

Do You Hate It?

The American South in William Faulkner's Literature and Brad Paisley's Country Music.



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ABSTRACT

William Faulkner is one of the greatest American authors, and especially one of the greatest authors on the American South. Brad Paisley is a contemporary country musician whose songs involve the South and who uses similar themes to describe Southern culture as William Faulkner. In this thesis, I will analyze what kind of themes and ideas the twentieth century author on the one hand, and the contemporary country artist on the other hand, express through their cultural works. There are a number of questions that I aim to answer: what are the differences between Faulkner as a modernist author writing for an elite audience, and Paisley describing the South through his country music? What themes do the two artists use to express their views on the South? What is Southern identity according to Faulkner and Paisley?

Keywords: William Faulkner, Brad Paisley, the South, literature, country music, ambivalence, *As I Lay Dying*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *A Rose for Emily*

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Introduction

“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” (Faulkner, *Absalom* 174).

The American South is a region and a concept at the same time. A region that some call the most ‘marked’ region in the United States (Bassett 11). That means that it is not only a region that is used to describe an area where people live, but that it has also become an idea of a way of life distinct from the big city life that characterizes non-Southern cities like New York, Los Angeles or Chicago. Within the creative industries, there are two genres that actively address the culture of and life in the South: literature and country music. There is a lot of American literature that has been written in the South. ‘Southern’ literature has gradually developed into a major literary genre, and is full of themes that are relevant in the area. Themes that mark the literature of the South are poverty vs. wealth, racism, rurality, class, race, small-town people, darkness, obscenity, the language of the South, the importance of religion, and perhaps most notably: the burden of the past which is mainly portrayed through the Civil War and its aftermath. These themes stem from the problems that the South faces, like poverty, segregation of blacks and whites, bad education in comparison with the rest of the country, and the writing techniques that southern writers use are satire, irony, and the grotesque, which are techniques that can help enlighten the often heavy topics that southern literature addresses (Strauss, par. 10).

There has been a change in the way Southern literature is characterized. Susan Castillo Street and Charles Crow argue “in recent years, scholars have moved beyond traditional views of the South and of Southern literature as characterized by a strong sense of place, nostalgia for a lost past and a Lost Cause, and a history of defeat, articulated by white male writers” (1). Street and Crow argue here that there is a more diverse group of authors in the South, not only confined to white men. What’s more, Southern literature in general has become more diverse and should not be seen as monolithic or caricatural.

For decades, Southern literature was characterized mainly by the burden of the past, the longing for the ‘old’ South from before the Civil War. The literature of past authors like amongst others William Faulkner and Flannery O’Connor draws on these themes, but these twentieth century authors already tried to give a different voice as well, a voice that was not only positive about the South and wanted the ‘old’ South back, but a voice that mirrored the ambivalence they felt when thinking about the South and its culture. So already in the first half of the twentieth century, Southern authors were trying to move away from the

regionalism, the nostalgia, and the blindness for the problems of the region that characterized the writing from the South before that time. An example of these authors is William Faulkner, who was –even though he was a white, male author—one of the first important Southern authors to incorporate this ambivalence in his works. Joseph Keener calls Faulkner “the pope of all things Southern and literary” (xiv). Noel Polk, one of the most influential contemporary Faulkner scholars argues that Faulkner is essential in how many people perceive the South. “For so many writers in the South, especially those who want to be southern writers rather than writers, Faulkner’s vision seems to have defined what can be seen, so that southern writers following him have indeed been in a double bind” (3). Regarding the themes relevant to southern literature, Faulkner has left an indelible impression and a framework for the themes that southern literature addresses. According to Polk, “more critics than even southern writers have felt that Faulkner alone has defined the terms by which we can talk about the South” (5). For a large part, the ‘old’ themes in Southern literature such as the burden of the past and nostalgia are important in modern literature, but the ambivalence and the different themes that have come up during the twentieth century are also addressed by contemporary Southern authors such as Anne Rice, Cormac McCarthy, and John Grisham.

Literature is an important creative industry in the South, but another significant creative industry that blooms in the South and often expresses the culture and identity of the South is country music. In their paper, Richard Peterson and Paul Di Maggio investigate the roots of country music and describe how it developed from a minor genre played and consumed only by very small groups in rural areas of America and Canada to a mainstream, highly popular music genre that is played all over the North-American continent. They describe how Nashville became the capital of country music and how the South turned into the major hinterland for the music. “Country music, and the closely related white gospel music, have become badges of southern ethnic identity” (Peterson and Di Maggio 500).

Country music has a distinct sound that has made it popular, but the lyrics to the music are also very important. The music is very popular in the rural areas in America, most notably the South and the Midwest. Musicologist Nadine Hubbs of the University of Michigan argues “there are good reasons for the customary association of country music with the South, including country’s early history in rural southern song collecting and record industry talent scouting, and the persistence of southern themes in song lyrics, band names, and other aspects of country music culture” (11).

An example of an artist who heavily connects his own country music to the South is Brad Paisley, an American country musician who has been active in the country scene for almost

twenty years and has gradually turned into one of the most popular contemporary country musicians. Paisley, a West-Virginian by birth who has been living in Tennessee for more than half of his life is proud of the South and repeatedly expresses that he enjoys living there. Like Faulkner, he seems to see the South as his main expertise, and many of his songs revolve around the region he lives in. He might also feel that, because of his heritage as a Southerner, he has to represent the South. Paisley incorporates many of the important themes of Southern literature that have been discussed in this introduction into his songs. However—even though he loves the South and enjoys living there—he feels the same ambivalence that Faulkner and other authors of Southern literature feel, which makes Paisley a very interesting country singer and an interesting case study.

The focus in this master's thesis will be on literature and country music lyrics of the South, two ways in which the South is often shown. The main question is what the differences are between William Faulkner as a high modernist author writing about the South for an elite audience and Brad Paisley representing the South as a popular contemporary country musician. In this question, William Faulkner is obviously the example of the American author who has had much influence on the South, its identity and its literature. Brad Paisley is in this thesis the contemporary popular country star whose songs show connections to Faulkner's legacy and the idea of a Southern identity. This thesis will thus be a comparing analysis of literature with a completely different genre: country music lyrics. It will discuss questions like which place both men have within their genre, or which themes they address in their works. These are legitimate and relevant questions because both country music and literature are manifestations of Southern identity. Doing this research is relevant, since there has been a lot of research on the topic of the South and of Southern literature such as the works of Cleanth Brooks, Hugh Holman or Noel Polk, but not so much about country music and the relation between country music and the literature of the South. Taking a highly acclaimed, Nobel-prize winning author who has probably been the most influential writer on the South so far, and showing how a contemporary popular country artist takes those concepts that the influential author addressed in his works, is a new and relevant method of research.

Chapter 1: William Faulkner: On Southern Literature

For almost all his life, William Faulkner lived in Mississippi, and he made the region into his expertise. Already in the initial stages of his writing career, Faulkner was “capturing the accent, diction, and syntax of the rural people of northern Mississippi” (Williamson 200). Because of his lifelong experience as an inhabitant of Mississippi, he knew the state very well and became really engaged in its socio-political life later in his career. However, Faulkner not only wrote about Mississippi, but about the South, the region his home state was part of, which was his area of expertise, an area considered so special by outsiders that made him realize that it needed explanation. Faulkner himself declared on his writing on the American South “I’m inclined to think that my material, the South, is not very important to me. I just happen to know it, and don’t have time in one life to learn another one and write it at the same time” (Blotner 185). It could be true that the material of the South was not very important to Faulkner himself, but the South was definitely, without question, essential to his literature. And as he declares, to him, it is obvious that he should write about the South. It is the region he spent almost his entire life, which he knew the most about and which he loved (to hate).

An important literary critic and professor who has done a lot of research into the literature and the ‘Southernness’ of William Faulkner is Cleanth Brooks, a contemporary of Faulkner, born in Kentucky in 1904. Brooks was seven years younger than Faulkner, but grew up in a similar time and environment in a Southern state. On being a Southerner and what it means to come from the South, Brooks argues:

“[m]ost of us grew up, as [Faulkner] did, in the South of the early decades of this century (the 20th) [and] had talked to Confederate veterans, who were in some instances our own grandfathers. We felt a sense of identity as ‘Southerners’. We believed that we really constituted a kind of subnation within the United States, and were very much aware of the consequences of the South’s defeat in the war. Such a defeat did make a difference in one’s present life. Our loss of the war had political and economic consequences that had affected and continued to affect us” (265).

The South did not have the opportunity to break with the agrarian-regional culture and could not shift to an urban-industrial culture. That led to poverty in the region of the United States, which many other parts of the country did not know at all. Faulkner, like many of his contemporaries, knew this poverty and realized that they grew up in a state that was poor on a much more significant scale than other US states. The year the American stock market crashed, 1929, was the year that Faulkner wrote *The Sound and the Fury*. Joel Williamson

argues about Faulkner's later novels that he "seldom mentioned the depression explicitly in his stories, and yet those stories were undergirded by a keen awareness of the long history of poverty in the South, one that really began with the Civil War and, in effect, put the South as a region in the position usual among the underdeveloped regions of the world" (Williamson 227). Brooks agrees with the fact that there was poverty in the South, especially during the Great Depression of the 1930s, but he does argue that poverty clearly played a major role in the works of Faulkner. This poverty is however not connected to the Great Depression, but to the history of poverty and despair that seems to characterize the post-Civil War South. What's more, of some of Faulkner's best works, such as *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* it is not possible for the Great Depression to play a role, since those novels are set before the stock-market crash of 1929. According to Brooks:

"Faulkner's fiction clearly reflects this general cultural situation: there was poverty, extreme at one end of the social scale and not much better than genteel at the other. The habits and customs of an older America persisted. The South's was essentially an agricultural society, a society of small towns and farms, a hunting society where everybody had a gun and supplied the table from time to time with squirrels, rabbits, partridges, and, very occasionally, with venison" (Brooks 266).

What both scholars are arguing is that Faulkner creates a universe of the South that he is familiar with, where poverty plays a significant role, and where a depression had been going for years before 1929. That is the South we get to know when reading Faulkner. A South with many troubles and issues, but with a strong sense of history, where the trauma of the Civil War still plays a significant role in almost everyone's life, but also with a genuine feeling of pride of that history, its people, and its culture. "[H]istory not so much book-learned, as passed down from father to son or from mother to daughter, or simply absorbed through a process of cultural osmosis" (Brooks 266). *Absalom, Absalom!* is one of Faulkner's examples of this kind of transmission of history from person to person, because that novel is a collection of stories told by people to other people, each person giving their own personal interpretation to -sometimes- the same events. The Civil War ended long before Faulkner was born, but is in many of his novels a central theme. He made the memory of the Civil War, through talks with people in the South who did experience it, *his* memory: history thus became lived experience.

Faulkner's infatuation with the South resulted in the creation of Yoknapatawpha County. According to many people, this fictional county that Faulkner introduced in his 1927 novel *Flags in the Dust* was a miniature of Lafayette County in Mississippi, where Faulkner spent most of his life. However, several scholars and academics also agree upon the fact that Yoknapatawpha is a miniature of the complete South. Cleanth Brooks argues that "Faulkner's invention of Yoknapatawpha County was crucial to his career as a writer. His mythical county provided him with a social context in which what was healthiest in his romanticism could live in fruitful tension with his realistic and detailed knowledge of the men and manners of his own land. In Yoknapatawpha, the nymphs and fauns of his early imagination take on flesh and blood" (preface xi). The social context was clear in Yoknapatawpha, which seems a real county that could actually exist in the real world. Through close reading of Faulkner's works, one learns for example, that there are different groups and classes of people in the county, that express different sentiments, and that can be categorized in several groups, such as the older generation and the newer generation, or in higher or lower class people. Brooks describes this as

"they have differing emphases and even differing ideas of what is proper. Colonel Sartoris, for example, belongs to an older generation, with a paternalistic ethic, a certain elaborate courtliness of manner, and a good many old-fashioned beliefs. It was he who, undoubtedly with the approbation of his peers, concocted the fiction that Miss Emily (from "A Rose for Emily") owned no real estate taxes because of an arrangement made years before between her father and the town. The new generation, blessed with more up-to-date ideas, insists that she pay taxes like everyone else, that she should attach the new street numbers to her house, and so on" (159).

This behavior shows that Emily, the most important character in William Faulkner's short story "A Rose for Emily", belongs to the old generation herself, and that she refuses to give up her heritage as member of a family of the antebellum Southern aristocracy.

Demography

In a hand-drawn map of Yoknapatawpha County, Faulkner has tried to show what the boundaries of the county are and where in the county certain events from his novels take place (fig. 1). With little scribbles on the map, Faulkner shows where for example Thomas Sutpen's mansion from *Absalom, Absalom!* is located, or where Bundrens from *As I Lay Dying* are living. Faulkner has divided the population of Yoknapatawpha into two groups:

blacks and whites. There are 6298 whites and 9313 blacks, meaning the blacks were a majority in the county. These are the only groups that Faulkner describes, turning the color of one's skin into the only mode of distinguishing different groups of people when counting the population of an area, overlooking the other ethnic groups.

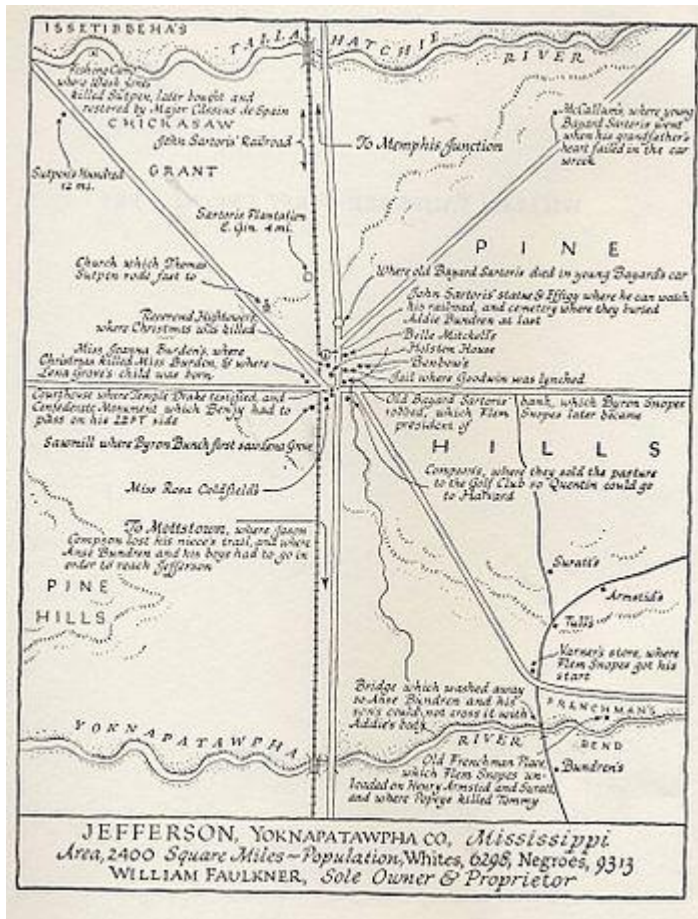


Fig. 1 Map of Yoknapatawpha County

With the creation of the fictional Yoknapatawpha County, William Faulkner has tried to create a county that looks like a genuine, actually existing county. It has, much like other counties in the South of the US, a rich history. Native Americans used to inhabit American lands, and also big parts of Mississippi. The Chickasaw Indians was an indigenous nation that lived in the Mississippi area, spanning a population of about 40,000 people across Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee and Oklahoma. Faulkner's map of his fictional county shows where there are pieces of land that are still owned by Indians, such as the Chickasaw Grant that is shown on the map. The county's name, Yoknapatawpha is—as one might expect—an Indian name, from the Chickasaw language, meaning land that is cut or slashed open. In some of Faulkner's stories, Indian 'mounds' are present in the county. These mounds are burial mounds that the Chickasaw used to store their dead, which still characterizes the

environment of the Lafayette County, that contains some of the mounds that Faulkner seems to have incorporated in his stories. According to Thomas Hines, Faulkner had been fascinated by the mounds that he saw around him at a young age, and is that one of the reasons why they come back in his novels and short stories (21). In *Absalom, Absalom!* it turns out that Thomas Sutpen has gotten the hundred miles of land that he has used to create ‘Sutpen’s hundred’ from a “poor ignorant Indian” (178), who he has tricked into giving him his land. That implies that like in the real America, much of the land was owned by Indians, but stolen by whites.

Geography

The geography of the county is, like other features of the county, much like a real Southern county. Charles Aiken is a professor at the university of Tennessee in Knoxville, who specializes in rural geography, and mainly the geography of the South. Taking his expertise on geographical studies as the starting point of his project, Aiken has done research into the geography and the demography of Yoknapatawpha. In this project, he tries to show how much Yoknapatawpha resembles real parts of the South. He distinguishes the whole South into two different categories: Lowland and Upland South. The first, Lowland South, is the area that housed the most plantations, slave-owners and slaves. The Lowland South is characterized by agrarianism, and the production of rice, tobacco, sugar and most notably cotton is highly important for the region. Because of the widespread slavery in the area, there is a majority of black people in the Lowland South. The Upland South is characterized by more geographical diversity. Whereas the lowlands are mostly flat and fit for agriculture, the uplands are more diverse, with mountain ridges, plateaus and basins and thus less ideal for large-scale agriculture (Aiken 332). The Upland South is demographically different as well: since there have never been many plantations and small amounts of slaves, the amount of black people is low. Its economy has always been based on agrarianism, but was focused on small white farmers or sharecroppers.

This duality of Lowland and Upland South, is present in Yoknapatawpha. Aiken argues that an

“examination of the physical and cultural geography of Yoknapatawpha County initially leads to the conclusion that it is the South in microcosm, complete to its Upland and Lowland sections. Faulkner’s world has subregions distinguished by topographical, economic, and cultural traits. The northern and northwestern parts, including the rich Tallahatchie River bottom, are plantation country, the ‘fat, black

rich plantation earth still synonymous of the proud fading white plantation names’.

Here in the part of the county characteristic of the Lowland South are McCaslin, Sartoris, Sutpen, and Compson holdings, and here resides most of the county’s black population” (334).

The central part of Yoknapatawpha is the part that does not contain any black people and does not welcome any strangers. One could say that this is the domain of the so-called ‘white trash’. It is hill country, without any roads or good infrastructure, that is inhabited by the McCallums, Gowries, Fraziers, and Muirs who do not speak proper English (Aiken 334). One could see this region as the Yoknapatawpha version of the Appalachian mountain-land, that is well-known for this demographic layout. The remainder of Yoknapatawpha County, called Frenchman’s Bend, is mainly farmland, inhabited by small farmers and sharecroppers like the Bundrens of *As I Lay Dying*, who do not own big pieces of land nor big farmhouses. There are a few blacks who are probably former slaves living in Frenchman’s Bend, but none of these former slaves own land.

Rural vs. Urban

The important characters that inhabit Yoknapatawpha in Faulkner’s stories often have difficult relationships with the urban areas inside and outside of their home county. Yoknapatawpha is a very rural county that only has Jefferson as a town of more stature and significance than the one-horse towns that the county has plenty of. Many of Faulkner’s works focus on small towns and rural spaces, and it is very important that Faulkner has created Jefferson in Yoknapatawpha, and that the county is situated closely to Memphis, Tennessee, which in some of Faulkner’s works is the most important town. During Faulkner’s lifetime, Memphis grew from a provincial town with 100,000 inhabitants to a much bigger place with nearly half a million inhabitants. For the characters in Faulkner’s stories, there was a sharp contrast between the rural places they inhabited, and Memphis, “with its congestion, its paved streets, its Italian immigrants, and its second- and third-generation, urban-born population” (Aiken 343). In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Henry Sutpen goes to Memphis. In the novel, Memphis and New Orleans are certainly described as the big cities, unknown to the inhabitants of Jefferson, who have never been outside of Yoknapatawpha, as Mr. Compson tells Quentin “I can imagine Henry in New Orleans, who had not yet even been in Memphis, whose entire worldly experience consisted of sojourns at other houses, plantations, almost interchangeable with his own, where he followed the same routine which he did at home” (108). However, even Jefferson, the much smaller town that formed the most important center

of Yoknapatawpha, does for the uneducated, rural characters in Faulkner's stories that live in the remote areas of the county feel like a big urban space. For those people, Jefferson offers services and products that they are not able to get at the small-town country stores they usually visit (Aiken 342). In *As I Lay Dying*, the poor, rural Bundren family ends up in Jefferson which is the place where Addie, the mother, wants to be buried. Dewey Dell, the daughter of the family, is pregnant and wants to get an abortion at the pharmacy. Upon entering the town, the girl has changed her clothes. "She now wears her Sunday dress, her beads, her shoes, and stockings" (Faulkner AILD 209). She seems to do this in order to not attract attention, thinking that when she dresses nicely, people will not notice that she comes from the 'country' and that she is not used to visiting a place like Jefferson. However, the minute she enters the pharmacy, she is recognized as a country girl by the clerks who work there.

The Development of Yoknapatawpha

Like all places, Yoknapatawpha is a hybrid entity. Cities and counties grow or shrink, and the same goes for Yoknapatawpha, which becomes clear in Faulkner's 1936 novel *Absalom, Absalom!*. This novel is set for the most part in Jefferson, Yoknapatawpha and describes at certain points how big the county is and what kind of developments it went through. In the beginning of the story, when Tomas Sutpen had just arrived in the town, Jefferson was still a village with "the Holston House, the courthouse, six stores, a blacksmith and livery stable, a saloon frequented by drovers and peddlers, three churches and perhaps thirty residences" (32). Later on in the story, one notices that the town has grown in size and in the amount of facilities it offers its inhabitants. After Sutpen has married Ellen Coldfield and got children with her, the narrator describes how Ellen liked to go shopping in Jefferson, which now counted twenty stores instead of six (AA 69).

Yoknapatawpha is a fictional world, but one that closely resembles an actual county in the Southern United States. One that, according to some, could be seen as a microcosm of the South, with a rich history, people with different ethnicities, skin-colors, classes, and ideas. According to Cleanth Brooks, the creation of Yoknapatawpha also brought a risk to Faulkner's writing: "the risk of turning him into a mere local colorist, exploiting the oddities of a provincial scene for the titillation and amusement of a condescending 'outside' world" (preface xi). But Faulkner never became a local colorist. He became one of the most influential authors in American history and perhaps the most influential author on Southern literature. Yoknapatawpha is an essentially southern county. However, at the same time the

problems that the county faces are not exclusively Southern, there is a big difference in status between the poor and the rich, and between whites and blacks, in the South, but also in the rest of the country. The issues raised by the people living in Yoknapatawpha and the problems the county has itself are issues of universal human nature and they have reference to actual developments in the present world, with a heavy emphasis on the South, its culture, and its vernacular.

Novels and Short Stories

This section will explore the themes and characteristics of Faulkner's novels and short stories and will analyze how Faulkner portrays the Southern identity. It will delve into the themes connected to the South as initiated by Faulkner, because he, in the eyes of many scholars and academics such as Noel Polk, laid the framework for southern literature, and the themes, styles and ideas associated with it (Polk 3, 5). For this section, three of William Faulkner's works will be used: the novels *As I Lay Dying*, *Absalom, Absalom!* and the short story "A Rose for Emily".

As I Lay Dying

As mentioned before, *As I Lay Dying* revolves around the poor Bundren family that lives in Frenchman's Bend in Yoknapatawpha. The family consists of the father, Anse Bundren, the sick mother who dies early in the story, Addie Bundren, and their children Cash, Jewel (Addie's illegitimate son), Darl, Dewey Dell, and Vardaman. Upon entering the story, the reader learns that Addie has been sick for a while and that she can die at any moment. Cash, the eldest son in the family, is a carpenter and is already working on Addie's coffin before she dies. Her last wish is that she is buried in Jefferson, the biggest town in Yoknapatawpha County. That means that the family has to make a long trip, since they live in the poor, rural, remote area of the county. After Addie dies, Anse and his children set out to fulfill her wish and bring her to Jefferson. They encounter numerous problems along the way, because the rivers that they have to cross are flooded and the bridges have been washed out after heavy rainfall on the night Addie died. Anse, a very stubborn man who refuses any charity does not want to take strangers' food or shelter, which means that the family has to sleep in barns without the farmers knowing it, and going to bed hungry. The family loses the two mules that carried the wagon when they try to cross one of the rivers they encounter on a small wooden bridge, and they almost lose the coffin with Addie's body. In an attempt to save the coffin, Cash breaks his leg and has to travel on top of the wagon for the remainder of the

journey. The family eventually arrives in Jefferson, where almost every family member has to take care of something first. Anse has to make sure that he has shovels in order to dig a grave for Addie, Dewey Dell wants to get an abortion from the local pharmacy, Darl is arrested for arson: he set a barn on fire on the way to Jefferson, and Cash asks the medical experts in the town to take a look at his broken leg. Just after burying Addie, Anse takes the money that Dewey Dell had saved for 'new teeth' and uses it to marry the woman who borrowed him the shovels. So on the same day that he has buried his late wife, Anse already marries a new woman.

As I Lay Dying was published in 1930, one year after *The Sound and the Fury* was published. For many literary scholars, the publication of *As I Lay Dying* confirmed that Faulkner could be considered a modernist author. These two novels had shown that Faulkner was a stream-of-consciousness author, which is a narrative mode that depicts the multiple thought patterns and feelings which pass through someone's mind and was very clearly linked to modernism. What's more, critics showed that Faulkner dared to take on new ways of writing literature, switching perspectives in one novel, even using fifteen different narrators in *As I Lay Dying*. On top of that, Faulkner also experimented with unreliable narration. *Absalom, Absalom!*, which will be discussed later in this chapter, knows many narrators through one single narrator, and also experiments with narration that is false, or with speculation as narration, making it very difficult to know what is true and what is false. In *As I Lay Dying*, one of the most important chapters is posthumously narrated by Addie Bundren, marking that Faulkner here also experimented, trying to give a voice to a dead person. These experiments are all part of modernist writing, that experimented heavily with traditional writing structures and patterns.

Faulkner is also known for playing with time, which is a modernist feature. Many of his stories, including *As I Lay Dying*, are non-linear, or episodic, which sometimes makes it confusing for the reader to know when certain events take place. Many events overlap each other without the reader at first knowing it. Since Faulkner created Yoknapatawpha County and made that the stage for many of his novels, there are characters that the reader encounters in multiple works. An example is Quentin Compson, narrator in *Absalom, Absalom!*, who also had a major role in *The Sound and the Fury*. From the latter novel, which was published in 1929, the reader might already know that he is going to commit suicide. In *Absalom*, published in 1936, there is not one single word about Quentin committing suicide, indicating that that happens later that year, or that in this 'universe', Quentin might not kill himself.

As I Lay Dying is not a happy story: it is almost the opposite of a happy story,

characterized by feelings of despair, sadness, poverty, and desolateness. The farm house that the Bundren family inhabits is a dilapidated building in a remote and poor area of Yoknapatawpha County. Faulkner's writing style in the novel emphasizes that the setting is sad, full of dust and mud, without any opportunities for its inhabitants. A quote from Dewey Dell, the only daughter of the Bundren family, accurately describes her feelings of Frenchman's Bend, when she says "[t]he dead air shapes the dead earth in the dead darkness, further away than seeing shapes the dead earth" (57). Almost everything in the world of the Bundren family seems dead, crooked or lost. Michael Gorra argues in his Norton Critical Edition of *As I Lay Dying* "Faulkner has in the Bundrens given us a family whose lives, forty miles away from the nearest significant town, have lagged several decades behind their times" (205). According to Richard Gray, the Bundren family is nevertheless portrayed as a family of Southern folk heroes "who embodied Southerners' sense -and especially poor Southerners' sense" (Gray "Carnival" 336). They go on an 'adventure' that should bring the matriarch of the family to the place of her burial. This seems as a very difficult and hard task for the family to do, especially with the small resources they have, but they all seem to want to do this and take responsibility and eagerness to fulfill Addie's last wish. Hugh Holman, an important scholar of Southern literature, has stated that

"the use of southern history by serious southern novelists has been a tragic fable of man's lot in a hostile world (...) man does not lose his tragic stature in the process; he retains, though soiled and common like the Bundrens of Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, the potential of being challenged by an obligation and of accomplishing the impossible in discharging it. In this world, dark with evil and torn with bloody violence, over and over an idea of human dignity and responsibility comes" (11).

The ideas stated here by Holman correspond with Faulkner's novel. The Bundren family is a tragic fable and dark comedy of man's lot in a hostile world, but eventually, there is some comfort in the fact that the whole family has done almost everything in their power to reach Jefferson and make sure that Addie is buried there. When Anse has already found a new wife right after Addie's burial is absurd and shameful, but through Cash, the reader learns that this woman eventually helps the Bundrens to become more in touch with the future, for instance in buying and using a graphophone (Faulkner 239).

As I Lay Dying is one of Faulkner's earliest novels, and it introduces many of the themes that would come to be seen as typical Southern themes for which Faulkner laid the framework. The poverty that surrounds the Bundren family is essential to the story and comes from the family's heritage as a lower-class people in the South. Despite this lower-class

heritage, many of the characters have saved some money for themselves, to buy something that they desire or need: Jewel buys a horse with money he saved, Dewey Dell wants to buy new teeth. However, the family needs that money in order to survive the trip to Jefferson, and eventually Anse even uses the money Dewey Dell saved for her new teeth to marry the woman who borrowed him the shovels for digging Addie's grave. Vardaman, the youngest child of the family, realizes that money is important and that his family does not have much. At one point, he says:

“The train is behind the glass, red on the track. When it runs the tracks shines on and off. Pa said flour and sugar and coffee costs so much. Because I am a country boy because boys in town. Bicycles. Why do flour and sugar and coffee cost so much when he is a country boy. (...) Why ain't I a town boy, pa? I said God made me. I did not said to God to made me in the country” (AILD 58).

This quote shows that Vardaman realizes what it means to be poor. He has seen a toy train in a shop window somewhere and would like to have this. He understands that he will never get this because his family cannot afford expensive gifts for him, as they find even normal products like coffee and sugar expensive. Vardaman also shows that there is a clear difference between the rich and the poor, and between the people in the country and the ones in the town. Country boys like him are not able to get fancy toys or other fancy things, whereas people from the town are able to get these kind of things. He notices a big divide between the financial situation of town people and country people, where the country people function as the poor, lower class people. The duality of rich vs. poor, the lower class vs. the higher class – sometimes connected with the city vs. the countryside—is an essential theme of the South.

As I Lay Dying was published in 1930, when America was much more rural than it is now. America's biggest cities, New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, did however already have big metropolitan areas around them and these areas all counted over one million people. At that time, the biggest place in Mississippi was Meridian, which was a very small town with its twenty-three thousand inhabitants. Mississippi, much like other southern states, was still very much relying on the pre-industrial economy of before the Civil War. David Davis argues in *A Literary History of Mississippi* that “[f]or most Mississippians, life was rural, either on a farm or in a crossroads community, and isolated. (...) the experience of urbanism, with the exception of an occasional visit to Memphis or New Orleans was wholly apart from their lives” (172). The rurality and the lack of an urban space that Davis describes applies to the Bundren family, who never seem to come out of the region that they live in, except for the trip they are making in the novel. Addie's wish to be buried in Jefferson is too important for them

to just stay at home, in the rural, remote area of Yoknapatawpha, south of Frenchman's Bend, the most remote region of the county. Because of the rurality of Mississippi and the South in general, rurality became an important theme in Southern writing. Many of Faulkner's works, including this novel, contribute to his idea of the South as a rural area that depended on agrarianism for a long time and did not open up for more modernity and industrialization until way into the twentieth century.

Another recurring theme in the South is religion. The Pew research center has done an elaborate study which shows that the number of Christians in the South is very high (PEW). Themes of southern religious history are, according to Paul Harvey "racial separation, sin, [and] forgiveness" ("God" 321). Harvey also sees a paradox of southern American history and religious history, that entails "the deep contradiction between human spiritual equality in the eyes of God and divinely ordained social inequality in the everyday world" ("God" 322). As *I Lay Dying* contains, like many of Faulkner's works, a lot of references to Christianity. Often Faulkner goes even further than mere referencing. According to some scholars, Faulkner has written many lengthy passages, chapters or even whole books that are structured or patterned after the Christian story (Potter 49). There are three characters in the novel that talk a lot about religion: Cora Tull, reverend Whitfield, and Anse Bundren. All of these three characters like to express how religious and 'pure' they are, especially Cora Tull, who, in each chapter she narrates, tells the reader how she has always behaved as a good Christian and has "tried to live right in the sight of God and man" (AILD 19). The same goes for reverend Whitfield, who is a reverend and thus obviously has to spread the Christian word. He is a Christian, occupied with praying and condemning other people for sinning, while he realizes that he has sinned himself as well. He has had an affair with Addie Bundren, which resulted into the birth of Jewel. Having an affair with a married woman and conceiving an extramarital child is one of the biggest sins in the Christian world, especially for a reverend. Vernon Tull sums Whitfield's behavior up aptly when he says "his voice is bigger than him" (AILD 80). The same could be said, though less poignantly, about Anse, who does not see himself as a religious person, but thinks he can get whatever he wants through being humble, peaceful and—as a result—respected. According to A.M. Potter, these three characters are satisfied with themselves: "Cora in her complacent assurance of her 'reward' for all her good works and piety, Whitfield in the superficial piety of his role as preacher, and Anse in his ability to manipulate others to do everything for him" (53). The presence of these three characters in the novel could be seen as Faulknerian criticism on religion and on the shallowness of these kinds of people who think that every sin they commit can be countered with their good and 'pure'

behavior that they show when they are not sinning. Faulkner describes these people as hypocrites who use religion as a façade for their sinful behavior. The Bundren children might be better examples of religious (Christian) characters in the novel. Cash might be the ultimate Christian figure. He is, like Joseph, a carpenter, a craftsman. He spends many hours working on his mother's coffin, and is a genteel, friendly character who sacrifices himself for others. Unlike the aforementioned characters Cora, Whitfield and Anse, he does not brag about this. It is in his nature to be some kind of martyr for the rest of the family. Dewey Dell could be seen as a fertility symbol: she has become pregnant and is thus the bearer of life.

As I Lay Dying is one of Faulkner's most popular books and is listed among the best books of the twentieth century more often than not, together with other works by the same Nobel-prize winning author. It is also often mentioned as one of the most relevant books on the American South, but Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* is mostly seen as the greatest example of writing on the South. In his article on the top-10 books on the American South, Virginia-born novelist and professor of English at the West-Virginia university Glenn Taylor lists *As I Lay Dying* at the ninth place, arguing "just listen to the words on the page" (par. 13). The themes that are relevant for the novel, in addition to the fact that the setting is Yoknapatawpha County, the deep Mississippi South that Faulkner knew so well, make this novel an apt example of writing on the American South.

Absalom, Absalom!

Perhaps William Faulkner's most ambitious novel, *Absalom, Absalom!* revolves around the story of Thomas Sutpen, a West-Virginian man who was born into poverty but moved to Mississippi –more specifically Yoknapatawpha—with the intention of gaining wealth, status and becoming a powerful family patriarch. The narration is done by the young Quentin Compson, who tells the story of Thomas Sutpen to his Canadian roommate Shreve at Harvard University. Parts of the story are narrated by other characters, when they are in a conversation with Quentin, and there is even one part, in the penultimate chapter, where Quentin and Shreve speculate about things that could have happened, which complicates the story even further. Basically, the whole novel consists of people telling each other stories about Thomas Sutpen and his family. On top of that, some of the stories that characters in the novel tell Quentin contain inaccuracies, discrepancies, or even lies, which are all deliberately incorporated into the novel by Faulkner, who wanted to show that the 'elusiveness of truth' is one of the central ideas behind this novel.

Absalom is a very dark, macabre and somber novel. Richard Gray emphasizes that

Absalom, Absalom! is “steeped in the Gothic, and in particular the Southern Gothic” (“Dark House” 28). A good example of the Gothic in the novel is the fact that Goodhue Coldfield, father to Thomas Sutpen’s wife Ellen, locked himself up in the attic of his house, nailed the door shut and with that committed a very slow and painful suicide. In the novel, Thomas Sutpen is the typical Gothic villain-hero who one often encounters in Gothic stories. He is driven by pride and revenge and does reject ethical considerations, much like other Gothic characters in literature such as *Moby Dick*’s Captain Ahab, or, more recently and in different cultural manifestations, Tony Soprano in *The Sopranos* or Walter White in *Breaking Bad*.

According to Richard Gray, there is in the story that Rosa Coldfield tells Quentin

“the familiar, grim castle of gothic stories, a ‘private hell’ apparently preserved for ‘some desolation more profound than ruin’. There is also the traditional villain, Sutpen, a perpetrator of horrible deeds on innocent victims (...) Henry and Judith Sutpen are transmuted, by Rosa’s tale telling, into living ghosts, ‘two half-phantom children’, and the cast list is completed by a black maid Clytemnestra who—by virtue of being father by ‘fell darkness’—has become the ‘cold Cerberus’ of the Sutpen mansion. Together, in this version of the fall of the house of Sutpen, all these characters seem to seal the fate of the family—helping to assure its ‘doom’ as the Sutpen ‘name and lineage’ are ‘finally effaced from the earth’” (“Dark House” 29-30).

The world that the novel is set in is often described as a desolate and grim place, inherently Gothic. Cleanth Brooks has stated that “[t]he world of Quentin Compson, particularly as revealed to us in *Absalom, Absalom!*, is a world suffocated by its past, and many readers have regarded it as a horrifying world, a world of nightmare” (202). Gray calls Faulkner’s novel the fall of the house of Sutpen, referencing to Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher”, “a piece widely seen as one of the founding texts of the ‘Southern Gothic’” (Wright 13). He thereby lays a connection between Faulkner’s novel and Poe’s short story, both works of great American authors that heavily draw on elements of the Gothic. *Absalom* is within a particularly Southern Gothic discourse because it is inherently Southern: it is set in the South, it is set on a plantation in Mississippi, with a protagonist who is a plantation aristocrat, and the supporting characters all function as accompaniments, such as the plantation matriarch (Ellen Coldfield), the plantation Hotspur (Henry Sutpen), and the Hamlet of the plantation (Charles Bon), who eventually gets murdered by the Hotspur (Gray, “Dark House” 31). It is also a novel that is set before, during, and after the Civil War, which was extremely important for the South and for the feeling that the people in the South had towards the country they were living in. The sentiments about the South and the hopes for the region that the characters

in the novel have are even more depressing and hopeless than in the beginning.

In all kinds of ways, *Absalom* is an inherently Southern novel. *The New York Times* wrote that the novel was named the greatest Southern novel ever written (Sullivan par. 1). The South is one of the most important themes in the novel and mainly Quentin's Canadian roommate Shrevlin McCannon (Shreve) plays an important role in this theme. In the novel, the South is often presented in relation to the past: the Civil War, reconstruction, a history of poverty and despair. Perhaps the most adequate quote from the novel that shows the significance of the past on southerners comes from Shreve, who describes the differences between Canadians and southerners when he states "[w]e don't live among defeated grandfathers and freed slaves and bullets in the dining room table and such, to be always reminding us to never forget" (AA 361). In other words, Shreve says that he does not live in history and does not feel the guilt and the shame of history that people in the South feel. Quentin responds with "You cant understand it. You would have to be born there" (AA 361). Quentin's reasoning seems to be that to truly understand the South, one has to be born and raised there. Faulkner also makes it clear that the South from before 1865—the end of the Civil War—is significantly different from the South after 1865. He calls "the deep South dead since 1865" (AA 9) and says that "the old South is dead" (AA 132). The feeling about the fate of the South after the Civil War is that of a cursed land, a land that offers little hope for the people living there. Quentin Compson, who is born and raised in the South, moves to Massachusetts in order to study law at Harvard university. This is a development that Rosa Coldfield, who is talking to Quentin in the first chapter of the novel, sees everywhere in the South: "Northern people have already seen to it that there is little left in the South for a young man" (AA 9), she says. This idea, that the whole of the South is cursed, reverberates throughout the novel. It is the same Rosa Coldfield who says that "fatality and curse on the South and on our family as though because some ancestor of ours had elected to establish his descent in a land primed for fatality and already cursed with it" (AA 21) is the story of her and many other southern people's lives. Another character in the novel who agrees with the state of the South at that moment is Jim Hamblett, a justice in the process against Charles Etienne De Saint Velery Bon, the son of Charles Bon. Hamblett addresses the issue of the recovery of the South in a speech when he states that "[a]t this time, while our country is struggling to rise from beneath the iron heel of a tyrant oppressor, when the very future of the South as a place bearable for our women and children to live in depends on the labor of our own hands, [we need blacks and whites to rebuild]" (AA 203). As stated before, Shreve is an important character regarding the theme of the South in this novel. Especially towards the end

of the novel, he gets more intrigued by the South and wants to know more about it. He begs Quentin to answer the questions he has about the region, and does not understand what people do there or why they even live there (AA 174). The novel ends with Quentin's answer to a question by Shreve about why he hates the South. Quentin responds by saying he doesn't hate it: "I don't hate it. *I dont hate it* he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark; *I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!*" (AA 378). Quentin's response shows how difficult his relationship with the South is, and it resembles Faulkner's own relationship with the South: they love and hate it, both at the same time.

Another important theme in *Absalom, Absalom!* is slavery and race. The plantation that Sutpen built in his first years in Mississippi accommodated a large group of 'negroes' he brought with him when he came into Yoknapatawpha in 1833. Even though Sutpen despised black people, many blacks were working for him. Sutpen's racism towards black people becomes clear when the reader learns that he has abandoned his wife and son when he discovers that his wife (and thus also his son) has African blood. According to Sullivan, Sutpen spurned his first son, purely on the basis of social abstraction (par. 14). The moment he discovered that they were not all white, he decided to leave them and build a new life, which eventually brought him to Mississippi. Although Thomas Sutpen is one of the main characters of the novel, he is not a progressive thinker. Nevertheless, *Absalom, Absalom!* can be seen as a very progressive novel with regards to the history of slavery and racism. Jim Hamblett, the justice who was proclaiming that the South was struggling to rise again after the Civil War, acknowledges that "the tools which we have to use, to depend on, are the pride and integrity and forbearance of black men and the pride and integrity and forbearance of white" (203). This means that a public official, living in a very conservative region in conservative times, proclaims that the South will need the help of black people to rebuild. What's more, Hamblett does in this case not mean help in the sense of slavery, but sincere help with the intention of rebuilding the land again. African-Americans also play very powerful roles in this novel. One example of this is Clytie Sutpen, the black daughter of Thomas Sutpen and a negro slave, who is a very strong and powerful character. She takes good care of all members of the Sutpen family, and prevents the family and the house from collapsing. However, at the end of the novel, she shows even more power, when she does make sure that the Sutpen dynasty completely collapses, when she sets the house on fire, killing Henry and herself with it, but making sure that Jim Bond can escape the premises and start a new life without the Sutpens. In the final paragraph of the novel, Shreve talks about the fate of the South and what role the current inhabitants of it play in its fate. According to Shreve,

“You’ve got one nigger left. One nigger Sutpen (Jim Bond) left (...) And so do you know what I think? (...) I think that in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere. Of course it won’t quite be in our time and of course as they spread toward the poles they will bleach out again like the rabbits and the birds do, so they won’t show up so sharp against the snow. But it will still be Jim Bond; and so in a few thousand years, I who regard you will also have sprung from the loins of African kings” (AA 378).

Whether this statement by Shreve is progressive or not is up for debate. One can say that Shreve embraces the idea that African-Americans will dominate the world in thousands of years, but one can also argue that Shreve fears that that might happen, arguing his theory is an example of the one-drop rule, saying that mixed races are black when they contain even one single drop of blood (like Charles Bon), and are only white when they are ‘pure’. What Shreve’s reason is for saying this, is not made clear, so one can only speculate what his intention was. Sean Latham of the University of Tulsa argues that “Shreve invites us to see in Jim Bond more than just a symbol of American racism and slavery, for his roots extend beyond Jefferson to a multi-national, multi-cultural Atlantic” (22). Latham thus sees Shreve’s point as an embrace of African-American domination of the world, instead of a fear for what could happen between now and the next thousand years. That topic, race and ethnicity, was an important one for Faulkner. Mainly after World War II, he became specifically interested in the continued problems between African-Americans and whites, and he became one of the most asked speakers on the topic. When he spoke about segregation, race and discrimination, he was quoted, noted, and used (Williamson 300).

Masculinity and gender are two themes that are important not only in *Absalom*, but in more of Faulkner’s works. Faulkner presents masculinity and gender not as static, but as fluid entities. According to Joseph Keener, professor of English at Dalton State College, throughout his writing career, Faulkner questioned “roles of sex, gender, race and class” (Keener 110). In *Absalom*, Faulkner revises stereotypical patterns of masculinity. That means there are different forms of masculinity in the novel. On the one hand, there is for example Thomas Sutpen, who is aggressive, strong, and violent, who shows his willingness to fight during the fights with his ‘Negroes’ in the boxing ring. On the other hand, starkly contrasting the physical prowess and masculinity that Sutpen shows, there is Quentin Compson, a frail young man, who does not seem confident of his body, not confident about his sexuality, as he is in love with his sister and allegedly has a relationship with Shreve, and not confident about his identity in general. He seems a person in crisis, who does not comply to the masculine

standards that someone like Thomas Sutpen sets. Clytie Sutpen is a very strong female character. She is the one who eventually chooses between a future for the Sutpen family or not, giving her immense power over the lives of several people, including her own. Since she takes care of the remaining family members, but decides to set the house on fire, burning herself to death, she decides what the faith for the family is. Through the presentation of a masculinity in crisis and strong female roles, Faulkner marks that gender and masculinity are important subjects and distinguishes himself from contemporary authors who portray more conservative images of strong, masculine men and typical gender differences.

Faulkner made many allusions to Biblical or other religious texts in his works. This might have its origins in his education as a Southern country boy who grew up in the religious area that Mississippi was (and is) (Gwynn and Blotner 86). However, none of Faulkner's works contain so many references to the Bible as *Absalom, Absalom!* It starts with the title, which refers to David's lament "O my son Absalom, O Absalom. My son, my son", from the Second book of Samuel, in the Old Testament. Faulkner's idea to choose this title was a great one, since the Biblical story is one of a father who desperately wants a son but loses him in the end. According to Haihui Chen, "the novel is full of Biblical allusions" (188). Religion as a broader topic does not play such a big role in this novel as it does in *As I Lay Dying* for example, but in this novel, Faulkner shows how much he likes playing with these allusions, even creating narratives that are direct references to stories in the Bible, such as the creation story.

A theme so far only briefly mentioned but highly significant in this novel, with a clear connection to the ambivalence towards the South that Quentin and Faulkner experience is the Civil War. The Civil War and its aftermath is one of the red threads through the novel, as most of the important characters experience life before and after the War and notice that there is a significant change in the way southerners feel about the South. The novel seems to categorize post-Civil War southerners into two groups: the 'romantic' conservatives, who are still very proud of the Confederate army and still want to try everything in their power to secede from the US, and the 'realists' who realize that the late 19th century South is a region without much hope, with an old-fashioned agrarian economy that has much difficulties adapting to urbanization and modernization. One of the most famous quotes of the novel is repeatedly spoken by Wash Jones, the poor, white southern handyman on Sutpen's plantation, reads "they kilt us but they ain't whupped us yit" (184). This quote illustrates Jones' unwillingness to admit defeat. He still believes that there are enough southerners like him that can beat the Yankee army. Theophilus McCaslin, who does not play a significant role in the

story, seems to agree with Jones. McCaslin praises the confederate army and says that he can “pray for any Confedrit soldier” (152), even when they are Catholic. The realist voices such as Rosa Colfield, who actually agree upon the fact that the South was dead or hopeless after they forfeited in 1865, are already described in the part on the theme of the South. They take on the opposite position of the romantics, and think it was wise for the South to stop fighting against the industrial, far more developed North. Like Mr. Compson, they “knew that the South would be whipped and then there wouldn’t be anything left that mattered that much, worth getting that heated over, worth protesting against or suffering for or dying for or even living for” (AA 270).

“A Rose for Emily”

The third work by William Faulkner that this thesis discusses and analyzes is not a complete novel, but the short story “A Rose for Emily”, which Faulkner published in 1930 in the magazine *The Forum*. It tells the story of the downfall of a Southern family, through the story of the last years of Emily Grierson’s life. Emily stems from a rich and important family that had a high status in the antebellum South. In many ways, she is a typical ‘Southern belle’ a character that often appears in Southern literature. According to Diane Roberts of Oxford University, a Southern belle, to white southerners, “represents the highest aspirations of their society; to non-Southerners, she is a remnant of the past, asexually afloat in her flower-petal skirt in front of a white-columned house” (233). One of the examples of Emily Grierson’s heritage as part of the Southern aristocracy is the fact that she still has a Negro servant who takes care of her daily duties, such as shopping, and who opens her door when people want to enter. She also follows Colonel Sartoris’ reasoning that she does not have to pay taxes because of a special arrangement that her father has made with the town. She keeps claiming that she does not have any taxes in Jefferson and disregards the claims by the Board of Aldermen, who claim that there are no written statements that prove this (ARFE 2). However, Emily is not the only one in the town unwilling or refusing to adapt to the modernization of society. When Emily dies and is buried, the narration describes how some very old men are wearing their confederate uniforms, showing how these old men are refusing to give up on the fact that they lost the Civil War.

“A Rose for Emily” heavily relies on the implication that it is set in Jefferson, which is described as a small Southern town, which is a small community that shares everything with

each other. This idea is not uncommon in both Southern literature and country music themes, since the South often presents itself as an area where the community in a small town is very important. Faulkner's short story knows no single narrator, but has the whole town of Jefferson as a narrator, which comments on what happens in the story and says things like "We did not say [Miss Emily] was crazy then" (4), and speaks of "our whole town" (1). The narration is thus obviously done from the perspective of the people from the town. The town people are observing what happens to Emily, and it also becomes clear that the people in the town have their own interpretation of what they see happening at the Grierson house and outside of it. An example of this is the speculation about whether Emily is going to commit suicide or not when she buys arsenic at the local druggist. The narration describes how the gossip in the town about Emily and her problems goes, saying how the scandalized whispering "do you suppose it's really so" (5) reverberates throughout town. There is a clear connection on this theme to *Absalom, Absalom!* which knows the same kind of structure and is also set in Jefferson. Although the pattern of narration is completely different, the novel occasionally speaks about the town and its people in the same way. In *Absalom*, the Jefferson community is very interested in the whereabouts and activities of Thomas Sutpen, and the novel often implies that people in the community gossip often about the Sutpen family. A good example is given early on in the novel, when Sutpen has not been living in Jefferson long. "[E]ach morning he fed and saddled the horse and rode away before daylight, where to the town likewise failed to learn" (AA 33). Another example is when the novel reads "[b]ecause the town now believed that it knew him. For two years it had watched him" (AA 42). In both "A Rose" and *Absalom*, the town functions as a character, an entity that almost lives and breathes, and that carefully watches both Thomas Sutpen and Emily Grierson, trying to ground what they are up to in their daily lives and why they do what they do. It might be somewhat less obvious that the town is a character in *Absalom, Absalom*, mainly because the pattern of narration is much different, but given the fact that the town tries to follow Thomas Sutpen's ways so closely, the argument that it is a character in itself can definitely be made.

The downfall or disintegration of Southern families that happens in "A Rose" is, in fact, a theme that Faulkner has addressed often in his works. Connected to the heritage of suffering after the Civil War, many of the most important characters in Faulkner's novels and short stories are people from the Antebellum aristocracy that see their fortunes and name collapse after, or even before the Civil War. His infatuation with the theme of the downfall of once powerful families might stem from his own background, since the Falkner family was proud of their prominent role in the history of the South, but saw the reason for that pride

crumble down as time passed and the South as a region reached a low point in history. Many critics see the story of Thomas Sutpen as the downfall of a Southern family that in the beginning, when Sutpen had just moved to Yoknapatawpha and started living there was an important family in Jefferson, living in the biggest mansion on the biggest tract of land in the county. The attention on the downfall of antebellum Southern families marks the decay of the South in general, exemplified through Faulkner's literary families.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown, through *As I Lay Dying*, *Absalom, Absalom!* and "A Rose for Emily" and the works of many academic scholars, including Noel Polk, Cleanth Brooks and Joel Williamson, how William Faulkner has introduced many themes into Southern literature that have become essentially Southern themes and how these themes reverberate through the three works discussed. Through *As I Lay Dying*, *Absalom, Absalom!* and "A Rose for Emily", this thesis has shown that relevant themes for Faulkner are religion, the burden and the nostalgia of the past, masculinity and gender, race and slavery, small-town communities, poverty, rurality and ambivalence towards the South. It has shown how Faulkner has used these themes in these three important works.

Both "A Rose for Emily" and *Absalom, Absalom!* tell a story that spans many years, where Faulkner writes about history, or times long before he was born. In these stories, the American Civil War of the 1860s also plays a major role, indicating that history and especially the war still plays a big role in the South. *As I Lay Dying* takes the reader on a journey from the poor, rural Frenchman's Bend in Yoknapatawpha County to Jefferson. The poverty stricken area that the Bundren family inhabits is, according to scholars like Cleanth Brooks, an indication of the poverty that has characterized the South for ages, a poverty that, generally speaking, is not associated with America. The South is one of the most rural areas of the US, and Faulkner evokes that image of a rural and somewhat traditional region, where urbanization and industrialization have not yet been introduced. It is still a land that is known for small-towns and small businesses, except for the big plantations, making the bridge between the bigger American cities such as New Orleans and Memphis seem very far.

Faulkner's home state Mississippi is the state with the highest percentage of African-Americans in the USA, which might be a legacy of slavery, that used to be normal and widespread in the southern state. In Faulkner's selected works, African-Americans play important roles, and are powerful primary or secondary characters who heavily influence the outcome of the story. Contemporary authors often presented African-Americans as secondary,

stupid characters who spoke English in a very childish or funny way, but Faulkner sometimes even does the opposite: some African-Americans speak English more eloquently than whites. Faulkner goes into the stereotype of the black man as stupid and hateful, and presents characters like Wash Jones in *Absalom*, who is a poor white man living on Sutpen's plantation, who idolizes Sutpen and is not capable of speaking English the right way.

The presence of the Civil War in Faulkner's literature is also important. That war had ended more than sixty years before Faulkner even started writing as a teenager, and nevertheless it was important during his whole youth and writing career. *Absalom, Absalom!* and "A Rose for Emily" are heavily influenced by the Civil War, even though the war itself is barely visible in both works. However, the effects of the war on the people in the Southland are what's most important. People change because of it, as is most clearly shown in *Absalom, Absalom!* through Goodhue Coldfield, who is heavily against secession, avoids the draft for the Confederate army, and who eventually does not sell any products in his store to Confederate soldiers, not wanting to support the war effort in any way. Eventually, this man locks himself up in his attic and starves to death. "A Rose for Emily" revolves around the downfall of a Southern family after the defeat of the Confederate army during the Civil War. The Grierson family was not the only family to fall, since this happened to many of the aristocratic antebellum Southern families whose status and wealth rapidly evaporated after the end of the war. Faulkner's scenarios in the three novels analyzed feel like examples of the 'Old South', the southern slave-owning society that characterized the region before the war. And both *Absalom* and "A Rose" are partly set in that society, whereas *As I Lay Dying* is not, but the setting in the latter novel very much seems like the first half of the 19th century, as there is almost no modernization taking place in the novel, even though that was one of the defining features of the 1920s. The small towns and tight communities that the stories are set in, in combination with the rural elements, the Southern vernacular and the themes contribute to a feeling of what is often called the 'Old South' in Faulkner's works. Interestingly, Faulkner was a progressive man who did not want to go back to the South from before the Civil War, he wanted to move forward and try to build the South into a more modern region, without the horrors of slavery or a crooked system of sharecropping. His love for local, and thus Southern history, and his ambition to write about this, eventually made him write extensively about the Old South, life in the region before the Civil War, but his progressiveness was definitely visible in these works.

Chapter 2: Brad Paisley: Country Music as Embodiment of the American South

There is a clear and unavoidable link between country music and the southern United States, which reverberates through many current and old country songs. “Country music, and the closely related white gospel music, have become badges of southern ethnic identity” (500), is the conclusion that Richard Peterson and Paul Di Maggio drew when they did extensive research into the demography of the country music audience. They came to the conclusion that the majority of the listeners of country music lives on the American rural countryside, and that the listeners often identify with the themes that country songs address. Even though Peterson and Di Maggio’s research is dated, its outcomes are confirmed by recent publications on country music and the demography of its audience which also investigated the connection with and the importance of country music in the South of the United States (Hubbs 11, Mann 74, Fraser 17). This chapter will look at country music as a musical embodiment of the South, how the music is a manifestation of Southern identity and more specifically, what kinds of southern themes country artist Brad Paisley incorporates in his works.

The South has become for American country music what Hollywood has become for American movies. Nashville is nowadays not only the capital of Tennessee, it has also become the capital of country music. The Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce states that the economic impact on the city of the music industry adds up to \$9.7 billion every year. Also, almost 60,000 jobs in the Nashville area are directly or indirectly tied to the music business, which means that there are more jobs in the music industry in Nashville alone than in Los Angeles, New York City, and Austin, Texas combined (Fraser 17). This now huge economic factor grew slowly. Country music used to be a small market that only had loyal listeners in the very rural regions of America. Nowadays, it has become a mainstream and hugely popular genre, whose artists are known all over the world. As Max Fraser has argued in his essay on Nashville as the capital of country music: “country music long ago shot beyond a mainstream acceptability to something more like mainstream domination, with country artists like Garth Brooks, Shania Twain, and Taylor Swift redefining the sound and style of pop music in their image” (18).

Song Tradition

Like many other countries, America knows a literary tradition that is still taught in schools and universities. Literature gets a lot of attention, especially in the academic world. Parallel to this literary tradition, there is an American song tradition. The song tradition was

recognized by the Nobel Prize committee when they awarded the Nobel prize of literature to Bob Dylan in 2016. The song tradition might be less interesting for scholars and academics, but it is certainly more interesting for the 'common people'. Songs are more accessible, easier to understand and are perceived by many as simply more fun than reading literature. The first chapter to this thesis described the life and works of William Faulkner, and one can easily state that one must have quite some reading experience and devote many hours to the reading of a novel such as *Absalom, Absalom!*, which is extremely difficult to follow and comprehend, which is not the case with the average song.

The American song tradition is characterized by a mixture of different American genres, most of which have originated in the American South. The blues, bluegrass, soul music, jazz music, and country music all originated in the southern states of the United States, mainly because these states had many slave plantations. The major American musical genres, Stephanie Shonekan argues, "can truly be traced back to the sounds of the African slaves and the British immigrants" (24). The slaves that were shipped to America to work on the fields introduced new sounds to the new country, and these new sounds slowly developed into new musical streams that were unknown until that time in America. That soul, jazz and blues music have their roots in the African-American presence in the US seems clear and is often stated in sources about the origins of the genres. Country music, however, is not often seen as one of the genres that has its roots in the African-American slave songs that they sang on the plantations. Crispin Sartwell states that "while the artists and audience for country are pretty lily white, the music itself is mulatto. Country is a musical integration of the races, and that's why it's not surprising that country radio and country performance had and has some place in black as well as white homes, especially in the South" (110).

This thesis will now briefly explain how country music has changed since it became a more widespread, mainstream genre. Since the earliest attempts at what we would now call country music, the genre has undergone a lot of changes and developments, or, in Nadine Hubbs' words, "the music is and always has been a hybridized, commercial cultural and media form" (8). This argument is endorsed and elaborated upon by Christian Schmidt, who argues that authentic country music was never really found in the rural areas of America, but that the presupposed 'authenticity' of the music is a construction that is used in order to sell more copies and have a more loyal fanbase (Nashville 329). This goes directly against the research that scholars like Peterson and DiMaggio have done and does not apply to most country stars that southern people are familiar with, since most of them are born and raised in the rural areas of the country, and have learned to play the authentic music of the country

there.

The development of country music started with the replacement of the honky-tonk sound that it had from its origins onwards with the so-called 'Nashville sound' in the 1950s, which was more jazzy, including a piano, violin-sections and a six-string guitar in the music. In the 1960s, the so-called Bakersfield sound became more important and took the center stage in country music. Bakersfield was a rougher form of country, with harsher sounds, which one could call more heavy or hard. This period also gave rise to country musicians that became real legends in their genre, such as Buck Owens and Merle Haggard. The late 1960s and early 1970s were again more dominated by a 'softer' form of country music, including more instruments than the Bakersfield sound had, including horns, and where the lyrics of a song became more important. Country legends like Willie Nelson and Johnny Cash became very popular during these years. The kinds of country music that were popular in the 1960s and 1970s are the kinds that are often still seen as 'true' country, by people who argue that modern country is too much influenced by pop music. The years after this until the present show a more fluid country music scene that knows many different forms of making country music. Since the new millennium, however, one can clearly identify a more popularized country music scene that adheres much more to the current pop-music and sometimes even incorporates electronic or dance music in its songs. This last development has coincided with criticism from people in the country music business and country music fans who think that current country stars are renouncing country music and leaving the older traditions and roots of country music, which they see as a bad development.

Brad Paisley

One of the best examples of the new popular country star is Brad Paisley. Born in Glen Dale, West Virginia in 1972, he grew up listening to the 'old' country music that was played by country music legends such as Hank Williams, Merle Haggard, and Johnny Cash. Paisley incorporates other genres such as rock 'n roll, soul and sometimes even some hip-hop into his country songs. That might make his music more accessible for an audience that does not love country, but some country listeners regret the crossovers to other genres, and want to keep country music 'pure'. When Paisley was eight years old, his grandfather on his mother's side gave him a guitar, and a local guitarist started teaching him how to play, and noticed that he had a lot of talent. From the age of 13 onwards, Paisley would play in bands and at small concert venues or local festivities. He has stated that "[t]he neat thing about a small town is that when you want to be an artist, by golly, they'll make you one" (Abbey 128). Later, he

would move to Nashville to study music business administration at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee. It is no coincidence that he studied in Nashville, the capital of country music, where he learned how country music was made and how songs were written. A week after graduating from Belmont University, Paisley signed a songwriting contract with EMI Music Publishing and started writing songs for other country artists, and later for himself.

In 1999 Paisley debuted as a singer with his first album *Who Needs Pictures*. He scored two number 1 hits and three Top 20 hits, and two years after the release of the album, it was certified platinum. *Who Needs Pictures* set the tone for the rest of Paisley's career, which can be described as very successful. Since 1999, he has made and released eleven studio albums, became a regular member of the Grand Ole Opry (the 'home of country music', located in Nashville), won three Grammy awards, fifteen Country Music Association Awards and countless other awards. In a very short time, Paisley maneuvered himself to mega-stardom in the country scene. According to Jody Rosen in her interview with Paisley for *Vulture Magazine*, "[f]or more than a decade, Paisley has been a superstar (...) He's also a progressive figure, who has slyly challenged the most conservative constituency in popular music" (par. 3). This last feature, Paisley's progressiveness, is something that has started to characterize him and his music later on in his career. In 2009, he released the album *American Saturday Night*, which included the single "Welcome to the Future", which heralded the election of Barack Obama as the first African-American president of the United States, and saw the election of Obama as next president as a major step to the 'dream' that Martin Luther King described in his famous speech in 1963.

His progressiveness characterizes many of Paisley's songs, but there are also many examples where the artist confines himself to the themes that are often associated with country music and the South in general. Because country music has always been one of the most pregnant manifestations of the culture and identity of the American South, there are certain 'southern' themes that reverberate through the country music scene. These are themes like religion and religious practices, a focus on the lower-class working people of the South, dedication to the southern small-towns, and nostalgia for the past. Country music symbolizes the music of the working-class, who live normal lives and have common jobs such as truck driver, farmer, or waitress. They describe life as it is and not as how they would want it to be, which is supported by US Census data, which show that people who listen to country music have less income, lower levels of education, and it shows that they spend less time on education than for example listeners of rock music (Hubbs 14). Examples of this are to be found in Brad Paisley's works. The song "Outstanding in Our Field", which appeared on

Paisley's 2013 album *Wheelhouse*, is a perfect example of this. The song revolves around some friends that all have lower-class jobs who meet up on a Friday night and hang out in a field somewhere on the countryside. The first verse introduces the listener to Johnny, who washes cars for a living, and Cristina, who is a waitress. After work, they meet up in a field in order to spend their Friday night, where they are joined by other friends. They are not going to any fancy places, all they need is some drinks, themselves, and a field. Paisley sings "We ain't nothing special/We ain't no big deal/But if you wanna throw a party in the middle of nowhere/We're outstanding in our field" (Outstanding). The joke in the song is obviously a *double entendre*, because it means that they are excellent –outstanding—at what they do –standing in a field—and they are literally out, standing in their field. What is made very explicit, however, is that these people in the song do not care about achieving great things or having successful careers. They only seem to care about the Friday night and how to spend it. They proudly call themselves underachievers who are all pyromaniacs, and who love to live like they do. The same kind of feeling is generated in Paisley's song "Easy Money", on the album *Time Well Wasted* which tells the story of how Paisley and his band members enjoy the life of music stars, and how they used to have regular jobs before that. They worked as carpenters, farmers, garbage men or did other things, and now are country music stars, implying that like their audience, they are working-class people who happened to be musically talented and used that to get rich. Pride of social lowness seems to characterize these songs, and are an essential part of country music, which focuses on the working person, provincialism, and on 'being country', but shines a positive light on these emblems that are perceived as negative by non-country audiences (Hubbs 61).

Nevertheless, Paisley is most often characterized as one of the most progressive modern-day country musicians, who sometimes takes on traditional country music topics but puts them in a progressive jacket. Through the words of Paul Harvey in the first chapter, this thesis has already shown that religion is very important in the American South. It is more important in the South than anywhere else in the country, according to PEW data. For Paisley, a devout Christian himself, religion is very important. He is a regular churchgoer and the importance of religion is evident in his music. He demonstrates his Protestant beliefs on most of his albums by including songs with religious themes. The most devout examples are old traditional religious hymns that he has covered and placed on his albums. These are songs like "In the Garden", "The Old Rugged Cross", "Farther Along", "When We All Get to Heaven", and "Life's Railway to Heaven" and are characterized by lines such as "Blessed Savior, Thou wilt guide us" or "When we see Jesus coming in glory".

In addition to the traditional hymns just discussed, Paisley has (co-)written several religious themed songs himself, which are the most interesting pieces to analyze in this context, because he takes on a progressive stance in these songs. “Long Sermon” is the first track on his first ever album, *Who Needs Pictures*. As the opener of his first album, “Long Sermon” was an important track. As the name already indicates, the song has religious influences. The narrator and his brother are in church, waiting for the sermon to be over, since they want to go outside and have fun in the nice weather. Although this is a song concerning religion, it is interesting to see how much it differs from the traditional hymns that Paisley has integrated into his works. Whereas those traditional hymns proclaim that people always have to be true to their faith and that they should follow Jesus, Paisley contradicts these proclamations with the narrator’s desire to leave church and do something he enjoys much more, such as sunbathing on a boat. A traditional religious country song would never contain this desire to leave a sermon in order to drink beer on a boat. Another one of Paisley’s songs that underscore the importance of religion in his life is “Those Crazy Christians”, which appeared on *Wheelhouse* in 2013. On this album, Paisley actively approached topics uncommon to country music, in which he tried to take a stance or at least generate some discussion. Anthony Kosar argues that “[w]hile the majority of the songs on this album fit within traditional country music themes, Paisley expands those themes not only by including songs about abusive relationships, skepticism in religion, and references to other cultures, but also by introducing a slightly darker humor in those songs” (1). The lyrics to this song are not exactly what one would expect from an American Christian country singer. Like Kosar argued, it could be characterized as a song that expresses Paisley’s skepticism about religion, but at the same time it expresses his love for it. Because in this song, the narrator describes the dedication and the devotedness to other people’s lives that characterizes Christians. He calls them crazy, but at the same time he praises them. He critiques Christianity when he sings that Christians “can’t wait to forgive someone about just anything”, or “they curse the devil’s whiskey while they drink the Savior’s wine”. The first half of the song emphasizes the ‘craziness’ of the Christians, meaning all the sacrifices they make in order to practice their faith, which Paisley sometimes sees in a negative, and sometimes in a positive way. But the last half of the song reveals the point that Paisley wants to make with this song: he sings:

“Instead of being outside on this sunny afternoon/They’re by the bedside of a stranger
in a cold hospital room/And every now and then they meet a poor lost soul like
me/Who’s not quite sure just who or what or how he ought to be/They march him
down the aisle and then the next thing that you know/They dunk him in the water and

here comes another one of those crazy Christians”

There are many aspects that make the narrator desire the intensity with which Christians practice their faith and how much they appreciate their fellow human beings. He knows that, when in need, he can always rely on ‘those crazy Christians’. At the same time, he sees discrepancies and developments that he disagrees with and mentions these in the song. One can replace the unknown narrator with Brad Paisley, who would never have written this song if he did not feel a certain ambivalence towards religion, even though he is also one of those ‘crazy Christians’. According to Kosar, “at the end of the narrative, even though the narrator admits that he would contact the Christians if he ever needed help, he only concedes that they might be right” (4). That narrator could be Paisley himself, because he would, even though he might be skeptic once in a while, always contact the Christians when in need.

“The narrator in [“Those Crazy Christians”] is far from the idealized country figure that listeners expect as the narrator” (Kosar 4). That is something not uncommon in the work of Brad Paisley, who has repeatedly stated, especially as in relation to *Wheelhouse*, that he wants to address topics that are normally not associated with country, and especially not with country megastars like Paisley. The expression of this desire started before *Wheelhouse*. The title track on his 2009 album *American Saturday Night* is significantly different than what is often heard in country songs. Many scholars agree upon the fact that country music is not specifically an ethnically diverse genre. Geoff Mann is one of these scholars, who argues that

“country music is widely perceived to be ‘white’ music – produced by white people, consumed by white people, apparently appealing almost exclusively to white people, at least in North America. This is not merely received opinion, but is confirmed by virtually every scholar of the genre” (74).

For Paisley to be appealing almost exclusively to white people, would imply that he sings about topics that white people in the South would appreciate. However, he does not only sing about things he knows his audience will take for granted, but actively approaches topics that might be more difficult to swallow for a conservative audience like the country music fans. He does this in “American Saturday Night”, in which he expresses his joy about all the different kinds of cultures and ethnicities that characterize American society. He sings “You know everywhere has something they’re known for/Although it usually washes up on our shores”. These lines express Paisley perception that every place is different and contains its own heritage. However, so many different cultures inhabit America that it has become a country with a very ethnically and culturally diverse population, and Paisley celebrates that in “American Saturday Night”. It would not be remarkable for a country singer to only mention

this, but the fact that the song is a happy-tuned celebration of that cultural diversity is definitely an original perspective not often encountered in country music. Another song on the album *American Saturday Night* is “Welcome to the Future”, which was already described as one of Paisley’s most progressive songs earlier in this chapter. He wrote the song in the wake of Barack Obama’s election as the first African-American president of the United States, and praised the fact that this was now possible, after Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King desperately fought for the end of segregation in the 1960s. Even though there is still a long way to go, which might make Paisley’s message feel somewhat blunt, the message and the optimism that he showcases in this song is admirable and uncommon in the country scene. Nadine Hubbs has poignantly stated:

“Perhaps [an] effective way of inspiring conversation about bridging the historical and political chasm between the North and South is found in an earlier attempt by Brad Paisley in his song “Welcome to the Future” (2009), which he performed at the White House for President Barack Obama. It is simply a song that acknowledges a painful past where the KKK burned flags and terrorized African Americans, where interracial marriage was frowned on, but looks forward to the possibilities of a future where the president can be any ethnicity, and by extension, any gender. With this songs, Paisley, an extremely popular country star tightly embraced by that constituency, has complicated the usual political discourse and told a story that encourages hope in a changed future” (154).

The criticism that several scholars express at country musicians in particular, is summarized by Christian Schmidt’s quote in his article *Famous in a Small Town*, when he states “the unpopularity of country music is more than a simple unwillingness to leave one’s Southern comfort zone. It also entails a refusal to take on the admittedly complicated task of honestly dealing with its own constructions of whiteness” (161). That is definitely the case with many American country musicians. But Brad Paisley, one of the most progressive country artists, dares to take on different subjects than other, less progressive country stars such as Blake Shelton or Keith Urban.

In 2013, on the album *Wheelhouse*, Paisley tried to address perhaps the most difficult of all subjects: slavery, racism and the role of the South in that. On this album, the song *Accidental Racist* appeared, which is a collaboration with African-American rapper LL Cool J, who is a friend of Paisley’s. The song tries to address the topic of slavery and how that topic is still relevant, mainly in the South, with regards to the Southern pride that many white southerners still have. Paisley has argued that he tried to generate discussion among his fans

with the song, because most country fans are conservative people who will have received a different perspective from what they normally get from the musicians they listen to (Rosen par. 6). The song did generate a lot of discussion, although probably not the way Paisley and Cool J would have hoped it would. The song was bombarded with criticism, mainly from African-Americans who saw the song as an oversimplification of the problems that have characterized America and the American South for centuries. Sentences like “If you don’t judge the gold chains/I’ll forget the iron chains”, or “If you don’t judge my do-rag/I’ll forget the red flag”, rapped by LL Cool J, offended many people because they viewed the comparison of the gold chains and iron chains as inappropriate, and thought it was way too easy to say “let bygones be bygones”, which LL Cool J also sings in the song. African-American critics such as Ta-Nehisi Coates found the lyrics “laughable” (par. 1) and futile, while he also appreciated that Paisley tried to address the topic in a different way than normal country musicians would do it. The song stands in stark contrast with for example “Welcome to the Future”, which also approached the conversation about race and discrimination in the United States, but in a much more careful and subtle way. What many critics found strange in this song, was Paisley’s choice to cooperate with LL Cool J in this song. The rapper is not known for addressing difficult topics in his songs and is not a frontrunner when it comes to equality between whites and blacks in America. He never tried to start ‘the conversation’ that the duo now wanted to start, in any of his songs. Paisley should have chosen for a different African-American artist who actually knows a lot about the problems and who is known for addressing the issues and actually trying to start the conversation that Paisley wanted, is the argument that critics have made. The idea that with collaborating with an African-American, the conversation would start, might actually be a sign that Paisley sees no difference between black people. According to Coates, “[t]he assumption that there is no real difference between black people is exactly what racism is” (par. 9).

It would have been wise for Paisley to choose a different African-American artist who did engage in the conversation about slavery and the American past in their earlier work. If he had collaborated with artists like Mos Def or Kendrick Lamar, the lyrics would have been different, critics could not have stated that Paisley ‘used’ an African-American just because of the color of his skin, and he would have been able to really engage in a discussion, because now a different discussion than the one Paisley hoped for was initiated with the song. According to Schmidt, it is possible “that a country song by definition cannot achieve what Paisley presumably wanted it to: that is, to go beyond the tightly drawn racial scripts of country music because it is so deeply enmeshed in its own unpopular reproduction of

whiteness as its default condition” (Famous 163). Schmidt comes to this conclusion after he concludes that country music is white music that thrives on the notion that it represents the unpopular, functioning as an alternative to pop-music and that this notion excludes non-whites from the idea that it is a minority group that is different from the mainstream audience outside of the rural areas of America. This is exactly what Paisley tries to change with “Accidental Racist”. Unfortunately, this does not work since the lyrics to the song are horribly chosen and the whole song became controversial. But the intention is there, and when this intention is shared by more country artists –one could think of Darius Rucker, who is an African-American country star—Schmidt’s argument that it is deeply enmeshed in country music to have whiteness as a default condition could change and the genre could become more diverse. Paisley would applaud more diversity in country music, as he is one of the first country musicians who has tried to approach this delicate subject. Because even though his song might have been a catastrophe, the intention was to generate discussion among the conservative country-music fans that would normally listen to Brad Paisley. Now that this intention has not worked out this time, it would be shameful if that prevents other country artists or himself to approach the subject (again) and try to generate discussion among the conservative people of rural America. Perhaps Paisley’s and Cool J’s failure with “Accidental Racist” provides the spark for other country artists to take another shot at opening up the discussion about ‘Southern pride and Southern blame’ with regards to the heritage of slavery.

Opening up the discussion about Southern pride among the country audience is something that Paisley had tried earlier in his career. His 2011 album *This is Country Music* contains the song “Camouflage”, which celebrates the existence of camouflage and asks the question whether American rednecks shouldn’t replace the red confederate flag with a camouflage flag. In the third verse of the song, Paisley sings “Well the stars and bars offend some folks and I guess I see why/Nowadays there is still a way to show your southern pride/The only thing as patriotic as the old red, white and blue/Is green and grey and black and brown all over too”. The ‘stars and bars’ that he mentions is the Confederate flag, and he thus proposes to start using an alternative symbol that does not have associations with racism to show Southern pride. Of the use of this imagery in “Camouflage”, Jody Rosen has stated “Paisley cheekily advocated replacing the Confederate stars-and-bars with a redneck symbol that causes no offence: a camouflage flag. It was a very Paisley move: politics that defied the country music partyline, smuggled onto the charts under the cover of a joke” (par. 3). Paisley’s response when Rosen asked him whether this was what he tried to do with Camouflage was that that was exactly what he tried to do. This once again establishes Brad

Paisley as a progressive figure in the country music industry who tries to approach the problems he sees developing in the industry he is working in, and he tries to make songs that tackle the problems, and perhaps stimulates his mainly white, conservative audience to reconsider using symbols like the Confederate flag to show their Southern pride.

A similar way in which Paisley once more encourages his audience to think about the South in a critical way is in the song “Southern Comfort Zone”. On the one hand, the song in fact is a celebration and a statement of Paisley’s love for the South, on the other hand, it challenges Southerners to step outside of their comfort zone, and to see other parts of the world, since that will also contribute to their love for the South. In several interviews, Paisley has stated that the idea behind “Southern Comfort Zone” was that he and his crew were “trying to do the thing you don’t expect out of country music. Which is to say, go see the world, it will make you love the South more, it will make you feel strongly about a lot of things” (Rosen par. 22). The song has two different beginnings. The album version starts with an excerpt from Jeff Foxworthy’s ‘You Might be a Redneck’ and a piece from *The Andy Griffith Show*, whereas the music video starts with the song ‘How ya gonna keep’em down on the Farm after they’ve seen Paree?, by Joe Young and Sam Lewis. On the album, the song by Young and Lewis comes right before “Southern Comfort Zone”, and it is thus also part of the narrative that Paisley tells in that song. It is an old folk song about a farmer whose sons come home after World War I. He is worried that they will not stay at the farm, but will move to the American metropolitan areas to enjoy the big city life instead. The fear that characterizes the farmer in the song is a fear that Paisley does not know but that is felt by many southerners, so Paisley’s reasoning goes. Both songs address the same issue, but have different fears, and are thus assembled together.

“Southern Comfort Zone” is a plea for the people in the South to look away from the region they live in and to experience different places than one’s home. Paisley sings how it might be strange to leave one’s ‘wheelhouse’, the place where one feels at home or at ease, but that it is still worthwhile leaving your comfort zone and exploring other areas. He then continues with an enumeration of typically Southern things that he does not encounter on his foreign travels, such as people drinking sweet tea, wearing ball cap boots and jeans, or loving NASCAR races. The fact that Paisley says that in foreign countries not everybody does these things, implies that everyone in the South is almost the same and spends their time carrying a gun, watching NASCAR races or going to church. While he says that his fans should think deeper about country culture and identity, he presents the activities and consummation of food, music and sports by people in the South as the same for everyone, thereby stereotyping

the South as one entity (Shonekan 79-80). According to Christian Schmidt “as a self-conscious performance the song also indicates that this Southern authenticity is no longer –if ever it was—to be had without the cosmopolitan dimension” (Famous 157). It is true that there are a lot of stereotypes used in this song, and that that might draw the attention away from what Paisley actually wants to say with it. On the other hand, stereotypes might have been created in order to effectively spread the message that Paisley wants to spread, because by using these stereotypes, he creates a starker contrast between the American South and the other places in the world that he has visited, and is thus able to make his point. Because in this song, Paisley notes that he has been to many places in the world and that he has had experiences there that he would not have been able to have when he would not travel the world. He sings that he has “kissed a West Coast girl underneath the Northern lights” and how he has experienced “what it's like to talk and have nobody understand”. His song is a call for people in the South, who are –according to Paisley—known for staying in their own comfort zone for a big part of their lives, to go into the world and see other places (“look away, look away”). At the same time, Paisley realizes how much he loves the South, its people, and its culture and is happy every time that he comes back into ‘Dixie’ again.

“Southern Comfort Zone”, “Accidental Racist”, “Those Crazy Christians”, “Camouflage” and others are all examples of Brad Paisley songs that show the singer’s progressiveness and approach to typical country topics such as living in the South, religion, and Southern pride, or non-typical country topics such as slavery and the heritage of the South, and present these themes in a different style than what the country audience is used to. This chapter has made clear how country music, especially the music of Brad Paisley, is tightly linked to the South of the United States and to Southern identity and how it is a clear manifestation of the culture and ideas of the South. The next chapter will combine the conclusions of the first and second chapter and see how literature can be compared to music and how these two different genres are both legitimate manifestations of the culture and identity of the South, each in their own, sometimes differing, sometimes similar way.

Chapter 3: Connections and Contrasts Between Faulkner and Paisley

The previous two chapters have, separately from each other, discussed the works by William Faulkner and Brad Paisley and analyzed what kind of themes characterize their works, and how the South is presented through them. Since both literature and country music are two ways in which Southern culture and identity are expressed, both art forms can be compared, contrasted, and connected to or with each other. Like in the previous two chapters, this thesis will specifically not see Paisley as a literary figure, but it will compare country music to literature. Even though country music is a completely different genre, there are good reasons why it is relevant to compare the two art forms with each other. According to Anthony Kosar, “[s]ince narrative is such an important feature of country music, the lyrics and thematic content of the narratives in country music songs may be more significant than in other styles of popular music” (2). What’s more, in addition to an American literary tradition—which definitely includes William Faulkner—country music or even music in general knows a song tradition in which Brad Paisley plays a role. As discussed in the previous chapters, many of the themes that both Faulkner and Paisley address are themes that often come back in Southern literature and Southern country music: religion, small-town communities, the burden of the past, racial tensions and slavery, poverty, and rurality. This chapter will look at the connections, comparisons and contrasts that can be made between these two cultural products, while also looking at how Paisley and Faulkner separately present their themes, and what the differences are between a modernist author in the first half of the twentieth century and a contemporary country artist.

Masculinity

The historical setting of Faulkner’s novels aligns relatively well with the emergence of American definitions of masculinity, sex, and gender, and the more nuanced definitions exemplified in the American South. Faulkner’s selected novels do not present these themes as static. Instead, they show a fluidity in masculinity. Joseph Keener argues that in his literature, Faulkner questioned “roles of sex, gender, race and class” (Keener 110). According to Anne Goodwyn Jones “[a]s a young man, and in his earlier fiction, Faulkner defied – deliberately or not – both national and regional prescriptions for masculinity, femininity, and sexuality, sometimes opposing, sometimes exaggerating, sometimes rendering them with detachment” (61). Through his literature, Faulkner asks many questions about identity politics, such as what race, sex, gender, and class mean, but he does not provide a lot of answers. Nevertheless, he does remind his audience of how important the questions are. Keener argues

that “revising masculine stereotypes drives Faulkner’s works” (Keener 112). There are numerous examples of that in for instance *Absalom, Absalom!*, where there are distinct markers of masculinity or of revised masculinity shown in its most relevant characters. Thomas Sutpen is the prime example of the typically masculine man. He is aggressive, shows physical prowess, and dominates his African-American slaves physically when he enters the ‘ring’ during their fights. Through this masculinity, Sutpen creates a stark contrast with another major character in the novel, Quentin Compson, who does not show much of the physical prowess and aggressiveness that Sutpen does. On the contrary, Quentin is many things at the same time, he is in love with his sister and therefore heterosexual, while at the same time he and his roommate Shreve allegedly have sexual relations, making him bisexual. Quentin is presented as a boy who is confused about his own identity, who might even have an identity crisis.

Quentin is not the only character who is in an identity crisis. In his book about masculinity in Southern fiction, Joseph Keener introduces a theory by Judith Butler which argues that sexed positions are a citational strategy, stating that “Butler’s concept of the almost constant reiteration of the masculine position and the perpetual chance for failure, in terms of both the citation and the law it creates, is especially key for many of Faulkner’s male characters” (112). That leads to many characters in Faulkner’s works, like Quentin Compson, Charles Bon, and Darl Bundren not knowing who they are, missing a distinctive identity. Thus, Keener concludes, “Faulkner’s fiction offers a masculinity in crisis, having to cope with a more fluid and decentered representational field” (113). On top of that, the professor of English observes that

“Faulkner’s fiction is rife with men who (...) still perform masculinity in ways that are seemingly role reversals or at least contain elements of serious conflation of the two. (...) Charles Bon and Henry Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!* and Quentin Compson of both *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* are just a few examples of these Faulknerian men” (122).

Brad Paisley operates in a cultural genre that generally has different view on masculinity. Christian Schmidt argues that the redneck, the crass, unsophisticated, rural figure that inhabits the rural South, is a crucial figure in country music, and that “the redneck is presented as a masculine and heterosexual character in both its male and female incarnations and it serves as a figure of communal regeneration in the face of urban norms against which it rebels” (“Rednecks” 67). The images of man vs. woman that reverberate through country music present the woman as an objectified person, a sexed object only there for the visual

pleasure of the male character. The concept of the male gaze thus seems important in country music. In his article, Schmidt enumerates many examples where women have these roles in either the lyrics or in the music videos, where they are scantily clad and pose in sexual ways. Schmidt states that “the music’s political unconscious is clearly gendered as masculine—and usually male” (“Rednecks” 68).

Paisley does not often engage with the discussion about sex, gender, and masculinity. However, when the so-called ‘Bro-country’ appeared as a subgenre in country music which focuses mainly on hot girls, partying and pick-up trucks, many country artists, including Brad Paisley, heavily criticized that subgenre. That does not mean that the regular stream of artists within country music has a progressive perspective on gender and masculinity. The images that the audience receives in many country songs resemble the bro-country images of scantily clad women whose role is either to be a sexed object or to be a housewife taking care of her man. Paisley does not paint these male-fantasies of women in his songs, but he does not go against the female stereotype either. His most significant song considering this topic is “I’m Still a Guy” which appeared on *5th Gear*. It is meant to portray the difference between men and women, but also to capture how society is putting pressure on the masculinity of men. The protagonist of the song is the typical country music man who enjoys hunting, drinking beer, and girls. At the same time, however, he is also a sweet and loving person, who loves his wife dearly and who is not afraid of showing her how much he loves her. There is a struggle within this person’s head, that becomes clear when he sings “I’ll pour out my heart/Hold your hand in the car/Write a love song that makes you cry/Then turn right around knock some jerk to the ground/’Cause he copped a feel as you walked by”. At one point, the man is very eager to show his wife affection, one moment later he feels that he needs to turn to physical violence because someone might have interest in her. The protagonist also describes how men are getting more feminine, as he says “it’s hip now to be feminized”. He hates that development, and makes it clear that he is “still a guy” without those feminist frills. Paisley tries to address both the conservative and the progressive audience, using a protagonist who carries both redneck and progressive features. He seems like the typical redneck, who is anti-feminism and despises men who show their vulnerability. At the same time, he is one of those men himself, perhaps without knowing it. That is the joke that Paisley wants to portray in this song.

There is a significant difference between Paisley and Faulkner regarding the topic of gender and masculinity. Paisley, like Faulkner, does not answer any questions about gender and masculinity. Unlike Faulkner, he does not pose many questions either, and so does not

really open up the discussion to his audience. His oeuvre does not pay much attention to gender, sexual identity and masculinity, and it does not go so far as Faulkner as to acknowledge that there are various kind of masculinities, with the one being more feminine than the other, and that men are not better than women. Faulkner portrayed much more non-stereotypical, sophisticated characters that struggled with their own sexual identity and did this in a more structural way than Paisley, trying to find answers to the questions that were at that point still unanswered.

Religion

This thesis has shown before that religion is important for the American South. The data by the PEW research center shows that 71 percent of the southerners is absolutely certain that there is a God. For 62 percent, religion is very important, and for 21 percent, it is somewhat important. That is higher than the average number of Americans that believe in God, which is 63%, and the average amount of Americans that finds religion very important is 53%, while for 24%, it is somewhat important. Paul Harvey mentions that in an earlier poll “20 percent of southerners indicated they attended church services more than once a week, a rate more than double than that for non-Southerners” (“Race” 8).

In Faulkner’s works, religion plays a big role, either in the characters and stories, or in the fact that there are all kinds of religious –mostly Biblical—allusions in his works. That matches Paul Harvey’s statement that “religion in the South has deeply influenced American life less through theology, ritual, or formal structures than through cultural forms” (“Race” 10). In Faulkner’s fiction, religion does not mean that there clearly is a God and that God has set out a clear path for the characters to follow, but that the characters all believe that there is a certain divine entity that they can turn to when in need. According to Doreen Fowler and Ann Abadie “[a] son of the South, Faulkner was undeniably influenced not only by the South’s heritage of defeat, but also by the South’s predominantly Christian culture” (xi). That does not mean that he was a practicing Christian himself, but that it was part of his education as a ‘Southern boy’, Faulkner himself once stated (Blotner 86). In school, he was taught what Christianity meant and what its origins were. According to Alfred Kazin, the loss of the Civil War was a religious crisis for Southerners, which brought a period of decline with it in which Faulkner was raised. Growing up in that period made Faulkner write out of a sense of failure and guilt, that significantly differs from the competitive and unforgiving religious heritage of the rest of America (Fowler and Abadie x). An example of this is Jewel who, in *As I Lay Dying* asks himself, “if there is a God what the hell is he for” (22). The role of religion in

Faulkner's works is therefore one that emerges out of the social circumstances of the early twentieth century South that he grew up in. That was a poor South, much in decline and not adapting to the urbanization and industrialization like the rest of the country, which still had a heavy emphasis on religion, and Faulkner incorporates that into his literature.

In his literature, Faulkner revises the standard religious narrative, and chooses to present some of his religious characters as hypocrites and he references to characters and events that are important for Christianity. *As I Lay Dying* for example, is in many ways a mockery of religion and religious narratives. It is an ironic twist to the classic quest, with a family traveling a long way from one place to the other. What's more, all the characters that claim that religion plays an important part in their life are sinners, who do not obey the rules that Christianity has set, the most obvious example being Minister Whitfield, who had an affair with Addie that led to the birth of Jewel. At the same time, the non-religious characters, the children of the Bundren family, appropriately behave like Christians. Cash, the carpenter, who sacrifices all his time and energy for other people's wishes, seems like the most Christian character in the novel, while he is never presented as someone who values Christianity or religion. Dewey Dell, his sister, is pregnant and therefore represents fertility. The whole family makes many sacrifices in order to fulfill Addie's wish.

A similar revision takes place in *Absalom, Absalom!* where the Biblical creation story (genesis) is put in a new dimension. According to Maxine Rose of the University of Alabama, Faulkner does not only "make occasional use of biblical parallels in *Absalom, Absalom!*, but there is in this novel an overarching structure that coincides with that of the Bible" (219). It resembles the story of Genesis in the Bible, where God creates the earth out of nothing, where in this case, Sutpen creates his estate (Sutpen's Hundred) out of a tract of land that could be seen as nothing, a wasteland. In *Absalom, Absalom!* a similar structure as in Genesis is present. The first five years of Sutpen's presence in Yoknapatawpha, he creates his estate out of the barren wasteland, he builds gardens and plants cotton, after which the animals come to live and walk around Sutpen's Hundred, similar to how God creates the earth in the first five days. God creates Adam as the first man on the sixth day, Sutpen 'creates' Henry in the sixth year in Jefferson. According to Maxine Rose, "[i]n many of the parallels with Genesis, Sutpen is also Adam as well as God and is therefore a god-man. Sutpen names all of his creation, as Adam names all the living creatures in Genesis 2. Sutpen and his assistants are stark naked, as Adam was naked in the garden" (220). The reference to religion through the Biblical allusions and the reversal of Christian characters in the novels discussed, signifies that Faulkner paid a lot of attention to religion, something that has been important in the South for a long time,

and that he was eager to put religious narrative into a new perspective.

Brad Paisley also likes to present religion in a new perspective in his songs, sometimes in a funny, tongue-in-cheek way. He enjoys tackling delicate subjects such as the putative hypocrisy of Christians or racism and discrimination. The second chapter has already extensively treated the song “Those Crazy Christians” and has shown how Paisley revises the standard religious song, at first singing about the hypocrisy of Christians when they drink “the Savior’s” wine but curse “the devil’s Whiskey”, or when a TV pastor is immediately forgiven after he confesses to a major sin. Near the ending of the song, Paisley remarks that he sees himself as one of those ‘crazy’ Christians, who are by some people considered crazy because of these hypocrisies. However, Paisley’s message is that he still loves the way Christians help other people and the sacrifices that they make for each other. In Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, Anse Bundren shares this idea, stating “[t]here is Christians enough to help you (...) They will help us in our sorrow” (44). Another Paisley song that has not been discussed so far is “No”, which appeared on *American Saturday Night*. The title refers back to the last sentence of the song, which is “Sometimes the answer is no”, and refers back to the answer to a prayer. The idea behind the song is that every prayer gets answered, but that the answer might be negative. The idea that all prayers are heard but sometimes get a ‘no’ as response is uncommon in country music. It was Garth Brooks who, in 1990, released the song “Unanswered Prayers”, in which he claims that it is good that God sometimes not answers prayers. That was already a more controversial statement, but Paisley responds to Brooks’ song by saying that every prayer does get an answer, even though it might be no. The most common idea in country music songs is different than the one presented by Paisley or Brooks. What Dolly Parton implies in “Heaven’s Just a Prayer Away” for example, is that praying is always the answer to one’s problems, and that even one prayer can make a big difference: the difference between going and not going to heaven.

Faulkner knew a lot about religion, and especially about Christian thought and doctrine. His use of Biblical imagery in his works is usually ironic, but evokes positive and negative views on the role of religion. What seems important in Faulkner’s works regarding religion and the human nature, is that humans are sinful and selfish creatures. The religious characters in *As I Lay Dying* all commit sins or do what is best for themselves. Anse Bundren has already found a new wife when he has not even buried Addie (240). Many of Faulkner’s characters choose to commit evil rather than good. The same goes for Thomas Sutpen, who leaves his son and wife because they are partly black, or for Wash Jones’ who kills his granddaughter and his great-granddaughter because his granddaughter had the baby with

Sutpen. Religion as a theme is inverted or revised by Faulkner, in order to explore what role religion plays in his characters' lives, what the role of God is, and how they relate to other human beings. Paisley uses a similar inversion of religion, in order to make people think about what it means to be Christian and whether their behavior is acceptable and in line with the ideological premise. The difference between the theme and how it is incorporated by both artists is found in Paisley's critique of the hypocrisy of Christianity, but at the same time his love for it, while Faulkner uses an extensive amount of Biblical and other religious references and allusions to paint a much darker image of the world and of the nature of man than Paisley does.

Race

Faulkner was a very outspoken author concerning the treatment of African-Americans in the South and incorporated this theme in his literature. During the last years of his life, the issue of racism and racial equality was one of the most important discussions in (southern) America. Faulkner actively participated in this discussion. He took on progressive standpoints, and argued against the ways blacks were treated in the South, which made him a spokesperson on Civil Rights. According to James Cobb, "Faulkner simultaneously encouraged white southerners to instigate gradual racial change themselves while resisting northern efforts to impose immediate equality on the South" (188). This idea reverberates throughout Faulkner's works, as it shows African-American characters that slowly broaden their own horizon by teaching themselves how to read or how to speak proper English. Barbara Ladd argues that "[t]here are, for example, stories of upward mobility among the children and grandchildren of those African American servants to the Compsons and the McCaslins (...) movement of the Gibson children and grandchildren from rural Mississippi to Memphis" (211-212). In *The Sound and the Fury*, the black houseslave Dilsey is the only factor of peace and quiet. According to Michael Gorra, "[t]here was Dilsey to be the future, to stand above the fallen ruins of the family like a ruined chimney, gaunt, patient, and indomitable" (709). Similar to the idea that Dilsey is the future of the South and southern families, is the idea that Shreve expresses at the end of *Absalom, Absalom!* when he says that "the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere" (378). In addition to characters who see African-Americans as the future, or powerful black characters like Clytie Sutpen, Yoknapatawpha also inhabits many racist characters. Rosa Coldfield is one of them. She gets very angry with Clytie for using her first name "'Rosa?' I cried. 'To me? To my face?'" (139). What's more, she does not want Clytie to touch her and avoids objects that have been

touched by African-Americans. Another racist character is Thomas Sutpen, since he immediately abandons his son Charles Bon when he learns that the mother of his son has African-American blood. He also has slaves before the Civil War. However, according to Cleanth Brooks, Faulkner is “essentially realistic in his account of slavery. If his novels of th[e] older time show us some slaveholders who were fundamentally decent and honorable men, they show others who were callous and inhuman” (Brooks 270). This realism in his account of slavery originates in his wish to portray Yoknapatawpha as an authentic, southern county.

Like Faulkner, Paisley sees race as a very important theme and addresses it extensively in his works, thereby signifying his progressiveness. The song “Accidental Racist” might be the best example of Paisley’s intention to address race issues. The song is a collaboration with the African-American rapper LL Cool J and tried to open up the discussion within the country audience about slavery and the heritage of the past in the South. It does this through a conversation between a white and a black man at a Starbucks. The song became quite controversial because of some of the lyrics, on which Paisley commented:

“I mostly thought of “Accidental Racist” in terms of *my* fans. This song was meant to generate discussion among the people who listen to my albums (...) I thought that my fans would get something out of hearing a point of view that they don’t hear very often -- a perspective you really don’t hear in country music. (...) I have no interest in offending anyone – especially anyone in the African-American community. That song was absolutely, earnestly supposed to be a healing song” (Rosen par. 7-8).

The song became highly controversial and criticized by many people. As already stated in chapter two, the criticism that the song got was justified, since the song and the way the duo sought to ‘solve’ the problem were far too simplistic. It starts with a black man who is offended by the confederate flag on a white man’s shirt. According to the white man, that flag is only there because he is a Lynyrd Skynyrd fan. They have a conversation about race and how that influences the South and its inhabitants. Four minutes later, the song ends with Cool J rapping “Let bygones be bygones” which is as much as saying that it does not really matter what has happened in the past. That statement is just far too blunt and may have offended a large part of (mostly) the African-American community. That also stands in sharp contrast with the gradual change in equality that Faulkner envisioned. In many ways, “Accidental Racist” is a horrible song. It is simplistic and overlooks so many years of exploitation, racism and discrimination. Paisley’s choice to collaborate with LL Cool J on this kind of work might

have been a poor one as well. He should have chosen a different African-American artist who has dealt with these kind of topics before. Cool J was never known for political or social messages in his songs. However, what is very relevant with regards to this song, is that the two singers dared to take on this project. They did not shy away from a topic that they knew would be highly controversial. That it did not work out like they hoped it would was a setback, but Paisley's courage to approach the subject and ask Cool J to collaborate with him shows a willingness for the country musician to also leave his 'comfort zone', and to explore new, progressive and very relevant themes in his works.

Another song that showed Paisley's uncommon stance on equality in race is *American Saturday Night's* "Welcome to the Future". The origins of the song are already very uncommon for a country singer, who is often part of a group of conservative Republicans. In 2008, Paisley actively endorsed and supported Barack Obama's election campaign. When Obama actually won the presidency, Paisley sat down to write a song, celebrating moving forward and electing a black man as president of the United States, especially considering the history of that group in the country. Six months after Obama's first inauguration, Paisley was invited to play at the White House, where he performed "Welcome to the Future". The singer stated that "I looked down at the president—who was sitting about 10 feet away from me at the time—and I said, 'I think about my kids and this generation, and you are the first president they're going to remember'" (Betts par. 5). "Welcome to the Future" describes the troubling history that makes Obama's victory even more significant. In the song, Paisley references to the fact that a former friend in his school had a cross burned in his yard, because this black boy asked the homecoming queen out. The braveries of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King are also applauded in the song, so it gives personal and generic examples of racism and discrimination in the past. Paisley's plea for equality between blacks and whites celebrates diversity, which is significantly original in the country music scene.

Race is an important theme in the American South, and both Faulkner and Paisley have shown their audience that they approach the subject from an originally progressive perspective. Faulkner did this in a time that was not marked by its progressiveness, in an area that was still highly conservative. Through his novels, he showed a keen interest in attempting to open up the discussion about the heritage of slavery in the South and the racial tensions between blacks and whites at that moment. As a Nobel prize winner and renowned author, he spoke about the racial tensions that he saw in Mississippi and was very critical at his home state. When the young boy Emmet Till was mutilated and murdered for whistling at a white female, Faulkner responded with

“[p]erhaps the purpose of this sorry and tragic error committed in my native Mississippi... is to prove to us whether or not we deserve to survive. Because if we in America have reached that point in our desperate culture when we must murder children, no matter for what reason or what color, we don’t deserve to survive, and probably won’t (Weinstein 18).

The region and the genre that Paisley works in is predominantly conservative and right-wing. Although Paisley never indicates where he stands in the political field—he does not want to lose any fans because of his support for either party—he did choose sides when Obama was running for president, and thus showed his approval for the progressive candidate. During many interviews after the release of “Welcome to the Future”, Paisley emphasized this by saying that he was proud of America. According to Paisley, “[o]ur country, coming from its history of slavery and racial inequality – one of the worst offenders for that in the history of the world – turns on a dime and elects a black man to the presidency. (...) I’m proud of our country for being that open-minded” (Batey par. 4). With “Welcome to the Future”, Paisley welcomes the listener to the future, but he also uses history in order to show how his country has developed into a much less conservative place, abandoning the history of slavery and segregation (from a Dutch perspective, America still has a long way to go, of course).

As the works of Paisley and Faulkner have shown, race and racism have been highly important themes throughout the decades that separate the two artists. Even though there have been huge changes in the American scenery, the discussion about race and racism has not diminished much. Especially in the South, the home of many African-Americans and the region where important moments during the Civil Rights era happened, such as the Montgomery bus boycott, the Brown vs. Board of Education case in Kansas, and the march on Selma, the discussion about race has been a prominent one. The attention that Faulkner and Paisley pay to this discussion shows that it was a prominent one in both eras, which made them incorporate it into their works. The similarity between the two is that their stance on the subject was not appreciated by many southerners. People found Faulkner too progressive, and hated the fact that he was an outspoken proponent of gradual change towards more equality, while others found that he did not go far enough (Williamson 302-304). Paisley got a lot of critique from both sides of the discussion as well. The conservative part of his audience was angry at the singer for trying to engage in the discussion, while others felt that the song was horrible and offended many African-Americans. The difference between the approach of Faulkner on the one hand and Paisley on the other is found in the way both men present the topic. Faulkner, as a modernist writer, incorporates the theme into his works without blatantly

pointing to it. He does this by introducing powerful African-American characters, who resemble the power and the chances for the future of black people. Paisley does it in a more obvious way, especially in “Accidental Racist”. In the other songs that address the topic, like “Welcome to the Future” or “American Saturday Night”, he manages to introduce the topic in a less obvious way, without receiving the blunt criticism from the conservative corner of his audience that he is too progressive. However, one cannot argue that the manner in which Paisley presents the topic resembles the complexity of the issue, while Faulkner does a much better job at presenting the complexity, but also looking towards the future, and seeing that there might be a solution.

Rurality and Class

There are differing views on whether rurality and class are essential parts of country music or not, but they are certainly themes that Brad Paisley incorporates in his work. The German scholar Christian Schmidt laments that the rurality and the small-town heritage of country musicians is a fake, unauthentic façade used by country musicians to connect with the small-town people that live in the rural areas of the US that often identify themselves with country music. According to Schmidt, the attention that these country musicians give rurality and, in many occasions, the Southern heritage of the music is not authentic, but just there to enable the country music fans to identify with the country musician (“Nashville” 329). There is also a deep feeling of unpopularity that seems to accompany country music, as Schmidt argues “[t]rue country music, so the reasoning goes, is the unpopular realm of small-town folks and precisely not the glitter of Hollywood or Broadway and thus almost necessitates a negation of commercialism or popular success” (“Famous” 150). However, his point is that this unpopularity is not justifiable anymore, since country music has expanded way beyond the music of small towns and rural areas. Another scholar, Bill Malone, who is a noted scholar in the field of country music and a musician himself, has done a lot of research into country music and the relation with the South. His opinion about the authenticity and unpopularity of country music differs from Schmidt’s. Both agree upon the fact that the roots of the music lie in the rural areas of the country, and Malone argues of the early country musicians of the 1920s, “their dialects, speech patterns, and performing styles reflected the rural South” (49). However, Malone and Schmidt disagree on the background of country artists and country music as a working-class genre, because Schmidt sees this as a construction, an image, only portrayed in order to appeal more to the general country audience, whereas Malone has a different view on this matter, arguing that country music

“has become a phenomenon with worldwide appeal, but it maintains its southern identification (...) Country singers still come from southern working-class backgrounds in surprising numbers, and both they and the lyrics of their songs convey the ambivalent impulses that have always been at the center of country music and southern culture: puritanism and hedonism, a reverence for home and a fascination with rambling, the sense of being uniquely different and at the same time more American than anyone else” (55).

Rurality and the blue-collar class are thus not only a theme in country music, but they are two of the principles that the music is grounded in. Without the rural areas of the US, the music cannot exist, so the reasoning by for example Bill Malone goes. According to Christian Schmidt, the music has since long grown from its rural roots and now only uses the image of rurality and low-class in order to be successful and popular with the rural audience.

The notion that rurality is important in country music is understood by Brad Paisley and incorporated in his music. A good example of rurality in a Paisley song is in “Cloud of Dust”, which appeared on Paisley first album *Who Needs Pictures*. It is set in West Texas, a highly rural, almost desert-like area, and tells the story of a farmer who has lost most of his crops due to the dry weather. The only cloud in the sky is the ‘cloud’ of dust that the tractor leaves above the field. The idea of a rural area is heavily evoked in this song: it is set in the rural West Texas, on a farm which for many people embodies rurality, and the song mentions a town with an “old hardware store” which evokes the idea of a town that we know from spaghetti Westerns, somewhere in the middle of nowhere. In the song “This is Country Music”, Paisley celebrates country music and the role it has in fans’ lives. He sings that “It ain’t hip to sing about tractors, trucks/Little towns, or mama, yeah that might be true/But this is country music, and we do”. Country music, so Paisley’s reasoning goes, is the music that expresses and celebrates the rurality of the South and the music’s audience. As explained earlier, the song “Outstanding in Our Field” celebrates the common working-class people who do not contribute to many great things in life, but who do thoroughly enjoy their Friday nights out in a field. It heavily relies on rurality as well. The characters in the song thrive in the rural area, where they have enough fields to go into on a Friday night to have fun and drink alcohol. They do not need night clubs or bars, the only thing they need is a field, as they sing “We can take a hundred acre big old empty pasture/And turn it into the hottest weekend nightclub from here”. Paisley does not simply present rurality as a theme through the setting of songs like “Cloud of Dust” or “Outstanding in Our Field”. Instead, he celebrates the rurality of the region he is working in, and describes how important it is for his audience and

his characters, implying that the emphasis on rurality is authentic and not only used in order to appeal to the country music audience, as Christian Schmidt thinks.

Rurality also plays a major role in the works of William Faulkner. He grew up in Mississippi in the early 1900s, when it was an even more rural and remote state than it is now. It was the remote places of rural Mississippi that Faulkner was familiar with and that laid the foundation for Yoknapatawpha County and all the stories and novels taking place in that county. According to Michael Gorra “Faulkner brought credibility to the nonmetropolitan *rural* spaces of the Global South” (my italics 251). Later writers on Southern or ‘rural’ literature continued this tradition, but that is also definitely the case for country musicians, who try to bring that credibility to the nonmetropolitan rural spaces as well, instead of places like New York City or Los Angeles that get so much attention in popular music. Most of Faulkner’s works are thus set in rural spaces, and heavily draw on the fact that they are set there. Faulkner himself came from a family that had always been proud inhabitants of Mississippi, and who were important for the state’s history. According to Cheryl Lester of the university of Kansas,

“[a]s opposed to families like the Bundrens, Faulkner himself, widely traveled within and beyond the South, could navigate both the fading traditional agrarian world represented by wheelbarrows and mule-drawn wagons, a world that persisted longer in the South than anywhere else in the nation, and the dominant modern world represented by electric power, trains, mass-produced sound recordings, inexpensive record players, and the depopulation of the rural South” (par. 6).

In *As I Lay Dying*, the reader is introduced to the Bundren family, a poor Southern family living in Frenchman’s Bend, one of the most remote and rural areas of Yoknapatawpha. Their trip into Jefferson brings them to a more developed, more urban world that they do not encounter in Frenchman’s Bend. Charles Aiken mentions that Faulkner “presents a type of rural-urban continuum. To the uneducated inhabitants of the remote parts of Yoknapatawpha County, Jefferson is definitely urban, offering goods and services that cannot be obtained at Fraser’s store in Beat Four or in the hamlet of Varner’s Crossroads” (342). At the same time, Jefferson is not at all an urban place. It is the biggest town in Yoknapatawpha, but it is still an insignificant, rural town when compared to places like Memphis or New Orleans, both significant in many of Faulkner’s works. “A Rose for Emily” and *Absalom, Absalom!* are both set in Jefferson, and the town is presented as small, in stark contrast with Memphis, the big city to the North. Memphis offers activities and services that Jefferson does not. However, it is all a matter of perspective, since Jefferson is a marvelous place with many facilities and

opportunities for the Bundrens, whereas for Henry Sutpen, Jefferson does not offer much, forcing him to go to New Orleans. That means that the people from Jefferson are different than those from the rural areas, and the people from the big cities will be significantly different from those in Jefferson as well. When the Bundren family is in Jefferson, the family's daughter Dewey Dell puts on her nicest clothes in order not to stand out as a girl from the country. However, the people of Jefferson immediately recognize that she is a "country girl" (Faulkner AILD 222). The implication seems to be that one can take a person out of the country, but that the country cannot be taken out of the person.

With his focus on the rural areas of America, William Faulkner contrasted the works of other great twentieth century writers such as James Joyce and John Dos Passos, who were heavily inspired by and wrote about big city life in Dublin and New York City. Whereas these cities were seen as markers of progress in the first half of the twentieth century, the rural areas of America were not. Jolene Hubbs states that "Faulkner's poor whites, true to the experience of those who live in poverty and in isolated rural communities, are far behind the vanguard of progress" (464). The difference between living in the rural countryside on the one hand, and the city on the other hand leads to intraracial social distinctions. In *As I Lay Dying*, that is perfectly illustrated by Dewey Dell, who says "[w]e are country people not as good as town people" (53). The city/country divide is a geopolitical facet of the novel that creates these social distinctions that become apparent during the family's trip to Jefferson. On their way, they stop in Mottson, where Dewey Dell enters the drugstore on her quest for an abortion. Upon entering the store, the owner, called Mosely, says "she kind of bumbled at the screen door a minute, *like they do*, and came in" (Faulkner AILD 180, my italics). *Like they do* implies that even the owner of the pharmacy in a provincial town like Mottson looks down upon people from the countryside and sees them as the lowest of classes. He thinks that they cannot even open a screen door in a normal way. This attitude is amplified by MacGowan, the owner of the drugstore in Jefferson. MacGowan immediately recognizes her as a country girl when she enters his store, even though she has put effort into looking like a city girl, putting on her best clothes. He does acknowledge that she looks fine, "for a country girl" (222), and eventually tricks her into having sex with her, convincing her that helps her get rid of the baby in her belly. Both store clerks Dewey Dell meets in the novel refuse to see her as an individual looking for help. Through their descriptions of the girl, the reader learns that they see her as a representative of a people they look down upon. MacGowan even takes advantage of the little knowledge the girl has of medicine and abortions by having sex with her. Through his condescension, Mosely still feels sorry for Dewey Dell, as he says that "it's a hard life they

have” (184). Through the use of rural American spaces, Faulkner contrasts his work with that of the great modernist writers of his time, who wrote about the big city and life in those cities, focusing on an area that did not get much attention in any form of cultural work, bringing the rural spaces of the American South to life.

The rural space has a different function in Faulkner and Paisley’s oeuvre. Whereas Faulkner’s rural spaces in general contribute to a negative worldview and an air of despair and decay, Paisley presents the South, the working classes and southern rurality as something much more positive. Some of Faulkner’s fiction, and definitely *Absalom, Absalom!* and *As I Lay Dying* are novels that do not express much hope. They present Mississippi as a wasteland, swampy, and unfit for inhabitation. The only glimpse of hope in *As I Lay Dying* is given at the end, when Anse Bundren has already found a new wife who gives a glimpse into a future through the eyes of Cash “I see that the grip she was carrying was one of them little graphophones (...) every time a new record would come from the mail order and us setting in the house in the winter, listening to it, I would think what a shame Darl couldn’t be to enjoy it too” (239-240). Cash thus sees possibilities for the Bundren family to benefit from for example the technological developments of the twentieth century, but is the only beacon of hope in an otherwise hopeless world. *Absalom* presents the Sutpen story as not much more hopeful. Because of Sutpen’s obsession with fulfilling his dream of becoming a rich planter, rising above the lowest of classes that he got at his birth, his plan is doomed to fail. He abjures his humanity, and his eventual fall is very similar to the fall of the South during and after the Civil War. Paisley’s rural spaces carry less negative connotations. Paisley is proud of his southern heritage, and rurality is an essential part of that. A song like “This is Country Music” celebrates the rural, small-town life of the working-class hero in the American South and also confirms the image that country music is the only genre that pays attention to the these lower-class people in the rural areas of America, contrasting other genres that celebrate urban America.

Ambivalence

Quentin’s response to Shreve’s question if he hates the South is a semi-convinced “I don’t hate it!”. Semi because he repeats it seven times, which seems like it feels unnatural for him to say he does not hate it. One can see this as ambivalence towards the South that marks Quentin’s love and hate for it, as he was glad also to move away from the South, moving to New England as a young student. At the same time he loves telling the story of the South and the dysfunctional Sutpen family to his Canadian roommate Shreve. Ambivalence with regards

to Southern literature has had considerable focus in the academic world, since many authors from the American South seem to struggle with their feelings about the region. In *William Faulkner and Southern History*, Joel Williamson goes into this, arguing “[w]riters appeared either to love the South or hate it. Looking at his own career, [Faulkner] thought that ‘I seem to have tried both of the courses’ (...) but more and more he emerged as profound critic of the South, and particularly of the strict roles it prescribed as to sex, race, and class” (244).

Faulkner thus states that he both loves and hates the South. Even though he became more and more critical of the South and its people, especially entering the Civil Rights era, in which he was a firm supporter of the Civil Rights Movement, his love for the region stayed and he continued writing stories that were set in the South and that were inherently Southern. In an interview he explained his difficult relationship with the South as follows: “Some of the things I don’t like at all, but I was born there and that’s my home, and I will defend it even if I hate it” (Cobb 139).

This ambivalence towards the South is shared by Brad Paisley who, according to the country music tradition, numerous times states how much he loves the South, but also expresses his critique. His songs “Country Nation”, “Heaven South”, and “Old Alabama” show his love for the region, but at the same time he also encourages his audience to look away from the South and to experience other cultures, or to celebrate diversity and multiculturalism in both “Southern Comfort Zone” and “American Saturday Night”. Paisley portrays this ambivalence through playing with the tropes of country music and revising standard themes to give an original interpretation to these themes. Andrew Mueller summarizes this by noting that “Paisley regards country’s clichés as material to be stretched, shredded, or subversively repurposed” (par. 6). Examples of ambivalence that Paisley expresses in his songs through a revision of traditional themes are religion (in “Those Crazy Christians” for example) and masculinity, where Paisley presents a masculine man who also has some feminine features, even though he might not realize that. However, he does not dare to go as far as Faulkner did in his literature. Paisley still presents a masculine man who enjoys the things that male characters in country music enjoy in general: drinking beer, shooting animals, and looking at women. Faulkner portrayed multiple sorts of masculinity, from the aggressive macho man Thomas Sutpen to the feminine bisexual Quentin Compson and everything in-between. He dared to emphasize the role of the female characters in his novels as very important and underestimated by the general public.

It is safe to say that both Faulkner and Paisley feel a deep ambivalence towards the South, and that through that ambivalence they have become original, innovative artists, each

in their own genre and time. Through what both artists have said in interviews about their perspective on the South, the feeling of ambivalence is even made stronger. Both men show that they have a deep love for the South, because it is the region they were born and raised in, but also remark that there are many things that they are not proud of in that region. That dichotomy they experience characterizes their work and contributes to a feeling of ambivalence towards the South that is shared by more artists and their audience. A difference between the two concerning ambivalence is that Faulkner condemned the South more and was even more outspoken on the feeling of love and hate towards the South that he had than Paisley, whose audience as a contemporary country musician will not tolerate the same critique that Faulkner expressed.

Conclusion

This chapter has used the analyses that the first and the second chapter have already made with regards to how William Faulkner and Brad Paisley, through their music and literature, approach Southern themes, and how their cultural products are ways of illustrating the South. It has shown how Faulkner and Paisley both approach the subjects of masculinity, religion, race, rurality, class and ambivalence towards the South, while showing the differences in how they do this and what could be the reason for a different presentation of a theme.

Masculinity, gender and sexual identity reverberate through Faulkner's oeuvre. The important Faulkner scholar Ilse Duso Lind describes him as the first to "put the biological facts of female life into fiction" (92) and "the only major American fiction writer of the twenties and thirties who incorporates into his depiction of women the functioning of the organs of reproduction" (94). Addie Bundren for example describes her own genitals in a very meticulous way in *As I Lay Dying*. Faulkner is seen as an author who gave a voice to women who are, according to Annette Wannamaker "outside the margins and frustrated by the existing symbolic order" (par. 8). The existing symbolic order that Wannamaker mentions, is the order that was very much present during the twentieth century: the order that women do not get their own voices heard enough. For Faulkner to achieve this would be a miracle, since he is a male writer, but his emphasis on the limitedness of the roles of women in the South points towards a critique of the limited roles that many women carry. Thus, some of Faulkner's women are very powerful, which characters like Clytie Sutpen, Addie Bundren and even Emily Grierson show the reader. Paisley does not give gender and masculinity much emphasis in his works, and when he does, he presents a male as both a masculine and a

feminine man in order not to offend any side of his audience. Paisley acknowledges gender differences and differences within one gender, but at the same time presents the feminine behavior in men as wrong or negative.

Revision of conventional Southern traditions is a writing technique that Faulkner and Paisley both apply. The standard religious narrative is an example of something that both artists like to revise. That is to say, there is a lot of attention on religion in their works, but they decide to present the theme from a new perspective, and even critique the concept of religion and the behavior of Christians. The most obvious example of Faulkner critiquing Christianity and its morals is in *As I Lay Dying*, where the devout Christians all sin or proclaim they are very devout believers in order to wash them free of any guilt or blame, writing them off as hypocrites. Paisley's critique is expressed the most poignantly in "Those Crazy Christians", where he argues that there is a certain hypocrisy that characterizes the behavior of Christians around him, to end with the fact that it does not take away his love for the sacrifices they make.

Race, slavery, and multiculturalism have been hot topics since a long time, and still are. Both Paisley and Faulkner these themes highly important and dedicate much of their work to it. Brad Paisley is one of the first country singers to embrace multiculturalism in the wake of Obama's election as President. His songs "Welcome to the Future" and "American Saturday Night" praise America as a multicultural, diverse country where immigrants have all injected American culture with their own. William Faulkner started writing in the late 1910s and wrote between the 1920s and 1962 and thus worked in a completely different time, that was characterized by Jim Crow laws, segregation and racism towards African-Americans. Nevertheless, Faulkner tackled these subjects, marking his relatively uncommon stance on slavery and racism for a Southerner. According to Laurence Goldstein, "Faulkner came to represent the progressive side of American culture because he wrote so witheringly about the curse of slavery and the mad pursuit of wealth and status" (par. 14).

Other themes that are important in the works of both Southerners are rurality, class, the importance of small-town communities and the urban versus the rural. As a rural and agricultural region, the countryside and the rural areas of the southern part of America have regularly dominated country music and literature about the South. The same goes for Paisley and Faulkner's selected works that also feature rurality and the stark contrast between the small towns and the urban centers in the area. Through the portrayal of the South, in for example *Absalom, Absalom!* and "A Rose for Emily", as an area of tight small-town communities, just like Brad Paisley does in "This is Country Music", or in "Famous People",

where a man is very famous in a small town for throwing the touchdown pass in the region's final, the South is presented as a very rural area that only consists of small towns. All these examples, be it either from the literary giant or the contemporary country star, indicate that the South is a region dominated by small town life and rurality, and especially Paisley's, but also some of Faulkner's characters represent the lower, working classes. Through the selected works of both artists, the South is also characterized by agrarianism: Sutpen owns a plantation, the Bundren family lives on a farm and is dependent on staying at other farms throughout their journey, Paisley's "Cloud of Dust" is all about farming in a remote area of the American South, and other songs, like "This is Country Music" praise small towns, tractors and trucks.

Throughout the discussed works, both Faulkner and Paisley use ambivalence to express their attitude towards the South. Especially *Absalom, Absalom!* and "Southern Comfort Zone", contain a double feeling that shows that the musician and the author love and hate it at the same time. Both the novel and the song address what it means to be Southern and what this means for the people living there. They express their love for the South (or that they at least don't hate it), but at the same time, heavily critique the region for the conservative attitudes of many people and for the fact that they tend to stay in the region instead of experiencing what other cultures are like.

Conclusion

This thesis started with its research question, which asks what the difference is between Faulkner as a high modernist author writing about the South for an elite audience, and Paisley representing the South as a popular country musician. The previous chapters have answered that question, without seeing Paisley's country music as the same kind of cultural expression of the South as Faulkner's literature. However, it does look at how Brad Paisley and William Faulkner present the South in their respective works.

Faulkner and Paisley have different places in the genre they are working in. Where Faulkner functions as one of the, or perhaps even the most important 'beacon' of Southern literature, inspiring many later writers who wrote in or about the Southern states of America, Paisley has a different role. Faulkner has created an immense legacy, and according to Taylor Hagood, he is "much less an individual genius working in remote isolation from prevailing cultural movements than an artist in touch with the complexities and turbulence of his society's culture" (619). He was writing in and about the South, the society he knew through and through, which made him into an important source of inspiration for later Southern writers. According to Faulkner scholars, he is the greatest writer the South has ever produced and he has laid the foundations for Southern literature, defining what later writers on the American South can incorporate as 'Southern' in their writing (Kazin 3, Polk 3). Margaret Donovan Bauer has written a book on William Faulkner's legacy, in which she explains how Faulkner has been so important for later writers of Southern literature. She argues that Faulkner's tales are retold and his characters reinvented by more recent authors, clearly marking his legacy and showing that his characters and themes still form the framework for Southern literature (3). Three of his most influential works, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury*, showed that Faulkner was a modernist author. According to Michael Levenson, the modernist features are found in "the representation of interior states, the resources of spoken testimony, the concern with reliable and unreliable narration (...) [and] the shifting view in the novels" (244). Brad Paisley is one of the most famous and popular country artists at this moment, who stands out as a country musician for the non-traditional perspectives he portrays in his songs. Of course, there is a big difference between the place in the genre that Faulkner has and the one Paisley has. The singer is much more of a follower, who was inspired by country legends, and who is now positioning himself in the footsteps of those legends that he grew up listening to. Paisley does not have a similar role in his genre as Faulkner has in Southern literature. Although he is a big star who young country musicians may look up to, he has not yet achieved the status in country music that Faulkner has in (Southern) American literature.

Without doubt, Faulkner was a more skilled literary artist, who was also more aware of the history of the South, the Civil War and its consequences than Paisley is, which means he was able to present the important topics and messages to the audience in a more smooth, discrete way. Of course there is an obvious reason for the difference in quality and complexity that Faulkner's works have and Paisley's have not. Faulkner was a modernist writer, very much aware of the painful history of the South, writing for an elite audience that demanded more of someone's novels than simply a chronological story. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Faulkner stated that he did not start writing to achieve fame, success, or to become rich. He started writing and continued after his first attempts were not successful, because he loved working on stories. He did it "not for glory, and least of all for profit, but to create out of the materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before" (Nobel Speech, par. 1). Paisley is representing the South as a popular country musician, whose audience consists of different people than Faulkner's. His drive to go into the music industry was both his love for country music, but also that he did not see many other career paths for himself, and he was thus also doing it for the profit ("Southern Living Interview"). Because Faulkner never wrote with commercial success as his main goal, he had all the freedom to experiment with styles, characters, and structures. Paisley first had to become successful in the business to be able to try original ideas and experiments. His music is therefore much more common and approachable for the general audience than Faulkner's literature is. The logical assumption would be that because of the character of Paisley's music, his audience is significantly different than Faulkner's: less educated and less intellectual, and consisting more of the working and lower class people. Studies have shown that people who listen to country music have less income, lower levels of education, and spend less time on education than people who listen to other musical genres (Hubbs 14). Research into the difference between country listeners and readers of Southern literature has not been done yet.

This thesis has often used the word theme, in order to distinguish what Faulkner and Paisley write about in either their novels, short stories, or songs. The third chapter has devoted significant attention to the analysis of the themes that emerge out of both artists' works, and how connections, comparisons, or contrasts between those themes can be distinguished. Themes that both men have often used are masculinity and gender, race and slavery, ambivalence, religion, rurality, class, and the burden of the past (and the Civil War).

Paisley, as a 21st century country musician, often presents the important themes to his audience in a smooth fashion, without being too explicit or obvious with it. A writing technique that Paisley likes to use to address the themes that he finds relevant is revision or

inversion. He likes to play with the tropes of country music traditions, but also with the expectations of his audience. Examples of this revision of traditional country topics are his songs “American Saturday Night”, “Welcome to the Future”, and “Those Crazy Christians”. In these songs, he inverts and revises traditional narratives on topics like religion, race and discrimination, and the history of the US and uses that inversion to spread his message about a certain theme. Through that inversion, he surprises his audience and critics, often in a positive way.

In contrast with the inversion of themes that Paisley is incorporating into his songs in contemporary country music, Faulkner’s role was to establish the themes important for him, which eventually became important themes for the literature of the South. In Faulkner’s literature, there is less attention on the revision of relevant Southern themes than in Paisley’s music, since those themes were not yet introduced into the literature. However, next to laying the foundation for a Southern literature, there were also narrative structures that were revised by Faulkner. These are however far less obvious than the ones Paisley presents to us. Considering the inversion of traditional images that Faulkner incorporates in his work, Richard Gray says about Quentin Compson, narrator in *Absalom, Absalom!*

“Quentin Compson is not just a gothic figure; he is a determinately Southern Gothic one. He is neurotic, imaginative, introverted, obsessed with the past and haunted by its voice (...) Faulkner is playing here not only with autobiography but with an acutely regional character trope, a figure for the South’s sense of its own distinctiveness, its separation, as white Southerners saw it and sometimes still try to see it, from the bourgeois, utilitarian norms of the nation, its impotence and apparently irreversible decline” (“Dark House” 32).

Like Gray says, Faulkner here plays with the tropes of a regional character, describing Quentin as someone who is at all outside of American society, living in a Southern past, perhaps longing for the old glory of the South, within a New England setting at Harvard University. He is attending one of the most renowned universities of America, but the only thing that the reader sees him do is ‘investigate’ –like a detective—what happened to the Sutpen family ages ago in a land far from where he is living.

In the selected works, Faulkner has smoothly –and sometimes more overtly— incorporated themes like race and discrimination, slavery, the Civil War, rurality, and religion. Like Paisley, he does this in a variety of ways. In *Absalom, Absalom!* for example, race and racism are themes central to the novel, and it is openly presented. There are also less obvious, or less poignant examples of Faulkner presenting themes in the discussed works.

Religion is one of those themes. In *Absalom, Absalom!* religion is mostly portrayed through the Biblical allusions that Faulkner has incorporated into the novel. The critique that Faulkner expresses towards Christians in *As I Lay Dying* resembles the critique of the shallowness or hypocrisy that Paisley laments in his song “Those Crazy Christians”. However, Faulkner does not blatantly criticize Christianity or religion in the novel, he portrays characters that at first glance seem like true Christians, but the reader gradually learns that these people use religion as a façade for their sinful behavior.

For Faulkner’s literature, the identity of the South was an important element. However, he was never outspoken on what the identity of the South would mean. According to James Cobb, “Faulkner’s ambivalence about the essence of southern identity was readily apparent in his writing” (139). Faulkner was ambivalent about the identity of the South, and also about his perspective on the identity of the South or his attitude towards it. He was not explicitly stating whether he loved the South or whether he hated it, but he seemed to do both at the same time. One of the ways that Faulkner, like other Southern writers, is presenting the region, is as “defeated, guilt-ridden, backward-looking, and tragic” (Cobb 236). What’s more, through the works of Southern writers, including that of William Faulkner, the South was presented as a counterpoint to the rest of America. Faulkner was thus also one of the authors who presented the South as much different from the rest of America. Southern identity thus turned into something that clearly distinguished southerners from non-southerners, almost implying that a southerner would not be considered an American anymore.

Paisley shares Faulkner’s stance on the South as rather different than the rest of America, but he would call it unique, and tends to be positive of the South and the identity of the region and its people. In “The Southern Living interview”, he describes Southern culture as living in small towns in the countryside, surrounded by family and friends whom you know well. According to Paisley, people are not concerned with moving on up in their careers, but more about having mutual respect for each other, about celebrating the weekend on a Friday night with a beer in a field, and about rurality. Through Paisley’s songs, it also becomes clear that for him, Southern identity is characterized by people enjoying things that are typically Southern, such as NASCAR-racing. “Southern Comfort Zone” gives a good idea of what Paisley constitutes as Southern: driving a truck, owning a gun, listening to country music, and going to church. It is thus an identity characterized by masculine activities (driving trucks, owning guns), religion, rurality, the working class and small towns.

Many of the themes that Faulkner has introduced in the selected works reverberate through Paisley’s oeuvre. Paisley sings about small-town Southern life, rurality, slavery and

race, the struggles of the working class, and about the South in general. However, he pays much less attention to the history of the South than Faulkner does. Paisley does not place many of his songs in a historical setting. He is writing about American society today, and trying to tackle the problems or give solutions to current challenges in the world he sees around him. Because he is a southerner, many of those challenges and problems have a southern character. The biggest difference between the two artists might be the time they were working in. Faulkner's audience would still have many ties with Southern history, and especially with the history of the Civil War, which has had an impact on southerners for a long time. Also, Faulkner's works are much more complicated, meaning that they lend themselves more to contain extensive history of a region.

To conclude, there are clear similarities and differences between Faulkner and Paisley. The differences are found in the way they present their messages to their audience. Faulkner clearly distinguishes himself as the modernist author writing for an elite audience, who dares to experiment with his topics, structures and writing styles. Because Paisley first had to establish himself within the country music business, it was not possible for him to experiment with narration styles and topics in the early stages of his career to the same extent as Faulkner. Regarding important themes, there are clear differences between the two artists as well. Paisley does not give much prominence to the topic of gender and masculinity, while this is a significant theme in Faulkner's selected works. What's more, Faulkner asks many questions about the topic and incorporates strong female characters in his literature. Paisley does not go so far as Faulkner, who acknowledges that there are various kinds of masculinities and presents these in his novels and short stories. Regarding religion, the difference between the two is that Faulkner uses his extensive knowledge about religion and the Bible to present a critical look at religion and the hypocrisy of it, while presenting a dark and bleak world where the fate of man is doomed. Paisley, a devout Christian himself, paints a different, more positive worldview. He does agree on the hypocrisies of Christianity with Faulkner, but at the end emphasizes the importance of religion in his life. Regarding the topic of race and discrimination, Faulkner and Paisley were both characterized by progressiveness. However, their respective audiences responded differently to their attempts to acknowledge the South's troubled past with regards to slavery and race. What's more, the way in which Faulkner approaches the theme is different than how Paisley does it. As a modernist author, Faulkner presents the theme in his works without blatantly pointing to it. Even though it is an important theme in for example *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner creates characters, settings, and developments within the story that mark the importance he devotes to race and slavery,

without making this obvious. The reader has to carefully read the novel to be able to understand the point that the author wants to make. Paisley's songs are more easy to understand, written for a different audience than Faulkner's novels, which means less complexity and a more obvious way of presenting the theme and Paisley's perspective on it, in for example "Accidental Racist". With regards to the theme of rurality and class, there are various differences between Paisley and Faulkner. The negative worldview and view of the future of man that reverberates throughout Faulkner's oeuvre is emphasized by the remoteness and the desolateness of the southern rural spaces. In opposition to Faulkner, the rurality of the South is heralded by Paisley. The singer is very positive about the rural spaces, as it is the home of the southern working class people, country music's heroes.

Next to differences and contradictions between the two artists, there is one significant similarity: their progressiveness. Both artists have shown that they dare to approach subjects that are controversial or uncommon in the South, such as the way they approach the problems of the South's history of slavery and racism. They encourage southerners to look beyond the South, hoping that they will realize there is more to the world than their birth-region. They love and hate the South at the same time, and have both expressed through their works and in interviews that they have a double feeling, both positive and negative, when thinking about the South. They might sometimes hate the South, but eventually, through that hate, the love will remain, and they will always feel connected to the South.

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