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Reading Faulkner's Minds

Čtení Faulknerových myslí

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Faulkner on Your Mind

In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, William Faulkner sets the life of mind embodied as the subject, goal and ideal of writing. Given the identification of the mind, “the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself”¹, as the most important topic of his own writing, an analysis of the concept of mind in Faulkner’s works is long overdue. Mind, body, environment, and humanity are all aspects that are crucial for my dissertation which seeks to scrutinize the concept of human mind that Faulkner’s work portrays. Literature, after all, is the mind’s laboratory: a laboratory where the mind is not only the experimenter, but also the experiment. The writer and literary critic David Lodge proclaims that “literature is a record of human consciousness, the richest and most comprehensive we have. Lyric poetry is arguably man’s most successful effort to describe qualia. The novel is arguably man’s most successful effort to describe the experience of individual human beings moving through space and time.”²

Narrative itself is seen as centrally preoccupied with and defined by the mind. David Herman, a prominent narratologist argues that “narrative is centrally concerned with qualia [...] the sense of ‘what it is like’ for someone or something to have a particular experience.”³ This is a universal of narrative which arguably works at a scale: particular narratives will rely on or foreground experience in different ways and to a different degree. Alan Palmer, who bases his whole research on the premise that “narrative fiction is, in essence, the presentation of fictional mental functioning”⁴, confides that from his perspective “all serious students of literature are cognitivists, whether they like it or not. [...] So the divide is [...] between those who *explicitly* see themselves as cognitivists and make use of real-mind discourses to study literary texts, and those who do not.”⁵ In terms of this divide, I approach Faulkner’s work explicitly admitting the cognitive concerns of studying literary fiction. While narrative and literature in general are used as vehicles of exploring and staging the life of the mind, the work of William Faulkner presents a particularly salient example of the literary exploration of experience. His texts are mired in writing the mind and, conversely, minding writing: Faulkner reveals the working of the human mind both as a topic of his narratives and in the very style of writing about it.

In the past several decades, cognitive sciences have developed an understanding of the mind “denying, or at least questioning, the central assumption of cartesian cognitive science: mental processes are identical with, or exclusively realized by, brain processes.”⁶ Mark Rowlands usefully summarizes

¹ William Faulkner, “Address Upon Receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature,” in *Essays, Speeches & Public Letters*, ed. James B. Meriwether (New York: The Modern Library, 2004), 119.

² David Lodge, “Consciousness and the Novel,” in *Consciousness and the Novel: Connected Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 10.

³ David Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), xvi. Jerome Bruner observes that “[p]hysical events play a role in stories chiefly by affecting the intentional states of their protagonists.” Jerome Bruner, “The Narrative Construction of Reality,” *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (Autumn 1991): 7.

⁴ Alan Palmer, *Fictional Minds* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 5.

⁵ Alan Palmer, “Social Minds in Fiction and Criticism,” *Style* 45, no.2 (Summer 2011): 200.

⁶ Mark Rowlands, *The New Science of the Mind. From Extended Mind to Embodied Phenomenology* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2010), 3.

the “new way of thinking about the mind”⁷ under the label “4e cognition”, i.e., the mind as embodied, embedded, enacted and extended:

The idea that mental processes are *embodied* is, very roughly, the idea that they are partly constituted by, partly made up of, wider (i.e., extraneural) bodily structures and processes. The idea that mental processes are *embedded* is, again roughly, the idea that mental processes have been designed to function only in tandem with a certain environment that lies outside the brain of the subject. [...] The idea that mental processes are *enacted* is the idea that they are made up not just of neural processes but also of things that the organism *does* more generally – that they are constituted in part by the ways in which an organism acts on the world and the ways in which world, as a result, acts back on that organism. The idea that mental processes are *extended* is the idea that they are not located exclusively inside an organism’s head but extend out, in various ways, into the organism’s environment.⁸

As Shaun Gallagher puts it, the “E-approaches” supplant the “neurocentric” picture of the mind, a “narrow perspective on cognition” which sees it as brain-based, and instead “argue that the unit of explanation ought to be brain-body-environment.”⁹ Current cognitive research brings with it the experimentally based discovery that culture affects the mind on a material level, i.e. the brain.¹⁰ All the approaches to human mind presented here posit a fuzzy, if any, border between a biological organism and its environment including society and culture. Therefore, to tailor the sciences of the mind to their subject of study requires “[m]aking explicit the domain of social interaction” and, thus, “to take a crucial step away from methodological individualism.”¹¹ Faulkner’s work refuses a neurocentric concept of the mind.

Faulkner conceptualizes the mind in accordance with these so called second wave cognitive sciences’ view of the mind already in the 1920s and 1930s through the medium of narrative both on the level of story and the level of discourse. His view of the mind, thus, bears markings of the specific nature of the medium: the ecological and social nature of the human mind manifests as a topic of various narratives as well as a way of organizing, stylizing the process of narration. In agreement with my claim about Faulkner, David Herman suggests that “modernist narratives can be viewed as concretizing the lived, phenomenal worlds that postcognitive theorists have subsequently tried to describe in more

⁷ Rowlands, *New Science*, 3.

⁸ Rowlands, *New Science*, 3.

⁹ Shaun Gallagher, “Decentering the Brain: Embodied Cognition and the Critique of Neurocentrism and Narrow-Minded Philosophy of Mind,” *Constructivist Foundations* 14, no. 1 (2008): 9.

¹⁰ See Shaun Gallagher, “The Socially Extended Mind,” *Cognitive Systems Research* 25-26 (2013): 10, or Steven Mithen, “Excavating the Prehistoric Mind: The Brain as a Cultural Artefact and Material Culture as Biological Extension,” in *Social Brain, Distributed Mind*, ed. Robin Dunbar, Clive Gamble and John Gowlett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 497.

¹¹ Ezequiel di Paolo and Evan Thompson, “The Enactive Approach,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Embodied Cognition*, ed. Lawrence Shapiro (New York: Routledge, 2014), 75. Cf. Shaun Gallagher, *Enactivist Interventions: Rethinking the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 6.

abstract terms.”¹² In other words, Faulkner’s narrative and literary envisioning of mind does not need, let alone seek, validation by the “hard sciences”.

The status of literary scholars as contributors to cognitive science is due to literature’s ability to channel the human mind, but also to channel it in markedly different way than is studied in cognitive sciences. As Uri Margolin articulates it, the difference is between the generality of cognitive sciences which use “individual features as a mere source of data for constructing prototypes, and individual behavior as information for formulating regularities of some kind”, and the specificity of literature which presents the reader with “individual, differentiated story participants and their specific cognitive features and acts”.¹³ The difference of the resulting picture of the mind in literature, as opposed to science, is paramount as literature “documents and records cognitive and neural processes of self with an intimacy that is otherwise unavailable to neuroscience.”¹⁴

There is a patently obvious difference of cognitive levels in which disciplines like neurology and literary studies deal since “narrative, like any mode of signification, involves a cognitive level whose basic elements are symbols and not neurons.”¹⁵ Given the pragmatic nature not only of the mind itself, but also of the research practices, I agree with Lisa Zunshine that the cognitive literary critic “would thus do well to think of herself as a bricoleur who reaches out for the best mix of insights that cognitive theory as a whole has to offer without worrying about blurring lines between its various domains” – after all, “[c]ognitive scientists themselves cross disciplinary boundaries daily, attracting new academic fields into their orbit.”¹⁶ While cognitive sciences are a source for cognitive literary studies, with some reliance or dependence on them thus being inevitable, they should not be a model to be copied blindly, being a research enterprise of a different kind. After all, it is only a logical extension of, a logical conclusion to the conception of the mind as both a biological as well as cultural phenomenon that it need both natural and human sciences to explain human cognition.

My approach might be considered ethnographic given its interest in and focus on the ecological and cultural aspect of the mind. I agree with Zunshine who has recently argued that “cognitive cultural studies *is* cultural studies [...] [f]or just as the concept of the human brain becomes meaningless once we attempt to separate it from the culture in which it develops, so the concept of human culture becomes meaningless once we try to extract the human brain from it.”¹⁷ My cognitive approach to literature is a thematic approach in that it takes concepts from the cognitive sciences and analyzes them *in* literature following Tony E. Jackson’s dictum that if literary cognitive studies are to become a really

¹² David Herman, “1880-1945 Re-minding Modernism,” in *The Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English*, ed. David Herman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 265.

¹³ Uri Margolin, “Cognitive Science, the Thinking Mind, and Literary Narrative,” in *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences*, ed. David Herman (Stanford, Cal.: Center for the Study of Language and Information, 2003), 287.

¹⁴ Aaron L. Mishara, “The Literary Neuroscience of Kafka’s Hypnagogic Hallucinations: How Literature Informs the Neuroscientific Study of Self and its Disorders,” in *Cognitive Literary Studies: Current Themes and New Directions*, ed. Isabel Jaén and Julien Jacques Simon (Austin: University of Texas, 2012), 107.

¹⁵ Marie-Laure Ryan, “Narratology and Cognitive Science: A Problematic Relation,” *Style* 44, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 473.

¹⁶ Lisa Zunshine, “Introduction: What is Cognitive Cultural Studies?,” in *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 3.

¹⁷ Lisa Zunshine, “Introduction: What Is Cognitive Cultural Studies?,” 8.

interdisciplinary enterprise, they “will have to involve some dialectical interaction between cognitive universals and variations of cultural forms, for example, great social, political, or ideological upheaval.”¹⁸ The main upheaval shaping my observations on cognitive universals can be formulated as modernity, manifesting in both the social and economic spheres as well as in the technologico-cultural dimension, especially the medium of film, showing Faulkner to be an author evincing “uncommonly sensitive writer’s responsiveness to the cultural field.”¹⁹

Mind Reading in *As I Lay Dying*

Reading *As I Lay Dying*, I focus on eyes and looks in the novel as a way of reconstituting the mind-body relationship, that of an embodied mind in a novel that has been traditionally seen as positing this relationship in terms of cartesian dualism: the body as belonging to the material world and the mind as belonging to the spiritual world.²⁰ The link between the prominence of eyes and looks in the novel and the conception of mind as embodied can be captured best in terms of the so called “theory of mind.” Alternatively called mind-reading or folk psychology, this cognitive concept puts forth an explanation of how one understands others’ motivations, beliefs, desires etc. in an everyday and largely unconscious manner. As an interpretation of behavior in mentalistic terms, mind-reading is the attribution of the mind to the body. Consequently, posture, gestures, facial expressions and dynamics of movement of the body in general are the clues to be interpreted as indicative of mental states. In Baron-Cohen’s account, eyes are central to theory of mind: Baron-Cohen et al. have tested subjects’ ability to understand mental state terms and match them to photographs of eyes and the area around them and have found that “normal adults could judge mental states from even minimal cues (expressions around the eyes alone)” thus establishing “the ability to ‘read the mind in the eyes’.”²¹

Visual perception is the most reported on event in the novel. The attention paid to eyes and looking and its specificity of detail in *As I Lay Dying* allows drawing parallels to the particulars of the mind-reading process. Mental attribution in the novel works in an uncannily similar way to Baron-Cohen’s account: the eyes or the face are described, the direction of the look, and the object being looked at after which a particular narrator proceeds to the ascription of mental states to a character. The refinement on the theory which *As I Lay Dying* offers is putting this mechanism in various social contexts and thus showing that it does not operate in a vacuum as in the experimental conditions where the

¹⁸ Tony E. Jackson, “Issues and Problems in the Blending of Cognitive Science, Evolutionary Psychology, and Literary Study,” *Poetics Today* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 171.

¹⁹ Peter Lurie, “Faulkner’s Literary Historiography: Color, Photography, and the Accessible Past,” *Philological Quarterly* 90, no. 2&3 (2012): 235.

²⁰ This view is encapsulated by Eric J. Sundquist who sees the novel as “obsessively concerned with problems of disembodiment, with disjunctive relationships between character and narration or between bodily self and conscious identity.” Eric J. Sundquist, *Faulkner: The House Divided* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 29.

²¹ Simon Baron-Cohen et al., “The ‘Reading the Mind in the Eyes’ Test Revisited Version: A Study with Normal Adults, and Adults with Asperger Syndrome or High-Functioning Autism,” *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 42, no. 2 (February 2001): 242.

account was devised. The novel shows that human understanding of others is a combination of both deploying folk psychological narratives and attentively observing others for clues to read their minds.

If everyone is watching everyone, then the obverse is that everyone is being watched by everyone, all the time. In this novel concerned with looks as appearances and as acts trying to uncover the truth behind those appearances, characters live, and die in the state of constant surveillance.²² Attending to the embodiment of mind that runs throughout *As I Lay Dying* helps to pinpoint a significant source of Faulkner's view of the human mind in a technique employed by the dominant cultural art form and medium of his time and of modernism. With its close attention to the language of the body (postures, gestures, facial expressions), especially to looks (both appearance and acts of observation) that one can visualize as close-ups of faces, with the sometimes sparse dialogue almost as rare as title cards in silent films, and, above all, with the assignment of meaning and significance to all these leaving the reader with not much else to go on than the characters' bodies, the novel's representation of the mind as embodied is informed by silent film aesthetics.

The early film theorist Béla Balázs saw film as a medium of radical embodiment of the mind as opposed to literature which in his view presented mind (or spirit in his words) as radically disembodied. In his book published in 1924, Balázs states that under the new dominant medium of silent film "[t]he screens of the entire world are now starting to project the *first international language*, the language of gestures and facial expressions."²³ Such an observation goes against the traditional view of Faulkner as nothing but critical of modernization,²⁴ but is in accordance with the scrutiny under which this view has recently come. As Julian Murphet writes in his introduction to the collection of essays *Faulkner in the Media Ecology*, "Faulkner's oft-remarked antimodernity – his discomfort with the new in general, and his specific repertoire of complaints against the technological forms that it took – is secretly undone by a persistent figural feedback loop, in which the techno-mediatic-new inscribes itself indelibly into the available matrix of representational means for making the past present."²⁵

Putting forth a conception of embodied mind while drawing on silent film aesthetic, Faulkner makes theory of mind, albeit unconsciously, a pivotal principle of *As I Lay Dying*. Theory of mind is doubly important for the novel. Firstly, the observation of other bodies and ascription of their mental states forms a large part of the content of the novel, one of the most prominent topics as various narrating characters, "watchful sentinels of the mind"²⁶ observe the way other characters look (their gestures, movement and posture) and how they look (their eyes and gaze), and infer their mental states. The mind-reading that seeps through a large part of the narrative discourse shows Faulkner conceiving of human

²² Cf. André Bleikasten, *Faulkner's As I Lay Dying*, Revised and Enlarged Edition, trans. Roger Little with the collaboration of the author (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 72.

²³ Béla Balázs, *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory*. *Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, ed Erica Carter, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 14.

²⁴ See Richard C. Moreland, "Faulkner and Modernism," in *The Cambridge Companion to William Faulkner*, ed. Philip M. Weinstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 18.

²⁵ Julian Murphet, "Introduction," in *Faulkner in the Media Ecology*, ed. Julian Murphet and Stefan Solomon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 4-5.

²⁶ Bleikasten *Faulkner's As I Lay Dying*, 72.

mind as inseparable from, although potentially in a problematic relationship with the body. Through this unstable synthesis, in *As I Lay Dying*, “at the same time as being face, body, attitude, or action, the character comes to life through his inner speech.”²⁷ Secondly, in a multiperspective novel consisting of an ebb and flow of perception and frequent changes in narrators, the observation of other bodies and the inference of their mental states is a *sine qua non* of the narrative technique.

Extending the Mind in *Absalom, Absalom!*

My reading of *Absalom, Absalom!* through the ideas of cognitive extension and enactivism underlies a holistic approach to the narrative situation of the novel: the story transcends any individual teller. This transcendence is manifested in the novel by always putting two (and two in the case of Quentin and Shreve) together: it couples a teller and a hearer in various scenes of storytelling. Approaching the narrative pairs in terms of coupling, rather than doubling as John T. Irwin has famously done, I argue against his claim that “[f]or Faulkner, doubling and incest are both images of the self-enclosed – the inability of the ego to break out of the circle of the self and of the individual to break out of the ring of the family – and as such, both appear in his novels as symbols of the state of the South after the Civil War, symbols of a region turned in upon itself.”²⁸ For me, coupling in *Absalom, Absalom!* is a sign of the opposite: an attempt of the ego “to break out of the circle of the self” and to reach beyond its boundaries.

The idea of coupling is central for the Extended Mind Thesis as conceived by Andy Clark and David J. Chalmers. In their article, they brashly announce that “[c]ognitive processes ain’t (all) in the head!”²⁹ putting forth a protean conception of mind which changes its domain based on the environment and using various “tools” to extend beyond the skin. This is done through the process of coupling: “[...] the human organism is linked with an external entity in a two-way interaction, creating a *coupled system* that can be seen as a cognitive system in its own right. All the components in the system play an active causal role, and they jointly govern behavior in the same sort of way that cognition usually does.”³⁰ This approach is necessitated by *Absalom, Absalom!* itself: after all, Faulkner casts the most successful storytelling union – that of Quentin and Shreve – in terms of an ultimate form of coupling as “some happy marriage of speaking and hearing” (253). It is my claim that in the more or less happy “marriages” of tellers and listeners, Faulkner presents the human mind as extended, enacted, and embedded in its environment, reaching an apogee in the creative, playful merger of the minds of Quentin the Southerner and Shreve the Canadian.

²⁷ Bleikasten, *Faulkner’s As I Lay Dying*, 65-66.

²⁸ John T. Irwin, *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner*, Expanded Edition (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 59.

²⁹ Andy Clark and David J. Chalmers, “The Extended Mind,” in *The Extended Mind*, ed. Richard Menary (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2010), 29.

³⁰ Clark and Chalmers, “Extended Mind,” 29.

Minds in the novel extend beyond the body and couple through a variety of means. Environmental features such as temperature, smell or visual stimuli facilitate, for example, the storytelling situation between Quentin and his father marked by such Southern paraphernalia as the pervading smell of wistaria. Adverse, dire circumstances constitute, for example, the group cognition that develops among Rosa, Judith and Clytie erasing the distinctions of race and age, that would normally prevent them from becoming “*that triumvirate mother-woman*” (131). The interactional, conversational aspect of the storytelling engagement and language are most developed between Quentin and Shreve who can finish one another’s sentences as well as thoughts. Blood relation is the connective tissue among the acknowledged and unacknowledged members of Sutpen’s family: implying that black and white are not related only by physical appearance but by a mental one as well, blood becomes ironically an appropriate critique of the fiction of race pointing out that Sutpen is a Sutpen no matter whether black or white.

It is in the coupling of Quentin and Shreve that the novel’s idea of the extended mind reaches its most complex and forceful articulation. The extension of minds between Quentin and Shreve is an emergent phenomenon that transcends minds, bodies, time and space. Shreve and Quentin enjoy all the constitutive features of extension in the novel with the extra ingredient of love which is lacking in one form or another in the previous couplings. The coupling of tellers and listeners in the novel is asymmetric: a teller (active participant) narrates a story to a listener (passive participant). What Quentin and Shreve achieve is a symmetric coupling, “a marriage of hearing and speaking”, where hearing and speaking no longer reside within individuals but move to the space of interaction, to the space of “in between” where social cognition emerges.

Their union successfully captures the autonomy and emergence of a social interaction in which both participants stand on equal footing and both yield to the situation. Thus, it heralds a new epistemology in the novel: an “engaged epistemology”, as Hanne De Jaegher terms it, in which loving is a form of knowing. Promoting the enactive view of cognition and of social interaction, De Jaegher considers an interaction truly social only when participatory sense-making occurs, which “happens when agents participate in each other’s sense-making. This, they do when the precarious processes of not just their individual sense-making, but also of the interaction process, which is also autonomous and thus precarious, interact with each other [...]. This makes it possible to deeply affect one another [...].”³¹ In the scene of storytelling between Quentin and Shreve, this relationship between affect and cognition is shown in the inseparability of the act of loving and of knowing: “Every sense-maker is implicated in what they make sense of, because it matters to them—they *care* about it.”³² The “marriage” between the two youths assigns agency to both and to both each other’s storytelling role in a constant shifting of the couple dynamic which resides in both and in neither at the same time. Quentin and Shreve tell *about*,

³¹ Hanne de Jaegher, “Loving and Knowing: Reflections for an Engaged Epistemology,” in *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*: 9-10. first online. doi: 10.1007/s11097-019-09634-5.

³² De Jaegher, “Loving and Knowing,” 16.

with and *in* love: love seeps from the tellers to their characters, hence the hybrid forms of “Quentin-Henry, Shreve-Bon”.

Shreve the Canadian, a foreigner and a stranger to the South gets involved in the story through his love for Quentin, by their common blood of youth, through the severity of chilling New England which brings them together, and all that in the spirit of play through the means of language. Given their origins in Mississippi and Canada, and their union at Harvard University, what is insinuated in Shreve and Quentin’s dialogue, in their cooperative storytelling is the process of the postbellum rapprochement between the North and the South that Nina Silber explores in her study *The Romance of Reunion*. Specifically, the national reconciliation is tied in with the homoerotic relationship between Quentin and Shreve. An essential part of the reunion process was a gendered figuration of the power relations between the North and the South in which “the southern female had become the tempestuous and romantic belle, the object of the northern man’s desires, and, ultimately, the feminine partner in a symbolic marital alliance which became the principal representation of sectional reunion.”³³ It was the image of marriage between man/North and woman/South which “stood at the foundation of the late-nineteenth-century culture of conciliation and became a symbol which defined and justified the northern view of the power relations in the reunified nation.”³⁴

While it is the northerner who is figured as female, so the gender roles seem to be reversed in this romance, the novel continually hints that the only real love relationship is a homoerotic one. As Norman W. Jones points out, “[t]elling history becomes a mode of sexual expression for Quentin and Shreve.”³⁵ As Silber reports, the image of manly ideal was provided in the figure of the Southerner who turned out to be “an extremely pliable and useful model in this age of the masculinity crisis”³⁶, especially in the propaganda surrounding the Spanish-American War, “[t]he men of the North and the South, [...] epitomized the spirit of masculine, virile patriotism, the ideology that could finally bridge the bloody chasm of the Civil War.”³⁷ Thus, enamored with a masculine ideal more than with the Southern belle, Northern men invested Southerners with their homosocial desires using Southern women as a conduit in this national love triangle. In the collaborative narration of Quentin and Shreve the personal relationship is intertwined with the national appeasement as the homoerotic desire between the two youths is reflected in the homosocial male romance of reunion between two regions of the nation, the polar opposites of the North and the South.

³³ Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of Carolina Press, 1993), 6.

³⁴ Silber, *Romance of Reunion*, 6-7.

³⁵ Norman W. Jones, “Coming Out through History’s Hidden Love Letter in *Absalom, Absalom!*,” *American Literature* 76, no. 2 (June 2004): 345.

³⁶ Silber, *Romance of Reunion*, 176.

³⁷ Silber, *Romance of Reunion*, 196.

Reading Faulkner's Minds: Method to/in/and Madness

Faulkner's narrative forms are commensurate to his depiction of the mind not as a lump of mass entombed within the skull isolated from the body and the world at large but as a shapeshifting entity that is fundamentally embodied, distributed, social, shaped by culture as well as biology. Faulkner writes what David Herman calls "intelligent" narratives. Observing the variety of uses of narrative in a variety of contexts, Herman states that "narrative functions as a powerful and basic tool for thinking"³⁸ which suggests that "its prevalence as a means for cognition stems from its essential flexibility, its adaptability vis-à-vis the most diverse objects, situations, and events."³⁹ Faulkner's conception of mind is inherent in the structure of his novels and his narrative techniques. The aesthetics of his narrative reflect the workings of human cognition mainly in representing characters' mental functioning, non-linear chronology and multiple timelines, embedding of narrative levels, and multiperspectivity.

All these elements participate in creating a "smart" whole larger than the sum of its parts. Faulkner's narrator groups constitute cognitive systems of two and more narrators that jointly perform the cognitive act of narrating a story, the "same" story. Importantly, if one or more of these narrators were removed the story itself would change: in terms of the extended mind, if we remove part of the distributed cognitive system, "the system's behavioural competence will drop"⁴⁰. Faulkner's narratives are marked by a high degree of multiperspectivity: as Marcus Hartner observes, "[t]he most prototypical cases of multiperspectivity can be found in repeated, successive renderings of one and the same event from different character's points of view."⁴¹ Multiperspectivity as a narrative technique directly and most appropriately reflects intersubjectivity defined "[i]n the simplest terms [...] as *the sharing of experiential content (e.g., feelings, perceptions, thoughts, and linguistic meanings) among a plurality of subjects*."⁴²

Faulkner powerfully illustrates that individuality is a phenomenon that is recognizable only against the background of intersubjectivity; in other words, that "[a]n individual in human society is never isolated."⁴³ Through multiperspectivity, the various extensions occurring among the characters and narrators, and the specific constitutions of mental functioning, Faulkner points out that collective consciousness "may be present at any level: from family, community or society to a deeper configuration comprising 'culture' as a whole, in the abstract."⁴⁴ While Faulkner clearly sees the mind as an event that transcends the individual, he does not portray such mental being in the world as unproblematic. The

³⁸ David Herman, "Stories as a Tool for Thinking," in *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences*, ed. David Herman (Stanford, Cal.: Center for the Study of Language and Information, 2003), 163.

³⁹ David Herman, "How Stories Make us Smarter: Narrative Theory and Cognitive Semiotics," *Recherches en communication*, no 19 (2003): 135.

⁴⁰ Clark and Chalmers, "The Extended Mind," 29.

⁴¹ Marcus Hartner, "Narrative Theory Meets Blending: Multiperspectivity Reconsidered," *REAL* 24 (December 2008): 182.

⁴² Jordan Zlatev et al., "Intersubjectivity: What Makes us Human?," in *The Shared Mind: Perspectives on Intersubjectivity*, ed. Jordan Zlatev et al. (Amsterdam: Johns Benjamins, 2008), 1. Emphasis in the original.

⁴³ Alan Barnard, "When Individuals Do Not Stop at the Skin," in *Social Brain, Distributed Mind*, ed. Robin Dunbar, Clive Gamble and John Gowlett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 260.

⁴⁴ Barnard, Alan. "When Individuals Do Not Stop at the Skin," 257.

fraught dynamics between extension of the mind and the self-enclosed ego comes forth in the schizophrenia, in the disintegration of the self of the two main protagonists of the novels analyzed here: Darl Bundren and Quentin Compson.

If, as Philip Weinstein claims, “Faulkner’s brilliantly unruly early texts pass on to us (into us) the visceral assault of culture upon the subject”⁴⁵, this is because tensions pulling the self apart are inherent in the culture these texts reflect and are directly related to the exigencies of the extension of one’s mind, i.e. one’s self. The relation to others underlines the commonality of Quentin’s and Darl’s madness: as extreme cases of extending their mind beyond their skin, the two protagonists become mad because they lack any solidity in themselves. Quentin, with his lungs full of the stale air of Mississippi, his mind full of the “interchangeable and almost myriad” (7) stories, is (full of) the South. Darl, a telepath constantly reading and penetrating other characters’ minds, is left with little of his own identity.⁴⁶ Both Darl and Quentin are characterized by notable emptiness when it comes to their experientiality: their minds are stages on which the plays of their communities are performed.

What Darl’s and Quentin’s cases share is the crucial proposition that the emergence of schizophrenia occurs when the individual is deprived of its intersubjective context: Darl is separated from his family and removed to a mental asylum, whereas Quentin is transplanted from his native South to the “strange” New England. Through Quentin’s and Darl’s madness, Faulkner advocates the “most radical meaning” of intersubjectivity which posits that “intersubjectivity is truly a process of cocreativity, where *relationship* is ontologically primary. All individuated subjects co-emerge, or co-arise, as a result of a holistic ‘field’ of relationships.”⁴⁷ Schizophrenia reveals the cultural foundation of the subject by stripping it of individuated identity. As Liah Greenfeld puts it, in schizophrenic thought disorder, “it is no longer the individual, but culture, which does the thinking; similarly, in the abnormalities of schizophrenic language, it is no longer the individual, but the language, which speaks.”⁴⁸ The loss of self manifests linguistically as a deictic failure reflecting the unmooring of ego from an individual perspective.⁴⁹

Tied to World War I and capitalism in Darl’s case and to the problem of race in Quentin’s, their madness is relevant to the central argument of Greenfeld’s study which “connects in a causal relationship the cultural phenomenon of nationalism and psychiatric diseases of unknown etiology: schizophrenia, manic depression, and major unipolar depression.”⁵⁰ In embedding Darl’s and Quentin’s madness in the social sphere, in taking it outside their head, Faulkner reveals that “mental illnesses are not just brain diseases”, as Thomas Fuchs puts it, but that in fact “altered subjective experience and disturbed relation

⁴⁵ Philip M. Weinstein, *Faulkner’s Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3.

⁴⁶ Cleanth Brooks, “Odyssey of the Bundrens,” in *As I Lay Dying*, ed. Michael Gorra (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 256.

⁴⁷ Christian De Quincey, “Intersubjectivity: Exploring Consciousness from the Second-Person Perspective,” in *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 32, no. 2 (2000): 139.

⁴⁸ Liah Greenfeld, *Mind, Modernity, Madness: The Impact of Culture on Human Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), 168.

⁴⁹ See Bent Rosenbaum and Harly Sonne, *The Language of Psychosis* (New York: New York University Press, 1980).

⁵⁰ Greenfeld, *Mind, Modernity, Madness*, 2.

to others are not mere epiphenomena of an effective organic process; much rather, they are essential elements of the illness itself.”⁵¹ The madness in and of his texts is another testimony of his conception of the mind as transcending the brain.

Taking full advantage of the bricolage of cognitive literary studies, tying in various motifs, topics and approaches to reveal their interconnections, I analyze Faulkner’s concept of the mind as a whole. While this analysis is of necessity incomplete, the approach also offers a new perspective on old problems – the issue of voice and identity in *As I Lay Dying* or the puzzle of Shreve’s narrative involvement in *Absalom, Absalom!* – besides readings going against the grain of some traditional interpretations of the novels. Any future foray into a cognitive interpretation of not only Faulkner’s works but as a general principle must be guided by the here defended notion of literature as an authoritative discourse on the mind that might draw on hard sciences yet has its distinct methods, goals and subject – art. Wedding scientific concepts with specifically cultural interests of literary studies necessitates fundamentally an anthropological, in other words, cognitive-cultural approach to literature. Reading Faulkner’s work through this prism shows the Southern author to be a great philosopher, psychologist and anthropologist of the mind not through experiments or questionnaires, but by means of his idiosyncratic narrative form of art.

⁵¹ Thomas Fuchs, “Are Mental Illnesses Diseases of the Brain?,” in *Critical Neuroscience: A Handbook of the Social and Cultural Contexts of Neuroscience*, ed. Suparna Choudhury and Jan Slaby (Malden: Blackwell, 2012) 332.

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Academic Activities

Conference Papers

“Minding Fiction: Real World Concepts and Fictional Minds”: a paper presented at *The 5th Conference of the European Narratology Network*, Prague, The Czech Republic, 13th-15th September 2017

“Reading Minds in Literature”: a paper presented at the *Cognitive Futures in the Arts and Humanities* fifth international conference, Stony Brook, New York, USA, 5th-7th June 2017

“Unnatural Narratology and its Discontents”: a paper presented at the 2017 *International Conference on Narrative*, Lexington, Kentucky, USA, 23rd – 26th March 2017

“Reading Faulkner’s Minds”: a paper presented at *The Modern Body 1830-Present*, York, UK, 3rd June 2016

“Blending Multiple Narratives”: a paper presented at *The 4th Conference of the European Narratology Network*, Ghent, The Netherlands, 16th-18th April 2015

“We-narrative and Collective Memory: The Case of William Faulkner’s ‘A Rose for Emily’”: a paper presented at *The 3rd Conference of the European Narratology Network*, Paris, France, 29th-30th March 2013

“Some Thoughts on the Appearances of *Hamlet* in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*: Forging the Notion of the ‘Menardian Text’ as a Literary Concept”: a paper presented at *6th Geoffrey Chaucer Student Society Conference*, Łódź, Poland, 16th-17th March 2013

Research Stays

Fulbright Scholarship at the English Department, Boston University in Boston, Massachusetts, USA
2016-2017