Journal of American Studies of Turkey
3 (1996): 95-105.

The Thematic and Structural Function of Time in William Faulkner's "The Bear"

Erinç Özdemir

At the core of "The Bear," as in any other work by William Faulkner, is the sense that time is much less an objective fact of human existence than what the individual, as an organic part of human collectivity, makes of it. In the Faulknerian world, time is not there simply as an entity external to the human being, nor as a solely subjective quantity, but as a living continuum at once inside and outside the human mind and psyche, in relation to which the human being continually shapes and defines all experience by continually reshaping and redefining it.

As F.J. Hoffman points out, "there are two important, typical uses of time" in Faulkner's work:

> the slow, gradual, painstaking reconstruction of the past by narrators who exist in the present or existed in the recent past (as in Absalom); and the pattern of movement from past to present to past, or within points in the past (The Sound and the Fury is a good example). In either case, one almost never sees the present as a pure or separate time; it is infused with the past, it has meaning only in terms of it, and its complex nature results from the fusion of the two. (338-339)

What the reader encounters in "The Bear" is a continual narrative movement "within points in the past." The actual present exists in the story as no more than a shadow, represented by Isaac McCaslin (Ike)'s present age, which the narrator indicates as "almost eighty" (222). Within this framework, Ike's twenty-first year, or rather birthday, functions as the "relative present" in connection to which crucial past events in Ike's life are recounted, reconstructed and evaluated.

Besides this typically Faulknerian use of time, there is another dimension of time in the story which Hoffman labels the "Edenic past," defining it as "pure statis or a timeless vision or an unhistorical condition existing before and transcending human complication." According to him, this Edenic past finds symbolic expression in "The Bear" through the depiction of the wilderness as an "ideal state of nature which precedes" time and civilization (339).

Time emerges in "The Bear" as a major theme in itself, and, moreover, as the chief organizing and unifying structural element that weaves together the whole narrative, as well as the themes that appear in it. As is his characteristic practice, Faulkner breaks in this work "the limiting convention of progressive, linear time and juxtaposes past and present in an attempt to find a new meaning, a new truth" (Utley 116). Yet what makes this story unique among his works is the special emphasis laid on time both as theme, or conceptual reality, and as narrative element, or structural configuration. In "The Bear," time as thematic concern and time as structural element, that is, the temporal ordering of events (on one level the two sides of the same coin) are inseparable aspects of an organic whole which is an expression of a special concept of time that reveals the essential subjectivity of human experience. This organic quality, which is typically Faulknerian, is foregrounded in "The Bear" to a greater degree than in any other of his works.

In addition to organizing the narrative and weaving together the various themes, time, as chronological device, functions in "The Bear" as a tool that supports and enhances the deeper meanings of the rhetoric of destiny that are presented largely through Ike's point of view. This richness and complexity of the temporal dimension endows in turn the other themes with a depth and comprehensiveness of vision that otherwise would not have been possible. Faulkner could have written a story about the growth into maturity of a young boy in the South in the seventies and eighties of the last century; about primitive hunting lore; about civilization versus nature, about the alienation of modern man from the land, about the wrongs of slavery, and so on. Or he could have written a story containing all these themes at once, in an ordinary chronological order progressing in a linear fashion, either forwards or backwards in time. Yet he could not possibly have created within the framework of such a narrative the particular effect of "The Bear," which is thoroughly dependent on the special use of narrative time, which moves in overlapping semi-circles, as I explain below. What Faulkner ultimately achieves by such a scheme is a comment on time itself, on its meaning and value in human life.

Therefore, it can be said that the temporal configuration of narrative in relation to thematic meaning in "The Bear" is, in a sense, such as form is in relation to content. In other words, just as form and content are inseparable aspects of any story, time in "The Bear" is at the same time the main structural device that moulds the narrative and the thematic concern that gives meaning to the human experience that is the subject matter of the story. As the special arrangement of time drives the narrative on its non-linear course, the narrative gives meaning to time as psychological reality.

In a parallel manner, just as time shapes human consciousness and experience, human consciousness and experience themselves impress their stamp on time in "The Bear." Memory, individual and collective, emerges in the story as the agent that gives concrete reality and existential meaning to time. Without memory, there would be no time either. And the way memory functions is anything but a linear

process. Ike's memory (which can be considered to be the "main character" of the story) moves back and forth in time, drawing zigzags and circles that overlap. At times, Ike's memory concentrates in itself and within a single moment, the whole of the time that is recorded in the collective memory of humankind, as well as a big slice of the future, much as the midpoint of a centripetal force.

Ike's story is essentially an account of how the character and worldview of a person are formed through a series of experiences in his/her early youth. The manner by which the narrative is arranged in terms of chronology, the particular division of the story into parts, as well as the length of these parts suggest that, to a considerable degree, what is central in "The Bear" is the process of Ike's growing into maturity, rather than the end-result of that process. Or more correctly, the result gains importance only through the process as it occurs *in* and *through* time. As R. W. B. Lewis points out, this is evidenced by the narrator's striking insistence on Ike's age, and the even stronger emphasis laid on the events of Ike's sixteenth year, returned to again and again throughout the narrative ("The Hero in the New World: William Faulkner's 'The Bear.'" 311).

It is a fact that part IV, which deals with the central act of Ike's life *after* he has attained maturity as a result of the events of parts I, II and III, is almost equal in length to parts I, II and III combined; it carries the thematic weight of the whole story. Yet what makes part IV possible, and gives sense to the act of repudiation that is its subject matter, is the story that is told in the first three parts, namely the experiences Ike had in his early youth (Utley 309-316). Moreover, part IV is not simply about Ike's repudiation of his heritage, but about the reasons behind this act. Thus, although the repudiation occurs when Ike is twenty-one, the explanation of this act takes the narrative back to Ike's sixteenth year, the most crucial period of his growth, and to the events of that year, which make Ike the man he will be for the rest of his life.

Part I begins with Ike at sixteen and, immediately after referring to his age, returns to the previous six years, during which Ike has developed into his present state. It is worth noting here that each section, including this first one, begins without any paragraph indentation, which suggests that the narrative does not start in the conventional sense, but just continues, flows on. This gives the impression of catching up with time at a particular point while it flows by--like mounting a horse in motion: "There was a man and a dog too this time . . . [first paragraph]. He was sixteen. For six years now he had been a man's hunter . . . [second paragraph]." The third paragraph is a flashback to the time when Ike had just turned ten. The fourth paragraph goes even further back in time. The fifth paragraph returns to Ike's tenth year and the rest of part I deals with the incidents during that period. Structurally, then, the tenth year of Ike's life dominates the first section.

On the first page of part I, one of the two major themes of the story, namely the human being's (specifically and particularly Southern White American man's)

relation to the land as part and symbol of the whole of nature is introduced, the other main theme being the relation of Southern man to his fellow-men, specifically to the Black. The theme of the human being's relationship with nature is conjoined with the theme of immortality that pervades the whole text. The background against which the yearly hunting-rite and the whole drama concerning the pursuit of Old Ben are enacted emerges as the immortality enveloping the wilderness. Old Ben is presented as the symbol of immortality, of which the wilderness in turn is the visible manifestation. The wilderness is then an essentially timeless, eternal space, whereas the movement of time is only seasonal, circular.

Yet, the wilderness is under the threat of destruction by the human being. In symbolic terms, the struggle at this juncture is between immortality and mortality; between eternal time (or eternal life) and death. The drama is conveyed as if through Ike's consciousness, as is the rest of the story; for, the whole narrative is after all about the formation of Ike's consciousness and conscience, of his growing into maturity:

> It was as if the boy had already divined what his senses and intellect had not encompassed yet: that doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with ploughs and axes who feared it because it was wilderness . . . where the old bear had earned a name . . . epitome and apotheosis of the old wild life . . . and absolved of mortality. (147)

The main event of part I is Ike's initiation into the wilderness and into the virtues of a huntsman: "It seemed to him that at the age of ten he was witnessing his own birth" (148). Ike enters the magic circle and meets Old Ben without seeing him:

> He was only ten. It seemed to him that he could see them, the two of them, shadowy in the limbo from which time emerged and became time: the old bear absolved of mortality and himself who shared a little of it. (155)

Thus, Ike's symbolic birth into a whole new world, at the convergence of time and the timeless, establishes the thematic dimension of time at this point in the story. Ike becoming aware of sharing the immortality of the bear is the human being experiencing him/herself as part of the vast universe which is the manifestation of limitless time.

The following summer Ike enters the magic circle fully, by accomplishing, under the tutelage of Sam Fathers, the ritual act of relinquishing his gun and divesting himself of the artefacts of civilization, such as the compass and the watch, before entering the heart of the wilderness (Lydenberg 283-284). Only then does he gain admission to the sight of the bear, which appears to him as "dimensionless," the incarnation of timeless space and limitless time.

Part II begins with Ike at the age of thirteen and moves through the period until he becomes sixteen, the crucial year of the hunting episodes and the turning point of his education in the wilderness. His second encounter with the bear takes place when he is fourteen. Sam tells Ike that he could not have missed the bear this time

with a gun in his hand, adding that "Somebody is going to [kill him], some day" (161). Significantly, Ike does not, cannot shoot Old Ben, to him the epitome of nature and immortality. However, some time later, Major de Spain discovers that his colt is missing and presumes it dead. He decides that it was Old Ben who did it. Old Ben's fate is sealed; he has to be killed now because he has destroyed sacred "property" (Utley 256). Sam knows that he too must die then because his own identity and destiny are intertwined with that of Old Ben. For they both belong to a race of creatures destroyed by the White:

Later, a man, the boy realized . . . It had been foreknowledge in Sam's face that morning. He was old. He had no children, no people, none of his blood anywhere above earth that he would ever meet again. And even if he were to, he could not have touched it, spoken to it, because for seventy years now he had had to be a negro. It was almost over now and he was glad. (163)

As the son of a Chickasaw chief, Sam belongs to a free and noble race. What is more, although he is partly Black, in the wilderness he shares Old Ben's nobility and superiority . However, if Old Ben is to be vanquished by the human being and by time, so must also Sam Fathers. The White has already defeated his people, Indian and Black; it remains for him to synchronize his bodily death with that of Old Ben.

For the next two years, the team prepare during the hunting season for the last duel with Old Ben by training Lion, a huge wild dog which is to bring Old Ben to bay. The reader is told that Ike

should have hated and feared Lion. Yet he did not. It seemed to him that there was a fatality in it. It seemed to him that something, he didn't know what, was beginning; had already begun. It was the beginning of the end of something. (172)

That "something" will turn out to be the new world with its new values. What is foreshadowed in this instance is a new era in which the honor code of the wilderness as well as of the whole South will inevitably die out. Ike will witness it happen, or rather, will become aware that it has already started happening, while at the same time trying to preserve the wisdom and morality he learned in his personal life from Sam Fathers.

It should be noted that Part II, like Part I, starts with a reference to the final hunting episode in which Old Ben is killed. The opening sentence, "So he should have hated and feared Lion" (159), refers to the period of time when Ike is sixteen, a short while before the death of the bear. Immediately after this, the narrative goes back to the time when Ike was thirteen. The reader finds out that he is at this age at the end of part II, the last paragraph of which, partly quoted above, begins with exactly the same sentence. Thus, the narrative forms a circle in time, taking the reader to the point at the beginning of the section. Part I, also, as mentioned above, begins with Ike at sixteen and with a reference to the fatal hunting episode, and

then immediately goes back to events that took place during the preceding years: "There was a man and a dog too this time . . . He was sixteen" (145). The reversed temporal order at this point functions so as to emphasize and foreground the event of the killing of the bear which takes place in the third section. Faulkner's purpose, in foregrounding this incident thus, seems to be to convey its overwhelming significance in Ike's mental and emotional life. This paves the way for a better understanding of part IV, which deals with the consequences of the completion of Ike's initiation, brought about by this climactic event.

Part III thus forms, in a sense, the pivot of the narrative in terms of structure and theme. For it contains *the* event of the story, around which the whole narrative evolves and revolves. The undisputed hero of this section is Lion, for he is essential in killing Old Ben. As Lydenberg points out, it is significantly reserved for Lion the animal, and Boon, the animal-like man, to accomplish the deed jointly (287). As foreshadowed in part II, Sam dies shortly after the bear. In fact, he falls to the ground as if to die even before the bear is downed by Lion and Boon.

The sentence beginning Part IV is without the initial capital letter, giving the impression of starting in the middle: "then he was twenty-one" (194). The sentence lasts for five and a half pages, and, in the words of F. L. Utley, "contains much of what Faulkner spent a lifetime writing about" (4). Within the sentence is presented part of the dialogue between Ike and his cousin McCaslin, in which they discuss Ike's decision to relinquish the land he has inherited on his coming-of-age. Indeed, the main issue of the whole section is land: what the human being has done to it and on it to his fellow-men and women throughout ages. Just before the dialogue begins, the narrative voice, which represents Ike's memory and consciousness, takes the reader back to the time his grandfather bought the land; from that moment to time immemorial, and back again to the history of the land under the ownership of Carothers McCaslin. Once again, the theme of time/history runs parallel to the theme of land:

> the land which old Carothers McCaslin his grandfather had bought with white man's money from the wild men whose grandfathers without guns hunted it, and tamed and ordered or believed he had tamed and ordered it for the reason the human beings he held in bondage and in the power of life and death had removed the forest from it . . . that wilderness which was bigger and older than any recorded deed . . . (194)

Ike argues that the land was never his father's and uncle's to bequeath him in the first place, because it was never his grandfather's to bequeath them, because "it was never Ikkemotubbe's fathers' fathers' to bequeath Ikkemotubbe to sell" to his grandfather. As Ike puts it, "Because He told in the Book how He. . . made the earth. . . and then He created man to be His overseer on the earth," and not to buy it and hold it in his possession "for himself and his descendants" (196).

Ike at twenty-one is, then, a mature man who considers ownership of land and of slaves as part and parcel of the whole history of humankind from the moment God

created the human being. His interpretation of Biblical history involves an account of how sin against the land and its creatures was first committed, and why God let the human being sin the way s/he did for thousands of years since his/her expulsion from Eden. According to Ike's cosmology, God watched the human being sin against the land He gave him/her, until the day He decided to reveal to him/her a new world where s/he could start with a blank page and fill it with his/her toil "in humility and pity and sufferance and pride of one to another"(197). Yet Ikkemotubbe and Ike's "Grandfather did own the land," thus perpetuating the perennial curse.

The long sentence which contains part of the dialogue between Ike and McCaslin ends at the point where Ike's memory goes back to the time when he discovered the meaning of the ledgers that his father and uncle had kept. The connection between part III and part IV is established by the fact that this discovery takes place when Ike is sixteen, soon after the last hunt when Old Ben and Sam Fathers died. The deeper significance of this connection--i.e., the fact that Ike's discovery of the *meaning* of the ledgers happened *after* Old Ben's and Sam Fathers's deaths--is that this discovery is made possible by the previous event, which completed Ike's initiation into the virtues represented by Old Ben and Sam Fathers, and that the act of repudiation that is the subject of part IV is in turn made possible by the discovery in the comissary. Therefore, the act of repudiation is contained in, and predetermined by Old Ben's and Sam Fathers's deaths, which meant Ike's birth as the Ike who will, at twenty-one, renounce the legacy of the tainted land.

The most crucial date entered in the ledgers is 1833, when Eunice, the slave woman bought by Carothers McCaslin in 1807, drowned herself. Working his way through the maze of the apparently innocent record, Ike discovers that Eunice killed herself when her daughter Tomasina died at child-birth. The child was begot by Carothers McCaslin, Eunice's lover and Tomasina's own father. Ike learns further that his grandfather added, to his sins of incest, adultery and miscegenation, the guilt of not acknowledging his own son/ grandson. Carothers McCaslin unburdened his conscience by bequeathing his son/grandson a legacy of one thousand dollars to be paid him at his coming-of-age, which money Carothers McCaslin did not even actually leave. Ike thinks, "So I reckon that was cheaper than saying My son to a nigger" (205). The realization of the whole tragedy leads Ike, in a way, to assume the whole burden of his forefathers' guilt and of the sin of slavery, which, according to him, is the curse of the South.

The manner by which Ike takes upon himself the responsibility of the familial and collective guilt is by the gesture of repudiation, which, ironically, amounts to evading the burden of guilt: "and that was all: 1874 the boy; 1888 the man, repudiated denied and free; 1895 and husband but no father . . . and found long since that no man is ever free and probably could not bear it if he were" (215). Ike's marriage is only mentioned in passing and the narrative returns to the scene of Ike and McCaslin conversing as before (199). The sentence beginning with "More men

than Father and Uncle Buddy" and left unfinished on page 199, is taken up again on page 215 as "More men than that one Buck and Buddy . . ." indicating the return to the scene. Then Ike engages in a long disquisition on the human condition through his own version of the Civil War. The conversation is interrupted by the narrative voice, and at one point the narrator refers to Ike as a man at eighty in connection with the war: "McCaslin had actually seen it, and the boy even at almost eighty would never be able to distinguish clearly between what he had seen and what had been told him" (222). This is one of several instances in the story when Ike is referred to as "almost eighty" at present, when the story is told.

The ledgers thus engage Ike and via him the reader in a journey through time that takes place within Ike's memory and imagination. The chronicle contained in the ledgers has for him not only historical and moral significance, but also metaphysical meaning, by virtue of the insight he has acquired through Sam Fathers, into the nature of the continuum called time. Because Ike sees himself as Sam Fathers's inheritor and continuation, and Sam Fathers as the inheritor of the older race of the bear, he conceives time as the existential thread binding together all races and species as the children of the same land:

> that chronicle which was a whole land in miniature, which multiplied and compounded was the entire South . . . Sam Fathers . . . an old man, son of a negro slave and an Indian king, inheritor on the one hand of the long chronicle of a people who had learned humility through suffering and learned pride through the endurance which survived the suffering, and on the other side the chronicle of a people even longer in the land than the first, yet who now existed there only in the solitary brotherhood of an old and childless Negro's alien blood and the wild and invincible spirit of an old bear . . . (225).

Existence, for Ike, is something more than mere physical being. Neither is human existence contained within the limits of the human body and its transitory life. The human being is the natural inheritor of all the past that belongs to the land that gave birth to him/her and nurtured him/her. This is because Ike conceives the human being as an organic part of nature and its spirit. Consequently, the history of the human being is inevitably bound up with the history of the land as that part of nature in which his/her existence is rooted.

Ike sees the values, such as honor, humility and pride, which make up his theology--handed down to him by Sam Fathers--as part of the all-encompassing spirit of the metaphysical dyad "space-time," in a manner bringing to mind a pantheistic conception of the universe. The dyad constitutes the dimension which takes in the existence and permanence of all the creatures of nature from Adam to Sam Fathers to Ike, and from the primeval ancestor of the bear to Old Ben. Time may be said to be what blows spirit (="breath," "life," "soul") into space. Without time, there would be no change, and without change, there would be no life. Yet in Ike's cosmology, change, or the flow of time, ultimately brings permanence because time is the thread that connects all existence in a single flux. This is why, and how, Sam

Fathers's Indian forefathers exist "in . . . the wild and invincible spirit of an old bear."

The will and ability to endure, as well as to achieve permanence in time, emerge in Ike's cosmic belief as a prime virtue, elevating those who suffer *and* survive above common humanity, tainted with evil and depravity. The Black's experience, for Ike, is the epitome of the sort of endurance that survives intense suffering, enabling the sufferer to project himself further into the future than those lacking in this quality: "they will endure. They will outlast us . . . They are better than we are. Stronger than we are" (224). The capacity to endure, which is another name for the strength of spirit that only can connect a human being firmly to his/her roots in the land that gives him/her nourishment, is presented in Faulkner's fictional world as a prime value. It gives solidity to other Faulknerian values such as love, honor, justice, compassion, pride, courage and hope. For without endurance, these other values would not have gained permanence.

History has shown that the Whites as slave-holders did not have the ability to endure. Consequently, the values enumerated above were bound to disappear as well, as part of a regional (i.e., Southern) moral code; however they may live on as part of a universal moral understanding. Indeed, perhaps these values were nothing but a chimera that served to uphold the White's sense of superiority; for as Ike explains, "that whole edifice [was] . . . founded upon injustice . . . and carried on with at times downright savagery not only to the human beings but the valuable animals too" (227). Chronologically, Ike at the age of twenty-one stands somewhere between the old world and the new one with its new values of materialism and opportunism. So does his cousin, "who had been born too late into the old time and too soon for the new, the two of them juxtaposed and alien now to each other against their ravaged patrimony" (227).

Yet McCaslin insists that Ike continue what is left of the ravaged patrimony, arguing that, as the sole male descendant of the paternal line of the family, he is not free to choose not to do so. Ike counter-argues that he is free because Sam Fathers set him free. McCaslin attacks Ike by cynically referring to Ike's Calvinistic teleology, according to which Ike is the chosen one of God, predestined to set the wrong of slavery and its consequences right:

'Chosen, I suppose . . . out of all your time by Him . . . And it took Him a bear and an old man and four years just for you. And it took you fourteen years to reach that point and about that many, maybe more, for Old Ben, and more than seventy for Sam Fathers. And you are just one. How long then? How Long?' and he
'It will be long . . . But it will be all right because they will endure--' (228)

In the Calvinistic scheme of the universe, time may be said to be measured in terms of God's arbitrary moves. Thus, God, according to Ike, simply chose to allot him four years to become the humble and proud hunter He predestined him to become, then fourteen more to become the mature believer who would repudiate ownership

of the accursed land, which was in the first place predestined by the same God to become accursed several centuries ago for Ike to do his share to lift the curse from it.

The dual--structural and thematic--function of time as it appears in the first three parts of the story, which, as already noted, concentrate on events that occur between the tenth and sixteenth years of Ike's life, becomes most apparent in this part of the dialogue, referred to above, between Ike and McCaslin. Here is a summary of the effect on Ike of the totality of his experiences in the wilderness and of the meaning he derives from them at twenty-one (in part IV), whereas in fact the sole action is Ike's repudiation.

At the core of part IV, as well as of the whole of the story, is the sense that memory is *the* medium that connects the individual to his own personal past as well as to his/her community's past and the collective history of humankind. And only through a conscious moral effort can the individual arrive at a synthesis of the two, which are in fact seen by Faulkner as inevitably and irrevocably bound together. Seen in this light, it is not totally illusory to believe, as Ike does, that the destiny of the whole of humankind can be contained within the conscience, and even within a single deed, of a single individual.

One implication of such a view as this is expressed by the Bergsonian idea that the whole consciousness of a person, past, present and even future, can be contained within a single moment in time. This is the way Ike's state of mind is depicted at the instance of repudiation, which takes literally only one moment--a mere second long; sufficiently short for him to say to himself, or to McCaslin, "I repudiate." Yet, within the consciousness that produced this momentary act is contained an infinitely concentrated memory, extending not only back in history to the moment before God created the earth, but also forward into the future when the Black people will be enduring for an indefinite time.

The correlate of this "collective" memory, or consciousness, is of course Ike's personal past. His decision to repudiate his heritage is predetermined by the wisdom he acquired in the forest, which can be summed up as the semi-articulated, semi-intuited moral vision of a purer, primitive culture, handed down to him by Sam Fathers. Therefore, the whole of Ike's past, from the moment he entered the woods at the age of ten to the moment he rejects the inheritance of the land at the age of twenty-one, is contained within the single moment of repudiation. This single moment determines and contains in turn the content and form, as well as the quality, of Ike's whole future life--at least until the age of eighty. The reader is told that repudiating ownership of the land leads Ike to decide to become a carpenter in "emulation of the Nazarene," and, for the rest of his life, to refuse to own anything but

carpenter's tools and the shotgun McCaslin had given him . . . and old General Compson's compass . . . and the iron cot and mattress and the blankets which he would take each fall into the woods for more than sixty years and the bright tin coffee-pot. (229)

In the fifth and final section of the story, Ike, at the age of eighteen, returns to the woods "one more time" after Old Ben and Sam Fathers's deaths, and "before the lumber company moved in and began" to destroy the wilderness (240). That the story should have at the end the same setting it had in the beginning, as well as end at a point in time before the event of the section just before it, creates an effect of semi-circularity that pervades the whole narrative. The fact that, just as in part I, the narrative voice depicts the wilderness, as changeless and immortal, despite what human will and machinery do to it, adds also to this effect: it "did not change, and, timeless, would not, anymore than would the green of summer and the fire and rain of fall" (247). In the middle of this sentence, Ike returns in his memory to the day he killed his first buck "and Sam marked his face with its hot blood." The sentence is resumed two pages later: "--summer, and fall . . . " (249). The insertion of the memory into the narrative of the present in this manner suggests the simultaneity of the past and the present in the human consciousness. On another level, this juxtaposition indicates the fusion and coexistence of the subjective and objective, the human and cosmic dimensions of time. What the human being ordinarily conceives as objective, linear time is revealed to be a multi-dimensional phenomenon, containing not only the circularity of cosmic time manifested by the perpetual succession of the seasons, but the indescribable complexity of the inner, psychological time of the human mind, which itself mirrors also the circularity of cosmic time.

Human memory in "The Bear" emerges as the ultimate agent that gives significance to human life, sharing in the eternal life cycle of nature:

summer, and fall, and . . . spring in their ordered immortal sequence, the deathless and immemorial phases of the mother who had shaped him if any toward the man he almost was . . . and he would marry someday and they too would own for their brief while that brief unsubstanced glory which inherently of itself cannot last . . . and they would, might carry even the remembrance of it into the time when flesh no longer talks to flesh because memory at least does last. (249)

It is thus memory that gives substance and reality to all existence, even when "flesh no longer talks to flesh." At its most profound level, "The Bear" is an embodiment of the quest to comprehend the meaning of Time in human existence.

Works Consulted

Faulkner, William. "The Bear."*Go Down, Moses*. London: Penguin Books, 1960.

Fowler, Doreen and Ann J. Abadie, eds.*Faulkner and Religion: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1989*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991.

Hoffman, F. J. "Faulkner's Concepts of Time." *Bear, Man, and God: Seven Approaches to William Faulkner's "The Bear."* Eds. F. L. Utley, L.Z. Bloom and A. F. Kinney. New York: Random House, 1964.

Kinney, A. F.*Faulkner's Narrative Poetics: Style As Vision*. Amherst: University Press of Massachusetts Press, 1978.

Lewis, R. W. B.*The Picaresque Saint*. Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1959.

-----. "The Hero in the New World: William Faulkner's 'The Bear.'" *Bear, Man, and God: Seven Approaches to William Faulkner's "The Bear."* Eds. F. L. Utley, L.Z. Bloom and A. F. Kinney. New York: Random House, 1964.

Lydenberg, John. "Nature Myth in Faulkner's 'The Bear.'" *Bear, Man, and God: Seven Approaches to William Faulkner's "The Bear."* Eds. F. L. Utley, L.Z. Bloom and A. F. Kinney. New York: Random House, 1964.

Richardson, H. E.*William Faulkner: The Journey to Self-Discovery*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1970.

Utley, F. L. "Pride and Humility: The Cultural Roots of Ike McCaslin", in *Bear, Man, and God: Seven Approaches to William Faulkner's "The Bear."* Eds. F. L. Utley, L.Z. Bloom and A. F. Kinney. New York: Random House, 1964.

-----. et al. "William Faulkner's 'The Bear': Introduction." *Bear, Man, and God: Seven Approaches to William Faulkner's "The Bear."* Eds. F. L. Utley, L.Z. Bloom and A. F. Kinney. New York: Random House, 1964.