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TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

Thomas Sutpen's personality analyzed through the characters of Faulkner's novel *Absalom, Absalom!*

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we study characterization by analyzing and comparing how is the personality of the protagonist of *Absalom, Absalom!*, Thomas Sutpen, depicted according to different characters' testimonies in the novel. To do this, we make use of the personality inventory *NEO PI-R* designed by Costa and McCrae which helps us organize the information within five personality domains. The first account analyzed belonged to Rosa Coldfield and highlighted Thomas Sutpen's Disagreeableness domain of personality. The second description studied appears in chapter VII of the novel and belongs to General Compson, who highlights Sutpen's Conscientiousness domain. Then, we conducted the same analysis to the descriptors to measure the influence of their personality in their accounts. Finally we applied Kelley's Covariant Theory to present the descriptors' cause for Sutpen's behavior.

Keywords: William Faulkner, Characterization, *Absalom, Absalom!*, Personality, Covariant Theory.

En el presente trabajo pretendemos estudiar la caracterización mediante el estudio y la comparación de la personalidad de Thomas Sutpen, el protagonista de *Absalom, Absalom!*, descrita a través de los testimonios de los personajes de la novela. Para ello, hemos utilizado el *NEO PI-R*, un inventario de la personalidad diseñado por Costa y McCrae que organiza la información en cinco dominios de la personalidad. La primera versión de Sutpen pertenece a Rosa Coldfield y destaca su dominio no Afable de la personalidad. La segunda versión estudiada se encuentra en el capítulo VII de la novela y corresponde al General Compson, quien destaca de Sutpen el dominio de la Responsabilidad. Después realizamos el mismo estudio de la personalidad a los personajes que le describían para ver cómo influía su personalidad en la narración. Por último, pusimos en práctica el modelo de la Covarianza Causal de Kelley, que trata de presentar el motivo de los personajes para el comportamiento de Sutpen.

Palabras Clave: William Faulkner, Caracterización, *Absalom, Absalom!*, Personalidad, Teoría de la Covarianza.



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1. INTRODUCTION

One of Faulkner's most complex works is *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), set in an imaginary southern city called Jefferson town, Yoknapatawpha County, which deals with its decay after the American Civil War.

This novel captured my interest because it is mysterious, intriguing and fascinating at the same time. It may be due to its style. Nonetheless, for our analysis it is interesting from the point of view of characterization, the device that allows readers create a mental representation of a subject's personality (Cámara, 2005:103).

The central figure in the book is Thomas Sutpen, a man often considered a demon and the destructor of a family. Several characters of the book talk about this man. This effect creates in readers an expectation or, more precisely, the desire of an explanation for that anger against his persona. Thomas Sutpen is already dead by the beginning of the temporal line of the work, which arouses even more curiosity and interest in his person. In effect, he is a mysterious character and has become an obsession for all the citizens of Jefferson town.

The characters, by telling over and over the story, try to rebuild all the events in an attempt to understand and not to forget them. Rosa Coldfield, the first voice of the story, believed that someone should write down the story in order for it to be remembered in time. The idea is that maybe this way the townspeople would achieve to prevent that fatality from happening again.

But what triggers us are the following questions: who is Thomas Sutpen? What links the characters to him? How is he? What is that fatality? He is addressed 'the demon' yet, we do



not know the reasons why he is called by that name. Some characters even seem to use the term in a humorous sense.

We, as readers, do not have access to him as he is a fictional character and we only receive information of him through the narrative function of some characters in the novel. Therefore, we are going to derive our image of him from other characters' subjectivity. The aura of mystery surrounding the central figure creates a specific phenomenology in the readers. To my view, Faulkner plays with that effect in the novel as it enhances curiosity and promotes an addictive feeling. This phenomenology changes our homeostasis, that is, our actual state of emotional balance, and gets readers involved as participants in solving the mystery. Trying to guess as much as possible about Thomas Sutpen is a challenge not only for readers but also for scholars and researchers.

The figure of Thomas Sutpen is linked to the main storyline of the work and Faulkner designed it in order for it not to be solved. Each character builds a different version of him and versions often conflict. One peculiarity of the novel is that after reading it, each reader is bound to construe their own view of Sutpen. This novel has been regarded by many authors as divided into four parts corresponding to four voices, but there are actually more voices involved. As critical readers, we are going to analyze Rosa's representation of Sutpen and finally briefly compare it with that of General Compson to check if they coincide or not and see in what they differ. The visions we are going to compare are two of all that appear in the novel. I have selected these two because they contrast significantly, and are, therefore, very interesting for comparison. Nonetheless, an exhaustive analysis should include all the reports.

Our aim is to describe in an organized and scientific manner the characteristic features of Thomas Sutpen's personality by these two characters. This will allow us to easily draw a comparison highlighting the similarities and differences. For that reason, we are going to need a method that offers a stable formulation of the mental representations that the figures have of Thomas Sutpen.



The chosen method is the *NEO PI-R*, a personality inventory that measures all major aspects of individual differences (Costa & McCrae, 1992: 39). It has been designed by Costa and McCrae and claims that personality can be measured according to five domains. Moreover, we will draw from Cámara's article *Villains in Our Mind: A Psychological Approach to Literary and Filmic Villainy* since the character under analysis is often considered a villain and we are going to use his method to analyze Thomas Sutpen.

2. CONTEXT

What Faulkner intended with this intricate work is to explain the situation of a region where he himself lived and grew up. It seems that he owed his land a tribute. William Faulkner was born in Mississippi the 25th of September 1897. Additionally, it is in that region where the events of this novel and most of his works take place.

Faulkner's literary style is obscure, very peculiar and personal. His writing is fragmentary in many senses. In this particular novel, extra complexity is added since the story is told through the subjectivity of the characters involved in it. We can use the target work as an example, the story of a town and a generation told not by one but by many speakers. They may be telling the same story but for him it was important that readers obtained the different visions of the events and characters.

The year of publication of this novel was 1936, when the Second World War started. In the novel there is also a war but it is a different one, the American Civil War. War is used here as a motif to explain the situation of the Southern region. Slavery was still allowed there and black people did not have any civil rights. The conditions in the south were totally different from the north and after the war most of the slaves moved to northern regions, especially to the big cities such as New York.



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Faulkner belongs to the modernist period, where the stream of consciousness and internal perspectives play a central role. Additionally, the sequence of time and events is not linear, we know before the end of the story how it is going to end. Furthermore, we are told about episodes in a disconnected manner. Sometimes, there is an element in the narration that makes the speaker remember another situation and comes back to that moment. Faulkner managed to develop a style that forces readers to wait till the end of the novel to uncover and connect all events and stories told along *Absalom, Absalom!*

The style of the author has been described as belonging to the Southern Gothic Tradition. It is true that his birthplace plays an important role. In the target story “he deals with conflicts of the south like society classes and “castes”, national and regional boundaries...” (Bockting, 2013: 29). It is impossible to separate his personal life from his works, “even New-Critics- who were known for exclusively focusing on the text and not engaging historical or cultural contexts in their close readings, needed to find ways to talk about Faulkner’s relationship to southern culture” (Andrews cited in Artuso 2013: 31).

Some characteristics of this genre are the following: broken characters, family conflicts, the decay of the south, slavery... (Benito 2014) The person of Thomas Sutpen is a reflection and personification of that south and his fall represents the aspirations of those southern citizens, their way of life and the result after war. Four characters try to make sense of it and through them we know “the collective mind of the south” (Norton, 1994:1525).

This novel shares many elements with other works by Faulkner such as the four characters’ structure that also appears in *As I Lie Dying* (1930). Other recurrent elements are the place, Yoknapatawpha County; the protagonists, Quentin, Mr Compson, among others. Quentin appears frequently chosen as the witness or recipient of told stories, maybe Faulkner’s alter ego, also present in other of his masterpieces, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). He has been compared with other great authors such as Gabriel García Márquez for the choice of a recurrent fictional place as the setting of all his stories.

Williamson talking about this novel argued that “southern culture is deeply purist and intolerant of mixtures [...] racial, sexual or moral” (cited in Artuso 2013: 38). Yet Faulkner himself inserts in the novel his own perception of the South through the characters’ narrations:

where high mortality was concomitant with the money and the sheen on the dollars was not from gold but from blood—a spot of earth [...] as a theatre for violence and injustice and bloodshed and all the satanic lusts of human greed and cruelty, for the last despairing fury of all the pariah-interdict and all the doomed—a little island set in a smiling and fury—lurked and incredible indigo sea (250).

This striking description comes out at the end of the work trying to justify why the characters had ended up in that situation. The protagonist, Thomas Sutpen, is only a man who wants to continue with the existing situation in the South. The fall of the South meant his own fall as well. All that appears at the end of the novel as a moral of their situation not to be repeated. As Quentin’s Grandfather states in *Absalom, Absalom!*, the problem would be solved “that day when the South would realise that it was now paying the price for having erected its economic edifice not on the rock of stern morality but on the shifting sands of opportunism and moral brigandage.” (260).

What Hans H. Skei in her article “A Summer of Wistaria” (Artuso 2013) suggests is that as the events are repeated, retold and interpreted through the narrators and voices in the book, it engages the readers too to participate and create their own vision of the story and Thomas Sutpen.

Before moving to the proper analysis of the novel I would like to add that what authors of the southern gothic genre pretend is to make readers feel the southern environment leaking through them in every page. They try to move the audience with both, dramatic events and



the end and destruction of families. This is a consequence of the southern literary genre, whose goal is “to explore social issues and reveal the cultural character of the American South” (Benito 2014: 2).

3. METHOD

As we have said above, The *NEO-PI-R* psychology manual has gathered all recurrent personality adjectives and classified them into five domains. The method “consists of five 12-item scales that measure each domain” (Costa & McCrae, 1992: 11). Each facet is represented by the capital letter of the domain and a number from one to six, whilst the negative feature is preceded by a minus.

The NEO method allows us to approach everyone’s personality as it covers all personality features and it is very clear to understand. In our analysis we are not going to carry out the test, we are just going to use the method as a tool to describe characterization in the novel. In addition we have chosen this method in the belief that we make sense of literary characters as we do of real people (Toolan, Emmott and Culpepper, qtd in Cámara 44). Therefore, we can make use of the *NEO-PI-R* personality inventory to define our characters.

Also called the Big Five, the method organizes all the information belonging to someone’s personality as belonging to one of the five domains. The first one is Neuroticism or “the general tendency to experience negative affections such as fear, sadness, embarrassment, anger, guilt and disgust” (1992: 14). It measures the emotional stability of a person and its facets are the following ones: Anxiety, Angry Hostility, Depression, Self-Consciousness, Impulsiveness and Vulnerability. The second domain is Agreeableness, defined as an interpersonal and interactive tendency, which also implies being helpful to others and sympathetic (Costa & McCrae, 1992: 15). The facets of Trust, Straightforwardness, Altruism, Compliance, Modesty and Tender Mindedness can be found in this domain.

Conscientiousness or diligence to carry out tasks is the next domain. A conscientious person is determined and strong-willed. The facets that define it are the following: Competence, Order, Dutifulness, Achievement Striving, Self Discipline and Deliberation. The next dimension of personality is Openness to experience and aesthetics, which measures intellectual curiosity and has the following facets: Fantasy, Aesthetics, Feelings, Actions, Ideas and Values (Costa & McCrae, 1992: 15). Finally, we find Extraversion or a gregariousness attitude. It is proper of people who manifest a cheerful disposition and contains the facets of Warmth, Gregariousness, Assertiveness, Activity, Excitement-Seeking and Positive Emotions. (Costa & McCrae, 1992: 15-17).

The NEO model of personality tends to be universal, in other words, it can be applied to everybody (Costa & McCrae, 1992: 1). For our particular interest in studying literary theory and characterization, we are going to apply it to book characters. However it has been many times applied in the psychotherapy and medical treatment. It is a method valid across cultures but admits individual variations with time (Costa & McCrae, 1992: 9).

Its goal is to “give you some idea about what makes you unique in your ways of thinking, feeling, and interacting with others.” (Costa & McCrae, 1992: 9). It characterizes and highlights any subject’s most salient features. We may think this analysis reduced to five would be simple yet it actually offers a complete summary. In other words, everyone has those attributes to a lesser or greater extent, and the high scores on any particular facet or domain are the ones that stand out and tend to define the individual’s personality.

In order to do the psychological testing, one has to match the adjectives used by the characters with the scales of adjectives of the Neo manual. Those scales “are most conveniently explained by describing characteristics of extremely high or extremely low scores” (Costa & McCrae, 1992: 13). It is an in-text reasoning process, as we cannot do an in-person test, we have to infer information from the text belonging to each personality domain.



The method is going to be useful for a characterization study since it allows to “predict important aspects of their [characters] life” (Costa & McCrae, 1992: 18). It is also helpful as it proposes some probable implications the facets can convey. More precisely, dealing with stress, anxiety and social integration problems among others. The test tends to provide a profile, never a diagnosis of any psychiatric problem.

The second tool we mentioned we were going to use was the method designed by Enrique Cámara for analyzing villains that we can find in his article *Villains in Our Mind: A Psychological Approach to Literary and Filmic Villainy* (2011). Villains have traditionally been seen as mere patterns in text against which we project our emotions (Cámara, 2011: 3). They are certainly the elements in a book that capture our attention, sometimes due to their appearance, which might play an important role. Still, what Cámara wants to point out is that villains are characterized by their personality domain of Agreeableness. As Costa and McCrae stated in their manual, “people who score in this range are antagonistic and tend to be brusque or even rude in dealing with others. They are generally suspicious of other people” (1992: 25). Of course there are many types of villains but the traditional one is characterized by a strong social independence. This domain includes the facets of Trust, Straightforwardness, Altruism, Compliance, Modesty and Tender-Mindedness.

The purpose of using the method is to describe the salient aspect of a villain’s personality in order to facilitate readers the understanding of them. We consider our protagonist to be a villain as he stands out for his low score in the domain of Agreeableness, the one that distinguishes villains and we will see later in this essay.

For our analysis we have only considered the character traits or, as to say, we have conducted an analysis of the outer villain leaving apart the Inner Villain analysis with its interior conscious and subconscious level. As we mentioned, we do not have total access to the character but through other characters’ narrations and we do not obtain complete information about Sutpen.

The last part of the analysis consists in a causal analysis of the character, which consists in a study of the mitigating factors that had lead to that situation. It has been developed by H. H. Kelley (Kelley 1973 qtd in Cámara 2010) and as Cámara defines it “tends to see the behavior of others as a sequence of causes and effects” (2011: 18). It is divided into internal and external causes depending whether the direct cause is the proper subject or the circumstances and stimulus. This attribution is going to be assigned automatically and rationally from evidences in the text.

4. ANALYSIS

We are given details about the characters of stories by means of characterization, which helps readers create a mental image of them. What is more, characterization is a curious phenomenon that consists in a process similar to communication and, as Enrique Cámara discusses in his essay *The human end of Characterization* it is triangular (2005: 79). It means that it has three elements: the writer, the reader and character attributions. In the creation of a character, Bobes N. (qtd in Cámara 2005: 79) suggests that the writer should give at least three pieces of information: about his personality and appearance, about his function in the novel and about his dimension (cultural stereotype). We are going to focus on these three aspects but above all on the character traits of the protagonist which are provided by other characters.

Absalom, Absalom! revolves around the figure of Thomas Sutpen, who is a complex character. This type of characterization would be adequately described using Pfister’s model of characterization techniques. (Cámara, 2005: 80). Considering that the information we are given about him comes from other characters of the novel, we can say that his characterization is figural. At the same time, this information is sometimes explicit and others implicit. Explicit characterization means that other characters comment and tell their point of view of Sutpen’s personality. This is the case of Rosa’s narration, who tells

Quentin her account of the events in a soliloquy way. For that reason, characterization is as well “other-commentary”. If Sutpen talked about him, it would be “self-commentary”.

Implicit characterization is when readers infer that information of a character from the attitudes or responses of other characters to him, or from his own actions or thoughts. In that case, the information would be non-verbal or verbal depending whether the message is sent in linguistic form or not. This would be the example of General Compson’s Chapter VII, in which characterization is made through a biographical account of Thomas Sutpen’s life.

It would be logical to say that each character is going to focus on a different facet of the protagonist that most calls their attention or interest.

4.1. Rosa Coldfield’s perception of Thomas Sutpen

Rosa’s narration is the first one that appears in the novel. She asks Quentin to visit her and listen to the story. The starting point of the novel is the fact that Quentin is going to attend Harvard College, and he can better than anyone write down the whole tragedy. Since his grandfather was the only friend Sutpen had in the town; Miss Coldfield chooses him to be the audience of her story. He has grown up in the same atmosphere as her and the story is not strange to him.

Hans H. Skei (Artuso, 2013: 225) claims the importance of Miss Coldfield’s narration in the story “Rosa Coldfield is central in the events that lead up to the final revelations at Sutpen’s Hundred, and she is also the only one who knew Sutpen and many, if not all, aspects of life at the plantation”. In spite of the fact that she personally knew him and formed part of the same family, her account is not reliable due to her own neurotic character. Her report is even criticized by other characters in the novel. Anyways, we will later discuss the reasons why she depicted him that way in the section of causal analysis.

4.1.1. Sutpen as a villain. Core Traits.

The schema of villains' classification of Enrique Cámara allows us to focus on the shared points of those characters and to conduct an exhaustive analysis of them. As we have said, it is based on the personality inventory of Costa and McCrae. The difference lies at the center of attention, which is going to be the Agreeableness domain and its facets, which we are going to call core traits. Agreeableness is going to be the core part of the analysis since Costa & McCrae defend in their method that low scorers in this domain "are skeptical and antagonistic" (1992: 33). Thus, it is related to villainy in its extreme low score.

Miss Coldfield considers Thomas Sutpen a villain as the domain she most highlights of him is his Disagreeableness. This domain deals with interpersonal tendencies and sociability as defined by Costa & McCrae (1992: 17). We can observe it in the first facts Miss Coldfield gives us of Thomas Sutpen. She says about him that:

- (1) just as anyone could have looked at him once and known that he would be lying about who and where and why he came from by the very fact that apparently he had to refuse to say at all. (16)

Sutpen's lack of Trust in anyone is evident in this quote and as Rosa says, he preferred to lie rather than say the truth. As Costa & McCrae define in their method, is it proper of people who "assume others may be dishonest or dangerous" (1992: 17). Sutpen was, according to Miss Coldfield, not an assertive person and he did not like communicative situations. His origin is a mystery and apparently he had only one friend in town, Quentin's Grandfather, who will tell his son and grandson what he knew from Stupen.

The same excerpt also tells us about his lack of Straightforwardness, he was a person "likely to stretch the truth or to be guarded in expressing his true feelings" (1992: 17).

- (2) He wasn't a gentleman. He wasn't even a gentleman. He came here with a horse and two pistols and a name which nobody ever heard before, knew for certain was his own anymore than the horse was his own or even the pistols, seeking some place to hide himself, and Yoknapatawpha County supplied him with it. He sought the guarantee of reputable men to

barricade him from the other and later strangers who might come seeking him in turn, and Jefferson gave him that. (14-15).

From the following fragment I would also like to point out the fact that Rosa does not consider Sutpen a gentleman. She is indicating that he had little interest in helping others and a more self-centered attitude, proper of people who score low in Altruism, the third facet of the Agreeableness domain. She considers that he should have showed more apprehension for his relatives.

- (3) And still called it Sutpen's Hundred as if it had been a King's grant in unbroken perpetuity from his great grandfather—a home, position: a wife and family which, being necessary to concealment, he accepted along with the rest of respectability as he would have accepted the necessary discomfort and even pain of the briars and thorns as he would have wanted our father's (or any other reputable man's) signature on a note of hand (15).

In this citation, we are told about the protagonist's interests. He wanted to obtain his house and position and for that he needed a rich wife with a wealthy family. His own concern is above all and his new family is only a link to attaining it. Besides, as we can see, Rosa regards Sutpen's attitude as arrogant due to the name he gave to his residence. That opinion she has coincides with the lack of Modesty trait of villains. Who "believe they are superior people" (Costa&McCrae, 1992: 18). Proper of this type of people is the lack of conformity or compliance. Their ambition is boundless and they like to fight for what they want instead of working together.

The last facet of the Agreeableness domain and proper of villains is the lack of Tender Mindedness, which is defined as proper of people who "are more hard-hearted and less moved by appeals to pity" (Costa & McCrae, 1992: 18). They are strict to their determinations and not influenced by anything. We can observe Sutpen lacked this facet when Rosa says of him:

- (4) married her sister Ellen and begot a son and a daughter which— (Without gentleness begot, Miss Rosa Coldfield says)—without gentleness . Which should have been the jewels of his pride and the shield and comfort of his old age (9).

Sutpen's children meant for him the final step for the family he wanted to establish. Rosa sees him for that as an uncompassionate person. Fitting all the Agreeableness facets means there are reasons to believe that she pictured him like a demon. It also implies that this first image we obtain from him was stereotypical, the classical evils we are used to read and see in films. However Miss Coldfield describes other domains of Sutpen's personality that I consider relevant for his characterization.

4.1.2. Features beyond Agreeableness: Conscientiousness, Neuroticism

First, I would like to point out that every statement of a character defining Sutpen's personality can be analyzed and connected to various domains of personality seeing that they are not independent. Connections between domains are often commonsensical and may be better understood with an example. If we refer to someone saying that he/she is altruist and generous, we will not expect from that person to be hostile. For that reason, from one statement talking about Thomas Sutpen we can describe various domains of his personality.

It is the example of Miss Coldfield's quote

- (5) it was not even public opinion that stopped him, [...] it was the minister himself, speaking in the name of the women of Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County (24)

Here we obtain the image of Sutpen as an impulsive person, which contributes to his neurotic personality. The Impulsiveness facet describes people's "inability to control cravings and urges" (Costa & McCrae, 1992: 16). Furthermore, we also assume that he was a conscientious person, who finds no barriers to achieve his goals. Not caring about anything or anyone to carry out your plans also reveals a lack of Tender Mindedness, from the domain of Agreeableness that we have previously mentioned in quote n° 4.

As we have seen, from a small quote we obtain information belonging to three of the five domains of personality. We consider the previous statement proper of a neurotic personality

and so, we imagine the character as hardhearted and determined in his decisions. We can link that last piece of information with the Consciousness domain, whose facets of Self-Discipline and Achievement Striving correlate with the information Rosa gives of Sutpen. They imply a high aspiration level and attitude to finish all tasks they have started (Costa & McCrae, 1992: 18). Another correlation we can find appears in the personality inventory as very frequent, it is the relationship between Disagreeableness and the lack of Warmth, from the domain of Extraversion. It can be seen in the quote n° 4 of Rosa talking about Sutpen's sons and his absence of friends.

It would be reasonable to understand that, once someone scores negatively in a facet of a domain, he/she would score negatively in the rest of the facets as well. It is the case of Rosa's view of Sutpen's Extraversion domain. The colonel stands out for his lack of Warmth and he would be likely to lack social excitement or joy.

From what we have seen, Sutpen was clearly a villain in Rosa's perception since he coincides with all negative facets of the Agreeableness domain. It surprises us to find a positive trait in him. It is the example of Rosa mentioning his courage claiming

- (6) Oh he was brave. I have never gainsaid that. But that our cause, our very life and future hopes and past pride, should have been thrown into the balance with men like that to buttress it-men with valor and strength but without pity or honor. (20)

On the one hand Rosa admires his valor and on the other she claims that the decay of the region was due to men like him without moral principles. Courage and valor is a feature typical of villains as it is authoritarianism (1992: 15), like antagonistic figures such as Ursula in *The Little Mermaid* or Lord Voldemort from *The Harry Potter Saga*. Therefore, it does not surprise us to find this trait in Sutpen's description.

4.1.3. Causal Analysis

Rosa's accounts are crucial for the novel. She is the character who gives more details of the person of Thomas Sutpen. It may be due to her hate against him and the fact that she blames him for all disgraces of her family.

Ineke Bockting has analyzed Rosa's narration as a person who never understood his brother in law "the themes that occupy Miss Rosa most: youth, responsibility [...] and most of all, the disruption of her family's life caused by Thomas Sutpen". (Bockting, 1995: 205). Other authors such as Kerr (qtd in Kuyk 1990: 128) claim that "new information reveals Rosa's prejudices. We can see her demonizing as melodramatic" giving Miss Coldfield's account not much veracity.

For this causal analysis of Miss Coldfield we are going to make use of Kelley's Covariant Theory (Kelley 1973 qtd in Cámara 2010). Summarizing it very briefly, Kelley claims that there are only three possible answers to explain why someone has reacted in a particular way. The first option would be to attribute the cause to the subject itself, the second option would be to attribute it to the circumstances and the last one would be an attribution to the stimulus.

Following his theory we could define why Rosa Coldfield thought Sutpen acted that way. Miss Coldfield does not mention any situation or conditions in which readers could observe how Sutpen would have acted. Rosa ignored every circumstance or stimulus that could have influenced in his decisions. She believed that Sutpen acted badly just because he was the evil itself, that is how she portrayed him with her extremely negative and villain-like descriptions. According to her, the first option of the Covariant Theory, the person of Thomas Sutpen, was the cause of the entire fault, ignoring the circumstances and stimulus. Besides, Rosa offers an explicit characterization in which she imposes her point of view in the depiction. By saying "he was brave" (20) she is not giving us reasons to think that Sutpen may be courageous but forcing us to believe what she says. It is for that reason that many authors consider her version as biased (Kuyk 1990: 127).

Something we can never leave apart when studying characterization is subjectivism. It is the part of a subject's personality that is going to influence her or his description. Reading some descriptions we gather information relating to both the describer and the described.

Some traits of Miss Coldfield's personality may be influencing her account. In Rosa's report, the most evident detail we infer of her behavior is her Neuroticism. It is a trait that Costa and McCrae define as the emotional stability of a person. As we have previously defined, it is proper of people who experience negative emotions.

The other trait that defines Miss Coldfield is her lack of Openness to Experience. She is a traditional person who likes to preserve things as they have always been:

- (7) Miss Coldfield still called the office because her father had called it that—a dim hot airless room with the blinds all closed and fastened for forty-three summers because when she was a girl someone had believed that light and moving air carried heat and that dark was always cooler (7).

Her refusal to open the windows after forty-three years or to call that room for another name are a proof of her conservative attitude. She is a character that stands out for lack of Openness, specifically the facet of Values due to her traditionalist religious attitude and her easy acceptance of authority (1992: 17). Surprisingly, we find in Miss Coldfield positive traits in Openness, which are Fantasy and Aesthetics. We discover it in the first chapter when we read that

- (8) [Rosa] had already established (even if not affirmed) herself as the town's and the county's poetess laureate by issuing to the stern and meagre subscription list of the county newspaper poems, ode eulogy and epitaph (11).

The quote tells us about Miss Coldfield's passion for poetry, which is an artistic appreciation proper of people curious of art.

Rosa Coldfield's personality influences Sutpen's description in the way that she depicts an evil creature, almost non-human or supernatural, full of anger and with wicked plans on his

mind. This is clearly qualified by Miss Coldfield's Neurotic domain and Fantasy trait, which are going to overemphasize all the facts and descriptions.

It is part of the characteristics of the Southern Gothic literary genre, to find supernatural events or gothic archetypes such as "the monster", which is going to represent and highlight the unpleasant features of the south (Benito, 2014: 5). Those villains and monsters are the characters that call the readers' attention and interest to continue reading the work.

The profile of the characters of Thomas Sutpen and Rosa are recurrent in novels belonging to the Southern Gothic genre. Rosa is clearly "a reclusive spinster, a typical southern archetype, such as the drunk man or the "innocent", a character who acts as "redeemer" for others" (Benito 2014)ⁱ

As we will see in the next part of the analysis, not all the characters of the novel *Absalom, Absalom!* considered Thomas Sutpen a monster and we will discover as we continue reading the novel a more humanizing side of the protagonist.

4.2. General Compson's perception of Thomas Sutpen

For the second analysis of Sutpen's personality we have focused our attention on Chapter VII, which is mainly based on General Compson's testimony, Quentin's grandfather, who told his grandson all that Sutpen confessed to him. We have chosen this chapter because General Compson and Rosa Coldfield are the only voices of the novel who personally knew Thomas Sutpen.

Due to the structural intricacies proper of the novel, the chapter we are dealing with contains infiltrations of other characters' subjectivities. The voices of many characters talk about the same person and sometimes collide with one another, which constitutes the dynamics and idiosyncrasy of the novel. We cannot solve it but we can describe it and use it for our purpose.

4.2.1. Thomas Sutpen reduced to the Big Five

It is in this chapter of the novel where readers know the reasons of Sutpen's behavior and the origin of this child trauma:

- (9) the boy-symbol was just the figment of the amazed and desperate child; that now he would take that boy in where he would never again need to stand on the outside of a white door and knock at it (261)

Thomas Sutpen was denied entrance to a house by a black servant and he felt such outrage that he drew a design for avoiding this situation to happen in a future.

Whilst Rosa tells the arrival of Sutpen to Jefferson town, General Compson narrates his childhood and early years of his life. Sutpen's design became his life-motto and everything was reduced to contribute to it.

- (10) while they sat in the cart outside the doors of doggeries and taverns and waited for the father to drink himself insensible, [...] they did not seem to progress at all but just to hang suspended while the earth itself altered, flattened and broadened out of the mountain cove where they had all been born, mounting, rising about them like a tide in which the strange harsh (224-225).

Those harsh details about Sutpen's childhood make us believe his live has not been easy, not many people has been in this situation. He had to deal with a drunk father, no mother, moving as nomads without a clear destiny... this leads us to think that maybe circumstances made him the person he was, and highlighting his innocence, it makes us think that this little boy could have been any of us.

- (11) the woodsman's instinct which he had acquired from the environment where he grew up or maybe had been bequeathed him by the two brothers who had vanished (226)

It is difficult for a person to be social if you have not been in contact with other children or siblings in your childhood. According to what Sutpen has told Compson about his early life, he has been travelling with his family as nomads and they had no time to establish

friendship or any kind of affective relationships with someone external to the family. Besides, as General Compson relates, Thomas' sisters disappeared without saying goodbye or where they were going. In the following extract we obtain more information about his sociability:

- (12) All of a sudden he found himself running and already some distance from the house, and not toward home. He was not crying, he said. He wasn't even mad. He just had to think, so he was going to where he could be quiet and think, and he knew where that place was. He went into the woods (232-233).

In the previous fragment we observe Sutpen's behavior after his childhood incident of being rejected to enter a house. His instinctive action was to run away and get to be alone, an act proper of introvert people. Following the method, we would obtain that not only he scored low in Extroversion but more specifically in the facet of Gregariousness, which is the one that implies enjoy the company of others. Sutpen just knew in that moment after the rejection that he needed to be alone. Moreover, as we can see that he did not cry or felt anguish, he is proving an admirable emotional stability. According to the NEO method that attitude would correspond to the domain of Neuroticism, in which he is standing out for his lack of negative feelings. The facet that defines his personality is Vulnerability. According to the method, it is characteristic of individuals who feel unable to handle stress (Costa & McCrae, 1992: 16). Our character identifies himself with the negative sign of this facet, as he is capable of "handling himself in difficult situations".

- (13) he repudiated that first wife and that child when he discovered that they would not be adjunctive to the forwarding of the design. [...] his conscience had bothered him somewhat at first but that he had argued calmly and logically with his conscience until it was settled (262).

In the following excerpt we are witnesses of how Sutpen in his adult life disclaims his first wife for having black blood, which would mean an impediment in the achievement of his design. Thomas Sutpen is for that reason a high scorer in the domain of Conscientiousness; he is purposeful and determined, which are characteristics of this profile of people since

they “are not necessarily lacking in moral principles, but they are less exacting in applying them” (Costa & McCrae, 1992: 16). He finds no barriers in achieving his goals and therefore he would stand out for the Conscientiousness facet of Achievement Striving. This facet is defined as proper of people who “have high aspiration levels and work hard to achieve their goals” (Costa & McCrae, 1992: 18). General Compson coincides here with Rosa Coldfield in the description of Sutpen as a resolute person but adds more. There is some conscience and regret for having repudiated his wife and son, which is an emotion proper of the Neuroticism domain. It implies feeling worried and it belongs to the Anxiety facet. As we can observe it was a fleeting feeling and did not bother him much. Following with the connections between domains, I would link this feeling of worry for hurting others to the Agreeableness domain, whose facet of Tender Mindedness appears in people who is sympathetic.

From all we have seen, General Compson’s description differs substantially from the one by Miss Coldfield in chapter one. For Rosa, Sutpen was not an Agreeable person at all and Mr Coldfield wants to warn us about Sutpen’s concern for others. This is not the only difference in the characterization. As we have seen in the General Compson’s chapter, the character under analysis is not flat, he is round and Compson describes many aspects of his personality giving us an overview of his life. In this chapter we observe a different type of characterization, through giving details of Sutpen’s live and how he acted in every situation, General Compson gives an implicit description of the character.

4.2.2. Causal Analysis

General Compson, tries to justify Sutpen’s actions and behavior. Using again Kelley’s Causal Analysis, we can see that here the subject is not the cause of the final situation since Compson constantly mentions Sutpen’s innocence “Grandfather said he apparently did not know, comprehend, what he must have been seeing every day because of that innocence”

(252). For General Compson, Sutpen would have been any of us, it is, his personality and acts are a product of external conditions. The stimulus and circumstances together would have acted in the formation of his person. When this occurs, we tend to see people differently; Sutpen ends with Compson's narration being a villain, as we perceive him as a normal person. Everyone would have performed like him in his circumstances and with the same stimulus, the black servant's rejection.

General Compson's personality would as well be influencing his relate. From what we have read, we have a person who is prone to defend and exculpate others, characteristic of the Agreeableness domain, more specifically to the Tender Mindedness facet. It is proper people who show concern and sympathy for others, and reading Chapter VII we can infer that General Compson felt some kind of pity for the person of Sutpen. Besides, we can say that in his interest in the story and the way he reinterprets Sutpen's life to offer a new vision of the events and exculpation would mean that General Compson is characterized by the trait of Values. This facet is related to people who "reexamine social, political and religious values" (Costa & McCrae, 1992: 17), which is what General Compson does offering a new perspective of Sutpen's life.

4.3. Comparison

The descriptions analyzed were as different as its narrators although there were some coincidences. The first one is the focus on the Conscientiousness domain. Both Miss Coldfield and Compson agree on this important trait in Sutpen's personality. Every reader would as well admit the importance of Sutpen's design in his life. Thomas' diligence in carrying out tasks is a trait that both Rosa and the General recognize in him. Apart from that, Rosa adds Sutpen's self discipline.

The second coincidence appears in Coldfield and Compson's description of Sutpen as an Introvert person. Rosa centers her attention of the lack of Warmth trait whilst Compson mentions the Gregariousness facet, in which Sutpen scores low.

Differences in their depictions are more than similarities. The first one to list is Rosa's insistence in describing Sutpen's Disagreeableness. Her description fills out all facets of this domain, creating on readers a villain image of the protagonist very different from that one described in chapter VII.

Secondly, Rosa and Compson both refer to the Neuroticism domain. Nonetheless, Rosa focused on Sutpen's Impulsiveness while General Compson admires his emotional stability. Compson goes further explaining Sutpen's Vulnerability and Tender Mindedness facets, which clearly contribute to create a positive image of the protagonist.

Finally, I believe it is well mentioning the influence of the characters' personality in their descriptions. Rosa's Neuroticism made her create a more unlikely evil person whereas General Compson's description was more convincing and favorable. It is a result of Compson's sympathy, from the Agreeableness domain, which makes him being comprehensive and Sutpen's only friend.

5. CONCLUSION

As we said at the beginning, the plot and mystery around Sutpen's figure that Faulkner built in this novel cannot be solved. Each character poses a different version of him in the book and not only that, of the whole story as well. The character of Sutpen starts as a mystery and end being a mystery too. Even though we are using a personality method to describe people, the actual personality of the protagonist will remain unknown.

The method used helped us to approach and describe the detail we were given of Thomas Sutpen. This person started being an intrigue but as one continues reading the novel discovers many versions of him. The first vision of Sutpen in the novel is the one by Rosa Coldfield, which highlights Sutpen's Disagreeableness above all domains of his personality. This domain is proper of antagonistic people as Enrique Cámara stated and the figure described by Rosa Coldfield fitted those attributes proper of villains.

After conducting his analysis we also analyzed Miss Coldfield's personality using the NEO model and we found out that her personality might be influencing her characterization of Thomas Sutpen. As we have seen an extremely high scores on the Neuroticism domain would affect someone's relationship with others as they are always showing negative emotions. Besides, as we commented in the Causal Analysis of Rosa, she attributed to him the entire fault for his behavior instead of explaining situations in which that behavior might be accepted.

The second part of the analysis was General Compson's account, which appears in chapter VII of the novel and deals with Sutpen's previous life before arriving to Jefferson town. It is a crucial chapter as it represents a completely new vision of Sutpen's personality explained by the circumstances and kind of life he previously had.

Here Compson's attitude was as well analyzed as he tries to justify Sutpen's actions and attitudes. From his narration we inferred that he is a person who would be characterized by his strong domain of Agreeableness and the Openness facet of Values. This last one was the origin of his interest in redefining the character of Thomas Sutpen. In his narration it is also possible to find another cause according to Kelley's Covariant Theory for Sutpen's behavior, external forces, as they might be the circumstances or the stimulus of his rejection when he was a child.

All those traits of Sutpen's descriptors have certainly influenced the ultimate vision we obtain of him and thanks to the NEO inventory it is possible to separate and describe them in an organized way.



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The comparison of the two versions has been interesting since the two descriptions seemed incompatible. The first description was unbelievable due to its exaggeration, a product of Miss Coldfield's personality. The second version analyzed was more plausible. It was focused on Sutpen's past rather than on the person itself and it required an inference process to be described with the NEO method. General Compson's personality was analyzed as well showing a strong score of the Agreeableness domain which may have caused his empathy with Thomas Sutpen.

Characterization is influenced by many elements and certainly is interesting studying it to get to know more about it since it is a key element in any narrative text. As the device that makes readers sympathize with fictional characters and makes them continue reading, it is a determinant factor in a novel that shows maturity and strength of the writing.

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ⁱ Being a stereotype of a literary genre does not mean that her characterization is flat or simple. It is a recurrent schema that helps authors to save energy and time in the characterization of their protagonists but it does not mean it is going to be simple or not real-like. (Macrae, Milne & Bodenhausen qtd in Cámara, 2011;11)