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Spatio-Temporality in Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury*

Čas a prostor ve Faulknerově románu *Hluk a věrava*

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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In Prague, on 6.7.2015

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

Abstract:

Spatio-temporality is an interdisciplinary term, which transgresses into politics, economy, history, and last but not least, into literature and literary studies. Time and space are two terms that go always hand in hand and thus it is unthinkable to think of them separately.

In William Faulkner's work, spatio-temporality has a special place, especially in *The Sound and the Fury*, in which Faulkner uses ideas and concepts of other philosophers and writers who were preoccupied with time. Above all, it was Henri Bergson and his work *Time and Free Will*. In this work, Bergson coins the term *la durée* (duration) and refuses the idea that time is a system of causes and effects. Another philosopher who deeply influenced Faulkner was William James, the author of *Principles of Psychology*, in which he speaks of the stream of consciousness. Faulkner's fiction is further marked by the influence of James Joyce, especially by his time focus on one day in a character's life, with numerous flashbacks, and by Marcel Proust and his perception of the past.

The concept of time and place has something to do with the Lost Cause of the Confederacy and the Southern American states' frustration with the development of events that took place after the Civil War. The Southern territory is difficult to demarcate. Missouri and Kentucky are surely part of it; nonetheless, for Faulkner, the South is defined by a set of values rather than geographical frontiers.

In terms of Spatio-temporality, the most important passage is the one taking place on 2 July 1910, on the day of Quentin's suicide. The Spatio-temporal significance of

this passage of the book is evident from Jean Paul's Sartre's essay *On The Sound and the Fury: Time in the Work of Faulkner*, as the author chooses these passages for his essay. This passage of the book portrays the character Quentin Compson's vain battle with time. He breaks the watch that he was given by his father and that once had belonged to his grandfather, and he thus breaks the temporal continuity. His perception of the present is constantly violated by events from the past, which Faulkner puts into italics. Bergson's ideas are often expressed by the voice of Quentin's father (if it is his voice and not Quentin's imaginary voice). The voice is trying to teach Quentin of Bergson's critique of time, measured by space and numbers. Unfortunately, it is a pessimistic voice, which does not offer Bergson's alternative of *durée* but only offers frozen time, which does not lead anywhere.

Once Quentin breaks his watch, temporal duality sets in motion. The cause of this duality is Quentin's problematic relation with his sister Caddy and her virginity. The time frame becomes a single axis, which we could call a temporal present. Quentin's perception of the present is constantly distorted by his childhood memories of his sister and their problematic relationship. He perceives time as a stream of a river. Water, mud and the river are recurring elements throughout the whole novel that also serve as measurements of time, and Quentin is often reminded of the presence of the Charles River, in which he eventually drowns. Throughout the book, the river is emblematic even from a spatio-temporal perspective.

Anotace:

Časoprostor je interdisciplinární pojem, který má přesah do politiky, ekonomie, historie a v neposlední řadě také do literatury a literárních studií. Čas a prostor jsou dva pojmy, které jdou vždy ruku v ruce a tudíž je dnes již nemyslitelné o nich uvažovat zvlášť.

Právě časoprostor hraje důležitou roli v díle Williama Faulknera, zejména pak v jeho díle Hluk a vřava (*The Sound and the Fury*). Faulkner navazuje na tradici filozofů a spisovatelů, kteří se pojetím času hluboce zabývali. Jedná se především o francouzského filosofa Henriho Bergsona a jeho dílo *Čas a svobodná vůle*. Faulkner používá Bergsonův koncept trvání, neboli *la durée*. Tento koncept se staví proti pojetí času jako množině příčin a následků. Mezi další, kdo v tomto směru ovlivnili Faulknera, patří James Joyce, a to zejména svým časovým záběrem románu, který popisuje jeden den v životě hlavního hrdiny, s četnými retrospektivními záblesky, ale také filosof William James a jeho proud vědomí nebo francouzský spisovatel Marcel Proust a jeho vnímání minulosti.

Pojetí času a prostoru má i cosi dočinění s konceptem *Lost Cause* a Jihoamerickou frustrací událostmi, které se děly po konci občanské války na Jihu Ameriky. Toto území je dnes těžké vymezit, ale zajisté do něj spadá Missouri a Kentucky díky své geografické pozici. Nicméně pro Faulknera je Jih definován spíše souborem hodnot, které byly na Jihu Spojených států vyznávány, nežli geografickými hranicemi.

Otázka časoprostoru nás bude zajímat zejména v nejsložitější a i nejzajímavější části románu, té která se odehrává druhého Června roku 1910, v den Quentinovi sebevraždy. O důležitosti a významu této pasáže svědčí i fakt, že si ji Jean Paul Sartre vybral jako stěžejní pro svou esej Čas v díle Williama Faulknera (Time in Faulkner). Quentin v této pasáži svádí svůj marný boj s časem a prostorem. Rozbívá hodinky, které dostal od svého otce a které patřili jeho dědovi a tím přerušuje veškerou časovou kontinuitu. Do jeho vnímání přítomnosti se vměšují události z minulosti, které Faulkner odlišuje v textu kurzívou. Bergsonovy myšlenky jsou vyjádřeny častými vstupy Quentinova otce (pokud je to vůbec hlas Quentinova otce a ne Quentinův vymyšlený hlas), který se snaží poučit Quentina o Bergsonově kritice času, měřeného prostorem a čísly. Je to ale hlas pesimistický, který již nenabízí Bergsonovu alternativu trvání (durée), ale nabízí pouze zmrazený čas, který sám o sobě nikam nevede.

Poté co Quentin rozbije své hodinky se v jeho vnímání dává do pohybu časová dualita, jejímž centrem a příčinou je problematický vztah s jeho sestrou Caddice a její panenství. Časová osa se slévá do jedné přímky, kterou bychom mohli nazvat bezčasou přítomností. Quentinovo vnímání přítomnosti je neustále narušováno vzpomínkami z jeho dětství, zejména vzpomínkami na jeho setru a jejich problematický vztah. Prostřední ze sourozenců Campsonových vnímá čas jako proud řeky a právě voda, bahno a řeka jsou elementy, které se v románě neustále opakují a figurují zároveň jako indikátory času. Samotná Charles River, ve které Quentin spáchá sebevraždu o sobě často dává vědět. Quentin ji často vnímá (cítí vlhkost v průvanu, atd.) a tím nám dává najevo, že se Quentinova smrt neodvratně blíží.



## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	10
1. THE ROOTS OF FAULKNER'S TREATMENT OF TIME – A BRIEF OVERVIEW	12
2. PREDECESSORS OF FAULKNER	17
2.1. HENRI JAMES	17
2.2. HENRI BERGSON	19
2.3. SARTRE	21
2.4. PROUST	25
3. THE NOTION OF THE SPACE, LOST CAUSE AND THE ANTEBELLUM PERIOD	26
4. THE FIELD OF VISION IN THE SOUND AND THE FURY	28
5. THE ROLE OF CADDY IN TIME AND SPACE	33
6. VIRGINITY	39
7. MALFUNCTIONING CLOCK, QUENTIN AND DILSEY	47
8. TIME AND CHANGE	51
8.1 TEMPORAL DOUBLING	54
9. PROUST AND FAULKNER AND THEIR TREATMENT OF TIME	56
10. CONCLUSION	63
BIBLIOGRAPHY:	66

## Introduction

There is very little left to say that has not been written about the work of William Faulkner. The infatuation with his work in academic circles is more than obvious from the establishment of Faulkner studies as a separate field of academic research in literary studies programs all over the world.

Having said that, one aspect that does not seem to be sufficiently analyzed is the role of time and space in Faulkner's work. Due to the extent of Faulkner's oeuvre and with regard to the limits of this work, it is impossible to take a general look at Faulkner's oeuvre as such. For that reason, this thesis attempts to provide an analysis of spatio-temporality in Faulkner's best known work, *The Sound and the Fury*.

In the following thesis, I would like to demonstrate that to analyze a work of fiction from the standpoint of time and space appears to be the most objective method, mainly because it does not take anything for granted. The purpose of this work is to analyze and understand the way that time and space operate in Faulkner's novel *The Sound and the Fury*. First of all, we will be interested in the source of Faulkner's metaphysics of time and its origin. The most important book for this part of the paper is Bergson's *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, but we will take in account other philosophers and writers, such as William James, Jean Paul Sartre, and Marcel Proust.

Secondly, this thesis provides an analysis of the temporality of the novel. This paper aims to prove that there is a temporal center in the novel, which is represented by a single event in the book, which functions as a black hole into which everything is drawn into. This temporal center is the meaningful core of the novel, which gives meaning to all temporal and spatial events in the novel and to which all events in the novel aspire.

Having said that, we will attempt to analyze the way the characters in the novel function in temporal and spatial terms and we will try to analyze their relation to time and space. Not surprisingly, the most important characters here are Quentin and his older sister Caddy and their mutual relation from the temporal perspective. In addition to that, we will try to explain the way the characters perceive time, what type of relation they have to time and what effects time has on them.

## 1. The Roots of Faulkner's Treatment of Time – A Brief Overview

It would be wrong to say that Faulkner's writing is the product of a strictly American tradition as there are many influences from Europe. Nonetheless, let us very briefly identify certain points in American literature that could have shaped the consciousness of American writers, including Faulkner.

In Puritan America, the chief idea was based on Myth. This Myth is a foundation of American temporality. Plymouth Colony governor William Bradford was stressing the similarities between the adventures of the Pilgrims in the inhospitable New World with events described in the Holy Scripture. In other words, as if the events that take place in the New Testament were predicting the colonization of America. The Pilgrims were seen as akin to Moses leading the Jews through the desert to the Promised Land. So from this, we can see that the Pilgrims were very interested in imitation, and it is also a temporal imitation, in the sense that they reveal what was experienced before. They imitate a certain kind of pattern. For instance, the Puritans were evaluated according to their ability to imitate Christ. The purpose of an artist was to illustrate the Glory of God. I am speaking about this because Faulkner's characters also imitate a certain kind of pattern from the past. Look at Quentin and his idea of noble Sothern chivalry, or his attempt to make Caddy become a Southern belle. The Compson family's present situation is constantly contrasted with its noble past.

In the Puritan past, there is a very strong concept of predestination, but inevitably, a concept of predetermination that was rather negative, as we will see shortly.

Faulkner has “taken away [the] future – that is to say, the dimension of free choice and act.”<sup>1</sup> In this respect, Faulkner also uses the concept of predestination. None of his characters has any prospects for the future. In other words, his characters are doomed.

A major change in American history comes with a very prominent figure, John Cotton, who in a way anticipated American Romanticism and the teaching of Ralph Waldo Emerson. One of Cotton’s remarkable ideas was the notion that the quality of imagination is to flow, not to freeze. It is a key concept that influences even Hawthorne and much later Faulkner.

Later, the dogmatic ideas of the Puritans were changed, especially by the teaching of the British philosopher John Locke, who introduced the concept of Deism. This concept was well adopted by Benjamin Franklin. His book *The Autobiography*, never completely finished, published during the period of Enlightenment is itself based on a metaphor; Franklin sees his life as a book. This is also interesting from the point of temporality. Franklin is able to reflect upon life and see it as something that has a structure and that could be edited. As if things that already happened in the past could be changed. He writes down these points as errata, or a list of things he has done wrong and that could be improved. I mention Franklin because the work of both authors (Franklin and Faulkner) is retrospective; everything has already happened. As if both books (especially Quentin’s section) were written posthumously.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, *William Faulkner, Three Decades of Criticism*, ‘Time in Faulkner: The Sound and the Fury’ (New York : Harcourt, Brace & World INC. 1963) 230

The real change in the whole mindset comes with American Transcendentalism, which brings the liberation from empiricism and common sense. As Emerson says: “the main concern of our knowledge are not objects but our mode of knowing objects.” Emerson suggests “abandoning the distinction between right and wrong in favor of thinking and living onward.”<sup>2</sup> It is most importantly liberation from fatalism and determinism and from the dogmas of the Puritans, but it is also a new way of thinking which says that an artist must be a non-conformist.

Transcendentalists see no constant, but quite the opposite: everything is a process, there are no fixed laws, and everything is organic and subject to constant change.

Faulkner is very much influenced by this concept and adopts its alternate form from William James.

Hawthorne is also a significant author for Faulkner. They both have a very strong attachment to land. While for Hawthorne it is New England, for Faulkner it is the South. They both deal with the past and see it as something that they cannot escape, something that is inherent. See the passage from *The House of Seven Gables*, in which Young Holgrave says:

Shall we never get rid of the past? It lies upon the present like a giant dead body<sup>3</sup>

Here, Hawthorne speaks about the Puritan past. For him, the past is something heavy and bleak; for Faulkner, it is quite the opposite. The past is a model for the

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<sup>2</sup> Justin Quinn (ed.), *Lectures on American Literature* (Prague : Charles University in Prague 2011) 83

<sup>3</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of Seven Gables*, ‘XII The Daguerreotypist’ (Australia: Dover Publications 1991) 87

centuries to come. In this way, he glorifies the past of the South. On the other hand, the past is something that is constantly hurting Faulkner's characters, and even paralyzes them, especially Quentin.

Paul Douglass says that:

...we must start: with Faulkner's obsession with fluidity, change, and the related concepts of 'endurance' and 'outrage'. Over and over Faulkner identifies life with 'constant flux...constant change.' In this 'fluidity which is human life' the only 'alternative to change and progress is death.' Faulkner speculated more than once in his classes at the University of Virginia that man is by nature 'incapable of peace...' He characterizes himself as a 'man in motion who happens to be a writer' and declared that 'what is important is that man continues to create.' In other words, it is necessary for every writer to come to terms with change, if he is to accomplish anything.<sup>4</sup>

This may remind us strongly of Emerson and his warning against "freezing" into "thingness" and later of William James, who would change all nouns into verbs (poeticizing, etc.) because they represent a more accurate definition. The notion that time cannot be divided into individual parts is apparent in the work of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust and others. Faulkner summarizes their notion of time in his novel *Requiem for a Nun* by saying that "The past is never dead. It's not even a past."<sup>5</sup> Having said that, there are several factors that distinguish Faulkner from the English and French modernists (In this paper, a comparison of the treatment of time in Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury* and Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* are contrasted in a separate chapter on the basis of Deleuze's theory of signs). These differences are discussed in the chapters below.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Douglass, *Bergson, Eliot and American Literature* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky 2014) 120

<sup>5</sup> William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (London: Penguin Books Pty. Ltd. 1960) 81





## 2. Predecessors of Faulkner

### 2.1. Henri James

Throughout his novel, Faulkner uses a narrative technique, which is known as the stream of consciousness. The American philosopher William James, the brother of the author Henry James, coined the term in 1890 in his famous publication *Principles of Psychology*. Edouard Desjardin, a famous French writer, inspired James Joyce with his narrative style called “interior monologue.” The origin of the notion of the flow of the human mind would be difficult to trace. It most probably originated in Europe in Kant’s or Nietzsche’s philosophy; then it was further developed by Ralph Waldo Emerson, who gave the whole concept a new dimension and wrote many essays on the flow of imagination and the flow of the human mind. The concept of the inner flow of the mind was in the culture, but it was William James who coined the term “stream of consciousness” and turned it into a universal concept. Michael Cotsell says that:

James described the justly-celebrated ninth chapter of his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), ‘The Stream of Thought’, as the ‘charcoal sketch’ for his whole work.<sup>6</sup>

He wrote: “[Consciousness] is nothing jointed; it flows. A ‘river’ or ‘stream’ is the metaphor by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.” His concept is largely based on Emerson’s concept of determinism. The stream of consciousness is not only a breakthrough in terms of narrative techniques, it also liberates the author from the slavery of linear time and allows him to retreat to subjective time

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<sup>6</sup> ‘William Faulkner, *The Sound and The Fury*, Michael Cotsell 49

of the inner world. In Faulkner's novel, this linearity is shattered from the very beginning. When Benjamin ("Benjy") Compson starts his passage, it is clear after a few lines. What is more, the characters themselves (Benjamin, Quentin) find it impossible to follow the linear time.

James says: "The mind has no simple or derived relation to the succession of things perceived. Inner arrangements alter like the aurora borealis or 'the gyrations of a kaleidoscope,' changing everything."<sup>7</sup>

When we employ language, "the whole sentence [is] bathed in... [an] original halo of obscure relations." James repeatedly stresses what he calls the "psychic overtone, suffusion, or fringe" of thought. Such statements had much influence on modernist style and help us characterize Faulkner's remarkable effects. Aiken remarked that Faulkner's style established a continuum, "a medium without stops or pauses, a medium which is always of the moment, and of which the passage from moment to moment is as fluid and undetectable as in the life itself which he is purporting to give." However, and this is a point of considerable significance, Faulkner's development of James' stream of consciousness suggests that it cannot be simply seen as what James called "a world of pure experience" – or, as Virginia Woolf says, "a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end." In Faulkner's work, stream of consciousness is in all important cases the mimesis or imitation of dissociation.

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Cotsell 49

## 2.2. Henri Bergson

Faulkner derives his treatment of temporality from various works, but it is Bergson's essays *Time and Free Will* (1910) and *Matter and Memory* (1911) that appear to have a major influence on him. Bergson mainly resists the idea that time passes in unified equal segments. On the contrary, Bergson claims that there is internal and external time, which is a very strong motif in *The Sound and The Fury*.

As French psychologist Pierre Janet's patients demonstrated, time operates differently inside, and what is past may be as vivid as what is present. The mind is, to a significant degree, independent of the sequence of experience. Bergson drew a sharp distinction between a vision of time modeled on space and numbers (clocks or linear time) and inner time, which he called "duration" (*la durée*) and which was in a sense an absolute. Thus Bergson certainly contributed to the idea of the stream of consciousness (later coined by William James).

Faulkner experiments with the stream of consciousness and often implements Bergson's concept of *la durée*. This concept is a reaction on the scientific notion of cause and effect, which says that events take place progressively (subsequently) and that they can be divided into causes and effects. Seeing the world through this lens, we may perceive it as a net of causes and effects, which are scientifically discernable; they could be analyzed and we could find hints in them that would allow us to predict the future. Bergson has claimed that there is something in our perception of time that is in opposition to this notion. His major argument was that we cannot see and divide time into sequences of cause and effect mainly because

every moment has a certain coloring, impression, with some fragments of the past and some hints to the future. Should we accept this claim, it is no longer possible to divide time into individual parts because the perception is always interwoven with the past and the future, and thus no individual part of time could be separated without distorting or reducing it:

I asked Faulkner to explain his conception of time. 'There isn't any time' he replied, 'in fact I agree pretty much with Bergson's theory of the fluidity of time. There is only the present moment in which I include both the past and the future and that is eternity. In my opinion time can be shaved quite a bit by the artist, after all, man is never a time slave.'<sup>8</sup>

Throughout this paper, excerpts from interviews with Faulkner, such as the one above, will be used as little as possible. One reason for this is that Faulkner often contradicts himself, especially in questions concerning his metaphysics of time. The other reason for this is that Faulkner himself admitted in an interview for *The Paris Review* that his answers may change completely from one day to another (one of the reasons for this might be his "obsession with fluidity"<sup>9</sup> and "change"<sup>10</sup>). From Faulkner's response above, which one can find as the major argument to read Faulkner through the lens of Bergson's metaphysics of time, we learn that for Faulkner, there is no moment of unfolding; however, this is clearly not in accord but in conflict with Bergson's idea of fluidity of time. Bergson says that "time is the moment of duration in which presence is never simply present, but continually passing."<sup>11</sup> However, Faulkner put his characters in a sort of temporal prison where there is no "fluidity of time" and "change."

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<sup>8</sup> Douglass 119

<sup>9</sup> Douglass 120

<sup>10</sup> Douglass 120

<sup>11</sup> Alan Bourassa, *Deleuze and American Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillain 2009) 141

### 2.3. Sartre

Faulkner's characters are trapped in the present, which is rather an event already passed. The future is impossible; nothing new could happen in the story. Faulkner at the beginning knows what will happen and how the story will end. It is written with a sense of retrospection, as if everything has already happened.

As for Faulkner's concept of the present, it is not a circumscribed or sharply defined point between past and future. His present is irrational in its essence, it is an event, monstrous and incomprehensible, which comes upon us like a thief – comes upon us and disappears. Beyond this present, there is nothing, since the future doesn't exist. One present, emerging from the unknown, drives out another present. If this like a sum that we compute again and again: 'And... and... and then.'

That poses an interesting question about Quentin and his standpoint. Everything in his passage draws him nearer to his suicide; its inevitability is almost tangible throughout his entire section. It seems as if Quentin was telling his story from a standpoint of a dead person. There is no future, only the pain of the past.

Sartre says that:

Faulkner's characters are like that, only worse, for their past, which is in order, does not assume chronological order. It is, in actual fact, a matter of emotional constellations. Around a few central themes (Caddy's pregnancy, Benjy's castration, Quentin's suicide) gravitate innumerable silent masses. Hence the absurdity of the chronology of 'the assertive and contradictory assurance' of the clock. The order of the past is the order of the heard. It would be wrong to think that when the present is past it becomes our closest memory. Its metamorphosis can cause it to

sink to the bottom of our memory, just as it can leave it floating on the surface. Only its own density and the dramatic meaning of our life can determine at what level it will remain.<sup>12</sup>

This idea is almost directly quoted from Bergson's work *Time and Free Will*, in which he speaks about the linearity of time and says that every memory in our mind has a different coloring and different significance in our mind. Thus, our mind does not necessarily work in a chronological order.

This phenomenon causes a serious problem in Quentin's life. He finds himself disoriented in time. He cannot see the future, and he constantly mixes the past and the present.

The passing of time represents the major source of pain and a sense of loss for Quentin. John T. Matthews says that "the danger that so paralyzes Quentin is not that the past will overcome the present as Sartre and others have argued but that the present will extinguish the possibility of remembering the past."<sup>13</sup> Matthews has a point here as Quentin's father says: "You cannot bear in mind that someday it will no longer hurt you like this"<sup>14</sup> (speaking of the fact that Dalton Ames made his daughter Caddy pregnant and abandoned her). Matthews suggests that the reason why Quentin so much dreads the passing of time is that, in the end, his memory will fail him and he will forget about Caddy completely or that time will distort his memory of her and he will no longer be able to remember the time they spent together.

Paradoxically, Caddy's pregnancy does not stand for any prospect of the future to

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<sup>12</sup> Sartre 228

<sup>13</sup> John T. Matthews, *The Play of Faulkner's Language* (Boston: Cornell University Press 1982)

<sup>14</sup> Faulkner 175

the family but rather quite the opposite. Miss Quentin would normally signify the future of the family, but this future is estranged, alienated and taken away from the family. Caddy's pregnancy is a break in temporality, from that time on; there is no future that could change things, but rather consequences or as Sartre pointed out "events"<sup>15</sup>, as if there were no longer any future. For Benjy, there has never been a future (he lives and thinks in instantaneous present due to his mental condition) and for Quentin, it ceased to exist at the moment he breaks his watch. One thing we should be aware of is that the break in temporality does not mean the loss of temporality. In his essay *On the Sound and The Fury: Time in the Work of Faulkner* Sartre says:

Nothing happens; the story does not unfold; we discover it under each word, like an obscene and obstructing presence, more or less condensed, depending upon the particular case. It would be a mistake to regard these irregularities as gratuitous exercises in virtuosity. A fictional technique always relates back to the novelist's metaphysics. The critic's task is to define the latter before evaluating the former. Now, it is immediately obvious that Faulkner's metaphysics is a metaphysics of time. Man's misfortune lies in being time-bound.<sup>16</sup>

Moving and not moving. Time not moving, frozen time. Objective time (of the two hands of the clock) versus subjective time (as it passes in the lives of the characters). Quentin wakes up in his bed in a Harvard dormitory and his first thought is immediately directly toward time. He says: "I was back in time again, hearing the watch."<sup>17</sup> Quentin is back under the tyranny of time. He could only half forget about time while he was asleep, and immediately after he wakes up, the next

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<sup>15</sup> Sartre 226

<sup>16</sup> Sartre 226

<sup>17</sup> Faulkner 74

thought does not refer to the present or the future but to the past. His father told him: "I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it."<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, Quentin is unable to do so.

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<sup>18</sup> Faulkner 74



## 2.4. Proust

Time for Quentin, very much like for Proust, means separation from the past, but unlike Proust, who finds hope in a perfect reconstruction of the past, for Quentin, the past is only full of pain and the source of misery. Quentin remembers his father's words for once more: "because no battle is ever won, he said. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools."<sup>19</sup> By "turning it face down"<sup>20</sup> he thinks he can trick time, but immediately there is "the shadow of the sash," whose progress is another measurement of time. He turns away from the sash as well, but once he does so, he begins "to wonder what time it was."<sup>21</sup>

Sartre says that:

This, than, is the nature of Faulkner's time. How valid is it? This indefinable present, these invasions of the past, this affective order, opposed to the rational order which, though chronological, lacks reality. These memories, monstrous and recurring, these fluctuations of the heart – don't you recognize in them Marcel Proust's lost and recaptured time?

Sartre, as well as other authors, sees the difference between Proust's perception of time and Faulkner's. In Faulkner's perception of time, all the characters are doomed since there is no future. He limits himself to the past and the present. A comparative study of the treatment of time of Proust and Faulkner is in the penultimate chapter of this work.

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<sup>19</sup> Faulkner 74

<sup>20</sup> Faulkner 75

<sup>21</sup> Faulkner 75

### 3. The Notion of the Space, Lost Cause and the Antebellum Period

[Southerners] need to talk, to tell, since oratory is our heritage. We seem to try in the simple furious breathing (or writing) span of the individual to draw a savage indictment of the contemporary scene or to escape from it into a makebelievable region of swords and magnolias and mockingbirds which perhaps never existed anywhere.

- William Faulkner, An Introduction  
To *'The Sound and the Fury'*

In his novel, Faulkner speaks about a generation of people who carry in them the experience of the spatio-temporal "what if." It is not only the feeling but also the memory of the time when the war was not yet lost. Those people carry in themselves a haunting memory of a different time and place. This feature is not exclusive for the Southerners, rather its message is universal and could be applied to the whole history of human kind as well as to seemingly minor and mundane events in the lives of every individual. For this paper, the following passage is relevant as an element of contra-factuality and the Lost Cause that comes into question:

For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it's still not yet two o'clock on that July afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the rail fence, the guns are laid and ready in the woods and the furled flags are already loosened to break out and Pickett himself with his long oiled ringlets and his hat in one hand probably and his sword in the other looking up the hill waiting for Longstreet to give the word and it's all in the balance, it hasn't happened yet, it hasn't even begun yet, it not only hasn't begun yet but there is still time for it not to begin against that position and those circumstances which made more men than Garnett and

Kemper and Armstead and Wilcox look grave yet it's going to begin, we all know that, we have come too far with too much at stake and that moment doesn't need even a fourteen-year-old boy to think This time. Maybe this time with all this much to lose and all this much to gain: Pennsylvania, Maryland, the world, the golden dome of Washington itself to crown with desperate and unbelievable victory the desperate gamble, the cast made two years ago...."

The Lost Cause, an antebellum South movement glorifying the traditional South, seeks to restore its glory and its noble values. It portrays the Southerners as the protagonists of the old chivalry. After the Civil War, the South was not only destroyed economically, but first of all, psychologically. Due to their longstanding military tradition and experience, the Southerners thought that they were invincible in that conflict, which was not the case. Faulkner is not a protagonist of this movement but in the quotation above from *Intruder in the Dust*, he very poignantly portrays the Southern experience and, more importantly, the antebellum atmosphere in the decimated South. We will be interested in the way this event influences the temporality of the novel. For the Southerners, the South before 1863 is just like the Grecian urn in Keats's poem; it is a moment that is frozen in time, portraying its glory and pride. From that year on, time becomes every Southerner's enemy because the ticking of the clock separates them from this glorious period. To some, this separation appears to be hopeless, and this will be clearly demonstrated on all Faulkner's characters later in the text.

#### 4. The Field of Vision in *The Sound and the Fury*

Faulkner always uses the setting of the American South, but the setting is always fictional. In *The Sound and the Fury*, we are evidently exposed to the consequences to the economic changes of the American South, but we are never given any historical background that has caused such changes. In the novel, we are always limited to the scope of perception and the field of vision of the three Compson brothers (and finally that of Dilsey Gibson, the servant family matriarch).

Benjy's spatialization of loss succeeds in his strictly sensual realm; he needs objects to see and to fondle, objects that above all must be *there*. Dilsey's grandson Luster can always torment him by duplicating the process of dispossession.

I tried to pick up the flowers. Luster picked them up, and they went away. I began to cry.

"Beller." Luster said. "Beller. You want something to beller about. All right, then. Caddy." he whispered. "Caddy. Beller now. Caddy."

"Luster." Dilsey said from the kitchen.

The flowers came back.

"Hush." Luster said. "Here they is. Look. It's fixed back just like it was at first. Hush, now."<sup>22</sup>

Benjamin does not even have the capacity to imagine that things are behind the wall, hidden in a person's palm, or temporarily not there. For him, things and people are either there or they cease to exist. He feels the absences and

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<sup>22</sup> William Faulkner, *The Sound and The Fury: Corrected Text* (New York: Vintage Book 1990) 55

understands that things go wrong. When Caddy is no longer there, for Benjy, it is eternal and he has no notion that the state may change in time; he is always moaning until things get “fixed.”<sup>23</sup>

Benjy lives in the eternal present and since there is a void that the absence of Caddy created, he desperately tries to fill this void, perhaps by assaulting one of the Burgess girls passing around the fence. For Benjy, objects that become the relics of Caddy often fill this void. Once Caddy is no longer with the family, it is either the smell of trees, or objects, such as the jimson weed in the bottle, that he substitutes for her presence.

Other Compson brothers also provide only a certain field of vision, and they all seem to have a troublesome relation to time. While Benjamin’s chapter covers a vast period of time, Quentin’s narration only takes place in a day: more precisely, on the day of his suicide. Faulkner’s book does not take place in actions. It rather takes place in discourses. Having said that, we come to one of the most complicated aspects of the novel: we only see what is going on through the lens of the three brothers and can never be sure what is taking place and what is only a product of the characters’ imagination. It is not surprising that the most complicated passage, in this respect, is the one of Quentin. The view that Quentin provides us with is overburdened by his disorientation in time and his constant inability to distinguish between the present and the past.

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<sup>23</sup> Faulkner 53

His disorientation in time might be caused by the fact that he was too soon deprived of his mother, who was mentally ill. Since he cannot see his mother as a source of plenitude, he attempts to see it in his sister Caddy, but only until the point when she loses her purity and becomes pregnant by Dalton Ames.

Again, the field of vision is extremely limited; and again, we are dealing with an unreliable narrator and it is not a priori certain which events take place in Quentin's life and which events take place in his mind, such as the discussions with his father.

Sartre suggests that Quentin is a relic from the past. In a way, much like Benjamin, who is a caricature to the Southerner's eldest son, (intelligent, wise, strong and confident enough to take over the whole family) Quentin might seem as a failed Southern authority mainly because of his troublesome relation to time, which I attempt to discuss into more detail in the following chapters.

After Quentin's and his father's death, Jason, the youngest brother, lives in the house with his Benjamin, their mentally sick mother, and his adolescent niece, Miss Quentin. We only see his world through the lens of Jason's greed and frustration and from the temporal perspective; there is little we could possibly analyze. What is interesting about Jason is the broken continuity. Although he becomes the head of the family, he is another failed authority. While his ancestors were Civil War generals and governors of Mississippi, he is a regular worker in a farm shop. Unlike

his brother Quentin, he is not tormented by the past because all he cares about is the present and how to gain more money.

The atmosphere in the novel is the one of mourning, and the decline of the South is expressed by the desolate state in which things and people are:

Roskus said. "You got to do this milking. I cant use my right hand no more."

T.P. came and milked.

"Whyn't you get the doctor." T.P. said.

"Doctor cant do no good."Roskus said. "Not on this place."

"What wrong with this place." T.P. said.

"Taint no luck on this place."<sup>24</sup>

Roskus, Dilley's husband, constantly refers to the fact that the place itself is unlucky and sees no hope, as if time ceased to move in these lands. However, his constant stress of and reference to the place rather speaks of the time and appears in regular intervals. The above-mentioned quotation appears repeatedly in the novel in numerous sections of the text but the reference is always different. On page 47 is it uttered for the first time; later in the text, on page 49, it refers to the fact that Benjamin's name was changed because he did not reflect the pride of the family and later, Roskus comments on the fact that Caddy's name can no longer be mentioned in the house.

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<sup>24</sup> Faulkner 29





## 5. The Role of Caddy in Time and Space

From the temporal and spatial perspective, Caddy is the character that stands in the center of *The Sound and The Fury*, and it is her positioning and her role in the novel that makes her a central point around which/whom everything oscillates. In the interview for *The Paris Review*, Faulkner himself says:

It began with a mental picture. I didn't realize at the time it was symbolical. The picture was of the muddy seat of a little girl's drawers in a pear tree, where she could see through a window where her grandmother's funeral was taking place and report what was happening to her brothers on the ground below. By the time I explained who they were and what they were doing and how her pants got muddy, I realized it would be impossible to get all of it into a short story and that it would have to be a book. And then I realized the symbolism of the soiled pants, and that image was replaced by the one of the fatherless and motherless girl climbing down the drainpipe to escape from the only home she had, where she had never been offered love or affection or understanding.<sup>25</sup>

Consciously or not, Faulkner seems to have created an emblematic scene in which all levels of temporality become one. What Caddy sees is a funeral, death, and the end of a generation. By seeing something she was not supposed to see as a child, she trespasses into the world of adults, and while she watches her grandmother's funeral, her brothers see her muddy underwear, which is in contrast to what she sees – an erotic scene. In this scene, we have a contrast of death and birth, or

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<sup>25</sup> William Faulkner, *The Art of Fiction* No. 12, interviewed by Jean Stein, 1956

fertility. It is the end of one generation, and possibly the death of the noble South and its values: Caddy's "muddy drawers" represent a symbolic loss of virginity, her childhood, her innocence, and it could be read as an insinuation of her later promiscuity, so as a reference to the future. In this respect, the tree scene is a novelty where the past and present meet. It is also a scene that will haunt Quentin for the rest of his life.

My argument is that by inciting his memories of Caddy from childhood to invade the present, Quentin temporarily fights off this world meaninglessness. Caddy is Quentin's decreed center of inheritance or natural significance, the base of stability, the core of original identity. Quentin's memory seeks to retain this center (or to re-appropriate its presence). The underlying irony – and it is paradigmatic of Quentin's dilemma – is that Caddy could never have been an original source of significance of plentitude. For Quentin, the center of stability would normally be the mother, but she fails to be. Quentin laments this fact in the novel: "*if I'd just had a mother so I could say Mother Mother*"<sup>26</sup> Since their mother is a chronically ill hypochondriac and is unable to take care of her children, she passes this role to Caddy, and as a matter of fact, Caddy becomes the center of stability, the source of identity and the standpoint of temporality for Quentin and for his troubled mind: He is constantly attempting to reconstruct the center, tormented by the clock, the fear of it, his preoccupation with maturity and incest and his desire to reconstruct the past (which will be discussed later in this paper).

Discussion of *The Sound and the Fury* has well established that Benjy primitively stabilizes his world by hoarding relics of Caddy after she leaves. Olga Vickery refers

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<sup>26</sup> Faulkner 93

to the process of “mechanical identification” that designates the slipper, the spot where the narrow one hung, the smell of trees, the jimson weed in the bottle, and so on as things whose presence partially fills the void left by Caddy.<sup>27</sup>

Lacan speaks about the question of representation and its limits. He speaks about the core of the novel and identifies it as the void. The novel’s central concern is “the abyss of meaning.” It explores the void, the hidden yet determining absence that gives order and structure to the lives of characters. Caddy is the meaning of Quentin’s life. All his memories are related to his childhood and to her.

In terms of the text of the novel, Caddy might be seen through the structure of the book as an element: that is, interwoven into the novel to such an extent that she holds the novel together, even in terms of temporality, as both Benjamin and Quentin describe all their experiences and thoughts in relation to Caddy. Having said that, it is paradoxical that we can never hear Caddy directly; she was not given a narrative voice and she is only created as a construct through the process of narration in our minds. The way we meet Caddy is always mediated, never direct, and in this respect, the space for Caddy is vacant. In his essay *Faulkner’s Text Which Is Not One*, Dawn Trouard says:

To view Caddy as a unified, single figure, as the criticism has done, distorts, even erases, in practice and spirit, possibilities for understanding Caddy and the complexities of female experience. Each of *The Sound and the Fury*’s varied representations of Caddy’s departures, disappearances, or removals from the Compson household has led readers to improvise a coherent and unfired Caddy that coherently explains Benjy’s bellowing, Jason’s rage, Quentin’s suicide and the bleakness of the final section.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Olga W. Vickery, *The Novels of William Faulkner* (Louisiana: Baton Haven 1995) 34

<sup>28</sup> Noel Polk, ed., Dawn Trouard, *New Essays of Faulkner’s The Sound and The Fury*, ‘Faulkner’s Text Which Is Not One,’ (USA: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 24

This is one of the paradoxes of the novel. The character of Caddy provides a reflected analysis. Although her character is mediated in the novel and distorted by three different narrations, it is actually through Caddy that we learn about her brothers. In a way, Caddy has never been one (in the sense of a single unified character), “existing in fluid subversion, flowing between and around and even against the accounts of her that attempt to contain and unify her, the contradictory Caddy resist finality, closure, and coherence.”<sup>29</sup>

A question that may be more acute than the unity and distortion of Caddy is to what extent can we consider Caddy to be a real and fully fledged character of the novel, and to what extent is she rather an instrument, a tool, a structural element that has inspired Faulkner to write the novel but the role of which is rather to hold the novel together and to form what we may call the center of it. In this way, Caddy functions as a temporal and spatial element that holds the temporality of the novel together.

Faulkner as the owner and proprietor set the boundaries of his familiar ‘somewhere’ but I would like to explore its ‘elsewhere,’ the it-of-bounds, where the branch that sweeps Caddy away really begins.<sup>30</sup>

What Dawn Trouard says about Caddy is very similar to Lacanian concept of the Real. Slavoj Žižek speaks in *The Puppet Theatre* about Lacanian Real. We should bear in mind that Lacan regarded Real as another center, not “deeper and truer.” He says that:

[It is] not a deeper center around which symbolic formations fluctuate; rather, it is the obstacle on account of which every Center is always

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<sup>29</sup> Polk 27

<sup>30</sup> Polk 28

displaced missed. Or, with regard to the topic of the Thing-in-itself: the Real is not the abyss of the Thing that forever eludes our grasp, and on account of which every symbolization of the Real is partial and inappropriate; it is, rather, that invisible obstacle, that distorting screen, which always 'falsifies' our access to external reality, that 'bone in the throat' which gives a pathological twist to every symbolization, that is to say, on account of which every symbolization misses its object.<sup>31</sup>

In literature, the Lacanian concept of the Real (in the sense of "the terrifying primordial abyss that swallows everything, dissolving all identities") is manifested in several novels. Most notably, we can see it in Melville's *Moby Dick*, but also in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In Melville's novel it is manifested when Pip falls into the depths of the ocean and experiences an encounter with a hideous God:

Carried down alive to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the unwrapped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes . . . Pip saw the multitudinous, God-omnipresent, coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters heaved the colossal orbs. He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke to it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad.<sup>32</sup>

This veil that could be found in texts by Lacan, Melville, Conrad and others, is in a way similar to what we can see in *The Sound and the Fury*. We always see Caddy behind a kind of a veil; there is always something obstructing our view. We have already spoken about the absence of her narrative voice. Having said that, Caddy appears to be very little of a character; she rather serves Faulkner as a structural element, or rather a tool, up until the moment of her pregnancy. She becomes a standpoint in Quentin's life and his sense of time, and the longer Caddy is away from

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<sup>31</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (USA: The MIT Press 2003) 83

<sup>32</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (New York: Signet 1961) 396-7

his life, the worse he feels because the more his past is lost and thus the closer he is to his suicide.

## 6. Virginitv

Virginitv in general is one of the major themes in the novel, not only for Caddy but more importantly for Quentin, who appears to be most tormented by it. Throughout the book, Quentin seems to be mixing the loss of virginitv with death. He refers to this in numerous passages. We could illustrate it on the following passage:

“yes I hate him I would die for him Ive already died for him I die for him over and over again everytime this goes

when I lifted my hand I could still feel crisscrossed twigs and grass burning into the palm

poor Quentin

she leaned back on her arms her hands locked about her knees

youve never done that have you

what done what

that what I have what I did

yes yes lots of times with lots of girls

then I was crying her hand touched me again and I was crying against her damp blouse then she lying on her back looking past my head into the sky I could see a rim of white under her irises I opened my knife do you remember the day

damuddy died when you sat down in the water in your drawers

yes

I held the point of the knife at her throat

it wont take but a second just a second then I can do mine I can do mine then

all right can you do yours by yourself

yes the blades long enough Benjys in bed by now

yes

it wont take but a second Ill try[...]"<sup>33</sup>

This intimate moment that occurs between Caddy and Quentin is very sexual (Quentin touching Caddy's breasts, Caddy talking about the sexual intercourse she had), but it also has an aspect of a mixture of sexuality and death. The knife Quentin is pointing towards Caddy is a phallic object, and the scene itself is erotic though Caddy's life is at stake. Quentin lies that he has already lost his virginity so as to appear more mature in front of Caddy, but the loss of virginity is something he fears the most. For Quentin suffers from a sense of nostalgia for the past, for childhood innocence, and this nostalgia makes his unable to make any progress in his life. It is a point where the temporality for Caddy and Quentin are distinctly different. While Caddy accepts the process of passing of time and does not refuse to mature and live in the world of experience, Quentin is not able to do so. In Freudian terms, it may be the "secondary narcissism." There are many authors and critics who attempted to

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<sup>33</sup> Faulkner 127



interpret and see Quentin only in the frame of Freudian theory. The first person to suggest that was Carvel Collins in his essay *The Interior Monologues of The Sound and the Fury*. The essay describes the way “Faulkner built his novel around Freud’s tri-partite structure of the personality; in this structure, Benjy is roughly equivalent to the id, Quentin to the ego, and Jason the superego.” Faulkner’s novels were subject to psychoanalytic reading, most notably the essay by John T. Irwin in 1975 *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner* centers. In this essay, Irwin studies Faulkner’s use of incest and compares it to the Oedipus complex.

However, to analyze and interpret the behavior of a character as complex as Quentin in those terms appears to be far too simplistic and narrow, but it could still help us to understand the novel in some respects: “did you love them Caddy did you love them When they touched me I died,” said Caddy, and this moment in her life and this latter recognition is a major temporal twist in the whole novel for everybody. By having sexual intercourse with Dalton Ames, she first of all loses her purity, her innocence and her childhood. For Quentin, this act represents a loss of reputation of the family for which he feels responsible, but he also loses a person who was a substitute for his mother. Quentin, much like all the brothers, already has a vision of Caddy as a respectable Southern Belle; they already have a vision of her and expect her to live up to their expectations. In personal terms, it creates an insurmountable gap between Quentin and his sister. His incestuous thoughts find no ground, and the only way to be reunited with his sister, in the way he was in his childhood, is to commit a suicide. Faulkner often mixes sexuality and death (remember the tree scene when Caddy is secretly watching a funeral of her

grandmother and the brothers can see her muddy drawers). When she says: "When they touched me I died," it sounds ambiguous. Caddy was dying of pleasure, but she also died as a member of the family, and it was immediately clear to her that she would have to leave the family to spare it the shame.

Especially in the questions of Quentin's virginity, it is not a priori certain if the conversation are taking place or if they are again only products of Quentin's phantasy. The following passage represents another association of the loss of virginity and death:

In the South you are ashamed of being a virgin. Boys. Men. They lie about it. Because it means less to women, Father said. He said it was men invented virginity not women. Father said it's like death: only a state in which the others are left and I said, But to believe it doesn't matter and he said, That's what's so sad about anything: not only virginity and I said, Why couldn't it have been me and not her who is unvirgin and he said, That's why that's sad too; nothing is even worth the changing of it.<sup>34</sup>

When Shreve utters "dirty sluts," Quentin is immediately reminded of his sister. Therefore, he reacts so aggressively to his words and asks him: "Did you ever have a sister? Did you? Did you?" Most probably, the above-mentioned dialogue is not a conversation between a cynical father and his son, but rather an internal dialogue that Quentin leads in himself as a sort of

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<sup>34</sup> Faulkner 76

justification for his being a virgin. In addition to that, it is always Quentin, never Mr. Compson, who makes such associations. Quentin sees social differences between women and men (the perception of virginity) and understands that while virginity is appreciated in women, men are mocked for it. He wanted the situation to be the opposite; that Caddy should be a virgin, not him. But of course this thought brings him only misery and anger.

Quentin appears to suffer from his obsessive mind, if the term itself is not contracting itself. Michael Cotsell says that:

Quentin's obsessive memories of Caddy are the major theme of his narrative ('obsessive memory' is very nearly a contradictory term, for the object of obsession is not in the past but in version of the second present).<sup>35</sup>

This "second present" that he constantly searches for and at times relives, for instance, when he meets the little Italian girl and takes her for Caddy: "The little girl watched me, holding the bread against her dirty dress."<sup>36</sup> Remember that Caddy is repeatedly described as dirty, with her muddy drawers, muddy near to the river and other references. Further in the text, the confusion and the dual temporality is even more evident:

"Which way do you live?" I said.

A buggy, the one with the white horse it was. Only Doc Peabody is fat. Three hundred pounds. You ride with him on the uphill side, holding on. Children. Walking easier than holding uphill. *Seen the doctor yet have you seen Caddy*

*I don't have to I cant ask now afterward it will be all right it wont matter*

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<sup>35</sup> Cotsell

<sup>36</sup> Faulkner 127

Because women so delicate so mysterious Father said. Delicate equilibrium of periodical filth between two moons balanced. Moons he said full and yellow as harvest moons her hips thighs. Outside outside of them always but. Yellow. Feet soles with walking like. Then know that some man that all those mysterious and imperious concealed. With all that inside of them shapes an outward suavity waiting for a touch to. Liquid putrefaction like drowned things floating like pale rubber flabbily filled getting the odor of honeysuckle all mixed up.

Quentin is trying to find the home of the little (Italian) girl, but on the way he constantly experiences flashbacks, such as one of Doc Peabody, Caddy's doctor, who told her she would not see a doctor about her pregnancy until after the wedding. He runs into further linguistic-temporal confusions, the search for seeing somebody is mixed with the check-up of Caddy: "*Seen the doctor yet have you seen Caddy.*" It is not clear if Quentin is asking Caddy whether she was at the doctor or if he is now looking for Caddy. The answer from Caddy in Quentin's mind is elusive, and she says she will see the doctor "*afterward,*" meaning after the wedding.

After that comes another seemingly a-temporal monologue from the Father and again, it is not clear if it is him speaking or if it is another illusion in Quentin's mind. What we get is a poetic explanation that nobody can tell if Caddy is pregnant, that only time will tell. Unless she sees a doctor, only "*The delicate equilibrium of periodical filth between two moons*" could show that she is not pregnant. Those discussions with Quentin's father (imagined or not) always stay aside from the temporal line of the novel and are explanative of the situation from the position of an authority.

The concept of Virginité could be discussed not only in relation to Caddy and Quentin, but also to Benjamin. Faulkner decided to use the first person narrative,

which is extremely difficult, given that he has to enter the mind of a mute idiot, Benjamin. He is thus facing the problem of language. Benjy cannot speak, but the section is written in an interior monologue, which cannot be spoken but could possibly be thought. In Benjy's world, there are occurrences that he is able to interpret and occurrences that he cannot. Those passages, or dialogues between the other members that Benjy recognizes, are either perfectly memorized in his brain, or mixed with Benjy's consciousness by Faulkner, to help us follow the chronology of events in the novel. In that respect, we could say that Benjamin's part of his interior dialogue is not spoken but only experienced, and Faulkner is thus nothing but a translator of this experience. Having said that, we may say that the events that occurred in the novel are broken and simplified so as they would fit into Benjy's world and then subsequently put together, although not by the character but by the reader. Benjy's ability to perceive dialogues makes it possible for him to travel in various time zones. In her essay *A Rhetoric for Benjy* Cecil L. Moffitt says that:

The tense of Benjy's verbs is another indication of his mental limitations. All of the verb forms he is represented as using are in the past tense: either the simple past (they took; they went; we stopped), the past progressive (they were coming; Luster was hunting), or a combination of the auxiliary could followed by an infinitive (I could see them hitting). The auxiliary could, however, is not often used by Benjy in its proper meaning of to be able to, but instead in a loose sense to form with its infinitive an assertive force roughly equivalent to that of the simple past. Benjy's consciousness of the present is continually being

invaded by his memories of the past, but he has no inklings of a future.

He cannot predict or prophesy. He cannot anticipate.<sup>37</sup>

It was already said that the lack of the future is an aspect common to all three Compson brothers, but this aspect operates differently for each of them. Some critics suggest that Benjy is a Christ figure. They think so because of his age (33), which happens to be Christ's age when he was crucified. Furthermore, he was born on the Holy Saturday, which is a day regarded by Christians as associated with death but also with renewal (the resurrection). Faulkner makes many insinuations and parallels between Jesus Christ and Benjamin. My argument here is that although Benjamin is a virgin and innocent figure, he is not a personification of Christ but rather a character who is a virgin to time. For Benjamin, the lapse of time has no importance, he is much more living in the world of seeing it here and now and not seeing it here and now. For him, time does not separate, he only sees the world through the egocentric prism of gain and loss, Caddy is here, Caddy is not here.

Even the symbolic temporality is disrupted in the novel. Benjamin was the firstborn son, who was supposed to be the pride of the family, but once it turned out that he was both retarded and mute, they renamed him to Benjamin, which in Jacob's section of the Bible means the last born, or the youngest.

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<sup>37</sup> Cecil, L. Moffitt. "A Rhetoric for Benjy." *The Southern Literary Journal* 3.1 (1970): 32+. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 28 Feb. 2015.

## 7. Malfunctioning Clock, Quentin and Dilsey

Dilsey, an African-American servant, narrates the fourth part of the novel. She is the only person with a sense of reality and stability, who oddly enough could stand for all the values that the Compson family has lost. Paradoxically, it is not Mrs. Compson but Dilsey who is in charge of the kitchen and of the whole family. It is always Dilsey, never the mother, who constantly works in the kitchen and prepares food for the family (an image which speaks for itself) and thus keeps the family going. It is she and Luster who take care of Benjamin when Caddy is gone and Quentin dead. Dilsey is the witness to the downfall in the Compson family while she manages her own household and takes care of her own children at the same time.

Regardless of the difficulties, she is always there to console the children, for instance, when Damuddy dies, she tells the children that they will learn about what happened “in the Lawd’s own time.”<sup>38</sup> It appears to be a sensitive answer to the children’s questions as to why should they be quiet, but Faulkner might have been inspired by Hawthorne’s novel *The Scarlet Letter*, in which he uses a similar phrase:

Women, more especially,—in the continually recurring trials of wounded, wasted, wronged, misplaced, or erring and sinful passion,—or with the dreary burden of a heart unyielded, because unvalued and unsought,—came to Hester’s cottage, demanding why they were so wretched, and what the remedy! Hester comforted and counselled them, as best she might. She assured them, too, of her firm belief, that, at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven’s own time, a new truth

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<sup>38</sup> Faulkner 23

would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness.<sup>39</sup>

It may seem slightly farfetched, but the link between the two passages is related to time and it signals that both characters look forward to the future. This is something very poignant and characteristic for Dilsey, who is the only character in the novel who represents hope and some prospect of the future, which is actually the case, since she is the one who is in the family from the very first until the concluding chapter, which is narrated by herself. Paradoxically, it is not Quentin who is in charge of the family but Dilsey, an aging African-American who is the only hope for the values for the old South to survive in its original form.

There is one moment in the novel that we could consider to be emblematic and interesting to note:

On the wall above a cupboard, invisible save at night, by lamp light and even then evincing an enigmatic profundity because it had but one hand, a cabinet clock ticked, then with a preliminary sound as if it had cleared its throat, struck five times.

“Eight oclock,” Dilsey said. <sup>40</sup>

While Dilsey is working in the kitchen, a place with which she is so familiar and where she spends so much time, there is a clock with only one hand that does not indicate the correct time. We learn that although the clock strikes five, Dilsey knows it is eight. This passage about the clock appears to be the first reference to Quentin in the fourth part of the novel.

Let us compare this passage with another emblematic part of the novel:

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<sup>39</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (New York: Classic Book International 2009) 512

<sup>40</sup> Faulkner 102



When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight o'clock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch. <sup>41</sup>

...

I went to the dresser and took up the watch, with the face still down. I tapped the crystal on the corner of the dresser and caught the fragments of glass in my hand and put them into the ashtray and wrenched the hands off and put them in the tray. The watch ticked on. I turned the face up, the blank dial with little wheels clicking and clicking behind it, not knowing any better.

While in the previous passage of the text that takes place in the kitchen, we learn from Dilsey that it is 8 o'clock in the evening, in the opening passage of Quentin's part of the novel, we learn that in his chamber, it is approximately 8 o'clock in the morning. While for Dilsey it is just another ordinary evening of 8 o'clock, for Quentin, it is the last 8 o'clock of his life. Both Dilsey and Quentin have a malfunctioning instrument for the measurement of time, but while Dilsey is able to live with it:

Dilsey went out. She closed the door and returned to the kitchen. The stove was almost cold. While she stood there the clock above the cupboard struck ten times. "One o'clock," she said aloud. <sup>42</sup>

Quentin is not. When he destroys his watch, he hurts his hand, but the watch does not stop ticking – as Sartre and many others suggest, it is a symbol of his vain battle with time. When Quentin cuts himself trying to destroy the watch he loses some

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<sup>41</sup> Faulkner 74

<sup>42</sup> Faulkner 299

kind of virginity with time and the blood symbolizes it. It is a very eloquent moment because it represents a dead end for Quentin.

Quentin part starts on 2 June 1910, a day when he commits or prepares to commit suicide. It has already been said that the narration of the Compson sons is always retrospective, and so is Quentin's. Sartre says that "the present does not exist, it becomes was." There is no anticipation of the future. Even when Quentin fights Bland, he confuses this scene with the imaginary battle between him and Dalton Ames.

"Say," he said. "What did you hit him for? What was it he said?"

"I don't know. I don't know why I did."

"The first I knew was when you jumped up all of a sudden and said, 'did you ever have a sister? Did you?' and when he said No, you hit him. I noticed you kept on looking at him, but you didn't seem to be paying any attention to what anybody was saying until you jumped up and asked him if he had any sisters."

## 8. Time and Change

Faulkner creates characters in his book that resist the flux, the change, and they refuse to accept the reality (Quentin attempting to convince his father that he has committed incest with Caddy). Douglass argues that this resistance or rejection is also a rejection of self, “that Faulkner, like Bergson, relates freedom directly to self-knowledge and self-acceptance.”<sup>43</sup> Bergson writes:

Although we are free when we are willing to get back into ourselves, it seldom happens that we are willing. Rather than admit self’s bubbling, unpredictable stream into consciousness, we repress it, and the tool of that repression is the spatializing intellect.<sup>44</sup>

What Bergson says is in part responsible for the crisis of Quentin’s identity and his subsequent suicide. His crisis of identity: “I was I was not who was not was not who.”<sup>45</sup> And since Quentin lives “divided against [himself], many of Faulkner’s characters are vulnerable to disorders of consciousness – that is to say, of remembering.” One element that is very prominent and common to the three Compson brothers is their orientation in time. The brothers provide three different perceptions of temporality, three different orientations in time and three different views of the world. Similarly to Benjamin’s section, we may notice many breaks and disruptions in Quentin’s passage.

Shirley Parker Callen says that, “Both Faulkner and Bergson consider change the

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<sup>43</sup> Douglass 142

<sup>44</sup> Bergson 240

<sup>45</sup> Faulkner 168

universal principle of reality, and life itself as a ceaseless flow of reality.”<sup>46</sup> This appears to be the major problem for Quentin, who fails to accept change and attempts to find a point of stasis, a moment when time stopped:

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,  
Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,

Keats's poem *Ode on the Grecian Urn* is a good example of such stasis as the picture on the urn captures a frozen moment in time. Art makes an attempt to capture time in motion. Faulkner himself is preoccupied with this idea and asks if a “novel is ever finished” or is it just “abandoned”? He point out that time is a continuous flow of experience while art attempts to capture this flow in a sort of stasis and thus distorts the original image, he says that “the aim of every artist is to arrest motion.”

Quentin says:

I would lie in bed thinking when will it stop when will it stop. The draft in the door smelled of water, a damp steady breath. Sometimes I could put myself to sleep saying that over and over until after the honeysuckle got all mixed up in the whole thing came to symbolize night and unrest I seemed to be lying neither asleep nor awake looking down a long corridor of grey halflight where all stable things had become shadowy paradoxical all I had done shadows all I have felt suffered taking visible form antic and perverse mocking without relevance inherent themselves with the denial of the significance they should have affirmed thinking I was I was not who was not was not who.<sup>47</sup>

For Quentin, the attempt to “arrest motion” is not productive, quite the opposite. “It,” possibly the “draft in the door [that] smelled of water” is another

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<sup>46</sup> Shirley Parker Callen, *Bergsonian Dynamism in the Writings of William Faulkner* (USA: University Microfilms 1967) 67

<sup>47</sup> Faulkner 168

symbol of time passing and the approaching of the moment of his death. It brings Quentin closer to the moment when he commits suicide in the Charles River. Such moments are frequent in the novel. Quentin is repeatedly aware of the river, for example, when he says: "I could smell the curves of the river beyond the dusk." Water is symbolical, especially the flow of the river contrasted with the flow of time that could not be stopped.

Another aspect that is of interest is to what point in history "it" refers. It could possibly refer to the "draft" but also to his confusion after Caddy failed to live up to his and his family's expectations. It may refer to Quentin's confusion over sexuality, maturity, the family crisis and other traumatic events that befall the Compson family. In fact, a shadow that progresses on the curtain in Harvard is the first indication of time for Quentin.

He is disoriented in time, and instead of any sense of time, he can only feel the shadows, sleep and half sleep. He seems to be living on the verge of the day and night. From the extract, we can see that there is a gradual crisis of Quentin's identity: "I was I was not who was not was not who." The confusion over his maturity, virginity and sexuality leads to the confusion of his entire personality.

## 8.1. Temporal Doubling

Temporal Doubling is thoroughly analyzed in several essays, most notably in John T. Irving's *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge*. But very few essays study the way temporal doubling operates in the novel. The character who is most troubled by the temporal doubling is Quentin. It causes many problems for him throughout the novel. Most notably, when Quentin fights Bland, and Gerald tells him:

The first I knew was when you jumped up all of a sudden and said, 'Did you ever have a sister? did you?' and when he said No, you hit him. I noticed you kept on looking at him, but you didn't seem to be paying any attention to what anybody was saying until you jumped up and asked him if he had any sisters.<sup>48</sup>

Quentin actually thinks he is fighting Dalton Ames. But it is an imaginary fight that failed to happen when Quentin confronted Ames and when Ames offended him:

Did you ever have a sister did you  
no but they're all bitches<sup>49</sup>

Quentin's father tells him at some point that "time is dead as long as it is being clocked off by little wheels, only when the clock stops does time come to life."<sup>50</sup> Ever since the moment Quentin breaks his watch, he loses sense of the present and the past and the two levels of temporality start to intersect.

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<sup>48</sup> Faulkner 158

<sup>49</sup> Faulkner 164

<sup>50</sup> Faulkner 83

For example, when Quentin sees in the little Italian girl his sister Caddy (her younger version) and takes care of her during the day (later confronting her brother Julio, who has no understanding for such behavior).

## 9. Proust and Faulkner and Their Treatment of Time

One of the elements that distinguish Faulkner and Proust is the method of exposition. In *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Proust describes, in the well-known passage, his experience of tasting madeleine cake. What we get throughout Proust's text is always first the cause that has evoked his memory before he moves on to speak about the actual memory. Before he actually starts speaking about his childhood home at Combray, for example, we learn step by step what precisely reminded him of the place. Apart from the association of madeleine and Combray, we see other examples as well:

Madeleine – Combray  
Steeple – young girls  
Cobble stones – Venice

But what kind of vision of Combray does Proust provide us with? Is the passage in which Proust speaks about Combray a faithful image of the place? Interpreted through the system of signs, Deleuze sees Proust's sensuous qualities (madeleine, cobble stones, steeples) as "material signs."<sup>51</sup> Those "material signs" trigger the narrator's involuntary memory. In this respect, the narrator is always first preoccupied with some sort of "material sign" that prompts him to delve into his memory.

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<sup>51</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* (London: Continuum 2008) 64



For example, Proust wants to explain his sudden thought of Combray, which he thought was forever lost in his memory, but then he discovered that it could be retrieved under certain circumstances:

Many years had elapsed during which nothing of Combray, save what was comprised in the theatre and the drama of my going to bed there, had any existence for me, when one day in winter, as I came home, my mother, seeing that I was cold, offered me some tea, a thing I did not ordinarily take. I declined at first, and then, for no particular reason, changed my mind. She sent out for one of those short, plump little cakes called 'petites madeleines,' which look as though they had been moulded in the fluted scallop of a pilgrim's shell. And soon, mechanically, weary after a dull day with the prospect of a depressing morrow, I raised to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had soaked a morsel of the cake. No sooner had the warm liquid, and the crumbs with it, touched my palate than a shudder ran through my whole body, and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary changes that were taking place.<sup>52</sup>

Sartre says that for Proust: "salvation lies in time itself, in the total recovery of the past."<sup>53</sup> This would never work for Faulkner's character. The Father says to Quentin that "time is your misfortune..."<sup>54</sup> For Faulkner, in fact [the past] "is not even past."<sup>55</sup> Rather, "It is always there, almost as an obsession."<sup>56</sup>

In Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury*, the author uses a similar method and what makes things more complex is the fact that we need to distinguish among the Compson brothers. For instance, for Benjamin, the association is always evoked either on the semantic level (by motivated signs, for example, when he hears the golfers shouting for a caddy, he is reminded of his sister Caddy) or on the empirical level (the smell of trees also remind him of her).

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<sup>52</sup> Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* (New York: Random House 1992) 48

<sup>53</sup> Sartre 229

<sup>54</sup> Faulkner 104

<sup>55</sup> *Requiem for a Nun* 81

<sup>56</sup> Sartre 229

In *Proust and Signs*, Deleuze says: “Proust sets the double idea of ‘constraint’ and of ‘chance.’ Truth depends on an encounter with something that forces us to think and to seek the truth. The accident of encounters and the pressure of constraints are Proust’s two fundamental themes.”<sup>57</sup> We can see both ideas, the one of “constraints” and the one of “chance” in Proust’s and Faulkner’s texts. For both of them, “time is above all that separates.”<sup>58</sup>

What makes Proust delve into his memory? Proust, either not familiar with or running against the ideas of Sigmund Freud, creates a motivation of his own. In *À la recherche du temps perdu*, it is apparent that there is a constant manifestation of disagreement with Freud. In fact, Proust’s writing is untouched by his ideas. He also manifests a strong disagreement with 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy and denies the notion that all human beings naturally aspire to truth. What we learn from his novel is not a natural aspiration of all human beings to truth. Instead, we can see a portrait of a person suffering from sexual jealousy, and it is this sentiment that prompts him to perform an autopsy of the past on paper. Deleuze, interpreting Proust through a system of signs, would argue that the narrator’s motivation for his meticulous search in memory is the result of a “violence of sign.” In our case, this “violence of sign” appears to be extreme jealousy. In his famous work on Proust, Deleuze says that “violence of sign makes us search for things that are hidden in the past”<sup>59</sup> and that is what we see in Proust’s novel, an assiduous search not for lost time, but relevant details in the past. Time is only the silent vehicle.

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<sup>57</sup> Deleuze 64

<sup>58</sup> Sartre 229

<sup>59</sup> Deleuze 65

In Faulkner's novel, the element of "violence of sign" is less clear. He is constantly distancing himself from the events taking place in the novel by using various points of view. There are many essays dedicated to the semantic duality in *The Sound and the Fury*; a brilliant example would be John T. Matthews' collection of essays called *The Play of Faulkner's Language*. It is interesting to see the text through the lens of dual temporality. In the novel, there is a dual measurement of time. It is sometimes measured by the clock (mechanical time), by Quentin's watch, or by the shadow on the curtain in his dormitory (the real time), but also there is a great difference between the perception of time for Quentin and for Benjamin, who has no sense of time and only lives in the present. From the novel, we can see that time for Faulkner is not a constant or something that we can treat objectively.

In *Knowing Innocence*, Reena Sastri says that:

when we look at ourselves in the past, both present and past selves are 'being changed,' both because at any moment of our lives were changing, and because the act of looking back, of interpreting the past, changes both it and us.

...

Proust's myth of time regained imagines that memory and the creation of the work of art can evade the indeterminacy of the double condition of 'being changed' just described.<sup>60</sup>

This is exactly what Quentin dreads, that the future will make him oblivious, and he will forget about his childhood innocence and the period of life which made sense to him.

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<sup>60</sup> Reena Sastri, *James Merrill, Knowing Innocence*, (New York: Routledge 2007) 372

Sastri agrees with Deleuze that the element by which this constant shift could be avoided is the element of art. Proust, in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, often speaks about his involuntary memory. As we already said, Proust sees his search in memory as a search for truth. Nonetheless, the result of this search is not truth. What Proust reveals is involuntary interpretation (translation, if you want) of truth. What is triggered by the tasting of the madeleine cake, by seeing the cobblestones, by the girls is not a voluntary reminiscence; it is an involuntary memory and, as Proust says himself, it is as if the present and past were united in the moment “outside time”<sup>61</sup> at which the “I” is an “extra-temporal being”<sup>62</sup> – something that exists outside of time and outside of this permanent state of change:

And I began to discover the cause by comparing those varying happy impressions which had the common quality of being felt simultaneously at the actual moment and at a distance in time, because of which common quality the noise of the spoon upon the plate, the unevenness of the paving-stones, the taste of the madeleine, imposed the past upon the present and made me hesitate as to which time I was existing in.<sup>63</sup>

Proust’s perception of time is here still twofold. He cannot decide in which moment he finds himself. But as we said, it is the work of art that can cease this process and allows the narrator to step outside of it, stand outside time, in the realm of atemporality:

Of a truth, the being within me which sensed this impression, sensed what it had in common in former days and now, sensed its extra-temporal character, a being which only appeared when through the medium of the identity of present and past, it found itself in the only setting in which it could exist and enjoy the essence of things, that is, outside Time. That

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<sup>61</sup> Proust 221

<sup>62</sup> Proust 223

<sup>63</sup> Proust 252

explained why my apprehensions on the subject of my death had ceased from the moment when I had unconsciously recognized the taste of the little madeleine because at that moment the being that I then had been was an extra-temporal being and in consequence indifferent to the vicissitudes of the future. That being had never come to me, had never manifested itself except when I was inactive and in a sphere beyond the enjoyment of the moment, that was my prevailing condition every time that analogical miracle had enabled me to escape from the present. Only that being had the power of enabling me to recapture former days, Time Lost, in the face of which all the efforts of my memory and of my intelligence came to nought.<sup>64</sup>

For Quentin, this step is impossible, and to step outside of time and his “I” to become an “extra-temporal being,” he needs to commit suicide. He cannot continue living due to his troublesome relation with the past. He says:

people cannot do anything that dreadful they cannot do anything very dreadful at all they cannot even remember tomorrow what seemed dreadful today.

Sastri says that:

The artist makes this recovery of time permanent by bringing to light a photographic negative, impressions experience has imprinted on him, thus discovering in and as literature, his true, ‘real self.’<sup>65</sup>

Thus, Proust tells us that nothing is lost in the past, or “everything is lost in translation,” as demonstrated above. Back to the material meaning of this, which was further developed by Deleuze in his work on Proust. Here comes the crucial passage:

At the end of the Search, the interpreter understands what had escaped him in the case of the madeleine or even of the steeples: that the material meaning is nothing without an ideal essence that it incarnates. The mistake is to suppose that the hieroglyphs represent ‘only material objects’ (III, 878). But what now permits the interpreter to go further is that meanwhile the

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<sup>64</sup> Proust 253

<sup>65</sup> Sastri 372

problem of art has been raised and has received a solution. Now the world of art is the ultimate world of signs, and these signs, as though dematerialized, find their meaning in an ideal essence. Henceforth, the world revealed by art reacts on all the others and notably on the sensuous signs; it integrates them, colors them with an aesthetic meaning, and imbues what was still opaque about them. Then we understand that the sensuous signs already referred to an ideal essence that was incarnated in their material meaning.<sup>66</sup>

These “essential signs of art” transform all the other “signs.”<sup>67</sup> In this way, we can say that all “material signs” are “dematerialized.”<sup>68</sup> They have no value as such (cobble stones, madeleine, coffee at noon), but in the process of dematerialization (translation), they are vehicles that contribute to the constitution of a universal meaning. The difference between Proust and Faulkner is that for Faulkner, those sign that are dematerialized and which carry meaning are usually not material (madeleine) but verbal and semantic (the golfers shouting for their caddy). Benjamin’s inability to orient himself in time and distinguish between the present and the past makes it possible for him to create associations that other people cannot.

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<sup>66</sup> Deleuze 281

<sup>67</sup> Deleuze 282

<sup>68</sup> Deleuze 282

## 10. Conclusion

In this paper, I have been arguing that Faulkner's treatment of time and space is the culmination of the American philosophy and literature of its time. He combines the concepts of Puritan fatalism (a story told as if all events were already passed) and transcendentalism in its most developed form. As opposed to what most critics claim, I see little evidence for regarding Faulkner as a continuer of a strictly Bergson tradition.

Faulkner makes several attempts to tell the story, but he always fails. The reality is always obstructed for his characters. For Benjamin, it is obstructed by his mental illness and his inability to understand why things happen. As Faulkner himself said in the interview for *The Paris Review*: "He was a prologue, like the gravedigger in the Elizabethan dramas. He serves his purpose and is gone."<sup>69</sup> For Jason, reality is obstructed by his ignorance and malevolence. He only cares about the present. For Quentin, the present is unbearable and his troublesome relation to the past distorts temporality for him. He is not afraid that the past may overtake the present but rather that the present and the future will make him forget about the past.

By past, he means his memories of Caddy, who left home to save their family's reputation. My chief argument here is that all events that take place in the novel point all the way back to the emblematic scene that appears to be the center of the novel from the temporal as well as semantic perspective, the tree scene, in which

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<sup>69</sup> Jean Stein, *Paris Review*. *The Art of Fiction* No. 12, (1957)

Caddy trespasses into a different temporality and thus for a moment unites the past, the present and the future at the same time.

Apart from that, most of the symbols that appear throughout the text and that haunt Quentin originate in this scene, such as the element of the mud, the river, and Caddy's drawers. Even his narration itself is retrospective (was). The only character with any prospect of the future is Dilsey and it may be mainly because she is too busy running the family. She follows mechanical time (in the kitchen), and she cannot afford to be weak and feeble.

Faulkner is always invested with Bergson's notion of *la durée*, never with the precise historical time or geographical place. He rather shows the incapacity of our mind to follow linear time, the timelessness of our minds and the way our mind operates with atemporality ("the past is never dead. It's not even past."<sup>70</sup>). The consequences of such thinking are, as Sartre noted in his essay, a dead end.

Faulkner portrays a futile attempt ("they [the battles against time] are not even fought") of an individual to stop time; he shows the imprisonment in time and the disastrous effects of time on the human mind. However, for Faulkner, time is something that makes us search for the fundamental, enlightened self. This is in accord with Bergson's notion that "time is nothing but the ghost of space haunting the reflective consciousness."<sup>71</sup> Quentin, unlike Jason, is haunted by this ghost and cannot escape it. It is now clear that for Faulkner, the past is not productive. It does

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<sup>70</sup> *Requiem for a Nun* 81

<sup>71</sup> Bergson 59



not work the same way as in Proust's novel, quite the opposite. It is something that separates and that casts all events into oblivion.

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