

Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*

Spring 2021 – Ten Sessions

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Assignment for Session 5

Reading:

> Chapter 4 of *Absalom, Absalom!*, pp. 70-106

Selection of Passages (a repeat from our last assignment):

“YOU, the Study Group participants, have a strong voice in setting the agenda of the discussion.

As you read, I ask you to identify at least one passage that strikes YOU of deserving attention in class (I can tell you from my own reading that a significant fraction of the text might qualify):

Significant plot elements

Character-revealing

Language rich enough to enjoy reading aloud

Unresolved or unexplained puzzles in the text

You should note page, line number, the first few words of the section, and where it ends.

Email your selections to me at sds@mit.edu. I will assemble them into an agenda for the day of the session.”

Discussion Topics:

We have already discussed the issue of distancing, how Faulkner likes to tell stories at a constructed distance from the events, using a main narrator and what I have called meta-narrators. Chapter 4 is a rich example of this practice.

By the end of the chapter, we learn that “Henry has done shot that durn French feller. Kilt him dead as beef.” It is in this chapter that the story of Charles Bon and his relationships with Judith and Henry Sutpen, up to that violent end, gets fleshed out, even if not thoroughly understood.

But what is the basis of this fleshing out? The meta-narrator is Mr. Compson, and we will spend some discussion time evaluating him in that roler. To what extent is he filling in blanks that, of necessity, must exist within whatever sequence of events he personally witnessed?

Therefore, as you identify passages you would like us to spend class time discussing, please include things that either justify, or call into question, Mr. Compson’s reliability as a narrator.