

CHAPTER III

ABSALOM, ABSALOM!

GO DOWN, MOSES

Thus, early on and consciously, black women as reality became possibilities only to themselves. To others they were mostly seen and described in the abstract, concrete in their labor but surreal in their humanness.¹

This chapter will examine the characters of Molly Beauchamp in *Go Down, Moses* and Clytie Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!*. As with the study of Dilsey Gibson in Chapter II, the actions of Molly and Clytie will be studied from the Christian Humanistic angle. Maya Angelou's characterization of black women above, is especially applicable in the portrayal of Clytie Sutpen.

I

Clytie Sutpen - Clytie being an abbreviation of Clytemnestra - is the daughter of Thomas Sutpen and one of his slaves. Thus, she is half-black. Her home is at Sutpen's Hundred, Sutpen's plantation. Clytie is half-sister to both Judith and Henry and Charles Bon. The name of her mother is not given nor is she mentioned except for the fact that she was one of Sutpen's first group of slaves. Very little is known of Clytie's past and she is not cast in a primary role in the novel. Nevertheless, Clytie's actions at the close of the novel prove decisive in the plot. As a person of mixed parentage and mixed blood, Clytie's status at Sutpen's Hundred seems rather ambivalent. On the one hand, she is not relegated

explicitly to the position of an employed black housekeeper-servant, but on the other hand, she is not free from the stigmas and restrictions blacks face.

This is apparent in Rosa's sister's, (Ellen Coldfield) dealings with Clytie. Ellen is the mother of Judith and Henry, Sutpen's second wife. Rosa shrinks from the slightest contact with Clytie, whom she sees as "the nigger" - a type and not a person. Thomas Sutpen himself acts in a way like Rosa in his behaviour towards Clytie. When Thomas Sutpen returns home from the Civil War, three women meet him as he comes back - Judith, Clytie and Rosa.

' Well daughter,', and stooped and touched his beard to Judith's forehead... and still standing with his hands on her shoulders and looked at Clytie and said, ' Ah, Clytie '...²

Sutpen greets his daughter Judith differently from his other daughter Clytie. He does not touch Clytie. Sutpen calls Judith, ' daughter', and acknowledges verbally their familial ties. Clytie becomes merely Clytie, a name to a face, nothing more. Faulkner does not show Clytie's reaction to this difference displayed in familial recognition on her father's part, for Sutpen does not address Clytie as daughter specifically, he calls Clytie by name only - as he would perhaps call anyone else working for him. However, the fact remains that she receives unequal treatment compared to that which Judith receives.

...Clytie knows what it is to be treated as "nigger" in the white world.

...Clytie is denied access to the only two institutions available to blacks - the family and the church. She is deprived of the sustenance of communal identity.

Clytie is neither hymn-singing nor church-going; for her there is no refuge in a private life as a black person.³

Unlike Dilsey Gibson in *The Sound And The Fury* , who experiences and participates in both family and church life effectively, Clytie Sutpen does not seem to be an actual personality in the novel.

...her personal response to her status as a slave-daughter and to her world go unarticulated by words or gestures.⁴

Clytie does not speak much and it seems as if Faulkner desires Clytie to become a muted figure, but muted only to heighten the importance of Clytie's actions. Clytie's actions will be studied, and, even if Clytie does not speak or reveal her thoughts or herself in words, there stands a possibility that Clytie can and does speak with her actions. Thus her thoughts and feelings are only verbally unarticulated. They are physically articulate in the sense that Clytie speaks through her own actions, in what she does to and for others. Hence Clytie becomes important through her actions and subsequently also through those who are the recipients of her acts. These persons react to and are affected by Clytie Sutpen. Consequently Clytie cannot be an insubstantial figure.

After the death of both Charles Bon and his wife, Charles Etienne their son comes to live at Sutpen's Hundred. Judith and Clytie then prepare to raise a boy of twelve from New Orleans - a place in total contrast to that where Judith and Clytie live. Clytie goes to New Orleans to look for the boy after his mother's death.

... Clytie who had never been further from Sutpen's Hundred than Jefferson in her life, yet who made that journey alone to New Orleans and returned with the child ... - this child who could speak no English as the woman could speak no French who had found him, hunted him down, in a French city and brought him away⁵

Clytie goes in search of the boy - she who had never ventured forth from home and who does not speak French, the boy's language. We are not told exactly why Clytie goes to such lengths to secure and bring the boy back home. However, what can be surmised from such actions is the fact that Clytie has been moved to compassion for the boy's situation after his mother dies. Clytie first met the boy a year ago in the summer of 1870 after Judith wrote to the mother to inform her of where Charles Bon was buried. Mother and son come to Sutpen's Hundred to visit the father's grave. Note the description of Charles Etienne when he first arrives at Sutpen's Hundred with his mother,

... a thin delicate child with a smooth ivory sexless face who, ...having been born and lived all his life in a kind of silken prison lighted by perpetual shaded candles, breathing for air the milklike and absolutely physical lambence which his mother's days and hours emanated, had seen little enough of sunlight before, let alone out-of-doors, trees and grass and earth; ...⁶

Clytie meets this "thin, delicate child" and she is aware or becomes aware of his vulnerability.

... what is at stake primarily is the survival and protection of human beings. The term "humanism" is used repeatedly in these pages as a way of directing attention to the exalted value of human persons ... Present conditions throughout the world still include threats to ... the entire human race ... Therefore every available resource must be explored in searching for ways to protect human beings, and Christian humanism is among such resources.⁷

How is Christian Humanism resourceful in protecting and enhancing human existence?

If Clytie becomes aware of Charles Etienne's fragile, vulnerable state and she reacts to his situation in ways that depict that she is showing concern over his welfare - these actions of Clytie's then could be suggestive of Christian Humanistic traits in that Clytie creates her own resources to protect and enhance Charles Etienne's existence. Charles Etienne's existence counts, it is a life. Clytie on her part, although she never states it verbally, shows through her sometimes awkward behaviour towards the boy that she recognizes the boy's existence as an individual, and she makes an effort to protect that boy's existence.

... she would quit the kitchen from time to time and search the rooms downstairs until she found that little strange lonely boy ...⁸

This reflects more than passing interest in a foreign-looking child on Clytie's part. True, she never mentions her sentiments regarding the child or his mother but she is not altogether impervious to the boy, in her actions. Clytie must need to ensure that this frail child is safe.

The boy on his part seems terrified of Clytie. He,

... who regarded with an aghast fatalistic terror the grim coffee-coloured woman who would come on bare feet to the door and look in at him, who gave him not teacakes but the coarsest cornbread spread with as coarse molasses (this surreptitiously, ... because the household did not have food for eating between meals),⁹

It was not the normal custom to have food in between meals yet Clytie prepares food and gives it to the boy. Her intentions are not known. Unless of course this child is the child of Charles Bon, her step-sister Judith's fiance and because there is a close bond between Judith and Clytie despite their racial differences, which in reality do not figure pointedly in their sibling relationship, Clytie feels compelled to strengthen this otherwise weak child. This linkage is rather roundabout undoubtedly, nevertheless Clytie's efforts should be emphasized upon for her efforts prove that she cares.

Perhaps a rather disturbing factor about Clytie's relationship with the child is her seeming possessiveness over the boy.

... (She) found him one afternoon playing with a Negro boy about his own size in the road outside the gates and cursed the Negro child out of sight with level and deadly violence and sent him, the other, back to the house in a voice the very absence from which vituperation or rage made it seem just that much more deadly and cold.¹⁰

... Clytie watched, never out of sight of him, with the brooding fierce unflagging jealous care, hurrying out anyone white or black stopped in the road as if to wait for the boy to complete the furrow and pause long enough to be spoken to, sending the boy on with a single quiet word or even a gesture a hundred times more fierce than the level murmur of vituperation with which she drove the passerby on.¹¹

Clytie forbids him to interact with any outsiders. Why the extra cautionary measure?

Thadious Davis explains that Clytie's possessive and rather tight guarding of the boy stems from a belief that,

... as long as she can keep him on Sutpen's Hundred, Clytie believes that she can protect Charles Etienne from the knowledge that barriers exist between races and that those barriers are socially real.¹²

Then again this explanation resists proof as Clytie neither acknowledges her reason for forbidding Charles Etienne to interact with the black boy, verbally nor does Faulkner tell us explicitly in the novel.

However I believe that Clytie does impose such restrictions upon the boy with reason too. Clytie cannot be unaware of the fact that how she is treated by her father Colonel Sutpen differs from the way the same man treats his white daughter Judith. Also, Rosa Coldfield's clear distancing herself from Clytie stems from the fact that Rosa considers Clytie a "nigger". Clytie does not say much but she is not portrayed as someone mentally deficient either. Her actions even if performed silently then prove to be evidence that she understands that there are racial impediments between white and black, and these racial impediments if not checked can be crippling both morally and emotionally.

Therefore Clytie intervenes when she finds Charles Etienne playing with a coloured boy. She does so because she herself is partly black and because she realizes what it means to be black, even if partly, hence the need to deter the boy from ever knowing that there are children different from him. It was after all 1870, seven years after Emancipation and five after the end of the Civil War but the status of blacks had not changed much since the era of slavery even if they were declared in theory free by Abraham Lincoln.

Significantly, as R. William Franklin and Joseph M. Shaw explain,

Christian Humanism is taught by the Bible to provide for the poor, the hungry, and the outcasts of the world, but at the same time it is hearing a side of the biblical message that conventional charity had forgotten. Poverty, hunger, and racism are evils to be fought against because they dehumanize people.¹³

"... Racism dehumanizes people" - this statement illustrates that Clytie's deadly serious order to Charles Etienne, then seems justified to herself on the grounds that firstly, Charles Etienne's existence as an individual is recognized by Clytie and she will go to any measure to ensure that his existence will not be scarred by the knowledge that racism exists. Secondly, Clytie's behaviour has a basis in that she does experience a kind of racial chasm as a result of her not being white.

Unfortunately Clytie's over-zealous and over-guarded protectiveness of the boy as he grows up has serious repercussions on the boy. Clytie means well but as a consequence to her over-protectiveness of the boy, Charles Etienne faces disillusionment and his marrying a "coal-black, ape-like" woman eventually is a sign that he retaliates against the social restrictions Clytie had imposed upon him ever since his arrival at Sutpen's Hundred.

Clytie's efforts, nevertheless, lead the boy to a much more painful and premature knowledge: the awareness that the barriers between races and individuals are physically real.¹⁴

By their inability to express their feelings for him in terms he can clearly comprehend, his two Sutpen "aunts" propel Charles Etienne into constant battle with racial barriers, which are mainly presented as social restrictions against open, public displays of interracial activities.¹⁵

Clytie's failed attempts to shield Charles Etienne from the awareness that there are gaps sometimes unbridgeable between races, does not in the end, invalidate her genuine and concerned efforts to protect and provide a home for Charles Etienne.

Clytie's relationship to her half-sister Judith also reveals some details about herself. Faulkner does not depict Clytie and Judith as having much to say to each other, nevertheless there is a felt sisterly bond between the two.

... she and Clytie should begin at once to fashion a wedding dress and veil out of rags and scraps; ...

... and she (Judith) and Clytie making and keeping a kitchen garden of sorts to keep them alive; ...¹⁶

The import of these brief but meaningful descriptions is that Clytie does not work for Judith, or work under Judith as an employed servant, but that Judith and Clytie do work together. After Judith's engagement to Charles Bon, both Clytie and Judith work together on her rough make-shift wedding-gown . When the menfolk go off to fight in the Civil War both Judith and Clytie work to support themselves and Judith's ailing mother. Clytie does not, or at any cost, it is not evidenced in the novel, harbour resentment against her half-sister's acknowledged status as white sister to Clytie's partly black self.

The two are locked into a narrow existence; uncomplaining and stoical, they make the best of their lives. They share the "indomitable woman-blood" and are as close to survivors as Faulkner comes in *Absalom, Absalom!* They accept a life without joy or frivolity; they assume the burden of existence and accept each other as human beings.¹⁷

Certainly, Faulkner endows them with dignity and endurance, with pity and love - the virtues he esteemed most¹⁸

What is visible here is that Clytie and Judith exist together as women - persons, and that Judith in sending for Charles Etienne to come to live at Sutpen's Hundred with them, after his mother dies, indeed exhibits a generous and accomodating nature. Clytie in venturing out for the first time all the way to New Orleans to locate and bring the boy back manifests on her part a certain self-effacement and a desire to assist the boy whom she deems helpless.

She knows that the plantation is a self-contained world sustained only by Judith and herself, for whom racial distinctions no longer have social meanings.¹⁹

Clytie and Judith do lead self-sufficient lives.

The focal point here in this sibling-female relationship where Clytie is concerned is that Clytie's role, even if silently played, in this relationship speaks something about her. Because Judith and Clytie both possess venerable qualities of "dignity, endurance, pity, love" - they do demonstrate something humanistic in their very actions towards others.

How is Clytie's behaviour then Christian Humanistic? Clytie and Judith are implied as being close. Clytie does not seem to resent Judith or her father. Clytie cares, though somewhat aggressively, for a boy not known to her before. Clytie assists in providing sustenance to the family and in maintaining the plantation. This shows responsibility on her part for the welfare of others. These facts about Clytie can lead us to infer that Clytie in a way perhaps unknown to her, perhaps not visible directly, can be capable of love. This love is a love for humankind, especially for the people she feels a responsibility for. St. Paul's definition of what love requires or necessitates of man can help describe Clytie's concern and in a way, love, for those who are family to her. And Clytie is uncalculating when she assists another.

Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil but is happy with truth. Love never gives up; and its faith, hope and patience never fail. Love is eternal.²⁰

1 Corinthians 13 : 4 - 8

The Clytie glimpsed in the novel does not seem remotely religious or spiritual unlike Dilsey in *The Sound And The Fury* . This may be so but neither is she said to be unreligious. Faulkner does not state where Clytie stands as far as religion or spirituality is concerned. Nonetheless I would like to suggest that what motivates her actions can be termed a kind of Christian Humanism.

The sort of love I feel Clytie is able to generate is reminiscent of the sort of love St. Paul advocates in 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8 . Because Clytie's love is reminiscent of this biblically advocated love and because the source of Christian Humanism is the Gospel, therefore a connection, albeit indirect, is permissible. Because Clytie is able to love in this manner, she is also thus able to help spontaneously and without stint and Clytie is able to regard her half-sister as a fellow co-existent in life, separate only in physical appearances but united in their sisterhood as Sutpen daughters.

The next thing to be considered is Clytie's relationship with her stepbrother Henry Sutpen. If Judith and Clytie had said very little to one another, Clytie and Henry say even less, or nothing. The crux in this seemingly silent relationship comes when Clytie sets the house on fire with Henry and herself in it.

Henry Sutpen flees from Sutpen's Hundred in 1865, after he shoots Charles Bon, his step brother, (the son from his father's first marriage to a Haitian woman). Charles Bon is not only Judith's fiance but her step brother as well. In 1905, forty years after that shooting, Henry Sutpen returns home to die, as Henry himself puts it.

... the bare stale room whose shutters were closed too, where a second lamp burned dimly on a crude table; waking or sleeping it was the same: ... the wasted yellow face with closed, almost transparent eyelids on the pillow, the wasted hands crossed on the breast as if he were already a corpse; waking or sleeping it was the same and would be the same forever as long as he lived:²¹

So Clytie hides Henry in his deteriorating state, for she has not forgotten the shooting of Charles Bon. Such is the condition of Henry Sutpen when both Rosa and Quentin Compson see him in September 1909 - four years after Henry reappears at his home. Henry is family to Clytie, her half-brother, Rosa and Quentin are outsiders - not Sutpens. Clytie fears that these outsiders may take Henry from her. She feels she should be responsible for Henry, just as she felt responsible for Charles Etienne. There was no other Sutpen to see to him ever since he came back. If Rosa and Quentin take Henry away, they strip away Clytie's responsibility towards Henry. Clytie cannot allow that. She is afraid that Rosa and Quentin may also take him to the authorities.

And how she (Clytie) and Miss Coldfield said no word to one another, as if Clytie had looked once at the other woman and knew that would do no good; that it was to him, Quentin, that she turned, putting her hand on his arm and saying, "Don't let her go up there, young marster." And how maybe she looked at him and knew that would do no good either, because she turned and overtook Miss Coldfield and caught her arm and said, "Don't you go up there, Rosie" and Miss Coldfield struck the hand away ... and Clytie said "Rosie" and ran after the other again, whereupon Miss Coldfield turned on the step and struck Clytie to the floor with a full-armed blow like a man would have, and turned and went on up the stairs ... he stood above her, thinking, 'Yes. She is the one who owns the terror ...'²²

Clytie endeavours to stop Rosa and Quentin from going up to Henry because she considers Henry to have expiated what he did forty-odd years ago, in the sense that Henry has not stopped disintegrating and suffering since that fateful day. Judith and Clytie too have had to live with Henry's act of killing. Clytie feels that what occurred was strictly an internal affair among the Sutpens and thus Rosa and Quentin, should leave both Henry and herself alone. However, Clytie does not ignore the fact that Henry did shoot Charles Bon.

"You go up there and make her come down. Make her go away from here. Whatever he done, me and Judith and him have paid it out ..." ²³

We should note that Clytie does not deny what Henry had done forty-over years ago. What she feels now is that Judith, Henry and herself have "paid it out". Charles Bon's son, Charles Etienne is sent to make his home at their place after his mother dies. When he eventually contracts yellow-fever, Judith nurses him and in turn contracts yellow-fever from him, and this fever claims both their lives. Clytie takes care of Charles Etienne's son. What Clytie and Judith have done throughout that forty-odd year period has not erased, cannot erase, Henry's act of shooting; but their labour and suffering constitute an atonement for what Henry did. Henry can never undo what he did but Henry's wasted life too has been a sort of prolonged reparation for what he did because he was not able to be at peace with himself after what he did to Charles Bon - regardless that he felt he had to stop Charles Bon, his step-brother, from marrying Judith his sister.

Three months later, when Rosa Coldfield comes again, this time with an ambulance wagon and two other men, Clytie is ready. She has already been cautioned through the abrupt arrival of Rosa and Quentin three months ago.

But the ambulance would not go fast in that drive; doubtless Clytie knew, counted upon, that; it would be a good three minutes before it would reach the house, the monstrous tinder-dry rotten shell seeping smoke through the warped cracks in the weather -boarding ...²⁴

How is this act of setting the house on fire with both Henry and herself in it, an act both drastic and sacrificial, even in the least, Christian Humanistic?

Here Henry discloses his identity to Quentin when Quentin stumbles into his room.

"And you are ____?
 Henry Sutpen.
 And you have been here ____?
 Four years.
 And you came home ____?
 To die. Yes.
 To die?
 Yes. To die.
 And you have been here ____?
 Four years.
 And you are ____?
 Henry Sutpen."²⁵

Henry in his debilitated and wasted state comes home to await his death. Henry with the "wasted yellow face, almost transparent eyelids, wasted hands crossed on the breast as if he were already a corpse..." depicts a horrifying picture of death in life. Thus he looked to Quentin - how much more pitiable and pathetic he must have looked to Clytie - his own kin, Clytie who is a part of the Sutpen family and a part of his years at Sutpen's Hundred. Clytie, not knowing Rosa's intentions but fearing the worst, cannot allow Henry to die under circumstances more debasing than what he is undergoing already. Clytie reacts as one who is cornered and yet refuses to surrender, for the act of surrender would necessitate the taking of Henry away from Clytie.

Through sacrificing both her life and Henry's, Clytie ultimately ensures that Henry will not be taken away and that she will maintain responsibility for him to the end. Her wanting Henry not to be taken away from her does not stem from selfish motives - she really believes that Henry would come to harm if he were taken away.

... she believed it was that same black wagon for which she probably had had that nigger boy watching for three months now, coming to carry Henry into town for the white folks to hang him for shooting Charles Bon.²⁶

Clytie cannot be insensitive to Henry's condition at that moment. She must care and be moved by his appalling life-mocking state. For Clytie, setting the house on fire with Henry and herself in it does not constitute murder - it constitutes sacrifice.

Faulkner does not state explicitly why Clytie is motivated to do what she did . I can only suggest reasons. Because she holds Henry's existence as a Sutpen as a very private and personal matter and because she feels Henry has suffered enough, Clytie is prepared at any cost to have Henry's existence remain private and personal and to have his death remain private also.

"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."²⁷

John 15 : 13

Clytie's sacrificing of her own life bears undertones of a Christian understanding. Because she has been moved and propelled to such actions by another's condition marks her recognition of her stepbrother's plight. Her behaviour is Christian Humanistic in that she esteems her stepbrother's existence as his own, his personal and individual right and for

that existence eventually to be controlled or manipulated by outsiders, (meaning Rosa and the authorities) would be a violation of Henry's existence. Hence she fights to protect Henry. She allows Henry to die as he desires.

Christian humanism points to the deep interest in human beings, their life, well-being, culture and eternal significance, that belongs to the Christian faith.²⁸

Clytie's involvement in the lives of other characters forwards the conclusion that in order to avoid self-destruction, and perhaps ultimately social disintegration, bonds of kinship on every level must be honored, even if they exist across racial lines ...²⁹

Clytie's involvement with others implies a belief in equality, in the Christian doctrine that all are equal before God. Furthermore, Clytie's involvement with others shows a certain generosity on her part and a fierceness to protect the existence of those for whom she feels responsible. More importantly, Clytie's involvement with others carries certain Christian Humanistic traits in that her behaviour in aiding and protecting others stems from a desire to protect and safeguard the existence of others. Although, Clytie does technically destroy herself, her self-destruction is not bent on malice or despair even, her self-destruction bears sacrificial undertones.

II

In the novel *Go Down, Moses*, the character in focus, Molly Beauchamp, is featured in two sections of the novel titled *The Fire and the Hearth* and *Go Down, Moses*. Molly like Clytie in *Absalom, Absalom!*, is not a verbal character. However, Molly's behaviour and actions, like Clytie's also, compensate for her silence.

The section *The Fire and The Hearth* spans a period of forty-three years. The characters of Lucas and Molly Beauchamp appear once at a younger age and another time at an older age. The incident or event of the novel here to be examined occurs after Lucas and Molly have been married.

... that night of early spring following ten days of such rain that even the old people remembered nothing to compare it with, and the white man's wife's time upon her and the creek out of banks until the whole valley rose, bled a river choked with down timber ... And Molly, a young woman then and nursing their first child, wakened at midnight by the white man himself and they followed then the white man through the streaming darkness to his house ... and Molly delivered the white child with none to help but Edmonds and then they knew that the doctor had to be fetched. So even before daylight he was in the water and crossed it, how he never knew, and was back by dark with the doctor ... to find the white man's wife dead and his own wife already established in the white man's house.³⁰

Molly had assisted in the white woman's, Zack Edmonds's wife's, childbirth. After Zack's wife's death, Molly takes over the responsibility of nursing and caring for the motherless infant and to do this, she is kept on in the house for almost six months.

... keeping alive on the hearth the fire he had lit there on their wedding day and which had burned ever since though there was little enough cooking done on it now; - thus, until almost half a year had passed and one day he went to Zack Edmonds and said, 'I wants my wife. I needs her at home.'³¹

The fact that Molly has been kept on in the house for six months angers Lucas, her husband. His anger is fed by the suspicion that Molly could have been made to serve as more than just the nanny of the infant.

When Molly returns that night with both their son and the white child, Lucas is further incensed by the sight of his wife nursing the white child.

She was sitting before the hearth where the supper was cooking, holding the child, shielding his face from the light and heat with her hand - a small woman even then, years before her flesh, her very bones apparently, had begun to wither and shrink inward upon themselves, and he standing over her, looking down not at his own child but at the face of the white one nuzzling into the dark swell of her breast - ... his voice loud, his clawing hand darting towards the child as her hand sprang and caught his wrist.

'Whar's ourn?' he cried. 'whar's mine?'

'Right yonder on the bed, sleeping!' she said.

'Go and look at him!'

He didn't move, standing over her, locked hand and wrist with her.

'I couldn't leave him! You know I couldn't! I had to bring him!'

'Don't lie to me!' he said. 'Don't tell me

Zack Edmonds know where he is.'

'He does know! I told him!'

He broke his wrist free, flinging her hand and arm back; he heard the faint click of her teeth when the back of her hand struck her chin and he watched her start to raise her hand to her mouth, then let it fall again.'

'That's right,' he said. 'It ain't none of your blood that's trying to break out and run!'

'You fool!' she cried. 'Oh God,' she said. 'Oh God. All right. I'll take him back. I aimed to anyway. Aunt Thisbe can fix him a sugar-tit --'32

Molly came back that night because earlier on in the day Lucas had demanded her return from Zack Edmonds; but Molly cannot bring herself to leave the white child behind. Molly does not say that there is no one else to look after the child. Her very action of bringing the child back with her suggests her attachment to and concern for the child, even though the child is not her own. Molly's answers to Lucas convey her protest in a way. She is adamant that she cannot leave the young nursing child behind, and that she has told the father she is bringing the child to her place.

In Molly's words, " All right. I'll take him back. I aimed to anyway." there seems to be a subtle irony. It would look as if she had foreseen her husband's reaction if she were to take home with her both the children, theirs and Zack's. Hence the implication of the phrase "I aimed to anyway".

The question raised is why did she bring the white child back, then? The answer to this must be that Molly is not only already attached to (it has been about six months since the white child was born) and concerned for the child's welfare, she is also moved by compassion and pity for the child's situation. The child was motherless at birth. Molly could have foreseen her husband's getting angry at the sight of the white child but the fact that she brought the baby along anyway because she " couldn't leave him " and " had to " do so portrays a certain quality of decidedness and strength in Molly. Her action shows resolve and courage to do what she feels is right. It may be argued that being a black woman at that period - with a white employer Molly would have felt it a part of her obligation and duty to nurse and care for her employer's motherless child. However I feel that Molly is more than merely being dutiful or obliging when she takes to the role of surrogate mother for the child. She is sincerely and uncomplicatedly moved by the plight of the child.

... the dangerous prospect of a society becoming nonchalant about the value of life requires the counter-influence of a rigorous caring humanism.³³

Molly's actions in the novel are considered humane and she does exhibit a " rigorous caring humanism " in her care for the white child. But how are her actions to be understood as being Christian Humanistic?

Roth Edwards - the white child whom Molly raised almost like her own, remembers later Molly as being,

... the only mother he, Edmonds, ever knew, who raised him, fed him from her own breast as she was actually doing her own child, who had surrounded him always with care for his physical body and for his spirit

too, teaching him his manners, behaviour - to be gentle with his inferiors, honorable with his equals, generous to the weak and considerate of the aged, courteous, truthful and brave to all - who had given him, the motherless, without stint or expectation of reward that constant and abiding devotion and love which existed nowhere else in this world for him ...³⁴

Roth Edmonds' acknowledgement, albeit silent, of all that Molly had done for him manifests a distinct picture of the person Molly is. Molly's venerable qualities may have been seen through Roth's eyes - but Molly becomes exalted - in this situation and thus Roth's acknowledgement of Molly's qualities becomes an affirmation of the kind of person she is.

A genuine belief must have motivated Molly to be so much. Roth's description of her "constant and abiding devotion and love" bears a resemblance to the Christian concept of ideal love preached by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 which R. William Franklin and Joseph M. Shaw summarize thus:

It is patient, kind, not envious or boastful, a love that avoids arrogance and rudeness, irritability and resentment. This love, fashioned in human beings through the power of the Holy Spirit, rejoices in the right, not the wrong ...³⁵

Like Clytie Sutpen, Molly is not depicted as being outwardly religious. In *Go Down, Moses*, Molly makes a biblical analogy to the selling of Joseph by his brothers into Egypt when she describes what she feels has happened to her grandson. I take this usage of a biblical event and the ability to connect and compare this biblical event to one which concerns herself as a sign that Molly must have some Christian background. Therefore her belief in the notions of right and proper behaviour and the fact that she taught these notions to Roth, a child not her own, is very likely a consequence of her putting into practice what she held to be biblically correct Christian behaviour.

Themes of Christian humanism are not theories for abstract speculation but living instances of the gospel at work.³⁶

Thus what I'm proposing here is that Molly's behaviour should be understood as being Christian Humanistic in that she embodies "living instances of the gospel at work".

Another incident in *The Fire and The Hearth* which I think helps illustrate what I mean by saying Molly embodies "living instances of the gospel at work" is one which sees Molly trying to ease a difficult situation for Roth Edmonds, now at this point a young boy. Roth in becoming aware of the complex relationship between blacks and whites, one night refuses to allow Henry, Molly's and Lucas' son to sleep with him in the same bed - something they had done since they were both infants. His behaviour shames him eventually, he knows this and trying to appease his guilt he goes over to the Beauchamps' place one night to try to make up in his own way.

Then one day he knew it was grief and was ready to admit it was shame also, wanted to admit it only it was too late then, for ever and for ever too late. He went to Molly's house ... Molly was there, looking at him from the kitchen door ... There was nothing in her face; he said it the best he could for that moment, because later he would be able to say it all right ... 'I'm going to eat supper with you all tonight.'
... There was nothing in her face ... 'Course you is,' she said. 'I'll cook you a chicken.'
Then it was as if it had never happened at all ...
Molly called Henry and then a little later himself, the voice as it had always been, peaceful and steadfast; 'Come and eat your supper.'³⁷

Molly acts as if nothing had changed - by doing so, she has sensitively and tactfully eased a difficult situation for Roth. Although there are no insights into Molly's inner thoughts, her actions point as evidence of her compassionate nature.

She must know the difficulty and uneasiness existing in the relationship between blacks and whites in the postbellum South even after Emancipation. Therefore she understands what Roth has to grapple with as a young white boy coming to terms with this relationship. In behaving as if nothing had changed - Molly is in actual fact helping Roth. Why should she do it ? This was her own son Henry who was affronted. Because Molly does not view the situation judgementally - she demonstrates a desire to maintain peace and stability in being neutral in a non-judgemental way. Her attitude thus carries some traits of Christian Humanism.

God who created man out of love also calls him to love - the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God who is Himself love.³⁸

Because Molly must love Roth in her own way, Molly is thus fulfilling God's call for man to love. Her concern for Roth is shown in her desire to combat the possible emergence of racist traits in young Roth. Because she cares for young Roth, Molly wants him as an individual, to grow up regarding others not as lesser individuals because doing that would lessen his own self worth .

In *Go Down, Moses* Molly is much older, in fact she's an old woman now. She seeks the legal assistance of a county attorney Gavin Stevens, to help find her grandson. Molly raises her grandson, Samuel Beauchamp, after his mother dies and his father deserts him but he " grew up wrong " and when Roth Edmonds discovers Samuel breaking into and stealing from the plantation commissary Roth expells Samuel from his place and sends him to Jefferson. Samuel then breaks out from jail in Jefferson, and flees to the North where he is eventually caught and tried for murder.

Faulkner does not mention the workings of Molly's mind. As with Clytie, whatever is perceived externally of Molly comes from the words or thoughts of those who come into contact with her. In *Go Down, Moses* the musings of Gavin Stevens on Molly reveal some essential information about her. When Molly is told that her grandson was found, after having gone up north for five years but that he is no longer alive, she grieves with an authentically black analogy to the Bible.

'He'll be home the day after tomorrow, Aunt Mollie,' he said. The old Negress didn't even look at him; she never had looked at him.

'He dead,' she said. 'Pharaoh got him'

... 'Done sold my Benjamin,' the old Negress said. 'Sold him in Egypt.' She began to sway faintly back and forth in the chair.

... 'Sold him to Pharaoh and now he dead.'³⁹

Molly is mistaken in believing that it was Benjamin who was sold to Pharaoh -when in actuality it was Joseph, Benjamin's older brother . Perhaps what Molly meant was that her youngest kin - the last of her own - the " child " of her old age, as Benjamin was to Jacob, is now lost to her. As mentioned earlier in this discussion, an analogy of this sort is to be taken as a sign that Molly was not ignorant of the Bible's contents and she finds the Bible a source of meaningful analogy.

Miss Worsham, whose grandfather owned Molly's parents and with whom Molly grew up with as a sister, believes that Molly would want her grandson to come home. If he is put to death then, Molly's grandson should be buried back home where Molly is.

'She will want to take him back home with her,' she said ... 'He is the only child of her oldest daughter, her own dead first child. He must come home.'⁴⁰

Molly's anxious desire to find her grandson after he has left home for five years without a word in between, could depict on Molly's part an instinctive urge that she must locate him soon as it is of the utmost necessity.

'I come to find my boy ...'

'... I don't know whar he is. I just knows Pharaoh got him. And you the law. I wants to find my boy.'⁴¹

Because he did not for one moment doubt the old Negress's instinct. If she had also been able to divine where the boy was and what his trouble was, he would not have been surprised,⁴²

'Do you know what she asked me this morning, back there at the station?' he said.

... 'she said, "Is you gonter put hit in de paper?" ' ... 'And she said it again: "Is you gonter put hit in de paper? I wants hit all in de paper. All of hit." And I wanted to say, "If I should happen to know how he really died, do you want that in too,?" And by Jupiter, if I had and if she had known what we know even, I believe she would have said yes. But I didn't say it. I just said, "Why, you couldn't read it, Aunty." And she said, "Miss Belle will show me whar to look and I can look at hit. You put hit in de paper. All of hit."⁴³

Molly reiterates with emphasis that she wants the actual story of what had happened to her grandson. Her illiteracy is not a hindrance to reality for her. Now that her grandson has been "found" and brought back "right", Molly demonstrates an acceptance of reality.

Yes, (he thought) it doesn't matter to her now. Since it had to be and she couldn't stop it, and now that it's all over and done and finished, she doesn't care how he died. She just wanted him home, but she wanted him to come home right. She wanted that casket and those flowers and the hearse and she wanted to ride through town behind it in a car.⁴⁴

Molly's insistence on locating her grandson and then in turn having him "come home right" depicts her genuine love and care for one whom she has raised herself. Molly's

desire for her grandson to "come home right" again exhibits on her part - a recognition of her loved one's existence and individuality as a person. He was "her boy" - and "the only child of her own dead first child" - "her Benjamin sold into Egypt", her own kin. Her other wish to publicly acknowledge in print in the paper what had occurred where her grandson is concerned marks not only her ability to accept reality but more significantly her regard and her attitude for one of her own.

How are these desires and wishes to be comprehended as desires or wishes motivated by Christian Humanistic concerns? Firstly, Molly's wish for her grandson to come home right despite his circumstances shows the value she accords him as a human being. Even death by execution does not lessen her grandson's worth as a person. As with Dilsey in *The Sound and The Fury* and Clytie in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Molly regards her grandson as a person, an important human being.

Of supreme importance for Christian humanism, however, was the biblical concept of the belief that humans were created in the image of God.⁴⁵

In honouring another's worth and dignity as a person, Molly can also be said to have fulfilled this aspect of Christian Humanism. Humans were created in the image of God, if Molly honours this belief, she is in fact honouring God and his creation of man.

Although Clytie and Molly make no personal claims to be Christian Humanists, what I'm trying to convey is that there is a possible avenue for - interpreting their actions and behaviour as being Christian Humanistic. The workings of their minds, like Dilsey's in *The Sound and The Fury*, are not disclosed. Whatever these women are and become, is present in the consciousness of others with whom these women come into contact. They are Christian Humanists in behaviour.

They are this firstly because their actions are reminiscent of the " living instances of the gospel at work ". They have always been self-effacing in practice and sensitive to the suffering and pain of others. Lastly, they are witnesses, though perhaps unconscious and unaware ones, to St. Paul's call for Christians to,

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.⁴⁶

(Galatians 6:2)

Endnotes

1. Maya Angelou, " They Came to Stay, " *National Geographic* , 176, (May 1989), 208.
2. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, (The Corrected Text), New York : Vintage International, 1990, 128.
3. Thadious Davis , *Faulkner's 'Negro', Art and the Southern Context* , (rev.ed.). Baton Rouge and London : Louisiana State University Press, 1983, 198.
4. Ibid., 200.
5. William Faulkner, 159.
6. Ibid., 157.
7. William Franklin and Joseph Shaw, *The Case for Christian Humanism*, Michigan : William Eerdmans Publishing Comany, 1991, 204.
8. William Faulkner, 158.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 158.
11. Ibid., 162.
12. Thadious Davis, 202.
13. William Franklin and Joseph Shaw, 199.
14. Thadious Davis, 203.

15. Ibid., 204.
16. William Faulkner, 81, 99.
17. Thadious Davis , 201.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 202.
20. 1 Corinthians 13 : 4-8 , Good News Bible , New York : American Bible Society, 1978, 233.
21. William Faulkner, 298.
22. Ibid., 295, 296.
23. Ibid., 298.
24. Ibid., 300.
25. Ibid., 298.
26. Ibid., 299.
27. John 15:13, The Holy Bible , New King James Version , Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers , 1982, 727.
28. William Franklin and Joseph Shaw , 5.
29. Thadious Davis , 211.
30. William Faulkner , *Go Down, Moses* , London : Penguin Modern Classics, 1987, 41.
31. Ibid., 42.

32. Ibid., 44, 45.
33. William Franklin and Joseph Shaw, 198.
34. William Faulkner, 96.
35. William Franklin and Joseph Shaw, 233, 234.
36. Ibid., xii.
37. William Faulkner, 92, 93.
38. William Franklin and Joseph Shaw, 199.
39. William Faulkner, 285-86.
40. Ibid., 282.
41. Ibid., 279.
42. Ibid., 280.
43. Ibid., 287-88.
44. Ibid., 288.
45. William Franklin and Joseph Shaw, 15.
46. Galatians 6:2, The Holy Bible, New King James Version, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982, 786.