The Development of Class Consciousness in Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!

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Abstract
This article reads William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) as a constant negotiation between Thomas Stupen's "design" and the class of the planters, with which he tries to compete. Sutpen's childhood in the Appalachian Mountains, where class and racial differences are largely absent, renders his descent with his family into the plains in Tidewater as a kind of a Fall associated with knowledge. Sutpen observes the importance of land in the plains and the racial differences on the basis of colour and the differences between white people and white people. Even though Sutpen's humiliation comes from a black butler who does not allow him to enter the mansion of the planter Bettibone from the front door, it is with the planter that Sutpen plans to combat. Sutpen's "design" which will shape his life starts as a reading of the planters' class and as a recipe for becoming one of them, or even defeating them. Sutpen expresses this design as follows: "So to combat them you have got to have what they have that made them do what the man did. You got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with" (*A,A!.* 229). Sutpen succeeds in having land and slaves, but it is the more subtle aspects of class which he misses that undermine his design and even bring his life to a tragic end.
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When his family descends from the Appalachian mountains in Western Virginia to the Tidewater plains, Thomas Sutpen starts observing the new society and comparing it to the society which has known in the mountains. In the mountains, Sutpen confirms later to his friend in Jefferson General Compson, "only a crazy man would go to the trouble to take or even want more than he could eat or swap for powder and whisky" (*AA* 221). Although Sutpen's remark applies to the concept of ownership in the mountains in general, he makes this observation to contrast the two different concepts of land ownership in Tidewater and the mountains, in particular. Don H. Doyle warns that the narrator description of the mountains does not extend beyond popular ideas on Appalachia. He suggests that the poor whites of Appalachia are presented like American Indians (Doyle 30-1-2). The similarity of Sutpen's family to the Indians acquires more strength as both seem to have no idea of market economy. Karen Rhodes observes that the Indians were locked in the mind-set of a use-value economy (77). In contrast to the economy of the mountains, there are plantations in the plains of Tidewater, and these are the most important form of possessions there. C. G. Woodson explains that the fertile soil, mild climate, navigable streams and good harbours in Tidewater facilitated trade with Europe. These factors were also influential in developing aristocracy there (132). This, however, must not suggest that the majority of the people in Tidewater own plantations. Only a small number of white people own plantations, and the rest of the whites are involved in the plantations as tenants. At this early stage of his experience in Tidewater, Sutpen does not have a chance to observe a third class of whites: the poor whites who are leading independent but less prosperous lives because the plantation his family works on seems like a little universe for him. It is the single place which contains his experience in Tidewater, as he does not speak about other places in the plains.

Because the concept of ownership is far more sophisticated in the plains and because it represents a major difference between the mountains and the plains, Sutpen considers ownership and its implications very carefully. As the plantation depends on land and those who work on it, these elements are clearly divided and controlled: planters own, divide, and fence the land. Sutpen sees "a land divided neatly up and actually owned by men who did nothing but ride over it on fine horses or sit in fine clothes on the galleries of big houses while other people worked for them" (*AA* 221). As for the people, Sutpen observes that the planters in Tidewater own the slaves who work on the land, and they have a lot of control over the whites who work for them as tenants. Like the divisions in the land, Sutpen observes divisions among people. The first and most obvious division pertains to skin colour: "because of what colour their skins happened to be." This divides people racially into free men and slaves. The second division is based on ownership: Sutpen observes "a difference between white men and white men, not to be measured by lifting anvils or gouging eyes or how much whiskey you could drink then get up and walk out of the room," rather the difference between white men is measured by what they happened to own (*AA* 226).

This last division between whites and whites is, of course, more troubling to Sutpen because he belongs, according to this division, to the less advantaged group. Sutpen observes that the poor whites, the class to which he belongs, have the worst living conditions. Even slaves live in better houses, eat, and dress better than poor

whites do. The only advantage poor whites have over slaves is freedom, which is significantly compromised because of their economic dependence on planters. This initial stage of Sutpen's developing class consciousness leads him to observe his family from a new perspective, which involves comparing them to other social classes. When he looks at his family's log cabin, he sees:

> the rough partly rotten log walls, the sagging roof whose missing shingles they did not replace but just set pans and buckets under the leaks, the lean-to room which they used for kitchen and which was all right because in good weather it didn't even matter that it had no chimney since they did not attempt to use it at all when it rained, ... (*AA* 236)

Moreover, the cabin they lived in "didn't sit up in the bright wind but sat instead beside the big flat river that sometimes showed no current at all and even sometimes ran backward" (*AA* 227). Sutpen's brothers do not cope with the new environment and they die one after another because of the climate and the dampness. Like their cabins, Sutpen's and his class's ugly clothes are another reminder of the inferiority of their class. Sutpen himself dresses in garments which "his father had got from the plantation commissary and had worn out and which one of the sisters had patched and cut down to fit him" (*AA* 229).

As Sutpen realises that ownership is the basis of the division between whites, he tries to delve into the power that keeps each in his "fixed" position. The short time Sutpen has so far spent in the plantation society does not give him examples of how people rise and fall on the social ladder. The only explanation, which is available to him at this stage, is the mysterious power of luck: "he still thought that that was just a matter of where you were spawned and how; whether you were lucky or not lucky" (*AA* 226). Of course, Sutpen will not remain satisfied with explaining things by luck. In response to this challenge, he focuses his observation; he observes the planter as he does not need to observe the poor whites because he is one of them. Taking his own class for granted will prove to be a deadly mistake for Sutpen, however.

It is most likely that these observations about the differences among white people are made very early by the other Sutpen family members, but they are acutely conscious in the case of Thomas Sutpen because they follow his painful humiliation at the front door of the planter Pettibone's mansion. Sutpen, who goes to the mansion to deliver a message to the planter, is denied access to the planter's mansion from the front door by a black butler, who asks him to go to the back door. When Sutpen relates this command to the divisions which he has observed among people, he realises his own insignificance in the new society, and that his family belongs to an inferior class. Later on in Jefferson, he explains to General Compson how the two Sutpens inside him were arguing about what might be done and how the following observation was boiling inside him: *"I not only wasn't doing any good to [the planter] by telling it or any harm to him by not telling it, there aint any good or harm either in the living world that I can do to him"* (*AA* 238).

Sutpen's conscious study of the new society takes the form of creeping up among the tangled shrubbery of the lawn and lying hidden watching the planter. This time he has to seek a way out of his insignificance, and his analysis correctly points out that the difference between the plains and mountains and the planters and poor whites is economic in the first place and that all the things that he has admired in planters are social reflections of people's economic status. It is economy that divides whites into classes. What is more important for Sutpen at this stage is the rejection of luck as an explanation for his being in his social position. People are not fixed in their positions and there are ways to change things: "so to combat them," Sutpen convinces himself, "you have got to have what they have that made them do what the man did. You got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with" (*AA* 238).

Considering the possibilities of retaliation for his humiliation, Sutpen soon forgets the black butler because he knows that his problem is with the planter, who gave orders that people like him should not be admitted from the front door.[1] This points to a parallel developing consciousness regarding race relations in the plains. Sutpen repudiates the tenant occupation of his family, and he even repudiates his own family. He adopts the planter's point of view, looks at his family through the planter's eyes, and sees them as:

> cattle, creatures heavy and without grace, brutely evacuated into a world without hope or purpose for them, who would in turn spawn with brutish and vicious prolixity, populate, double treble and compound, fill space and earth with a race whose future would be a succession of cut-down and patched and made-over garments bought on exorbitant credit because they were white people, from stores where niggers were given the garments free,… (*AA* 235).

This look at poor whites seems to be shared by the young shocked Sutpen, Sutpen the planter who is telling his story to General Compson many years later in Jefferson and by the different generations of the Compson family

[1] Sutpen seems to realize in a very short time the significance of using the front and the back doors in the context of slavery and social class even though his family did not own slaves in the mountains. *Go Down, Moses* explores this motif in relation to the slave Lucas Beauchamp, who refuses to use the back door (44-5). For a discussion of the back door motif, see: Al-Barhow (36-7)

who relate Sutpen's story. Slaves are also regarded in the same way as animals, and sometimes worse, as objects. This look to poor whites was, however, concealed behind different layers of paternalism and white solidarity, which was needed to maintain white unity in the face of potential black rebellion. W. J. Cash confirms that the poor white was not exploited directly. He was "made by extension a member of the dominant class—was lodged solidly on a tremendous superiority, which, however much the blacks in the 'big house' might sneer at him, and however much their masters might privately agree with them, he could never publicly lose. Come what might, he would always be a white man" (39).

Sutpen specifies his view of poor whites as cattle by describing his sister as a cow. He observes

> … his sister pumping rhythmic up and down above a washtub in the yard, her back to him, shapeless in a calico dress and a pair of the old man's shoes unlaced and flapping about her bare ankles and broad in the beam as a cow, the very labour she was doing brutish and stupidly out of all proportion to its reward: the very primary essence of labor, toil, reduced to its crude absolute which only a beast could and would endure... (*AA* 236)

The association between Sutpen's sister and the cow springs from the miserable life his sister leads and the tough tasks she performs for cheap rewards.

As can be seen from the "design," Sutpen's project to found a dynasty, Sutpen's retaliation to his humiliation is to become a planter. Cleanth Brooks argues that Sutpen does not fully belong to the planters' class because he does not share the planters' code of values and general outlook on life (284). However, it can be argued that Sutpen does, and one should not expect from Sutpen what might be expected from the planters who came to Jefferson one or two generations before him. Shirley Callen rightly points out that Sutpen's mistake is that he comes to Jefferson one or two generations later than the Sartorises, the Compsons, etc. (26). Indeed, Sutpen can be read as a planter, and a fanatic planter, too. He adheres to the code that he considers the essence of being a planter with such vehemence that it becomes to him a gospel which he blindly follows. Many of his practices can be explained in this way. The phrase "combat them" does not mean conflict as much as competition with the aristocracy. Sutpen's exaggeration of the planters' practices can also be seen as a defence mechanism against the inferiority which his origins make him feel. He thinks that the more he plays the planter, the further he will be from his humble origins. In this way, he builds the biggest mansion, and buys the best land in the county. If there is anything from the planters' culture that Sutpen does not adopt, then that is because he is not aware of it. It is important to add here that Sutpen's observations of the planters' code of values in Tidewater have never been complete. Therefore, he follows what he comes to know about. His cultural defeat in the face of the planters is so total. Even when it comes to manners, Sutpen adopts the planters' outlook as he sees poor whites "without grace." He even realizes that his father's laughing and drinking mountain habits are the reason for ejecting him from Tidewater's taverns. If Rosa Coldfield and the Compson narrators might not agree that Sutpen has graceful manners, then that can be partly explained by the conflicts between them and Sutpen and by the fact that Sutpen remains tough and he uses patronization less than others do.

As Sutpen adopts the design, he devotes himself to securing the elements that will make him a planter and he pays little attention to other things. He is so absorbed in his commitment to these things that he learns nothing from school except what pertains to his scheme: that the West Indies is a place "to which poor men went in ships and became rich" (*AA* 242).

Though Sutpen's attitude towards slaves is mainly consistent with planters' attitude, Sutpen's behaviour with his slaves remains problematical till the end. Sutpen's physical fights with his slaves is definitely an aberration. In Tidewater, young Sutpen wishes that he and his family had slaves to wait on them as he sees them waiting on the planter Pettibone. When young Sutpen refers to other people working on the fields for the rich planters in Tidewater, he does not know that slaves work for nothing, while whites are paid for their labour. As Sutpen grows up, he learns that the black slaves can be put into full use as commodities. This involves first the denial of these slaves' will and then increasing the small pleasure white masters derive from being waited on by a slave into using black females as sexual objects. The children who will be born in the process will follow their mothers' status as slaves. Slaves will also be used as a labour force on the fields in addition to performing some domestic services to serve their white masters. Sutpen exercises this full commodification of slaves in Haiti, as he oversees a French sugar plantation, and in Jefferson as he oversees his own plantation, the Hundred.[1]

Of course, this commodification of slaves did not go without resistance. Richard Godden reads Sutpen's success in subduing slaves' rebellion in Haiti, along with his physical fights with his slaves, as counterrevolutionary acts on the side of the planters' class against possible black insurrections (685). It does not appear that Sutpen represents planters in fighting with his slaves although he is the only planter who does so in the novel. Of course, planters always insure the surrender of their slaves, and to achieve this, they use complex

[1] Richard King in "From Haiti to Mississippi…" discusses the ways Hegel's paradigm of domination, the master-slave relationship is reproduced in the novel and helps illuminate Sutpen's story (96-101).

and constant surveillance systems in addition to physical violence in the forms of whipping, lashing or even lynching slaves, but not fighting physically with them. Sutpen uses the planters' methods, too. He shoots at the slaves in Haiti, and when he brings his band of slaves he carries two guns with him. It seems that the message of Sutpen's fights with the slaves is directed to the whites, rather than to the blacks. Sutpen is trying to compete with the planters at the expense of the slaves. Though these fights are presented as between equals, they are not. Sutpen is always sure that he will win and the slaves are weaker because they are underfed or they are not given enough time to rest from work.

This violence against blacks seems to be troubling to the series of white narrators, who try to present these fights as a sort of sport, while it is, in fact, something to amuse the whites who attend them and satisfy Sutpen's sense of superiority.[1] General Compson, who sees Sutpen fights naked chest to chest with a wild slave, reports how slaves suffer seriously in these fights and at end of every fight "the nigger would be flat on his back with his chest heaving and another nigger throwing water on him" (*AA* 253). Sutpen badly needs to feel superior to other whites in order to compensate for the class inferiority he felt at the planter's door, which was done to him through a black butler. Now he is paying the planters back and, like them, he is using his own slaves as tools.

The American Civil War 1861-1865 disturbed the social and economic order as masters had to leave their plantations to fight the war, which also demanded that poor whites do the same as they identified with the planters in their cause. This left only white women and slaves, who deserted their masters in big numbers to join the armies of the North. In consequence, plantations were neglected, and very often, burned and destroyed in the war. The same fate befell the mansions. *Absalom, Absalom!* provides a good image of the Southern economy during the war, which was sometimes reduced to a subsistence economy. Rosa Coldfield, Sutpen's sister-in-law, narrates how the Sutpen women, for example, do not produce anything extra to support the troops. She, along with Judith and Clytie, resort to planting their garden in a primitive way in order to support themselves:

> *We grew and tended and harvested with our hands the food we ate, made and worked that garden just as we cooked and ate the food which came out of it:… kept that garden growing, spun thread and wove the cloth we wore, hunted and found and rendered the meagre ditch-side herbs to protect and guarantee what spartan compromise we dared or had the time to make with illness,…* (*AA* 155)

In a way, this is a reduction to something close to the economic state of the poor whites in the Appalachian mountains. Sutpen's economic loss because of the war is quite considerable. His loss accumulates because the plantation operations stop and because the carpetbag governments, which governed the South after the Civil War, imposed heavy taxes on planters. Moreover, the plantation needs repair and the cost of this becomes, understandably, higher because of the loss of the free labour that was provided by slaves. Sutpen's slaves desert the Hundred with the first Yankee troops that come to Jefferson. Rosa explains to Quentin Compson that Sutpen comes back from the war to find:

> his chances of descendants gone where his children had attended to that, and his plantation ruined, fields fallow except for a fine stand of weeds, and taxes and levies and penalties sowed by United States marshals and such and all his niggers gone where the Yankees had attended to that… (*AA* 179)

Sutpen is reduced from the biggest planter in Jefferson to a small storekeeper, and Sutpen does not prove to be a good storekeeper, either. He sells cheap products to poor customers made up of poor whites and ex-slaves. In addition to this, the loss of the Civil War and his domestic troubles make him very bitter and he finds his consolation in drink, which makes him inactive most of the time. Rosa explains how other planters face an even grimmer reality as they return home and how this bitterness is translated into domestic conflicts.[2]

The economic loss of the Southerners in general and the planters in particular reorganises the relationships between the different social classes. Plantations stop to be the main form of economy, as they are divided, sold or taken over by banks because of heavy debts; Sutpen's plantation is not an exception. Planters have to give up the appearances of aristocracy and compete with other classes, showing the capitalist logic that underlined their economic activities as planters, which has so far been covered with paternalism.

Sutpen decides now to start anew from where he stopped before the war, and he even extends the scope of his exploitation to include more whites. This includes the humiliation of Rosa Coldfield and both Wash Jones

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[1] Thadious Davis reads the McCaslin brothers' chasing of their brother/slave within the game context. Chasing Tomey's Turl in *Go Down, Moses* involves both violence and sport (135).

[2] Rosa explains this as follows:

> *It was winter and already soldiers were beginning to come back—the stragglers, not all of them tramps, ruffians, but men who had risked everything and lost everything, suffered beyond endurance and had returned now to a ruined land, not the same men who had marched away but transformed—this is the worst, the ultimate degradation to which war brings the spirit, the soul—into the likeness of that man who abuses from very despair and pity the beloved wife or mistress who in his absence has been raped.* (*AA* 157)

and his granddaughter Milly. Indeed Sutpen is ready to extend "slavery" to include whites who are in need if that serves his project. In this way, the huge social and economic change that was brought about by the Civil War has a little impact on Sutpen's perception of class relations, and his design remains intact, despite the domestic problems which involve fratricide and the threat of incest and miscegenation. If the design changes in any way, then that might be summed up by a sense of urgency, which emanates from Sutpen's realization that he has grown old and time has started to work against him.

Though added incidentally, family becomes an integral part of Sutpen's design as he plans to found a dynasty. Sutpen does not specify a place for a wife in his design at the beginning. This might be because Sutpen is still young to think of a wife. He does not seek a wife until he comes to Jefferson; his first wife is offered to him as a reward for quelling the slaves' revolt on Haitian plantation where he works as an overseer. The French planter and his daughter give Sutpen a dowry in the form of land and slaves, and they hide Eulalia's defect, mixed blood. Sutpen considers this an

> "actual misrepresentation on their part and misrepresentation of such a crass nature as to have not only voided and frustrated without his knowing it the central motivation of his entire design, but to have made ironic delusion of all that he could ever accomplish in the future toward that design…" (*AA* 262-3)

Sutpen's uncompromising attitude towards Eulalia and even his son shows the extent of his commitment to the planters' code of values. Indeed Sutpen is ready to sacrifice everything he has gained in marriage to save the design. Ignoring that fact and going on with the marriage would be to him "a mockery and a betrayal of that little boy who approached that door fifty years ago and was turned away, for whose vindication the whole plan was conceived and carried forward to the moment of this choice" (*AA* 274). Thinking that money can solve the problem, he terminates his relationship with the planter's daughter by providing for her and her son. He gives back her father's land and takes away the slaves only.

Callen explains Sutpen's pain as he comes to Jefferson by the loss of Eulalia (28). I think that Sutpen is disappointed because he has failed to secure a white heir and he has to try again. His rejection to hide Eulalia's mixed origin is not a matter of insisting on being honest; rather it is blind adherence to the code of the planters' class. Sutpen is afraid that he might be rejected by planters and that is why he hides his origins, at least until he secures his position among Jefferson planters. He does not take the risk of keeping an octoroon woman even if that fact about her origins can be kept a secret.

When back in the South, Sutpen does not hurry to get married and, apparently, he can marry for money, as the town's speculations show. His marriage to Ellen Coldfield is not motivated by any economic rewards, but it is not free from considerations of respectability. Though there are economic deals between Sutpen and Mr Coldfield, they remain too small to explain why Sutpen should marry Ellen. Ellen's father is a small storekeeper, and, economically, he is no match to Sutpen who owns the biggest plantation in Jefferson. Ellen, though, is seduced by Sutpen's wealth more than with his personality, but we must be careful about Ellen's attitude towards the marriage as this account is rendered through the old maid Rosa Coldfied, who does not have enough experience in the relationships between men and women, and who is still furious with Sutpen because he has insulted her.

Sutpen's blind faithfulness to the planter's class and their values create for him new troubles which complicate his relationship to the class of poor whites, from which he has risen, and to his family members. Eulalia, whose father acknowledges her as his daughter despite the fact that she has black blood, wants Sutpen to do the same with his son Charles Bon, who follows his father to the South. Actually, the horror of miscegenation is not only a Southern idea; rather something that is shared by European colonialists. There were differences, however, as the French, for example, were inclined to regarded whiteness and blackness as a relative matter, whereas the Anglo Saxons were inclined to think in terms of purity. As the French planter's stand shows, some planters are ready to hide facts and let their mixed children pass for whites if circumstances allow. This, of course, implies acknowledging them as children. Sutpen is not prepared to do so even to save the unity of his own family.

It is true that Charles is Sutpen's eldest son and so his move to the South might be motivated by his desire to be his father's heir. This might even explain why his brother Henry kills him: to rid himself of a rival heir, but there is little ground for all of this, as far as Charles Bon and Henry Sutpen are concerned. Charles promises to drop all claims in return for being acknowledged as Sutpen's son, and there is the fact that Henry repudiates his right to inherit his father as his father rejects to approve Charles's engagement to Judith. Henry kills his brother who threatens that he, as partly black, is going to marry Judith, who is a white girl. This shows that to Henry and his father, incest seems to be less horrifying than miscegenation.

Following the death of his wife Ellen, Sutpen proposes to Rosa Coldfield. Rosa is different from the other women Sutpen proposes to in that she has a narrative voice, even though it is mediated through men. Indeed she is one of the main narrators in the novel, but she is different from the other narrators in that in that she is directly involved in Sutpen's story. The analysis of her position demands, therefore, considering her

involvement in the action and her role as a narrator. Christopher Cunningham, who observes that the narratives of Sutpen create a new genealogy passing directly from a man to a man, circumventing female mediation, explains the inclusion of Rosa's narrative by her ambiguous femininity. Even though Rosa presents her own version of Sutpen's story, this story is coloured by the opinions of the male narrators because this version is contained within their own accounts. Rosa's decision to accept marrying Sutpen is motivated by economic need and she seems to be as infatuated with his position in Jefferson and his personality for, in addition to his wealth, Sutpen fights as a colonel in the Civil War and Rosa admires his contribution to the Southern cause, even though she tries to demonize him in every way possible after his proposal to her. She explains that because of her poverty, her chances of marriage were very limited.

> *had I been the daughter of a wealthy planter I could have married almost anyone but being the daughter merely of a small store-keeper I could even afford to accept flowers from almost no one and so would have been doomed to marry at last some casual apprentice-clerk in my father's business—* (*AA* 169)

As the daughter of a weak father, Rosa has to work in the family store in order to support both of them. She has to face the horror of the Civil War, the looting and lack of security, alone. Though she does not have the mentality of a business woman, she is better than Judith as she runs the family store for quite sometime until it is sold because of bankruptcy.

Sutpen's shocking proposal that they mate first to see if they can produce a male heir before they commit themselves to each other in marriage complicates Rosa's position and her role as a narrator. She has to choose between money, which she badly needs, and respectability. Rosa does not hesitate to choose respectability, and the first thing she picks up in retaliation is the obscurity of Sutpen's origins. Thinking of the time when he first appeared in Jefferson, she confirms to Quentin: "He wasn't a gentleman. He wasn't even a gentleman. He came here with a horse and two pistols and a name which nobody ever heard before, knew for certain was his own any more than the horse was his own or even the pistols" (*AA* 14-5). The conflict between Rosa and Sutpen shows that they adopt different views of class, each according to what suits his condition. Sutpen, who believes the essence of being a planter is having land, slaves and a fine house, insults Rosa by treating her like a slave because she is poor. In response to her feeling of economic inferiority towards Sutpen, Rosa tries to maintain some sort of class superiority over Sutpen by sticking to the good name she inherited from her father. Even though Sutpen is a respectable member of Jefferson's society, he does not have ancestors with a name to match the good name of the Coldfieds. Donald Kartiganer rightly observes that Rosa judges men not by their deeds but by their heritage, their blood (298). Rosa's insult emanates mainly from the idea that Sutpen is dealing with her like a slave, or, to be more accurate, like a poor white girl, even if she happens to be a respectable one.

Rosa's readiness to marry Sutpen shows, however, that her concept of class becomes flexible, just as her father's and her sister Ellen's, to include people whose names are not very well known if they can prove they are a match to planters in possessions. This emphasises the primacy of the economic basis of aristocracy even though Rosa seems to give more weight to good names. Rosa's aunt is a notable exception as she sticks to the importance of a good name in defining respectability. However, we know that her opposition to Ellen's marriage to Sutpen does not succeed in preventing it from taking place. Rosa herself is less willing to compromise in her treatment of poor whites and mulattoes. She always looks down at Wash Jones. Furthermore, she regrets that the necessity of the war times has forced her and Judith to live with Clytie "*with no distinction among the three of* [them] *of age or color but just as to who could build this fire or stir this pot or weed this bed or carry this apron full of corn to the mill for meal with least cost to the general good in time or expanse of other duties*" (*AA* 155). Even in her last visit to the Hundred, she makes it clear to Clytie that she is superior to her.

Though not a typical one, the relationship between Thomas Sutpen and Wash Jones highlights the main aspects of the relationship between planters and poor whites. Wash Jones admires Sutpen and lives on his plantation like a servant. Jones cannot be classified as a tenant since he does not farm, and cannot be classified as a full squatter as he does the Sutpens some services in return for allowing him and his granddaughter Milly to live on Sutpen's land. Charles C. Bolton observes that the lines between tenant and squatter in the north-eastern Mississippi remained unclear for many years before the war (93). Jones remains thus until the war is over. His living conditions are worse than the Sutpens in Tidewater. He lives "*with his granddaughter in the abandoned fishing camp with its collapsing roof and rotting porch*" (*AA* 182). He gives a good example of the way poor whites were exploited by planters, yet they were made to feel happy because they were allowed to feel superior to black slaves. Sutpen, as a young man, rejects his own origins because the planter does not give him the chance to feel superior to the black butler; rather he is made to feel inferior through what is meant to remind him of his superiority. Callen points out that Sutpen is an exception because the other poor whites vent their anger against blacks and Sutpen wants revenge against the planter (30). I do not think that Sutpen is an exception, but his shock at realizing his social position is stronger than that of his class members as he is made to feel inferior even

to the black butler. Jones is not a typical poor white as Callen suggests, for he is treated, in many ways, like blacks (Callen 31). He is, for example, not allowed to enter Sutpen's mansion from the front door, even though he brings them the game, fish and vegetables on which they depend "to keep life in them." He is teased by slaves, who, no doubt, know that his pretence to superiority is false because it does not have economic grounds.

Callen refers to Sutpen's affair with Milly as a compromise with his design because she is poor and not a respectable middle class lady like Ellen (29). This might be a compromise, but it is not a significant one: all Sutpen wants now is a white mother of his child. He does not lack respectability now in the same way he lacked it when he first came to Jefferson. Indeed, he can bestow respectability on his child even if his mother happened to be a poor white. It is true that he is reduced to a small storekeeper but so are the other planters. Sutpen knows that in Jefferson a good name follows even if one becomes poor and it is in this way that the Coldfields are considered respectable. Like the response of black slave girls to sexual abuse, Milly's reaction to Sutpen's seduction is ignored, and it is possible to consider Sutpen's relationship to Milly as rape. She does not talk for herself, and all we know is that Sutpen has seduced her with cheap candy. Even if she consents to the relationship, she remains underage, only fifteen years old. Milly is not given a voice, and all we have is her grandfather's reaction, who responds to his own humiliation rather than hers.

The Civil War, which brings about many changes, improves Jones' position considerably. He starts working in Sutpen's store, and he becomes a "partner porter and clerk." Rosa observes the change in the relationship of the two men whom she does not like:

> Jones who before '61 had not even been allowed to approach the front of the house…and Clytie too, the one remaining servant, negro, the one who would forbid him to pass the kitchen door with what he brought…but who now entered the house itself on the (quite frequent now) afternoons when the demon would…. direct Jones to fetch the jug, the two of them (and Jones even sitting now who in the old days, the old dead Sunday afternoons of monotonous peace which they spent together beneath the scuppernong arbor in the back yard, the demon lying in the hammock while Jones squatted against a post, rising from time to time to pour for the demon from the demijohn and the bucket of spring water which he had fetched from the spring more than a mile away then squatting again... (*AA* 183)

It is obvious from the different ways Jones is received at the door of the mansion and the different ways he sits with Sutpen that he has risen above his previous position and that Sutpen has lost a great deal of his past superiority. Indeed Jones thinks that he might rise socially further through marrying his granddaughter Milly to Supten, who has impregnated her. Jones identifies with Sutpen and the Southern cause even though he does not go to the war. He often repeats: "Well, Kernel, they kilt us but they ain't whupped us yit, air they?"

Conclusion

Because Milly gives birth to a girl, Sutpen is not willing to fulfil Jones's expectation by marrying Milly. Indeed, Sutpen means to show Jones this time that he is not better than slaves as he whips Wash with the slash which he used to whip the slaves with before. Wash feels that his pride is wounded and he retaliates very violently because Sutpen rejects to "make hit right." He does not only kill Sutpen, who is responsible for wounding his pride, but also kills his granddaughter and her baby girl.

Whipping Wash Jones is an act which repeats Sutpen's own humiliation at the front door of Pettibone's mansion and Rosa's humiliation by Sutpen's shocking proposal. Sutpen has spent his life trying to reproduce Pettibone's example. Even though critics do not agree that Sutpen has succeeded in his "design," Sutpen has at least produced the external appearance of that design, which is composed of land and slaves. Sutpen's tragedy, however, is that he has not understood the very class from which he has emerged. If his humiliation at the Pettibone's door has made him deny his own connection to his own class, then other members of his class can retaliate to humiliation in different ways. Sutpen, who hid himself to observe every detail of the planter's life, has forgotten to observe his own class and, more importantly, has forgotten that he, as a poor white boy, has responded strongly to his own response to humiliation at the hands of the planters.

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