ANALYSIS 10

STRUCTURES AND TECHNIQUES OF FAULKNER

William Faulkner

(1897-1962)

"We have what may be called Anti-Narrative, a set of complex devices used to keep the story from being told. Mr. Faulkner is very clever at this. He gets quite an interesting effect, for example, by tearing the Sutpen chronicle into pieces, as if a mad child were to go to work on it with a pair of shears, and then having each of the jagged divisions narrated by a different personage: the author, Rosa, Quentin, Quentin's father, Quentin's grandfather. All these people do a neat job of mixing up the time sequences, delaying climaxes, confusing the reader, and otherwise enabling Mr. Faulkner to demonstrate that as a technician he has Joyce and Proust punch-drink. I should add that everybody talks the same language, a kind of Dixie Gongorism, very formal, allusive, cryptic. Apparently the entire population of Jefferson, Mississippi, consists of rhetoricians who would blanch at the sight of a simple declarative sentence…. Seriously, I do not know what to say of this book except that it seems to point to the final blowup of what was once a remarkable, if minor, talent."

Clifton Fadiman
"Faulkner, Extra-Special, Double-Distilled"
The New Yorker
(31 October 1936)

"William Faulkner's myth finds expression in work that is definitely romantic; when he comes near to tragedy, it is the tragedy of Webster. His art, like Webster's, is tortured. In form, each of his novels resembles a late Elizabethan blank verse line, where the meter is strained, threatens to break, sometimes breaks, but is always exciting. He is an original craftsman, making his own solutions to his problems of form, often blundering, but occasionally striking upon an effect that no amount of studious craftsmanship could achieve. Consequently, like Dostoevsky, or like Miss Djuna Barnes in our own time, he is very special; and his work cannot be imitated except futilely, for he works within no general tradition of craft and hands on no tradition to his successors…. It appears significant that *The Unvanquished* contains his least tortured and *Pylon* his most tortured prose."

George Marion O'Donnell
"Faulkner's Mythology"
The Kenyon Review I.3 (1939)

"Most of Faulkner's apparent perversities, the difficulties he seems to cultivate, may be explained by his ambition to obtain a total identification between himself and the reader. Again, let us take as an example the same name given to different people within the same narration…. Every time the author mentions the name 'Quentin,' he knows perfectly well which Quentin he means. But the reader, from whom an increase of attention and reflection is required in order to discriminate, is thereby forced to look behind the scenes to where the author is, where the creative vision is. We are forced to become his accomplices if we want to decipher his enigmas. He is not obscure out of scorn for us; he wants our complicity. He wants us to become, as it were, the authors of what we read…. Certain poets and modern critics proceed in a similar way, refusing to surrender their meaning too easily to us."

Claude-Edmonde Magny
"Faulkner or Theological Inversion"
L'Age du Roman americain
trans. Jacqueline Merriam
(Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1948) 196-243

"It is true that the obscurities squandered by the author in his novels are not always purely exterior and are often required by the psychology of the characters portrayed, and, in that way, become their expression. This occurs in the beginning of *The Sound and the Fury*, which is supposed to be the interior monologue of an idiot growing aware of what is going on around him. It is far from convincing and it is doubtful whether

an idiot would have a train of ideas with such a hurried, skipping pace. Even admitting that the author's views are perfectly tenable, Benjy's monologue would still be only the illustration of a hypothesis and, as such, since it cannot support the author's attempt toward a refined realism, it comes very close to being an absurdity. We are therefore forced to conclude that the other intricacies of style--the games of hide-and-seek between author and reader--are no more necessary, and, moreover, do not even achieve their end, which is to intensify the atmosphere or heighten the impression of mystery. Besides, it strikes me that Faulkner himself has more recently recognized the vanity of these devices.

The humid warmth, the mystery, the religious half-light, in which Faulknerian characters move, owe nothing whatever to tricks or techniques whose effects--contrary to what so many naïve avant-gardists believe--are narrowly limited. Generally speaking, we owe all that is particularly moving, fine and worthwhile in Faulkner's work to his creative genius, his power of evocation. It is precisely his gift for raising up a tragic world with an atmosphere of such singular poetry, which has gained for him in France (as, I suppose, in America) faithful and numerous admirers…"

Marcel Ayme
"What French Readers Find in William Faulkner's Fiction"
Highlights of Modern Literature: essays from The New York Times Book Review
ed. Francis Brown
(1949; New American Library/Mentor, 1954) 105

"What distinguishes Faulkner from most of his fellow Southerners is his preoccupation with form. Though there is every possible difference between his work and that of Henry James, no novelist since James has developed so skillfully a genuinely effective management of point of view. Each of his novels since 1929 may be said to have made its own peculiar contribution to the history of literary form. Faulkner does not, therefore, merely 'tell a story'; nor is he concerned, as many critics have insisted, merely with exploiting the horror, vulgarity and obscenity associated with the South's decadence. He is, above all, preoccupied with the problem of defining psychologically the moral sensibilities of his world.

The most brilliant example of Faulkner's experiments with point of view is, of course, *The Sound and the Fury.* In many ways, this novel is a more honest and efficient use of the so-called 'stream of consciousness' technique than Joyce's notorious *Ulysses.* Unlike Joyce, Faulkner does not waste the method simply for the sake of virtuosity. The points of view of Benjy and Quentin Compson which direct the narrative in the novel's first two sections are consistently relevant; the discoveries and the interpretations of events of which each is capable are integrally pertinent to the narrative. Their value is seen only ultimately, when, in the full maturity of Faulkner's omniscience, the narrative concludes objectively. To have told the story in strictly chronological terms would have canceled out the advantages of Benjy's and Quentin's own special and varied insights into its meaning.

The other great marks of Faulkner's talent have to do with his conception of time and his very complex moral insight into his characters. The past is for Faulkner cumulatively and complexly relevant to the present. Each of his novels, whatever method it uses, testifies to the skill with which he has portrayed time as a psychological and moral complex in the vision of his characters. The intricate uses of time in *Absalom, Absalom!* eventually prove the meaning of that novel to be resident in the tortured consciousness of Quentin Compson. Every turn and return which the narrative takes provides a contribution to the uses he ultimately makes of the Sutpen story."

Frederick J. Hoffman
The Modern Novel in America
(Regnery Gateway, 1951-63) 176-78

"We can enter Faulkner's work, in a time without clocks, in the true rather than the construed time. Hence the mingling of steams of consciousness, the mutilation and entangling of the thinking process; hence, too, the apparent formlessness of his novels, this thicket of sentences, this mountain range of words, this bankless river bed through which the primitive stream of his narrative moves. Faulkner's people live in archaic time, in the primordial; they live in mythical space--since 'back' always means 'down' as well. And because the mythical, lying far ahead of the transforming grip of human arbitration, is the authentic, the writer without time becomes the poet of Being….

With unjustified diffidence, Faulkner explains the strange technique of his novel [telling the story four times in succeeding sections] as the result of a shortcoming. Supposedly he tries to tell the story from different points of view because he thinks he has not yet told it right. But, in fact, with this technique he has reached a realism more total than that of Joyce or anybody else before him. Even the realistic final chapter, which--according to the author's dissatisfied self-commentary--is meant to 'fill the gaps,' is by no means an artistic resignation. His purpose is to resume the whole nightmare and recast it once more in a visible form. And so once more we must pass through the abyss, this time with a seeing eye, for until now we had only groped our way through."

Gunter Blocker
"William Faulkner," *Die Neuen Wirklichkeiten*
trans. Jacqueline Merriam
(Argon Verlag, 1958) 112-23

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

"An entirely different kind of scenic pattern is found in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. This novel, like *The Waves* [by Virginia Woolf], is composed of a group of soliloquies. Like *The Waves* also, it is presented in a set of scenes unconnected by any objective narrative. But there the similarity ends. The arbitrarily presented scenes in *As I Lay Dying* are introduced simply by titles identifying the speaker, similar to such description in plays. The soliloquies are not stylized in the manner of a writer's formal style with the same style for each of the characters as they are in *The Waves.* Instead, they are written in the idiom and thought patterns typical of each character. It may be summarily stated that Faulkner's use of formal arrangement of scenes in *As I Lay Dying* is a device for making it possible to introduce the thoughts of a great many characters without unduly confusing the reader. There are thirteen characters whose consciousnesses are represented in this short novel. This distinguishes it from all other stream-of-consciousness fiction, which varies in this respect from only one important character in *Pilgrimage* [by Dorothy Richardson] to six in *The Waves.*

UNITY OF ACTION

Faulkner's chief unifying device in this novel is something else. It is a unity of action which he employs. In other words, he uses a substantial plot, the thing that is lacking in all other stream-of-consciousness literature. It is this differentiating aspect of Faulkner's work (the same thing is true in *The Sound and the Fury*)… It is the thing that carries *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury* away from the pure stream-of-consciousness type of novel to a point where the traditional novel and stream of consciousness are combined. Because there is a coherent plot and because the characters act in an external drama which has a beginning, complications, climax, and ending, the absolute need for further unifying devices does not exist. What is egocentric and chaotic, in, say, Darl's mind, can be understood because it has reference to a clearly built conflict and problem of action.

For example, in the following passage, when Darl's consciousness is represented just after someone has asked him where his brother, Jewel, is, the content becomes clear to the reader on the basis of a brooding conflict between the two brothers: 'Down there fooling with that horse. He will go on through the barn, into the pasture. The horse will not be in sight: He is up there among the pine seedlings, in the cool. Jewel whistles, once and shrill. The horse snorts, then Jewel sees him, glinting for a gaudy instant among the blue shadows. Jewel whistles again; the horse comes dropping down the slope, stiff-legged, his ears cocking and flicking, his mis-matched eyes rolling, and fetches up twenty feet away, broadside on, watching Jewel over his shoulder in an attitude kittenish and alert.'

LEVELS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Usually in this novel, the contents of the characters' psyches are essentially observations of other characters. This offers a special problem for Faulkner, because in depending on the observational content of consciousness, he is forced to give less of the content which arises from the workings of memory and the imagination. Such selecting tends to make the representation of consciousness unconvincing. Faulkner partly circumvents this difficulty with two devices: first, he deals only with a fairly surface level of

consciousness in *As I Lay Dying*; and second, he is faithful to the idiom and language which most accurately represents the particular character. Thus the effect of verisimilitude of consciousness is achieved.

As I Lay Dying is a fairly simple and unsubtle work compared to Faulkner's other stream-of-consciousness novel, *The Sound and the Fury.* These novels are, however, similar in several technical matters: both contain substantial unity of action, but that of the latter is more complex; both have a formal scenic arrangement, but that of the latter is once more complex and less clear-cut. The technical similarity does not go much past this; for *The Sound and the Fury* deals with complex personalities, and consciousness is presented in it at an extremely deep level. Consequently, other structural devices are needed to clarify for the reader what is going on in this particular world of consciousness. The chief of these other devices are symbolic structure and motif. So what we have as patterns for unity in *The Sound and the Fury* are closely intertwined in plot, unity of time, scenic arrangement, symbolic framework, and motifs. None of these is predominant in effectiveness and none is clear-cut.

The Sound and the Fury (1929)

The plot of *The Sound and the Fury* is presented in terms of the lives of the four children of the Compson family, a once respectable and proud Mississippi family that is in its last stages of decay. This process of decay is symbolized by the gradual vanishing of 'The Copson domain,' originally a choice square mile of land with its 'slave quarters and stables and kitchen gardens and the formal lawns and promenades and pavilions laid out by the same architect who built the columned porticoed house furnished by steamboat from France and New Orleans….' The process of decay is dramatized by the story of the destruction of the children, Benjy, Quentin III, Candace (Caddy), and Jason IV. Since the destruction, except with Jason, is an inner one, the drama presenting the destruction, except the part that deals with Jason, has as its setting the psyches of the characters.

The problems of time unity and scenic arrangement are, of course, closely worked out in relation to this action unity or plot. It is complex. The first section of the novel is labeled 'April 7, 1928.' That is the date that stands for the 'now' of this scene. The setting is the mind of the idiot, Benjy, who in 1928 is thirty-three years old, but whose mental age is three. Benjy's consciousness follows the same laws of movement and association that other consciousnesses do, except perhaps it moves with greater fluidity. Thus the 'present' in his mind moves freely through the past years of his life, so that there is to his consciousness, more than to that of anyone else in fiction, a quality of flux.

This section of the novel, then, has to be considered on two levels: that of the events of the day, April 7, 1928, and that of the past events in the life of Benjy. The events of the 'present' concern what happens to Benjy and to his keeper, the Negro boy, Luster. The accomplishment on this level is presentation of a subtheme centered on the Negro-white relationship, a corollary to the main theme of Compson degeneracy. The materials of the past are the important ones here for purposes of plot. Benjy's psychic character is dramatized and the crucial past events and personages (especially Candace) in the Compson family history are presented from the point of view of the simple, but strangely lucid idiot.

Faulkner tells us, 'Benjy loved three things: The pasture which was sold to pay for Candace's wedding and to send Quentin to Harvard, his sister Candace, firelight.' Since Benjy's love is uniquely persistent and unwavering, these three things, and little else, form the materials of his consciousness. The narrative significance of this lies in the fact that 'the pasture' is a metonymy for the vanishing Compson domain, the central symbol of the novel; 'Candace' is the only one of the Compson children whose consciousness is not directly presented, so that she is dealt with as a character in this indirect way; and 'firelight' is a vital symbol for the exceptional insight of the idiot. This insight gives the materials of Benjy's consciousness a certain weight of authority in relation to the whole novel, in spite of his idiocy. It is by this concentration on three basic subjects in Benjy's mind that not only is it possible for a reader to grasp what is going on, but it is also possible for him to become grounded in the materials of the plot.

The second episode of the novel is entitled 'June 2, 1910.' The external setting is Cambridge, Massachusetts, on the title date; the plot is concerned with Quentin's preparation for suicide. The internal setting is Quentin's mind, which, like Benjy's, flows freely in the past. The plot here is a supplement to the main plot of the novel, which was sketched in the opening section. Quentin, although he is intelligent, is extremely unstable psychologically , so that he, even more than Benjy, is obsessed; and, like Benjy, his sister Candace is the object of his obsession. Thus the development of Candace's character and her role in the broad scheme of things is again advanced. The brotherly concern, in this instance, is incestuous, but it is not physical; it is symbolic for Quentin, 'who loved not his sister's body, but some concept of Compson honor.' The incestuous relation becomes a symbol itself related to the main plot and to the theme of the whole novel.

The third and the last section are labeled 'April 6, 1928,' and 'April 8, 1928,' respectively, which, it will be noted, are the day before and the day after the opening episode. The primary method of the first of these sections is not internal monologue as was that of the two previous ones, but it is soliloquy on a surface, communicating level. It concerns the fourth and youngest of the Compson children, Jason IV. Because chiefly the surface narrative is unfolding here, the time element is fairly static. The same is true of the last section, except that an even more conventional method is used, that of the omniscient third person narrator. Jason's role in the drama of the degeneration of the Compson family is properly the last one treated because it is climactic; that is, his degeneration is the ultimate one. Although he is the only sane one of the brothers, his degeneracy is greater because it involves a break with Compson standards of integrity. Robert Penn Warren has noted this in his remarks on Faulkner. He says of Jason: '…there is no one who can be compared in degradation and vileness to Jason of *The Sound and the Fury,* the Compson who has embraced Snopesism. In fact, Popeye and Flem, Faulkner's best advertised villains, cannot, for vileness and ultimate meanness, touch Jason.

Jason's conflict is with two persons (his father is dead and so is his brother Quentin, the two chief upholders of Compson honor): Dilsey, the old Negro cook who understands Compson honor, at least in its externals, and Miss Quentin, Candace's illegitimate daughter. Miss Quentin lives with the Compsons, but she doesn't understand (or care for) the Compson code. She represents a deliberate animality foreign to all Compsons--even to Jason. Jason's defeat is by Miss Quentin, not by Dilsey. Symbolically, the Compson line is ended with Jason's defeat (he leaves no heir), and Quentin's suicide (he never cohabits, except imaginatively and symbolically with his sister). Benjy, of course, is gelded and is finally committed to the State Asylum. This story parallels the defeat of the Sutpen dynasty in *Absalom, Absalom!*

It is by this complicated, but organic, use of plot, time unity, scenic arrangement, and symbolic frame that Faulkner achieves a pattern of structural unity in *The Sound and the Fury.* In addition, he makes interesting use of motifs to aid in the binding together of these other structural elements. Faulkner's particular use of motifs can be found in either of the first two sections of the novel. It will be sufficient for illustration to examine but one of them. In the second episode, which contains Quentin's monologue, the motifs are chiefly symbol-motifs, although there are some image-motifs also. The word-motif is not used frequently by Faulkner, who does not, like Joyce, 'equate words with things.'

The chief motifs are the watch, the wedding announcement, the pasture, the chimes, the images of tidying up, and the word 'sister.' In a previous chapter dealing with the privacy of associations, it was shown that these things reappear in Quentin's consciousness. They recur constantly as signals, not only to Quentin's mind, but to the reader's as well. These motifs carry the main weight of the plot, and they are the means by which universal and coherent meaning is distilled from private and chaotic meaning. For example, the watch, which often appears as an object of Quentin's attention, is the watch Quentin's father presented to him. Quentin denudes it of its hands in order to prove to himself that his father's theory is valid: that is purpose is '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.'

The click of the watch, which doesn't tell time but only tells that time is always passing, is emphasized by the various clocks--Quentin always refuses to look at them--that impinge on Quentin's consciousness. These watch and clock references support two important ideas related to the main theme: one is the

disjuncture of consciousness while it is coping with psychological versus calendar time; the other is the more general idea of decay in time.

It is not necessary for our purpose to show the manner in which all of these motifs are used in the novel. One of them, however, is particularly instructive as an example of manner of utilizing motif that is found generally throughout Faulkner's writing. This is the narrative imagery that has to do with Quentin's concern with his appearance before he commits suicide. He is depicted as washing his hands, cleaning his tie with gasoline, brushing his teeth, and brushing his hat, before he leaves his room finally to go to the river. Of course Faulkner has to have him doing something in order to give a focus to the processes of his consciousness. The symbolic value of this particular imagery, which because it recurs so frequently takes on the status of motif, is great. It may be considered the final and feeble act of cleaning up Compson disgrace and dishonor; a purgative attempt on Quentin's part to erase the stain Candace has put on his psyche. It comes as a preparation for the climax of the episode, the suicide itself, which is likewise an act of atonement."

Robert Humphrey
Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel
(U California, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1962) 104-111

"Faulkner is a constant and restless experimenter in his use of the novel. He is quite capable of putting together a well-made piece of fiction in which every incident and (almost) every word is 'functionally' justified, in which there is a neat pattern of events moving from a precise beginning to a precise end, and in which the language serves as a clear glass enabling the reader to get immediately to the matter of the story. But only seldom does he choose to abide with the familiar conventions of the novel. He prefers, instead, to break up and jumble his time sequences; to divide his narrative into fragments told by a variety of participants and observers; to weight his prose with lyric intensities, baroque displays, and philosophic speculations; to lure the reader from difficulty to difficulty, so that the very effort to read a Faulkner novel forces one into an act of esthetic and moral discovery, parallel to those discoveries his narrators make in the course of telling their stories.

In *Absalom, Absalom!,* for example, the main action of the novel is not a line of events traced by the author and followed by the reader, but the struggle of the narrator, Quentin Compson, to piece together the facts concerning the life of Thomas Sutpen, a ruthless figure in the Southern past, and to make out what these facts really meant. The story is unfolded not in the orderly sequence of the traditional novel, which assumes that an omniscient author has everything under control, but rather in a --temporarily bewildering-- series of intuitions, false starts, gasps, and corrections.

There are, to be sure, times when some of Faulkner's technical experiments seem wanton or trivial; but whenever he is at or near his best, they always have a serious purpose. That purpose is usually to draw the reader into a more direct and perilous relation to the happenings of the story; to saturate him in the atmospheres of an imagined world; to force him to abandon the posture of a passive listener and become an active participant struggling, like some of Faulkner's characters themselves, to discover the meaning in the represented events. Faulkner wants the reader to share with his characters the full weight of human experience, so that, in a sense, the reader becomes 'part of' the novel. All of Faulkner's devices--such as his use of stream of consciousness, multiple narrators, interior monologues and a convoluted style--are put to the service of making us active collaborators in the working out of the Yoknapatawpha saga.

From book to book Faulkner employs different methods. In *The Sound and the Fury* he penetrates the private consciousness of several members of the Compson family: with the idiot Benjy, through a flow of language resembling what psychoanalysts call 'free association,' and with the villainous Jason, through an interior monologue which bears outer signs of rational structure. The effect Faulkner creates is like a spiraling back and forth over the same stretch of human history, but each time in terms of radically different moral perceptions and each time with a further dissolution of the boundary between past and present, so that the past becomes part of the present, a memory imprisoned in consciousness."

Irving Howe
Major Writers of America II

(Harcourt, 1962) 838

STEREOSCOPIC VISION

"Faulkner's greatness as an artist is due to a great extent to what might be called his stereoscopic vision, his ability to deal with the specific and the universal simultaneously, to make the real symbolic without sacrificing reality. He is unquestionably the greatest of the American regional writers. His fiction is as Southern as bourbon whiskey. Southern history, climate, geography, natural life, society, customs, traditions, ideologies, living conditions, speech patterns--everything that particularizes the American South and its inhabitants is rendered realistically in his writing. But he is far more than a regional writer, and the breadth of his achievement is due, in large measure, to his narrative structure, narrative technique, and his style.

SHORT STORIES

Certain important characteristics of Faulkner's talent are more apparent in his short stories than in his novels. For one thing, reading through the *Collected Stories* makes us realize that he is a born storyteller, that he loves to tell stories, and that he has a passionate, almost obsessive desire to understand his fellow human beings. He is fascinated by people, continually amazed, shocked, horrified, and amused by their antics. He is, in fact, a gossip, a gossip elevated by genius to the stature of an artist. Faulkner lacks the self-righteousness and malice that motivate the gossip, but he shares the gossip's passion for the skeleton in the family closet. He writes about the bizarre and the unpleasant: the sexual escapades of members of the town's leading families, the old woman of good family who lives in isolation, who refuses to pay taxes and who is suspected of having murdered her suitor, the local druggist who is a narcotics addict, the frustrated old maid who suddenly accuses a Negro of raping her, the incredulous and diabolically shrewd rube who ends up as president of the First National Bank.

Faulkner is this kind of local tale-teller; a great many of his short stories are little more than anecdotes. Often he created great stories, but often too he wrote for the slick magazines. In most of his short stories, Faulkner's talent is obvious. He had a sensitive ear for local speech patterns; he could deftly create character, atmosphere, and settings. But most of the stories lack the technical ingenuity, the evocative style, the profound themes and broad vision that make many of the novels great works of art.

NOVELS COMPOSED OF STORIES

Paradoxically, Faulkner is primarily a short story writer. He was able to fulfill his artistic potential only in the novel form, although his talent was not for the long narrative. The majority of his novels are either thematic expansions of narratives little longer than short stories or they are fusions of short stories. *The Sound and the Fury* began as a short story, and in terms of narrative action is little more than that. *Light in August* combines three separate tales. *The Wild Palms* contains two separate short stories connected only by thematic relationship. *Sartoris,* if stripped of its many tales of the past which are related or recalled by the various characters, would be a very short book about a returning veteran who finally gets himself killed. Both *The Unvanquished* and *Go Down, Moses* have seven chapters, and in both novels, six of the seven sections were originally published as separate stories. The three novels dealing with the Snopes family are made up of short stories, many of which were published apart from the novels. An entire long section of *A Fable* was presented separately as 'Notes on a Horsethief.' The only two books whose basic plots are sufficiently developed for novel length are *Intruder in the Dust* and *The Reivers*, both popular rather than literary successes.

Go Down, Moses (1942)

In structuring his novels, Faulkner often achieved thematic unity by grouping stories which were concerned with the same family. To the title *Go Down, Moses* in the original edition, Faulkner added the phrase "And Other Stories.' In the next edition, he decided to drop that phrase; for, in comparison, for instance, to *Knight's Gambit*, which is a collection of detective stories united only by the presence of Gavin Stevens in each, *Go Down, Moses* is a unified novel. It concerns the McCaslin family in several generations, from the 1850's to about the fourth decade of the twentieth century. In this novel, the stories

are not place in chronological order. The first takes place about 1855, the second and third are set in 1940, the fourth and fifth jump back to the 1800's, and the sixth and seventh are again in 1940.

By fragmenting chronological time, juxtaposing stories of the past with stories of the present, Faulkner reveals the effect of the past on the present. Events of the past determine what occurs in the present. No act, no thought is isolated in time. By deliberately breaking up the chronology of his narrative, Faulkner also dramatizes his recognition that though the human body must exist in chronological time, the mind does not function within the barriers imposed on the body. The mind fuses past, present, and future. Because we think beyond clock-measured time and because what we do today is shaped by what happened yesterday, 'Yesterday today and tomorrow are Is: Indivisible: One.'

JUXTAPOSING PAST AND PRESENT

By juxtaposing stories of the past and present, Faulkner also expands the significance of what occurs in the present. Against the backdrop of extended time, the specific history of the South. But the themes of moral transgression and inherited guilt transcend, as they do in the drama of Aeschylus, historical time and geographical location. Thus, though each story in *Go Down, Moses* has its own plot and theme, when united with the other stories in the novel, it becomes a unit in an inclusive narrative with a broader and more universal theme.

The Sound and the Fury (1929)

The use of this type of montage structuring allows Faulkner to combine the techniques of twentieth-century realism with the techniques of nineteenth-century American metaphysical novelists like Hawthorne and Melville. Faulkner's characters are products of a particular society at a particular moment in history. The tensions, drives and needs of a character such as Quentin Compson, for instance, are those of a young man born of Jason and Caroline Compson in Jefferson, Mississippi about 1890. Quentin's problems in *The Sound and the Fury* are rooted in his childhood experiences. His mother and father, his relationship to them, the society of Jefferson with its stratified class structure, its tradition of plantation aristocracy, all contribute to his suicide. Quentin is individualized, and yet partly because of the structure of *The Sound and the Fury,* his is a story within a larger story that describes what is, in some degree, the terrible fate of modern man.

"The Bear" (1942)

In the same way, Ike McCaslin's repudiation of his heritage in 'The Bear' is the act of a young man whose experience and background are unique. He is the child of parents who marry when they are old, the grandson of a man who could treat his own mulatto daughter as a sexual implement6, and the spiritual son of Sam Fathers who provides the paternal guidance the fatherless boy needs. But, again, partly due to the narrative structure of *Go Down, Moses,* Ike's story mirrors a universal moral problem.

Light in August (1932)

A Faulkner novel is structured to tell a story and at the same time to explore the social, historical, and moral significance of that story. Present action, for example, in *Light in August,* extends over a period of one week. Joanna Burden has been murdered and her house set on fire. The murderer escapes, is hunted down and lynched when he is declared to have Negro blood. That is the story that provides forward narrative action in this long novel. Why Joanna was murdered, what specific psychological and social forces culminated in this act of violence and what forces produced the lynching are explored in the subsidiary stories erected upon the action taking place in the present. The manner in which Faulkner weaves his various stories together and structures his scenes gives to his novels their broad thematic significance. Each of the stories is interesting and meaningful by itself, but where set as complements or contrasts to one another, they create a supra-story with a universal theme….

In comparison with novels written in more traditional form, a Faulkner novel places a considerable burden upon the reader. The novel's real theme is not always explicit. The reader of *Light in August* must recognize that the story of Lena Grove, which is a minor story that opens and closes the novel, is included for a thematic purpose. And he must sensitively respond, as if listening to a symphony, to the contrasting

or complementary motifs of the various scenes and stories. Faulkner was perfectly capable of writing a simple straightforward story; the vague references, ambiguities, avoidance of transitions, withholding of vital information are always deliberate. Faulkner's technique may sometimes exasperate, but they are effective in compelling the reader to join in the writer's search for truth….

OMNISCIENCE

The effects achieved with this type of structuring are complemented and extended by Faulkner's other techniques of narration. He frequently uses third-person narration, as in *Sartoris* and *Light in August.* Third-person narration provides an author a great deal of freedom in the development of his story. The omniscient author shifts from one character to another informing us what each one is thinking.

LIMITED CONSCIOUSNESS

A refinement in story-telling is to limit the point of view, that is, to view all the action through the eyes and mind of one character. This method of narration brings us closer to the reality of consciousness. In life, we can only know what other people do and what they say. What they are thinking, what internal forces motivate them, we must deduce from the evidence of their words and deeds. When an author arbitrarily decides to tell his story through the mind of one character, he is deliberately limiting his own narrative freedom. The character whose mind represents the central consciousness must be present in all the scenes, or he must be the recipient of information about an incident that occurred when he was not present--if the author needs that scene in his story.

INTERIOR MONOLOGUE

Despite the limitations and difficulties this technique poses for the story-teller, it offers the novelist an opportunity for realistic analysis of the way the mind works. If his major interest is in the inner world of his characters, he can pay comparatively little attention to external events. As a result we usually do not witness the events themselves but the way they are registered in a particular mind. Faulkner adopted this technique and developed his own variations of it. Three of the four sections of *The Sound and the Fury* are adaptations of the interior monologue technique. *As I Lay Dying* introduces another variant of the method by telling the story of a burial journey exclusively by means of the monologues of fourteen characters.

NARRATION BY CHARACTER

However, though he used the interior monologue effectively in these two early novels, Faulkner ultimately abandoned it in favor of telling his stories through narrators. A character, either one involved directly in the action, or a witness, or hearer of it, tells the story, and the author himself is not heard from. This narrative technique parallels and complements the narrative structuring which tells stories within stories. For instance, if the narrator, as is often the case, is an adolescent, the reactions of the adolescent to the incident he is recounting constitute another story and expand the significance of the central tale. With this technique, Faulkner is also able to dramatize his concept of time. When the boy recounts events from a time long ago before he was born, we are made aware that these events are as much a part of his personality as his own childhood past--that in his mind past and present are one.

MULTIPLE NARRATORS

An extension of this technique is the use of multiple narrators. In *Absalom, Absalom!,* Rosa Coldfield tells what she knows about the central character of the novel, Thomas Sutpen. Her view of him is colored by her own experiences and her personality. We therefore learn about Sutpen and, at the same time, about the effect he had upon Rosa. She is only one of four narrators in the novel. And each narrator provides a different perspective for viewing Sutpen's story, depending upon his own degree of involvement in the story, his own predilections, his own psychological make-up. None of the four narrators can be considered the voice of the author. The reader, therefore, cannot accept any account as authoritative. The effect of this removal of the author from the story is a dramatization of Faulkner's view of reality.

In reading *Absalom, Absalom,* for instance, we are presented with certain facts: Henry Sutpen murders Charles Bon. The mind can register this as fact, but as soon as it seeks motive, attempts to understand the Why of the murder, it enters the realm of speculation. In this realm there can be no certainty. The mind, however, seeks truth, but the conclusions that one mind reaches will differ from the conclusions of another. *The Town* provides another illustration. One of the narrators of the novel, Gavin Stevens, wonders about Flem's motive in closing Montgomery Snopes's pornography show. His speculations reveal more about Gavin than they do about Flem. Then Ratliff speculates. He is more practical than Gavin, so his view is quite different.

Because the author does not enter these novels, we, as readers, must join the game of speculation by examining the thoughts of the narrator. Our conclusions will probably be affected by our own experiences and personalities. Two interesting effects are achieved with this type of narration. First, Faulkner skillfully explores what the mind does with the information concerning external events brought to it by the senses and thereby explores the nature of reality. Second, by involving the reader in this process of philosophical speculation and investigation, Faulkner broadens the meaning of his story. The reader is forced to contribute his own meaning, to join in the search for truth in these epistemological novels.

SYMBOLISM

Another important means by which Faulkner reveals the universal in the specific is symbolism. Faulkner's symbols can be divided into two types: narrative symbols and thematic symbols. A narrative symbol is used to develop the individual scene or story within the novel. Honeysuckle, in Quentin's section of *The Sound and the Fury,* symbolizes the complex relations of Quentin and his sister, the memory of which Quentin has attempted to bury below the level of consciousness. Symbols such as this are frequently used by Faulkner to represent the unformulated needs, the unconscious drives of the characters. In 'An Odor of Verbena' the flower is used as a tangible representation of the traditional concepts and mode of action which the young hero is opposing when he refuses to avenge the murder of his father.

A thematic symbol develops and furthers the theme of the entire novel rather than that of the narrative unit, in which it occurs. In a Faulkner novel, with its montage structure and its supra-story, an incident or even a character can become a thematic symbol. In *The Sound and the Fury,* the image of the idiot, Benjy, holding a narcissus, serves as a thematic symbol. Against the background of the whole novel, the idiot symbolizes modern man, inarticulate in a man-centered world without love or moral values. Joe Christmas, in *Light in August,* believes he has Negro blood. As a putative mulatto he fits neither into the white world nor the Negro world. Within the framework of the entire novel, Joe is the symbol of the tensions that affect modern man. Though these characters and scenes are presented in realistic detail and are not immediately apparent as symbols, as Faulkner widens the angle of vision, the situations and characters become symbolic.

MYTHOLOGICAL ALLUSIONS

To broaden the perspective of his novels, Faulkner frequently employs mythological allusions. In *The Hamlet* the battle of the local swains over Eula Varner is ironically compared to the Trojan War. In *The Town,* Eula is compared to Semiramis, Lilith, Eve, and Helen to give her the stature of the mythical temptress and the earth goddess. In these novels, Eula is an incarnation of sex, elevated to mythological proportions because she embodies a single attribute of the human being. The presence of such a myth-like character among the complex, more realistically portrayed characters like Gavin Stevens amplifies the significance of the stories.

BIBLICAL ALLUSIONS

Faulkner also uses Biblical allusions to give depth and universality to his fiction. Temple and Gowan Stevens re-enact the garden of Eden myth in *Requiem for a Nun.* Faulkner's use of the New Testament throughout his work to broaden perspective culminates in *A Fable,* in which he retells the Christ story. In book after book, the Christ story, which in an early sketch he called 'a fairy tale that has conquered the whole Western earth,' is utilized, often ironically, to provide a broad framework for his novels. A number of characters, for example, are thirty-three years old, like Christ, when they are killed. Present action in *The Sound and the Fury* occurs during Easter Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. By employing these devices--

myth, symbol, various narrative techniques and narrative structure--Faulkner transforms Yoknapatawpha County into a microcosm of the world."

The Town (1957) and *The Mansion* (1959)

In his greatest novels, Faulkner's architectonic sense operated to unite the various stories thematically. Considering the incredible complexity and difficulty of such narrative structuring, he was frequently successful. But there are novels in which he lost control and either added stories that contributed nothing through tone or meaning to the overall theme or he failed to establish their thematic relationship. In *The Town* and *The Mansion,* for example, he seems to have been so caught up with the idea of unifying all his county novels that he spent an inordinate amount of space retelling stories included in previous novels that have little discernible relevance to narrative, tone, or theme."

Edmond L. Volpe
A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner
(Farrar, Straus, 1964-71) 28-36

"As a technician, Faulkner, except for his peers, Melville and James, is the most profound experimenter in the novel that America has produced…. The notion that Faulkner's complicated techniques were somehow associated with reprehensible content anticipated a line of criticism brought to bear on Pound's poetry after his capture and imprisonment. Back in 1940, Percy Boynton had commented on such a connection in Faulkner's work by affirming that 'the technique is simple and the content more lucid in those tales which have the greater normality,' and becomes 'more intricate and elusive in the tales of abnormality,' and that 'technique becomes a compensation for content as content sinks in the social scale.' By this line of reasoning the prose of the famous corn cob scene would, of course, make that of *Finnegan's Wake* look like a selection from *The Bobbsey Twins*."

Robert Penn Warren, ed.
"Introduction: Faulkner: Past and Future"
Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays
(Prentice-Hall, 1966) 5,9

Michael Hollister (2015)