

TIME AND CHARACTER IN THREE NOVELS BY
WILLIAM FAULKNER

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I

An author's awareness of reality is revealed in many ways: character, setting, and action are his most basic materials, and through his manipulation of these he defines his more abstract concepts, his beliefs about the nature of the human situation. Often he sees this situation in terms of man's previously established, external limitations, such as birth and death, time and space. Since time and space are the limits that exist all through the time between birth and death, since it is existence in time and space that defines our humanity, an author's view of the human situation is qualified and specified by his view of these two limitations. As Margaret Church says in Time and Reality, "The understanding of the form, content, thought and motif of fiction depends on the understanding of an author's attitude towards time and space."¹

In setting up his construct of reality, William Faulkner creates a definite and quite intricate world, one that is more expansive than the Yoknapatawpha County that he so carefully outlines and populates. Indeed, he creates a whole hierarchy, complete with a god of sorts. The Divine Being is referred to variously as the Player (in Light in August), the Creditor

¹Margaret Church, Time and Reality (Chapel Hill, 1949), p. 4.

(in Absalom, Absalom!), or the Lord who "giveth and taketh away" (in As I Lay Dying). It is this rather nebulous figure who has placed man in his situation and who will eventually remove him. He is in control: He gives man life, and at the end of life He puts death in its place. Along with life, the Divine Being gives man certain media in which to operate. Because man is a physical, tangible being for the duration of his existence on earth, he must exist in space. The other medium that the Creator offers is time, and it is this which offers the greater possibilities. The Player or the Creditor creates the limits--birth, death, time, and space--which he offers to the creature man as those within which he is to live out his life. Space represents the area in which physical man exists, but it is through time only that he progresses from one end of his life to the other. Thus it is time and man's use of it which chiefly determine the effectiveness of his operation in this existence. Because an understanding of time is so important to Faulkner, those characters in his novels who come the closest to achieving the heroic dimensions he thought man capable of are those who also understand time, who make use of it to gain a greater knowledge of themselves, who perhaps become so knowledgeable about man's condition that society can no longer tolerate them.

In order to determine which of Faulkner's characters succeed in struggling with and reconciling themselves to

time and the conditions it imposes, one must first examine Faulkner's view of time and man's place in it.² Margaret Church, again in Time and Reality, discusses the time sense of Bergson and Proust and relates them to several contemporary authors, of which Faulkner is one. According to her interpretation³ Bergson says that what we mistakenly conceive of as time, in which impressions, emotions, and feelings are put into an order one after the other, is really only space. Time cannot be divided and enumerated, but rather exists as what Bergson calls duration or durée in which the present is not separated from the past or the future. Time seen in this way has a fluid quality with states of consciousness blending into one another continuously. Thus the past, though it is definitely past and will not happen in the same way again, is continually a part of the present, always moving into the present and the future. As Bergson puts it, "Duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the

²Margaret Church's is the most helpful study of time of those used. For some other studies of time in William Faulkner, see Sartre, "Time in Faulkner: The Sound and the Fury" in Three Decades of Criticism, ed. by Hoffman and Vickery; Peter Swiggart, "Time in Faulkner's Novels: in Modern Fiction Studies, May, 1955; Karl Zink, "Flux and the Frozen Moment: in PMLA, Volume LXXI; Richard P. Adams, Faulkner, Myth and Motion, 1968; Morris Beja, "A Flash, A Glare: Faulkner and Time," in Renaissance, Volume XVI; Olga Vickery, "Faulkner and the Contours of Time," in The Georgia Review, Volume 12; and Jean Pouillon, "Time and Destiny in Faulkner" in Faulkner, ed. by Robert Penn Warren, 1966.

³Margaret Church, p. 6.

future and which swells as it advances."⁴ At each moment the past and the present exist simultaneously. The present is a dimension of the past because the past not only leads into it but also has an effect on it: what the present is is dependent on what the past has been. At the same time, the past is also a dimension of the present, being non-existent if there is no present from which to view it. It is, in addition, qualified by the present, since each moment of the present alters slightly the way one views the past.

Faulkner himself said in an interview with Loic Bouvard, "There isn't any time...In fact I agree pretty much with Bergson's theory of the fluidity of time. Time is only the present moment, in which I conclude both the past and the future and that is eternity."⁵ This is one point at which Faulkner as teller can apparently be trusted, since his tales seem to confirm this attitude. Time can't be any more than just the present moment because all the past is there in that moment. For many of Faulkner's characters this reality of time is just what they cannot accept; they become paralyzed by the awareness that the past is ever-present and they either try to stop time so that the present moment won't become any more uncontrollable than it already is (as does

⁴Ibid., p. 9.

⁵Loic Bouvard, "Conversations with William Faulkner." in Lion in the Garden, ed. James B. Meriweather and Michael Millgate (New York, 1968), p. 70.

Quentin Compson of The Sound and the Fury), or they attempt to forcibly separate the past from the present and give themselves over to the past entirely, doing all they can to avoid the reality of the present (as does Gail Hightower.)

This difficulty in dealing with time is apparent in many of Faulkner's works. Because time is a constant flow, often symbolized in his novels by a stream, it does not stop and cannot be measured out into events that follow one another consecutively. Thomas Sutpen's most serious problem, to be examined later, is that he set up a design that was to be completed in time. He divided time into slots and designated each period for the accomplishment of a specific piece of his design. What is worse, he denied, or attempted to deny, a whole segment of the time which made up his life, refusing to acknowledge the existence of a previous marriage or a partly Negro son. It is his misunderstanding and misuse of time that is Sutpen's downfall. He never realizes, even when his past destroys his design, that all past is present, all time is motion.

Gail Hightower also distorts time, though in a different manner. Because the present is distasteful to him, he tries to artificially separate it from the past and then exist in that past. It was because of his preoccupation with the past that he first came to Jefferson, so that he could remain safely in the past, even while going through the motions of living in the present. His failure, which will also be

examined later, stems from his refusal to recognize the constant flow of time.

Both Sutpen and Hightower, along with others of Faulkner's people, illustrate his concept of time by living the consequences of its misuse. Time cannot be halted or pushed; past cannot be divided from present. Man must discern its motion and fit his own to it.

The proper attitude towards time, the attitude that contrasts with the distortions just described, must begin with the realization that the past always exists in the present. In referring again to the French writers, Margaret Church quotes Froust as saying that "the past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which the material object will give us) which we do not suspect."⁶ This is frequently illustrated in Faulkner's novels. Stated somewhat abstractly in Light in August, it is that "Memory believes before knowing remembers."⁷ A present experience produces a sensation that has been experienced before, but the sensation produces an emotional response before the mind has time to consciously know that cause of the response. This is the most perfect manifestation of how the past exists in the

⁶Margaret Church, p. 13.

⁷William Faulkner, Light in August (New York, 1968), p. 111. All subsequent quotations from this novel will be cited by page number in the text of the paper and will be drawn from this edition.

present. Joe Christmas, upon entering Joanna Burden's house for the first time, eats something which he finds on the table in the dark kitchen and responds emotionally before he remembers where the sensation originates.

He ate something from an invisible dish, with invisible fingers: invisible food. He did not care what it would be. He did not know that he had even wondered or tasted until his jaw stopped suddenly in midchewing and thinking fled for twentyfive years back down the street...I have eaten it before, somewhere. In a minute I will memory clicking knowing I see I see I more than see hear I hear I see my head bent I hear the monotonous dogmatic voice which I believe will never cease...How can he be so nothungry and I smelling my mouth and tongue weeping the hot salt of waiting my eyes tasting the hot steam from the dish "It's peas," he said, aloud. "For sweet Jesus. Field peas cooked with molasses." (217)

Before his mind knows what he is eating, Joe's memory begins to pump back the sounds, sights and emotions that accompanied this physical sensation at another time. This experience is emblematic of Joe's total progress through the novel. He experiences, he reacts instinctively and according to the dictates of his past, and eventually he recognizes rationally what the meaning of that experience is.

Though this is a vivid and isolated example of this process, it must be remembered that the existence of the past in the present is continual. Time, as pointed out earlier, is that something, that progress, "which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances." Time, in fact, is motion. Consequently, events do not occur and then take their place in the static past, not to be considered or made use of ever

again. Rather each moment, each event, moves from the present which is active experience into the past-present which is cumulative, intellectual experience. Each moment changes those other moments in some way and is itself formed or altered to a certain degree by them. Time must be recognized not only as motion, but also as a motion that builds and Faulkner provides images for both of these qualities.

In As I Lay Dying time is the river and Darl recognizes this; "The river itself is not a hundred yards across, and pa and Vernon and Vardaman and Dewey Dell are the only things in sight not of that single monotony...It is as though the space between us were time: an irrevocable quality."⁸ The river moves on and on, irrevocable because it, like the process of time, cannot be stopped. At one point in Light in August time takes on an image of a turning wheel picking up sand as it goes; "Progress now is still progress, yet it is not indistinguishable from the recent past like the already traversed inches of sand which cling to the turning wheel...." (464) The wheel as it turns picks up grains of sand that then turn with it as the motion continues, demonstrating not only the motion but also the cumulative quality of that motion.

If, then, time is motion, with the past continually and

⁸William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying (New York, 1930), p. 139. All subsequent quotations from this novel will be cited by page number in the text of the paper, and will be drawn from this edition.

steadily moving into the present which at the same time of necessity moves into the future, the role of man is to recognize that motion and realize its implication for him. Many of Faulkner's characters attempt to stop time or, finding that impossible, simply freeze their own motion. The Quentin Compson of The Sound and the Fury (not to be confused with the Quentin Compson of Absalom, Absalom!) recognized that time was motion, but he couldn't face the implications of that recognition and the only way he could find to stop time was to kill himself. The entire Bundren family, with the exception of Darl and perhaps even Vardaman, were attempting to freeze time, in a sense, with their fanatical insistence upon getting Addie to Jefferson. The natural end of life is death and death therefore becomes just a moment in the cycle of life. But the Bundrens artificially prolonged Addie's death and thereby distorted the natural rhythm of things. The point is that since time is motion, man must respond to that motion in order to endure.

To respond to the motion, to be in harmony, man must also be able to change. Thomas Sutpen was out of harmony because he tried to distort time to his own purposes. To respond to the motion, of course, is to recognize the necessity of change, but in trying to separate the past from the present and in creating his own design and determining to carry it out at all cost, Sutpen becomes a victim of his own inflexibility. As Kenneth Richardson says, "Inflexibility is the symptom of a loss of freedom. Inflexible man can learn no-

thing new, must live by the past, and by dogma. He resists with violence the threat of change...Personality within the design is inhuman because it cannot take the risk of being in motion, of being alive."⁹ Even though Sutpen has a furious kind of motion of his own, he fails because he expends his energy in attempting to maintain an artificial suspension of time. At the end of his life--the end that is unmistakably brought about by his own inflexibility--he knows nothing more about the meaning of the motion of time than he knew when he first conceived his design. Ironically and unawares he himself makes a significant comment on his relationship to time when he tells General Compson, "You see, I had a design in my mind. Whether it was a good or bad design is beside the point"¹⁰ Sutpen was right--whether the design was good or bad was of no account. He was already doomed when he created a design which would not allow for the motion of time and change.

These, then, are some brief examples of the ways in which men do not respond to time, do not recognize its motion. The manner in which a character handles time becomes almost a moral issue in Faulkner's works--at the very least, it can serve as a means of evaluating that person's success or failure as a human being. And for Faulkner, at least some did

⁹Kenneth Richardson, Force and Faith in the Novels of William Faulkner (Paris, 1967), pp. 42-43.

¹⁰William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (New York, 1936), p. 263. All subsequent quotations from this novel will be cited by page number in the text of the paper and will be drawn from this edition.

succeed. Since time is man's most important medium, it is with this that he must struggle. Faulkner says that the greatness of man is that "he is faced with a tragedy he can't beat and he still tries to do something with it."¹¹ This tragedy has to do with the motion of time, since in the system of continual change the ultimate and inevitable change is that from life to nonlife: the only event after birth that one can definitely depend on experiencing is death. Some never realize that this is where all of life leads. Some do realize it and they spend all of their lives trying to forget it. Some, in a moment of rare recognition, see time in its pure form, realize that all men are brothers in their common, necessary submission to the motion of time, and ironically enough, because of that awareness, superceding that of nearly all other men, they are cut off and often sacrificed by that very community they have finally discovered. In the process, because of their painful realization and subsequent ostracism, they achieve a heroic dimension that those around them don't reach, possibly don't even recognize.

There are some characters in Faulkner's works, it should be pointed out, who definitely do not work against time but still are not particularly heroic. Lena Grove operates completely free of time. She recognizes no distinction between

¹¹Richard P. Adams, Faulkner: Myth and Motion (Princeton, New Jersey, 1968), p. 93.

past and present and future; all for her is the ever-present Now. She is in beautiful harmony with the natural cycle of time but only because she has never even known it existed. The Lena Grove who leaves Jefferson with Byron Bunch at the end of Light in August is the same Lena Grove exactly who wandered into the planing mill at the beginning. There has been no change, no recognition, no growth. There is something commendable about her ease in moving with nature's rhythm, but there is nothing heroic in it--no conflict, no enlightenment, no separation from society. If time is motion and if, as Darrel Abel suggests, reality is a "becomingness"¹² then the best use man can make of time's motion is to become. It is this that defines the real heroes, those who recognize the tragedy implicit in time's movement, who realize the inevitability of movement and change, and who eventually learn to make use of that motion to become what he has not been before, to use time as it should be used--to achieve greater understanding.

As I Lay Dying, Light in August, and Absalom, Absalom!, the three novels used for the following study, all present a journey in some form. The journey is presented in a different manner in each novel, but each serves to define one character, Darl Bundren, Joe Christmas, and Quentin Compson,

¹²Darrel Abel, "Frozen Movement in Light in August," Twentieth Century Interpretations of Light in August, ed. David L. Minter (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1969), p. 42.

respectively, who in the course of the journey comes to an understanding of time and demonstrates the strength that can be achieved through that understanding. In the context of the journey, the three characters undergo similar stages of development. Each character begins with a consciousness of time but an inadequate understanding of its real nature. Eventually, for all three, there is a moment of recognition of pure, fluid time, and following this each character discovers something new about himself, sees the human condition more clearly, and as a result of his greater understanding of humanity, becomes himself isolated from the society of people who cannot bear that much knowledge. In the struggle, the recognition, and the resulting isolation, these three characters attain a stature not granted the other characters in the novels.

Each of the following sections treats one of the novels, discussing first the general progression of the novel and then examining various characters whose misuse of time heightens and clarifies by contrast the success of the one character who learns the nature of time. Finally, that character himself will be defined, following the stages outlined in the previous paragraph.

II

As I Lay Dying is, in a sense, a study in suspended time. As death is a cessation of life for Addie, so does it tempo-

rarily become that for the entire Bundren family. Nearly all of the novel describes a journey, which would seem to imply movement, but it is a journey through space only, from the Bundren farm to Jefferson. Paradoxically, if time is motion, as has been explained, then that very journey symbolizes anti-motion, for it attempts to stop time. Thus, though it is a journey through space, it has little to do with progress or motion and Faulkner makes this clear through his repeated images of suspended motion. In addition, with the exception of Darl, who by the end of the book is a social outcast, each of the Bundrens comes away from Jefferson as nearly the same person who began the journey. There has been no recognition of time's motion.

For Anse Bundren, for instance, the suspension of motion is one indication of his unwillingness to accept change. When he does move, it is only for the purpose of restoring things to their former state. At the end of the novel, he has gotten Addie to Jefferson and, in the process, he has regained the teeth he lost years ago and he has acquired a wife to replace Addie so that, at least outwardly, things can continue exactly as they always have. There is no progress for Anse, no continual, flowing motion, but only an attempt to maintain changelessness.

This uneven and haphazard motion is reflected even in the way Anse handles his work. Various narrators outside the family refer to the fact that everyone has always helped

Anse Bundren all his life. As Tull says, "I tell him again I will help him out if he gets into a tight, with her sick and all. Like most folks around here, I done help him so much already I can't quit now." (32) Because there is always something that comes up to slow Anse down he must depend on letting others help him get things done. He is continually described in terms of non-motion. Tull elsewhere describes an episode just before Addie dies, when Anse enters her bedroom and "stands there, like he dont aim to move again nor nothing else." (31) Samson also recognizes the reluctance Anse shows towards motion or, more specifically, change, when he says, "I notice how it takes a lazy man, a man that hates moving, to get set on moving once he does get started off, the same as he was set on staying still, like it ain't the moving he hates so much as the starting and the stopping." (108) This particularly illustrates Anse's problem: what he dislikes is change, which is inevitable in the motion of time. Tull, again, describes Anse as the most static of all things when he sees "Anse standing there like a scarecrow, like he was a steer standing knee-deep in a pond and somebody come by and set the pond up on edge and he aint missed it yet." (69) Even Anse gives himself away when he laments the road that passes by his house, "keeping the folks restless and wanting to get up and go somewheres else when He aimed for them to stay put like a tree or a stand of corn. Because if He'd a aimed

for man to be always a-moving and going somewheres else, wouldnt he a put him longways on his belly, like a snake?"

(35)

Because Anse is opposed to motion, he clings to the cessation of motion that Addie's death brings with a stubborn ferocity. He is so blind to the real nature of the motion of time that he thinks he is acting in accord with the motion when he is actually suspending time disastrously. And when their motionless journey is completed, Anse has learned nothing and has changed only superficially. His goal has been not so much to carry out Addie's wishes, actually, as it has been to use Addie's instructions as an excuse for getting to Jefferson to buy some new teeth. By the end of the novel he has accomplished that, but has achieved no realization.

Jewel is another excellent example of suspended motion. He is the illegitimate son, Addie's act of rebellion against the violation of her selfhood. There is a furious kind of energy in Jewel, the same kind appearing in Thomas Sutpen. Darl and Cash, as revealed in the flashback, were observers of the fury with which he went about earning his horse, but even that was an attempt to deny the past in the sense that it was a transferral of his loyalty from the mother who conceived him in sin to the horse that he could control. Thus, Jewel, like Sutpen, attempted to erase his past, becoming not the son of Addie but rather, as Darl says, the son of a horse. At the same time, he,

like Anse, denies the naturalness of Addie's death, refuses to accept it as a part of time's motion. This is revealed in the one passage of the book that is narrated by him. If he could stop time, "It would just be me and her on a high hill and me rolling the rocks down the hill at their faces, picking them up and throwing them down the hill faces and teeth and all by God until she was quiet and not that goddam adze going One lick less. One lick less and we could be quiet."

(15)

Faulkner reinforces this view of Jewel through the images of stillness and rigidity he uses to describe him. His features, for one thing, are frozen and changeless. "Still staring straight ahead, his pale eyes like wood set into his wooden face, he crosses the floor in four strides with the rigid gravity of a cigar store Indian dressed in patched overalls and endued with life from the hips down...." (4) Later he matches the non-motion of the buzzards circling the wagon, "Motionless, wooden-backed, wooden-faced, he shapes the horse in a rigid stoop like a hawk, hook-winged." (89) Jewel is frequently--almost continually--on his horse, but in spite of that he doesn't seem to achieve any movement from it. After the incident of the river when the family is invited to stay at the Armstid home, it is Jewel who is most notably resistant; "He had that wooden look on his face again; that bold, surly, high-colored rigid look like his face and eyes were two colors of wood, the wrong one pale and the

wrong one dark." (173) Darl continually describes Jewel in these terms, with the rigid eyes and the board-like back. He always refers to him as made of wood or metal, both of which are stiff and inflexible. Darl's last picture of Jewel is that he "squats there, staring straight ahead, motionless, lean, wooden-backed, as though carved squatting out of the lean wood." (221)

It isn't only Darl who sees Jewel in these terms; others, like Tull, give us the same impression. At the river, "Jewel hadn't moved. He sat there on the horse, leaning a little forward, with that same look on his face when him and Darl passed the house yesterday, coming back to get her." (118) There is never any evidence of growth or change in Jewel because all that repressed energy is used in an attempt to stop a process that cannot be stopped.

There is a suggestion that Addie has an understanding of time that the others lack. She accepts death as a part of the process of life or, as her father says, "the reason for living is getting ready to stay dead." (167) Though Addie reveals in the one section she narrates that she has learned and changed profoundly during the course of her life, within the novel she does not actually function as a growing, developing figure. Rather, she is the center of the novel, the figure who evokes the responses that define all the others.

The one member of the family who does grow and gain in awareness is Darl. He is the only one who recognizes the absurdity of the time-stopping ritual that the family per-

forms at the time of Addie's death. It is he who says as Jewel and Gillespie struggle outside the burning barn, "They are like two figures in a Greek frieze, isolated out of all reality by the red glare." (211) In effect, all the characters but Darl are outside reality. Once again the image of motionlessness is used, and the isolation from reality is caused by more than the red glare, for the red glare of the burning barn is just a symbol for the attempt on Darl's part to put time back into its proper motion.

Darl has always been somewhat different from the others. He is the one who seems to know what goes on inside all the others, probably because he continually uses time to increase his knowledge of himself. The only reference to learning anywhere in the novel occurs when Darl says, "When I was a boy I first learned how much better water tastes when it has set a while in a cedar bucket." (10) Darl is the only one of the Bundrens, with the possible exception of Addie, who ever learns anything. His most acute perceptions and realizations are about other people, particularly the members of his own family. Dewey Dell hates him for his ability to perceive, "It was then, and then I saw Darl and he knew. He said he knew without the words like he told me that ma is going to die without words...." (26) Darl himself describes some of these perceptions in the long section which relates how Jewel acquired his horse. When Addie realized that Jewel, her only child born of love, had transferred his affection to a horse, she cried, and it was Darl who saw her.

That night I found ma sitting beside the bed where he was sleeping in the dark. She cried hard, maybe because she had to cry so quiet; maybe because she felt the same way about tears she did about deceit, hating herself for doing it, hating him because she had to. And then I knew that I knew. I knew that as plain on that day as I knew about Dewey Dell on that day. (129)

In addition to seeing into the others, Darl also has more self-awareness than any of the others and because of this, too, he can be more aware of the motion of time and the necessity of change. Darl knows he is a changing being and he articulates that in a brief passage just after he has described the process of completing Addie's coffin and bringing it into the house,

In a strange room you must empty yourself for sleep. And before you are emptied for sleep, what are you. And when you are emptied for sleep, you are not. And when you are filled with sleep, you never were. I don't know what I am. I don't know if I am or not. Jewel knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know whether he is or not. He cannot empty himself for sleep because he is not what he is and he is what he is not. (76)

In a strange way Darl knows what he is because he knows that he cannot know. What he knows is that as a human being he changes, and this is what Jewel does not seem to know. It is this kind of perception that others recognize in Darl. Vernon Tull says, "I always say it aint never been what he done so much or said or anything so much as how he looks at you. It's like he had got inside of you, someway. Like somehow you was looking at yourself and your doings outen his eyes." (119)

When Darl's time-sense becomes defined is at the time

of Addie's death. While the others entirely rearrange their lives around it, Darl recognizes it as a part of the natural process. Jewel won't accept the inevitability of the death and curses Cash for building the casket right outside Addie's window. But Darl knows she will die and he tells Dewey Dell as much in those vision-words that they speak. He even tries to tell Jewel, "'Jewel,' I say, 'do you know that Addie Bundren is going to die? Addie Bundren is going to die?'"

(39) It is not a shocking thing for Darl, nor is it unbelievable, nor is it an excuse to go to town. It is merely a thing that happens and must be accepted as a part of--an ultimate consequence of--the motion. He is the only one of the family who grasps, without it having to be explained, the concept of death that Peabody sets forth, "The nihilists say it is the end; the fundamentalists, the beginning; when in reality it is no more than a single tenant or family moving out of a tenement or a town." (42-43) Darl knows this. He accepts death and in time he learns how it should be handled, though he becomes a social outcast in the process.

As was pointed out in Part I of this paper, it is at the river, which he now sees as time, that Darl, through his glimpse of this pure motion, realizes that this ritual is a distortion of time's pattern. Standing across the river from Anse, Vardaman, and Dewey Dell, he says, "It is as though the space between us were time: an irrevocable quality. It is as though time, no longer running straight before us in a diminishing line, now runs parallel between us

like a looping string, the distance being the doubling accretion of the thread and not the interval between." (139) As time, the river illustrates well the motion, "Before us the dark current runs. It talks up to us in a murmur become ceaseless and myriad, the yellow surface dimpled monstrously into fading swirls travelling along the surface for an instant, silent, impermanent and profoundly significant...." (134)

The entire episode at the river reveals Darl's unfolding realization about time and man's place in it. He realizes that time is motion and he realizes that it is a motion that is unfelt until one is in conflict with it; "I felt the current take us and I knew we were on the ford by that reason, since it was only by means of that slipping contact that we could tell that we were in motion at all." (140) In another reference he observes, "We hold to the rope, the current curling and dimpling about our shoulders. But beneath that false blandness the true force of it leans against us lazily.... Even the mud there is not still. It has a chill, scouring quality, as though the earth under us were in motion too." (152) The motion is insistent though not always apparent, and when the casket slips away in the water, Darl lets it go with the current. In watching Jewel and Vernon in the water, he sees that "they do not appear to violate the surface at all," (156) and with that he realizes that time is going to move on and man must move with it because he can't stop it. For Darl at that moment, the crossing of the river

becomes "the crossing or transcendence of time itself."¹³

Consequently, after the river episode the continuation of the journey becomes a mockery, a complete thwarting of time. Even Vardaman notices the suspension of the buzzards: "We watch them in little tall black circles of not-moving," (185) and the situation becomes intolerable to Darl. "If you could just ravel out into time," he says. "That would be nice. It would be nice if you could just ravel out into time." (198) He finally convinces Vardaman that the murmuring in the casket is Addie talking to God. "She wants Him to hide her away from the sight of man." (204)

Darl's ultimate gesture of realization is the burning of the barn which holds Addie's body. Addie needs to be in the ground and Darl recognizes the outrage of continuing the journey. Thus he sets fire to the barn which holds the casket and in listening to the burning he says, "The sound of it has become quite peaceful now, like the sound of the river did." (211) He hopes that this will again put time back in its place, or rather, put the humans involved back in their place in time, since time will move on without them anyway. But Jewel rescues the casket from the barn and Darl is doomed because of the acuteness of his awareness which places him in a realm different from the rest of his family members, particularly Anse and Jewel.

¹³Margaret Church, p. 236.

Though Darl is sent to Jackson for burning the barn, there are still indications of the rightness of his actions. He is now definitely recognized as being in motion or in rhythm with the natural motion. Vardaman says after the coffin has been rescued from the barn, "On her [the moonlight] was still, but on Darl it dappled up and down." (215) He has seen the motion of time and attempts to save his family by trying to put them back into harmony with that motion. Even Cash says hesitantly,

I thought more than once before we crossed the river and after, how it would be God's blessing if He did take her outen our hands and get shut of her in some clean way, and it seemed to me that when Jewel worked so to get her outen the river, he was going against God in a way, and then when Darl seen that it looked like one of us would have to do something, I can almost believe he done right in a way. (223)

Darl, then, moves from a state of merely being conscious of time to fully realizing its nature and effect. He sees that all the Bundrens--all men--are joined in a submission to time's motion and that the most they can do is recognize it and act accordingly. He, in fact, does act and as a result, he is rejected as insane.

III

Light in August also involves a journey, beginning and ending in the hot Southern sun, in a creaky wagon, on a dusty road. The progression of the novel is less chronological than that of As I Lay Dying; instead of a continuing, moment-for-moment narrative, it makes use of a cumulative effect, gradually

increasing the reader's knowledge through frequent flashbacks. At the end of the novel the narrative has come full circle and Lena Grove is again on the road, now accompanied by a man and a child, but still on the same kind of journey. This seeming changelessness, however, is a marked contrast to the dramatic development of Joe Christmas, and it is his story that is at the heart of the novel.

Time, in this novel, is again seen as motion and there is, as before, a distinction made between the motion of time and mere movement through space. Lena Grove has travelled "a fur piece" in terms of geography, but that has little to do with development through time. The reference to the train that Byron Bunch hears, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of time, its ability to encompass all else: "This rouses him; this is the world and time too...It is getting late: it is time now, with distance, moving in it." (416) The characters in this novel, as in the earlier one, are judged according to their ability to make this distinction, to achieve an understanding of the nature of time, and to act according to that knowledge.

There are many references to motionlessness in the novel, quite consistently tied with the misuse of time. The distorted time-sense of Gail Hightower has been pointed out before, his attempt to separate the past from the present. Byron Bunch first learns of this from the residents of Jefferson, who told him "how the young minister was still

excited even after six months, still talking about the Civil War and his grandfather, a cavalryman, who was killed, and about General Grant's store burning in Jefferson until it did not make sense at all." (56) For the most part, Hightower does not live in the world of real people but in a glorious, imaginative past. He failed his parishioners, his wife, and even himself because of his inability to join that past with the present and following that error, he commits the additional sin of attempting to remove those parts of his past that are painful to him. He endured his wife's adultery, her suicide, and his church's rejection of him so that he would again be free to live in his unchanging, romantic has-been, saying, "Ah. That's done now. That's past now. That's bought and paid for now," (464) not realizing that while the past may be past, it is never done, but is always doing.

Hightower is repeatedly referred to as motionless or rigid in the passages which recount his conversations with Byron Bunch. Even his chair, as Byron sees it, "evocative of disuse and supineness and shabby remoteness from the world, is somehow the symbol and the being too of the man himself." (342) Even when there seems to be some hope for Hightower, in that last moment when he attempts to save Christmas, he once again slips back into the past with the galloping hooves and the bugles. Byron says of him, "'It is because a fellow is more afraid of the trouble he might have than he ever is of the trouble he's already got. He'll cling to trouble he's used to before he'll risk a change.'" (69) It is a fear

of the change that time and motion imply that causes Hightower to prefer the past apart from the present. His reluctance to recognize the motion of time is ultimately the cause of his refusal to enter into that human community which has as its unifying force the common necessity to submit to time.

Hightower's misuse of time and his dislike of change seem to stem from at least a partial understanding of what the motion of time involves. There are others, however, like McEachern and Percy Grimm, who freeze time not so much through a conscious effort as through a crystallization of their own identities. The motionlessness caused by their strict adherence to a narrow set of beliefs is suggested, typically, in terms of rigidity and stillness. McEachern is "squat, big, shapeless, somehow rocklike, indomitable, not so much ungentle as ruthless." (135) He is also "unbending and quietly outraged..." (164) McEachern does not change; thus, time to him is not motion but the slow accomplishment of the end of life, the conquering of sin. Percy Grimm's mission and his description are similar. "His face was rocklike, calm, still bright with that expression of fulfillment, of grave and reckless joy...He was quite motionless, still, alone, fateful, like a landmark almost." (436) At the moment of the capture his voice is "clear and outraged like that of a young priest." (439) The identification of Grimm with a young priest, possibly the surest symbol of undeviating righteousness, again establishes him as rigid and immovable.

Both these characters perhaps succeed well enough according to their own terms; both, in other words, feel justified in their own ways of life. But neither demonstrates any real awareness of time and neither experiences any growth or change. Like Jewel, their energies are expended in attempting to maintain a false stability, to keep things as they always were, and as a result, they are considerably less than heroic.

As the hero of the novel, it is Joe Christmas who finally comes to the necessary understanding of time. Like Darl, he sees time, eventually, in its pure form, as a continual flowing motion, and after that he realizes his participation in the human condition and acts in a positive way on the strength of that knowledge. His ultimate rejection from the human community is more vivid and more final than Darl's and, for that reason, perhaps more memorable.

Before Joe's struggle and eventual victory can be traced, it is necessary to consider what Joe is at the outset. His situation, in contrast to Darl's, is complicated by the more insistent presence in this novel of the Player. It was stated earlier that the Divine Being in Faulkner's novels gives man life and certain limits within which to live life. At first glance, Joe seems to be enclosed by more powerful limits than just time and space. In addition to these, he seems to be limited by the constant attempt of those around him to manipulate him, to make him what they want him to be. The dietitian

and Doc Hines at the orphanage tried to make him a Negro, McEachern tried to make him a narrow, fundamentalist Christian, Joanna Burden tried to make him the atonement for her white man's guilt. Sometimes he found himself doing things he seemed to have no control over. When he entered Joanna Burden's house, "it was as though, as soon as he found that his feet intended to go there, that he let go, seemed to float, surrendered, thinking all right all right..." (224) If he is not a free agent, then it is futile to hope that Joe will ever be able to understand time; if he is merely a pawn in the hands of the Player or those around him, then there is no justification for assuming that he can reach the heroic dimensions possible for one who accepts time's limitations while striving to act within them.

In answer to that, it should be pointed out, as John Lewis Longley does, that the question of whether Joe is black or white is never resolved; he never allows anyone to establish that for him. "Although he is, largely through the efforts of Old Doc Hines, putatively a Negro child at the orphanage, he is adopted and brought up as a white child by the McEacherns....This is probably the most crucial point in the book. Christmas is free to choose what he will be, and his freedom is infinite."¹⁴

¹⁴John Lewis Longley, The Tragic Mask (Chapel Hill, 1957), p. 197.

Given this freedom, Joe still faces an overwhelming battle. He doesn't achieve his harmony with time as easily or through as vivid a symbol as does Darl Bundren; neither does he as painlessly acquire his self-knowledge. He, like other characters who have been mentioned, experiences a considerable amount of movement, but it is not necessarily the sort of motion that puts him in tune with time's motion. Until the murder of Joanna Burden, in fact, it is an aimless sort of movement, covering many miles but accomplishing little. Because his identity is such a problem for him, he spends much of life running from the identities those around him try to ascribe to him rather than attempting to find his place in the human community. The first questions are raised at the orphanage where the black yard man asks,

'What you watching me for, boy?' and he said, 'How come you are a nigger?' and the nigger said, 'Who told you I am a nigger, you little white trash bastard?' and he says, 'I aint a nigger,' 'You are worse than that. You dont know what you are. And more than that, you wont never know. You'll live and you'll die and you wont never know,' and he says, 'God aint no nigger,' and the nigger says, 'I reckon you ought to know what God is, because dont nobody but God know what you is.' (363)

At the McEachern's there is a new attempt to mold him. It would be fatal, of course, for Joe to follow McEachern's pattern, becoming as cold and inflexible as McEachern himself is, but from the beginning there seems to be little danger of that. When his new father announces that Joe will henceforth carry the McEachern name, Joe does not even attempt to contradict him. "He was not bothered. He did not especially

care, anymore than if the man had said the day was hot when it was not hot. He didn't even bother to say to himself, "My name ain't McEachern. My name is Christmas. There was no need to bother about that yet. There was plenty of time."

(136) Though Joe recognizes at this time the impossibility of his ever being what McEachern wants him to be, he has yet to learn what he is. The worst damage that McEachern does to Joe is to make of that part of his life something that he will spend the next fifteen years running away from. It is this furious attempt to escape that is evidenced that night he enters Bobbie's room for the last time. Everyone else in that room was still, but "though Joe had not moved since he entered, he was still running." (201)

It is not a profitable sort of movement that he employs for those fifteen years. Time, it has been pointed out, is a constant movement of the past into the present, but for Joe there is only the attempt to outrun the past. "He thought that it was loneliness which he was trying to escape and not himself. But the street ran on: catlike, one place was the same as another to him. But in none of them could he be quiet. But the street ran on in its moods and phases, always empty: he might have seen himself as in numberless avatars, in silence, doomed with motion, driven by the courage of flagged and spurred despair..." (213) The quiet that he cannot find is like the peace that Darl Bundren hears in the fire and in the river. It is the recognition of the

quality of time, and when it is found, one can stop running and simply move with that sound.

It was because of the habit of running that he looked as he did when he entered Jefferson. "He did not look like a professional hobo in his professional rags, but there was something definitely rootless about him, as though no town nor city was his, no street, no walls, no square of earth his home." (27) And in Jefferson, as everywhere else, he finds only people who want to mold him into something that they think he should be. He fights again, but he can never win until he realizes the nature of time, the movement of the past into the present, and can stop feeling he is pursued by time or that he needs to pursue it. Still in Jefferson, wandering from the streets of the whites to the streets of the blacks, "he looked like a phantom, a spirit, strayed out of its own world, and lost." (106)

When Joe becomes involved with Joanna Burden, the chains begin to tighten once again. After the tempestuous nights and then the silent nights, he welcomes what he thinks is going to be Joanna's reconciliation. "He should have seen that he was bound just as tightly by that small square of still undivulging paper as though it were a lock and chain." (257) And when he finds what it is that Joanna wants to make him into he commits his final act of freedom and, indeed, it does free him. According to Darrel Abel, "He transvaluated murder into something like a creative act..."

since it was for him a symbolic annihilation of the world which had denied his claims to selfhood and status."¹⁵ At the time of the murder Joe says, "'She ought not to started praying over me.'" (104) In the similarity of Joanna Burden's actions to those of McEachern, and in his reaction to those actions, Joe finally recognizes the insistent existence of the past in the present.

The murder of Joanna Burden becomes for Joe the equivalent of Darl's experience at the river. In order to see time in its true rhythm Joe has to exist outside mechanical time for awhile. He has realized, finally, that the past cannot be escaped, that it is always in the present; now he must experience the unmasked flow of time before he can realize that it is not important that he is black or that he is white, but that he is human. Again, it is in the common submission to time's relentless motion that all men are united.

Consequently, days, nights and hours melt into one another in an undistinguishable flow for the week during which he wanders from the Burden house to Mottstown. "When he thinks about time, it seems to him now that for thirty years he has lived inside an orderly parade of named and numbered days like fence pickets, and that one night he went to sleep and when he waked up he was outside of them....Time, the spaces of light and dark, had long since lost orderliness."

¹⁵Darrel Abel, p. 49.

(313-315) It is during this week that he travels from the white community to the black community and back to the white, finally realizing that he is not a black man or a white man, but a man. The identities that he has attempted to escape for thirty years have been only superficial ones, and with his new recognition of his humanity, he experiences a new harmony with the world around him.

Again his direction is straight as a surveyor's line, disregarding hill and valley and bog. Yet he is not hurrying. He is like a man who knows where he is and where he wants to go and how much time to the exact minute he has to get there in. It is as though he desires to see his native earth in all its phases for the first or the last time. (320)

Joe himself gives evidence that he now recognizes not only the nature of time's flow but also the futility of his attempt to escape from his past and the identity he assumed that past imposed upon him.

Looking, he can see the smoke low on the sky, beyond an imperceptible corner; he is entering it again, the street, where going should be fast. It had made a circle and he is still inside the circle. "And yet I have been further in these seven days than in all the thirty years," he thinks. (321)

It is not that he has left the world or time, but that he has seen time in a new sense. He travelled so far in those seven days because he at last gained the proper understanding. He has not left the circle but he did leave the paved street for awhile and he can now re-enter that with the knowledge that he cannot escape the past as past because all time is continual motion.

It is appropriate that Joe's journey should end at

Mottstown, which was also the place of his birth into this human situation that he has finally become aware of. It is here that he finally is able to shed the obsession of whether he is black or white and recognize instead his humanity. As Longley says, "In the fifteen years of wandering he tries life as a black man living with Negroes and as a white man attempting to live with whites. But ultimately he chooses to be neither--he will simply be himself."¹⁶

There is no inconsistency in Joe's attempt to escape once he is imprisoned for the murder of Joanna Burden. Realization that all men must ultimately die does not necessitate courting death. There is even a significance in his attempt to rejoin the human community by running to Gail Hightower's house. He, like Darl, failed to make the human community recognize his right to be accepted, but achieved a permanent place in their collective memory, and, in his own realization of his humanity, he finally gains that peace that came to Darl as he heard the crackling of the fire.

For a long moment he looked at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes....They are not to lose it, in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in the mirroring faces of whatever children they will contemplate old disasters and newer hopes. It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatening, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant. (440)

This, then, is how Joe achieves his particular heroism.

¹⁶Longley, 196.

When he recognized his ability to transcend time for that brief period, he also recognized the meaning of time as motion: he was a man, perhaps white, perhaps black, but a man, and not isolated from other human beings but joined with them in that community of suffering, that inevitably tragic situation--created by time--which all share and some even realize. With the realization comes the sense of fulfillment, somehow, and the peace.

IV

Of the three works, Absalom, Absalom! is probably the best example of the concept of time manifest in the form, for this novel, in form, is a flat denial of the validity of measured, calculated, categorized time. It is that rolling movement that Bergson talked about, with the past moving into the present and the future like a snowball, building and building. It is Hightower's wheel that keeps picking up grains of sand. It is the whole concept of time as motion, with each moment (and each detail of the story) changing slightly the meaning of all other moments, adding new dimensions. An awareness of the form of this novel is an awareness of the concept of time it manifests.

The form is accomplished, of course, through the use of various narrators, each of whom has a different perspective from the others and a greater or lesser amount of knowledge. Rosa Coldfield's narrative is colored by her hatred and

frustration. She sees Sutpen's story as the reason for the South's fall. For her, the punishment of the South was necessitated by the actions and lives of such men as Sutpen. Mr. Compson relates the story simply as one that was passed down to him. For him it is an illustration of the mystery of human existence, and if all the pieces don't fit together, if the humans involved act according to no apparent formula, it is because that is the way life is.

It is Quentin and Shreve who finally combine all they have heard into an imaginative and comprehensible recounting of their own and it is in this way that Quentin, apart from Shreve, can achieve the stature already seen in Darl and Joe. It is a painful process for Quentin because the world he and Shreve are describing is one he has inhabited all his life. Shreve sees the events, as he frequently points out, from the perspective of an outsider. He can never feel the impact quite to the extent that Quentin can because it is a way of life that he has never experienced. For Quentin it is quite different. "In a sense, the story of Sutpen is an explanation of Quentin's life, and Quentin's ability to tell it is a test of his ability to live."¹⁷ It is in the imaginative telling of the story that Quentin passes the test.

Absalom, Absalom!, like the others, has sufficient suspension of motion to show the value of moving with time. The

¹⁷Richard P. Adams, p. 174.

case of Thomas Sutpen has been discussed in the introduction to this paper and his is the most outstanding example of the misuse of time. Indeed, it is around him and his misconceptions that the novel centers and it is from the effort to deny his method that the novel takes its form. "Considered as an integral symbol the form of Absalom says that reality is unknowable in Sutpen's way, by weighing, measuring, calculating."¹⁸

As has been mentioned, Thomas Sutpen had a design according to which he organized his life. Mr. Compson describes his method as a division into phases. The first phase, the construction of the empire, took two years, during which time "they worked from sunup to sundown..." (38) The manner in which Sutpen operated during these two years is suggested by Mr. Compson's observation "that only an artist could have borne Sutpen's ruthlessness and hurry and still manage to curb the dream of grim and castlelike magnificence at which Sutpen obviously aimed..." (38) Following the phase of driven, furious activity, Sutpen began a new phase, one which "required patience or passive time." (39) He rested in this attitude for three years before beginning the third. Having "remained completely static, as if he were run by electricity and someone had come along and removed, dismantled the wiring

¹⁸Hyatt Waggoner, William Faulkner (Lexington, 1959), p. 166.

or the dynamo," (42) he then plugged himself in again and moved on.

Sutpen's entire life was run this way, with phases and episodes and spurts of energy and periods of passivity, but with no continual, progressive flow. Not realizing the changes which time necessitates, he spent his whole life attempting to avoid change, to maintain the plan he had long ago devised for his life.

He also demonstrated his misunderstanding of the relationship of past to present when he attempted to deny one whole segment of his life. Sutpen told General Compson that finding that his first wife was part Negro forced him to reconsider his design. "'I could have reminded them of those wasted years, those years which would now leave me behind with my schedule....But I did not. I merely explained how this new fact rendered it impossible that this woman and child be incorporated in my design....'" (264) With that he simply obliterated that part of his past and determined to begin his design anew. Mr. Compson again confirms this when he describes Ellen's aunt as one of the Jefferson women "who, on the second day after the town saw him five years ago, had agreed never to forgive him for not having any past...." (52)

Even having been threatened by this error once, Sutpen continues to pursue the same course of action. When he comes home from the war he dives in once again, "like maybe

he was hoping to fool the Creditor by illusion and obfuscation by concealing behind the illusion that time had not elapsed and change occurred the fact that he was now almost sixty years old...." (179) Sutpen does not give up, even to the very end of his life. The gesture that ended his life was just one more step in the attempt to complete the design. "All that he was concerned about was the possibility that he might not have time sufficient to do it in, regain his lost ground in." (278)

It is his stubborn pursuit of an inflexible design that defeats Sutpen, and it is this same design that destroys many of the other figures in his story. His misunderstanding of time is so strong that it somehow seems to be transmitted to those he touches. Ellen, his wife, is definitely swept into his furious pattern and eventually fades away with little more than a sense of bewilderment.

Ellen was dead two years now--the butterfly, the moth caught in a gale and blown against a wall and clinging there beating feebly, not with any particular stubborn clinging to life, not in particular pain since it was too light to have struck hard, nor even with very much remembrance of the light vacuum before the gale, but just in bewildered and uncomprehending amazement.... (85)

It is that kind of motionlessness that is always ascribed to Ellen. Rosa's aunt, for instance, taught Rosa to view Ellen as one "who had vanished, not only out of the family and the house but out of life too, into an edifice like Bluebeard's and there transmogrified into a mask looking back with passive and hopeless grief upon the irrevocable world, held there not

in durance but in a kind of jeering suspension...." (60)

Henry and Charles Bon seem also to be caught in the trap of Sutpen's ignorance. Charles Bon seems to make little effort to act; though continually expectant and anxious for some sign from Sutpen, his only overt attempt to force acknowledgement is the writing of the letter to Judith. Otherwise, he merely waits for a sign of recognition from his father and when that doesn't come, he then waits for Henry to do something about the impending marriage. Henry, of course, does act, but his is an action of desperation, a final compliance with what his father has desired all along, rather than an action of understanding or enlightenment.

The characters who join with Thomas Sutpen to act out his drama are almost totally overcome by his distorted time, but even those who tell that story are touched and, in one case, altered.

Aunt Rosa, who had actual contact with Sutpen, is of course affected most strongly. She sees him as a demon, the representative of what destroyed the South. Consequently, her hatred for him has frozen her and she does not move through time but rather lives in the past. When he talks to her, "among the musing and decorous wraiths Quentin seemed to watch resolving the figure of a little girl, in the prim skirts and pantalettes, the smooth prim decorous braids, of the dead time." (21) Seated at the Sutpen table she is described as being "cloistered now by deliberate choice and still in the throes of enforced apprenticeship to, rather than voluntary or even acquiescent participation in, breathing

--this bound maidservant to flesh and blood waiting even now to escape it by writing a schoolgirl's poetry about the also-dead." (65) Rosa's account gives evidence of her preoccupation with the dead past, as opposed to the past moving into and changing the present.

Mr. Compson has not had the personal contact with Sutpen that Rosa has had; neither does he hold the bitterness. But Mr. Compson also sees the whole story as something past, and therefore inexplicable. In describing Henry's killing of Bon he tells Quentin,

'It's just incredible. It just does not explain. Or perhaps that's it: they don't explain and we are not supposed to know. We have a few old mouth-to-mouth tales; we exhume from old trunks letters without salutation or signature...we see dimly people...They are there, yet something is missing...you bring them together in the proportions called for, but nothing happens...just the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene, against the turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs.' (100-101)

It is Quentin who is most profoundly affected and who becomes actually the focus of the novel. His achievement is of quite a different nature than that of either Darl Bundren or Joe Christmas and, because it is more subtle, it is not easy to recognize immediately that he is indeed achieving the same realization as they did. Quentin's experience is less active and more intellectual than either Darl's or Joe's, but the stages of his development are similar. Darl and Joe progress by living the events of their lives, experiencing a moment of realization that clarifies those previous--and therefore present--events, and proceeding as a

different person with a new enlightenment about man's condition. Quentin passes through those same stages, but his development occurs through the living of the lives of others. Through hearing the stories told by Rosa and his father, by telling them himself to Shreve and by eventually losing himself in the story to such an extent that he moves outside mechanical time in much the same way as did Darl and Joe, Quentin, too, can emerge with a new understanding of the existence of the past in the present, of the continual motion of time. And his way of acting on this new enlightenment is to reshape imaginatively the tale he has heard and make it comprehensible. He, too, at that point, through his union with Bon, Henry, and Shreve, comes to a recognition of his own humanity, of the brotherhood into which all humanity is born, and if his rejection as a Southerner from that human community represented by Shreve is less dramatic than that of Darl or Joe, it is no less real. Shreve only rejects him unintentionally, through his inability to comprehend what Quentin's life has been, but it is through the telling of the story that shows Quentin his very real humanity that he also learns the uniqueness of being of the South.

The novel itself may be regarded as the structural expression of what Quentin learns. It is an illustration of the concept that time flows and accumulates, that it cannot be halted and divided or categorized, and that it only becomes intelligible, has meaning, when this is understood.

Quentin goes reluctantly to visit Miss Rosa the first time and his earliest conception of the story is a very simple one. "It seems that this demon...Colonel Sutpen. Who came out of nowhere and without warning upon the land with a band of strange niggers and built a plantation...and married her sister Ellen and begot a son and a daughter...and died...."

(9) As the story unfolds, however, first through Miss Rosa, next through Mr. Compson, and finally through the imaginations of Shreve and Quentin themselves, his own awareness is touched.

It isn't until he gets back to his Harvard room after Christmas vacation that he actually begins to imaginatively reconstruct the story with Shreve's help. Opening his father's letter brings the summer into the winter room with him, "that dead summer twilight--the wistaria, the cigar-smell, the fireflies--attenuated up from Mississippi and into this strange room, across this strange iron New England snow."

(173)

As he becomes more involved and more aware, the past is no longer the past--it becomes the present as it properly should be. Quentin, and Shreve, too, begin to live in that time. Yet it is not as if they are living in the past but as if the past has moved into the present and all of it is for the moment outside of mechanical time. It is again that brief time, as when Darl crossed the river and Joe crashed into the woods after Joanna's murder, when clock time, the normally accepted time, is put away and a new mode of time is

discovered. It is that moment of transcendence that is required for an understanding of time's motion and for the expansion of one's own awareness. At this moment "it seemed to Quentin he could actually see them: the ragged and starving troops without shoes, the gaunt powder-blackened faces looking backward over tattered shoulders..." (189) At this moment, too, he sees, "If I had been there I could not have seen it this plain." (190) He can see it more clearly now because time has illuminated it for him. He is able to merge the past with the present because he can see the way in which each moment is changed by every other moment.

In this existence of past/present both Shreve and Quentin become one with Bon and Henry. They become

Not two of them in a New England college sitting-room but one in a Mississippi library sixty years ago.... It did not matter to them...what faces and what names they called themselves and were called by so long as the blood coursed--the blood, the immortal brief recent intransient blood which could hold honor above slothy unregret and love above fat and easy shame. (295)

It is through the placing of themselves apart from clock time and in union with the spirits of another era that they can begin to imaginatively understand the very real existence of that past in their present.

Quentin's awareness of the significance of what has happened can be seen in his comments as he listens to Shreve;

Maybe we are both Father. Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which

the pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter.... (261)

This is the nature of time, the motion of time. Quentin realizes that the past is continually vibrating into the present, that the "happened" is not just "happened" but is happening still. "Do you understand?" Shreve asks. "'I dont know,' Quentin said. 'Yes of course I understand it...I dont know.'" (362)

Through recognizing this motion, Quentin begins also to recognize who he himself is: "I am older at twenty than a lot of people who have died," (377) he tells Shreve. The acquaintance with time brings this kind of aging because it teaches one to move with time in self-awareness. Finally, when Shreve accuses him of hating the South, he insists, "I dont hate it...I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!" (378) Because he has discovered that the South is what he is, Quentin, through the story of the South, begins to understand the significance of the past that exists in his present. At the same time he realizes the essential human condition, that of movement through time, never escaping the past but carrying it continually with one. It is the same acceptance that Darl Bundren and Joe Christmas come to, the one which eventually brings them peace. Quentin, too, achieves the sense of belonging to the human community, but, at the same time, Shreve, through his emphasis upon Quentin's southern heritage

and the awareness that Quentin derives from it, isolates him from that community. Quentin's isolation is more subtle, and so is the reconciliation he achieves. Still, he has achieved a great understanding and all of the novel reflects it.

V

In As I Lay Dying, Light in August, and Absalom, Absalom!, William Faulkner illustrates through the repeated pattern of the journey the strength and insight of characters who gain unusual understanding of the nature and meaning of time. Darl Bundren, Joe Christmas, and Quentin Compson all undertake the journey in slightly different ways, but each, through his discovery of time's movement and his own brotherhood with all humanity, achieves a stature that sets him apart from all other men.

The journey involves for each man an examination of the past, with the eventual realization that all past exists in the present. Each character at this point undergoes a vivid and concrete experience that reveals to him not only the existence of the past in the present, but also the very motion of time implied in that simultaneous existence. The effect of that experience is almost immediately discernible in each of them: Darl hears the peace in the river's movement; Joe recognizes that he has traveled farther in seven days than in the other thirty years of his life; and Quentin sees that he is older at twenty than most people who have died.

The irony of the situation for all three characters is that the understanding they work so hard to gain serves only to alienate them from the very community that they have finally become parts of. For Joe and Darl the alienation is so complete that it finally destroys them. Yet the simple acceptance of the submission to time and of brotherhood with all men makes the journey worthwhile, and in the quiet calm of Darl watching the burning barn, the peaceful eyes of Joe, and the insistent acceptance by Quentin of his heritage can be seen the strength that each has acquired.

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TIME AND CHARACTER IN THREE NOVELS BY
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by

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ABSTRACT

The use of time in the novels of William Faulkner serves as one means of evaluating character. Man must learn to understand the nature of time and must respond to it in order to become a successful human.

What must first be understood is that the past always exists in the present. There is no event in the past which does not affect in some way the present and, in this way the past is always moving into the present. Because of this continual progress of the past into the present, time must be seen as motion, resulting in what is for man a state of continual change. What this change and motion imply for man is eventual death, and it is this that he must recognize.

As I Lay Dying, Light in August, and Absalom, Absalom! each present for one man a journey towards discovery of his own identity. Darl Bundren, Joe Christmas, and Quentin Compson all begin the respective novel as men aware of time but not fully conscious of its motion. Through the course of his journey, each man at one point, seeing this motion that is time in its pure form, moves outside mechanical time for that moment and recognizes the continual, fluid motion of pure time. After that moment, each of the characters, recognizing a change within himself, becomes aware

of having travelled a great distance and of having learned something very basic about the way in which all men are joined in the common submission to time.

This realization and increased awareness on the part of each of the three characters causes him to be rejected by the other members of society, but it also lends to that character a unique understanding of self and reality.