

## Summary

The present dissertation focuses on the work of William Faulkner in relation to the concept of mind as conceived by the second wave cognitive sciences. This concept radically challenges previous notions such as cartesian dualism and physicalism which equates mind with the brain and puts forth the human mind as embodied, embedded in the environment, extended beyond the skin, enacted in a particular situation, and encultured, being both a product and a producer of culture. Such a vision changes the landscape of phenomena that fall under the label “mind” and has implications for the study of minds within literature as well. Literature and narrative art constitute a rich source of insights on the human mind and are treated here as an autonomous discourse on human cognition without necessarily seeking confirmation by the sciences. Since it represents a new discipline among approaches to Faulkner’s oeuvre, I discuss cognitive literary studies and their relation to cognitive sciences as well as more traditional literary studies arguing for a cognitive approach to literature guided by the discipline’s distinctive methods, goals and object of study.

In his works, Faulkner narratively presents human cognition as transcending the boundaries of the skull, being formed by both natural and social spheres, by humanity at large as well as by the particulars of his Southern milieu. Faulkner is aligned with other modernist writers in showing the entanglement of the mind with the world that the recent discourse of cognitive sciences provides the most suitable vocabulary to describe. I analyze two of his novels focusing on particular aspects of the mind that are figured in these works. In *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner depicts in detail the workings of mindreading (theory of mind), i.e., processes by which we understand other humans as beings with minds of their own and thus understand them. Particularly, he puts acts of looking and observation center stage showing the essential role of eyes and looks in this process. Observation of bodies in order to interpret minds combined with the form of the narrative via interior monologues that show the characters not only “from the inside” as consciousnesses but also “from the outside” as bodies underline the embodied nature of the mind. This cognitive universal is wedded with the visual prominence of the ruling medium of the time, the silent film, staging both a pantomime of the Bundren family and visual scrutiny as the dominant form of communication.

Reading *Absalom, Absalom!*, I focus on cognitive extension which manifests in the novel especially in setting up pairs of narrators and their listeners who participate in scenes of storytelling that transcend them. Minds in the novel extend beyond the body through a variety of means: environmental features such as temperature, smell or visual stimuli; adverse

circumstances; the interactional, conversational aspect of the storytelling engagement and language; blood relation. All these aspects combine with love in case of Quentin Compson and Shreve MacCannon, the two narrators who come to share their minds. Their coming together, given their origins in Mississippi and Canada, at Harvard University translates into a symbolic rapprochement between the North and South regions of the USA.

Faulkner's conception of human mind is presented both on the story and discourse levels of his works. Such aspects as representations of consciousness, embedded narrative levels, multiperspectivity and multitemporality provide the narratives with a complexity that matches that of the human mind while reflecting its aspects. The resulting "intelligent" narratives show Faulkner fulfilling the novel's potential in depicting human mental life with idiosyncratic intensity. It is no coincidence that the main protagonists of the two novels focused on here, Darl Bundren and Quentin Compson, descend into madness trying to make sense of the world they live in through radical cognitive extensions. Even in their mental disintegration, brought on by the strain of modern society as well as the particulars of their Southern heritage, Faulkner portrays the mind as more than a matter of biology.