

As i lay dying: how  
does time affect how  
human experience is  
portrayed?



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Change from past to present:

“” His mind is set on taking her to Jefferson,”” Quick said.

“” Then he better get at it soon as he can,”” Armstid said.

Anse meets us at the door. He has shaved, but not good. There is a long cut on his jaw, and he is wearing his Sunday pants and a white shirt with the neckband buttoned. It is drawn smooth over his hump, making it look bigger than ever, like a white shirt will, and his face is different too. He looks folks in the eye now, dignified, his face tragic and composed, shaking us by the hand as we walk up onto the porch and scrape our shoes, a little stiff in our Sunday clothes, our Sunday clothes rustling, not looking full at him as he meets us.

“” The Lord giveth,”” we say. (Faulkner 86)

After brief interaction with Peabody, Armstid and Co., Tull turns his attention to Anse and talks in present tense. By beginning with the past and switching to present, Faulkner indicates the melding of the past and present together to show how the human experience is not straightforward.

This also shows a change in the conscious mind. Sections narrated in past tense seem to show a disengagement to the events in the passage while parts in present tense show immediate engagement and interest.

In the beginning, Tull is simply listening and not really participating.

However, when Anse enters the scene, Tull’s attention is captivated and seems to be physically experiencing it which is indicated by both the present

tense and the amount of detail he describes Anse, He looks folks in the eye now, dignified, his face tragic and composed.

Here, Faulkner is breaking through traditional storytelling of linear time by presenting a story that consistently flashes back to the past. This method also provides a reader of an idea of the characters' mentality as they experience life. Those reflected in the past show little interest by the narrator. Meanwhile, those in present tense show attentiveness to the situation.

Moreover, Tull is able to describe his encounter with Anse with sight, sound and feeling, indicating his awareness of the events. Imagery like scrape, shak[e] and rustle are audible and physical descriptions.

Through this, Faulkner shows that the human experience and memory does not follow strict past, present and future terms. Unimportant events in the mind remain in the background in the past and significant events are portrayed in the present. The talk among the men continues, but it is in the background and past tense.

He shifts time in accordance to the characters' intensity.

Contents

The signboard comes in sight. It is looking out at the road now, because it can wait. New Hope. 3 mi. It will say. New Hope. 3 mi. New Hope. 3 mi. Now it begins to say it. New Hope three miles. New Hope three miles.

That's what they mean by the womb of time: the agony and the despair of

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spreading bones, the hard girdle in which lie the outraged entrails of events  
(Faulkner 120-121)

Dewey Dell feels trapped in time, her monologues are mostly in harsh, present tense, indicating her consciousness frozen in the present. Unlike other characters in the book whose mind freely moves from past to present with each scenario, she is unable to do so which shows that her psyche is one of constant agony as the only woman in the family and one that is reminded by the baby in her belly.

She uses words like hard girdle and womb of time to show how she feels caged by her current situation and hopes to get it over with quickly. Her noting of New Hope three miles show her desperation to get to Jefferson, almost like she's watching the seconds tick by on a clock, wishing for it to go faster but experiencing what seems like standstill in the wagon.

Since sleep is is-not and rain and wind are was, it is not. Yet the wagon is, because when the wagon is was, Addie Bundren will not be. And Jewel is, so Addie Bundren must be. And then I must be, or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room. And so if I am not emptied yet, I am is. (Faulkner 80-81)

When Darl talks about empty[ing] [him]self, he is emptying himself into time and releasing his existence within time. However, since he has not done this, he continues to be an is, his physical and mental mind both in the present.

Darl tries to claim the nature of existence within time and finds himself becoming lost in the flux of time. He plays with is and was, which are

signifiers of the passage of time, weighing each one and trying to understand their meaning. However, because of Darl's inability to understand the concept of time and his existence within it, he is incapable of following time. By the end of the story, Darl is left without any identity in time, switching from past to present constantly and even to third person.

They pulled two seats together so Darl could sit by the window to laugh.

One of them sat beside him, the other sat on the seat facing him, riding backward. One of them had to ride backward because the state's money has a face to each backside and a backside to each face, and they are riding on the state's money which is incest.

The wagon stands on the square, hitched, the mules motionless, the reins wrapped

about the seat-spring, the back of the wagon toward the courthouse. It looks no

different from a hundred other wagons there; Jewel standing beside it and

looking up the street like any other man in town that day, yet there is

something different, distinctive.

During that passage, he mainly focuses on the past except when his mind pictures his family in Jefferson. This signifies his emotional mind wanting to be there but his physical state and mental mind are trapped in a cage in Jackson.

So in a sense, his loss of time and existence has separated his emotional mind from the rest of his mind, leaving him with no true nature of existence. To him, his past and present self are all melded into one being which is left without a cohesive identity and place in time.

At this time, Darl has accepted his fate of becoming a was and emptied himself of being an is. Thus, his emotional mind is left without a home because Darl has become a was while his physical body is still in the present and is left without the spiritual existence of Darl in it.

What does time say about the emotional self?

It was not her. I was there, looking. I saw. I thought it was her, but it was not. It was not my mother. She went away when the other one laid down in her bed and drew the quilt up. She went away. "" Did she go as far as town?"" "" She went further than town."" "" Did all those rabbits and possums go further than town?""... And so if Cash nails the box up, she is not a rabbit. And so if she is not a rabbit I couldn't breathe in the crib and Cash is going to nail it up. And so if she lets him it is not her. I know. I was there. I saw when it did not be her. I saw. They think it is and Cash is going to nail it up.

It was not her because it was laying right yonder in the dirt. And now it's all chopped up. I chopped it up. It's laying in the kitchen in the bleeding pan, waiting to be cooked and et. Then it wasn't and she was, and now it is and she wasn't. And tomorrow it will be cooked and et and she will be him and pa and Cash and Dewey Dell and there wont be anything in the box and so she can breathe. It was laying right yonder on the ground. I can get Vernon. He

was there and he seen it, and with both of us it will be and then it will not be.  
(Faulkner 66-67)

Vardaman can only comprehend things in the present because he cannot understand the passage of time. He reasons with himself how Addie came to be dead without comprehending her death. He explains to himself that Addie's passing is not a passing at all but has merely left the scene, continues to live in the coffin, or has becomes the fish he caught. Vardaman's belief of Addie still living within the coffin is shown when he tries to comprehend his mother in the coffin, explaining to himself that a rabbit couldn't breathe in the crib. This eventually convinces him to drill holes into the coffin to allow her to breathe, signifying that Vardaman still believes his mother is living and does not understand that time has taken her away from him. This idea is also revealed when Vardaman excitedly asks Darl if he caught his mother, telling him You never got her. You knew she was a fish but you let her get away (Faulkner 151). To him, his mother is alive (in one way or another).

Tull is in his lot. He looks at us, lifts his hand. We go on, the wagon creaking, the mud whispering on the wheels. Vernon still stands there. He watches Jewel as he passes, the horse moving with a light, high-kneed driving gait, three hundred yards back. We go on, with a motion so soporific, so dreamlike as to be uninferant of progress, as though time and not space were decreasing between us and it. (Faulkner 107-108)

Time is drifting away from the Bundrens, almost as if they are losing sight of the past present and future, very similar to how the book uses past, present

and future tense freely to describe occurrences. It is almost as if they are stuck in time with soporific and dreamlike motion which seem to move uninferant of progress. Time, and its meaning within the book is decreasing.

The river itself is not a hundred yards across, and pa and Vernon and Vardaman and Dewey Dell are the only things in sight not of that single monotony of desolation leaning with, that terrific quality a little from right to left, as though we had reached the place where the motion of the wasted world accelerates just before the final precipice. Yet they appear dwarfed. It is as though the space between us were time: an irrevocable quality. It is as though time, no longer running straight before us in a diminishing line, now runs parallel between us like a looping string, tie distance being the doubling accretion of the thread and not the interval between. (146)

After watching the river swirl with impermanence and change, Darl creates a connection between the physical form he just witnessed and space and time. Like the river, it is forever changing

This passage speaks to the idea that time is not linear but varies by human experience. Time no longer run[s] straight but runs parallel with each character. Instead, it loops and turns much like the river they are crossing. Time ebbs and flows with each character.

Darl also describes distance as a double accretion of the thread. While accretion can mean a growth, it can also mean the accumulation of disparate fragments to make one whole, much like how the story is narrated not only with each person's perspective but also time frame. Time flows differently for



each character, some moving faster than others. But each time frame harmonize to tell a story with a beginning and an end.

The women sing again. In the thick air it's like their voices come out of the air, flowing together and on in the sad, comforting tunes. When they cease it's like they hadn't gone away. It's like they had just disappeared into the air and when we moved we would loose them again out of the air around us, sad and comforting. Then they finish and we put on our hats, our movements stiff, like we hadn't never wore hats before. On the way home Cora is still singing. (Faulkner 91-92)

He creates his own time space, very fast' indicates the significance of events and his consciousness.

Jumps abruptly from scene to scenet' represents Tull's psychological time span, each sentence representing a unit of time. This portrays Tulls consciousness during the funeral.

He starts this passage with singing and ends with Cora still singing so it seems like this time frame belongs to that of the funeral.

Time frame changes with each character and each scene that the character deems important or unimportant (or creates a lasting impact on his/her mind)

What does time say about the human consciousness and thinking?

If you could just ravel out into time. That would be nice. It would be nice if you could just ravel out into time.(Faulkner 208)

Darl's desire to unfold time speaks to the book's sudden changes in past and present tense. Indeed, Faulkner does not provide the reader with a stable present tense and changes tenses within each characters' section.

Darl's awareness of the profundity of time and the end of it: death. He is also overwhelmed by triviality of human life against time because his is will eventually become was in time. Thus, by yearning to Ravel out into time he wants time to become fully unfurled to without any existence at all.

Darl's loss in time results in his mind becoming locked out of his physical self. His mind has convinced itself that existence is nonexistent, he has become a was while his current physical psyche lives on as his is, without logical or comprehensive thought that was seen throughout much of the book.

How does the passage of time relate to human existence?

Time is not always felt in sequence, it varies boundlessly and constantly intertwines itself with aspects of human experience.

By dissolving the concept of time and lacking a stable present, Faulkner is able to shape character consciousness by warping time, stretching or shrinking durations with the intensity and engagement within characters' inner lives.

His usage of the past tense and present tense also shows the variability in human awareness and perception of events.

Fragments of time, no matter how discordant and anachronist, can come together to form a story, just as it did in *As I Lay Dying*.