

**Fiction begot Fiction: An exploration of trauma in William Faulkner's  
novel *The Sound and the Fury***

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## ABSTRACT

“Fiction begot Fiction,” is a psychobiographical study of William Faulkner, which draws primarily on *The Sound and the Fury* for its evidence. It is not, strictly speaking, a study of Faulkner’s novel, since the questions it seeks to answer are biographical ones concerning Faulkner’s motivations for writing the novel, and the reasons for its famously elliptical style. Nor is it a conventional literary critical essay, even in the psychobiographical mode, since it relies heavily on red herrings, suspense, and a *deus ex machina* resolution. It is therefore most aptly considered as a specimen of creative non-fiction for which psychobiographical literary criticism provides the foundation. The project offers a defense of conjectural readings of *characters’* fictive past traumas, drawn from the work of Esther Rashkin. The author offers her own justification for extending Rashkin’s character-focused approach to the uncovering of an authorial trauma that is figured elliptically in the traumatic and post-traumatic struggles of the novel’s fictional characters. The project provides a provocative “riff” on psychobiographical criticism.

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In memory of Betty Benincasa. Your strength and whimsy live on.

William Faulkner's novel *The Sound and the Fury* is a traumatic text that moves towards achieving resolution for the characters, for the audience and primarily for Faulkner himself. Historical, physical, and psychological traumas are threaded throughout the four narrating characters' stories, and Faulkner's desperate need to tell a story that haunted him led to his initial draft of *The Sound and the Fury*. The novel is encompassed in historical echoes of the American civil war and slavery, which provides the basis for Faulkner to write about unspoken cruelties and the psychological context of haunting family secrets. The reader must look to the traumas that are cryptically implanted in the narrative in order to develop an ongoing account that leads to a fuller understanding of the complexities of Faulkner's need to testify to a personal trauma. In order for the reader to understand how trauma theory and psychoanalytical discourse fit into *The Sound and the Fury* I will be looking at an array of trauma theory. I will be focusing primarily on Esther Rashkin's emphasis on the intermingling of narrative and psychoanalysis and the reasoning behind this as viewed in Nicolas Abraham's psychoanalytical theory of the Phantom. Also, I will extend Rashkin's character-focused approach, and discuss the significance of authorial psychology. An understanding of authorial psychology will establish a link between authorial trauma and its representation through the characters' fictional traumas, which are themselves hidden secrets. I will touch on Freud's writing in *Civilization and its Discontents* as a way to put the historical period of Modernism into context. I will also be using Cathy Caruth's idea of departure. I will specifically be investigating Caruth's conception of how detecting an individual's departure from narrative can be a way of finding the psychological space where trauma can be viewed. When an individual experiences a specific trauma the traumatic experience drops into a place in the psyche that is locked away by the mind's defences to move past the trauma. This is why victims of trauma often cannot pinpoint the exact experience. Their

everyday life is engulfed by symptoms of trauma, but they are unaware that they are being affected by symptoms. Many times individuals move forward in life, dismissing any masked symptoms only to suffer with moments of recollection. To unlock the trauma in *The Sound and the Fury*, one must first search for the symptoms of trauma and then look for the space in which the trauma has dropped.

Ester Rashkin's book *Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative* lends an extensive explanation of the beneficial use of psychoanalysis in the explication of literature. Since the implementation of psychoanalysis, critics have been questioning the relevance of combining literary analysis and psychoanalysis as a way to understand a fictional story, and a story that many believe is confined to the structure of the book. "A primary argument forwarded by those disagreeing with the appropriateness of analyzing characters in literature has been the impossibility of reconstructing a character's past when it is not explicitly present in the text" (7). This argument follows that psychoanalysis can trace an event back to a living human because he or she is capable of expressing, formulating and revisiting past events, whereas literary characters, being unreal, have no past to go back to. Rashkin believes that these perspectives are limited, and that they do not allow the reader an understanding of the narrative in a full way. She writes that those are perspectives that are based on "fallacious assumptions" (7). She carries on saying that those theorists presume "that talking about a fictive character's past means treating the character as human and (that) his or her past (is) "real" (7). Rashkin explains the rationale behind using her unique form of fictional analysis stating:

The past dramas I reconstruct from short stories and to which I trace characters' behaviour have the same fictional status as the characters themselves. Both the "life" of the character as it is presented in the text and the past I conjecture are

fictive, which is not to say fictitious. The familial dramas that can be reconstituted as motive forces in each story are not without textual basis but are inscribed and readable in the narrative. It is thus not a question of inventing a false, fantasized past for a character but of understanding that the text, in each instance, call upon the reader to expand its apparent parameters to include scenarios that are rhetorically, semantically, phonemically, cryptonymically, and symbolically inscribed within it. (7-8)

Rashkin speaks of a fictional character, combined with the past she adds, as fictive not fictitious. The word “fictive” is pertaining to the inventiveness that is applied within the creation of fiction. By reconstructing a “fictive” character and backstory, Rashkin regenerates a hidden story that can be proven within the text. The story that she has assembled based on deep reading leads to a deeper understanding. Rashkin’s theory can be applied to *The Sound and the Fury*. It is the job of the reader to explicate the cryptic messages of the text as a way to find a message; a message that indicates a particular family secret is being veiled. All texts move forward and are changed by ideals of perspectives at any given time and by applying Rashkin’s theory to *The Sound and the Fury*, the text becomes much more coherent and meaningful. The story of the Compsons is similar to many novels that Rashkin has explicated “Phantoms” from. Rashkin focused her study highly on early twentieth century gothic novels and found that the more obscure and complex the text the more likely that she would find a hidden family secret. She reveals that she “did not know when she chose them that they would all turn out to contain Phantoms. The results of the study are nonetheless perhaps an indication of how frequently unspeakable family secrets, Phantom structures, and concealed bastards may be found in nineteenth-and early twentieth-century literature” (12).



When Rashkin refers to the Phantom she is speaking of the Nicolas Abraham's theory of the Phantom in psychoanalysis. The creation of a Phantom occurs when there is an intergenerational trauma that has occurred. The original trauma falls into a gap in the victim's psyche and then is transferred from generation to generation. One example Abraham writes of is that of a "resourceful and enthusiastic young scientist (who) is filled with energy for his work, the comparative study of the morphology and microchemistry of human spermatozoids" (288). During this research the young man becomes obsessed with genealogy and lashes out at individuals who are unable to sufficiently trace their ancestry back to prestigious individuals. The young man ends up having a break-down. He meets with Abraham who claims that the young man instantly insults him saying that he is of low birth. He quickly gathers his composure and apologizes, claiming that he "hates genealogical inquiries. A man is worth what he is on his own" (288). Abraham continues to treat the young man, gaining from him the knowledge of his parents. It quickly becomes apparent to him that his young man's father is a "bastard that bears the same name as his mother. An insignificant fact in itself, had it not led to a secret pain in the father and to his constructing an entire family romance about his aristocratic origins" (289). Abraham calls this piece of information a "Phantom," an entity that has transferred from the father's subconscious to the son's subconscious, processing the young man. This theory is what Rashkin bases her idea of exploration on. She believes that one must consciously enter a piece of literature, seeking the Phantom that resides throughout the narrative. Rashkin's character-focused approach can carry far past the boundaries of fictive or fictional characters. What is figured elliptically in the trauma and post-traumatic struggles of the characters are the repressed traumas of the author. "The task of the reader is to redraw [...] boundaries, which, we will see are not static but moving constantly outward" (8).

Cathy Caruth reflects on the idea of finding this determining hidden piece of information. While the Phantom can be viewed as personified trauma the reader needs to find a way to expose the Phantom, thus discovering the significant trauma or incident that has occurred. Caruth suggests that when listening to (or for my argument reading) a tale of trauma, one must not listen to what is being said directly but what is being omitted. She refers to this as “how to listen to the departure” (10). When a traumatic event has occurred it is isolated in the psyche, sealed up in a mental crypt. The individual may not even be completely aware of the trauma and therefore is unable to properly articulate it. It is through speaking and writing that the crypt can be opened and the Phantom/trauma can be exposed. In order for a reader to understand and search for an underlying trauma one must look for the departure in the narrative and insert a well thought-out hypothesis of the event that occurred, based upon evidence earlier perceived throughout scenarios that are rhetorically, semantically, phonemically, cryptonymically, and symbolically inscribed within it. (Rashkin 7-8). Throughout *The Sound and the Fury* the audience wrestles with the cryptic and secret ambiance that surrounds not only the Compson family but the text as well. It is by using psychoanalytical reflections that the story Faulkner is trying to tell becomes exposed, and it is through this that the reader is able to understand the tragedy of a life that was riddled with secrets and obscurity.

The four chapters in *The Sound and the Fury* are based on the perspectives of the three Compson children and their “mammy”: Benjy, Quentin, Jason and Dilsey. There are numerous traumatic events that occur in the Compson household and the surrounding area of Faulkner’s fictional Yoknapatawpha County. The events are distorted by the different perspectives of the four narratives and feature key themes identified by trauma theory. Each succeeding chapter layers new details and works to fill in the gaps of the previous narrative, but never is the reader

given a clear sense of the tragedy Faulkner is trying to work through, as one works through an issue in psychotherapy. Each of the four characters offers a narrative of occurrences that transpire within the family structure. Faulkner focuses first on the three Compson children and, being unable to tell the narrative fully through them, inserts a character that is not a member of the immediate family as a way to get closer to the truth. However, this insertion of Dilsey does not necessarily clarify the underlying trauma. Dilsey's narrative offers the perspective of a witness; while she is a part of the events; she is also alienated from the family as an African American, as a servant and not a blood relative. Faulkner's inability to tell the underlying traumatic event through the characters' narratives propels the reader to go outside of the story to Faulkner's own words found in the several times revised appendix of *The Sound and the Fury*. These words offer yet another layer of narrative. Faulkner leaves the reader to reflect on the indication of trauma in each narrative; he or she questions if the trauma can ever be fully understood in a way that is satisfying to the audience. Faulkner's later attempt to bring clarity to the narrative also conveys an underlying tragedy that Faulkner is trying to work through. His use of Dilsey indicates a final attempt at telling a story that desperately needs closure. However, his trauma is never fully revealed, and the reader begins to feel the haunting effect of an underlying personal tragedy. Faulkner allows the reader access to the trauma but leaves the characters and the readers stuck in its resin, the truth to be extracted only after his death.

The trauma of *The Sound and the Fury* begins in the historical context of Modernism. Not only is the story a reflection of an imprinted historical trauma, but Faulkner writes from the collective trauma of world events at the time of writing. He wrote during a time of social, political and personal uncertainty. The carnage and horror of World War I left writers with a fragmented and pessimistic view of reality. Faulkner's own social and political anxieties are

reflected within his writing. This discontentment with civilization during the time that Faulkner was writing is emphasized by Sigmund Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents*. Freud comments on the anxieties that were experienced by those living in this especially traumatic time. There can be no religious consolation, however, as Freud questions the relevance of religion; he views it as a primitive need for a demanding father figure as well as a “mass delusion” (23) held by many to give them a feeling of security. He asks what humans are searching for. He writes that “life imposed on us is too much pain, too many disappointments, too many insoluble problems. If [humans] are to endure it [they] cannot do [so] without palliative measures” (14). What humans are searching for is happiness, and Freud writes that happiness can be found in love. By love he means sexual love based upon a need for a man to have a helper that fulfills his sexual desires and a female’s need for security for her children. However, this sexual love becomes something that one fears losing because one’s state of happiness would be diminished. Freud also writes about an ideal love, one that has transformed the sexual aim “into an aim-inhibited impulse creating a state of balance and unwavering, affectionate feelings” (49) that no longer require consummation. This kind of love can be seen in the love a parent has for a child. The loss of an object of “aim-inhibited love” would be jarring, as this sort of love and happiness is difficult to attain. I would argue that what William Faulkner searched for when writing *The Sound and the Fury* was solace, the happiness that would help him move past traumatic events in his own personal life. However, through the process of writing the novel, Faulkner increasingly tried to make sense for the audience of a narrative that is distorted and shattered. Like society according to Freud, the audience must also struggle in order to find understanding in the novel.

In an interview with Jean Stein Van den Heuvel, Faulkner explains the rationale behind his obsessive focus on *The Sound and the Fury*. When asked about what story caused him the most anguish, he replies:

*The Sound and the Fury*. I wrote it five separate times trying to tell the story, to rid myself of the dream which would continue to anguish me until I did. It's a tragedy of two lost women: Caddy and her daughter. Dilsey is one of my own favorite characters because she is brave, courageous, generous, gentle and honest. She's much more brave and honest and generous than me. (232)

Faulkner's desire to tell the tragic story of "two lost women" represents his own frustrations surrounding the outcome of the story; he indicates in his response that he wanted to project himself into Dilsey's narration. However, knowing he is not like her, Faulkner must stand outside of the character. Layers of secrets are added to the narrative as Faulkner is unable to explain the haunting story through Dilsey. He fundamentally becomes a witness to the fictional witness of his own real-life tragedy. Dilsey is a reflection of Faulkner in the fictional world, but Faulkner is unable to puncture the layers of narrative within the fictional world through Dilsey. His inability to explicate his fictional trauma in the narrative leads him to be unable to grasp the true trauma in the real world.

Faulkner's confusion and inability to understand his obsession with *The Sound and the Fury* is found throughout many of his interviews, his numerous introductions and the posthumous appendix. In the first introduction he discusses how his obsession with the book led him to be unable to write his next books in an unlaboured way: "While writing *Sanctuary*, the next novel to *The Sound and the Fury*, [...] there was something missing, something that *The Sound and the Fury* gave me and *Sanctuary* did not" (Faulkner 226). He claims that after *The*

*Sound and the Fury*, every book he wrote felt laboured and troublesome, because he continued to be attached to the characters and narrative of *The Sound and the Fury*. Caruth writes that to be traumatized is to “be possessed by an image or event” (5), and this is exactly what Faulkner struggled with his entire life, the image that he tried to reflect in his writing. The story was built upon a mental picture that Faulkner had, a fragment from his own memory. In the introduction to the novel he is unable to explain why or how this image came to haunt him but insists that the entire story is based upon one mental picture: “The picture was of the muddy seat of a little girl’s drawers in a pear tree where she could see through a window where her grandmother’s funeral was taking place and report what was happening to her brothers down below” (233). This imaginative fragment, the catalyst of the narrative, runs throughout the first three chapters.

The tragedy is not only the loss but also Faulkner’s inability to express this fragmented vision. Unable to give the story an ending that he is satisfied with, Faulkner writes in a later introduction that “the story is all there, in the first section as Benjy told it” (231). Faulkner initially wrote the Benjy section as a way to express himself artistically, and personally, and he did not intend on making it obscure to an audience. Faulkner writes that when he realized “that the story might be printed, [he] took three more sections, all longer than Benjy’s to try and clarify it” (231). He only added the last three chapters when he found out that the story would be going to print, claiming that he had not written the Benjy section for publication. Faulkner’s drive to express the story of the girl in the tree, and to do it for his own personal solace indicates that he was an individual trying to excavate his own concealed, personal tragedy.

Faulkner continued to be frustrated with his inability to establish a firm resolution to the tragic story. He indicates this frustration in the Stein Van den Heuvel interview:

I had already begun to tell it through the eyes of the idiot child since I felt it would be more effective as told by someone capable only of knowing what happened, but not why. I saw that I had not told the story that time. I tried to tell it again, the same through the eyes of another brother. That was still not it. I told it for the third time through the eyes of the third brother. That was still not it. I tried to gather the pieces together and fill in the gaps by making myself the spokesman. It was still not complete, not until 15 years after the book was published when I wrote as an appendix to another book the final effort to get the story told and off my mind, so that I myself could have some peace from it. (...) I could never tell it right, though I tried hard and would like to try again, though I'd probably fail again. (233)

Grappling with his insatiable desire to unravel an unknown personal story, Faulkner carries on with the next three chapters past Benjy's narrative. It is in the first narrative from the perspective of the mentally disabled Benjy that the audience first recognizes textual symptoms of trauma in the fluctuating narrative. The first two chapters have caused many readers and critics anguish and frustration as they have found the narrative inaccessible. Joseph Warren Beach writes

In Faulkner we are lost for pages at a time in waste and mountainous seas of psychological speculation or hypothetical reconstructions of history. Half the time we are swimming under water, holding our breath and straining our eyes to read off the meaning of submarine phenomena, unable to tell facts from figure, to fix the reference of pronouns, or distinguish between guess and certainty. (160)

Another critic wrote that the reader leaves the book feeling "much as Quentin does-emotionally and intellectually bewildered" (Slatoff 201). These initial chapters work to create the wound by

puncturing the structure of the narrative. By using the narrative to “work through” a trauma that originated outside of the narrative Faulkner has unintentionally created a wound within the narrative of *The Sound and the Fury*. The wound is a trauma that “consists precisely in claiming to discover and master the meaning, in claiming to suture or saturate, to fill the void” (Derrida 1). Once the wound is created then the ability to find and understand the wound becomes graspable. Faulkner projected his internal psychological wound into the initial chapter. The repetition of the story in the three chapters that followed stress how Faulkner strained to pass into the space in which the trauma was held. Ideally, it is in this space that the reader is able to view the traumatic event.

When Faulkner writes that the story is more effective if “told by someone capable only of knowing what happened, but not why” (233), he seems to be suggesting that the “traumatic event [is] registered rather than experienced. [It has] bypassed perception and consciousness, and falls directly into the psyche” (Hartman 1). The registered trauma is implied in Benjy’s narrative as the reader is introduced to an individual who is mentally incapable of understanding a traumatic event, but has an event imprinted upon him. Within the narrative is the second paradoxical element that Geoffrey Hartman writes about, traumatic memory as a “kind of memory of the event, in the form of perpetual troping of it by the bypassed or severely split (dissociated) psyche” (1). Perpetual troping can be viewed in Benjy’s section with the continuous use of metaphor, metonyms, and hyperbole, and can also be connected with Caruth’s idea of departures. The use of metaphor can be read in the first sentence of the novel and continues heavily throughout Benjy’s section. Benjy refers to the gaps in the fence as “the curling flower spaces” (3), and as one reads the story he or she is able to recognize the importance of this metaphor in regards to the trauma that surrounds the fence.



Trauma in Benjy's section is explored through a stream-of-consciousness narrative that is told by an unreliable narrator; however, Benjy's narration is the purest form of trauma transmission that Faulkner provides. The narrative is unpredictable and jumps back and forth through time and space. The reader is drawn to, yet frustrated by, the garbled, confusing oration and may initially experience the departures and illogical structure of the plot as something traumatic. By the end of the first chapter many readers feel exhausted and confused, knowing only that they have experienced something but that they are not entirely sure what that is. For the reader the trauma of Benjy's narrative becomes the registration of an event that is not experienced. Like Benjy, who has the trauma imprinted on him but does not understand it, the reader registers the trauma but does not experience it. An unknown event has dropped into the unconscious through the scattered narrative, and the reader works to recover it throughout the following chapters.

The first line of Chapter One starts with an immediate sense of entrance into an unknown traumatic event by providing a specific date: "April Seventh, 1928." Benjy's chapter begins with instant uncertainty: "Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting" (3). The word "hit" is repeated twenty-one times in Benjy's section. Faulkner's use of repetition of words and images suggests that a trauma has occurred. The repetition of it creates a melodious effect that resounds throughout the narrative. Sometimes the black servant T.P. is being hit or hitting. Sometimes the dog Queenie is being hit, and at other points, the sentence is profoundly vague, stating not *who* hit, just "He hit" (4). The violence has no explanation. The narrator and the audience do not know who is being hit, just that violence is occurring. The hitting becomes a part of the reader, and the reader becomes a participant in the violence through registering its repetition. The word "fence" is used forty-one times, and "gate" is also used in the

same style eighteen times. “Gate” and “fence” are used liberally in a way that strays from traditional story-telling. Rather than explain the use of these words Faulkner simply “dropped” them into the middle of a sentence, leading to a fragmented feel. This repetition is a valuable clue to a significant traumatic event that is being recollected throughout the first three chapters of the novel: the event of Benjy being castrated after attempting to rape a young neighbor girl. The character of Benjy can be viewed as representing Freud’s theory of the Id, or the libido. This is because the Id is primarily instinctual and functions on a highly physical level. Benjy is unresponsive to the surrounding concerns and seeks only to fulfill his instinctual desires. This instinctual personality is the first character that Faulkner presents the reader with. Benjy’s inability to practice a sense of morality or judgment leaves the reader initially lost.

The event of the rape is alluded to throughout the novel but is never blatantly stated. The attempted assault occurs because Benjy is highly instinctual, is not being watched, and the gate has been left open. Having no concept of time he wanders out to the fence, where two young girls are walking by. When reading Benjy’s chapter, one finds the event to be obscure and confusing; it is only after reading the entire book that the reader recognizes the trauma. As a personified Id, chaos and desire surround Benjy, and the underlying trauma that Faulkner is exploring displays itself as a reflection of the characteristics of Benjy. Faulkner is unintentionally trying to avoid mental displeasure or anxiety by exposing directly the instinctual desires of Benjy’s narrative. The attempted assault is conveyed through the repetitive use of “hit,” “fence” and “gate.” There is also an incoherent recollection of girls walking by the fence, frightened of Benjy. Because Benjy’s story jumps in time, he is constantly experiencing the trauma, and so is the reader. While this is not the main image that Faulkner wrote his story around, it is one of the many traumas that lead to the downfall of the Compson family. Faulkner’s need and failure to

testify to the image that possesses his dreams is encapsulated in the structure of Benjy's section, in his inability to articulate accurately the image and central trauma.

Throughout Benjy's narrative, Caddy's position in the tree is alluded to via repetition that indicates something is hidden. Freud wrote that repetition and order are two of the ways that humans find happiness in life: "order is a kind of compulsion to repeat. [...] The benefits of order are undeniable; it enables people to make the best use of space and time" (38). Repetition and the compulsion to establish order are symptomatic of trauma; the need to put the trauma into a logical order is not conscious. Cathy Caruth writes that repetition occurs because the mind has missed the experience, and there has been a "break in the mind's experience of time"(61). Because the trauma has dropped into timelessness, it can only paradoxically show itself in the form of repetition. The repetitive intrusion of the event that haunts Faulkner is strung throughout Benjy's narrative. Benjy says seven times that "Caddy smells like trees" (10, 17, 31, 32, 34). Faulkner's desire to find the truth along with the lack of knowledge of his own traumatic event causes the repetition to become a reflection of both seeking and loss. Yet at the time the reader is unable to recognize the significance of Benjy's continuous repetition.

Caruth writes that it is essential to not "only listen for the event, but to hear in the testimony the survivor's departure from it" (10). The introduction of *The Sound and the Fury* alerts the reader to the importance of the tree. It is not by looking for the actual tree scene that one finds the original trauma, but by recognizing where Faulkner departs from writing about the actual scene and does so through repetition. The departure from the implied story is where the reader finds the symptoms of trauma. "Caddy smells like trees" is also repeated throughout the three time periods in Benjy's narrative: the past, present and future. He is obsessed with Caddy, and he is hypersensitive to Caddy smelling like trees. This indicates that an event connected

with Caddy and the tree has occurred that is of utmost importance to Benjy. It is not until Quentin's section that the reader is given more details of the tree scene. In Jason's section, there are only small indications of the importance of the event. Caddy smells like trees throughout the first narrative because not only is she viewed with her dirty drawers as a child in the tree, but she sneaks out her window and climbs down the tree as a teenager. The fact that "Caddy smells like trees" is indicative of an underlying Phantom.

A hidden family secret also lurks beneath the surface of this section. What is it that Faulkner is trying to expose? What is it about the story of Caddy Compson that haunted him apparently until the day he died? The Phantom that Nicolas Abraham writes about in "Notes on the Phantom" can help articulate this problem. The secret is viewed again through "the gaps left within [the characters] through the secrets of others" (287). The mysterious secret stays hidden throughout the novel, and the reader closes the book uncertain of its existence. However, a prominent and haunting theme of incest plays out in Benjy's narrative as well as in Quentin's. Caroline Compson, the hypochondriac and alcoholic mother of the four children, has a particularly close relationship with her brother Maury, who lives in the house and is a prominent part of the household activities. There are numerous occasions where incest is alluded to between the brother and sister. In Benjy's section, but also throughout the novel, Caroline is always saying that the fate of her children is due to her sins. One can speculate that Benjy was the product of an incestuous relationship between Caroline and her brother Maury. His disabilities can be the product of a brother/sister impregnation. Benjy's name was originally Maury; in another traumatic event, his name is changed to Benjamin. There is no definite indication of why the change has occurred, just that Benjy was named after his uncle Maury and then no longer is. When talking with Maury about Benjy's mental disability, she says, "It's a judgment on me. I

sometimes wonder” (6). Jason Compson III, patriarch of the house, seems to harness an unexplainable distaste for Caroline’s brother Maury. Caroline’s family comes from higher Southern Aristocratic heritage; however, Jason Compson III revels in a “sense of racial superiority” (28) over his brother-in-law Maury. In a conversation with Caroline he reveals that Benjy’s bad health has nothing to do with his side of the family. These allusions to incest between Caroline Compson and her brother Maury, with the outcome being the birth of Benjy, are strung throughout the novel. Incest is explored again in Quentin’s section during a highly suggestive scene between Quentin and Caddy when they are teenagers. The Compson family is built upon the conventions of old, where class structures promoted cousins marrying cousins. The idea of a family secret or Phantom adds to the levels of trauma that Faulkner is developing in this novel.

Benjy’s section offers a view of the psychic space that trauma falls into as well as introduces the reader to the mentally disabled character as Id. When a traumatic event becomes almost a reality, Benjy drifts off into a space which is filled with hallucinogenic images. In these images, Faulkner indicates the placement of traumatic events. Caruth writes that “in its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (11). When Benjy experiences trauma, he drifts off into a space made of floating shapes, a world outside the real world. The reader is first introduced to “the bright shapes” (8) when the Compson family is driving to the cemetery to visit their grandmother’s grave. The death of their grandmother Damuddy is another traumatic event that the reader is unaware of at this point. The reader enters the trauma through recognizing the departure from relatively coherent narrative to hallucinogenic descriptions of

Benjy's unconscious mental space. As the family is driving Benjy listens to the hooves of the horse, and Benjy sees shapes:

The bright shapes went smooth and steady on both sides, the shadows of them flowing across Queenie's back. They went on like the bright tops of wheels. Then those on one side stopped at the tall white post where the soldier was. But on the other side they went on smooth and steady, but a little slower. (8)

The shapes come again to Benjy when the Caddy tree scene is about to occur. Benjy says, "They went on, smooth and bright. I could hear T.P. laughing. I went on with them, up the bright hill" (15). The shapes are inserted ten times into the narrative of Benjy, each time eliminating any conventional realism and instead functioning highly on an instinctual plane. Benjy's section displays the most instances of hallucinatory shapes, but there are also two instances of the shapes appearing when a narrative cannot be properly articulated in Quentin's chapter. Thus Faulkner uses various techniques to provide the reader access into the trauma that he is trying to articulate. It is in this original section where Benjy's perspective is articulated that the reader feels most the unanswered and unrevealed experience.

Quentin Compson, the oldest Compson child, offers a slightly more comprehensible view of Faulkner's preoccupation with the story of Caddy. He represents Faulkner's second attempt at understanding his obsessive story of the girl with the dirty underpants. However, in this attempt at clarity Quentin's narrative delves deeper into the unconscious of the plot, leaving Quentin stuck in the limbo of tragedy. Quentin Compson can be viewed as Faulkner's Ego. He is highly intellectual and yet struggles, being set between the Id and the Super-Ego, the Super-Ego being Jason Compson. The Ego tries to mediate between the Id and the Super-Ego, leaving it hanging in a seemingly timeless state of existence. Quentin's preoccupation with time is clearly woven

throughout Chapter Two, entitled “June Second, 1910” (48). Quentin’s narrative begins with an indication that he is highly preoccupied with time, but is never able to live in it. Throughout the chapter, he focuses on time and the sound of his grandfather’s watch that his father gave him.

When he presents him with the watch, his grandfather stoically states:

I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it’s rather excruciatingly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father’s. I give it 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. (48)

His father’s use of the term “mausoleum” is cryptic and suggests that time is but a prison from which individuals have not been able to escape; time can bury Quentin if he focuses on it. This speech from his grandfather is foretelling as Quentin is constantly in a state of traumatic limbo, never fully present in a specific time. His obsession with time is a symptom of an inability to be fully in time, to move forward. He focuses obsessively on the idea of time. The ticking of the watch only indicates a place that he is not a part of. As he gives Benjy’s shapes, Faulkner has given Quentin a traumatic space, which is found within the ticks he does not hear. As he lies listening to his watch, he imagines a time that does not exist, a parade that is revealed if one stops listening to the tick of a clock. That if one is “oblivious to the sound for a long while, then in a second of ticking it can create in the mind unbroken the long diminishing parade of time you didn’t hear” (49). Quickly after this statement, Quentin speaks of “Little Sister Death, that never had a sister” (50). This is the first of thirty-six references to “sister”. According to Cleanth Brooks his repetition indicates that Quentin “is a young man who has received a grievous psychic wound” (292) in relation to his own sister and that he is unable to heal the wound.

Repeated references to the ticking watch, void of the ticking, insert the reader into a space of hanging suspense. This, combined with the almost simultaneous use of “sister,” suggests to the reader a state of unknown trauma. The creation of a space in time and the repetition of the word “sister” are associated. If the timeless space represents the place of trauma, then the “sister” represents the traumatic event. Recognizing from Benjy’s section the preoccupation with the sister Caddy and understanding that this is a story about family; the reader may suspect that something traumatic has happened with Quentin’s sister. In Quentin’s narrative repetition is a way for the reader to recognize the significance of a sister figure, before Quentin’s sister Caddy is even mentioned. Such “repetitions, though cathartic, suggest an unresolved shock; a rhythmic or temporal stutter, they leave the storyteller in purgatory, awaiting the next assault” (Hartman 4). Likewise, Quentin and the reader are assaulted endlessly throughout this chapter. Faulkner’s insatiable need to testify to the trauma of Caddy becomes desperate. The sentences of the chapter start flowing together and seven pages are written entirely without punctuation or any capitalization of personal pronouns. There are intentional gaps between words as Quentin scrambles to narrate the past. The reader barely has to time to breathe. There are time-breaks as in Benjy’s chapter and fragments in italics. Moreover, different voices come into these italicized bits signifying a Phantom’s presence.

The way in which Quentin tells Caddy’s story is relatively obscure. He approaches the timeless space through the melodic chiming of a clock tower. Quentin “listened to the strokes spaced and tranquil along the sunlight [then] spaced and peaceful and serene (111) the chimes cease and “lying on the ground under the window bellowing. He took one look at her and knew. Out of the mouths of babes” (111): this is a reference to Benjy’s reaction earlier when he sees Caddy’s soiled drawers. He is unable to speak, and so emits a loud haunting moan. This is the



only direct reference to Caddy in the tree, in all of Quentin's section. The trauma is deeper in Quentin because he is an intellectual character and the narrative becomes paradoxically more complex. The narrative in Quentin's section is virtually void of understandable testimony. So while this section may be viewed as more structurally comprehensive, it is actually more complicated and tragic than Benjy's section. The reason is that Quentin's connection with Caddy is much more complex than Benjy's connection with her. Behind Quentin's narrative lies the innuendo of incest.

The earlier suggested Phantom of family incest enters into Quentin's section, and Quentin and Caddy (as well as the other Compson Children) carry the family secret of his mother and uncle possibly having incestuous relations. Quentin's full desire for his sister is never known, but an allusion to a sexual encounter between the two indicates the possibility. Quentin's narrative becomes void of punctuation, as he enters into the traumatic memory. The reader becomes a voyeur as Quentin distortedly recollects himself and Caddy alone in a field; he mentions her dirty drawers. He also mentions the day that their Grandmother Damuddy died, the day that Benjy began seeing the hallucinatory, timeless shapes. It is here that the reader understands that this is the same day that Caddy climbed the tree:

Do you remember the day damuddy died when you sat down in the water in your drawers

Yes

I held the point of the knife at her throat

it won't take but a second just a second then I can do mine I can do mine then

all right can you do your by yourself

yes the blades long enough Benjys in bed by now

yes  
it wont take but one second Ill try not to hurt  
all right will you close your eyes  
no like this youll have to push it harder  
touch your hand to it[...]  
don't cry  
Im not crying Caddy  
push it are you going to  
do you want me to  
yes push it  
touch your hand to it  
don't cry poor Quentin (96-97)

This unconventional narrative void of punctuation is not a complete departure from traditional narrative as it indicates a story, but the structure does represent a departure from traditional storytelling techniques. The emotional effect of the peculiar narrative focuses the reader on a secret that he or she is not privy to. This highly suggestive scene ends with the reader not quite understanding what went on, yet able to grasp a piece of the story. The phallic knife and sexual innuendo suggests a rape scene, but there is never any consummation, leading the reader to feel as if he or she has been granted an inside view of a hidden secret. The Phantom of incest is accentuated by the feeling that Quentin has towards Caddy's dirty drawers. The real trauma that Faulkner is trying to expose comes at the reader through a vague and unpunctuated string of words in the form of innuendo.

Later, when Quentin Compson drowns himself, the reader feels the vibrations of death.

Jean- Paul Sartre writes about the effect of Faulkner writing Quentin's section:

The past takes on a sort of super-reality; its contours are hard and clear, unchangeable. The present, nameless and fleeting, is helpless before it. It is full of gaps, and through these gaps, things of the past, fixed, motionless and silent as judges or glances, come to invade it. Faulkner's monologues remind one of aeroplane trips full of air-pockets. At each pocket, the hero's consciousness "sinks back into the past" and rises only to sink again. (267)

Faulkner's desperate vision of exposing the traumatic story of Caddy Compson fails but because of the gaps in structure and obscurity of the writing, along with the underlying Phantom of a family secret, the narrative pulls the reader into the tragedy. Brooks writes that "the reader's movement through the book is a progression from murkiness to increasing enlightenment, and this is natural, since we start with the mind of an idiot, go on next through the memories of the Hamlet-like Quentin, and come finally to the observations of the brittle, would-be rationalist Jason" (290). The enlightenment that the reader starts to feel is likely from Faulkner's drive to retell the story. The clarity of the story comes only through retellings of the story; however, the clarity is an illusion. The reader becomes familiar with the narrative because of repetition and therefore is tricked into a feeling of enlightenment. Faulkner continues to give testimony but is unable to articulate the story fully throughout Quentin's chapter; because of this, Faulkner moves to the "would-be rationalist Jason" (290).

Jason Compson's narrative in the chapter entitled "April Sixth, 1928" (113) is told mainly in present tense. Jason can be viewed as the Super-Ego, aiming for complete perfection. He tries to control grown up and young Caddy and young Quentin and behaves as a moral and

fearful father figure. Faulkner starts the chapter with Jason stating, "Once a bitch, always a bitch, what I say" (113). This blatant change of tone exposes the obscenities behind Faulkner's obligation to testify to the story of Caddy in the tree. Finally, he desires to tell it so much that he constructs the narrative of Jason in a linear fashion. The story must be told. He also does so in a way that gives it a straightforward patriarchal authority. Jason's narrative fills in many of the gaps that were ambiguous in the narratives of Benjy and Quentin, because he is speaking of the present. As well, the reader is introduced to the second female character whom Faulkner described as tragic in his interview: Caddy's daughter Quentin. Once again the suggestion of incest comes in to the narrative through the names of the children: Benjy being initially named after Uncle Maury, and Quentin being named after the older Quentin. The suggestion of a mental incestuous relationship if not a physical one is implied in Caddy's daughter's name. Caddy would prefer above all, if he isn't already, that her brother Quentin be the father of her daughter.

Caroline Compson is highly visible in this chapter, and she continues to speak about how her "own flesh and blood rose up to curse her" (114). The depth of Mrs. Compson's guilty conscience is threaded throughout much of the novel and can be clearly viewed within Jason's section. Caddy now becomes a real person, not just a memory; however, Jason's harsh treatment of her indicates a perception of her that has followed him into adulthood. It is in Jason's section that the reader is given a more detailed account of Caddy Compson's illegitimate pregnancy. The pregnancy is only alluded to through the repetition of the name "Dalton Ames" (51) in Quentin's section. Quentin had become obsessed with Dalton Amos, a boy who Caddy had supposed relations with and who the reader is led to believe may have impregnated her. Throughout Quentin's section he insists that it was not Dalton Ames and thinks in his head "I have committed incest I said Father it was not Dalton Ames" (51). Like Caddy this confession could

mean a mental incest, but still alludes to a hidden Phantom of an incestuous past. Faulkner uses Jason Compson to explain the present situation but does not clear up the past.

The story of Caddy in the tree is not told in Jason's chapter. What the reader beholds is the suggestion of a tragedy through association. When young Quentin runs away, Jason goes into her room and notices that "on the floor lay a soiled undergarment"; he then turns his attention to "a pear tree" (172) that is growing outside of Quentin's window. This moment is meant to guide the reader back to Caddy in the pear tree with her soiled drawers. It has nothing to do with young Quentin. This is as far as Faulkner goes in Jason's section with trying to explicate the story of Caddy in the tree. The narrative at this point is a way for Faulkner to try and clear up some of the confusion of the first two chapters; however, this technique only adds more layers of unknowing to a narrative of loss. Jason Compson does not recollect or see glimpses of the past as the others do. The trauma of Caddy that he has witnessed is buried deep within his psyche.

The final chapter of *The Sound and the Fury* is Faulkner's last attempt in the narrative to clarify the scene that haunts his dreams, that of a girl climbing the tree. The final chapter is his way of witnessing most clearly the trauma that the Compsons have endured. This is through Dilsey's recognition of the events that have led to the loss of the Compson family name. During a church sermon to which she has brought Benjy, Dilsey weeps for the family. As Benjy has one of his screaming attacks, Jason leans in to comfort him; he drops a flower that he is holding and "Ben's fist and his eyes were empty blue and serene again" (199). Impotent Benjy Compson is given the last word and the future for the Compsons is led back to the perspective of an "idiot".

The story ends by returning to the beginning of the novel and directs the reader back to the first line of *The Sound and the Fury*: "Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. Luster was hunting in the grass by the flower tree." (4). Faulkner's

attempt at explaining the story is futile as the circular process sends the reader back to the beginning and back to Benjy's unsettled view. The future of the Compson family is also the past. The ending of this section works only to clear up the future tense that Jason was speaking of. It does not help explicate the implied and uncertain trauma; it leaves the reader in a state of unsettled discontent.

It was not until 1945, sixteen years after the book was written, that Faulkner returned again to the story of the Compsons and Caddy. He wrote an appendix that gave a superficial explanation of the outcome of each of the character's lives, as well as some insight into the characters. The appendix is normally placed at the end of any of the new editions and is considered the fifth chapter to the book. Faulkner entitled the first appendix "Compson 1699-1945" (Faulkner 204). He said that he did this because "it's really an obituary" (204). This was only Faulkner's first return to the story. He did not succeed in burying the tragedy of the Compsons. The most valuable indication of the true trauma to which Faulkner was trying to give testimony can be viewed in the 1933 introduction: "No version of Faulkner's introduction to *The Sound and the Fury* was published during his lifetime, but two have since been published, both edited by James B. Meriwether" (225). It was not the tree scene that was haunting Faulkner, it was something deeper, something more hidden. At the end of his introduction, Faulkner writes, "I who had never had a sister and was fated to lose my daughter in infancy, set out to make myself a beautiful and tragic little girl" (228). It is with these words that Faulkner finally allows the reader entrance into his obsession with the story of Caddy Compson. It is with these words that Faulkner allows himself an understanding of his desire to testify. The true tragedy, that of the death of his daughter, can be successfully understood and the reader is able to have closure, whether Faulkner did or not.

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