

## The Triumph of Time As Seen in *The Sound and the Fury*\*

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Time is Jesus walking “down the long and lonely light-rays.” (SF 64) This is the proclamation stated by Mr. Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* who can see things very clearly. Time is the fundamental substance of our existence, which begins with Jesus and ends with Jesus. The existence is seemingly nullified because of people who crucified Jesus. Faulkner himself explained his positive conception of time: “There is only the present moment, in which I include both the past and the future, and that is eternity. In my opinion time can be shaped quite a bit by the artist; after all, man is never time’s slave.” This concept has a tone similar to Tillich’s concept of “eternal now.”<sup>1)</sup> In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner is trying to revalue time and its function, as he believes,

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- 1) Faulkner’s affinities with existentialism have been pointed out. His methodology—his narrative style and its technique—has one fundamental aim: to comprehend experience by encountering it from within. His world is filled with anguish, anger and fear of nothingness. [Cf. Hyatt H. Waggoner, *William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World* (Lexington, Ky., 1959), pp. 84, 86, 109–112, 113–114, 119, 240, 251, 257, 271; Harry Modean Campbell and Ruel E. Foster, *William Faulkner: A Critical Appraisal* (Norman, Okla., 1951), p. 124; Robert M. Slabey, “Joe Christmas, Faulkner’s Marginal Man,” *Phylon*, XXI (1960), 266–277, and “Myth and Ritual in *Light in August*,” *Studies in Literature and Language*, II (1960), 328–349.] And his affinities with Tillich have been taken up by Philip Bliar Rice in “Faulkner’s Crucifixion:”

In trying to get some kind of foothold on the implicit ideational purport of the book, we can at least note some remote parallels to doctrines of such theologians as Tillich and Niebuhr. For the former, man’s precarious triumph consists in his Courage to Be, which includes the courage to face anxiety and the eventual non-being in time which is his individual destiny: the Christ figure as the “concrete absolute” is the paradigm for this courage. For both theologians, man’s redemption is not an ultimate victory of the Christian message in time, but both a timeless realization and a neverending battle to wring some approximation to it from the relativities of history. [*Kenyon Review*, 16 (Autumn, 1954) p. 669]

Also John W. Hunt in *William Faulkner: Art in Theological Tension* (New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd, 1973) uses Paul Tillich’s clarification of his notion to interpret Faulkner. (pp. 28, 31, 55, 67, 126–7, 172)

And Hyatt H. Waggoner says that Faulkner’s fiction is existentialist as much of modern painting is existential, and the fiction of Kafka, and the earlier poetry of T. S. Eliot, and the theology of Paul Tillich. (*William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World*, p. 251) And as Tillich himself has said, existentialist art rediscovers in a manner appropriate to our time “the basic questions to which the Christian symbols are the answers.” (“Existential Aspects of Modern art,” in Carl Michalson, ed., *Christianity and the Existentialists*.)

Much Protestant theology implies that man is innately evil, that he can do nothing, since he is imperfect, to save himself, that only the grace of God is sufficient to raise him. Faulkner, however, insisting that values are imposed from within rather than from without, seems to suggest, man’s work can save man. His spiritual vocabulary, “prevail” symbolizes his theological concept. For him free will must end as action because it is expressed only in action, which may be defined as executed choice. He was once asked, “Would it be true to surmise that you favor strongly individual rather an organized religion?” He answered, “I do, always.” He was then asked if he thought men worked out their own