Why is everyone talking about time all of a sudden? What is involved in the ‘temporal turn’ in American literary studies? What can temporality tell us about literature that history cannot? In order to answer such questions, George Thomas argues that certain novels by William Faulkner (Absalom, Absalom!), Cormac McCarthy (Blood Meridian), and Toni Morrison (A Mercy) are in fact not historical novels but “temporal novels” – self-reflexive attempts to represent in fiction senses of time outside of historicity. Touching on literary history, temporality theory, and the politics of memory, his paper will take us to Colonial Virginia, the US-Mexico borderlands after the Mexican-American War, and Civil War-era Mississippi in order to pursue a counterintuitive thesis: it is precisely by questioning the very idea of history that these novels make the past come alive.

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