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ASSOCIATIVE MEMORY, BROKEN CHRONOLOGY AND THE SOUTHERN PAST IN WILLIAM FAULKNER'S "THE SOUND AND THE FURY"

Nilufar Gulomovna Jumaeva
Associate professor, PhD
Karshi State University
E-mail address: jumaeva.nilufarg@gmail.com
Karshi, Uzbekistan

ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: This article examines how William Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury" (1929) breaks chronological order inside its sections and what that broken order means beyond the psychology of individual characters. Reconstructing the story's actual sequence of events shows that the decisive moments of 1909–1910 are never narrated directly; they reach the reader only as memories. Three types of associative transition are distinguished: sensory, verbal, and emotional-ideational. The article then reads the decline of the Compson family as an extended metaphor for the historical fate of the American South, and argues that Dilsey's whole, liturgical sense of time offers the novel's only alternative to the Compsons' fractured one.

Introduction. Anyone who opens *The Sound and the Fury* for the first time is lost within a page. A man is watching golfers through a fence; someone snags his clothes on a nail; suddenly it is Christmas, years earlier, and a little girl is freeing him from the same nail. Nothing announces the jump. The reader has to work out, slowly and with some frustration, that the mind telling the story does not distinguish between then and now. The novel fragments time on two levels. On the large scale, its four sections are dated but not arranged chronologically. On the small scale, which is the concern of this article, past and present change places inside

each section without warning. The second level is where the reader actually experiences the book, sentence by sentence.

The question I want to pursue is what this technique is for. One answer is psychological: it shows how each brother lives in time. That answer is correct but incomplete. The Compsons are not just three disturbed individuals. They are the last generation of a family that once produced a governor and a Confederate general, and their inability to move forward in time belongs to a larger story about a region that could not let go of its defeat.

The aim of the article is therefore twofold: to describe the mechanism by which memory disrupts chronology in the novel, and to show how that mechanism connects subjective time to Southern history. The overall architecture of the four sections and the narrative voices of the three brothers are treated only where the argument needs them.

Literature Review. The philosophical reading of Faulkner's time begins with Jean-Paul Sartre. In his essay he argued that Faulkner's characters have no future: the present exists for them only under the pressure of the past, and their situation resembles that of a passenger looking backward from an open car [2]. Sartre's image remains the starting point for most later discussion, including this one.

Narratology supplied the vocabulary for describing the technique. Gérard Genette's account of order, and in particular of analepsis, makes it possible to say precisely what happens when a narrative returns to an earlier point [3]. Behind the technique stands Henri Bergson, whose "Matter and Memory" describes a past that is preserved and revived when it meets a present perception [4]; Faulkner himself later said that he agreed with Bergson's view of time. Several scholars have done the patient work of reconstruction. Edmond Volpe compiled a detailed chronology of the novel and separated the time levels of the first section [5]. Cleanth Brooks described the reader's gradual movement from enclosed consciousness toward outward reality [11]. David Kartiganer saw the novel's broken form as meaningful in itself: its point is that wholeness cannot be reached [4]. The historical reading goes back to Malcolm Cowley, who proposed in his introduction to "The Portable Faulkner" that the Yoknapatawpha fiction forms a single legend of the South [7]. Historians give that legend its context. W. J. Cash analyzed the romantic code of honour and the imagined past at the centre of the Southern mind [8]; Charles Reagan Wilson showed how the Lost Cause hardened into a kind of civil religion after 1865 [8]. John T. Matthews tied the Compsons' experience of loss directly to the Lost Cause [6], Thadious Davis examined the role of Faulkner's Black characters as moral counterweights to declining white families [7], and Richard King placed Faulkner within a generation that forced Southern culture into a painful reckoning with its history [8]. The Russian scholar N. A.

Anastasyev stressed that Faulkner portrays this history with compassion rather than verdict [9].

These two lines of scholarship, the formal and the historical, usually run in parallel. What is less often shown is the exact point where they meet: how a nail in a fence or the smell of honeysuckle becomes, by the end of the book, a statement about a region. That link is the subject here.

Research Methodology. The study draws on the text of the novel and on the "Compson Appendix," which Faulkner wrote for "*The Portable Faulkner*" [1]; the Appendix is treated not as a fifth section of the novel but as an extratextual authorial commentary that clarifies its historical background. The analysis combined four complementary procedures. First, a chronological reconstruction was carried out, in which the principal events of the story were arranged in their actual sequence and correlated with the sections in which they are narrated or recalled. Second, a narratological analysis was applied, with shifts between temporal levels described in terms of Genette's categories of order [3]. Third, individual temporal transitions were subjected to close reading in order to identify their triggers and were then classified by trigger type. Finally, a historical-contextual interpretation was undertaken: the family history presented in the Appendix was compared with the conventionally distinguished stages of Southern history, and the final scene was read against the background of Lost Cause memory.

The classification of transitions is qualitative. No attempt was made to count every time shift in the novel; the examples chosen are those that most clearly display each mechanism.

Analysis of the Results. To recover the chronology, a reader has to finish all four sections and join the pieces unaided. Table 1 sets out the main events in their actual order and shows where each one surfaces in the text.

Table 1. Chronology of events and where the novel tells them

No.	Date	Event	Section			
			I	II	III	IV
1	1898	Damuddy's death; the children play in the branch and Caddy muddies her drawers	•			
2	1900	Benjy's name is changed from Maury to Benjamin	•			
3	1909	Caddy's affair with Dalton Ames; Quentin confronts him and makes his "confession" to his father		•		
4	1909–1910	Benjy's pasture is sold to pay for Quentin's year at Harvard and Caddy's wedding	•	•		
5	25 April 1910	Caddy marries Herbert Head	•	•		
6	2 June 1910	Quentin drowns himself in Cambridge		•		

No.	Date	Event	Section			
			I	II	III	IV
7	after 1910	Benjy frightens a schoolgirl at the gate and is castrated	•		•	
8	1911	Caddy is divorced; her daughter Quentin is brought to the Compson house			•	
9	1912	Mr Compson dies	•		•	
10	6 April 1928	Jason's day: the cotton market, the pursuit of Miss Quentin			•	
11	7 April 1928	Benjy's thirty-third birthday; Luster hunts for his lost quarter	•			
12	8 April 1928	Miss Quentin runs off with Jason's money; Dilsey goes to church; Jason gives chase				•

The table makes one thing plain. The events on which everything turns, Caddy's "fall", her wedding and Quentin's death, belong to 1909–1910, yet none of them is narrated as it happens. They are available only as memories, recalled in 1928 or on Quentin's last day. In Genette's terms the novel is a system of analepses so dense that the border between the main narrative and its past practically disappears [3]. The fourth section alone stays wholly in the present.

In Benjy's section the shifts obey a clear rule. A sensation in the present, a sound, a word, a smell, a movement, calls up the same sensation in the past, and Benjy is at once there. The best-known instance comes near the beginning. In 1928 he crawls through a gap in the fence with Luster, catches his clothes on a nail and is scolded. The text slips into italics and it is a winter day years before: Caddy is unhooking him from the same nail in the same place. No reasoning carries him across. The link is a repeated bodily state. The pattern recurs dozens of times: cold weather recalls Caddy telling him to keep his hands in his pockets; water recalls the branch on the day Damuddy died; the gate recalls waiting for Caddy to come home from school, and then the disaster with the schoolgirl. Bergson wrote that memory preserves the past and revives it when it merges with a present perception [4]. Benjy is that process with all rational control removed. He does not remember the past so much as live it again, at full strength.

Quentin's associations are more complicated, because words and ideas trigger them as readily as sensations do. He calls a little Italian girl he meets on the road "sister", and the word releases a flood of memories of Caddy. The smell of honeysuckle brings back her meetings with Dalton Ames and comes close to unhinging him. The most dramatic case is the fight with Gerald Bland. Quentin strikes a fellow student, but his mind is entirely in the previous year, facing Ames; afterwards he cannot recall having hit Gerald at all. Here the past does not interrupt the present. It swallows it. Quentin's body is in 1910 and the rest of him is in 1909.

On the basis of these readings, the associative shifts in the novel fall into three types:

1. Sensory association. The shift is triggered by a repeated smell, sound, movement or bodily state. It dominates Benjy's section. For example, *The nail in the fence…,(p. 4), Caddy's smell*…., pp. 6, 19, 42, 72.

2. Verbal association. A word, name or phrase recurs ("caddie" and Caddy; "sister" and Caddy). It appears in both Benjy's and Quentin's sections. For example, *Caddie" / Caddy,* (p. 3.) Benjy moans at the golfer's call because the word sounds like his sister's name. *"Here, caddie"* p 3.

3. Emotional-ideational association. The present situation resembles a painful earlier one from the inside (Gerald Bland and Dalton Ames). It belongs chiefly to Quentin. For example, *Bland on the river…*,(p. 148), *The fight…*, (pp. 158–168)

Jason hardly associates at all. He brings up the past only as evidence, to justify a grievance. The external narrator of the fourth section never goes back. Across the book, then, associative fragmentation steadily thins out, and the reader moves from minds ruled by memory to a world simply observed.

The novel also offers a different way of living in time, and it does so through a small detail. In the fourth section the kitchen clock, which has only one hand, strikes five. Dilsey says, without hesitating, that it is eight o'clock. She knows the real time in spite of the instrument, because she relies on experience and faith and not on the mechanism. For Quentin a watch is torment, and he breaks it. For Jason the clock measures money. For Dilsey it is a faulty household object that she has long since mastered.

Inside the novel the family's past is given only in hints: a governor and a general among the ancestors, a large holding of land, the last of it now being sold. The Appendix tells the story in full, and when its generations are laid beside the usual periods of Southern history the fit is close.

Table 2. Compson generations and the stages of Southern history (after Faulkner's Appendix)

STAGE	GENERATION	PLACE IN THE FAMILY STORY	CORRESPONDING STAGE IN SOUTHERN HISTORY
● Roots stage 1 of 6	Quentin MacLachan Compson	A fugitive who comes to America from Scotland	Colonial period; migration from Europe
↑ Rise stage 2 of 6	Jason Lycurgus Compson	Obtains a square mile of land from the Chickasaw chief Ikkemotubbe in exchange for a horse	Dispossession of Native lands; settlement of Mississippi
▲ Height stage 3 of 6	Quentin MacLachan Compson II	Governor of the state	The antebellum planter aristocracy at its peak

STAGE	GENERATION	PLACE IN THE FAMILY STORY	CORRESPONDING STAGE IN SOUTHERN HISTORY
↓ Turn stage 4 of 6	Jason Lycurgus Compson II	Confederate general; defeats in the field, the land mortgaged	Civil War, defeat, Reconstruction
↓ Decline stage 5 of 6	Jason Richmond Compson III (Mr Compson)	A lawyer given to drink and nihilism; sells the pasture	A fading aristocracy living on the memory of the Lost Cause
▼ Collapse stage 6 of 6	Quentin, Caddy, Jason IV, Benjy	Suicide, "fall", greed, idiocy	The early twentieth-century South: tradition in crisis, commerce triumphant

The family that appears in 1928 stands at the last of these stages. It remembers its history and cannot continue it, the three brothers represent three ways the South related to its own history.

Quentin is absolute loyalty to the old code: honour, female purity, the family name. When he sees he cannot defend these values he destroys himself. His imprisonment in the past shows the Lost Cause carried to its tragic end. Cash described exactly this romantic code and this imagined past as the core of the Southern mind; Wilson showed how the myth of the Lost Cause became a civil religion.

Jason is the opposite. He has dropped the tradition altogether. The past is lost money, the family a burden. His greed and his lack of scruple anticipate the Snopeses of Faulkner's later fiction, the new commercial class that moves into the space the aristocracy left empty.

Benjy stands outside both positions. He neither idealises the past nor reaches for the future; he only feels the loss. His castration marks the end of the family line, and his wordless bellowing is helplessness in the face of history. Matthews links the Compsons' experience of loss to the Lost Cause in just this sense: each member of the family tries in his own way to restore what is gone and give it meaning.

Against the Compsons' decline the novel sets a figure of endurance. On Easter Sunday Dilsey goes to the Black church and hears the visiting preacher from St. Louis, Reverend Shegog. When the sermon ends she is in tears, and she says that she has seen the first and the last, the beginning and the ending. Those words answer the novel's whole problem of time. The Compsons live in a time that is shattered and turned backward. Dilsey perceives time as a whole, with a beginning, an end and a meaning. Davis observes that Faulkner's Black characters often witness the fall of white families and act as a moral counterweight to it. In the Appendix Faulkner sums up Dilsey and her family in a single short sentence about endurance, an idea he took further in his Nobel Prize address of 1950, where he expressed the belief that man will not merely endure but prevail.

The closing scene completes the metaphor. Luster drives Benjy in the surrey to the town square, where a statue of a Confederate soldier stands. The carriage always passes the monument on the right. This time Luster swings to the left, and Benjy, finding the familiar order reversed, begins to roar. Jason runs up, strikes Luster and turns the horse around. Benjy falls quiet as the buildings and signs once more flow past in their accustomed places. The Compsons, and with them the South, go round and round a monument to a defeated past. Any change of direction produces terror. Order is restored in the end, but it is the order of repetition and has no life in it.

Discussion. The findings suggest that temporal fragmentation does three jobs in the novel at once. The first is psychological. The way a character slips out of the present tells us how that character lives in time. Benjy is carried off by a smell, Quentin by a word or a wound, Jason by nothing at all. The technique characterises before any description does. The second is epistemological. Because the central events are never shown directly, the reader must rebuild them from fragments and can never be sure the reconstruction is complete. The difficulty of knowing what happened to Caddy is not a problem the book poses and then solves; it is an experience the book imposes. Kartiganer's claim that the meaning of the broken form lies in the impossibility of wholeness describes the reader's position as much as the characters'. The third is philosophical, and here Sartre's reading still holds: for these characters the past is more real than the present, and the future scarcely exists. Yet Sartre treated this as Faulkner's metaphysics, a general statement about the human condition, and objected to it on those grounds. The evidence assembled above points to a narrower and, I think, more accurate conclusion. The rule of the past in this novel is historical before it is metaphysical. It belongs to a particular family in a particular region, at the end of a line that runs from a land grant through a governorship and a lost war to a sold pasture. The Compsons cannot think the future because the culture that formed them had organised itself around a defeat.

This is where the formal and the historical readings join. Benjy's associative leap at the fence and the surrey's circuit of the Confederate monument are the same movement at two scales. In both, a present moment is valued only in so far as it repeats an earlier one, and any departure from the pattern is felt as catastrophe. The small mechanism of memory rehearses, from the first page, the large image with which the book ends. Dilsey complicates any reading of the novel as pure fatalism. Her sense of time is neither fragmented nor nostalgic, and it rests on a history the Compsons do not own: that of people who kept their humanity under slavery and its aftermath. One may see in her an alternative history told from the side of those the official story left out. Some caution is needed, however. Dilsey is seen from outside, by a

narrator who never enters her mind as the novel enters the brothers'. The book grants her wholeness, but not a voice of her own, and a reading that makes her simply the answer to the Compsons' problem risks repeating the old habit of using a Black character to measure a white family's fall. King's account of the Southern Renaissance as a painful reckoning is useful here: the novel begins that reckoning without completing it.

Anastasyev's point that Faulkner writes with compassion and not with a verdict [9] seems right for the ending. Benjy's calm in the last lines is terrible, but it is not mocked. The novel understands why the carriage must go the usual way round, even as it shows what that habit costs.

Conclusion. In "The Sound and the Fury", the poetics of subjective time and the metaphor of Southern history prove to be inseparable, and the study supports five conclusions. First, the decisive events of 1909–1910 are never narrated directly: they are present in the text only as analepses, so that the boundary between the primary narrative and its past all but disappears. Second, shifts between temporal levels are governed by three types of association (sensory, verbal, and emotional-ideational), whose density decreases from Benjy's section to Jason's and falls to zero in the fourth. Third, fragmentation performs psychological, epistemological, and philosophical functions, the last of which is grounded in history, not in an abstract conception of time. Fourth, the Compson generations, as set out in the Appendix, retrace the rise and collapse of the planter South, while the three brothers embody, respectively, loyalty to the lost order, its commercial replacement, and mute suffering between the two. Fifth, Dilsey's integral, liturgical time constitutes the novel's sole alternative to the fractured time of the Compsons, although the novel presents it only from the outside. The Compsons' failure to grasp time as a whole is the artistic image of a society unable to come to terms with its own past.

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