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# "Infinitesimal Progress": Rethinking Bergsonian Modalities of Time in William Faulkner's Novels, 1929-1932

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**“Infinitesimal Progress”: Rethinking Bergsonian Modalities of Time in  
William Faulkner’s Novels, 1929-1932**

An Honors Thesis

Presented to  
The Department of English  
Bates College  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Bachelor of Arts

by  
Beau Sperry  
Lewiston, Maine  
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To Patricia and Barbara, whose endurance, love, and dedication could fill a thousand thesis binders.

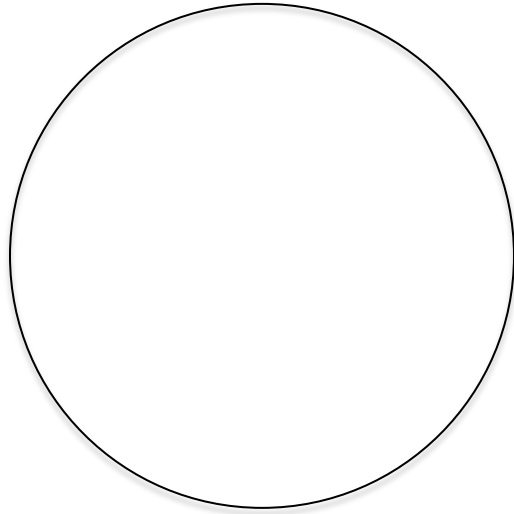
To Saja Chodosh, a best friend to whom I could speak silence for hours.

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## Abstract

William Faulkner's depictions of the past are as ornate as they are inescapable. His characters cannot escape the perpetual imposition of the past upon the present; entire lineages fall victim to the flaws of their fathers, history is as cyclical as the movements of a wagon along a dusty Mississippi road. This thesis explains the Bergsonian mechanics of duration present in *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, and *Light in August* and reevaluates the fatalistic implications Faulkner's macabre characters face recursively in and through time. Much of the critical exploration of time in Faulkner's fiction is outmoded and does not correspond with current modes of analysis, particularly race and gender studies. However, a critical reevaluation of Faulkner's fatalistic depictions of time offers new studies a different undertaking. This thesis explores the implications of reuniting Bergsonism and three of Faulkner's novels, concentrating on the significant implications wagons and wagon wheels bear on a paradoxically static but perpetually moving time. Through this reading, this thesis offers a nuanced account of what temporal modalities in Faulkner might amount to in this century.

## **Introduction: The Relevance of Bergsonian Time in Contemporary Narrative**

Matthew McConaughey opens his fourth beer, lights a cigarette, and laments:

Why should I live in history, huh? Fuck, I don't wanna know anything anymore; this is a world where nothing gets solved. Someone once told me that time is a flat circle and that everything we've ever done or will do we're gonna do over and over and over again, and that little boy and that little girl they're both gonna be in that room again and again and again forever (*True Detective*).

The contemporary drama series *True Detective* (HBO, 2014) taps many of the classic signposts of the Southern Gothic genre. It is also unabashedly borrows from a Faulknerian lexicon of temporal and psychological unrest and discomfort. *True Detective* is obsessed with time; its narrative structure consists of layers where the same characters move backward and forward into time, often abruptly or without delineation. The show chronicles two flawed, unreliable detectives as they chase a serial killer who repeats his disturbing, ritualistic style of killing over the course of several decades in swamps across Louisiana. Matthew McConaughey plays Detective Rustin Cohle whose intelligence borders on clairvoyance and is fundamentally obsessed with time's inescapably recursive nature, casually citing such thinkers as Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche to legitimize his macabre perspective.

*True Detective* has garnered incredible popularity and critical acclaim since its 2014 release. But the premises under which the narrative structure operates are far from original. Its pervasive fatalism, oddity, and unrest are important tropes of the Southern Gothic genre, a narrative tradition whose roots extend from Virginia-



born Edgar Allen Poe to present-day television dramas such as *True Detective*, *True Blood*, and *The Walking Dead*. The similarity of these three titles is immediately striking. Each on some level is concerned with the impermanence of death, the psychological implications of relentless movement, and the self-conscious (and sometimes ironic) representation of the tragic genre.

These themes are most at home—and most artfully depicted—in William Faulkner’s fictions. Between 1929 and 1932, Faulkner experimented heavily with narrative time by obscuring traditional notions of linear time while depicting a phenomenological picture of how time passes psychologically in each character. The complex, avant-garde techniques Faulkner employs in his works during this period are essentially unprecedented in American fiction. *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying*, (1930), and *Light in August* (1932) are considered to be some of the finest works of American fiction and establish Faulkner as the main representative of the Southern Gothic literary discourse.

But despite the increasing popularity of Southern Gothic narratives in contemporary America, studies of time and temporality in Faulkner’s works are largely outdated. Writing on temporal arrangement in Faulkner seems to have been a critical project of the mid-twentieth century; indeed, the most relevant papers written on Faulkner and time came about between 1960 and 1975. What constitutes this gap in criticism? Does this decrease in criticism suggest that studies of the topic have been exhausted? What might a reprisal of such study tell us about Faulkner’s obsession with temporality in the new century?

This thesis reexamines the once oft-discussed topic of temporal modalities in Faulkner's fiction. Criticism of Faulkner's snapshots of time trace back through such public intellectuals as Jean-Paul Sartre and richly describe the nuance and form of the novels in question. Much of this criticism is centered around Faulkner's influence by the French philosopher Henri Bergson, whose works *Time and Free Will* (1889), *Matter and Memory* (1896), and *Creative Evolution* (1907) provide theories of time as a perpetually flowing present that humans intelligently render into representations and heuristics in order to differentiate the past from the present and make decisions and choices that govern their realities. Bergson suggests that images of the past (and the innate human ability to intuit and determine them) constantly invade the present yet do not consider the past as a deterministic force that necessarily renders the future. In fact, Bergson is a staunch opponent of determinism in any form it could represent.

Bergsonian engagement with the text is far from an outdated phenomenon. Mark Cirino reintroduces Georges Poulet's paper "Bergson: The Theme of the Panoramic Vision of the Dying and Juxtaposition" in a contemporary context, suggesting, "Using Bergson to read McCarthy and other contemporary authors is not intended to be an attention-seeking critical gambit" (Poulet 483). Reading Cormac McCarthy through Bergson is clear evidence that temporal studies of contemporary gothic literature can benefit from a Bergsonian lens regardless of how dated it appears at first glance. Indeed, death (and its paradoxical, sick impermanence) is one of the central themes and projects of Southern Gothic

literature. As the genre regains cultural popularity, critics are warranted in their efforts to reevaluate Bergsonian manifestations of time in the twenty-first century.

Twenty-first century Bergsonism must be re-viewed through the lens of contemporary cultural studies. This reevaluation is particularly pertinent to Faulkner's works because of their highly nuanced and complicated racial and gender dynamics. However, a reevaluated and resituated systematic of Bergsonian time must be created before such studies can occur. This is the project of this thesis.

Much of the Bergsonian criticism in Faulkner centers on the psychological inability of characters to process time according to a Bergsonian dynamic instead of a linear one. Critics often suggest that Faulkner's characters fatalistically impose their futures upon themselves; their inability to reconcile their pasts with their present creates the macabre circumstances they encounter.

This is the philosophical juncture at which I argue that Faulkner departs from the Bergsonian sphere of influence. The collective, grim pasts he depicts entrap the characters he creates, surrounding and often overcoming them. Faulkner's characters are entrapped within pasts, earned or inherited, that determine their fate in each of his narratives. Yoknapatawpha is defined by its inexorable stasis: pasts are doomed to repeat themselves; people are damned to make the mistakes of their predecessors. It is for these reasons that in *Light in August*, Reverend Gail Hightower grieves, "is it any wonder that this world is peopled principally by the dead?" (Faulkner 459) Faulkner's twisted realities present animate ghosts and phantoms that speak and even drive the narrative

forward. For Faulkner, even death is not an escape from the sordid, infinitely recursive nature of existence.

The realignment of the Bergsonian theories of duration within a gothic fatalist paradigm informs a more nuanced study of Faulknerian time and paves the way for new, exciting studies of temporality in his works. Due to the somewhat antiquated nature of much of the criticism on the subject, Faulknerian studies of time would invariably benefit from rejuvenated critical inquiry using this altered Bergsonian framework within the contexts of gender and racial criticism. These forms of criticism would undoubtedly offer new insight into what constitutes identity and difference in the Faulknerian universe. This thesis might be considered a foundation for such inquiries into cultural studies, and with this foundation in mind I establish the fatalist Bergsonian reading of time that augments the precision of future inquiries into time in Faulkner.

This theme of infinite recursion in Faulkner's works is communicated through important signifiers such as the wagon wheel and clock. The wagon wheel as signifier is largely understudied in Faulknerian criticism; clocks are better represented yet also lack a comprehensive study of fatalist variations of Bergsonian time that this thesis presents. Wagon wheels are prominent signifiers in *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, and *Light in August* and are inseparable from the inescapable repetition the act of living in a Faulknerian universe constitutes.

This thesis provides a thematic genealogy of the wagon's progress through Faulkner's fictions between 1929 and 1932, choosing to explain the Bergsonian dynamics within the text and the fatalist implications that combine to create a

paradoxical “frozen movement” that pervades Faulkner’s works. Through this reevaluation of Bergsonian time, grounded in a critical exploration of the wagon’s significance in each narrative, this thesis establishes a critical precedent for the reevaluation of commonly considered Bergsonian metrics of time in Faulkner. Faulkner’s pasts are as inescapable as they are ornate, and a thorough reevaluation of the frieze images they depict allows us a more nuanced perspective on what temporal Faulknerian modalities might amount to in this century.

“Oh,” Clark Gable said, “Do you write?” “Yes, Mr. Gable,” Faulkner replied,  
“What do you do?”

Joseph Blotner, *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*

### **I. A Brief Biographical Note on Faulkner’s Fascination with Time**

Faulkner, ever the raconteur, always took care to represent his own life in mysterious or enigmatic mixes of fact and fiction. For example, when asked to submit a biographical profile for *Forum*, a journal that was later to publish “A Rose for Emily,” Faulkner wrote that he “[q]uit school after five years in the seventh grade” and joined the British Royal Air Force because he “[l]iked British Uniform” (Blotner 47). From that point in the biographical profile, Faulkner’s claims become more ridiculous and apparent in their farcicality. Faulkner quit school in the eleventh grade after earning top marks in grammar school and was commissioned in the Canadian Royal Air Force where he never completed training. Carolyn Porter comments on Faulkner’s deliberate biographical misrepresentation, stating, “[f]rom the outset, it is clear that Faulkner is making fun of the implicit biographical form” (Porter 2). That Faulkner openly mocks biographical form implies a disinterest with linear retrospection and serves as an interesting link between his life and his fictions. He chooses to examine the present moment in which he lives as an impetus for describing his past in a manner that coincides with his authorial approach to *The Sound and the Fury*, where he claims in an interview that he “figure[s] what must have happened before to lead people to that particular moment, and I work away from it, finding out how people act after the moment” (Blotner 373). The relationship between the temporalities in Faulkner’s fictions and his descriptions of

his own personal life perhaps intimate a congruent, if not symbiotic, relationship between them.

Time and its impositions of history and lineage appear to have troubled Faulkner. Many biographers note his concern with perceptions of his own masculinity, and his efforts to play the role of a masculine southern gentleman are well documented<sup>1</sup>. In his youth, Faulkner was deeply interested in athletics, heritage, and the soldiering life: three distinctly masculine projects. Despite having never flown an airplane, Faulkner returned to Mississippi after the war wearing a uniform not commensurate with his station or rank and walked with a limp and a cane, claiming his plane had been shot down over France during the war. Porter considers, "It is noteworthy that he now used the name Faulkner rather than Falkner, having added the 'u' to the same fraudulent forms he submitted when joining the [British] RAF" (Porter 7). The ridiculous spectacle of these behaviors displays Faulkner's fascination with constructed pasts and temporalities.

The temporality of lineage, too, deeply concerned Faulkner from his youth. Faulkner displayed a profound interest in carrying the legacy of his great grandfather, who, for Faulkner, embodied all that was masculine, successful, and southern. Blotner notes, "From the time he was nine years old, William Faulkner would respond to the perennially annoying adult question, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' by saying 'I want to be a writer like my great-granddaddy'" (23). In addition to William Clarke Falkner's status as a writer, he was held in high

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<sup>1</sup> See Porter, Carolyn. *Lives and Legacies: William Faulkner*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> See Bergson, Henri. *Time and Free Will*, trans. F. L. Pogson. London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1910.

<sup>3</sup> Sartre has been critiqued (correctly, I think) for generalizing Faulkner's temporal experimentation

esteem for being a successful business owner and decorated Civil War colonel. Faulkner's declaration to emulate the enigmatic, masculine great-grandfather for whom he was named displays within his own life a profound concern with the projects of lineage and masculinity. Faulkner's great-grandfather fulfilled any conception of a masculine and tragic end when he was gunned down by a former business partner in 1889, eight years before Faulkner would be born. Despite Faulkner's never having known his great-grandfather, his letters display a clear concern with emulating his predecessor's image. In the 1954 foreword to *The Faulkner Reader*, Faulkner reflects on his youth, suggesting, "This was 1915 and '16...and I was waiting, biding, until I would be old enough or free enough or anyway could get to France and become glorified and beribboned too" (Meriwether 180). This late-in-life reflection reveals Faulkner's immediate concern with fulfilling and continuing his grandfather's lineage and participating in a longstanding tradition and archetype of the intelligent, courageous, and successful masculine southern gentleman. Faulkner's fictions are filled with the same obsessions over the participation and conservation of lineage and the suffering and difficulty that often accompany it.

Faulkner's personal obsession with lineage appears as a salient, historical trace through which we can evaluate Faulkner's obsession with paradoxical renderings of time. Faulkner, like many characters that drive his fictions, obsessed over the proliferation of his family's lineage or good name. However, unlike the fiction, Faulkner's desire to apply his family's past into the present was a highly complicated and protracted process. Blotner's biography of Faulkner describes



Faulkner's intimate interaction with his mother Maud on her deathbed. She asks, according to Blotner, if she will have to be reunited with her late husband in heaven, to which Faulkner replies, "No, not if you don't want to." She then replies, "[T]hat's good, I never did like him" (761-762). This intra-family vitriol, combined with the fact that Faulkner's father often struggled to find work, paints a picture that suggests Faulkner's reckoning and adjusting of his lineage was multifaceted at best.

Faulkner's curious tendency toward hyperbolic self-representation provides a nuanced perspective from which we might evaluate his interest in Bergsonian theories of time. Faulkner's predisposition to consider lineage as a somewhat paradoxical product of time's forward progress (one is renamed according to names valued in the past; time marches on relentlessly) allows us insight into his initial fascination with time and temporality. With these biographical details in mind, consider the period in Faulkner's literary career in which experimentations with narrative forms of time are most evident.

*"I am telling the same story over and over, which is myself and the world"*

William Faulkner, *Selected Letters*

## **II. Faulkner's Works between 1929-1932: Why the Timeline Matters**

Faulkner had a particularly long and prolific writing career that spanned four decades and included prose, poetry, and screenplays. This thesis focuses on works of fiction Faulkner composed between 1929 and 1932; *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, and *Light in August* are its primary texts. These three novels depict Faulkner's fascination with Bergsonian time more than his other works, and because they were created in such quick succession, it may suggest Faulkner was overtly concerned with time during these years. These three novels brought Faulkner out of relative obscurity into canonical fame, and aside from *Absalom, Absalom!*, are considered his finest fictions. The following section examines the thematic and literal links between these three works and justifies the exclusion of Faulkner's other seminal works such as *Sanctuary* and *Absalom, Absalom!* on the basis of the same thematic and biographical criteria.

*The Sound and the Fury* appeared on October 7, 1929 and prompted an initially mixed critical response. Many considered the work to be unnecessarily abstruse or difficult to follow, while others were quick to compliment its nuanced constructions of language and plot. On many occasions Faulkner would mention that he was most proud of *The Sound and the Fury*, and that he "worked so hard at that book, that I doubt if there's anything in it that didn't belong there" (Minter 104). Looking back on the work, Faulkner reminisced on how much more he enjoyed

composing *The Sound and the Fury* than his other works, noting that he had “written [his] guts into *The Sound and the Fury* though I was not aware until the book was published that I had done so, because I had done it for pleasure” (Blotner 220).

Faulkner’s writing of *The Sound and the Fury* was for him a rapturous process that he would spend much of his career trying to recreate. As he continued to produce increasingly popular work, critics would look to *The Sound and the Fury* as Faulkner’s inaugural declaration of superb talent and literary craft.

Stylistically *The Sound and the Fury* represents Faulkner’s first completely modernist or avant-garde work of fiction. The novel’s temporal construction and stream-of-consciousness style of narration confused and seduced readers then and for years to come. Many were too quick to submit that Faulkner’s use of italics and changing tenses were cheaply and frivolously employed; years of intense study have proven these claims to be invalid. In a letter to Ben Wasson, Faulkner readily defends these temporal shifts as purposefully situated and insists that Wasson stop editing the draft Faulkner had sent him. Defensively, Faulkner states, “I purposely used italics for both actual scenes and remembered scenes for the reason, not to indicate the different dates of happenings, but merely to permit the reader to anticipate a thought-transference, letting the recollection postulate its own date” (Blotner 45). Such instances of “thought-transference” establish *The Sound and the Fury*’s keen interest in time and temporality. Furthermore, Faulkner’s suggestion that memory is an autonomous entity enriches our reading of time and Bergsonian influence—that recollection can put forward its own date assumes a sort of ever-flowing continuum from which memory, independent of human agency or

intelligence, can choose moments to represent or project onto human consciousness. Finally, Faulkner considers the narrative's pace and seemingly abrupt transfer between and through memory space, suggesting "a break indicates an objective change in tempo, while the objective picture here should be a continuous whole, since the thought transference is subjective" (Blotner 243). This statement implies multiple agreements with Bergsonian mechanics of time. Time's status as subjective phenomenon, and that time's objective or full picture should be perceived as a "continuous whole" coincides with Bergsonian theories of intelligence and duration<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, signifiers of wagons and clocks play fundamental roles in the physical manifestation of time's articulations in the novel. *The Sound and the Fury*, then, considered one of Faulkner's most brilliant works, may as well be considered as one of the novels most apt for Bergsonian critical analysis.

Shortly after publishing *The Sound and the Fury*, (and embarking upon the requisite and particularly colorful streak of binge drinking in New York) Faulkner began work on *Sanctuary*. He was disappointed with the initial reception of *The Sound and the Fury* and was plagued with financial troubles that would prove to affect him for the duration of his career. Beset by these issues, Faulkner declared that he would construct an accessible, popular novel whose main goal would be to establish his reputation. *Sanctuary* was to be this project. Faulkner, after its release, commented upon it, suggesting, "I took a little time out and speculated what a person in Mississippi would believe to be current trends, chose what I thought was

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<sup>2</sup> See Bergson, Henri. *Time and Free Will*, trans. F. L. Pogson. London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1910.

the right answer and invented the most horrific tale I could imagine and wrote it in about three weeks” (Blotner 233). Here, Faulkner adopts his classically enigmatic and hyperbolic strategy for self-representation. Despite his suggestions that he had written *Sanctuary* in under one month, Faulkner marked the final manuscript, “Oxford, Miss./January-May 1929” (237). The disparity between the truth and Faulkner’s invented narrative suggests an intentional self-distancing from the work that differentiates it from the other works Faulkner produced between 1929 and 1932.

This is not to say, however, that *Sanctuary* is a poorly crafted novel. Phil Stone, Faulkner’s friend and mentor, commented upon its craft, alluding to the idea that he was “sure that Faulkner was intent on shaping it into a work of art rather than a sensational potboiler” (237). *Sanctuary*, though different from Faulkner’s other novels, is an exemplar of the Southern Gothic and True Crime genres. Nevertheless, Carolyn Porter takes care to differentiate *Sanctuary* from Faulkner’s other works during this time, suggesting:

One can’t comfortably situate it within the constellation of Faulkner’s greatest fiction because it is indeed sadistic, and primarily toward its readers, whom Faulkner seems to have regarded—as his 1932 Introduction suggests—with anger and contempt (Porter 61).

The suggestion that *Sanctuary*’s creative genesis was somehow “sadistic” is a controversial claim. But Porter’s differentiation holds weight, and *Sanctuary*’s relatively conventional temporal structure certainly separates it from the fictions that directly surround it in Faulkner’s corpus.

Though *Sanctuary* is not typically placed in the highest tier of Faulkner's works, its temporal situation between works that concern this thesis' topic would theoretically legitimize it as a subject for temporal inquiry. *Sanctuary's* structure is essentially chronological, and Faulkner's volition that this novel be simple and easily marketable is a relatively easy explanation for its structure. Still, *Sanctuary's* structure, though chronological, contains what Gerald Langford refers to as an "intricate pattern of flashbacks and shifting perspectives" (Langford 7). It is evident that Faulkner learned a great deal in composing *The Sound and the Fury* and that the intricacy and craft demonstrated in its construction contributed to and informed *Sanctuary*. Although *Sanctuary* is far from the slipshod bestseller Faulkner made it out to be, its temporal construction is not nearly as experimental as his other works and is therefore not a pertinent subject for this thesis.

*As I Lay Dying*, by contrast, presents experimental strategies of theme and narration that warrant a Bergsonian analysis. Faulkner finished *Sanctuary* in May of 1929 but didn't publish it until 1931. In early October of 1929, as he began to receive complimentary and encouraging reviews of *The Sound and the Fury* from around the country, he began *As I Lay Dying* on October 25th, several weeks later. Faulkner worked at a blistering pace and completed the initial draft in December, making few revisions to the manuscript and establishing a final manuscript in early January of 1930.

Likely the advent of critical acclaim for *The Sound and the Fury* encouraged Faulkner to begin a similarly experimental project only a few weeks later. *As I Lay Dying* displays many of the same temporally experimental narrative constructions

found in the *Sound and the Fury* yet chooses to complicate its relationship to time's passage by including substantially more narrators whose proximity (physical and emotional) to the Bundren family vary greatly. In addition, *As I Lay Dying* continues to explore the critical Faulknerian project to comment on language's constantly changing and futile nature. Language is represented in Faulkner as a barely functional system of reference that vainly tries to add order or cohesion to events and the feelings that rise as results of them. Porter describes this gap:

In foregrounding the gap between words and deeds, the novel brings directly to the surface the issue of language already at work in *The Sound and the Fury*. The possibility that words relate only arbitrarily to their meaning, and thus that our speech is 'full of sound and fury, signifying nothing,' becomes in *As I Lay Dying* a central hypothesis (Porter 81).

The potential insignificance of language as arbitrary impacts our temporal readings of Faulkner because it emphasizes that spatiotemporal relations are the only legitimate expression of time's passing. If language cannot convey significant feelings, including those of temporal passage, the signs of space and movement become the primary agents of representing time's passage in both *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*.

Space, and the Bundren family's movement through it, constitute a central theme in *As I Lay Dying* that articulates and defines time's constant, recursive, and Bergsonian passage throughout the novel. The entire novel is predicated upon the movement of a wagon that is the central physical object that governs time's passing. Hence, the wagon and the road it travels on are fundamentally important to the temporal structure in *As I Lay Dying*. The wagon's repetitive journey and the

eternally recursive movement of its wheels embody Bergsonian conceptions of movement. *As I Lay Dying* stylistically and thematically agrees with *The Sound and the Fury* and was produced within the same short period of time offers us an opportunity to analyze temporal modalities in Faulkner's fiction through both works.

The final novel Faulkner wrote during this period between 1929 and 1932 opens entirely new modes of study through its provocative discourse on race. *Light in August* was published in October of 1932, almost a year and a half after the corrected text of *Sanctuary* was released to the public. Both *Sanctuary* and *As I Lay Dying* had garnered considerable acclaim by this point in Faulkner's career, and *Light in August* sought to expand his literary reputation. Much of the novel's composition occurred when Faulkner worked in Hollywood for MGM Studios (many critics suggest Faulkner's time in Hollywood augmented his ability to "zoom in and out" of characters in *Light in August*) and served as a major turning point in his literary composition and social commentary. Porter comments upon the nature of this shift, suggesting that *Light in August* was important because, "[n]ot only did he address the issue of race directly for the first time, but he turned decisively toward the broad-based representation of social structures and practices that would occupy him for the rest of his career" (Porter 102). These explorations of social structures and cultural practices for Porter differentiate *Light in August* from the rest of Faulkner's fictions. She maintains, "*The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* are by no means cut off from social reality, but they approach it from a more insulated, psychologically focused, and formally self-referential vantage point than that at



work in *Light in August*" (102). These vantage points, though different than his previous narrative experiments, are still pertinent to a Bergsonian temporal study of Faulkner's fictions.

So it appears Faulkner begins to play for different stakes in his fictions in *Light in August*. How, then, might we reconcile these structural differences with Bergsonian readings of the other novels discussed? Do thematic signifiers establish a relationship between these texts that a structural comparison would not otherwise support?

*Light in August* opens into a world already in constant motion. Porter characterizes *Light in August*'s profound narratorial movement, arguing, "the novel appropriates larger and larger chunks of time into a structure that is constantly struggling to enfold them within a unified vision" and concludes, "[t]hus the tension keeps mounting between time's ceaseless motion and the need to impose a structure large enough to give that notion meaning" (91). The struggle to contextualize moments of time within a comprehensible framework from which order might be derived is Bergson's fundamental study of duration and the human ability to interpret time's passing. Bergson suggests that humans have an "insatiable desire to separate" the present from the infinite potentialities the present performs, and Faulkner's novel attempts to create a narrative landscape from which order can only be established through time's eternal, recursive progress. The fact that *Light in August*'s temporal construction was created to be "a moving present capable of leading us anywhere" justifies a critical study of time's passage through a Bergsonian lens (Porter 88).

*Light in August* advances several significant physical signifiers of time's recursion that coincide with *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*. The role of wagons and wagon wheels in *Light in August* as both physical vehicles and figurative, metaphorical representations of time's recursion powerfully connect the novel to Faulkner's previous works. In terms of narrative management, *Light in August* was Faulkner's boldest experiment in the four-year period in question. This may not validly apply in terms of elements like grammatical composition, but the sheer number of unmarked narratives and the degrees through which the novel's present shifts forward and backward into time, distinguishes it from *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury*. Indeed, it may be due to *Light in August's* less psychologically oriented perspective (I am hesitant to agree with Porter and characterize this novel as non-psychological; the novel is replete with rich psychoanalytic material) that Faulkner is able to conduct so many dramatic and intermingled narrative shifts. Despite its more socially concerned plotline, *Light in August* corresponds with the previous two novels discussed and warrants analysis through this critical approach.

After *Light in August's* 1932 publication, Faulkner pursued various opportunities outside the realm of fiction writing. Originally a poet, Faulkner reverted to poetry in his 1933 publication of *The Green Bough*, a book of poems similar to some of his earliest works, such as *The Marble Faun* (1924). Additionally, Faulkner spent the next few years travelling back and forth between Mississippi and California on assignment as a screenwriter for many Hollywood studios. He would not publish his next novel, *Pylon*, until 1935. These years, though indicative of his

diverse abilities, were largely unproductive in terms of the production of novels. Not until the 1936 publication of *Absalom, Absalom!* Did Faulkner reaffirm himself as one of America's leading fiction writers.

This temporal gap bears huge importance to Faulkner studies and represents a point of serious transition in Faulkner's literary career. Because of this artistic shift, it is apt that we classify *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, and *Light in August* as pertinent texts for the study of Bergsonian temporal modalities in Faulkner's fiction. Here, Faulkner's fascination with time and the manner in which it passes or seems to pass appears unobstructed. Although each and every Faulkner novel merits detailed study, the framework presented here establishes these three novels as particularly interesting topics of critical analysis when combined.

### III. A Genealogy of Time in Faulkner Criticism

Time and its recursive construction have been the focus of much critical study of Faulkner. Generally, critics generate such readings by close examination of Faulknerian language. This is largely due to the tendency for digression in Faulkner's characters who sometimes articulate themselves through fleeting and illogical streams-of-consciousness. Despite the fact that how Faulkner reckons time through psychological metaphor proves to be an apt subject for critical study, metaphors of physical objects, too, allow us a unique perspective into how Faulkner structures disturbing, circadian realities. This section establishes a brief genealogy of critical inquiries into time and temporality in Faulkner's fictions and attempts to back theoretically Bergson's notion of privileging influence over temporal reckoning in Faulkner's fiction. In the aftermath, this section seeks to explain how contemporary criticism of both time and order in fiction affect the idea of a Faulknerian ending and how the meaning of "tragic" impacts our study of time in Faulkner's fiction and of Faulkner's work as a whole.

Faulkner's literary technique displays a profound self-awareness in generating narratives that drive themselves. Opposite to determining a teleological, defined ending from a course of actions, Faulkner describes his own writing technique as the following:

There's always a moment in experience—a thought—an incident—that's there. Then all I do is work up to that moment. I figure what must have happened before to lead people to that particular moment, and I work away from it, finding out how people act after the moment (Blotner 373).

For Faulkner, then, his own ability to work backward from a seminal moment in the character's psychological human experience predates the creative genesis of plot. In other words, he generates a fictional moment and then allows the infinite iterations of the past inform its context within the present. Faulkner's own reading of his time is not strictly linear as he allows a singular moment's essence to inform what came before it as well as what comes after it. Getting from "point A" to "point B," then, is not the essential concern or project of his fictions. Rather, "point A" attempts to establish a circle through which one seminal moment informs the past and provides consequences such that the past appears to repeat itself without achieving a definitive or permanent future end. Such is the self-aware circular nature of Faulkner's fiction.

Porter's biography and critical study of Faulkner, entitled *William Faulkner: Lives and Legacies*, offers a complementary reading of time's articulation in Faulkner novels. Porter, in studying *the Sound and the Fury*, suggests, "The novel's present consists, in other words, of events conceived not as acts with as-yet-undetermined future consequences, but as consequences already determined by as-yet-unrevealed previous events" (Porter 43). Each of the three novels this thesis studies can be viewed through this lens. It is not by mistake that none of Faulkner's narratives examined in this thesis begin at the legitimate beginning of the narrative: Lena Grove begins in an infinitesimal movement that catapults backward in time into the life of Joe Christmas and others; Addie's impending death inspires reflections of the past from many onlookers (even Addie herself after death); and Benjy's narrative begins in 1928 (elements from his account span his entire life in non-chronological

order) and moves forward Quentin's narrative, which takes place seventeen years prior to the time of Benjy's section. Faulkner's fictions, then, intend to subvert linear renderings of time. As we will see later, some of these novels declare this subversion to be their principal project or essence. However, psychological narrative techniques such as those employed in Benjy's non-chronological section are not the only techniques Faulkner uses to establish a circular rendering of time.

Watches and the cogs that compose these narratives are objects that function as the central manifestation of time's paradoxical representation in *the Sound and the Fury*, particularly in Quentin's section. Bernhard Radloff, perhaps the only author whose central thesis topic explores Quentin's relationship with clocks, cogs, and time's passing overly relies on a Heideggerian reading inconsistent with Faulkner's demonstrated interest in Bergson (or, perhaps more appropriately, his lack of interest in Heidegger). Radloff's "Time and Timepieces: A Note on Quentin's Section in *The Sound and the Fury* suggests, "the qualitatively empty time-sequence by which Quentin measures himself becomes an external, oppressive force only insofar as he himself reckons his time in terms of the faceless watch" (Radloff 56). Quentin's section is shown through a psychological internalization of his inability to reckon time (as a pedestrian, quantitative idea) as opposed to any concepts of externalized oppression. But to confound these elements is to misuse Faulkner's thematic understanding of time as a constantly extending flux of projections of the past (and its infinite potentialities) and to discount any level of Bergson's influence on Faulkner. In addition, Radloff's reading fails to account for the Bergsonian renderings of time that clearly are present in Quentin's narrative; rather, he relies

on a Heideggerian manifestation of time incongruous to both Faulkner's creative intent and his admitted critical influence.

This contention reopens a long debate in the history of Faulknerian criticism over Bergson's direct influence on Faulkner. Cleanth Brooks claims Faulkner "never read Bergson very deeply or thoroughly. . .the influence of Bergson has been generally overestimated and. . .its importance has been occasionally pushed to absurd length" (Brooks 255). Porter disagrees with Brooks, suggesting, "Faulkner's affinity to Bergson is greater than we have realized" (Porter 108). Each interpretation appears to stem from a 1952 interview Faulkner conducted with a French graduate student in the journal, *Lion in the Garden*, in which he suggested that he was "influenced by Bergson, obviously" (Blotner 1219, 1302). Critics approach the seriousness of this quotation with varying levels of skepticism. Paul Douglass complicates the debate, suggesting that Faulkner appropriated a critical affinity for (and resulting influence by) Bergson through a thorough study of Eliot, a contention supported by Ida Fasel and others (Douglass 119). Regardless of the actual amount of Bergson Faulkner may have read, considerable thematic overlap exists between Bergson's metaphysics of time and time's paradoxical and pluripotent nature in *As I Lay Dying*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Light in August*.

Heideggerian renderings of time, by contrast, appear considerably less frequently in Faulkner. William Barrett, a philosopher and critic of Faulkner's works, asserts, "Faulkner certainly never read Heidegger; he may never have even heard of him" (Barrett 213). Although the Heideggerian concept of the hermeneutic circle is apt to offer nuanced renderings of Faulknerian time, the hermeneutic

system is designed to enforce a critical literary understanding of a text's place between its cultural and sociohistorical contexts as opposed to any system of temporality or time's passing within the text itself. Different approaches to thematic and contextual literary circularity help establish a gap between Heideggerian and Bergsonian modes of temporal inquiry.

James Gilbert-Walsh does considerable work to explain the intricate relationship between each philosopher's renderings of time. Gilbert-Walsh establishes a notable and fundamental similarity in each theorist's approach, asserting, "both Bergson and Heidegger present time, understood in a certain precise sense, as the basis—the *arché*—of all discursively representable 'beings.'" He continues, "time functions as the most radical ground which underlies everything else, the 'necessary condition for the possibility' of everything else" (Gilbert-Walsh 175). For Bergson, time appears to be a conglomeration of the past's infinite potentialities. Gilbert-Walsh asserts that Bergson's conception of time is based in a nuanced understanding of multiplicity and our ability to "count" time. He explains, "the notion of a multiplicity that could be anything but quantitative might seem odd at first; indeed, we normally think of multiplicity as precisely a *quantifiable* collection of distinct elements (e.g., the measurable, countable units of time, which we imagine laid out sequentially on a line in space") (176). Bergson himself comments on the multiplicity of lived time, suggesting, "[Succeeding] each other means melting into one another and forming an organic whole" (Bergson 128). Heidegger echoes Bergson's idea of time on a superficial level but also takes into



account the future. Heidegger suggests that existence is “futural,” and is inclusive of past, present and future.

Despite a superficially congruent theory of time as an amalgamation of moments, Bergson and Heidegger provide differing explanations for human and societal misrepresentations of time. Heidegger suggests that handed-down sociohistoric and linguistic contexts have established a vocabulary that by nature obscures a rational view of time. Bergson, by contrast, suggests that humans typically misrepresent time because of consciousness’ “insatiable desire to separate” the present from the infinite potentialities that the present, for Bergson, performs (128). Bergson is concerned with the human psychological tendency to provide order to time, whereas Heidegger is concerned with the institutions that have established the lexicon through which humans evaluate time as a discourse. Bergson’s psychological explanation of the human rendering of time provides a more fruitful insight into Faulkner’s time and the characters that articulate its passing.

Frank Kermode, one of the most influential literary critics of the twentieth century, offers a representation of temporal narrative systems that informs both Bergson and Faulkner’s works. *The Sense of an Ending* establishes a reading of narrative time as an entity without beginning or ending that largely corresponds with Bergson’s. Kermode explains, “[t]he clock’s *tick-tock* I take to be a model of what we call a plot, an organization that humanizes time by giving it form; and the interval between *tock* and *tick* represents purely successive, disorganized time of the sort that we need to humanize” (Kermode 45).

Kermode also accounts for the nuanced nature of death's impermanence that is on full display in Faulkner's fiction. He links the impermanence of death as an ending to tragedy:

Tragedy may be thought of as the successor of apocalypse, and this is evidently in accord with the notion of an endless world. In *King Lear* everything tends toward a conclusion that does not occur...Beyond the apparent worst there is a worse suffering, and when the end comes it is not only more appalling than anybody expected, but a mere image of that horror, not the thing itself. The end is not a matter of immanence; tragedy assumes the figurations of apocalypse...but the world goes forward in the hands of exhausted survivors (82).

The circular narratives in Faulkner may not readily satisfy the definition of tragedy as defined classically by Aristotle, but they seem to have been made for Kermode's. The inability for anything in Faulkner to reach a definitive conclusion suggests a space that exists beyond a text's ending, consequently existing behind any type of hermeneutic end we could ascribe to the text as it establishes itself literally on the page. That is to say, although the actual narratives of Faulkner's fictions conclude, the language and circular renderings of time are such that the reader is left to assume that each circumstance folds in upon itself and establishes a cyclical rendering of history. *As I Lay Dying*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Light in August* all open and conclude with similar signifiers of paradoxical sameness and movement: Lena Grove carries on down the same road in a wagon similar to the one she started with, (indeed, she envisions the wagon before it arrives in the novel's opening pages). Anse Bundren takes a new bride (the wife whom he has just buried is subjected to a sort of perverse resurrection), and *The Sound and the Fury* closes with Benjy travelling down the same road he has all his life, interpreting his surroundings

in the same manner that has always brought him comfort. The endings of Faulkner's texts, then, are significant because they serve as self-conscious paradoxes of time's linear and cyclical potentialities.

Kermode's suggestion that the truly tragic nature of a narrative's apocalypse or conclusion can be seen when the end is "not only more appalling than anybody expected, but a mere image of horror, not the thing itself" is of great importance to the tragic nature of Faulkner's fictions. Faulkner takes care not to display overwhelming signifiers of apocalypse (which, in this case, constitutes a legitimate conclusion) in his novels that are most directly concerned with time's passing. Furthermore, Faulkner concludes his novels with images, signifiers, and suggestions of the existence of a cyclical post-time space where characters relive their experiences in perpetuity. Kermode's explanation that "the world goes on in the hands of exhausted survivors" is particularly relevant to Faulkner's temporally oriented works. This exhaustion is not merely physical. Characters in each of Faulkner's three most temporally stylized works experience breaks with reality and an inability to reckon with the notion of perpetual and circular experience. Temporal oppression and confinement within the Compson family drive Quentin to suicide, Darl's exhaustion from the journey across Mississippi costs him his sanity, and Reverend Hightower is overcome by phantom images of his grandfather's Civil War battalion. The subtle imageries of perpetually exhausting post-apocalyptic spaces pervade Faulkner's works and establish a precedent for the existence of a circular or cyclical rendering of time in his fictions.

Interestingly, Kermode applies this atemporal formula to *Macbeth* in a manner complimentary to Faulkner's construction of time, suggesting: "*Macbeth*, more than any other of Shakespeare's plays, is a play of crisis, and its opening is a figure for the seemingly atemporal agony of a moment when times cross; when our usual apprehension of successive past and future is translated into another order of time" (84). Kermode's description of successive, crossing times aligns with Bergson and informs an understanding of temporality in Faulkner's fiction. Faulkner himself was clearly influenced by *Macbeth*, as he borrows from one of Macbeth's soliloquies for the title of *the Sound and the Fury*:

There would have been time for such a word.  
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time,  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more: it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing (Shakespeare V.V.20-30).

Elements of the infinitesimal, paradoxical march of time can be traced from Shakespeare into Faulkner's fictions. An understanding of the phrase "to the last syllable of recorded time" informs a metaphysic of time's reckoning as linguistically bound or oriented. Time's ability to be expressed, then, is contingent upon the human project of language to articulate its progress. This psychological process of articulation is similar to Bergson's conception of the human necessity to order or characterize time in order to impose "intelligent" decisions upon the present. This

notion is buttressed by Shakespeare's commentary upon time's relentless march as "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, creeps in this petty pace." The stylistic repetition of tomorrow characterizes time as inherently repetitive and composed exclusively of future times contextualized by their envisioning in a collective today ("tomorrow" as an element of happening time can only be perceived, explained, or commented upon from "today;" post hoc reckonings of "tomorrow" cannot exist). It is this simultaneity of time that pervades *Macbeth* and informs Faulkner's fiction to the extent that he titled one of his works with its concluding lines. Faulkner's tale opens through the perspective of an "idiot" (idiocy has many connotations and iterations in Faulkner) and concludes with the image of this "idiot" embracing the patterns he has experienced all his life. This circularity echoes the cyclical nature of "tomorrow[s]" found in Macbeth's soliloquy.

But how does the fact that *The Sound and the Fury* told in part by an idiot act to characterize the entire narrative as "signifying nothing?" Linear logic would suggest that the forwardness of traditional human reckoning of time should be applied to the narrative and the signifiers it contains in order to confirm an ending: the logic of its literal ending (and the signifiers that compose it) should *signify* the conclusion of both the narrative and the text. Kermode agrees with this explanation, suggesting "the punctuation of time and its ordering into myth" constitute an ending (Kermode 61). This, however, is not strictly the case in Faulkner's fictions. Time, it seems, is punctuated and ordered in Faulkner by its propensity to loop back onto itself. Here, Kermode's definition of tragedy as the "successor of apocalypse" is particularly helpful. Tragedy is derived in Faulkner by each narrative's inability to

signify its own end. Each of Faulkner's fictions envisions an ending that corresponds with its beginning to the extent that the reader is left with the macabre sense that the characters are the source of their own collective damnation and that history is purposed to repeat itself. This recursive damnation and the linguistic articulations of its passing are what Porter refers to as "a counterintuitive form of narrative pull" (Porter 43). Our human predilection to intuit time in a linear fashion does not allow a cohesive or fully comprehensive reading of Faulkner's fictions because they are inherently concerned with temporal and thematic circularity. In this regard, Faulkner's narratives may "signify nothing" because they fail to achieve a static or final conclusion.

#### IV. Time's Recursion in *The Sound and the Fury*

Faulkner's vision of the world can be compared to that of a man sitting in a convertible looking back. At every moment shadows emerge on his right, and on his left flickering and quavering points of light, which become trees, men, and cars only when they are seen in perspective.

-Jean-Paul Sartre, "Time in Faulkner: *The Sound and the Fury*"

##### I: Critical Approaches to Wagons, Clocks, and Fatalistic Renderings of Time in *The Sound and the Fury*

*The Sound and the Fury* is the prime exemplar of Faulkner's experimentation with narrative form. Through four perspectives constantly moving backward and forward into time, the downfall of the Compson family is explained in a bold, avant-garde rendering whose style was unprecedented in American fiction. As a result of this supreme originality, *The Sound and the Fury* has attracted significant critical attention. Although the novel is still a common subject of critical analyses, the majority of critical studies concerning time were written in the mid-twentieth century; Justin Skirry's 2001 paper "Sartre on William Faulkner's Metaphysics of Time in *The Sound and the Fury*" is an apt summary of much of the criticism from this period. Much of the debate around Faulkner's experimentations with temporality in *The Sound and the Fury* stems from Jean-Paul Sartre's critical essay "Time in Faulkner: *The Sound and the Fury*" in which he describes Faulkner as a fatalist and proceeds to critique him on that premise. Sartre's seminal essay inspired several decades of critical response, much of which was rooted in a fundamental disagreement with Sartre's depiction of Faulknerian time as fatalist.

Theorists were quick to focus on Henri Bergson's theories of duration and the perpetual implications of the past upon the present to argue against Sartre's fatalist thesis. Bergson, like many of these theorists, suggests a fundamental speciousness in fatalistic interpretations of life. Sartre establishes a fatalist reading of Faulkner's temporal experiments,<sup>3</sup> claiming "Faulkner wants to forget time because he has taken away time's future, deprived his characters of potentiality—the dimension of free choice and act" (Sartre 226). Sartre continues to explain his argument that suggests the Compson family exists without the possibility of a future, suggesting, "Faulkner always shows us events when they are already completed. In *The Sound and the Fury*, everything occurs in the wings; nothing happens, everything has happened" (227). Sartre is correct in his assumption that *The Sound and the Fury's* principal events are never explained as they happen. For Faulkner, then, the Compson family's downfall exists in a space of perpetual past in which the future is fully informed by the past's relentless informing of an inescapable future of decay and recursion. Sartre claims this fatalist depiction of time is the fundamental problem in all of Faulkner's novels and suggests that this fatalism is at the root of his tragic nature.

Douglas Messerli and Margaret Church suggest that the two critical traditions through which *The Sound and the Fury* has been evaluated are the ideas of time as durational or transcendent. Church claims that this "opposition exists in Faulkner's vision" and often drives the characters' psychological force for unity (Church 228).

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<sup>3</sup> Sartre has been critiqued (correctly, I think) for generalizing Faulkner's temporal experimentation as entirely similar across all his works. I object to this generalization but still consider Sartre's essay to be the critical building block for time studies in *The Sound and the Fury*.



Church immediately sees Bergsonian influence in the novel's structure and suggests, "There is in Faulkner a very real sense of Bergson's *durée*" (228). Messerli agrees insofar as Bergsonian influence is present in *The Sound and the Fury*; however, Messerli traces his own phenomenological approach to Faulkner through the philosopher Eugène Minkowski (who also studied Bergson) and his more psychopathological approach to temporal rendering. Both critics follow Sartre in the tentative acceptance of Bergsonian time as a premise or underlying theoretical consideration (despite Sartre's disagreement with Bergson) to critique his fatalist approach.

Jean Pouillon, Olga Vickery, and Justin Skirry establish more nuanced readings of Faulknerian time in *The Sound and the Fury* using Sartre's study as a foundation. Pouillon suggests the absence of a Faulknerian present, explaining, "The past, therefore, not only was but is, and will be; it is the unfolding of destiny" (Pouillon 83). The past then literally becomes present for Pouillon, who looks to characters such as Quentin Compson and Gail Hightower for affirmation. Pouillon extends this argument building upon Sartre's premise that "everything has happened" in Faulkner, suggesting that determinism in Faulkner cannot exist under these premises because the very idea of determinism relies upon a system of linear chronology that cannot exist if everything the characters do is, for one reason or another, a past action. Vickery suggests that atemporal ideas such as imagination and truth, given complete freedom, can transcend ideas of time and inform characters' futures in Faulkner. Skirry is less confident in the human ability to transcend time through psychological acts; rather, Skirry propagates a

“phenomenological ordering” in which “the future is present to the reader as an absence in the novel, because the phenomenology of the three Compson brothers do not include it” (Skirry 15-16). Church and Messerli’s frameworks of durational and transcendent time also indicate a presence, however latent, of the future in Faulkner’s novel.

Messerli, Swiggart, and Skirry agree that there are in fact some representations of the future in the novel. Messerli explains the general Bergsonian framework of several other critics before him who consistently point to Dilsey’s section of *The Sound and the Fury* for a restorative, futurist, or Bergsonian legitimacy. The final section of the novel, though told from a third-person perspective, is usually referred to as Dilsey’s section. Dilsey’s narrative culminates as she takes Benjy to church on Easter where the pastor fervently discusses rebirth, resurrection, and endurance. Critics look to this scene as a justification for non-fatalist and free-will based readings of *The Sound and the Fury*. However, the overall effect of Dilsey on the Compson family’s narrative in *The Sound and the Fury* is remarkably small, as Messerli notes, “At no time does Dilsey’s activity, expectation, desire, hope, prayer or ethical action affect for the better the Compson family. Dilsey is quite literally in a world of her own” (Messerli 35). Faulkner appeals to the resurrection narrative to establish in the reader a false hope for the Compson family’s salvation only to display the family’s ongoing recursion as the novel closes. Dilsey’s endurance, though symbolic of the idea that she is the novel’s moral and rational temporal center, has little effect on the Compson family’s predilection for self-destruction.

Transcendent ideas of time present a futurist, multifaceted critical approach to Faulkner's experimentations in *The Sound and the Fury*. Vickery explains the ability for transcendence, suggesting, "since imagination alone is free of time, it can transcend [time]...and thereby rescue man not from time but from his temporal delusions" (Vickery 194). More importantly, Vickery qualifies this sentiment with the premise, "If, on the other hand, [imagination] is not permitted to function in perfect freedom, it merely intensifies [temporal] delusions" (194). Problematic and doomed lineage, inheritance, and Faulkner's propensity to employ metaphors of recursion such as clocks and wagons act as inherent limitations to the imaginative freedom Vickery proposes. Quentin's neuroses predicate his inability to imagine futures (or even presents) unfettered or unburdened by the Compson family's problematic past. The oppressive nature of the clocks in his section punctuate this theme, and the fact that Faulkner chooses to reuse his name on a similarly damned character enforces this notion.

Vickery is unconvinced of the clock's legitimacy as embodiment of temporal unity or meaning in *The Sound and the Fury*. Vickery suggests the mechanical and representative nature of the clock perverts the organic nature of time's progress:

The clock face disguises its linear quality by assuming the spatial figure of a circle; by analogy it hopes to suggest the cyclic form of natural time. It is, however, an incomplete symbol, for its hands in themselves are merely reflexive, indicating nothing beyond the repetition of a particular angle obtaining between two straight lines. Like the calendar and all the other instruments of linear time, it lacks a recurrent polarity, a systole and diastole, such as the seasons and natural time possess (193).

Vickery does not go far enough in considering the human mind's ability to ascribe organic implications of the clock. Frank Kermode, by contrast, suggests that the human mind naturally orders time's progress on a clock into a recurrent polarity. It is the human ability psychologically to ascribe a biological naturalism to clocks that Kermode suggests enforces an organic sense of duration. Kermode articulates this line of thought in *The Sense of an Ending*, explaining:

Of course, it is we who provide the fictional difference between the two sounds; *tick* is our word for a physical beginning, *tock* our word for an end...We can perceive a duration [between them] only when it is organized...The fact that we call the second of the two related sounds *tock* is evidence that we use fictions to enable the end to confer organization and form on the temporal structure (Kermode 45-46)

This explanation does considerable work in refuting Vickery's apparent doubt in the power of the clock as signifier of organically passing time. The human ability to psychologically ascribe biological meaning to an object, for Kermode, is sufficient to establish it as an agent of passing duration in a thematic sense. For Kermode, the *tick* and *tock* are the systole and diastole that Vickery suggests cannot be present in the clock. The clock, in this regard, is fully capable of operating as a constant, dominant, and obstructive reminder of time's apparently linear yet actually cyclical or recursive nature in *The Sound and the Fury*.

Critics who discuss *The Sound and the Fury* largely ignore the significance of the wagon as a signifier. Though theorists such as Radloff and Skirry give considerable attention to timepieces, the brief yet significant appearance of the wagon in the novel seems to go largely undiscussed. Skirry notes the importance of

clocks and other signifiers, suggesting, “the watch and other measures of time, e.g. clock towers and shadows, play a significant role in this narrative and provide a framework of a metaphysics of time conceived as chronology” (Skirry 20). Radloff dedicates an entire paper to the study of timepieces;<sup>4</sup> critics like Vickery would denounce the wagon wheel’s ability to be a simultaneous signifier of time’s superficially linear movement and overall recursive progression. However, through the same psychologically constructed criteria Kermode adds, the wagon lends a powerful sense of recursive and fatalistic temporality to *The Sound and the Fury* and its appearance at the novel’s closing illustrates its importance.

The following section will establish a reading of clocks and wagon wheels as fatalist and recursive signifiers that pervade *The Sound and the Fury* and determine its narrative trajectory. Sartre’s theory of fatalism will be expanded within a more Bergsonian worldview, taking care to elaborate on the impossibility of characters’ transcendence through time. Furthermore, recursive elements of Faulkner’s establishment of the Compson family’s lineage will be evaluated to establish a case for the recursive (and corruptive) fate names, nomenclature, and lineage ascribe to Faulkner’s characters. Dilsey’s section will be elaborated to demonstrate the speciousness of the assertion that she (though the novel’s moral grounding force) is Faulkner’s embodiment or method of demonstrating the hope or validity of the future. The diverse yet inescapable tragic family histories that compose *The Sound and the Fury* are informed by a fatal determinism; each character’s past is predetermined and, though the present is reckoned from a Bergsonian viewpoint,

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<sup>4</sup> See Radloff, Bernhard. “Time and Timepieces: A Note on Quentin’s Section in *The Sound and the Fury*.” *English Language Notes*, Fall 1986, pp. 51-57.

each character is haunted by the Compson family's spectral yet inescapable past. Clocks and wagons embody, pervade, and derive this inescapable circularity in Faulkner's most temporally experimental works.

## II: Wagons and Clocks as Signifiers of Temporal Recursion in *The Sound and the Fury*

The wagon is a vehicle of great literal and metaphorical importance in *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* because of its multifaceted and paradoxical roles as agent of movement and arbiter of stasis. Furthermore, the wagon itself presents a complicated construction whose physical parts offer a unique perspective on Faulknerian renderings of time. The wagon's bed (indeed, the signifier "bed" manifests a utilitarian purpose based on stasis) serves as a stabling element in its construction—an object that is designed for the preservation of its cargo's stasis relative to the motion of the wheels. This stasis parallels the Faulknerian reading of time that suggests a painful and cynical temporal stasis that establishes the macabre nature of the families Faulkner depicts.

Though wagon wheels serve as the most predominant manifestation of time's paradoxical entrapment in Faulkner's other works, watches and the ever-moving wheels that compose watches signify time's problematic nature in *the Sound and the Fury*. Quentin Compson's chapter is governed by time's passage and its inescapable recursion. The opening chapter immediately enforces the impact of his past upon his present, establishing the scene:

When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight o'clock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch. It was Grandfather's and when Father gave it to me he said, Quentin, I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it's rather excruciatingly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father's. I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. 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. (*S&F*<sup>5</sup> 93).

The circular nature of the watch and its ability to measure the forward progress of time in recursive patterns mechanically contradict one another. Furthermore, Quentin suggests that he is only "in time again" and subject to its torturous illusion of progress when he physically hears it and is confronted with the existence of the watch and its importance as literal, inherited time. He immediately realizes his own temporal imprisonment but suggests that simply hearing the watch is not the true indicator. Quentin explains, "I don't suppose anybody ever deliberately listens to a watch or a clock. You don't have to. You can be oblivious to the sound for a long while, then in a second of ticking it can create in the mind unbroken the long diminishing parade of time you didn't hear" (94). The notion that one second of time can resurrect an eternity of moments one has inherited through time's paradoxical measurement horrifies Quentin and drives him to suicide.

The first of Quentin's symbolic attempts at disenfranchisement from time is his attempt to break the watch that belonged to his ancestors before him. Quentin

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<sup>5</sup> All references to *The Sound and the Fury* will be hereby represented as *S&F* when referred to parenthetically. For further abbreviations, see Works Cited.

describes this attempt, noting, "I tapped the crystal on the corner of the dresser and caught the fragments of glass in my hand and put them into the ashtray and twisted the hands off and put them in the tray. The watch ticked on" (98-99). Quentin, unable to escape the circularity of time and the phantoms of his past (and their projections onto his present) shatters his handed-down watch, manifesting a literal fracturing of or departure from reckonings of time and its recursive passage that dominate his life. As he shatters the watch, Quentin himself vainly attempts to lose his connection to time and its realities and is eventually left with suicide as his only recourse. However, despite attempting to destroy the watch by dismembering the manifestations of its movement (the hands), the timepiece and time itself continue to record. Furthermore, Quentin's attempt to destroy the watch physically scars him as it cuts his thumb. This wound reinforces the notion that the watch is more than a mere instrument for the measurement of time's progress in *the Sound and the Fury* and suggests that the watch and its inescapable measurement of time are espoused in Quentin's body and physical existence. Finally, Quentin's wound foreshadows the idea that the only way he might completely distance himself from time is to hurt himself further, specifically by ending his own life.

Quentin's visit to the clock shop deepens the understanding of time's inescapable circularity and perpetuates his oncoming loss of sanity. He enters the shop under the false pretense of fixing his watch when he is beset by the sensory reminder of time's circularity, recounting, "The place was full of ticking" (102). Again, Quentin is confronted with the fact that the dismantling of his inherited watch does not stop or discontinue his inheritance of time, and that time itself drags



relentlessly forward. This realization presents a key differentiation in Quentin's consciousness. After being overwhelmed by the collective ticking, he asks the watchmaker "if any of those watches in the window are right?" (103). The shopkeeper begins to answer by telling Quentin the exact time until Quentin interrupts him and informs the shopkeeper that he has no interest in the actual time of day but rather if any clock in the window is correct. This assertion suggests Quentin's desire to reject a singular, objective reading of time that is collectively determined and agreed upon. Rather, Quentin is interested in the overpowering nature of the clock shop's collective ticking, of time's "being clicked off by little wheels" (105). The image of a clock shop not united in its rendering of time suggests a fundamental shift in the very nature of time's passing—a shift that an increasingly mad Quentin readily entertains.

Like the overpowering nature of the clocks in the shop, Quentin's narrative is overpowered by the pluripotent and inescapable renderings of time. Quentin's frustration with (and ultimate and complete separation from) time becomes increasingly apparent as his section advances. Time's simultaneous happenings overpower Quentin's thought process and distance him from reality; traumatic fragments from other times begin to invade his present. As his narrative continues, Faulkner italicizes these instances of pantemporal invasion to demonstrate the infinite potentiality of the present moment as a portal through which every past moment might be observed or contextualized. Elements of his past begin to inhabit him, repeat themselves, and contextualize themselves through other speakers from his past. Near the opening of Quentin's narrative, the first incidence of this invasion

occurs, displaying, "*Roses. Roses. Mr and Mrs Jason Richmond Compson announce the marriage of Roses*" (95). Quentin attempts to show himself this memory and regain control of time and reality by reminding himself of the same information, telling himself, "Mr and Mrs Jason Richmond Compson announce the marriage of their daughter Candace to Mr Sydney Herbert Head on the twenty-fifth of April one thousand nine hundred and ten at Jefferson Mississippi," only to be invaded by another italicized perspective that suggests, "*Three days. Times. Mr and Mrs Jason Richmond Compson*" (115). Quentin presumably owns a personal memory or perception of this event's intended occurrence<sup>6</sup> but cannot stop the invasion of other iterations of its happening regardless of the experience's actual owner.

Faulkner even goes so far as to employ puns to express the entrapment felt by the Compson family. As Quentin argues with his father about the idea of feminine purity, Quentin indicts his father, accusing him, "You can't know [purity]" to which his father replies, "Yes. On the instant when we come to realize that tragedy is second-hand" (143). The father's commentary on the nature of tragedy reveals a duality of meaning and feeling in the Compsonian genealogy of pain and temporal entrapment. Of course, the term "second hand" refers to the ability for an entity to be passed down, inherited, or experienced without physically inhabiting the moment in which it occurs. Additionally, "second hand" signifies the literal hand of a clock that counts away seconds and consequently overwhelms Quentin with its ticking. The notion that time itself (and the Compson family's entrapment within it)

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<sup>6</sup> Quentin's narrative takes place on June 2, 1910, several months after the intended marriage date of April 1, 1910

is the agent and mode of the Compson family's tragedy that informs the feelings of temporal entrapment pervading the novel.

Quentin is finally and fully separated from reality when he ceases to capitalize the word "i." Near the end of his narrative, Quentin suggests, "I could hear whispers secret struggles smell the beating of hot blood under wild unsecret flesh" (219). Warm and mixed blood is referred to earlier in the narrative in a description of his own perception of his blood against Caddy's, suggesting both their familial connection and the plot to suggest an incestuous relationship between them<sup>7</sup>. This marks the final use of a capitalized "I" until the final paragraph of his narrative. The stylistic decision to no longer capitalize "i" is an expression of the reality-based Quentin Compson's surrender to the infinite potentialities and trauma that the past places on him during every present moment. After this moment, the text loses much of its remaining coherence. The penultimate paragraph of Quentin's narrative follows no conventional grammatical forms. He rants:

i you dont believe i am serious and he i think you are too serious to give me any cause for alarm you wouldnt have felt driven to the expedient of telling me you have committed incest otherwise and i i wasnt lying i wasnt lying and he you wanted to sublimate a piece of natural human folly into a horror and then exorcise it (220).

Quentin's multiple manifestations of the past interrupt and contradict themselves further distancing him from any coherent rendering of time. His personal and familial histories of trauma aggressively seize control of his consciousness, and the consecutive placement of pronouns such as "he you" and "i i" completes Quentin's

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<sup>7</sup> "not raining hard but we couldn't hear anything but the roof and as if it was my blood or her blood," "It was her fault she pushed me she ran away / I can lift you up see how I can / Oh her blood or my blood Oh" (167)

total mental perdition. This double pronoun placement, particularly important in the instance of “i i,” suggests that there are multiple speakers within Quentin (who identify as Quentin) speaking in conflict with one another. Quentin’s experiences and inherited pasts, histories, and memories inhabit his present reality and control him in this passage, finalizing his complete separation from reality and driving him to suicide.

In addition to the conflicting grammatical form of Quentin’s penultimate paragraph, terms alluding to transience and temporality appear repeatedly to enforce his interior polyphony (derived from his simultaneous inhabitation of every conceivable past) and clarify his suicidal intentions. Quentin asks himself about the validity of suicide as response to his recursive temporal entrapment, enquiring,

you are not thinking of finitude you are contemplating an apotheosis in which a temporary state of mind will become symmetrical above the flesh and aware both of itself and of the flesh it will not quite discard you will not even be dead and i temporary and he you cannot bear to think that someday it will no longer hurt you (220).

Here, it appears that the sane component that remains in Quentin’s consciousness tells him that the conflation of suicide with finitude is a critical mistake; suicide will not provide the ultimate end to time’s progression (and his family’s woes) that he seeks. This “symmetricality” of flesh and self-awareness outside the constraining circularity of time entices Quentin, who by this point in the narrative has become increasingly distressed and inhabits a space totally disparate from reality. His final attempt at sanity is underlined in his final appeals as he suggests, “it will not discard you will not even be dead” (220). This admission that suicide will not discard or disinherit him from time’s torturous circularity embodies the final appeal for the

real in Quentin's narrative. This assertion becomes more definitive as he asserts to himself "you will not even be dead," an emotional and desperate appeal to the disintegrating version of Quentin that exists in reality. Quentin's suicide, then, is not a release from time's entropic circularity but rather a feeble attempt at dissociation from time's pluripotent metric. Quentin's sanity disappears after this attempt at persuasion fails, and the grammatically unstructured aspect of his narrative concludes, ending:

no compson has ever disappointed a lady and i temporary it will be better for me and all of us and he every man is the arbiter of his own virtues but let no man prescribe for another mans wellbeing and i temporary and he was the saddest word of all there is nothing else in the world its not despair until time its not even time until it was (221-22).

At this point, Quentin's separation from reality has become total and his decision to commit suicide has been made. The phrase "i temporary" is repeated three times in Quentin's penultimate paragraph and punctuates the conclusion to his grammatically unstructured narrative. The statement "i temporary" is the most direct assertion of Quentin's perdition in time because it asserts an adjectival condition of being transitory without the modifier of a verb of being. The absence of the verb "to be" and any of its past, present, future, or imperfect iterations implies that every potential iteration or potentiality of time will paradoxically embody Quentin's essential entrapment regardless of whether he is alive or dead. Quentin's literal presence in time concludes as he ends his own life; however, despite Quentin's best effort to escape time's paradoxical and entropic imprisonment, Quentin's genealogy of trauma continues outside of his own personal narrative.

Inheritance, lineage, and genealogy actualize the Compson family's inability to escape entropic and pluripotent renderings of time. Names and items are passed down from generation to generation creating an actual temporal unity between generations. This progression through time is paradoxically tempered by the continuation of names that suggest one consciousness or past embodies multiple members of the Compson family. This temporal embodiment is so strong that multiple characters in *the Sound and the Fury* allude to it. At the opening of his narrative, Quentin cites his father's remarks accompanying the watch he passed down to his son as a gift, ruminating, "It was Grandfather's and when Father gave it to me he said, Quentin, I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it's rather excruciating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father's" (93). Jason Richmond Lycurgus Compson, III (Quentin's father) displays a clear knowledge of time's inescapability and of his family's painful espousal to its paradoxical entrapment. Elder Compson even acknowledges the hardship associated with this temporal confinement, suggesting that Quentin's futile struggle against his own entrapment will be "excruciating-ly apt." The act of passing down this antique, then, becomes an expression of defeat or submission to time itself. Compson acknowledges that Quentin will be as trapped within time as "his or his father" before him and actualizes this entrapment through the gift of the watch. The watch, like the Compson family, appears to move forward into time yet denotes an underlying, deep seated entrapment within its perpetual past and passage.

Despite Quentin's attempt to escape from this pantemporal imprisonment, his legacy continues. Caddy gives birth to the child she presumably conceived with Dalton Ames less than a year after Quentin's suicide, passing down the name "Quentin" to her newborn daughter. Consequently, Miss Quentin inherits the name of her temporally entrapped uncle, entrapping her within the inescapable genealogy of pain and decay brought on by a past that perpetually manifests itself in the present. In this regard Quentin's death is purely a symbolic event; his entrapment continues in his departure from the present reality of living. Furthermore, despite the fact that Miss Quentin is almost definitely the child of Dalton Ames, Quentin's assertion of paternity through incest, inaccurate as it may be, provides a powerful argument for Miss Quentin's entrapment within Quentin's (and the entire Compson family's) legacy. Names, signifiers of family history and legacy, are regularly passed down from father to child in the Compson family. Quentin Compson is the third Compson to be given the name Quentin; his brother, father, grandfather, and great great-grandfather are all named Jason. Faulkner's decision to name Caddy's daughter Quentin, then, is an intentional act of ascription to the Compson family's circular legacy. This act of naming presents a powerful example of the Compson family's legacy of perpetual confrontation with the past.

Jason's narrative of *the Sound and the Fury* opens seventeen years after Quentin's death with the provocative statement "Once a bitch always a bitch" (223). Jason is frustrated by Miss Quentin's promiscuity and by Caddy's original promiscuity that put him in the position of sole caretaker of the Compson family. Jason's statement refers to both Miss Quentin and Caddy's promiscuity and

simultaneously asserts that they, despite being different people, are subject to the same inescapable temporal outcome of shame via the consequences of their promiscuity. These similar outcomes inform the trans-generational sense of temporal entrapment that pervades *the Sound and the Fury*.

The final section of *the Sound and the Fury*, "April 8, 1928," is unlike the previous three sections in that it lacks a single first person narrator. Consequently, direct manifestations of Bergsonian time through the language Faulkner uses in this section are few and far between. Time, for Bergson and for Faulkner, is subject to the human psychological dependency upon order to determine focus and employ logic and intelligent behavior. Stylistically, however, the final section of *the Sound and the Fury* presents signifiers of recursion and the tension between circular and linear time that bare significance. For example, Dilsey takes Benjy and her family to their African American church, where the pastor speaks dramatically about the circularity of resurrection, exclaiming: "I sees de darkness en de death everlastin upon de generations. Den, lo! Breddren! Yes, breddren! Whut I see? Whut I see, O sinner? I sees de resurrection en de light" (370). Here, Faulkner complicates the ideas of resurrection, redemption, and salvation through gothic portrayals of religion and time. Where Dilsey believes in the possibility of the Compson family's salvation despite generations of defeat, sin, and abuse, Faulkner employs this scene as a sort of false hope that informs the gothic lexicon and comments upon the perverse temporal recursion with which the Compson family is forced to live. During the scene in which Dilsey's belief in the Compson family's salvation comes to the forefront, Caddy runs off with a carnival worker after stealing the money Jason



embezzled from her in the first place. The hopeful, optimistic rendering of time's circularity (through Christ's resurrection and redemption of the faithful) is subverted through the climax of the Compson family's recurrent sin and strife.

The simultaneity of these actions is of great importance to the temporal circularity in *the Sound and the Fury*. Faulkner chooses to conclude the collection of narratives with the notions of temporal perversion and holy resurrection and circularity not in juxtaposition but in tandem. This is perhaps the most gothic thematic arrangement in the novel. Dilsey speaks of the family's potential for redemption as she weeps in the chapel, exhorting, "I've seed de first en de last...I seed de beginnin, en now I sees de endin'" (371). Faulkner's omniscient narrator reinforces the gothic tone directly after Dilsey's exclamation, describing, "Before they reached the street, though, she stopped and lifted her skirt and dried her eyes on the hem of her topmost underskirt. Then they went on." (371). The use of the qualifier "though" tempers any hope that Dilsey's claim that the Compson family legacy will resurrect itself. Furthermore, the short, declarative sentence "Then they went on" contradicts Dilsey's statement that she has seen a legitimate ending to the Compson family's struggle. The "going on" despite Dilsey's suggestion that she has perceived the ending of the Compson family's struggle indicates the greater circularity of their temporal imprisonment: the narrative relentlessly continues past a perceived ending. Finally, the separation of the church from the street contextualizes the church as a temporary resting place removed from the symbolically pregnant signifier of "the street" or road, which Faulkner often signifies as an embodiment of eternal, infinitesimal, and recursive progression.

The final section of this narrative explains Benjy's relationship with the road between the church and his home and informs the recursive nature of the road as signifier in *the Sound and the Fury* and in Faulkner's fiction more broadly. As the narrative closes, Luster attempts to take Benjy to the graveyard but takes a road that Benjy is unfamiliar with. As a result, Benjy begins to yell and scream uncontrollably. Jason appears next to the graveyard, strikes Benjy to calm him, and chastises Luster, exclaiming, "Don't you know any better than to take him to the left?" and immediately tells Luster to "get the hell on home with him" (400). Benjy's fit as a result of taking a road other than the one he knows, the one he has tread repeatedly his entire life, characterizes the Compson's doomed legacy and its temporal inescapability. Jason, an agent of the Compson family legacy, denies Benjy entrance into the graveyard preventing him from earning any sense of closure as the novel ends. Furthermore the final sentences of the novel offer a powerful instance of time as patterned and circular:

Queenie moved again, her feet began to clop-clop steadily again, and at once Ben hushed. Luster looked quickly back over his shoulder, then he drove on. The broken flower drooped over Ben's fist and his eyes were empty and blue and serene again as cornice and façade flowed smoothly once more from left to right; post and tree, window and doorway, and signboard, each in its ordered place (401).

Here, Benjy has returned to the road on which he is accustomed to travelling and has travelled upon all his life, consequently becoming accustomed to seeing the same things that constitute the circular patterns of "post and tree, window and doorway, and signboard." It is not until Benjy finds himself within this pattern that

he concludes his tantrum and allows the novel to conclude. The “broken flower” signifies a gothic loss or perversion of innocence, adding to the pervasive sense that nothing at the end of *the Sound and the Fury* has been concluded or resolved. The novel concludes with a powerful image of characters progressing infinitesimally through an eternally present pattern of movement. This pattern provides a form of narrative closure that is unique in its infiniteness and circularity. The thematic infinitesimal, circular continuation that concludes *the Sound and the Fury* provides a strong argument for the overarching circularity and inescapability of time in Faulkner’s works.

## V. Wagons, Travel, and the Embodiment of Bergsonian Time in *As I Lay Dying*

How often have I lain beneath rain on a strange roof, thinking of home

-Darl Bundren, *As I Lay Dying*

### I: Tracing the Wagon's Route through Criticism in *As I Lay Dying*

In 1967, R.W. Franklin released an article in *Modern Fiction Studies* entitled "Narrative Management in *As I Lay Dying*," in which he indicted Faulkner on the basis of temporal inconsistency and lack of cohesive narrative construction. Franklin critiques Faulkner, judging "the anachronisms [to be] inconsistent, the narrative management faulty," and concluding that "*As I Lay Dying* shows the great haste in which it was written" (Franklin 64,65). Franklin presents one of the more scathing reviews of *As I Lay Dying* based upon the criterion that the novel ought to be read according to a linear function of time. From this perspective, Franklin's argument is more than justified. *As I Lay Dying* is replete with grammatical and temporal anachronisms that complicate each witness's narrative and destabilize a reading of the novel's overall plot. However, the novel's systematic rendering of time, when contextualized within Bergson's theory of pure duration, begins to make sense. Darl's clairvoyance and final separation from reality can be viewed as a separation from the human institution of linear temporal rendering—he shows his ability to manifest past, present, and future during single narrations. Psychological and, more specifically, stream-of-consciousness styles of narration establish a spatial dynamic of time that renders the novel more artful and comprehensible.

However, physical manifestations of Bergsonian temporalities also appear and help to characterize time in Faulkner as paradoxically cyclical while continuing forward into some unrecognizable eternity. Wagons and the Bundren family's epic journey upon them signify an eternal, perpetually manifesting present that defies death and agrees with a Bergsonian rendering of, as Faulkner himself puts it, "only the present moment, in which I include both the past and the future, and that is eternity" (Blotner 362).

A crucial point of distinction that ought to be made in comparing *As I Lay Dying* with *The Sound and the Fury* and *Light in August* is the reckoning of temporality through lineage. *The Sound and the Fury* is fundamentally obsessed with the rendering of lineage through Compson family genealogy, and *Light in August* showcases Joe Christmas's obsession with his mysterious lineage (which is also a racial commentary), and Reverend Hightower's ancestry and their involvement in the Civil War. In her description of *As I Lay Dying*, Carolyn Porter is quick to note, "the conflicts and anxieties that both split and bond the Bundrens stem from no socially consequent past" (Porter 64). In many ways, the Bundren family is the inverse of the well-to-do, formerly glorious Sutpen and Compson families that fill Faulkner's other narratives. However, it is evident that linear renderings of time still cannot conform to *As I Lay Dying* no matter how dynastic the Bundren family may or may not be. Temporal circularity, then, must be situated and organized by other principles in the text. Following Bergson's notions of image, representation, and temporality, wagons, wheels, and roads pervade *As I Lay Dying*

and serve as signifiers that demonstrate time's infinite potentialities and its resulting recursion.

Because of the wagon's thematic prominence in *As I Lay Dying*, substantial criticism exists that is directly pertinent to the wagon's symbolic and literal function throughout the novel. The wagon is referred to as many as seventy-five occasions and is mentioned for different purposes for the novel's unfolding. Critics such as Alice Shoemaker and Charlotte Goodman have devised perceptive commentary on the wagon's role as temporal icon and method through which Faulkner explores character development. Critics such as Steven Ross, Fred Miller Robinson, and Olga Vickery take extreme care in handling Faulkner's precarious grasp of Bergsonian time yet fail to recognize the full spectrum of the wagon's importance as signifier of a twisted Bergsonian recursion. The great breadth of criticism of both time and the wagon's importance informs the importance of both elements within the text and buttresses the validity of reading each entity as a function the another.

Goodman suggests that the wagon's most important element as a function of storytelling is to differentiate and comment upon the power dynamics between members of the Bundren family. Goodman explains, "Most significant of all is the way Faulkner employs the wagon as both 'prop' and symbol to delineate the transfer of power from Darl to Jewel during the course of the novel" (Goodman 236). Goodman further explains the wagon as a literal vehicle for psychological progression and development that centers Darl's increasing introspection and psychosis throughout the novel. Goodman cites Vardaman's poignant and informative explanation, "[Darl] went crazy in our wagon" to drive this point home

(*AILD*<sup>8</sup> 241). However, Goodman fails to consider the wagon's wheels as a function for time's passing and does not include temporal criticism on the subject.

Shoemaker, by contrast, offers an architectonic perspective on the wheel and uses it to consider the architectural implications of the wheel's function as recursive temporal metaphor in *As I Lay Dying*. Shoemaker concludes, "timelessness and circularity of structure imply eternity," approaching this distinction from the foregrounding in the wheel's narrative prowess, suggesting, "the two perspectives—a wheel within a wheel—move through time and space to help reveal the complexity of modern consciousness in regard to life and death" (Shoemaker 113, 112).

Shoemaker is correct in that the wheel as a signifier and literal vehicle throughout the novel has a great deal to do with each character's life (and sometimes death); however, she does not consider the overarching circularity of the temporal implications the wheel represents in the novel. Shoemaker is cognizant of the Bergsonian elements of time in Faulkner, explaining:

Faulkner incorporated concepts stemming from [Bergson's] modern ideas into his novels, and Addie's journey through time and space—from life through death, from her home on the farm to her final abode in the Jefferson cemetery—represents, to a certain extent, Bergson's and Einstein's concepts (112).

Although Shoemaker recognizes the importance of Bergsonian influence in *As I Lay Dying*, she does not fully consider the implications of the wheel upon a potentially fatalist or recursive rendering of time's progress.

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<sup>8</sup> All references to *As I Lay Dying* will hereby be represented as *AILD* when referred to parenthetically. Please see works cited for a complete list of abbreviations.

Shoemaker does considerable work in explaining the structure of the wheel's movement within the psychological machinations of each character in *As I Lay Dying*. Succinctly, Shoemaker suggests the circuitous nature of each character's psychology as a function of the wagon wheel, citing, "Dewey Dell's character seems static: it does not evolve or develop. In this respect her character resembles the circularity of the novel's structure and plot" and astutely noticing, "Vardaman...like Dewey Dell, does not evolve but moves in a psychologically circuitous pattern" (106, 107). Furthermore, Shoemaker finds the importance in the signifier of the road in the novel, establishing, "Darl, who is Faulkner's chief spokesman regarding time, compares Addie's continuing consciousness to a road, one of Faulkner's favored time-related analogues" (112). Shoemaker's observations, though somewhat lacking in their foundation in temporal study, provide a valuable foundation from which readings of Faulknerian time as a function of the wagon's progress (or lack thereof) might be conducted.

Stephen Ross' "Shapes of Time and Consciousness in *As I Lay Dying*" is perhaps the most seminal paper in establishing Faulknerian time as a function of a larger Bergsonian mechanism. However, in his discussion of time, Ross concentrates primarily on the most literal (even typographical) elements of the novel in order to justify certain shifts and display the concrete, purposeful movements within the narrative that explain its structure. In part, this is to refute arguments of "purposeless shifts" by early Faulkner critics such as R.W. Franklin. Additionally, this in-depth discussion of narrative focalization is of great benefit to



this study of the wagon's temporal importance because many of the elements Ross considers can be applied to the wagon's pluripotent temporal essence.

In his study of the justification of Faulkner's constant narrative shifts in *As I Lay Dying*, Ross offers considerable analyses of time's structure in the novel that inform a reading of the wagon's importance to time studies. Ross suggests the shifts in narrative between people inside and outside the Bundren family are justified because they represent an "infinite variability of human awareness" (Ross 726). Furthermore, Ross validates the Bergsonian influence on the novel, suggesting:

Faulkner felt free to step out of the regular progression of past-present-future, not believing it necessary to represent time as linear sequence; nor did he find it essential to create for the novel a stable present of narration which mirrors any "correct" ordering of chronology (730).

This underlying assertion is critical to the understanding of Faulkner's overall approach to temporalities. Insofar as Bergson is concerned, Ross' analysis is spot-on. However, profound symbols of recursion such as the wagon, the infinitesimal road, and even the buzzards that follow the Bundren wagon ascribe a fatalistic, eternal meaning of the wagon's position within the novel.

The following section will merge these criticisms, accommodating Ross' dismissal of Franklin and including aspects of both Goodman and Shoemaker's understanding of the wagon's importance to the novel. However, the architectonic importance of the wagon will be explained within the framework of time and temporality, taking care to explain the fatalistic elements of recursion that establish the wagon wheel as a profound and dominant signifier in the novel. The wagon wheel represents the Bundren family's inescapable toil: the idea that the past can

transcend and permeate the present to the point that not even death is safe from its machinations is a profoundly fatalist implication with consequences that manifest in each of the Bundren's narrative experiences in *As I Lay Dying*.

## II: Circularities and Fatalist Impositions of the Future in *As I Lay Dying*

Wagon wheels embody the pluripotent Faulknerian conception of time's recursive movement. Wheels, like other circular entities in Faulkner, are tangible reminders of the characters' inability to escape their collective past and that they have inherited a genealogy of loss and spiritual (and even actual) perdition that governs their future and the narratives of perpetual decay that surround them. These two elements in themselves present an interesting paradox of both movement and stasis. However, the fact that most wagons in Faulkner travel upon roads that are long, (of a seemingly infinite distance according to Lena Grove in *Light in August* and the ever-complaining Anse in *As I Lay Dying*) arduous, and similar (with the exception of the bridge) characterizes them as infinite lines. Furthermore, it is interesting to quantify the geometric Faulknerian flatness of roads as being lain upon a round Earth, which in itself is in constant motion in a cyclical orbit in which it has been floating since the beginning of either qualitatively or quantitatively notable time.

The road and the idea of traveling upon it are critical to temporal movement in *As I Lay Dying*. Joseph Blotner finds a biographical note describing the road's

intrinsic nature as the genesis of the novel's plot, stating, "the idea from which the book grew, Allen Tate would remember Faulkner saying, was Anse Bundren's reflection that his troubles had come with the building of the road, that once it was built, it was easy for bad luck to find him" (Blotner 249). For Faulkner, then, the construction (or approach) of the road into the Bundren family's life is so important that it is fundamentally inseparable from the novel's central theme and project. The Bundren family's descriptions of and relation to the road often imply (and occasionally explicitly note) the inherent connection between the individual's psychology and the road on which it unfolds.

Anse's immediate frustration with the road and the inevitable travel that must occur on it underline the road's mysterious and paradoxical stasis. Anse's first words in *As I Lay Dying* are "Durn that road" (AILD 35). It is difficult to imagine a more concise or poignant expression of opinion in the entire Faulknerian lexicon. Furthermore, Anse thinks, "I can stand here and same as see [the road] with a second-sight, a-shutting down behind them like a wall, shutting down betwixt them and my given promise" (35). The notion of a "second-sight" reveals a sort of supernatural, dreadful connection or feeling Anse has toward that road and toward the act of traveling upon it. This feeling, in turn, is informed by Anse's philosophical examination of movement. Anse remembers a conversation with Addie in which he expressed "it want any luck living on a road," to which Addie responds, "Get up and move, then" (35). Anse then continues with a profound metaphysical explanation of roads and the human purpose that greatly influence the definition of roads as spatiotemporally important in *As I Lay Dying*:

But I told her it want no luck in it, because the Lord put roads for travelling: why He laid them down flat on the earth. When He aims for something to be always a-moving, He makes it long ways, like a road or a horse or a wagon, but when He aims for something to stay put, He makes it up-and-down ways, like a tree or a man (35-36).

Here, Anse suggests that roads and wagons are inherently juxtaposed with the supposedly perfect human condition of stasis. Because the human criterion of having been made “up-and-down ways” does not suit the transient and spatiotemporally complicated nature of roads and wagons, people and the physical elements they use to travel exist in fundamental juxtaposition in *As I Lay Dying*. This philosophical monologue shows Faulkner’s ability to transpose abstruse philosophical concepts into the southern agrarian idiom at its finest and establishes a fundamental theme through which the rest of his section is realized.

Anse’s first section continues and his obsession with the road as harbinger of malady and restlessness becomes increasingly apparent. Anse begins to describe Darl’s upbringing within the context of the road, suggesting, “he was alright at first, with his eyes full of the land, because the land laid up-and-down ways then; it wasn’t till that ere road come and switch the land around longways...that they begun to threaten me out of him” (36-37). The land’s “up-and-down ways” orientation suggests a lack of movement or temporal progression in Anse’s view. The advent of the road, an element completely beyond Anse’s control, seems to have set in motion a perversion of his static environment into a progress of perpetual decay. Anse’s feeling that the coming of the road has subjected both he and his family to the unavoidable, calamitous decay of time becomes increasingly clear. Anse even goes so far as to repeatedly suggest, “[Addie] was well and hale as ere a woman ever

were, except for that road" (37). The following sentence displays a clever grammatical subversion of linear time in which Anse says directly to Mr. Peabody, "I never sent for you. . .I take you to witness I never sent for you" (37). Faulkner transitions from use of the imperfect tense in which he chronicles Addie's health (days or weeks before the onset of Addie's illness) into the moment Dr. Peabody arrives unannounced to treat her as she lays on her deathbed. This transition is completed as Peabody asks "where is she?" and employs the present use of the verb "to be" to shift from a passive chronicling of time into the direct presence of the situation in which Anse argues with Peabody. Anse swears he never sent for Peabody in the same fashion that he never asked for the arrival of the road that has brought tragedy and misfortune to his house (Peabody's own arrival is also contingent upon the road's existence). Peabody's arrival actualizes Addie's illness for Anse and triggers his grim realization that he will soon have to embark upon the road to bury his dying wife.

Anse's first section concludes as a rainstorm approaches his house, to which he reacts, "And now I can see same as a second sight the rain shutting down betwixt us, a-coming up that road like a durn man, like it want ere a other house to rain on in all the living land" (37-38). Although this is not Anse's first use of the present tense after Peabody's plea for Anse to enter the present, (he suggests to himself "And now I got to pay for it" to open the paragraph), it is the first incidence of Anse's complete entry into the present in which he sees the coming storm. Anse, then, perceives time's passing relative to the storm's position on the road instead of the linear model traditionally used to articulate time's passing. Stephen Ross characterizes

Faulkner's movement between tenses through a Bergsonian lens, suggesting, "That present tense suggests greater immediacy than does past allows Faulkner, merely by choosing one tense over another, to submerge a character more deeply in experience" (Ross 726). But this apparently capricious transition between tenses, then, is really anything but careless. The rain's march down the road serves as a temporal fulcrum that shifts Anse's interior perceptions outward onto the road and onto the inevitability of time's entrapment. The personification of the coming storm can be considered a foreshadowing of Anse's own march down the road (and entry into Bergsonian temporal transience). The road's characterization and description in Anse's chapter establishes a foreground for human movement (illusory and literal) that governs time's articulation in *As I Lay Dying*.

Faulkner considers the paradox of the Bundren family's movement and stasis and its consequences on the notion of temporality through Darl (whose clairvoyance is in itself a function of Bergsonian time) as he reflects, "We go on, with a motion so soporific, so dreamlike as to be uninferant of progress, as though time and not space were decreasing between us and it" (*AILD* 108). Here, Darl confounds spatial and linear renderings of time in his description of his family's arduous journey on the road to Jefferson. Darl's beautiful clairvoyance and the feelings of paradoxical stasis within motion or travel along the road are critical to the understanding of roads as agents of paradoxical temporal stasis in *As I Lay Dying*.

In another of *As I Lay Dying's* most profound philosophical explorations, Darl examines the metaphysics of being within the context of death, wagons, and his own human project. Darl considers the wagon's construction, pondering,

Beyond the unlamped wall I can hear the rain shaping the wagon that is ours, the load that is no longer theirs that felled it and sawed it nor yet theirs that bought it and which is not ours either...And since sleep is is-not and rain and wind are *was*, it is not. Yet the wagon *is*, because when the wagon is *was*, Addie Bundren will not be (80)

Darl profoundly (and abstrusely) explores the Bergsonian implications of the wagon as object. Here, Darl views the wagon through the Bergsonian concepts of duration and quantitative multiplicity: Darl is able to intuit the existence of the wagon's true essence despite the homogeneous appearance of the wagon in comparison to what the wagon was when it was "theirs that felled it and sawed it." Furthermore, Darl understands the wagon as physical entity or image that is able to "exist in continuity of experiences without juxtaposition." The wagon is *is* and *was* and *will be was* as Darl's perceptions of the wagon situate it relative to himself and to his place in the ever-flowing continuum of the present. Darl can intuit the wagon as *is* because it exists behind the unlamped wall according to his intelligent rendering of logic upon time. The wagon is also *is* because it currently exists with the intelligent purpose of transporting his mother's body to Jefferson. Therefore, "when the wagon is *was*," or his purpose for the wagon is exhausted, "Addie Bundren will not be." Darl's clairvoyant perception of the wagon's existence in a continuity of experiences *without* juxtaposing them, as would be the natural reflex of linear or traditional reckonings of time, (past/present/future exist traditionally as incongruous or opposite entities) displays the pantemporal, Bergsonian systematics of time that govern *As I Lay Dying*.

Darl's clairvoyance continues as he places the wagon and the entire Bundren family journey within the Bergsonian moment. Examining the wagon after it has

been salvaged from the river, Darl considers, "it is as though upon the shabby, familiar, inert shape of the wagon there lingered somehow, latent yet still immediate, that violence which had slain the mules that drew it not an hour since" (157). Darl's paradoxical description of the wagon's essence confirms its temporal pluripotency and shows it inhabiting, at once, moments other than yet including the present. That the wagon can be "latent yet still immediate" is an example of the sort of paradoxical arrangement of past against present that Bergsonian renderings of time would encourage. If the wagon embodies this temporal paradox or theoretical impossibility, the linear temporal system by which we evaluate time's passing must be reconsidered. Furthermore, that the wagon can be capable of this paradoxical temporal embodiment despite the fact that it is "shabby, familiar, [and] inert" justifies the Bergsonian importance of an object's ability when translated into image for quantitative multiplicity while still intelligently representing or signifying the same object. Such heterogeneity and non-linear temporal arrangement underline elements of Bergsonian temporal construction in *As I Lay Dying*.

Darl's consciousness of time as an expression of the past's potentialities superimposed onto a moving, present moment is so total that he describes the wagon's positioning through space relative to his family members across the river in *As I Lay Dying* in a manner that is identical with Bergson's metaphor for time's passing in Bergson's 1903 essay "An Introduction to Metaphysics." Darl describes his attempt to situate himself spatiotemporally relative to his family from across the flowing river, contemplating:



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 (146).

Bergson, in his celebrated essay “An Introduction to Metaphysics,” offers an undeniably congruent metaphor for time’s passing:

This inner life may be compared to the unrolling of a coil, for there is no living being who does not feel himself gradually to the end of his role; and to live is to grow old. But it may just as well be compared to a continual rolling up, like that of a thread on a ball, for our past follows us, it swells incessantly with the present that it picks up on its way; and consciousness means memory. (Bergson n.p.)

The similarity if not complete congruence of the metaphors that Bergson and Faulkner use are undeniable. Scholars have often debated over whether Faulkner had actually read Bergson before working on his fiction, but evidence of this nature leaves little doubt. Faulkner’s description of time as space, and the “looping string” which gathers into the thread of “past that follows us,” according to Bergson, is strong evidence of Faulkner’s immediate knowledge of this essay and of Bergsonian renderings of time. If anything, Faulkner adds to the metaphor’s artful description of time’s universally present and flowing articulation. Whether Faulkner borrowed this metaphor or built upon it, the presupposition that he closely read Bergson is enough to satisfy any inquiry. That these two metaphors are practically interchangeable is of dramatic significance to understanding Faulkner’s approach to time in his fictions.

This apparent congruence of Faulkner’s passage with Bergson’s is informed by an interview at the University of Virginia in which Faulkner offers a concise

theory of literature. After a student asked Faulkner about the similarity between Addie Bundren and Hester Prynne and the linguistic play at stake between his Reverend Whitfield and Hawthorne's Reverend Dimmesdale, Faulkner explained, "a writer don't have to consciously parallel because he robs and steals from everything he ever wrote or read or saw. . . I took whatever I needed wherever I could find it, without any compunction and with no sense of violating any ethics" (Gwynn 87). Faulkner's declaration that a writer is entitled to borrow from every writer before him informs the possibility that he would borrow this metaphor from Bergson. Furthermore, Faulkner's very statement implies his belief in a Bergsonian rendering of time in which the past unconsciously follows human agents in a "continual rolling up, like that of a thread on a ball" (Bergson, n.p.). Faulkner's apparent borrowing from a Bergsonian text, and his expression of both an artist's entitlement to borrow from previous artists and the importance of a continual past following persons into the present inform both Faulkner's Bergsonian bent and time's progression in *As I Lay Dying*.

Darl's clairvoyance results in a second important description from the wagon as the Bundren family approaches Jefferson. Darl responds to Vardaman's question about whether or not they had reached Jefferson and proceeds to notice the increasing amount of vultures that have begun to follow the wagon. Darl describes them, fancying, "[h]igh against [the sky] they hang in narrowing circles, like the smoke, with an outward semblance of form and purpose, but with no inference of motion, progress or retrograde" (*AILD* 227). The movement of the vultures resembles the movement of the wagon on which the Bundren family rides. Despite

the fact that the Bundren family has arrived in Jefferson, the inescapable past (in this case, the death of Addie) reasserts its presence in the form of an increased number of vultures attracted by her decomposition. The vultures have paradoxically arrived (constituting their increase in number) and move paradoxically, “with an outward semblance of form and purpose,” yet do not in fact advance because, as Darl suggests, they have “no inference of motion, progress or retrograde.” The vultures follow the Bundren family, yet Darl describes them as lacking any sort of physical progress or regression. The vultures are unmoving yet exact upon the Bundren family a painful reminder through a type of following. What implications, then, does this have on the Bundrens’ own movement?

The vultures, moving though unmoving, are a response to the Bundren family’s similarly paradoxical progress through time. To follow the Bundren’s is to mimic their progress: the ways in which their movement manifests itself through space, and the way that space is psychologically perceived and intelligently contextualized with order and the human imposition of temporal linearity. In this regard, Darl continues to describe the family’s epic movement through a present moment that, as Bergson describes, “varies infinitely, and intertwines itself with all other qualities of experience” (Bergson 99). Darl’s description of the present cannot be separated from the same paradoxical present the vultures inhabit. Darl, as clairvoyant, is particularly sensitive to time’s alterations in accordance with what Bergson refers to as “gradations in emotional intensity” (99). This intensity, in part, informs Darl’s ability to perceive time in a Bergsonian fashion. Furthermore, The fact that Darl notices the vulture’s movement in relation to their family’s movement

in the wagon (along the road) underlines the importance of the wagon as catalyst or metaphor for Bergsonian temporal movement.

Darl's final, heartbreaking narration in *As I Lay Dying* establishes a double-consciousness that establishes multiple physical positions in which Darl exists and, due to the impossibility of this idea, manifests his total disassociation with reality similar to Quentin Compson's final words in *The Sound and the Fury*. Darl explains to himself:

The wagon stands on the square, hitched, the mules motionless...It looks no different from a hundred other wagons there; Jewel standing beside it and looking up the street like any other man in town that day, yet there is something different, distinctive. There is about it that unmistakable air of definite and imminent departure that trains have, perhaps due to the fact that Dewey Dell and Vardaman on the seat and Cash on a pallet in the wagon bed are eating bananas from a paper bag. 'Is that why you are laughing, Darl?' Darl is our brother, our brother Darl, Our brother Darl in a cage in Jackson where, his grimed hands lying light in the quiet interstices, looking out he foams. "Yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes (*AILD* 254).

Darl exists in two places at this moment in the text. Darl believes himself to be physically present in the square and commenting upon the wagon's construction and nature (as he has repeatedly throughout the novel) but is in actuality in a mental institution miles away in Jackson. The fact that Darl chooses to comment on the wagon's physical nature again (as he did in his section where he begins by considering, "I can hear the rain shaping the wagon that is ours, the load that is no longer theirs that felled it and sawed it") reinforces the wagons importance as medium for paradoxical temporal progression. That the wagon is "no different from a hundred other wagons there" yet possesses "different, distinctive" qualities

implies the significance of the physical nature of the wagon through a Bergsonian lens of duration. At the “beginning” and “conclusion” of the wagon’s journey (according to linear time, the time the reader supposedly exists in while reading the novel) Darl notes that the wagon is nondescript in its physical construction yet somehow contains a collection of all of its past attributes through the Bergsonian lens that the mind collects images and presents them continuously without the possibility for juxtaposition. The past cannot be opposed with the present; the future cannot be opposed with the past. Consequently, Darl is unable to differentiate the wagon’s current physical state from the continuous past in which it held “the load that is no longer theirs that felled and sawed it” and the past in which it holds and delivers Addie Bundren’s corpse to Jefferson. Despite being conscious of the wagon’s trans-spatial, consistent physical construction, Darl understands its perpetually assertive relation to the past through Bergsonian mechanics of time. Darl’s supernatural understanding of time as a nonlinear phenomenon and his choice to consistently articulate its passage through the wagon expand the wagon’s salience as a literal and metaphorical vehicle for Bergsonian temporal inquiry.

Before this paragraph, Darl explains his transportation to Jackson by train, believing, “They pulled two seats together so Darl could sit by the window to laugh” (254). Darl’s stream-of-consciousness moves from the present moments in which he narrates his journey to another present moment in which he exists in Jefferson’s town square. This ability (or imagined ability) to exist in two places confounds a linear reading of time and constitutes Darl’s separation from reality. However, a Bergsonian reading of time would suggest that Darl is in fact capable of commenting

or describing the present moment in which he was in the Jefferson town square because the continual nature of the past endows and informs the potentiality of his existence within that space.

Vernon Tull's sections of *As I Lay Dying* present an argument for Bergsonian renderings of time in Faulkner's fictions by evidencing the opposing psychological viewpoint. Where the Bundren family often describes the events that transpire as they happen, Tull takes care to distance himself from the Bundren's epic voyage. Tull's passage describing the Bundren family's attempt to cross the bridge in the wagon provides an excellent view into the circularity of experience that accompanies Bergson's spatial rendering of time. Furthermore, the psychological distance Tull maintains in this section legitimizes Ross' reading of tense as Bergsonian function in *As I Lay Dying*. Tull opens his passage *in medias res*, explaining:

So they finally got Anse to say what he wanted to do, and him and the gal and the boy got out of the wagon. But even when we were on the bridge Anse kept on looking back, like he thought maybe, once he was outen the wagon, the whole thing would kind of blow up and he would find himself back yonder in the field again and her laying up there in the house, waiting to die and it to do all over again (137).

Here, Tull uses only the third person style of narration, indicating that he is both physically and emotionally distant from the Bundren's attempt to cross the bridge. This is congruent with Ross' assessment that "past [tense] implies greater detachment, a looking back on events, and a separation from them" (Ross 725). Tull is not as invested in the well being of the Bundren family (or its success in its epic endeavor) as its family members are, therefore justifying the emotional and literal

distance from the event through past-tense narration. Furthermore, Tull perceives Anse's dread of the wagon and its relentless movement. The notion that Anse looks as though he thinks that he will be transported back into time if he is separated from the wagon suggests he perceives the wagon (the wheels that carry it and the road on which it travels) to be a burden he must carry so that he might free himself from future movement. The irony of this line of thought is that regardless of whether or not he actually returned to the moment in experience in which Addie was dying, Anse is trapped in a temporally circular universe. *As I Lay Dying* concludes with Anse taking a new wife, closing the novel with the final words "Meet Mrs. Bundren" (AILD 261). Anse takes a new wife in Jefferson and will presumably return home along the same road, setting in motion what appears to be an eternally circular pattern of motion and trial for the entire family. Faulkner is conscious of this circularity and plays upon it to exemplify the paradoxical stasis of the South and the people that compose it. In this sense, Anse will always "find himself back yonder in the field again," existing in a moment in which the past, present, and future become inseparable.

Biological circularity as a repetitive and inescapable force, though not as lineage-driven as *The Sound and the Fury* or *Light in August*, conforms to a Bergsonian rendering of perpetual temporal inescapability in *As I Lay Dying*. There are two principal examples of this biological circularity: that of Dewey Dell's illegitimate pregnancy, and that of the novel's conclusion bringing forward a new "Mrs. Bundren." Each instance buttresses the sense of circularity and the past's

perpetual imposition on the current moment and lends insight into Faulkner's Bergsonian influence.

Despite the fact that Addie Bundren believes that "the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time," she is symbolically resurrected through Anse's immediate acquisition of a new spouse. In this regard, Addie Bundren fails to escape any finality associated with death. This conforms with Frank Robinson's supposition that Addie believes "what is real is beyond linear time" and agrees with Kermode's idea of a tragic ending as what happens post-apocalypse "in the hands of the exhausted survivors" (Robinson 67, Kermode 82). That the final spoken words in *As I Lay Dying* are "Meet Mrs Bundren" confirm Faulkner's imposition of eternality, circularity, and resurrection upon Addie. Furthermore, it is notable that Addie's (Mrs. Bundren's) body is brought to Jefferson on the same wagon that the new "Mrs Bundren" is returned home on. The repetitive nature of the route and of its characters as symbols of nomenclature perpetuates the senses of fatigue and temporal entrapment that pervade *As I Lay Dying*.

Being doomed to live permanently and recursively (to be victim to time) is Addie's worst fear. Her section of *As I Lay Dying* confirms this idea and reinforces in the reader Addie's bitterness at the act of living. Why, then, is she allowed to speak? What implications does her section have on a Bergsonian reading of *As I Lay Dying*? Porter reminds us "the controlling time frame of the novel is the continuous present. . .[w]ithin this time period, however, events by no means unfold in precise chronological order" (Porter 65). Eric Sundquist complicates this dynamic, suggesting "the son's problematic attachment to the event of their mother's death is



that Addie is both there and not there; her body remains in spite of her missing self” (Sundquist 68). What can we make of the continuous present in relation to the speech of a character from beyond death, a paradoxical embodiment of what Faulkner would refer to as *is* and *is-not*? Faulkner carefully foreshadows Addie’s appearance as author or teller of a section through Dr. Peabody’s first soliloquy:

I can remember how when I was young I believed death to be a phenomenon of the body; now I know it to be merely a function of the mind—and that of the minds of the ones who suffer the bereavement. 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 (*AILD* 43-44).

Death’s perception as a biological phenomenon as opposed to a psychological one informs the Bergsonian mechanics of time in *As I Lay Dying*. Bergson suggests that the linear ordering of time is an intelligent representation made psychologically from the human mind to generate order upon which decision-making is predicated. However, Bergson also suggests that “time is not always felt as sequence; time, like other dimensions of our awareness, varies infinitely, and intertwines itself with all other qualities of experience—with gradations in emotional intensity, with our sense of proximity or detachment” (Bergson 99). Franklin has taken care to show that tense employment as a signifier of chronological order in *As I Lay Dying* establishes the narrative as nonlinear. If, as Bergson contends, time “intertwines itself with all other qualities of experience,” why should death be exempt from this quality? Let’s remember according to Darl’s attempt at deductive logic that Addie is “is,” because “the wagon *is*, because when the wagon *is was*, Addie Bundren will not be” (*AILD* 80). Interestingly, Darl is only able logically to examine Addie’s existence

relative to the wagon. This idea has profound implications on the importance of the wagon as embodiment of Bergsonian time. Furthermore, Peabody's foreshadowing that death is not a bodily phenomenon (in combination with Darl's establishment of Addie's continual existence) establishes a thematic landscape that justifies and even encourages the appearance of Addie as a narrator.

Rhetorical aspects Peabody's soliloquy have a particularly interesting importance on the relevance of recursive, Bergsonian time in *As I Lay Dying*. As Peabody expresses his opinion he takes care to note that "the nihilists say that it is the end; the fundamentalists, the beginning" only to build off each to established a nuanced, temporally recursive view of death. That death, as incorporeal and psychological phenomenon, is neither the beginning nor the end implies that our births and deaths (the ultimate human psychological hallmarks of linear time) take place essentially in the middle of an eternally flowing present that is by nature intertwined with the past and future. To represent death as neither beginning nor end of time is to represent time circular, recursive, and all-inclusive in accordance with Bergsonian theories of duration.

Finally, Peabody's comparison of death to movement informs the relationship between physical and temporal movement in *As I Lay Dying*. Peabody ruminates, in reality [death] is no more than a single tenant or family moving out of a tenement or town." Death for Peabody can be equated with a single person or group's movement through space as opposed to any movement through time that terms such as "beginning" and "ending" impose. Peabody enforces a metaphysics of time as a spatial relationship that is congruent with Bergson's ideas of time and

actively opposes a rendering of progression as only able to be temporally situated or defined. Furthermore, Peabody's assertion that death is a signifier of movement applies to the novel's very essence as a multifaceted chronicle of Addie's (and the resulting Bundren family's) movement because of and through the act of dying as a spatial phenomenon which is, in this case, the distance between Addie's deathbed and her burial—the distance needed for her to become “*was*” according to Darl's temporal logic. As Porter suggests, “Addie's death itself is not a punctual event but one experienced continually by various characters before it is fully accomplished” (Porter 65). Peabody's profundity in addressing death and temporality at a relatively early stage in the novel establishes temporality as a key theme in *As I Lay Dying* and suggests its relativity and recursion.

*As I Lay Dying* is a powerful embodiment of Bergsonian time made manifest in narrative. The wagon that carries the Bundren family across Mississippi is inseparable from the novel's thematic and narrative project: time exists as a space fraught with tragedy and perpetual effort that constitutes its overall recursion. Faulkner masterfully establishes these elements in the novel through a multiplicity of characters, rhetorical strategies, and textual and plot constructions that endow *As I Lay Dying* with masterful narrative qualities that ask a series of fundamentally demanding questions about the nature of time and its movement with, against, and through human consciousness.

## VI. Physical and Temporal Recursion in *Light in August*

Because a man aint given that many choices.

-Gail Hightower, *Light in August*

### I: Criticism of Wagons, Bergson, and Time in *Light in August*

Faulkner's 1932 novel, *Light in August*, the final publication of his most experimental period of fiction writing, is the final work of examination for this thesis. *Light in August* is in many regards the most experimental of the three fictions and certainly explores in greatest depth the past and its inevitable and inescapable manifestations into the present in the greatest depth<sup>9</sup>. The ever-present lexicon of memory in *Light in August* reaches as far back as the Civil War and functions as a fulcrum to comment upon class, race, and gender constructions to a degree Faulkner had yet to explain in his prior fiction. He continues to explore narrative functions of time, memory, and telling that he previously explored in the *Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* and relies on thematic and structural similarities between these two works to develop a characteristic of time congruent with those adopted previous novels. Particularly, Faulkner's use of recursive signifiers such as the wagon establishes a schematic of time that agrees with Bergsonian theories of duration and intelligence. Despite the fact that *Light in August* is more temporally concerned with the past's imposition upon the future, the novel should be placed within the

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<sup>9</sup> Sally Padgett Wheeler does fantastic work establishing and confirming temporal consistency in "Chronology in *Light in August*."

Faulknerian lexicon of experimental narrative strategies. Because Bergsonian temporal theory suggests that the past be placed around and within the present and future without theoretical or literal juxtaposition, *Light in August* presents a similarly multifaceted temporal landscape from which Faulkner explores what it means to be simultaneously in and through history, memory, and time.

Carolyn Porter agrees with this notion, claiming “[Faulkner] moves us from one place and time to another as the narrator focuses his attention on one character’s story only to turn away to another’s, as if he too were trying to keep up with the stories he’s trying to tell” (Porter 87). As we have seen in his previous works, Faulkner is always careful to create the illusion of disorder while simultaneously maintaining a cohesive temporal structure. This strategy culminates in *Light in August* as Faulkner dives deeper into past events with more character development than any previous undertaking.

The high degree of nuance in *Light in August*’s temporal structuring has attracted a great deal of critical attention. Many have found Faulkner’s renderings of time’s paradoxical stasis in *Light in August* to be an important medium to conduct Marxist, feminist, and racial studies of the novel and of modernism more broadly. Philosophers and intellectuals as influential as Jean-Paul Sartre have written extensively about Faulkner’s manifestations of time. Porter and Darrel Abel are two theorists whose central projects involve Faulknerian “frozen movement” and explain their chronological rendering of Faulknerian time through Bergson’s nonlinear postulations. Porter concentrates on the collective failure of *Light in August*’s characters to adapt to Bergsonian time and suggests that this psychological

failure to “accept” circular or non-linear time achieves a type of tragic, Kermodean ending. Abel considers how Bergson differentiates between “image” and “representation” in the context of symbolism in *Light in August* and takes care to demonstrate the ability of the novel’s symbolic moments to enforce a nonlinear metric of time in the reader’s interpretation. Still other theorists such as Peter Puchek and Harold Bloom associate time’s cyclical nature in *Light in August* with classical and pagan renderings of time, concentrating on Lena Grove’s lack of internal epiphany (a moment every other character has at least once in *Light in August*) as an embodiment of the relentless, unwavering, and incontestable progress of time. Joan Korenman combines many of these themes in her in-depth analysis of Faulkner’s allusion to Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn.”

The purpose of this section will be to establish a reading of *Light in August* through a focus on physical signifiers of recursion and infiniteness in a manner similar to Abel’s while demonstrating time’s recursion nature and furthering the psychological implications Porter suggests. In addition, this reading attempts to establish a link between Abel’s symbolist reading and Puchek’s ideas of epiphany: the perpetuation of time’s nonlinear nature in *Light in August*.

Henri Bergson suggests that artists are individuals who are “born detached” and have “a much more direct vision of reality” than other individuals (Bergson 162-163). Bergson carefully explains and defends this assertion of an artist’s philosophical superiority through introspection, specifically the ability to “intuit” one’s presence within a perpetually flowing present. The static for Bergson is an abstract or representative moment. An artist’s ability in Bergsonian terms, then, is

the ability to perceive oneself as a similarly static entity within the eternally flowing present and to create these images or representations of reality whose significance is informed by their own self-consciousness as representatively still. This, for Bergson, constitutes the best art. Abel posits that Faulkner is an artist who was born into such detached circumstances and can therefore perceive and create these self-conscious images of a Bergsonian temporal metric.

Abel then employs Jean-Paul Sartre's explanation of symbols to Faulkner to establish a more nuanced explanation of their importance. He points out, "the resource of the intuitive artist in conveying his intuitions to practical men, who must have reality represented to them in 'states' and 'things,' is symbolism" (Abel 110). Sartre's reading of symbolism in "Time and Faulkner: *The Sound and the Fury*" complicates Abel's assertion since it suggests that one symbol is not enough to support an entirely new rendering of time, as Sartre claims symbolism "will have to use ideas as conveyance. It will prefer, however, to have recourse to the most concrete ideas, but those which still retain an outer fringe of images" (Sartre 48). Only through an interwoven network of signifiers of recursion and temporality can we establish a thorough, pertinent discourse on nonlinear time in Faulkner.

Bergson himself supports this assertion, suggesting:

No image will replace the intuition of duration, but many images... will be able, through the convergence of their action, to direct the consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to seize on (Bergson 195).

Physical manifestations of time's fluid reality in language rely then, for both Bergson and Sartre, on multiple signifiers whose essences somehow proclaim or allude to

time's nonlinear nature. These snapshots, or what Bergson refers to as "cuttings made out of the becoming" (39) establish a still, thematic system of reference to time's circularity which communicate Faulkner's attempt to establish a nonlinear, Bergsonian rendering of time in *Light in August*.

Porter discusses Bergsonian temporalities within the context of each character's tragic failure to understand them in "The Problem of Time in *Light in August*." Porter understands the importance of the wagon as metaphor for movement on a superficial level and correctly asserts:

Time as segmented and reshuffled into a reordered whole, and time as the duration sustaining life, both operate in *Light in August*. And the tension between continuity and discontinuity, grounded in the effort to structure time and the need to respect its endless flow, informs both the novel's meaning and its structure (Porter 108).

Meanings in the novel, Porter implies, represent each character's struggle to realize, interpret, or accept Bergsonian renderings of time. Her argument carries considerable weight in regard to Lena's relationship with travel and the wagon as medium for the depiction of the paradoxical frozen movement it embodies.

Through the signifier of the wagon and the consequential allusion to the Grecian urn, Porter suggests "[Faulkner] is appealing to our predisposition to view immobility as a sign of permanence, but complicating our responses by attributing that permanence to motion itself" (Porter 89). She aptly names this phenomenon in another critical examination of Faulkner's fictions as "a counterintuitive form of narrative pull" (43). Contradictory and counterintuitive suggestions of immobility as permanence pervade the opening of *Light in August* and assert the importance of a circular rendering of time from the outset of the narrative.



Porter pays the most attention in *Light in August* to the wagon's role as signifier of temporal recursion when she examines Lena's psychological perspective at the novel's opening. Somewhat simplistically, she suggests, "all [wagons] are simply metaphors for the motion they embody" (112). Porter explains the simplistic reading of the wagons through Lena's nuanced (yet somehow facile) experience by asserting that the wagons manifest Bergsonian time for Lena because "her attention to life, like the ceaseless motion around her, while minimal, is constant" (112). Porter concludes her argument concerning Lena's appreciation of the wagon as phenomenon, arguing, "Lena's future and past are enfolded in a perpetual present...[t]hus the feeling of being on the wagon, even of having been on the wagon, does not disrupt the present, but seems to flow out of it without a break in time" (116). This line of argument leaves little room for doubt and establishes a coherent, if not overly basic, reading of the wagon's importance as a metaphor for recursion and the past's ability to inform the present in *Light in August*.

However, certain aspects of *Light in August* contradict parts of Porter's reading of Bergsonian aspects of time in Faulkner. Porter suggests that the main characters in *Light in August* grapple with (and fail to understand) the nature of time in the novel as circular or flowing. Porter insists that Bergsonian time cannot independently determine the future. She defends this assumption, arguing:

Bergson asserts that viewing the present as a system of possibles which anticipate a future reality entails a false determinism in which the present is spuriously imprinted with the pattern of a future whose outline is unforeseeable...The possible is a concept only applicable to the past wherein we try to find the causes for the present and so posit sources for that present. But when we apply this operation to the relationship between present and future, we necessarily fail because

the present can only become possible from the vantage point of the future (116).

Although Porter's theory displays an astute understanding of Bergson and is a springboard for a cohesive interpretation of *Light in August*, she fails to articulate the importance of the temporal circularity that pervades Faulkner's fiction and informs the tragic nature of his works. The "spurious" application of the past to the future does not do justice to Faulkner's work, and considerable textual evidence in *Light in August* supports this claim. For example, Porter is correct, I believe, to classify Joe Christmas' attitude as nihilistic; however, she does not fully envision the nihilistic implication of the world the novel depicts. Faulkner frequently employs allegorical signifiers (often Christian signifiers) that suggest the possibility of resurrection or redemption. But here these explanations function farcically—as sorts of straw man arguments that are inevitably trumped by the exhausting, doomed circularity of Faulkner's novels.

That Lena Grove exemplifies the imposition of the past upon the future, which establishes a fatalist reading of *Light in August's* time, does not coincide with Porter's or Bergson's accounts. Before the novel begins, Lena Grove is pregnant. That the novel opens in medias res establishes her pregnancy as a precedent governs the narrative's direction: there existed a time before the Faulknerian narrative present in which Lena Grove's doomed and relentless progress existed. The novel's opening with Lena "sitting beside the road, watching the wagon mount

the hill toward her” (*LIA*<sup>10</sup> 1) requires an explanation of her situation relative to the road, the wagon, and the temporal arrangement of the novel. That she was “sitting” suggests that she exists in perpetual movement along the road and has been seated for a reason. The past, which Faulkner explains in ensuing passages in *Light in August*, opens in medias res and literally moves forward by going backward as it explains Lena’s unfortunate situation. Lena’s past in which she conceives the child is not the opening of the novel. Consequently, Faulkner must explore the past in order to explain the inevitable future consequence of Lena’s giving birth. Here it is difficult to imagine a more direct signifier of the past’s direct import on the future than this depiction of a woman inevitably “doomed” to give birth. This birth provides a supreme ironic and fatalistic rendering of the project of life in *Light in August*—Lena’s progress is affixed to a doomed inevitability of giving birth to an individual who will struggle as she has struggled.

Critics often pair the birth of Lena’s child with the death of Joe Christmas suggesting that Lena’s child will forcibly confront the same fatiguing life as Christmas’ because of their mutual “illegitimacy.” Porter suggests that Joe’s future “is here defined by a pattern imposed on it as if it were past, so that he does not, cannot really, anticipate the future, except as the reality already possible in, and therefore determined by, the present” (Porter 116). Yet this reading seems tenuous because Porter adapts Bergsonian theory and implies that it is somehow Joe’s fault that he “spuriously” adapts fatalism in an attempt to defer time. Christmas’ fatalism is largely driven by his belief in his own racial “impurity”: an uncontrollable

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<sup>10</sup> All references to *Light in August* will hereby be represented as *LIA* when cited parenthetically. See Works Cited page for a complete list of abbreviations.

condition of his past that *most certainly* governs his future fate in *Light in August*<sup>11</sup>. Simply put, Christmas is doomed not because he has decided he was doomed at some point; rather, Christmas exists as a recursive component of a lineage of tragic mistreatment and misunderstanding that is fundamentally inescapable in *Light in August*.

Fatalistic, circular renderings of time in Faulkner transcend Porter's reading of Bergsonian time in *Light in August* as a construct from which characters struggle and fail to understand. In a footnote of her article, Porter claims, "Death comes to be allied with form in the novel, just as life comes to be allied with formlessness" yet does not go far enough into extending the footnote's fatalist implications into a reading of Bergsonian time (Porter 125). This understanding of time as a circular, inescapable entity in Faulkner departs from Bergson's understanding of temporality to some extent. Faulkner clearly considers Bergson's temporal significance at great length and many of his fictions present remarkably Bergsonian traits. However, Faulkner considers circularity at such length that it is unjust to ignore the significance of the circle and circular objects as a pervasive motif in his fiction, particularly in *Light in August*. The following section will address the significance of wagons and wheels in *Light in August*, offering heightened attention to the Bergsonian implications present within the circular, inescapable nature of the wagons and their progress through space and time in Faulkner.

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<sup>11</sup> Sociopolitical heritage plays a role in Faulkner's commentary on race that warrants further explanation but exceeds the realm of this thesis. For example, Faulkner describes Joanna Burden's relationship to the community, describing, "even though she is but a woman and but the descendant of them whom the ancestors of the town had reason (or thought that they had) to hate and dread. But it is there: the descendants of both in their relationship to one another's ghosts, with between them the phantom of the old spilled blood and the old horror and anger and fear" (46-47).

## II: The Interpretive Importance of Wagons as Signifier in *Light in August*

Abel, Porter, and Puchek all consider the opening and closing of *Light in August* in detail but do not significantly concentrate upon the wagon as a primary signifier of time's recursion. Perhaps this is due in part to the boldness of Faulkner's use of Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" in the novel's opening pages. Although extensive criticism has been dedicated to this allusion, Lena's relation to the wagon, I argue, sets the thematic stage in *Light in August*. The wagon is a Bergsonian symbol and its ability to house the "Grecian Urn" as simile confirms Sartre's description of symbols as "[having] recourse to the most concrete ideas, but those which still retain an outer fringe of images" (Sartre 48). The "outer fringe" of these images is embodied by Faulkner's epic simile to Keats' ode. Consequently, the wagon is an easily envisioned, concrete idea through which Faulkner is able to communicate the abstract idea of Bergsonian time.

Faulkner opens the novel and immediately establishes a thematic lexicon from which he develops the nuanced, highly psychological relationship each character has with Bergsonian time. The opening presents Lena Grove walking along a roadside, thinking, "I have come a long way from Alabama: a fur piece" and closes with her, again on the road, pondering, "My, my. A body does get around<sup>12</sup>. Here we aint been coming from Alabama but two months, and now it's already Tennessee." (*LIA* 1, 507) The circular construction of these lines links a fatalist

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<sup>12</sup> This is also a sexual commentary on the nature of the female body, also a potential cycling including the birth of new individuals who are also incapable of escaping their history.

illusion to Faulkner's notion of time and history's circular inescapability. Not coincidentally does Faulkner choose the preposition "around" to signify the nature of Lena's (and every other character's) journey throughout the novel. "Around" both embodies the rural vernacular common among Faulkner's characters and represents a circular and recursive movement without definitive beginning or end. The narration fixes as circular and inseparable from the infinite road and wagon that are media for her unstoppable movement Lena's perpetual and comically indefatigable journey through space. In effect, *Light in August's* thorough network of signifiers at the novel's beginning foregrounds the temporal inquiry that is its project.

This technique is perhaps most evident in the novel's opening description of Lena. Faulkner almost immediately introduces the wagon as a function of Lena's movement through time, alluding to her father's death and the beginning of her journey in relation to the wagon, suggesting, "the next morning she departed forever, though it is possible she did not know this at the time...[t]he wagon was borrowed and the brother had promised to return it by nightfall" (4). At the opening of the novel, Lena's father dies abruptly and without considerable explanation and thereby determines the conditions for Lena's seemingly infinite and inescapable travel. The notion that Lena "departs forever" is doubly meaningful because she literally leaves her home forever and begins a recursive process of eternal departure through constant movement across space. After this brief but necessary contextualization, the novel displays an elaborate manifestation of

Bergsonian temporality through the appearance of another wagon years after Lena's initial departure from her home:

*Here's a wagon that's going a piece of the way. It will take you that far; backrolling now behind her a long monotonous succession of peaceful and undeviating changes from day to dark and dark to day again, through which she advanced in identical and anonymous and deliberate wagons as though through a succession of creakwheeled and limpeared avatars, like something moving forever and without progress across an urn (7).*

Lena appears to be supernaturally aware of the wagon as it approaches her along the road. This abnormal awareness is similar to the Bergsonian notion of intuition that suggests the human ability to call forward sensory images and representations before intelligence can contextualize them to previous experiences.<sup>13</sup> That the wagons are “creakwheeled and limpeared avatars” suggests that, despite each wagon's inherent difference and separation in actuality, each participates in an essential “wagonness.” Each wagon that has previously carried Lena participates in her transport (an essential thematic and literal aspect of the novel) and exists within the Bergsonian framework of intuitively similar objects whose principal difference is their organization in space. The idea that the wagons are “avatars” characterizes the wagons as literal manifestations of Bergsonian time because, as avatars, they are merely intelligently rendered representations of the intuitive idea of the wagon whose motion is chronicled across space rather than linear time. That the wagons are fundamentally and intuitively the same object through their “identical and anonymous and deliberate” supports this idea. Despite the fact that each wagon

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<sup>13</sup> See Bergson, Henri. *The Creative Mind*. Trans. M. L. Andison. New York: Philosophical Library, 1946.

differs according to linear, traditional reckonings of time, the wagon's status as object and signifier of importance informs the novel's intent to explore temporal modalities.

Faulkner's allusion to Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" participates in the "outer fringe of images" predicated by the concrete idea of the wagon's movement on the road. Without Lena's perception of the wagon's movement, Faulkner would be unable to achieve the grand simile of the urn. The description of the urn depends upon its context as the wagon's equivocation or abstract idea, represented in this case by an epic simile. This allusion is made with great care, and the richness that accompanies the introduction of this image into the novel is well wrought. This connection establishes the initial abstract image of movement as a paradoxically still. The urn's ability to move through linear history while existing as a "still unravish'd bride of quietness" and "foster-child of silence and slow time" adds the urn into the lexicon of paradoxical images in *Light in August* (Keats l.1-2). The notion that something can be perpetually moving yet fail to progress appears paradoxical within the constraints of traditional, linear renderings of time. The urn implies the presence of the same narrative being told over and over again while simultaneously moving through space (or linear time, informing our ability to perceive the narrative). Faulkner's allusion to the urn and the urn's consequent dependence upon the wagon and road for points of similarity and equivocation reinforce each object's importance as temporally self-conscious, concrete signifiers and images in *Light in August*.



Once the concrete idea of the wagon as signifier of time's recursion has been established and then legitimized by an epic allusion, Faulkner experiments with psychological monologues that unite the images and strengthen the thematic bond between them. Faulkner enters Lena's mind as she speculates:

She thinks of herself as already moving, riding again, thinking *Then it will be as if I were riding for a half mile before I even got into the wagon, before the wagon even got to where I was waiting, and that when the wagon is empty of me again it will go on for a half mile with me still in it* (LIA 8).

Lena's remembrance of the wagon as inseparable from her movement enforces Bergsonian metrics of time. Furthermore, the idea that Lena could have been riding in the wagon before she enters it informs the similarity of her recursive travels and the travels presumably depicted on the urn represented in Faulkner's intertextual reference. The Bergsonian implications that the wagon wheel, in combination with the wagon's pattern of circular movement that informs and chronicles Lena's doomed journey through motherhood (and the child's doom to life characterized as impure or illegitimate) lend a nuanced understanding to the network of temporal signifiers operating in paradoxical recursion in the novel.

The role of the wagon as signifier and principal agent of recursion pervades *Light in August* but is of foremost importance at the opening and closing of the novel. Lena's description of the wagon's movement through space and its ensuing implications on the rendering of time in *Light in August* establish it as a fundamental signifier and allude to the inescapable recursion of its function to which Lena is inexorably chained. This paragraph also introduces the themes of paradoxical

movement and stasis' representation in pattern analyses in *Light in August*.

Describing the wagon's approach to Lena, Faulkner shows,

The sharp and brittle crack and clatter of its weathered and ungreased wood and metal is slow and terrific: a series of dry sluggish reports carrying for a half mile across the hot still pinewiney silence of the August afternoon. Though the mules plod in a steady and unflagging hypnosis, the vehicle does not seem to progress. It seems to hang suspended in the middle distance forever and ever, so infinitesimal in its progress, like a shabby bead upon the mild red string of road. So much so is this that in the watching of it the eye loses it as sight and sense drowsily merge and blend, like the road itself, with all the peaceful and monotonous changes between darkness and day, like already measured thread being rewound onto a spool. So that at last, as though out of some trivial and unimportant region beyond even distance, the sound of it seems to come slow and terrific and without meaning, as though it were a ghost travelling a half mile ahead of its own shape (8).

The metaphor of the perpetually rewinding of thread upon a spool is a key metaphor because it is originally found in Bergson. Faulkner employs this metaphor in *As I Lay Dying* to describe the running of the river that separates the Bundren family. However, this metaphor was first used in Bergson's 1903 essay "An Introduction to Metaphysics" in which he compares time "to a continual rolling up, like that of a thread on a ball, for our past follows us, it swells incessantly with the present that it picks up on its way; and consciousness means memory" (Bergson n.p.). The genealogy of this metaphor is crucial to firmly linking Bergson directly with Faulkner.

The paradoxical frozen movement of the wagon across the road establishes each object's importance as signifier of recurrent and eternal progress. Faulkner's

description of a space “of some trivial and unimportant region beyond even distance” also informs the wagon’s almost supernatural power as a concretization of Bergsonian schematics of time in *Light in August*. The notion that a region can exist physically beyond distance itself is an idea fundamentally opposed to an actual quantifiable length, confirming Bergsonian elements of duration beyond linear time. Furthermore, the idea that the wagon can be “ahead of its own shape” confirms the idea that for Lena the wagon exists as a composite representation of every wagon she has previously imagined. Again this affirms Bergsonian theories of both image and duration. The opening of *Light in August* immediately foregrounds the importance of the wagon as both metaphor for the story’s temporal progress and the overall structure of the novel.

*Light in August* opens with Lena Grove’s travel across Yoknapatawpha County and circuitously arrives at a conclusion in which Lena continues to travel. The novel describes Lena perpetuating her indefatigable and recursive movement from the perspective of a wagon driver who suggests at the end of the novel:

I think she was just travelling. I don’t think she had any idea of finding whoever it was she was following. I don’t think she had ever aimed to...I think she had just made up her mind to travel a little further and see as much as she could (*LIA* 506).

The idea that Lena’s epic journey can be reduced to the idea of “just travelling” indicates a sort of fatalistic reduction of her entire experience in *Light in August*. Despite the fact that Lena’s travel through the novel has been exhausting in every respect, Lena appears doomed to repeat this travel until a sort of constructed end of time (“a space beyond even distance”). The description of Lena as never having

“aimed to” find who she was following establishes a similar fatalistic tone that suggests this grand pursuit has for naught and will continue to be for naught ad infinitum. Lena is unconscious of this fatalistic rendering of time and relentlessly, simple-mindedly continues to progress in circles much as the wagon’s wheels progress in circles from Yoknapatawpha to Tennessee.

Lena Grove is not the only character in *Light in August* who becomes intimately acquainted with the wagon as both a literal signifier and idea of time’s recursive and infinitesimally constructed motion. Reverend Gail Hightower similarly encounters with the wagon when visions of his grandfather’s Civil War battalion overcome him. The wheel begins to take over Hightower’s consciousness, beginning, “progress now is still progress, yet it is now indistinguishable from the recent past like the already traversed inches of sand which cling to the turning wheel” (490). Hightower’s time is indistinguishable from the past that has informed it and refers to the Bergsonian, perpetually flowing present. Hightower’s grim epiphany continues as he realizes:

Out of the instant the sandclutched wheel of thinking turns on with slow implacability of a medieval torture instrument, beneath the wrenched and broken sockets of his spirit, his life...And I know that for fifty years I have not even been clay: I have been a single instant of darkness in which a horse galloped and a gun crashed (491).

The comparison of the wheel to a “medieval torture instrument” instills a fatalist reading of temporality that disagrees with Porter’s contentions about temporality in *Light in August*. That Hightower has been continuously defined by his past for 50 years is considerable because the past that defines him is beyond his control.

Hightower has no control over his grandfather’s ironic Civil War demise, yet he has

existed in a Bergsonian perpetual present while simultaneously being “a single instant of darkness in which a horse galloped and a gun crashed.” Hightower exists as a living example of demise that was beyond his control. His complete departure from the present reality continues as Faulkner describes,

The wheel whirls on. It is going fast and smooth now, because it is freed now of burden, of vehicle, axle, all. In the lambent suspension of August into which night is about to fully come, it seems to engender and surround itself with a faint glow like a halo. The halo is full of faces. The faces are not shaped with suffering, not shaped with anything: not horror, pain, not even reproach. They are peaceful, as though they have escaped into an apotheosis; his own is among them. In fact, they all look a little alike, composite of all the faces which he has ever seen (491).

At this point the wagon has separated completely from the mechanism that carries it, which shifts importance to the perpetual movement of the wheel against the background of sand and dust that becomes a Civil War battlefield. Everything exists in paradoxical suspension at this moment in the text; the month of August itself becomes an image suspended against the perpetual flow of twilight moments in August that have preceded it. The wagon wheel then adapts to the supernatural, theologically steeped image of the halo. This transition illustrates a moment in which Faulkner brings in a sort of straw man religious signifier to engender false hope for redemption, salvation, or rebirth. Momentarily, Hightower’s face is able to exist within an amalgamation of other faces on a halo that implies human salvation or redemption (in Bergsonian terms, an overprioritizing of the future onto the present). Hightower parts with this image and descends into a moment of abject atheism as he departs from reality, indicating, “I should pray. I should try to pray”

when Faulkner's narrator brutally and tragically asserts, "but he does not" (492). The atheist, fatalistic interjection Faulkner's narrator poses reinforces the idea that Faulkner tries to establish a fatalistic rendering of time in which agents' futures are grimly determined by circumstances beyond their control.

Despite the appearance of the angelic halo, Hightower falls victim to his uncontrollable past and the novel leaves him as he departs completely from reality. Faulkner comments on this tragic nature, pondering, "It is as though [his Grandfather's battalion] had merely waited until he could find something to pant with, to be reaffirmed in triumph and desire with" before overtaking Hightower and separating him completely from reality (492). This description, contextualized with the description of the wheel as "medieval torture instrument," informs the everlasting and tragic nature of the recursive adaptation of Bergsonian time in *Light in August*.

Hightower's final scene shows the fatalistic movement of the wheel as totally detached from any force or burden that previously held it back. Faulkner describes the wheel in Hightower's mind:

The wheel turns on. It spins now, fading, without progress, as though turned by that final flood which had rushed out of him, leaving his body empty and lighter than a forgotten leaf and even more trivial than flotsam lying spent and still upon the window ledge which has no solidity beneath hands that have no weight; so that it can be now Now (492).

Here, the novel depicts the wheel again as paradoxically "spinning" and "fading," yet it does not move forward into any tangible state or space. Faulkner describes Hightower earlier in the novel from the same study window as "dissociated from

mechanical time,” existing as an entity separate from the supposedly linearly rendered world outside his home (366). He justifies this theory by postulating Hightower’s ordering of time as subconscious and out of his control, explaining, “It is as though out of his subconscious he produces without volition the few crystallizations of stated instances by which his dead life in the actual world had been governed and ordered once” (366). Hightower’s existence is a paradoxically “dead life,” a series of pasts whose future entirely governs him. This scene initiates Hightower’s climactic emptying and total forfeiture of the present. At the window his hands become empty and weightless so that he can leave the present moment “so that it can be now Now.” The essential presentness Faulkner depicts in his repetition of the word “now” signals Hightower’s total reclusion into the past and subsequent exit from *Light in August*. Hightower’s experience with the wagon’s paradoxical frozen movement informs the importance of the wagon as signifier of Bergsonian time. That the wagon signifies his downfall adds significant meaning to the fatalist reading of recursive time in *Light in August*.

The signifier of the wagon in *Light in August* is fundamental to the understanding of Faulkner’s twisted, fatalistic rendering of Bergsonian time. Although critics are quick to accept Faulkner’s immediate influence by Bergson, fatalist elements of time’s inescapable recursion, manifested by signifiers such as the wagon and the urn, suggest that there is more at play than Bergsonian temporality can offer as originally conceived. The repetitive motion of the wagons’ wheels (and the notion that the wagon exists as a Bergsonian image intuitively rendered at multiple points by different characters in *Light in August*)

contextualizes each character's doomed fate of stasis within Faulknerian fiction. This fatalist, omnipresent stasis informs new approaches to Faulknerian studies on race, gender, and socioeconomics through the lens of temporal study. The past is omnipresent in Faulkner, and the implications of lineage and unconscious magical<sup>14</sup> signifiers that doom each character's future to infinite recursion ensure that the future, too, is darkly manifest.

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<sup>14</sup> The ways in which Faulkner characterizes these events as sordidly magical or supernatural is powerfully outlined in Lisa Hinrichsen's "Enchanting Ghosts: Memory and Magical Thinking in *As I Lay Dying* and *Beloved*."



## VII: Rethinking Bergsonian Time, Moving Forward

As we reconsider the implications of Bergsonian time in Faulkner's fiction other avenues through which this theory might be applied also appear. Implications for further study as a result of this reevaluation are particularly exciting and deserve to be explained here, at least in part. A reevaluation of Bergsonian mechanics of time within the concept of a larger, gothic failure in Faulkner's fiction can inform deterministic readings of Faulkner's beautiful and sordid universe. Faulkner inserted images into *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*, which allows us to explore--within the context of modernism's doubt of language's ability to attain full human expression—a viewpoint referenced by explicitly doomed characters such as Addie Bundren and Joe Christmas. Furthermore, this theme of failure and entrapment can inform our ability to conduct readings through the lenses of feminism and race theory. Most time analysis in Faulkner stems from the mid-twentieth century, when feminist and racial studies of literature were not as prevalent as they are today. Readings of fatalistically doomed individuals such as Addie Bundren and Joe Christmas can be considered through these lenses, and further studies of Faulkner's twisted Bergsonian time facilitate the study of these downtrodden individuals because their societally subjugated state lacks the means to escape a predetermined fate. The implications of the temporality proposed in this study of Faulkner open the doors to other fields of Faulkner criticism that present changing opportunities for further study. The final section of this thesis

evaluates some further studies and provides closure to the readings of a redefined Bergsonian influence conducted in previous chapters.

At the moment Tull describes the coffin that Cash has built for Addie as being “clock shaped,” something remarkable happens in the text. Faulkner draws the actual shape of a coffin into the manuscript, leaving it in the middle of two lines of text as if to set it against the text (*AILD* 86). Dilsey’s section of *The Sound and the Fury* presents a similar phenomenon in which Faulkner draws a human eye into the manuscript and surrounds it with text as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened (*S&F* 311). What are we to make of these phenomena? We have seen such graphic interjections in narrative works like Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, but what place do they have in Faulkner? Textually, what ideas could they represent, and how do they relate to the perceptions or modalities of time in Faulkner’s fiction?

*The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying* and *Light in August* all contend with the inherent failure of language, or, to quote Faulkner’s Nobel Prize acceptance speech, of language’s failure to chronicle “the human heart in conflict with itself” (Meriwether 120). The implication that language, like time, is a failed or fatalist modality posits a powerful topic that has attracted much critical analysis. Lothar Hönninghausen observantly notes the reader’s cognitive engagement with symbols in Faulkner’s fiction, suggesting, “The analogy between the role-playing artist and the reader, who participates in the metaphorizing process, lies in the fact that both engage in an act of the imagination whose object is nothing less than to negotiate the tension between identity and difference” (Hönninghausen 140). Faulkner’s placement of these images within the text, then, relies on the understanding that

human imagination can comprehend and process images that are meaningful in ways language alone fails to articulate. If Faulkner surrounds these images with text, does he mean to suggest that true narrative can only be expressed through a combination of words and images? This appears to nod toward the inadequacy of language expressed in characters like Joe Christmas and Addie Bundren, individuals who appear dissatisfied with language and its relation to their grim fate from the outset.

That Faulkner links the insertion of images in his texts with his characters' fatalistic sentiments about language confers a new meaning upon how we must study time and its relationship to the language we use to chronicle its passing. An understanding of Faulkner's twisting of Bergsonian time into a fatalistic shape informs our ability to read Faulkner's insertion of images in the text as signing a grandiose failure for full human expression. Returning to Kermode we remember, "tragedy assumes the figurations of apocalypse. . .but the world goes forward in the hands of exhausted survivors" (Kermode 86). For Faulkner, language itself appears to be a doomed project similar to the destinies of the characters he depicts; humanity is fated relentlessly, circularly to articulate itself through a system that is inherently flawed and incomplete. Exhausted by fate, Addie Bundren and Joe Christmas signal the incompatibility of language with complete human expression. This explanation is, in part, the reason why these characters stand in isolation to the world that surrounds and consumes them. The failure of linear time and the failure of language to articulate time's passing are symbiotic in Faulkner's fiction.

Gender and race theory are also espoused by this reevaluated Bergsonian temporality. The way we look at Bergson and Faulkner must be reviewed given the outmoded critical tradition through which it was interpreted. In this thesis, fifteen of the seventeen scholarly articles referenced pertaining to Bergsonian time or temporal arrangement in Faulkner were written before 1980. In other words, during the period that articles about time in Faulkner were being written, feminist and racial discourses in literature were not yet empowered or prevalent. Many of the readings of subjugated characters within the context of Bergsonian time imply that the characters who feel they are doomed psychologically impose their own doom upon themselves, misunderstanding their place in Bergsonian time. To a contemporary audience this assertion is problematic at best. The argument that a mixed-race child born out of wedlock in rural Mississippi at the turn of the century imposed his own fate upon himself borders on ridiculous. A reevaluation of temporal modalities in Faulkner would greatly augment our understanding of what it means to be subjugated and lack the privilege of self-determination because of an oppressive society that surrounds them. The past histories of subjugation impose themselves upon individuals like Joe Christmas and Lena Grove and remind us of the malicious inescapability of difference that drives many of Faulkner's works.

The idea that the past's perpetual recursion establishes a fundamental difference or separation between human agents is, in part, the project of Trauma Studies. The inescapable failures of both time and language to articulate a horrible experience provide developing avenues for critical and theoretical analyses. Many theorists understand the importance of these experienced and inherited traumas in

Faulkner, and a rich breadth of work has been conducted on Southern Gothic literature. Bergsonian manifestations of time, when reconsidered, inform a nuanced reading of Faulkner's characters' inability to recognize their inherited traumatic pasts or sufficiently articulate their accounts of this trauma through language.

Faulkner sets the stage of *Absalom, Absalom!*, immediately describing the traumatic and haunted nature of the South, describing, "Quentin Compson preparing for Harvard in the South, the deep South dead since 1865 and peopled with garrulous baffled outraged ghosts" (AA 1). This passage presents Quentin's character less descriptively than the ghosts that populate Yoknapatawpha, in effect characterizing them as more alive than one of the novel's principal narrators. Quentin cannot escape the ghosts of his lineage and his traumatic past, a failure that results in his suicide. Although race and gender are significant to the interpretation of trauma in Faulkner, it is worth noting that each character in Faulkner is victim to the trauma of being dead in some form or another, of having been killed in some way through the South's losing of the Civil War. Faulkner's depiction of the South itself as "dead" yet "filled" illustrates his viewpoint that to some extent, the very essence of the South and of "Southernness" is a failed project. That ghosts exist in Faulkner among the living evinces the fact that not even death can remove them from their perpetual struggle to fight trauma. Death, as Peabody uses it, "is merely a function of the mind—and that of the minds of the ones who suffer bereavement" (AILD 43). Each mind in Faulkner is bereaved by the collective trauma of being placed on the wrong side of history or sociological constructions. The ghosts that populate these novels are doomed to re-experience their fate and articulate it using

the failed system of language. Faulkner's characters have no conceivable way out of this circle of trauma. For this reason, studies of trauma in Faulkner with particular emphasis on recursive manifestations of time represent a new angle through which we can study narratives of personal and collected trauma in all of Southern Gothic literature.

Finally, one of the most notable and rewarding aspects of Faulkner's writing is its ability to intrigue and seduce the reader into emotionally responding without having a firm understanding of the novel's plot. Faulkner himself was often vague in explaining the machinations of a work after he released it, implying his belief in the ability of the work to stand independent of any analysis it would attract. How, then, can we make sense of this nuanced interpretation of a single element of Faulkner's canvas while respecting his fiction's rewarding ability to stand independently as if it were intentionally mysterious? It is vital that we consider temporal modalities even in a casual reading of Faulkner so that we might inform ourselves of the astounding humanness each of his characters present. Faulkner's gift to fiction is his ability to present the most abstrusely philosophical and mysterious aspects of the human condition within a uniquely rural American idiom. This idiomatic expression of the human condition demands an understanding of the artfulness Faulkner establishes in and through time. The notion that he can take an object as simple as a wagon and endow it with a transcendent significance that pervades his entire corpus is one of the most astounding facets of his artistry.

A reconfigured schematic of Bergsonian time in Faulkner opens many doors of critical analysis to his works and to all of Southern Gothic fiction. The relevance

of this powerful metaphor continues to astound readers and attract critical attention across decades. The richness of Faulkner's narrative craft creates a space of analysis as infinite as the progressions of the perpetually moving wheels he depicts.

Elsewhere, eighty-five years through time, Matthew McConaughey, the acclaimed actor of the 2014 HBO crime anthology series, *True Detective*, finishes the final beer in his six-pack, crushes it in his hands, and spins the flattened product between his thumb and middle fingers. Drunk, aloof, McConaughey looks through the two detectives who are questioning him and explains thoughts about time and space that have their beginning in Faulkner:

In this universe, we process time linearly, forward. But outside of our space-time, from what would be a fourth dimensional perspective, time wouldn't exist. And from that vantage, could we attain it, we'd see our space-time would look flattened like a single sculpture with matter in a superposition of every place it occupied, with sentience just cycling through our lives like carts on a track.

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Abbreviations Catalogue:

*S&F: The Sound and the Fury*

*AILD: As I Lay Dying*

*LIA: Light in August*

*AA: Absalom, Absalom!*