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Perspectives on History: New Orleans's Women in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and Anne Rice's *The Feast of All Saints*

Stacey Morgan Ford
Longwood University

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Perspectives on History:

New Orleans's Women of Color in William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!

and Anne Rice's The Feast of All Saints

Stacey Morgan Ford

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts in English at Longwood College, Farmville, Virginia, May, 1998.

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Perspectives on History:

New Orleans's Women of Color in William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!

and Anne Rice's The Feast of All Saints

By

Stacey Morgan Ford

Martha E. Cook
(Director of Thesis)

Susan Anderson
(First Reader)

Maria C. Simon
(Second Reader)

April 23, 1998
Date

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Preface

As in many of his novels, William Faulkner uses a non-traditional style in writing Absalom, Absalom! (1936). In this novel Faulkner relates the story of Thomas Sutpen and his family through multiple narrators who possess varying degrees of information on the subject. Each of these narrators uses the information they possess to create a version of the Sutpen legend that fits his or her own aesthetic and philosophical notions. Faulkner scholars work in much the same way as the narrators of Absalom, Absalom!. As Richard H. Brodhead says,

Each new worker in the field of Faulkner sets the subject in his own frame of expectations and needs, seen within which features that were formerly prominent suddenly fade, and other sets of features come to the fore. "Let me play," each new critic, Shreve-like, says to his predecessors--a gesture that prepares for him later to say: "because your old man was wrong here, too." (12)

New scholars are particularly apt to say "Let me play" and "your old man was wrong here" with Absalom, Absalom! (1936) because of its myriad, often ambiguous, versions of the Sutpen family legend.

Faulkner provides a great deal of the Sutpen family history through Mr. Compson, who received some information from Grandfather Compson and infers still more of the history. A large part of Mr. Compson's version of the Sutpen family legend involves Charles Bon and his murder at the hands of Henry Sutpen. Mr. Compson tells a story of Charles introducing Henry to the world of New Orleans and attempts to make Henry

accept his octoroon mistress. Mr. Compson vividly describes Charles Bon and his environment in New Orleans, especially as that environment relates to women of color.

In re-telling the Sutpen family story, the Mississippian, Quentin Compson, and the Canadian, Shreve McCannon, rely heavily on most of Mr. Compson's version of the Sutpen family legend in creating their version. In fact, much of what Mr. Compson tells Quentin comes to the reader through Quentin. Quentin and Shreve do, however, discount Mr. Compson's depiction of Henry and Charles in New Orleans. Formerly, most critics have followed Quentin and Shreve's example. Many critics have examined what this passage tells the reader about Mr. Compson as a narrator and a character, but few have examined the history of Mr. Compson's version of the legend, especially the portion depicting New Orleans's women of color. Those who have discussed this passage have accepted it as historically accurate or at least plausible. Faulkner's use of vivid imagery and detail do create a believable tale, making such assessments possible.

After reading a novel such as Anne Rice's The Feast of All Saints (1979), however, one must say that perhaps the forefathers of Faulkner criticism were wrong in this respect. Rice uses a more traditional narrative technique than Faulkner uses for Absalom, Absalom!. Rice uses a single, omniscient narrator to tell the story of Marcel Ste. Marie, the son of a woman of color and a white man, and his family and friends. Unlike Absalom, Absalom!, which only provides a narrow view of New Orleans's women of color, The Feast Of All Saints creates a comprehensive view of New Orleans's people of color, male and female. Rice's novel, to which she appends a description of the primary sources on which she relied, presents an equally, if not more, believable, yet very different portrayal of New Orleans's women of color from Faulkner's. Rice's portrayal raises

numerous questions about Faulkner's version. What was the real situation of New Orleans's women of color? Which version, Rice's or Faulkner's, comes closest to this reality? How did these writers arrive at the portrayals they provide? If the origins of their portrayals differ, how and why do they do so? Finally, what did Faulkner and Rice think they were doing? That is to say, why did they use the portrayals they did? Why did they choose to portray these women of color at all?

To discover the answers to these questions, one must examine a number of different types of sources. First, one must look at historical sources, the most detailed and unbiased of which have been written within the last twenty-five years. This information must then be applied to the works of Faulkner and Rice. Next, one must explore previous scholarship, both critical and biographical, for these two writers. Finally, particularly when discussing Faulkner, one must play the part of Mr. Compson who, as Dirk Kuyk, Jr. explains, relies heavily on inference (32).

Chapter One

New Orleans' Free Women of Color:

A Historical Account of Their World

In the decades just before the Civil War there lived in New Orleans a substantially large caste of people known as the *gens de couleur libre*, free people of color. The world of the free people of color fairly well mirrored that of white society. Among the men were business men, craftsmen, artists, laborers, and scientists. The women lived as housewives, hairdressers, seamstresses, boardinghouse matrons, and, of course, the famous quadroon *placées*, mistresses to wealthy white men. Indeed, these free people of color, Robert Tallant says, “prospered, living quite as well as what might actually have been their whiter cousins” (39). This caste of free people of color did not, however, exist solely in the decades immediately preceding the Civil War. Their society’s development began during the French establishment of the Louisiana colony and continued on through American rule until the Civil War.

French and Spanish Creole attitudes toward their slaves and miscegenation, which differed greatly from Anglo-American attitudes, permitted this unique society to arise in North America. In Creoles of Color in the Bayou Country, Carl A. Brasseaux, Keith P. Fontenot, and Claude F. Oubre state, “Creoles of Color are among the ‘first families’ of southwestern Louisiana. Most Creole of Color families trace their ancestry to African slaves imported from present-day Mali, Senegal, and, to a lesser extent, from other West African nations and later manumitted for various reasons” (3). Until the mid to late eighteenth century, Brasseaux and his associates explain, some slaves earned their freedom through military or public service; others were freed as reward for faithful service

to their masters; still others purchased their freedom with money earned by working on Sundays and holidays. Under Spanish rule slaves could also earn their freedom through litigation, provided they could prove Indian ancestry. Spanish law forbade enslaving local natives. These methods for obtaining freedom, however, became rare as the eighteenth century progressed (3-4).

Throughout the eighteenth century, one reason for manumitting slaves remained prominent, especially in the country parishes; white men frequently freed their slave mistresses and their mulatto children. As Gwendolyn Midlo Hall notes in Africans in Colonial Louisiana, “the French and Spanish colonists of Louisiana were more considerate of their mixed-blood children than were settlers in other parts of America.” These children and their mothers were not only freed, but often the children were also educated (239). American rule, however, curbed this practice a great deal. In 1807, laws were passed which banned the emancipation of slaves under the age of thirty (Hall 273).

Hall notes that the Pointe Coupe district censuses did not list free people of color as such, but listed them along with the whites until after 1803 (258). Some, but not all, other districts likely did the same. Despite the inadequacy of these censuses in providing clear numbers, they do give an idea of the rapid growth in the free people of color population and of the influence of African-Creole unions on that growth. Brasseaux and his associates summarize the census findings by stating, “The 1763 census of lower Louisiana, for example, lists 82 free persons of color (FPCs), all of whom resided in the New Orleans area; the free black community, however, grew rapidly in subsequent years, rising to 1,710 in 1788; 3,350 in 1806; 16,710 in 1830; 17,462 in 1850; and 18,467 in 1860” (4). Of the free people in 1860, John W. Blassingame says in Black New Orleans:

1860-1880, seventy-seven percent were mulattos while seventy-four percent of all slaves were black (21).

Considering the emancipation laws of 1807, the rise in the free people of color population can not be the result of newly emancipated slaves. Marriage records likewise do not completely account for the population rise. In The Free People of Color of New Orleans: An Introduction, Mary Gehman says that between the years 1782 and 1791 the St. Louis Church recorded only forty marriages between free persons of color, yet the records show 2,688 births of free people of color (38). As Gehman suggests, the majority of these children had to be illegitimate and many most likely had white fathers (39), for in New Orleans there had developed an institution known as *plaçage* where white men took free women of color as mistresses.

In the early days of the colony the white men took slave mistresses because of the lack of white women available to wed. As the colony grew and prospered and more white women arrived, however, the white men did not lose their admiration for the darker beauties, especially the beautiful quadroon women. Until the Civil War, wealthy white men often engaged in relationships with free women of color and no social stigma was attached to the men. In The Romantic New Orleanians Robert Tallant explains the Creole attitude thus:

the Creole attitude towards male virtue was typically French, and the wealthy young beau was expected to do a certain amount of wallowing in the fleshpots. As a gentleman, it was part of his role to attend the gambling houses, the cafés and the coffeehouses, to be seen at the races and to indulge in such other sports as interested him. It was also accepted, if not

condoned, that he might in his youth amuse himself with a mistress, who in New Orleans was usually a quadroon. . . . (69)

The women who entered into these relationships were usually quite beautiful, graceful, and well educated. In The Forgotten People: Cane River's Creoles of Color, Gary B. Mills explains that the women's mothers trained them from childhood in the social graces of music, art, literature, and dancing; and many even went abroad to be educated. Their mothers closely guarded their chastity. When these young women reached maturity, they entered into society at one of the quadroon balls. Only white men of affluence and free women of color could attend these balls, and the young women were strictly chaperoned (96). Blassingame states, "When a white man found a Negro woman whom he desired (often at the almost nightly quadroon balls) he courted her as assiduously as he would any of his white paramours. . . . The wealthiest and most beautiful quadroons frequently chose from among several white suitors" (17-18). After courtship, provided the young woman and her mother agreed, a *plaçage* agreement was made. In this agreement, Saxon explains, the man generally agreed to purchase a home for the young quadroon woman in the Vieux Carré (159). Mills adds that the man also agreed to provide an allowance for the woman and money for any children that might result from the relationship (Mills 97). Mills, writing in 1977, believes that contracts were signed to seal these arrangements (97). Gehman, writing in 1994, however, states, "In their community such women were considered placed as the 'wives' of white men, though their unions could not be legalized nor were there any written contracts" (37). Apparently, the women who entered these relationships depended on the white men's honor to keep their agreement.

According to Gehman, the quadroon woman then became, among her peers, *un placée*, a term taken from the French word *placer* meaning to place. Gehman also explains that *un placée* was expected to remain faithful to her white protector until he died or left her (37) and, Mills adds, as long as she did so she was viewed as honorable and virtuous within her community (97). One reason for this attitude among the free people of color was the marriage laws in Louisiana. Virginia R. Dominguez says that marriage outside a person's caste was illegal in Louisiana until the end of the Civil War; therefore, a slave could only marry another slave, a free person of color another free person of color, and a white another white (26).

Generally, the white man left his quadroon mistress when he married. As Tallant says, "When the young man married and wished to sever the relationship he was compelled by custom and his code to settle a substantial sum upon the girl who had often been an ideal and honestly affectionate companion and to make some arrangement for the support of any children that might have resulted from the *affaire*" (70). According to Blassingame, many men remained bachelors and remained with one quadroon woman for life. The state courts, Blassingame's example shows, often recognized these women as the man's heir because the woman had lived in the closest approximation to marriage the state allowed (18-19). Occasionally, Tallant explains, a Creole husband would break with custom and fail to discard his mistress, but such matters would never be discussed in polite female society (70).

The *plaçage* arrangement provided many benefits for the quadroon women. James Haskins says, in The Creoles of Color of New Orleans, a famous saying among free people of color was, "'un bon plaçage vaut mieux qu'un mauvais mariage' ('A good plaçage is

better than a bad marriage’)'’ (23). In fact, the *plaçage* arrangement, Mills says, offered advantages that free women of color could not obtain through marriage to a free man of color regardless of how much wealth and position the man might possess (79). Although, as Haskins suggests, these quadroon women might worry that the Church did not recognize their unions, the advantages of the unions outweighed such concerns. The advantages included financial security, higher social status, and educational opportunities for their children, as well as the opportunities fairer skin and Caucasian features provided these children (24). Gehman suggests another advantage that made a *plaçage* arrangement appealing. *Plaçage* gave the free women of color independence and power (37-38). Gehman stresses that these women owned property, built houses, and passed on estates (38). Tallant notes that, after being discarded by their protectors, they often went into business for themselves (70).

Of course, all free women of color did not enter into *plaçage* arrangements. Not even all quadroon (one-fourth Negro blood) and octoroon (one-eighth Negro blood) women entered into such relationships (Mills 96). As Gehman explains, many free women of color married free men of color or never married, having children out of wedlock if they had any at all (39).

Thus Creole Louisiana had a three tiered socioracial hierarchy rather than the two tiered system employed in the Anglo-American South. The additional caste of people, the *gens de couleur libre*, reflects the Creoles’ unique attitude toward their slaves. The caste arose out of slaves manumitted for a number of reasons. Not the least of these reasons, especially during the first century of the colony, was freedom for the slave mistresses and children of white men. The relations between white men and women of color, however,

continued until the Civil War. Gradually, these relations occurred almost exclusively between free quadroon or octoroon women and wealthy white men through the social, though not legal, institution of *plaçage*. Understanding the free people of color, including the *placées*, has a strong bearing on the interpretation of Mr. Compson's section of William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!. While Anne Rice's The Feast of All Saints may be useful in such an interpretation, the historical accuracy of her portrayal adds to the power of her plot, characters, and theme, compelling an interpretation of her work as well.

Chapter Two

Faulkner and Rice: Versions of History

In Absalom, Absalom!, William Faulkner explores the nature of history through multiple versions of the Sutpen family story and the various narrators' attempts to solve the mystery of why Henry Sutpen murders Charles Bon. Mr. Compson theorizes that Henry killed Bon because Bon kept an octoroon mistress and refused to set her aside. In his presentation of this theory to Quentin, Faulkner has Mr. Compson describe how Bon introduces Henry to the world of New Orleans and the relations between white men and women of color in that city. Faulkner's vision of this world initially seems plausible if not completely believable. Anne Rice's historical novel, The Feast of All Saints, chronicles the world of New Orleans and its people of color through the coming of age story of Marcel St. Marie, the son of *un placée* and her white "protector." Her depiction of this world, however, contradicts Faulkner's portrayal almost completely and causes one to question Faulkner's version. This contradiction between the two texts requires a close examination of the texts against historical accounts.

The most evident contradiction between Faulkner's and Rice's depiction of New Orleans concerns the status of the women of color who had relations with white men. Faulkner portrays these women as slaves rather than as free women. Faulkner describes these women as ". . . the supreme apotheosis of chattelry, of human flesh bred of the two races for that sale" (89). Furthermore, these women could be sold "'to any brute who had the price'" (92). Anne Rice, on the other hand, establishes the free status of these women of color who had relationships with white men before her novel even begins. In a Preface, Rice briefly sketches the rise of the free people of color and the society they created for

themselves. Within this Preface she states, “. . . in their midst there existed always a species of beautiful woman whose allure for the well-to-do white men of Louisiana became a legend” (7). Historical texts support Rice’s portrayal of these women. Most historical works which discuss women of color and their relations with white men are histories of the free people of color. For example, in The Creoles of Color of New Orleans, James Haskins states, “Most of the rich Frenchmen had free women of color for mistresses” (41). Faulkner, therefore, provides a misleading estimation of these women’s status, describing them as slaves rather than as free people.

This initial fallacy leads to further misconceptions concerning these women of color. Faulkner’s portrayal says that these women are born, bred and raised specifically for the purpose of being sold as concubines to white men. These women were, according to Faulkner, “creatures taken at childhood, culled and chosen and raised more carefully than any white girl, any nun, than any blooded mare even, by a person who gives them the unsleeping care and attention which no mother ever gives” (93). Faulkner goes on to say, “[These women are] raised and trained to fulfill a woman’s sole end and purpose in life: to love, to be beautiful, to divert” (93) and to provide “ancient curious pleasures of the flesh” (92).

Rice’s novel confirms Faulkner’s impression that these women were trained from childhood, but the nature, source, and purpose of that training differ. Mothers or female guardians raise all of Rice’s young free people of color, male and female. Cecile Ste. Marie, the mother of the central family in the novel, raises her daughter, Marie, to be “. . . above reproach, virtuous, ladylike and beautiful” (136). While, as Rudolphe Lermontant, a rich undertaker who is a free person of color, explains to his son, Richard, “girls like

Marie Ste. Marie, yes, yes, Marie . . . girls like that *always* follow in the footsteps of their mothers” (136), they possessed the option of another lifestyle. When Marie receives an invitation from Richard Lermontant’s mother, her aunt refuses to accompany her, saying, “You see, even if you were to marry a colored boy, I mean if you were to make up your mind that that was what you wanted for yourself, and Michie Philippe was willing and your Maman was willing . . . [there are wealthier colored boys to choose from]” (438). This reaction suggests that Marie’s training has not been to become *un placée*, but to attract the best suitor, white or colored, possible.

The historical texts agree with Rice’s depiction of the manner in which these girls were raised and of the purposes for that rearing. Lyle Saxon states, “The fairest of these [young women of color] were trained and educated by their mothers” (159). Gary B. Mills details their rearing by saying, “From childhood such girls were rigorously trained in the social graces: music, art, literature, conversation. . . . All were raised in chastity and carefully protected” (96). While young free women of color were raised in this manner, many with hopes for an alliance with a white man, not all free women of color chose such a life. As Mary Gehman says, “Still there were always some free women of color who married free black men. . . . By no means did all free women of color consort with white men” (39).

The contradictions between Faulkner’s and Rice’s portrayals do not stop at the social status and options open to the women of color. Their descriptions of the balls where the white men and the women of color met also differ. Faulkner describes the entrance to the location of the balls as “a closed and curiously monastic doorway in a neighborhood a little decadent, even a little sinister” (88). The building itself Faulkner

describes as having “a façade shuttered and blank, drowsing in steamy morning sunlight, invested by the bland and cryptic voice [of Bon] with something of secret and curious and unimaginable delights” (89). Inside this façade Faulkner reveals “a row of faces like a bazaar of flowers, the supreme apotheosis of chattelry, of human flesh bred of the two races for that sale--a corridor of doomed and tragic flower faces walled between the grim duenna row of old women and the elegant shapes of young men trim and predatory and (at the moment) goatlike” (89). This description resembles Rice’s portrayal of the slave auction more than that of the balls where white men met women of color. According to Rice’s novel, the auction commenced at ten o’clock in the morning (95). At the auction there was a “row of bright dressed men and women beyond [the auction block], blue calico, tailcoats, and dark eyes that watched . . . from impassive faces” (95).

Rice, however, paints quite a different picture of the quadroon balls. She describes one ball as follows:

But walking back from Benediction one night alone he [Marcel Ste. Marie] found himself by no accident standing before the high façade of the Salle d’Orleans, swept up at once by the music, violins raw and lovely in the cold air, so that he did what he had never done before which was to linger in this spot, turning his head slowly but boldly toward the commotion in the open doors. Carriages crowded the cobblestone streets, and black capes glistened as they shook off the rain. Young white men, sometimes arm in arm, talked rapidly as they rushed through the candlelit vestibule, and beyond Marcel saw the bare shoulders of a dark woman on the broad stairs.

The music swung violently with a waltz, and through the high French windows above he could make out the shadows of swaying couples on the walls, women he knew to be colored, men that he knew to be white. (90)

Again the historians confirm Rice's understanding of the legendary quadroon balls. John W. Blassingame suggests the quadroon balls were nightly affairs (17-18). They were held in ballrooms within the city such as the Louisiana Ballroom (Saxon 160) or the Orleans Ballroom next to the Théâtre d'Orleans (Haskins 41). Lyle Saxon says, "These balls were always conducted with great dignity and elegance, and attendance there risked no social stigma. The affairs were gay and lavish, but never vulgar, the young women being quite as well trained and as ladylike as the white belles of the era" (159). Gary B. Mills adds, "Attendance at these balls was restricted to free women of color and white men of affluence" (97[emphasis added]).

Similarly, Faulkner's description of the living conditions of women of color does not correspond to those provided by Rice or the historians. After introducing Henry to the quadroon ball, Bon leads Henry to the house where he keeps his own concubine. Faulkner writes that Bon took Henry "through one of those inscrutable and curiously lifeless doorways like that before which he [Henry] had seen the horse or the trap [at the quadroon ball], and so into a place which to his puritan's provincial mind all of morality was upside down and all of honor perished--a place created for and by voluptuousness, the abashless and unabashed senses" (90 -91). In this sensual locale the concubine "reigns . . . from the sunless and silken bed which is her throne" (93). This description creates an image of an expensive brothel rather than a home.

Rice's portrayal of the homes in which *placées* lived with their children bears little resemblance to Faulkner's brothel-like house. Rice describes the outside of such a home with the following details: "The Ste. Marie cottage gleamed with respectability beyond its short fence and dense banana trees, a sprawl of magnolia limbs over its pitched roof" (14). Inside, there are "gleaming white coverlets" on the beds and everywhere it is "spotless" with "exquisite touches of luxury" (195). At times, "the long slanting rays of the sun found all the glass in the cottage" (77). Likewise, the home established for Anna Bella, Marcel Ste. Marie's friend, when she becomes *un placée* creates an image of respectable domesticity. Of this cottage Rice writes, "All of the furniture Anna Bella had chosen was light in feel, she preferred petit-point to damask, and had hung lace curtains with only a strip of velvet at the edge" (360).

Historical accounts, of course, do not contain the detail of Rice's portrayal, but they do seem to support her impressions that the *placées* were provided with homes. Lyle Saxon states that when a young woman of color and a white man reached an agreement, overseen by the young woman's mother, then "a small home was established in the quadroon section of the Vieux Carré" (159). These homes, according to Mary Gehman, were listed in property records as belonging to the woman (38). Tallant confirms that the establishment of a home, usually a cottage, was evidently always a part of the *plaçage* arrangement (70).

It is with the *plaçage* arrangement that Faulkner, by design or accident, almost hits the truth. Faulkner explains that the white man obtained a colored concubine thus: "For a price, of course, but a price offered and accepted or declined through a system more formal than any that white girls are sold under" (93). Once the offer has been accepted,

Faulkner says, the man “in return, not can and not will but *must*, supply her with the surroundings proper in which to love and be beautiful and divert” (93). Of course, the reader already knows that the woman is not the one to accept or decline the offer because Faulkner has already established that these women are slaves. On the preceding page he states that they can be “sold to any brute who had the price, not sold to him for the night like a white prostitute, but body and soul for life” (92).

Rice confirms that a system existed for arranging the relationships between white men and women of color. Rice states, “they [women of color] were so closely guarded, one had to ‘set them up’ to have them, it was the custom, *plaçage*. Promises, rituals, and long term means” (321). The promises and rituals, however, do not correspond to Faulkner’s ceremony. Faulkner describes the ceremony as “A formula, a shibboleth meaningless as a child’s game, performed by someone created by the situation whose need it answered: a crone mumbling in a dungeon lighted by a handful of burning hair, something in a tongue which not even the girls themselves understood anymore, maybe not even the crone herself” (93). Rice explains the ritual through Anna Bella as she considers the offer of *plaçage* she receives. Anna Bella says, “He and Madame Elsie [her guardian] they talked about it for hours already . . . It’s the old-fashioned way, she saw to that, I’d have my own house” (308). Although Madame Elsie pressures Anna Bella toward accepting the offer, the ultimate decision is Anna Bella’s. Marcel reminds her, “You don’t have to do it unless it’s arranged as you want it, do you understand” (309). John Blassingame confirms Rice’s portrayal by explaining: “The wealthiest and most beautiful quadroons frequently chose from among several white suitors. After a period of courtship a wealthy white suitor met with the girl’s parents and agreed to purchase her a

house and to give a certain amount of money to each of the children which might result from the union” (18).

Because of Faulkner’s initial fallacy concerning the social status of the women of color he determines that, unlike white women, women of color did not have economic agendas for entering into a union with a white man. Faulkner portrays this concept as follows:

[The woman of color possesses] a principle apt docile and instinct with strange and ancient curious pleasures of the flesh (which is all: there is nothing else) which her white sisters of a mushroom yesterday flee from in moral and outraged horror -- a principle which, where her white sister must needs try to make an economic matter of it like someone who insists upon installing a counter or a scales or a safe in a store or business for a certain percentage of the profits, reigns, wise supine and all-powerful, from the sunless and silken bed which is her throne. (92-93)

Of course, this view is perfectly logical in Faulkner’s scheme of things. Free, the white woman can make an economic matter of her union with a man where the slave woman can not.

Rice, however, shows that economics played a large part in the decision of the woman of color to attend the quadroon balls and form a *plaçage* with a white man. When the white “protector” of Cecile Ste. Marie and father of Marcel and Marie, Philippe Ferronaire, dies without leaving any provisions for the Ste. Marie family, Cecile tries to persuade Marie to obtain *un plaçage* instead of marrying Richard Lermontant. Cecile asserts the following:

“The Lermontants are nothing, they’ll make Marcel a clerk in that store, they’ll pay him a pittance and he’ll be threadbare and bitter all his days. But you can change that! You can do anything, don’t you understand? You walk into that ballroom and they will go down on their knees! They’ll be all too glad to get rid of your brother, they’ll send him to the ends of the earth if you ask them, Paris, what’s that to them, they have wealth of which you’ve never even dreamed. . . . You can do it, you can state it plain in the beginning. . . . They send him to Paris or they don’t have you, and they will want you, ma chère. . . .” (545)

Marie goes to her aunt for help, but her aunt supports her mother’s position. Her aunt argues thus:

“Now when your papa was alive . . . that was a different time. Your papa was rich, and your maman was rich, and if you wanted to throw away your life on some colored boy that was your whim! But I’m sick to death now of hearing this spoiled selfish talk! What do you mean to do, march up that aisle in a white dress . . . and leave your mother and brother to sell off the furniture for a living, end up selling that house?” (551)

Although the historians do not deal directly with situations such as Rice presents, they do confirm that economics played a large part in the decision of the woman of color to attend the quadroon balls and form *un plaçage*. Gary B. Mills explains, “To become the *placée* of a wealthy French gentleman offered these women advantages that they could never attain as the wives of free men of color, regardless of how wealthy the nonwhite husbands might be” (79). Mary Gehman adds, “Marriage to a free man of color usually

did not offer the same financial security to the woman, nor the privileges that lighter skinned children with Caucasian features would enjoy” (39). Gehman also says *plaçage* “created an independence and power among free women of color” (37-38). This view seems to be accurate because, as Robert Tallant explains, after the white man left his *placée* to marry, the woman of color usually went into some type of business for herself. Tallant asserts, “For years nearly all boardinghouses in New Orleans were operated by these discarded mistresses” (70).

Faulkner comes closest to realism in the conclusion he has Mr. Compson draw as to why Henry shot Charles. Mr. Compson explains as follows:

Anyway, Henry waited four years, holding the three of them in that abeyance, that durance, waiting, hoping, for Bon to renounce the woman and dissolve the marriage which he (Henry) admitted was no marriage In fact, as time passed and he became accustomed to the idea of that ceremony which was still no marriage, that may have been the trouble with Henry--not the two ceremonies but the two women. (94)

Henry, therefore, commits murder to prevent adultery rather than bigamy, to prevent his sister from being second choice.

Anne Rice and the historians illustrate that such an explanation would be quite reasonable. In Rice, Phillipe Ferronaire not only conducts a *plaçage* after marriage, but also begins it after that marriage (326-327). The reaction of Ferronaire’s brother-in-law, Vincent Dazincourt, to learning of Phillippe’s *placée* and colored family illustrates the impropriety of such a relationship. When Phillippe shows Vincent the Ste. Marie cottage, Rice writes, “Vincent’s soul shriveled as he turned his head. At first he did not believe

that he understood, that his brother-in-law kept a colored family! And would tell him this casually as they passed the gate!” (333). Even Phillippe’s mixed-blood son, Marcel, understands the lack of honor with which his father behaves. When Phillippe has Vincent pick him up at the cottage in a carriage, Marcel is both shocked and disgusted. He remembers that Anna Bella, his friend who enters into a *plaçage* with Vincent, had described Vincent as “a fine gentleman just like your father” and thinks “Gentleman, indeed” (314). Vincent, however, is not like Philippe. After learning of Phillippe’s extramarital family, Vincent thinks of the relationship he had just proposed to Anna Bella and swears, “But by God, that alliance would end with honor and dignity at the very moment he contracted for a proper marriage” (333). Actually it ends before his marriage, but does end with honor, for he provides for Anna Bella and their child and takes legal measures to protect those provisions (590). Most historians confirm Rice’s presentation, agreeing with Robert Tallant, who explains that a white man was custom and honor bound to sever relations with his mixed-blood mistress upon marriage to a white woman and to provide for the financial security of his mixed-blood family (70).

Honor played an important role in all aspects of Creole society. Faulkner comes close to reality in his estimation of this aspect of New Orleans and its women of color. Although Henry does not seem to accept the part honor plays in the white men’s relationships with the women of color, it does exist to some extent in Faulkner’s portrayal. One must keep in mind, however, that, for Faulkner in Absalom, Absalom!, these women are slaves, forced mistresses. Honor, Faulkner indicates, requires the men to provide these women with luxurious surroundings, “surrounding proper in which to love and be beautiful and divert.” Faulkner explains that the white men often duel over these women

by saying “[the man] must usually risk his life or at least his blood for the privilege [of having one of these women]” (93). The white men, according to Faulkner, would even go so far as to duel over these women’s honor. When Henry calls the women whores, Bon explains, “Not whore. Don’t say that. In fact, never refer to one of them by that name in New Orleans: otherwise you may be forced to purchase that privilege with some of your blood from probably a thousand men” (91).

Rice and the historians agree that honor required the white man to uphold his *plaçage* agreement as discussed earlier. Rice also suggests that duels were fought over the women of color and over their honor. Of Dolly Rose, a beautiful courtesan (one who takes many lovers over time rather than entering *plaçage*), Rice says, “She had provoked duels” (150). Most compelling, however, are the duels in which Vincent Dazincourt engages. After fighting with her mother and aunts over attending the quadroon balls, Marie, Marcel’s sister, accompanies the family slave, Lisette, to a voodooienne’s home where the voodooiene drugs Marie and five white men rape her. Knowing that none of Marie’s family or friends can defend her honor because of their race, Vincent defends her honor by dueling with the men involved. Although Marcel believes Vincent engages in the duels to avenge Philippe Ferronaire’s honor, Vincent tells Marcel, “I go to avenge your sister’s honor. . . . Not merely your father’s honor, your father is dead” (574).

Little has been written by historians on the subject of dueling as it pertained to women of color. Likely, duels went unrecorded unless someone died. Lyle Saxon explains that “These events [duels] became so frequent that there were often three or four a day in New Orleans” and that “honor was usually satisfied by the first sight of blood”

(161). Pierre Paul Ebeyer suggests that disagreements concerning women of color often sparked a duel (50).

Although Rice and some historians confirm that duels over women of color occurred, Faulkner's vision of where such events took place contradicts history. Faulkner describes the place as follows:

a wall, unscalable, a gate ponderously locked . . . the gate of solid beams in place of the lacelike iron grilling and they [Charles and Henry] passing on, Bon knocking at a small adjacent doorway from which a swarthy man . . . erupts, concerned, even a little aghast, looking first at the daylight and then at Henry and speaking to Bon in French which Henry does not understand and Bon's teeth glinting for an instant before he answers in French: "with him? An American? He is a guest . . . Just the key." Just the key; and now, the solid gates closed behind them instead of before, no sight or evidence above the high thick walls of the low city and scarce any sound of it, the labyrinthine mass of oleander and jasmine, lantana and mimosa walling yet again the strip of bare earth combed and curried with powdered shell, raked and immaculate and only the most recent of the brown stains showing. . . . (89-90)

Faulkner seems to believe that a location, built specifically for the purpose of dueling and complete with an attendant, existed in New Orleans.

Rice, on the other hand, provides a less descriptive, but more realistic version of the locations for duels. Vincent Dazincourt calls out the first man he duels at the man's plantation and they perform the duel in the bayou nearby. The second man he calls out at

the St. Louis Hotel bar and evidently performs the duel there. With the last of the men he schedules the duel for the next day to be performed at the Metarie Oaks (571). This location served as the location for Philippe Ferronaire's one duel as well (319). In his description of the typical duel, Lyle Saxon explains, "Just back of the Saint Louis Cathedral, in Saint Anthony's Garden, the men would gather, concealed from the street by a tall growth of evergreens" (160). Saxon goes on to say, "This rear garden of the Cathedral and the oaks [Metarie Oaks] in City Park were usually the scenes of these encounters" (161).

In Absalom, Absalom! Faulkner presents the world of New Orleans and the relations that occurred between women of color and white men in that city. Faulkner's presentation seems, initially, to be at least plausible if not completely believable. Reading Anne Rice's The Feast of All Saints, however, calls Faulkner's portrayal into question. Faulkner's depiction of these relationships hinges on the women being slaves; this idea determines how he portrays every aspect of these women's lives, living conditions, and relationships. Rice, on the other hand, states from the beginning that the women involved in relations with white men were free. Her portrayal, therefore, contradicts almost every aspect of Faulkner's portrayal. Comparing these two novels to historical texts proves that Rice's portrayal more accurately depicts the reality of the women of color and their relationships with white men. This fact, however, only serves to raise further questions concerning Faulkner's representation of New Orleans and its women of color.

Chapter Three

Faulkner and Rice: Origins and Purposes of Conflicting Histories

Knowing that Faulkner's portrayal of New Orleans's women of color contradicts the portrayals presented by both Rice and the historians leads one to question why these contradictions occurred. One must question what each of these writers knew or might have known. In Faulkner's case, one might argue that what Faulkner knew or might have known is irrelevant because the character of Mr. Compson, not an omniscient narrator, narrates the section in question. Robert Dale Parker, however, points out that "whether Mr. Compson makes them [Bon, his concubine, and New Orleans] up or not, Mr. Faulkner certainly does" (61). In Rice's case, however, the narration is presented through an omniscient narrator. Omniscient narrator or not, then, one must first examine the origins of Faulkner and Rice's portrayals to discover the reason for their contradictory depictions.

The origins of Anne Rice's portrayal of New Orleans's free people of color, including its famous *placées*, can be more easily discovered than the origins of Faulkner's portrayal. In an Afterword to The Feast of All Saints, Rice herself states, "I am deeply indebted to many who have written about New Orleans and the Free People of Color in the ante-bellum South, from the popular writers who have kept alive the romance and richness of those days to the scholars whose books, articles, theses and dissertations continue to swell the growing body of work on the free Afro-American before the Civil War" (640). In her biography of Rice, Prism of the Night, Katherine Ramsland explains that Rice did scholarly research at the libraries of Berkeley, Loyola, and Louisiana State University. Ramsland goes on to explain that Rice did not stop at this scholarly research.

She also discovered a collection of diaries, letters, and financial papers which belonged to an ante-bellum free man of color from New Orleans. Rice went even further by visiting Haiti to learn something of the French patois still spoken there and as much as possible about the plantation life that led to the slave revolts on that island. On her return trip from Haiti, she stopped in New Orleans, her home town, to obtain photographs to use in creating the setting of her novel (178-179). Still, Rice felt uncertain about pursuing the novel, so she wrote a history professor at Loyola, who suggested that she not write the novel unless she was a native of Louisiana. Rice was born in New Orleans and lived there until she was sixteen according to Ramsland's chronology (354-355); therefore, as Ramsland says, "She understood what he meant. It takes a native to understand the complex conditions in Louisiana that had allowed such a group of people to flourish" (179).

Evidently, Rice considers historical accuracy to be very important. Many of Rice's novels are set, at least in part, in the past and she always researches the subject of her novels. For example, when writing Cry to Heaven (1982), Ramsland says that Rice researched every aspect of the Italian *castrati* singers, men castrated as boys to retain their soprano voices. She read extensively on the subject and listened to the one recording of a *castrati* singer. She also asked a doctor friend to research the rumors that the *castrati* had sexual relations, gaining scientific verification, before including such scenes in the novel (198). Prior to writing her first novel, Interview With a Vampire (1976), she had been reading Louisiana history intently (Ramsland 143). While writing that novel, she went to the library daily to research vampire lore and Louisiana history (Ramsland 149). Out of the research for Interview, Rice formed the idea for her second novel, The Feast of All

Saints (Ramsland 178). In the Afterword to this novel, Rice makes clear her dedication to accuracy. Rice states that she changed the date for the first publication of L'Album Littéraire, a literary magazine published by free men of color in New Orleans, by one year. Following this confession she says, "But aside from a few liberties with dates, every effort has been made to render the world of New Orleans's Free People of Color accurately" (640). The amount of research Rice does for her novels and the information she provided in the Afterword to The Feast of All Saints illustrates the importance she places on history in general.

William Faulkner, on the other hand, does not seem to have done any research for his creation of New Orleans and its women of color. Joseph Blotner's William Faulkner's Library: A Catalogue lists no books concerning New Orleans or its history, nor does it list any novels by New Orleans's most famous authors such as George Washington Cable, Grace King, or Lafcadio Hearn. Similarly, in Faulkner: A Biography, Blotner includes no indication that Faulkner made an effort to learn anything about New Orleans's history. In the absence of documentable proof of what Faulkner knew concerning New Orleans and its women of color, one must play the part of Mr. Compson and infer what Faulkner might have known, could have known, and probably did know.

Alan Warren Friedman quotes Faulkner as saying, "I don't have much patience with facts . . . and any writer is a congenital liar to begin with or he wouldn't take up writing. And so I couldn't tell the truth about history. That's why I'll never write a[n] [auto]biography. I couldn't tell the truth about Faulkner, I'm sure" (33). Since Faulkner did not feel the need or ability to "tell the truth about history," Calvin S. Brown is probably correct in stating, "He spun his books out of his head as he went along, not

depending on outlines, notes, or, above all, research” (4). Most likely Brown is also correct when he explains, “he [Faulkner] was probably telling the truth when he said he had read little history. He had picked it up from family traditions, reminiscences of Confederate veterans, and other oral sources, and when he needed it he rummaged in his mental attic, not in reference books” (4).

Assuming Faulkner did not do research per se, one must take inference further by questioning when, where, and from whom Faulkner could have heard about Creole New Orleans and its women of color. Barbara Ladd claims, “There is little doubt that Faulkner wrote Absalom, Absalom! out of a deep familiarity with the political and cultural situation in both New Orleans and Haiti Faulkner’s familiarity with this context should not be surprising, given his Deep South origins . . . and his own time in the French Quarter of New Orleans and in France in the mid-1920’s” (537). Faulkner’s misrepresentation of Creole New Orleans, however, casts serious doubt on how “deep” his familiarity with that city’s history really was. Furthermore, Richard Godden’s essay, “Absalom, Absalom!, Haiti and Labor History: Reading Unreadable Revolutions,” demonstrates that Faulkner creates a counter-revolution of sorts in his depiction of Haiti. Nonetheless, Faulkner’s numerous visits to New Orleans between 1919 and 1924 and his extended stay there from January to July of 1925 must have bred some familiarity with the city and its history.

While in the city, Faulkner could have met and spoken with the descendants of the free people of color. He might have read or at least heard of writers such as Cable, King, and Hearn, all of whom write about ante-bellum New Orleans. And he probably did hear stories of the city’s beautiful quadroons and the quadroon balls. During his stay in New Orleans, Faulkner became friends with Lyle Saxon, a native of Louisiana. Blotner explains

that Saxon was a reporter and feature writer for the Times-Picayune and drew heavily on Louisiana legend in his writing (394). Saxon certainly knew about the quadroons and their situation and likely told Faulkner stories about these women and the Creole men who kept them. Whether or not Faulkner understood that these women were free women can not be determined. It is entirely possible that he did not. A native of Louisiana and intimately familiar with its history and customs, Saxon likely did not think to point out this fact. For example, in Gumbo Ya-Ya, he discusses these women and the institution of *plaçage*, but never indicates the free status of the women (158-160). He, evidently, assumes it will be understood. Faulkner, however, comes from the Anglo-American tradition and history, the same tradition from which he draws Henry Sutpen, “in which females were ladies or whores or slaves” (Faulkner 91), and in which prior to the Civil War colored women, regardless of what else they might be, were slaves. Unlike Rice, Faulkner was not a native of New Orleans; therefore, he more than likely could not comprehend the complicated system that permitted the free people of color to come into existence there.

Given that Faulkner did hear these tales some ten years before writing Absalom, Absalom!, one still wonders how he created such a vivid and plausible depiction. His portrayal of New Orleans reminds one of his portrayal of Indians in his native Mississippi: distinctive, believable, and, as Brown says, “almost pure fantasy” (5). For both portrayals Faulkner draws on what he calls in Absalom “a few old mouth-to-mouth tales” (80) which hold bits of legend, but no factual history. Brown explains, “She [Brown’s mother] once asked Faulkner where his Indians came from, and he frankly and simply replied, ‘Mrs. Brown, I made them up’” (5). Evidently, he arrived at his portrayal of New Orleans’s

Creoles and women of color much the same way. Faulkner distrusted the ability of history and fact to bring about understanding. What really happened is not as important to Faulkner as what that history does to people in the present.

One reason, therefore, for the contradictions between Faulkner's and Rice's portrayals of Creole New Orleans is their attitudes toward history. Anne Rice believes in accurately depicting history even in her non-historical works such as Interview With a Vampire. She always researches her novels, especially those set in the past. With The Feast of All Saints she went a step further by visiting the locales of her novel, including Haiti, which only serves as the origin for some of her characters. Faulkner, however, draws his stories almost exclusively from oral sources and his own imagination. Aside from stories he may have heard while in New Orleans, Faulkner creates the New Orleans scenes of Absalom, Absalom! completely out of his own imagination. This fact raises questions as to the purpose each of these writers has in fashioning his or her contradictory versions of ante-bellum New Orleans.

Faulkner and Rice draw on very different sources for their portrayals of New Orleans and its women of color. Their differing attitudes toward history, however, only partially explain the contradictions between their portrayals. Since Faulkner did not choose to find out the reality of New Orleans's women of color, he could have presented them in any manner he wished. In fact, the explanation he has Mr. Compson create could have been supported with a realistic portrayal. In reality a man's refusal to renounce his mixed-blood mistress would have been a valid objection to a legitimate marriage. One must assume, therefore, that Faulkner had some purpose for choosing to depict these women as slaves. As Brown states, "when he needed something, he looked around the

‘lumber room’ of his head for something to serve his purpose” (4). Similarly, Rice had a specific purpose for creating a realistic portrayal of New Orleans and its free people of color.

Like the origins of Rice’s portrayal, one does not need to look too deeply for the purpose of that portrayal. Rice metaphorically states her purpose for writing her novel of the free people of color in the title, The Feast of All Saints. Ramsland explains, “The Feast of All Saints is a Catholic holy day when people remember the dead and celebrate forgotten saints. . . . Anne wrote the book as a tribute to the free people of color in New Orleans, symbolically placing flowers on their graves and cleaning off the dusty memories of their rich heritage so their contributions would not be forgotten” (183). Rice seeks fictionally to bring back to life a people unique in American history and long neglected in the scholarly world. The women of color who lived as *placées* were an integral part of the society created by the free people of color. Rice, therefore, provides detailed and realistic portrayals of them. For example, in the first scene in which Cecile Ste. Marie appears, the reader comes to see her as a round character. Rice describes her thus: “She was startling in her lemon muslin, two tiny pearls pressed into the tender flesh of her earlobes, and the heat of the day had not touched her. He [Richard Lermontant] had never known a woman more delicate, more fragile” (36). In the same scene she goes through changes from sorrow, with “tears starting in her eyes” (36), to anger, shouting with “her voice hoarse and cold” (37). Throughout the novel, Cecile is depicted in many emotional states and serving roles such as mother and lover. Rice also provides portraits of older *placées* and the roles they serve in the community. Madame Elsie, Anna Bella’s guardian, runs a boarding house, and Tantes Collette and Louisa run a dressmaking business. Of course,

within this overreaching purpose she also seeks to explore themes such as personal identity, coming of age, and family.

Faulkner likewise explores various themes and has multiple purposes in writing Absalom, Absalom!. Even in the section of the novel narrated by Mr. Compson, Faulkner employs multiple purposes. Initially, the Mr. Compson section serves as a delaying tactic. Mr. Compson himself uses his tale of Henry's introduction to the world of New Orleans to delay allowing Quentin to read a letter written by Bon to Judith Sutpen, who then gave the letter to Grandmother Compson. Faulkner also uses this section to delay the rest of Miss Rosa's story and the reason she tells the story to Quentin as well as to postpone the section narrated by Quentin and his college roommate, Shreve. In Mr. Compson's section the barrier to Bon's marriage to Judith is Bon's mistress; but, in Quentin and Shreve's section, as Eric J. Sundquist explains, "The barrier of Bon's marriage to the octoroon is ultimately overwhelmed by the barrier of incest and, later still, the barrier of miscegenation" (119).

Thus some critics dismiss Mr. Compson's version of history as nothing more than a delaying tactic, citing the fact that Quentin and Shreve discard most of his tale as evidence. Sundquist, however, astutely notes, "In this chapter [Chapter 4], as elsewhere in the novel, Faulkner's narrative covertly reveals what it strives to hold in suspense" (119). Sundquist explains his view by stating, "Mr. Compson's dwelling on the 'ceremony' between Bon and his 'wife' provides a significant context for the unraveling of Bon's tragedy eventually undertaken by Quentin and Shreve, for it is at the climax of his recapitulation of Bon's gradual exposure of Henry to the peculiar sexual conventions of

New Orleans that the ultimate barrier of the novel [miscegenation] is preliminarily revealed” (119).

The theme of miscegenation plays a prominent role in Absalom, Absalom! and in other Faulkner novels, such as Go Down, Moses (1940), which deal with the era of slavery, and miscegenation is always a consequence of slavery. As Charles D. Peavy explains, “miscegenation was an inevitable result of slavery, and it is quite natural that it is a major issue in Faulkner’s treatment of slavery in the South” (33-34). For Faulkner, however, miscegenation is much more than a mere by-product of slavery. Peavy goes on to say, “When Faulkner treats of unions between whites and Negroes during the slave period, he is always indicating the chattel status of the slave woman and the inhumanity of the white man” (34). Glenn Cannon Arbery states this point more strongly by saying, “the quadroon or octoroon woman [slave] became a victim of sexual ownership, an erotic violence to her will” (58). In Mr. Compson’s section of Absalom the slave status of Bon’s “mistress” and child as well as the other women of color at the ball is repeatedly pointed out. Primarily, Faulkner portrays miscegenation during slavery time in this manner because, in his native Mississippi, it likely occurred that way.

In Faulkner, however, miscegenation and its results come to represent more than the historical fact; they also come to be representative of the sin of slavery. The lack of characterization Faulkner provides for Bon’s concubine illustrates the fact that she serves only as a symbol. Faulkner never gives this character a name and she never speaks. He describes her as “the apotheosis of two doomed races presided over by its own victim—a woman with a face like a tragic magnolia” (91). Charles Sherry explains, “By taking possession of the earth, man creates the conditions for tragedy, which in Faulkner’s view,

manifests itself as miscegenation, a mingling of races in the blood of a people whose presence reveals the catastrophic, violent trajectory of the historical tradition which produces them. They stand as the repudiation of that entire culture and its historical significance” (50). Sherry goes on to explain that as long as possession remained slavery alone, then the situation could be improved or corrected. When the possession took the form of forced miscegenation, however, “it became ineluctable, in Faulkner’s view, as that which cannot be undone” (62).

For Faulkner’s purposes, therefore, the woman of color involved in a miscegenetic relationship must be a slave. To show miscegenation as the ultimate and insurmountable sin of slavery, the woman must be a victim, what Faulkner in Absalom labels “the eternal Who-suffers” (91). Faulkner, even had he known the reality, could not have portrayed New Orleans’s women of color accurately. The real women of color in New Orleans had power, independence, and choices, as Rice illustrates in The Feast of All Saints. A free woman of color who willingly chose to enter into a miscegenetic relationship would not fit into Faulkner’s design. Such a woman could not fill the role of victim or represent the ineluctable sin of slavery.

Just as Faulkner has a specific purpose for the manner in which he portrays New Orleans’s women of color, he has a specific purpose for including that portrayal in the novel. As noted earlier, Quentin and Shreve do not include Mr. Compson’s tale in their recreation of history. They discount this tale because it does not fit into their romantic story of love and murder. Unlike Faulkner, Quentin and Shreve do not seek to comment on slavery or miscegenation. Miscegenation does, however, play a prominent role in their story.

According to Quentin and Shreve's account, Charles Bon is the son of Thomas Sutpen and Eulalia Bon. In their tale Thomas Sutpen renounced Eulalia and Charles Bon because Eulalia, whom he married in Haiti, possessed African blood, presumably from a slave mother. Quentin and Shreve imagine Thomas Sutpen saying, "His [Bon's] mother's father told me that her mother had been a Spanish woman. I believed him; it was not until after he was born [Bon] that I found out that his mother was part negro" (283). The threat of further miscegenation, even more than the incest, causes Henry to murder Bon. Quentin and Shreve speculate that after learning about Bon's racial heritage, Henry becomes adamant about stopping Bon's marriage to Judith. As Quentin and Shreve believe, Bon says, "So it's the miscegenation, not the incest, which you cant bear" (285). Mr. Compson's story has prepared the reader not only for the subject of miscegenation, but also to understand where to place the blame for this tragedy. Because of Mr. Compson's story the reader knows the murder is not Henry's or Bon's fault or even Eulalia's fault, but the fault of slavery and the white men who used their power to force slave women into miscegenetic relationships.

In Quentin and Shreve's story, Faulkner reintroduces Bon's slave "mistress," now a free woman. Even in freedom and in grief over Bon's death, she remains a flat character, a symbol. Shreve describes the octoroon and her visit to Bon's grave as follows:

The pageant, the scene, the act, entering upon the stage--the magnolia-faced woman a little plumper now, a woman created of by and for darkness whom the artist Beardsley might have dressed, in a soft flowing gown designed not to infer bereavement or widowhood but to dress some

interlude of slumberous and fatal insatiation, of passionate and inexorable
hunger of the flesh. . . . (157)

Although Shreve states that she cries over the grave, the reader does not see emotion acted out in any way. She remains the flower, the image created by white men and suitable only for providing beauty and pleasure. Rice provides a much rounder character in Cecile Ste. Marie, and the portrayal of her grief at Philippe Ferronaire's death contributes to her roundness. Rice says, "the woman [Cecile], crying, tore her handkerchief in shreds" (535). While Philippe's white family has Requiem Mass in the St. Jacques chapel, Cecile and her friends and family gather to mourn at the St. Louis Cathedral. Rice states, "As soon as they entered the cottage, Cecile looked at the clock. She stared so intently at it, her face drained and weary, that Tante Louisa took her by the arm and told her to sit down" (537). This is a more realistic portrayal of grief than the one provided by Faulkner and makes Cecile a more realized character than Faulkner's octrooon.

Faulkner, in Absalom, Absalom!, and Rice, in The Feast of All Saints, present contradictory portrayals of New Orleans's women of color. Their differing presentations arise out of their different sources for and purposes in portraying these women. Faulkner distrusted and placed little importance on historical facts; therefore, he did not do historical research for his work. Instead, he relied on oral history, stories told him by a number of sources, and on his own imagination. For the most part, Faulkner's portrayal of New Orleans's women of color seems to come from his imagination to serve his own purpose. By portraying these women as slaves, Faulkner is able to use them to represent the ultimate, irredeemable sin of slavery, miscegenation, and to reinforce the theme he

develops through Charles Bon. Rice, on the other hand, did extensive research in libraries, private collections, and by traveling to the locales of her work. For Rice historical accuracy is very important, especially in The Feast of All Saints, which was written as a tribute to New Orleans's free people of color.

Conclusion

Calvin S. Brown claims, "One exception must be made to the general statement about the range and accuracy of Faulkner's knowledge. His Indians and their ways and customs are almost pure fantasy" (5). To this observation must be added a second exception to Faulkner's range of knowledge; New Orleans's women of color and the customs and ways of Creole New Orleans which surrounded them are also fantastical. In the section of Absalom, Absalom! narrated by Mr. Compson, Faulkner creates a vivid image of New Orleans's unique sexual conventions that bears little resemblance to the reality of that world. In Faulkner's portrayal New Orleans's women of color are beautiful, tragic slave women bred and raised to serve as concubines to their white owners. Anne Rice, in The Feast of All Saints, provides the reader with a contradictory and realistic view of this world. Rice shows the women involved in miscegenetic relationships as they truly existed. These free women of color chose to enter into *plaçage* with white men instead of marrying within their own caste. They were women with power and independence and choices.

Both of these writers, however, provide portrayals which serve their own purposes. Faulkner's image of this world is vivid; but, it is still only an image, a picture. The women, including Bon's "mistress," have no depth of characterization. None of them has a name or speaks in Mr. Compson's section of the narrative. For Faulkner's purposes, they serve only as the symbol of slavery at its worst, of the irredeemable sin of slavery. Rice's purpose, on the other hand, was to pay homage to the free people of color and the society and accomplishments they made in pre-Civil War Louisiana. Rice, therefore, provides a detailed portrayal of these women, *placées*, in all their roles in the community

and family and in all their emotional states. Her women of color are well rounded because they were an important part of the world of the free people of color.

The connection between Absalom, Absalom! and The Feast of All Saints does not end with the women of color, however. Knowing the history of the free people of color raises questions regarding possible avenues of further study. For instance, the lack of a father figure for children of miscegenetic relationships plays an important role in both novels. In Quentin and Shreve's version of history, Charles Bon's desire to be recognized by his father drives him to pursue the relationship with Judith Sutpen and to seek his own death when his father fails to acknowledge him. Similarly, in Rice's novel, Marcel Ste. Marie's desire for a real father figure affects his relationships with other male characters and drives him to seek out his white father at his father's plantation. This desire leads both characters to tragedy. A compelling analysis could also be made of the search of mixed blood characters for their place in society. The searches for a place in society made by Charles Etienne De Saint Valery Bon and Rice's characters Christophe Mercier and, to a point, Marcel present interesting comparisons and juxtapositions. One might also examine the portrayals of the slave revolt in Haiti. As Robert Dale Parker states, "We continue to reenvision the history in Absalom, Absalom! as our own history changes and leads us to read through changing perspectives, even as the characters in Absalom, Absalom! itself continually remake their own readings of their own history" (9).

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