Jean Paul Sartre in his essay, “On ‘The Sound and the Fury’: Time in the work of Faulkner,” states that the technique of the fiction writer always relates back to his metaphysics (OSF 79). Faulkner’s clock-based or chronological metaphysics of time found in The Sound and the Fury is the focal point of Sartre’s criticism of this work. His main criticism that the novel’s metaphysics of time leaves its characters with only pasts and no futures led some Faulkner scholars to seek the future in it while providing their own interpretation of time in Faulkner’s work. However, although many of these works were inspired by Sartre’s original contribution, none of them have attempted to provide an expanded Sartrean interpretation of the novel’s metaphysics of time in light of some of his more elaborate remarks on time and temporality found in Being and Nothingness.

The primary purpose of this study is to provide this expanded interpretation by first elucidating Sartre’s criticisms of Faulkner’s chronological metaphysics found in his original essay, and then analyzing each of the novel’s four main sections under Sartre’s theory of temporality and emotions.

Three conclusions will be drawn upon the completion of this study: first, the novel’s ordering is purposeful despite its apparent lack of order as Sartre correctly pointed out. I will argue that this purposeful ordering is a “phenomenological ordering” by which the novel progresses from a phenomenology of time that is completely an emotional constellation (in Sartre’s words) toward a completely emotionless and rational third person perspective. Second, contrary to Sartre’s conclusion in his original essay and in light of his later remarks in Being and Nothingness, some of the characters’ phenomenologies of time include the present, and therefore are not of the past only. Third, the future is present to the reader as an absence in the novel, because
the phenomenologies of the three Compson brothers do not include it. This presence as absence is personified in the character of Quentin, Caddy's daughter, found in the final section through whom Faulkner characterizes the future as something external to consciousness that cannot be captured, contrary to Sartre's view.

William Faulkner was born in New Albany, Mississippi in September 1897 into a well-established southern family whose family-lore was embroidered with tales of civil war heroism. Yet, this generation of southerners born around the turn of the twentieth century was also deeply engraved with the dark, painful collective memory of the south’s defeat and subsequent molestation by northern troops and carpetbaggers. The quixotic and desperate attempts by the old southern agrarian society to hold onto past glories in the midst of defeat through these heroic tales and its reluctance to embrace modern industrialized society provide the material from which Faulkner crafted his masterful stories. He wove together the themes of the old agrarian versus the new industrial societies, the old and new social roles of blacks and whites, tradition, progress, ruin, despair and religious beliefs, resulting from this collective experience, into the fabric of his stories and characters. In this way, much of Faulkner’s writing concerns the south’s tight grip on their past and their deep reluctance, or even defiance, in letting go of it and embracing the modern post-civil war future.

The Sound and the Fury took Faulkner three years to write and was first published in 1929. It is a story in which many of these southern themes are woven into an artful and powerful story of a southern, aristocratic agrarian family clinging to dusty old traditions handed down from pre-war generations. The novel does not portray tales of civil war heroism but begins with the final effects of southern defeat on the Compson family. The reader first meets the Compson family on the brink of complete destruction after years of ruin. In the novel, Faulkner explores the southern themes of tradition, progress, race, religion and despair through three first-person narratives from the three Compson brothers: one from the perspective of an idiot, the second from the perspective of a dead man, and the third through the perspective of the Compson’s bitter, greedy and sadistic last patriarch, Jason. The fourth and final section is written from a third person perspective which has a largely religious flavor. The sister of the Compson brothers, Caddy, is the central focus of all four sections, and therefore her character is considered the novel’s central figure.

The characters in The Sound and the Fury are each in their own ways wedded to the past, which is Sartre’s main criticism of the
novel. Sartre argues that Faulkner’s characters lack a future, and therefore Faulkner portrays human beings as In-itselfs without For-itselfs—that is, as people determined by their pasts rather than as being the source of their own future possibilities. For Sartre, the For-itself is consciousness conceived of as a lack of Being. We are what we are not in that we are not yet a possible future self. For example, someone who chooses to be a lawyer but has not yet completed law school is what he is not. He is not a lawyer, but he is projecting himself towards a possible future self qua lawyer, i.e. he is a “lawyer-to-be.” Time, or temporality, is a dimension of the For-itself in that it is a subjective process whereby the For-itself projects itself toward a possible future self. “The For-itself as what it has been (Past) is a flight (Present) toward what it projects to be (Future)” (BN 807). As such, Sartre conceives of time as a totality and as a subjective process whereby we choose our possible future selves. Faulkner, on the other hand, presupposes that time is chronological in that it is an external force composed of a collection of discrete instances that determines us to be what we are (In-itself) without regard for what we are not (For-itself).

Some commentators such as Euschio Rodrigues and Michael Maloney basically reiterated Sartre’s conclusions. However, Jean Pouillon, for instance, accepted what he took to be Sartre’s premise that Faulkner’s characters live in a present that is “eaten up” by the past, but with different results. He concludes that Faulkner’s characters are not determined by their pasts because they are the past; the past is “extra-temporal” in the sense that the past for Quentin, Caddy’s brother, exists in the present. As such, the characters are psychologically dominated by destiny. His conclusion agrees with Sartre’s in so far as it denies the existence of the future as part of Faulkner’s metaphysics of time.

Other commentators disagree with this conclusion and have attempted to find the future in various characters and themes within the novel. Some search for it in the character of Dilsey, who is largely seen in a religious context, while others have sought it in Jason, who is looking ahead to the modern commercial society while turning his back on the old south. Peter Swiggart argued that Quentin’s perspective is a kind of fusion between past, present and future, which is a kind of religious perspective, and Dilsey, who, along with preacher Shegog, is the embodiment of Faulkner’s moral order. According to this religious perspective from eternity, Dilsey transcends time and Quentin seeks its extinction. Perrin Lowrey maintained that each section of the novel focuses on a character dealing with the problem
of time in his or her own unique way. Benjy has no sense of time, but the past is experienced as the present. Quentin, who is obsessed with the past, sees time as something to be destroyed. For Jason, time is money, which is made by beating the clock. The final section is seen as Dilsey’s section, for whom, according to Lowrey, time is a continuum, again emphasizing the eternal, religious perspective.

A work concerning Faulkner and time with which this essay shares an affinity is Douglas Messerli’s “The Problem of Time in The Sound and the Fury: A Critical Reassessment and Reinterpretation.” Messerli’s interpretation is based on the phenomenology of Eugene Minkowski as described in his work Lived Time, which he applies to each of the characters’ dealings with the problem of time as suggested by Lowrey. A complete exposition of Minkowski’s phenomenology of time and Messerli’s application of it to the novel would lead us too far astray. As such, we must content ourselves with a brief enumeration of Messerli’s main points. First, Benjy, Quentin and Jason each have or live a certain aspect of time: Benjy has only an animalistic awareness of the present, Quentin is egocentrically involved with the past and wants to destroy it, and Jason lives for the future, “hurrying to reach what he has come to confuse with time—money—before it is gone.” In this way, Messerli agrees with Lowrey but argues against Sartre by finding the future in Jason’s section. Second, Dilsey, who is considered the final section’s main character, transcends time, for she has “… seed de beginnin en now [she] sees de endin.” Third, he attempts to connect these individual experiences of time by positing the character of Caddy as Faulkner’s version of the character of time, because she appears in some way, either via memory or as symbolized by her daughter, in all four sections. I agree with Swiggart, Lowery and Messerli in their conclusion that the novel contains the future, although only fleetingly; however, I do not think that it can be found in Jason’s section nor does Dilsey exemplify it. Also, I find Lowrey’s insight that each of the novel’s four main sections explores a different aspect of time useful, and that Messerli is correct to investigate this suggestion in terms of the lived experience of time. This same investigation is undertaken here from a thoroughly Sartrean phenomenology of time and emotion.

Also, it should be noted that Sartre has been criticized for making an invalid generalization from his interpretation of Quentin’s relationship with the past to all of Faulkner’s characters. Given the vast range of Faulkner’s work since The Sound and the Fury and Sartre’s criticism, it is unfair to say that Faulkner’s metaphysics of time in general is exactly the metaphysics found in this one novel. Therefore, the
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present inquiry limits its concerns to the characters’ phenomenologies of time in this novel and the chronological or clock-based model of time that provides its metaphysical scaffolding. In other words, the results of this essay apply only to *The Sound and the Fury* and are not intended to apply to Faulkner’s work in general. We now turn our attention to a fuller discussion of Sartre’s interpretation of the novel’s main theme and criticism of its chronological metaphysics.

*The Sound and the Fury* is a story written in four parts, three of which are narratives from the respective perspectives of the three Compson brothers, Benjy, Quentin and Jason. The first is written from the perspective of the idiot Benjy on his thirty-third birthday, April 7, 1928. The second is written from Quentin’s perspective on the day of his suicide, June 2, 1910. The third is from Jason’s perspective during a pivotal point in his antagonistic relationship with his illegitimate seventeen-year old niece, Quentin, on April 6, 1928. The final section takes place on Easter Sunday, April 8, 1928, and is written in the third person. It follows the enduring black kitchen servant and maid, Dilsey, whose family has worked for the Compsons since the days of slavery, on the day Quentin steals seven thousand dollars from her uncle and runs away. A significant portion of this section is devoted to the discovery of Quentin’s disappearance and Jason’s fruitless search for her.

Notice that the story itself is not told chronologically but in temporal fragments that are shuffled around. This shuffling is not solely a characteristic of the novel’s overall format but also occurs to varying degrees within the three narratives themselves. The way in which this phenomenon takes place in each of these sections will be discussed in due course. But first it is important to stress Sartre’s assertion that the shuffling about of dates in the organization of the novel manifests the importance of the novel’s metaphysics of time. Sartre makes the observation that it is primarily a metaphysics of the past. According to Sartre, what occurs on the dates heading each section is also in the past, and the description of what happened on those days sifts away, sometimes slowly and sometimes abruptly, with the intrusion of memories. Sartre put it aptly when he said that

Faulkner’s vision of the world can be compared to that of a man sitting in an open car and looking backwards. At every moment, formless shadows, flickerings, faint tremblings, and patches of light rise up on either side of him, and only afterwards, when he has a little perspective, do they become trees and men and cars. (OSF 81-82)

A closer look at the novel’s main theme, according to Sartre, is a good starting point for an exposition of the novel’s chronological meta-
physics of time. This brief discussion will allow us to segue into an interpretation of the clock motif, which is the novel’s model of time.

Sartre’s interpretation of the novel’s main theme is most easily lifted from Quentin’s narrative where the clock motif is introduced. His monologue begins:

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 reductio 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 93)

The first paragraph of Quentin’s narrative expresses his grandfather’s, father’s and his own regard for time as absurd and invincible. The great misfortune of human beings is that they are time bound, which, for Sartre, is the real subject of the novel (OSF 79-80). The watch and other measures of time, e.g. clock towers and shadows, play a significant role in this narrative and provide the framework of a metaphysics of time conceived as chronology. Let us now take a closer look at the clock from a phenomenological perspective, for a phenomenological description of the clock is essential for an understanding of both Faulkner’s metaphysics of time and Sartre’s criticisms of it.14

First and foremost, a clock is an In-itself, a being existing permanently in time. It is what it is without a future. As such, we are conscious of it, as well as any other phenomenon that is In-itself, in its temporal and atemporal aspects. The For-itself is conscious of the clock in time and recognizes it as that which it is not. So, consciousness of a clock is the consciousness of an In-itself. Now, for Sartre, temporality is a means of viewing the In-itself. The temporal aspects of a clock (or anything that is wholly In-itself) have meaning only because someone was copresent with its previous state. So, the meaning of the change of a thing (an In-itself) is conferred upon it by a human consciousness (a For-itself), which was copresent with that previous state (BN 282-283). For example, if the hand of a clock moves from 5 to 6, that change only has meaning because a consciousness was copresent with the clock’s hand when it was in the state of being at 5 and then is present to it when it is at 6. In this
way, the For-itself is fixed in the past as the For-itself that was copresent with the clock’s hand at 5. There would be no past world without a copresent past consciousness of the thing (in this case the clock). Furthermore, my past is the past of the world in so far as I am the copresence of the thing in the past. So, a clock is a thing whose changing states have meaning only because of my past copresence with it.

Moreover, it is by means of the clock that we “keep track of time.” Temporality is conventionally sliced into convenient instants that can be measured and quantified by means of the clock. The movements of the clock’s hands measure these instants, which are external relations between beings—the hands of the clock and the For-itself. It is the For-itself that conveys meaning onto the hands’ movement. For example, it is a consciousness that conveys the meaning “Five minutes have passed,” “Go to class,” etc. when the hands are in a certain configuration. Otherwise the clock just is without any meaning whatsoever. In this way, time governs our actions and intentions. For instance, considerations of whether or not a certain project can be completed in a certain amount of time may be a deciding factor as to whether or not we engage in that endeavor. So, time provides an aspect of one’s coefficient of adversity, which is Sartre’s term for the amount of resistance offered by external objects to the projects of the For-itself. Time, as conventionally measured and represented by clocks, determines to some extent our future possibilities from the outside. Therefore, time, conceived of as chronology only, becomes viewed as an external force that we stand up against as not being it and which determines us from without to some extent.

Time as measured and represented by clocks is the paradigm of time found in The Sound and the Fury. Here time is an accumulation of discrete isolatable instants, contrary to Sartre’s conception of temporality as a totality. For Quentin and Jason time is what is collected in the past. Their father says, “Man the sum of his climatic experiences ... Man the sum of what have you” (S&F 153). He also says, “[A] man is the sum of his misfortunes. One day you’d think misfortune would get tired, but then time is your misfortune” (S&F 129). As such, humans are the entire collection of what they are; who you are, what you become is constituted by these past experiences. In this way, the Compson brothers are In-itselfs only without a For-itself; that is, without a projection toward a possible future self, for the future self is determined by these past experiences. Sartre points out that this makes sense of another, somewhat odd phrase found in
the novel, “Fui. Non sum”–“I was. I am not.” These characters are immutable selves fixed in the past (OSF 81). However, contrary to Sartre, this is not entirely correct for Benjy and Jason, for both have the present as a part of their respective phenomenologies of time as discussed below.

Sartre’s main criticism of the novel is that Faulkner confuses chronology and temporality, characterizing time as an external rather than an internal relation, distinct from and determinate of human consciousness, which is to emphasize a past without a future. This confusion of chronology and temporality led Sartre to criticize Faulkner further for the novel’s lack of a progression towards a future event, which he finds endemic to the structure of the entire novel (OSF 79). For, in each first-person narrative, words describing the present are often interrupted by descriptions of past experiences, which sometimes completely usurp the narrative describing the chronological present. This interplay between the characters’ narratives of the past and their narratives of the present is a movement that does not go anywhere since Faulkner’s world has no future progression. Sartre comments: “It seems as though Faulkner has laid hold of a frozen speed at the very heart of things; he is grazed by congealed spurts that wane and dwindle without moving” (OSF 81). This “motionless movement” is characteristic of the novel as a whole. Yet, a story is told nonetheless, which implies some sort of movement between these narratives of the past and present.

Sartre describes this movement as a “sinking in” of the present into the past out of which the present may reappear without reason (OSF 81). He illustrates this notion with a metaphor of an airplane flight with lots of air pockets. At each pocket the protagonist’s consciousness sinks back into the past, arising only to sink back again (OSF 82). So, Sartre finds that the novel’s order is not the rational ordering of chronology but rather the emotional ordering of the heart, which provides a temporal movement from one moment to the next, but does not progress toward a future event. According to Sartre, this is a matter of emotional constellations (OSF 83). This brings us to the questions: What is the nature of this motionless movement characterized by this sinking into consciousness into the past? And, to what extent is the novel’s ordering an emotional constellation? The answers to these questions are different for each of the novel’s four main sections.

In sum, Sartre criticizes Faulkner for maintaining a chronological metaphysics of time under which consciousness is determined by the sum of its misfortunes, leaving his characters without their future posi-
sibilities. Sartre, on the other hand, maintains that the novel is a matter of emotional constellations, which provide it with a purposeful ordering different from a rational, chronological ordering. This implies that any expansion of Sartre’s interpretation of the novel will include an account of emotions in each of the novel’s sections. As such, we now turn to a brief exposition of Sartre’s theory of emotions.

According to Sartre, all emotions have an object, and in this way emotional consciousness is a way of apprehending the world. For example, one is not merely afraid, but one is afraid of something, and as such that something (e.g. the dark) is apprehended as fearful (E 223-224). Moreover, Sartre holds that consciousness can “be-in-the-world” in two different ways. One is the apprehension of the instrumental world organized such that there are determinate means to ends. The other is the world in its non-instrumental totality. The instrumental world is apprehended in pragmatic intuition, whereas the non-instrumental world is the realm of magic. In the latter case, the world acts upon consciousness immediately, and reciprocally consciousness immediately modifies these objects by absolute and massive modifications of the world without instruments (E 249-250). In the former case, pragmatic intuition is an apprehension of the world’s determinism and facilitates the setting of ends and determinate means to achieve them (E 228). However,

When the paths traced out become too difficult, or when we see no path, we can no longer live in so urgent and difficult a world. All the ways are barred. However, we must act. So we try to change the world, that is, to live as if the connection between things and their potentialities were ruled not by deterministic processes, but by magic. (E 228-229).

So, when we cannot bring the deterministic world to serve our ends, emotional consciousness transforms it into a world of magic not bound by determinism. In other words, the impossibility of finding a solution to a given problem or situation, which is apprehended objectively as a quality of the world in pragmatic intuition, provides the motivation for a new consciousness that perceives the world differently and with new aspects (E 230). Therefore, according to Sartre, an emotion is a transformation of the world from the pragmatic to the magical.

This setting up of a magical world occurs by use of the body, which is directed by consciousness to change its relation to the world such that the world may change its qualities (E 230 & 236). In this way, consciousness confers affectivity on its object. For example, x is fearful, because x is feared by me, which occurs as an unreflective transformation of the world enacted by consciousness in order to
ease the tension of a situation that cannot be handled pragmatically. So, according to Sartre, the true meaning of fear, for instance, is a consciousness which aims at denying an object of the external world through magical behavior and that will go so far as to annihilate itself (e.g. fainting or running away, which is a fainting enacted) in order to annihilate the object with it. Thus, for Sartre, emotion is an organized form of human experience and a system of means aiming at ends; that is, emotions are purposeful (E 200 & 210). Generally, their purpose is to transform an unendurable world to an endurable one that suits our ends. However, consciousness is not limited to the projection of affective signification on the world (e.g. fearful, hateful, etc.), but consciousness also lives in this newly established magical world because it believes in it, and therefore consciousness is caught in its own belief (E 240-241). Hence, Sartre calls emotion “an abrupt drop of consciousness into the magical,” which is reminiscent of his notion of “sinking-in” discussed above (E 250).

In his work *Psychology of Imagination*, Sartre is concerned with transformations of objects of consciousness. Here Sartre marks a distinction between perception and imagination. The former is a consciousness of an object as existent, while the latter is a consciousness of an object as nonexistent (PI 18). This means that in perception one is present to the object, whereas in imagination one is not present to it. Often the object of imagination is derived from perception in which case the object is transformed affectively into our ideal image of it. We make the object what we want it to be by means of imaginative consciousness (PI 85). This transformation from the real to the ideal occurs so that one can possess the object in its essence and all at once. It facilitates a shift from an apprehension of the deterministic or pragmatic world to the magical world in which the object is presented without any resistance to my wants and desires (PI 102). As such, this magical world of emotions is an ideal world where I may possess objects as I want them to be in their essence, and it is a world in which I believe and live.15

Two questions arise regarding the Compson brothers and their emotions in light of the previous paragraphs: (1) What is the object of their emotion? (2) What is the emotion felt in relation to and conferred on this object? Broadly, the answer to both of these questions is that they all have a feeling of loss associated with their sister, Caddy. Faulkner scholars agree that Caddy is the novel’s central figure despite its narrative domination by her brothers. The support for this claim can be found in the story of the novel’s origin, which had its humble beginnings as a short story about a brother and sister splash-
ing each other in a brook where they had been sent to play during
their grandmother’s funeral. This scene produced what Faulkner con-
sidered to be the novel’s central image: Caddy’s muddy drawers as
she climbs a tree just outside the Compson house to witness the
funeral inside.\textsuperscript{16} So, although she does not have a voice in the novel
as do her brothers, she is the novel’s central figure, and each Comp-
son son has significant emotions in relation to her. The analyses
below will show that the sinking in and re-emergence of conscious-
ness is brought about by a shift from a pragmatic to a magical world
in which Caddy is possessed in their image of her ideal essence. This
occurs differently for each brother, and each will be discussed in fur-
ther detail in its own place, beginning with Benjy’s narrative.

The novel begins with Benjy watching golfers through a fence
while Luster, Dilsey’s youngest son, hunts around for a lost quarter
without which he cannot go to the show that evening. Giving up
his search, he decides to find a stray golf ball lost over the fence,
and sell it to one of the golfers. After locating one, Luster and
Benjy go to retrieve it:

\begin{quote}
We went along the fence and came to the garden fence, where our shad-
ows were. My shadow was higher than Luster’s on the fence. We came to
the broken place and went through it.

“Wait a minute” Luster said, “you snagged on that nail again. Can’t you
never crawl through here without snagging on that nail.”

Caddy uncaught me and we crawled through.

Keep your hands in your pockets, Caddy said, or they’ll get froze. You don’t
want your hands froze on Christmas, do you.

“It’s too cold out there.” Versh said. “You don’t want to go out doors”

“What is it now.” Mother said.

“Let him go.” Uncle Maury said … (S&F 2-3)
\end{quote}

This shift from roman typeface to italics and back again is a signifi-
cant literary device found in both Benjy’s and Quentin’s narratives.\textsuperscript{17}
The italics mark off the “air pockets” into which Benjy’s conscious-
ness sinks. This passage begins in the chronological present, April 7,
1928, a day on which Caddy is not present, but Benjy’s conscious-
ness sinks into the image of a past December afternoon or evening
on which Caddy is present. But, this consciousness of a past Decem-
ber sinks yet again into the near past of that very morning before
they ventured outside, which is marked off again by the shift from
italics to roman type. Yet, the movement is not only a sinking but a
rising as well. A couple of pages later we read:
“Did you come to meet Caddy.” She said, rubbing my hands. “What is
it. What are you trying to tell Caddy.” Caddy smelled like trees and like
when she says we were asleep.

“What are you moaning about”, Luster said. “You can watch them again
when we get to the branch. H ere. H ere’s your jimson weed.’ He gave me
the flower. We went through the fence into the lot

“What is it.” Caddy said. “What are you trying to tell Caddy. Did they send
him out Versh?” (S& F 5)

This time his consciousness is attempting to arise again only to sink
back down again. H ere Benjy’s consciousness is of a remembered
world in which Caddy is present and, as such, is a consciousness of
Caddy. H owever, Benjy’s consciousness of a remembered image of
Caddy occurs differently for him than for someone with an unim-
paired consciousness.

An ordinary consciousness is generally conscious of a memory
(i.e. an image of a past self) as an object of consciousness; however,
Benjy’s consciousness is not an ordinary one. H e is not conscious of
his chronologically past memories as memories, but rather he is
conscious of them as a presence to the people, places and things,
which are the images constituting these memories. H e is reliving
these past experiences as the present without being conscious of the
fact that he is reliving them. This amounts to what I will call a
“(re)living” of the past. The “re” is placed in parentheses to indi-
cate that the aspect of living the experience again is set off to the
side. The event is, in fact, relived, but the character is not conscious
of it. H e is immersed in the memory as though it were the present.
This term has been coined in order to capture Sartre’s comments
on this phenomenon in Quentin’s narrative, although I think that it
applies even more to Benjy’s.18

Sartre points out the features of a (re)lived experience in his dis-
cussion of Quentin’s fights with Dalton Ames and Gerald Bland
(OSF 82-83). Although he does not use the term itself, he uses the
following example to reinforce the same general point:

Someone once told me about an old monitor who had grown senile. H is
memory had stopped like a broken watch; it had been arrested at his for-
tieth year. H e was sixty, but didn’t know it. H is last memory was that of a
schoolyard and his daily walk around it. Thus, he interpreted his present
in terms of his past and walked about his table, convinced that he was
watching students during recreation. (OSF 82)

This captures the concept of a (re)lived experience as it is conceived
here, but it should be noted that there is a disanalogy between the
old monitor and the way in which Benjy and Quentin (re)live their
pasts, which is the fact that their consciousnesses are not arrested at any one particular moment. Rather, especially in Benjy’s case but also in Quentin’s, consciousness may sink into past images that are even further in the past, and so they may be (re)lived as well. However, like the old monitor, Benjy and Quentin believe in and live in their respective magical worlds. In other words, (re)living is a mode of consciousness’ being-in-the-world for Benjy and Quentin.

Now, in the passages quoted above, notice that Luster scolds Benjy for snagging himself on the nail, which is not nurturing behavior and does not promote a feeling of love and security; however, Caddy had unsnagged him before and cautioned him to keep his hands in his pockets to prevent their freezing. In fact, Caddy is the only source of motherly love and security that Benjy is able to possess, since his mother has cut herself off from all her children, his father was consumed with alcoholism and eventually died, and his brothers are self absorbed with problems of their own. Caddy is Benjy’s only source of comfort. The following passages are examples of Caddy’s selfless, maternal love toward Benjy:

“All right,’ Versh said, ‘I aint going out in that cold for no fun.’ He went on and we stopped in the hall and Caddy knelt and put her arms around me and her cold bright face against mine. She smelled like trees.

“You’re not a poor baby. Are you. You’ve got your Caddy. Haven’t you got your Caddy.” (S&F 8)

“I’ll feed him tonight.” Caddy said. “Sometimes he cries when Versh feeds him.”

“Take this tray up,” Dilsey said. “And hurry back and feed Benjy.”

“Don’t you want Caddy to feed you.” Caddy said. …

Steam came off the bowl. Caddy put the spoon into my mouth easy … (S&F 86)

Also, Caddy is the only person that can make Benjy hush (e.g., see S&F 21-22 & 76). In this way, Caddy is often interpreted as a mother figure for him.

Faulkner writes in the novel’s appendix that Benjy did not lose his sister but only remembers her loss:

[Benjamin] loved three things: the pasture which was sold to pay for Candace’s wedding and to send Quentin to Harvard, his sister Candace, firelight. Who lost none of them because he could not remember his sister but only the loss of her. (S&F 423)

Benjy has not lost Caddy, because he possesses her as an image of his memory. That is, Benjy’s sense of loss, which is triggered by reminders of Caddy such as the word “Caddie” shouted by the
golfers (S&F 18 & 65) or “Caddy” whispered maliciously into his ear by Luster, motivates an unreflective act of consciousness that transforms the pragmatic world into the magical. Benjy is incapable of acting in the pragmatic world to regain Caddy’s loving, nurturing, maternal presence. He cannot cause Caddy’s presence by bringing her to the Compson home or by taking himself to her, which is a world that he cannot endure. The pragmatic world that has the objective quality of Caddy’s loss is transformed by Benjy’s unreflective act of consciousness into a world in which deterministic restrictions do not apply. He replaces Caddy’s loss with her imagined presence so that he may possess her in her maternal essence, which is how Benjy wants to possess her. This magical world is a world in which Benjy believes and lives in the mode of (re)living his past with her. Thus, Benjy’s phenomenology is entirely emotional, because his impaired consciousness precludes pragmatic action and a rational ordering of events and serves the purpose of transforming a loveless world into a magical world of selfless love and affection.

In sum, Benjy’s remembered loss of Caddy motivates a drop in consciousness from the perceptual world into the magical world of imagination where he possesses Caddy qua selfless, maternal love. However, despite this movement amongst his shifting myriad of perceptions and images, Benjy is motionless in his perpetual presence to them. Benjy is incapable of distinguishing between image and perception and therefore between past and present, nor is he capable of projecting a possible future self. So, Benjy’s consciousness is always either living or (re)living the world that he apprehends, and therefore his phenomenology of time is a phenomenology of the present only. Quentin has a similar phenomenology of time as Benjy’s in so far as he too (re)lives the past. But, his is not governed by emotions alone but is more rational–(re)lived past and (re)lived present running parallel courses.

Quentin is plagued by time as measured and represented by clocks. At the beginning of his narrative, Quentin lies there listening to the watch his father gave him. He finds that one can become oblivious to the sound of time, but it takes only one tick to “create in the mind unbroken the long diminishing parade of time you didn’t hear” (S&F 94). For Quentin, one may not constantly apprehend the progression of the series of discrete instants that constitute chronological time, but this progression may invade one’s consciousness at any given moment. He tries to flee time by breaking the watch’s crystal and pulling off its hands, but time still ticks along (S&F 98-99). In fact, throughout his narrative Quentin is constantly
confronting time as something external to him. During his wanderings through a neighboring town, he is conscious of his relation to his shadow indicating the position of the sun and therefore the time of day. Other examples are the bells of the Harvard clock tower that ring in on him, the watch shop he enters under the pretense of fixing his broken watch and his inquiry after, and eventual discovery of, the town’s clock tower. Time, as represented by clocks, constantly invades Quentin’s consciousness from the outside. He constantly confronts time as something quantifiable and external to him in accordance with the novel’s chronological metaphysics.

Sartre claims that Quentin’s breaking of his watch has the symbolic value of giving us access to time without clocks. Given the above considerations, this does not seem quite correct. Rather, the symbolic value of Quentin’s breaking of his watch is an attempt to flee time as quantified, discrete instants collected into his past. This act does not give us time without clocks, because Quentin becomes conscious of clocks or other measures of time throughout his narrative. Sartre also finds that Benjy, who does not know how to tell time, is clockless (OSF 80). This seems more on the mark, because Benjy is unable to confer meaning on clocks. Just as Benjy magically possesses Caddy in her maternal essence, Quentin’s escape is an attempt to possess a perpetually present Compson honor in its divine, eternal essence by magically guarding and preserving Caddy’s innocence.

Faulkner writes of Quentin in the appendix:

Who loved not his sister’s body but some concept of Compson honor precariously and (he knew well) only temporarily supported by the minute fragile membrane of her maidenhead as a miniature replica of all the whole vast bloby earth may be posed on the nose of a trained seal. (S&F 411)

Thus, Quentin’s love was for a temporary and precariously balanced family honor, teetering on the brink of non-existence and which fell with Caddy’s fall from innocence. Also, when Quentin “confesses” incest to his father, Mr. Compson responds in part:

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 is temporary and he you cannot bear to think that someday it will no longer hurt you like this now. (S&F 220)

Quentin seeks to raise the moment of Caddy’s lost innocence above the flesh to the level of the divine quintessence of Compson honor. Such a divine position would remove it from its temporary and pre-
carious perch on Caddy’s fragile maidenhead, preserving it forever. Also, Caddy’s loss of innocence afforded Quentin the opportunity to defend her qua Compson honor against her defiler. His threat to Dalton Ames that he should leave town by sundown is a quixotic and feeble attempt to guard her innocence and, symbolically, the family honor. Faulkner states further in the appendix that Quentin wanted his guardianship to continue forever in the fiery pits of hell:

[Quentin] loved not the idea of the incest which he would not commit, but some presbyterian concept of the eternal punishment: he, not God, could by that means cast himself and his sister both into hell, where he could guard her forever and keep her forevermore intact amid the eternal fires. (S&F 411)

Quentin can no longer guard her innocence in the lived pragmatic world, for it is already lost. Indeed, by June 2, 1910, she is pregnant and married to Herbert Head for two months (S&F 411). He cannot reinstate Caddy’s virginity; he cannot enact a means toward this end because it is precluded by the pragmatic world’s determinism. This is a world that Quentin cannot endure. Therefore, Quentin’s suicide is an unreflective act of consciousness that sets up a magical world lying beyond death in order to possess and guard Caddy in her symbolic essence qua Compson honor.22

Sartre makes the observation that Quentin’s narrative takes place from the infinitesimal moment of death (OSF 85). As such, Quentin (re)lives the events of that fateful day, sometimes remembering, sometimes (re)living other past events into which his (re)lived present sinks. Therefore, Quentin’s phenomenology of time is a phenomenology of the past only, for his narrative is a (re)lived magical world. Yet, further acts of consciousness transform his (re)lived world into another imagined (re)lived world at the moment of Caddy’s lost innocence so that he can possess, guard and preserve it. Also, his (re)lived present “moves along in the shadow, like an underground river, and reappears only when it itself is past” (OSF 82). Quentin’s (re)lived past and (re)lived present run parallel courses, which suggests a more orderly movement from event to event than Benjy’s. Quentin’s altercations with Dalton Ames and Gerald Bland provide a wonderful example of the parallel course run by the two worlds.

Quentin is riding along in an automobile with his friends Gerald, Spoade and Shreve, along with Gerald’s mother, Mrs. Bland, and two young women brought along by Mrs. Bland to accompany the young gentlemen on a picnic. While driving along, Quentin’s consciousness sinks from the conversation among the members of the
picnic party in the (re)lived present into his imagined incestuous relationship with Caddy and images of a conversation with her:

“I think young gentlemen should drink wine, although my father, Gerald’s grandfather ever do that Have you ever done that In the grey darkness a little light her hands locked about

“They do, when they can get it” Spoade said, “Hey, Shreve?” her knees her face looking at the sky the smell of honeysuckle upon her face and throat

“Beer, too.” Shreve said. His hand touched my knee again. I moved my knee again. like a thin wash of lilac coloured paint talking about him bringing (S&F 183)

At this point, Quentin seems to be conscious of the memory qua memory on some level albeit separate from his (re)lived magical present. Eventually, Quentin loses all grasp on the picnickers and sinks into the imagined past and (re)lives it at length.

“He [Gerald’s grandfather] was as crotchety about his julep as an old maid, measuring everything by a recipe in his head. There was only one man he ever gave the recipe to; that was” we did how can you not know it if you’ll just wait I’ll tell you how it was it was a crime we did a terrible crime it cannot be hid you think it can but wait Poor Quentin you’ve never done that have you … (S& F 184-185)

At this point, Quentin is completely (re)living his relationship and conversation with Caddy and the subsequent fight with Dalton Ames. But notice that the movement of Quentin’s phenomenology of time is not as violent or irrational as Benjy’s. His (re)lived present sinks into only a couple of past images throughout the narrative (although only one in the case under consideration), giving substance to the simile of an underground river. It is as though his (re)lived past and his (re)lived present were on two parallel courses; sometimes one is on the surface while the other is submerged beneath the other, switching back and forth.

Eventually Quentin’s (re)living leads up to his fight with Dalton Ames in the middle of which he says to him “did you ever have a sister did you” Dalton responds, “no but they’re all bitches” (S& F 109). Quentin attempts to hit him. Dalton is too fast for him. After a short scuffle it seems as though Dalton had knocked out Quentin, but we learn later that Quentin actually fainted causing himself some minor injuries. This is an instance of Quentin’s feeble, quixotic attempt to defend Caddy’s innocence and, as such, to defend the Compson honor. The reader discovers later that this is the start of the fight with Gerald occurring in his (re)lived present. Quentin admits that he does not know why he hit Gerald. Spoade reports:
"The first I knew was when you jumped up all of a sudden and said, ‘Did you ever have a sister? did you?’ and when he said No, you hit him. I noticed you kept looking at him, but you didn’t seem to be paying attention to what anybody was saying until you jumped up and asked him if he had any sisters.” (S&F 206)

It is evident from this passage that Quentin was (re)living in a “second layer” magical world, defending his family honor, oblivious to his (re)lived presence to Gerald, and only aware of his (re)lived presence to Dalton. His presence to Dalton became the present for Quentin, although he was present to Gerald. His impotence in fighting Dalton is carried over into his impotence in fighting Gerald. Thus he lost the fight with Gerald because he lost the fight with Dalton. This is a specific instance of Sartre’s criticism that the past determines the present and cuts off the future for the characters in the novel.

This is the nature of the motionless movement found in Quentin’s monologue: Quentin does not have a chronological present nor does he have a future because his perspective is from the infinitesimal moment of death. Quentin is just his past and no more. His consciousness (re)lives a magical world from beyond death and sinks into a further transformed world in which he possesses, preserves and guards Caddy’s innocence, which is the symbolic essence of Compson honor. Each world he (re)lives spends time on the surface of his consciousness, but the other is lurking in the shadows on a parallel course beneath the other, waiting to be brought back to the surface like an underground river. Quentin’s narrative is composed of two parallel magical worlds unlike Benjy’s multitude of transformations from the world of perception to a variety of past images in his magical world. As such, Quentin’s emotional constellation is infused with an element of rationality that Benjy’s lacks. However, Jason’s narrative is even more rational than Quentin’s as we will see below.

The first line of Jason’s section shouts out his feeling towards women in general and Caddy in particular: “ONCE A BITCH ALWAYS A BITCH” (S&F 223). Jason also feels a loss in relation to Caddy; however, his is not an ideal loss such as Benjy’s loss of maternal love or Quentin’s loss of family honor. Jason’s is a material loss. He is financially burdened by Caddy’s actions as well as those of other members of his family. Consider the following passage in which Jason has caught a glimpse of his niece, Quentin, with a young showman. He goes out into the street without his hat, losing sight of them. Jason begins to muse about what other people must think of him looking like a madman without his hat when he sinks into a memory about his father:
And there I was without my hat, looking like I was crazy too. Like a man would naturally think ... All the time I could see them watching me like a hawk, waiting for a chance to say Well, I’m not surprised I expected it all the time the whole family’s crazy. Selling land to send him [Quentin] to Harvard and paying taxes to support a state University all the time that I never saw except twice at a baseball game and not letting her daughter’s name [Caddy] be spoken on the place until after a while Father wouldn’t even come down anymore but just sat there all day with the decanter . . . (S&F 290)

This passage is interesting for two reasons. First, it is an example of how Jason’s narrative is a turning point in the style of the novel, for here Faulkner abandons the technique of italics used in Benjy’s and Quentin’s sections to signal a “thought transference.” For our purposes, this means that Jason does not (re)live his past as do his brothers; however, his phenomenology of time still fits within a rubric of a motionless movement. His consciousness performs an act of transformation from the pragmatic to the magical, but he does not live in the magical world in the same way as the others. Rather, Jason’s consciousness sinks into reveries or daydreams that recount the unfortunate events that caused him to acquire the role of Compson family patriarch and his lowly job at Earl’s store.

Second, this passage expresses Jason’s resentment towards his father. He resents the fact that his father provided an opportunity for Quentin without providing an equally good opportunity for him. Jason believes that the opportunity spent on Quentin would have been better spent on him, because Quentin wasted it by committing suicide. So, Jason feels resentment toward his father for not providing him with the possibility of a college education. Although Jason spends some time recounting unfortunate events concerning his father, mother, Uncle Maury and others, Caddy and her progeny are the primary objects of his consciousness on April 6, 1928; either Caddy herself or as represented by her daughter is a main object of his consciousness on this day. As such, I will focus on Caddy’s contributions to his misfortunes.

Caddy’s actions contribute to his misfortunes by removing opportunities and adding to his financial burden. She was unfaithful to her husband, Herbert, who had promised Jason a job at his bank. This infidelity broke up their marriage, thereby precluding this opportunity for Jason. Moreover, after Herbert broke it off with Caddy, she gave her illegitimate child to her mother to raise, thus adding one more mouth to feed to Jason’s financial burden. Therefore, Jason also feels resentment toward Caddy for cutting him off from an opportunity that would have been financially beneficial to him. As
such, he sees Caddy herself and as represented by her daughter as a contributing factor to his financial woes, which, to his mind, justifies his petty acts of sadism towards her and Quentin.

In an expression of this sentiment, Faulkner relates an incident involving Caddy and the infant, Quentin, in which Jason performs an act of petty revenge: Caddy and Jason accidentally meet at their father’s funeral. Caddy offers Jason fifty dollars to see the infant “just for a minute.” Jason takes the fifty dollars, gets the baby, and hires a carriage and a driver. When he approaches their rendezvous point, he orders the driver to whip the horses into a gallop so that they speed past Caddy as Jason holds the baby to the carriage window while she runs in vain to catch up. Later, while back home counting the money, Jason says to himself, “I says I reckon that’ll show you. I reckon you’ll know now that you cant beat me out of a job and get away with it” (S&F 255). Jason apprehends this pragmatic situation in which Caddy and the rest of his family cause him not to get ahead financially as beyond his control. It is beyond his ability to bring about a means to the end of financial betterment which he cannot endure. So, he performs a transformation to the magical world, thereby conferring on Caddy and Quentin (as her mother’s representative) the affective property of being resentful and therefore worthy of his malice.

More generally, these scenes and quotations indicate Jason’s resentment towards these people for either not providing him with opportunities or for cutting him off from opportunities. So, his resentment focuses on the cause of his lack of possibilities. Hence, Jason views his possibilities as provided by or not provided by forces external to him, which determine his financial well-being. He does not see himself as the source of his own possibilities. This is the key to his phenomenology of time: Jason is the sum of these misfortunes, which is to say that he is identical to his past unfortunate experiences. The fact that it was not possible for him to attend college, or for him to take the job at Herbert’s bank, made it necessary for him to work at Earl’s store. Jason’s consciousness sinks into past images of Caddy and Quentin as causal explanations of his present situation. He would not have to do what he is doing if it were not for these past misfortunes, e.g. if Caddy had kept the child, then he would not have to feed her and chase her all over town, or if he were not a Compson at all. So, Jason’s magical world permits him to possess Caddy in her essence as the contributing cause of his misfortune and serves the purpose of justifying his petty acts of revenge because she is resentful.
This magical world in which Caddy and others are resentful enables Jason’s project of bad faith. Jason seeks to flee himself as the source of his own possibilities by living in a world in which possibilities are either given or withheld by the Other. As such, he posits a reality constituted as a being which is what it is not and which is not what it is (BN 107). That is, on the one hand, Jason posits a world constituted by a being, namely Caddy, which is a cause of his unfortunate present by being a source of withheld possibilities, but she is not this because Jason is the source of his own possibilities. On the other hand, Jason posits a world constituted by a being, namely himself, which is not a cause of his unfortunate present, because he is not the source of his own possibilities, but he is such a being. Therefore, Jason deceives himself into believing and living in a world that determines his being in order to escape himself as the source of his own possibilities, which permits him to avoid the responsibility of his own free actions. 24

These considerations allow us to conclude that Jason’s living, normal human consciousness (albeit in bad faith) does not yield a wholly one-dimensional phenomenology of time like those of Benjy or Quentin. Rather, he is present to people, things and events as they occur and is present to past images as memories but does not (re)live them. He lives in a magical world in which Caddy (either herself or as represented by Quentin) is resentful, for the pragmatic world is perceived by him to be out of his control and therefore unendurable. So, the pragmatic world is transformed into a magical world where Caddy is resentful, which motivates reveries or daydreams in which he possesses Caddy in her essence qua cause of his misfortunes. This possession of Caddy qua cause is the way in which he wants to possess her in order to facilitate his project of bad faith. Yet, his consciousness sinks into past images and rises back to present perceptions again, which provides the cyclical movement of his phenomenology of time between present and past and back again. It moves from past to present and present to past but does not go anywhere. Therefore, the motionless movement that is Jason’s phenomenology of time is a phenomenology of the past (image) and the present (perception) only. Moreover, Jason’s phenomenology is the most rational and the least emotional of the three first person narratives, because he is capable of rational thought and subject to chronological time. 25 We now turn to the fourth and final section of the novel.

The final section, April 8, 1928, deviates from the novel’s usual first-person perspective by shifting to the third-person. Since this
section is not from the perspective of an individual human consciousness, it is a completely rational ordering of events. So, the concepts of sinking in, motionless movement, emotional constellation, pragmatic world, magical world, etc. do not apply here because the narrative’s perspective is external to the consciousnesses of the characters themselves. In other words, since the narrative is not from the first-person perspective of a human consciousness, no transformation from a pragmatic to a magical world is enacted. Sartre does not explicitly address this final section; however, given its radical break from the first person perspective and its external relation to the characters, there are at least two significant issues that are germane to our discussion: (1) The contemporaneous nature of the tales told, and (2) the glimmer of the future hidden beyond the Compson consciousness.\textsuperscript{26}

The first issue is significant, because it marks another shift in the novel’s style. In this section two stories are told but neither chronologically precedes nor succeeds the other, rather the two stories occur simultaneously. The story that begins the section concerns Dilsey and her son Luster. The reader is guided along the course of Dilsey’s day in her dealings with the Compsons, her efforts to attend church on this Easter Sunday and the inspirational service that she and her family, including Benjy, actually attend. The second story concerns Jason Compson’s futile hunt for his niece after she took the money that he embezzled from her and Caddy. As such, there are only two changes in these story lines from one to the other:

Dilsey tied a cloth about his [Benjy’s] neck. He and Luster ate. Dilsey moved about the kitchen, singing the two lines of the hymn which she remembered. “Y’all kin g’awn en eat,” she said, “Jason aint comin home.”

He was twenty miles away at that time. When he left the house he drove rapidly to town, overreaching the slow sabbath groups and peremptory bells along the broken air. (S&F 376)

He [Jason] wasn’t thinking of home, where Ben and Luster were eating cold dinner at the kitchen table. Something—the absence of disaster, threat, in any constant evil—permitted him to forget Jefferson as any place which he had ever seen before, where his life must resume itself.

When Ben and Luster were done Dilsey sent them outdoors. “And see kin you keep let him alone twell fo oclock. T.P. be here den.” (S&F 392)

Notice that the first sentence of the story concerning Jason, “He was twenty miles away at that time” (emphasis added), indicates that the story about Jason beginning to unfold occurs contemporaneously with the events regarding Dilsey. Also, the story concerning Dilsey picks up in the latter passage right where we left them in the former.
The language in these two passages indicates that neither storyline sinks into or rises out of the other. Therefore, the events in this section unfold in a completely rational, chronological order. As such, this section is necessarily devoid of emotional content, since it is not given from the perspective of a consciousness.

The second issue for discussion is the way in which the future is hidden behind the scenes. My support for this claim can be found in the character of Quentin. Before she took back the money hoarded by Jason and ran away with the showman, she must have had some sort of plan. The goal of her plan was to get away from the Compson household in general and her sadistic uncle in particular. As such, she was projecting a possible future self as not being a member of that household. Yet, the reader is not given a first hand account of her planning the caper or pulling it off. The reader, like Jason and the rest of the Compson clan, come upon the aftermath of a plan already carried out—a broken window, the broken lock on Jason’s strongbox, etc. The reader does not have access to her consciousness as she does with Benjy, Quentin and Jason, nor does this final third person narrative follow her around. In fact, the reader only sees and hears her in Benjy’s and Jason’s sections, and she is completely absent here. Yet, it is her absence from this narrative that makes her a presence to the reader. A thorough discussion of this phenomenon requires a brief digression regarding Sartre’s discussion of absence in Being and Nothingness.

Sartre talks about nothingness from many different angles. The one that is most pertinent to the considerations here is the section where Sartre talks about Pierre’s absence in the café.27 For Sartre, all perception involves the construction of a figure on a ground. A ground is an undifferentiated plentitude of being, which carries the figure everywhere before it. However, no object is specifically structured to be only figure or only ground, but rather it depends on one’s direction of attention. So, the isolation of a specific figure from a ground depends on the attention of the perceiver. Now, let us take Sartre’s example and suppose that I am searching for my friend Pierre whom I expect to meet at the café. First, when searching for Pierre, I perform a synthetic organization of the objects in the café that forms the ground upon which Pierre is about to appear as figure, which is an original nihilation—a making of a nothingness by consciousness (BN 804). So, when searching for Pierre, each object that is not Pierre is swallowed back into the ground, failing to become the principled object of my attention and therefore failing to become a figure (BN 41). The objects of the café, then, become
fixed as ground, because Pierre, who is the expected object of my attention, is not there. Moreover, Pierre’s absence is not discovered in a particular place in the café. He is absent from the entire café. Therefore, Pierre’s absence from the café is a fact brought into the world by virtue of a consciousness not differentiating Pierre from this ground as expected, which is discovered and presents itself as a synthetic relation between Pierre and the nihilation of the café. As such, I am present to Pierre’s absence.

In this way, the reader attempts to lift the future from the undifferentiated ground of the novel itself; however, she cannot do this in its first three-quarters, because she is immersed in the consciousness of one Compson brother or another. The reader expects the future only to find that every object briefly differentiated from the ground of these consciousnesses is not it. The absence of the future in the novel presents itself to the reader as the synthetic relation between it and the nihilation of each of the three brothers’ phenomenologies of time. In other words, the future does not appear to the reader as a figure on the ground of these respective phenomenologies of time. So, the reader is present to the future in the first three-quarters of the novel as an absence. However, this is different for the final section, though the reader must look very closely. The reader’s coming across Quentin’s carried out plan is a glimmer of the future no longer veiled by the Compson consciousness. The reader’s presence to her absence in the final section is the way in which the reader is finally, although temporarily, present to the future in the novel.

Another interesting point is the symbolism of Jason’s pursuits of Quentin that this interpretation suggests. He chases her twice, once in his narrative and again in the final section, but he cannot catch her. This can be taken to symbolize further the fact that the future (as symbolized by Quentin) eludes Jason and the Compsons altogether. Also, the reader is invited to give chase alongside Jason, but the novel ends and we do not catch sight of it ever again. In light of these considerations, Faulkner portrays the future as external to consciousness and elusive—a will-o-the-wisp haunting us from beyond our grasp.

In sum, the novel’s final section from the third person perspective is a completely unemotional and rational ordering of events one after the other, because it does not occur from the perspective of a Compson consciousness. Neither of the two story lines sinks into or rises out of the other but occur contemporaneously. Also, the plan carried out by Quentin suggests a consciousness whose phenomenology of time includes the future, unlike the three Compson brothers. In the
novel’s first three-quarters, the reader apprehends the future as an absence upon the ground of their phenomenologies of time. These phenomenologies veil the future from the reader; however, the future is present as an absence to the reader who attempts to isolate it from the ground of the respective Compson consciousnesses. The reader catches a fleeting glimpse of the future from outside these consciousnesses in the final section as symbolized by Quentin’s projection of a possible future self as not a member of the Compson household. This completes the analyses of the novel’s four main parts through Sartre’s concepts. It remains to sum up these results.

These Sartrean interpretations of the four main sections that comprise The Sound and the Fury propose an interpretation expanded from Sartre’s original essay on the subject. The novel moves along from a phenomenology of time that is completely an emotional constellation without any rational ordering to a completely rational chronological ordering of events. Benjy’s phenomenology is of the present only, which is motivated entirely by his remembrance of Caddy’s loss, and satisfies his purpose of possessing her in her maternal essence. Quentin’s phenomenology is of the past only, since it occurs from the infinitesimal moment of death. His consciousness sinks and arises again between two modes of being-in-the-world like an underground river, which suggests a more rational ordering than Benjy’s. His suicide satisfies his purpose of possessing and guarding the stable and eternal quintessence of Compson honor symbolized for him by Caddy’s essential innocence. Jason’s phenomenology is of the past and the present only without a future. Since his consciousness is of a normal, living human being, Jason’s phenomenology takes on a more rational ordering than his two brothers, although it is still an emotional constellation in so far as he transforms the pragmatic world in which he is ineffectual into a magical world in which Caddy is resentful in her essence as the cause of his misfortunes. This transformation serves the purpose of Jason’s bad faith flee from his own freedom and responsibility. The final section is not told from the perspective of a consciousness and therefore is not an emotional constellation at all but a completely rational third person ordering of events.

Finally, Sartre was correct to point out that Faulkner leaves his characters without futures; however, this is not to say that the future is not present in the novel to the reader, for it is present to her as an absence brought about by her expected but unaccomplished isolation of it from the grounds of the three Compson consciousnesses. However, Faulkner provides a brief glimpse of a phenomenology of time that includes the future in the character of Caddy’s daughter,
Quentin, as something external to us and which cannot be caught. Sartre would criticize this characterization of the future, because we are the source of our own possibilities and therefore of our possible future selves. But, some of the value of Faulkner’s work is that he provided a southern phenomenology of time in which the past dominates the present, and the future is fleeting. Faulkner was not looking to describe the lived experience of all human beings, but rather was describing and expressing a distinctly southern experience that non-southerners could feel so deeply they almost believed they experienced it themselves.30

Notes

1. Here the word “metaphysics” is being used in the sense of the study of the essence and existence of beings rather than in the sense of “world-view.” In this paper, the metaphysical issue concerns the nature or essence of time.
2. O SF p. 83.
5. It should be noted that Pouillon’s notion of an extra-temporal past is not a consequence that Sartre would have drawn; however, Sartre, I think, would agree to some extent with the conclusion that, for Quentin, the past takes the place of the present as evidenced by his discussion of the old school monitor addressed below.
10. Ibid., p. 37.
12. Sergel Chakovsky finds that the chronological shuffling of dates is the backdrop that brings about the “absolute coherence” of Caddy’s story. Benjy’s section

13. This seems true in Quentin’s narrative as I try to show below, but I have been unable to discover Sartre’s reasons for holding that this is the case throughout the rest of the novel. For, although the past is very important to the novel, it is also very committed to the palpable immediacy of the present.

14. It should be mentioned that Sartre does not provide a phenomenological description of the clock in his essay, nor does he do so explicitly in his later work Being and Nothingness. What follows is a description based on what he says in the latter work.

15. This brief exegesis follows the interpretation of Sartre’s theory of emotions found in Joseph P. Fell, Emotion in the Thought of Sartre, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965).


17. A passage from a letter written by Faulkner to his friend, agent and editor, Ben Wasson, defending this technique supports this claim:

   I purposely used italics for both actual scenes and remembered scenes for the reason, not to indicate the different dates of happenings [as Wasson thought], but merely to permit the reader to anticipate a thought transference, letting the recollection postulate its own date. Surely you see this. [Quoted from Michael Millgate, The Achievement of Faulkner, (London: Constable & Company, 1966), p. 94.]

18. Indeed, memory plays a significant role throughout Faulkner’s work. For a thorough discussion of this topic, see Lee Anne Vennell, “Unquiet Ghosts: Memory and Determinism in Faulkner”, Southern Literary Journal, vol. XXXI, No. 2 (Spring 1999), p. 35-49.


20. John T. Matthews in chapter two of his book The Play of Faulkner’s Language elaborates Caddy’s maternal role regarding all of the Compson brothers. Although I do not agree that Caddy plays this role with regard to Quentin and Jason, it is evident that she plays this role for Benjy. In fact, this seems to be the standard interpretation of Benjy’s relationship to Caddy. John T. Matthews, The Play of Faulkner’s Language, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982). See particularly chapter 2 entitled “The Discovery of Loss in The Sound and the Fury” and especially pages 65-78.


22. One might think that Quentin’s suicide is necessarily reflective. That is, he must have planned it out. However, any such reflection about his suicide (or suicide in general) is curiously absent from his narrative on the day he commits the act. The absence of any such reflection provides good reason to believe that his suicide was an unreflective act of consciousness.
23. Also, it is important to notice that the notions of “heritage” or “bloodline” are often invoked by Jason as explanations for behavior. For example, Quentin’s heritage from her mother and her namesake explain her rebellious behavior, and his heritage or bloodline provides another cause for his present situation. See S&F 257, 267, 286, 293, 297, 298, 303, 307, 325 and 327 for passages supporting this claim.

24. The consciousnesses of Benjy and Quentin also contain an element of bad faith, for both posit a being, namely Caddy, as what she is not and not what she is. Benjy transforms a world absent of Caddy into one in which she is present, and Quentin transforms her into the embodiment of Compson honor. Caddy is neither of these things despite her brothers’ desires for her to be them. In these ways, Benjy and Quentin had conscious reactions to perceptions of reality by unreflectively choosing to transform the pragmatic world to a magical one, which brings them into the context of bad faith. Joseph Fell criticizes Sartre’s theory of emotion, maintaining that emotions are not always conscious choices (reflective or not), but are sometimes determined by conditioning (see, e.g. Fell, p. 217). If Sartre is correct, then Faulkner demonstrated a profound misunderstanding of human consciousness, because he characterizes Benjy’s and Quentin’s behavior as determined when it is not. Under Sartre’s account, Benjy and Quentin would be responsible for their behavior just as Jason is responsible for his behavior. If Fell is correct, then Faulkner’s portrayal of Benjy shows a deep understanding of human behavior. I will not adjudicate these opposing positions here, because it would lead us too far astray. I have one of the blind reviewers for this journal to thank for these helpful insights.

25. Other commentators such as Douglas Messerli and John Matthews (see their works cited above) have maintained that Jason Compson has a future, because he has moved on to the modern world of commerce where time is money. However, Jason’s phenomenology of time indicates otherwise. He does not arrive at the telegraph office on time to receive prompt stock updates. Also, he is late to work and late returning from lunch, because he is busy running after Quentin and generally dealing with the Compson legacy, which, in his eyes, binds him. In this way, the clock is an external force that Jason cannot beat, and therefore he loses money hand-over-fist. Certainly, time is money in the commercial world, but on April 6, 1928 Jason is still learning this harsh lesson, because he does not project a possible future self. As such, Jason is still in the past on this date. He is bound to his legacy, which he believes causes him to bear these misfortunes. He does not receive his emancipation from these bonds until his mother’s death in 1933, at which time he is able to live as he chooses (S&F 422). Therefore, on the date of his monologue, Jason’s phenomenology is without a future. For some examples of Jason’s losing battle with the clock, see S&F p. 270 & 281-283.

26. A third interesting point, which digresses from the main topics of this section, is the way in which the clock motif occurs in the following two passages:

[A] cabinet clock ticked, then with a preliminary sound as if it had cleared its throat, struck five times. “Eight oclock,” Dilsey said. (S&F 341-342)

Dilsey went out. She closed the door and returned to the kitchen. The stove was almost cold. While she stood there the clock above the cupboard struck ten times. “One oclock,” she said aloud. (S&F 375)

The entire household is running three hours slow; the house as a symbol of the Compson family is in the past, yet Dilsey can tell the correct time without a moment’s calculation. As mentioned above, Dilsey is often interpreted as provid-
ing an eternal, religious perspective. Therefore, her character is interpreted as external to Compson time, and as such she “seed de beginning en now [she] sees de endin” (S&F 371). That is, she can see the Compson past and future without hindrance from the perspective of eternity. The Easter service that Dilsey attends and preacher Shegog’s sermon provide the basis for this interpretation. For a more thorough discussion, see Arthur Geffen, “Profane Time, Sacred Time and Confederate Time in The Sound and the Fury” in Critical Essays on Faulkner: The Compson Family, ed. Arthur F. Kinney, (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982), p. 231-251.

27. See the section “Negation” at BN 36-44 for a more thorough account of this phenomenon.

28. Jason gives chase both in his narrative and in this final section. See S&F. 296-303 where Jason chases Quentin and the man wearing the red tie in his car. Also see S&F 376-392 where Jason tries to hunt her down at the show, which had traveled to the next town.

29. One might think that Jason is present to the absence of the future given his normal living human consciousness. However, this is not the case, because he does not expect the future. Recall that for Sartre an absence is brought into the world by a consciousness’ expectation of isolating an object from a given ground, which is not accomplished. Jason has no such expectation, and therefore does not bring the future’s absence into his world. This is not to say that Jason does not have a future but that the future is not a part of his phenomenology of time because of his bad faith.

30. I would like to thank Prof. William L. McBride and the blind reviewers for this journal for their helpful comments and criticisms on earlier drafts of this paper.

Works Cited in the Text


In the Appendix, Faulkner describes the history of the Compson family and their fates after the novel. After Caroline dies, Jason sends Benjy to an asylum and sells the Compson house. Years later a librarian sees a picture of Caddy in a magazine, and she brings it to Dilsey, but Dilsey has no desire to save Caddy, as she is better off away from Jefferson. Faulkner’s fourth novel, The Sound and the Fury is notable for its nonlinear plot structure and its unconventional narrative style. It also distorts his sense of time, such that he cannot distinguish between the past and the present. Benjy experiences all time as the present and thus narrates all events, including and especially memories of past events, as though they occur in the present. Unbeknownst to him, the events he narrates as the present actually span a 30-year period, from 1898 to 1928. Get exclusive access to content from our 1768 First Edition with your subscription. The third section of The Sound and the Fury returns to Yoknapatawpha County in the year 1928. This section is set one day before the first, on April 6, 1928.