

A Journey in Understanding the End: An Analysis of Stream of Consciousness, Emotion, and  
Repetition in *The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner

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First published in 1929, *The Sound and the Fury* is recognized as one of the most innovative and experimental American novels of its time. The novel portrays the downfall of the Compsons, a prominent family of Jefferson, Mississippi. Faulkner subjectively represents the human experience through several different characters' respective memories. The novel's stream of consciousness style is frequently very opaque and challenging to interpret, as events are often purposefully masked and narrated non-linearly. Because of his southern background, Faulkner was particularly interested in the decline of the Deep South and the emotional aftermath of the Civil War. Because of the history Faulkner brings to *The Sound and the Fury*, his relationship to the emotional aftermath of the Civil War is why I believe that emotion pervades the novel so intensely. Through the emotional intensity of the novel, Faulkner is suggesting that the South is caught in an emotional repetition that needs to be theorized but cannot be because the emotion is so variable. In *The Sound and the Fury*, characters' emotional repetitive cycles challenge the reader to find stability: only through stability of emotion can both the South and the characters in the novel progress past these fixed emotional repetitive cycles. The characters' emotions help the reader understand the progression of the emotionality of the South paralleled to those of the characters in *The Sound and the Fury*.

With many access points into a tangled web of illogical characters, *The Sound and the Fury* is made a complex novel by both the reader and the author. Faulkner superimposes the narrative structure of stream of consciousness onto the novel as a way for the characters to represent the period of emotional instability and paralysis of the South post-Civil War. Because the characters are already trapped within the confines of the stream of consciousness narration, they do not have control over their emotionally unstable repetitive cycles. One access point into the novel would be through a close analysis of language. However, Faulkner's stream of

consciousness narration degrades language into a non-linear representation of distorted time and emotion. Therefore, in an attempt to redirect access to the novel, my argument focuses on the emotion of the novel. Emotionality, or the state of emotion, transcends logic in the effort to break out of the stream of consciousness narration. Because this narrative structure constantly forces characters to recall experiences through repeated emotional responses, the characters' emotional repetitive cycles are my main access point into the novel.

In an essay entitled "Now I Can Write: Faulkner's Novel of Invention," Donald Kartiganer wants to complicate the preconceived notions that readers use during the reading process to access literature. In this sense, texts have a binary perspective: either accessible or non-accessible to a reader based on prior experiences. Readers approach the process of reading with a certain vocabulary, a particular understanding of rhetorical strategy, and an ideology to create a relational bridge into the novel. When attempting to make difficult texts more accessible, Kartiganer's agenda encourages good readers and good texts to disrupt and challenge predetermined schemas. The product of such an experience of new reading lies in the creation of an environment in which new meaning emerges that neither text nor reader nor reading has previously encountered. In the creation of a new text, *The Sound and the Fury* demonstrates Faulkner's intent to impose "the double action of mourning what it no longer can depend on and proclaiming the fact of its freedom. It declares what it *is* in the wake of what it is *not*" (Kartiganer 74). In the composition of *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner set out to not only revise the process of writing but to redirect the meaning and function of literary criteria. Consequently, Benjy, Quentin, and Jason project worlds that Kartiganer suggests "cannot imitate anything we can cognitively comprehend as the real, answerable to nothing except the needs of their deranged fantasies" (74).

My purpose of engaging Faulkner's narrative structure of stream of consciousness is to show how he finesses control over the characters and manipulates the setting to parallel the emotional instability and paralysis of the South post-Civil War. In order to understand character progression and reach the end of the novel, the stream of consciousness narration must be broken—releasing the characters from their emotional repetitive cycles. Repetition persists throughout Faulkner's narrative structure: the only way to make sense of the novel's repetition is through the emotional responses of the characters. Looking at the novel through the characters' unstable emotional states, the reader is provided with an understanding of the paralysis within the novel. However, the character development is only progressed when the stream of consciousness narrative structure is dropped in the presence of the third person present narrator of the final section of the novel. After Faulkner's stream of consciousness narrative structure is abandoned, the reader can finally see how the characters exist and develop outside of their emotional repetitive cycles. Therefore, the reader gains a newfound knowledge of how a forced narrative structure provides alternative methods for gaining access to a novel that work within its confines. Specifically to *The Sound and the Fury*, emotion becomes the lens into and the bridge out of the characters' repetitive existences within the stream of consciousness narration: only at the end of the novel are the characters allowed to fully develop and progress into the present and beyond. But are all the characters afforded this power and opportunity?

As a narrative structure, stream of consciousness allows me to work with the language of emotion. I begin my argument with stream of consciousness to establish the need to move past the sense that language has to be logical. With the removal of logic, the reader gets the most basic form of an emotional state and how the characters interact with one another on an emotional level. Because none of these forms of traditional reading were satisfactory to work

through my argument, I want to propose an emotional reading of *The Sound and the Fury* – in hopes of finding a new way to understand and complicate the novel. I use language to portray how the characters are stuck in emotional turmoil. In doing so, I can move toward my idea of highlighting the pervading emotionality in *The Sound and the Fury*. The language of emotion that derives from stream of consciousness dismisses the issues of linearity and rationality. By redirecting the focus away from the language of logic to the language of emotion, the reader is able to navigate the repetition within the novel. The repetition exists in individualized emotional repetitive cycles that control the characters' existences. Through the language of emotion, I am able to identify and understand the repetition of the novel that exists in characters' specific emotional repetitive cycles. Emotion moves away from the three downfalls of traditional readings of *The Sound and the Fury*. The reader seems to be thrown into the novel at a point in which identification has already happened. The inability to recognize the language of the landscape sets the reader outside of the conversation within each section. How can a novel establish itself as having a narrator, a narrative construct, and a language set that can only be accessed by a certain readership? My reading of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* provides an access point more relatable to the reader in my movement from stream of consciousness through emotion to repetition. Because the characters revolve in a circular emotional bubble in which past experiences are brought to the surface by present emotions, repetition plays a key role in understanding the emotional states of the characters. After the paralysis of Faulkner's stream of consciousness narrative structure is removed, the characters' emotional repetitive cycles will stop and Faulkner's imposed narrative structure can no longer detract from the progression of the novel to its end.

As a narrative structure, stream of consciousness can be hard to follow from the start. The location of the novel's subjects and objects cannot be connected to one another without close analysis. The narrator is established as untrustworthy and unpredictable because of the lack of connection to the environment. I want to work through the emotionality of the characters as the driving force and temporality of the novel. A reduced reading of *The Sound and the Fury* is not a satisfactory way to handle its complex ambiguities. The novel must be carefully worked through in order to fully understand the characters' intricacies and how their inability to develop emotionally thwarts the novel's progress. Because the novel's ambiguities complicate the reading process, some readers have reduced *The Sound and the Fury* to unsatisfactory readings. These reduced readings of the novel can be boiled down to three main categories: pure readership ambivalence, an attempt to understand the novel logically, and a critique of the characters' inefficiencies. Kartiganer tackles readership ambivalence and how to confront the anti-progression of the novel through his discussion of repetition. Weinstein discusses the complications of trying to logically identify character development within stream of consciousness. My argument traces the overall understanding of how character development and their intricacies are affected within and out of Faulkner's stream of consciousness narrative structure.

If the reader takes the unproductive search for Truth and logic out of their interpretive framework, a reader must use the emotional states of the characters and their interactions to move through a very unprogressive novel. By throwing the reader into an unexplained repetitive cycle of emotional irrationality, the novel dismantles readers' traditional approach to reading; therefore, the reader can only maneuver the confines of the stream of consciousness narrative by understanding the emotional work of repetition. In the first paragraph of the Quentin section, the

importance and depth of stream of consciousness as a narrative structure can be uncovered through close analysis. Quentin's character shows that time fades away, and the past should not be focused on in order to move through the present. He conveys that the present allows the past to exist: "I give it [watch] to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. Because no battle is ever won he said. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools" (Faulkner 76). The field represents the consistency and stability of a progressing present. A stream of consciousness narrative embodies the perspective of the emotional present of an individual's reality. However, because linear time does not exist in the novel, *The Sound and the Fury* shows how this removal of time through stream of consciousness paralyzes progression toward an end. Therefore, the reader and the characters within the novel can only progress to an end by dropping stream of consciousness: allowing linear time to regain control and move the novel into the future away from the distractions and entrapment of the past.

In his discussion of repetition, Kartiganer parallels my argument regarding the lack of emotional flexibility of the characters. The characters of the novel approach each situation not as new but as a continuation of previous interactions and repeat their reactive cycles. One of the most important parts of establishing the Faulknerian narrative pattern lies in the fact that repetition exists as "the reenactment of a given ground...a way of knowing only that dimension of one's self and moment that is similar to what has already been, only that which *continues*" (Kartiganer 25). In his essay entitled "Faulkner's Art of Repetition," Kartiganer defines the use of repetition in Faulknerian fiction. He describes compulsive repetition as a disease that reenacts old desires. A proposed cure for this disease is the modification of the past to show different

formations of previously established original stories. Repetition continuously replicates reflections that must be tied to an origin. Kartiganer uses repetition to further develop its authority over influencing identity and knowing. Despite each individual experience being unique and distinct from any other, these individual experiences exist within a pattern.

Kartiganer continues to assert that repetition can and should be traced back to origin stories to uncover hidden links. Therefore, the foretold gives meaning to subsequent experiences.

Using Kartiganer's discussion of repetition as the continuation of what has come before is a very interesting way to approach *The Sound and the Fury*. The structure of repetition keeps the characters stuck in their emotional states. This is the key to the relationship between emotion and repetition in the novel. The repetition of the novel does not and cannot bring the novel to a satisfactory close because of the unique perspective of each repetitive cycle. By dropping Faulkner's stream of consciousness narrative structure and upgrading the novel to a stable present temporality, repetition can no longer stop the progression of the novel to its end. The repetition of *The Sound and the Fury* is not whole but fragmentary. As they are represented in different characters through stream of consciousness, the repetitive cycles are incongruous to one another. The unique perspective of each repetitive cycle and how the characters subsequently react within their own and to the cycles of others continues to heighten the emotional state of the novel. Therefore, emotionality and repetition are directly related to the anti-progress of the novel. The characters' emotionally stuck states thwart forward progression. The family in *The Sound and the Fury* is trapped in the conscious framing of individual consciousness. Is it possible to find who holds the origin story in the novel and to link separate points of view as spawning from an individualized perspective? I do not feel that it is necessary to find the origin story of the novel. This brings me to a portion of my argument at the juncture between the Truth

of the novel and the truths of the characters' developments. The overall Truth of the novel does not lie in its origin but in its progression. Along the reader's journey in discovering the Truth of the novel, one must understand what truth searches entrap each character in their individual emotional repetitive cycle.

The characters are the centers of their true reality. Driven by their unique emotional repetitive cycle, each individual existence provides an undeniable and simultaneously unverifiable account of "true" events. In the characters' individual struggles with truth, the novel's progression is at stake. The reader will never truly be able to understand or uncover an overall Truth, just several juxtaposed truths to decipher. The idea of Truth vs. truth comes from Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*. In Derrida's discussion of the origins of archives, he establishes the terms of Truth and truth. Truth refers to an overall understanding that everyone receives after getting to the origin of an archive; whereas, truth – or in the case of *The Sound and the Fury* emotional truth – is represented by the individual perspectival truths that can be gained from an archive based on agenda or a prior history of experiences. Kartiganer asserts that each narrative voice "pursues an autonomous tale that risks being neither more nor less than *unlikeness*: telling what it has never quite known, yet recreating undeniable, if unverifiable, truth" (Kartiganer 79). Furthermore, Faulkner's stream of consciousness narration allows emotional repetition to thrive within its structure: forcing the reader to find a way to exit the narrative structure in order to break these emotional repetitive cycles, ultimately arriving at the end of the novel.

In an essay entitled "Thinking I Was I Was Not Who Was Not Was Not Who: The Vertigo of Faulknerian Literature," Philip M. Weinstein talks about how Faulkner's narration deliberately dizzies the reader in an attempt to redirect the conversation surrounding identity. By

dizzying the reader, I refer to Kartiganer's idea of unsettling the traditional sense of reading. Weinstein enjoys off-balancing his readers through the creation of an environment of motion, contrary to the emotional immobility of the characters in *The Sound and the Fury*. For Weinstein, identity is a moving process of negotiating the locus of hopeless desires in an attempt to merge incompleteness through characters' "common acts of imaginary transference" (Weinstein 190). However, because the characters of *The Sound and the Fury* are stuck in their emotional repetitive cycles, their immobility cripples their ability to establish a stable sense of self and relationships with others.

The title of Weinstein's essay comes from a Quentin passage in *The Sound and the Fury*: Quentin's sanity is grounded in the stability of his relationships and is undermined by his overpowering emotional thoughts. The lines are blurred between reality and fantasy, light and darkness, rationality and irrationality. The most obvious sign of Quentin's breakdown to the reader lies in the fragmentation of language. After the decision to commit suicide has been made, Quentin is living a dying life. His emotional repetitive cycle rapidly circulates all of his feelings about all the tragedy that is happening to his family: his morose mother, his fatalistic father, his sexual sister, and his bellowing brother. As he visits the river for the last time, Quentin accepts his fate and allows his emotional repetitive cycle to fully derail the little stability he had left into complete darkness. He reduces his experience of living as "the whole thing came to symbolize night and unrest I seemed to be lying neither asleep nor awake looking down a long corridor of gray half-light where all stable things had become shadowy paradoxical all I had done shadows all I had felt suffered taking visible from antic and perverse mocking without relevance inherent themselves" (Faulkner 170). His thoughts spiral completely out of control. Through the fragmented self-awareness and narration, Quentin exposes his sense of self as lacking any past or

present identity: “I was I was not who was not was not who” (Faulkner 170). The stream of consciousness technique becomes the new identification of Quentin: an othered body, a disjointed mind frame, a dizzied sense of objectivity and subjectivity. The “who” Quentin becomes is not what existed before: he is owned by these qualities; he does not own them. The reader can understand the derailment of the emotional repetitive cycle from the deconstruction of the self-awareness in the stream of consciousness narrative.

Weinstein reveals that language is the “script” by which a character knows himself or herself (Weinstein 173). In the narrative frame of stream of consciousness, I believe nothing can be finished. As a fragmented character, Quentin cannot complete a full self-identification because he is constantly bombarded and affected by every stimulus in his surrounding environment. Experiences are taken as one continuous experience: never individualized. Experiences are neither truly started nor stopped. Within the stream of consciousness narrative structure, language lacks the ability to fully identify. The stream of consciousness narrative structure exposes the formation of Quentin’s fragmented identity. Weinstein argues that identification holds two unbreakable truths: the initial being that identity is always itself, and the second being that identity must therefore be different from all other identities. The process of identification comes from language. Identity is a privileged term because language continues to support the sameness of an identity. However, the problems of having stream of consciousness as a narrative structure are that language does not form a rational sequence, is contradictory in nature, and cannot be used to identify a character like Quentin who depends on relationships with others to identify himself. Because Quentin is always concerned with other characters, he cannot formulate who he is. Instead, his breakdown of self-identification results in a disembodied, alien sense of over identifying with the qualities of others as one who “I was I was not who was not

was not who” (Faulkner 170). In conjunction with the emotional repetitive cycles, Weinstein’s argument shows how repetition identifies, re-identifies, and misidentifies characters throughout the novel.

Magnifying my example of Quentin’s identification process, Weinstein portrays Quentin as “unable to consolidate what he has absorbed, unable to shape his own thoughts into the coherence of a temporal project, he is a figure in motley” (Weinstein 174). He is composed of everything that is not himself. Filled with the concern and discourse of others, Quentin’s cacophonous existence maps directly onto his struggle to understand the relationships within his family. For example, Quentin revisits Damuddy’s death and observes Benjy’s emotional repetitive cycle through his outcries: “Niggers say a drowned man’s shadow was watching for him in the water all the time...What a sinful waste Dilsey would say. Benjy knew it when Damuddy died. He cried. *He smell hit. He smell hit*” (Faulkner 90). Over identification causes Quentin to gain new qualities of identification from those around him and their experiences. However, through Faulkner’s stream of consciousness narrative, the reader learns that Quentin cannot find any productive reflection on his observations of his family. As a narrative structure, stream of consciousness narration moves with the constantly shifting temporality of the present: where the only relationship to the past comes from a repeated experience in the present. The newer generation seems to represent one that does not understand the persistence of the family’s ties to Faulkner’s stream of consciousness and combats it with a desire to progress into the future.

In a glimpse at the newest Compson family generation, Miss Quentin does not understand the tragedy the family is facing. She naively suggests that they should all get along better and solve their issues. Constantly being manipulated and controlled by the emotional repetitive

cycles of the other characters, Miss Quentin finally snaps and expresses her disdain for her existence and the entire family's existence: "Whatever I do, it's your fault...If I'm bad, it's because I had to be. You made me. I wish I was dead. I wish we were all dead. (Faulkner 260). She blames the family for her predetermined demise. As the youngest member of the family, Miss Quentin is stripped of her hope with the realization that no matter what she does the emotional repetitive cycles will persist until the fragments remaining of the Compson family are completely lost. Miss Quentin's idea of life has been forever altered by the influence of the chaos produced by the distinct emotional repetitive cycles. Faulkner establishes *The Sound and the Fury* as a negotiation of maintaining stability between the self and the outside world.

*The Sound and the Fury's* major characters are not ordinary and need a proper introduction for none is truly defined within the confines of the novel. After reading the novel and conducting a surface analysis of language, I came to the conclusion that the characters' logical representations describe their behaviors and attitudes toward one another. Each character fits into a certain archetype within the narrative that becomes degraded throughout the novel: a father who attempts to progress the family honor of the past, a matriarch who feels compelled to keep the family together whatever the cost, a "young boy" (Benjy) observing and absorbing the world around him, an "adolescent teen" (Quentin) dealing with the pressures and transformations of pubescent desires, an "angered adult" (Jason) who lives in the present and does not look back at the past to shape his future, and a "maturing women" (Caddy) who desires to marry and have children. However, Faulkner's stream of consciousness narrative structure envelopes the characters in their individual emotional repetitive cycles and contributes to the explanation of their ultimate degradation. Because these emotional repetitive cycles are individualized, each character is the sole focus of their own cycle. While reading a non-linear novel, the repetition of

the characters' emotions allowed me to track their development between past and present experiences and provided me with the understanding to create the following character descriptions.

Mr. Compson is an eloquent but very cynical and disconnected man. He subscribes to a philosophy of determinism and passivity, believing life is essentially meaningless and that he can do little to change the events that plague his family. However, Mr. Compson maintains notions of family honor that only Quentin seems to inherit. Mr. Compson caters to Quentin's irrational obsession with prestigious aspirations by paying for his Harvard education and uplifting the family name through storytelling. The "matriarch" of the family, Mrs. Compson, neglects and disregards the family's downfall. Constantly lost in a self-absorbed haze of hypochondria and self-pity, Mrs. Compson is portrayed as an absent mother figure who has no sense of her children's needs. She foolishly doles all of her love and attention out to Jason, the one child who is incapable of reciprocating her love.

Caddy is perhaps the most important figure in the novel because she is the object of obsession for her brothers. She steps in as a mother figure for both Quentin and Benjy in place of the misanthropic Mrs. Compson. Caddy's muddying of her underwear in the stream as a young girl foreshadows her later promiscuity for her family and symbolizes the shame that her conduct brings on the Compson family. Caddy is the only Compson capable of giving herself to love and life. An important distinction to realize is that the narrative portrays Caddy as a maturing young woman while the family critiques her promiscuity. Later, her maturation is twisted and corrupted by her family which leads to her ultimate promiscuity. Caddy's sexual maturity acts as a disruptive intrusion on the emotional atmospheres of the Compson brothers' realities. Her loss of virginity produces an obsessed disturbance in the family. As directed by

Mrs. Compson, Jason spies on his sister. Her mother's self-pitying lamentations turn Caddy's love for Dalton into a targeted evil. Quentin's desperate death-plea borders on spiraling madness, and Benjy's emotional howls tear at Caddy's heart. In a dying family, she is the only one who is alive, who is uninhibited by the fear to live and to love. Caddy's dilemma is that she must sacrifice her own emotional response to life if she is to keep her brothers stable; but she is too passionate about living to immolate herself.

Portrayed as a moaning, speechless idiot, Benjy is utterly dependent upon Caddy, his only real source of motherly affection. He is only capable of absorbing visual and auditory cues from the world around him. Benjy can only respond to these cues through emotionally charged utterances and outbursts. Benjy's memory consists of fragmentary moments barely strung together. It is very important to note that Benjy cannot understand any abstract concepts such as time, cause and effect, or right and wrong. The most important aspect of understanding how to connect these fragments lie within Faulkner's repetitive patterns. Certain key words directly correlate to specific scenes regardless of their non-sequitur chronology in Benjy's narration. Benjy is incapable of associating ideas: his memory sparks these fragmentary remembrances through sensations. Despite his inability to interpret the world, Benjy does have an acute emotional connection to order, and he can immediately sense the presence of anything out of place. In light of this ability, Benjy is one of the only characters who truly takes notice of the Compson family's progressing decline: from Quentin's suicide to Caddy's promiscuity. Faulkner uses many images and symbols which he demands the active reader to interpret and react to since he does not bestow Benjy with any normal communicative power. Because his mother pawns him off on Caddy and a caretaker Versh, Benjy is referred to as a poor baby that will eventually need Caddy to think for him; however Caddy understands her brother's needs and

affectionately cuddles him. In reassuring Benjy, the bond between Caddy as mother and Benjy as child is established: “You’re not a poor baby. Are you. You’ve got your Caddy. Haven’t you got your Caddy” (Faulkner 9). The notions of belonging are interesting as well. The use of the second person possessive may seem harmless to Caddy, but she unknowingly reaffirms Benjy’s obsession with her. Thus, because this scene takes place over twenty-five years previous to the present, this is the point when Caddy observes Benjy produce his childlike attached emotional repetitive cycle.

Quentin feels an inordinate burden of responsibility to live up to his family’s previous greatness and prestige. He is very intelligent and emotional but is rendered inactive by his obsession with Caddy and the traditional southern customs. His mind darts from one thought to the next in a discordant cacophony of ideas, allusions, and memories; however, upon deeper analysis of the Quentin section, the reader begins to understand that all of his unconnected inconsistencies are related. Quentin is driven to depression and his eventual suicide by both his father’s and sister’s declining regard for the Southern code that gives order and meaning to his life. Quentin conveys the image of Mr. Compson via voice alone. No physical appearance is mentioned in a description of Mr. Compson from the perspective of Quentin: his language guides Quentin to protect women and uphold the honor of women. Because Quentin becomes fulfilled by protecting women, his relationship with his sister, Caddy, is the most important thing in his life. Furthermore, Quentin’s failed attempts to protect his sister begin to unravel his sense of self on his predetermined final day. The tragedy of Quentin lies in the fact that he cannot remove the multitude of voices from his head which constantly influence his opinion of self and others. Mr. Compson tells Quentin that he is “blind to what is in yourself to that part of the general truth the sequence of natural events and their causes which shadows every mans brow

even benjys you are not thinking of finitude you are contemplating an apotheosis in which a temporary state of mind will become symmetrical above flesh and aware both of itself and of the flesh it will not quite discard you will not even be dead and I temporary and he you cannot bear to think that someday it will no longer hurt you” (Faulkner 177). Because Quentin cannot grow out of the pain he feels at her betrayal of his ideal, his emotional instability is only quelled through the unspoken act of suicide. Quentin’s fractured relationship with Caddy represents his deep anguish being brought back to the surface which results in his ultimate cessation with the present.

Jason’s perspective is one of malice and hatred which distances him from the other children. Since childhood, Jason was obsessed with two things: self-aggrandizement and money. Following the precedent of the Compson family of losing what they love most during the course of the novel, Jason also loses something despite not having the capacity to love any person. Unlike his brother’s fixation, Jason’s fixation is based on bitterness and a desire to get Caddy in trouble. Ironically, the loveless Jason is the only one of the Compson children who receives Mrs. Compson’s affection. Jason has no capacity to accept, enjoy, or reciprocate this love – thus correlating to his lack of romantic love life as well. His section begins with the exclamation, “Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say” (Faulkner 180). He hates all women, leading to his undesirability to date or marry and have children. Unlike Quentin, who is obsessed with the past, Jason thinks solely about the present and the immediate future. Jason’s flat affect toward his malice driven emotionality provides him with an outlet to twist circumstances in his favor at the expense of others with no guilt attached. Jason is very clever and crafty, but never uses these talents in the spirit of goodness. Despite the straightforward logical disguise of the narrative, Jason is an aggressive, ignorant, egotistical, master manipulator

who may be even more biased than his brother Quentin. Upon seeing a letter from Earl's daughter, Lorraine, Jason is outraged at the manipulative tactics he senses being used by women on unsuspecting men. From similar past experiences, Jason has learned not to make women promises. In order to manage women, Jason asserts that men should constantly surprise women even with occasional violence: "I never promise a woman anything nor let her know what I'm going to give her. That's the only way to manage them. Always keep them guessing. If you can't think of any way to surprise them, give them a bust in the jaw" (Faulkner 193). Jason's emotional repetitive cycle circulates with a fever to degrade and spread hatred and violence against women. Past experiences have warped Jason's present and future interactions with women. If it were up to Jason, I believe his malice and disdain for women would only be quelled if all of them were removed from his existence. He is unable to catch up to the speed at which his emotional repetitive cycle circulates his extreme emotional state.

In the final section of the novel, Jason's emotions come to realization for the reader in his pursuit of Miss Quentin because she has stolen his money and fled. He sarcastically conveys his violent hatred of Miss Quentin to the sheriff: "I wouldn't lay my hand on her. The bitch that cost me a job, the one chance I ever had to get ahead, that killed my father and is shortening my mother's life every day and made my name a laughing stock in the town. I won't do anything to her" (Faulkner 304). Jason holds all past experiences in his present mind and uses them to fuel his overarching hatred and malice toward women. By adopting the role of victim, Jason validates his emotional state. Despite the ironic overtones of Jason's sarcastic threat, we realize that his emotional state will never be stabilized. Therefore, he can never reconcile his hate for Miss Quentin which only deepens his frustration. Jason only expresses his inability to break out of his emotional repetitive cycle through his use of irony and sarcasm. Jason does not and will

not compromise his emotional state. In a play against his family's need for one another, Jason reduces their emotions and has no desire to placate them in any sense: "I'm glad I haven't got the sort of conscience I've got to nurse like a sick puppy all the time" (Faulkner 229). With his unapologetic attitude and not relying on any characters, the reader can understand why Jason's extreme emotional repetitive cycle barrels through the present only looking toward the future, while using the past as fuel for his malice and hatred.

Dilsey symbolizes the only source of stability in the Compson household. She is the only character detached enough from the Compsons' downfall who can provide a unique perspective as a witness to both the beginning and the end of the family history. Importantly, Dilsey lives her life based on the same set of fundamental values of family, faith, and honor which ties her to the original Compson establishment. However, Dilsey does not allow corruption to thwart her spirit. She is very patient and selfless—she cooks, cleans, and takes care of the Compson children in Mrs. Compson's absence, while raising her own children and grandchildren simultaneously. Dilsey represents the favorable mothering figure that the Compson children will never have: in fact, she is the opposite of Mrs. Compson in every sense of characterization. In the creation of her character, Faulkner establishes Dilsey as the alternative life to the Compson family. Dilsey seems to be the only person in the household truly concerned for the Compson children's welfare and character development by treating all of the children with love and fairness. Focusing on Dilsey, the last chapter implies a hope for renewal after the tragedies that have occurred. The reader gains an understanding that Dilsey represents the new foundation of the Compson legacy and represents the only hope for resurrecting the values of the old South in a pure and uncorrupted form. Dilsey moves forward with time in a normal manner and is not held back by the past: as a highly religious person, she looks forward to redemption, not death.

Kartiganer asserts that each narrative voice “pursues an autonomous tale that risks being neither more nor less than *unlikeness*: telling what it has never quite known, yet recreating undeniable, if unverifiable, truth” (79). In conjunction with Kartiganer’s revelation of the “autonomous tale” coupled with Weinstein’s interpretation of the “told story,” Polk brings the two together in a unique way in an essay entitled “Trying Not to Say: A Primer on the Language of *The Sound and the Fury*” by describing the reader’s struggle for interpretive power while reading the opening section of the novel. Polk explains the uncertainty of the reader through the narrator’s language in the beginning of the novel:

Flower spaces that curl, a fence, a search, a table a movable flag, and a pasture in which people are ‘hitting,’ all without any apparent relationship to one another, dot the visual landscape of the opening lines of *The Sound and the Fury*. And, as if the first paragraph didn’t throw enough problems at the reader, the opening words of the second paragraph, the novel’s first spoken words – ‘Here, caddie.’ – are relayed to us by the same narrator who has thrown us asea in the first paragraph, who transmits them without identifying their source, and who misunderstands them. They contain an aural pun, a homophone, and are related, though we don’t yet know how, to the narrator’s inexplicable reaction. Careful readers will pretty quickly figure out that the narrator is looking through the fence at a golf course, and a really alert reader might, even this early, suspect that the course was once a pasture, and so be able to negotiate an uneasy narrative collaboration with the opening paragraph; but these two ‘spoken’ words, which both are and are not what they seem to be, throw us back into uncertainty (Polk 139).

As a narrative structure, stream of consciousness can be hard to follow from the start. The first two spoken words hint at the established ambiguity of the novel. How can a novel establish itself as having a narrator, a narrative construct, and a language set that can only be accessed by a certain readership? I agree with Polk in his descriptions of the novel’s language as being a

halting force throughout the narration. However, I would like to further develop Polk's assertion regarding the definition of a narrator and narration:

At most it is a monstrous violation of the fictional tradition that identifies a 'narrator,' especially a first person narrator, with a point of view and demands that narrators be self-conscious enough to describe what is happening to others and to themselves, to let us know that something is happening, to give us reason to believe that they have some communicable sense of the possible relationships among events and of the events' significance, even if that sense is inly fragmentary and speculative, and even if they don't, won't, or can't tell us all they know (Polk 140).

The tradition of narration in Polk's description does not fit the narrator of *The Sound and the Fury*: the narrative mold is broken. I do not believe that the narrator has conscious control over the objects and subjects within the novel because of the power of perspective. I believe the narrator is on the same ride as the reader; however, the narrator is not afforded the same opportunity as the reader in having a fresh perspective and the ability to revisit the text in a different way.

In her essay entitled "Form and Fulfillment in *The Sound and the Fury*," Beverly Gross discusses lack of satisfaction in the ending of the novel because ambiguity continues. Gross calls for an analytical reading of *The Sound and the Fury* in an attempt to connect the lapses between the sections of the novel. She desires to create a direct sequence of events that will connect the sections successively and make sense of these sections in comprising a logical account of the novel. If the sections were placed in chronological order, *The Sound and the Fury* would be forever altered into a different novel. Structurally, the arrangement of the novel is justified. Benjy's section encompasses all of the events of the subsequent sections. Quentin's section alludes to several references found within Benjy's. Jason's section is furthest removed from Benjy's by only having one scene in common. The final section of the novel joins all three

threads into a culmination of present action. Gross describes the “ending” of the novel in a very intriguing way: “This then is the novel’s ending. In no way is it a dramatic conclusion to the action; instead, it is a concentrated image of intense disruption and disaster” (145). Gross explains that the novel does not come to a conclusion that follows the actions portrayed within it. Therefore, the reader is left without an ending but an amalgamation of loss and degradation. *The Sound and the Fury* has no satisfactory conclusion. Sound and fury abound from beginning to end. The most intense and haunting depiction of sound and fury comes from Benjy’s howl at the end of the novel: “There was more than astonishment in it, it was horror: shock, agony eyeless, tongueless; just sound” (Faulkner 335). Furthermore, the end of *The Sound and the Fury* allows the reader to come to an understanding of what has happened and accept the potential to move forward into a more stable future.

The unfulfilled ending of the novel recalls the beginning. What I believe to be the most important realization of *The Sound and the Fury* lies in the assertion that the novel does not end in a satisfactory way for a reader that is looking for a succinct conclusion or realization of the meaning of the novel: *The Sound and the Fury* concludes not in action but in “the enactment of a process; the novel ends not with an ending, but with an unforgettable epitome of itself” (Gross 151). In searching for the end of the novel, I find myself returning to the missing center of the novel: Caddy. Existing solely as the obsession of the novel, the reader does not really get a chance to see Caddy for Caddy. We see Benjy, Quentin, and even Jason obsess over her, but we do not see Caddy separate from their perspective. Up until this point, I have been constructing an argument around this missing piece of *The Sound and the Fury*. How has the figure that captured all of her family members’ hearts as well as Faulkner’s heart evaded the novel? In fact, as readers, she has not alluded our thoughts at all. Caddy represents the nagging feeling we

struggle with in making sense of the novel. Her absence in the novel forces her to exist only in the remaining characters' memories. Caddy's legacy is told from the warped perspective of her obsessed brothers. Nevertheless, Caddy explains to Quentin earlier in the novel that she cannot always control her bodily pleasure-driven experiences: "There was something terrible in me sometimes at night I could see it grinning at me I could see it through them grinning at me through their faces it's gone now and I'm sick" (Faulkner 112). Caddy's internal struggle of leaving the family presents her with the pleasure filled life she so desperately desires while simultaneously fully severing her physical presence from the Compson household forever.

The reader must search for her presence within Faulkner's stream of consciousness that attempts to hide her. However, because she is the love of both author and characters, Caddy remains ever present even in her absence. In the final section of the novel, Dilsey's grandson, Luster, and Benjy are watching a foursome of golfers play. When one of them shouts, "Here, caddie. Bring the bag," a Benjy meltdown ensues (Faulkner 315). Despite her absence, the constant reminder of what has been lost by recalling past experiences into the present continues Caddy's existence in the novel. Furthermore, in the final lines of the novel as Benjy begins to calm down and Luster rides away on Queenie the horse, Luster looks back at a scene that fully encompasses Caddy's presence in the novel: "The broken flower drooped over Ben's fist and his eyes were empty and blue and serene again as cornice and façade flowed smoothly once more from left to right, post and tree, window and doorway and signboard each in its ordered place" (Faulkner 321). Caddy represents the final missing piece to complete the connection of the fractured Compson family. Whether positive or negative, all of the major characters focus most of their energy on her. Through Caddy's absence, the reader can truly understand what it means to break free from Faulkner's stream of consciousness narrative structure and the turmoil of the

emotional repetitive cycles. In recognizing her freedom from Faulkner's stream of consciousness and the emotional repetitive cycles, the reader understands Caddy as the future that has transcended the emotionality of the post-Civil War era because she never truly existed in Faulkner's stream of consciousness: the characters cannot yet understand this because they remain trapped in the ruins of the past.

Dilsey understands the entire cycle of the Compson family and is not rendered motionless in her interaction amongst the characters' emotional repetitive cycles. She has been the repetitive present of the family prior to the novel and after their ultimate downfall: "I seed de beginning, en now I sees de endin'" (Faulkner 297). Dilsey is not bound by the social conformities of society. She does not feel pressure to maintain a certain social status because her emotional stability within keeps her ever present and unaffected by changing temporalities. Dilsey understands the constraints of time but does not allow time to constrict her. Rather than obsessing over past experiences, Dilsey's character attempts to maintain order in a chaotic world as the forever present, calming perspective. The form of the present is embodied in the character of Dilsey. In the final section of the novel, the present dominates and is seemingly unmasked and removed from the multiple emotional repetitive cycles of the Compson family. As the only character that has been present from the beginning to the end of the Compson family, Dilsey's body has absorbed the family's tragedy: "She had been a big woman once but now her skeleton rose, draped loosely in unpadded skin that tightened again upon a paunch almost dropsical, as though muscle and tissue had been courage or fortitude which the days or the years had consumed until only the indomitable skeleton was left rising like a ruin or a landmark above the somnolent and impervious guts" (Faulkner 265-66). Disfigured and unrecognizable, Dilsey is the only person left "standing" at the end of the novel. As the reader observes, Dilsey's

character absorbs the mental degradation of the members of the Compson family which emaciates her physical body. As the sole source of strength and stability for the Compson family, she represents the embodiment of the abysmal ruins left behind by the Compson family's collapse. Dilsey shows the present state of the emotional aftermath of the Civil War in the South. At the end of the novel, Dilsey is the only character that can reflect on the past, interpret the present, and hope for the future in regards to the Compson family's existence.

*The Sound and the Fury* is not the story of Benjy who "lost nothing then either because, as with his sister, he remembered not the pasture but only its loss, and firelight was still the same bright shape," or Quentin "who loved not his sister's body but some concept of Compson honor," or Jason "the first sane Compson since before Culloden and (a childless bachelor) hence the last," or Dilsey who "endured", or even Caddy who was "doomed and knew it, accepted the doom without either seeking or fleeing it" on those days of 1928 (Faulkner 331-343). It is the story of the Compson family, a story that extends from Damuddy's death in 1898 through the flight of Caddy's daughter, Quentin, from the Compson house in 1928. This sound and fury is described perfectly by the Easter Sunday's music: "There was more than astonishment in it, it was horror; shock; agony eyeless, tongueless; just sound" (Faulkner 320). The preacher creates a somber scene of silence in which the attention has been directed toward the choir. The overwhelming silence of the room allows the present to reflect on the Compson's tragedy: "It was as different as day and dark from his former tone, with a sad, timbrous quality like an alto horn, sinking into their hearts and speaking there again when it had ceased in fading and cumulate echoes" (Faulkner 294). The reader is reduced to the base form of communication in the novel: a Benjy utterance. What I want to draw focus to is the echo of Benjy's last utterance. Echoes are a representation of the intersection between the preservation and the death of a sound.

Through this juxtaposition at the end of the novel, Faulkner influences the reader to take away both the degradation of the past presented by the novel and the movement toward a new beginning for the Compson family who represent the South during the post-Civil War era. The somber presentation is both abysmal and awe-inspiring. *The Sound and the Fury* represents both a lack and a fullness, ambiguity and understanding, loss and gain, strength and decay. The reader is left with the resounding echoes of the novel that ripple through time and create a never ending present. Only then can the emotional repetitive cycles stop; only then can the past and future fuse into the present; only then can the reader understand *The Sound and the Fury*.

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