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"Mistral" and "Evangeline":
The Gothic Derivation of Absalom, Absalom!

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Gothicism versus realism in Faulkner's fiction has been argued since the 1930s. In recent criticism it can be clearly seen in the polemical opposition between Warren Beck's view in Faulkner (1976) and Elizabeth M. Kerr's view in William Faulkner's Gothic Domain (1979). Warren Beck repudiates those critics who associate Faulkner's fiction with Poe:

The association of ideas is typical of these critics' superficiality; Poe deals in horror, Faulkner presents horror—therefore Faulkner is like Poe. Horror is of different kinds, however. The essence of Poe's frightful fiction is unreality, product of a morbid taste for prearranged nightmares and self-induced hallucinations, that narcissism of the imagination which is the seamy side of romanticism. Faulkner, on the other hand, is a brilliant realist.

In contrast, Elizabeth Kerr in describing Faulkner's characterization argues for his unique transformation of the gothic: "To pour into a whole row of old bottles of Gothicism a new wine fermented by a powerful creative imagination, stimulated by technical knowledge, and irradiated by intuition, this was Faulkner's distinctive achievement in Gothic characterization." She refers to Absalom, Absalom! as "so obviously Gothic that critical references to it as Gothic are inevitable." And, indeed, Malcolm Cowley's early review of the novel is entitled "Poe in Mississippi." Kerr carefully enumerates many later references to the gothicism of the novel and carefully analyzes the novel's gothic characteristics. The opposing views of Beck and Kerr typify critical arguments concerning Faulkner's use of gothic devices. Those who emphasize the importance of realism dismiss Poe as a mere artificer and resent comparisons between Faulkner and Poe. Those making the comparisons admit the artifice of the gothic tradition but find it an
important characteristic of serious as well as popular fiction.

My intention within this essay is to demonstrate that Absalom, Absalom! is derived directly from a gothic tradition and that Faulkner’s apprenticeship includes two unsuccessful gothic mysteries which are the origin of Absalom, Absalom! However, even within these two stories there is a tentative movement away from Old World gothicism and an attempt to reshape the gothic tradition for a uniquely American experience. Absalom, Absalom! progresses far beyond the “prearranged nightmare” of gothicism as it becomes an American story of New World innocence and loss of innocence. Whether or not one calls the final product gothicism or realism is less important than a recognition of its gothic derivation and its expansion far beyond its gothic origins.

The two early stories from which Absalom, Absalom! derives are “Mistral” and “Evangeline.” These two stories link with “Wash” to form the tripodal base on which the novel finally rests. “Mistral” and “Evangeline” are the more important Don-and-I stories, stories in which Faulkner uses as narrators two young men clearly modelled after himself and William Spratling. Through their discovery of evil the narrators begin their passage from innocence to experience. Faulkner toured Europe with Spratling in 1925. “Mistral” is set in Italy, and Joseph Blotner suggests that the story was written soon after Faulkner returned from Europe in 1926. However, the story was apparently not submitted for publication until October 1928. After repeated magazine rejections, the story was finally published in These 13 (1931), Faulkner’s first collection of short fiction. In the same year, Faulkner submitted “Evangeline,” which experienced a similar series of rejections. “Evangeline” was not published until Joseph Blotner’s collection of the Uncollected Stories of William Faulkner (1979).

Since Faulkner was working on These 13 in May 1931 and submitted “Evangeline” in July 1931, a renewed interest in “Mistral” most likely stimulated the writing of “Evangeline.” Between 1926 and 1931, Faulkner had succeeded in creating his Southern domain of Yoknapatawpha in Flags in the Dust (revised as Sartoris), The Sound and the Fury, and As I Lay Dying. He attempted to use the same region in profitable short stories. “Evangeline” is essentially “Mistral” reshaped to the American experience, and “Evangeline” becomes the obvious basis for Absalom, Absalom! To complete the tripod, “Wash,” which establishes Sutpen as a fully realized character, was accepted by

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Harper's in November 1933. Shortly thereafter, in February 1934, Faulkner began to write the novel (then gothically entitled A Dark House) but failed in July and switched to Pylon. He returned to Absalom, Absalom! later, beginning a successful draft in March 1935.

The arduous creation of the novel thus occurred ten years (and several novels) after the European walking tour by Faulkner and Spratling and possibly as long after the experimental story “Mistral.” However, several critics, including Lisa Paddock, Charles C. Clark, and Estella Schoenberg, have noted the story’s similarity to Absalom, Absalom! in narration, plot, theme, and character. What has not been noted is the very traditional Old World gothicism of “Mistral” and its transformation into New World gothicism in “Evangeline.”

Briefly, “Mistral” is set in Italy and focuses on a young man, a young woman, and a priest. Don and the first-person narrator see the young man, Giulio, going toward the village with his bicycle. They also meet an old woman who tells them the story of the three main characters. The young woman, an illegitimate child, was taken in by the priest after her mother left the community after having worked as a prostitute. The priest first raised the child for the convent, but as she matured into a vivacious, independent woman, he abandoned this plan and attempted to marry her to a rich farmer rather than permit her flirtation with Giulio, a young villager. The priest was instrumental in the drafting of Giulio into the military. However, the marriage of the young beauty to the rich farmer was mysteriously delayed for three years. Just before the wedding was finally to occur, the rich farmer died, apparently poisoned.

Don and the narrator (and Giulio as well) enter the village on the day of the funeral. From the distance, Don and the narrator watch the service and the funeral procession, then go to the presbytery for food and shelter. They are fed by the priest's old servant. When the priest joins them, he is distracted and confuses the burial service with the table prayer. He is repeatedly hushed by the harsh servant. After the priest leaves, the servant suggests that Don and the narrator find shelter elsewhere. Outside, they find the priest pacing beneath his ward’s window. They continue to the café, where they witness the meeting of Giulio and the beautiful ward. They also hear a waiter’s interpretation of the situation. Since the farmer was rich, the waiter believes that the
murder is being surreptitiously investigated. Don and the narrator separate but meet later outside the village. They hear a sound, like a baby or an animal, and discover the priest lying by a wall: “He was lying on his face just inside the wall, his robes over his head, the black blur of his gown moving faintly and steadily, either because of the wind or because he was moving under them” (pp. 327-28). In disgust, the narrator moves on, bickering with his companion. Their final discovery is Giulio’s bicycle: “the handlebars rising from beyond the wall like the horns of a hidden antelope. Against the gloom the blob of the copse seemed to pulse and fade, as though it breathed, lived” (p. 328). The story concludes with the two young Americans walking separately in the mistral wind and the darkness.

As Lisa Paddock has observed, the story, although it is clearly intended as a mystery with a solution, leaves three questions unanswered: (1) Why is the young woman’s wedding delayed? (2) Why is the wedding date finally set? (3) Who actually murdered the rich farmer? The priest’s guilt and corruption suggest that he is the most instrumental throughout, but nothing that Don and the narrator see or hear establishes him as the direct agent in all three cases. He may be either pathetic in his perverse impotence, or he may have become authentically satanic. In either case, he and his cold, cloistered world are clearly derived from the early gothic tradition. As in Matthew Gregory Lewis’s *The Monk* and Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian*, the central character is a chilling image of priestly madness. The Catholic dream of spiritual purity becomes the English rationalist’s nightmare of perverse sexuality and violence.

Faulkner was apparently so engrossed in controlling the gothic ambience with the wind and the gloom and in creating the proper effect on his two young initiates that the mystery element is simply permitted to fade at the end of the story. In light of this uncertainty and the novella length of the story, it is not surprising that “Mistral” would not sell. Yet Faulkner sensed the importance of the story, including it in his first collection and imitating the story’s structure in another long, unwieldy story entitled “Evangeline.”

Here again he begins with Don-and-I, but notes that the narrator has not seen Don for seven years (which would be one year longer than the period from the European tour to the submission of “Evangeline”). Don, like Spratling an architect and painter, wires that he has a Mississippi ghost for the journalist
narrator to investigate. Thus the story begins with the gothic cliché of a ghost hunt. When the narrator arrives in the village, Don tells him the story he has learned from the daughter of Raby, who is in turn the black daughter of Colonel Sutpen (and the eventual equivalent of Clytemnestra). The story concerns three primary characters: Judith and Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon, all of whom maintain (essentially) the same roles as in *Absalom, Absalom!* Colonel Sutpen is a secondary character in this drama. His rise to power is noted, but Faulkner progresses quickly to Judith’s burial of her father. The three roles are like the three roles in “Mistral,” with two lovers and a man who tries to stop the lovers. The germinal story concerns two mysteries: (1) Who remains in the Sutpen mansion—ghost or human? and (2) Why did Henry murder Charles Bon? The daughter of Raby introduces the first mystery, which includes German police dogs guarding the Sutpen mansion. The rest of the woman’s story tells of Henry and Bon’s university friendship, Bon’s courtship of Judith, the unexplained antagonism of Bon and Henry, the announced engagement of Bon and Judith, a thwarted duel between Bon and Henry, Henry’s disappearance, his return in uniform at the moment Judith is to be married, his exodus with Bon the evening after the ceremony, and finally his return with the body of Bon. The tale concludes with the supposed appearance of the ghost after the death of Judith. The daughter of Raby recalls being trapped as a child in the Sutpen mansion; she panicked and fell, then saw “in the air above her face, a head upside down” (p. 592).12

Once the story is told, Don’s participation ends as the narrator goes alone to the mansion. Raby tries to scare him away with the threat of the dog, but he returns at night and tricks the dog with peppered meat. Once inside the mansion, he again confronts Raby. She takes him upstairs where he sees Henry lying on his deathbed. Raby takes him back down the stairs where the focus shifts to the second half of the mystery. Raby explains that in New Orleans Henry discovered that Charles Bon already had a wife and recounts the story of Henry’s return with the body of Bon, including a reference to a metal case on Bon’s person which once contained a portrait of Judith. Raby heard a pounding from the room before Judith unlocked the door and admitted Raby to help prepare Bon’s body. Later, Judith sent for Bon’s previous wife and child. According to Raby, “soon as I saw her I knew, and soon as Judith saw her she knew too” (p. 602). However, Raby refuses to...
tell the narrator exactly what she knew. The urbane mother and child stayed briefly, then returned to New Orleans. A year later, when Judith knew she was dying, she sent for Henry who arrived just before her death. He remained in the house for forty years, only venturing out to buy another German police dog when a replacement was needed. Only at this point does Raby reveal that she is the sister of Henry Sutpen.

She tells the narrator that he may go ahead and write his story, but to go away and let Henry die quietly. The narrator intends to leave; however, he seems unable. He turns at the gate and returns to the front of the house. With his back resting on the column, he dreams of a final confrontation with Henry, Bon, and Raby. The dream suggests that the betrayal of Judith by Bon had to do with the New Orleans child’s birth after Judith’s marriage. The narrator awakens to the burning of the house as Raby fulfills her prophecy that Henry will not live through the night. Just before the building collapses, Raby is seen in the window “no bigger than a doll, as impervious as an effigy of bronze, serene, dynamic, musing in the foreground of Holocaust” (p. 607). In a final section, the daughter of Raby and the narrator walk through the ashes and debris. The old black woman finds the metal case which supposedly contains the picture of Judith. The lock “which Judith had hammered shut for all time” is “melted now into a thin streak along the seam” (p. 608). The narrator pries it open and finds, instead of the blonde Judith, “the smooth, oval, unblemished face, the mouth rich, full, a little loose, the hot, slumbrous, secretive eyes, the inklike hair with its faint but unmistakable wiriness—all the ineradicable and tragic stamp of negro blood” (p. 608). The picture is inscribed “A mon mari. Toujours. 12 Aout, 1860” (p. 609). Thus it was more than the marriage and more than the child as the narrator realizes “what to a Henry Sutpen born, created by long time, with what he was and what he believed and thought, would be worse than the marriage and which compounded the bigamy to where the pistol was not only justified, but inescapable” (p. 609).

The story actually places Henry and Judith in the center as Charles Bon, an orphan with no apparent black blood and no blood relation to the Sutpens, can be seen only as the betrayer. His role gains in depth and richness in Absalom, Absalom! only as Colonel Sutpen becomes the source of the action. Two primary character changes occur in the Sutpen story (excluding those involved in the storytelling process): (1) the proportional
enlargement of Thomas Sutpen's role into a position of central mystery and (2) the transformation of Bon from enigmatic betrayer of friend and lover to a more complex dual role of betrayed-betrayer as he becomes the shunned, tainted child of Thomas Sutpen. But in "Evangeline," Faulkner's gothic ghost is Henry, and the mystery concerns the motive for his actions. "Evangeline" is Henry's story and secondarily Judith's story. Thomas Sutpen simply "came home and died in '70" (p. 591); he apparently remained ignorant of why his son opposed his daughter's marriage and even of his son's murder of Charles Bon. Bon's actions can only be attributed to depravity and greed. That he had switched the picture of his New Orleans wife for the picture of Judith seems an act of personal betrayal far exceeding the social threats of bigamy and miscegenation. The racial factor seems quite unnecessary to explain Judith's actions; however, it does establish the inescapability of Henry's action.

In "Evangeline," Southern racial rigidity becomes the equivalent of Catholic sexual rigidity in "Mistral." In both cases, the code of the past oppresses the present, and murder results from the inability either to live by the code or to escape the code. Decay, in typical gothic fashion, results from the impossibility of either stability or progression. Thus, the house and dynasty topple, the house of Sutpen, much like the house of Usher, with the last male haunted by his sister's life in death. (The black sister remains as a virtual shadow of the white sister.) In "Evangeline," Faulkner discovers that the short history of the antebellum South introduces the same elements of decay as the medieval history of European culture. This permits Faulkner to move beyond a restrictive, formulaic nightmare and closer to a nightmare of initiation, a form of nightmare most applicable to the tension between the American dream and the American reality.

Yet, from "Mistral" to "Evangeline," one can see Faulkner's caution as he imposes the Old World formula on the New World. Most important, in characterization, Henry Sutpen becomes the equivalent of the priest. He is certainly treated more sympathetically, but both are sensitive humans driven to murder; both are cursed to live out a life of guilt and impotence. Neither is permitted even the release of communicating his sin or curse. Both remain forever isolated, and, as representations of a lost nobility and purity, both maintain an image of simultaneous innocence and corruption. It is through the ghostly, silent images of these men
that the narrator discovers the inexpressible secret of earthly experience. To extend the comparison, both men, through the traditional roles of the masculine protectors of feminine virtue, place themselves in direct opposition to natural forces (their own as well as others'); they become impotent social barriers to natural procreation. Both discover death as the only defense against fruition and corruption. Thus, Henry, the original focus of the Sutpen story, is derived from a traditional gothic image of the darkly dangerous, cowled celibate.

A structural consistency takes this comparison far beyond a similarity of characters. Although “Mistral” is divided into five sections and “Evangeline” into seven, the plot progression is basically the same. Both stories progress through six steps with crucial discoveries occurring in the fourth and sixth steps.

(1) Both stories begin with Don-and-I, investigators who remain outside the central drama; however, the story introduces their descent into an irrational, unknown world. They are derived from a gothic formula in which a skeptical narrator serves as a link between the initial rational world of the reader and an irrational world into which the reader is asked to descend. Faulkner adds two elements which become important in his future use of Quentin and Shreve. Both characters are novices, thus permitting the element of initiation; this element is derived from Hawthorne’s successful merging of the gothic tale with the story of initiation. Furthermore, a contrast between the two young men in both their experience and temperament permits a tension as one is more likely to understand clearly or identify closely with particular events. Surprisingly, Faulkner uses this element of contrast more successfully in “Mistral” than in “Evangeline,” as Don is a Catholic (and older), thus initially is more empathic; however, the narrator, who is more innocently sensitive, is finally more devastated both by the image of the desirable ward and by the image of the writhing priest. In “Evangeline,” the pair is seven years older and some of the power of initiation is lost. In Absalom, Absalom! Faulkner wisely returns to the younger age for Quentin and Shreve. Still, in both stories, the first step introduces the narrative team and demands our identification with them in order to begin successfully the traditional gothic descent into nightmare.

(2) At this point, the description of the main characters and their life stories begins at a safe distance, before the actual descent. In “Mistral,” Don and the narrator meet an old woman and her
deaf husband on the road. The conventional old woman, with interruptions from her more independent husband, offers what appears to be the basic communal awareness and response (mainly indignation) to the situation of the priest and his ward. In "Evangeline," when the narrator arrives in the village, he and Don have supper at the hotel, and Don recounts the story of the Sutpen house and the mystery of the ghost as it has been given to him by Raby's daughter. Again, the initial account seems to represent the community's awareness and response (mainly fear). In both cases, just as we are removed from the actual scene of the action, we are also emotionally removed from the impact of the events. The young men joke and respond to the stories mostly in terms of formulaic mysteries and romances; thus they operate as vehicles for the reader's initial response. The initial accounts involve two elements: youthful passion and murder resulting from an attempt to control the passion. Don and the narrator are naturally aroused but also distance themselves through a recognition of fabulous clichés. We, likewise, are aroused but are led to believe that a rational distance will be permitted. It is, after all, still daylight, and the ghost or demon can be considered objectively as long as it remains a distant threat.

(3) At this point, the narrator descends into an irrational past from which there is no escape. In "Mistral" this begins when the narrator and Don reach the village and attend the funeral, and continues into the presbytery where they are fed by the old peasant servant. In "Evangeline," it begins with the narrator's daylight trip to the house and extends to his moonlight return and confrontation with Raby. Step three begins the disintegration of rationality as daylight gives way to darkness. The story becomes experience rather than formulaic fantasy. The description of the church and presbytery in "Mistral" and the mansion in "Evangeline" transforms the narrator's journey from youthful adventure (future-oriented) to oppressive descent (past-oriented). The "keepers" in both cases are aged women who must admit but will not welcome the initiate into their darkened and time-cursed domains. The narrator becomes conscious of his youth and senses the danger; however, he has passed a point beyond which there can be no return. The narrator's description as the old women lead the way is similarly gothic. For example, in "Mistral":

When we followed her down the hall we carried with us in
our ears the long rush of the recent wind, like in a sea shell. There was no light save the candle which she carried. So that, behind her, we walked in gloom out of which the serrated shadow of a stair on one wall reared dimly into the passing candle and dissolved in mounting serration, carrying the eye with it up the wall where there was not any light. (p. 308)

And, in "Evangeline," Raby leads the way into darkness:

She passed me, without touching me. I heard her begin to mount the stairs. I turned toward the sound, as though I could see her. . . . We mounted the stairs. She moved on ahead, surely, invisible. I held to the railing, feeling ahead, my eyeballs aching: suddenly I brushed into her where she stood motionless. . . . I followed her again, the soft sound of her bare feet. I touched a wall and heard a door click and felt the door yawn inward upon a rush of stale, fetid air. . . . (p. 597)

Both descriptions emphasize the gloom and discomfort. In both cases the narrator reacts to his sense of a trap closing around him. The movement within the building suggests an inevitable passage into death and despair. The reader as he identifies with the narrator is no longer permitted the safety of light and observation, but must rather be led as a child and revert to his more primitive sensations of smell and touch.

(4) The narrator now reaches the center and is permitted a momentary vision. This occurs in section III of both stories. In "Mistral" Don and the narrator meet and watch the priest. In "Evangeline," the narrator confronts Henry Sutpen. This step is both a discovery and a deepening of the mystery. The priest with his first glance at the young Americans is described in terms of internal torment: "He looked at us for the first time, out of weak, rushing eyes. They were brown and irisless, like those of an old dog. Looking at us, it was as though he had driven them up with whips and held them so, in cringing and rushing depression" (pp. 310-11). Henry Sutpen is presented more as an image of decay, but the description similarly focuses on the eyes (or eyelessness):

. . . the gaunt, pallid, skull-like head surrounded by long,
unkempt hair of the same ivory color, and a beard reaching almost to his waist, lying in a foul, yellowish nightshirt on foul, yellowish sheets. His mouth was open, and he breathed through it, peaceful, slow, faint, scarce stirring his beard. He lay with closed eyelids so thin that they looked like patches of dampened tissue paper over the balls. (p. 598)

Fittingly, neither man is able to speak. In the first case, the old woman stops the priest each time he begins a possible confession or explanation. In the second case, the old woman leads the narrator away after his momentary view of Henry. The narrator's response to the priest and to Henry is reaction to a vision—a haunting, ghostly image intended to transcend any form of normal, human exchange. The narrator, and by extension the reader, is to see and to know the effect of the worldly experience. After the priest leaves, Don asks for some explanation: "'You are seeing the hand of God, signorino,' she said. 'Pray God that you are too young to remember it'" (p. 314).

(5) The previous step serves as an initial vision; however, the narrator must still experience the apocalyptic moment in order to merge with the nightmare and become part of that which he has now encountered. Section III in both stories is followed by a step in which the narrator seeks understanding. Like step two, step five offers explanation, but the narrator is no longer the innocent, casual observer. He now compulsively seeks explanation for a world which he cannot escape. The informers are long residents of this world, and they no longer deal with the narrator as a complete novice. However, the informers cannot offer the narrator final explanations. Such explanations must be derived directly through confrontation. In "Mistral" Don and the narrator leave the presbytery and go to "the caffè on the lee side of the street" (p. 317). The view from the caffè offers a dual vision of the world of innocence left behind (a fiddler and piper on the curb, a peasant woman and child listening, and five young men drinking) and the world of experience. (The ward and soldier meet outside and walk off together; the waiter boasts of his atheism and worldly wisdom.) The waiter called "Grandfather lust himself" (p. 320) speaks to Don and the narrator as fellow travellers, assuming their knowledge of worldly ways. He insinuates plots and schemes with disguised detectives investigating the murder. ("So you made him too, did you? Came in here this afternoon; said he was a shoe-
drummer. But I made him” (p. 323). The waiter with his “sloven, precarious skill” is comfortable within this world and falsely assumes the comfort of the young men. But when the young men walk out into the darkness, the music has ceased, and they bicker about the waiter’s statements and about where they should go next—an argument which leaves the narrator alone on the road.

In “Evangeline,” the narrator is back downstairs in the dark kitchen with Raby. The narrator’s new position becomes clear as he first fears the dog’s pacing and barking outside, but after Raby goes to the window and hushes the dog, the narrator imitates her action, and the dog immediately obeys. Raby now speaks to the narrator as one who has seen and must attempt understanding. However, like the waiter, Raby cannot offer final realization. She tells the narrator, “You’ll hear what I going to tell you. What I aint going to tell you aint going to hear” (p. 602). When she has given the narrator all she intends to give him, including the information that Henry will not live until morning, she sends him away, which appears to be the narrator’s desire and intent. As in “Mistral,” this point of the story leaves the narrator alone in the darkness. Again the narrator desires escape, but he realizes that he cannot return to the safety of his previous detachment. After standing in the “myriad, peaceful, summer country midnight” (p. 605), he returns to the house, realizing that this in itself merges him with the world he has confronted, for “she [Raby] will know I lied to her like Charles Bon lied to Henry Sutpen” (p. 605). In his dream he continues this merging process by speaking directly to Charles Bon and Henry, but they also will not reveal the final secret. Again, discovery requires direct confrontation with the damned.

In this step, the narrator is taken into a final awareness. In both stories, there are actually two visions, the first more emotionally climactic, the second more rationally enlightening. In “Mistral,” the climactic image occurs with the priest “shuddering, writhing, twisting” against the wall. This moment presents the final destination of the narrator’s nightmarish descent. The narrator emphasizes the vision of damnation through his cursing. (“Where in hell do you expect to see it?” “Get down, damn you.” “This damn wind. This damn wind” (pp. 328-29).) The second part of the vision is “the handlebars rising from beyond the wall like the horns of a hidden antelope” (p. 328). This offers explanation as we realize that the priest’s onanistic agony results directly from the
ward and soldier hidden somewhere in the darkness of the copse. Clark properly notes Hawthorne's influence, and one can see the basic sense of Hawthorne's primitive, midnight forest in Faulkner's description of "the blob of the copse" that "seemed to pulse and fade, as though it breathed, lived" (p. 328). It is certainly gothicism—that dark or as Beck says "seamy side" of the romantic tradition, which is most responsible for both the image of the writhing, damned priest and the image of the dark, fecund forest, far beyond human knowledge or control.

The climax of "Evangeline" follows a similar two-part progression again with the use of a stock, gothic image—in this case, the midnight devastation of the mansion and, as in "The Fall of the House of Usher," of those whose lives are so entangled with the edifice that they must be destroyed with it. The image of the calm figure in the center of the fiery holocaust, followed by the complete collapse of the structure, is as gothic as the image of the internally burning priest. Again Faulkner follows this catharsis with an image which offers resolution of the mystery. In this case, the narrator discovers the metal case which contains the likeness of the octoroon wife rather than the likeness of Judith. This, more effectively than the resolution of "Mistral," solves the mystery element as Henry's motivation and action are clarified. Here we must keep in mind the close relationship between the gothic romance and the murder mystery. Although there can be a conflict between the two in terms of our faith in ratiocination, the two are merged (since Poe) through the cohesion of their nightmarish effects. In "Evangeline," we may note a degree of separation, as the burning of the Sutpen mansion is derived from the gothic romance, whereas sorting through the debris and finding the picture are derived from the murder mystery. The effect conflicts to an extent since the discovery in the aftermath of holocaust offers the reader a certain reassurance which dims the previous effect of the devastation. Although "Mistral" offers a less satisfactory resolution of the murder mystery (or possibly because it does offer less resolution), it has a more horrifying impact. The reader is left with only the despair and isolation of the two young men.

Yet in terms of Faulkner's own progression from "Mistral" to "Evangeline," the second story offers a proper direction for his future writing. By transforming the Old World code of Catholicism into the New World code of the Southern culture,
Faulkner is able to progress far beyond the formulaic elements of the gloomy cathedrals, mausoleums, and catacombs, beyond the cowled image of the mad monk, and beyond the repression, murder, and devastation typifying the Old World’s painful progression out of the ecclesiastical security and stability of the Middle Ages. Old World despair is replaced by the pains of initiation. The Southern mansion becomes a proper American equivalent of the European castle and cathedral. The mad monk or hypersensitive aristocrat becomes the innocent entrepreneur or Southern gentleman. The repression, murder, and devastation result from the evil within innocence—the racial, sexual, and finally human assumptions which destroy the dream of the new beginning. “Evangeline” permits Faulkner to follow a structure derived from the Old World tradition but offering all of the possibilities of the New World experience. “Mistral” is accurate in terms of its psychic impact, but it denies the importance of direct social observation and relies upon stark, archetypal images to deal with an internal reality. “Evangeline” offers the possibility of merging the psychic effect of successful gothic fiction with the historical and social reality of the author. Certainly Faulkner himself must have been conscious of the incomplete merging in “Evangeline.” The story remains too cautious, too close to its gothic origin. Many years and many revisions would be required to transform this still-ephemeral horror story into a truly physical, as well as psychic, American reality.

NOTES

3Kerr, Faulkner’s Gothic Domain, 29.
5Joseph Blotner, Faulkner: A Biography, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, 1974), 595. Further references to dates within this paragraph are also derived from Blotner’s biography.
6My dating of “Mistral” before “Evangeline” is primarily based on its submission nearly three years before “Evangeline.” Since Faulkner was most interested in profiting from his short stories, it is unlikely that he would wait so long to submit a story as exciting as “Evangeline.” However, early manuscripts are available for both “Mistral” and
“Evangeline,” so one cannot be certain that the early version of one or of both had not existed long before the submission of the later versions. Estella Schoenberg in Old Tales and Talking: Quentin Compson in William Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom! and Related Works (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977) offers the following attempt to date “Evangeline”: “If any of the Don-and-I stories was written when its frame indicates it was, it would be this one. For one thing, the setting of both frame and story is the same. For another thing, the writing here is more polished, the style more sophisticated and elaborate, than in any of the other tales. In contrast to this early known writing of ‘Evangeline’ the other Don-and-I stories are almost Hemingway-like in the brevity and directness of their sentences and in the handling of foreign languages by suggestion. The draft, however, has very few miss-licks. It could represent the reworking of earlier material—material always, even in Absalom, Absalom!, too miscellaneous for complete resolution” (p. 23).

7Lisa Paddock, “‘Trifles with a tragic profundity’: The Importance of ‘Mistral,’” Mississippi Quarterly 32 (1979), 413-22; Charles C. Clark, “‘Mistral’: A Study in Human Tempering,” Mississippi Quarterly 21 (1968), 195-204; Schoenberg, Old Tales. Schoenberg notes the following manuscript revisions of Absalom, Absalom!: “As he began the writing of Absalom, Absalom! Faulkner moved these two narrators through at least two metamorphoses. For a while they were, as in the stories, Don and I. Then they were Chisholm and Burke. At one point, briefly, they seem to have been combined as contrasting sides of a single mind—Quentin’s. In the end they became Quentin and Shreve—or maybe they had been Quentin and his friend all along” (p. 21).

8William Faulkner, “Mistral,” These 13 (New York: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith, 1931). This text will be used in all future references to “Mistral” with page numbers included parenthetically.

9Paddock, “The Importance of ‘Mistral’,” 415.

10A listing of standard gothic devices appears in Jane Lundblad’s Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Tradition of Gothic Romance (New York: Haskell House, 1964). From this list, the following apply directly to “Mistral”: the castle (sometimes convent, etc.); the crime (“mysterious crime, not infrequently illicit or incestuous love, and at times perpetrated by a person in holy orders” (p. 17)); religion (“dramatic personae are often monks or have some kind of tie with religion” (p. 18)); Italians (“The villain of the piece is generally an Italian. This device follows an old tradition, going back to the influence of the Catholic excommunication of Machiavelli” (p. 18)); deformity (in “Mistral” the old woman on the road has a gnarled, rigid hand and speaks to her deaf husband with her other hand); nature. (“For purpose of evoking sensations of terror, the authors of these novels frequently avail themselves of natural phenomena, sometimes rather surprisingly stressed to serve the terrifying purpose. A deep darkness often attends the crucial events. Rain is falling, wind is blowing, etc.” (p. 21)) The darkness and wind are repeatedly stressed by Faulkner. Another conventional gothic device listed by Lundblad, the ghost, figures prominently in “Evangeline.” As Lundblad explains, these “apparitions may also be false ghosts, viz. phenomena that seem
supernatural to the beholder, but are afterwards rationally explained” (p. 20). A more extensive analysis of these standard gothic devices may be found in Eino Railo’s *The Haunted Castle: A Study of the Elements of English Romanticism* (New York: Humanities Press, 1964).

However, Schoenberg notes that Faulkner often adjusted introductions to update the material when the story was ready to be submitted.


Schoenberg contends that there is no hard evidence that Bon in the novel is either black or Sutpen. Thus, except for Quentin’s “creation” of Bon, he remains the same essential mystery as in “Evangeline.”