

Bellarmino University

ScholarWorks@Bellarmino

Undergraduate Theses

Undergraduate Works

5-4-2020

Lost Voices: William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, and the Nature of History

Luke Hardin
lhardin@bellarmine.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.bellarmino.edu/ugrad_theses



Part of the [Literature in English, North America Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hardin, Luke, "Lost Voices: William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, and the Nature of History" (2020).
Undergraduate Theses. 51.
https://scholarworks.bellarmino.edu/ugrad_theses/51

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Works at ScholarWorks@Bellarmino. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@Bellarmino. For more information, please contact jstemmer@bellarmine.edu, kpeers@bellarmine.edu.

Lost Voices: William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, and the Nature of History

Luke Hardin

“I was talking about time. It’s so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it’s not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place—the picture of it, stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don’t think of it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened.” - Toni Morrison (Beloved, 43)

“and so in a few thousand years, I who regard you will also have sprung from the loins of African kings. Now I want you to tell me just one more thing. Why do you hate the South?” – William Faulkner (Absalom, Absalom!, 302)

The novels of William Faulkner and Toni Morrison are nothing if not haunted. Though the authors themselves remain, in many ways, diametrically opposed, their works remain inextricably entangled due to the looming specter of history that hangs over their pages. Perhaps more-so than any other writers in the 20th Century, these two towering figures of American fiction took seriously the task of unpacking the migrainous burden of history. Read together, they offer differing perspectives on the nature of writing one's own past, and how this is informed by race and class. Specifically, Faulkner's novel *Absalom, Absalom!* has long been regarded as the example par excellence of meta-narration and the construction of historical consensus. Morrison's novel *Beloved*, by contrast, is a story about those that have been deemed other by traditional accounts of history, and in that sense, its absence of meta-narration is deafening. Nevertheless, despite the disparate nature of these viewpoints, a fruitful dialogue between the two can be constructed through the mediation of two major thematic concerns: time and narrative. As conceived of by Faulkner and Morrison, narrative is greatly informed and shaped by time, and the two together serve as the constitutive elements of history itself. What this work will look to do is use these two themes to fully construct the new, pragmatic vision of history

that is hinted at in *Beloved*. Whereas the vision of historiography critiqued by Faulkner in *Absalom, Absalom!* is immanently othering, this alternative approach to history is centered primarily for the other.

Rather than focusing on these works in their entirety, this essay will be guided by character studies of Faulkner's Quentin Compson and Morrison's Sethe. Quentin, Faulkner's most three-dimensional character and perhaps greatest literary achievement, is best suited for this kind of analysis, as his presence extends across two books and can be seen as the clearest distillation of Southern historiography. Though a brief analysis of Quentin's father Jason will be used to better illuminate his narrative patterns, it is Quentin that will serve as the primary point of interest for establishing Faulkner's critique of traditional history, the totalizing account of how things "really" played themselves out. Sethe, likewise, is a towering figure in Morrison's oeuvre and her story can be viewed as Morrison's definitive account of the psychological bludgeoning that comes as a result of having a traumatic past. Just as Jason will be used as a foil to Quentin, another of *Beloved's* primary characters, Paul D, will be used to augment Sethe's characterization. Unlike the exegesis of Faulkner's work, though, which will be established through a reading of the meta-narration that appears within the primary texts, the significance of Morrison's work can only be comprehended by considering the production of the primary text itself. That is, Toni Morrison's extra-textual choice to reach back into the past and narrativize the life of Margaret Garner actually informs how the content of *Beloved* is to be read. It is this narrative technique of Morrison herself that finally supplements the absence of meta-narration for her characters and points to a new conception of historical writing. In contrast to the totalizing attempts of the historical accounts given by Faulkner's characters, the historical excavation of Morrison calls for a more pragmatic relationship to history, one that appropriates

certain moments from the past and uses them to ground the present and constructively inspire events in the future. This alternative relationship to history is one that cultivates a historical consciousness, yet circumvents the pernicious effects of totalizing meta-narratives.

Faulkner's genius by this point hardly needs any expounding, but it is worth underscoring the degree to which his work conveys the shifting roles of white aristocrats in the American South in the wake of Reconstruction. At the heart of Faulkner's work is the Old South, a mythologized paradise that represents the zenith of Southern culture for the citizens of Yoknapatawpha County. Many of his characters are the fallen and benighted, those that are unable to reconcile themselves with the region's fall from grace; Faulkner's South is static, unable to move on from a perceived tragedy in the past. This feeling of being stuck in time, unable to look towards the future, is at the root of Faulkner's occupation with temporality and explains why his characters are continuously being rocked by reverberations from the past. What is rarely, if ever, acknowledged by these characters, however, is the true nature of this perceived paradise, the fact that its immense wealth was generated by the free labor of African-American slaves. What Faulkner's greatest works depict is the subtle shift in this center of Southern culture. Many of the county's citizens are indeed happy to proceed as usual, continuing on as damned exiles of a great civilization, but for some, the true nature of the South is beginning to gently creep into the psyche. This is incommensurate with common depictions of an inflated Old South, and just as the disintegration of an edifice's foundation can cause even a mansion to crumble, the façade of Southern glory begins to deteriorate. For Quentin, who is ravished by guilt over his region's past, this center of the illustrious Old South has finally collapsed into a vacuous black hole, and by the end of *The Sound and the Fury*, this abyss has indeed consumed him. For Faulkner, Quentin's self-annihilation is the only logical end point for the aspect of the

South represented by Quentin, and his job as an author is simply to peruse the landscape of a moribund world.

This is not to suggest that Faulkner was entirely clear-eyed and attentive to the nuances of social inequalities surrounding class, gender, and the South at large. This is perhaps most evident in his 1956 “Letter to a Norther Editor,” in which he notoriously argued against desegregation in the South and defended his region from the epithets of Northerners. He writes that:

“The rest of the United States knows next to nothing about the South. The present idea and picture which they hold of a people decadent and even obsolete through inbreeding and illiteracy—the inbreeding a result of the illiteracy and the isolation so that there is nothing else to do at night—as to be a kind of species of juvenile delinquents with a folklore of blood and violence, yet who, like juvenile delinquents, can be controlled by firmness once they are brought to believe that the police mean business, is as baseless and illusory as that one a generation ago of (oh yes, we subscribed to it too) columned porticoes and magnolias.”

These hardly seem the words of a man intent on critiquing the South, and this polemic published near the end of Faulkner’s life has necessitated a certain reconsideration of his work. Some have attributed this statement to the general concomitance of old age and increasingly conservative social stances, but I would argue that this outburst from Faulkner is in deep accordance with his 1930s output. “Letter to A Northern Editor” is the publication of a man clearly invested in the well-being of the South, and this is in undoubtable agreement with what we know of Faulkner as a person and writer. Having lived nearly the entirety of his life in Oxford, Mississippi, Faulkner

was never able to escape the suffocating grasp of his hometown, and though a select few of his novels are located outside of Jefferson (*The Wild Palms* and *A Fable*, perhaps most notably), he always returned to the South, his true muse. Many of literature's most beautiful, baroque, and inflated descriptions of the American South can be found in the work of Faulkner; his career-long ode and dedication to this region of the United States reach such cosmic proportions that one cannot help but wonder if his presentation of Quentin is in part a self-critique. Quentin represents a self-destructive strain of the Old South that has been brought into the present, and *The South and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* may be best read as an attempt on Faulkner's behalf to purge this self-annihilating element out of himself as a way of leading the way forward for his fellow Southerners. Though many of Faulkner's depictions of race and gender can be read progressively (especially *Light in August*), it is vital to keep in mind the general ambivalence towards social inequality of the author when reading his works. This is all the more true when considering the work of Toni Morrison as a dialogic response to his work.

In the decade following Faulkner's 1962 death, American literature was rocked by the emergence of Cleveland-born author Toni Morrison. Her typically fragmented narratives harkened back to her Modernist predecessors, and as such, her work was frequently pigeonholed and measured against Joyce, Eliot, and other Modernists. Though she is very much writing in the Modernist tradition, her identity as an African-American woman gives her a unique perspective in how she conflates time and narrative, particularly as they deal with race. As she herself put it, "I am not *like* James Joyce; I am not *like* Thomas Hardy; I am not *like* Faulkner; I am not *like* in that sense." (Interview with Nellie McKay; rpt. Taylor Guthrie 152) Morrison's experience as an African-American woman, indeed, provides her with thematic nuance that both corrects and enlightens the work of these and other Modernist predecessors. She is not Faulkner, and her

work is vital because of it. So while her stylistic experimentation and use of time to examine slavery in *Beloved* could be considered Faulknerian, perhaps the most accurate way of considering Faulkner's influence can be derived from Morrison's frequent likening of her writing to music. As critic Nancy Ellen Batty has noted regarding Morrison's resistance to being *like* her influences, "this insistence invites us to speculate on an intertextuality that operates somewhat like the "riffing" of a jazz piece." (*Riff, Refrain, Reframe: Toni Morrison's Song of Absalom*) In this sense, much of her work can be read as a response to Faulkner in the same way a signified trumpet responds to a signifying saxophone in a jazz piece. While Faulkner, Joyce, and Eliot are writing from *Paradise Lost* and ultimately supplementing the hole created by loss with a subjectivity that reflects the white male experience, Morrison acts as the unconscious that reemerges after being denied entrance to the gates of Eden. The characters of *Beloved* were never allowed the elevated status that allows Quentin to reflect on a cavalier ethos that is now gone. While the traditional Modernist loss emerged from an absent center and created a periphery around which Quentin could stand and gaze, Morrison remains at the center and provides a thundering voice that can only be heard as echoes in the distance in Faulkner novels.

As previously alluded to, two themes that allow for a discourse between the two authors to be mediated are narrative and time. These terms are shrouded in ambiguity and used in different senses throughout the analysis, so it will be worthwhile to briefly denote how they should be conceptualized. Regarding narrative, specifically the meta-narrative that is blindingly present in *Absalom, Absalom!* and equally striking in its absence in *Beloved*, I will approach these works by borrowing a concept from Paul Ricoeur, the 20th Century French hermeneutician. *Narrative identity* is a concept Ricoeur proposed in his 1986 Gifford Lectures as a critique of the Cartesian cogito; quite simply, it argues that the primary constituent of personal identity is the

narrative that one tells about oneself. For Ricoeur, a self is a person, “capable of attesting to his or her own existence and acting in the world, a self that both acted and was acted upon who could recount and take responsibility for its actions. Insofar as we can speak metaphysically of such a self it has to be in terms of act and potentiality rather than substance.” (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*) Thus, a person’s sense of self and personal agency is directly tied to their ability to conceptualize their life events as a cohesive narrative, according to this theory. As a theoretical lens, this concept will allow us to read *Quentin and Sethe* as attempting to integrate their personal loose ends into a cohesive narrative identity that subsumes other minor narratives. This can clearly be seen on a personal level in countless texts, but Faulkner and Morrison take the next step by extending this concept to the collective level. While much of the following analysis will be centered upon the construction of personal narrative identity, it will ultimately move towards a collective narrative identity, a phenomenon I will term *cultural meta-narrative*. A *collective* narrative, in contrast to a personal one, is simply the meaning-creating story that is told by any given society or group of people.

This idea of a cultural meta-narrative is derived from Jean-François Lyotard, but there is a key distinction. The meta-narrative as conceived by Lyotard is “a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience.” (Stephens, John and Robyn McCallum, *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature*) The distinction I draw with my emphasis on “cultural” is essentially one of size and genesis. Whereas a Christian or Marxian meta-narrative is all-encompassing in its application to human history and is based upon a primary set of texts, a cultural meta-narrative is functional for a specific community and has its foundation in the aggregate of many sources. Perhaps the best example of such a narrative is the ideology of *The Lost Cause*, which stressed

both the nobility of the Confederate Army in the Civil War and the virtues of the Antebellum South. This view was nearly all-encompassing in its influence upon the Reconstruction-Era South, as it attempted to structure and make sense of the disillusion felt by southerners at the time. Crucially, this narrative came about as a result of various Confederate generals and historians retelling the story of the fall of the Old South (particularly the 1870s articles of General Jubal A. Early and *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* by Jefferson Davis). As a result, these cultural meta-narratives maintain a certain fluidity lacked by meta-narratives based upon isolated primary sources, allowing for high-standing citizens, like historians or generals, to morph and fit these narratives for changing social circumstances. This is precisely what we will see Quentin Compson and his fellow high-standing southerners do in *Absalom, Absalom!* The ultimate purpose of these kinds of collective narratives, I will argue, is to provide infrastructural support for personal narratives. When integrating experience into a narrative identity becomes difficult, the cultural meta-narrative will always be there to ground it.

The use of time by these authors is equally perplexing. Most importantly, it must be sharply distinguished from the measurement of time, or “clock time.” Faulkner and Morrison are instead preoccupied with the experience of temporality, or how past, present, and future all interact with each other. This interaction among the elements of temporal experience was perhaps most eloquently expressed by Martin Heidegger, who favored a unitary conception of these elements as opposed to the “vulgar” conception of time, which views past, present, and future as being isolated from each other. For the purposes of this analysis, the most important element of Heidegger’s conception of temporality is the aspect of *projecting* futures. “Essentially ahead of itself,” Heidegger writes, “it (Dasein) has projected itself upon its potentiality-for-being

before going on to any more considerations of itself.” (*Being and Time*, 458) The source of this projection, however, comes directly from the past. As Simon Critchley puts it, “in anticipation, I project towards the future, but what comes out of the future is my past, my personal and cultural baggage, what Heidegger calls my ‘having-been-ness.’” This lens to view temporality will be crucial to keep in mind, as Faulkner and Morrison’s true goal is to demonstrate how history, events in the past, have immense influence upon how we orient ourselves towards the future.

Just as Faulkner and Morrison consider narrative on a collective level, so too do they consider the function of time on a society at large. Much has been written about Faulkner and his use of time, and perhaps the most popular mediation has been through the lens of Henri Bergson’s *durée*. This is not particularly surprising, given that Faulkner himself expressed in an interview with Loic Bouvard that, “I agree pretty much...with Bergson’s theory of the fluidity of time. There is only the present moment, in which I include both the past and the future, and that is eternity.” (*Lion in the Garden*, ed. Meriwether and Millgate, p. 70) This has led to much fruitful discussion of Faulkner’s work, but for the purposes of this analysis, I will resist superimposing any firm and rigid theory of temporality onto these novels. I have evoked Heidegger’s vision of temporality as a metaphor for the way Faulkner and Morrison present the past as constituting one’s orientation towards the future, but this should not be read as an extension or thorough application of Heideggerian philosophy. It is meant merely to mediate the transition from the personal experience of time to the collective level. This ultimate transition is crucial, as Morrison’s conception of time considers the copresence of “rememories” of people that have long-since died (epigraph). Similarly, though Quentin is of course a mere individual, Faulkner depicts him as intimately haunted by the actions of people that lived centuries before him, much in the same way Morrison considers the eternal presence of rememories. Perhaps the

most fitting way to conceptualize time, then, is through Faulkner's famous claim that, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." (*Requiem for a Nun*) Quite simply, what the prose of Faulkner and Morrison rejects is the easily accepted notion that we live on a single, isolated point on a linear graph of time, in which past points are gone and forgotten. Just as, in the Heideggerian framework, the individual projects its future out of its past, so too do societies at large. As Sethe relates in *Beloved*, the experiences of each individual remain "out there outside my head," (43) as the past remains ontologically present alongside and within the temporal present. While this is perhaps easily understood intellectually, what these authors want us to come to terms with is the real, every-day presence of both history and our future.

The textual analysis will be roughly separated into two primary sections, the first of which will be a side-by-side reading of Sethe and Quentin that demonstrates how they experience time and narrative on a personal level. What will ultimately be revealed is that their experiences are entirely reversed; Quentin has a tendency to over-narrate and privilege the diachronic aspect of time, while Sethe is revealed to under-narrate and focus on the synchronic aspect of time. Rather than discussing the implications of this inversion of time and narrative, the goal of this initial reading is merely to demonstrate that it exists, and thus establish a lens for reading the interaction between these two concepts. In *Beloved*, time and narrative are conscious themes for Morrison, which many critics have noted, so the incentive to use this particular novel of hers is clear. Similarly, Faulkner's treatment of the two themes are front and center in his characterization of Quentin, and being as though he appears in two novels, I will consult both *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury* in my discussion of Quentin. For both characters, this portion of the essay will demonstrate how they experience temporality, and how this bleeds into their narrative patterns.

The project's second half will be an investigation into why this lack of congruency between time and narrative is vitally important, and how it came about. Before engaging directly with the texts, I will revisit the concepts of Ricoeur's narrative identity and Heidegger's projection of futures and synthesize them in a way that emphasizes the future-determining nature of narrative identity and cultural meta-narratives. This will allow for a reading of *Beloved* that demonstrates the lack of agency experienced by Sethe and Paul D as a result of their lack of historical consciousness. Despite being perpetually discombobulated due to past trauma, each character is paradoxically in a state of not having any history to speak of, and this results in them dialectically changing roles in their attempt to carve out a new future for themselves. What will hopefully be revealed by the end of the reading is that an agency over one's future is only possible with a collective sense of history, the ability for a social group to write their own past. I will then finally turn to Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* as an exposition of how the dialectic of Sethe and Paul D is overcome, but also as a demonstration of how totalizing approaches to history necessarily create an other. Even further, this form of history leads directly to self-annihilation, and by the novel's end, Faulkner appears to be begging for an alternative way of approaching it. He has brilliantly dissected traditional history and diagnosed its flaws, but we are left wondering where to go as an alternative. This is where the true power of reading him alongside Morrison begins to reveal itself.

The importance of the Faulkner-Morrison dialogue should not be viewed as isolated from contemporary literary and cultural studies. Their works are in fact keenly apt to address, as Fredric Jameson puts it, "an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place." (1, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*) Rightly or wrongly, postmodernism and post-structuralist theory have come to be associated with a lack of historical consciousness,

and though today's humanities are marked by a tremendous plurality, they nevertheless remain firmly influenced by the deconstruction of the 1980s. The successful navigation of late capitalism will surely require a number of tools and perspectives, but what this analysis will argue is that historical consciousness is one of them, and a pivotal one at that. As I will argue throughout my reading, the lack of a sense of history merely leaves structural imbalances in play and obfuscates their nature. What can finally be gleaned from Faulkner and Morrison is that we do in fact need history, as only a historical consciousness will allow us to interrogate and correct how the other has been subsumed by the totalizing meta-narratives that create harmful distinctions. The guiding force, then, of this exegesis will be to establish a collective sense of narrative identity for those that have been deemed other by traditional meta-narrative and cultural meta-narratives. This will be a conception of history that resists both the millenarianism of meta-narratives and the isolated fragmentation of the micro-narratives that characterize postmodernism. History is the un-transcendable horizon of humanity, and if we do not properly grapple with it, it will consume us.

1: Time and Narrative as Experienced by Sethe and Quentin

Time and narrative are the two primary phenomenon that control the lives of both Sethe and Quentin Compson, and it is with these themes that this essay must begin. The two characters experience narrative identity and temporality in inverted ways and this in turn creates a polarity in how they relate to and create history, the written record of past events. Since history, or perhaps historiography, can be broken down into these two constitutive elements, an understanding of how both Faulkner and Morrison's characters experience them can lay the ground for the construction of a new approach to history. What will initially become clear through a comparison of these two characters is a discrepancy in their capacity to construct narrative identities; whereas Sethe can only manage to tell partial narratives of her past, Quentin is so in control of his narrative identity that he can actually insert false information into his story so that he can influence the future in a way that behooves his ideology. Furthermore, the disparate nature of their personal narrativizing is directly formed by their experience of temporality. Due to the traumatic weight of her past, Sethe can barely stand to acknowledge the existence of her personal history and in turn has a great deal of difficulty in shaping her narrative identity. Quentin, conversely, can seemingly only think about the past and fails to acknowledge the reality of the present; this, ultimately, shapes his narrative identity, as he attempts to shape it in a way that preserve the crumbled ruins of his cultural past. Though the relationship of these two themes to historiography will be discussed in a later chapter, it should be clear by the end of this section that narrative identity and temporality regulate each other through a positive feedback loop, creating ever-greater discrepancies between those of high social standing and those that have been deemed other by the dominant cultural narrative.

Toni Morrison begins the action of *Beloved* by allowing Sethe and her daughter Denver to beckon their maudlin muse: “Come on. Come on. You may as well just come on,” (4) they importune the ghost of slavery’s past. Living in 124 Bluestone Road, Sethe and her daughter have been haunted by malevolent supernatural forces for years, as their daily living is frequently interrupted by the throwing of chairs or the rumbling of the floor. Morrison is careful to avoid any hints regarding the “true” nature of these forces, but whether they are meant as genuine supernatural forces or metaphorical statements regarding the intrusion of the past, it quickly becomes clear that Sethe is haunted by her earlier life. Throughout the novel’s first half, Sethe will struggle mightily against herself to let that past come back to her: she perhaps subconsciously knows that control over the specter of her deceased daughter represents her salvation, her ability to shed the plague of guilt and step into the future, but the success of this endeavor is far from guaranteed. This is her predicament. A dive into the murky waters of the past is her only possible entrance into the future, but her imminent fear is that she will drown in the process. Nevertheless, she dives head in, “to end the persecution by calling forth the ghost that tried them so.” (4) Her journey, in every sense, is a Dante-esque descent into the underworld, and the psychology of this purposed acquiescence into the past manifests itself in both Sethe’s phenomenology of temporality and capacity to form a cohesive narrative identity. As the pathway of Sethe’s journey begins to unravel, Morrison makes a pointed effort to demonstrate her heroine’s anxiety over time’s inability to properly pass and the necessary half-truths that make up her narratives.

From the novel’s start, it is clear that Sethe has a strikingly *synchronic* view of temporal passage. That is, she is interested in that which persists despite the passage of clock-time. This is first hinted at in a discussion she has with Baby Suggs, as the two discuss what they can

remember about their deceased children. Baby Suggs laments the fact that all she can remember about her eight children is that her firstborn enjoyed the burnt bottom of bread, but Sethe suggests that this is just her mind blocking out trauma, acting as a survival mechanism: “That’s all you let yourself remember.” (6) For herself, Sethe does not enjoy this perceived luxury; instead, “she worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe. Unfortunately, her brain was devious.” (6) Her mind is then overtaken by an onrush of fragmented memories from her life on Sweet Home as a slave. Sethe’s mind, to her, is defective, unable to properly compartmentalize the disjointed pieces of her past life, and as a result of this inability to narrate her life cohesively, her past comes roaring back. Indeed, after *Beloved*’s backdrop has officially been established, the romantic action between Sethe and Paul D that largely drives the novel begins with this line: “As if to punish her further for her terrible memory, sitting on the porch not forty feet away was Paul D, the last of the Sweet Home men.” (7) Sethe resists this return of the past greatly, wanting nothing more than to have a present without eventfulness; rather than desiring anything positive, she yearns simply for the ceasing of pain, some momentary reprieve from suffering. This is initially what Paul D represents for her, a bit of temporary leisure free from the constant onrush of rememories. Just, as Morrison puts it, “a little time, some way to hold off eventfulness, to push busyness into the corners of the room and just stand there a minute or two.” (21) All of this may not represent an exactly synchronic relationship to time, but it does offer insight into the working of Sethe’s mind, demonstrating her frustration at her inability to keep the past at bay.

David Laurence suggests that, “The damage done by dead folks in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* points to the central position accorded to memory, the place where these dead folks are kept alive, in this novel of futile forgetting and persistent remembrance.” (*Fleshly Ghost and*

Ghostly Flesh: The Word and the Body in Beloved) This may indeed be an accurate evaluation of memory's role in the novel, but for Sethe as a character, the past represents something more than just stored memory. In an early conversation with Denver, she makes this conspicuously clear, admonishing that, "If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened." (43) Denver inquires whether she herself would be able to see someone else's rememory, and Sethe quickly responds in the affirmative. In this staggering description of the past, Morrison makes it unambiguously clear that Sethe views past temporal events as having a genuine ontological quality that persists in reality, even detached from the human memory. At this point in the novel, even before the character of Beloved appears, Sethe's ability to control past events is so weak that her memories seem to slip outside of her head and take on a quality of physical co-presence with the present. Surely, this kind of thinking on Sethe's part accounts for the critical ambiguity that surrounds the existence of Beloved, whether she is a true supernatural ghost or a metaphor for Sethe's past. This conception of temporal synchronism strongly suggests the degree to which Sethe is consumed by her past: she literally cannot fathom reality without its presence. The past, which so often takes on a ghostly quality, is for Sethe engrained into the fabric of the universe. The future, strikingly, is the real apparition in the novel, a faint figure in the distance that only serves to remind one of hopelessness of the present. The future, for Sethe, "was a matter of keeping the past at bay. The 'better life' she believed she and Denver were living was simply not that other one." (51)

As we will see later, the repressed memories of Quentin Compson are more or less constantly near the surface of his thought, as can be seen by the stream of conscious narrative that Faulkner provides him. For Sethe, this is not the case. Rather, her repressed memories appear to be more deeply buried, and when they are triggered, they have the capacity to completely destabilize her. The arrival of Paul D, for one, brings about a flood of repressed memories, and this leads directly to an outburst from the ghostly presence that occupies 124. Paul himself, recognizing the violent intrusion of the past into reality, also experiences the intensity of the situation: “Now he was trembling again but in the legs this time. It took him a while to realize that his legs were not shaking because of worry, but because the floorboards were and the grinding, shoving floor was only part of it.” (21) This violence of the past’s intrusion is only exaggerated as Paul D’s stay lengthens, with it eventually culminating in Beloved’s physical appearance after the group’s trip to the town fair. This continues to point to Sethe’s lack of control over time.

The extent to which Sethe is both attracted and repelled by her past manifests itself in her attempts to construct a narrative identity as well. She recognizes that she needs to construct her past into a cohesive fabric, but approaching such trauma makes full narration nigh-impossible. Thus, her temporal experience directly shapes the way in which she is able to narrate her life’s past. She tries time and time again to engage her past, even going as far as to summon it at the novel’s outset, but the common current that runs throughout the accounts she gives to Denver and Paul D is the element of fragmentation. She has the pieces to work with, but has yet to figure out how they all fit together. This, also, is evident quite early on. After describing her brain as “devious” in her discussion with Baby Suggs, she is reminded of an image of herself, “hurrying across a field, running practically, to get to the pump quickly and rinse the chamomile sap from

her legs.”; crucially, “Nothing else would be in her mind.” (6) This image has appeared in her head with no context, for no apparent reason. Whereas any given mental image can usually be contextualized within a larger internal monologue, these pictures appear for Sethe out of nowhere. Next, “The picture of men coming to nurse her was as lifeless as the nerves in her back where skin buckled like a washboard.” (6) Sethe continues to list vaguely related images, but as she says, they are “lifeless”, disconnected from the meaning that would surround them. Sethe’s psyche is radically fragmented, perhaps as a result of her inability to properly form a narrative identity. Furthermore, as a result of her inability to cohesively narrate her past, Sethe displays a resistance towards the power of language. Much later in the text, when confronted by Paul D, Sethe considers that she “could recognize only seventy-five printed words (half of which appeared in the newspaper clipping), but she knew that the words she did not understand hadn’t any more power than she had to explain.” (190) Her psyche, ravaged by a constant flow of images, is not optimistic that a better way to linguistically write her past would precipitate a better understanding of it. Language comes after reality. This will serve as another point of contrast between her and Quentin, who attempts to shape reality itself with his command over narrative.

Another recurring element of Sethe’s psyche is her tendency to metonymically substitute the trauma of one object onto another. In the barrage of mental images that she lists, she recounts “Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world. It shamed her—remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that.” (7) Her mind can handle the memory, but only if it focuses on something that was tangentially involved with it. Later, she describes outside voices as helping her refurbish “the baby faces of

Howard and Bugler and kept them whole in the world because in her dreams she saw only their parts in trees.” (101) Again, Sethe is unable to construct a full view of her children in her head due to the trauma that is associated with them. This fragmentation of her memory is tied directly into her narrative capacity when Denver asks her mother if she tells her everything there is to tell. Sethe, tellingly, “looked down at her feet and saw again the sycamores.” (9) Pressed about the veracity of her stories, Sethe can only consider the way in which her brain refuses to confront memories in their full prowess. Nevertheless, with the arrival of Paul D, Sethe has no choice but to start truly facing her memories. The first half of the novel is structured largely around her gradual approach to the root of her trauma.

Much has been made of this tension between the desire to both remember and forget in the novel. Caroline Rody suggests that even for Morrison, there is a “hesitance to force the past out of characters whose memories stand in for the suffering of innumerable unknown people. Any recuperations are performed against a blank background of storylessness, symbolic of our historical knowledge of African Americans and of their representation in our literature.” (*Toni Morrison's Beloved: History, 'Rememory,' and a 'Clamor for a Kiss,'*) To the degree to which Sethe and Paul D indeed act as stand ins for numerous unknown people, it makes sense that the stories Sethe tells throughout the novel's first half are surface level. Sethe is put under pressure, however, when Denver reprimands her for not telling her full history. After Sethe recounts the episode with Amy, Denver accusatorily states: “You never told me all what happened. Just that they whipped you and you run off, pregnant. With me.” (44) Sethe acquiesces, going into a bit more detail about life with schoolteacher, but by the time she reaches the fate of Sixo, even Denver accepts that going further would be too painful. After Sethe stops her narrative, “Denver knew that her mother was through with it...Sethe had reached the point beyond which she would

not go.” (45) Reflecting upon this break in her mother’s narrative, Denver resigns herself to the fact that “Her mother had secrets—things she wouldn’t tell; things she halfway told.” (45)

Despite these difficulties, Sethe persists in her efforts to lasso in her past with the rope of narrative; this, however, only causes the pain of her past to increase. After the flood of memories released after reuniting with Paul D, along with the more extensive narratives she begins to tell Denver, Sethe’s past manifests itself in the physical form of Beloved. The trauma of her past and the completeness of her narrative feed off and strengthen each other, ultimately moving towards a conrescence that lies at the center of the novel. After Beloved asks Sethe to speak of her diamonds, it is revealed that storytelling was

“a way to feed her. Just as Denver discovered and relied on the delightful effect sweet things had on Beloved, Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling. It amazed Sethe (as much as it pleased Beloved) because every mention of her past life hurt. Everything in it was past or lost. She and Baby Suggs had agreed without saying so that it was unspeakable; to Denver’s inquiries Sethe gave short replies or rambling incomplete reveries...But, as she began telling about the earrings, she found herself wanting to, liking it...it was an unexpected pleasure.” (69)

In the pages that follow, the potency of both Sethe’s temporal experience and her narrative capacity increase together. Morrison suggests that Sethe’s “brain was not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day...one more step was the most she could see of the future.” (83) This ever-shrinking orientation towards the future makes the abyss that her narrative is approaching seem all the more insidious. From Paul D’s point of view, “Saying more might push them both to a place they couldn’t get back from.” (86) Still, despite this growing sense of dread accompanying the

residents of 124, the threads of the past begin to come together, and even Denver feels confident enough to relate to Beloved the story of her birth; summoning the courage needed to tell the story, Denver “swallowed twice to prepare for the telling, to construct out of the strings she had heard all her life a net to hold Beloved.” (90) Paul D, also, offers Sethe a sense of stability that allows for her to buttress her storytelling. She even begins to feel somewhat better about her past, saying that “Her story was bearable because it was his as well—to tell, to refine and tell again.” (116) With both the strength of narrative and temporal experience increasing, they appear to be moving together towards a point of singularity.

That is indeed exactly what is found in the last section of the book’s first part. After receiving a news clip from Stamp Paid about a lady that murdered her daughter in a shed to save her from a life of slavery, Paul D takes the clip to Sethe to inquire whether the story is about her. Upon being confronted, Sethe is described as “Circling, circling, now she was gnawing something else instead of getting to the point.” (191) Sethe, apparently, is aware that her narrative identity is coming dangerously close to a point of pure trauma, and she hovers persistently above that abyss, desperately trying to avoid speaking the words that she knows will condemn her. She fights this, saying that she “knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask”; all of this is futile, however, because the truth of the matter is “simple, not a long-drawn-out record of flowered shifts, tree cages, selfishness, ankle ropes and walls.” (192) Sethe finally completes the book’s thus-far guiding process, telling Paul D that she did in fact slit the throat of her infant daughter, putting her babies where she thought they would be safe. Paul, for all of his own trauma, is petrified in terror over this revelation; his horror, however, rather than being rooted in the murderous act itself, comes out of his disbelief over

Sethe's ability to tell the story. "Suddenly", Morrison writes "he saw what Stamp Paid wanted him to see: more important than what Sethe had done was what she claimed. It scared him."

(193) Paul proceeds to insult her, and distance between the two emerges, negating all that they had built in the previous pages. After completing her story and securing her narrative identity, Sethe coolly thinks to herself: "He must think I can't bear to hear him say it. That after all I have told him and after telling me how many feet I have, 'goodbye' would break me to pieces. Ain't that sweet." (195) Narrative identity completed, she returns to 124 to face Denver and Beloved with this wholistic sense of identity.

The repercussions of Sethe's completed narrative identity will be discussed in a latter chapter, as the goal of this section is simply to demonstrate the manner in which she experiences both temporality and narrative. As we have seen, Sethe is caught deeply in the slough of the past, focused primarily on staying afloat rather than actually swimming to safety. As Paul D relates, "Working, working dough. Nothing better than that to start the day's serious work of beating back the past." (86) Her ability to narrativize her own past, similarly, lacks the capacity to plan for the future: due to the trauma that is continuously revisiting her, Sethe's primary narrative concern is suppressing undesired memories. Compared to Quentin, who meticulously crafts narratives in a way that will be propitious to his future, Sethe's command over narrative is essentially nonexistent. For Sethe, this relationship to time and narrative undergoes a shift over the course of the novel, but Sethe's initial predicament is perhaps most relevant to the argument this analysis will make. If we follow Rody in viewing *Beloved's* cast as "characters whose memories stand in for the suffering of innumerable unknown people", then Sethe's experience can be viewed as archetypal of the how those deemed other by history experience time and narrative. The common thread that characterizes the experiences of these others is that of the

unusable past: rather than being able to craft the narrative of their pasts in a way that they see fit, they struggle greatly to write their pasts in any cohesive sense at all.

The complete opposite experience of narrative identity and temporality is seen in the character of Quentin Compson. In his essay "Time in Faulkner: *The Sound and the Fury*," Jean-Paul Sartre accuses William Faulkner of ignoring any sense of future in his portrayal of temporality. For Quentin Compson, whom he takes to be the author's most representative character, the generation of meaning is likened to the coming into focus of images viewed through a rearview mirror: the peripheral vision of the present garners meaning only as it fades into the distance and can be viewed retrospectively. For Quentin, who cannot interpret the present or consider the future, "there is nothing, since the future does not exist. One present, emerging from the unknown, drives out another present. It is the sum that we compute again and again." (Sartre, 226) Quentin is so engulfed by memories of the past that thoughts towards the future fail to even appear on his radar; the present, conversely, is the source of Quentin's anxiety, and he maniacally attempts to ensure that the present moment lives up to his grandiloquent conceptions of the past. Rather than attempting to reconcile himself with the past through forming a narrative identity though, Quentin actively understands narrative as a time-binding epiphenomenon that is able to strategically mold how past moments are brought back into the present. In this sense, he attempts to over-narrate in an effort to halt the passage of time in its tracks, keeping himself and the South at large in a state where he sits at the top of the social hierarchy.

Quentin's anxiety over the passage of the present moment is most pronounced in *The Sound and the Fury*, in which he is the focus of the second chapter. On the morning of June 2, 1910, he wakes up in his Harvard dormitory and immediately notes that, "When the shadow of

the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight o'clock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch." (76) Just by viewing the shadow of a sash, Quentin is able to approximate the day's hour, and this will be the theme that runs throughout the course of this chapter: regardless of how many physical signs of the time he destroys, Quentin is completely incapable of ignoring the passage of time. It is possible to momentarily forget it, but then "in a second of ticking it can create in the mind the unbroken the long diminishing parade of time you didn't hear." (76) This incessant focus upon time is sardonically mocked by the memory of Quentin's grandfather, who gifted him his current watch years ago: "I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it." (76) Lying in bed and contemplating the day ahead of him, his thoughts immediately go to his sister Caddy as he begins to consider her lost virginity. As will be later revealed, Quentin's distress over his sister's perceived promiscuity is due not to incestuous jealousy, but rather simply because of the refractory nature of Caddy's actions. Against all decorum of the 19th Century South, Caddy engaged in sexual activity outside of wedlock, and Quentin is beginning to understand the somber fact that he can no longer completely control his sister and women in general. Frantically, he remembers his father's remark that "men invented virginity not women," (78) a statement likely made as an attempt to combat Quentin's reification of virginity, but in turn only reinforces his fear that an entire way of living is beginning to crumble. Quentin, who derives all sense of self and meaning from cultural values, defiantly attempts to stop this passage of cultural time as he symbolically crushes his watch, smashing it onto his dresser and leaving for the day.

Nevertheless, despite smashing the watch's glass, "The watch ticked on;" (80) outside in Cambridge, he notes that "There was a clock, high up in the sky," (82) as the sun itself begins

to act as a primordial clock. With this universal clock now in play, Quentin becomes hyper-aware of his own shadow, trying repeatedly to lose it to no avail. Clearly, Quentin will never be able to distract himself long enough to forget about the eternal clicking of the world's clock. As with the sash in the chapter's opening passage, he is continuously reminded of his desire to stop time by viewing various physical objects, such as the hands of a clock that reminds him of a soaring gull. Stephen M. Ross notes this gull as a recurring motif, suggesting that "This image of stasis within space and time reflects Quentin's desire to escape time and motion — to escape life itself — into some pure, still, and safe realm where nothing will change." (*Reading Faulkner*, 55) The temporal stasis of the gull is what Quentin longs for but never finds on this day in Boston. The lone instance in the chapter of Quentin actively associating this sense of stasis with a moment comes in the form of a memory, as he recalls the first time he revisited his home-town of Jefferson after going away to school. In this memory, he plays "Christmas gift" with an African-American, an old Antebellum game in which whites acted in a clearly condescending manner. After seeing an African-American acting in such a subservient way after months of seeing them in a relatively more progressive position in Massachusetts, Quentin nostalgically describes his train as having "that quality about them of shabby and timeless patience, of static serenity." (87) Clearly, in his pining for "static serenity", what Quentin truly longs for is a time in which he can fully embody the cavalier ethos that he hears reverberated in family stories of the Old South. If it had not already been clear, this passage reveals what is truly at stake for Quentin in this chapter: he has the most to lose with the passage of time and he can rapidly feel his sense of self disintegrating. Unlike Sethe, his relationship to time is completely diachronic and related to the change that comes with it. In this sense, the phenomenology of their experiences of temporality is completely inverted.

Quentin's approach to narration is equally incongruous to that of Sethe. This is the catalyzing force of *Absalom, Absalom!* and will be dealt with extensively in a later chapter, but there is also much that can be inferred about Quentin's relationship to narrative in *The Sound and the Fury*. Whereas Sethe can only narrate her past in partial half-truths, Quentin consciously inserts false information into his narrative for strategic purposes. I have termed this approach "over-narration," in opposition to Sethe's "under-narration," as he seemingly views narrative as something that shapes reality rather than reflects it. As an example, during his walk around Cambridge, Quentin recalls a story told to him by Versch about a man that went into the woods and castrated himself. Considering the effects of castration, Quentin suggests that "It's not not having them. It's never to have had them then I could say O That That's Chinese I don't know Chinese." (116) Ross explains the significance of this utterance, suggesting that Quentin's approach to language represents "a kind of dream wish in which words can change reality, even biology... Quentin is typically trying to make the power of words greater than the power of reality. He has had other such fantasies, as when he imagines that he was Dalton Ames's mother holding Ames's father away so that Ames would never have been conceived, and when he imagines himself without the capacity for sex ("O That That's Chinese I don't know Chinese" [116:5])." (106-107) This idea of language determining reality is quickly reinforced as Quentin observes three young boys fishing: "They all talked at once, their voices insistent and contradictory and impatient, making of unreality a possibility, then a probability, then an incontrovertible fact, as people will when their desires become words." (117) Ross argues that this line of thinking indeed foreshadows Quentin's attempt to retroactively change reality with his words: "Quentin inadvertently describes his own attempt to eliminate Caddy's lovers from her past and to make his incest with Caddy real by telling his father he committed it: "if i could

tell you we did it would have been so and then the others wouldnt be so and then the world would roar away" (177:10)." (104) Finally, Quentin's faith in the power of narrative is most pronounced during his interactions with Caddy. Recalling an argument between the two of them about Caddy's premarital sexuality, he remembers a rhetorical question from his sister: "Do you want me to say it do you think that if I say it it wont be." (122) Quentin seemingly answers this question in the affirmative, obscurely remarking: "Say it to Father will you I will am my fathers Progenitive I invented him created I him Say it to him it will not be for he will say I was not and then you and I since philoprogenitive." (122) So great is Quentin's belief in the power of narrative that he believes it can change reality and retroactively negate the perceived crimes of his sister.

For his own part, Faulkner is strongly condemnatory of Quentin, and his broader critique of historical narration can be seen as anticipated in this earlier work. Faulkner almost certainly had in mind T.S. Eliot's "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" in his use of the word "philoprogenitive" in the previously quoted passage. As Ross again notes, "Quentin's — rather, Faulkner's — allusion to Eliot's poem, then, invokes a cautionary note about the potential dangers of trafficking too heavily in words, at the expense of physical reality." (108) Perhaps the most telling image of the entire chapter, however, comes during Quentin's altercation with Gerald Bland. Here, in one of the most intense passages in the entire novel, Quentin is deep in reverie thinking about an episode in which he held a knife to Caddy's throat over the Dalton Ames incident. After over ten pages of dialogue from this event in the past, Faulkner presents us with this seemingly irrelevant passage: "It kept on running for a long time, but my face felt cold and sort of dead, and my eye, and the cut place on my finger was smarting again. I could hear Shreve working the pump, then he came back with the basin and a round blob of twilight

wobbling in it, with a yellow edge like a fading balloon, then my reflection. I tried to see my face in it.” (164) In the context of the novel, it is initially difficult to make sense of what exactly is occurring here, but this confusion of the reader is meant to mirror Quentin’s own confoundment that he has actually been in a physical fight with Bland during this memory. This, seemingly, encapsulates the entirety of Quentin’s predicament: maniacally obsessed with the past, he is unable to actively interpret the present, leaving him completely defenseless. Despite his insistence upon trying to halt time with his over-narration, Quentin is left completely naked in the face of the present, and as a result, he feels that his only way forward is self-annihilation.

Taken as a whole, *The Sound and the Fury* can be seen as a book about perspective, as the novel’s four chapters are comprised of four separate characters’ radically different subjective interpretations of the same story. This perhaps suggests that it is misguided to place too much emphasis upon the interpretation of any one character, as Faulkner himself never indicates that one character’s interpretation of the family is any more valid than the others. Nevertheless, there is strong reason to believe that Quentin holds a place of heightened importance within the oeuvre of Faulkner; like Shakespeare’s Hamlet and Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus, the eldest Compson boy is the nexus of his author’s major themes. Like Hamlet and Dedalus, Quentin is an archetypal white Euro-American male intellectual that sees a new vision of society in the future and must come to terms with it. Accordingly, many critics have interpreted Quentin’s character as a world-historical individual, a character that represents the general zeitgeist of a hegemonic culture. Among these critics is perhaps Fredric Jameson, who argues in his book *The Antinomies of Realism* that for writers such as Faulkner and Zola, characters take on true worldly importance when they fight the flow of time in the name of maintaining a moribund culture. Jameson’s own example of a world-historical character in Faulkner is the entire Snopes clan, but it is clear that

Quentin neatly fits such a description. World-historical significance is rarely associated with such a conservative impulse, and Jameson readily acknowledges that characters like Quentin are “rarely seen as world-historical individuals in Hegel's sense, for in Hegel this kind of figure consciously or unconsciously prepared the future and epitomized a kind of historical progress that the conservative historical novelists reject...and it may be suggested that wherever a vision of history embodies this struggle between past and future in a way that approaches the radical dichotomy of class struggle and genuine revolution, the text and its characters are likely to take on an allegorical function.” (266) Thus, because Quentin so clearly embodies this struggle between past and future, his character as a whole can be read allegorically, according to Jameson. This point is furthermore touched upon in “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” where Jameson suggests that characters in third world literature quite frequently act as allegorical stand-ins for the nation at large. The American South is of course not a third world country, but it has nevertheless functioned as somewhat of an isolated colony within the larger context of the United States. If we follow these arguments from Jameson, it becomes a bit clearer why Faulkner spends so much time building up and considering the ramifications of Quentin as a character: he is, in this sense, a stand-in for the South at large. So while much of Faulkner's work is indeed a mediation upon the multiplicity of perspective, these arguments from Jameson suggest that it is appropriate to extrapolate Quentin's experience of temporality and narration into a larger context.

Having examined Quentin Compson's character in *The Sound and the Fury*, it should be clear just how diametrically opposed to Sethe he is. Whereas Sethe constantly fears being pulled into the black hole of her past, Quentin is petrified by the present moment's ceaseless ability to pull him away from the past; where Sethe struggles immensely to formulate even half-narratives

of her past, Quentin freely narrates things that he knows are false in the hope of halting the progression of time. For these two characters, and the groups they represent, the experience of temporality and narrative are fundamentally out of joint. In the following chapters, I will demonstrate how the effects of this incongruency between time and narrative play themselves out, specifically in regard to how these characters take agency over their futures. The harmful effects of this phenomenon, I will argue, can only be mitigated by a radical reconsideration of our relationship to history.

Chapter 2: Sethe, Paul D, and the Limitations of Personal Narrative

In the concluding moments of *Beloved*, Paul D looks to Sethe and asserts: “me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow.” (322) The rest of this essay will consider how such a tomorrow can be achieved. Throughout the course of the novel, Sethe and Paul D try endlessly to break free of their pasts, yet by the book’s end, the chances of them meeting this end seem to be vague at best. At the book’s outset, Sethe and Paul D relate to their pasts in polar opposite ways, and yet for all the seemingly purgative trauma they endure throughout Morrison’s narrative, the two characters merely switch positions by the novel’s end. What the fates of these two characters ultimately point towards is the limitation of personal narrative, or, to again evoke Ricoeur’s term, Narrative Identity, the cohesive story of one’s life that maintains the self. Despite the progress made by both characters in crafting a personal narrative, their capacity to take agency over their futures is greatly diminished by the lack of a collective narrative that would provide infrastructural support to their narrative identities. As Morrison trice notes in the novel’s final two pages, “This was not a story to pass on.” (323-324) “Like an unpleasant dream during a troubling sleep,” (324) the stories of Sethe and Paul D are finally engulfed into the collective ocean without much of a ripple. True agency over the future, Morrison’s text suggests, comes from the capacity of a social group to collectively write their past, and until an authentic relationship to one’s history can be cultivated, the only available future will be the fragmented isolation of Sethe and Paul D. What the character arcs of Sethe and Paul D finally suggest, then, is that agency over the future can only occur once a collective identity is established.

Previous chapters have stressed the disparate manners in which Faulkner’s Quentin and Morrison’s Sethe experience time and narrative, but the consequences of the imbalance have yet

to be expounded. Thus, before considering the narrative arcs of Paul D and Sethe in *Beloved*, it will be necessary to construct a model of how both time and narrative interpenetrate and influence each other. As was discussed in the introduction, for the purposes of this essay, the concept of time must be considered primarily as something that refers to the experience of temporality, the phenomenology of experiencing the interplay of past, present, and future. The concept of temporality has fascinated philosophers since at least the time of Plato, but perhaps the most incisive explications of temporal experiences have come from the 20th Century phenomenological accounts of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Both of these thinkers have provided extensive and systematic models for the general experience of human consciousness, but because this essay also defers to the work of Paul Ricoeur, who himself was heavily influenced by Heidegger, a turn to Heidegger's philosophy will hopefully make for maximum clarity.

In his seminal work *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues for a complete reimagining of Western ontology, replacing the classical notion of the inner subject with the concept *Dasein*, a concept that stresses the individual's status as being-in-the-world; what his philosophy ultimately argues for is an erasure of the classical distinction between subject and object. In the course of his argument, he asserts that Western philosophy has been entirely misguided in its approach to temporality, with its insistence upon the rigid distinctions among past, present, and future. Temporality, for Heidegger, is an essentially *unitary* phenomenon. Past, present, and future are tripart sides of a single phenomenon, that of primordial time. Contemporary philosopher Simon Critchley here succinctly characterizes Heidegger's alternative approach to temporality:

“For Heidegger, the primary phenomenon of time is the future that is revealed to me in my being-towards-death...Insofar as *Dasein* anticipates, it comes towards itself.

The human is not confined in the present, but always projects towards the future. But what *Dasein* takes over in the future is its basic ontological indebtedness, its guilt, as discussed in the previous blog. There is a tricky but compelling thought at work here: in anticipation, I project towards the future, but what comes out of the future is my past, my personal and cultural baggage, what Heidegger calls my "having-been-ness" (*Gewesenheit*). But this does not mean that I am somehow condemned to my past. On the contrary, I can make a decision to take over the fact of who I am in a free action. This is what Heidegger calls "resoluteness."

Within the context of this essay, the portion of Critchley's summary that is of the most importance is the key idea that as one lives in anticipation of the future, the past is necessarily projected into the future. Whereas traditional notions of temporality consider the past as something gone and cut-off from the present, Heidegger's model of consciousness considers the past as a being continually co-present with the present, with the present itself being oriented towards the future. Concisely, one's past is inexorably being projected into the future.

As Critchley emphatically notes, though, this model of temporality does not amount to an enslavement to a certain past: one's relation to the past is fluid. This notion of the past being a fluid mosaic takes a quite interesting turn when considered in the light of the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, who, again, emerged from a school of hermeneutics heavily influenced by the phenomenology of Heidegger. Ricoeur is the originator of the concept of narrative identity that has been used throughout this analysis; to again summarize the concept, narrative identity is the fundamental story that can be told about one's life, the way in which the chaotic events of a lifespan are organized into a cohesive structure. For Ricoeur, this is the absolute ground of one's

personal identity and the primary force that maintains the image of a consistent self throughout life. This concept appears to be quite agreeable to the philosophy of Heidegger: the way in which past events are organized determines a self that is radically oriented towards the future. Taken together, these philosophies suggest that time and narrative work together so that the story one tells about their past directly influences the possibilities that are projected into the future. The ultimate implication is that, if the narrative of the past can be changed, so can the future. The capacity to take agency over how one's past is told leads to a much greater potential to shape the future.

This phenomenon can perhaps be best demonstrated with an example from *Beloved*. While at Sweet Home, Sethe had the traumatic experience of being raped by Schoolteacher's boys, but while in conversation with Paul D, she becomes aware of the previously unknown fact that her husband Halle watched while this occurred. Thus, Sethe's past has been retroactively changed by knowledge that she has gained in the present, and she is accordingly devastated. Allowing her brain to replay the scenario with this newly provided information, she laments that "There is also my husband squatting by the churn smearing the butter as well as its clabber all over his face because the milk they took is on his mind." (83) With the narrative of her past changed, Sethe explicitly states that this new information affects her orientation towards the future, saying "I don't want to know or have to remember that. I have other things to do: worry, for example, about tomorrow, about Denver, about Beloved, about age and sickness not to speak of love." (83) Sethe is of course passively receiving this information, but the point to be stressed by this example is that narration of the past can retroactively be changed in the present, leading to a new orientation towards the future. This model of how time and narrative interact will serve

as a lens to view Sethe and Paul D's attempts to carve out "some kind of tomorrow" over the course of *Beloved*.

Much of Sethe's relationship to the past has already been established, but it is nevertheless worthwhile to characterize her temporal orientation at the novel's outset. Crucially, though she is not able to initially do so, Sethe feels the need to confront her past. Regarding her tendency to remember the sycamore trees rather than the boys hanging from them, she says: "Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that;" (7) there is a sense of guilt over the fact that she cannot directly confront her past. This general attitude of confrontation is again reflected in her response to Paul D's suggestion that she leave 124; she matter-of-factly asserts: "No more running—from nothing. I will never run from another thing on this earth." (18) Sethe frequently reprimands her own mind for bringing back repressed traumas, but it is clear that at least part of her actively wants to remember her past. Once Paul D initially appears and begins probing her on issues about her life at Sweet Home, she entertains her desire to "feel the hurt her back ought to. Trust things and remember things because the last of the Sweet Home men was there to catch her if she sank." (21) Sethe's relationship to the past is undoubtedly ambivalent, as she simultaneously wishes to both remember and forget it, but it is certainly clear that she wishes to engage with it. As was detailed in Chapter 1, this line of thinking ultimately allows her to narrativize even her most traumatic memories, causing her, consciously or not, to form a cohesive narrative identity. After fully narrativizing the murder of Beloved to Paul D, she has fully integrated her trauma into a cohesive whole and must now deal with the repercussions.

This willingness to engage with the past places her in direct opposition with Paul D, who goes to great lengths to repress the past and live in an eternal present. Morrison introduces Paul

as a character always on the run, never feeling the need to tell his life's story to anyone, including himself. He "stopped speaking English because there was no future in it" (30) and stores all his traumatic memories directly in his "tobacco tin heart." Paul has such an aversion to his past that he can only attempt to completely dissociate from it, allowing the entirety of his memory bank to be associated with the inorganic metal of the "tin heart." Furthermore, after his travail in Alfred, Georgia, Paul D makes it a point to never stay in one place for too long ("That was about as long as he could abide one place" (49)) because "walking off when he got ready was the only way he could convince himself that he would no longer have to sleep, pee, eat or swing a sledge hammer in chains." (49) Whereas Sethe finds it nigh impossible to get outside the confines of her own head, Paul D purposefully places himself in a nearly animalistic mindset: "he had shut down a generous portion of his head, operating on the part that helped him walk, eat, sleep, sing. If he could do those things—with a little work and a little sex thrown in—he asked no more, for more required him to dwell on Halle's face and Sixo's laughing." (49) Paul is ultimately "a walking man...been in territory ain't got no name, never staying nowhere long." (55) Paul has condemned himself to a life of aimless wandering to avoid conjuring up memories of his life at Sweet Home and Alfred, Georgia. This is in complete contrast with Sethe's willingness to directly confront the past, but for both of them, "the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay." (51)

As Sethe and Paul D pursue these contrasting lines of thought to their conclusions, however, Morrison fascinatingly portrays them as merely trading places. In Sethe's case, after formulating a narrative identity that includes the trauma of murdering her own daughter, she returns to her house with the goal of completely isolating herself from the rest of society:

“Think about all I ain’t got to remember no more. Do like Baby said: Think on it then lay it down—for good. Paul D convinced me there was a world out there and that I could live in it. Should have known better. *Did* know better. Whatever is going on outside my door ain’t for me. The world is in this room. This here’s all there is and all there needs to be” (215).

Having incorporated her traumatic memories into her sense of self, Sethe no longer has to worry about issues of remembering or forgetting and has in a sense escaped temporality. Morrison is explicit in this regard, as Sethe exclaims that she “can forget how Baby Suggs’ heart collapsed...how she told me that Howard and Buglar were all right but wouldn’t let go each other’s hands,” (216) among a number of other things. She is finally “wrapped in a timeless present.” (217) Having gotten the sudden emergence of repressed memories under control at a high cost, Sethe now needs to know only one thing: “How bad is the scar?” (217)

As it turns out, the scar is festering. As Kimberly Davis argues, “Although Sethe hopes that her timeless world has put a stop to the cycle in which the past can return to haunt, 124’s no-time represents a different kind of vicious cycle—with the past, present, and future collapsed into one.” (*Postmodern Blackness*) By this point, Sethe has completely identified herself with the trauma of her past and the rest of part II sees her become consumed by the presence of Beloved, before finally being saved by the community in part III. The ending of *Beloved* has been subject to much critical debate, specifically regarding the extent to which Sethe has been healed; many critics have read the vanquishing of Beloved as a sign that Sethe has healed or come to terms with her past, but it seems that Morrison’s final pages resist such finality. As Sethe talks to Paul D in the aftermath of her final encounter with Beloved, she utters: “Oh, I don’t have no plans. No plans at all,” (320) a statement that clearly mirrors the maundering nature of Paul D’s character

at the novel's outset; having been catapulted into a state of timeless present, she still cannot begin to think of carving out a real future for herself. Furthermore, despite Paul's final call for "some kind of tomorrow," the book's final word is simply "Beloved," (324) a sobering reminder of the book's central claim: the past never really goes away. Linda Hutcheon, in a discussion of Morrison's work, shares this sentiment, suggesting that "the past is not something to be escaped, avoided, or controlled...the past is something with which we must come to terms and such a confrontation involved an acknowledgement of limitations as well as power." (*The Politics of Postmodernism*, 58) To an extent, Sethe's vanquishing of Beloved was healing, but the ultimate feeling at the end of Morrison's novel is that Sethe is still chained to her past. Though she has perhaps come to terms with her murder of Beloved, she nevertheless lacks the capacity to plan for the future ("I don't have no plans"). In this sense, she has made her way to the position Paul D occupies at the outset of the novel.

Similarly, Paul D's character arc leads him to the position of willful engagement with the past that characterizes Sethe at the beginning of the novel. Having stored away his memories in his tobacco tin heart, the development of his character can be tracked by the gradual "reddening" of his heart, which in turn signifies the potency of his memory. Morrison here describes this method of placing his repressed memories into a metaphorical tin heart:

"It was some time before he could put Alfred, Georgia, Sixo, schoolteacher, Halle, his brothers, Sethe, Mister, the taste of iron, the sight of butter, the smell of hickory, notebook paper, one by one, into the tobacco tin lodged in his chest. By the time he got to 124 nothing in this world could pry it open." (133)

Paul's relationship with Sethe reveals that there was indeed something that could pry open his heart. Having integrated himself into Sethe and Denver's family dynamic, he himself is visited

by the ghost of Beloved. After being seduced by the ghost in the middle of the night while still asleep, Paul can only yell out, “‘Red heart. Red heart,’ over and over again. Softly and then so loud it woke Denver, then Paul D himself. ‘Red heart. Red heart. Red heart.’” (118) Having momentarily stopped his aimless wandering so that he can settle in with Sethe and Denver, Paul D becomes subconsciously seduced by memories of the past and begins to feel the need to confront them. If Beloved is here read symbolically, and she is conflated with repressed memories of the past, it appears as though Sethe’s personal past is infringing upon the present of Paul D. Paul is seemingly affected by witnessing Sethe’s attempts to grapple with the past and realizes that he must do the same if he ever hopes to create a future that puts an end to his ceaseless wandering. As Davis again suggests, “Paul D learned that living only in the present is like not living at all, because life means ‘caring and looking forward, remembering and looking back.’ (109)” In order to begin living, Paul D must begin confronting the past, and that means narrativizing the past in order to carve out a future.

Accordingly, as Sethe becomes trapped in an eternal present in part II, Paul himself begins to directly confront his past: “His tobacco tin, blown open, spilled contents that floated freely and made him their plat and prey.” (258) In the following paragraph, he allows repressed memories to begin flooding in, memories of his mother and father, his siblings, and an encounter with slave families in Maryland. Paul himself seems astonished at his own transformation at the hands of Sethe, considering: “Just when doubt, regret and every single unasked question was packed away, long after he believed he had willed himself into being, at the very time and place he wanted to take root—she moved him. From room to room. Like a rag doll.” (261) Perhaps resigned to the fact that “he never stayed uncaught,” (316) Paul ultimately comes to terms with the fact that he has to confront his past. He even takes comfort in the notion of having some kind

of home, even if it is located in his own mind; considering his sexual relations with Beloved, “He was thankful too for having been escorted to some ocean-deep place he once belonged to.” (311) Finally, in order to fully confront his past, Paul D realizes that he must narrativize it, and in the novel’s concluding moments, he looks at Sethe and asserts that “He wants to put his story next to hers.” (322) By book’s end, Paul D is willing to confront the past and begin forming some kind of narrative identity, a position that mirrors that of Sethe at the novel’s onset.

As was extrapolated from the philosophies of Heidegger and Ricoeur, the ability to purposefully plan for the future is intricately tied up with the capacity to write own’s own past. If this is indeed the case, the final fates of Sethe and Paul D are somewhat confounding. Sethe, after integrating her past trauma and changing the story of her personal identity, enters a state of such strong identification with her past that she is nearly consumed by it, leaving scant room to plan for a future. Paul D initially does not even attempt to plan for the future, but after ultimately realizing the unsustainability of living in a constant present, feels the urge to structure his past into a narrative, a process that will likely lead him to the same position Sethe occupied during the second half of the novel, as she became consumed by Beloved. Neither of these positions provide any kind of capacity to take agency over the future. For Morrison, these attempts to deal with the baggage of past trauma ultimately add up to a circular process. Though both characters perhaps heal and make some sense of peace with the past throughout the novel, they never cultivate enough of a historical conscious to allow them to take agency over their futures. This points towards a certain limitation inherent in the construction of personal narrative as a means of taking agency over the future. Sethe and Paul D, as lone individuals, can only oscillate back and forth in their representative positions as they attempt to create a tomorrow in the light of yesterday’s unspeakable tragedies. This in itself may seem to invalidate the model of time and

narrative developed from Heidegger and Ricoeur, but what will be demonstrated in the subsequent reading of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* is that the model does in fact work, but only on a collective level. Agency over the future is something that can only be achieved when a social group collectively narrates the past in a way that allows them to realize a desired future. Until those social groups that have been deemed other by history enact a collective writing of their history, they will be doomed to the fates of Morrison's characters. In Sethe's case, it is a complete identification with one's own personal trauma; in Paul D's case, it is a history-less present that is nevertheless continually rocked by the reverberations of previous tragedy. As Theodor Adorno suggests, "We will not have come to terms with the past until the causes of what happened then are no longer active. Only because these causes live on does the spell of the past remain, to this very day, unbroken." ("What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean", 129) This is perhaps what Sethe has in mind when she admonishes Denver to never go back to Sweet Home: the forces that caused her own trauma are very much active, and in that sense, her memories are "out there outside my head." (43) Thus, for those like Sethe and Paul D, the past will never be vanquished through the simple formation of narrative identities or attempts to stay in an eternal present; they need a structural change in the way that the past is dealt with on a collective level. Only then will they be able to effectively use the past to ground the present and inspire actions that lead to a desirable future.

Chapter 3: Historical Meta-Narration in *Absalom, Absalom!*

The character arcs of two of *Beloved*'s central figures demonstrate the inability of personal narratives to bring about change in society. Though Sethe is able to create a narrative of her own self, she lacks the capacity to influence the social narrative in a way that someone such as Quentin Compson can, as will be demonstrated in this chapter. Viewed as a whole, the novel can be read as Sethe's descent into the most excruciating depths of her psyche in an effort to narrativize her fragmented and traumatic past; yet in spite of this, she ends the book in a state of confusion over how to proceed. She, in her own words, "don't have no plans. No plans at all." (320) Sethe's community, furthermore, has failed to be moved by her travail and will soon forget about her entirely. Morrison herself seems to emphasize as much by concluding the novel with an epilogue that continually notes her lack of impact upon the community: "This was not a story to pass on. They forgot about her like a bad dream. After they made up their tales, shaped and decorated them, those that saw her that day on the porch quickly and deliberately forgot about her." (323) Sethe, a victim of a vicious social structure, seemingly has no possible way of changing that social structure with her personal narrative alone. She is stuck in a pawn-like position, with her life and story being at the mercy of the true tellers of history. At this point, the only way forward is through an examination of how such social structures originate in the first place, which is precisely what William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* invites its readers to do. This 1936 novel is about the structural narratives that bind communities together and give its members a sense of purpose in their orientations towards the future. In this sense, these structural narratives allow their believers to both transcend the isolation of Sethe and Paul D and enact visible change within the structures of society through group effort in the form of laws and general social etiquette. This is perhaps an obvious point, but what Faulkner painstakingly

suggests throughout his novel is that such a method necessarily comes at the expense of an other that stands outside the community. Collective narratives, in the form evoked in *Absalom, Absalom!*, are the material from which prejudiced and deadly social structures are made. What this work simultaneously demonstrates is the importance of collective narrative and the toxic form such narration has traditionally taken in the epoch of recorded history. The final task will be to formulate an approach to collective identity that eschews the poisonous tendencies of the one used in *Absalom, Absalom!*.

The form of collective narrative that has thus far been referred to is that of cultural meta narrative. As discussed in the introduction, this is a kind of teleological meta-narrative that has been scaled down to the focus of a single local community or region. Whereas a full, traditional meta-narrative provides an all-encompassing perspective on human history and is based upon a primary set of texts, a cultural meta narrative does the same thing for a small subset of the population and does not rely on the rigid interpretation of a single body of work. This lack of reliance upon an actual textual source gives these kinds of narratives a certain element of fluidity that can be taken advantage of by high-ranking members of the community. The ultimate function of these narratives is to provide infrastructural support for the personal narratives of those members in the community. In *Beloved*, Sethe has only herself to interpret and make sense of the trauma she has experienced, but for someone operating within the context of a cultural meta-narrative, the ambiguities of life can easily be interpreted and integrated into one's narrative identity through the ready-made cultural values provided by the meta-narrative. This is precisely what occurs in Faulkner's novel, as both Quentin and his father make substantial leaps in logic based upon their pre-given cultural assumptions. By and large, however, this smaller form of meta-narrative enacts the same purpose as that of the full meta-narrative. As Lyotard

explains, it is a “totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience.” The only thing to be perhaps added is the millenarian nature of these meta-narratives. Whereas a full meta-narrative anticipates an end state of humanity at-large, a cultural meta-narrative such as the Lost Cause Ideology anticipates the return of the American South to glory. This is the sense in which these narratives are teleological, as their subscribers conceptualize history as being pulled towards some kind of goal. These small meta-narratives can be viewed as the atomistic sub-part of our notion of history at large.

The phenomenon of cultural meta-narrative is first introduced in *Absalom, Absalom!* by Rosa Coldfield in her opening meeting with Quentin. Considering the career prospects for the Compson boy upon graduation from Harvard, Rosa suggests, “maybe you will enter the literary profession as so many Southern gentlemen and gentlewomen too are doing now and maybe some day you will remember this and write about it...you can write this and submit it to the magazines.” (5) Rosa is about to tell him the story of her life with Thomas Sutpen, but what makes this statement immediately striking is that Rosa herself is the poetess laureate of the county and seemingly holds just as much personal power as Quentin to propagate her story. Rosa, however, is not nearly as naïve as the Quentin that appears in *The Sound and the Fury*. Whereas Quentin will later attempt to halt the procession of time with his own personal narrative, Rosa recognizes that such an endeavor is destined for impotence if not enacted on a collective level. She is ultimately driven by the same purpose as Quentin in her desire to stop time, but she cunningly transfers her own over-narration of events into the mind of the young intellectual, who she hopes will spread the story in the prestigious environment of New England academia. Quentin himself is aware of Rosa’s motives, and after she apologizes to him for keeping him from being outside with his friends, he dryly comments, “Only she dont mean

that...It's because she wants it told." (5) Rosa's own story is one filled with conjecture based upon cultural biases, but the reason her character is highlighted here is simply to demonstrate the level of narrative that will be dealt with in this novel. Faulkner's text is immanently preoccupied with narrative identity on a collective level, hence the immediate introduction of Rosa and her conscious attempt to propagate her narrative through Quentin.

The driving force of *Absalom, Absalom!* is the mysterious nature of murder of Charles Bon at the hands of Henry Sutpen and the attempts of both Quentin and his father Jason to explain it away. The surest facts of the situation seem to be that Henry, the son of Thomas Sutpen, befriended fellow student Charles Bon while attending the University of Mississippi and brought him home to Jefferson for Christmas. While there, Bon seemingly fell in love with Henry's sister Judith, but the elder Sutpen recognized something and pulled Henry into his quarters to inform him of a pivotal piece of information. Shortly thereafter, Henry rebuked his birthright and indignantly followed Bon down to his home in New Orleans. Years later, while Thomas Sutpen is away fighting in the Civil War, the two boys returned to Jefferson and Bon and Judith agreed to be married. On the day of their arranged wedding, however, Henry fatally shot Bon. Both haunted by the disturbing story, Quentin and Jason grapple with loose-end details and attempt to construct a reason for why Henry would shoot and kill his beloved friend Charles Bon. The novel demonstrates both father and son's attempt to bend and twist the given information into a form that fits into their cultural meta-narrative, in spite of the fact that "It's just incredible. It just does not explain. Or perhaps that's it: they don't explain and we are not supposed to know." (80)

Jason Compson is the first of the two to attempt to tie together the loose-ends of the story. Jason, who has heard portions of this story from his own father, tells Quentin that when Thomas

pulled his son into his office, he informed Henry that Bon had an octoroon mistress that he was seeing in New Orleans and thus was unfit for marriage with Judith. According to Jason, Henry went down to New Orleans with the indignant hope of his friend being in the right, but after indoctrinating Henry to the morally loose culture of the region, Bon does in fact reveal to him the existence of his octoroon mistress. For four years, allegedly, Henry contemplates the loss of his innocence in New Orleans and the turpitude of Bon's relations with an octoroon and eventually explodes in a fit of outrage and kills his friend. The biggest hole in such conjecture is clearly the four year gap in between the trip to Louisiana and the climactic murder; for Rick Moreland, Jason makes such a leap in logic fit by actively emphasizing both Henry's status as a victim and his Southern values. Jason, writes Moreland, "will try to explain, on the other hand, the violence of the victim Henry's act of murdering Bon as Henry's eventually explosive reaction to Compson's and Bon's having much more carefully and authoritatively staged Henry's loss of innocence during their visit to New Orleans." (*Faulkner and Modernism*, 66) Jason, shortly thereafter, seems to recognize the absurdity of such a proposition. Murder over the "existence of the eighth part negro mistress and the sixteenth part negro son, granted even the morganatic ceremony...is drawing honor a little too fine even for the shadowy paragons which are our ancestors." (100) Though this version of the story appears too artificial for Jason to immediately accept, the existence of the Southern cultural meta-narrative allows him to pivot and propose another scenario. Moreland again notes that "Compson instead explains Henry's delayed violence as the result of Bon's skillfully but dangerously protracted foreplay with Henry's more deep-seated, Southern, and especially Coldfield 'puritan heritage which must show disapproval instead of surprise or even despair and nothing at all rather than have the dis-approbation construed as surprise or despair.'" (66-67) This is indeed more in-tune with the general stoicism

of Southern aristocracy; rather than immediately bursting out in a fit of anger, Henry upholds the values of his culture even in the face of great disrespect.

Such a version of the story is fitting to Jason's character. In Moreland's chapter on the novel in his *Faulkner and Modernism*, he suggests that the overwhelming irony Jason employs throughout the novel ultimately serves as a façade to mask his true interest in the preservation of the values of the South. Thus, while seemingly being detached from the situation, Jason is able to portray Henry as an admirable young Southerner that is rightfully faithful to the values of the Old South. He jokes about the chivalry of his Southern ancestors, but for Moreland, this is a guise to protect him from his true devastation at the moribund nature of a fallen culture; by portraying Henry as a dutiful Southern gentleman, he keeps intact the mythical image of an Old South filled with honorable citizens ready to defend their honor. Compson continues his narration, occasionally implying that Henry's attraction to Bon was erotic, and ultimately concludes that the contradictory feeling within Henry catalyzed an explosion of violence from him. Immediately after concluding his narrative, however, Jason expressed doubt over the adequacy of his explanation, with strong hesitancy being directed towards his explanation of the four year interval between Henry's initial trip to New Orleans and his ultimate killing of Bon. He strikingly laments "that curious lack of economy between cause and effect which is always a characteristic of fate when reduced to using human being for tools, material." (94) Mr. Compson ultimately provides one last attempt to put the pieces together, suggesting that both Bon and Henry viewed the Civil War as an attempt to reconcile their difficulties. Characterizing this attempt, Moreland notes that, "Rather than stretching the ancestral honor too fine, this explanation abandons the idea of Henry's honor almost completely, to retain only the fatalism, as

against Compson's easy, retrospective irony at the delusion of this meager but still misplaced faith in the war to solve their problem." (70)

What ultimately becomes clear is that Jason cannot accept that "lack of economy between cause and effect." The reason for Henry's murder of Bon is an aporia, a piece of information that is simply unavailable to Compson, yet he continually insists upon filling in this gap in a way that projects his cultural values. This form of narration furthermore manifests itself repeatedly in Jason's description of the various women in the novel: regarding Ellen Coldfield, he regards her as "the substanceless shell, the shade impervious to any alteration or dissolution because of its very weightlessness;" (100) regarding Judith, he characterizes her as "just the blank shape, the empty vessel in which each of them strove to preserve." (94) Jason cannot interpret the reticence of these women, but instead of reconciling himself to this fact, he makes a logical leap and states that his inability to interpret them is a reflection of their own emptiness as subjects. All of these examples serve to demonstrate the infrastructural-like function of cultural meta-narratives. Jason cannot make sense of Henry or the various ladies present in his community, and instead of accepting this ignorance, he feels the need to project his own hopes and desires onto this blankness. This is characteristic of totalizing historical accounts of events that attempt to repeat events "as they really happened." Such inappropriate conjecture is the target of Faulkner's criticism throughout *Absalom, Absalom!*.

Throughout this narration from Jason, Quentin is on the receiving end, attempting to synchronize the information he is gathering from his father with the stories he has heard from Rosa Coldfield. Upon arriving in Cambridge, he becomes friends with his roommate Shreve, who wants nothing more than to know about life in the South. From there, Quentin attempts to give the definitive version of what really happened between Henry and Bon. For the purposes of

this essay, the most significant portion of Quentin's retelling of the story begins when he recounts the life of the young Thomas Sutpen, which was originally told by Sutpen to General Compson, who himself passed on the knowledge to Jason. According to Quentin, Sutpen ran away from his West Virginia home at an early age and made for the West Indies, where he became the overseer of a large sugar plantation. After single-handedly subduing a slave revolt on the plantation, Sutpen is offered the hand of the landowner's daughter, and the two subsequently have a child that grows up to be Charles Bon. Soon thereafter, Sutpen learned a secret about his new wife that made it impossible for him to continue on with the marriage and he accordingly went back to America, leaving his new family behind. All the while, as Quentin tells this story to Shreve, he uses increasingly subjective language that indicates the extent to which what he is saying is conjecture. Stephen Ross notes this use of language, stating,

“Chapter IV and indeed the entire narrative are punctuated by phrases— *I believe, perhaps, maybe, I can imagine, he must have* —that mark the narrators' speculations about character, motive, and actions. The text constantly stresses how much of Mr. Compson's narrative is his induction from possibilities that he has created; Faulkner reminds us repeatedly how little of “fact” we and the narrators have to deal with, how much of it is a construction, a piecing together of the “rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and telling” (250:17) that may not be related.” (*Reading Faulkner: Absalom, Absalom!*, 39)

During Quentin's retelling of the story, and in fact all of the novel, very little can be taken at face value.

If we accept that Quentin's narrative has some degree of truth, however, it is clear that his father's telling of the story has already been discredited. The knowledge of Bon's status as the

child of Sutpen was unknown to Jason at the time of his retelling and only acquired by Quentin after personally visiting Sutpen's Hundred before leaving for college. Thus, when Thomas Sutpen brought his son into his office upon initially meeting Bon, it is much more likely that he was informing Henry of the potential incest that arise would from the marriage of his friend and Judith. The crux of Quentin's retelling of the story, though, comes at the moment of Sutpen's learning of his wife's secret. During the actual telling of the story, it is important to note, the content of the secret is withheld so as to seemingly beg for speculation. In the words of Sutpen himself, as he told General Compson, "they deliberately withheld from me the one fact which I have reason to know they were aware would have caused me to decline the entire matter, otherwise that would have not withheld it from me—a fact which I did not learn until after my son was born." (212) Ross notes the necessity of recognizing the ambiguity of the situation, writing, "We must read with extreme care the discussion of "what he did" which follows from this admission of possible injustice. We do not know what Sutpen found unacceptable in his wife and child. This information seems deliberately withheld not just to make complete knowledge impossible but to invite speculations such as Shreve's and Quentin's." (138) Whatever the secret is, it holds immense importance. As Sutpen contemplates the prospective marriage between Bon and Judith, he states: "either I destroy my design with my own hand, which will happen if I am forced to play my last trump card, or do nothing, let matters take the course which I know they will take and see my design complete itself quite normally and naturally and successfully to the public eye." (226) Ultimately, in Quinten's narrative, Sutpen plays his trump card, which finally precipitates Henry's murder of Bon. The ambiguity of the secret, though, will become the central aporia that plagues Quentin's interpretation of the events, and just as Jason projected his own culturally-informed biases onto the mystery, Quentin does the exact same.

In Chapter 8 of the novel, after Quentin has seemingly synthesized all of the stories he's heard from his father and Rosa, both he and Shreve create an entirely fabricated story to explain away any of the vague details. This remarkable portion of the novel is Faulkner's clearest commentary upon the conjectural nature of totalizing historical accounts, as the two boys do not even pretend to ground their story with actual facts. As the chapter comes to a close and the two boys imagine the scene of Sutpen playing his trump card on Henry, Sutpen announces: "He must not marry her, Henry. His mother's father told me that her mother had been born a Spanish woman. I believed him; it was not until after he was born that I found out that his mother was part negro." (283) Thus, it is finally revealed that Bon's alleged African ancestry is the catalyzing force of Henry's murder. It must be underscored that this is speculation on the part of Quentin. Critics have traditionally discussed *Absalom, Absalom!* with the assumption that Bon was factually of African descent, and this has largely been due to the Genealogy and Chronology sections that Faulkner included in the novel's initial publication, which affirms the Quentin story. I would argue, however, that Faulkner does not mean for us to take this "fact" at face value, as evidenced by both Jason's previous mis-telling of the event and the deliberate ambiguity surrounding the knowledge obtained by Sutpen regarding his wife. Imagining that the secret withheld from Sutpen was related to the racial identity of his wife is perhaps reasonable, but the text itself has admonished time and time again against the dangers of making assumptions based upon an incomplete knowledge of the situation.

Just as Jason's conjecture is based upon his fulfillment of a cultural meta-narrative, so too is Quentin's. As was demonstrated in the reading of *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin's true desire is to see African-Americans in a place of immanent subservience; the lone image he describes as "timeless" in that novel is that in which he is playing "Christmas gift." Rather than

pure and malevolent racism, this stems from a desire to uphold a way of living that provides Quentin's sense of meaning and purpose. This is seemingly his goal in continually stressing the essential difference between African-American and white citizens. In his telling of the story, when Bon realizes the extent of Henry's anger over the revelation, he remarks: "So it's the miscegenation, not the incest, which you cant bear." (285) Later, Henry asserts "You are my brother," to which Bon responds, "No I'm not. I'm the nigger that's going to sleep with your sister. Unless you stop me, Henry." (286) This appears to be the center of Quentin's narrative strategy, to demonstrate the blacks and white are not truly brothers, even when they share a biological link; they represent two fundamentally different kinds of people. When Henry finally ends Bon's life, it is in the name of racial purity and patriarchy. These are the final messages that Quentin wishes to get across to Shreve and others that will hear this story: murder is necessary in the name of preserving the virginal and racial purity of white women. Quentin derives his personal meaning from his role as a protector of the "helpless" white woman, and he wishes to preserve and propagate the dignity of this position through the narrative he projects. Just as Jason projected his ideal image of Southern chivalry onto the blank space, Quentin himself projects his need for racial separation. When the story finally ends, what should truly be a simple gap in knowledge becomes a staggering affirmation of violent racism. By reinforcing such hatred, Quentin perhaps succeeds to an extent in halting the progression of time in its tracks, as it keeps alive the spirit of a culture that has long ago begun its process of rotting.

Despite the precarious ground upon which Quentin's narration of the story stands, his version is ultimately taken as a factual account. As previously alluded to, *Absalom, Absalom!*, contains an appended chronology at the end of the novel that is meant to seemingly clarify any confusion. In 1831, it reads: "Charles Bon born, Haiti. Sutpen learns his wife has negro blood,

repudiates her and child.” The text itself provides no proof for the genuine veracity of the claim, but in this seemingly official account of the events, the conjecture of Quentin’s narrative has been taken as factual. Even the legacy of Charles Bon is defenseless against the ceaseless racism that characterized the worst aspects of the American South. Charles Bon is one of many others of *Absalom, Absalom!*. He is not understood and subsequently becomes a blank space in which members of Southern society can project their anxieties and prejudices. The same fate reaches both Ellen and Judith, two women Jason refers to as being completely empty, and ultimately Thomas Sutpen himself. Sutpen has no familial background and thus becomes a mystery to the heritage-obsessed citizens of Jefferson; throughout the course of the novel, nearly every character projects some of their anxieties onto him at some point. He is often referred to simply as “the demon.” This cuts to the heart of the dangers of collective meta-narratives that are tied to millenarian goals. Such narratives indeed bind communities together and foster a general sense of purpose, but when their goals are not being met, it becomes the fault of some other party: the other. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Quentin and Jason both yearn for the South of old, where they as white males would hold complete social dominance. They try to bring about the return of the Old South by narrating some of its values into the present, in an attempt to alter the natural passage of time. To use the language of Ricoeur and Heidegger, they are able to project the future by collectively altering the story of the past. Whereas Sethe is unable to do such a thing based on her limited power as an individual, the characters of Faulkner operate on a collective level in their telling of these stories to others. As represented by the final chronology, Quentin’s version of the past is nearly written in adamantite. Such effects are seemingly inseparable from cultural meta-narratives that attempt to provide totalizing accounts of historical events.

This process of othering is discussed on a temporal level by David Watson in his essay “Southern Time: Transnational Temporalities in Faulkner.” Regarding the nonlinear nature of Faulkner’s treatment of time, he suggests that “the temporality unfolding in Faulkner’s novel is not simply a mode for bringing back the dead; it is directed towards the future. He posits a potential for renewal that will be actualized in a future radically different from the present, a future “where we are not” already at, which can only be apprehended as a form of temporal difference.” (4) Watson convincingly argues that cultures themselves operate upon different temporal scales, due to their orientation towards the future. In support of this theory, he evokes Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*, a work that considers how the vision of an unrealized but envisaged society “allows the future then to haunt the present, to manifest different temporalities within the homogeneous instance of the now.” (5) For Derrida and Watson, when a community posits a better society in the future, they become temporally out of joint with the rest of society. Thus, within the confines of this theory, when a cultural meta-narrative creates an other on a narrative level, it also creates an other on a temporal level. Taken together, this serves as an explanation for the complete temporal and narrative inversion experienced between Sethe and Quentin in the first half of the essay.

The generation of the other ultimately stems from historical accounts that aim for totalization. Social structures come about from collective identities attempting to bring about a certain vision of society; as demonstrated by the fates of Sethe and Paul D, the construction of narrative identity on the personal level alone fails to bring about change on a social level. When these collective narratives take the form of cultural meta-narrative, though, they necessarily engender an other in respect to the community, both on a narrative and temporal level. As versions of meta-narratives, they attempt to provide explanations for all aspects of life, and when

this inevitably fails, narrators such as Jason and Quentin replace ambiguity with affirmation of their cause at the exclusion of those not within the community. By announcing a future that has not yet arrived, their orientation towards the future creates a temporal fracture with the rest of the population. The final result can be seen in the juxtaposition between Sethe and Quentin: Quentin over-narrates and conjectures as he pleases so as to project a future that is to his liking, while Sethe can barely construct a cohesive narrative of her own life and has no power in creating a future. This is the result of the historiography that has been practiced over the past 2,000 years. Its consequences have been disastrous for those that have fallen into the position of other, but it does not truly behoove those that ostensibly benefit from it, such as the high-standing Southerners of *Absalom, Absalom!*. The story of Quentin himself, who seemingly represents this approach to history, ends with self-annihilation; unable to stand the dissolution of his culture and sense of meaning, he ends his life. Yet, if there is anything to be learned from *Beloved*, it is that history cannot be ignored. By neglecting the development of a historical consciousness, the injustices of traditional telling of history are merely left in place unchecked. The only path forward, then, is the cultivation of a new approach to collective narrative, one that strengthens community and eschews the millenarianism of cultural meta-narratives. This new approach to historiography will finally be put forth in the essay's conclusion, with the actual writing of *Beloved* itself by Toni Morrison being used as a primary example.

Conclusion

The conception of history developed in the preceding chapter is indubitably grim. As demonstrated by William Faulkner in *Absalom, Absalom!*, the process of recording history is inextricably tied to the social contexts and personal biases of those who do its writing, and more often than not, subtle prejudices insert themselves into matters that aspire to be objective. As constitutive subunits of the grand edifice known as Western History, the cultural meta-narratives depicted by Faulkner invariably generate imbalanced social structures that occasionally result in the kinds of unspeakable brutality recounted in *Beloved*. The approach to history critiqued by Faulkner, one that aims for a totalizing accounts of past events, results in a specific orientation towards both time and narrative, an orientation brilliantly explicated in the character of Quentin Compson. While Faulkner limits himself to a critique of such an approach to history, Toni Morrison completes the picture by illustrating the effects of Quentin's alienating historiography; accordingly, Sethe's experience of time and narrative is the inverted form of Quentin's. What makes Morrison's masterful novel truly disquieting, however, is its somber conclusion that though we may wish to ignore the legacy of recorded history, it surely won't yield its grasp upon us. Paul D attempts to expunge the past from his mind entirely while Sethe tries to grapple with history on a personal level, yet by the novel's end, it is revealed that they are moving in circles. The only way to achieve "some kind of tomorrow," (322) it seems, is to reorient ourselves towards history on a collective level. Only then will its othering effects be finally eradicated.

A possible way forward is represented by none other than *Beloved* itself. Rather than simply a story, *Beloved* can be read as a particular form of history in its own right, as its dedication to "60 million and more" allows it to transcend traditional narrative and become historiography. In this sense, Morrison is occupying the same role as Quentin in *Absalom*,

Absalom!, thus giving the formerly disenfranchised other a place in the conversation. Morrison's novel was published in 1987, towards the end of the Reagan administration and one of the most conservative decades in American history, due to its notorious War on Drugs and trickle-down economics. This period in the country's history featured a great deal of debate over the nature of crime in urban ghettos, with much of the debate stemming from the publication of the Moynihan Report in 1965. A product of the U.S. Department of Labor, Moynihan's controversial paper argued that matriarchal family structure was the root of African-American crime, with young boys lacking a father figure and dealing with the economic strife commonly associated with single-parent households. While Moynihan himself endorsed investments in employment, housing, and health-care as remedies to the issue, the paper was frequently mischaracterized in the 1980s by conservative politicians who suggested a lack of family values as the source of African-American crime. It is in this social setting that Toni Morrison published a novel based upon the life of Margaret Garner, a 19th Century slave that murdered her daughter so as to save her from a life in slavery. James Berger, in his book *After the End*, summarizes *Beloved's* intrusion into such a social context, suggesting that,

“Because of *Beloved's* concern with violence committed both against and within African American communities, the novel can be read as an intervention in two distinct but related debates on American histories of race. Morrison emphasizes in *Beloved* the systemic, structural effects of racism during slavery and reconstruction, and—since *Beloved* is above all a novel concerned with historical transmission—continuing into the present. This emphasis opposes the neoconservative and Reaganist polemics of the 1980s that attributed the poverty and violence of urban ghettos, the problem of the ‘underclass,’

to intrinsic and individual moral deficiencies, as well as the liberal policies of the War on Poverty.” (190)

In Berger’s reading of the novel, Morrison is arguing against the false conclusions reached by the Moynihan report which read like the thinly-veiled “scientific” racism embodied by the figure of Schoolteacher. Any pseudoscientific, causal explanation of systemic crime in the African-American community runs counter to *Beloved’s* focus on the horrors of slavery experienced by a single person. Whereas the Moynihan report and its defenders diverted attention from the historical and structural roots of poverty and crime in African-American communities, Morrison’s story of Sethe and her excruciating decision to murder her own child reframed the dialogue entirely, highlighting the brutal social structures that have characterized America since the time of slavery. In reading the novel alongside the Moynihan report, Berger articulates the clear dialogue that can be inferred between the two texts and ultimately makes a strong case for viewing the novel as a refutation of the report and its defenders.

This clash between the historiographies of Morrison and her opposition can be likened to a real-time confrontation between *Beloved* and *Absalom, Absalom!*. Mirroring the attempts of Quentin and his father to project their biases onto ambiguous historical material for ideological purposes, conservative polemics attempted to present the Moynihan report in a fashion that misrepresented the true source of African-American crime in the U.S. With *Beloved*, Morrison provides a voice to those slaves reflected in the experiences of Sethe and Paul D, who would be otherwise defenseless against the manipulation of their histories. Though Sethe herself does not have the capacity to propagate her story and influence the grander cultural narrative, Morrison as a writer does in fact have the ability to contextualize her life within the broader debate over America’s history and its influence on the present day. By doing this, she injects Sethe’s story

with a sense of potency that begins to level the playing field with those that have traditionally manipulated historical content for ideologically-driven purposes. Such an approach to history serves as a counteracting force against that of Quentin Compson and his analogs. In this essay's consideration of historiography, Toni Morrison and Quentin are operating on parallel levels, as storytellers and organizers of historical content; likewise, whereas the story of Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon serve as the content of Quentin's narrative, the story of Sethe and Paul D constitutes the content of Morrison's story. In this sense, *Beloved* is historiography for the other. Though much of American and European historical writing has mirrored the hegemonic revisionism of Faulkner's novel, Morrison's groundbreaking novel presents a staggering challenge to the dominant culture.

Contextualizing Morrison's novel alongside the Moynihan report is only a single example of how the text represents values that resonate contemporaneously. Her novel sheds light on a myriad of debates on race that have occurred throughout history and continue today. By becoming a meta-fictional document, *Beloved* and its form of historiography ensure that the retelling of history will not simply fall to the hands of dominant power structures. It initiates a genuine multi-cultural attempt to tell America's history, and with the countless other unheard voices referred to in its dedication to "60 million and more," Morrison is perhaps encouraging others to follow in her footsteps. This is what I hope to have articulated by reading *Beloved* alongside Faulkner's presentation of historiography; though Morrison's novel is a tremendous success by itself, there is work yet to be done. America's History and its accompanying prejudices run centuries deep, and if we are to finally cleanse the nation of its structured injustice, others must pick up where Morrison left off. A community's past always recapitulates itself in the future, and until the way that past is written is altered, very little progress can truly

be made. *Beloved*, I have argued, offers a blueprint for initiating this re-write without falling into the same pitfalls that generate an other. Most crucially, this approach to history does not aim for a totalizing account of events as they actually occurred. Rather, it evokes events from the past and allows them to speak outside the continuum of recorded history. As Walter Benjamin argued in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was.’ It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashed up at a moment of danger.” (Thesis VI) This is a relationship to history that directly benefits those that have been othered by traditional forms of history, one that allows for a relation to a social group’s collective history and both avoids the pitfalls of meta-narratives and provides real structural change in the present.

Such a pragmatic approach to history need not limit itself to the exact formula laid out by Morrison, though. Another recent example of pragmatic history that is perhaps rooted in more traditional forms of historiography is David Treuer’s *Heartbeat of the Wounded Knee*. A finalist for the 2019 National Book award, this work is an attempt to trace the history of Native Americans after the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee, an event that has traditionally been regarded as the end of Native American culture by most American history books. A hybrid of both reportage and memoir, Treuer’s work provides a compelling counter narrative of Native American culture that directly confronts many of the reports handed down by the official narrative of American history. The success of the work is reflected in many of its reviews upon publication. Writing for NPR, Scott Simon writes that, “Chapter after chapter, it’s like one shattered myth after another;” similarly, Ned Blackhawk of the New York Times acknowledged that “Treuer’s book suggests the need for soul-searching about the meaning of American history and the stories we tell ourselves about this nation’s past.” As a partial memoir, Treuer’s account

of Native American history breathes life and meaning into that which has often been moved to the statistical periphery of the American collective conscious. Like Morrison's novel, his historiography rescues historical events from the accounts of a hegemonic culture and allows them to be used by the other. For future generations of Native Americans, the inheritance of such a historiography would allow for a true paradigm shift in how they relate to history. Rather than carrying the burden of Native American history as told by the dominant culture, they will have the potential to relate to their history in a way that positively grounds the present moment and inspires achievements in the future.

This new approach to history is ultimately why William Faulkner and Toni Morrison have been brought together in the first place. More than any other American writers in the 20th Century, these two authors grappled with the implications of living in a present that is constantly haunted by the ghosts of the past, and though they may ultimately share more differences than similarities, it's clear that a dialogue on the nature of history unfolds itself when some of their texts are read together. Furthermore, as I have attempted to demonstrate in this conclusion, Faulkner is necessary to show how Morrison's engagement with histories of the other requires that one understand how totalizing narratives have systematically snuffed out these voices for centuries. Inheriting a historical record and its consequences is one of the most complex and definitive aspects of human culture, but both authors were able to locate its roots in the ability to carry along events of the past into the present through the medium of narrative. Throughout this essay, it has been shown that Faulkner's Quentin Compson and Morrison's Sethe experience both temporality and narrative in completely inverted ways, and this is precisely due to the history they have inherited. Viewing these characters through the lens of history developed out of Martin Heidegger and Paul Ricoeur's work on time and narrative identity, Sethe's inability to

take agency over her future can be traced back to her lack of collective history, while the root of Quentin's manic anxiety over the future can be located in his desire to preserve his culture's meta-narrative. Perhaps most telling is the unfortunate fates that await both characters: Sethe ends *Beloved* lying on the floor with no plans for the future while Quinten jump to his death. Finally, though Quentin initially appears to be benefiting from the othering of those like Sethe, it is revealed that history is taking a deadly toll on both parties. What the texts of Morrison and Faulkner finally suggest is that an alternate approach to history is the only way to stop the incessant cycle of othering and self-annihilation.

Alternate approaches to history are ultimately an area for further research. Those new forms of historiography previously outlined may in fact hold their own set of alienating features, but the crucial element is that they are being discussed. The two writers discussed in this essay are ultimately brilliant diagnosticians, with William Faulkner locating the faults in traditional accounts of history and Toni Morrison demonstrating the necessity of history in spite of those faults. It is this judgement of the necessity of history that holds the most relevance for contemporary debate within the humanities. Accurately or not, post-structuralist theory and postmodernism as a cultural phase have come to be associated with a certain flattening of time and lack of historicity. Again returning to Fredric Jameson, this view is summarized by his statement that, "time has become a perpetual present and thus spatial." (Stephanson, 46) a quote he provided when pressed to succinctly summarize his book *Postmodernism; or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* in an interview. Whether or not postmodern theory is genuinely anti-historical is subject to debate, but Jameson's argument is nevertheless vital: without a sense of history, we are condemned to the way things are in the present. History adds volume to the flat surface of the present moment and a failure to acknowledge its presence only results in the kind

of timeless present experienced by Sethe in 124. To change the future, we must delve into the past, however painful that may be. We do in fact need history, but until we find a way to harness it in a pragmatic way, we will continue to read Faulkner's famous quote that "The past is never dead. It's not even past" as a careful admonition.

Bibliography

- Batty, Nancy. "Riff, Raff, Refrain: Toni Morrison's Song of Absalom." *Unflinching Gaze: Morrison and Faulkner Re-Envisioned*, by Carol A. Kolmerten et al., University Press of Mississippi, 1997, pp. 77–90.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." *Illuminations*, by Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt, Mariner Books, 2019.
- Berger, James. *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*. University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Blackhawk, Ned. "A New History of Native Americans Responds to 'Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee'." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 20 Jan. 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/01/20/books/review/david-treuer-heartbeat-wounded-knee.html.
- Critchley, Simon. "Heidegger's Being and Time: Temporality | Simon Critchley." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 27 July 2009, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/jul/27/heidegger-being-time-philosophy.
- Davis, Kimberly. "'Postmodern Blackness': Toni Morrison's Beloved and the End of History." *Duke University Press*, 1998.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Spectres of Marx*. Routledge, 1994.
- Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* Random House, 1936.
- Faulkner, William. "Letter to a Northern Editor." *"Letter to a Northern Editor"*, 1956, users.soc.umn.edu/~samaha/cases/faulkner_letter_northern_ed.html.
- Faulkner, William. *Requiem for a Nun*. Vintage, 2015.
- Hartman, Geoffrey H. "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, by Theodor Adorno, Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. Routledge, 2007.
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Antinomies of Realism*. Duke University Press, 2013.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text*, 1986.

- Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke University Press, 1991.
- Laurence, David. "Fleshly Ghost and Ghostly Flesh: The Word and the Body in *Beloved*." *Johns Hopkins University Press*, 1991, pp. 189–201.
- Meriwether, James B., and Michael Millgate. *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962*. University of Nebraska Press, 1980.
- Moreland, Rick. *Faulkner and Modernism: Rereading and Rewriting*. University of Wisconsin Press, 1990.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1987.
- "Paul Ricoeur." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, 2016, plato.stanford.edu/.
- Rody, Caroline. "Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: History, 'Rememory,' and a 'Clamour for a Kiss.'" *Oxford University Press*, 1995.
- Ross, Stephen M., and Noel Polk. *Reading Faulkner. Absalom, Absalom: Glossary and Commentary*. University Press of Mississippi, 2010.
- Ross, Stephen M., and Noel Polk. *Reading Faulkner. The Sound and the Fury: Glossary and Commentary*. University Press of Mississippi, 1996.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. "On *The Sound and the Fury*: Time in the Work of William Faulkner." *On The Sound and the Fury*, drc.usask.ca/projects/faulkner/main/criticism/sartre.html.
- Simon, Scott. "'Heartbeat Of Wounded Knee' Demystifies The Modern Native Experience." *NPR*, NPR, 19 Jan. 2019, www.npr.org/2019/01/19/686830482/heartbeat-of-wounded-knee-demystifies-the-modern-native-experience.
- Stephens, John, and Robyn McCallum. *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature*. Routledge, 2013.
- Treuer, David. *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the Present*. Riverhead Books, 2019.
- Watson, David. "Southern Time: Transnational Temporalities in William Faulkner." *Faulkner Society*, 14 June 2007, faulknersociety.com/mla07watson.doc.