

An Archetypal Study on William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*

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Abstract—This paper attempts to analyze Faulkner's novel from archetypal perspective with a focus on Biblical allusions in the novel *Absalom, Absalom!*. My purpose is to induce a kind of pattern in Faulkner's writings which reveals the artist's capability to assimilate archetypes as well as displace them. His unique method of using archetypes remarkably foregrounds the themes of his fictions and marks him as an innovative and talented writer.

Index Terms—archetypal, Biblical allusion, assimilate, displace

I. INTRODUCTION

Being a man with great talent of making inventions and experiments, William Faulkner has added to the theory of the novel as an art and evolved his own literary strategies. Critics have paid much attention to his themes, his narrative techniques, and his particular style. Enormous comments have been made on his use of stream-of-consciousness, multiple points of view and his juxtaposing the past with the present to construct his stories. However, there is another important feature of Faulkner's works that is seldom discussed by critics. That is his use of mythological or Biblical allusions in his fictions.

Myth, as a great heritage of ancient cultures, is an inexhaustible source of ingenious ideas, pleasing images, interesting subjects, allegories and emblems. The term "myth" has a truly protean existence in contemporary thought and criticism, with the capacity to assume a bewildering variety of meaning, "myth" or "mythical" can, for example, signify any of the following: "stories about gods and heroes; philosophical fables such as those of Plato; a special and 'higher' kind of insight that is denied to the merely rational man; or ideologically distorted history" (Verma, 1990, p.1). According to this wide-range definition, stories in the Bible can also be classified into the category of myth.

In Faulkner's works, according to Coffee's(1983) accurate statistics, "he [Faulkner] altogether quoted from the Bible or alluded to it for 379 times. Among them, 183 are from the Old Testament and the other 196 from the New Testament" (p.183). He either directly took the title for his novels from the Bible, such as *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses*; or indirectly used the story of the Bible as a parallel to his own, such as *The Sound and the Fury* and *The Bear*. For this reason, some critics judged Faulkner as a "Christian writer". Faulkner himself also said that he bore a kind of "Christian Complex" which was formed from his adolescence to his adulthood. However, with a closing reading of his works, it is evident that Faulkner, actually, is not a "preacher" of Christianity. Faulkner once said,

The writer must write out of his background. He must write out of what he knows and the Christian legend is part of any Christian's background, especially the background of a country boy, a Southern country boy. My life was passed, my childhood, in a very small Mississippi town, and that was a part of my background. I grew up with that, I assimilated that, took that in without even knowing it. It's just there. It has nothing to do with how much of it I might believe or disbelieve—it's just there.

(Gwynn & Blotner, 1959, p. 86)

As for the use of mythologies, Faulkner further explained, "the myths, for me, are just a kind of tool. That is a matter of the carpenter trying to find the hammer or the axe that he thinks will do the best job. They are used to write about men and women, human beings, the human heart in conflict with its fellows, or with its environment" (ibid 19). These remarks give us two hints: one is that Faulkner did not write his works for the preachment of the Christianity, he was not a theologian; the other is that, in spite of the first one, Biblical mythologies play an important role in the world of his fictions. For this reason, archetypal criticism, which focuses on myths or mythical allusions in a literal work, can be an illuminating approach to Faulkner's mysterious fictional world.

II. BIBLICAL ARCHETYPES IN *ABSALOM, ABSALOM!*

As we have mentioned in the introduction, archetypes are the communicable units which recur again and again in literature. It can be a certain image, a certain symbol, a certain narrative or even a certain theme. In this part, I try to identify the Biblical archetypes in the novel by examining the parallel correspondence between the Biblical narratives and the plots of *Absalom, Absalom!*

Absalom, Absalom! constitutes an important part of the entire Yoknapatawpha Saga and vividly depicts characters. While being regarded as the greatest of Faulkner's works, it is also the most difficult one. Because in the novel, what is

called the Sutpen legend actually consists of no more than some fragments. The chief problem in reading this novel is the complexity of the narration. In the novel, on the foreground is a group of narrators busy weaving and reweaving the legend according to their own designs to interpret, to make sense of its fragments. Like the baton in a relay race, the Sutpen legend is passed from mouth to mouth. But unlike it in a relay, the succeeding narration is not at all a mere development upon its forerunners. It changes, contradicts, criticizes, and even attacks what goes before and what will come after. Thus, readers often feel confused by the complicated plots. But if we pay enough attention to the title *Absalom, Absalom!*, it will give us some enlightenments.

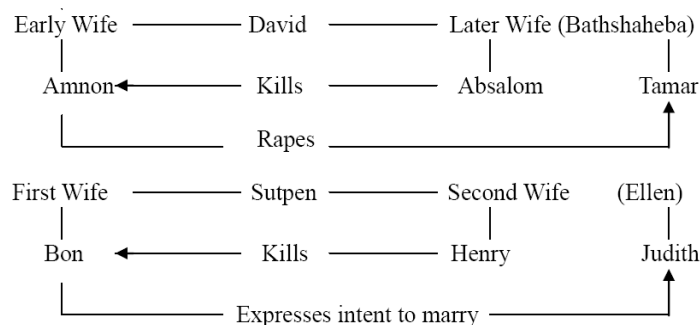
As Faulkner himself indicated, the title came from David's lament, "O my son Absalom, O Absalom, My son, my son!" (II Sam. 19:4). Although the novel is full of Biblical allusions, there is not a single reference to David or to Absalom. While with the cue of the title, readers will think of the story about King David and his son Absalom in II Samuel. Faulkner also commented that "the story in that book [*Absalom, Absalom!*] was of a man who wanted a son and lost that son" (Gwynn & Blotner, 1959, p.143). This illuminating remark as well as the title leads us to think of the connections between the Biblical narratives and the novel.

The story of revolt, incest and fratricide in II Samuel: 13 – 19 might be summarized as follows: King David cruelly killed Uriah and married his wife Bathsheba. Later they had a son named Absalom and a daughter Tamar. But Amnon, David's son by another wife, "fells sick for his sister," and Tamar was willing to seek her father's permission to be mated with him. Upon the advice of his cousin Jonadab, Amnon tricked Tamar into coming to his bedside where he raped her. Immediately his love for her turned to hatred and he had her removed from his house. When he learned of these events, David was angry, but did not seek retribution. Absalom, however, nursed his wrath for two years; then, during a sheep-shearing festival at which all the King's sons were present, he commanded his servants to slay Amnon. Absalom then fled to Geshur for three years, returning only after the King's councilor Joab interceded with David on his behalf. But David would not see him. When Joab refused to arrange a meeting between the king and the son, the angry Absalom set fire to Joab's crops. Upon being summoned by David to account for this, Absalom bowed down in a gesture of submission and David embraced him. Restored to his father's favor, Absalom became ambitious. He built a powerful following among the people and developed a network of spies. When the time was ripe, Absalom led a successful revolt against David, and the king, accompanied by loyal followers, fled to Jerusalem. Absalom then rejected the advice of Achitophel to seek reconciliation with David's followers and heeded instead on the advice of Hushai to pursue the fleeing King and his retinue and crush them all. But Hushai was secretly loyal to David and sent him warning of the plans. Although David commanded that in the forthcoming battle Absalom be spared, Joab slew Absalom when he found him hanging from a tree in which his hair had been caught. Despite victory in a battle in which 20,000 men were killed, David so lamented the death of Absalom that he had no interest in ruling his restored kingdom. Only after Joab chided him and warned of further strife in the land did David agree to return to Jerusalem and resume his authority.

In Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, the plot centers around the career of the Mississippi planter Thomas Sutpen who came to Jefferson when it was still a frontier community. He bought a hundred-square-mile section of land ("Sutpen's Hundred"), imported a French architect to build a mansion, and brought in a wagonload of slaves. After he had finished furnishing the house in expensive taste, he consolidated his position in the community by marrying Ellen Coldfield, daughter of a leading citizen of Jefferson. His wife bore him a son, Henry, and a daughter, Judith. Henry went off to the university and there met Charles Bon; by coincidence Charles was Henry's half brother. Thomas Sutpen had been married before to a Western Indian woman, but had abandoned her after discovery of her Negro blood. Now this ghost of his marriage returned to haunt him; Charles met his half-sister Judith and fell in love with her. At this point the source of Sutpen's wealth was revealed; it came from the dowry of the first wife he had abandoned. He refused to recognize Charles as his son. The war intervened. Then, as Charles was about to marry Judith, he was mysteriously killed by Henry Sutpen. Henry fled and dropped out of sight for many years. Meanwhile, Thomas Sutpen returned from the war to find his wife dead, and developed an obsessive desire to perpetuate his line. Since Charles was dead, Henry a fugitive, and Judith vowed to spinsterhood, he planned another marriage to Rosa Coldfield, his dead wife's little sister, if she could produce a son first. Rosa fled from him in indignation, and in 1867 Sutpen, still seeking an heir, entered into a liaison with Milly Jones, granddaughter of the tenant farmer Wash Jones. In 1869 Milly bore a child, and Wash killed Sutpen in a rage. Henry returned to Jefferson, and was hidden at Sutpen's Hundred by Clytemnestra, a Sutpen daughter by a Negro slave, and both died in the 1910 burning of the mansion to the ground.

The story in II Samuel and *Absalom, Absalom!* do indeed seem to be remarkably alike. In both, the patriarchal fathers, King David and Thomas Sutpen rose through their power to high station among men; later both of them broke the moral law and brought suffering upon his children. In both the house of David and the house of Sutpen, retribution took the form of violent crimes by the children—revolt, incest and fratricide. Both of the eldest sons of the vital and forceful patriarch seek an incestuous relationship with their half-sister and both were killed by their half-brother.

The parallels between the Bible narratives and *Absalom, Absalom!* may be diagrammed as follows (Hagopian, 1974, p.23):



From the diagram, we see very clearly the parallel correspondences between the Biblical narratives and the plots, between the Biblical figures and the characters. Bearing this in mind, a reader, as long as he has sufficient knowledge of the Bible, will have a better understanding of the novel. What's more, by using the Biblical narratives as an archetype, Faulkner indicated continuity in the human condition through centuries of time. The predominant themes of Faulkner's novels, such as revolt, incest and fratricide recur again and again in different works of different periods. So with these archetypes, Faulkner built a bridge between his own works and the whole body of human literature. He presented the story of the Sutpen household, which was set in the American South around the Civil War, against a background of eternity. Thus in his works, readers may discover a feeling for the American South that bespeaks a concern for human beings both in the modern world and in some larger, more inclusive realm as well.

III. DISPLACEMENTS OF THE BIBLICAL ARCHETYPES IN *ABSALOM, ABSALOM!*

The correspondences between the story of King David and the story of the Sutpens obviously show that in *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner deliberately foregrounded two archetypes: incest and fratricide. The novel repeats the archetypal triangular structure of seducer, victim, and revenger in the act of incest. Therefore, the triangular relation of Bon, Judith and Henry is a repetition of that of Amnon, Tamar and Absalom. However, when the actions and especially the motives and emotional attitudes involved in these two narratives are closely examined, the differences between them are very notable, even significant. Faulkner did not simply take the Biblical narratives as the archetypes; he made crucial changes for certain purposes. These changes, or in Frye's word, "displacements", are actually the keys to the better understanding of the novel. In this part, I try to expound the displacements in the novel with a focus on incest archetype and fratricide archetype, trying to demonstrate the close relationship between these displacements and the themes of the novel.

A. *Motives of Incest*

The Biblical archetype of Charles Bon is Amnon. Both of them had sex, or intended to have sex with their own sisters and were thus murdered by their half brothers. In spite of these similarities, their motives of incest were quite different. Amnon, an acknowledged son of David, merely lusting for Tamar, did not seek marriage with her and felt revulsion against her after he raped her; Bon (in Shreve's final version of the Sutpen legend) did not show sexual desire towards Judith and respected her to the end. But why did Bon still seek an incestuous relationship with her? Obviously Bon's motives of incest are more complicated and mysterious than that of Amnon.

To explore Bon's motives of incest, we should first take Bon's life experience into our consideration. Where did Bon come from? Who were his parents? What did he come to Sutpen's Hundred for? All these questions are very crucial in understanding Bon's intention to marry Judith. In terms of Bon's origin, there is no direct or definite description throughout the whole novel, but with the help of those clues provided by different narrators, especially those of Quentin's, we gradually get a clear idea: before Thomas Sutpen came to Jefferson, he married a woman named Eulialia Bon Sutpen in Haiti, but when he discovered that she had some Negro blood, Sutpen put aside her as well as their son, Charles Bon, who was a one-sixteenth Negro.

With this background knowledge, the puzzles why Bon came to Sutpen's house and why he wanted to marry Judith can be solved. Bon came for nothing else but Sutpen's acknowledgment. When Bon agreed to go to Sutpen's Hundred with Henry for Christmas, he did not come to "see the third inhabitant [Judith] of Henry's fairy tale, not to see the sister because he had not once thought of her: he had merely listened about her: but thinking 'So at last I shall see him [Sutpen], whom I had even learned to live without'"¹ (398). He even imagined "how he[Bon] would walk into the house and see the man who made him" and there would be "an instant of indisputable recognition between them..."(398). However, what Sutpen did disappointed Bon a lot. When he "saw face to face the man who might be his father, nothing happened—no shock, no hot communicated flesh that speech would have been too slow even to impede—nothing" (400).

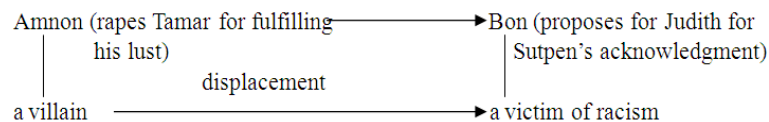
¹ All the quotations from *Absalom, Absalom!* are quoted from William Faulkner, 1945, *Absalom, Absalom!*, New York: Viking Press. Further references are seen in the parentheses.

After their first meet, Bon still held a ray of hope that Sutpen would acknowledge him one day. While unfortunately, his hope was shattered at the end of the Civil War. Desperately, he set his plan to marry Judith in motion, hoping that Sutpen would then be forced to acknowledge him in order to prevent the marriage. In Chapter Eight, Bon implicitly confessed that the reason why he made approach to Judith was not to have sex with her, but that he was waiting for Thomas Sutpen, his father, to intervene between them, because Sutpen's intervention might indicate the fact that Judith was the prohibited object of Bon's desire, because she was his "sister". For Bon, therefore, Sutpen's acknowledgment of him as son had more significance than incest itself.

"Charles Bon's search (the search-for-a-father-theme) is a theme prevailing in modern literature. Faulkner combined this with incest, miscegenation, and the fate of the South. Bon's search for a father is made more poignantly appealing in that he did not desire a formal acknowledgment but only a sign, however small"(Roberts, 1964, p 68). What he dreamed of was only a piece of paper from Sutpen which said, "I am your father. Burn this" (408). Or even "a sheet a scrap of paper with the one word 'Charles' in his hand. Or a lock of his hair or a paring from his finger nail" (408). If given this information, Bon "will not even demand to know what my mother [Bon's mother] did that justified his action [Sutpen's abandonment] toward her and me" (408). But to Bon's great disappointment, all his hopes and waiting ended in vain. Sutpen didn't show even a vague sign of accepting him, let alone formal acknowledgment.

The part which puzzles the readers most of the novel is Sutpen's insistent refusal to acknowledge Bon, even if Bon had stated that he would be satisfied with the slightest sign of acknowledgment. However, if we take Bon's one-sixteenth Negro blood as well as Sutpen's design into our consideration, this puzzle will become understandable. Sutpen was eager to build a great dynasty which would protect his offspring from racism and white supremacy. If he took a Negro as his son, his design was doomed to be a failure. And we know from the story that it is Sutpen's refusal which motivated Bon's incestuous relationship with Judith and later forced Henry to murder Bon. Thus, Sutpen was in a dilemma because if he acknowledged Bon, then the design would fail; if he refused to acknowledge him, then the design collapsed. Therefore, the link between Sutpen's design and his failure to achieve it is represented in Sutpen's refusal to recognize Bon. "Bon's need for recognition and acceptance as he was turned away from his father's door paralleled the episode where Sutpen was turned away from the plantation" (Roberts, 1964, p.55). In this sense, when "Sutpen rejected his son, he seemed to have forgotten all the torment and anguish he felt when he was himself rejected. Sutpen's rejection as a boy brought about the inception of the design, and Sutpen's rejection of his own son brought about the failure of the design and its total collapse" (Roberts, 1964, p.56).

From the above analysis, we can see that all the tragedies, the death of Bon, the collapse of the Sutpen household, are due to one thing: Bon's one-sixteenth Negro blood, or to say more explicitly, the separation among people of different races. Faulkner put Bon in the background of racism. In comparison with Amnon, what Bon hoped to detect was a mere hint of Sutpen's acknowledgment. Their motives of incest are totally different. This displacement may be diagrammed as follows:



Unlike Amnon who committed a villainous crime, Bon will arouse the readers' sympathy, for he is depicted as a victim of racism who wanted to cross the gap between white and black at the cost of committing incest. Through this displacement, the theme of racism is forcefully stressed.

B. Attitudes toward Incest

Incest has always been regarded as a basic prohibition by human being. Incest prohibition lies in the deeper structure of human society. Even in primitive societies, people had attached great importance to the function of incest prohibition. Claude Levi—Strauss(1983), a social anthropologist, explains this as follows "In primitive societies, by casting sisters and daughters out of the consanguineous group, and by assign them to husbands who belong to other groups, the prohibition of incest creates bonds of alliance between these biological groups, the first such bonds which one can call social. The incest prohibition is thus the basis of human society: in a sense it is the society" (p.546). It is possible to infer from this quotation that in any society, incest is severely problematized morally, ethically and genetically, thus the more developed a society is, the more strict the incest prohibition should be.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* the triangular relationship between Henry, Bon and Judith is very intricate. Henry felt very strongly towards his sister and later formed a very strong attraction for Bon. Even after he knew that Bon was his half brother, he still acted as go-between of Bon and Judith. When Sutpen forbade the marriage, Henry violently repudiated his father and his birthright to support their marriage. So why did Henry react so strangely to this incestuous relationship?

With a close study of the following accounts, we may get some clues to the above question.

When talking about Henry's pride in his sister's virginity, Mr. Compson explained to his son, Quentin, how virginity could exist as virginity:

Henry... may have been conscious that his fierce provincial's pride in his sister's virginity was a false quantity which

must incorporate in itself an inability to endure in order to be precious, to exist, and so must depend upon its loss, absence, to have existed at all. (118)

He then further explained:

In fact, perhaps this is the pure and perfect incest: the brother realizing that the sister's virginity must be destroyed in order to have existed at all, taking that virginity in the person of the brother-in-law, the man whom he would be if he could become, metamorphose into, the lover, the husband; by whom he would despoiled, choose for despoiler, if he could become, metamorphose into the sister, the mistress, the bride. Perhaps that is what went on, not in Henry's mind, but in his soul. (118—119)

This paragraph indicates Henry's purpose to support the marriage as well as his attitude towards incest. As indicated in the novel, Henry was sexually attracted by Judith and Charles at the same time. So in supporting Bon's decision of marrying Judith, he fulfilled two desires in his nature which he could never realize in his life: one is a kind of incestuous desire for his sister, the other is a mildly suggested homosexual desire for Bon.

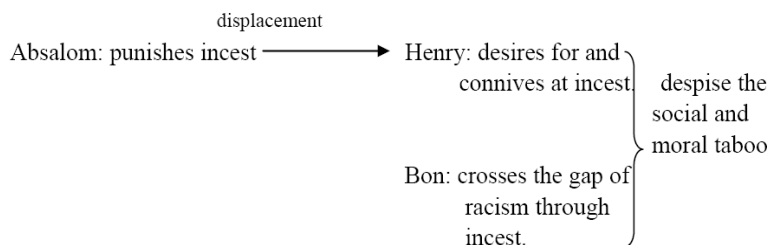
We have mentioned that the Biblical archetype of Henry is Absalom. But their attitudes towards incest are totally different. Absalom safeguarded the honor of a sister and punished incest, while Henry, a young man of good education, not only connived at incest, but also desired for it. What are the reasons for this sharp contrast?

To answer this question, we should turn to examine the whole Sutpen household, or even the whole plantation owners' households in the old South. The incestuous relationship between brothers and sisters doesn't merely exist in *Absalom, Absalom!*, but also in many of Faulkner's other works. For instance, Quentin and Caddy in *The Sound and the Fury*, Horas and Nacisia in *Sartoris*. So it is a phenomenon, not a special case in the families of Yoknapatawpha County. In such families, husbands and wives show no sign of love and mutual understanding to each other, so do parents and their children. Growing up in such kind of family, therefore, children's desire for love is unfulfilled and distorted. They are turned down by their parents and as a result, they can only seek love from their brothers or sisters. Thus the abnormal, incestuous love became a common phenomenon. Just as Kerr (1983) point out "In the area of Yoknapatawpha, the coldness between husbands and wives is ironically put on the opposite to the consanguineous love between brothers and sisters" (p. 401). This is not only Faulkner's artistic creation, but also proved and supported by some researchers studying the society and culture of the American old South.

Then, let's turn back to the Sutpen household for further illustration. For Sutpen, the family mattered only for its necessary place in his design. Its essential element, the begetting of sons, demanded only that he transmitted his seed; and fatherhood, degraded to mere policy, carried no further obligation or delights. Yet, Judith, Henry, and Charles did act, as their father had never done, out of love. Henry, whose bond with Judith was so strong that they seemed as one, himself wooed Bon for her, read the letter they exchanged, waited patiently for Bon to repudiate his mistress. Aching for his father's recognition of him, Bon was willing to force it, even through the marriage to his half-sister, and significantly unlike his father, he refused to abandon his mistress and son. Judith acceded to Henry's probation period, buried her lover, and reared his orphan son. In all of these actions, "there is the impulse toward family loyalty, filial affection, and common humanity that seeks to subvert the implacable inhumanity of the father's master plan" (Tobin, 1989, p.84).

Nevertheless, this sense of family is doomed to be ultimately and tragically inconsequential; for the method they chose is in the wrong way. As we have mentioned that, incest prohibition is a basic social taboo. To despise this social taboo is to subvert humanity. In this sense, Henry and Bon's attitudes towards incest partially lead to the collapse of the family. In spite of this fact, Faulkner didn't mean to put the blame on them, who he indicted is the father, Thomas Sutpen, his great design, or more broadly speaking, the reality of the old South which conditioned man with its hierarchical stratification and judged people by their origin, by their wealth and by their status.

As we have noticed that, Henry's attitude towards incest is totally different from that of his Biblical archetype, Absalom. So, here also exists a displacement which can be diagrammed as following:



Through this displacement, Faulkner put his blame on the reality of the old South which had dehumanized the young generation by forcing them to cultivate false values. The so-called Southern aristocratic families as well as the whole society were doomed to decay and collapse.

In discussing this displacement, we still leave an important issue untouched—Bon's attitude towards incest and racism when these two were juxtaposed before him. He chose to eliminate the power of racism through incest. So in comparison with incest prohibition, racism influences people's morality and action more profoundly. Here, Faulkner

protruded the theme of racism again. Actually, this was the same with Henry. After the Civil War, Henry's attitude towards the marriage of Judith and Bon turned sharply. In order to prevent it, he even murdered Bon, his half-brother and his ideal, at the gate of Supen's Hundred. So what happened? Why he changed so abruptly? In the following section which deals with the displacement of fratricide, we will find answers to these questions.

C. *Motives of Fratricide*

In order to answer the above questions, let us first illustrate how Henry's attitude towards Bon and Judith's marriage changed, following Quentin's process of putting together his collected information.

In chapter 4, the romantic relationship between Bon and Judith became clear. A possible obstacle for their marriage, according to Mr. Compson, was bigamy: Bon was married to an octoroon, and there was a son between them in New Orleans. This mulatto woman, in spite of her looking like a white, was identified in that racist society as black, not exceptionally under the law that an eighth of black blood surpassed the rest seven eighths of white blood. It was not unusual for a white man of the upper class in the South to have a few (slave) children as a result of sex with slave women. Although he could not come to terms with the fact that Bon held a wedding ceremony, Henry after all took her simply as a slave. Mr. Compson concluded that Henry prohibited the marriage not because of "the fact that Bon's intention was to commit bigamy but that was apparently to make his [Henry's] sister a sort of junior partner in a harem" (94). In spite of Henry's voices of "I will" and "I believe" that repetitively break into Mr. Compson's narrative, what he would do and believe still remained quite ambiguous. In the following chapter, Quentin revealed the fact that Judith could not marry Bon because "he is her brother" (235). While Henry, believing Bon had abandoned his octoroon mistress, approved this marriage. The problem of incest foregrounds here, but the story goes farther than incest. In chapter 8, when Henry visited his father to tell his decision to realize the marriage of his brother and sister, he confronted a new fact that completely upset his plan: Bon was black. Henry oscillated between Bon as brother and as "nigger", until Bon definitely identified himself as following:

"You are my brother."

"No, I'm not. I'm the nigger that's going to sleep with your sister.

Unless you stop me, Henry." (286)

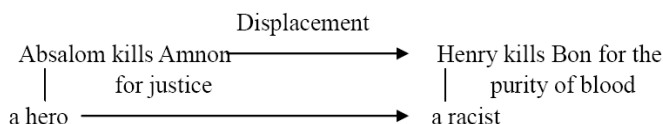
Henry really stopped Bon by taking radical action, killing Bon at the gate of their home. So we can conclude from the changing process that what drives Henry to kill Bon is not incest, but the truth that Bon was a black. Though he was only one-sixteenth black, he was not a white suitor for Judith but a black who conspired to rape a white lady. In this sense, it is quite important that Henry, who had convincingly said he made them marry because God was dead, could not stand a black's having sex with his sister whether the suitor was his brother or not. Bon also recognized Henry's predicament based on racism and said, "So it's the miscegenation, not the incest, which you can't bear" (285). Thus, *Absalom, Absalom!*, in spite of its title, problematizes race rather than incest.

In the previous section, we have discussed the doom of the old southern family which brought by lacking love and the hierarchic society. Up to this point, we must add to the list another element that determined the collapse of the family and the society. That is the powerful Southern taboo on miscegenation. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, both of Sutpen's design and Southern tradition depended for their ends upon a family that was a pure white, male dynasty. For the Sutpens and the South, the question of color generated the disastrous irony of their strength and their defeat. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, marital and familial bonds could not survive any conflict involving racial considerations. Because of "black blood," a wife was discarded, a son orphaned, a brother murdered, a sister widowed. The family fell apart when faced with the fear or fact of miscegenation.

In Thomas Sutpen and his son Henry and Bon, Faulkner provided a parallel to King David and his son Absalom and Amnon. Both of Absalom and Henry killed their half-brothers Amnon and Bon. While in terms of the motives of fratricide as well as the father's attitude towards the murder, we can find many differences.

Absalom killed Amnon because of the Hebrew code that a brother should safeguard the honor of a sister. Besides this, his murder of Amnon appears to be motivated also by rivalry for the inheritance of his father's power and status; Henry welcomed and even abetted the incestuous relationship between Bon and Judith. He was prompted to murder only by his obsessive bigotry against miscegenation. David heartedly forgave Absalom for the murder and maintained his love for his oldest son, making no gesture of punishment; Sutpen tried desperately to prevent the union of Judith and Bon and finally goaded Henry into acting as his instrument of doom by revealing to Henry that Bon was a Negro. The reason for all these differences is that the conflicts in King David household are just in the context of consanguinity, while the conflicts in the Sutpen household are promoted into the context of racism. Through this displacement concentrating on the motives of fratricide, the theme of racism is again foregrounded. In a society like the old American South which conditions a person by his blood, the bond of family, of consanguinity is rather weak when challenged by the gap of white and black.

This displacement can be diagrammed as follows:



D. Results of Fratricide

As we have mentioned that Absalom killed Amnon partially for the inheritance of his father’s power and status. And finally, he actually took his brother’s place in line for the throne and eventually rebelled against his father. In this sense, Absalom becomes a triumpher after fratricide.

However, Faulkner did not present a power struggle between Henry and Bon, but concentrated on the sister-incest theme. Henry felt obliged to protect a sister from miscegenation in accordance with a code that was binding in the South of Civil War times. In addition, Henry did not kill in anger, but in love. Bon had “seduced” Henry, his classmate at the University of Mississippi, before he met the sister, Judith. Bon was shown as committing a kind of suicide in forcing his execution upon a reluctant Henry. He took out his pistol and handed it to Henry, the butt extended:

“Then do it now,” he says.

Henry looks at the pistol; now he is not only panting, he is trembling; when he speaks now, his voice is not even the exhalation, it is the suffused and suffocating in breath itself.

“You are my brother.”

“No I’m not. I’m the nigger that’s going to sleep with you sister. Unless you stop me, Henry.” (286)

Bon’s murder was an act of sacrifice which Henry felt obliged to perform to save a sister from an interracial marriage. Like Absalom, Henry became estranged from his father. But Henry was not ambitious for property or power. After the killing, he “abjures” his birthright, left the family home, and became a voluntary sacrificial lamb for the sins of his father. So, when Henry killed Bon, he was not a murderer, but a victim.

Henry paid a price for a sin out of the remote past. Miss Rosa Coldfield, sister-in-law to Thomas Sutpen, saw her family as paying the penalty for some sin of the ancestors. The fact that Sutpen (whom Rosa considered a demon) had met Ellen Coldfield in church made the young sister believed that the family’s fate was part of some eternal plan:

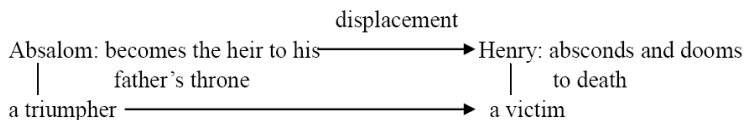
In church, mind you, as though there were a fatality and curse on our family and God himself were seeing to it was performed and discharged to the last drop and dreg. Yes, fatality and curse on the South and on our family... (21)

Little Miss Rosa, too short for her chair and thus looking like a “crucified child”, could not understand what her forbears could have done that her family would be “cursed to be instruments not only for that man’s [Sutpen’s] destruction, but for our own” (21).

The answer lies in the disordered relationship in the Southern family garden. As the South was punished by the Civil War, Sutpen was destroyed because he ignored God’s will. Sutpen’s fall occurred because of the rapacity which is the sin of the South: Sutpen attempted to “hold for himself and his descendants inviolable title forever, generation after generation, to the oblongs and squares of the earth”, he failed to “hold the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood”² (Faulkner, 1973, pp.13-14).

Absalom, Absalom! presents no solution for the restoration of the Southern family garden. By killing Charles Bon, Henry doomed the family line because he became a fugitive from law and never married. Like many other Faulkner protagonists, Henry could only suffer; he was unable to get rid of the past or to provide any modern solution to inherited problems.

As for the results of fratricide, the displacement may be diagrammed as follows:



Through this displacement, Faulkner again showed his sympathy for Henry, for the young generation of the old South who served as the sacrificial lambs for the guilt of the family, of their ancestors and of the society. In the old American South, the evils of incest, of fratricide interacted with the evils of the slavery system and racism. All these maladies caused the fall of the young generation and the collapse of the Southern society.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the using of Biblical images and plots as the archetypes of his own works, Faulkner has shown his great talent as a writer. According to H. L. Weatherby (1967), “Faulkner combines a more than common knowledge of traditional Christian images (and with those images traditional values) with a more than common ignorance of Christian doctrines and theology” (p.354). This remark, judging by all of our previous analysis, best summarizes Faulkner’s method of

² This remark is quoted from William Faulkner, 1973, *Go Down, Moses*, New York: Random House. Further reference is seen in the parenthesis.

using Biblical archetypes.

By using Biblical archetypes in his novels, “Faulkner made his imaginative narratives serve in providing a cognitive, unbroken connection of the present with the past and the future” (Roberts, 1964, p.60). Faulkner is just like a great magician who situates at the present but sees through the past and the future in the crystal ball. So by breaking the boundary of time and space, Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County has become a parable of the Old South as well as a miniature of the whole world.

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