The Eternal Hermeneutic Project: A Phenomenological Interpretation of Woolf & Faulkner

by

Kevin Vedak

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The field of Western philosophy, while focusing astutely on the human subject and its relation with the world, traditionally restricts its investigations to theoretical inquiry with empirical justifications. Even though the philosopher crosses many boundaries untouched by other fields of study, he or she neglects various ways of thinking as well as complex images produced by fiction. In an attempt to bridge this preconceived gap between philosophy and literature, culminating in a complementary relation between the two disciplines, we shall examine the fiction introduced through a philosophically complex critical theory without losing the inherent value of the text itself.

In our contemporary culture, we seem to be meandering through postmodernist doubts of the existence of "objective" experiences, as well as deconstruction's conclusions asserting that ideology constitutes all of our "truths." While I do not plan to necessarily deny these propositions, I will insist that our attempts to escape these skeptical manacles "enlighten" humanity to an extent of at least recognizing the degree of our confinement. One way of experiencing this struggle consists of entering different modes of thinking, and thus literature functions as a necessary "escape."

World War I sparked a horrific revelation for many artists and thinkers which caused them to fully resist their society's
dictates and reflect seriously on the meaning of life. The "purely" philosophical question of the subject's relation to the world thus became a more prominent endeavor for artists to explore. More importantly, traditional narration with a complete story began to fall apart in the broken world, and fragmentary techniques appeared in acknowledgement of the surrounding stagnation and denial of the world's natural harmony. A manifestation of this phenomenon occurs in the form of stream-of-consciousness narration. While this technique is not truly unstructured, it does require a perceptive reader to comprehend the chaotic thoughts and reveal the present ideologies. Virginia Woolf, in To the Lighthouse, and William Faulkner, in The Sound and the Fury, display this revolutionary focus and expose philosophy's inquiries to a whole new environment.

In giving a philosophical reading of these texts, we will first explore a coherent method of analyzing consciousness without imposing unnecessary presuppositions on this "buzzing confusion." Edmund Husserl, at the beginning of the twentieth century, offers a beneficial starting point to this analysis. After recognizing the limits to his examination, I will introduce Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic reformation to Husserl's phenomenology, which provides a path to our desire for reciprocity between literature and philosophy. This complex theory will then aid our reading of Woolf and Faulkner and will allow us to thoroughly inquire into the eternal struggle against ideology.
The Revolution of Phenomenology

Faced with simplistic psychological theories of the mind based on Newtonian physics, Edmund Husserl believed philosophy needed to revolutionalize humanity's perspective of the mind. Psychologism, the theory that physical forces dictate all of the mind's functions, not only applies theories based on physical laws, but "every psychological judgment involves the existential positing of physical nature" ("Philosophy as Rigorous Science" [hereafter "PRS"] 86). As a result, these psychological theories lack a theoretical foundation that reveals an underlying process explaining how we rationally interact with the world. At the same time, Husserl does not revert back to scholastic arguments for a "pure" rational constitution of the mind. Classical ontological debate "loses itself by deriving analytical judgments from word meanings, in the belief that it has thereby gained knowledge of facts" (95). In leading away from this abstract deductive method, Husserl argues for a "formal and material a priori," i.e. our epistemological theory must include a necessary relation between essence and structure (Lauer 52). He also found Kant's methods enlightening for this goal, yet the latter's gap between phenomena and noumena neglected what Husserl viewed as an immediate relation between the subject and the world.

Husserl's reasoning leads him to establish a new method for understanding the world and ourselves. Contrary to naturalist perspectives, he discovers consciousness existing as the immediate source of knowledge in the individual subject.
Furthermore, our inquiries into being itself are mediated by consciousness: knowledge theory "can have before its eyes only being as the correlate of consciousness, as something 'intended' after the manner of consciousness" ("PRS" 89). Husserl also distinguishes between the activity of consciousness and reflection. The mind's activity focuses on objects, gegenstand, which do not necessarily consist of material beings in front of the subject. By applying Franz Brentano's concept of intentionality, Husserl argues that the direction of the mind immanently intends an object contained in this direction itself. Reflection thus "grasp[s] the corresponding subjective experiences in which we become 'conscious' of them, in which... they 'appear'" (Phenomenology" 78). As Husserl's analysis investigates these "phenomena" of reflection, he names his philosophical method "phenomenology."

Husserl's phenomenology aims to reveal a theory of cognition which comprehends objects in their "givenness," or the way consciousness grasps its objects immanently. For phenomenology to understand this process, one needs to look beyond a descriptive method (as the early Husserl performs in the Logical Investigations) and reflect deeply on the necessary structures in consciousness. Kant discovered the categories structuring the mind, but Husserl wants to ensure his theory focuses on the "things themselves" perceived via consciousness. As a result, he develops a form of "bracketing" theoretical presuppositions which do not aid the phenomenologist in constituting consciousness.
Labeled in his later writings as the "transcendental epoche," this method recognizes the need for a synthetic totality between subject and object and grounds all experience in consciousness (Crisis of European Sciences 145-8). In distinguishing his method from the Cartesian project, Husserl views his movement towards transcendent acts as an advancement beyond solipsism, culminating in a pure transcendental ego as the subject for all essences. He also separates his method from rationalist theories by recognizing the infinity of egos forming an intersubjective world, which exists as the "one spatio-temporal world which is fixed through our actual experience" (Ideas I 150).

In fully conceiving Husserl's transcendental method, we can represent the process as a spiral with levels of empirical and formal analysis. We ascend from the original empirical acceptance up to the formal level of imagining an infinite amount of possible worlds. When returning to the empirical level, then, we advance in our knowledge by understanding the objective world in light of a transcendental consciousness. An infinite spiraling appears to correspond with Husserl's entire phenomenological method for eternally grounding our experiences in an a priori structure: "a limitless field of work opens out . . . without the apparatus of premises and conclusions" ("PRS" 147). Nevertheless, two specific directions appear to manifest themselves within this limitless field of phenomenology and which correspond to the levels of the spiral: pure consciousness and description. The latter entails depicting objects in a way that
recognizes essences, while the former evolves from studying the necessary structure of consciousness and transcending solipsism. Furthermore, this infinite endeavor does not negate itself as an absurd analysis. Human experience requires philosophy to attempt to understand immanent mental acts both in their varieties and their essential processes.

Given this simplified version of Husserl's project, we should recognize the vitality of his perspective as well as the limitations inherent in his analysis. By examining consciousness as an intentional structure, i.e. as always "consciousness-of" something, phenomenology grounds all human experience in the mind's actions. The phenomenologist applies the epoche to comprehend the transcendental structure implicit in these acts. Husserl realized the problematic effects to this system in his later writings, as all conscious acts appear to be "surrounded by a vital horizon" (Crisis 149). As a result, the transcendental epoche must recognize the world from which consciousness never escapes, the Lebenswelt or life-world. This world does not merely contain the physical universe, however, as consciousness inhabits a distinct realm not restricted by the empirical world. Hence, Husserl leaves the phenomenological project in an unresolved position, where Heidegger will found existentialism. I will not interpret the latter's advancement as philosophical.

While Husserl continues the Kantian project, he views a transcendental act as the process of perceiving essences without neglecting the "given." Thus, one should take caution in equating Kant's transcendental method with Husserl's desire to get beyond theoretical presuppositions in pure consciousness.
progress, however, and instead assert with Ricoeur that Husserl's inquiries into the nature of consciousness and its relation to the Lebenswelt remain unsettled. We shall therefore continue our exploration of consciousness in light of Husserl's methods.

**Ricoeur's Reformation**

Husserl's project, while very insightful into at least methodically understanding a relation between the subject and the world, neglects human experience as a complex web of relations. In contrast to the naive phenomenological position, consciousness evolves through many processes that depend on the subject's physical affinity with the empirical world. Ricoeur indicates this complexity by asserting that "consciousness is not a given but a task" *(Conflicts* 108). While Husserl simply rejected psychological theories as contingent on the present world, Ricoeur suggests that some psychoanalytic analyses can aid us in comprehending at least a part of consciousness. He suggests three points where phenomenology and psychoanalysis converge. Self-conscious activity appears to be connected to "economic objectivity," or the way one desires to possess control over him/herself. Furthermore, consciousness itself creates the potential for "entering into the political problematic of power" and corresponding feelings around this power. Finally, the self becomes constituted in the "cultural sphere," where my "existence for myself depends utterly on this self-constitution in the opinion of others" *(110-12)*. Since the first two points may merely exist as effects of the present world, the connection to
the cultural sphere (in the generic sense) seems most relevant to analyzing consciousness. Indeed, most of Ricoeur's investigations explore this connection.

In hopes of expanding phenomenology's limited field, Ricoeur suggests that we "graft" the "hermeneutic problem onto the phenomenological method" (3). This new element attempts to discover the relation between "interpretation," viz. the exegesis of the text, and "comprehension," viz. understanding signs (4). As a result, we will begin to perceive the relations of the subject as fully connected to her or his cultural sphere. Before exploring the details in this process (covering two volumes of lectures), let us reflect on how Ricoeur maintains Husserl's desire for cohesion between immanence and transcendence. If phenomenology examines consciousness as the source of immanent knowledge with corresponding essential structures, Ricoeur shows that the transcendental ego, viz. pure consciousness as the structure underlying all subjects, applies certain elements in hermeneutics to exist as a practical structure. Hence, the spiral method must apply the hermeneutic problem before understanding how the ego functions. Consequentially, hermeneutics benefits from this method by receiving an infinite grounding to its investigations.

Hermeneutics commences its analysis in the field of semantics, as language constitutes all human acts (11). Similar
to Husserl's beginning techniques of immanence and transcendence, Ricoeur discovers a complex structure in this analysis consisting of two levels. On one level, language applies symbols to indicate "figurative" meanings, and thus interpretation involves "deciphering" these meanings (i.e. an exegesis of language). Language possesses another source of analysis, however, in the "semantic constitution" of constructed styles, such as metaphor, allegory, and simile (12-14). One thus needs to comprehend the various modes of constitution that language establishes. These linguistic analyses require a grounding in human existence, though, and reflection performs this task as the link between the understanding of signs and self-understanding (16). Ricoeur reveals the focus of the whole hermeneutic project at this point: "Every hermeneutic is thus, explicitly or implicitly, self-understanding by means of understanding others" (17). Furthermore, self-understanding involves assigning a meaning to oneself for an "effort to exist" (21). As a result, Ricoeur finds an eternal dialectic between interpretation (exegesis of the self) and the "interpreted being" (23), as these two levels create continual implications for each other, i.e. the spiral of self-reflection.

Ricoeur relates the above "skeleton" analysis to the field of literature in From Text to Action [hereafter FTA]. While language (the structure enabling one to express meaning)

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Ideas I extensively explores the noema/noesis distinction in relation to language. The former term designates a word's essence as the latter term fulfills this meaning in a semantic structure.
possesses certain "intentions" manifest in meanings, discourse (the process of applying language in interaction between agents) actualizes these intentions in temporal "events" (77). Thus, a dialectic evolves between the meaning and the event, producing necessary "level of signification" that establishes the concrete constitution to language (cf. Conflicts 260). In other words, Ricoeur follows a neo-Hegelian method by recognizing a structure to language which requires both an interpretation of "intentions" and a comprehension of the expression of an event. We cannot interpret meanings without analyzing corresponding significations, but we view an essential nature to meanings as inherent in language (viz. its transcendental level). To make this evaluation even more complex, writing forms an intricate relation surpassing the level of discourse. While a speaker's intentions receive mediation through language, a written text distances an author's intentions from the text itself (FTA 83).

The structure of a text contains a similar relation between linguistic meanings and events. Ricoeur believes discourse or speech actualizes the intentions of language, and he finds text as a complex substitute for speech: "Fixation by writing takes the very place of speech, occurring at the site where speech could have emerged" (106). As a result, certain "upheavals" transpire. The immediate relation between language and the world, i.e. the ability inherent for the subject to connect meaning and signification, becomes "intercepted" by the text (107-8). Furthermore, the relation between actor and receiver,
now the author and the reader, no longer possesses a defined relation normally manifest in interaction. Ricoeur identifies an intriguing result to this interception, though. The text resides in an ambiguous position, since the direct relation to the world no longer exists. Hence, the text hangs "in the air," and the world itself becomes a "kind of 'aura' that works unfold" (109).

When one reads a text, then, an intricate fulfillment emerges that produces a connection between the text’s world and the reader’s existence in that world.

Using a method similar to Husserl, Ricoeur argues that a continual process transpires when reading a text. The fundamental level of analysis occurs in the exegesis of the text, as the reader places him/herself "in place of the text" and thus performs an immediate interpretation of the text (113). By physically reading the text, a person in this position believes his or her thoughts coincide with the text’s meaning. Structuralist analyses transcend this position by explicating the "logic of operations" in the text, yet the meaning for the reader "remains in suspense" from this reading (116). Ricoeur then suggests the need for a hermeneutic return to the fundamental relation between text and reader, where the relation remains disjointed. He labels this distancing between structure and interpretation "distanciation," or the "cultural distance" one experiences (119). We thus return to the phenomenological project of constituting the self in relations with others. Distanciation not only involves experiencing the gap between text
and interpretation, but entails beginning the critique of ideology (35). In other words, the reader experiences another consciousness, must struggle with understanding this consciousness, and begins a new self-interpretation from this consciousness.

From a phenomenological standpoint, Ricoeur surpasses Husserl's exploration into consciousness and establishes a whole new world when one reads a text. The interaction between intentions and actions simply connected in discourse succumbs to a disjointed relation, leading to a complex level of meaning: "to interpret is to explicate the type of being-in-the-world unfolded in front of the text" (86). In other words, Husserl's Lebenswelt exists in fictional discourse, and we understand ourselves by entering this world (36). Just as semantic analyses reveal meanings and significations in language through reflection, interpreting texts involves inhabiting a "proposed world" by following a "path of thought" (122). As a result, fiction provides a "nonplace" of intersubjective interaction for the reader: "It is in this state of noninvolvement that we try out new ideas, new values, new ways of being in the world" (174-5). Restating the beginning of our analysis of Ricoeur, consciousness exists as a task rather than a given. Hence, one must enter fiction's disjointed world to begin to understand her or his meaning in / relation to the world.

If we accept Ricoeur's reformation of phenomenology, viz. a necessary dialectic with hermeneutics, the connection between
philosophy and literature is more immediate than the traditional disciplines assume. I will place a condition on this conclusion. While we can interpret literature from this phenomenological standpoint, we may also find other modes of analysis more congruent with certain texts. Our "conflicts of interpretation" reflect the way the text affects us as readers, and our standards for determining the most beneficial perspective depend on the way we experience the text. Therefore, I find stream-of-consciousness writing the most accessible form for Ricoeur's analysis. Not only does one enter a foreign world with different ideological viewpoints, but one also discovers an immediate expression of this world’s impression on foreign subjectivities. We thus encounter a world within a world, similar to the way in which phenomenological reflection creates its own world within the world of consciousness. This complex relation can only be clarified by examining the literature itself.

Virginia Woolf’s Challenge

To the Lighthouse presents a complex world with various stream-of-consciousness perspectives that both clash and merge throughout the text. In maintaining Ricoeur’s method, I will treat these different consciousnesses as points of distanciation for the reader within a limited world. As a result, the reader (contemporary or modern) engages in a critique of the presented ideologies to ultimately understand him/herself better. Woolf confronts male norms, bourgeois standards, and the war’s logic of destruction. However, we should not expect an ultimate escape
from the ideologies of the early twentieth century, nor a utopian vision of the future. Her stream-of-consciousness structure discloses individuals' "frames" of others:

Only by revealing these frames as reifications of relative, nonuniversal presumptions, her novel suggests, can a society begin to approach the problem of war.

(Handley 17)

Hence, we experience the novel as a negative aesthetic showing the author as herself framed (37), which may destroy the possibilities of transcending ideologies. Woolf's complex framing and highly self-reflective position thus will cause a culmination of Ricoeur's project.

The novel's first section, "The Window," begins with a curious clash of consciousnesses. Laura Doyle, in her "intercorporeal" analysis of the narrative, suggests that the window symbolizes a "crucial passageway between indoor and outdoor," in Victorian ideology "female and male" (50). The discussion about the trip to the lighthouse thus acts as a symptom of the struggle between the traditional sexes in a world of war. In contrast to Mr. Ramsay's cold logic that one needs "above all, courage, truth, and the power to endure" (Woolf 11), Mrs. Ramsay possesses an "intercorporeal kinship with the world of things" (Doyle 52). For her, the natural world exists as a connection to the world's past, which did not contain "reason, order, justice" (Woolf 98). However, she does not accept the
existentialist solution to this lack, and instead escaped "by laying hold of some little odd or end, some sound, some sight" (99). In this respect, the lighthouse acts as her ultimate source of inspiration and "ideal of social relations" (Doyle 52). The "steady light" draws her into a more ideal and ecstatic love, not without its heterosexual power structure: "she is at the 'beck and call' of her 'pitiless' lover" (53). Thus, Mrs. Ramsay's reflection on the world is restricted by her framed existence.

The lighthouse serves another purpose in the novel, though. If the Ramsays inhabit the bourgeois world, the family in the lighthouse (never truly revealed) symbolize the proletariat class necessary for the Ramsays' survival (Handley 29). With this interpretation, Mrs. Ramsay acts to overcome the present structure, a form of Ricoeur's distanciation, yet never looks beyond her own frame. "Time Passes" presents another proletarian figure, Mrs. McNab, who enters the abandoned house:

... tearing the veil of silence with hands that had stood in the wash tub, grinding it with boots that had crunched the shingle, came as directed to open all windows, and dust the bedrooms. (196)

William Handley suggests that Woolf reveals her own frames at this point by depicting a "witless domestic servant," and does so to create a "critique of [the] judgment" that patriarchal structures assume (35). Mrs. McNab's "drink and gossip" (198)
establish another frame which counters both Mr. Ramsay's philosophy and Mrs. Ramsay's dinner discussions. Hence, Woolf criticizes society's class structure as a hinderance to universality and the freedom of women. Furthermore, her own limitations do not suggest a way of overcoming the social distances.

The novel's most powerful figure who truly attempts to break from society's frames, Lily, also possesses a restrictive perspective. She differs from the other characters in her artistic attempts to connect with others who have conflicting ideologies. When speaking with Andrew, she wonders about Mr. Ramsay's philosophical beliefs:

So now she always saw, when she thought of Mr. Ramsay's work, a scrubbed kitchen table. It lodged now in the fork of a pear tree . . . whose virtue seems to have been laid bare by years of muscular integrity, which stuck there, its four legs in the air. (38)

Not only does Lily's depiction invert Mr. Ramsay's logic by centering on the table rather than his concepts, but her images also "spring from and carry within them the sensory world" (Doyle 55). As a result, her focus on the physical world attempts to connect her with Mr. Ramsay. Doyle suggests that this use of objects serves as a medium for "moving across the separateness between one consciousness and another an from one time frame to another" (55). Lily's painting, then, acts as the attempt to
imagine an intimacy (such as mother and child) that transcends
traditional patriarchal structures (56). At the same time, Woolf
contrasts her artistic creation against the work of Mrs. McNab
and the servants (Emery 230). Lily is therefore restricted by
her class position.

The end of Lily’s quests suggests even more complexity to
the novel:

> With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it
clear for a second, she drew a line there, in
the centre. It was done; it was finished.
Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in
extreme fatigue, I have had my vision. (310)

What exactly does this vision include, especially when it appears
to exist as a transitory moment without supreme significance?
Doyle believes the line signifies a filling of emptiness by
imaginative reflection on Mrs. Ramsay and the trip to the
lighthouse (67). Similarly, Handley finds "mourning and
representation" established on a "lack," and thus a negative
aesthetic permeates the search for meaning (25). Both of these
interpretations demonstrate Woolf’s ultimate reversal of the
Western philosophical tradition, as well as her recognition of
how ideology rests on our inability to fully relate with others.
Furthermore, the background of a proletarian class enabling
Lily’s creation (a form of lack) constructs the novel’s political
critique.

Woolf thus challenges her readers to experience the
ideological frames presented and reflect on how society limits our capabilities. Harvena Richter discovers the reader's dual position as actor and spectator in four areas. One must understand the novel's cohesiveness despite the stream-of-consciousness style, as well as uncover her or his own "horrors" and "terrors." Moreover, the reader enters disliked characters' minds, producing a loss of objectivity in experiencing numerous ideologies without alternatives. Finally, Woolf's "presence" in the novel forces the reader to respond in positive and negative manners (236-7).

From the above explication of the text, we can easily comprehend the reader's position of distanciation in relation to the novel as a whole, the reflective characters, and the author's "presence." As a result, the reader must reflect on her or his own relation to the world (created by the text) and ideological frames. As stated above, no utopian visions appear; instead, Woolf seems to question our entire quest. If Lily can only find fulfillment through another's lack, the reader's intersubjective experience never leads to a positive perspective for self-understanding, as one always remains distant from another.

Does Woolf's challenge refute Ricoeur's hermeneutic method as well as the entire phenomenological project? As much as she reverses traditional beliefs and creates an "intercorporeal narrative," the novel never abandons the self-reflective method. Hence, we seem to experience a complex relation to Ricoeur's analysis. We interpret a limited social structure within the
confines of distinct consciousnesses (including Woolf's). Our position in this world appears alienated without an ideal perspective as well as fulfilled by the quest itself for an intersubjective world. This ambivalent position, however, impels us to keep searching for a necessary constitution to the subject-world relation, as we feel a sense of intellectual superiority over the characters' frames. Our feeling then becomes undermined by the knowledge that we remain just as trapped in our own frames. When reading from this philosophically struggling position, the clash between the Ramsays forces us to question gender biases, and Lily's artistic attempt makes us inquire into our own lacks or ignorance of others in relation to the world. These narrative compulsions appear more immediate in Woolf's style, as the phenomenal flow of different minds contain concealed ideologies not always apparent to the characters. We reveal these frames as distanced readers, and as a result begin to become aware of contemporary frames limiting our capabilities and the reflective quest.

Faulkner's Struggle Against Rationality

The Sound and the Fury presents another intricate world which impels readers to closely examine three consciousnesses in a clearly limited manner. While Woolf creates an abstract style of developing characters searching for meaning, Faulkner evades this whole project by unfolding severely limited consciousnesses. Benjy, a thirty-three year old man, is mentally handicapped and can only moan to reveal his feelings. Quentin painfully labors
over his existence, ultimately leading to suicide. Jason's traditional male patriarchal reasoning does not coincide with the reader's attempt to discover a satisfying intersubjective world. Thus, Faulkner also constructs a negative aesthetic which forces the reader to discover progressive methods of dealing with the text's world. As a result, we encounter another complexity for the hermeneutic method.

The three consciousnesses in the novel center around particular themes, which each interprets differently. Caddy's acceptance of Dalton Ames influences their thoughts and actions (Vickery 28-9). All of Benjy's distress seems connected to a lack of Caddy, and his constant desire for her presence establishes his world's rigidity (31). The shift between past memories and present events demonstrates this "closed" world:

Caddy smelled like trees in the rain.

... Cant you get done with that moaning and
play in the branch like folks. (22)

Benjy's connection of Caddy with trees never allows him to escape the pain from a world without her. As Jean Kellogg asserts in an existential analysis, Benjy's age as the same as Christ's on the cross suggests that his life must be a "perpetual crucifixion" (127). Caddy provides the only source of meaning for his life, and thus his world remains continually incomplete--a psychosocial frame not entirely dependent on his mental deficiencies.

By contrast, Quentin inhabits a world of abstractions which echo a philosopher's search for meaning. However, Quentin also
remains confined in a rigid system based on Caddy’s actions. The section’s beginning speech from his grandfather shows his preoccupation with time and man:

... I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire ... The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools. (93)

The connection between time’s power and the folly of war initiates Quentin’s flow of thoughts, and we find him continually attempting to escape the oppressiveness of linear time (Kellogg 128). Philip Weinstein examines Quentin’s troubling logic as a "recorder of others’ voices" which cannot cohere these voices with his own thoughts (85). Specifically, Caddy’s sexuality contrasts with his own idealistic views on virginity (established by antebellum society), leading him to the "babble of 'I was I was not who was not was not who'" (84). Faulkner thus parallels the diverse consciousnesses of Benjy and Quentin by the "outrage and agony" arising from the "abyss" between experience and ideals (Vickery 31). Quentin, though, ends what he sees as an irrational life with a return to the river that symbolizes the source of the maddening honeysuckle--"all stable things had becomes shadowy paradoxical" (211).

Jason’s logic resists this abstract thinking and instead clings to a patriarchal frame. Furthermore, his revenge on Caddy through withholding Miss Quentin’s money suggests a monstrosity to his logic straying from rationality. By attributing a lost
inheritance and a lack of a promised job to Caddy, he becomes a "satiric" object of Faulkner as society's "rational" man (Vickery 31). Jason’s main problem lies in a vulnerability to circumstance (45), which resembles Quentin’s struggle between experience and ideals. His ability to secure a rigid world by a static frame—"once a bitch always a bitch" (329)—distances him from reflection that would lead to Quentin’s resolution. We should acknowledge, however, that Jason opposes the thoughts of his surrounding environment, including the antebellum South, and clearly recognizes his "comic-realistic" attitude. As a result, Richard Pearce suggests, "we laugh at his lines because they caricature what we are convinced is true" (85). Moreover, his judgments appear to be supported in the final omniscient section, as his fate materializes here with a heroic position by saving Luster and Benjy from danger and sustaining the latter’s recognized path around the Confederate monument (88).

Interpreting Faulkner’s intents beyond the above observations becomes murky at best. While Pearce recognizes the validated "author-ial" voice in the final section, he does not suggest implications from this structure. Vickery, by contrast, finds Dilsey as the ultimate vision of coherence in the "sound and the fury" of life (49). In other words, religious beliefs withhold judgments of others to reduce the world’s suffering. Pearce addresses the black community in the novel, though, as another object of satire and a structure that "continually undermines" the community’s "sense of self-worth" (88).
Weinstein expresses the novel's conflicts most lucidly: "all ideological assertions . . . (insofar as they move through the filter of conflicting narrative voices) shatter" (118). Once again, we experience a negative aesthetic unable to posit an ideal world as long as framed subjectivities (including Faulkner's) inhabit the world. Faulkner also seems to seriously question the quest for an intersubjective world by revealing various irrational consciousnesses finding order only within their irrationality. We thus must discover how Ricoeur's method coheres with such a critique.

From the above interpretations, we perceive the novel's focus on Caddy without her own voice. Even the Appendix depicts her in an ambiguous light by slipping into the librarian's attempt to "save" her from a luxurious yet "cold serene and damned" existence (415). Faulkner's sustained distance from Caddy impels the reader to concentrate on her actions and how they affect all of the other characters. He also applies an extremely free style of writing to present the "irrationality" of the minds. As readers, we either fall into states of confusion about the text's events, or we follow the minds' path of thought to comprehend Caddy's decisions and effects. While Ricoeur's project urges us to apply the latter method, we cannot deny the presence of the former phenomenon. This confusion, however, coincides with Ricoeur's hermeneutic method. Weinstein examines

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3 Of course, much debate exists over whether or not to include the Appendix as part of the novel.
the problems of assuming identity depends on a static conception: "we shall probably never concede the degree to which we depend upon the other and upon system in order to constitute the self" (98-9). Our confusions in experiencing another's thoughts in a foreign world demonstrates our own framed existence, and hence Faulkner desires us to struggle to understand his characters so that we will recognize our preconceived views of thought. As a result, we experience another level of distanciation contained in the act of reading itself.

Another way of examining this struggle lies in Faulkner's use of language. While Woolf's structure coincides with traditional narrative patterns, Faulkner's movements into repetitions and nonpunctuated paragraphs clearly separates the connection between language and existence (i.e. the creation of ambiguous significations). As Ricoeur suggested reflection as the medium for this connection, Faulkner compels his readers to acts as the reflective agents. However, one must follow a large portion of a consciousness and its world to perform this task. Furthermore, our ideological frames serve as an unconscious ground underneath our reading. Hence, Ricoeur's method of distanciation emerges in Faulkner's style itself. This style suggests a return to understanding language as we experience the novel's various consciousnesses.

The Eternal Hermeneutic Project

Woolf and Faulkner undoubtedly advance the hermeneutic project beyond the reader's experience of a text. The former's
phenomenal connections to inanimate objects as sources of meaning for human existence supplies philosophy with a perspective distinct from the need for the subject's constitution in reason. Faulkner's style itself also suggests this contrast to the philosophical tradition, and he fully reveals strict ideological structures interpreting the world differently. As noted above, both authors imply a negative aesthetic as the only basis for transcending the text's world. Do these novels lead to a deconstruction of Ricoeur's project?

While the authors' negative aesthetics may induce a sense of despair over the world's continual ideological frames, we must recall Husserl's infinite endeavor to ground experience in an a priori structure. Ricoeur sustains this aspect to his method, as new readers will constantly evolve to interpret texts from distinct perspectives. Obviously, the above interpretations of Woolf and Faulkner differ greatly from contemporary analyses. Ricoeur allows for this difference by acknowledging the world of the text as a distinct system constantly changing. Thus, the use of a negative aesthetic acts as a tool for self-reflecting that resembles an existential freedom impelling us to search for the most acceptable relation to the world. By experiencing other ideological frames, we struggle against the present world's impositions and attempt to imagine a reality without such oppressiveness, rigid rationality, or static irrationality.

This eternal struggle to escape beyond reality's bounds seems to constitute human existence itself. Literature provides
a medium for beginning to understand possible intersubjective relations with the world, whether or not texts posit particular alternatives. Our application of Ricoeur's method to literature supplies a link for comprehending the way in which fiction is a philosophical experience. Thus, the hermeneutic project establishes the degree of our limitations without condemning our quests as inconsequential or unnecessary.


Lauer, Quentin, trans. Phenomenology and the Crisis of


