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A NOTE ON SHREVE MACKENZIE

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The symbolic or associative significance of the names of many of William Faulkner's characters has long been recognized. Critical Commentaries on *Light in August*, for example, are replete with references to the remoteness of Hightower, living "outside life," the fecundity of the pregnant Lena Grove, and the martyrdom of Joe Christmas (emphasis mine). In others, scholars have pointed out that "Bundren" (a north Mississippi corruption of "Bondurant"), in *As I Lay Dying*, is a near anagram of "burden," describing both the body of Addie Bundren and her husband's promise to bear it to Jefferson for burial, and that in "Barn Burning," Sarty's full name, "Colonel Sartoris Snopes," symbolizes the conflicting forces of good and evil, right and wrong, struggling for primacy within the boy's conscience.

None, however, have adequately addressed the multiple implications inherent in the name "Shreve" (an archaic spelling of "shrive"), Quentin Compson's Harvard roommate in both *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* Among the definitions of the word given in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, several appear to be significant when applied to Shreve and, by extension, to Quentin. A number of them serve to define the respective roles played by the two men in their long dialogue about the South as well as the relationship that exists between them. One definition, "to question, examine (a person)," suggests Shreve's initial function as questioner: "Tell about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all." That Shreve's role becomes one of priest or "Father Confessor" is indicated by such definitions as "to relieve (one) of a burden" and "to administer absolution; to hear the confession of." Quentin's relationship to Shreve thus becomes that of penitent seeking absolution, as is implied by the reflexive "to make one's confession, to go to confession, to confess." Finally, two definitions, "to renounce" and "to reconcile (a person) to a course of action," apply to Quentin alone, foreshadowing his ultimate decision to take his own life.