WHAT WAS, IS, AND WILL BE: MANIPULATIONS OF TIME IN THE TELLING OF NARRATIVE EVENTS

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By

Kavitha Bondada, J.D.

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Kavitha Bondada, J.D.

Thesis Advisor: Edward J. Maloney, Ph.D.
Thesis Committee Member: Ricardo L. Ortiz, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Narrative theorists study movements of time in narrative by discussing how events in a narrative fit together. Writers shift from the past, to the present, to the future, and back again when they write. Writers move back and forth through time. Time, however, does not only shift between the telling of discrete narrative events. Writers also manipulate time within singular narrative events, whether it is to move the reader across different time periods, or whether it is to try and get the reader to comprehend the totality of time by calling forth moments from the past, present, and future and intertwining them together in a single sentence or phrase. These types of time manipulations are worth studying because of the rhetorical effect they have on the reader. Each writer discussed in this thesis works with time in a different way and often to different narrative effect. A helpful way to organize narrative time manipulations would be to place them in two categories: through the ways writers manipulate time in narrative explicitly and through the way in which writers shift time in a single sentence or paragraph implicitly. This thesis will explore this analytical framework through a number of texts, including narratives by William Faulkner and Vladimir Nabokov.
To Vikrant – All my love, all my life.

To my family, friends, and all my teachers.
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I. THE BEGINNING – INTRODUCTION

As Jonathan Gottschall writes in *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*, we human beings are “creatures of story” (199). People learn from the experiences they have in stories. A story “simulates the big dilemmas of human life” and causes the reader to think through larger life questions (65-67). A writer’s manipulation of time when telling a narrative can have a rhetorical effect on the reader and cause the reader to think about questions of existence, and more specifically, questions dealing with time and existence.¹ There is no question that events narrated in a story cause readers to think through larger life questions, but I will argue in this thesis that the way in which a writer narrates discrete, singular events in the story can also cause a reader to think through life questions that deal with time and existence.

A. Narratives make Readers Conscious of Problems of Being and Time

Stories simulate the dilemmas of human life and present readers with conflicts to think through in a safe space. They engage people’s imaginations and allow them to wander through fictional spaces and times, or as Gottschall writes, “space-time.” Narratives help readers consider what would happen or what they would do if they encountered a similar problem in real life (Gottschall 11). When people read, they learn how to approach problems they might encounter in their daily lives, whether or not they consciously recognize what they are learning or the connections they are making as they read (199). Martin Heidegger writes in *Being and

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¹ Since theorists like Mikhail Bakhtin, Gerard Genette, and Mieke Bal introduced their revolutionary theories of time and narrative, literary scholars have sought to unlock the mysteries of time in narrative. Bakhtin, Genette, and Bal, along with many others of their time, forced what Peter Rabinowitz would call a “radical reexamination of our critical vocabulary” in matters pertaining to time and narrative (Rabinowitz 121). They started a discussion that pulled apart time in narrative and explored how writers worked with time and to what effect. Although it is every student’s dream to come up with an idea that forces another “radical reexamination” of all previous theory, my goal in this thesis is to simply set forth a way of looking at time in narrative that I think could be a useful way of thinking about how writers manipulate time within a single narrative event (Rabinowitz 121).
*Time* that “the history of literature is to become the history of problems” (30). The problems people encounter in the narrative world raise their awareness of questions and problems they may encounter in their real lives.

One of the most ubiquitous larger life questions that stories help people sort through is the question of what Aristotle would describe as “*to ti ēn einai,*” or, in other words, “‘what it is to be’ or ‘what being is.’…” (Ong 29; Heidegger 24). It is difficult to distill questions of being and time to a few lines, but for the purposes of this thesis, two topics are important: 1) what it means “to be,” and 2) the characteristics that time has and the role that it plays in defining existence and giving existence meaning. As I described in my undergraduate thesis, Heidegger writes that “Being lies in the fact that something is, and in its Being as it is; in Reality; in presence-at-hand; in subsistence; in validity; in Dasein; in the ‘there is’” (26). A being exists because it “is,” and that characteristic of “is” is a part of the substance of the being. Something “is” only when it occurs in terms of a particular existence, or within a beginning and an ending. But in order to access the substance of the existence, to understand the “life” that is a part of the being, the “is,” an individual must consider the being’s “Dasein,” or human existence. An existence only occurs if there is a being to give rise to the existence.

One of the subsidiary questions to the problem of what it means “to be” is the place that time has in our lives. One way of looking at our lives as human beings on this earth is that we exist in the context of time; we have beginnings and endings. We have births and deaths that frame the time we exist on earth. The passage of time is a part of our experience of existence. In their daily lives, people typically conceive of their existence as being linear and moving forward; they perceive events in their lives to be ordered chronologically within a beginning and an
ending.² We conceive of our lives as having time periods with separate pasts, presents and futures that always move forward toward the future. Sometimes, however, that perception is challenged by what we experience in our lives.

As the narrative theorist Gerard Genette observed, narratives have a “doubly temporal sequence…: There is the time of the thing told and the time of the narrative (the time of the signified and the time of the signifier)” (33). When a reader reads a narrative, the reader exists in a number of different temporalities. These temporalities include the time of the reader’s reading of the story and the time of the narrative itself. The “duality” of time in narrative invites the reader “to consider that one of the functions of narrative is to invent one time scheme in terms of another time scheme” (33). Additionally, narrative “can only be ‘consumed,’ and therefore actualized, in a time that is obviously reading time, and even if the sequentiality of its components can be undermined by a capricious, repetitive, or selective reading…” (34). The time that is needed to “consume” narrative is the time that is needed for “crossing or traversing it, like a road or a field. The narrative text, like every other text, has no other temporality than what it borrows, metonymically, from its own reading” (34). Stories and narrative can ask readers to “decode events narrated in the past tense as a kind of present, and ask us to view those events as structured in relation to a future which is already there and waiting for us to reach it” (Currie, Expansion 353). This decoding connects back to the fact that a text is typically written before it is read by the reader; it is written in the past of the present of the reading. In a narrative, “the future” is pre-decided and written, in contrast to reality, where it is always uncertain (353).

Whether or not there is a clear beginning, middle, and ending to the narrative, the future of the

² I cursorily address beginnings and endings because beginnings and endings frame people’s sense of existence and the time of existence; they affect people’s perception of the chronology of the past, present, and future. Beginnings and endings necessarily become a part of a discussion of how writers play with the reader’s experience of time in narrative.
novel is always defined during the moment of the reading. A “narrative reconfigures the experience of time in the act of representing it, and in so doing, it inflects the temporality that it represents with the shape that narrative gives to it” (355). Narratives inevitably involve the manipulation of events in time, regardless of what temporal scheme the event exists in.

Narratives can help readers better understand how time pervades people’s lives in often unrecognized ways. In “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics,” Mikhail Bakhtin sets forth his theory of how time and space are intrinsically connected and inseparable in literature (84). Bakhtin theorizes that in chronotopes, “spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole” (94). Bakhtin’s theory of chronotopes help the time in a narrative become visible; the space that chronotopes indicate becomes “charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history” (84). We try to “make sense of existence by defining our specific place in it;” that effort is “performed in cognitive time and space,” which are “the basic categories of perception” (Holquist 35). From Bakhtin, we get a sense that people can try to understand their existence by figuring out where they are located in it – in space and in time. Bakhtin theorized that there are different types of time and space, or “chronotopes,” and that those different types of time and space and help define the genre of the narrative involved.

Chronotopes are the time and space of events or moments in the novel; they compose the narrative. The theory of manipulation of time in the telling of narrative events focuses on the changes that occur in time within the linked events in the narrative, or the relationships that occur within chronotopes. The theory set forth in this thesis is not about what occurs between events in the narrative or between the chronotopes of a narrative; it is about what happens within the events of the narrative themselves and within the chronotopes themselves. Writers play with
the way they tell events in the narrative. Different writers all do things a little bit differently when it comes to playing with the way they tell events within the discourse of the narrative. Chronotopes help highlight the interplay of time and space in narrative, and of life in general. Bakhtin’s theory of chronotopes was influenced by Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity and the idea that a person’s experience of time can be subjective.

B. People have Subjective Experiences of Time

Time is a tricky thing when it comes to articulating how we experience it in a specific series of moments or specific moment in our lives. Scientists are not completely sure how our brains track time, but it appears that some of our perception of time is dependent on what is happening inside of our minds and some of it is dependent on what is happening outside of our minds (Bilger 3). Sometimes it can feel like time is passing quickly, while at other times it feels like it is passing slowly. This feeling applies to the passage of time across events. It can also apply to the passage of time within a single event. Depending on what is happening in a particular moment, time seems to speed up or slow down, even though in reality it is always passing at the same speed. In his *New Yorker* article on the neuroscientist David Eagleman’s work on how the brain perceives time, Berkhard Bilger explains that our brains are relatively adept at keeping time, but at the end of the day, the time that our brain keeps is “intrinsically subjective” and dependent on a number of different variables (2-3).3

3 Bilger discusses how Eagleman’s work shows that some individuals are more adept at keeping precise time inside their heads than others (Bilger 12-13). Bilger explains that drummers, for example, are very good at being able to keep precise time in their heads (12-13). A drummer’s timing is “a physical thing” (15). Drummers know how fast the beat in different genres of music need to go and how to manipulate the tempo of the beat to create excitement or change in a song (15). Eagleman’s research shows that some people, like schizophrenics in particular, do not do very well on similar types of timing tests because they process time “a little out of sequence” and subsequently experience a different reality (16-17).
Recent studies have shown that “if very few events come to mind, then the perception of time does not persist; the brain telescopes the interval that has passed” (Carey). If only a few intervening events have occurred over time, the brain’s “internal pacemaker” speeds up (Carey).4 Our perception of time can also slow down. When people have near death experiences or fear for their lives, for example, they feel like time is slowing down because their minds are trying to process every sensation that is happening (Bilger 3). Their brains take what they do not understand and try to translate it into something they can understand (Carey). Their brains take the overload of information that they are given and try to process it into something manageable and understandable (Carey). This same principle works throughout people’s lives: when people are given an overload of information, they try to process it into something comprehensible.

However we perceive time within a single moment or a series of events, it is clear that the rhythm of time, the feeling of how fast or slow it is passing, if it is in sync or not, changes depending on what we are experiencing outside of our brain during that time. Because the experience of time as a past, present and future, or “chronologic time,” and the experience of time within a specific moment is crucial to our sense of being, it is necessary to consider what happens when something or someone disrupts what we might intuitively believe about the sequence of time. When our instinctual beliefs about time are contradicted, we are forced to confront our perceptions of being and time and try to make sense of them again.

C. Writers Manipulate Time in the Telling of Narrative Events

But how does narrative help disrupt what people might intuitively feel about the rhythm of time and the sequence of time? How does narrative get people to re-think about what they

4 Carey offers the following example as clarification: “Involved parents are all too well aware of every hiccup, split lip and first step in their own children; whereas, seeing a cousin’s child once every few years, without intervening memories, telescopes the time” (Carey).
believe about time? How does narrative get people to question their instinctual beliefs about chronologic time and the rhythm of our experience of time at a specific moment? Novice writers are discouraged from shifting time and tense in a single sentence for fear that their attempts will lead to convoluted writing that is difficult to understand, but there are a number of ways that more advanced writers play with time in narrative. Some writers use analepses and prolepses to manipulate the chronology of the narrative while others play with the narrative’s endings or a lack of endings. Some writers even create false endings.\(^5\) The theory of time in narrative set forth in this thesis considers the way that writers manipulate time within the telling of a discrete narrative event, instead of the way that writers manipulate the telling of a series of connected or disconnected events.

The sequence and rhythm of time might be easy to understand in a narrative like *The Little Engine that Could*, which has a clear beginning, middle, and end, and plods along with a series of rhythmic ‘I think I can…I think I can-s’ (Piper), but it becomes more complex and difficult to follow with the works of writers like William Faulkner and Vladimir Nabokov. Faulkner and Nabokov use analepses and prolepses to manipulate the order of the stories they tell in their narratives. Faulkner and Nabokov also shift time, tense, and time referents throughout the course of a single sentence and a single paragraph. I mention two brief examples

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\(^5\) As I explained in a paper for my American Detective Fiction Course: A reader can think of a “fake ending” as the revelation of the crime in the story. In a traditional story, the plot builds up to the crime, but in detective fiction, the crime is generally explained within the first few pages, and the story proceeds backwards to untangle how the crime was committed and who committed it. The reader can then think of that revelation – who committed the crime and how – as the “false ending.” The criminal act and the motive happened first, but the reader learned about them last. The detective story, therefore, is bookended by two endings. Because detective writers use this technique, which is present in some form in virtually all detective fiction, a detective writer does not provide the reader with a true sense of finality. Instead, most detective fiction leaves the reader with the sense that the entire story was just a stop on the quest for a larger understanding of life.
here as a starting point. These examples will be explained more fully in the body of the thesis. In *Absalom, Absalom*, Faulkner has the character Charles Bon write a letter to his beloved Judith and say that “We have waited long enough…Because what WAS is one thing, and now it is not because it is dead, it died in 1861, and therefore what IS…Because what IS is something else again because it was not even alive then…I now believe that you and I are, strangely enough, included among those who are doomed to live” (104). In this sentence, Faulkner is not necessarily shifting tenses, but he uses conjugations of the verb “to be” in different ways to call the reader’s attention to time. Nabokov uses a similar, but less overt, technique as he manipulates time and time referents in a single sentence without using conjugations of the verb “to be.” Nabokov describes Van, one of the main characters in *Ada, or Ardor* as he writes: “In later years he had never been able to reread Proust (as he had never been able to enjoy again the perfumed gum of Turkish paste) without a roll-wave of surfeit and a rasp of gravelly heartburn…” (9). Nabokov pulls together a number of different moments in Van’s life in this single sentence. For example, Nabokov place the memory of reading Proust next to the memory of enjoying perfumed gum immediately next to each other; Nabokov shifts his reader through what is arguably four of different time references in this single sentence.

In this thesis, I will attempt to sort through ways in which writers change the rhythm of time for the reader. Writers manipulate time within singular narrative events, whether it is to move the reader across different time periods, or whether it is to try and get the reader to comprehend the totality of time by calling forth moments from the past, present, and future and intertwining them together in a single sentence or phrase. These time manipulations change how reader experiences time in the narrative; sometimes it speeds up, sometimes it slows down, and sometimes the reader feels a sense of a shift in time. The prosody of time manipulations, as the
“syntagma” of narrative, could be a fruitful way of looking at time in narrative because being forced to confront unintuitive movements of time focuses the reader on questions of time and how they perceive it. Time manipulations in the telling of singular narrative events causes the reader to think about time in terms of the passage of time across events and the passage of time during a specific moment within an event.

Instead of talking about the order and sequence of events in the discourse of the narrative and how the sequence of the discourse may not match the sequence of events that is contained in the story, this thesis will explore time manipulations within a singular event in two primary ways: 1) through the ways that writers manipulate time in narrative explicitly and 2) the way in which writers shift time in a single sentence or paragraph implicitly. The types of time manipulations are separated into two different groups in order to distinguish between situations where it is possible to discern authorial intent and situations where authorial intent is more ambiguous. Each writer discussed in this thesis works with time in a different way and often to different narrative effect.
II. **THE MIDDLE – THEORY AND TEXTS**

Theorists have agonized over questions of time and meaning in narrative for generations. Paul Ricoeur and Martin Heidegger sought to explore the metaphysics of time. Mikhail Bakhtin considered how time and space were intrinsically connected in the art of literature (64). Gerard Genette meticulously identified and classified different aspects of time in narrative, like a scientist cataloging his specimens. Genette organized the ways that writers play with time and created a vocabulary system for describing time in narrative. Mieke Bal, Seymour Chatman, and James Phelan identified parts of narrative and articulated the characteristic of narrative as rhetoric, or the ways in which narrative communicates meaning. Mark Currie began identifying ways in which tense affects narrative. All of these theorists have their own ways of thinking about time and narrative; even though they might not all agree about the meaning of time in literature, their thinking has contributed to the way we speak about and understand time in narrative today. The manipulation of time in the telling of narrative events combines three main types of theory: narrative theory, time theory, and theories of tense and language. The theory of manipulations of time in narrative set forth in this thesis is based in my interpretation of these fundamental philosophies. It is clear that a narrative has multiple temporalities at the macro-level; the theory of time manipulations in the telling of narrative events is an attempt to better understand the “multiple temporalities” that occur at the micro-level of the narrative, during a singular narrative event.

This technique of time manipulations has existed for hundreds of years and exists outside a category of writers that could arguably be called “modern” or “post-modern.” I hazard against calling this manipulation of time articulated in this thesis “universal,” because the examples I explain are simply examples that I have come across during my years of reading. However,
these examples do show that writers explore questions of time and existence through their
writing, both explicitly and implicitly, and that part of this exploration involves playing with the
prosody of time in the narrative.

A. Narrators’ Rhetorical Decisions have an Effect on the Reader

In *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames*, Brian Richardson
explains that “[t]ime, plot, openings, endings, and frames” are some of the most important
aspects of narrative to study (1). Theorists debate over which of these aspects is the most
important to the study of narrative. All, however, agree that a discussion of a work’s “particular
type of beginning, development, temporal arrangement, and denouement” is worth having
because it can lead to a larger understanding of the text as a whole (2). It is helpful to start a
discussion of shifting time in narrative and the temporal arrangement of a narrative with a brief
introduction to what constitutes “narrative” because the word “narrative” is a term of art. A
“narrative” is not just a story told by a writer or a retelling of events; it is something larger and
more nuanced.

The word “narrative” has many different definitions. Mieke Bal, for example, describes
narratives as a “finite, structured whole composed of signs” (5). Working from Bal’s definition
of narrative, David Herman, James Phelan, Peter Rabinowitz, and Robyn R. Warhol describe
narrative as an “event” in and of itself; it is more than just a “linked sequence of events”
(Herman, Phelan, Rabinowitz, Warhol 3). In their introduction to narrative theory, Herman,
Phelan, Rabinowitz, and Warhol describe narrative as a “multidimensional purposive
communication from a teller to an audience” (3). It is important to note that, according to these
theorists, a “narrative” does not have to tell a “story” in the traditional sense; a narrative does not
have to be a linked sequence of events that tells a cohesive story. A narrative can be a
connection or even just a movement between two events. The definition of a narrative as a “multidimensional purposive communication from a teller to an audience” has strengths and weaknesses (3). It allows for variety of different texts, including poetry, to be considered “narratives,” and takes accounts for the relationship that exists between the teller and the audience. However, this definition does not adequately address the purposive strides that “tellers,” or writers, make in narratives so that the narrative has a rhetorical effect on its audience.

For example, Charles Dickens’ Our Mutual Friend makes an explicit manipulation of time in the telling of a narrative event that has an effect on the reader. In Our Mutual Friend, Dickens tells the reader the story of about fifty different characters who live in Victorian England. Jenny Wren, who is one of those characters, is a young girl whose father is an alcoholic that cannot provide for his family. Of all the characters in Our Mutual Friend, Jenny Wren seems to be the character who is uniquely situated to discuss the enormity of time and existence. Jenny Wren and her “godmother,” a man named Mr. Riah, have a heart to heart as they walk through London (Dickens 430). “Tell me this,” Jenny asks of Mr. Riah, “Is it better to have had a good thing and lost it, or never to have had it?” (430). Mr. Riah responds that “Some beloved companionship fades out of most lives,” but that “the happiness was” (430). Through Mr. Riah, Dickens seems to be saying that painful events will always happen in people’s lives, but that the pain will fade and the happiness will still remain as a part of the

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6 Dickens describes Jenny Wren as “a child – a dwarf – a girl – a something” who is difficult to put into an age group (222-223). Jenny Wren is “the child,” “the queer little figure,” and “the person of the house” (222-223). Jenny Wren loves to play pretend and create complex storylines for her dolls, but she also provides for her family by staying up all night and making doll clothes to sell (223). Jenny Wren seems to be a child in quantity of years, but she takes on adult responsibilities and provides for her family. Jenny Wren hovers in a place in this odd place because chronologically she is a child, but in terms of sensibility, she is an adult.
“was,” or the past. Jenny Wren responds to Mr. Riah by saying she thinks that “you had better change Is into Was and Was into Is, and keep them so” (430). Dickens does not use conjugations of the verb “to be” to show shifts in tense. He uses the conjugations to illustrate how Jenny Wren wants to change the past into the present and the present into the past; she wants things to go back to the way they always were, and for the past to become the present again. Dickens highlights the change and the pain that Jenny Wren feels by having her put the past immediately next to the present; the past exists in stark contrast to the present and the difference between the two is highlighted for the reader. Time here passes quickly, sharply, and harshly. The explicit movement Dickens makes in shifting the reader from “Is” to “Was,” the present to the past, helps the reader see how Jenny Wren hovers between this past of childhood and tender friendships and this present of being alone and having to support her family by making doll clothes.

1. Narrators Make Purposive Choices in Narratives

A narrative is a communication of linked but possibly unrelated events, from teller to audience, that can have a rhetorical effect on the reader. James Phelan explains that the word “rhetoric” refers to the “complex, multilayered processes of writing and reading, processes that call upon our cognition, emotions, desires, hopes, values, and beliefs” (19). Rhetorical narrative theory “assumes that texts are designed by authors (consciously or not) to affect readers in particular ways” (Herman 5-6). The concept of narrative-as-rhetoric infers that there is a sort of intentionality in the rhetorical choices that a teller makes when crafting a narrative at the micro-level of syntax and at the macro-level of larger structure, and that those choices are made so that a reader experiences a certain effect (Phelan 8). The designs that are contained in the discourse
of the narrative could be interpreted as the strides that writers make in narrative discourse to create a certain effect in the reader.

While not a traditionally defined as narrative, William Wordsworth’s “Malham Cove” provides a helpful example of rhetorical choices a teller makes at the level of syntax and at the level of structure. “Malham Cove” is a part of William Wordsworth’s exploration of the “local” and “folkloric” traditions surrounding the places he was seeing on his trips with his family (Garrett 116). Wordsworth does not write in prose, but he tells a brief creation story in his poem. “Malham Cove” is helpful in showing how a writer can purposefully design a text to have an effect on the reader because it contains easily accessibly examples of manipulations of time through conjugations of the verb “to be.” Wordsworth uses conjugations of “to be” to draw the reader’s attention to the deep chasm and simultaneous harmony that exists between the past and the present. In “Malham Cove,” Wordsworth is trying to give his reader a sense of the magnitude of the cove and perhaps what he himself felt when he saw it.

At the level of syntax, Wordsworth completely capitalizes three words in the poem: “WAS,” “IS,” and “WAS.” These are ways of conjugating the verb “to be.” These are the only words the Wordsworth capitalizes in the poem and it seems reasonable to infer that Wordsworth...

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7 In 1807, Wordsworth and his family took a trip to Yorkshire and toured several different landmarks, including Malham Cove (Bradford 61). “Malham Cove” describes an actual location in Yorkshire (Seven Man Made Wonders). The cove is “a curving limestone cliff 1,000ft wide and 250ft high, has inspired awe in tourists and walkers for centuries in a landscape, which, on a good day, gleams silver with its distinctive rock” (Wordsworth’s aged inspiration).

8 The complete text of “Malhalm Cove” is as follows: “WAS the aim frustrated by force or guile,/When giants scooped from out the rocky ground,/Tier under tier, this semicirque profound?/(Giants--the same who built in Erin’s isle/That Causeway with incomparable toil!!--/Oh, had this vast theatric structure wound/With finished sweep into a perfect round,/No mightier work had gained the plausive smile/Of all-beholding Phoebus! But, alas,/Vain earth! false world! Foundations must be laid/In Heaven; for, 'mid the wreck of IS and WAS,/Things incomplete and purposes betrayed/Make sadder transits o'er thought's optic glass/Than noblest objects utterly decayed” (Wordsworth).
intended to demarcate them and set them apart from the rest of the words in the poem. He uses conjugations of “to be” three times, in these three situations. Wordsworth does not use a conjugation of the verb “to be” in any other line of the poem. By starting the first line of the poem with “WAS,” Wordsworth places the reader in an unlocated past but also asks the reader to question, from the very beginning of the poem and the creation of the cove, the existence and characteristics of the cove and the reader’s location in time. This is quite frankly beautiful word play: Wordsworth uses the conjugation of “to be” to indicate a question in the past tense but it could also be argued that Wordsworth uses “WAS” as a noun to indicate the “past” as a whole. Wordsworth focuses his readers on questions of time and existence through the way in which he discusses the creation of the cove.

At the macro-level of the poem’s larger structure, Wordsworth manipulates time in his telling of the cove’s creation story. Wordsworth creates an image of giants working and ‘scooping,’ and mourns the fact that the semicircle was not completed to form a complete circle (Line 2, Line 7). Wordsworth gives the landscape he describes “human transit and human purposes” (116). Garrett explains that the landscape “is marked everywhere by a history that reconnects the present with the past” (117). But which present of the landscape does Wordsworth describe in his poem? Is it the present of the creation of the cove, the present of Wordsworth’s viewing of the cove, or perhaps it is the present of the reader’s reading of the poem? And to what past is Wordsworth describing? Is it the pasts of each of the previously described presents?

In the poem, the voice of the narrator switches back and forth between what appears to be Wordsworth’s narrative voice telling a story and a present-at-the-creation narrator’s awe at the enormity of the cove. Wordsworth places the reader in multiple different “presents” in the poem.
Wordsworth writes in a voice of wonder looking back at the genesis of the cove, “WAS the aim frustrated by force or guile,/When giants scooped from out the rocky ground,/Tier under tier, this semicirque profound?/” (Lines 1-3). The narrator in the poem then goes on to marvel at the architects of the cove. In an aside, the narrator, who is now present at the creation or at least knowledgeable as to who created the cove, is fascinated at the thought of the “(Giants--the same who built in Erin's isle/That Causeway with incomparable toil!)” (Lines 4-5). Wordsworth then definitively slips into the past time of the cove’s creation to plaintively mourn that had this “wound” have been finished into a full round that it would have “gained the plausible smile/Of all-beholding Phoebus! But, alas,/Vain earth! false world!” (Lines 8-10). Moving to a different present, a present that reflects back on the creation of the cove, Wordsworth explains that “Things” that are incomplete and unfinished are more sad than “noblest objects” that were complete but now are “utterly decayed” (Lines 13-14). To Wordsworth, the cove is “unfinished” and incomplete. The creation story of the cove is unfinished because the giants’ aim was frustrated by something Wordsworth cannot describe.

In Lines 10-14 of the poem, the location in space and time of the speaker are particularly unclear. The narrator seems to be a combination of someone who exists in the present of the completed cove and someone who exists in the present of the cove’s construction and comprehends the magnitude of “Heaven” (Line 11). Wordsworth writes “Vain earth! false world! Foundations must be laid/In Heaven; for, ‘mid the wreck of IS and WAS,/Things incomplete and purposes betrayed/Make sadder transit o’er thought’s optic glass/Than noblest objects utterly decayed” (Wordsworth Lines 10-14). Wordsworth makes a distinction between what “is,” in an unarticulated “present” and what “was” in an unarticulated past. Precisely when this present and past occurs in the chronology of the time of the world is unclear; in fact, it
appears that Wordsworth is moving along a series of different “presents” in the chronology of time: Wordsworth refers to the present of the time of his writing, the present of the time of the poem, and the present of the time of the reading of the poem. In answer to the questions listed above, Wordsworth does not seek to locate a specific moment in the poem as “the present” or “the past.” He wants the reader to contemplate all of it. In order to do that, Wordsworth does not identify the specific time that he is referring to with his conjugations of the verb “to be” in the poem. The “IS” and the “WAS” could refer to the present or past of the poem, the present or past of the creation of the cove, the present or past of the reader’s reading, the list goes on and on.

2. **Choices Writers Make have a Rhetorical Effect on the Reader**

Now that we have established that writers make explicit and implicit intentional strides in their narratives, we can begin to discuss precisely what strides writers make and what those strides mean. There have traditionally been two attitudes towards rhetoric in Western thought (Phelan 11). Phelan describes the first as “the attitude that rhetoric is a means by which a truth independent of our discourse is folded, spindled, mutilated, or otherwise manipulated” and the second as “the attitude that rhetoric is inescapable because truth is not independent of but rather constituted by our discourse about it” (11). The theory of the manipulation of time in the telling of narrative events is a combination of the two; the manipulation of time within a single narrative event as a rhetorical device gives rise to a “truth independent of our discourse,” and that this rhetorical device is “inescapable” because the reader better understands the truth about shifts in time and tense by engaging in “discourse about it” (11). In the case of the rhetorical device of time manipulation that is discussed in this thesis, the truth about shifts in tense and time is
shaped by the reader’s experience of the sense of change in rhythm that the rhetorical device creates in the audience.

Analyzing and evaluating the characteristics of narrative and the purposive strides that writers make in particular helps explain the “narrative’s affective, ethical, and aesthetic effects” (Herman 3). Narrators try to achieve specific “multidimensional purposes” in their narratives, even as they try to be “sufficiently flexible to respond to the diversity of narrative acts” and the diversity of the audience that might be reading the narrative (5). Exploring how a narrative is constructed helps explain the “narrative’s design and its purposes” (Herman 5-6). An author achieves his purpose through the connections and transitions between elements of a narrative, but it is still important to take an approach to narrative that “shifts emphasis from author as controller to the recursive relationships among authorial agency, textual phenomena, and reader response” (Phelan 19). Phelan advocates for a way of discussing narrative form that considers the relationships between a number of different aspects of narrative; Phelan cautions that it is important to consider “the way in which our attention to each of these elements both influences and can be influenced by the other two” (19). Phelan suggests that if we can look at the elements of narrative together, if we can look at the connections among them and move away from simply considering the “author as controller,” we can develop a fuller understanding of a narrative, its rhetorical effects, and eventually meaning.

We return briefly to Wordsworth’s “Malhalm Cove” to better understand how the rhetorical choices writers make may have an effect on the reader of the text. Wherever the “present” and “past” in the poem are located in the chronology of time in human history, it is the telescoping of time between “IS” and “WAS,” the placing of “IS” next to “WAS” that seems to be meaningful to Wordsworth. The cove existed in the past, it exists in the present, but it also
exists as a sum total of the past and the present. From my reading of this Wordsworth poem, it appears in the poem that Wordsworth believes that the past and the present have the contradictory characteristics of being distinct and fused together. In “Malham Cove,” the “IS” and “WAS” are distinct in that there is a change that occurs from the past to the present to the past. But, the past and the present can also never be completely separate because they are ‘wrecked’ together. They are intertwined together. The world has changed in the generations from the past of the cove to the present, but the cove also exists in essentially the same form that it did at its creation. It exists in the present as remarkably the same cove. The past gives rise to the present and the present is nothing without the past. It has a more complicated and simultaneous existence in the past and the present. This time manipulation is quite different from a simple chronological communication of distinct pasts, presents, and futures. Wordsworth uses the different conjugations of the verb “to be” to explain how the past and the present of the cove and of existence itself clash, intermingle, and overlap. The dynamic relationship between the past and the present is part of the beauty of the cove to Wordsworth. Wordsworth overloads his reader with enormous amounts of information by asking his reader to consider the change in time between the past and the present with references to what “WAS” and what “IS.” The reader has to try to make sense of what she has read. Wordsworth calls the reader’s attention to the way readers typically look at time and what other ways a reader can conceive of time.

Finally, some critics like Brian McHale and Linda Hutcheon would likely argue that the texts I am working with in this thesis, like *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Ada, or Ardor* in particular, are modern or “post-modern” texts that do not try to communicate any “timeless meaning” to their reader (Hutcheon 19). They would instead say that post-modern texts are about joy and playing. Postmodern literature comes with a whole host of characteristics that make it different
from other ‘genres’ of literature. Frederick Jameson argues that the postmodern world is characterized by a system that “resorts to new techniques of distortion by way of a suppression of history and even, as we shall see, of time and temporality itself…” (701). Hutcheon would likely suggest that a better framing of what would result from studying the intricacies of a text like *Ada* would probably be that an exploration of Nabokov’s narration style could give rise to a larger exploration of self in the reader (12). These are valid concerns that factor into any claims I might make in this thesis about why these writers manipulate time in narrative and to what effect. As a result, I focus in this thesis on looking at the rhetorical effect the text has on the reader.

3. **Narratives Have a Story and a Discourse that can be Manipulated**

Writers make purposive strides to communicate with their reader in a narrative. Those strides take place in different parts of the narrative. Gerard Genette and Seymour Chatman make a distinction between what is called the “story” and the “discourse” of the narrative. “Story” refers to the “content of the narrative expression,” while the term “discourse” describes “the form of that expression” (Chatman 23). Genette and Chatman also suggest that when talking about stories, it may be helpful to conceive of the word “story” as describing “the signified or narrative content,” and thinking of the word “narrative” as describing the “signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself,” and to use the word “narrating” for the act of “producing narrative action and, by extension, the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that action takes place” (27) (internal footnote omitted).

Narrative theorists have also used the words “fabula” and the “sjuzhet” to describe the different parts of narrative. In Mieke Bal’s theoretical framework, “fabula” refers to the story that is derived from the text, while “sjuzhet” refers to “the presentation of that story in the order
that it appears in the text” (Herman 77). Fabula/sjuzhet and story/discourse have slightly different meanings; fabula describes the story that is contained in the narrative, while “story” describes the “content” of the narrative. This distinction is important because “story” refers more precisely to the content that is contained in certain post-modern or experimental works, which may or may not have a story to tell in the traditional sense of the word. Similarly, “sjuzhet” has the connotation that a story must have an internal order, whether or not that is the order in which events are presented in the text; “discourse” allows theorists the freedom to argue that a narrative may not have a specific order in the text. The term “discourse,” more clearly allows events in the narrative to be defined as “processes,” or “a change, a development, and presupposes therefore a succession in time or a chronology” (Bal 214). The words “story” and “discourse” more precisely articulate the difference between the content in a text (the story) and the form of the expression of that content (the discourse). These words allow for a more articulate discussion of narratives that include the categories of modern and postmodern writing.

The purposive strides that a writer makes for rhetorical effect in a narrative could happen in the story or the discourse of the narrative. For example, even though events in a narrative might occur sequentially if the narrative was mapped out on a storyboard of the story, that does not mean they have to be told in the same order in the discourse. Bal explains that “[t]he best-known principle of ordering” that writers use “is the presentation of events in an order different from their chronological order” (76). Writers may manipulate the order of events in the discourse for rhetorical effect. As a variation on the prototypical narrative that is an event containing a linked sequence of predominantly chronologically-related events, many contemporary experimental novels intentionally manipulate time and conceal the relationships
between events in the sequence of the narrative for rhetorical effect (79). In *Ada*, for example, Nabokov does not reveal the events of the story to the reader in chronological order; the events in the story are presented out of order in the discourse of the narrative and some events do not even seem to fit together in the story of the narrative.

Highlighting this type of time manipulation at the story and discourse level is important because writers also use this kind of manipulation at a micro-level, or within single narrative events in the story.9 In the Faulkner and Nabokov passages10 mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, both writers manipulate time in the telling of the content that is contained in a single narrative event. Faulkner explicitly moves the reader through different time references in a single sentence by using conjugations of the verb “to be” in order to call forth different moments from the history of the narrative with references to what “WAS” and what “IS” (104). A reader of this passage does not experience the story in the letter as if it is moving forward linearly because Faulkner complicates the story by referring to different moments in Charles Bon’s past. Faulkner’s telling of the event using the words “WAS” and “IS” as more than just verbs in the past tense or the present tense calls forth many different time referents; Faulkner manipulates the reader’s sense of time and location in the time of the narrative. The words “WAS” and “IS” are not just used to explain what happened in the past of the narrative or what is happening in the present of the narrative. Faulkner’s use of the conjugations of “to be” in this passage

9 The relationship between the micro-level of time manipulation during a single narrative event and the macro-level of time manipulation in the over-arching chronology of the narrative is yet another aspect of narrative that gives rise to a rhetorical effect in the reader. Genette proposes that the study of narrative is a study of relationships at many different levels; it is a study of relationships between “narrative and story, between narrative and narrating, and (to the extent that they are inscribed in the narrative discourse) between story and narrating” (27-29).

10 The passage reads as follows: “We have waited long enough...Because what WAS is one thing, and now it is not because it is dead, it died in 1861, and therefore what IS...Because what IS is something else again because it was not even alive then...I now believe that you and I are, strangely enough, included among those who are doomed to live” (Faulkner 104).
communicates to the reader something more than the plain meaning of the words. Similarly, Nabokov implicitly brings moments from different time periods in Van’s life together in a single sentence. Nabokov could have told the reader a linear, sequential story with discrete events as follows: Van and Ada discover treasures together as children, then Van reads Proust over and over, and then later, Van thinks about when he read Proust, but Nabokov chooses not to. Instead, Nabokov chooses to ask the reader to consider the moments together.

4. **Individuals have Context-Specific Responses to Texts**

Narratives have story and form, and forms can have a rhetorical effect on the reader. The final step in the analytical path to the discussion of how writers manipulate time in the telling of narrative events and explain why a writer might choose to manipulate time at the micro-level of a narrative is the meaning that is created by such purposeful strides. Narrative theorists are typically limited to the field of “textual analysis” when it comes to literary and fictional narrative because the story and narrating exist “by means of the intermediary of the narrative” (Genette 29). When a reader reads, she reads a text that was produced during a specific moment and in a specific place. A reader’s reading of the text is filtered through the context of the time of the writing and the reading. As Bakhtin writes of a text, “our creation of it, our acquaintance with it occurs through time” (252). A text is alive and dynamic; even though the text must pass through “a lengthy series of mediating links” and even though it is captured in a “dead material of some sort,” a reader always ends up with the human being who produced the text (252). A narrative is reconstituted by the process of being read (Friedman 220). The creators of the text and the

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11 The passage reads as follows: “In later years he had never been able to reread Proust (as he had never been able to enjoy again the perfumed gum of Turkish paste) without a roll-wave of surfeit and a rasp of gravelly heartburn…” (Nabokov 9).
readers may occupy different “time-spaces,” but they are both located outside of the “represented” world in the text (Bakhtin 253).

The signs of a text come alive when they are read; writing has an effect on its reader, whether or not it is the effect that was intended by the writer (Poulet 5). A work of literature takes on a life of its own when it is read; the reading is “animated” by a “vital inbreathing;” the literature “becomes (at the expense of the reader whose own life it suspends) a sort of human being that the reader experiences through the reading of the text (59). The work becomes “a mind conscious of itself;” it constitutes itself in the reader “as the subject of its own objects” (59). Walter Ong writes that “there is a paradox in the fact that the deadness of the written or printed text, its removal from the living human lifeworld, its rigid visual fixity, assures its endurance and its potential for being resurrected into limitless living contexts by a limitless number of living readers” (22).

In his seminal article, “Signature, Event, Context,” Jacques Derrida explores the meaning of the written word and how meaning is communicated in through writing. Derrida begins his article by asking his reader to consider if “the word or signifier ‘communication’ communicates a determinate content, an identifiable meaning, or a describable value,” or whether the word has multiple meanings (1). Derrida explains that there are three predicates that characterize all writing (10). The first predicate is that all writing has written signs that are iterable, reproducible marks. These marks exist “in the absence and beyond the presence of the empirically determined subject who, in a given context, has emitted or produced it” (9). The second predicate is that the written sign is distinct from context; the sign can transcend time, space, and the world of the creator of the written sign’s experience (9). The third predicate is there is a space that separates the mark from context; this “spacing” is “the emergence of the mark” (10).
Signs can be ‘disengaged’ or removed from context, but they must always be readable and iterable to be writing. In the characteristic of “iterability,” we see a conflict between the requirement for the mark to have a “certain self-identity” that permits “its recognition and repetition,” or a connection, and the fact that the identity of the “signifying form” is “paradoxically the division or dissociation of itself…” and what makes this “phonic sign a grapheme” that is disconnected (10). Written communication must always be readable, or “connected,” but in order to be writing, it must also be capable of surviving a complete “rupture in presence,” or a “disconnect” (7-8). Derrida explains that the sign came “into being at the same time as imagination and memory, the moment it is necessitated by the absence of the object from present perception…” (6). As the sign comes into being, absence becomes possible. Written pasts and memories become possible. Communication with the absence of the creator of the writing becomes possible. There is simultaneously a connection and distance to writing: writing is simultaneously of the time of the writer’s creation and out of time (9).

Writing is produced in a specific moment and context of the writer’s existence, but can be read generations and eons later with either the same specific moment and context of production in mind, or with a different moment and context in mind (9). Those contexts give rise to meaning in the reader that is a unique combination of what the context the reader has and the context that the writer has when he or she creates the writing. Context matters when it comes to interpreting the meaning of a word or a text. The mark, like a signature, “implies” that there is an “actual or empirical nonpresence” of the person who signed (20). A mark “retains this having-been present in a past now or present…which will remain a future now or present…” (20). A signature also has an iterable form that is “detached from the present and singular intention of its production” (20). A mark is simultaneously in the time of its past creation and
Writers design their narratives to affect their readers in a certain way (Herman 5-6). A writing has an effect on the reader, whether or not it was the effect intended by the creator of that writing. The use of open-ended techniques in narratives require “the reader to develop his or her own powers of discernment and judgment” (60). This can be a conscious or unconscious effort on the part of the writer. Texts and narratives can have an impact on their readers because they cause “mental objects” to “rise up from the depth of consciousness into the light of recognition” (Poulet 57). Texts can help give rise to a re-evaluation of self. Disorienting and open-ended movements like time manipulations in the telling of narrative events “wakes readers up, shatters complacencies, ‘defamiliarizes’ language, transforms normal expectations of chronology and character, sharpens readers’ perceptions, opens new worlds and so on” (Booth 60). When an individual reads, he or she enters into a relationship with the text and brings his or her context to a written text. The meaning that results for the reader is contingent on the combination of the text and the context a reader brings to the reading. It may never be possible to fully know Faulkner and Nabokov’s intention in the rhetorical moves that they make in their writing, but it is possible to see that both writers make explicit and implicit efforts to cause the reader to think about time in their lives, and by extension, to cause the reader to re-evaluate his sense of self.

B. Writers Manipulate Time in the Telling of Narrative Events

When studying narrative, theorists have typically focused on studying the macro-level structure of narrative. Theorists look at what happen across events: what comes first, second, or within another event. In this next section, I hope to articulate a theory of how writers manipulate
time in the telling within single narrative events and often within a single sentence, at the micro-
level. When I started my research on this topic, I began by looking at approaches to time in
narrative because it seemed like the place most likely to have a way of explaining what is
happening in a text when time is manipulated within a single narrative event. Although
Bakhtin’s theory of chronotopes puts “flesh” on the relationship of time and space in a narrative,
it does not adequately explain what is happening in an event in a narrative when there is shift in
time inside the event of the narrative itself. Similarly, Genette’s theories of time do not
sufficiently explain the shifting time referents and tenses in the events of the narrative because
they do not take into consideration the linguistic component of shifts in time.

1. Current Theoretical Approaches to Time in Narrative

   Brian Richardson uses the term “narrative dynamics” to describe how a narrative moves
from its beginning to ending (1). “Linearity” can refer to the characteristic of having distinct
beginnings, middles, and ends. Some narratives move linearly, from beginning to ending, while
others do not. If the narrative does not have a clear beginning or ending, there are a number of
“interpretative operations that readers are likely to use to restore balance” (Rabinowitz Reading
Beginnings and Endings 305). What constitutes a “beginning” to a narrative depends on the
narrative itself. Friedman explains that openings have distinct characteristics, and that the
beginnings of most narratives are “false” (Friedman 250). Readers seem to want a definite
beginning, whether or not they want a definitive ending; they have a need for “certainty at the
beginning over the usually later sense of an ending” (Said 265). There seems to be some
confusion about the meaning of endings or “closure.” It can refer to the way a text “calls on
readers to apply rules of signification; in this sense, a text is ‘open’ if is symbolic meanings are
not restricted…but closure can also refer to the way that a text utilizes rules of configuration; in
this sense, a work is ‘open’ when, for instance, the plot remains unresolved and incomplete even at the end” (Rabinowitz 307).

The same goes at the micro-level of narrative, within the telling of single narrative events. Readers want closure, they want clear beginnings and endings within singular narrative events. Readers try to restore order so that there can be clear understanding and meaning. If we look back to the Faulkner passage from *Absalom*,12 we can see that Faulkner moves the reader back and forth through time, and leaves the telling of narrative event “incomplete.” The passage is presented to the reader as a part of a letter from Charles Bon to his lover Judith. The letter is introduced to the reader through a character named Quentin, who is neither the writer or receiver of the letter. Quentin remarks that the letter looks like a there was a “shadow cast upon it” and that it has no “date or salutation or signature:” (102). The context of the letter and the individuals party to the letter at the macro level of the story are uncertain to a first and even second-time reader of the letter who reads it as is presented in the text, and the events contained in the letter itself are left open and unclear. There is no certain beginning or ending in terms of the story that is being told in the sentence; a reader is left wondering what the parties to the letter were waiting for, what has changed in their lives, and why it matters that they are “doomed to live” (104). Faulkner references many unique private moments from different parts of the Charles Bon and Judith’s lives that are clear only to the parties to the letter and causes all parties involved, Charles Bon, Judith, and the reader of the text to consider the different moments from their lives together. The reader can only try to infer the story that is being communicated from Charles Bon to Judith. This uncertainty is a part of what gives rise to meaning in the reader.

12 The passage reads: “We have waited long enough...Because what WAS is one thing, and now it is not because it is dead, it died in 1861, and therefore what IS...Because what IS is something else again because it was not even alive then...I now believe that you and I are, strangely enough, included among those who are doomed to live” (Faulkner 104).
Paul Ricoeur questions what it means for there to be a “sequence” or order in a narrative between the linked events that occur in the narrative (35). Ricoeur suggests that there might be a “deeper experience of time, one that escapes the dichotomy between the chronology of sequence and the achronology of models” (35). This conception of time would transcend the models and forms that we dissect to try and understand time in the novel. Ricoeur sees a reciprocal relationship between temporality and narrativity: he takes “temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent” (35). Ricoeur highlights the importance of questioning the “ordinary representation of time as a linear succession of instants” and seeks to connect features of the narrative to features of temporality (35-36). Ricoeur explains that the “ordinary representation of time as a linear series of ‘nows’ hides the true constitution of time…” and sets forth a theory for how events happen “in” time (36). Events in a narrative occur sequentially, although not necessarily in a certain “order;” conceiving those narratives as being a linear series of “nows,” constrains the true complexity of time and narrative. As the theorist Seymour Chatman writes, language is a “temporally flowing medium, thought it may depict temporally static (or atemporal) entities as well as temporal movements” (Chatman, Towards a Theory 302).

Ricoeur talks about “nows” at the macro level. He discusses what it means for a narrative to have a chronological sequence over time, even if it is not ordered as such in the discourse of the narrative. The Nabokov passage that was mentioned previously and is contained in the footnote below illustrates how reading a narrative, and the events in the narrative itself,

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13 Nabokov writes that “In later years he had never been able to reread Proust (as he had never been able to enjoy again the perfumed gum of Turkish paste) without a roll-wave of surfeit and a rasp of gravelly heartburn; yet his favorite purple passage remained the one concerning the name ‘Guermantes,’ with whose hue his adjacent ultramine merged in the prism of his mind, pleasantly teasing Van’s artistic vanity” (9).
as a sequential series of “nows” at the micro-level is also problematic. In the Nabokov passage, the point is not that moments have occurred chronologically over time, but that moments can also occur together, in a single instant and within a single narrative event. There are three or four arguably different “presents” in the telling of this moment that describes Van, but they cannot be read in sequence; they must be read simultaneously. The moments in time cannot be read as discrete events that occur chronologically over time. They occur in time and out of time, together.

When studying the “temporal order of narrative,” we “compare the order in which events or temporal sections are arranged in the narrative discourse with the order of succession these same events or temporal segments have in the story, to the extent that story order is explicitly indicated by the narrative itself or inferrable from one or another indirect clue” (Genette 35). We talk about if the event “comes after in the narrative” even though it is supposed “to have come before in the story” (35). Genette describes this manipulation of events with the terms “analepses” and “prolepses” to remove the “psychological connotations” of the words “anticipation” and “retrospection” (40) (internal footnote omitted). “Written linguistic text” appears to be linear when compared to other art forms because it is a form where “[o]ne word follows another, one sentence follows another; and when one has finished the book, one has sometimes forgotten the beginning” (Bal 81). Typically, one reads a narrative all the way through, from the beginning to the end, as opposed to what readers do with other art forms (Bal, 81).

Bal explains that it is not always possible or helpful to try and construct the chronological sequence, or the “fabula,” of the story (79). Sometimes, Bal explains, the sequence is “intentionally confused” or “expressly concealed” by what appears to be a clear chronology (79).
Authors can break the linearity of the text and force “the reader to read more intensively. Deviations in sequential ordering may contribute to intense reading” and make the reader have to work to follow the story; this process forces the reader to “reflect also on other elements and aspects” (81). When the events in the discourse are not presented in order, readers are asked to read the “end in the beginning and the beginning in the end” (Genette 45). Readers learn “to read time itself backward, as the recapitulating of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences” (45). By reading in this fashion, human action is not only established within time, “but within memory” (45). Memory “repeats the course of events according to an order that is the counterpart of time as ‘stretching-along’ between a beginning and an end” (45).

The balance of a narrative is upset “through violation (deception cadence) and through exaggeration (excessive cadence)” (Rabinowitz 305). The “chronological chaos” of a narrative can still be “quite meaningful” (Bal 79). I disagree with Mark Currie when he writes that “A sentence which preserves the order of letters in words but which reverses word order is relatively intelligible, and by extension, a narrative which narrates in forward-moving blocks a backwards order of events presents few problems to its interpreter” (Currie, Expansion 361). This type of forward-moving that narrates a backwards order of events may not be difficult for a trained theorist to follow, but it can be difficult for a lay person to follow because readers “expect balance in a text…” and will likely try restore balance to the text when they are writing (Rabinowitz 305). When a writer plays with sequential ordering in a text or when a writer calls forth multiple different time references during a singular narrative event, he might be trying to draw attention to different aspects of narrative, to “emphasize, to bring about aesthetic or psychological effects” (Bal 81). According to Bal, the fabula is “treated,” and this treatment is what ‘manipulates’ the reader and gives rise to emotions in the reader (Bal 76).
An example of this traditional way of looking at time in narrative would be to analyze how a writer tells events and facts in and out of the storyline in the novel. One of the most basic time manipulations that Nabokov uses in *Ada* is to tell episodes and reveal facts of the story out of the chronological time of the narrative. For example, considering that the “present” of the narrative is Ada and Van’s story, the book begins with a sort of analepsis: Nabokov introduces Van’s grandmother and tells her story first, before the reader ever hears about Ada and Van. But Daria (“Dolly”) Durmanov is not introduced to the reader as the daughter of Prince Peter Zemski; instead, she is introduced as “Van’s maternal grandmother Daria (“Dolly”) Durmanov…” (Nabokov 3). Dolly’s past existence is framed in the context of Van’s present existence, before Van is even introduced inside the text of the main narrative. This type of analysis looks at time at the macro-level, but neglects looking at time at the micro-level, within a single narrative event or a single sentence. The theory of the manipulation of time at the micro-level is focused on the idea that all of these same principles apply when looking at the happenings within a single event in the narrative, as opposed to the links between and among different singular events in the narrative.

Finally, narratives also change speed, or “the relationship between a temporal dimension and a spatial dimension” (Genette 87). The basic rhythm of a story is contained in the “movement back and forth from present to past to past to present” (Bal 82). Anachrony is an ordinary textual device; many novels often start the discourse with a moment from the middle of the story, but then shift back to a different part of the story, and then tell the story chronologically from there (82). When an event is presented in an anachronistic fashion, it is “separated by an interval, large or small, from the ‘present’; that is, from the moment in the

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14 A reader of the family tree paratext might already know that Dolly is Van’s grandmother.
development of the story with which the story is concerned at the time the anachrony interrupts it” (88). There can be external and internal analepses depending on whether or not the “retroversion” takes place insider or outside of the “primary fabula” of the text; if the retroversion “begins outside the primary time span and ends within it,” it is called a “mixed retroversion” (89). Sometimes, however, “anachronies are embedded in each other, intertwined to such an extent that it becomes just too difficult to analyse them” (87). These anachronoies give rise to the narrative rhythm of the narrative. “Narrative rhythm” is one of the most difficult aspects of narrative to evaluate (Bal 98).15 Narrative rhythm refers to the tempo (Bal 104), the speed and the steadiness of the presentation of the narrative (Genette 88). Any change in the rhythm of the time of the narrative can have an effect on the reader (88). These approaches to time in narrative focus on time at the macro-level of the narrative. These approaches focus on the movements between narrative events, instead of the movements that are happening within the singular narrative event itself. Sometimes, it appears that there are changes in time and tense within the events of the narrative themselves. This affects the meaning of the discourse and the meaning of the story as a whole. Another aspect of the narrative technique of manipulations of time in the telling of narrative events is the fact that it changes the rhythm and tempo of the narrative event being told.

Genette suggests that “[d]etailed analysis of these effects would be both wearing and devoid of all real rigor, since diegetic time is almost never indicated (or inferable) with the precision that would be necessary” (88). I agree with Genette that a detailed analysis of these effects would be “wearing,” but I think that an analysis of these effects could be fruitful, not in

15 As Roland Barthes writes, “in order for repetition to be erotic, it must be formal, literal, and in our culture this flaunted (excessive) repetition reverts to eccentricity, thrust toward various marginal regions of music” (41).
the sense that we would be able to pinpoint the precise diegetic time of the narrative, but that it would be possible to identify the shifts in time and time referents that occur in a singular event of the narrative. As Phelan writes, all parts of the narrative “may have consequences for the progression, even if those consequences lie solely in their effect on the reader’s understanding of the instabilities, tensions, and resolution” (Phelan, *Narrative Progression* 212).

2. **Manipulations of Time in the Telling of Narrative Events**

   Acknowledging the limited scope of the research I could complete throughout the course of writing this thesis, I could not find a way to fully explain what was going on in these types of singular narrative events in the theory and criticism I found. Both critical and literary theorists alike discuss time and writers’ manipulation of time in among narrative events, but I could not find a theory that fully explained how time referents are shifted in the narrative events of a narrative in a single narrative event. In order to sum up how the technique of manipulation of time when telling narrative events works, we start from Phelan’s premise that writers of texts have a purpose, or rhetorical effect, in mind when they write and that writers seek to communicate something to their reader in the text. Bakhtin and Poulet provide the principle that readers have a relationship with texts; through their reading of texts, readers breathe life into texts. Readers have a dynamic relationship with texts; texts have an effect upon the readers, whether or not it was the effect that the writer intended. This means that it is possible to look at texts as creators of meaning for readers; even if texts do not create a specific meaning, they are at least creators of questions about meaning.

   From Bal and Herman, et. al., comes the principle that narratives are linked sequences of events and events in and of themselves. From Derrida, we take the importance of the iterability of the sign and context in determining the meaning of written communication. And from Currie
and the other linguistic theorists mentioned above, we take the principle that a verb does not actually refer to a specific moment in time because tense is an “anaphoric” concept. Currie and Chatman give rise to the idea that narratives contain time “referents,” which refer to time and different aspects of time, but may not indicate a specific time period. At this point, we can move to trying to understand the shifts in time or combinations of time references that occur within a singular narrative event in the series of linked events in a narrative. When time is shifted in a single event or many different moments in time are pulled together in a single narrative, it does not mean that the tense of the event necessarily changes (although that may be true) or that the reader is moved to a separate time period of a past or future. Instead, it is the manipulation of time that the author uses that changes the rhythm of the event in the narrative and the rhythm of the narrative as a whole. It is helpful to place the time manipulations in the telling of narrative events in two primary categories: explicit and implicit.

Explicit time manipulations use what are traditionally considered time and tense-related words in different ways. They are explicit movements because they are overt strides made by the writer to use the time-related words in ways that the reader may not be expecting or accustomed to. They function at the level of the language and syntax of the narrative. The “tense system of a language can tell us about the metaphysics of time entailed by that language” and arguably about “the structure of human language to the nature of reality” (Ludlow xiv). This relationship is one often explored in narrative and poetry. For example, the poems collected in T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* contain the common theme that all periods of time, the past, present, and future, and all senses of existence are contained within “the still point of the turning
world” (BN, Lines 9-10, 64).\footnote{16} Eliot explores this idea throughout each of the four quartets. In “Dry Salvages,” for example, Eliot writes that “Between midnight and dawn, when the past is all deception,” Eliot writes, “The future futureless, before the morning watch/When time stops and time is never ending;/And the ground swell, that is and was from the beginning” (DS, Lines 45-48). Eliot does something fascinating in this passage. In Faulkner and Nabokov, the different conjugations of the verb “to be” seem to indicate change, from past to present. The change in tense represents a transition or delineation, whether or not it is possible to pinpoint exactly when those moments occurred. In the \textit{Quartets}, however, Eliot seems to be showing the reader that there is really no difference between the past and the present, because the future has no future, time stops and is simultaneously never-ending, and the is and was have been unified from the beginning, in a timeless moment. The rhythm of time is suspended. It no longer moves forward or backwards; it simply is.

Writers can also implicitly use different time “referents” to manipulate time in the telling of a narrative event. A writer may change the location of the voice of the narrator, the time period that is being talked about, or a combination of both. A writer might use analepses and prolepsis within the telling of the single narrative event in order to shift the reader through different time referents. This type of time manipulation may also focus the reader on considering all the different nuances of time and shifts in time together, in tandem. This type of manipulation of time is located more at the structural level. It occurs during the telling of a

\footnote{16} The first issue with using the \textit{Four Quartets} in this thesis is that it does not seem to tell a cohesive narrative; Eliot focuses more on describing images and his theories of time. His poetry creates what seems be impressions or memories. Eliot does not tell a story like Wordsworth, Faulkner, and Nabokov do. Instead, Eliot seems to set forth his musings on time and existence in the poems as more of a theoretical exercise. The second problem is that again, the \textit{Quartets}, like “Malham Cove,” is poetry, and it introduces a whole host of complex issues in terms of interpretation of form and meaning.
singular narrative event; it can give rise to meaning to the text that describes a single narrative event (Chatman).

In “Burnt Norton,” Eliot writes that “Time present and time past/Are both perhaps present in time future,/And time future contained in time past...What might have been is an abstraction/Remaining a perpetual possibility” (BN, Lines 1-5). Like Nabokov, Eliot does not use changes in conjugations of the verb “to be” to shift time or tense in this line of poetry.

Instead, he names the past and the present and then shifts the reader, who is located in a present, through time, with his explanation that “What might have been” (a past that did not occur), is a “perpetual possibility” (in the future). The reader’s location in time is moved. This may be Eliot’s implicit way of saying what he said explicitly before when he manipulated the conjugations of the verb “to be:” if what might have been is always a perpetual possibility, and time future is contained in time past, then all time is unified and the same because it is all a part of the same moment. All of the future is contained in the past. Time seems to be unified.

3. ___ Explicit Manipulations of Time in the Telling of Narrative Events

a. ___ Narrators Manipulate Time at the Linguistic Level

Bill Clinton famously parsed through the meaning of the word “is” when asked about his affair with Monica Lewinsky (“Bill Clinton and The Meaning of Is”). When asked by the grand jury about his relationship with Monica Lewinsky, Clinton responded that

It depends on what the meaning of the word “is: is. If the--if he--if “is” means is and never has been, that is not--that is one thing. If it means there is none, that was a completely true statement....Now, if someone had asked me on that day, are you having any kind of sexual relations with Ms. Lewinsky, that is, asked me a
question in the present tense, I would have said no. And it would have been completely true. (“Bill Clinton and The Meaning of Is)

Clinton makes a fine distinction between the meaning of “is” and “was” and the shift that occurs between those two words. Clinton uses that distinction in order to avoid admitting that what he said in response to being questioned about his affair with Lewinsky may not have been completely truthful (“Bill Clinton and The Meaning of Is”). Clinton explains that if what was meant by “is” was a question about whether he had ever had a relationship with Lewinsky, then his answer to the question would have been an untrue statement. However, if he was asked if he was having sexual relationship with Lewinsky on that day, then his answer would have been true, because he had ended his relationship with Lewinsky by that point. It all depended on the meaning of “is.”

Another aspect of manipulations of time in the telling of narrative events occurs through writers’ manipulations of verb tenses when narrating the event. Authorial intent is involved when writers decide to manipulate verb tenses in narrative, because the writers do not necessarily use the verbs as verbs. Recently, a new field of study has been developed by “philosophers and linguistics” who seek to understand the “relationship between linguistic forms and metaphysics: that some understanding of reality can be reached through the analysis of linguistic forms” (Currie, About Time 137). These individuals seek to understand the “relevance of tense in narratology” (137). Currie explains that “some understanding of what time is can be reached through an analysis of temporal reference in language, and particularly through the understanding of tense. What has not really been done is to apply this argument specifically to narrative, and therefore to move not only between linguistics and metaphysics, but to infer from the tense structure of narrative a metaphysics of time” (137). Currie suggests that “an
understanding of the temporal structure of fictional narrative, and of narrative in general offers a kind of access, perhaps the only access we have, to what might be called the ‘reality’ of time” (138). The theory of time manipulations in the telling of narrative events seeks to apply an understanding of changes in tense to events in a narrative.

An understanding of the way verbs have been perceived over time provides a helpful foundation for the discussion of how verb tenses work in narrative. In “Talking about Time,” David Crystal explains that historically, people have thought that “Time is expressed by the verb, through the notion of tense” (106). However, we cannot “place the entire burden of time-reference on the verb” (Currie, About Time 138). This means that a verb that seems to refer to a particular moment in the past, present, or future may not actually do so; we must consider all the other aspects language and speech that might contribute to the meaning of the verb (Crystal 114). So then what does tense describe? Tense is contingent on the variables that surround it. When trying to determine the time sequence of reference points, “the rule of the permanence of the reference point is replaced by the more general rule of the positional use of the reference point” (Reichenbach 76). A “principled and unified semantics of natural-language categories like tense, aspect, and aspectual/temporal adverbials requires an ontology based on contingency rather than temporality” (Moens and Steedman 26). Tense is an “anaphoric category” that requires a “previously established temporal referent” (22). It depends on everything that is going on around it. It is not an independent moment in a narrative or text. There is a difference between trying to determine “identity” of reference points and the “time sequence” of reference points (Reichenbach 75).

Interpreting tense “plays an important role in determining the temporal ordering between the states and events mentioned in a narrative” (Song 131). Suppose we start from the premise
that the “tense form of the verb does not correspond to a particular time reference” (Currie 138) (internal citation omitted). That leads to the conclusion that considering the meaning of verbs in narrative, it is “necessary to distinguish the word itself from both its form and its meaning” (Lyons 18). The grammatical notion of tense has “to expand beyond the description of verb forms because the tense forms of verbs cannot account for the full complexities of temporal reference” (Currie, Expansion 357). Monica Fludernik argues that “Tense alternation never signifies temporally as such, but signifies in relation to the narrator’s (enunciator’s) present” (262). Fludernik seems to be saying that tense alternation does not mean that the time period of the narrative changes time; instead, tense alteration shows a change in relationship that occurs with respect to the narrator’s present. Since a “time reference cannot be located in the verb itself,” we must “look to other features of a sentence, or to larger units of discourse than the verb form itself” in order to better understand the time reference (Currie, About Time 139).

b. William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!

Absalom, Absalom! is a work that has inspired volumes of analysis. Countless theorists have tried to sort out the chronology of both the story and discourse because Faulkner weaves a complicated discourse that makes the story difficult to piece together. Faulkner’s story spans the lives of different generations of the Sutpen family and explores the complicated racial history of the South and the South’s struggle to endure its shameful history. Faulkner sifts through time and uses a number of different narrators to explore what would be called the “family chronicle” of the Sutpen family. Faulkner experiments with meaning, memory, and how the past always returns to haunt the present.

In the first few pages of Absalom, Faulkner lays out the outline of the story that he will tell throughout the rest of the narrative. In the first chapter, Faulkner has Quentin reflect on the
story he is hearing from his aunt, Rosa. Faulkner has Quentin muse over the fact that he already
knows this story; Quentin recognizes that this story has been a part of everything he has breathed
and lived for the last twenty years of his life. Quentin thinks:

   eighty years’ heritage of the same air which the man himself had breathed
   between this September afternoon in 1909 and that Sunday morning in June in
   1833 when he first rode into town out of no discernible past and acquired his land
   no one knew how and built this house, his mansion apparently out of nothing and
   married Ellen Coldfield and begot his two children – the son who widowed the
daughter who had not yet been a bride – and so accomplished his allotted course
to its violent (Miss Coldfield at least would have said, just) end. (Faulkner 7)

Faulkner lays out the entirety of the story of the Sutpen family’s descent and the story that he
will explore throughout the novel in these few lines. Every major plot point in the story is
contained in these few lines, even if they reasons for why something happened are not. Every
event Faulkner describes to the reader from this point onwards in the discourse is a repetition and
gradual expansion of these events. With these lines, Faulkner lays out a framework for the story
he will weave throughout the novel.

   Whether or not the reader actually feels this sentiment, it seems that like Quentin,
Faulkner’s intention is to leave the reader with a sense of wonder as to what is left to know in the
story and why we need to hear the story at all, when we are already haunted by “stubborn back-
looking ghosts” (Faulkner 7). Quentin asks his father, in the evening, “But why tell me about
it?...What is it to me that the land or the earth or whatever it was got tired of him at last and
turned and destroyed him?” (7). The “frequency” of the retelling of these events, in Genette’s
terms, and the way in which Faulkner gradually adds details to them, helps the reader gradually
understand the nuances of what the Sutpen family did, what happened to the Sutpen family, and how they simultaneously ceased and endured.

Faulkner explicitly uses conjugations of the verb “to be” in order to play with the rhythm of his narrative in this quotation. Faulkner does not leave his intent open to interpretation in these quotations; Faulkner intends to discuss time with respect to the lives of his novel’s characters, and at a macro level, the lives of the individuals who are reading the novel. Towards the middle of the discourse, Charles Bon, Judith Sutpen’s beau and Henry’s Sutpen’s friend, writes to Judith to tell her to wait for him. Charles Bon and Judith’s relationship is complicated because Charles Bon, Henry, and Judith are all half-siblings, and perhaps most troublingly for the men of the Sutpen family, a wedding between Judith and Bon would be miscegenation. This letter appears to be the only letter that Judith has saved to give to someone else in order “to make that scratch, that undying mark on the blank face of the oblivion to which we are all doomed, of which she spoke----” (Faulkner 102). It is worth mentioning why Judith decides to give this extremely private letter to Quentin’s grandmother because it elucidates what it means to have a desire to be remembered, to have a past. It situates the letter and helps explain Quentin’s experience of the letter.

Judith decides to give Quentin’s grandmother Bon’s letter because she wants “something, something that might make a mark on something that was once for the reason that it can die someday, while the block of stone cant be is because it never can become was because it cant ever die or perish…… [sic]” (Faulkner 101). In this excerpt, Judith appears to be speaking to Quentin’s grandmother. She is trying to explain to her why she wants to share this letter with someone else. Quentin’s grandmother describes Judith as “the impenetrable, the calm the absolutely serene face” that hints at a terrible tragedy and history in the family (101).
Faulkner, like many writers, uses conjugations of the verb “to be” in order to play with time (Chatman, *Story and Discourse* 83). In the quotation above, Faulkner does not use the signs “was” and “is” and “was” to signify the “the past” and “the present” and “the past” in the traditional linguistics definition of the words as reference to certain tenses (Saussure 67). If we conceive of these words, the “was,” the “is,” and the “was” as verbs, they do not seem to indicate a time reference in the traditional sense. They do not just indicate the past, the present, or the future. Instead, the signs “was,” “is,” and “was” seem to signify something more. They also seem to function as nouns. For example, the sign “was” signifies how something can never end or have ended if it has never existed. But it also seems to indicate something in a noun form: it seems to indicate what something that has an existence, that has a beginning and ending, has when it is over. This could be a past, or a history, or a memory. The sign “was” could be interpreted as both a noun and a verb. Similarly, the sign “is” seems to refer to the present in noun form, even though it also has the characteristic of being a time referent that indicates the present. Meaning, something cannot exist in the present tense, the “is” of a verb, but also cannot have a present, or what exists between a beginning and an ending if it does not have a beginning and an ending, if it is eternal. The “is” also indicates how something that has an existence has a presence and a present. Finally, the sign “was” seems to both refer to act of ending, or the process something that has an existence goes through in order to end, or “become was,” but also the noun of an end. The words serve multiple purposes and seem to have multiple meanings in this sentence.

Judith wants to make a mark on something that “was,” something that is now in the past because it had the capacity to end and die someday. Judith feels like a lifeless stone stuck in a world that is happening around her. She has made “so little impression” on her world; this is her
one chance to do something about it (Faulkner 100). Judith is tired of things happening to her, she wants to take charge of her life and do something so that she will be remembered. But the thing is that a “block of stone” can never be in the present because it can never become a “was;” it can never die and exists in a continuous present because it has no beginning and ending (101). It has no beginning or ending because it has no existence or being. It is not framed by the context of time. It is instead eternal. Time makes no impression on the block of stone because it exists in a perpetual “was.” Judith has to do something in order to take charge of her life, to begin her life, her existence, so that she can eventually end. Faulkner plays with “is” and “was” here in order to get the reader to think about the role that the past and the present plays in our lives.

The letter that Judith gives Quentin’s grandmother is a “desiccated square, were not the paper but the intact ash of its former shape and substance;” the writing on the paper is covered in a script that “not like something impressed upon the paper by a once-living hand but like a shadow cast upon it which had resolved on the paper the instant before he looked at it and which might fade, vanish, at any instant while he still did….” (Faulkner 102). Quentin reads what Faulkner has Charles Bon write in his letter to Judith:

*And so the conclusion and augury which I draw, even though no philosopher, is this.*

*We have waited long enough. You will notice how I do not insult you either by saying I have waited long enough. And therefore, since I do not insult you by saying that only I have waited, I do not add, expect me. Because I cannot say when to expect me. Because what WAS is one thing, and now it is not because it is dead, it died in 1861, and therefore what IS----(There. They have started firing again. Which-----to mention it-----is redundancy too, like the breathing or the need of ammunition. Because sometimes I think*
Charles Bon is the speaker in this letter. He writes to Judith as he is fighting for the South with Henry. At a foundational level, Bon writes to Judith in order to tell her that he is ready to be with her, that he is ready to leave everything and be with her. But Bon also ruminates on the changes that have occurred in their lives. At this point in the story, Sutpen has forbidden Judith and Bon’s marriage, and Bon and Henry have gone away to war. The reader, however, is still unclear as to why this relationship has fallen apart. Henry himself does not know that Bon and Judith’s marriage would be miscegenation. He and Bon leave the Sutpen family home in protest of Sutpen’s disapproval of the marriage because Bon and Judith are related siblings.

The reader hears Bon’s thoughts and ideas through the medium of a letter within the narrative. Whatever Bon intended to communicate to Judith is not just said to her in the dialogue of the discourse, he is removed from this sort communication; the letter mediates the meaning he intends to convey to Judith. Bon’s words on the page, the meaning that he intends to communicate are simultaneously connected and disconnected from what he writes. His writing, as Jacques Derrida theorizes in “Signature, Event, Context,” is iterable. Bon marks a series of words and sentences on the page that may or may not contain the meaning he intends to communicate to Judith. That meaning is again filtered through both the structure of the discourse and the story that Faulkner locates it in: Bon’s letter occurs towards the middle of the discourse of the novel, but is located towards the end of the story. It is the beginning of the end for Henry and his father, and the Sutpen dynasty.
In this quotation, the words “WAS” and “IS” do not seem to have the same multiple meanings as the conjugations of the verb “to be” that occur in Judith’s stone quotation. In this quotation, the words seem to refer to the past and the present as nouns. The signs “WAS” and “IS” do not indicate tense; they indicate time periods. They indicate encapsulations of all that has happened in the past and the present of the Sutpen family. Faulkner deliberately uses conjugations of the verb “to be” in order to play with time. But Faulkner is not necessarily changing tense here. He is not moving the reader back and forth through a definite past and the present. He is however, trying to conjure up a sense in the reader of the distinction between the past and the present and how much has changed over time for Bon and the Sutpens.\(^\text{17}\)

Faulkner creates that distinction by encapsulating the enormity of the past and the present of the South and Judith and Bon’s relationship in the words “WAS” and the “IS.” As I wrote in my undergraduate thesis, the “WAS” in this letter refers to the time before Charles Bon knew for sure that he was Sutpen’s son, before the South crumbled under the weight of its traditions and the war: it is a time that contains the former glory of the South and the hazy mirage of grandeur that once surrounded Charles Bon’s character. It is a reference to the past. The “IS,” on the other hand represents the reality of the present….The memory of the past, however, is still contained within the present. This present is foreign and new “Because what IS is something else again because it was not even alive then” in the past, and because it incorporates the past in a new way (Faulkner 104). Faulkner places the “WAS” next to the “IS” in order to show the reader the contrast between the two time periods in Bon and Judith’s lives; he shows how the characters’ lives have changed from the past to the present and the present to the past. This movement forces the reader to think through time and memory. It has the effect of calling the

\(^{\text{17}}\) As he is Sutpen’s son, Bon could also be considered a “Sutpen;” however, because Sutpen has repudiated Bon, I do not classify him as such in this thesis.
past and the present to the forefront of the reader’s consciousness; the reader must focus all of
his or her efforts to try and understand and digest the enormity of what has happened in the past
and the present of Bon and Judith’s lives. Faulkner uses the conjugations of “to be” to force the
reader to consider time and highlight the differences between the two time periods for the reader.

Faulkner places the reader in the past, the “was” of what could be called “present” of the
novel. He asks the reader to consider what is happening in a “was.” I refer back to Faulkner’s
musings on memory that I mentioned with respect to the first quotation. Faulkner uses the word
“was” because, as Faulkner explains, that “there is no such thing as memory” because “the brain
recalls just what the muscles grope for” (115). This seems to be the heart of Faulkner’s use of
“the was” throughout the novel. Faulkner writes about “the substance of remembering – sense,
sight, smell,” which are the “muscles” with which we “see and hear and feel.” The “was”
invades the “is” like the wistaria that pervades summers in the South, but it is still never true
because a memory will always have falseness to it (115). Memories become hazy and blurred
with time and re-remembering. The South can never forget its shameful past, Faulkner seems to
say, because it continuously pervades the present. The past never ends; it can never be tucked
away and forgotten. There is always a faint memory of the past.

The question remains at this point, what is Faulkner doing when he works through these
theories of time? Theorists of post-modern literature, like Linda Hutcheon suggest that trying to
discern larger, over-arching meaning from a work of post-modern literature is a troublesome
thought because “post-modern” texts that do not try to communicate any “timeless meaning” to
their reader (19). Faulkner’s narrative contains countless unresolved problems of existence and
meaning, like the question of how the South will “endure” with its shameful history. Faulkner
seems to believe that making his reader aware of the problem, just forcing his reader to confront
the issue and bringing it to the forefront of his reader’s consciousness, may be as helpful as trying to resolve it in the story. Forcing the reader to confront problems of time allows the reader to re-evaluate his or her perception of time in their daily lives.

e. Vladimir Nabokov, Ada, or Ardor

In Ada, or Ardor, Vladimir Nabokov presents a family chronicle that tells the story of two characters named Ada and Van, and the lives of those who are related and connected to them. Ada and Van meet as young children and fall in love, but their love story is interrupted by twists of fate over and over again. Nabokov does not narrate episodes and details of Ada and Van’s story chronologically; stories told in the “present” of the events happening in the novel are interspersed with comments from a putative “future.” Like Faulkner, Nabokov makes substantial use of analepses and prolepses, so much so that the discourse of the novel becomes complex and nonlinear, and it takes much effort on the part of reader to even begin to decipher the line of the story. Nabokov uses explicit movements of time within a single narrative event in order to disrupt the reader’s sense of existence and being.

For the sake of clarity, it is helpful to tentatively mark the “present” of Nabokov’s narrative in Ada as the telling of Ada and Van’s story, from the first time they explore their family’s heirlooms to their death. The “present” of the narrative changes over time as events progress chronologically in the story. Van himself explains that he is reconstructing his deepest past out of sequential order because “he soon noticed that such details of his infancy as really mattered…could be best treated, could not seldom be only treated, when reappearing at various later stages of his boyhood and youth, as sudden juxtapositions that revived the part while vivifying the whole. This is why his first love has precedence here over his first bad hurt or dream” (Nabokov 31). Through Van, Nabokov explains that it is difficult to narrate a single
event in Ada and Van’s life without referencing the past events that gave rise to it, because they are a part of the “sudden juxtapositions” that give life to those moments. Van seems to believe that the “details of his infancy” have their significance highlighted when they are juxtaposed with different, later stages of his life: the past “details of his infancy” are invigorated when they are placed next to the continuously shifting “present” of Van’s later life. Van prioritizes which events to discuss, when, and in what order, even if the discussion of the events does not follow a chronologically linear progression. He also brings the past and the present together within a single event in the narrative in order to try and get the reader to contemplate it all together, so that she can see the connections that Van sees among the events in his life.

Nabokov intersperses his telling of Ada and Van’s past with notes of how they perceive of that moment in the present, as “grown-ups,” and as a result makes his story simultaneously be about both the young and the old Ada and Van. Nabokov prefaces his description of a young Ada and Van having breakfast on the balcony with a past-facing comment from an older Van who says “When I kiss you here…I always remember that blue morning on the balcony…” (Nabokov 75). Nabokov goes on to describe “The classical beauty of clover honey, smooth, pale, translucent, feely flowing from the spoon and soaking my love’s bread and butter in liquid brass. The crumb steeped in nectar” (75). It is unclear whether it is an old or young Van who is making this observation about the honey and the nectar. Nabokov’s description of Ada (narrated through Van) seemed to be curiously old and young at the same time: there is an allusion to “classical beauty” that seems to be a more old world mature reference, but the scene itself is about children playing with their breakfast - it is about children playing with crumbs and honey (75). Ada and Van are children, but they are also children who are talking about eating wasps “gorged” on honey (75). Even before Ada and Van’s physical relationship evolves, the
two are already in a place that feels disturbingly adult. This interplay, between a young Ada and
Van and an old Ada and Van is what drives the narrative in *Ada, or Ardor*. The tension between
the different parts of Ada and Van’s lives and the gradual unfolding of their stories is
encapsulated in each single event that Nabokov tells in the narrative.

Much of the story in *Ada* is told through excerpts from the diaries that Ada and Van keep
over the course of their lives. The narrator explains that some of Ada and Van’s diaries have
been destroyed, for a number of different reasons, and that “Thus they had to rely on oral
tradition, on the mutual correction of common memories…Calendar dates were debated,
hesitations and resolutions passionately analyzed…Both were diverted by life’s young
fumblings, both saddened by the wisdom of time…When we remember our former selves, there
is always that little figure with its long shadow stopping like an uncertain belated visitor on a
lighted threshold at the far end of an impeccably narrowing corridor” (Nabokov 110). In this
passage, Nabokov returns to discuss the way that memories and events are not just experiences
moving forward in time, but are combinations of “life’s young fumblings” and “the wisdom” of
time (110). When we think back to memories of our past, there is always something that haunts
us and affects us, because we are always ‘correcting’ what we remember from our past when we
think of it in the present. Our experience of past events in a present moment is always changed.
Nabokov is trying to depict this change to yet another individual who is involved in the story: the
reader. The reader’s experience of Ada and Van’s story adds another layer to the complexity of
the memory, because these are not the reader’s memories, they are Ada and Van’s memories and
they have been filtered through a number of different lenses.

Nabokov presents several versions of some moments and episodes, which are perhaps
discovered through revisions. Returning to Van’s explanation of his memories, and how they are
colored by the passage of time, Nabokov shows his reader precisely how these revisions affect the telling of the memory. Nabokov writes, for example “That might have been true, but according to a later (considerable later!) version they were still in the tree, and still glowing…” The aside of “considerable later!” reveals how an individual’s reflection on a past memory (Nabokov 95).

This all leads to Nabokov’s explicit manipulation of time through conjugations of “to be.” Nabokov focuses the reader on the tension that exists between the future of “it will,” and the past of “it was,” as Ada asks, “‘But this,’ exclaimed Ada, ‘is certain, this is reality, this is pure fact – this forest, this moss, your hand, the ladybird on my leg, this cannot be taken away, can it? (it will, it was). This has all come together here, no matter how the paths twisted, and fooled each other, and got fouled up: they inevitably met here!’” (153). Nabokov plays with the reader here. Ada asks determinedly in the present of the narrated event whether everything she knows in this moment can ever be “taken away” (153). The present telling of the event is revised by a later hand that exists in the future of the present of Ada wondering whether this all can be taken away: a unnamed narrator explains in a cheekily foreboding voice that “(it will, it was)” (153).

This annotation exists in the future of Ada’s wondering, and there is also a time shift encapsulated in this future annotation. There is the forward looking “it will” that foreshadows to the reader how everything will be taken away from Ada and Van, and also refers to a time that exists after this “it will;” this is a time in which everything has been taken away from Ada and Van, the “it was” (Nabokov 153). The movement from the future of “it will” to the past of “it was” suggests to the reader that something tumultuous will and has happened to Ada and Van; their lives will be and have been disrupted. The conjugations of “to be” act as verbs, but also
encapsulate the entirety of the future of Ada’s questioning and the past of after everything has been taken away. They function as verbs, but they also seem to function as encapsulations of different time references. Nabokov pulls together four different time references in this single sentence and asks the reader to try and comprehend all four of them together. What is perhaps most fascinating is that Nabokov places this time manipulation immediately after one of Van’s explorations of time. Nabokov writes that “he found himself tackling, in still vague and idle fashion, the science that was to obsess his mature years – problems of space and time, space versus time, time-twisted space, space as time, time as space – and space breaking away from time, in the final tragic triumph of human cogitation: I am because I die” (153).18 Nabokov asks the reader to consider the same questions that trouble Van and Ada throughout their lives. Nabokov asks his reader to consider the questions that trouble Van and Ada; he asks his reader to consider the “problems of space and time, space versus time, time-twisted space, space as time, time as space – and space breaking away from time” because, at the end of the day, human beings are occupied by questions of existence and what it means “to be” or to exist as an “I am” (153). Death, or an ending, defines life, which begins with a birth, or a beginning.

4. Implicit Manipulations of Time in the Telling of Narrative Events

a. Narrators Manipulate Time through Changes in Time References

Narrators also implicitly manipulate time through changes in time references. This is another aspect of manipulating time in the telling of singular narrative events. In his writings on

18 This entire excerpt reads as follows “But as Van causally directed the searchlight of backthought into that maze of the past where the mirror-lined narrow paths not only took different turns, but used different levels (as a mule-drawn cart passes under the arch of a viaduct along which a motor skims by), he found himself tackling, in still vague and idle fashion, the science that was to obsess his mature years – problems of space and time, space versus time, time-twisted space, space as time, time as space – and space breaking away from time, in the final tragic triumph of human cogitation: I am because I die” (153).
meaning and narrative, Seymour Chatman suggests that one way to look at narrative would be to conceive of it as being “semiotic,” or “meaning-bearing in its own right, independent of the contents of the story it communicates” (Chatman, *Towards a Theory* 298). Narrative should “contain (1) a form and substance of expression, and (2) a form and substance of content” (Chatman, *Story and Discourse* 23). When we conceive of narrative being “semiotic,” we find that narrative contains three “signifieds” or “signifies,” which are “event, character, and detail of setting” (25). These “signifiants or signifiers are those elements in the narrative statement (whatever the medium) that can stand for one of these three, thus any kind of physical or mental action for the first, any person (or, indeed, any entity that can be personalized) for the second, and any evocation of place for the third” (25). The structure of narrative, at the micro-level, can also impart meaning to readers because it can “endow an otherwise meaningless ur-text with eventhood, characterhood, and settinghood, in a normal one-to-one standing-for relationship” (25). Readers draw inferences as a part of a “low-level kind of interpretation” or “exegesis” (31). Chatman establishes that we can look to narrative, and the structure of narrative, to find meaning, because narrative can be “meaning-bearing in its own right.”

When it comes to time in a narrative, whose structure is “meaning-bearing in its own right,” we find that “[p]oints and periods of time are in the story, and are expressed by the discourse. The discourse, in turn, is manifested by a medium” (Chatman 82). We can draw from Saussure’s theories of language and signs to form the relationship between language and meaning in a narrative. Ferdinand Saussure sought to explain his theory of meaning and language in his *Course in General Linguistics*. According to Saussure, language is a “product of the collective mind of linguistic groups” (5). Saussure explains that
Speech always implies both an established system and an evolution; at every moment it is an existing institution and a product of the past. To distinguish between the system and its history, between what it is and what it was, seems very simple at first glance; actually the two things are so closely related that we can scarcely keep them apart. (Saussure 8)

As Saussure writes, “[i]n discourse, words acquire relations based on the linear nature of language because they are chained together…The elements are arranged in sequence on the chain of speaking. Combinations supported by linearity are syntagms” (123) (internal citations omitted). Somehow, writers get language to move backwards and forwards (302). Time in a narrative is indicated by “varying choices among verb forms, temporal adverbs, vocabulary, and so on” (Chatman, Story and Discourse 82). There is always a distinction in narrative: “the distinction between story-NOW and discourse-NOW remains perfectly clear, for the narrator knows the outcome of the story, and it is evident that his present remains posterior to that of the characters” (83). Semiotics help explain how time and time references can be contained in the language of narratives. A writer can use the language of singular narrative events to manipulate time and time referents during discrete events in order to create a particular sense of time and the movement of time in the reader.

b. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*

The next Faulkner quotation that I will discuss is different in substance and in kind from the previous quotations that I have discussed. In this passage, Faulkner does not manipulate time referents by playing with tense; he works more implicitly by manipulating time referents. A little background helps situate this next passage. *Absalom* starts with Rosa Coldfield, the daughter of one of Thomas Sutpen’s first friends in Yoknapatawpha County. Rosa begins to tell
Quentin, her nephew, the story of the Sutpen family’s rise and fall. Rosa explains to Quentin that her older sister, Ellen, was married to Thomas Sutpen, the patriarch of the Sutpen family. Rosa explains that Sutpen came to Jefferson as a stranger (Faulkner 24), and that it took him years to create a life there (28). It takes Sutpen years of building, building his life as a slave owner, building his grand house twelve miles away from any neighbor, building his plantation, before he even thinks about building a family (29). But when he is finally ready five years later, Sutpen begins to court Ellen, Rosa’s older sister. Sutpen is arrested by the townspeople the night he and Ellen are engaged (36). Rosa explains to Quentin how the townspeople boycotted the Coldfield-Sutpen wedding and how the emptiness of the church and the crowd’s viciousness in throwing filth at the couple as they walked out of the church affected both Thomas and Ellen Sutpen in different ways for the rest of their lives (44): “He did not forget that night, even though Ellen, I think, did, since she washed it out of her remembering with tears. Yes, she was weeping again now; it did, indeed, rain on that marriage” (45).

The Coldfield-Sutpen wedding story begins on a Sunday in June of 1833, when Sutpen first arrives in the town of Jefferson, Mississippi (Faulkner 23-24). The time and space of the wedding story focuses on the five years that Sutpen takes to build his house, plantation, and family. The wedding takes place almost five years after Sutpen’s arrival in Jefferson to the day, in June of 1885 (37). This story is placed towards the beginning of the discourse of the novel but it occurs somewhere in the middle of the story of the novel. This story occurs after Sutpen’s birth and life in Haiti, but before we fully understand the turbulent decline of the Sutpen family. With this wedding story, Faulkner seems to give his reader an anchor in the convoluted discourse, a place to start piecing together the Sutpen family’s convoluted history.
Rosa’s description of how her sister and brother-in-law handled the fallout from their wedding occurs within the chronotope of the Coldfield-Sutpen marriage story; it occurs towards the end of this chronotope, but towards the beginning of this story. Faulkner has already told the reader this part of the story; the reader already knows that Sutpen and Ellen were married. In fact, the reader already knows that two children will result from that marriage, and that the family will meet a “violent” end. But Faulkner tells this story a little bit differently in this chronotope. He adds substance and flesh to the story. He adds details to enhance the reader’s experience of this memory.

At the beginning of the quotation, the narrator seems to be Rosa, speaking to Quentin. Faulkner writes “He did not forget that night, even though Ellen, I think, did, since she washed it out of her remembering with tears” (Faulkner 45). The identity of the narrator of the second part of this quotation is much less clear, as Faulkner writes, “Yes, she was weeping again now; it did, indeed, rain on that marriage” (45). The ambiguity of the narrative voice in this second half of the quotation makes it difficult to decipher the meaning of the quotation. Where there is an unidentified or unclear narrator to a portion of a quotation or a portion of a novel, the reader does not know who to question or whose authenticity to consider to help them in evaluating the veracity of that statement. This shift, this movement from established to narrator to unclear narrator is one of the ways that Faulkner manipulates the language in this sentence. A different, more straightforward way of saying relating this detail without a seeming shift in narrator would be to simply remain in this sort of past tense and have Rosa explain to Quentin that Ellen “wept now; it did, indeed, rain on that marriage” (45).

The next step in looking at this quotation is to consider how Faulkner manipulates time in this excerpt. In the first syntagma of the excerpt, where Faulkner writes that, “He did not forget
that night,” Faulkner is referring to Sutpen and how he never forgot how the townspeople treated him and his wife that night (45). This statement refers to a present of the story that is different from the time of the telling of the story in the narrative; it occurred before Rosa told the wedding story. When situated in the chronology of the story contained in the narrative, it also describes the future of the wedding story: it explains how Sutpen will handle the fallout from his marriage to Ellen and what will happen after their wedding. Finally, when it is situated in the discourse, it describes what happened to Sutpen after he married Ellen; it occurs towards the beginning of the discourse in the narrative.

It may seem superfluous to name the ways in which this event occurs in the past or future of a certain time referent. An event will always be in the past of one event or the future of different event, just depending on where the time referent is located, who is speaking about the matter, or whose experience is described in the matter. The point is not just that individuals’ sense of time, as mentioned in the David Eagleman article, is subjective and dependent on what the individual experiences both inside and outside of the mind. It is also not that all time is subjective or that it is possible to frame time or an event in any way imaginable. It is that Faulkner moves his reader through each different way of looking at the time of the event by placing it next to a different way of looking at the event, from a different perspective, and that those changes affect the experience of time that the reader has in the narrative in terms of the rhythm at the sentence level, the level of discourse, and at the level of the story.

In the next syntagma, where Faulkner writes that “even though Ellen, I think, did,” the sense of time contained in the phrase shifts slightly (45). Setting aside Rosa’s “I think,” The syntagma still refers to a time that occurs in the past of the present telling of the story, it describes the future of the wedding story, and what happens to Ellen after she marries Sutpen.
But this syntagma describes Ellen’s past, Ellen’s future after the wedding, not Sutpen’s. This statement is in the conditional, and it appears to be Rosa’s view of how Ellen handled her memory of her wedding night and how people treated her and Sutpen. This phrase contains a past that is different from Sutpen’s past: it is Ellen’s past, Ellen’s way of dealing with that night. Ellen forgot that night, in Rosa’s opinion. This is not necessarily a shift in tense, but it is a shift in whose past and future the sentence begins to refer to.

Within this exploration of Ellen’s way of dealing with that night, is a movement to indicate who precisely is speaking in the moment of the telling of the story. Rosa qualifies her explanation of what happened to Ellen and Sutpen by interjecting her own “I think” (Faulkner 45). This statement occurs in the present of the present telling of the story, and it describes a future of the wedding story. Because it occurs during the present of the present telling of the story, instead of in the past, like the two previously mentioned syntagmas, it gives rise to a sense of shift in time and tense in the reader, even though there is no true shift in tense in the sentence: where the phrase is located in the telling of the story changes the prosody of the sentence. It shifts the flow of the sentence and changes the tempo of the narrative.

Finally, in the last syntagma of the sentence, Faulkner has Rosa explain how she might know how Ellen feels about that the night. Rosa explains to Quentin that she knows “since she washed it out of her remembering with tears” (Faulkner 45). The “she” in this syntagma refers to Ellen. This syntagma relocates the reader to a past that occurred before the telling of this story by Rosa to Quentin; it is no longer contained in the present telling of the story. It describes a future of the wedding story that refers to an ongoing future. Rosa does not just name a single sentiment here in the future of the wedding story like she did before. She does not just say that Ellen forgot and Sutpen did not. Here, Rosa describes an ongoing event in the future of the
wedding story, where Ellen, over and over again, washes away the pain of her remembering, which is again, describing an ongoing, recurring event that happens over and over again in the time that exists between the happening of the wedding and the telling of the wedding story.

In this sentence, Faulkner does not shift “tense” in the sense of the word as it has been used by linguists in the past, but he does shift the sense of time that the reader might experience in the sentence, whether or not the reader consciously notices it. There are several “events” in this sentence that Faulkner sets forth and they appear to be purposive communications that seek to either advance the story of Absalom or at least explain the fallout from the Ellen and Sutpen’s wedding day. Faulkner gives his reader the totality of the experiences of three different people in the history of the Sutpen family; Sutpen, Ellen, and Rosa; over a time period that spans a generation. He asks the reader to consider all of their experiences, while trying to comprehend Rosa’s actual utterance of the sentence to Quentin. This is all encapsulated within a single sentence in the Coldfield-Sutpen wedding chronotope. Faulkner asks his reader to process all of this information and meaning that contained in a single sentence and a single utterance from Rosa to Quentin.

It is difficult to argue that Faulkner intentionally moves his reader through these different ways of looking at time for a specific purpose in these quotations. Earlier in this thesis, we established through an analysis of Seymour Chatman and his theories concerning the semiotics of language that it is possible to discern some meaning in the structure of time in narrative. We established that although it may not be possible to discern the meaning of the structure of narrative that the author intended to communicate to the reader or the audience, it may be possible to discern a possible meaning that the audience experiences as a result of the structure
and discourse of the narrative. I hesitate to argue that Faulkner intended to make a certain statement about time in this sentence.

However, I think that it is possible to see that Faulkner places an importance on memory, and remembering, and the unraveling of time and memory. He also seeks to cajole a response from the reader, to create an effect that causes the reader to reexamine what he or she knows to be true, whether it was the effect that the writer intended (Poulet 5). Faulkner writes:

> Once there was – Do you mark how the wisteria, sun-impacted on this wall here, distills and penetrates this room as though (light-unimpeded)…That is the substance of remembering – sense, sight, smell; the muscles with which we see and hear and feel – not mind, not thought: there is no such thing as memory: the brain recalls just what the muscles grope for: no more, no less: and its resultant sum is usually incorrect and false and worthy only of the name of dream.

(Faulkner 115)

Faulkner explains how the “was,” the past, is a part of the “substance of remembering” (115). Sense, sight, and smell thicken the thread of memory, just as remembering thickens, gives substance to memory. Faulkner seems to be saying that his retelling of the Coldfield-Sutpen family wedding story gives substance to the memory. By raising the complex ways that different individuals perceive or experience a certain event, by adding substance to the memory, Faulkner complicates the memory and makes it more vibrant, intense, and yet still a dream, because memories will never be real or true again.

In this next quotation, Faulkner explains how Sutpen struggles to create and sustain his dynasty at all costs:
‘His trouble was innocence: All of a sudden he discovered, not what he wanted to do but what he just had to do, had to do it whether he wanted to or not, because if he did not do it he knew that he could never live with himself for the rest of his life, never live with what all the men and women that had died to make him had left inside of him for him to pass on, with all the dead ones waiting and watching to see if he was going to do it right, fix things right so that he would be able to look in the face not only the old dead ones but all the living ones that would come after him when he would be one of the dead.

(Faulkner 178)

Here, Faulkner takes what is a sudden moment of clarity in Sutpen’s life and pulls it apart to explain everything that Sutpen is thinking about and considering before he realizes what he must do. In this present moment of actualization, Faulkner has Sutpen pull together his knowledge of the past to understand what he must do now and in the future. This moment defines the rest of Sutpen’s future. Tense is not shifted and neither is time, because this quotation seems to remain fully in the moment of Sutpen’s actualization. In this moment, Faulkner pulls together memories of the past and thoughts of the future, so time does not shift among the past, present, and future persay. The past and the future are pulled together in one single moment and event of actualization in Sutpen’s life.

This is the moment in Sutpen’s life that will define the future of every single member of his family; this decision has ramifications for his daughter, son, and half son, for the Sutpen dynasty, and for himself. It will change his family’s future, because it will lock them where they are and prevent them from moving forward and accepting the changing legacy of the South. Faulkner writes that Sutpen realizes “not what he wanted to do but what he just had to do, had to do it whether he wanted to or not” (Faulkner 178). Sutpen has thought about his options and
realizes that, in the future, “if he did not do it he knew that he could never live with himself for the rest of his life” because of the memories of “the men and women” in his family who died before him and gave rise to his life (178). Sutpen believes that the dynasty he creates is his legacy to “pass on” to the future and he will do anything to protect it (178). In this moment of actualization, Sutpen feels his past deceased ancestors “waiting and watching to see if he was going to do it right,” if he is going to be able to “fix things” (178). Sutpen believes that if he does these things, he will “be able to look in the face not only the old dead ones but all the living ones that would come after him when he would be one of the dead” (178). Sutpen will do anything to protect the dynasty he creates. He will stop at nothing to ensure that his lineage is what he wants it to be.

Faulkner does not change tense, and he does not shift the reader around different time periods as he did in the first passage. Instead, the past, present, and future are pulled together in this single moment that encapsulates the rise and fall of the Sutpen family. The rhythm of time is changed because, all of a sudden, the reader sees what happened in the past to explain what Sutpen is doing now and what will happen in the future in a single, unified moment. It is a moment that is simultaneously forward-looking and backward-looking. Faulkner asks his reader to look both backwards and forward simultaneously in this one breath of rest and actualization, The rhythm of time is disrupted; what was one moment in Sutpen’s life is taken out of the story of the narrative and expanded in the discourse.

c. Vladimir Nabokov, Ada, or Ardor

Nabokov manipulates time without using conjugations of “to be” when he describes Van’s experience of reading Proust later in his life. Nabokov writes that
In later years he had never been able to reread Proust (as he had never been able to enjoy
again the perfumed gum of Turkish paste) without a roll-wave of surfeit and a rasp of
gravelly heartburn; yet his favorite purple passage remained the one concerning the name
‘Guermantes,’ with whose hue his adjacent ultramine merged in the prism of his mind.
pleasantly teasing Van’s artistic vanity. (Nabokov 9)

Nabokov plays with time referents in this statement; he brings in the present of the future (when
and after all the events narrated in the novel have come to pass), to the present of the chronology
of the narrative about Ada and Van. “In later years,” refers to the future, while “he had never
been able to reread” refers to a past of the future that is still the future of the present of the
narrative (9). In other words, Nabokov indicates three chronologically sequential “presents” in
this one sentence and within the description of this one episode: 1) the present of the narrative
where the children are discovering their family’s treasures, 2) the future where Van has never
been able to read (and reread) Proust without surfeit and heartburn, and 3) the later years when
he reflects on or counts up the accumulation of those attempts to read Proust without excess and
heartburn and realizes that he has never been able to read and reread Proust without the
accompanying experiences (9). The second present described above also contains a reference to
a fourth present within it, a time in which Van has no only read but “reread” Proust. In this
single sentence, Nabokov asks his reader to consider the entirety of four different presents. He
plays with time and space and twists time and space so that the movement of time is
manipulated.

As another example of the interspersed time periods within the narration of a single
episode, there is marginal note by Ada at the end of this chapter about discovery – “Hue or who?
Awkward. Reword! (marginal note in Ada Veen’s late hand)” (Nabokov 9). Nabokov has a
reference to an Ada Veen, who to a careful reader of text and paratext might seem to be somehow related to Van, who also has the last name “Veen,” but does not reveal the specifics of the relationship between the two individuals. Nabokov also describes the marginal note as a note in Ada Veen’s “late hand” (9). The present tense of the narrative about Ada and Van is, as mentioned and marked before, the discovery of family artifacts a few hours or so before tea (9).

With Ada’s note and the subsequent description of Ada’s “late hands,” Nabokov brings in moments from the future of the narrative event’s present. Nabokov again indicates three chronologically sequential “presents” in this comment: 1) the present of the narrative where the children are discovering their family’s treasures, 2) a future where Ada has read this text (whatever it may be), thought about it, and suggested it needed to be changed, and 3) the past of a more distant future, where Ada is now deceased (9). Nabokov explains that memories become hazy over the passage of time and that time can change what was perceived to be the reality of an episode or series of episodes. He also explains that the first telling of an event might need revision.

Nabokov uses different techniques to focus his reader on time and existence; this manipulation without using conjugations of the verb “to be” is a different way of addressing the problem that we human beings “can know the time, we can know a time. We can never know Time. Our senses are simply not meant to perceive it. It is like – ” (Nabokov 563). In this sentence, Nabokov has Ada come to the realization that it may be possible to know the time of day or a moment in time, but that it is difficult to understand the totality of “Time” because people’s consciousnesses are simply not built to intuitively grasp the enormity of time. Ada is so

19 Ada’s “jotting” over the course of a time that exists after the present chronological telling of the narrative is interspersed throughout the text of the narrative. These annotations reveal that she has read the text more than once and exists in several futures of the narrative – “Marginal jotting in Ada’s 1965 hand” is “crossed out lightly in her latest wavering one” (15).
overwhelmed with the enormity of time, that she cannot even finish her sentence. Even though Nabokov plays with time throughout Ada, time at some points also does not seem to matter. Sometimes, chronological time is fluid and a non-issue.

Like Ada, Van struggles with the notion of time. Van explores the idea of time being fluid and flowing backwards and forwards. Van posits that a sense of time could be derived from rhythm, that “a sense of Time is rhythm; not the recurrent beats of the rhythm but the gap between two such beats, the gray gap between black beats: the Tender Interval. The regular throb itself merely brings back the miserable idea of measurement, but in between, something like True time lurks” (Nabokov 538). In between the shifting time references of conjugations of the verb “to be,” in between the shifting time references of different sequential presents, is where “Time” is located. Time to Nabokov in some sense is located in the shifts in time and tense, in the way that different parts of time are pulled together in a single moment or instant.

Time can also be considered to be “a kind of stream” (Nabokov 540). Van also suggests that “Pure Time, Perceptual Time, Tangible Time, Time free of content, context, and running commentary” is his “time and theme” (538-539). He mentions the direction of time, the irreversibility of time, time that can be stopped, time that can speed up and slow down – “one year seems to pass faster…I am less often bored than I was in childhood between dull game and duller book. But that ‘quickening’ depends precisely upon one’s not being attentive to time” (540). Van notes that it is difficult to “determine the nature of something consisting of phantomic phases” (540). Van’s inability to determine the nature of time, and the relationship that Van outlines between time and space, is another aspect of the time work that Nabokov does. Time makes those remembered episodes fluid. There are so many ways of conceiving of time and each one of these ways suggests that time has a different characteristic that makes it what it
is. Time is relative to whatever context or dialogue that it is viewed in. Perceptions of time are dependent on context. Individuals’ perception of the past, of memory, of the present, and the future cannot always be linear because time does not just follow a sequential order.
III. THE END - CONCLUSION

In 1961, John F. Kennedy delivered his inaugural address to the people of America (Richard Blanco). Robert Frost was asked to recite a poem at Kennedy’s inauguration (Richard Blanco). As the National Public Radio host Renée Montagne explained in a preface to a story about President Barack Obama’s inaugural poet for his second inauguration, “the glare of the snow kept [Frost] from reading the faint words on the page,” so Frost recited his poem, “The Gift Outright” from memory (Richard Blanco). Montagne’s story cuts to a clip of Frost shakily reciting, “The deed of gift was many deeds of war, to the land vaguely realizing westward, but still unstoried, artless, unenhanced, such as she was, such as she would become, has become and I - and for this occasion, let me change that to what she will become” (Richard Blanco).\textsuperscript{20} Unable to read the words on the page, Frost improvised the last line of the poem (Richard Blanco). At this intense moment fraught with faltering emotion, Frost revised his poem so that it called forth four different time referents: the past, a conditional future, the successes of a present, and a hopeful future. The people understood his reference.

Frost was not just saying that the people should think about the past, present, and future of America. Frost called the people’s attention to how the country had changed over time; he asked them to contemplate the difference between the past success, the present prowess, and the future glory he saw for the people of America in a single instant. Frost called on the people’s sense of the rhythm of time. We continually revisit that moment in history when things happen in the present day because it represents something more than just the words that Frost said. Even though Frost’s words and the happening itself means something different to every person who hears it or encounters it, it has become a part of the present cultural zeitgeist.

\textsuperscript{20} In its original form, the last line of the poem reads, “Such as she was, such as she would become” (Line 16, \textit{The Gift Outright}).
As a quick, pop culture example that has a vastly different sense of gravitas, fans of the television show “NCIS” (Naval Criminal Investigative Services) will remember the end of a recent episode, where, after realizing that a player in the death of an officer is not an innocent victim but a member of a violent terrorist group, the investigative team rushes to the man’s house to try to foil whatever the man is plotting (NCIS, “Shell Shock, Part I” 41:11). Nothing is left in the man’s toolshed, except for a scrap of blueprint and what looks like bomb-making tools (41:25). The group gathers to look at the blueprint as ominous music starts playing in the background. The comedian sidekick says, as he uncovers the bomb tools, “Looks like our wannabe John Walker Lindh was planning something. Something big” (41:29). The ominous music builds as the staid head of the team, Agent Gibbs, intones, “Not was…is. Find him” (41:34). The screen flashes with a cool “To be continued,” and the episode ends in what could be seen by devoted fans as a knuckle-biting cliffhanger. It is the simplicity of the line that calls forth angst in the viewer: the viewer is reminded that the bad guy was not finished when he completed his first crime, the past is not finished and it is not over, because something bad is happening now and may happen in the future if the team does not stop him. Agent Gibbs calls on the anxiety of the viewer who wants to forget and believe that the past is past. Placing the past next to the present within a single narrative event unsettles the viewer and creates this sense of suspense, a held breath in the space between the different conjugations of “to be,” between the different time referents.

Every time someone asks me about my thesis, I get excited. I am excited because I get to tell people that I am working on something that I think matters to them. I get to write about how playing with words, manipulating words, can be a way of exploring questions of time and meaning and existence. I get to tell the person I am talking to that I am trying to understand how
they read and respond not just to texts that they might encounter once in a lifetime in a classroom, but also to texts that they encounter in their daily lives. I am excited because I think this might matter to them someday. I believe that they might come across this technique in something they read or see in their daily lives.²¹

Like many people who decide to pursue higher education in English, I have always loved stories. One characteristic of stories that has always fascinated me is the fact that stories seem to be able to reach people from different backgrounds; no matter what the reader’s race, gender, economic status, or history, a reader can be whisked away by a good story and transformed by the experience she had in the story. This method of time manipulation is a part of the way that people write stories, across times and across places, and it is important to recognize its significance across all different types of narrative. Hopefully, this method of talking about time in narrative will provide theorists and lay people alike with a helpful way of looking at time manipulations in narrative. Writers make rhetorical strides in their narratives and it is worth trying to understand how these efforts focus the reader on his or her sense of time, self, and existence, because those are the larger life questions that people sometimes need help remembering because they are necessarily preoccupied with the picayune details of daily life.

²¹ The change in time reference narrative technique is also used in titles of narratives across genres. When I tried to do some syntactic searches on Google, I found the following examples: 1) GG Allin’s first album was titled “Always Was, Is And Always Shall Be;” 2) Kaiama L. Glover published an article in The New York Times titled “What Harlem Is and Was;” and 3) in March of this year, a writer named Andrew Delbanco published a book called College: What it Was, Is, and Should Be. I will of course be the first to admit the limitations of this search, especially considering the way that Google filters searches and considering how difficult it is to search for the phrase “is and was” and variations on that phrase. I think these examples show, however, that this is a form that is sometimes used in present day culture, whether or not it is named as such.


