

HISTORICITY IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

K.MUTHUKUMARAN¹, V. SUMITHIRA²

¹Research Supervisor PRIST Deemed to be University Puducherry

²Research Scholar PRIST Deemed to be University Puducherry

doi: <https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.6119.102>



ABSTRACT

William Faulkner's life and works were shaped by tension contradiction. He valued privacy, but he, "yearned for public validation of his work as a writer. Faulkner's world acclaimed novel *The Sound and the Fury*. It focuses on the deterioration of the Compsons, a Mississippi family destroyed by lovelessness, selfishness and an obsession with lost southern nobility.

The novel that established Faulkner's reputation as a pre-eminent figure in American Literature, *The sound and the Fury* is often considered his most successful work. Praised for its complex structure as well as its penetrating examination of human character, *The sound and the Fury* obscures distinctions between past and present by employing nonchronological narration, stream-of-consciousness techniques and multiple points of view. The work focuses upon the deterioration of the Compsons, a Mississippi family destroyed by lovelessness, selfishness and an obsession with lost Southern nobility. Robert Griffin observed:

The Compsons are doomed by the curse upon them, a curse of blood passed down through generations, expressing itself in feeble-mindedness, insanity, alcoholism and promiscuity and leading to the complete destruction of the family. Furthermore, they are doomed through their pride in the Compson blood, their extreme awareness of the Compson name"(28).

Faulkner described the experience of writing *The sound and the Fury* as one of the most exhilarating pursuits of his career. Following numerous unsuccessful attempts to publish his novel *Flags in the Dust*, he resolved to write only for himself and so began *The sound and the Fury* :

"One day it suddenly seemed as if a door has clapped silently and forever to between me and all publisher's addresses and booklists and I said to myself, Now I can write. Now I can write. Now I can just write. Whereupon I, who had three brothers and no sisters and was destined to lose my first daughter in infancy, began to write about a little girl". (13)

The girl Faulkner first portrayed in "Twilight", a short story eventually expanded into *The sound and the Fury* , is Caddy Compson. Forced into the role of surrogate parent because of her mother's weak, self-pitying and callous nature, Caddy provides compassion and direction for her three brothers during their childhood. However, as an adult, she becomes the focus of their obsessive love and hatred and the simultaneous source of both order and destruction within family; according to Olga W. Vickery, she is "almost a symbol of the blind forces of nature: (35). Although Caddy's viewpoint is not presented in the work, she

emerges through her brothers' monologues as a strong, caring, but desperate figure who was rejected by her kin when her promiscuous behavior resulted in family dishonor.

The sound and the Fury is composed of four sections, each with a distinct narrator who relates the events of a specific date in the Compson's history. The first section consists of a monologue by Benjy Compson, a mentally challenged man whose mind at the age of thirty-three is equivalent to that of a three-year-old child. In an interview, Faulkner vividly described Benjy's character: "Without thought or comprehension; shapeless, neuter, like something eyeless and voiceless which might have lived, existed merely because of its ability to suffer, in the beginning of life; half fluid, groping: a pallid and helpless mass of all mindless agony under sun (45). Although Benjy perceives his surroundings acutely and understands language, he remains locked in his own solitary world, unable to speak, interpret his emotions, or understand the passage of time. At the opening of the novel, he stands near a golf course that was once his favorite pasture, but was sold to pay for his sister Caddy's wedding and for the first year of his brother Quentin's Harvard education. As he listens to the calls of the golfers on the course, his perceptions become intermingled with intense childhood memories that he experiences as though they were occurring in the present. Through mechanical yet powerful recollections that are aroused by sounds, images and smells, the reader discovers that Benjy's basic experience has been one of loss and neglect. His mother, who rejected him when it was discovered that he was retarded, changed his name from Maury, a family name, to Benjy and his brothers, Quentin and Jason, perceive him only as a nuisance and a source of embarrassment.

Some critics have suggested that Compsons' rejection of Benjy symbolizes the moral deterioration of their family as reflected by their intrinsic lack of love, denial of self and aristocratic pride. Throughout *The sound and the Fury*, Benjy howls with grief when remembering his beloved sister Caddy, one of the few people who had shown him compassion and understanding. Explaining Benjy's inability to understanding Caddy's absence, Faulkner stated:

Benjy wasn't rational enough even to be selfish. He was an animal. He recognized tenderness and love though he could not have named them... He no longer had Caddy; being an idiot he was not even aware that Caddy was missing. He knew only that something was wrong, which left a vacuum in which he grieved".

Some critics have also suggested that Benjy functions in some ways as a Christ figure, his anguished wailing expressing an intense, universal suffering. (36)

ii) In the second section of *The sound and the Fury*, Quentin Compson recounts through first-person narration the events and turbulent emotions he experiences on the day of his suicide. Like Benjy, he is immersed in a rigidly ordered private world and vividly recalls his childhood. However, while Benjy is unaware of temporal progression and hungers for affection, Quentin is incapable of love and is virtually paralyzed by his perception of time as a destructive force. He is obsessed with the past and the only future he can imagine for himself is death. Throughout Quentin's narrative, feelings of fear, dread and meaninglessness are emphasized by images of death-like stillness as well as exhaustive references to watches and clocks. Many critics have suggested that the watch Quentin inherits from his aristocratic grandfather, General Compson, symbolizes his inability to relinquish the outdated values of honor and purity that characterized the old South. For example, Quentin is obsessed with Caddy's sexuality; he associates her loss of virginity to a brief lover by whom she becomes pregnant with the loss of Southern nobility and pride. However, it has also been suggested that Quentin's fixation on his sister stems from his own incestuous feelings and his longing to reclaim the closeness they shared as children. Conceiving of the Compson estate as a closed Edenic paradise, Quentin refuses to accept Caddy's pregnancy and her subsequent marriage to Herbert Head, whom she weds to conceal the illegitimacy of her pregnancy. Tormented by guilt and despair, Quentin tells his father that Caddy's unborn child is his Mr. Compson, an alcoholic fatalist who emotionally manipulates his children rejects Quentin's story, recognizing his son's desire to preserve an impossible relationship with Caddy and to sustain the intensity of his emotions from the dissolution caused by the passing of time: "you cannot bear to think that someday it will

no longer hurt you like this" (55). Extensive critical discussion has focused on Quentin's suicide. David Minter summarized the range of possible motives:

Quentin kills himself in part as punishment for his forbidden desires.... But he also kills himself because he fears his own inconstancy. What he discovers in himself is deep psychological impotence. He is unable to play either of the heroic roles; as seducer or as avenger... What he fears is that he will ultimately fail, too, in the role of despairing lover. What he cannot abide is the prospect of a moment when Caddy's corruption no longer matters to him". (85)

iii) The third section of the novel is narrated by Jason Compson, whose monologue has been variously described as suspect, egocentric and grimly satiric. Devoid of introspection, Jason's caustic wit, avarice and harsh rationalism contrast sharply with Benjy's confused observations and Quentin's melancholy narrative. James M. Coz observed: "[Jason's] long lamentation, though a monologue, is not spoken to himself; rather it is his self-dramatization of his plight in a language devoted to reckless and exaggerated criticism of all the ills his flesh is heir to" (60). Unlike Quentin, Jason has no reverence for his lost childhood or the irretrievable past. While Jason is 'free from Quentin's excessive nostalgia and guilt, many critics have suggested that he is victimized by his own worry, fear and suspicion associated with his utilitarian efforts to control time. Jason also contrasts with Quentin in his undisguised contempt for family members. In addition to his derision and sarcasm. Jason's habit of regularly stealing money from his family has prompted some critics to assert that his habitual cruelty indicates the moral collapse of the Compsons. At the time of his narrative, Caddy's husband has divorced her after discovering that her child is not his. Consequently, she sends her illegitimate daughter, whom she has named Quentin in honor of her brother's memory, to live at the Compson household. Acting as Miss Quentin's guardian, Jason embezzles the money Caddy entrusts to him for the child's care. He becomes the victim of his own scheme, however, when Miss Quentin, tormented by the callous treatment she has received in the Compson household and infuriated by Jason's continuous verbal abuse, breaks into his room, steals back her money as well as a substantial portion of his savings and runs away.

The final section of *The sound and the Fury* focuses on Dilsey, the Compson's black housekeeper. In a posthumously published introduction to *The sound and the Fury*, Faulkner described Dilsey as a figure of endurance and stability: "There was Dilsey to be the future, to stand above the fallen ruins of the family like a ruined chimney, gaunt, patient and indomitable" (96). This section contrasts with the three preceding monologues in that it is related from an omniscient, third-person perspective that many critics have associated with Dilsey's freedom from obsessive self-involvement. A sense of community, rather than entrapment within the self, is emphasized by the clear, Christian morality and humanistic decency, Dilsey encourages peace and order in the embittered Compson household. Her acceptance of reality is symbolized by her sensible attitude toward time; the only member of the Compson household who can tell time by the one handed and inaccurate clock in the kitchen, she focuses predominantly on the present. Critics have also discussed the religious aspects of Dilsey's Character, observing that the last section of *The sound and the Fury* occurs on Easter Sunday and ends with Dilsey taking Benjy to church with her. Despite the objections of her fellow worshippers who are offended by the presence of a retarded white man in a black church, Dilsey states, "Tell urn de good Lawd don't keer whether he bright er not" (92). In the novel's climactic scene, she is moved to tears by powerful sermon that many critics regard as the one meaningful act of ritual presented in *The sound and the Fury*. Robert Griffin stated: "Dilsey represents the 'old verities; of Christianity not Christian rites or theological dogma but the fundamental Christian ethic-forbearance and endurance and love and brotherhood"(46).

Time and man's place in history are specifically related, for Faulkner's characters, to their collective experience as Southerners. In one way or another, each of his characters must come to terms with the meaning of Southern history. Three approaches to time and history emerge in *The sound and the Fury*. The first, Quentin's, involves an obsession with and entrapment in, the past. Quentin, is paralyzed, unable to act in the present, because of a commitment to a view of time which is essentially a form of cyclical determinism. Quentin's allegiance is to a dead past, the past of his archetypal culture-hero and ancestor, his grandfather General Compson. Quentin is incapable of living in the present because, for him all the truly valuable acts were

performed in the past and the present is but a dim shadow, a poor reflection, of that past. He be himself fated to a repetition of dead gestures and at, a commitment to a dead past and an outmoded code. The second view of time, Jason's also involves an obsession, but a radically different obsession, with time. For Jason, it is a manipulable commodity, to the used for profit and he never quite has enough of it. For him, "time is money: (80). His is a purely economic orientation, implying a commitment to a materialistic business ethic and a mechanistic, spatialized, naively linear concept of "progress" in its narrowest, laissez-faire sense. Jason replaces Quentin's cyclical determinism with an equally destructive linear determinism. Third view of time, Dilsey's, involves an acceptance of time as lived, experienced duration. It involves no determinism, but implies an existential view of item, which is also, fundamentally, the traditional western view of history.

Jason Compson's attitude toward time has been most elusive for critics. Progress time was tentatively introduced into the Faulkner canon with the appearance of the first Snopes in Jefferson in Sarloris, but it is Jason who presents the first fully rounded treatment. Jason hurts or destroys others-Caddy, Benjy, his niece Quentin-as Flem Snopes will in the Snopes trilogy, by his rapacious exploitation of time as a commodity. While Quentin envisions time as a trap imprisoning him in the past of his dead grandfather, Jason has a little regard for his dead grandfather as for any other Compson or for any other member of the human race: "to him all the rest of *The Town* and the world and the human race too except himself were Compsons, inexplicable yet quite predictable in that they were in no sense whatever to be trusted" (95). Jason has committed what James Dickey has identified as the ultimate act of alienation for a Southerner: he has given up his ancestry. Jason has escaped his past as a Southerner by isolating himself, by becoming a disciple of a naïve, materialistic progress theory of history.

Jason, called ironically the "first sane Compson since before Culloden and (a childless bachelor) hence the last" (36), is logical, rational, in the same sense in which Flem Snopes will be. He has a legalistic rather than moral attitude toward guilt, which psychologically insulates him against the implications of his condition. Neither the absurd freedom to achieve ultimately inconsequential goals, which is one side of progress time, nor the underlying fatalism implied by the fixed and mechanical course of progress time, ever occurs to Jason. Time is a commodity, not a condition. It is to be used: saved, not wasted: expended in a calculated fashion, like money or goods. Unlike Quentin, Jason feels no need to escape time, He rather feels the frustration of one who must be constantly on his guard lest he should fail to get the most for his effort and money out of time. He never quite has enough time: he is always too late to catch his niece. Time thwarts him, but in his view it does so because he fails to use it properly.

Jason is almost an epitome and at the same time a caricature of the American business ethic. In connection with his vindictiveness toward his niece Quentin, whom he unreasonably blames for the loss of the job promised him by Caddy's husband, he says:

After she was gone I felt better. I says I reckon you'll think twice before you deprive me of a job that was promised me. I was a kid then. I believed folks when they said they'd do things. I've learned better since. Besides, like I say I guess I don't need any man's help to get along. I can stand on my own feet like I always have. (106)

He justifies his own greed and unscrupulousness in terms of self-reliance and business is business. He uses Quentin's illegitimacy to blackmail Caddy, he embezzles young Quentin's money, he sweats and scrimps and denied himself pleasures in order to accumulate money. He isolates, self-sufficient and inhuman; but he is vulnerable. His unquestioning acceptance of progress time, with its illusion of freedom, leaves him open to the very evils by which he succeeds. As the isolated self-sufficient man he can trust nobody. He cannot even trust his precious money to a bank. And so the thief is robbed by his victim, not merely of the four thousand dollars which was by rights hers, but also of the \$s, 840.50 which Jason had saved from the labor and sweat of his own time. Although Jason thinks himself the master of time he can use it, save it, convert it into money-he is also the victim of time. Despite his frantic haste, which is everywhere frustrated, he cannot catch up with Quentin. He is always too late, arriving at her latest point of departure just after she has gone.

Jason's view of time lends itself to a biting ironic comic interpretation in *The sound and the Fury* . The busy, bustling Jason is finally reduced to static, thwarted immobility:

He sat there for some time. He heard a clock strike the half hour, then some people began to pass, in Sunday and Easter clothes. Some looked at him as they passed, at the man sitting quietly behind the wheel of a smaller car, with his invisible life revealed out about him like a wornout sock. (142)

Jason undergoes a kind of symbolic death. In one of his class sessions at the University of Virginia, Faulkner defined life as motion and death as stasis. Jason's life is revealed out, finished. Of course he will continue to be alive, but for the moment he is figuratively dead. As Quentin Compson discovered before him, progress time is illusory. Jason will never consciously understand this lesson, because he is incapable of introspection. He will merely redouble his suspicion of every other human being, thinking that he will not be victimized again. And he will be successful until he matches wits with a man more ruthless and unscrupulous than he. In *The Mansion*, Flem Snopes beats Jason out of the last piece of Compson land. Jason sells the land to Flem for an airport which he knows will never be built and then discovers that Snopes intended from the first to use it for jerry built housing. Commenting on Jason's reaction to being in taken by Flem, V.K. Realiff says [in *The Mansion*], "That Jason may have divined, as though through some prescience bequeathed him by their mutual master, the Devil, that Flwm Snoped didn't want and didn't intend to have a flying field on that property" (123). Jason will again learn that living as a predator has its drawbacks, particularly when another and stronger predator comes along. The jungle ethic of progress time offers a deadly king of freedom.

While Jason believes himself radically free as a result of his rejection of the past, Quentin believes himself wholly conditioned and determined by it. His section of the novel begins, appropriately with his own statement of his preoccupation with time: Quentin's apprehension of time is frequently in terms of clocks and watches. For Quentin the watch or clock is the symbol of his dilemma, the neurasthenic inability to confront the meaning of his past and live in the present. With its circular dial around which the hands continually swing in an endlessly repeated cycle, it is a symbol of cyclical time. The watch will become the ambivalent center of Quentin's irreconcilable tension between cyclical and progress time. When he received it from his father he was told, "I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire" (106). Time is the invincible enemy which frustrates human aspirations, the negation of freedom: "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" (130). Quentin learns from his father to expect defeat as fated and inevitable. Hearing the watch, Quentin goes to the dresser, turns the watch face down and returns to bed. Then he begins to wonder what time it is. The mechanical progression of time is as terrifying to him as the power of the past. Neither present nor past is congenial to him; yet he can escape neither.

Sartre has noted that time for Quentin Compson does not move out of the past into the future. It is rather past and present confused, without expectation of future. It is rather past and present confused, without expectation of future. Man is "deprived of potentiality and explained only by what he was" (160). His obsession with the past is so radical as to deprive him of the capacity for effective action in the present and so he cannot move into the future in any real sense. As his father tells him, "a man is the sum of his misfortunes. One day you'd think misfortune would get tired, but then time is your misfortune" (145). Quentin defines himself as the sum of his family's past. In more than a figurative sense, he is his dead grandfather, but only a pale shadow of him. Not Quentin, the living grandson, but General Compson, the dead ancestor-hero, is real. The past has substance, it can be apprehended. The present is irrational, incomprehensible, terrifying. Quentin cannot cope with change, especially change in his sister Caddy. Change is a threat, for it appears to deny the efficacy of the past. He attempts to convince his father that he is guilty of incest with Caddy, for he thinks that this act will be so monstrous as to isolate him and Caddy from change. He will remove them from human time, preserve the past forever. He fails because he could not commit incest, not because it is a terrible sin, but because he is incapable of doing anything in the present. Even his suicide is conceived as already having taken place in the past, as a result of past actions not of his doing, but inherited with his name. As Sartre points out, Quentin does not choose his suicide, because he cannot conceive of not committing suicide; it is determined,

inevitable, actually only a repetition of his grandfather's death. Before he leaves his Harvard dormitory room for his last walk, he invests his grandfather with a new archetypal significance:

It used to be that thought of death as a man something like Grandfather a friend of his a king of private and particular friend like we used to think of Grandfather's desk not to touch it not even to talk loud in the room where it was always I thought of them as being together some where all the time waiting for old Colonel Sartoris to come down and sit with them waiting on a high place beyond the cedar trees Colonel Sartoris was on a still higher place looking out across at something and they were waiting for him to get done looking out across at something and they were waiting for him to get done looking at it and come down Grandfather wore his uniform and we could hear the murmur of their voices from beyond the cedars they were always talking and Grandfather was always right. (162).

The Grandfather archetype is invoked and identified with death. If the only valuable acts are the ones performed by the ancestor-hero and his ultimate act was death, then Quentin must die. He must rejoin the past in which his grandfather is still present to him.

He has already broken his grandfather's watch, a symbolic rejection of both cyclical and progress time. The symbolic rejection was ineffectual and one cannot escape the past. He has merely repeated his humiliation at the hands of Dalton Ames. And the watch keeps ticking. He cannot escape progress time either. He must commit himself to one or the other. He can live in neither. He puts the broken but still ticking watch in Shreve's room and walks to the bridge and joins his grandfather.

Set against Quentin's absorption in past time, on the one hand and Jason's impatience with the present in order to get into the more lucrative and successful future, on the other, is Dilsey's life of duration. After Dilsey's name in the Appendix written for the Viking portable Faulkner and reprinted as the Foreword of the Modern Liberty edition of *The sound and the Fury*, is written the simple legend, "They endured". In another context Faulkner says of her, "Dilsey, the Negro woman, she was a good human being. That she held that family together for not the hope of

On the wall above a cupboard, invisible save at night, by lamplight 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 o'clock" (92).

Mechanical progress time and cyclical time are both mocked in Dilsey's enigmatically profound clock which tells no time at all. For Quentin the watch, even stripped of its hands, remained a powerful force in his imagination, to be somehow reckoned with, or escaped in death. For Dilsey the clock is of so little consequence that its chronology and hers need not even coincide. Faulkner makes a point of repeating this motif twice again, emphasizing Dilsey's easy acceptance of lived time.

While Jason sits in the figurative death of motionlessness in Mottstown, Delsey, Luster and Benjy attend Easter services in the Negro church. The simple and moving sincerity of the service and the fierce but peaceful dignity of the weeping Dilsey are a muted contrast to the furious, frantic disintegration of Jason and his final capitulation to defeat. Quentin had died on Good Friday, Caddy's daughter Quentin had fled on Holy Saturday. There is no Resurrection on Easter Sunday for the Compsons. Dilsey sees only destruction for them. Because they cannot cope with time, they are defeated, crushed by the weight of the past or deceived by the illusion of success in the future. The Compsons cannot live in the real, existential present.

As an ironic commentary on the Compson destiny, the novel closes with the one Compson who has successfully achieved peace with time, the idiot Benjy, riding past the Confederate Monument in the Jefferson city square-the monument to the past which has, in one way or another, defeated them all. Luster has driven Benjy around the square many times and always in the same direction. This time he elects to drive in the opposite direction, a gesture, perhaps, of rebellion against the Compson world. Benjy's reaction is a predictable howl of terror and confusion. With characteristic violence, Jason reacts to the disruption of orderly progression. Fuming and exasperated as usual, he curses and strikes Luster and reverses the direction.

Benjoy's idiot calm is restored and Jason is reassured that orderly linear progress is efficacious. None of the Compsons can cope with the real world. Each attempts to escape it in some way: Quentin through suicide, his father through whisky and a cynical brand of stoicism, his mother through hypochondria and self-pity, Jason through sheer refusal to consider any alternative to his economic jungle, Caddy and Quentin III by actual physical flight. Only Benjy, an idiot, succeeds in avoiding the anguish of time, but he cannot do so on a human level. Of all the characters in *The sound and the Fury*, only Dilsey, who, as a Negro, is also a symbol of that past which has defeated the Compsons, or, to be more precise, a symbol of the terrible burden of guilt which lies in that past and causes Quentin's obsession and Jason's rejection, only Dilsey can live in the world the Compsons have made.

But we only gradually reconstruct for ourselves the Compson family's history, because it is presented to us only as it recurs in fragments in the memories of the characters whose interior monologues we overhear. Not only does this method of narration disrupt the order of events radically; it also presents these disordered events to us without explanation because the people who are remembering them know them too well to need to explain them to themselves; in the case of Benjy this lack of explanation goes even further, for well as he knows what he is remembering, Benjy does not understand most of it. What Faulkner gains by using this method is an uninterrupted view of his characters' innermost thoughts and feelings. In a conventional realistic novel the events of an action are presented in a temporal order; how a character knows these events, the order of the thoughts and feelings and memories which constitute his consciousness, can only be occasionally hinted at and must be largely reconstructed from such hints by the reader. In *The sound and the Fury* – except for the last section, which is written in the third person the consciousness of the characters are presented in the order that the ebb and flow of thoughts, feelings and memories determine; the events of the action can only be hinted at when the thoughts and memories of the characters touch on them in some psychologically plausible way and their temporal order must be largely reconstructed from such hints by the reader. What Faulkner has done, then, is to subordinate the historical reality of the temporal order of events to the psychological reality of the affective order of the consciousness.

What no Compson can endure is the outrage to his pride, the loss of dignity, imposed on him by his own time-bound nature. What Quentin will kill himself rather than endure is the temporal change that carries him and Caddy out of the timeless paradise of their childhood affection and brings Caddy to the fulfillment of her nature in her love for Dalton Ames and her pregnancy. Rather than admit that time can do that to him and Caddy, Quentin first insists that Caddy had no lover, that he and she have committed incest and then when Caddy does not join him in this grotesque and tragic fantasy but instead marries he commits suicide. Throughout the day of his suicide, as if to emphasize his awareness that time is his real enemy, Quentin is obsessed by the ticking of the watch he has inherited from the past, from his grandfather. He tears off its hands and then listens sardonically to its incoherent ticking, "clicking away", as he says, "not knowing it couldn't even lie" (120).

The reason Quentin so hates time is made clear in the conversation with his father about his claim to have committed incest with Caddy that he remembers just before he commits suicide:

... you wouldn't [he remembers his father saying] have been driven to the expedient of telling me you have committed incest [had you not been serious] and I wasn't lying I wasn't lying and he you wanted to sublimate a piece of human folly into a horror and then exorcise it with truth and it was to isolate her out of the loud noise of the world so that it would have to flee us of necessity and then the sound of it would be as though it had never been and he did you try to make her do it and I I was afraid she might and then it wouldn't have done any good but if I could tell you we did it would have been so and then the others wouldn't be so and then the world would roar away and he and now this other [Quentin's threat of suicide] you are not lying now-either but you are still blind to what is in yourself to that part of general truth the sequence of natural man's brow even benjys you are not thinking of finitude you are contemplating an apotheosis in which a temporary state of the mind will

become symmetrical above the flesh and aware both of itself and of the flesh it till not quite discard you will not even be dead. (134).

The novel opens with Benjy's interior monologue, on the morning of April 7, 1928, Benjy's birthday and he has an usual gone to look at the pasture under the care of Luster, Dilsey's grandchild:

Luster came away from the flowers tree and we were
fence and they [the golgers] stopped and were
looked through the fence ... "Here,
went across the pasture. I held to
going away. (136)

Faulkner has sketched two types of

Innocence of the world, the other by the

Her knowledge of the world. For no one has

When Dilsey is walking back from church, back into the unavoidable world of time that no Compson except Benjy has ever been able to endure, she continues to cry. It offends Frony's sense of the social decencies:

"Whyn't you quit dat, mammy? Wid all dese people looking.

We be passing white folks soon."

"I've seed de first en de last," Dilsey said. "Never you mind me."

"First en last what?" Frony said

"Never you mind", Dilsey said. "I seed de beginning, en now I sees de endin". (150)

What Dilsey has seen is not merely the temporal, historical reality or the Compsons, whom she has known from the first to the last member of the family, but also the paradoxical reality of that history's timeless meaning. Dilsey is remembering and believing the promise of "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (149).

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Faulkner, William, *The Hamlet*. London: Grafton Books, 1970.

---. *The Intruder in the Dust*. London: Grafton Books, 1983.

---. *The Sound and Fury*. London: Grafton Books, 1983.

Secondary Sources

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Modern Critical Views: William Faulkner*. New York, 1986.

Cowley, Malcolm. *The Portable Faulkner*. New York, 1946.

Gray, Richard. *The Life of William Faulkner: A Critical Biography*. Cambridge, Mass., 1994.

Grimwood, Michael. *Heart in Conflict: Faulkner's Struggles with Vocation*.

Athens, Ga., 1987. Details Faulkner's personal struggle over his identities as writer and farmer in relation to major texts.