

A Review of My Studies*

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I am fortunate to have been studying two great writers from my own unique point of view. One is William Faulkner (1897-1962), primarily known for his novels and short stories set in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi. And the other writer I encountered is T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), one of the twentieth century's major poets, as well as an essayist, publisher, playwright, and literary and social critic.

On William Faulkner

One of the major questions in the study of Faulkner is how his theological concept is used as a theme of his works. There have been studies on Faulkner's search for a Christ figure, which has received increasing critical attention, particularly since the publication of *Requiem for a Nun* (1951) and *A Fable* (1954). Also we have to mention there already have been Faulkner studies on his concept of time, but there have not been any significant studies on Faulkner's concept of time directly in reference to his Christ figure.

Mr. Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* describes, "the long diminishing parade of time" is like "down the long and lonely light-rays you might see Jesus walking."¹⁾ It is marvelous to find that Faulkner explains this concept of "Time is Christ" in the work.

The title, *The Sound and the Fury* quoted from *Macbeth*, "[Life] is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing," implies that life has no meaning whatever. This interpretation is applicable not only to the first section but also to the whole story.

The four chapters of the novel constitute four units of time seen by Compson family in its various aspects and Faulkner was very careful in fixing the temporal order of the novel. In each chapter we see how one's concept of time defines one's existential reality, which also reflects one's relationship to Christ.

The first section of the story is told by Benjy, the fourth child, who is intellectually disabled. All Benjy knows is that he is happy when his older sister Caddy smells the way she always does. She must remain intact with the smell of trees throughout Benjy's section, as Benjy repeatedly mentions, "She smelled like trees. *She smelled like trees*" (*SF* 61). However, what Benjy most expects of Caddy is the one thing she cannot give him, for his expectation is based on his complete ignorance of time. To him, time is not a continuation. It is an instant. There was no yesterday and no tomorrow, for it all is now to him. He cannot distinguish between what was and what will be.

*Key words: William Faulkner, T. S. Eliot, Christianity

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1) William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929; London: Everyman's Library, 1992), 64. Hereafter cited as *SF*, followed by the page number.

This section is in April 7th, 1928, Benjy's thirty-third birthday. Also it is Holy Saturday before Easter Sunday. April is a month of life and growth. It is the month that the thirty-three-year old Christ was crucified, and the Saturday between the Friday of his crucifixion and the Sunday of his resurrection is considered to be the darkest day in history. Therefore, as there is no time concept for Benjy, in Benjy's section which occurred on Holy Saturday, when Christ is buried, we can say time is nullified.

Section II is narrated by Quentin, the first child, from his viewpoint on June 2nd, 1910 when he commits suicide. In contrast to Benjy, who is oblivious of time, Quentin is obsessed with it. In the long stream of consciousness his obsession with time comes out in many ways. By tearing off the hands of his watch, Quentin hopes to transcend time. But he can never remove himself from time.

It is apparent that Quentin has been brought up under the influence of Mr. Compson's nihilistic philosophy of life. Mr. Compson sees things quite clearly. However, he has lost his ideals. He believes that no significant values exist in life and that time cures all things by annihilating them. For him life is a gamble in which "no battle is ever won ... The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools" (*SF* 64). Against such nihilism, Quentin desperately searches for a substantial sin, because it will prove the reality of virtue. He tries to convince Caddy that they did commit a terrible crime of incest, but he cannot even convince himself. He knows that he will never be successful.

What he is concerned with is not the fact of sins and virginity, but with the idea of them. Thus, rather than being involved in action, his search is turned deeply inward. And when Mr. Compson reduced virginity to just words (*SF* 98), Quentin is left with no final word to sustain his being. Quentin's suicide, then, results from despair at the ultimate meaninglessness and the emptiness of being in time. And the source of the anxieties of meaninglessness and emptiness is the loss of a spiritual center.

Section III is narrated by Jason, the third child, on April 6th, 1928, Good Friday. The world of Jason is entirely materialistic. Jason views himself as a victim of circumstances that have betrayed his anticipations. He blames Caddy for his remaining only a store clerk, since Jason missed his opportunity of getting the job he had been promised when Caddy was pregnant by another man and she was thrown out by her husband. As a result, Jason thinks nothing of taking for himself the two hundred dollars a month that Caddy sends for her daughter Miss Quentin's support, and at the same time he lets his mother believe that he burns the two hundred dollars and they accept nothing from Caddy at all. He deliberately blackmails his sister, robs his niece, and deceives his mother.

Being such a person, Jason finds that time is substantial, so that every second counts to benefit him. No italicized parts to indicate time shifts can be found in his section because in his own mind he is not at all confused about the past, the present, or the future. For Jason, time is a linear progression of yesterday and today and tomorrow. By insisting on seeing time only with regard to the money it obtains, Jason is using time only for his own advantage. Therefore, in Jason's section, which occurs on Good Friday, the day Christ was crucified, time is completely deprived of its value.

All of the Compson brothers find the world "full of sound and fury," and so all three attempt to create some sort of order in vain, all lack the absolutely stable centers of their respective universes. They make Caddy their center. We may say Caddy, who "doesn't want to be saved hasn't anything any more worth being saved for nothing worth being lost that she can lose,"²⁾ is a symbol of human

2) *The Portable Faulkner*, ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: Vintage-Penguin, 1977), 716.

finitude which is controlled and limited by chronological time.

The Compson brothers do not have the courage to accept Caddy as she is. Each of them is so preoccupied with his own concerns that he leaves no room for the others' needs in his mind. In other words, they are not humble enough to admit the being that is greater than the power of their own selves. Though Quentin calls the name of Jesus, "Yes Jesus O good man Jesus O that good man" (*SF* 146), for him "God would be canaille too in Boston in Massachusetts" (*SF* 95). Jason excludes Christ completely from his world, "Thinking nothing whatever of God one way or the other."³⁾

It is in section IV, whose setting is on April 8th, 1928, Easter Sunday, that time regains its meaning. It is narrated by the author in the third person and we enter into a proper notion of time as reality. With faith, Dilsey, a black servant, seems to have an undistorted view of reality. And of all the characters she alone can discern and respond to the needs of others. She toils heavily up and down the stairs in responding to Mrs. Compson's incessant calling, and takes care of the children devotedly. One hears her saying "Give him [Benjy] a flower to hold.... That what he wanting" (*SF* 7); "I'm coming just as fast as I can" (*SF* 25); "Don't you bother your head about her [Miss Quentin] ... I raised all of them and I reckon I can raise one more" (*SF* 25); "All right, here I is. I'll fill hit soon ez I git some hot water" (*SF* 230). With these phrases of love and concern, she is directly involved in the daily needs of the Compsons which stand in striking contrast to Mrs. Compson's self-pitying remark: "Look at me, I suffer too" (*SF* 171).

In the midst of the turmoil of the Compsons; Benjy bellows, Mrs. Compson whines, Jason complains, Quentin commits suicide, Caddy becomes a whore, Miss Quentin runs off with a pitchman, and the nihilistic Mr. Compson drinks himself to death, Dilsey never loses her fortitude. Dilsey reacts to each event with love, compassion, and pity. She is humble enough to know her limitation. Furthermore, Dilsey does not make a fuss over a clock that is three hours slow, and still she arrives at church on time. Her ability to make sense of the clock is simply one aspect of her ability to make sense of past, present, and future.

We witness that the Easter morning of 1928 brings to Dilsey the vision of Christ's suffering and death that makes *kairos*, "the fulfillment of time"⁴⁾ by her direct encounter with God in the divine-human. Sitting "bolt upright" and with tears streaming down her fallen cheeks, Dilsey listens to the moving sermon which describes the crucifixion of Jesus, the Lamb slain, and the sorrow of the women, but ends with the promise of resurrection and of ultimate glory. It is this vision of Christ's redemption that gives Dilsey the meaning of time. Dilsey keeps weeping on her way. Dilsey in her own vision does not care what people think and repeatedly expresses her conviction: "I've seed de first en de last," "I seed de beginnin, en now I sees de endin" (*SF* 256-57).

Dilsey's faith allows her to find "de power en de glory" (*SF* 256) in spite of the most depressing evidence of meaninglessness, to experience life at once realistically and meaningfully. Accordingly, we could say time represented by Dilsey is *kairos*, a divine, redemptive present, a "filled" magnitude, Christ, the Alpha and Omega filled.⁵⁾

The correlation of three days of April in the novel with the days of the Easter sequence is realized in this way. As Christ was crucified on April 6th, the Good Friday, by Jason Compson's mindless

3) *The Portable Faulkner*, 710.

4) Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* III (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1964), 369.

5) *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, ed. Alan Richardson (London: SCM Press, 1950), 267.

exploitation, time was killed violently: it is dead and buried in Benjy's "tale / Told by an idiot," for it seemingly signifies nothing, on April 7th, the Holy Saturday when Christ is buried in his tomb. And time was resurrected on Sunday, April 8th, the Easter as Christ is resurrected from death when Dilsey has the vision of Christ's redemption through His death.

The Sound and the Fury makes a celebration of time's victory. In fact, it is Faulkner's demonstration that man can live a meaningful life despite anxieties of nonbeing. As Christ who fills time is resurrected from death, time regains its meaning. Thus we find Faulkner's explanation of the bold declaration "Time is Christ" by paralleling the temporal order of the novel with the Passion.

Furthermore, though no one has ever pointed it out, I assume Faulkner was greatly influenced by Jeremy Taylor, a seventeenth-century Anglican bishop and writer. In spite of the fact that Taylor's *Holy Living and Holy Dying* was one of Faulkner's favorite books and he had it on his bedside table even when hospitalized, and he mentions Jeremy Taylor in his work, it is astonishing that as far as I know not one publication has mentioned Jeremy Taylor's influence on Faulkner.

If we refer to Jeremy Taylor, we can understand that the characteristics of Faulkner's religious ideas can be understood as the influence of Taylor's theology and we can vindicate Faulkner's theology by explaining that Faulkner's strong belief in man's efficacy is formed through the influence of Jeremy Taylor's practical piety which considers Christ as the Great Exemplar for us to follow.

For Faulkner, "Time is a fluid condition which has no existence except in the momentary avatars [= incarnations] of individual people,"⁶⁾ and, as has been mentioned, for him "Time is Christ," thus he sees a part of a Christ figure even in such characters as Joe Christmas in *Light in August*, Benjy Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* and Mink Snopes in *The Mansion* as well as the corporal in *A Fable* and Charles Bon in *Absalom, Absalom!*

Faulkner well knows that he as one of the Southerners who cling to the Bergsonian past memory of what might have been, should wake up from the illusion and redeem the past by facing it as it has been and by taking responsibility in the moment of now by taking time as *kairos*, as time of opportunities filled by Christ. Consequently, we claim Faulkner's concept of time is similar to Taylor's in its teleology. Thinking of time as our opportunity to do good, surely both Taylor and Faulkner believe that man can be a Christ figure in following his substance, the Great Exemplar, with one's faith which is courage to be despite one's mortality. Thus we can back up Faulkner's vision, "Time is Christ," theologically by claiming that he as well as Taylor, believes that the essence of time is Christ.

Moreover, when we explore the source of the unique vision of "Time is Christ," we come to know the influence of Cabbala, a system of Jewish theosophy which by the use of an esoteric method of interpretation of the OT, including ciphers, was believed to reveal to its initiates hidden doctrines of the creation of the world by means of emanations from the Divine Being. If we understand that Cabbala is a special way to express the vision of a hidden God and Taylor's affinities with it, it could be asserted that Faulkner's "Time is Christ" is Faulkner's own Cabbalistic vision influenced by Taylor so as to express his hidden God.

6) James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, eds. *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962* (New York: Random House, 1968), 255.

On T. S. Eliot

One of the most crucial themes of T. S. Eliot's works is his transformation of self-consciousness, which I believe, can be studied in reference to his dissertation, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*.⁷⁾

Prufrock, the protagonist of Eliot's first notable poems, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915), is troubled by the "eyes."

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?
(“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” ll. 55-61, *CPP* 14-15⁸⁾)

We have some evidence that Eliot considered Prufrock to be himself. In the interview in 1962, Eliot said that Prufrock was in part a man about forty and in part himself.⁹⁾

In the state pinned down by the "eyes," Prufrock-Eliot repeats, "... would it have been worth it, after all" (ll. 87, 99). We can conjecture that Prufrock-Eliot is suffering from the self-condemnation of his past act, and cannot move away from it. Because of the excessive obsession of some past memory protruding into him, Prufrock-Eliot thinks already dead and is condemned in the hell as we see in the epigraph of the poem.

Such notion of obsessive past memory of Eliot's is acquired under the influence of F. H. Bradley (1846-1924), who is an English philosopher of what Eliot calls "absolute idealism." Bradley confirms us that the past is not a thing frozen but lives in us. Therefore, in order to take responsibility for his present and his immediate future, Eliot has to confront with this notion of obsessive past of Bradley's.

Though Eliot's view of the world is substantially based on Bradley's ideas in his *Appearance and Reality* (1893), for both Bradley and Eliot, the reality is experience, Eliot refuses Bradley's use of consciousness as a principle of explicating the most important doctrine which consists of degree of truth and reality and the internality of relations. Eliot thinks that self-consciousness is a mechanism enforced on experience. For Eliot there is no such mental activity as can be the principle of most important doctrine of epistemology, but Eliot's most important doctrine of epistemology lies in "physiological activity and logical activity" (*KE* 153).

Based on physiological or logical activity as his doctrine, Eliot's view of the world is character-

7) T. S. Eliot, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley* (London: Faber & Faber, 1964), 193. Hereafter cited as *KE*, followed by the page number.

8) T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985) 14-15. Hereafter cited as *CPP*, followed by the page number.

9) Interview, *Grantite Review*, 24. No. 3 (1962) as quoted in Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot's Early Years* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 45.

ized by its practicability and relativity of what he accepts as reality. Eliot thinks of the world “not ready made, but as constructed, or constructing itself ... at every moment, a construction essentially practical in its nature” (KE 136).

Eliot then speculates that what we consider “real” can be a hallucination. He writes, “The real and the ideal (including unreal) are not two separate groups of objects. Reality is simply that which is intended and the ideal is that which intends” (KE 36). Also he defines, “An object is as such a point of attention, and thus anything and everything to which we may be said to direct attention is an object” (KE 99). Therefore, the real is the object created by the attention. And since the real and the ideal (including the unreal) are inseparable, it is inevitable that we are moved away from the real by our intending objects and, moreover, involved in a hallucination.

Recognizing that the reality of the world is created by the attention of the self, Eliot thinks of a self as a selector. He thinks of a self as a subject, calling it “form of subject of experience, impervious and isolated” (KE 35). And at the same time he thinks of a self as an object, “an ideal and largely a practical construction,” “a construction in space and time” (KE 204), and “an object among others, a self among others, and could not exist save in a common world” (KE 204).

Now we have realized that it is the ideal or unreal that selects our real, then we can go back to the problem of a past hallucination. Eliot says that a past hallucination is not the satisfaction and consummation of memory, but its disease (KE 59), because a past hallucination is unreal. He writes, “past in the sense in which it is supposed to be recalled, in popular psychology, simply never existed: the past lived over is not memory, and past remembered was never lived” (KE 51). The truth is “The past which we aim at is the experience of an ideal individual who should have both internal and external to ourselves, who should have both known and experienced the past to which in a very loose sense our memory may be said to ‘refer’” (KE 50). In other words, this ideal individual is one’s hyper-self-consciousness which was never actual (KE 49).

Thus philosophically Eliot already grasps that Prufrock can escape from his past hallucination only if he faces his situation and does not attend to his hyper-self-consciousness. Eliot suggests that transformation of a point of view is necessary in order to get out of one’s hallucinated scheme (KE 119). Here a point of view is “practical interest in the difference” through which the realization of the world is possible (KE 90). However, Prufrock’s point of view is so entrapped by the “eyes” in his hallucination that his point of view cannot be transformed easily.

In *The Waste Land* (1922) the image of Prufrock’s “eyes” appears again:

The hot water at ten.
And if it rains, a closed car at four.
And we shall play a game of chess,
Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.
(*The Waste Land*, ll. 135-138, CPP 65)

The line “waiting for a knock upon the door” reminds us of an awful image of *Sweeney Agonistes* (1932), where the protagonist is waiting for the police to come to expose his murder of a girl. Accordingly, we can conjecture that in *The Waste Land* the image of “lidless eyes” indicates the awareness of sin.

In *The Hollow Men* (1925) the protagonist laments that they’ve lost their sight. But surprisingly

the possibility of the appearance of new “eyes” is revealed.

Sightless, unless
 The eyes reappear
 As the perpetual star
 Multifoliate rose
 Of death’s twilight kingdom
 The hope only
 Of empty men.

(*The Hollow Men*, ll. 52-67, CPP 85)

“Multifoliate rose” connotes God’s grace in reference to the rose in *Divina Commedia, Paradiso*, XXXI, 1-24, which will cure man’s split into the judging self and the judged self.

Here we should notice from the very beginning Eliot recognizes that man, though finite, seems to have a sense and taste for the Absolute. He senses that man has to find a relation to the Absolute as the ultimate and all-embracing reality.¹⁰⁾ Whereas Bradley’s non-relational Absolute is an object of contemplation and cannot be the Absolute Eliot needed. After his conscious and conscientious search, Eliot finds it is the dogma of Incarnation that explains Absolute which has a relation with man as God of religion.

It is in *Ash-Wednesday* (1930) that the protagonist at last renounces his resistance against God in repentance, and there he accepts that his past hallucination condemned him to be dead and accepts God’s interference as a new different point of view which can objectify all his hallucinated scheme. Thus the “eyes” of the awareness of sin now appear as “Rose of memory / Rose of forgetfulness” (ll. 69-70). Eliot synthesizes the hyper-self-consciousness which tortured him and the tortured self, sensing his guilt, and attained the consciousness of grace represented by the suffering of Christ. We can say that Eliot’s hyper-self-consciousness has transformed into what we may call grace-consciousness.

Now that Eliot has recognized that the new point of view is the consciousness of God’s love represented by the suffering of Christ, he sees the present reality from that new point of view in “Little Gidding” (1942) of *Four Quartets*. Little Gidding is the historical place where Nicholas Ferrar and his family retired in order to lead a common life of devotion. However, it is now the battle field where the fire of air-raid is burning. In the face of the war, Eliot sees from the new point of view that the fire of air-raid becomes the tongues of flame suggesting the Holy Ghost, and the fire is in-folded into the crowned know of fire.

All the pasts are recovered with God’s interference, and set free from judgment. The grace of rose that actually appears symbolizes the incarnated Christ. With the repentance and the acceptance of the grace of rose, Eliot’s self, which was split comes to attain complete unity:

A condition of complete simplicity
 (Costing not less than everything)
 And all shall be well and
 All manner of thing shall be well

10) “The Function of Criticism,” in T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), 26.

When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

(*Four Quartets*, “Little Gidding,” ll. 253-59, *CPP* 198)

Thus the fire of suffering and the rose of grace are one. Accepting the grace of rose as a new point of view at the cost of everything else, Eliot can now objectify himself in his renewed self-consciousness.

Therefore, by tracing the transformation of the image of the “eyes” into the image of the “rose,” we can see the transformation of T. S. Eliot’s self-consciousness from his torturing hyper-self-consciousness to the renewed self-consciousness, that is, “a knowledge of eternal and necessary truths —νοῦς (mind).”¹¹⁾ This is the achievement of what Eliot once anticipated in his *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*.

We could say that the influence of F. H. Bradley on Eliot could be found in his poetical dramas and essays as well since Eliot stated that he was a disciple of Bradley even after his conversion.¹²⁾

11) “The Development of Leibniz’ Monadism,” *KE* 193.

12) *Criterion*, April 1933.

A Review of My Studies

ABSTRACT

I have endeavored to explore William Faulkner's concept of time and his search for a Christ figure in reference to Jeremy Taylor's practical piety that considers Christ as the Great Exemplar. These attempts helped me to arrive at the realization that Faulkner's theological system may be summarized as "Time is Christ." Faulkner marvelously proved this belief in *The Sound and the Fury* by paralleling the temporal order of the novel with the Passion. Further, by exploring the source of the unique vision of "Time is Christ," I became aware of the influence of Cabbala. If Cabbala is apprehended as a unique way of expressing the image of a hidden God and of Taylor's affinities with it, it could be asserted that Faulkner's conception of "Time is Christ" represents his own Cabbalistic vision influenced by Taylor so as to express his hidden God.

Additionally, I have reviewed the transformation of T. S. Eliot's self-consciousness in his major works. Although scholarly literature on Eliot in reference to F. H. Bradley is scant, Eliot himself stated, even after his conversion, that he was a disciple of Bradley. In fact, we can trace Bradley's influence in Eliot's search for a renewed self-consciousness based on his faith in Christ; "a knowledge of eternal and necessary truths—νοῦς (mind)," which is the achievement of what Eliot once anticipated in his dissertation, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*.

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