

Rememorizing the Anti-Miscegenation Laws in the United States: A Scrutiny of William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*

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Abstract: In writing this paper, I have discovered that William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* is the reconstruction of Blacks' experience of the anti-miscegenation laws which, in the colonial era, prohibited interracial marriages in the United States because of Whites' eagerness to create a white America. The author refers to this historical reality through Sutpen's divorce with Eulalia and Bon's separation from Judith. While the first couple ends up getting divorced for the simple reason that they do not share the same race, the second gets separated due to the same cause and to their paternal link for fear of committing incest, for they are all Sutpen's biological children. These characters' failed love affairs because of the respect of the anti-miscegenation laws evidences the encroachment between history and fiction in the author's narrative.

Keywords: The United States, Blacks, Whites, Anti-Miscegenation Laws.

Introduction

In the context of William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*, the expression "anti-miscegenation laws" refers to the prohibition of sexual relations or marriages between characters who are considered to be members of different races, particularly between a black character and white one in American society. Published in 1936, Faulkner's narrative tells of Thomas Sutpen, the protagonist who rejects his first wife Eulalia and his son Charles Bon after discovering that they have a drop of black blood running in their veins. He then gets married with Ellen, a full white American woman with whom they get two children, Henry and Judith. While studying at the University of Mississippi, Henry and Charles Bon become close friends. This friendship enables Charles Bon to win Judith's heart. They finally decide to get married, but this marriage does not come true because of Thomas Sutpen's attachment to the respect of the anti-miscegenation laws established in the United States.

The choice of William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* for this paper is linked to the author's reconstruction of white Americans' racist system that urges them to prohibit interracial marriages in all the spheres of the United States. This means that my main interest in writing on this novel is to examine the impacts of anti-miscegenation laws on characters' love affairs. Ann Carol who first scrutinized it, discovers that "it is out of question for any white American character to get married with a partner who is not white bloodily. Any attempt of the transgression of anti-miscegenation laws for whatever reason is welcomed by a severe punishment".¹ This quotation, as it can be seen, attests of white Americans' racist system against Blacks viewed as second zone citizens because of their blackness on the American soil. This racist system urges me to concentrate on the answer to the following question: To what extent are anti-miscegenation laws in the United States part of the author's account in *Absalom, Absalom*? I hypothesize that Faulkner's portrayal of characters' separation and divorce because of their racial differences attests of the presence of anti-miscegenation laws in this narrative.

Knowing that the novel examined contextualizes Blacks' experience of racism in the United States, I find it necessary to resort to the historical and sociological approaches to better conduct the above hypothesis. The historical approach helps me refer to the historical context of anti-miscegenation laws established in the white man's world, for according to Greenblatt and Gallagher "the historical approach evaluates how the work is influenced by the time in which it was produced. It also examines the social sphere, the psychological background of the author, the books and theories that may have influenced the author" (Greenblatt and Gallagher: 2015, 119). This quotation shows that the historical approach consists in establishing the interplay between history and fiction within a work of literature. This is to say that what is said in a novel is often linked to the experience of people in their society, as Foster states: "In the novel, we can know people perfectly, and, apart from the general pleasure of reading, we can find here a compensation for their dimness in life" (Foster: 1962, 70). The sociological approach enables me to examine the relationship between Whites and Blacks in the United States, for the novel studied appears as a reflection of the latter's social experience of racism in this great nation: "Art is not created in a vacuum; it is the work not simply of a person, but of an author fixed in time and space, answering to a community (...) The sociological critic, therefore, is interested in understanding the social milieu and the extent to which and manner in which the artists respond to it" (Krutch, quoted by Wilbur: 1962, 123). This quotation shows that the writer, whoever he may be, does not write in a vacuum, but is inspired by his

or her society. Such is the case of William Faulkner who, in *Absalom, Absalom*, portrays the experience of Blacks in the American society through fictitious characters. This is to say that the sociological approach helps me not only study the relationships that Blacks have with their white counterparts in this “so-called democratic society”, but also the way Faulkner recreates the community he belongs to within his work of fiction, as Toni Morrison states: “*If anything I do, in the way of writing novels or whatever I write is not about the village or the community or about you (the African Americans), then it is not about anything*” (Morrison: 1984, 339). Similarly, Herder argues: “*Literature is the consequence of the moment, the race, and the milieu*” (Herder, quoted by Wilbur, *ibid.*, 124). This quotation also shows that in writing any novel, the writer often takes into account the setting, the time, and the reality of a given community.

Two main points are examined in this paper. The first refers to love, marriage, and divorce between Thomas Sutpen and Eulalia. The second is linked to Bon’s failed love affair with Judith.

1. Love, marriage, and divorce between Thomas Sutpen and Eulalia

In Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom*, some characters are not free to love and get married with any partner of their choice because of the anti-miscegenation laws established by the white man in the United States. The novel reads that Thomas Sutpen and Eulalia’s first encounter takes place in Haiti where the white male character falls in love with his prospective wife without knowing her racial belonging. Being deeply attracted by her physical appearance that mirrors that of a woman who is white bloodily, Thomas Sutpen rapidly decides to present Eulalia to his grandparent as a woman he thinks to share the rest of his life with. But this grandparent is reluctant about his choice because he does not know her quite well, as evidenced in this passage:

That was how he told it: he went and subdued them. And when he returned, he and the girl became engaged to marry and the grandfather saying ‘wait, wait’ sure enough now, saying, but you didn’t even know her; you told me that when the siege began you didn’t even know her name’ and he looked at grandfather and said, yes. But you see, it took me some time to recover’ (AA, p. 254).

What the author describes in this passage is the question of love and marriage between Thomas Sutpen and Eulalia. The sentence “he and the girl became engaged to marry” justifies their marriage which is viewed as the result of their deep love for each other. Despite his grandparent’s hesitation about his choice, Sutpen ends up getting married with his sweetheart, Eulalia. The fact of not knowing her for years does not matter to him, for he believes that in the course of time, he will finish up knowing her deeply. Eulalia’s physical whiteness is enough for him to consider her as a white American woman who deserves to become his wife. His grandparent’s hesitation does not mean that he is against Sutpen’s choice. It only means that he fears the anti-miscegenation laws which may hamper the evolution of their couple. Knowing that the mixture of blood is strongly prohibited in American society, he fears his grandson to get married with a woman who may have a drop of black blood running in her veins. What one may find interesting in this love affair is the way Thomas Sutpen loves Eulalia. His deep love for her is evidenced through his determination to get married with her without even questioning about her racial belonging. This determination implies that what counts for him is not her partner’s race, but her beauty, as he argues:

I had the wife, accepted her in good faith, with no reservations about myself, and I expected as much from them. I didn’t even demand, mind as one of my obscure origin might have been expected to do (or at least be condoned in the doing) out of ignorance and gentility in dealing with gentle born people. I did not demand; I accepted them at their own valuation while insisting on my own part upon explaining fully about myself and my progenitors: yet they deliberately withheld from me the one fact which I have reason to know they were aware would have caused me to decline the entire matter, otherwise they would not have withheld it from me (AA, p. 264).

Through this passage, the author demonstrates Sutpen’s blind love for Eulalia thanks to her beauty which makes her attractive. For, the sentence “I had the wife, accepted her in good faith, with no reservations about myself”, shows that the white male character has found a woman of his life. He avoids questioning about her racial belonging for fear of giving up his ideas of having her for wife if only he discovers that she is black. This is to say that he is aware of the anti-miscegenation laws which gangrene the American society. But his love for her partner whose identity is still unrevealed, urges him to satisfy the needs of his heart rather than wasting time

questioning about her race. This blind love recalls that of Roger who, in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, gets married with Hester without knowing that the only reason for which the latter accepts to become his wife is his fortune: "Meanwhile her mother had accosted the physician. I would speak a word with you, said she - a word that concerns us much. Aha! And is it Mistress Hester that has a word for old Roger Chillingworth? Answered he, raising himself from his stooping posture" (Hawthorne: 1850, 158). One sees here how Hester's mother reassures Roger that they are ready to make their daughter accept his proposal even though she may think the contrary. This mother's motivation to talk to her prospective son-in-law suggests that she knows the choices of her daughter. She is aware of the fact that as an old man with a deformed body, Roger is not lucky to be accepted by her daughter. She certainly thinks that if she does not act rapidly to convince her daughter, Roger will certainly change his mind. That is why she is determined to talk to Roger in order to have him for son-in-law and profit from his wealth. This precipitation in the choice of a woman to get married with is what Faulkner denounces through Sutpen's love for Eulalia in *Absalom, Absalom!*. He means that people should take time to knowing their partners before deciding to get married with them for fear of facing some obstacles in the future. Unfortunately, Sutpen's deep affection for Eulalia urges him to get married with her without even knowing her living manners and racial belonging, as the narrator explains: "He just said, he was then engaged to get married" (AA, p. 255). Through this quotation, one sees the white male character's engagement in a love affair with his partner who seems to ignore that this love adventure will not last, because they do not share the same race. The novel reads that some years later after discovering that his wife is not white like him but black, Sutpen becomes shocked and finds it better to divorce her for fear of keeping on giving birth to mulatto babies. Such a pitiful divorce attests not only of Sutpen's racist view, but more of all white American characters who are determined to respect the anti-miscegenation laws applied in all the spheres of the United States. Eulalia's drop of black blood running in her veins which makes her black although she looks white physically, urges Sutpen to divorce her as a way for him to respect the laws prohibiting interracial marriages in this great nation:

There must have been when he repudiated that first wife and that child when he discovered that they would not be adjunctive to the forwarding of the design. And Grandfather said there was no conscience about that; that Sutpen sat in the office that afternoon after thirty years and told him how his conscience had bothered him somewhat at first but that he had argued calmly and logically with his conscience until it was settled (AA, p. 262).

This passage attests of divorce between Thomas Sutpen and Eulalia in Haiti after spending many years together as a couple. This divorce draws the reader back to the consequence of the anti-miscegenation laws which "also prohibited the issuance of marriage licenses and the solemnization of weddings between mixed-race couples and prohibited the officiation of such ceremonies in the United States".² When the narrator argues that "he repudiated the first wife", he lets the reader know that Eulalia who used to be Sutpen's wife is no longer his due to her racial belonging which is rejected not only by him, but by all white Americans who want to create a white America. Eulalia's repudiation by Sutpen shows that the plight of Blacks in the United States is not maybe due to poverty, but to the color of their skin which, for their white peers, dirties this democratic nation. One may guess how pitiful and inhuman it is to repudiate one's wife for the simple reason that she is black. Such a repudiation evidences the degree of the white man's hatred for all Blacks around the world. Sutpen's wrongful attitude towards Eulalia, the woman he used to call wife and share intimate secrets with, is a perfect illustration of a pitiless and heartless man. Faulkner's account for this white character's pitilessness is certainly a way to tell the reader not to act as such after getting married with one's partner. For, it is always important to have mercy on one's partner before taking any decision.

The need to respect the anti-miscegenation laws established by white American authorities finally urges Sutpen to abandon not only his wife who is from the black race, but also Charles Bon, their only son who is supposed to be innocent to endure such a marital fact. One may wonder how this divorced black woman is now condemned to raise a child by herself with no financial income. Her forced divorce certainly brings about her psychological trauma, for she still loves her husband in spite of his racist decision taken against her. She has trouble to restarting life without her him. She sometimes thinks of killing herself, for she hopes no better life for her as long as racist laws are applied in the United States. She is now conscious that any white American man who may fall in love with her, will not accept to marry her due to her race which is seen as a menace to the existence of the United States. In the passage below, for example, one sees how the author accounts for this divorce through Shreve and Quentin who complain about such a racist decision taken by Sutpen:

All right, Shreve said. Go on, I said he stopped, Quentin said. I heard you. Stopped what? How get engaged and then stopped, yet still had a wife to repudiate later, and then he did

not remember how he got to Haiti, and then he did not remember how he got into the house with the niggers surrounding it. Now, are you going to tell me he did not even remember getting marriage? That he got engaged and then he decided he would stop, only one day he found out he hadn't stopped but on the contrary he was married? (AA, p. 255).

This passage attests of Eulalia's repudiation by Sutpen, for one sees how Shreve and Quentin have trouble to believing that their black sister is abandoned for an unfair reason after having a son with her husband. The sentence "how get engaged and then stopped, yet still had a wife to repudiate" illustrates how this black female character who was appreciated, loved, and married is unfortunately rejected for the simple reason that she is black. This rejection evidences that in the United States, white Americans were prohibited to choose Blacks as men or women to get married with because of their racial belonging. The transgression of this prohibition was viewed as a byword for attracting severe problems to oneself: "*Sometimes, the individual attempting to marry would not be held guilty of miscegenation itself, but felony charges of adultery or fornication would be brought against them instead*".³ Sutpen's reaction to his wife is for the author a way to account for the plight of black American women in the white man's world. For, he shows the nothingness of these women through their forced divorces by their white partners who, after discovering their intimate parts, end up divorcing them by hiding themselves behind the anti-miscegenation laws established in their society: "*Somewhere, must have actually occurred, was about the patois he had to learn in order to oversee the plantation, and the French he had to learn, maybe not to get engaged to be marriage, but which he would certainly need to be able to repudiate the wife after he had already got her*" (AA, p. 248). As it can be seen, the sentence "he would certainly need to be able to repudiate the wife after he had already got her" attests of Sutpen and Eulalia's divorce. What the narrator does not understand is the fact that Sutpen who already has Eulalia for wife is no longer ready to share the rest of his life with her because of her racial belonging. This white male character's reaction against his wife attests of the prohibition of marriages between two characters from different races in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*. The author's account for the impacts of such a prohibition on Sutpen and Eulalia may lead the reader to consider him as an integrationist writer, for he denounces white Americans' racist system against their black peers through the couple's divorce. What he certainly wants is the banning of the anti-miscegenation laws not only in the United States where Eulalia is viewed as a victim, but in all the sphere of the world where Blacks and Whites are supposed to fall in with one another, for there are no boundaries in love affairs.

What is worth knowing is that Eulalia's trauma which is caused by her husband's reaction against her after discovering that she is black is also endured by her black peers who feel humiliated and rejected. For, Eulalia is the embodiment of all those black women who suffer such a racist system in the American society. Sutpen's eagerness to get married with Eulalia before deciding to get divorced was reinforced by her physical appearance. The novel reads that this black female character appears white like all white Americans, and this appearance makes it difficult for whoever to know whether she is black or white, as evidenced in this passage:

The body of one of the half breeds was found at last; Sutpen found it, hunted for it for two days without even knowing that what he was meeting was a blank wall of black secret faces, a wall behind which almost anything could be preparing to happen and, as he learnt later, almost anything was, and on the third he found the body where he could not possibly have missed it during the first hour of the first day it had been there (AA, p. 252).

The sentence "what he was meeting was a blank wall of black secret faces, a wall behind which almost anything" shows that Eulalia's identity is masked by her white skin color which resembles that of all white American women. This masked identity pushes the white male character to be mistaken in the choice of a woman to get married with. His awareness of the anti-miscegenation laws finally leads him to break his love relationship with Eulalia who does not know how to restart life with a child to raise daily. She is conscious of the fact that when wives and husbands get divorced, their children mostly suffer. Her son Charles is not excluded from this reality, for he is considered as an illegitimate child for being the fruit of a prohibited union. There is, in effect, the presence of history in Faulkner's narrative, for his account for divorce between Sutpen and Eulalia because of race draws the reader back to what happened to black Americans in the United States in the colonial era. It is well known that in many states of America, the anti-miscegenation laws prohibited marriages, sex relationships, and cohabitations between Whites and Blacks. For instance, "*Oklahoma in 1908 registered banned marriages between Africans and Americans; Louisiana in 1920 also registered banned marriages between Native Americans and African Americans*".⁴

Faulkner's account for divorce between Sutpen and Eulalia is so excessive that he continues to show how this white male character repudiates his innocent partner pitilessly after discovering that she belongs to the black

race. Despite her pleading for forgiveness from her husband, the latter finds no alternative than chasing her out just like an animal:

Because of that innocence which he had never lost, because after it finally told him what to do that night, he forgot about it and didn't know that he still had it and he told grandfather told him, mind, Not excusing, asking for no pity; not explaining, asking for no exculpation: just told grandfather how he had put his first wife aside like eleventh-and twelfth century kings did(AA,p. 240).

This passage illustrates the end of love relationship between Sutpen and his wife Eulalia who is rejected because of the kind of blood running in her veins. The cause of this rejection, as it can be seen, evidences to some extent the failure of the American Dream, as Massala and Mitati state: "*Whites' social injustice against Blacks has been, however, one of the main causes of the failure of the American Dream*" (Massala and Mitati: 2019, 17). In fact, the sentence "not excusing, asking for no pity; not explaining, asking for no exculpation" leaves the reader with the impression that Sutpen is one of those who defend the anti-miscegenation laws. For, he breaks his love affair with his sweetheart on behalf of the law without any sign of pity, as he voices it out in these terms: "*I found that she was not and could never be*" (AA, p. 240). This utterance attests not only of his readiness to divorce his wife, but more of his support for the application of the anti-miscegenation laws in the United States. By so acting, he certainly wants all white Americans to do the same in order to create a white America deprived of black and mulatto citizens. The same nightmarish love relationship experienced by Sutpen and Eulalia because of the respect of the prohibition linked to interracial marriages in the United States is also experienced by Bon and Judith, as demonstrated in the point below.

2. Bon's failed love affair with Judith

Bon and Judith's first encounter takes place in Mississippi without knowing that marriage between them is almost impossible, because while Judith is white bloodily, Bon is, however, black for being from a black mother. The other reason is that they are half-brother and half-sister because fathered by Thomas Sutpen who is white. This means that their love affair may lead them to commit incest. Unfortunately, their ignorance of these two main reasons urges them to fall in love with each other:

That was the summer following Henry's first year at the University, after he had brought Charles Bon home with him for Christmas and to see Judith and then again to spend a week or so of the summer vacation before Bon rode on to the river to take the steamboat home to New Orleans; the summer in which Sutpen himself went away, on business, Ellen said, doubtless unaware, such was her existence then, that she did not know where her husband had gone and not even conscious that she was not curious (AA, p. 70).

This passage shows Bon's encounter with Judith in Mississippi the day Henry who is Bon's friend and Judith's brother takes Bon to their home for vacation without knowing that they are all Sutpen's children. The narrator relates that before their turn to Mississippi, Henry speaks good of her sister to Bon who becomes interested in her without even seeing her. His description of Judith's physical appearance with good size, abundant hair, and beautiful face are seen as some of men's criteria in choosing a woman to love or get married with. This description shows that Bon's attachment to Judith is not only linked to his desire to have her for wife, but more to her beauty. Henry's apology for her sister's beauty pushes Bon to fall in love with her:

It was Henry, because at that time Bon had not even seen Judith. He had probably not paid attention to Henry's inarticulate recounting of his brief and conventional background and history to have remember that Henry had a sister, this indolent man too old to find even companionship among the youths, the children with whom he knew lived; this man miscast for the time and knowing it accepting it for a reason obviously good enough to cause him to endure it and apparently too serious or at least to private to be divulged to what acquaintances he now possessed (AA, p. 98).

It is clear that Bon is attracted by Judith's physical appearance, for after listening to what Henry often tells him about his sister, he says it openly to Judith that he wants to have her for wife. Judith, on her side, agrees with him without questioning about their racial belonging which may prevent them from going ahead in their love affair because of the anti-miscegenation laws which are applied in American society. What counts for

them is the affection they have for each other and their eagerness to form a legal couple one day, as the narrator argues:

Because he loved Judith. He would have added doubtless 'after his fashion' since as his intended father-in-law soon learned, this was not the first time he had played this part, pledged what he had pledged to Judith, let alone the first time he would have gone through a ceremony to commemorate it, make what distinction (he was a catholic of sorts) he might between this one with a white woman and that other. Because you will see the letter, not the first one he ever wrote to her but at least the first, the only one she ever showed, as your grandmother knew then (AA, p. 94).

This passage reveals Bon's feelings of deep affection for Judith. He does not mind his in-laws' objection about their love affair. For him, he has found a woman with whom he is supposed to spend the rest of his life. What is true is that this love affair is likely to break out, because they are on the way not only to commit incest, but more to transgress the anti-miscegenation laws which should be respected by all American citizens in the United States. The ignorance of these aspects finally leads Bon to be fond of his own half-sister. One understands that in *Absalom, Absalom*, Faulkner also denounces the consequences of parents' divorces on children. For, if Sutpen did not abandon Eulalia and Bon, the latter would not womanize his own half-sister. The fact of growing up somewhere in American society without seeing even his father's picture, justifies his mistake in the choice of a woman to get married with. In fact, the sentence "he loved Judith" is a perfect illustration of his deep love for the latter, for from the verb "to love", one may guess the place this white female character occupies in her partner's heart. The desire to have her for wife finally leads Bon to meet Judith's mother with Christmas gifts, as the narrator explains:

And Henry and Bon rode again to Sutpen Hundred and even the town convinced now by Hellen that the engagement existed, that twenty-fourth of December and the nigger children, with branches of mistletoe and holly for excuse, already lurking about the rear of the big house to shout Christmas gift' at the while people, the rich city man come to court Judith and Sutpen saying nothing even yet (AA, p. 105).

One sees here the confirmation of Bon's love relationship with Judith, for the latter's mother informs the family about her daughter's wedding. The sentence "Henry and Bon rode again to Sutpen Hundred" makes it possible for the reader to understand that Henry is to some extent accomplice with regard to Bon's choice, because he accepts her sister to get married with him. This acceptance shows that he is not conscious of the couple's blood relationship. He does not know that Bon who is determined to get married with his sister is also his half-brother. What is true is that Judith also admires Bon's physical appearance, for he is described as a fashion, elegant, and attractive young man. It is indeed because of this physical appearance that Judith gives her heart to him: "*That true pride, not that false kind which transforms what it does it does not at the moment understand into scorn and outrage and solvents itself in pique and lacerations, but true pride which can say to itself without abasement I love*" (AA, p. 121). In this quotation, one notices Judith's attachment to Bon, for the personal pronoun "I" here stands for this white female character who shows her readiness to die if only her parents object her choice. Her attachment to her fiancé is evidenced through her utterance "I love", which means that she is crazy about Bon. Faulkner's endeavors to portray Bon's love affair with Judith are so excessive that he continues to inform the reader about the letters this male character often sends to his sweetheart. These letters are, for him, a way to bring evidence of his deep affection for a woman he thinks has gained his heart, as the narrator voices it out in these terms:

Now you can see why I said that he loved her. Because there were other letters, many of them, gallant flowery indolent frequent an insincere, sent by hand over that forty miles between Oxford and Jefferson after that first Christmas, the metropolitan gallant's idle and delicately flattering (and doubtless to him meaningless) gesture to the bucolic maiden, with what profound and absolutely inexplicable tranquil patient clairvoyance of women against which that metropolitan gallant's foppish posturing was just the jackanapes antics of a small boy (AA, p. 128).

The phrase "many of them" indicates the number of letters Judith receives from Bon. The content of these letters shows not only how he is lucky and pleased to have Judith for partner, but more how he looks forward to forming a legal couple with him in the coming days. These letters which are unceasingly written to

her also show how the black male character devotes his time to thinking about someone he already considers as his wife. The author's portrayal of this character's love acts towards his sweetheart is a way to show the reader how all lovers should act in love affairs. He means that the more one partner sends loving letters to his or her lover, the more the latter is pleased and falls deeply in love, for these letters are viewed as proofs of love.

What is worth knowing is that Bon's love for Judith is reinforced not only by her beauty, but more by her fortune, for her father is an outstanding plantation owner who has much money in Mississippi. The novel reads that in the beginning of their love adventure, Ellen gives them a free field in order to deal with agricultural activities: "So, for the first and last time Bon and Judith might have been said to have a free field, might have been, since it was really Ellen who had the free field, I can imagine their engineering that courtship, supplying Judith and Bon" (AA, p. 103). Through this quotation, one sees some advantages Bon finds in falling in love with Judith whose parents are very rich. He is conscious that by getting married with this white female character, he will become rich in no time. Unfortunately, his dream of having her for wife finally turns into a nightmare because of her father's opposition. In fact, after discovering that Bon is black, Sutpen forces her daughter to forget about her love affair with this black male character. For him, it is an abomination for his daughter to get married with a man who is not from their racial belonging. He means that such a union is condemned by the laws established by white American authorities not only in the South of the United States where racism reigns, but also in the North of this great nation where the presence of Blacks is also evident. Here is the way the author accounts for Sutpen's opposition to his daughter's choice: "I accept no substitute; something has happened between him and my father, if my father was right, I will never see him again, if wrong he will come or send for me; If happy I can be I will, if suffer I must I can" (AA, p. 121).

Sutpen's opposition to Bon's proposal to have Judith for wife recalls that of Silvia's father who in Erich Segal's *Only Love*, forces his daughter to abandon Matthew in order to get married with Nico for the simple reason that the latter is rich and belongs to their race. In fact, after some moments of cohabitation, Matthew and Silvia decide to get married so as to form a legal couple. But this decision is fought back by Silvia's father who does not want his daughter to get married with a poor man from another origin. To break this relationship which already inhabits the two characters' spirits, he convinces his daughter to marry Nico who, he thinks, is wealthy and Italian like her. The question of wealth and nationality is the main hindrance to Matthew and Silvia's desire to be legally united. This strong opposition to the female character's good projects with the man of her life causes a very sad atmosphere on them. But despite this sad atmosphere, Matthew who is very eager to have Silvia for wife, insists vainly on his love-relationship with her: "Then will you marry me?" (Segal: 1997, 110). Through this utterance, one understands that Matthew's motivation to be part of Silvia's life is not only linked to the simple desire of discovering her intimate parts, but more to keep her as a legal wife with whom he shares secrets. For, a man without a wife is not well valued. The awareness of such a social reality is unquestionably what makes Matthew worry daily because of "his sweetheart's father who takes his daughter for granted and ends up forcing her to accomplish his ambitious will rather than hers" (N'zambi-Mikoulou: 2020, 184). When Matthew, for example, says that "once in a while I dare to ponder about the future", he means that he has already planned to share life with Silvia. His decision and determination to have her for wife is, in fact, what makes him feel shocked because of the opposition made to his project. This shock is shown through the word "pain" which is synonym of psychological suffering. He now sees that all his efforts to become Silvia's husband are turned into a nightmare not maybe because the lady does not love him, but because her father wants her to go by the rules of their tradition and customs. The pressure from this father becomes so excessive that Matthew decides then to leave the town, because he cannot stand seeing his beloved Silvia in the hands of another man.

Similarly, Bon in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*, ends up getting separated from Judith because of her father who fears not only the incest which the two lovers are about to commit, but more of the transgression of the anti-miscegenation laws established in the United States. This separation is, as it can be seen, caused by Sutpen's opposition to the two lovers' decision to get married with each other. While Judith's mother forgets about the question of racial belonging and agrees to have Bon for her son-in-law, Sutpen is, however, attached to the respect of the laws prohibiting interracial marriages in American society. This attachment pushes him to force her daughter to reject her fiancé by any means necessary. Consequently, Bon and Judith end up getting separated, as the author evidences it through Sutpen's talk with Judith in these terms:

This, mind you, in a man who had already acquired a name for prowess among women while at university, long before founding actual proof. No engagement, no courtship even: he and Judith saw one another three times in two years for a total period of seventeen days,

counting the time which Ellen consumed; they parted without even saying goodbye. And yet, four years later, Henry had to kill Bon to keep them from marrying (AA, p. 99).

This passage attests of the consequences of the anti-miscegenation laws on characters in Faulkner's novel, for one sees how white Americans reject Blacks on behalf of these laws which gangrene the American society. In fact, the utterance "mind you, in a man who had already acquired a name for prowess among women while at University" is an alibi created by Sutpen to mean that he fears Bon's famousness which may constitute a great hindrance for Judith to live better if she gets married with him. What he does not want to say openly is that Bon is not lucky to have his daughter for wife, because he is black and also his illegitimate son. It is indeed because of this hidden truth that Henry finishes up assassinating Bon in order to prevent his sister from getting married with him. This is to say that what makes Sutpen reject his prospective son-in-law is not maybe the latter's poverty or misbehavior, but his racial belonging and paternal side. He is cock-sure that Bon is the son he abandoned with his mother in Haiti after discovering that the latter belongs to the black race, as he confesses it in these terms: "*But now I have had four years to decide in. I will. I am going to. He must not marry her. His mother told me that her mother had been a Spanish woman. I believe him; it was not until after he was born that I found out that his mother was part Negro*" (AA, p. 355). What is true is that the question of race which makes Sutpen reject Bon's proposal of getting married with his daughter, is far from being from the author's personal imagination, for Ashok Bhusal, too, in his article entitled "The Rhetoric and Anti-Miscegenation Laws in the United States", evidences it in these terms: "*Interracial couples fought a long time for their marriage rights. In order to fairly address the issue of interracial marriages, the whole country had to wait for the United State Supreme Court's Fourteenth Amendment to forbid marriages between persons solely on racial classification*" (Bhusal: 2017, 84). This quotation evidences the role played by the Supreme Court in recognizing the necessity for all Americans to choose a partner to get married with regardless of the color of their skin or racial origin. This is to say that Sutpen's reaction against Bon is a way to respect the fundamental laws linked to the prohibition of interracial marriages in American society. He certainly fears to be put into jail if only he dares to allow the marriage between this black male character and his daughter who is totally white, for there is always a severe punishment reserved to those who do not respect the anti-miscegenation laws, as Bhusal keeps on stating:

In *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), Mildred Loving, a black woman, and Richard Loving, a white man, were sentenced to prison for a year for their interracial marriage. Their marriage violated the anti-miscegenation law of the state, the Racial Integrity Act of 1924. Mildred had become pregnant in June 1958, and the couple went to Washington DC from Virginia to marry. After their marriage, they returned to Virginia. Mildred Loving thought that showing the police, who had burst into their home when they were sleeping in bed, the certificate that declared her marriage to Richard Loving official would be enough to deter legal proceedings. She was wrong. The case was filed against them because they violated the Virginia code, which restricted racially mixed couples from entering marriage contracts in other states and coming back to Virginia. The punishment was a sentence of from one to five years' incarceration (Bhusal, *ibid.*, 85).

As it can be noticed, there is a similarity between Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* and the history of the United States, for it is historically recognized that Americans were victims of the anti-miscegenation laws in their love affairs in this great nation as it is the case in this narrative. These laws allowing marriages between persons solely on the same race explain in part the reason for which Sutpen stands as a strong opponent to his daughter's beloved partner:

Am I any less obliged because I did not happen to know the tongue in which he accepted me in good faith? No: the more, the more. And Bon- the trump now, the voice gentle now: 'have you forgot that this woman, this child, are niggers? You Henry Sutpen of Sutpen's Hundred in Mississippi? You, talking of marriage, a wedding, here? And Henry- the despair now, the last bitter cry for irrevocable undefeated: yes, I know. I know that. But It's still there. It's not right. Not even you doing it makes it right. Not even you (AA, p. 118).

In this passage, the author shows how Bon is totally rejected by Judith's family members who find it impossible for their daughter to get married with a black man. This rejection is evidenced though Sutpen's utterance "have you forgotten that this woman, this child, is nigger?". Here, the "woman" refers to Eulalia, the black female character whose marriage with Sutpen broke out because of her racial belonging. The "child" is,

however, the woman's son named Bon who also endures the same racist system by trying to marry a white American woman. When Sutpen claims that "it's not right", he means that such a marriage that Bon wants to celebrate with Judith, cannot come true for two main reasons: The first reason is that interracial marriages are forbidden in their community. The second is that Bon is Judith and Henry's half-brother from a black mother named Eulalia:

So, the old man sent the nigger for Henry, Shreve said. And Henry came in and the old man said they cannot marry because he is your brother, and Henry said, you lie like that, that quick: no space, no interval, no nothing between like when you press the button and get light in the room. And the old man just sat there, didn't even move and strike him and so Henry didn't say you lie again because he knew now it was so; he just said it's not true, not I don't believe it but it's not true because he could may be see the old man's face again now and demon or no it was a kind of grief and pity, not for himself but for Henry, because Henry was just young while he (the old man) knew that he still had the courage and even all the shrewdness too (AA, p. 293).

One understands that apart from the eagerness to respect laws prohibiting interracial marriages in the United States, what also urges Sutpen to destroy Bon's love affair with Judith is his awareness about the fact that both lovers are his biological children. His opposition to Bon's choice is a way to avoid incest between the latter and Judith whose love for her fiancé has no boundaries. But after being told that Bon is his brother, Henry considers his father as a liar. For him, this truth is an alibi for Sutpen to convince him to object his sister's choice, for there is no proof justifying what he says to him about Bon's parents:

What faces and what names they called themselves and were called by so long as the blood coursed-the blood, the immortal brief recent intransient blood which could hold honor above sloshy unregretted and love above fat and easy shame. 'And Bon didn't know it, Shreve said. The old man didn't move and this time Henry didn't say you lie, he said it's not true and the old man said, 'ask him. 'Ask Charles then' and then Henry knew that that was what his father had meant all the time and that that was what he meant himself when he told his father he lied, because what the old man said wasn't just, he is your brother, but he has known all the time that he is yours and your sister's brother (AA, p. 295).

This passage evidences Sutpen's objection to Judith's desire to get married with Bon. It is quite clear that both characters' love relationship appears as a failure because of their paternal link and the anti-miscegenation laws which, for white American Authorities, must be respected by everybody in the United States. One understands that Sutpen's opposition to this union is half-understood, for as a citizen who lives in a society where racism reigns, he has no alternative than respecting the laws established in it. He is conscious that the transgression of these laws to satisfy the desire of his daughter who is crazy about Bon, is a byword for attracting trouble to himself. In this regard, the blame for this failed love affair is not to be put on him, nor on Bon and Judith, but on the American Government which seems to ignore the advantages drawn from the mixture of race, as Obama who is half-white and black confesses it in these terms: "*I was raised as an Indonesian child and a Hawaiian child and as a white child and so what I benefit from it is a multiplicity of culture that all fed me*" (Obama: 2008, 17).

Conclusion

At the term of this exploration, I have discovered that in *Absalom, Absalom*, William Faulkner accounts for the theme of the anti-miscegenation laws through Sutpen's divorce with Eulalia and Bon's separation from Judith. While the first couple breaks their union because of their racial differences, the second gets separated due to the same cause and to their paternal relationship. It is discovered that they are all Sutpen's biological children. This makes it impossible for them to get married for fear of committing incest. The author's portrayal of Eulalia and Bon as black characters who are victims of love disillusionment because of their racial belonging, evidences their plight in the white man's world. This plight is made of their humiliation, rejection, and victimization by their white peers whose objective is to make Blacks return to Africa, for they believe that the United States should be composed solely of citizens who are white bloodily. I finally confess that Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* is unquestionably the reconstruction of the American history, for the themes of characters' separation and divorce due to anti-miscegenation laws, are conceptual tools that form historical core in it.

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