

ТМ	Г. XXXII	Бр. 3	Стр. 557 - 573	Ниш	јул - септембар	2008.
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UDK 821.111(73) Faulkner W. :: 784.011.26R.E.M.

Прегледни научни рад  
Примљено: 16.10.2006.

Dušan Stamenković  
Faculty of Philosophy  
Niš

## **THE INFLUENCE OF WILLIAM FAULKNER'S WORKS ON R.E.M.'S LYRICS: FABLES OF THE RECONSTRUCTION AND LIFES RICH PAGEANT**

### **Summary**

The main purpose of the paper is to show the ways in which a text which is bound to music can be related to a text that has no obvious connections with any kind of music. Also, it is meant to explore the possibilities of drawing parallels between them (by means of showing their similarities and differences). It concentrates on the influence of Faulkner's prose works (*Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Light in August*) on the lyrics that accompany R.E.M.'s songs (*Fables of the Reconstruction* and *Lifes Rich Pageant* albums). The paper consists of two major sections – one dealing with the notion of lyrics and its place in literature and the other dealing with the concrete connections between Faulkner's works and R.E.M.'s lyrics. Each section is structured in its own manner – the former defines the term 'lyrics' and describes its different aspects, leading towards the second section of the paper; the latter shows the specific links between R.E.M. and Faulkner in terms of: 1. the geographically-influenced presence of Southern storytelling and other aspects of Southern culture in their works, 2. using different perspectives and 3. their choice of topics.

**Key Words:** Faulkner, R.E.M., Lyrics, Irony, Satire, Storytelling, Perspective, The Reconstruction, The Civil War, American South

### *Introduction*

This paper can be considered as an attempt to show some traces of Faulkner's influence on R.E.M.'s lyrics from the early years of their career. The two main points of interest for this paper are their albums re-

leased in 1985 and 1986, named *Fables of the Reconstruction and Lifes Rich Pageant*, as Faulkner's influence was most obvious during that period of their work. On the other hand, three of the Faulkner's novels served as references, namely *The Sound and the Fury*, *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Light in August*.

The first section of the paper tries to explore the place of lyrics in the world of literature and to show its specificities. Firstly, it defines the term 'lyrics', then it describes the form of 'lyrics' and its aspects, with special attention paid to the aspects of irony and satire. The second section of the paper illustrates the influence of Faulkner's works on R.E.M.'s early lyrics. The three major points of connections are the exploration of Southern storytelling tradition in their works, the use of different perspectives and the similarities in the choice of topics they presented.

### *Lyrics and Literature*

In order to explain particular connections between Faulkner's works and R.E.M.'s lyrics, it is necessary to discuss lyrics as a particular kind of poetry. Namely, they are different from other poetic forms because they are meant to be sung. Therefore, their aesthetic merits are very closely connected to music. The purpose of this first section is to isolate the different aspects of lyrics and analyze them as a specific literary form before comparing them to some other forms of writing.

#### *Lyrics as a Form of Literary Expression*

More precisely the point to discuss here is what form of literary expression lyrics really are and which literary elements they contain. Firstly, lyrics have to be defined in as many ways as possible and have to be compared to the other song elements. After that, some explanations as to why the defined term is treated as a form of literature are offered. Finally, after we discuss the literary merits of lyrics, we shall proceed with examining the purpose they can serve and the effect they may have upon a reader.

#### *The Definition(s) of Lyrics*

Etymological studies have shown that the word *lyric* is associated with the Greek word *lurikos-lura*, which means lyre ("A plucked stringed musical instrument having strings fixed between a crossbar supported by two arms/an ancient Greek instrument with outwardly curved arms, usually played with a plectrum and used to accompany song and recitation."<sup>1</sup>). This earliest meaning of the word shows us the way this word and music are di-

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rectly connected. This word came to be used for the "words of a popular song" approximately in 1870's. In that period, the plural form (lyrics) was used only in reference to the words to several songs; using 'lyrics' to refer to the words of a single song was then considered incorrect. Nonetheless, such usage became increasingly common and is predominant nowadays. The use of the singular form – 'lyric' is still grammatically correct and it refers to all the words of one song.

The definition of the term of lyrics is likely to open further possibilities for the examination of lyrics from different aspects, the main of them being the issue of lyrics as a form of literature. Some of the existing contemporary definitions of lyrics are: "Words of an opera or of a song."<sup>2</sup>; "The sung words or text of a musical comedy or operetta song."<sup>3</sup>; "The words that are sung by characters in a musical.; Lyrics are words to a tune"<sup>4</sup> "Lyrics are the written words in a song. Lyrics can be written as the accompanying music is composed, or added afterwards. Sometimes, however, music is adapted to or written for a song or poem that has already been written. Lyrics can be studied from an academic perspective. For example, some lyrics can be considered a form of social commentary. Lyrics often contain political, social and economic themes as well as aesthetic elements, and so can connote messages which are culturally significant. Lyrics can also be analyzed with respect to the sense of unity (or lack of unity) it has with its supporting music."<sup>5</sup> "3 A lyric poem; a song; in *pl.*, lyric verses.; 4 *sing.* & (usu.) in *pl.* The words of a song (or songs)."<sup>6</sup>

What almost all of these definitions have in common is that lyric refers to a piece of text and that it accompanies the music. Whether these pieces of text can be considered to have high literary merits is a much broader question. Of course, it is important to distinguish lyrics from the song as a whole and from other parts of a song. Lyrics surely are a component of a song and their importance for a song can vary according to our approach to a song – we can study songs as a whole (giving equal importance to both sound and lyrics), we can put stress on the music or put stress on the lyrics, all of which depends on the effect one wants to pass to their listeners. The issue which makes lyrics different in comparison to the rest of the song elements such as rhythm, key, pattern and solo is the fact that they usually carry a much clearer meaning and are much more likely to pass a certain message to a listener. The meaning conveyed in

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<sup>2</sup> AZOpera.com. All Rights Reserved.

<sup>3</sup> www.nycopera.com. All Rights Reserved.

<sup>4</sup> NationMaster Encyclopedia

<sup>5</sup> Reference.com

<sup>6</sup> Excerpted from *Oxford Talking Dictionary*. Copyright © 1998 The Learning Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

lyrical verses can be explicit or implicit. Some lyrics are so abstract as to be completely unintelligible. In such cases, there is a tendency to emphasize the form, articulation, meter, and symmetries of the expressions. This paper is not focused on any component of a song other than lyrics. Lyrics, as a more or less meaningful piece of written text can be treated as a kind of literary expression and the following sub-section is going to explore these literary elements in lyrics.

#### *Lyrics as a Form of Literature*

There are several points that provide us with reasons to consider lyrics to be a part of literature. First of all, if we say that literature is "creative writing of recognized artistic value"<sup>7</sup>, then the position of lyrics as literature seems to be more noticeable, as lyrics themselves can be considered a kind of creative writing. One good example of the artistic values in lyrics are Leonard Cohen's writings – many of his poems have been turned into lyrics and accompanied by music (a vast majority by himself) and vice-versa – many of his lyrics were later published as poems. R.E.M. themselves can be taken as a proof for the artistic values of lyrics – their songs contain numerous prose and poetic elements characteristic of other forms of literature such as novels or poems. The most obvious example of the presence of literary elements in lyrics are their poetic features. Many lyrics have rhyme, meter and stanza structure very similar to the ones used in poetry. Because of this, it is sometimes very hard to distinguish between a lyric and a poem, which in some ways confirms the artistic values of lyrics.

Due to the fact that the strongpoint of Faulkner's fiction is his prose, this paper will mostly concentrate on searching for the prose elements in R.E.M.'s lyrics and then comparing them to the relevant sections of Faulkner's works. The resemblance between lyrics and prose works (mainly fiction) lies in the fact that many lyrics contain narrative elements. The examples which can be found in R.E.M.'s lyrics tell us of the different kinds of narratives which can be found in lyrics. In the book called *R.E.M. Inside Out – The Stories Behind Every Song*<sup>8</sup>, Craig Rosen mentions different types of stories in R.E.M.'s lyrics, the most prominent of them being the stories describing events and the stories presenting biographical elements.

The stories told through lyrics can describe certain events, either fictional or non-fictional. R.E.M.'s *So. Central Rain*<sup>9</sup> recounts the events of the flood disaster which made a town cut off from the rest of the world.

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<sup>7</sup> WordNet – Princeton University Cognitive Science Laboratory

<sup>8</sup> Rosen, Craig, *R.E.M. Inside Out – The Stories Behind Every Song*<sup>8</sup>, Carlton Books Ltd, 1997

<sup>9</sup> R.E.M., *So. Central Rain*, the 3<sup>rd</sup> track on *Reckoning*, IRS Records, April 1984

Another of their songs is a perfect example of mingling of lyrics and non-fiction prose elements – *Flowers of Guatemala*<sup>10</sup>, which, in an ironic way, speaks of the CIA's overthrowing of a democratically-elected government in Guatemala justified by their claims that dictators and military machines they upheld slaughtered a total of 110,000 Guatemalan peasants over the years. An example of a fiction story in R.E.M.'s lyrics is *Daysleeper*<sup>11</sup>, the story of the everyday life of a simple clerk enslaved by the exhausting demands of the modern economy. Other stories told through lyrics can contain various biographical elements – examples for these can also be found among R.E.M.'s songs. For example, *Man on the Moon*<sup>12</sup> and *The Great Beyond*<sup>13</sup> are both about Andy Kaufmann, a controversial American comedian and performance artist from the 70s. *Lightin' Hopkins*<sup>14</sup> refers to Samuel Hopkins, a Texas-blues legend of the postwar era, while *Wendell Gee*<sup>15</sup> tells of a former proprietor of "Wendell Gee Used Cars" and a resident of Jackson, Georgia. Lyrics can also contain stories from the past. Many of R.E.M.'s songs contain story-like references to the past events, such as *Ignoreland*<sup>16</sup>, *How the West Was Won* and *Where It Got Us*<sup>17</sup>, *Swan Swan H*<sup>18</sup>, all of which refer to a certain period in the past and some of which will later be used for the sake of connection R.E.M.'s and Faulkner's visions of history.

According to Denise Sullivan's *Talk about the Passion – An Oral History of R.E.M.*<sup>19</sup>, there are a couple of writing methods which R.E.M., and especially their front-man Michael Stipe, used for telling stories by means of lyrics. One of them is the method of an address, such as R.E.M.'s *Monty Got a Raw Deal*<sup>20</sup>, addressed to the American actor Montgomery Clift and *Let Me In*<sup>21</sup>, which is both addressed and dedicated

<sup>10</sup> R.E.M., *Flowers of Guatemala*, the 7<sup>th</sup> track on *Lifes Rich Pageant*, IRS Records, July 1986

<sup>11</sup> R.E.M., *Daysleeper*, the 10<sup>th</sup> track on *Up*, Warner Bros, October 1998

<sup>12</sup> R.E.M., *Man on the Moon*, the 10<sup>th</sup> track on *Automatic for the People*, Warner Bros, October 1992

<sup>13</sup> R.E.M., *The Great Beyond*, *Man on the Moon Original Soundtrack*, Warner Bros/Jersey, February 2000

<sup>14</sup> R.E.M., *Lightin' Hopkins*, the 9<sup>th</sup> track on *Document*, IRS Records, September 1987

<sup>15</sup> R.E.M., *Wendell Gee*, the 11<sup>th</sup> track on *Fables of the Reconstruction*, IRS Records, June 1985

<sup>16</sup> R.E.M., *Ignoreland*, the 8<sup>th</sup> track on *Automatic for the People*, Warner Bros, October 1992

<sup>17</sup> R.E.M., *How the West Was Won and Where It Got Us*, the 1<sup>st</sup> track on *New Adventures In Hi-Fi*, Warner Bros, September 1996

<sup>18</sup> R.E.M., *Swan Swan H*, the 11<sup>th</sup> track on *Lifes Rich Pageant*, IRS Records, July 1986

<sup>19</sup> Sullivan, Denise, *Talk about the Passion – An Oral History of R.E.M.*, Pavilion Books Ltd, 1995

<sup>20</sup> R.E.M., *Monty Got a Raw Deal*, the 7<sup>th</sup> track on *Automatic for the People*, Warner Bros, October 1992

<sup>21</sup> R.E.M., *Let Me In*, the 10<sup>th</sup> track on *Monster*, Warner Bros, September 1994

to Kurt Cobain and contains references to his life. Other literary methods used in R.E.M.'s lyrics include the use of different perspectives and re-telling which will be discussed in the third section of this paper.

In addition to the above-seen literary aspects of lyrics, there are other aspects of lyrics which allow them to be used for different purposes.

*Other Aspects: Use of Irony and Satire*

Lyrics are able to convey certain messages through themselves, like many other forms of literature. This fact allows the writer of lyrics to surpass the emotional level of a song and affect listeners in an intellectual way, by commenting upon certain contemporary issues or issues prior to his time. These, usually ironic and satirical comments can be of various sorts.

The most common contemporary comments conveyed through lyrics are socio-political ones, set upon the current social and political conditions. Authors can explicitly or implicitly criticize various issues, they can express their own points and their attitudes towards contemporary values; they can even suggest solutions to particular problems or they can just state and describe things as they are, as they think they are or as other people think they are (especially noticeable in the use of different perspectives). This is one of the points where lyrics meet prose (in which we also find the same kind of comments). Social and political criticism applied in lyrics can sometimes be very harsh, even revolutionary and rebellious and can lead to serious social disobedience and sometimes even result in important changes. Examples these activities can be found in two books by Nikola Božilović – *Sociology of Culture*<sup>22</sup> and *Rock Culture*<sup>23</sup>. The author describes the musical background of the Hippie movement of the 60s and 70s and the student protests of 1968 – both supported by protest songs by Donovan, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan and others. Contemporary social comments seem to be milder and less concentrated on one issue than they used to be (such as the issue of Vietnam War, which seemed to be the meeting point of 60s protests). The use of lyrics for the purpose of providing social and political comments can also be traced in R.E.M.'s lyrics. Their song *Green Grow the Rushes*<sup>24</sup> is a song about illegal immigrant day-workers paying for passage into the USA. *Orange Crush*<sup>25</sup> provides a comment on the usage of a country's youth for war purposes and sending inexperienced soldiers into battles where they can do nothing but die – the issue that has been actively criticized for many

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<sup>22</sup> Božilović, Nikola, *Sociologija kulture*, Narodne novine, Niš, 1995

<sup>23</sup> Božilović, Nikola, *Rok kultura*, Studentski kulturni centar, Niš, 2004

<sup>24</sup> R.E.M., *Green Grow the Rushes*, the 7<sup>th</sup> track on *Fables of the Reconstruction*, IRS Records, June 1985

<sup>25</sup> R.E.M., *Orange Crush*, the 7<sup>th</sup> track on *Green*, Warner Bros, 1988

years and by many authors. *Welcome to the Occupation*<sup>26</sup> criticizes both the foreign and the internal affairs of the U.S.A. *Drive*<sup>27</sup> speaks of 'the possibilities' which children have in the modern world and warns us about the misleading attitude of politicians towards the new generations. Other kinds of comments are aimed at the past and at the influence which the past has on the present. Bands can also express their attitude towards certain historical events or characters. These kinds of comments are also likely to be found in other forms of literature, such as prose. Again, there are many examples of references to the past in the songs of R.E.M. and that makes them very convenient for comparison with other literary works which contain historical issues. Rosen's *R.E.M. Inside Out* is likely to give us some examples of their references. For instance, *Exhuming McCarthy*<sup>28</sup> refers to Joseph McCarthy, who was a right wing Senator who led the anti-Communist witch hunt in the 1950's and who wrongly accused many Americans of treason. R.E.M.'s entire *Fables of the Reconstruction*<sup>29</sup> album comments upon the period of the Reconstruction after the Civil War. Among other songs, the already-mentioned *Flowers of Guatemala* recapitulates events from the 1950's and *Swan Swan H* and *Kohoutek*<sup>30</sup> deal with issues from the Civil War.

To conclude, among many of the aspects of lyrics, the social and the political ones of lyrics seem to be the ones which attract most listeners, who are at the same time readers.

All things considered, lyrics truly have many elements of a literary work and thus are eligible to be compared to other literary works, including prose works. We should, however be aware of one of the crucial differences between lyrics and prose – their length. Lyrics are subordinate to music in terms of duration, which means that their length is limited, unlike the length of prose. This fact directs the comparison from the smaller item (lyrics) to the larger one (a novel) as prose (novels especially) tends to contain much more information than lyrics. The comparison of R.E.M.'s lyrics and Faulkner's works should serve as a good example of the influence of other literary forms on lyrics.

#### *R.E.M.'s Lyrics and Faulkner's Influence on Them*

The previous section of this paper gave us a general framework which, to a certain degree, clarified the position of lyrics within the world of literature. This section is going to deal with the concrete links that con-

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<sup>26</sup> R.E.M., *Welcome to the Occupation*, the 2<sup>nd</sup> track on *Document*, IRS Records, September 1987

<sup>27</sup> R.E.M., *Drive*, the 1<sup>st</sup> track on *Automatic for the People*, Warner Bros, October 1992

<sup>28</sup> R.E.M., *Exhuming McCarthy*, the 3<sup>rd</sup> track on *Document*, IRS Records, September 1987

<sup>29</sup> R.E.M., *Fables of the Reconstruction*, IRS Records, June 1985.

<sup>30</sup> R.E.M., *Kohoutek*, the 8<sup>th</sup> track on *Fables of the Reconstruction*, IRS Records, June 1985

nect the lyrics of one band – R.E.M. with the works of one writer – William Faulkner. The fact that William Faulkner died in 1962, eighteen years before R.E.M. was founded, determined the title of this section - R.E.M.'s Lyrics and Faulkner's *Influence* on Them. In a 1988 *Music Maker*<sup>31</sup> interview, Michael Stipe (R.E.M.'s singer and the author of most of their lyrics), exclaimed that William Faulkner was one of his heroes, and this section of the paper is going to show whether this fact affected his band's lyrics. It deals with some of the issues that seemingly directly connect R.E.M.'s lyrics to some of Faulkner's works and the techniques he used to write them. Several analogies are going to be made, the main of them being parallels in terms of the presentation of the Southern storytelling tradition in their works, the use of different perspectives and the choice of topics.

#### *Southern Storytelling in Lyrics*

The most obvious connection between R.E.M. and Faulkner and probably the reason for many other similarities between their works may lie in the geographical proximity of their residences, which might sound strange, as there is almost four hundred miles between R.E.M.'s hometown of Athens (GA) and Faulkner's hometown of Oxford (MS). But, the important fact is that they come from two Southern states, Georgia and Mississippi, former constituents of the Confederate States of America. Peter Buck, R.E.M.'s lead guitarist, in an interview for *Ikon*<sup>32</sup> magazine in 1995, said: 'Now that America's becoming all the same all over because of the TV and all that, the South is like the last place that's really *out there*...' The reasons for this kind of statement can be derived from various sorts of facts, including the Southern geographic features and specific climate. Nevertheless, the reasons can also be historical, political and social. The seventh chapter of Dragana Mašović's *The Dreams of Destiny*<sup>33</sup> (the chapter on the Civil War) gives us an insight into the differences between the South and the rest of the USA. The Southern states were a separate country for a period of time. Also, in this part of the country, one could find families who owned plantations and claimed to be aristocratic, were in favor of slavery and eventually became the only part of the USA which underwent a purely European experience – that of being occupied and subjected to military rule for years. We can see that this part of the USA is specific in many ways, and those peculiarities probably influenced another trait of the South, which is the most important for this paper – that of preferring oral history to the written one. This love for talk led the South to create many of the stories about its people and events and which in turn marked this part of the USA as the land of storytelling.

<sup>31</sup> *Music Maker Magazine*, July edition, Music Maker Publications, 1988

<sup>32</sup> *Atlanta IKON Magazine, March edition*, Ikon Press, NY, 1995

<sup>33</sup> Mašović, Dragana R., *Sudbinski snovi*, Zograf, Niš, 2002



*Characteristics and Consequences of the  
Southern Storytelling Tradition*

There are many sorts of storytelling; the one which many Southern people seem to be proud of is the so-called 'Oral History' tradition, consisting of tales (fables, stories, legends) which are passed from generation to generation. In July 1985, in an interview for *Record* magazine, while commenting on the *Fables of the Reconstruction* album, Michael Stipe said: "I found myself surrounded a whole lot when we were writing these songs by fables and nursery rhymes and Uncle Remus and *old tales*. The idea of stories being passed down and becoming a tradition and having those stories become as much a part of a way of living or a particular area that you live in as the religion or the trees or the weather, I like the connection between that and the South." David Madden,<sup>34</sup> a Southern writer, explains this connection between storytelling and the South to a certain degree: "Southerners love to tell and hear stories, preferably about people rather than events. They are perfectly happy to hear the same story repeated time after time, because the repetition establishes a relationship, not only between the teller and the listener, but also between both of them and the subject." There is, of course, the other side of the coin - the fact that this habit quite frequently leads to rumors and gossip. Madden suggests that the majority of tales about people are a form of *ritualized gossip*. This is especially noticeable in small communities where statements beginning with 'maybe' and 'probably' are more likely to become 'credible truth' (if repeated enough) - which represents one of the factors that brought the American South to a deep crisis after the war.

*The Presence of Southern Storytelling in  
Works of Faulkner and R.E.M.*

The Southern storytelling tradition can be identified in the works of both authors. In Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*<sup>35</sup> we meet the characters of Miss Rosa Coldfield and Mr. Compson, who, 'interviewed' by Quentin Compson, exhibit their accounts of stories (many of which are supposedly rumors) and history gets recreated through their memory. In *Light in August*,<sup>36</sup> Miss Joanna Burden, born in the South to parents who came from the North, is alienated from the typical Southern society due to numerous rumors and gossips which connect her and her parents to various people of Afro-American origin (who were treated as the enslaved

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<sup>34</sup> Madden, David, *Classics of Civil War Fiction* (editor, with Peggy Bach), University Press of Mississippi, 1991

<sup>35</sup> Faulkner, William, *Absalom, Absalom!*, Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, July 1971.

<sup>36</sup> Faulkner, William, *Light in August*, Vintage Books, New York, January 1972.

and lower race before and even after the war), which represents her life-long stigma or burden (as her surname suggests).

The power of rumors and retelling can also be noticed in Stipe's lyrics. To prove this, the name of R.E.M.'s third album should be mentioned. It is a collection of Southern song-stories whose name consists of two phrases – '*Fables of the*' and '*Reconstruction of the*'. When these two phrases are combined, they make a progression that has no end. This shows that 'the truth' in the South is in the infinite state of movement and modification – *Fables* are *reconstructed*, so they become new fables which are again reconstructed and the process is permanent. The album's songs portray various peculiar characters who are *said to have done* something, some of them being *Old Man Kensey*<sup>37</sup> who is subject to various rumors such as being prone to kidnapping dogs and then blackmailing their owners (reminiscent of Jason Compson, who is eager to do anything just for money) and *Wendell Gee*, a World War II veteran, who is said to have lost the connection between his dreams and reality. In connection with this idea of stories about people, while commenting the second track from this album (named *Maps and Legends*<sup>38</sup>) Stipe says: "There's a lot of people like maps. You look at them and you can lay them out in a table and read them and run your finger over them. You can find their little stories, their little squares and circles. Some are filled in, some are not. Some have lines connecting them and it's real pretty, nice and mysterious, but you can't make heads or tails out of it.... And then you look at the map and it starts to make sense." This quotation shows us the striking similarity between the way Stipe describes people and the way that can be used to describe the structure of Faulkner's novels (e.g. *The Sound and the Fury*<sup>39</sup> and *Absalom, Absalom!*) – people are compared to maps with some fields filled and some missing. Jean-Paul Sartre's<sup>40</sup> idea is that by reading those 'fields' and attempting to fill in the missing ones the reader makes his own story, one of the many. That is the way that Faulkner's readers build their own versions of the stories told by his characters and that is the way the Stipe tells his stories of the people he knows. Another important conclusion that can be drawn from Stipe's quote tells us that in the South, people are likely to become stories over time and stories themselves get personified somehow and survive for centuries. Both Faulkner and Stipe seem to have presented examples of these two habitual processes in their works.

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<sup>37</sup> R.E.M., *Old Man Kensey*, the 5<sup>th</sup> track on *Fables of the Reconstruction*, IRS Records, June 1985

<sup>38</sup> R.E.M., *Maps and Legends*, the 1<sup>st</sup> track on *Fables of the Reconstruction*, IRS Records, June 1985

<sup>39</sup> Faulkner, William, *The Sound and the Fury*, Vintage, London, 2005.

<sup>40</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *On the Sound and the Fury: Time in the Work of Faulkner*, from *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, trans. Annette Michelson, Rider, London, 1955.

The concept of 'Southern Storytelling' is the first meeting point of Faulkner and R.E.M. However, as we could see there are gossip-related problems that have to do with the stories that come from the South. What seems to be the main problem with most Southern tales is that they usually have no single source – that could be the reason why there are all those missing 'fields' on the 'map'. Due to the question of the reliability of different sources, writers have but one option – to question the existence of the truth itself, and to do that they have to find a suitable form of thinking and writing.

*Use of Different Perspectives in Lyrics*

Questioning the truth leads us to another connection between Faulkner and Stipe. Stipe seems to have followed Faulkner in adopting some of the characteristics of the standpoint of *the undivided reality* (to the degree that the form of the lyrics allowed), as least while writing the lyrics for *Fables of the Reconstruction*. Briefly, according to Olga W. Vickery's<sup>41</sup> essay on perspectives, this undivided reality point of view assumes that reality can never be explained, depicted, nor shown in its entirety by the human brain and its thinking processes. On the one hand we have actions, people and events and on the other hand we have *comprehensions* of those actions, people and events. The human mind is only capable of *comprehending* the events and every attempt to understand and retell what happened is in fact the creation of a new story. What an author can do in that position is to analyze people, 'get into' their minds and try to tell the story from their perspectives in order to avoid creating a new one (one created by himself). There are various techniques for achieving this, such as interview, dialog, use of reported speech, and stream of consciousness. Some of these techniques can show us some of the connections between Faulkner and R.E.M.

*Use of Different Perspectives in Faulkner and R.E.M.*

The use of different perspectives allows the author to approach problems and issues from many different aspects and comment on reality or the past more than once. Taking the South as the main source for his writings, William Faulkner excelled in telling stories from other people's perspectives – in *The Sound and the Fury* he succeeded in telling the same story from the point of view both of an idiot (Benjy Compson) and of an intellectual (Quentin Compson). This book, in its entirety, was written from the point of view of its characters mostly through the technique of stream of consciousness, which is considered to be one of the

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<sup>41</sup> Vickery, Olga W, *A Study in Perspective*, from *The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation*, Louisiana State University Press, 1959

most difficult techniques in literature. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, one of the characters (Quentin Compson) talks to other characters and learns their versions of stories in the form of an interview or reported speech, narrated from the perspectives of others, sometimes mingled with the perspectives of the people from whom they learnt those stories, which once again proves evidence of the Southern tradition of retelling, this time well captured and analyzed by Faulkner. In sections of *Light in August* we also come across the perspectives of its characters, the most philosophical or critical of which seems to be the one of Reverend Gail Hightower, a dismissed church minister.

According to a radio interview with Michael Stipe from 1985,<sup>42</sup> largely influenced by Faulkner's works, R.E.M.'s third album was meant to be named after Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, but its name was changed in the last moment. Eventually, the album was named *Fables of the Reconstruction/Reconstruction of the Fables*, but still, there is a reason why they wanted to name their album *The Sound and the Fury*. Not only was Stipe influenced by Faulkner's works while working on the lyrics for their third album, but he also tried to use Faulkner's method of getting into people's heads and telling stories from their perspectives. There are various examples of this – the third track from the *Fables*, called *Driver 8*<sup>43</sup> is told from the perspective of a train engineer driving the train along the Southern Crescent railway line which is running through Georgia on its way to New Orleans. The chorus contains the quoted lines told by the train's conductor "Take a break Driver 8, we can reach our destination" which seem to echo in the driver's head just like his father's words echo in Quentin Compson's head in Faulkner's *the Sound and the Fury*. According to Craig Rosen, another of R.E.M.'s songs, *Life and How to Live It*,<sup>44</sup> puts us into the head of Stipe's Athens neighbor, Brivs Mekis, one of his peculiar characters, who was said to have divided his house into two totally different parts containing even different types of clothes, who moved from one part to the other after a certain period of time, and lived according to his book called *Life - How to Live*.<sup>45</sup> In this song, Stipe seems to have used a kind of poetic stream of consciousness as the lines of the song seem to mix up and combine in a way comparable to Quentin's thoughts. The lines begin with "Two doors" and end in different ways, reminiscent of mind's repetition of certain thoughts. Just like Quentin's narrative, where the sounds of the clock pervade the whole text, this song's lyrics contain the repetitive sound of knocking. *Good*

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<sup>42</sup> "Interview with REM" Melody Maker. June 15, 1985

<sup>43</sup> R.E.M., *Driver 8*, the 3<sup>rd</sup> track on *Fables of the Reconstruction*, IRS Records, June 1985

<sup>44</sup> R.E.M., *Life and Hot to Live It*, the 4<sup>th</sup> track on *Fables of the Reconstruction*, IRS Records, June 1985

<sup>45</sup> Brivs, Mekis, *Life - How to Live*, UR & UR Publications, 1982

*Advices*<sup>46</sup> is the *Fables*' tenth track and it is told from the perspective of a father who gives a whole set of strange pieces of advice, such as "When you greet a stranger look at his shoes" or "Keep your hat on your head", to his son, who is moving to a big city. Similarly, *Swan Swan H*, from their following album, called *Lifes Rich Pageant*<sup>47</sup>, is told from the perspective of an old freed Afro-American slave. These songs' lyrics are just another set of examples of Stipe's use of different people's perspective which makes him similar to his hero - Faulkner.

This sub-section of the paper has shown the similarity between the two authors in terms of using different perspectives in their works. The fact that they both *used it* is not the only thing that they have in common in regard to perspectives. As we could see, even some of the devices they used such as echoing and repetition within the stream of consciousness are very similar. Once we have taken note of these 'technical' similarities, we move to the following sub-section which will show us whether they applied these techniques to similar topics.

#### *Choice of Topics*

When we proceed to the issue of topics, the first thing that should be mentioned is that both Faulkner's works and R.E.M.'s lyrics contain references to the past – especially to the Civil War period and the Reconstruction which followed it. The reason for stressing these two historical events in their works might again be their Southern origin. The Civil War and the years that followed it were perhaps the most painful period for the American South and their consequences are felt even today. Michael Stipe tried to explain the usage of the past in his lyrics in his 1988 interview:<sup>48</sup> "In Europe, you can walk around and the sense of history that seeps out of the buildings makes you feel not quite so big. You feel a great sense of place. In America that sense of place is essentially a myth, especially in the Deep South." This sub-section of the paper is going to show some of the basic references to the Civil War and the Reconstruction in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Light in August* and *The Sound and the Fury* and in R.E.M.'s lyrics and to connect those references with one another.

#### *The Civil War and the Reconstruction in R.E.M.'s Lyrics*

The Civil War imagery is omnipresent in the works of William Faulkner. The war seems to be a haunting experience in the South and its consequences are key to many events described by Faulkner and his char-

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<sup>46</sup> R.E.M., *Good Advices*, the 10<sup>th</sup> track on *Fables of the Reconstruction*, IRS Records, June 1985

<sup>47</sup> R.E.M., *Lifes Rich Pageant*, IRS Records, July 1986

<sup>48</sup> *Music Maker Magazine*, July edition, Music Maker Publications, 1988

acters. There are very many examples of references to the war in the novels mentioned in this paper. *Absalom, Absalom!*, through recollections of Rosa Coldfield and Mr. Compson, revives the destinies of many of the Southern soldiers – both Thomas and Henry Sutpen fought the war, accompanied by General Compson, Charles Bon and others. Moreover, in *Light in August*, Reverend Gail Hightower keeps thinking of and mentioning his grandfather, who was a Southern army cavalryman and acts "as if he couldn't get religion and that galloping cavalry and his dead grandfather shot from the galloping horse untangled from each other, even in the pulpit." In *The Sound and the Fury*, we learn that in the Jefferson town square "the Confederate soldier gazed with empty eyes beneath his marble hand in wind and weather." Here, Faulkner is speaking about the statue of the soldier which stands in the center of the square, reminding people of the past. The statue of the defeated army's soldier standing in the center of the town now belonging to the land which is reunited with the winning army's land might seem very strange. It actually makes us raise the question of the war hero and its potential absurdity. We might ask ourselves who can be treated as a Southern hero and it would be difficult to give an answer to such a question, as common people of a war-ravaged land were unlikely to have cared about any kind of heroes.

This idea of the hero leads us to a direct link to R.E.M.'s lyrics. Stipe's *Swan, Swan H* is his only lyric literally set in the period which came immediately after the war, in the early years of the Reconstruction. It was influenced by a collection of old slaves' hymns that Michael Stipe came across at the time. It is told from a perspective of a slave who is freed and sings about the amount of nonsense which the war brought with itself. His remark in line "Marching feet, Johnny Reb"<sup>49</sup>, what's the price of heroes? – Six in one, half dozen the other" seems to confirm the absurdity of talking about heroes in the ruined South. Another of this song's lines "Hurrah, we are all free now" which seems to be the exclamation of happiness, but if we think deeper it can be a strange combination of two elements which connect two extremes. On the one hand, we have "Hurrah" which is a potential reference to the starting word of the recurring line in the chorus of the unofficial anthem of the Confederacy – *Dixie('s) Land*.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand we have "we are all free now" which was the

<sup>49</sup> Johnny Reb, short for Johnny Rebel, the slang term for any Confederate soldier, or the Confederate army as a whole, during the American Civil War.

<sup>50</sup> Most sources credit Ohio-born Daniel Decatur Emmett with the song's composition. The song originated in the blackface minstrel show of the 1850s and quickly grew famous across the United States. Its original lyrics were written in a racist, exaggerated version of African American English Vernacular. An alternative version of this song was considered to be the popular anthem of the Confederacy, with Southern-patriotic lyrics written by Albert Pike. It was played at the inauguration of Jefferson Davis.

fighting goal of the other warring side. Another reference to the South's defeat in the Civil War in R.E.M.'s lyrics can be traced in the song called *Burning Down*<sup>51</sup> from R.E.M.'s collection of B-sides<sup>52</sup> named *Dead Letter Office*<sup>53</sup>. This song contains lines which read "Plantation burning your boat is coming in", "Running water in a sinking boat" and "Burning down – my hands are tied my feet are bound", all of which are probably references to the defeat of the South.

The Civil War was followed by the period of the Reconstruction – the period which meant to convert the Southern system of values and beliefs into the Northern one. This practically meant that the South had to accept Northern rules and to play by them from that period onwards, which was likely to evoke feelings of shame and misery, mostly among the members of the Southern 'aristocracy.' The sense of shame and frustration in the South that we can trace in Faulkner's novels that were mentioned earlier in this paper, can also be found in Stipe's lyrics. A good example for this is *Good Advices* from *Fables of the Reconstruction*. One of the odd pieces of advice that a son, who is moving from the South to a big town (probably in the North, as the "home is long way away"), receives from his father is "Keep you memories in your shoes", which can be interpreted as the way of saying that he should forget the place where he comes from and replace his ways with the Northern ones. "When you greet a stranger look at his shoes" and "Keep your hat on your head" both give us a sense of *hiding* his Southern origin which could be said to be caused by shame or fear of being different. This scene might even seem to be a reminiscence of the conversations that Quentin Compson has with his father and Herbert Head, before going to Harvard, as Quentin's conversations are full of lines where other people advise him about what he should do.

It seems that the presence of similar historical topics is obvious in the works of both Faulkner and Stipe. As we have said, that fact might also be influenced by their Southern origin, as the meeting points are exclusively Southern topics, that of the Civil War and the Reconstruction. This section of the paper demonstrated some of the relations between Faulkner's novels and Stipe's lyrics. The starting position for their comparison was their Southern origin, which first connected them in presenting the Southern storytelling tradition in their works. Storytelling led us to find the similarities in the ways they used to tell the stories. In the end,

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<sup>51</sup> R.E.M., *Burning Down*, the 3<sup>rd</sup> track on *Dead Letter Office*, IRS Records, April 1987

<sup>52</sup> The terms A-side and B-side refer to the two sides of 7" vinyl records on which singles were released. The terms have come to refer to the types of song placed on each side of the record, with the A-side being the featured song, while the B-side, or "flipside," is secondary.

<sup>53</sup> R.E.M., *Dead Letter Office*, IRS Records, April 1987

after exploring the techniques of different perspectives, we saw some of the similar topics on which they applied those techniques. If we take into consideration Stipe's confirmation of his admiration for Faulkner's works, it seems that his early writing career was largely influenced by Faulkner, as they can be linked in several ways.

### *Conclusion*

All things considered, Faulkner's influence on R.E.M. helped us see some of the connections which can exist between two different literary forms. Some of the possible reasons for these connections, such as their geographical origin, are mentioned throughout the paper. The quality of Faulkner's works is reason enough for anyone to be influenced by them, but there are probably many more reasons for his impact on R.E.M.'s lyrics, known only to Stipe. The connections between them may also lead us towards thinking that there are links between other writers and musicians, which are yet to be explored.

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Душан Стаменковић, Ниш

**УТИЦАЈ ФОКНЕРОВИХ ДЕЛА НА ТЕКСТОВЕ ПЕСАМА  
ГРУПЕ R.E.M.: ОСВРТ НА АЛБУМЕ  
FABLES OF THE RECONSTRUCTION И LIFES RICH PAGEANT**

**Резиме**

Главни задатак овог рада је да покаже начине на које текст који је директно везан за музику може бити поређен са текстом који са музиком нема очигледних веза и да се између њих могу повући одређене паралеле и наћи њихове сличности и разлике. Пре свега, у њему се испитује утицај Фокнере прозе (пре свега романа "Абсаломе, сине мој!", "Бука и бес" и "Светлост у августу") на текстове који прате музику групе R.E.M. (песме са њиховог другог и трећег студијског албума). Рад се састоји из два дела: први део се бави појмом "текст песме" и положајем ове врсте писања у свету књижевности, док се други део бави конкретним везама између Фокнерових дела и текстова песама групе R.E.M. Сваки од ових делова је организован на посебан начин – први део најпре дефинише поменути појам, а затим га сагледава из више углова, што нас приближава другом делу, који се бави повезивањем Фокнера са R.E.M.-ом у смислу: 1. присуства посебне врсте приповедања типичног за амерички југ, као и присуства других елемената културе америчког југа у њиховим делима, 2. писања из перспективе других људи и 3. одабира тема које су присутне у њиховим делима.

**Кључне речи:** Фокнер, R.E.M., текст песме, иронија, сатира, приповедање, перспектива, период обнове, амерички грађански рат, амерички југ