintegration begin with an aperture incident involving General Compson, who overhears Wash and "Kernel" through the open window of Sutpen's store. As they drink behind the locked door, they discuss a very private matter, Sutpen's relationship with Milly, and Wash's trust in Sutpen's good treatment of her. The author permits the reader access to the situation by involving the open window, while he connotes Sutpen's degeneracy, changing character, and weakness through his previously uncharacteristic seclusion behind locked doors, in the extraordinary use pattern of aperture imagery.

Wash Jones recalls for the reader the slave at the hammock of the Virginia planter, but he is more. Since Sutpen has practically no friends, he makes a confidante of Wash, although a disreputable, clownish one who must be kept out of sight of the house. Faulkner chiefly describes Wash in terms of how close to the Sutpen house he is allowed to come, and from which direction. The barriers originally restricting him to the grape arbor gradually change, as Mr. Compson points out: "Jones . . . before '61 had not even been allowed to approach the front of the house and . . . during the next four years got no nearer than the kitchen door" (page 183), and then only to bring game, fish, and vegetables. In war-time, with Sutpen away, Clytie is the enforcer. She tells Wash, "Stop right there, white man. Stop right where you is. You ain't never crossed this door while Colonel was here and you ain't going to cross it now" (page 281).

In later years, as "Kernel's" fortunes go down, Wash's position in his life goes up. He is often there when Sutpen, in disgust, clears the store of customers and locks the door; and they drink until "Kernel" falls senseless. Then Wash commandeers "the first passing wagon to take him to the house and carry him up the front steps and through the paintless formal door . . . which Judith [holds] open for him to enter" (page 184), puts

Sutpen to bed and goes to sleep on the floor beside him.

Door and window images punctuate Faulkner's recounting of the gruesome killing of Sutpen by Wash Jones, pointing up the ambiguity and the ironic parallels interwoven throughout the episode. The plot progresses, and characterizations are drawn through the use of a variety of aperture image patterns. The positions the characters take are especially significant; Faulkner has them entering, exiting, looking at, and isolating themselves as follows:

Sutpen enters Wash's cabin; Wash stays on the porch, possibly holding the reins of Sutpen's horse. No doubt he is proud and happy, since "Kernel" is his hero and the father of Wash's newly-born great-granddaughter. Through the open door he hears Sutpen say to Milly on the floor of the cabin, "Well, Milly, too bad you're not a mare like Penelope. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable" (page 286). Wash first feels disbelief, then rage; and when Sutpen emerges from the door of the cabin, sees Wash and tells him to stand back, adding "Don't you touch me" (page 286), Wash quietly threatens, "I'm going to tech you, Kernel" (page 286). Wash kills him with the scythe and then retreats into the cabin where all day long "he [sits] at the window where he could look out above the body and the scythe in the weeds below, and watch the road" (page 289). Like

the boy Sutpen long ago, he decides what he will do, there in the safest place he has.

When the sheriff's men arrive at dark, "men who set the order and the rule of living" (page 290), instead of trying to run away, he first speaks to them quietly from the window, then he kills Milly and the baby, runs out the door and attacks the men with the scythe, and is shot. For the first time in his life Wash Jones faces up to danger and fights against the odds. But taking a stand before his door reveals his insanity, since no one is left alive inside to protect. His is a horrible parody of the old, brave stance of Thomas Sutpen, who "not only went out to meet his troubles, he sometimes went out and manufactured them" (page 105). Wash Jones has not suddenly become brave; he seeks death through this wild bravado because of Sutpen's rejection of him (through Milly and the baby).

It is symbolic that when Sutpen denies Wash's "Central I-AM" with his brusque insult to Milly, there is a door between the two men; there always has been; it is Sutpen's barrier, suddenly become unbearable to Wash. Sutpen's warning to Wash of "Don't you touch me" sums up his lifelong attitude toward others, his lack of inborn benevolence.

Other facets of the scene link it in ironic contrast with Sutpen's boyhood approach to the white door

of the Virginia planter. The view from Wash's window, like the approach to the boy's "own place" in the woods, is the reversal and antithesis of the approach to the planter's door, of course; but this scene contains a deeper level of contrast: the decay and stagnation of the post-war South of the time is symbolized by the stillness and deterioration of the setting--the old man's dead body, the rusty scythe, the weedy yard without even a path, and the small cabin window.

In contrast, their opposite numbers--the lively young boy, the "niggers with nothing to do all day but plant flowers" (tools like the scythe, but in good condition), the well-kept drive, and the impressive white door of the boyhood scene--represented the vigor and order of the smooth-running, slave-powered "machine" of the pre-war South.

Another ironic parallel between Sutpen and Wash which involves apertures is their destruction of their own descendents. Wash destroys his with his own hands inside their own doors; Sutpen instigates the death of one son at the hands of another outside their gate. This episode reveals that Faulkner still bounds, separates, balances, and repeats aperture images in Absalom, Absalom!, just as he did in the early Sartoris episode with Old Bayard, and still satisfies his readers as he does so.

The final aperture image of the plot and the

complete and paradoxical end to the course of the Sutpen design is the destruction of Sutpen's Hundred by fire, leaving only the idiot Jim Bond as progeny of Thomas Sutpen and evidence of his aspirations. Aperture imagery is connected with the final ruin of the house through Rosa's opening of the front door:

But the door was not locked; it swung inward; the blast of heat struck them . . . the draft created by the open door seemed to explode like powder among the flames as the whole lower hall vanished. (page 375)

The boy Thomas Sutpen centers his life-design around a white and shining plantation house door. The man Sutpen opens his own shining white door to Charles Bon, and realizes that his design has no more substance than smoke. Now the door opens for the last time, and the design literally goes up in smoke--all of this in accordance with the overall design William Faulkner has for Absalom, Absalom!, with its meaningful, patterned details of aperture imagery.

Chapter IV

ROSA AND OTHERS

Clearly, the use of aperture images assists Faulkner in making Thomas Sutpen a believable character. Faulkner also employs the images effectively in creating the lesser characters, as he demonstrates the truly remarkable scope and variety of his use of doors, gates, and windows.

The antithesis present in the Wash/Sutpen relationship typifies that of other pairs in Absalom, Absalom!. Regarding antithesis, Walter J. Slatoff comments, "the extent, variety, and intensity of such character antitheses in Faulkner's works is unusual, and, in some respects, unique."¹⁶ Since Faulkner often employs apertures to define parallels, contrasts, and antitheses among characters, this chapter explores Slatoff's statement as it suggests Faulkner's diversified use of aperture imagery in characterization.

Rosa Coldfield is the best-defined and the strongest-willed character in Absalom, Absalom!, after Thomas Sutpen; and the author makes the differences

¹⁶Walter J. Slatoff, Quest for Failure: A Study of William Faulkner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), p. 107.

between them strikingly clear through their dissimilar actions with doors, gates, and windows. The two opening paragraphs of the book help to establish setting, while at the same time portraying the character of the sixty-five-year-old spinster who lives in a house where all the apertures are closed while a wistaria vine, the essence of beauty, fragrance, and life, blooms just outside her shuttered windows.

The following aperture images in the passage make telling symbolic comment about her, as she sits and talks with the young Quentin Compson from two o'clock until almost sundown in 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. . . . [dust is like] flecks of dead old dried paint itself blown inward from the scaling blinds. . . . There was a wistaria vine blooming for the second time that summer on a wooden trellis before one window. . . . There would be the dim coffin-smelling gloom sweet and over-sweet with the twice bloomed wistaria. (pages 7-8)

The paragraphs also contain a physical description of Rosa which does not involve apertures, but the aperture images alone convey a great deal about her character. If one applies the connotations this essay proposes that Faulkner attributes to apertures, the following conclusions about Rosa might be drawn, based solely upon the few lines cited above.

Closed apertures and the long period of time indicate that Miss Rosa has isolated herself, an action often following a rejection. But Faulkner characterizes Rosa as now experiencing a resurgence of a long-held, overly-romantic or emotional view of life, since he commonly connects the qualities of romance and emotion with window images; and here he has referred to the vine in the window image as "over-sweet" and "twice-blooming." In her attempt to bar "moving air and light," Rosa also bars the sensual impressions and influences which come in with them; and since, in Faulkner, Rosa's blinds--like her windows--are Rosa, shutting them indicates the suppression of her emotions. The "coffin-smelling gloom"--the result of the combined images of over-sweet fragrance and closed apertures--and the reference to "dead old dried paint" relate the old woman to her approaching death, since death is plainly inferred and Rosa is the same as buried alive. "Twice-blooming" indicates recurrence of emotion, and "scaling blinds," long neglect.

The images lead to the conclusions that Miss Rosa, secluded behind her closed doors and windows through her own choosing and possibly after a rejection, has long neglected an emotional issue from out of the past. Wistaria bloom and scent from outside the window have aroused her suppressed emotions; and Rosa, aware that she may soon die and goaded by a recurrence of strong

feeling, has been sufficiently jolted out of her isolation to talk to Quentin about the issue from the past. Here, Miss Rosa demonstrates both her recalcitrant nature and her dependence on others by continuing to close up apertures in hot weather. She does this, not because she has decided for herself that she should, but because as a child she was "doomed to contemplate all human behavior through the complex and needless follies of adults," as Quentin realizes. Long before, "someone" had believed this was the thing to do, and Rosa, never able to recognize the "needless follies of adults," or to learn from experience, simply continues to do so.

The symbolism in the images which characterize Rosa may be obvious; certainly they are not unique to Faulkner. The point of analyzing them is to stress the apparent closeness in Faulkner's mind between the person and his doors and windows, and to demonstrate the variety and appropriateness of aperture imagery to the portrayal of Faulkner's characters in Absalom, Absalom!. As previously noted, many of Faulkner's characters are dramatically divided or thwarted people, "doomed" people, as he often describes them. Heredity and home environment are not alone responsible; in Quentin's words, "blind circumstance and savage event" (page 14), play important parts, too. The word "dramatic" describes Faulkner's literary style and his settings, as well as

his characters. He accentuates the dramatic nature of the novel by emphasizing the changes, division, and ambiguity in the lives of his characters (and their differences), through their differing actions with doors, gates, and windows. These ambivalent apertures may be literal, figurative, open, closed, locked, or forbidden--any or all.

One of the dominant emotions of Rosa Coldfield is fear, which she shows primarily through aperture images. In Miss Rosa's version of the story, she talks about Sutpen as an "ogre-shape," and recounts an early experience: a visit to his house. There her fear is triggered by entering the gates, strengthened by crossing the threshold, and she is in deep fear outside Ellen's door. She describes her fear, using the approach pattern of aperture imagery:

As soon as papa and I entered those gates that afternoon and began to go up the drive toward the house, I could feel it. . . . I remember yet the utter quiet of that house when we went in. . . . I only knew, as soon as papa and I crossed the threshold, that he was not here. . . . I stood just outside that quiet door in that quiet upper hall because I was afraid to go away even from it . . . standing motionless beside the door as though trying to make myself blend with the dark wood. (pages 25-7)

In this passage Faulkner uses aperture imagery in repetition to promote an effect. Much of Rosa's narrative strives for the effect of fear: she is afraid of Sutpen, afraid of Judith as a child, and afraid of Clytie all her

life. She is afraid of Sutpen's house, afraid to spend, afraid to disobey her father (although she does in secret, by writing poems in praise of Confederate soldiers). She is afraid to cross her aunt, afraid of love and life. The paradox of her nature is that she is also fascinated by much of what she fears; and sixty years after this Sunday afternoon incident, she returns to this same Sutpen house (and its closed doors) with Quentin Compson at night, in spite of her fear. Quentin correctly senses that she is not just afraid, but fascinated by what she believes might be behind the door there.

The labels "self-made," "self-reliant," and "man of action" describe Sutpen. He relates chiefly with doors, and Faulkner shows him making bold approaches to them, forcing them to open to him, and bravely taking a stand before them. Rosa lacks his physical strength and courage: she is impelled by fear and determination. Faulkner emphasizes her arbitrary pride by referring often to the fact that the aunt taught Rosa almost nothing, then abandoned her.

Both Rosa and Sutpen suffer neglect as children; but he roams freely, far beyond the bounds of the cabin door his sisters call from, while she is over-confined and must cope with what others do to her (with doors and gates) on a daily basis. This early coping later forces a sort of pseudo self-reliance on Rosa, in which she gives

the appearance of providing for herself, but actually depends totally on others. Her typical pattern is the retreat behind, as her forty-three summers in seclusion prove.

Three of the novel's narrators--Quentin, his father, and Rosa herself--characterize Rosa as a young person in images which use apertures as barriers; all of them emphasize Rosa's confinement and exclusion. Quentin's is first:

She seemed to stand, to lurk, behind the neat picket fence of a small, grimly middleclass yard or lawn, looking out upon the whatever ogreworld of that quiet village street. (page 21)

Next Rosa relates

Our aunt and papa were talking and I came in and my aunt said 'Go out and play,' though even if I could not have heard through the door at all, I could have repeated the conversation for them. (page 25)

Mr. Compson describes Rosa's childhood as having been passed

in a grim mausoleum air of Puritan righteousness and outraged female vindictiveness . . . that aged and ancient and timeless absence of youth which consisted of a Cassandralike listening beyond closed doors, of lurking in dim halls. (page 60)

In Rosa's own words, some delicately sexual imagery rephrases Mr. Compson's comment:

Instead of accomplishing the processional and measured milestones of the childhood's time I lurked, unapprehended as though,

shod with the very damp and velvet silence of the womb, I displaced no air, gave off no betraying sound, from one closed forbidden door to the next. (page 145)

Rosa is physically and emotionally shut off from warm, human contact in her childhood, reason enough for her repression and frustration in later relationships.

Mr. Coldfield enters Rosa's story, and Faulkner uses apertures to describe their passing of the war-time, when Mr. Coldfield's character changes drastically:

She did not see the regiment depart because her father forbade her to leave the house until it was gone. . . . He would not even allow Miss Rosa to look out the window at passing soldiers. (page 81)

In a vignette which pictures self-isolation, and the war-like aspect of religion, Faulkner forms aperture images (in the extraordinary use pattern) which include a striking simile. Mr. Coldfield closes his store and retreats into it, Mr. Compson tells Quentin. He and Rosa live "with the front door locked and the front shutters closed and fastened" (page 82): all but one, slightly opened, behind which he spends the day

like a picquet on post, armed not with a musket but with the big family Bible . . . until a detachment of troops would pass: whereupon he would open the Bible and declaim in a harsh loud voice . . . the passages of the old violent mysticism which he had already marked as the actual picquet would have ranged his row of cartridges along the window sill. (page 82)

After soldiers rob his store, Mr. Coldfield retreats further, to his attic: this involves more images

in the extraordinary use pattern: "He nailed the door tight shut, and threw the hammer out the window" (page 82). He dies there three years later, finally refusing to eat the food Rosa has passed up to him through the attic window.

Faulkner describes here a man's complete disintegration, basing his word picture almost solely on apertures. Mr. Coldfield's "firing" of Bible verses through the window repeats, in variation, Sutpen's firing through the window in Haiti, and illustrates Faulkner's skill at interrelating these aperture images to strengthen the novel's structure.

Miss Rosa's spinster aunt (first name never disclosed) is a minor character continually described in terms of her aperture-related actions. She is the "vindictive female influence" in Rosa's childhood mentioned by Mr. Compson, and the person responsible for Rosa's never having "been taught to cook nor taught to do anything save listen through closed doors" (page 73), and who, "four years after she had left . . . still seemed to be just beyond any door with her hand already on the knob" (page 70). Amazingly, this bitter woman elopes through her bedroom window after years of hating the entire male principle, "that principle which had left the aunt a virgin at thirty-five" (page 60). This window image demonstrates again Faulkner's application of the

extraordinary use pattern to show change in a character's state of mind. It appears here in its most common form, the substitution of window for door.

The aunt's most prominent role in the novel is that of promoter of Ellen's wedding. In a unique variation of the approach pattern, she does not ask for recognition but demands it, as she "spent the [wedding] day going from house to house, the invitation list in her hand" (page 54). She takes Quentin's grandmother completely by surprise: "the woman whom she had never seen before, who came bursting into the house, not to invite her to a wedding but to dare her not to come, and then rushed out again" (page 54).

Four of Rosa's trips to Sutpen's Hundred are described in detail in Absalom, Absalom!, and the Sutpen doors are important in all of them. At age three, Rosa is fearful outside Ellen's closed door; at twenty, rejected and grief-stricken, she is barred from entering Judith's locked door, beyond which Bon lies dead; at sixty-five, she demonstrates "implacable determination" (page 365) to get inside the Sutpen front door. She finds the dying Henry behind his unlocked door and returns later with help for him, opening the Sutpen door for the final time--on engulfing flames.

Rosa's second trip out begins with the appearance of Wash Jones on a mule at her gate. Their tragi-comic

approach to Sutpen's Hundred is a parody of Bon and Henry's approach earlier the same day which ends in Henry's killing Bon. These incidents typify the antithesis and the varied repetition which demonstrate Faulkner's sense of design and continually unify the narrative structure. Although she and Wash make a ludicrous approach--their appearance and conversation are comic in contrast with the tragic overtones of the earlier one--Miss Rosa is less of a comic figure here than Wash; when pushed to the extreme she is capable of acting aggressively, as she does at the gate, the focal point of the incident:

Twelve miles toward that I rode, beside an animal who could stand in the street and bellow placidly . . . but who could not permit himself to force the mule which drew us beyond a walk because . . . 'hit ain't had a decent bait of vittles since the corn give out in February': who, turning into the actual gate at last, must stop the mule and, pointing with the whip and spitting first, say 'Hit was right yonder'--'What was right there, fool?' I cried, and he: 'Hit was' until I took the whip from him into my own hand and struck the mule.
(page 135)

When she arrives at the house, Rosa encounters two strong women--first Clytie, then Judith--in the presence of tragedy. Faulkner dramatically shows the reaction of each of the three through a series of images which form a triangle of the women's physical placement in the house, and accent the similarities between the black and the white half-sisters in contrast with Rosa, the outsider. "Communal blood" is a theme in which doors

are open between family members and closed against outsiders. Rosa uses the expression two times during the course of the following incident; it is exemplified in the calm closeness of Clytie and Judith, as contrasted with the frantic movement of Rosa between the front door and Judith's door upstairs.

Rosa continues the story of her approach and entrance. It is framed in a triangle of images, and interspersed regularly with others.

And I running out of the bright afternoon,
into the thunderous silence of that brooding
house where I could see nothing at first
then gradually the face, the Sutpen face . . .
the same sphinx face she had been born with,
which had looked down from the loft that
night beside Judith's and which she still
wears now at seventy-four . . . she was not
looking at me but through me, apparently
still musing upon the open door's serene
rectangle which I had broken. (pages 136-37)

Clytie then bars Rosa's way on the stairs, laying her hand on Rosa's arm; but Rosa rushes on upstairs to find "Judith standing before the closed door to that chamber . . . 'Yes Rosa?' she said" (page 142). Rosa says of Judith, "[I] found her standing before that closed door which I was not to enter" (page 150). The distraught Rosa fantasizes about the fleeing murderer, her nephew Henry, in an effort to ward off reality:

What did I expect? I, self-mesmered fool,
come twelve miles expecting--what? Henry
perhaps, to emerge from some door which
knew his touch, his hand on the knob, the
weight of his foot on a sill which knew
that weight: Henry to emerge and say

'Why, it's Aunt Rosa; Wake up, Aunt Rosa; Wake up?' (page 141)

Rosa's reference to Henry's touch on the knob, door, and sill reinforces the evidence that Faulkner's mind turned quite naturally to the door as symbol for the man, and that he takes for granted the close relationship between a man and his door. In their role as an access, apertures are the means for Henry "to emerge"--to come back. Door, knob, and sill are interchangeable images iterated three times by the author, indicating that aperture images are more fitting to his subtle style than any more obvious synecdoche for "house." Through Rosa's words Faulkner has created a picture of a normal world with everything as it should be; and it centers around the door, the knob, the sill, and the man who should be there.

Faulkner demonstrates the versatility of aperture imagery through Rosa's repeated descriptions of the finality and grief brought about by the murder of Bon. Apertures appear in three different roles: the open door, "threshold"; the window, "sheet of glass"; and the closed door, "clap-to," in the following figurative uses:

It is not the blow we suffer from but the tedious repercussive anti-climax of it, the rubbishy aftermath to clear away from off the very threshold of despair. (page 150)

There are some things which happen to us which the intelligence and the senses refuse . . . occurrences which stop us dead

as though by some impalpable intervention,
like a sheet of glass through which we
watch all subsequent events transpire.
(page 151)

No, there had been no shot. That sound was
merely the sharp and final clap-to of a
door between us and all that was, all that
might have been. (page 158)

When Sutpen denies Rosa's "Central I-AM" with his
conditional proposal in which eventual marriage depends
on her bearing of a son, she is stunned past reason and
reacts by retreating behind her door. During her
forty-three-year isolation she becomes a pauper existing
on the kindness of others. Her arbitrary pride shows in
her eccentric behavior, as she refuses to admit to her
actual situation and tries to "deny she even breathes"
(page 302). She opens her door briefly to take in food
left on her doorstep (the closest she allows the world to
come) and watches "from behind the curtains of a window"
(page 212) while a boy she has hired but cannot pay rakes
her yard. Paradoxically, Rosa's self-erected barriers
(her literal and figurative doors) serve only to
emphasize the "dependence on others" which characterizes
her.

Judith's holding open of the "paintless formal
door" for Wash Jones and her drunken father shows her in
the action with doors which chiefly characterizes her:
the symbolic gesture of holding open the front door of
Sutpen's Hundred, granting admission and acceptance to

those approaching, at the cost to her of pain or lost pride. The reader feels that Judith does this in expiation for her father's repudiation of Charles Bon and her brother's murder of him--their refusal to admit Bon through the gates and into the family. Faulkner frequently refers to Judith as a widow who has been neither bride nor wife; and her adult life is a series of sacrifices for others, told in patterned repetitions of this significant gesture. The gesture epitomizes Shreve's analysis of Judith as she reacts to Bon's "gallant and elegant and automatic" attitude toward her. He describes her as "bludgeoned once more by disappointment but still unbowed" (page 333).

Judith holds the door open first for the dead Bon; then for her drunken father and Wash; then for Milly, who needs a dress made; next for the corpse of her father; then for the Octaroon and Etienne. Her final holding open of the door, fifteen years later for the fevered Etienne Bon is the ironic finale of her life, since it leads to her own death from his disease. The paradox and divisions which shape people's lives are sharply drawn by Faulkner in these aperture-related actions of Judith. Unlike Rosa's aperture-actions which reflect injurious childhood neglect, Judith's result more from the "blind circumstance and savage event" (page 14) mentioned by Quentin. In their role as an access, doors open onto life, the world,

and other people; but for Judith they are not an access to happiness. When Quentin hears how she dies, he thinks, "Yes . . . too much, too long" (page 210).

Clytie and Judith are almost like two sides of the same coin; they are two variations on a Sutpen model: one black, one white. Clytie takes arbitrary pride in the carrying out of Sutpen barriers, and in maintaining the family as far as she is able. Her defiance contrasts with Judith's acquiescence. She understands what Rosa calls the "devious intricate channels of decorous ordering" (page 139)--the barriers of caste and color--and she intends to see them carried out, as in her dictate to Wash Jones, "Stop right there, white man" (page 281). Sometimes this means doing things she considers degrading, such as permitting entrance to Wash, or serving the Octaroon for a week, carrying trays to her door "as Judith made her" (page 194). She must admit Judge Benbow through the door of Sutpen's Hundred, although he has paid her beloved Etienne to go away (but not until after she "came to the door and looked full and steadily at his face") (page 204). Like her father, Clytie's typical aperture usage pattern is the taking of a stand at an aperture, but in her own way. When Quentin's grandfather rides out after learning of Etienne's yellow fever, Clytie "looked down at him from one of the upper windows and told him 'they didn't need nothing.'" (page 210); but within a week, Judith is dead.

Clytie maintains Sutpen "communal blood" by opening the door of Sutpen's Hundred to Thomas Sutpen's heirs, and by barring it to outsiders. In later years these heirs include Jim Bond and Henry; before them, she admits Jim Bond's father, Etienne Bon, for whom she goes alone to New Orleans. Faulkner employs an aperture image in describing Etienne's arrival:

[He] crossed that strange threshold, that irrevocable demarcation, not led, not dragged, but driven and herded by that stern implacable presence . . . which cared for him with that curious blend of savageness and pity, of yearning and hatred. (pages 197-98)

(The last line is a typically Faulknerian expression of paradox.)

For Clytie, the door to Sutpen's Hundred is the symbol for the Family, and belonging to this family gives meaning to her presence on earth. The paradoxical presence of both the black and the white in Clytie shows in her desire to maintain Thomas Sutpen's barriers, through either defensive defiance or prideful and deliberate subjugation of herself.

Etienne Bon deliberately crosses forbidden barriers: Negro thresholds as he gets into fights he cannot win and white thresholds as he flaunts his black wife and his own light skin. In an extreme variation on the approach pattern, he

rode up to the house and apparently flung the wedding license in Judith's face with

something of that invincible despair with which he had attacked the negroes in the dice game. (page 205)

His "invincible despair" equates with Clytie's "fierce inexorable spurious humility" (page 199) as a means of demonstrating awareness of their cruelly divided status in the social structure and as a protest against the rejection inherent in their situation. Symbolically (and typically) they either cross forbidden thresholds (Etienne), or pointedly refuse to cross them (Clytie).

Like their sisters, Clytie and Judith, the brothers, Henry and Bon, are paired and contrasted throughout the novel. They are opposites in almost every way; and Faulkner makes their differences clear in the following architectural images which apply to the two young men and their backgrounds, and serve to introduce the next series of aperture images. The first concerns Henry,

this grim humorless yokel out of a granite heritage where even the houses, let alone clothing and conduct, are built in the image of a jealous and sadistic Jehovah.
(page 109)

The second refers to New Orleans, and in Faulkner's subtle way, to Bon: "-- the architecture a little curious, a little femininely flamboyant and therefore to Henry opulent, sensuous, sinful" (page 110).

Faulkner further emphasizes their difference in a series of door, gate, and window images (referred to in Chapter II), which describe a section of New Orleans as

Henry sees it. Henry is both fascinated and repelled by the way of life these apertures represent, just as he is by Bon, whom he both loves and resents. The paradoxical nature of apertures seems particularly relevant here in representing Henry's divided feelings. Henry sees and describes

a trap, a riding horse standing before a closed and curiously monastic doorway in a neighborhood a little decadent, even a little sinister. . . . (page 111)

a facade shuttered and blank, drowsing in steamy morning sunlight, invested . . . with something of secret and curious and unimaginable delights. . . . a wall unscalable, a gate ponderously locked . . . a lacelike iron grilling . . . (page 112)

[Henry] being carried by the friend, the mentor, through one of those inscrutable and curiously lifeless doorways . . . and so into a place which to his puritan's provincial mind all of morality was upside down and all of honor perished. . . . (page 114)

Quentin and Shreve make up another contrasted pair. Harvey Breit writes of Quentin's role in the novel that he "is made by Faulkner to be an embodiment of the presentness of the past."¹⁷ Their differing actions and reactions with the window in their Harvard room reflect the basic differences in their personalities: Shreve's is a physical action, Quentin's an emotional reaction. Stripped to the waist in the winter cold, Shreve takes

¹⁷Harvey Breit, "Introduction," Absalom, Absalom! (New York: The Modern Library, 1951), p. vii.

deep-breathing exercises in front of the window and makes fairly objective comments about Quentin's story of Rosa, Sutpen, et al. Quentin, deeply disturbed by conflicting emotions about his Southern heritage and about himself, shivers uncontrollably while he stares at the window from his bed, recounting the past and reflecting about the present.

Like those concerning Henry, many of the aperture images concerning Quentin have emotional overtones; they usually involve either windows or the concept of the forbidden door. In the following passage Faulkner subtly reveals the incestuous feelings common to both Henry and Quentin through door images accenting this aspect of the theme of "communal blood."

But Quentin was not listening, because there was also something which he too could not pass--that door . . . the white girl in her underthings . . . as the door crashed in and the brother stood there . . . the pistol still hanging against his flank: the two of them, brother and sister, curiously alike as if the difference in sex had merely sharpened the common blood to a terrific, an almost unbearable similarity. . . . (page 172)

Faulkner uses aperture imagery to connect The Sound and the Fury with Absalom, Absalom! in this incident which strongly suggests Quentin's own emotions about Caddy. In an essay on language patterns in Faulkner, Florence Leaver comments on "word motifs." She notes that Quentin uses the words "sister," "honeysuckle," and "water" many times in his one-hundred

page section of the book (The Sound and the Fury), and that he uses the word "door" twenty-five times. Leaver attaches symbolic significance to this group of words which she says "embody the incest theme, the too-sweet honeysuckle memories, and the compulsion to death by water."¹⁸

Faulkner also links the two novels through Quentin's emotional encounter with the dying Henry, and another forbidden door. Quentin recalls his night trip with Rosa to Sutpen's Hundred when

he walked down that upper hall between the scaling walls and beneath the cracked ceiling, toward the faint light which fell outward from the last door and paused there, saying, 'No, No' and then 'Only I must. I have to.'

Quentin's pause before the "last door"--death?--and his apparently involuntary comment hint of another forbidden door: his own "last door"--death by suicide. He obviously identifies with Henry, who also loved his sister.

Faulkner demonstrates resourcefulness as a writer by his wide and varied employment of aperture images in characterization. His sense of design shows in his use of parallel and contrasting door, gate, and window images. In addition, apertures definitely help to create the character antitheses noted by Slatoff.

¹⁸"Faulkner: The Word as Principle and Power," South Atlantic Quarterly, Autumn, 1958, rpt. in Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery, eds., William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1960), p. 207.

Chapter v

CONCLUSION

Relevant aperture images in quantity and variety give evidence of William Faulkner's use of them in his Yoknapatawpha series. He makes them function effectively but unobtrusively, and, in the case of Absalom, Absalom!, applies them appropriately at every level: plot, theme, setting, effect, and characterization, as well as structure. After a study of the images, they seem more than ever to have evolved through a process of natural selection, in that they have characters that help them become adapted to their specific environment.

But close reading of the text of Absalom, Absalom! points out a need for further explanation of their use in this complex work. The adaptability of these images to aspects of Southern life, plus Faulkner's own Southern heritage and his sensitivity to architecture and to paradox, cannot entirely account for the scope of their usage in Absalom, Absalom!; and although the conclusions stated at the end of the Chapter I of this image-study qualify as valid, they do not entirely suffice. The rather general conclusions given there state that these images are peculiarly appropriate to Absalom, Absalom!; and that Faulkner's full exploitation of them

at many levels of the work heightens interest and drama, unifies the novel, and demonstrates the author's command of patterned detail within an overall design. Perhaps they are too general; a more detailed analysis of their specific usage in Absalom, Absalom! follows.

A review of the text reveals some given conditions of form and content not heretofore stressed, which Faulkner establishes for himself in the novel. They concern its total effect, and they form limits within which he worked. These conditions affect the selection of devices to be used in telling his story (including images of apertures), whether or not he consciously planned and selected them in advance. They lead to some further conclusions concerning aperture usage in Absalom, Absalom!. Briefly, these governing conditions are the use in the novel of observed action; the lack of warmth in Sutpen and in his household; and the importance in the novel of pride, paradox, and pattern.

In Conrad Aiken's essay on Faulkner cited earlier, "The Novel as Form," he writes that the form of Absalom, Absalom! is "really circular--there is no beginning and no ending properly speaking, and therefore no logical point of entrance." After enlarging on this theory he concludes that Faulkner uses this "circular form" to force the reader into a game (which he cannot win) of trying to distinguish between "legend" and "truth," since "what is

'real' . . . from one point of view, turns out to be 'unreal' from another," and that the reader must "just submit and follow the circling of the author's interest" (page 51).

Aiken's commentary leads to the first of the "given conditions" noted above: Faulkner's use of observed action in Absalom, Absalom!. Although Aiken takes no note of observed action, his conclusion emphasizes the necessity for it. Observed (or observable) action is necessary because all the narrators are outsiders to the Sutpen household, and are therefore unreliable. Even Rosa is an outsider. Although Rosa has contact with the family as a child, and later lives at Sutpen's Hundred for a year, she is never accepted as being of "communal blood," and much is kept from her. Many of the events the narrators relate are told to them, not witnessed by them. The reader must sort out information he accumulates from them; is it fiction or fact? Faulkner does indeed play a game with the reader, but he keeps carefully within his own rules by diligently interspersing the opinions, conjectures, and exaggerations of the narrators with actions which are verifiable because they are observable by the more objective general public. He uses aperatures in doing so.

He obviously finds doors logical starting and ending points for the observation of a character, often

picking him up as he exits from a door, and dropping him when he enters one, since no narrator is present inside (behind the aperture) to give a factual report. An exit from a door provides opportunity for anyone nearby to see the character and observe his actions; the reader can accept these actions, at least, as fact. Sutpen's call on the Coldfields while "the committee" waits at the gate provides a typical example.

Similar rules for the "game" with the reader apply to windows. A character appears in a window and looks out on a particular scene. His manner or appearance can then be "legitimately" described, as well as the scene he watches, and the description accepted by the reader as factual, as in the case of Judith and Clytie looking down through the loft entrance, observable by all below.

The conclusion is reached that apertures continually provide for the alert reader "logical points of entrance" (to use Aiken's phrase) to the facts of Absalom, Absalom! by presenting opportunities for observed actions, which preserve the veracity of the author's narrative technique.

A second condition Faulkner establishes for himself in the novel, and within which he must work, is the lack of love and warmth in Sutpen's nature and a corresponding lack in his home. Cleanth Brooks has commented that Sutpen has "monstrous inhumanity," and "an aggressive innocence that destroys the world about

it."¹⁹ Some of Sutpen's actions with apertures prove the truth of the first statement; the second applies in part to his home and family.

Doors, gates, and windows are fitting symbols for Absalom, Absalom! because of the lack of a warm, human family-center; there is no heart-of-the-house for Sutpen's Hundred. Just as Sutpen formulated his design motivated by the influence of his brief experience with a person who was no more than a passing stranger--the Virginia planter--rather than by the influence of a loving family, so it is in his own home, his own family. For Sutpen's Hundred Faulkner has no images of kitchen or hearth, parlor or porch, which are the sources of human comfort and contact in other Faulknerian families. The reader agrees with the author in the conclusion that only apertures which open to the impersonal, uncaring, and chance influences and involvements of the world passing by just beyond them are fitting symbols for life as it is lived in the Sutpen house.

The final "condition" consists of the three basic concerns of Faulkner in this novel; they form an alliterative series: pride, paradox, and pattern--a trio of topics difficult to over-emphasize. Pride and

¹⁹Cleanth Brooks, "American 'Innocence' in James, Fitzgerald and Faulkner," Shaping Joy (New York: Harcourt, 1971), pp. 193, 194.

paradox prove to be the two fundamental subjects of Absalom, Absalom!, with each taking many forms; and pattern, based on repetition, is the predominating feature of its structure. The reader concludes that no objects other than doors, gates, and windows could more satisfactorily symbolize the pride and paradox in the novel, and that Faulkner's use of these images in various patterns contributes to its intricate but sound structure.

Some of the door, gate, and window images Faulkner uses are mundane; but accretion, even of the mundane, is convincing and impressive in its accumulated array of patterned use. The conclusion can be made that the sheer numbers of aperture images justify the thesis statement. But dramatic, significant, or interestingly obscure uses are also present; they intersperse the more ordinary incidents, highlighting and validating them. Both quantity and quality of image usage are important; in Absalom, Absalom!, they are equal.

Facile, mistaken conclusions abound concerning the private life of an author, based solely on his writing; but one must make the final conclusion that Faulkner's ingrained conception of the significance of doors was basic to his total view of life. He refers to sex and death as "the front door and back door of

the world" in Soldiers' Pay; ²⁰ and in a line from As I Lay Dying, he has Addie speak of her utter lack of feeling for Anse, describing him as a "significant shape, profoundly without life like an empty door-frame" (page 465). Conversely, Faulkner must see the person framed by an aperture as the profoundly eloquent expression of the very essence of life.

Faulkner's wife, Estelle, once reported in a published statement that

there are times when Billy will go into his workroom and stay for hours. He hasn't any key, so he takes the door knob off and carries it with him. No one can get in and he is quite secure.²¹

Just as in the "game" Conrad Aiken describes between Faulkner and the reader of his complex novel, the reader wonders (but will never know) if Faulkner, behind his own closed door, was influenced by contemplating the doorknob on his desk as he wrote of doors and other apertures in Absalom, Absalom!.

²⁰William Faulkner, Soldiers' Pay (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926; R. William Faulkner, 1954), p. 295.

²¹"Mrs. William Faulkner Interviewed by Marshall J. Smith (1931)," Press-Scimitar, November 30, rpt. in James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, eds., Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962 (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 26.

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