

Ariadne's Thread: Unraveling the Archive in William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!  
and Fernando Vallejo's Mi hermano el alcalde

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## Abstract

JESSE GRAY: Ariadne's Thread: Unraveling the Archive in William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! and Fernando Vallejo's Mi hermano el alcalde  
(Under the direction of Juan Carlos González Espitia)

In this thesis I examine two texts –William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! and Fernando Vallejo's Mi hermano el alcalde– not as they relate to studies of influence, nor the categorical imperatives of period studies, but as they relate in and to systems of archivization and narration. Within the novels are tropes of many elements of the Archive –the Archive as place, authority, and document of the past– that also serve as the structuring principle whereby the principle narrators are able to narrate.

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## Chapter I:

### Finding the Thread

In this thesis I will explore the relationship between the presence of facts and the construction of narrative in William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! (1936) and Fernando Vallejo's Mi hermano el alcalde (2004). I do not propose to read these texts in terms of influence or the categorical imperatives of period studies, but, instead, as they relate to systems of archivization and narration. I will discuss how each text utilizes the elisions and caesuras present in their foundations to produce narrative.

I have refrained from calling this an "Introduction" or an "Introductory Chapter" in acknowledgment of the fact that there is no beginning to the system that I hope to elucidate at the center of these two texts. Even the inscription "Chapter I," in Roman numerals (which will provide material for commentary in Chapter II), is only to the ends that this thesis conforms to the norms of the archive that it hopes to participate in: a norm that, for many reasons, says what is publishable (material substrate), as well as what can and cannot be said and how it must be said (discourse). This is a claim can be made of nearly any text, including the novels at hand, but the question of the simple delineation of archivization in these texts is ancillary to concerns more central to the narratives themselves.

The guiding question (the map of the labyrinth) to which I have constantly returned in this project is, faced with the loss of beloved people and things, how is that

loss rendered communicable? Also, possibly more importantly, how are these lost things changed in their communication and is there any regularity -a predictability in regards to what is affected- to this fluctuation? Walter Benjamin writes that, because modernity has pushed death out of the public sphere and into sanatoriums, and because we “live in rooms that have never been touched by death, [as] dry dwellers of eternity” (93), we have also lost our ability to exchange experiences, which are communicable only with our deaths. And yet, Benjamin continues, death has to exist somewhere, and he finds it (not without a degree of condemnation) in the novel, which the reader reads with “the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about” (101). What do death and loss have to do with the exchange of stories and experiences? Is there a mechanism that accounts for this economy? With these questions in mind I will consider the loss of beloved things and their subsequent narrations in these novels by Vallejo and Faulkner.

Pairing Faulkner with a Latin American author is nothing new; the temptation to compare is overwhelming. Faulkner’s tendency towards the Baroque, his staunch provincialism, the problems related to segregation and corruption regarding his native Mississippi, and his creation of verisimilar fictional spaces, among other characteristics of his work, have been fruitful ground for a number of enlightening studies relating him to Latin American authors like Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, Juan Carlos Onetti, and Agustín Yáñez.

Early studies relating Faulkner to Latin America, like James Irby’s La influencia de William Faulkner en cuatro narradores hispanoamericanos (The Influence of William Faulkner in Four Hispanic American Narrators) (1957) and more recent studies like Mark Frisch’s William Faulkner: su influencia en la literatura hispanoamericana: Mallea,

Rojas, Yáñez y García Márquez (William Faulkner: His Influence On Hispanic American Literature: Mallea, Rojas, Yáñez y García Márquez) (1993), have focused on Faulkner as a progenitor of literary invention in a region inhibited by literary forms inherited from its Spanish past. The argument is that in reading, and, in some cases, meeting Faulkner, Latin American authors have found literary techniques to employ in their own writing.

Many of Latin America's most well known writers have corroborated the claim that Faulkner is something of a literary savior, and have suggested their own struggles with the model/copy paradigm that is also so prevalent in criticism. Gabriel García Márquez has famously said, "my problem was not how to imitate Faulkner, but how to destroy him. His influence had screwed me up" (qtd. in Oakley 408). However, the claim that Faulkner liberates an inhibited literary culture, when tempered with a view more inclusive of the entirety of Latin American artistic production –for instance, if we consider New World Baroque and the continuity of this Americas-born art form in the entirety of the Americas' artistic history– is seen to be, at best, myopic, and, at worst, condescending.

Many critics have tried to soften the almost demagogic tendencies of Faulkner criticism in relation to Latin America. Tanya Feyen, for instance, in her In Search of the Latin American Faulkner (1995), takes into account that Faulkner's influence on Latin American writers is assumed, and rarely put to any real test. She argues that it is more important to understand Faulkner as he is received in Latin America (rather than Faulkner as he is studied in the U.S. and then imposed on Latin America), and, in her book-length study, she seeks the Latin American Faulkner in translation and his critical reception as being very different from the Faulkner read and studied in the United States (x-xi).

Helen Oakley, however, complicates the influence paradigm even further. She writes that Faulkner, who made various trips to Latin America in the 50s and 60s, seems to be part of a positive cultural exchange, but these exchanges, and the commonalities that both artists and critics have traced between Faulkner, the South, and Latin America, cannot be bracketed off from the United States' marketing of Faulkner during the Cold War. Oakley notes that Faulkner's trips to Latin America, primarily to Venezuela and Brazil, coincided with crises in diplomatic relations with those countries, as well as with U.S. military operations in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Guatemala, and were often undertaken at the behest of the State Department. According to Oakley, Faulkner's involvement, in Latin America thus served to "obscure deeper power-related tensions between the United States and Latin America" (405). This revelation of a manipulative intermediary between Faulkner and Latin America seems to have irrevocably marred studies of influence, even if they were not already suspiciously pedantic.<sup>1</sup>

With no recourse to studies of direct influence, most critics have turned their eyes to history, and, again, they find support in Latin American writers' testimonies. Carlos Fuentes once claimed that "William Faulkner is both yours [the U.S.'s] and ours [Latin Americans'], and as such, essential to us. For in him we see what has always lived with us and rarely with you: the haunting face of defeat" (qtd. in Cohn 2). The argument made by critics and writers alike is that, because of historical similarities (slavery, an agrarian society, racial segregation, etc.) between the South and, especially, Caribbean Latin America (the term "Plantation America" has been coined to connect the two regions),

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<sup>1</sup> The study of the U.S. as an intermediary between Faulkner and Latin America is a project that Deborah Cohn is undertaking in an article - "Faulkner, Latin America, and the Caribbean: Influence, Politics, and Academic Disciplines" - in the forthcoming A Companion to William Faulkner (Ed. Richard Moreland. Oxford: Blackwell P).

Latin American writers have been able to see something of their own past in Faulkner's novels, which were being translated into Spanish in the early 1930s.

Given the historical similarities between the South and Latin America, critics argue, Latin American writers found the literary techniques being used by Faulkner amenable to writing their own histories. An example of this type of criticism is an illuminating chapter of Deborah Cohn's History and Memory in the Two Souths (1999) in which she compares the reconstruction of historical events -the Civil War and the Cuban Revolution- in William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! and Mario Vargas Llosa's La historia de Mayta (The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta). She notes that both of these stories "are arranged as investigations into an incident that was a turning point in the past, yet which, years later, remains unexplained" which "alternate between two interwoven temporal and narrative planes" (49): the present of the narration and the past of the story. While her discussion of these two novels is illuminating, she does not refrain from approaching the camp of scholars working on influence. She comments that Vargas Llosa remarked that Faulkner represented the "paradigm of novelists" (qtd. in Cohn 57), and she also notes, "modern Spanish American fiction has drawn heavily upon Euro-American modernist techniques" (57). While Cohn, who is keenly aware of the ideological mess that is Faulkner's "influence" on Latin America (see footnote 1), also highlights the innovation of Vargas Llosa's and his contemporaries' fiction, she demonstrates a certain privileging that is nearly always awarded to Faulkner in comparative studies.

Many critics are conscious of this deficit in comparative studies, and are attempting to mend it. Several articles in the anthology Look Away!: The U.S. South in



New World Studies, particularly Phillip Weinstein's "Cant Mater/Must Matter: Setting Up the Loom in Faulknerian and Postcolonial Fiction" (355-382) and Dane Johnson's "Wherein the South Differs from the North": Tracing the Noncosmopolitan Aesthetic in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*" (383-404), treat the author contraposed with Faulkner with an even hand. It should be noted, however, that this author paired with Faulkner is, in both cases, García Márquez, who, in the first article, is lumped under postcolonial studies (Faulkner is his own category), and that both articles are about historical similarities treated in the two texts.

While many of the studies mentioned above have presented cogent analyses of Faulkner's relationship to Latin America, my discussion centers on the fact that there is little in the Faulkner/Latin America archive (the accumulation of things said about Faulkner in Latin America and the standard account of how to say them) relating to Latin America that treats a topic other than history or influence. As long as the planes of criticism are limited to influence and history (as long as the inertia driving scholars to ad hoc assumptions of influence and equivalence is unchallenged), the repertoire from which to draw for a comparative study is rapidly shrinking. To this end I propose to study these texts on a plane that places the commonalities that I see in Faulkner and Vallejo that is equalizing. The tendency of Southern scholars and of Americanists has been to aggrandize Faulkner and, worse, to impose him and his influence on other authors. The standard account of Faulkner and Latin America, then, would necessarily question the paring of Faulkner with a so-called "minor" Colombian author, virtually unheard of in the U.S., and who is often read in his home country more for infamy than for art. This

perception of “minor” is questionable, as Vallejo, who is published by one of the largest and most reputable Spanish-language publishers, Alfaguara, and widely read, is only minor in that he has not received attention from academics.

The interrogation of my project by the Faulkner/Latin America archive grows even more intense if biography is consulted. Vallejo began his artistic career directing films. After exiling himself to Mexico City, he decided to write, then decided that he could not, and wrote Logoi: una gramática del lenguaje literario (Logoi: A Grammar of Literary Language) (1983) to decide how to start writing. He has since published two biographies –on poets: Porfirio Barba Jacob, of which he wrote and published two versions, and José Asunción Silva–, a nearly unarchivable amount of scathing political, cultural, economical, and ecumenical criticism, two scientific treatises, and ten novels. In his final novel, La Rambla paralela (2002), he wrote the death of his narrator, and has sworn in many interviews to never write fiction again. Readers of his fiction who come across his political commentaries (mostly found on the Internet on a web-based magazine, [www.soho.com.co](http://www.soho.com.co), which gives its viewers the opportunity to read political and cultural commentary while simultaneously viewing what could be called pornography) are surprised at how Vallejo’s personal comments are reproduced verbatim in his novels. His novels, films, and essays, written in exile in Mexico, all take contemporary Colombia and its corruption and violence as their subject, juxtaposed with the Colombia of Vallejo’s youth, especially his bucolic childhood on his grandparent’s farm and the libertine homosexual encounters of his adolescence and young adulthood.

Some affinities with Faulkner are obvious, like Vallejo’s and Faulkner’s obsession with the past, and their commitment to the provincial, but Vallejo’s extreme

politicization and self-exile seems to place a certain rift between him and Faulkner, the famous artist who only left Mississippi long enough to earn a paycheck, and who wanted his epitaph to read: “He made the books and he died” (Faulkner, Selected Letters 285).<sup>2</sup> Faulkner, too, worked in the film industry and hated it; his ex-lover, Meta Carpenter, recalled his saying that he feared losing all his abilities as a writer “if I do one more treatment or screenplay.” However, relegating Faulkner to artistic megalomania and Vallejo to some dissociative disorder inevitably participates in the same assumptions that I have critiqued above: mainly that Faulkner is an inimitably serious artist, and all others are merely searching for a few technical tricks to add to their repertoire. Notwithstanding the mythology that tends to surround Nobel laureates like an aureole, even if biography were reliable, it would not necessarily get at the core of these texts.

To add to the perceived dissimilarities between the writers, there is not a similar event being treated in these two texts: Faulkner’s retelling of the Civil War and Reconstruction in Absalom, Absalom! through the biography of the Sutpens does not correspond to a Cuban Revolution or a Conquest story in Mi hermano el alcalde, which

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<sup>2</sup> Some critics have succeeded in arguing for a politicized Faulkner, especially in regard to labor. See, for instance Ted Atkinson’s Faulkner and the Great Depression: Aesthetics, Ideology, and Cultural Politics (Athens: U of Georgia P, 2006) and Richard Godden’s Fictions of Labor: William Faulkner and the South’s Long Revolution (New York: Cambridge, 1997). Homosexuality, ironically, remains untouched in criticism relating to Vallejo, which has mainly focused on the role of sicariato (the institution of hired assassins in Colombian culture) in his novels. In Faulkner this seems to be a still-nascent field that is receiving greater attention; see Neil Watson’s “Incredibly loud... Miss-fire: A Sexual Reading of Go Down, Moses” (William Faulkner: Six Decades of Criticism. Ed. Linda Wagner-Martin. East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 2002. 199-210.) and Norman Jones’ “Coming Out Through History’s Hidden Love Letters in Absalom, Absalom!” (American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography 76.2 (June 2004): 339-366.).

takes as its satirical object an electoral campaign in a small town in a pandemically corrupt Colombia.

Furthermore, the narrative modes are contrasting. Mi hermano el alcalde is narrated entirely in the first person, in the form of a dialogue with a foreigner, who listens to the narrator discuss his past, and the electoral campaign in which his brother, Carlos, runs for mayor. Absalom, Absalom! has four narrators –Miss Rosa, Mr. Compson, who is Quentin’s father, Quentin, and Shreve, who is Quentin’s roommate– who all struggle to make sense out of a series of events that happened 43 years prior.

The purpose of this study, however, is not to establish a connection of influence, or even to talk about similar reactions to a similar event, but to articulate a mechanism at the heart of these two texts by which they construct narrative. The system that I have found to be at work, and that is not inherently privileging of either text, is the Archive. By Archive I do not mean a library of sorts, or, on the other extreme, a discursive mode in which the past, or what can be said about it, is created. By Archive I mean a multifaceted dynamic of people, places, and things that realize the presence of the past, and its narratibility, in the present. But the Archive is also a collection of the past that does not privilege in that it does not order. The wealth of criticism on Faulkner and Latin America is an attempt to make sense of commonalities of literary technique, historical circumstances, and things said by people on any side of the many imaginary lines striating the Americas. It is my desire to put this ordering of the Archive –similar to Faulkner’s “rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking” (243) from which historical narratives are created- aside in order to discuss a system in which the texts are linked by a way of telling, and not by how they are talked about. In other words, the level at which I

will discuss the Archive is not the texts participation in the “real world” economy of books, writers, and audiences, but at the level of the texts themselves.

I have said that the Archive is not inherently privileging of any one text. Though his Archive is somewhat different than the Archive I will define here, Foucault warns that one cannot describe their own Archive, because it is from within their Archive that they speak (146). Though the Archive is necessarily a collection of documents, an arkhon is responsible for organizing and interpreting these documents, and is entirely capable of privileging any grouping, categorization, or order that he or she desires. In outlining the Archive at work in these novels, I, an arkhon of sorts, am speaking out of my own Archive, fabricating an order, an interconnectedness of the texts, and an interpretation where there originally was none stated (though I, of course, hope that my fabrication touches on each texts’ essence). I have wrestled with privileging one author over the other, and sought, to the extent that I am able, to treat Faulkner and Vallejo evenhandedly.

As will become clear, I am especially indebted to Derrida, Foucault, and González-Echevarría in my discussion and definition of the Archive. However, it will also be clear that I have both defined and substantiated an Archive different from any of their particular Archives, and that is more than an amalgamation of the three.

“Archive” comes to English, via old French, from the Latin archivum from the Greek arkheion, a government house in which records are stored, from arkhe, government or rule. These government houses were presided over by an arkhon, who both collected and interpreted the documents, the arkheia contained therein. The function of the Archive, the security of memory and its interpretation, can thus be seen as a

dynamic involving these elements –the arkheion as the place of the Archive, the arkhon as the interpretive authority of the Archive, and the arkheia as the document of the Archive. As I will discuss more in depth, the Archive also participates in a temporal layering that is the central mechanism exposing it to narration. This thesis essays a discussion of the presence of these two elements of the Archive present in the texts themselves. In the chapter that follows I will trace the dynamic of the Archive as troped in Faulkner’s and Vallejo’s novels, and, in chapter three I will discuss the system of narrativization taking place in these novels as it relates to archivization.

## Chapter II:

### Tracing the Archive

Before examining Absalom, Absalom!'s and Mi hermano el alcalde's response to and use of the Archive in the creation of narrative, the tropes of the Archive's presence must be outlined in the texts themselves. The tropes belong to two orders, although by order I do not mean to indicate hierarchy, but rather interdependence. In the first order, there are tropes of the physical Archive: its tangible representation in the novels, its place, the documents that it contains, and the people that interact with it. However, the facile presence-absence binary must be questioned: the Archive in these fictions is often the presence of what is not there in the first order. This aporia applies to the relationship between the first- and second-order tropes. In the second order there are the caesuras in the Archive, its voids and gaps, what is missing—discarded, destroyed, and even hidden—from it. I will argue in chapter three that this gap is the elusive pith and core of these texts' construction. In the discussion that follows I hope to trace the Archive in these two texts as both a shadowy presence and a pronounced absence.

I will use the etymology of the word “archive” that I have discussed in the introduction to organize my analysis focusing on the arkhon, the arkheion, and the arkheia. In doing so, I do not mean to project a fragmented picture of the Archive; the Archive is a system of interdependent parts, and I will attempt to present it as an organic dynamic.

As Derrida hints in the opening line of Archive Fever, “Let us not begin at the beginning, nor even at the archive” (1), there is no way to begin at the beginning of the Archive. The interdependency of the Archive’s various parts is such that it seems to be seamless. Here I have chosen to begin my discussion of the Archive with the arkhon, though not because the arkhon is the founding element of the Archive, but because it offers a concrete point of departure for a discussion of its role in the Archive and its relation to the arkheion and the arkheia.

The Archive is always policed by an arkhon, an authority that organizes and culls (which, said negatively, would be “obliterates and elides”) the documents in the Archive, and that otherwise makes the Archive presentable and understandable. The figure of the arkhon could likely be divided amongst several characters in Absalom, Absalom! and Mi hermano el alcalde, but I will focus on Quentin in Absalom, Absalom! and on the unnamed narrator of Mi hermano el alcalde. While there are several people who authoritatively tell the story in Absalom, Absalom!, my discussion will ultimately focus on Quentin’s final narration of the story. Both narrators also present a problem in that they resort often to telling their stories in the voice of other characters, but I will argue in the section on the arkheion and the arkheia that this practice is a function of the document being archived, and in no way compromises the integrity of the arkhon.

Like the chief magistrates in ancient Athens, Quentin and Mi hermano el alcalde’s narrator are authorities. Though they do not preside over the law in these two novels as the original arkhons did, they are called upon as guides who make sense of the Archive to those unfamiliar with its documents and organization. Although they both claim



disinterest, I contend that they are not unbiased archivists, but that they are hiding something from their interlocutors and the reader.

Mi hermano el alcalde takes the form of a conversation between the unnamed narrator and a foreigner as they travel to Támesis, a town “[perdido] en las montañas de Antioquia” (“[lost] in the mountains of Antioquia”) (7). The narrator serves, in part, as an interpreter of Colombian parlance, telling the otherwise linguistically capable foreigner that a “vereda” is a collection of country homes (13), that a “pico” is a kiss (17), that “mozo” means lover (29), etc. He gives the foreigner the keys to the discourse that surrounds him, while at the same time establishing the primacy of the past, as demonstrated in his explanation of the meaning of “provocar”: “‘Provoca’ allá quiere decir ‘se le antoja’. Allá todo lo cambiamos y lo que está bien lo dañamos...” (“Provocar” [to provoke] there means ‘to crave.’ There we change everything and we mess up what’s fine...”) (123).

The narrator is also an interpreter of Colombian history and culture, and, despite his claims otherwise – “yo soy cronista imparcial” (“I am an unbiased chronicler”) (29) – he has a definitive objective in the information he presents about his country. As already discussed, this novel’s plot revolves around the narrator’s assessment of Colombia’s political corruption in all its multifariousness: the government’s acquiescence to the guerrilla and Tirofijo, leader of the paramilitary group FARC-EP (22,73), the cultivation of coca, which is the plant from which cocaine is produced (94-95), the corruption involved in harvesting coffee (84-85), the corruption of the electoral process (the dead vote in Colombia (48)), among many others. As a counterpoint to Colombia’s endemic corruption the narrator presents an idyllic, Arcadian past that he invests with nostalgia, a

past haunted by his grandparents. For instance, he recounts his asking his grandmother, “Abuelita, ¿qué me dejaste de herencia?” (“Grandma, what did you leave me for my inheritance?”) to which she responds, “Nada, m’hijo, honradez” (“Nothing, child, uprightness”) (134). Like language (the discussion of “provocar” above), everything is getting worse for the narrator, to the extent that he exiles himself to Mexico (163).

Though he is the expert, he is largely untrustworthy, and his narration is saturated with omission (118), understatement (48) and exaggeration (157). The Archive, by its nature, is concerned with objects from the past, and given the supremacy that the arkhon bestows on these objects, his concern with presenting them as superior to the present casts certain doubts on his disinterestedness. If Támesis is “alegre y parrandero” (“merry and raucous”) (7), and La Cascada is heaven on earth (176), why leave, and why end the novel with a paroxysmal “¡Se la vendo!” (“I’ll sell it [the finca] to you!” (176))? It is important to note here that there is an agent, the arkhon, who is hiding something from both his interlocutor and the reader, or that there is a gap, an obstructing figure guarding the Archive.

Quentin, too, is called upon to represent his culture, the South that had seceded from the Union and then lost the Civil War 50 years before. Like Mi hermano el alcalde’s narrator, Quentin chooses exile to remaining in the South, to which he will not return, as Miss Rosa laments, “[since] Northern people have already seen to it that there is little left in the South for a young man” (5). He moves to the North to go to Harvard, where he is seen as something of an oddity. His Northern classmates barrage him with questions about the South that sound more like accusations, given the absence of interrogative punctuation: “*Tell about the South. What’s it like there. What do they do*

*there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all*" (142). Quentin is more than willing to indulge them, and, as Shreve suggests, he may even resort to embellishment; he invests the Ante Bellum South with a nostalgia for the chivalric ideal that had once prevailed there and had since been lost. When they begin to retell Sutpen's story, Quentin must periodically correct Shreve that it is not "Aunt Rosa" but "Miss Rosa," to which Shreve replies, "You mean she was no kin to you, no kin to you at all, that there was actually one Southern Bayard or Guinevere who was no kin to you?" (142). As their dialogue continues, he continues, sarcastically, "Jesus, the South is fine, isn't it. It's better than the theatre, isn't it. It's better than Ben Hur, isn't it. No wonder you have to come away now and then, isn't it" (176). In likening Quentin's storytelling to mythology – Arthurian legend and Ben Hur, which would have most likely been known to Quentin and Shreve through Union General Lew Wallace's 1880 novel, Ben Hur: A Tale of the Christ – Shreve is showing that he does not believe in the mythic portrait Quentin is trying to paint of the old South. Shreve, in fact, suggests the contrary, asking Quentin, "Why do you hate the South?," to which Quentin replies, "*I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!*" (303). This paroxysmal and somewhat pathetic attempt to convince himself that he does not hate his birthplace sheds new light on the reliability of his mythologizing the South and his reasons for going to study in the North. Quentin, like the narrator of Mi hermano el alcalde, is a creator of gaps.

That Quentin and Mi hermano el alcalde's narrator are essentially unreliable narrators is only part of a system of narrativization that is taking place. While they may possess the authority to direct interpretation and organization of the Archive's documents, the documents, in turn, affect the arkhons, as will be discussed. That the

documents affect the arkhons is even more pronounced by the fact that the arkhons preside over the Archive in absentia; they were not present for the events they are narrating, but instead rely on the events' documentation. In telling their stories these arkhons are only part of the Archive, its most visible element, possibly, but only a part nonetheless. In the next section I will consider the fact that an arkhon must have an archive to regulate, and I will examine that Archive as place.

Within the word "archive" itself there is the idea of a place: the arkheion. The arkheion looms large in both Absalom, Absalom! and Mi hermano el alcalde in the figure of the home, which most directly transposes the original function of the archive as the magisterial residence where documents were stored. It will be important to discuss the home not just in terms of a place, a stage for the Archive, but also a space outside of the physical/temporal imperatives of place. There must be, also, a certain amount of fungibility in the delineation of the arkheion due to the nature of the documents it contains. These records are not public in the strictest sense in that an arkhon, which has been discussed, limits their accessibility and guards their interpretation, nor are they necessarily written. The document that requires this play in our thinking of "place" is the oral. While orality's nature is such that it cannot be archived in the physical sense, and, because of this, is easily modified in its transmission from interlocutor to interlocutor, neither author lets the reader think of orality as something that originates in the speaker. Orality is, as I will show, something from without that is archived within the communicating body.

Absalom, Absalom! does not begin at the beginning of the tale of Sutpen, but in the Archive. The novel opens with Quentin's sitting in Miss Rosa's home listening to her

recounting the events that transpired 43 years ago. Miss Rosa and her “grim haggard amazed voice” (3) will figure prominently later, but my interest now is in the home where the telling is taking place and, in reality, all homes where telling takes place in Absalom, Absalom! and Mi hermano el alcalde. Gaston Bachelard writes in The Poetics of Space that “thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are stored” (8). He calls topoanalysis the psychological study of intimate sites, or the spaces in which we are able to recognize ourselves. He argues that it is not time in which a being recognizes itself, but in “a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being’s stability – a being who does not want to melt away, and who, even in the past, when he sets out in search of things past, wants time to “suspend” its flight. In its countless alveoli space contains compressed time” (8). This capacity of the home to contain time is the mechanism that is at work in the homes in Absalom, Absalom! and Mi hermano el alcalde. The arkheion are not seamless, however. The Archive as a place is an interior meant to mirror the exterior. The arkheions of ancient Greece guarded and interpreted the written representation of the law, of how things were supposed to, but could not be guaranteed to, exist outside. The arkheion in these novels contains a data set that, like the law, does not necessarily mirror what exists on the outside.

The narration of Absalom, Absalom! begins in Miss Rosa’s house, in “a dim hot airless room with the blinds all closed and fastened for forty-three summers” (3), a house “whose air was even hotter than outside, as if there were prisoned in it like in a tomb all the suspiration of slow heat-laden time which had recurred during the forty-three years” (6), and in which the light appeared in “yellow slashes full of dust motes” (3). The significance of the 43 years –the amount of time that has passed since Sutpen indecently

proposed to Miss Rosa that, if she produced a male heir for him, then he would marry her— is that nothing has happened in them. Outraged 43 years ago, Miss Rosa returned to her childhood home, described as “an overpopulated mausoleum” (144), and ceased to live, or at least ceased to live among the living, as she evidences when she says, “my life was destined to end on an afternoon in April forty-three years ago” (12). She instead recalcitrantly closed off her home like a hermetically sealed vault in order to ruminate and brood over the events of the past, allowing nothing new to enter and nothing old to escape. Her home becomes a place of telling where her visitors become prisoners to her endless talking about the past. Thus, one of the primary functions of the Archive is presented to the reader: the home is not a passive witness to what occurs in and around it, but, like an Archive, it collects, and what it collects, the dead, come to bear on the present. The Archive’s dynamism, however, prevails, and refuses to be completely stagnated: light enters her home, revealing an open system (3).

This same function is also presented later in the novel when Quentin and Shreve are in their dormitory completing the story of Sutpen. Informed of Miss Rosa’s death, they begin to fill in the gaps of the story (which will be discussed in chapter three) in their room, which is described as “tombl-like,” and so cold as to have “a quality stale and static and moribund beyond any mere vivid and living cold” (275). Whereas in Miss Rosa’s home it is heat that characterizes the Archive, here it is the cold. The function however, is the same: it seems that within the Archive, among its documents, the past is frozen and presented in a single, static moment. At the heart of narrative —of Miss Rosa’s and Quentin and Shreve’s narration— is a static data set sealed in the physical space of the Archive, one incapable of mirroring the outside.

Out of the accumulation of the “heat-laden time” and motes of dust suspended in it, in the stale and static presence of the past, the Archive manifests this past and sets the stage for their appearance. One of the most common metaphors used to express the appearance of the past within the Archive is that of a developing photograph<sup>3</sup>:

Quentin seemed to see [the Sutpens], the four of them arranged into the conventional family group of the period, with formal and lifeless decorum, and seen now as the fading and ancient photograph itself would have been seen enlarged and hung on the wall” (9).

Walter Benjamin comments that the daguerreotype, a plate-based photograph like the collodion photograph (see footnote 3), permitted, for the first time, a “touch of the finger” to “fix an event for an unlimited period of time” (“Some motifs in Baudelaire,” 175), and to present something that “even now is still real and will never consent to be wholly absorbed in ‘art’” (“Little History of Photography,” 510). In these portrait photographs Benjamin finds that “[for] the last time the aura emanates from the photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face” (“The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproduction,” 226), or that the subject of these photographs somehow lives on. Thus the daguerreotype is an apt metaphor for the archivization that is taking place in Absalom, Absalom! Within the space of the Archive, the past is not just collected, but is available to be perused and interacts with the present that it now inhabits. Here the home does not serve a simple mnemonic function; the rooms of the house do not simply serve as reminders, like a monument or tombstone, which cannot bear memory because a

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<sup>3</sup> A modern, gelatin emulsion photograph, though plausible, would be slightly anachronistic with the novel’s late 19<sup>th</sup> century setting. The photograph most known at this time was the collodion photograph, a plate-based photography. Faulkner alludes to this when, using a developing picture as a metaphor, says, “he (Bon) would be talking now, lazily, almost cryptically, stroking onto the plate himself now the picture which he wanted there” (88). Plates are not used in today’s gelatin emulsion photography.

“block of stone cant<sup>4</sup> be *is* because it never can become *was* because it cant die or perish” (101); they are instead the containers of a past that can be conjured.

Mi hermano el alcalde does not begin at the beginning, either; instead the narrative begins en route to the home that serves as a physical place of the Archive, the finca, La Cascada. The novel takes the form of a dialogue between a gringo and a Colombian, dominated by the latter, in which the Colombian eulogizes La Cascada, his father’s childhood home. It is not until later that the reader discovers that the home is haunted by the same stasis that haunts the homes of Absalom, Absalom! The narrator describes that in his first encounter with the home he was able to guess that it was the house where his father was born without his father’s having to tell him. Already there is the suggestion of the archiving function of the home, of the archiving of a genealogy that permits access to the Archive. The reader quickly discovers just how uncanny this home is; the narrator describes it as “polvosa y misteriosa” (“dusty and mysterious”), and guarded by an equally mysterious woman who dissipates “como la Muerte misma” (“like Death itself”) (79) when she finds out his identity, that it was his father’s home. What they –this particular use of the first-person plural is not qualified, but it is assumed that it is the narrator and members of his family- found upon entering was a house full of “polvo de medio siglo si no es que de más” (“half a century’s dust, if not more”) (79). The dust, like in Absalom, Absalom!, especially given the metaphoric use of time –“medio siglo”– to stand in for quantity, is indicative of the collective function of the home: it is hoarding the passage of time. The river that runs beside the home, the Támesis, and whose cascades are La Cascada’s (The Cascade) namesake, mirrors this function. The narrator

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<sup>4</sup> Faulkner did not use the apostrophe to indicate contractions, thus “can’t” is rendered “cant,” “don’t” is “dont,” etc.



says that the Támesis, “se me hace triste y monótono, lento, fatigado, sin ganas de vivir, como si arrastrara por la inercia de las edades sus cansadas aguas” (“seems sad and repetitive to me, slow, fatigued, without the will to live, as if its tired waters were dragging from the inertia of time”) (8).

Out of the accumulation of the past, the home also makes it manifest. The narrator recounts the vertigo that he feels as “el ciclón del tiempo empezó a girar, lento, lento, lento” (“the cyclone of time began to turn, slowly, slowly, slowly”) (79), as he views the house, and then of conjuring his grandmother, “Carmen Rosa Álvarez, te quiero conocer” (“Carmen Rosa Álvarez, I want to meet you”), but, he continues, “ella se soltó a llorar porque estaba muerta...” (“she began to cry because she was dead...”) (80). A noteworthy detail of this part of the story is that he wanted to meet her because he never had; he had seen her in only a single photograph. Thus, her identity as a specter is intractably linked to her photograph, as evidenced when the narrator says that she was, “mi abuela... la misma de la foto” (“my grandmother... the one from the photo” (80), a photograph that he describes as “vieja, desvaída, amarillenta” (“old, discolored, yellowed”) (80). The house as Archive permits a haunting, a presence of the past that cannot be captured in a photograph, but that simultaneously is like a photograph come to life, a tangible past revenant.

Without these homes to archive memory, oblivion takes hold. Another finca, La Batea, “estaba construida... sobre un abismo” (“was constructed... over an abyss”) (106), and was struck by a bus full of passengers and demolished before the bus itself fell into the abyss, killing all the passengers who, the narrator quips, “no salieron... ni en foto en El Colombiano” (“did not appear... not even in a photo in El Colombiano,” El

Colombiano is a Colombian newspaper from Antioquia) (106). In La Batea's place, Memo, Carlos' lover, constructed another finca, Las Ánimas (which literally means "The Spirits," but whose broader definition includes the souls of those who have died and are in purgatory), which is immediately haunted by the dead passengers, pleading for Memo to "sacarnos de penar" ("get us out of Purgatory") (107). Again, the home as Archive collects even that which goes unnamed and is immediately forgotten -- the souls in Purgatory whose epitaphs, and thus lives, would not even appear in a newspaper -- and it also follows that with the disappearance of the physical space of the Archive oblivion is able to take hold, and with the appearance of the new arkheion, Las Ánimas, their testimony is reinstated. At the end of the novel, however, when the narrator is mourning the loss of all his loved ones (in a list that seems inclusive of all of them), he includes, at the end of his list, as if to identify that even what was archived of them is gone, "La Batea y La Floresta están en ruinas... Ni las ánimas se arriman por allí" ("La Batea and La Floresta are in ruins... Not even spirits go near there") (166). Since the physical place once haunted by these spirits is missing, the testimony the Archive gives of them is entirely nominal, and the disjuncture between interior, the reality the Archive expresses, and exterior, reality as it really exists, is maintained.

Homes are not the only places for ghosts; the body is also a worthy candidate for a haunting. There are many ways that the body archives the past, but, before proceeding to a discussion of the arkheia, the documents that it archives in Mi hermano el alcalde and Absalom, Absalom!, the mechanism by which the body archives will be considered.

Memory, as Benedictus de Spinoza defines it, is "simply a certain interconnection of ideas which involve the nature of things which are outside the human body, and which

occurs in the mind in accordance with the order and interconnection of the affections of the human body” (134). Opposing Cartesian duality in this way, Spinoza affirms that memory is necessarily the same thing as sense perception, or that “the idea of any mode, by which the human body is affected by external bodies, must involve the nature of the human body and at the same time the nature of the external body” (131). In considering the human body as an archive, we will see that its archiving depends less on mental faculty than on the body’s own ability to perceive. Rather than a closed system that guarantees an immunity to loss or gain, the body is a system that is governed by an economy that renders the distinction between internal and external impossible to discern. It is this openness that will be focused on in chapter three, but it is important to understand here that there is a fluidity between self and other (as object) that allows for the involuntary archival of the object within the self.

Faulkner has Quentin’s father declare that the body’s archiving in Absalom, Absalom! is not mnemonic, in fact, “there is no such thing as memory: the brain recalls just what the muscles grope for: no more, no less” (115). This archiving function of the body is likened to a person asleep whose hand grazes across a candle, and, not waking, recoils from the flame, turning their pain into “some trashy myth of reality’s escape” (115) within their dream. The illusions created from this function will be discussed in the next chapter, but it is important to consider that experience is registered on the body in a way that cannot be escaped; the body is, in many respects, the envelope containing the sum of experience (54). Miss Rosa’s experience, for instance, is inscribed on her very body in that it is described as the “female old flesh long embattled in virginity” (4), and again the “lonely thwarted old female flesh embattled for forty-three years in the old

pursuit” (9). Her body –the “old female flesh”– is intractably linked to her experience 43 years ago, and presents itself as a site for haunting. At the beginning of the novel, as Quentin listens to Miss Rosa as she sits in the “too tall chair in which she resembled a crucified child” (4), he notes that her voice vanishes and a ghost –the figure of Sutpen– “mused with shadowy docility as if it were the voice he haunted where a more fortunate one would have had a house” (4). Thus her body serves as a container for her own past and her own ghosts, and makes them manifest in her voice.

The body in Faulkner does not only register experience that happens to it, but also the experience it inherits. Quentin, who says that he is “older at twenty than a lot of people who have died” (301), is also called “an entity... a commonwealth... a barracks filled with stubborn, back-looking ghosts still recovering” (7) from the South’s defeat in the Civil War. He is, in many respects, a body haunted by the ghosts manifested through orality, through the stories passed down that will be prominent in the discussion of the arkheia. The result of this inheritance is a loss of subjectivity. In the final narration, as Quentin and Shreve sit in their dorm room finishing the Sutpen story, discussing Henry’s and Charles’ participation in the Civil War, Faulkner writes that there were “First, two of them, then four; now two again” (275). In telling their story, they become a part of it, to the point that they lose themselves in the telling.

Vallejo is less explicit in his treatment of the body. As opposed to telling about the body as archive, he demonstrates it in the figure of the narrator. The narrator at one point says, “...¿cuánto hacía que papi había muerto! ¿Tres años? ¿Cuatro años? ¿Cinco años? No sé, yo no llevo la cuenta. Los muertos no llevamos cuenta de los muertos” (“... how long it had been since dad had died! Three years? Four years? Five years? I don’t

know; I don't keep count. Us dead don't keep count of the dead") (133). In considering himself dead, his body becomes a site for the return of the past. Like Quentin, he is a barracks of ghosts, a container for stories and experiences that is evidenced in the spontaneous switching of narrative voices and the subsequent muddled subjectivity that occurs in the novel. For instance, in describing several judicial procedures that his brother Carlos had to go through, an unknown person says, "Volvenos a contar, Carlos, la tutela que te pusieron los del Río Claro para cagarnos otra vez de risa" ("Carlos, tell us again about the tutela from the people from Río Claro so we can laugh our asses off again") (94).<sup>5</sup> Then, without interruption, the narrator (who is not Carlos) continues, "Hombre, nada del otro mundo..." ("No man, it was nothing extraordinary") (94), and he tells Carlos' story as if he were Carlos. These elisions are not relegated to people from the past; the confused subjectivity extends even to animals, especially to the narrator's beloved green parrots, to which he says at one point, "¡Y arranquen, loros, que vamos al megacierre de campaña de Carlos en la plaza!" ("Take off, parrots, because we're going to the closing<sup>6</sup> ceremony of Carlos' campaign in the plaza!") (56), which he follows with, "Y ahí vamos en bandada los loros partiendo de La Pintada a Támesis..." ("And there we

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<sup>5</sup> From acción de tutela which, loosely translated, is writ of protection. The acción de tutela stipulates that "Toda persona tendrá acción de tutela para reclamar ante los jueces, en todo momento y lugar, mediante un procedimiento preferente y sumario, por sí misma o por quien actúe a su nombre, la protección inmediata de sus derechos constitucionales fundamentales, cuando quiera que éstos resulten vulnerados o amenazados por la acción o la omisión de cualquier autoridad pública" ("All people will have acción de tutela to claim before the judges in any moment and place, by means of a preferential and timely procedure, for him or herself or for whosoever acts in his or her name, the immediate protection of his or her fundamental constitutional rights, whenever these rights are threatened or jeopardized by willful act or omission by any public authority" (Constitución colombiana, Artículo 86, 22).

<sup>6</sup> Vallejo uses "megacierre," which would be closer to a "mega-closing," or "super-closing." He is invoking the exaggeration of radio announcers and advertisements.

go, us parrots in a flock, from La Pintada to Támesis”) (56). Parrots are an interesting trope of the Archive in their own right. By their nature they are recorders, and, once taught a collection of phrases, such as “¡Tirofijo, hijueputa!” (“Tirofijo, son of a bitch!”) (22), they can repeat them unsolicited and uncoached. In an extreme example of Spinoza’s ideas on the body, the parrots register events and play them back without the (apparent) mental faculty to interpret them. A parrot can be trained to say a number of things with a great deal of coaching at first. But the parrot will eventually begin to make utterances without any need for a human to persuade them. For Vallejo they seem to be an automaton that assures memory both in its recording and in its endless playback.

Mi hermano el alcalde’s narrator is nearly unlocalizable amidst the ghosts of the past –Carlos- and the figures of national nostalgia –the parrots- that he has archived and that are made manifest in him. These elements that make the localization of the narrator so difficult are the documents that he archives, which will be discussed in the next section.

Within these two manifestations of the physical archive there are several types of documents. These documents, as discussed before, are not necessarily the dusty leather bound tomes that one thinks of when one thinks of an archive; by including the body as a manifestation of the physical Archive in Absalom, Absalom! and Mi hermano el alcalde, I have necessarily extended the idea of the document to include orality.

The letter is one of the most common documents in Absalom, Absalom!’s Archive. Upon giving Quentin a letter written by Charles Bon to Judith Sutpen, Mr. Compson says,

we exhume from old trunks and boxes and drawers letters without salutation or signature, in which men and women who once lived and

breathed are now merely initials or nicknames out of some now incomprehensible affection which sound to us like Sanskrit or Chocktaw; we see dimly people, the people in whose living blood and seed we ourselves lay dormant and waiting (80).

These letters always take the appearance of something undatably old, written in an archaic dialect by seemingly anonymous figures that vaguely appear as predecessor and origin. These letters serve as proof of genealogy: the town of Jefferson laments time and time again that Sutpen “had no past,” and that he only married Ellen because he wanted the “two names, the stainless wife and the unimpeachable father-in-law, on the license, the patent” (39). To be legitimate in the South, one needs documentation. The letters also serve, better than a monument, to attest to the existence of the writer. Though this fades, and the writers are dim figures, their existence is proved by the letter.

Included among the letters in the Archive are the “old mouth-to-mouth tales” (80) that are passed down, the “acts of simple passion and simple violence,” that, like the letters, are “impervious to time and inexplicable” (80). The novel is built around “a day of listening” (23): Quentin listening to Miss Rosa and his father talk about Sutpen. This is, in fact, what Quentin means when he says he is a “barracks filled with back-looking ghosts” (7); he has spent his whole life “listening, having to listen to one of the ghosts which had refused to lie still even longer than most had, telling him about old ghost times” (4); he is “still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost but nevertheless having to be one for all that, since he was born and bred in the deep South” (4). He is so haunted by these stories that he says, “*I am listening to it all over again I shall have to never listen to anything else but this again forever*” (222). These stories told come to be his identity and even his own subjectivity is confused with the persons in the stories he listens to and the stories he tells. What for Shreve is a game – “Let me play [tell the story] a while now”

(224)– is for Quentin a loss of autonomy: when he realizes he and Shreve are telling the same story his father tried to tell he says, “*Maybe we are both Father. Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished*” (210).

The Archive is also constructed around the exchange of letters, two in fact, one originally from Charles Bon to Judith Sutpen, and the other from Quentin’s father to Quentin in Harvard, informing him of Rosa’s death. The first letter resembles those already discussed, old and desiccated, as though it were “the intact ash of its former shape and substance” (102). The letter was given to Quentin’s grandmother (and then to his father and then to him) by Judith because, she says,

maybe if you could go to someone, the stranger the better, and give them something –a scrap of paper– something, anything, it not to mean anything in itself and them not even to read it or keep it, not even bother to throw it away or destroy it, at least it would be something just because it would have happened, be remembered even if only from passing from one hand to another, one mind to another, and it would be at least a scratch (101).

This is the letter’s power; it attests to the existence of its writer, though that person is seen dimly. The second letter<sup>7</sup> also presents this function. When Quentin receives the news of Miss Rosa’s death, and begins reading it, he “sat quite still, facing the table, his hands lying on either side of the open text book on which the letter rested... lying at such an angle that he could not have possibly read it, deciphered it” (176). The letter lying in the open book suggests its archivization, its acceptance into the Archive. What is important about the letter is not the actual information it presents, but its presence, its testimony that serves in the creation of narrative that will be addressed in chapter three.

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of this letter as a method of how to read the novel itself, see David Krause’s “Opening Pandora’s Box: Re-reading Compson’s Letter and Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*” (*William Faulkner: Six Decades of Criticism*. Ed. Linda Wagner Martin. East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 2002. 271-292).



This letter, like the one by Charles Bon, is a “fragile pandora’s box of scrawled paper” that “[fills] with violent and unratiocinative djinns and demons [the] snug monastic coign, this dreamy and heatless alcove” (208) that is their dorm room. Letters are not to be read, they are to be archived.

Like in Absalom, Absalom!, the oral discourse archived by the narrator is dated in Mi hermano el alcalde. The narrator’s brother Carlos is often remembered for the nature of his discourse, “¡Y ese latín ciceroniano en que se expresa cuando se presenta la ocasión! No bien lo eligieron se pronunció desde el púlpito de la iglesia parroquial de Támesis, con la bendición del padre Sánchez, una homilía que empezaba...” (And that Ciceronian Latin that he uses when the occasion arises! They had just elected him when he gave, from the pulpit of the parochial church of Támesis, with Father Sánchez’s blessing, a homily that began...)” (37) and the narrator transcribes a portion of the homily.<sup>8</sup> This oral, corporeal archiving is deeply rooted in the feelings of nostalgia that the narrator projects on the past, particularly in regards to Latin Mass. He laments, “Todo cambia. Ya no hay misa en latín, se celebra en vernáculo” (“Everything changes. There isn’t Latin Mass anymore, it’s done in the vernacular” (13). Carlos’ Latin imposes temporal distance on the events being narrated from their narration, making the intersection of the past and the present unimaginable: “Carlos, ¿Cómo se dice “internet” en latín?... ¿Es posible traducir una palabra viva a una lengua muerta?” (“Carlos, how do

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<sup>8</sup> Carlos’ “homily” is relegated mostly to vituperation. I will reproduce a part here that would most likely be, in part, intelligible to Spanish-speakers because of the presence of cognates and its relation to Latin Mass: “*Gratia vobis et pax a Deo Patre nostro, populus tamesinus, latro, sceleratus, sicarius*” (“Grace to you and peace from God our Father, citizens of Támesis, thieves, bloodguilty, murderers”) (37).

you say “internet” in Latin?... Can you translate a living word into a dead language?”) (120).

It is also in the narrator’s discussion of Latin that the reader first learns that the narrator was not present during the events he is describing, as discussed above. Instead, “Gloria grabó la homilía y me la mandó en un casete. Por ahí ha de andar, traspapelada entre tanto documento” (“Gloria recorded the homily and sent it to me on a cassette. It’s around somewhere, misplaced amongst so many documents”) (37). This sets the stage for the rest of the documents; in general, what is archived in Mi hermano el alcalde is the correspondence between the narrator’s family in Colombia and the narrator in Mexico. All the concrete materials that he is constructing his narrative around are recorded telephone conversations –“Esperá un momento, que voy por la grabadora” (“Wait a minute, I’m getting the recorder”) (157), photographs –“Quedan fotos” (“There are photos”) (68, 80), and web pages –“Yo no lo oí, pero lo leí en Internet en el boletín de Támesis” (“I didn’t hear it, but I read it; I read it on the Internet on Támesis’ news bulletin”) (111). The documents are detached from reality and situated within the past, and thus, according to the narrator, better than the present in which the narration occurs. When recounting the episode when Carlos brings the internet to Támesis the narrator comments, “Y no bien los niños aprendían a conectarse al Internet, ¿qué creen que es lo primero que buscaban? ¡La página web de Támesis!” (“And when the children had barely learned to connect to the Internet, what do you think they looked for first? Támesis’ web page!”) (115), which he follows with, “La realidad deja siempre mucho que desear, las cosas se ven mejor en Internet” (“Reality is always lacking, everything looks better on the Internet”) (115). Petitions by the (real or imagined) interlocutors in the novel for

information about Támesis are met with suggestions that they “Búsquelo en Yahoo en la página web que abrió mi hermano catapultando a Támesis en la era de la informática. Busque Támesis, Antioquia” (“Look for it on Yahoo in the web page that my brother opened, launching Támesis into the information age. Look for Támesis, Antioquia” (21). The narrative, the entire story of Mi hermano el alcalde is constructed, like Absalom, Absalom!, around the exchange of documents that give information about events that the narrators themselves have not witnessed, here facilitated by the Internet.

Death, as Roberto González-Echevarría says in Myth and Archive, is at the Archive’s origin, and its structuring is imbued with it (28). Death stands in for the foundation of the Archive, “a trope for interdiction” (185) and the creativity that is needed to overcome this gap, in this case by means of narration. This overcoming can be likened to a haunting; the gap left by the lost object’s death (be it figurative or literal) becomes a hole that can be filled, an ever-present absence that will never go away.

This death-as-gap is also at the core of both of these texts. The letter that Quentin’s father writes to him informing him of Rosa’s death sparks the dialogue between Quentin and Shreve that “completes” Sutpen’s story (141). Mi hermano el alcalde’s narrator comments, “Ya Carlos no está. Ni Memo. ¡Cuánto hace que murieron! Este libro no habría sido posible sin la muerte de ellos” (“Carlos isn’t with us anymore. Neither is Memo. How long it has been since they died! This book wouldn’t have been possible without their deaths”) (120). The narrative that is being read, the illusion that the arkhons are creating in these two novels is the product of an absence that is present on many levels. On the surface level there is the absence created by death, by the decay and eventual demise of the physical elements of the archive –Miss Rosa, the Sutpens,

Sutpen's Hundred, Carlos, Memo, the fincas– used in the narration. In this death, the arkhons find the legitimacy of their discourse and the ability to tell the story. In the chapter that follows, I will discuss the gap in the Archive, and how it interacts with the arkhon, the arkheion, and the arkheia in the production of the illusion of completeness, the presentation of the Archive as a unity. In this chapter I have presented the Archive as troped in these two novels, and I have also problematized its representation: Quentin and Mi hermano el alcalde's narrator are unreliable; the Archive as place is incapable of mirroring reality; the Archive's documents are often not important as fact, and are part of an incomplete whole; the narrators' absence from the events they are narrating. In the next chapter, I will discuss this negative core of the Archive, the gaps in its structuring, as they relate to the production of narrative.

### Chapter III:

#### Gap and Narrative

As I have shown in the previous chapter, the Archive is a dynamic involving many interdependent pieces that is represented in these two novels, and not simply a discursive device, or a way of talking about the past. From what has been said about the Archive here, however, it would seem that the past, at least, is the focus: an arkhon broods over the arkheia, the documents of the past contained in the Archive, which is also a physical place that captures time and freezes it. Derrida, however, suggests another feature that characterizes the Archive in Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression, a description that has not received much attention in critical theory, but that challenges the general conception of the Archive: “the word and the notion of the archive seem at first, admittedly, to point toward the past” (33), but the reality of the Archive

is not the question of a concept dealing with the past that might *already* be at our disposal or not at our disposal, *an archivable concept of the archive*. It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow (36).

Derrida’s Archive is not backward looking, but forward-looking in that it is constantly open to being extended.<sup>9</sup> He continues, saying, “There is no meta-archive”

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<sup>9</sup> By no means does this contradict what I discussed in the previous chapter about the function of the arkheion as being that which collects and contains the past. In the example I used, Miss Rosa’s house, the Archive appears to be closed by the will of the arkhon, Miss Rosa. She is, however, articulating the past in the present. Despite her

(67), but that the Archive incorporates everything “deployed in reference to it” (68). The work of the archivist “produces more archive” (68), so the characterizing feature of the Archive becomes its openness to the future, and not its concern with the past. What seems to be relegated to a dusty, ageless past is in reality a vertiginous intersection of the past (the Archive’s documents) and the present (the work of the archivist) that extends indefinitely, like Borges’ library of Babel, into the future.<sup>10</sup>

The intersection of past, present, and future is illuminated by one of Benjamin’s observations in the second thesis of his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” “The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one” (254). Benjamin continues that the present is gifted with a messianic power – a redemptive power – to which the past is entitled (254). Like Benjamin, Derrida sees messianicity in the recording of the past, or that “a spectral messianicity is at work in the concept of the archive and ties it, like religion, like history, like science itself, to a very singular experience of the promise” (36).<sup>11</sup> The future rests on the present’s promise to the past, but, in Derrida’s ever-expanding Archive, there can be no real fulfillment of this promise.<sup>12</sup>

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possible desire to exist only in the past, she still must give over the past to the present, thus presenting new possibilities for interpretation and narration.

<sup>10</sup> Borges says of the indefinite library of Babel: “Si un eterno viajero la atravesara en cualquier dirección, comprobaría al cabo de los siglos que los mismos volúmenes se repiten en el mismo desorden” (“If an eternal traveler crossed it [the library] in any direction, they would find over the course of several centuries that the same volumes are repeated in the same disorder”) (99).

<sup>11</sup> In a roundtable discussion at the Villanova University on October 3, 1994, Derrida said this about “messianicity” as opposed to “messianism,” “I insisted in the book on Marx on messianicity - which I distinguished from messianism - I wanted to show that the messianic structure is a universal structure, that as soon as you address the other, as you

This temporal intersection is echoed in Absalom, Absalom! and Mi hermano el alcalde. Quentin is undoubtedly haunted by the past – “*Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished*” (210)-, but it is a past that begs a response. When Miss Rosa summons him to tell him the story of Thomas Sutpen, Quentin thinks, “*It’s because she wants it told... so that people whom she will never see and whose names she will never hear... will read it and know at last why God let us lose the War*” (6). He is partially right, as she calls upon him to listen to the past (though Miss Rosa ends up wanting more from him; she takes him out to Sutpen’s Hundred in the dead of night to be a bodyguard and witness to Henry’s having returned home to die (288-303)), but he will, as I will discuss later in this chapter, also be called upon to construct something out of this past that he inherits.

The narrator of Mi hermano el alcalde is also situated at this crossroads of past, present, and future. He, too, is haunted by a past that has been all but forgotten by the “alegre y parrandero” (“festive and raucous”) (7) present, and he, like Quentin, hears the past’s call, and its demand for a kind of reckoning. The narrator jokingly refers to himself as one of “los estudiosos carlistas” (“the Carlist scholars”) (147), which suggests

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are open to the future, as you are, have temporal experience, you are waiting for the future, you are waiting for someone to come...that the opening of the experience, someone is to come... is now to come, and justice, peace will have to do with this coming of the other - with a promise” (“Villanova,” no pagination). For Derrida, messianicity is a universal experience of the futurity of interaction, not of the singular event of the coming of an eventual Messiah.

<sup>12</sup> Patrícia Vieira is one of few critics who has used the Archive’s openness to the future in a discussion of a literary text; in this case, the discussion of pre-colonial ghosts as archives of colonial violence (“Specters of Colonial Violence: The Archive in António Lobo Antunes’s *South of Nowhere*”. Portuguese Literary and Cultural Studies, 12. 23 Oct. 2006. <<http://www.plcs.umassd.edu/plcsissues/12.cfm>>).

the image of a historian hard at work in the archives. He dutifully cumulates and accumulates the past – here the past as it pertains to his brother, Carlos -in hopes of presenting something whole. What is this “whole” that both Quentin and Mi hermano el alcalde’s narrator hope to present, and when does it exist? I will contend in this chapter that the whole is the completed Archive, and, following Derrida’s postulation above, this whole always exists in an unreachable future.

Although it may never be fulfilled, what does the promise of redemption –the future- look like in the Archive? I will show in the discussion that follows that the promise that is given, that the redemptive power exercised by the present over the past functions in the future to complete the Archive, to overcome its gaps. I will examine how both Absalom, Absalom! and Mi hermano el alcalde utilize narrative, not just told, but inscribed in a book, to respond to the Archive’s imperative for completion, thus attempting to fill its gaps. First, however, I will address the production of the gap and the mechanisms compensating for it.

I have, so far, discussed several of the gaps in the Archive in Mi hermano el alcalde and Absalom, Absalom! reflected in the figures of the arkhon, the arkheion, and the arkheia. In the arkhon we find an ultimately untrustworthy archivist, seeking to tell his or her own story, regardless of any idea of “truth.” In the arkheion the stasis of the Archive is reflected, as is the disjuncture between the Archive’s interior and the exterior real world. In the arkheia the factuality of the Archive’s documents is brought into question, as is their place among the myriad documents that do not make it to the Archive, because of deliberate exclusion or accident.



In most cases, however, these gaps cannot be related to something exterior to the Archive, but to the interior of the Archive itself. Derrida addresses this aspect of the Archive with what he calls the Archive's archiviolithic force, an archival equivalent of Freud's death drive<sup>13</sup>, or that which

not only incites forgetfulness, amnesia, the annihilation of memory, as *mneme* or *anamnesis*, but also commands the radical effacement, in truth the eradication, of that which can never be reduced to *mneme* or to *anamnesis*, that is, the archive, consignation, the documentary or monumental apparatus as *hypomnema*, mnemotechnical supplement or representative, auxiliary or memorandum (11).<sup>14</sup>

Derrida's Archive "always works, and *a priori*, against itself" (12), not at the level of memory or recollection (as he comments, the past "would exist in any case... without the archive"), but at the level of the hypomnemic "technical structure of the *archiving* archive" (17). In other words, the Archive strives to archive and to simultaneously forget its having archived. The Archive is invested in covering up its tracks, so what is at stake is not memory, per se, but a record detailing how something got inside the Archive – which, as Derrida says above, is related to something he calls consignation. The necessary elements of an Archive, which Derrida calls the archon, substrate, and residence, and I have called the arkhon, the arkheia, and the arkheion, participate in this consignation, or the coordination within a single corpus of "a system or synchrony in

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<sup>13</sup> According to Freud, the death drive's (which is also called the aggression drive, the destruction drive, and, in post-Freudian thought, Thanatos) task "is to lead organic life back into the inanimate state" (Reader, 645). This idea was formulated as a response to the tendency of people to continually relive trauma. Freud contends that this repetition-compulsion is a way for the mind to work through trauma.

<sup>14</sup> Mneme can be understood as memory, whereas anamnesis is recollection. Hypomnema can be understood as something "under" memory, supporting it, like note taking.

which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration” (3). Consignation requires the sacrifice of the “singularity” of the event that is archived, or that “the gathering into itself of the One [the unified Archive] is never without violence” (78).<sup>15</sup>

Consignation is part of a death drive that simultaneously allows for archivization and creates holes in the Archive it is creating. This consignation is also that which the Archive tries to disown. It is, however, the material consigned to the Archive, or the presentation of the past as a continuous whole, that allows for the creation of meaning in the present from elements of the past. Thus Derrida warns that, without this necessary automatism, history and culture would be at stake (Archive Fever, 62).

Foucault makes a similar claim in his The Archaeology of Knowledge, when he comments,

The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events. But the archive is also that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity, nor do they disappear at the mercy of chance external accidents (129).<sup>16</sup>

Unlike Derrida, Foucault does not concern himself with the materiality of the Archive; he instead views it as a system allowing for enunciation, or, as Agamben summarizes, Foucault’s Archive is “the dark margin encircling and limiting every concrete act of speech” (144). Foucault’s Archive, however, does not “have the weight of tradition; and it does not constitute the library of all libraries, outside of time and place; nor is it the

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<sup>15</sup> Derrida calls what has been archived an “event,” highlighting the heterogeneous and singular nature of that which is archived. I will continue to use this term, as it allows for the archivization of such things as orality as they exist in Mi hermano el alcalde’s and Absalom, Absalom!’s Archives.

<sup>16</sup> Here Foucault is addressing only what is contained in the Archive. His statement does not disregard the notion that many things are lost before their archivization.

welcoming oblivion that opens up to all new speech the operational field of its freedom,” but instead, “it reveals the rules of a practice that enables statements both to survive and to undergo regular modification” (Foucault 130).

Following the Archive’s desire to disavow its consignation, it follows that the goal of the Archive is not necessarily the truth (the complete and unautomated archivization of an event), but a central unity. Barthes, quoting Nietzsche in La chambre claire, writes, “Un homme labyrinthique ne cherche jamais la vérité, mais uniquement son Ariane” (“A labyrinthine man does not ever search for the truth, but only for his Ariadne”) (114). In this book on photography written shortly after his mother’s death, Barthes describes all the photographs in the world as forming a labyrinth. He takes one photograph of his mother as the only photograph that truly exists for him, and from there tries not to “découvrir une chose secrète (monstre ou trésor), mais ... de quoi était fait ce fil qui me tirait vers la Photographie” (“discover a secret thing (monster or treasure), but... [to discover] what the string that draws me towards Photography was made of”) (114). The goal for Barthes is not a truth about all photographs, but an abstract whole deduced from the one photograph that means something to him.

Derrida, responding to Freud, makes a similar claim regarding the Archive. In Moses and Monotheism, the text that Derrida’s Archive Fever takes as its central discussion, Freud discusses the Mosaic root of Judaism, largely contradicting the biblical account of the events surrounding Moses’ life. In this text, he says this of the Jewish believer:

it is the general experience that the human intellect errs very easily without our suspecting it at all, and that nothing is more readily believed than what – regardless of the truth – meets our illusions half-way... I too

should credit the believer's solution with containing the truth; it is not, however, the material truth, but a historical truth (208).

The material truth, the event itself, is counterposed with historical truth, or the event lost and then reconstructed (especially through psychoanalysis). The “vertiginous difference” between these two “truths” is, as Derrida says, the best question with which to start an investigation of the Archive (59). This is because, at the heart of the Archive, the event qua event is absent (though the Archive is often presented as being the actual event and not a representation of it), but is experienced as the “hypomnesic and prosthetic experience of the technical substrate” (25) of the Archive itself; a whole is produced from the bits and pieces that have been archived.

I will deal more extensively with this formulation in the next section, but it is important now because it signals that, at the heart of the narrative in Absalom, Absalom! and Mi hermano el alcalde, is an Archive whose substrate, traced in chapter one, is riddled with holes. Their narratives, as I will discuss, are centered as much on these gaps in the Archive, as they are on what has been archived. The gap however, cannot be named in itself as anything other than an absence. I find that Derrida's discussion of the supplement illuminates what it is that allows the gap to be named in Absalom, Absalom! and Mi hermano el alcalde, and gives insight into what he calls the “hypomnesic” and “prosthetic” experience of the Archive.

In Of Grammatology Derrida comments that the supplement

adds itself, it is a surplus, a plentitude enriching another plentitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence... But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void (144-145).

Writing, for example, is such a supplement in that

it marks the point where the supplement proposes itself as supplement of supplement... *taking the place of* a speech already significant... it displaces the *proper place* of the sentence, the unique time of the sentence pronounced *hic et nunc* by an irreplaceable subject (281).

This accretive and substitutive function of the supplement is represented in the Archive by the prosthesis, a concept that Derrida sees at work in Freud's "A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad," in which Freud comments that he can guarantee his memory's working by making a supplementary note on paper, with the note serving as a prosthesis (Standard Edition 227). The prosthesis, true to its Greek root -from prostithenai "add to," from pros "to" + tithenai "to put, place"- is something that is added, and that substitutes for something missing, thus its most common modern use relating to artificial replacements for parts of the human body.

The prosthesis as that which fills that Archive's gaps has a unique relation to the Archive in that it is only the prosthesis' presence that allows the Archive's gap to be named. Whereas, in the case of a prosthesis on a word (also called a prothesis), the root word remains visible no matter what is added to it, there is, as I will discuss, no possibility of narrating the Archive without a prosthesis. The prosthesis in the Archive functions more as a false, working limb, allowing for the Archive to function – in this case as a basis for the narration of two novels – that is still something that takes the place of the original. To differentiate from the general term "prosthesis," which is applicable in a variety of contexts, I will use the term "inscription" as a synonym in regards to the act of writing. This term is synonymous with the prosthesis in that an inscription is the physical manifestation of writing (it in fact means writing into something, an implied material substrate), which, as mentioned above, is supplementary in that it takes the place of speech.

Here I have outlined a theory of the Archive that acknowledges its openness to the future, and to redemption, that is the result of the gaps that characterize it, and that are a product of its own making. The process by which these gaps are compensated for is one of supplementation, a process closely linked, especially in regards to the Archive, with the idea of a prosthetic narrative that creates a whole out of the disjointed archived events. In the section that follows, I will examine the gap more closely in Mi hermano el alcalde and Absalom, Absalom! I will discuss the formation of these gaps and their presence as that which opens up their Archives to redemption, or the filling of these gaps. This filling is done by means of a narrative that serves as an inscribed prosthetic supplement, which gives form to otherwise disjointed and incomplete data sets. Following Barthes' appropriated quote, one must remember that it is not the truth that is at the center of these two novels' labyrinthine Archives. The question that will be dealt with here is this: Who or what is the Ariadne of Absalom, Absalom! and Mi hermano el alcalde?<sup>17</sup> What is it that draws these two central figures – Quentin and the nameless narrator of Mi hermano el alcalde – to tell their stories?

As discussed in the previous chapter and, in part, here, Mi hermano el alcalde is based on an archival substrate that is full of gaps. The story's narrator has not firsthand experienced the events he is narrating. The narrator comments that "La imagen de ambos se me desdibuja bajo el sol insulso que se pone entre los laureles. Me fui a México, pasó el tiempo y no los volví a ver más. Me cuentan que murieron juntos tras un transplante

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<sup>17</sup> Stephanie Merrim also uses the myth of Ariadne and Theseus to organize her discussion of Absalom, Absalom! ("Wonder and Wounds of "Southern" Histories." Look Away!: The U.S. South in New World Studies. Eds. Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn. Durham: Duke UP, 2004. 311-332.)

de riñón” (“The image I have of both of them [Carlos and Memo] blurs beneath the insipid sun setting between the laurels. I went to Mexico, time passed, and I didn’t see them anymore. They tell me that they died together following a kidney transplant”) (163). He is not only losing the memories he once had of them (“The image I have of both of them blurs...”), but, as he hears about the events in absentia (“They tell me that...”), they are communicated to him by means of documents, for instance, the videos and audiocassettes that his sister Gloria sends him of Carlos’ speeches, which the narrator promptly misplaces (32, 37, 73). Derrida would call these inscriptions supplements of something that already signified in a unique way; what the narrator experiences is a prosthetic stand-in for events that happen elsewhere to other people. The sum of all this is a past that the narrator equates with Arcadia and with paradise (20, 83), which is a claim that cannot be backed by his final, desperate attempt to pawn off La Cascada on the foreigner. The pieces of the puzzle do not fit together, and yet there must be something holding the novel together, giving a narrative structure to a seemingly baseless story.

Spanning the entirety of the novel, across all the gaps, and even inclusive of them, is a narrative made possible by the archiviolithic function operating in the Archive. As I mentioned in the second chapter, it is, by the narrator’s own admission, a gaping hole caused by Memo and Carlos’ death that permits the telling of the story (120). It is death that permits the narrator to write at all, as he says near the end of the novel,

Mi hermana Gloria murió, mi hermano Manuel murió, mi hermano Aníbal murió, y por el mismo trillado camino de la muerte se me fueron yendo todos... dejando mi casa abandonada. Yo sigo en México, vivo, ahora sí que por una enfermedad o empecinamiento que nos acomete a los literatos viejos de hoy día y que un lúcido escritor peruano bautizó “empeño literario”

(My sister Gloria died, my brother Manuel died, my brother Aníbal died, and everyone left me, taking that same worn-out path of death... leaving my home abandoned. I'm still in Mexico, alive by some sickness or obstinacy that afflicts old literati these days, something that a lucid Peruvian writer called "literary drive") (165).

Incompleteness, troped here by death, is, as González-Echevarría claims, an impasse that encourages creation, and not stagnation (185). The novel, literary creation, and narration are all owed to the gap in Mi hermano el alcalde, because it is the gap that opens the novel up to the future and to redemption, which is, here, narration.

In Mi hermano el alcalde there is central impasse created by the Archive's gaps. The central impasse to be resolved (the Ariadne) is how the narrator can truly put his past behind him, which he attempts to do by means of consigning the material of his past into an inscribed, seamless narration. In the final section of the novel, as the narrator and his guest come closer and closer to La Cascada, the narrator makes nearly continual reference to the "tres caídas," a reference to the three falls of Christ as he went to the cross, as they stop to drink aguardiente in all the towns along the way to Támesis. In conflating Catholic discourse with the vulgarity of inebriation, the narrator attempts to put a comedic mask on his narrative, to pretend that it is merely a story to tell and not a burden that he carries. For the narrator, however, the longer one lives, the more difficult life is to bear. For example, the Támesis, the river that runs past the town where La Cascada is located, seems sad and fatigued to him, "como si arrastrara por la inercia de las edades sus cansadas aguas" ("as if its tired waters dragged from the inertia of time" (7), but the town itself, "Nació ayer y aún no ha perdido la fe ni la esperanza" ("was born yesterday, and still hasn't lost faith or hope" (7). Thus it is significant that, during the final section of the narrator and the foreigner's journey to La Cascada, they stop in a bar



(several bars) to have a drink where the narrator plays the song “Nadie es eterno en el mundo” (“No one lives forever”) on the jukebox. This song, written by Darío Gómez, is deeply engrained in “lowbrow” culture and somewhat tied to the drug business in part for its message of fatalism towards death, epitomizes the narrator’s desire to overcome his past: “Cuando ustedes me estén despidiendo/con el último adiós de este mundo/no me lloren, que nadie es eterno/nadie vuelve del sueño profundo” (“When I am departing from you/with my last goodbye in this world/don’t cry for me, because no one lives forever/no one wakes up from that deep slumber”) (“Darío Gómez”). In a previous section of the novel, the reader is informed that Carlos’ government was sued (by *acción de tutela*) for having buried a man without consulting his family about his wishes, because they were absent at the time. When the dead man’s brother returns, he sues the township to dig up the dead man, and bury him according to his wishes, which include playing “Nadie es eterno en el mundo” as a requiem (152).

The narrator’s Ariadne is the burial of his past, and he does this, quite literally, by holding a funeral for it. This is not a normal funeral, however, but an unearthing of the body, dressing it up by narration, and reburying it. Working backwards from the novel’s paroxysmal final line – “¡Se la vendo!” (171) – the entire dialogue between narrator and the foreigner that comprises the novel can be seen as a commercial narrative (inscription) used to sell a questionable product. Unable to cope with the past – his loved ones’ deaths, his absence, the political and social turmoil of his homeland – the narrator fits a prosthesis to the story in order to dress it up, make it look seamless, and put it on the market. All the while, in telling the story of his brother Carlos’ mayorship, he registers his complaints and grievances against the town, but he makes sure the foreigner knows

that “Pueblo más bello no conozco, y miren que he viajado, he estado hasta en Kirgisdán” (“I don’t know of any town more beautiful than this one, and you should know that I’ve traveled, I’ve been as far as Kyrgyzstan”) (11).

The foreigner’s doubts as to the veracity of the narrator’s claims, his suspicions of the prosthesis being presented to him, are implicit from the beginning of the novel. He often repeats the narrator’s bombastic rhetoric in a way that suggests derision and disbelief – “¿Y a cuánto queda esa maravilla del pueblo?” (“And how far is that wonder [La Cascada] from the town?”) (7). These doubts, or recognitions of the prosthesis, are most prevalent in the final section of the novel, when the narrator and the foreigner have arrived at La Cascada. At this point they are both drunk, as the narrator has insisted that they periodically stop to drink aguardiente, the Colombian national liquor par excellence (18). This is part of the narrator’s strategy to sell his narrative, and, despite the foreigner’s protests - “Yo estoy más bien mareado” (“I’m feeling kind of tipsy”) (169) – the narrator insists on their continuing to drink: “¡Qué va, tomémonos otro!” (“Yeah right, let’s have another!”) (169).

At this point in the narration, the narrator begins to dismiss all of the foreigner’s questions (which are directed precisely at the holes in the Archive’s substrate where the prosthesis is filling in) with quick answers. For instance, when the foreigner inquires about the presence of the guerrilla, “¿Y la guerrilla?” (“And the guerrilla?”), the narrator quickly responds, “¡Cuál guerrilla! Por aquí no hay guerrilla, esto está en manos de los paramilitares. Y donde hay gato no hay ratones” (“What guerrilla!? Here there isn’t any guerrilla, the paramilitary groups control the area. And where there’s a cat, there are no mice”) (169). Here the foreigner is hinting at the same question that the reader is, if this

place is so great, why leave? This is all done in an attempt to pass off memory to someone else, in the form of an inscription; the book, as a written narrative, serves as a prosthesis for a troubled past.

But to sell it to whom? To the foreigner, yes, but, more specifically, to the reader. The reader of Mi hermano el alcalde is reading a dialogue directed at him or her that assures that the memory of the narrator's past will be handed over. Until the last pages of the novel, all of the implied questions that the narrator answers are absent; there is a missing interlocutor that is quite possibly the reader. For instance, after relating a dialogue to the foreigner in which the word "mozo" is used (see above, pp. 13), the narrator snaps, "Mozo en Colombia es amante; segunda y última vez que lo digo y no lo vuelvo a repetir" ("Mozo in Colombia means lover; that's the second and last time I'll say it, and I won't say it again") (29). This is also supported by the fact that the narrator, despite pretending that the novel is a dialogue, also acknowledges that what he is producing is a book: at one point he starts to take the narrative away from his main goal and states, "Mi problema con los libros es que son sucesivos y yo soy simultáneo" ("My problem with books is that they are sequential and I'm simultaneous") (26).

There must be something behind this narrative that the narrator is not telling. And this is precisely the point. Behind the narrative are facts that cannot lead to the conclusion toward which the narrator's commercial narrative drives the reader. The narrative as a prosthetic experience of an archival substrate riddled with holes is additive, it adds to the incomplete narrative, but it is also substitutive, and thus highlights the gaps wherein it tries to fit. However, the narrative being produced, which has been shown to be an inscription, still attempts to serve as a mnemonic that can be passed on to another.

From the beginning, Absalom, Absalom! undergirds the notion that every telling is necessarily a retelling and participates in myth-making. As Quentin listens to Miss Rosa in the opening chapter, his experience of her story is like a reading of Genesis 1:

in long unamaze Quentin seemed to watch them [the Sutpens] overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth and drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing... *Be Sutpen's Hundred* like the oldentime *Be Light* (4).

The participation of the story in myth is amplified by the use of mythic figures, demons (4), ogres and djinns (16), and names from Greek and Roman mythology, for instance, Cassandra (48) to give meaning and explanation for the events of the story. In the beginning of the novel there is already a layering of traditions that ultimately converge on a myth that compensate for the gaps in the Archive, the major gap being that the events of the story are unwitnessed and therefore highly suspect.

The narration of the story requires a series of skillful elisions by the storyteller. The evening that Quentin is telling the story of Sutpen to Shreve, it is a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation retelling: it is the story as told by Sutpen to Quentin's grandfather, from his grandfather to his father, and from his father to him (supplemented, no doubt, by community gossip, and Miss Rosa's account of what happened). With each subsequent retelling, the story's veracity is more and more questionable. When Quentin's grandfather first heard the story, he comments, "I shouldn't believe it. But I do" (200). However, the elisions necessary to tell the story – "on the eighth night the water gave out and something had to be done so [Thomas Sutpen] put the musket down and went out and subdued them. That was how he told it: he went out and subdued them" (204) – are less and less convincing for later generations. The story, as told by Quentin, becomes muddled with a vocabulary of imprecision and conjecture: "*there must be some limit... who must have seen his*

*situation... must have seen himself...*" (148). Shreve receives this story as an unbelieving listener who appreciates it all as melodrama and entertainment: "The South. Jesus. No wonder you folks all outlive yourselves by years and years and years" (301). Despite his uninvolved involvement in the place and events of the story, however, he plays a great part in the story's final narration.

The fact that no one, including the arkhons who weave the tale together, witnesses the major event of the story, the murder of Charles Bon by Henry Sutpen, is perhaps the gap of gaps in Absalom, Absalom! Quentin's father comments that the victim seemed "a myth, a phantom: something which [the Sutpens] engendered and created whole themselves... as though as a man he did not exist at all. Yet there was the body" (82). All the evidence that can be found is unable to corroborate any teleology that the community has tried to come up with, to the point that the physical evidence has become meaningless.

The Archive's documents are suspect in that they allow only a "dim" view of the events behind their being documented, and their presence does not, in fact, explain anything (80). For Quentin, as for those that came before him, this gap in the details is an insuperable impasse. During his last meeting with Miss Rosa before going out to Sutpen's Hundred where they will discover that Henry has returned to die, Faulkner tells us that "Quentin was not listening, because there was also something which he too could not pass – that door, the running feet on the stairs beyond it almost a continuation of the faint shot... He (Quentin) couldn't pass that" (139-140, Faulkner's parenthetical comment). Again, at Harvard with Shreve talking to Quentin in their dorm room,

Faulkner writes, “he had not been listening since he had something which he still was unable to pass” (142).

The result of Quentin’s inability to cope with an incomplete history is that he sees himself as doomed to repeat it. He comments, “*I am listening to it all over again I shall have to never listen to anything else but this again forever*” (222), thus the central problem for Quentin: how to break free from the repetition of his inherited history. Echoing Freud’s destruction drive, Quentin, and those before him, repeat the story, live it out, and explain it, in hopes of returning to the quiescence of a time before the murder of Charles Bon. And, like in Mi hermano el alcalde, it is this impasse that opens the novel up to the future. In his struggle with the past, Quentin participates in the creative-redemptive act of narration in order to work through it, pursuing the “*might-have-been which is the single rock we cling to above the maelstrom of unbearable reality*” (120).<sup>18</sup>

Like in Vallejo’s novel, the supplementary nature of the narrative becomes clearest working backwards from Quentin’s final outburst, “I dont hate it... I dont hate it,” referring to the South, which he follows, thinking, “*I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!*” (303). From this vantage point, the narrative can be seen as Quentin’s desire to put his past behind him, to outlive it. Just before his final outburst Quentin comments “I

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<sup>18</sup> Wade Newhouse, in “‘Aghast and Uplifted’: William Faulkner and the Absence of History” states that Faulkner insists “upon permanently separating the historical event from the narrative subject that shares its name” (163). In Quentin’s meeting of Henry, however, the materiality of the past meets the inheritor of the myth that surrounds it, and the former is found to be lacking in its ability to support the “ideological and cultural weight of the stories in which they [the community] have invested themselves [about the Sutpens]” (145). While there are certain affinities between my approach and Newhouse’s, I focus here on the mechanisms by which the narrative tries to match a story to an incomplete data set, whereas Newhouse is focusing on a singular historical event – the Civil War – and the contact between memory and the event itself in the novel.

am older at twenty than a lot of people who have died,” (to which Shreve, unsympathetically retorts, “And more people have died than have been twenty-one”) (301). The past is a burden on Quentin that he is unlikely to outlive. The narrative that he and Shreve have placed on it in an attempt to complete it is an attempt to cope with his past, with the South, not unlike the commercial narrative that Vallejo’s narrator places over Colombia.<sup>19</sup>

The prosthetic is most clear in Quentin and Shreve’s discussion of Charles Bon. Bon is a somewhat spectral character from the beginning, and is described as, “fullsprung from no childhood, born of no woman and impervious to time” (58). To give a background to this character “possessing merely the name of a city for origin history and past” (77), and to complete the story, Quentin and Shreve add to Bon’s past a cunning lawyer and an embittered mother. This story is not without some factual basis. Thomas Sutpen does marry a woman in Haiti who he thought was of Spanish descent, but who turned out to be part black. This miscegenation was not amenable to his “design,” or his desire to vindicate himself for being mistreated by other white people while black servants had better clothes and food than he and his family, so he

explained how this new fact rendered it impossible that this woman and child [Charles Bon] be incorporated in my design, following which... I made no attempt to keep not only that which I might consider myself to have earned... but which had been given to me by signed testimonials, but on the contrary I declined and resigned all right and claim to this in order that I might repair whatever injustice I might be considered to have done

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<sup>19</sup> Many critics have argued quite successfully that the part of the South he is trying to work through is racial inequality. (Ladd, Barbara: "The Direction of the Howling": Nationalism and the Color Line in *Absalom, Absalom!*" In (pp. 219-50) Hobson, Fred (ed. and introd.), *William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!*. Oxford, England: Oxford UP, 2003. 301 p). My purpose here, as I stated in chapter I, is not to compare the particulars of history, but to discuss the common mechanism by which the narratives deal with and are constructed out of history.

by so providing for the two persons whom I might be considered to have deprived of anything I might later possess (213).

There is also some evidence for a lawyer – a “shadowy figure” (58) taking the place of parents -controlling the money that Bon must have, considering his worldliness.

Quentin and Shreve, however, give the story of the mother and lawyer a new depth to make the Sutpen saga make sense, and bring it full-circle. They construct a conspiracy theory that explains everything of Bon’s life, revolving around a lawyer who is taking advantage of Bon’s mother, who Shreve calls “the old Sabine” (243)<sup>20</sup>, and controlled by her desires for revenge. The lawyer supposedly engineers Bon’s meeting of Henry at college and the relationship between Bon and Sutpen’s daughter, Judith, in an attempt to steal the enormous wealth that Bon is destined to inherit from his mother, who was, they agree, certainly paid off after Thomas Sutpen left her in Haiti. Quentin and Shreve explain that the only reason that Bon would have agreed to marry Judith, who he knew was his sister, was, besides his desperate attempt to be recognized by his father, Thomas Sutpen, a letter from Bon’s octoroon mistress in New Orleans, “wailing for money and telling him that the lawyer had departed for Texas or Mexico or somewhere at last and that she (the octoroon) could not find his mother either and so without doubt the lawyer had murdered her before he stole the money” (271).

Faulkner, here, draws attention to the artifice at work in their conversation:

the two of them creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere, who, shadows, were shadows not of flesh and blood which had lived and died but shadows in turn of what were ... shades too (243).

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<sup>20</sup> In Roman legend, the Sabines were a neighboring tribe from which the Romans, needing to increase their population, stole their women.



In fact, it did not even matter if Shreve, who had no connection to these events, narrated, or if it was Quentin, “since now both of them were Henry Sutpen and both of them were Bon” (280). In this interstitial state, which is not unlike the drunkenness of Mi hermano el alcalde’s final section, they find the lynchpin, when they hear/invent Thomas Sutpen’s remark to Henry: “*He must not marry her, Henry. His mother’s father told me that her mother had been a Spanish woman. I believed him; it was not until after he was born that I found out that his mother was part negro*” (283).

The absurdity, however, of this statement in the context they have constructed does not escape Shreve for long – “And [Bon] never slipped away... He could have, but he never even tried. Jesus, maybe he even went to Henry and said, ‘I’m going, Henry’” (286) – though his conviction is unswerving: “Aint that right? Aint it? By God, aint it?” (287). Their story, however, cannot save the South for Quentin, and the reader is constantly aware of his impending suicide in The Sound and the Fury, written seven years earlier, but taking place after Absalom, Absalom! Even at the level of the text’s place in the “real world” it functions as a prosthesis explaining the past, giving readers the opportunity to speculate and interpret the events of The Sound and the Fury.

Their story, though, does fulfill Miss Rosa’s spoken and unspoken imperative, understood by Quentin without her having to clarify it in the beginning. She says to Quentin, “maybe you will enter the literary profession as so many Southern gentlemen and gentlewomen too are doing now and maybe some day you will remember this and write about it,” but he hears, “*Only she dont mean that... It’s because she wants it told*” (5). Quentin’s complicity in the writing of the novel is certainly implied by Miss Rosa’s comment, as well as the fact that the novel begins with Quentin’s impressions and ends

with his thoughts, but even if he is not the author, the imperative for inscription is still carried out. Though I have identified its imperfections as a mnemonic device, the narrative is still able to serve mnemesis, constantly reminding readers of a past that can still be sifted through in the text.

## Chapter IV

### Originary Shibboleths

Why are Quentin and the unnamed narrator of Mi hermano el alcalde so concerned with getting over the past? Both texts clearly are a product of the archival dynamic. As I have shown, they trope the Archive's main elements, the authorities, objects, and places that an archive implies, and their narration relies on what is missing from it. I have also discussed that, while narration is a product of this gap, it is this same vacuous core that each narrator wants to overcome. Written over the gaps of the histories in Vallejo's and Faulkner's novels are narratives that attempt to make a complete story where there was none and, however ineffective these attempts may have been for the narrators (Quentin kills himself a year later in The Sound and the Fury; Vallejo's unnamed narrator dies sometime later still in self-imposed exile in La Rambla paralela), the overwhelming desire for the inscription of memory is seen. So, the question is, what does it mean to want to overcome a vacuum or to overcome history? If simply passing memory on is not enough, then what is behind these two texts' Ariadne –the narrators' "getting over" history- and how does it relate to these stories?

Lois Zamora writes that, for many authors of the Americas, the desire, against the New World myth that the Americas are free of the burden of history, is to create a "usable past" (she includes Faulkner in this group of writers). She defines this anxiety for origins not as "some vague longing for originary mythic unity" but as "the displacement of hegemonies and hierarchies that would sustain any singular version of that quest or

those beginnings” (6). In other words, she is describing the desire for a communal understanding of hemispheric commonality that, at the same time, is not privileging. I suggest that this is a goal of the literature (and criticism) of the Americas, not a reality. The intertextuality inherent in the idea of a communal understanding of American origin would turn the writer and the critic away from the demands of determining influence and comparing histories (scars), and towards the probing of deeper mechanisms that illuminate the causes behind the writing of the Americas. This would even reopen the Faulkner/García Márquez Archive, which is now sparse and far too crowded. This would also demand rather positivistic writers who were willing to participate in myth making.<sup>21</sup> Amidst all these necessary assumptions, she is hitting on a question that has been central to writers and critics of the Americas: Why are so many writers concerned with the past?

Derrida hazards an answer that is actually present in the title of Archive Fever. The French, Mal d’archive, allows for more play than the English translation. “Mal” can, for instance, imply need or difficulty: “J’ai du mal à comprendre.” And, as is the case with the familiar “mal du pays,” or homesickness, it can suggest desire. Derrida suggests that to have mal d’archive

is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away... It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement (91).

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<sup>21</sup> I find it interesting that Zamora uses James Agee in several key moments of her analysis, yet she avoids the prickly language which he uses to describe the idea of a “usable past”: “A ‘usable past’? (That polite substitution for ‘tradition.’ Academic; philosophic; critics’ language)... things are ‘usable’ only by second-rate people and worse” (312-313). This could betray Agee’s own anxiety of influence, or the imposition of influence onto him by a critic.

What is the place of commencement for Quentin and Mi hermano el alcalde's narrator?

The nation. What is salient above all things for Quentin is the South; "You can't understand it," he says to Shreve, "You would have to be born there" (289). Vallejo's nameless narrator laments, "Colombia, mamita, no vas para ninguna parte. Eres un sueño vano, las ruinas de nada" ("Colombia, dear mother<sup>22</sup>, you aren't going anywhere. You're a vain dream, the ruins of nothing") (162). We also remember that their final statements both involve the "nation": Quentin's Antebellum South and Vallejo's narrator's childhood home as a synecdoche of a bucolic ideal that Colombia encompassed. Contrary to Zamora's claim, these two narrators seem to actually want to make sure that no one relies on the mythic unity behind their nations. In other words, their attitude towards the nation and belonging is irresolvable ambivalence: the nation is of utmost importance and is, at the same time, inconceivable. The Ariadne pulling the strings in these texts is not a desire to decide upon (invent) an origin or weave a teleology that makes sense of history, but to overcome a history that impedes a sense of belonging. The resistance on the part of the narrators is that any belonging comes at the price of participating in an arbitrary shibboleth.

These two narrators' "mal d'archive" is a "mal du pays," a need for and a desire for origin as home. The narrators' desire is also a Thanatos: a desire for the quiescent time in which history made sense, and the myths that filled the void made sense. This comes close to Zamora's formula, but there is a slight difference: the narrators want an origin without having to invent it. Beyond identifying that they live in invented

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<sup>22</sup> The use of "mamita" here, the informal, diminutive inflection of the word for "mother" is interesting in that it is at once an acknowledgment of the narrator's status as progeny of the nation, and is also somewhat pejorative.

communities, they acknowledge the impossibility of, and their longing for, and thus their melancholy surrounding the nation. Here I mean melancholy in the Freudian sense: the narrators realize that they have lost something (or at least that it is missing, “dead” to them), and spend their lives making up for it, but they are incapable of defining the exact object of their melancholic response. In Freudian psychology, melancholy is contrasted with mourning: when one mourns, one can invest that response into an object and work through the trauma of loss. If there is no object, the experience is one of melancholy, a pathological condition that does not allow for a working through of the trauma (Freud, “Mourning and Melancholy” 244-245).

The impossible object of the narrators’ melancholy is origin, because the telling of origin is always a myth that flies in the face of modern epistemological schema: Rome was founded by two boys raised by wolves; the fall of man, and his incestuous inception, took place in a garden and involved some kind of fruit and a serpent. The only way the narrators could work through their problem is an account of creation ex nihilo, and any such account would be suspect. And yet, the Archive, which contains only fragments of stories, cannot posit anything other than a creation ex nihilo. Without wanting to go to the extremes of invention of origin, both narrators try to salvage the pieces, to weave a telos over the abyss, or, to paraphrase Nietzsche, knowing the terror of existence, they attempt to interpose an invented story between themselves and life.

Derrida warns that without the automatism of the Archive –which is that which creates gaps, and opens it up to narration– “There would be neither history nor tradition nor culture” (62). The truth is that there is a void underneath the layers of tradition and myth that requires a leap of faith (and nothing less) to cross, and this is a leap that

Quentin and Vallejo's narrator cannot take. They are both stuck in a tragic ambivalence of homelessness and desire, mourning and melancholia, that they cannot, and, arguably, do not want to work through.

The ability to keep narrating, re-telling, and building on to the origin, however, is the guarantee of the Archive: no matter how arbitrary its documents, or the order it is placed in, there is no limit to the stories that can be produced from it. The curse of the Archive, though, is that no story can make up for the gaps in history -as I have shown, all prostheses will be quick to identify themselves- and at the center of any such story is a void. The curse of the Archive, at least for these two narrators, is also the curse of the Americas: any narrative that explains the nation in terms of history will participate in myth, and even the attempt to put history to rest, to mourn it, to get past it, requires inventing something to fill the gaps to make the story whole enough to mourn. Like the exhumation of the man in Mi hermano el alcalde in which "Nadie es eterno en el mundo" is played to mourn him properly, so Quentin and Vallejo's narrator attempt to disinter their histories to mourn them, only to find their histories too disfigured to mourn. In this desire, the Archive potentially holds one of the keys to the literature of the Americas: not that there is an inexhaustible storehouse of history, or that there is a possibility of agreeing upon a past (or agreeing to disagree), but that the loose ends of history and of the nation only meet in artifice.

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