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The Girl in the muddied drawers: A symbol of absence and the uncontrollable forces.

Informe Final de Seminario de Grado “Anglo-American Modernism” para optar al grado de  
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*To my mother. And my sister who has done more than her share of meals, dirty dishes and proof reading.*

## INDEX

I.	Abstract.....	4
II.	Introduction.....	5
III.	Theoretical framework.....	11
IV.	Analysis and Interpretation.....	17
V.	Conclusions.....	50
VI.	Bibliography.....	53

**ABSTRACT:**

Faulkner's fiction is pregnant with the uncontrollable forces phenomenon. These forces override human volition and prediction. In The Sound and the Fury the most important expression of these forces is Caddy as a symbol of female sexuality. In this thesis I explore how characters view this phenomenon. This phenomenon is investigated by using Ricoeur's hermeneutical literary approach.

**Keywords:** Uncontrollable forces, Caddy, symbol, absence.

## INTRODUCTION

### I

The research project henceforth presented, has originated from an Anglo-American Modernist seminar conducted in 2010 in my university. With this broad topic as a starting point, I have been drawn to explore William Faulkner's oeuvre. His work, and most particularly his quintessential The Sound and the Fury, has been chosen as the object of the following study; its proclivity to experiment with theme and form make of this work a valuable representative for the movement in question.

Before proceeding any further, let's discuss—although rather generally—the movement itself.

The Modernist movement arose during the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and extended into the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reaching its height in Europe between the period extending from the 1900s to the 1920s.<sup>1</sup>

Although Modernism was born and developed in the European continent<sup>2</sup>, its notions quickly spread to the world; American writers in particular, keenly perceived the impact of such ideas and incorporated them into their work; exponents such as Gertrude Stein, T.S Elliot and Ernest Hemingway arose as key representatives for the movement.

Some characteristic modernist traits include: individualistic thought, mistrust of institutions, disbelief in absolute truths, non-conformist view to traditional resources to create art, experimentation with form and themes, psychoanalytic approach to mental phenomena, and a fragmentary vision of the human experience<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to stress that the dates presented here function as dialectical approximations; the temporal boundaries of Modernism are, like those of any other movement, blurred.

<sup>2</sup> The french capital, for instance, can be counted as one of Modernism's neuralgic geographical areas, where writers such as James Joyce and Samuel Beckett took residence. Additionally, many expatriates were draw to this cultural center.

<sup>3</sup> For a modernist artist, the human being is no longer seen as a holistic entity, but rather as a composite of parts which cannot function harmoniously as a whole.

## II

William Faulkner's fiction stands as a pivotal example of the American writer who delves into modernist themes and techniques. His Nobel Prize acceptance speech testifies this, wherein light is shed on the themes he considers worth dealing with; a writer—he appeals—should leave “no room in his workshop for anything but the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed—love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice. Until he does so, he labors under a curse. He writes not of love but of lust, of defeats in which nobody loses anything of value (...) His griefs grieve on no universal bones, leaving no scars (Faulkner, 120.)”

Faulkner's words are telling; a writer should always seek to convey a genuine human experience by addressing universal themes only. He declares that all which is not universal to the human experience, is not worthy, indeed not even possible, to translate into compelling and lasting literature.

The assertion that themes are and will always be the same, that is, “the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself” (Faulkner, 119), can be interpreted as a Faulkner vouching for a literature deeply ingrained and empowered by experimentation of form and technique. Through these, a writer such as himself is able to portray the same quintessential topics; however, in virtue of permanent innovation, these topics never become trite.

To identify, what Ezra Pound termed “Make it new”, as a common ground between Modernism and Faulkner seems adequate enough. Pound's catchphrase conveys the underlying modernist maxim: to rework pivotal literary topics, such as love, hate, death, sex, loneliness, etc. and imbue these with an original creative impulse through experimental form.

Alongside his contemporaries, and enabled by experimental writing techniques such as Joyce's stream-of-consciousness<sup>4</sup>, Faulkner accomplished the portrayal of the American South as

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<sup>4</sup> Through which the speaker's innermost thoughts are presented, seemingly without editing and any other devices that might interfere with their thought process. This technique is a pivotal feature in modernist writing.

an arena where “the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself” (Faulkner, 119) were persistently contested.

Faulkner’s use of stream of consciousness acquires a pivotal role in The Sound and the Fury; in the novel this technique enables the narrative to vividly convey the perspectives of the multiple narrators. Presently, I have arrived to the novel which shall become the main subject of inquiry and analysis: William Faulkner’s The Sound and the Fury.

### III

The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner’s fourth novel, was published in 1929. Previously, he had written and published Soldier’s Pay and Mosquitoes. However, both novels had failed to yield the recognition and financial profitability the author hoped to achieve.

By 1928 Faulkner had completed his third novel; his favorite brainchild so far. He deemed Flags in the Dust to be his best achieved work “THE book, of which those other things were but foals” (Faulkner quoted in Morrison); he even humbly heralded that this was “the damdest best book you’ll look at this year” (Faulkner quoted in Morrison). Publishers however, disagreed. It was only after considerable revision and abbreviation that the novel was published as Sartoris. This rejection acted as an acute blow to Faulkner’s ambitions as a published writer.

This disenchanting state of affairs—Faulkner recounts in the 1933 introduction to The Sound and the Fury—was a decisive factor in order to gather the necessary latitude he required in order to embark on the production of the novel:

“I had written three novels, with progressively decreasing ease and pleasure, and reward or emolument. The third one was shopped about for three years during which I sent it from publisher to publisher with a kind of stubborn and fading hope of at least justifying the paper I had used and the time I had spent writing it. This hope must have died at last, because one day it suddenly seemed as if a door had clapped silently and forever to between me and all publishers’ addresses and booklists and I said to myself, Now I can write. Now I can just write.” (Faulkner 292-293.)

In this excerpt Faulkner retells how before writing The Sound and the Fury, the literary composition process had become increasingly more difficult and unpleasant, and how he had lost

hope to receive due recognition. It was only by resigning himself to the possibility he would never become a successfully published author, when this “door had clapped silently”, that he could to write for the sake of creation and enjoyment. Whereupon chances to become a household name had seemingly obliterated, Faulkner was able to profit from the newly-found liberty to write about topics which he found compelling, and in the style which best suited him. Thus by 1928, roughly the time when he started writing The Sound and the Fury, he had achieved a certain degree of literary maturity; a state which had sprouted from the shift between the author who sought to ingratiate himself with marketable literature to the author who no longer believed he could pursue literature professionally. Furthermore, an example of this maturity is shown by the exceptional quality and productivity of the 1929-1936 period<sup>5</sup>.

In the 1933 introduction to The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner details how the novel was brought into being; and how this was conceived during the period above described, without notions it would be published: “When I began the book I had no plan at all. I wasn’t even writing a book” (Faulkner, 292). He recounts he started writing a story about a little girl who had three brothers; and how he saw in his mind’s eye the children playing, the little girl falling and the smallest sibling crying; then, as the little girl went to comfort him, as “she quit the water fight and stooped in her wet garments above him, the entire story, which is told by that same little brother in the first section, seemed to explode on the paper before me<sup>6</sup>” (Faulkner 293)

Thus, according to the author, the novel sprung from a mental picture: a girl in soiled, wet undergarments. He goes on to add that this is no random image; the novel is later identified as an unconscious attempt to “manufacture the sister which I did not have and the daughter which I was to lose, though the former might have been apparent from the fact that Caddy had three brothers almost before I wrote her name on paper.” (Faulkner 293). This account reveals Faulkner’s deep emotional involvement in the composition of The Sound and the Fury; it insights that it was written not only as a literary artifact but as an attempt to control and order his private life through the exercise of his imagination, by the assemblage a sister who never existed.

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<sup>5</sup> During this seven year interval, Faulkner published some of his most remarkable novels, among which stand out The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, Light in August and Absalom, Absalom!.

<sup>6</sup> Faulkner also recounted numerous times a slightly different version of how he first conceived the novel; it involved the image of the same little girl climbing up a tree in order to peer into her grandmother’s funeral, while the other children saw her wet undergarments.



Before concluding this section on the composition of the novel, I would like to place emphasis on Faulkner's initial conception of the novel as a private creative effort, rather than as a text written for a public audience: "The story is all there, in the first section as Benjy told it. I did not try deliberately to make it obscure; when I realized that the story might be printed, I took three more sections, all longer than Benjy's to try to clarify it. But when I wrote Benjy's section, I was not writing it to be printed." (Faulkner 295). Faulkner remarks here that Benjy's section is not intentionally obscure in order to elude the reader's understanding, but due to it being initially conceived as a private creative piece; that is, written for its author's own enjoyment. He adds that it was only when he realized this "draft" would become a published novel, the next three sections were added in order to make its meaning clear.

Our discussion of Faulkner's remarks on The Sound and the Fury, point to a deep personal involvement with this particular novel; a work which marks the author's new-found creative freedom and a reunion with literature, but most importantly for our present purposes, it also points to how the novel is seen by himself as an attempt to reshape reality and acquire a certain control over it; even if such control is merely imaginary.

#### IV

This study shall be devoted to a phenomenon which impregnates Faulkner's universe and lies at its core: the uncontrollable forces. If we were asked to designate the foremost element in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha<sup>7</sup> universe, it is likely we would arrive to the presence of uncontrollable forces which override human capability for prediction and/or influence upon them.

However, as it shall be explored in this thesis, uncontrollable forces are hatched by human action and its effects are directly felt by individuals. Within Yoknapatawpha County, and particularly in the The Sound and the Fury, these forces play a central role since they bring forth conflict.

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<sup>7</sup> Yoknapatawpha is the fictional county created by Faulkner, serving as the setting for The Sound and the Fury and many others. Yoknapatawpha is based on Lafayette County, Mississippi.

In this thesis project, I intend to explore how uncontrollable forces evolve under the character's viewpoints in The Sound and the Fury, therefore stressing an analysis in the light of the main character's interpretation of these forces.

In the novel, uncontrollable forces take on the form of such concepts and experiences as the land and its heritage, kinship and the body; and wherever their expressions are felt, disaster necessarily follows. Characters seem to identify the existence of a causal relationship between those forces and suffering, whereupon uncontrollable forces are seen as a caustic agent that determines the downfall of the Compson family.

In the novel, the most important expression of these forces, takes form in Caddy's sexuality; and how her family, and above all, her brothers are unable to control it. The lack of control over it is seen as the cause for the downfall of each brother: Benjy points to Caddy's sexuality as the reason for him ending up alone in the Jackson asylum, Quentin sees it as the necessary cause to commit suicide, and Jason as the cause for his prospects' failure. Thus, each of these characters—who also play the role of speakers in three of the four sections of the novel—focus their misfortunes in the control they cannot exert over their sister's sexuality.

#### IV

The above proposed assumptions shall be approached from a hermeneutic critical perspective. Through this approach, I will attempt to analyze the uncontrollable forces network developed by Faulkner in The Sound and the Fury.

I will approach the novel so as to attempt to unpack meanings by focusing in the careful analysis of rhetorical figures. With this purpose, I will employ Paul Ricoeur's Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the surplus of Meaning and The Rule of the Metaphor.

Lastly, I hope this thesis shall prove a contribution to the understanding of the importance Faulkner places of the issue of control, and lack of it in his literary system.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### I

In the following section, we shall examine in some detail the literary theoretical approach under which our investigation shall be conducted. As it was mentioned in the introduction, we shall delve into the analysis of The Sound and the Fury by means of a hermeneutic theory of interpretation; to be more specific, the hermeneutic interpretation as it is presented in Paul Ricœur's Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning.

The reasons why I have chosen this particular literary approach in order to conduct the novel's interpretation are the following. First of all, because Ricoeur characterizes metaphor and symbol extensively. Additionally, his original definition of the symbol will prove to be useful for my interpretation of the novel. This is a decided advantage in order to interpret the novel, because in it symbols play an important part by imbuing the text with a surplus of meaning.

Secondly, I have chosen this literary approach because it proposes the notion of text's semantic autonomy, while simultaneously considering that a text is a man-made artifact, as such, the author's intention is not completely devoid of importance.

In Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning Ricœur postulates that discourse is composed of two poles, namely, the event pole and the meaning pole. On the one hand, the event corresponds to the discrete part of the message that has both duration and succession, and it is therefore transient. On the other hand, the meaning corresponds to the propositional content of such event.

The relationship between these two poles stands in the following manner: discourse is actualized as an event, that is, in the event discourse is realized "temporally and in a present moment" (Ricœur 11). However, such event is accessed via its meaning; it is understood and remembered as propositional content. Therefore, through the propositional content, a given event can be identified and recuperated and thus endure in time.

As we have already stated, the poles of discourse are present in all kinds of discourse. Nevertheless, this relationship changes in written discourse. This is the main point of divergence between speaking and writing, namely, the distance between meaning and event in written discourse:

“The event is not only the experience as expressed and communicated, but also the intersubjective exchange itself, the happening of dialogue. The instance of discourse is the instance of dialogue. Dialogue is an event that connects two events, that of speaking and that of hearing” (Ricoeur, 16.)

In a speaking act, the communicative situation allows the speakers the possibility to enter into a dialogue, which can serve as the means to clarify and minimize that portion of the event that cannot be made public by its meaning. Thus, a dialogue stands as bridge to partially surmount private experience. In writing, however, this direct mediation between the event and the meaning cannot take place due to the text’s fixation.

The result of fixating the discourse into a medium other than the human voice, in this case, the result of inscribing discourse into writing, has a twofold quality. Firstly, the human factor is erased, and as a consequence, the text acquires new autonomy. Secondly, the event itself is obscured by the inscription of the meaning.

The new autonomy of written discourse creates a rift between the author’s mental intention and the (verbal) meaning of the text; there is a disassociation between the two. As a result of its inscription, the text has gained semantic autonomy; and as such, the text’s verbal meaning is now more important than the author’s original intention. Nevertheless, the author’s meaning still holds some influence over the text’s meaning; if our analysis of a text were to ignore it, we would reduce a text to a natural object. We can’t eliminate— Ricoeur remarks—the main characteristic of discourse, namely, that it is a man-made artifact.

Another important aspect of the text’s semantic autonomy is that it allows a wide variety of potential readers. The text’s meaningfulness is activated by its readers. In this sense, a text is appropriated of its meaning by each particular reader; when a text’s autonomy and a reader’s right of appropriation converge, the interpretation dynamic is born.

Ricœur also focuses on another aspect of the written discourse autonomy; due to the absence of common temporal/spatial situation between writer and reader, their reference is not situational but rather of a new nature. Through writing, humanity gains access to a “world”, that is, to a collection of references that have accessed via different texts. This world has not been directly experienced by the reader, but accessed in a cognitive-imaginative manner via the appropriation of a text.

The assumptions about written discourse pointed above, are the basic postulates developed by Ricœur in order to carry out a hermeneutical analysis. This far into the discussion, it is pertinent to tackle hermeneutics as such.

## II

At first sight, Hermeneutics seems straight forward enough: a text-oriented interpretation. However, for Ricœur, this raises the question of what interpretation is as such. The answer seems to complicate matters: interpretation is a complete process that encompasses a dynamic of explanation and comprehension. In order to present this process in a didactic fashion, Ricœur describes interpretation in into two stages.

The first stage of interpretation is a movement from an initial comprehension to an explanation; the second stage is a movement from explanation to comprehension.

In the first stage, comprehension takes place as a conjecture based on the text’s autonomy. Since the author’s intention cannot be retrieved, the reader will conjecture about the text’s verbal meaning; comprehension is thus a result of semantic conjecture born from the text’s verbal meaning. That is, a reader doesn’t repeat the original event that is subscribed in the text, but rather generates a new event starting from the text. Subsequently, the conjecture must be validated in the explanation process. To explain a text is, according to the author, to identify the hierarchy of its elements while simultaneously recognizing it as an individual entity.

For my analysis of the novel, I will explain the text focusing on the meaning conveyed by tropes such as the metaphor, comparison, allegory, etc. and the network of meanings that is constructed by these. The explanation of these textual elements and their relationships will allow us to validate our conjectures. Concerning the validation process, Ricœur argues that complex discursive works are characterized by their plurivocity, that is, a plurality of explanations is available. As a result, a conjecture is not empirically verifiable, but rather is logically accepted as a probable option. Additionally, he remarks that invalidation processes work alongside validation ones; our chosen interpretation not only has to be logically probable but more probable than other interpretations as well.

The second stage of interpretation consists of a movement from explanation to comprehension. At this point, the reader must deal with the absence of an ostensible reference; we are no longer referred to a situation but rather to a “world”. In this sense, the reference in a literary work is suspended. As readers, we can choose between remaining in suspense to any reality by considering the text as an entity without universe, or to realize the potential references to a new situation.

The structural schools have interpreted texts by suppressing reference. A structural analysis considers that a text lacks external reference and is only a self-contained, internal system. Interestingly enough, Ricœur points out that a structural analysis can consist of a phase in our interpretation, a manner to interpret the semantic meaning of the text. The semantic meaning accessed via a structural analysis, holds the reference of a text; and points to a new possible world which doesn't correspond to the initial situation of the discourse. The text's semantic meaning opens a new world and to a possible orientation within itself. In this sense, a text transcends spoken discourse's referential function by creating a new order of the world. That is, while the reference in spoken discourse points to reality, the reference in written discourse corresponds to the world that is constructed by the text.

Now we have presented an overview of the hermeneutical interpretation as presented by Ricœur, we can provide some working definitions that shall be useful to produce such analysis, namely, definitions of some of the most recurrent rhetorical figures. In order to provide some definitions, we shall work jointly with Paul Ricœur's Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning and The Rule of Metaphor.

### III

In Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning, Ricœur redefines the notion of semantic meaning before discussing the metaphor and the symbol. Traditionally, logical positivism has identified explicit sense as cognitive language and implicit sense as emotive language. In contrast, the author proposes that the implicit sense of a sentence is also a constituent of the semantic field. This reformulates the sentence's implicit sense as cognitive language as well.

Why is it important to start with this clarification? Due to the very nature of the literary work; its meaning is constructed by linking an explicit sense to an implicit sense. Therefore, in our treatment of a sentence's meaning we shall be juggling with this twofold nature of semantic meaning. Furthermore, our treatment of rhetorical figures such as the metaphor and symbol relies on this reformulation.

In his treatment of the metaphor, Ricœur characterizes its function as predicative. Conversely to traditional rhetoric presuppositions, the metaphor works at a sentence level rather than at a word level. He proposes that the metaphor is a predicative phenomenon that conveys its sense only if considered as a whole; it is the result of the tension between two opposite interpretations of a sentence. When the metaphor is interpreted in this way, the surplus of meaning is shown, however, it is destroyed if we attempt to interpret each sense separately.

This phenomenon is termed "tension theory of the metaphor". It means that the meaning of a metaphor is created by the conflict between its literal and figurative interpretation; if we attempted to understand its literal meaning only, an absurdity will be revealed. Accordingly, to understand a metaphor, we must consider its twofold semantic meaning; a literal interpretation would destroy the metaphor.

Another divergence from the traditional treatment of the metaphor is created by the metaphorical tension. As a result of these two contradictory interpretations of a same sentence, a new meaning is created. The metaphor is no longer a mere substitution of one word in place of

another with the same meaning; when the metaphor is interpreted in virtue of its two senses, its meaning says something new and original about reality.

To conclude our discussion of the metaphor, we can add Ricœur's remarks in The rule of the metaphor: although the metaphor plays an important role by embellishing discourse—and more noticeably poetic discourse—its most important value lies in its ability to offer new information about reality and to do it so in a more didactic and accessible manner.

In Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning, Ricœur distinguishes the metaphor from the symbol in one main aspect. The metaphor has double a semantic meaning—more precisely a literal and figurative verbal meaning—whereas the symbol has an additional twofold non-verbal meaning. This means that the concept of symbol combines two discursive universes: a linguistic and a non-linguistic one.

On the one hand the metaphor has been purified from a non-linguistic reference, it is a free invention of discourse, and as such is self-contained. On the other hand, the symbol is linked to the cosmos, more specifically, to the sacred.

In the case of the symbol, the surplus of meaning that is born from the tension between two contradictory interpretations, also serves to access the symbolic meaning. As a consequence of the non-semantic meaning, the symbol can never be linguistically/logically explained. The crux of the problem is that the symbol has not been purified from the bios, but dwells in a space between bios and logos; that is to say, the symbol testifies to how language is deeply-seated in the experience of life.

The symbol is able to signify the sacred part of human experience, which is irreducible to poetic language. Ricœur addresses the sacred not only as theological but also to the nature; in short the sacred is perceived as all that can be expressed linguistically but which is also more powerful and energetic than the languages which convey it.



## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

### Chapter one

#### **The little girl's muddy bottom: the genetic myth.**

In both the 1933 introduction to The Sound and the Fury and its 1946 revised version, Faulkner established what has come to be referred to as the novel's "genetic myth". On the subject of how the novel was initially conceived, he was always emphatic to foreground the symbol of Caddy's soiled drawers: "the muddy bottom of a little doomed girl climbing a blooming pear tree in April to look in the window at the funeral" (Faulkner 296). For him, this symbolizes Caddy's tragic destiny; the natural result of a life force too virile to be contained.

There is ample textual evidence of Faulkner's endorsement of this symbol as the novel's genesis and nucleus. In addition to both introductions, this subject was also discussed in a number of scattered interviews and speeches<sup>8</sup>.

In the novel, the symbol of the muddy drawers is realized in Benjy's section in two different scenes. Both fragments correspond to Benjy's memories; and, in the manner of the novel's first three sections, these are narrated by means of the stream of consciousness technique:

"I'll run away and never come back." Caddy said. I began to cry. Caddy turned around and said "Hush" So I hushed. Then they played in the branch. Versh came around the bush and lifted me down into the water again. Caddy was all wet and muddy behind, and I started to cry and she came and squatted in the water.

"Hush now." she said. "I'm not going to run away." So I hushed. Caddy smelled like trees in the rain".<sup>9</sup> (Faulkner 19)

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<sup>8</sup> Among others: Faulkner in the University, Faulkner at Nagano, Interview with Cynthia Grenier, etc.

““Push me up, Versh.” Caddy said.

“All right.” Versh said. “You the one going to get whipped. I aint.” He went and pushed Caddy up into the tree to the first limb. We watched the muddy bottom of her drawers. Then we couldn’t see her. We could hear the tree thrashing.” (Faulkner 39)

The first fragment corresponds to the scene where the Compson children and Versh are playing at the branch. To Quentin’s dismay, Caddy takes off her wet dress to avoid punishment. However, in the heat of their playtime, her drawers are muddied. For this reason, she is reprimanded and warned by her brother; but she rebelliously replies that she doesn’t care, that she will run away. When Benjy—who at this time is still called Maury—hears her threats and becomes aware of her “muddy behind”, he responds by crying and is therefore consoled by his sister.

Following Faulkner’s endorsement of the muddy drawers genesis, we can safely suppose Faulkner would claim that the symbol of Caddy’s drawers is the foremost element in this scene. Nonetheless, a number of adjunct elements contribute to imbue the scene with symbolic meaning. Indeed, the symbol becomes quite inconspicuous without Caddy’s rebellious attitude, and more importantly, without Benjy’s reaction to it. Without the character’s attitudes, we would easily lose sight of its symbolic meaning, i.e. this symbol is not conspicuous on its own; we as readers are not unequivocally made aware of its symbolic meaning. Furthermore, its symbolic meaning and its prominence as it is pointed out by Faulkner, rely in a high degree on the comments on its importance he himself has extensively provided and that critics have subsequently also promoted. Before entering into a more extensive discussion on this issue, we will analyze the second fragment where the symbol is realized.

The second fragment corresponds to the first scene’s follow up. The children have already gone home, and discovered that their presence is unwanted there. In order to find out

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<sup>9</sup> In order to follow Faulkner’s use of italics, to quote fragments from *The Sound and the Fury* these will be used only if they appear in novel.

what is happening in the house, Caddy orders Versh to help her climb the pear tree so that she can peer into the window, where—unknown to the Compson siblings—dammudy’s funeral is being held. While Caddy is on the tree branch, her soiled undergarment is exposed to her three brothers and Dilsey’s children. In Benjy’s words: “We watched the muddy bottom of her drawers”.

### **Benjy’s discursive practices.**

In order to analyze this scene, it’s worth to take a detour in order to characterize Benjy’s narrative style. Tentatively, I propose a characteristic narratological aspect in Benjy’s section: the use of words in their most obvious manner. According to Ricoeur, this corresponds to a word’s literal meaning<sup>10</sup>. Benjy, being mentally handicapped, is unable to be semantically creative. At times, he can even fail to identify the proper relationship between the words in a given utterance. Let’s consider the following fragment:

““Caddy and Jason were fighting in the mirror.

“You, Caddy.” Father said.

They fought. Jason began to cry.

“Caddy.” Father said. Jason was crying. He wasn’t fighting anymore, but we could see Caddy fighting in the mirror and father put me down and went into the mirror and fought

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<sup>10</sup> In The Rule of the Metaphor, Ricoeur adopts Fontanier’s nomenclature for propositional meaning. Accordingly, objective meaning is “the basic meaning of the proposition: ‘that which it has relative to the object to which it applies’” (Fontanier quoted by Ricoeur). Literal meaning and an intellectual meaning, differentiate propositional meaning by considering traits peculiar to words. ‘The literal meaning is that which is borne by words taken to the letter, by words understood according to the way they are accepted in common usage (Fontanier quoted by Ricoeur). This is the meaning that immediately suggested by a word to those who are familiar with the language, while the intellectual meaning is “that which the literal meaning causes to be born in the spirit by means of the circumstances of the discourse, by tone of voice, or by means of expressed connections with unarticulated relationships’ (Fontanier quoted by Ricoeur 57). That is, the meaning that created from articulating a literal meaning with non-linguistic factors and atypical relationships.

too. She lifted Caddy up. She fought. Jason lay on the floor, crying. He had the scissors in his hand. Father held Caddy” (Faulkner 65)

This fragment describes a typical family interaction: while siblings are fighting, the father steps in to stop the argument. Social convention dictates that a father’s duty is to sanction his children. Whether this is accomplished by using physical force or through verbal admonition, “fought” isn’t the optimal verbal choice to describe his actions. However, the children can appropriately be described as “fighting”, because they are performing violence in the characteristic manner of siblings.

Benjy’s verbal inadequacy rises from his inability to grasp the complex hues of the social order; ergo, interfering with his linguistic choice. Since he cannot extrapolate the concept of family as an institution, he cannot understand that a father is endowed with the prerogative to interfere and stop his progeny’s conflicts without “fighting”; a father can do so by virtue of his paternal authority.

In this sense, a father cannot fight with his children because he has the authority to command them, and more importantly, the authority to make them submit to him. Indeed, if a father were to use violence with his children, he is not fighting, but rightfully chastising his offspring.

In light of this analysis, we confirm that Benjy as a narrator can fail to create the appropriate connections between a proposition’s units and the meaning of such; as shown above, he is unable to describe his father’s action with another word than “fought”. He can only understand the use of physical force as an act of violence; and since in this case the violence is reciprocal, he is only able to understand it as fighting.

As a general rule, I believe Benjy’s meaning can mostly be understood in a literal sense—in Fontanier’s words—it is a meaning “which is borne by words taken to the letter, by words understood according to the way they are accepted in common usage”. Consequently, we must pay particular attention to interpret his meaning, and understand that the linguistic options here made are mostly unidimensional; Benjy’s utterances must be understood in light of its literal

meaning. As a result of his inability to adapt a proposition's lexical options, he sometimes creates unlikely utterances, as in the case of "fought".

However, as unlikely as it may initially seem, once readers have familiarized themselves with Benjy's style, the process to trace back the event is somewhat simple. Thus, in this sense, the first section is more reliable, and easier to understand than Quentin's and Jason's:

"The opening monologue of *The Sound and the Fury* is only superficially the representation of an idiot's stream of consciousness. Because it renders dramatic events objectively, Benjy's account is less confused than the monologues of Quentin and Jason, in which details are occasionally distorted by the narrator's emotions or perversions of will." (Swiggart 70)

Swiggart supports the assertion that Benjy's monologue is a superficial representation of an idiot's stream of consciousness in virtue of two main reasons. Firstly, due to Benjy-the-narrator's ability to convey more than an idiot can in fact communicate; he is vastly endowed with linguistic abilities that are typically beyond the grasp of a mentally challenged human. This virtuosity enables the narrator to present the reader with carefully detailed and objectively described dramatic scenes. Secondly, in spite of the first person narrative, the emotional involvement of a first person narrator is clearly lacking: we never get to read Benjy's thoughts or his interpretation of the events, he merely describes them. Only obliquely we can reach an understanding of how he interprets and feels about an event. For instance, when he cries and is eased into silence by Caddy, we obtain an obscure insight into his feelings; however, we are only able to infer a sort of transition from an anguished state to a contented one.

As a result of Benjy's lack of emotional and moral involvement, his monologue is rendered more reliable than that of his brothers. Although his monologue does not put forward information about himself, it shows vivid characterizations of events and the people involved in them.

This brief discussion on the style of the first section, in no way is an attempt to exhaustively expound Benjy's monologue; but rather, it is meant to be used as a working knowledge to aid and enrich our analysis of the above mentioned funeral scene, and more particularly, in our interpretation of the symbol which has come to be referred to as the novel's genetic myth.

### **The genetic myth?**

In the fragment we were discussing, Benjy's narrative style becomes particularly relevant in the analysis of the sentence "We watched the muddy bottom of her drawers." In this sentence—I believe—the predicate acquires especial significance. By using the verb "watched" instead of saw, the narrator is pointing to a semantic characteristic of the verb to watch, namely, deliberate observation. The verb to watch, when considered in contrast to the verb to see, conveys the fact that the children were attentively observing the soiled undergarment. To paraphrase, in this episode, the choice of the verb to watch relates the manner in which the children observed: they didn't happen to accidentally notice Caddy's drawers, but rather their conscious attention was drawn to this. This is a valid analysis if we consider Benjy's style and its scrupulous use of the literal meaning. By using "we watched", the narrator is able to foreground the symbol.

Moreover, in this scene the symbol is also foregrounded by another device: the description of Caddy's spatial orientation in the scene. By climbing the tree, she is positioned as the focal point in this scene; as a result, the other children's vantage point is different from hers. While she is peering at the window of her grandmother's funeral, the children, in the same way as the reader is, are watching the symbol which marks her tragic destiny, which foreshadows her place as a pariah in society and her family.

Faulkner uses these devices in order to foreground this symbol as the novel's nucleus, thus, according to him, everything that takes place in the novel revolves around this particular symbol. However, one might well wonder in what degree this symbol is truly the core of the novel. Indeed, without Faulkner's continuous remarks on how it is here where the primary symbolic meaning of the novel lies, the reader may hardly notice it as having that much

importance in generating meaning in The Sound and The Fury. Let us examine Sundquist's comments on the issue of the novel's nucleus:

"The genetic myth of the novel—that "it began with the picture of the little girl's muddy drawers, climbing that tree to look in the parlor window" at her grandmother's funeral—has so overwhelmed the novel itself that one no longer questions its relevance, even though there is good reason to do so. One might rather say that this scene stands in the same relation to Caddy as Caddy does to the entire novel, for we find out so little about her (...). But since Caddy is not a character but an idea, an obsession in the minds of her brothers, we cannot rightly be said to find out much at all about her. Caddy is "lost" psychologically and aesthetically as well as morally: she is the very symbol of loss in Faulkner's world—the loss of innocence, integrity, chronology, personality, and dramatic unity, all the problematic virtues of his envisioned artistic design. To Benjy she smells like trees, to Quentin she is would-be lover, to Jason she is the whore mother of a whore daughter, and to Faulkner she is at once "the sister which I did not have and the daughter which I was to lose," and "a beautiful and tragic little girl" who later becomes, apparently, the mistress of a Nazi officer in occupied France. There is probably no major character in literature about whom we know so little in proportion to the amount of attention she receives. This is surely no objection to the novel, but it is quite certainly a measure of its drama, which is submerged to the point of invisibility. (...) One has only to record the scene that Faulkner maintained was the heart of the novel-

"All right." Versh said. "You the one going to get whipped. I aint." He went and pushed Caddy up into the tree to the first limb. We watched the muddy bottom of her drawers. Then we couldn't see her. We could hear the tree thrashing.

—to see how invisible Caddy truly is. Despite its marvelously elliptical portrayal of vanishing innocence and its vaguely erotic suggestion of something "dirty," this scene,

without Faulkner's repeated insistence on its centrality, would itself vanish into the novel's larger pattern of glimmering memories.” (Sundquist 126)

As we have discussed above, the image of the soiled drawers is pregnant with symbolic meaning, however, as Sundquist suggest, Faulkner has nourished this symbol as the core of the novel’s meaning, to the extent that it has acquired a mythic reputation. Due to Faulkner’s endorsement of its central meaning, reader and critics alike have sometimes failed to question its validity as the novel’s nucleus. If Faulkner’s remarks on this subject were not available for our perusal, this symbol might not stand out among the many others that also contain the novel’s meaning.

In spite of the arguments presented above, one is not to deny the anecdotic value of Faulkner’s endorsement of the genetic myth; although the text’s meaning may not reside preeminently here, we might well not question Faulkner’s remark that for him, this symbol is the novel’s genesis. In order to reconcile this apparent aporia, we can refer to what Ricoeur terms as the semantic autonomy of the text, that is, the rift that exists between the author’s mental intention and the meaning the text acquires as its meaning is activated by its readers.

Following the same line of argument, Sundquist asserts that Caddy is more an idea than a character; she symbolizes absence and only exists in her brother’s narratives. As a matter of fact, she is the only Compson child whose point of view is not exhibited by means of a monologue; thus, her insight is never revealed. Accordingly, the knowledge we possess of her derives from her brothers constructs of her persona.

### **Caddy as a symbol for absence.**

It is interesting to notice how Caddy progressively vanishes as one reads each section. In Benjy’s monologue, she is more present than she will ever be; this occurs in virtue of how he experiences time. For him, the events of the past and present are somewhat intermingled; for this reason, we may venture as far as to say that he lives in a sort of limbo between the past and the present, not recognizing the difference between one and another.



“(…) it cannot reasonably be argued that an idiot is capable of reliving the past, but neither can it be said that he “lives” the present as ordinary individuals do. Faulkner assumes that if an idiot could remember the past at all, he could not distinguish it from the present.” (Swiggart 65)

As a result of Benjy’s perception of time, that is, in virtue of him not being able to draw a clear distinction between present and past, he is enabled to perform something akin to reliving the past. Consequently, in the first section, Caddy is not completely absent and lost: since she is continually relived in her brother’s section of the book, she is to some degree never completely absent. However, she cannot be said to be absolutely present either: when Benjy’s thought process is aligned with the present time, he is aware—as we can infer from the wailing elicited on the occasions when Luster says Caddy’s name in order to make Benjy suffer<sup>11</sup>—that Caddy is no longer part of neither his household nor his life. In Benjy’s mind, she stands in the same relationship as time; somewhat blurred, wherein absence from presentness are not clearly distinguished.

Quentin, in contrast to Benjy, is able to distinguish the past as a closed event. In his monologue, this is formally conveyed by the use of italics when he experiences a vivid reminiscence of the past. In Quentin’s section, the fragments written in italics correspond to a gateway to the past: these memories are—in a manner similar to Benjy’s digressions into the past—somehow relived; the description of the memory is minute and, it is narrated in the present tense as if it were a simultaneous narration when in fact corresponds to a subsequent narration<sup>12</sup>. Nevertheless, it constitutes a memory in virtue of Quentin’s awareness of it as such, awareness which is formally marked by the use of italics. This pattern is maintained mostly throughout Quentin’s section; however, it is broken once the narration reaches its climax.

As Quentin’s section reaches its climax, his perception of reality and the past are confused. In a disoriented state, Quentin attacks Gerald Bland believing he is Dalton Ames.

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<sup>11</sup> ““Beller.” Luster said. “Beller. You want something to beller about. All right, then. Caddy.” He whispered. “Caddy. Beller now. Caddy”” (Faulkner 55)

<sup>12</sup> The distinction between simultaneous and subsequent narration is understood as formulated by Gérard Genette in Figures III.

From hereafter, the use of italics and bold print acquires a similar function as in Benjy's section, thus indicating that Quentin has also lost a clear distinction between past and present, and as a consequence has lost narrative control. As Quentin's suicide approaches, and his grasp on life loosens, so does his grasp on reality and his narrative<sup>13</sup>. However, the contrast between the first two sections holds almost through all Quentin's monologue.

Quite distinctively, the use of italic letters never discriminates between memories and present events in Benjy's section. In this monologue, italics are used in order to point out the shift between a relived event from the past and an event that is taking place as it is narrated, and vice versa. In Benjy's monologue, italics pinpoint a temporal jolt in his perception of reality.

In spite of the fact that Quentin experiences the above described flashbacks of his childhood, adolescence and nearer past, he is mostly able to distinguish them from the present. However, even though Quentin's present is aligned with the Harvard reality, the past intrudes—most prominently—as tortuous memories of his sister. Furthermore, as far as the present reality is perceived by Quentin, Caddy as a person belongs to the past only. My point is that for him, at the temporal period during which the narration takes place, Caddy as a human being and sister stands virtually as a nonentity: in his monologue we acquire no impression that he misses her or is concerned by her situation. Rather, he is haunted by Caddy as the symbol of lost purity. As such, she intrudes Quentin's thoughts as someone who was, rather than as someone who is; in this sense, she is perceived as a nonentity. The following fragments exemplify how Caddy is perceived by Quentin:

“And the good Saint Francis that said Little Sister Death, that never had a sister.”  
(Faulkner 76)

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<sup>13</sup> As Quentin's narrative approaches to its closure—and the time to kill himself approaches—the mechanics of the narrative become more chaotic, thus indicating he is moving towards deeper memories. e.g. in the most chaotic stream of consciousness (Faulkner 176-178) punctuation is altogether lacking, and the capital print for the pronoun “I” is lost.

“(…) and Shreve said if he’s got better sense than to chase after the little dirty sluts and I said Did you ever have a sister? Did you? Did you?” (Faulkner 78)

These two fragments correspond to one of the main leitmotifs associated with Caddy in the second section: “did you ever have a sister did you” (Faulkner 160). Chronologically, it appears for the first time when Quentin confronts Dalton Ames, and under similar guises is realized a total of nine times (Faulkner 76, 77, 78, 92, 95, 160, 166)

The predicate of this leitmotif seems to be particularly significant; whereupon the verb “have” is always realized in its past tense form “had” or “did have”. This recurrent use of the past tense is—I believe—symptomatic of Quentin’s detachment from his sister in the present; how Caddy represents absence above all; the manner in which what is perceived as taint and corruption overrides her existence as such, and how she stands foremost in his mind as lost purity and integrity. In short, Caddy represents for Quentin the loss of an ideal, rather than a flesh and blood sister.

In the first fragment, Quentin recalls St. Francis’ deathbed words: “Little Sister Death”. For St. Francis death was an integral and necessary part of life, an experience as familiar and welcoming as a relative, i.e. death as a sister. Quentin juxtaposes this metaphorical treatment of death to the taint that his own sister is to him; namely: death acquires a positive value in the saint’s metaphor in virtue that he “never had a sister”. Conversely, Quentin who does have a sister, transfers the traditional negative sentiments associated with death to his sister. In this fragment, the leitmotif’s predicate is also in the past tense. As pointed out previously, Caddy is referred to as the sister he “had” rather than the sister he “has”. This is emphasized by the use of the adverb “never”, altogether creating the impression of a sister that has been lost sister.

In the second fragment, the past tense predicate has the same recursive function as in the first fragment<sup>14</sup>. In this instance, Quentin’s utterance reinforces the notion that he associates his sister to promiscuity. Moreover, for Quentin sexuality appears to be composed exclusively by

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<sup>14</sup> A function which is shared by the 9 instances of the leitmotif.

negatives traits. The following fragment represents the extent to which Quentin perceives sex as an aberrant practice:

*“ (...)with one hand he could lift her to his shoulder and run with her running Running (...) running the beast with two backs and she blurred in the winking oars running the swine of Euboeus running coupled within how many Caddy (...) I don't know too many there was something terrible in me Father I have committed Have you ever done that We didn't we didn't do that did we do that (...) we did how can you not know it if youll just wait Ill tell you how it was it was a crime we did a terrible crime it cannot be hid you think it can but wait Poor Quentin you've never done that have you (...)”* (Faulkner 148-149)

This fragment corresponds to Quentin's memory of an alleged conversation that took place between Caddy and he. Its nature is chaotic to the degree that it is difficult to assert whether it really occurred or if it is a construct of Quentin's delirium. For the moment, we shall only concentrate on a few elements and later on in our analysis we shall examine this fragment to its fullest.

Quentin uses the expression “the beast with two backs” to refer to the sexual intercourse between Caddy and Dalton Ames. By using this metaphor Quentin compares sex to a deviant animal practice, for the sexual act is compared to a malformation “two backs” rather than to a natural human and animal activity. This metaphor is used—as in Shakespeare's Othello's—to dehumanize sexual activity. This instance of intertextuality emphasizes the disgust that Quentin feels towards her sister's sexuality: in the same manner as Iago uses this metaphor in to imprint in Desdemona's father the hideousness that will arise from his daughter's marriage to a moor<sup>15</sup>, Quentin uses this metaphor to convey the repellent and hideous qualities that intercourse has for him.

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<sup>15</sup> Othello and Desdemona's intermarriage should result in the undesirable mixture of races in the prevalent white Venetian society.

Additionally, if we consider that this conversation may be imagined by Quentin, it is interesting how Caddy describes her sexual desire as “*something terrible in me*”. that is, sexuality as an unwanted instinct that coerces Caddy into having sex. In this sense, sex is again identified as a transgression rather than as a natural act.

Finally, Quentin’s repulsion towards sex can also be inferred from the avoidance of the word itself; although his section is plagued by sex thoughts and sex allusions, sex is only referred to through substitutions such as “*the beast with two backs*” and the repetitive “that”.

As has been proposed and exemplified above, in Quentin’s section Caddy symbolizes the loss and absence of purity which is the result of Quentin’s perception of his sister’s sexuality as an aberration. For him, she has tainted herself and him with promiscuity, in short, by failing to remain a virgin, and as such a symbol for the sexless southern lady, she has unhinged Quentin’s idealized moral system. For Quentin, Cady’s virginity stands as the symbol of his ideal of purity and tradition, while her sexuality stands as the symbol for the corruption of his ideal, the corruption of a state of purity.

In Jason’s narrative, Caddy’s function as symbol of absence becomes truly striking. After Herbert Head dissolves his marriage to Caddy and she is banished from the Compson household, her existence is tabooed by her family , not only is she forbidden to go back home— or even approach her own daughter—even the mention of to her name is forbidden :

““You can say nonsense,” Mother says. “But she must never know. She must never even learn that name. Dilsey, I forbid you ever to speak that name in her hearing. If she could grow up never to know that she had a mother, I would thank God.”

“Don’t be a fool,” Father says.

“I have never interfered with the way you brought them up,” Mother says. “But now I cannot stand anymore. We must decide this now, tonight. Either that name is never to be spoken in her hearing, or she must go, or I will go. Take your choice.”” (Faulkner 199)

This fragment corresponds to Jason's flashback of the night Jason father brought baby Quentin to the Compson household. Caroline stipulates the condition that in order to keep Caddy's baby, her name must not be spoken again. By forbidding to utter her name, she attempts to banish Caddy's existence and their memories of her, while at the same time trying to obscure—in a feeble denial effort—that her daughter has given birth to a bastard child. By ordering “that name is never to be spoken in her hearing” she takes away Caddy's right as Quentin's mother replacing her by a lacuna in place of a mother: “if she could grow up never to know that she had a mother”. In this sense, Caroline doesn't wish to provide a mother for Quentin but instead just make her motherless. In Jason's monologue we are shown that Caroline's will has succeeded: by 1928 Quentin acknowledges Caddy as a mother only in the sense that she provides economically for her, as can be inferred from Jason's observation of Quentin's dismissal of her mother's letter and appropriation of her money only.

In Jason's section Caddy is morphed into a symbol of blame over the loss of his prospects. From his vantage point, Caddy symbolizes little more than the loss of his financial expectations. He deemed his sister's marriage to Herbert as his rightful opportunity to prosper, as a sort of compensation because, unlike Quentin, he was not given “time to go to Harvard” (Faulkner 181). Due to Caddy's divorce, the position offered by Herbert was denied and for this Caddy is seen as the one to blame:

“And so I counted the money again that night and put it away, and I didn't feel so bad. I says I reckon that'll show you. I reckon you'll know now that you cant beat me out of a job and get away with it” (Faulkner 205).

This fragment exemplifies Jason's stance towards his sister; Caddy plays the role of the victimizer who purposely robbed him from the job that could make him a prosperous man (“you cant beat me out of a job and get away with it”). Furthermore, since Caddy's divorce was the result of her pregnancy from a previous sexual relationship, she is thus regarded by Jason as nothing more than a tramp, as “a woman that cant name the father of her own child.” (Faulkner 262)

Nevertheless, this slut sister is the obsession that rules Jason's thoughts as the causer of his failure. Caddy's banishment from the Compson's household is of little comfort or consequence to Jason, since her daughter is the living reminder of Caddy's foulness. As it can be easily apprehended from his monologue, the transgressions of the mother are projected to the daughter. The first sentence of his monologue is telling: "Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say" (Faulkner 180). The bitch he refers to is simultaneously Caddy and Quentin, since he thinks of the mother as a bitch, the daughter has to be exactly the same as the mother; thus he groups the both of them under the same bitch label. In this sense, to him Caddy and Quentin are the same, the ones whose sole existence set him to failure.

For the moment, we shall not discuss Caddy as a symbol of absence in the last section. Here, the narrator is no longer one of the novel's characters but a hetero-diegetic narrator who stands outside the events. In virtue of the impartial narrator, Caddy is no longer the obsessive idea that plays in her brother's sections.

Lastly, I would like to remark one final element from the scene when Caddy climbs the tree and the soiled drawers are revealed. In this scene, it is also interesting to notice how Caddy shifts positions in the physical space: "We watched the muddy bottom of her drawers. Then we couldn't see her. We could hear her trashing" (Faulkner 39).

Initially, she is positioned at ground level with the rest of the children, subsequently, she is raised into the tree above them, and finally she disappears from everyone's view; henceforth she is no longer seen but only heard. The fashion in which she vanishes from everyone's sight, can be said to mirror how she eventually fades out in the novel; the way in which her presence—which is quite conspicuous in the first section—progressively faints out of focus and is replaced by absence.

Caddy's absence—in my opinion—is the true nucleus of the novel; it becomes the causation of the main events that are to take place in the novel: Quentin's suicide, Jason's anger, and Benjy's eventual commitment in the mental institution in Jackson. I believe at the core of the novel's meaning, we do not find Caddy the character, her downfall and suffering, but the absence that takes over as a result of her downfall; the absence and loss she begets in her siblings once she leaves.

In the next chapter we will analyze and interpret how Caddy represents to each brother the causation for the loss of what they regard as important in their lives, and how she represents a force that cannot be controlled.

## **Chapter 2**

In the previous chapter we have discussed the central role Caddy plays in The Sound and the Fury by symbolizing absence itself. Presently, we can start the discussion on how the three Compson brothers extrapolate Caddy as the causation for the loss they suffer.

In the 1933 introduction to The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner remarks the following about Benjamin Compson:

“He had to be an idiot so that, like Dilsey, he could be impervious to the future, though unlike her by refusing to accept it at all. Without thought or comprehension; shapeless, neuter, like something eyeless and voiceless which might have lived, existed merely because of its ability to suffer, in the beginning of life; half fluid, groping: a pallid and helpless mass of all mindless agony under the sun, in time yet not of it save that he could nightly carry with him that fierce, courageous being who was to him but a touch and a sound that may be heard on any golf links and a smell like trees, into the slow bright shapes of sleep.” (Faulkner 294)

In this fragment Faulkner describes Benjy’s limited ability to understand reality, and the events and people that surround him. Since he is endowed with meager intelligence, “without thought or comprehension”, he understands virtually nothing about his environment. Because of this, even though he is directly involved as a participant in the events that take place throughout his narration, his point of view remains impartial; indeed Benjy cannot produce moral judgments or interpretations of people’s actions. Moreover, he remains unaware of his family’s injustice towards him; indeed he is not conscious of his mother’s selfish love, who considers her youngest child as a judgment on her, or of Jason and Luster’s contempt for him. The exception to this apathy is his sister Caddy, for whom he feels love, and whose absence he mourns.



Benjy's lack of involvement with his surroundings (people and events), Caddy's pivotal role as the only loved person, and the bereavement that is born from his sister's loss, make of Benjy an entity whose main purpose is to experience grief, more than a character itself. Let's examine Faulkner's comments to Jean Stein on the subject of Benjy:

“You can't feel anything for Benjy because he doesn't feel anything. He was a prologue.... He serves his purpose and is gone.... He recognizes tenderness and love though he could not have named them, and it was the threat to tenderness and love that caused him to bellow when he felt the change in Caddy. He no longer had Caddy; being an idiot he was not even aware that Caddy was missing. He knew only that something was wrong, which left a vacuum in which he grieved. He tried to fill that vacuum.” (Faulkner quoted by Matthews 79).

In this fragment Faulkner explicitly says that Benjy is not a character in the strictest sense but that he rather serves the purpose to show and recognize Caddy's love and its loss. However, he is not able to “name them”; that is, he is not able to vocalize a discourse that conveys his perception of love and his grief over the loss of it. Even more, Faulkner says that Benjy is not completely aware that Caddy is missing from his life and that she cannot be recovered, he is only able to intuitively recognize loss, a “vacuum” over which he grieves.

In "Appendix: Compson: 1699-1945" Faulkner claims that Benjy loved three things only:

“the pasture which was sold to pay for Candace's wedding and to send Quentin to Harvard, his sister Candace, firelight. Who lost none of them because he could not remember his sister but only the loss of her, and firelight was the same bright shape as going to sleep, and the pasture was even better sold than before because now he and TP could not only follow timeless along the fence the motions which it did not even matter to him were humanbeings swinging golfsticks (...)" (Faulkner n.pag.)

According to Faulkner's Appendix: Compson: 1699-1945<sup>16</sup>, Benjy loves three things only: the pasture, his sister, and firelight. However, Faulkner here claims that although Benjy has lost two out of these three loved things, he is unaware of having lost something due to his inability to remember neither his sister nor the ownership of the pasture. Nevertheless, I believe Benjy in fact does remember his sister; his ignorance lies instead in the inability to clearly distinguish past from present as it was discussed in the first chapter. This lack of distinction between past states and present ones does not mean that Benjy is oblivious to Caddy's absence, but rather that he experiences her bereavement in the distinctive manner of an idiot<sup>17</sup>.

Benjy's intuitive knowledge that something is missing can be recognized in his need to keep within his reach objects that belong or are somehow connected to Caddy: "Discussion of *The Sound and the Fury* has well established that Benjy primitively stabilizes his world by hoarding relics of Caddy after she leaves." (Matthews 81).

It is by "hording relics" that Benjy is able to stabilize, that is, to substitute the vacuum that is left by Caddy. Objects such as the slipper, the sight of a red fire, and the jimson weeds in his cemetery, allow him to supply for the loss of affection that was only fulfilled by his sister. Although these objects can have a calming effect, and can partially fill the vacuum of affection left by Caddy, the nature of Benjy's attachment to them asks that he must be in constant contact with them. As a result, the loss of Caddy is constantly echoed by the dispossession of the objects when they are taken away from him; usually by Luster who acts as the agent of such dispossession:

"The long wire came across my shoulder, and the fire went away. I began to cry.

Dilsey and Luster fought.

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<sup>16</sup> The reader is to remember that this fictional essay on the Compson's lineage was published in 1945, that is, sixteen year after the publication of *The Sound and the Fury* in 1929. Although it is termed "appendix", it is not an integral part of the novel, and as such, it should be approached tentatively and not as irrefutable textual evidence when discussing the novel. Moreover, although it adds new information to the Yoknapatawpha universe, it differs from the novel in some details.

<sup>17</sup> It is important to remark that Faulkner presents a fictional account of an idiot's experience, rather than the real workings of the mind of a mentally handicapped person.

“I seen you.” Dilsey said.” “Oho, I seen you.” She dragged Luster out of the corner, shaking him. “Wasn’t nothing bothering him, was they. You just wait till your pappy come home. I wish I was young like I use to be, I’d tear them years right off your head. I good mind to lock you up in that cellar and not let you go to that show tonight, I sho is”

“Ow, mammy.” Luster said. “Ow, mammy.”

I put my hand out to where the fire had been.

“Catch him.” Dilsey said. “Catch him back.”

My hand jerked back and I put it in my mouth and Dilsey caught me. I could still hear the clock between my voice. Dilsey reached back and hit Luster on the head. My voice was going loud every time. (...)

“Look in the pantry and tear a piece off of that rag hanging on the nail.” she said. “Hush, now. You don’t want to make your maw sick again, does you. Here, look at the fire. Dilsey make your hand stop hurting in just a minute. Look at the fire.” She opened the fire door. I looked at the fire, but my hand didn’t stop and I didn’t stop. My hand was trying to go to my mouth, but Dilsey held it. (...)

“Hush up.” Luster said. “You hush up. You want me to burn your other hand for you. You aint hurt. Hush up.”

“Here.” Dilsey said. “Stop crying, now.” She gave me the slipper, and I hushed.”  
(Faulkner 59-60)

In this fragment Benjy interacts with two objects that remind him of Caddy. The most prominent one is firelight, which warmth he appears to connect to Caddy’s love and affection. Additionally, throughout his monologue, Benjy remembers episodes where Caddy is perceived as having some physical traits similar to fire. For example “Her hair was like fire, and little points of fire were in her eyes ...” (Faulkner 72). The other object is Caddy’s slipper; which due to its constant contact with Caddy’s body, is perceived by Benjy as having a strong connection to Caddy herself. Benjy’s attachment to these objects is born from distinguishing only the minutest

gap and difference between the firelight and the slipper to Caddy herself; due to the similarities he perceives between her and firelight and the close proximity that once existed between Caddy's body and the slipper, he is able to use these objects as partial substitution for his sister. Nevertheless, although in Benjy's mind these objects are very close to being Caddy herself, they are still different.

It is the difference between firelight and Caddy that burns Benjy, thus reminding him that firelight is not his sister, but only a substitution. Although the firelight might somehow contain the presence of his sister, Caddy cannot be retrieved from it. This is seen when Benjy tries to reach for the fire after Luster has taken it away. He is burnt from the fire's alien, destructive properties, that is, the heat fire emanates is not the same as the emotional warmth Caddy gives Benjy: "The objects can neither substitute fully for Caddy nor reappropriate her presence; they derive meaning only as they embody Caddy as already dying from the plenitude of full presence." (Matthews 82).

The realization of the object's inability to substitute Caddy can be seen in Benjy's unusual indifference to firelight after he has burned his hand and he has felt that it cannot reappropriate Caddy. Dilsey, attempting to calm him down orders him to "look at the fire" (Faulkner 59), however, Benjy is not eased from his (physical/emotional) pain by the firelight as he usually is; although he looks at it, he is not able to stop hurting and crying: "I looked at the fire, but my hand didn't stop and I didn't stop." (Faulkner 59). However, he is relieved from pain once he is given Caddy's slipper and can touch and feel it in his hands. His reaction to it is the common positive reaction he experiences in relation to these objects "She gave me the slipper, and I hushed" (Faulkner 60), because the difference between Caddy and the object has not been activated in the slipper's case, thus Benjy is able to fill the void left by Caddy's absence with her slipper.

### **Motherless children.**

A number of critics have recognized Caddy's role to supply her brothers with the love their self-pitying mother cannot feel or show to her children. Most acutely in Benjy's case, Caddy symbolizes motherly love and the loss of such love. Since their childhood, Caddy symbolically assumes a role as Benjy's mother. In this sense, by assuming the responsibility

alongside Dilsey to care for her for Benjy; Caddy poses a foil to Caroline's lack of maternal behavior towards her children. Caddy, in an attempt to care and provide love for her youngest brother, adopts the motherly role that her mother is not able to fulfill. Let us examine the following fragments:

“Remember to mind Dilsey, now.” He said behind us. I leaned my face over where the supper was. It steamed up on my face.

“Let them mind me tonight, Father.” Caddy said.

“I wont.” Jason said. “I’m going to mind Dilsey.”

“You’ll have to, if Father says so.” Caddy said. “Let them mind me, Father.”

“I wont.” Jason said. “I wont mind you”

“Hush.” Father said. “You all mind Caddy, then. When they are done, bring them up the back stairs, Dilsey.”

“Yes, sir.” Dilsey said.

“There.” Caddy said. “Now I guess you’ll mind me” (Faulkner 24)

“He cut up all Benjy’s dolls.” Caddy said. “I’ll slit his gizzle”

“Candance.” Father said.

“I will.” Caddy said. “I will.” She fought. Father held her. She kicked at Jason (...)

“Stop that.” Father said. “Do you want to make Mother sick in her room.”

Caddy stopped. “He cut up all the dolls Maury—Benjy and I made.” Caddy said. “He did it just for meanness.”

“I didn’t.” Jason said. He was sitting up, crying. “I didn’t know they were his. I just thought they were some old papers.”

“You couldn’t help but know.” Caddy said. “You did it just ”

“Hush.” Father said. “Jason.” He said.

“I’ll make you some more tomorrow.” Caddy said.

“We’ll make a lot of them. Here, you can look at the cushion, too.”” (Faulkner 65)

The first episode takes place the night of Damuddy’s funeral. When Jason III comes to make sure the children will heed Dilsey’s orders and keep as quiet as possible, Caddy asks to be placed in charge of her brothers (“Let them mind me tonight, Father”). Caddy’s request on the surface might seem as the typical childish whim to be of some authority and importance to other children. However, I believe Caddy’s wish to be in charge also relates to her wish to care for her brothers and to use her authority in order protect Benjy. When she realizes that they are left to manage on their own, without adult supervision—Dilsey is too busy catering the funeral’s food, Caroline is having a depression bout and Jason III is taking care of the funeral’s guests—Caddy asks to fill the void that is left by trying to adopt a parent’s role; for example, later in the scene we read how she tries to convince Quentin to eat his food and her efforts to comfort Benjy.

The second fragment describes Caddy’s anger at Jason’s cruel behavior towards Benjy. Caddy attacks Jason because she realizes that he has destroyed Benjy’s dolls “just for meanness” (Faulkner 65).

In this episode, it is striking how Caddy functions as a foil to both her parents and Jason. Firstly, Caroline is as usually locked up in her room complaining from constant “sickness”. Due to her constant sickness, she is enabled to seclude herself from the family problems, namely, the recent realization that Benjy is mentally handicapped; we are to infer Benjy’s mental retardation has recently been discovered due to Caddy’s use of Benjy’s original name (“He cut up all the dolls Maury—Benjy and I made.”). Secondly, Jason III, like his wife, also tries to escape his parenting role by reminding his children that they are going “to make Mother sick in her room”.

His portrayal depicts how he desires, above all, peace and silence. This is depicted by his lack of concern over Jason's cruel behavior towards Benjy, his aim being mainly to subdue his children into silence. Lastly, Jason IV directs his frustration to his parent's indifference by acting cruelly towards the weakest member of the family. However, this cruelty can also be interpreted as jealousy over Caddy's love for Benjy. We can suppose his motivation for cutting up Benjy's dolls is a misdirected attempt to draw his sister's attention; thus, we are also reminded that Jason too suffers from his parents' borderline indifference.

Caddy acts as a foil for all three of them, because she is the only one who is able to show Benjy real, caring love. In contrast to her mother, she does not mourn and complain over Benjy's handicap: she accepts him the way he is. In contrast to her father, she is able to strongly care for Benjy rather than just remaining kind but indifferent. And in contrast to Jason, although she is also a victim of their mother's detachment, she is able to care for her too, and stop fighting once she is reminded of her sickness. Moreover, she is able to transform the void produced by her mother's indifference into love for her youngest brother. However, this episode reminds us that Caddy—in the same way as the slippers and the fire act as a substitute of her love for Benjy—is also a substitute for proper parental love. She is a child and as such, she cannot assume her parent's role and neither their duty; as we can see by her violent reaction to Jason, she is foremost a sister and a child.

### **Faulkner's women.**

The discussion about Faulkner's woman centers on how for the most part, he creates stereotyped woman characters. Irving Malin proposes that Faulkner fails to create meaningful and adequately complex portraits of women, because he “cannot adequately describe their feelings or see them as well-rounded individuals.” (Malin31) As a result of Faulkner's lack of understanding of the woman psyche, Malin proposes that he creates women who can be grouped into two main categories: the sexual woman and the asexual woman.

I believe that in Caddy's portrayal, we are hinted at more complex visualization of woman. If we were to follow Malin's nomenclature, Caddy would represent these two types in a mutually exclusive fashion depending on who is concerned: with Benjy she would resemble the asexual woman and in her relations with other men she would resemble the sexual woman.

Nevertheless, this polarization between the two types of woman does not withstand analysis. Caddy cannot be said to have a different psychological essence where Benjy is concerned and another where other males are concerned. Thus, it would be inexact to classify Caddy as either the asexual archetype or the sexual archetype. It is more likely that she is a character who defies this archetypal characterization, and that she is portrayed as having a greater psychological complexity. However, as it was pointed out in the first chapter: “Caddy is not a character but an idea, an obsession in the minds of her brothers, we cannot rightly be said to find out much at all about her. Caddy is "lost" psychologically (...) (Sundquist 24).

We are able to discover little about Caddy’s psyche because she is not a character but a number of personas constructed by her brothers. Thus, we know virtually nothing about how she acts and feels, and possess only secondhand knowledge of her as it is understood by Benjy, Quentin and Jason; moreover, to the novel’s readers not only is she “lost psychologically”, she is also psychologically irretrievable. However, the above discussion of Faulkner’s sexual and asexual woman archetypes does in fact shed light on the manner in which each brother perceives Caddy. This occurs because the Compson brothers understand women archetypally, that is as either sexual or asexual beings.

This one-dimensional perception and expectation of a woman’s nature, is at the root of the conflict between Caddy and her brothers: for the purposes of each brother, Caddy should embody the archetype of the asexual woman, and Caddy’s failure of being so becomes the causation for the loss of control the Compson brothers experiment.

### **The mother role.**

Benjy, for example, requires that Caddy fulfills a substitute maternal role. During his childhood and early adolescence, Caddy is able to fully provide for his affective needs. As a child, Caddy’s sexuality does not interfere with the maternal role that Benjy requires her to play. During this period, Caddy’s maternal instincts to protect and care for Benjy rule her actions: her main concern is her brother and her sexual drive does not yet interfere with her self-appointed role. Let us examine the following fragment:



“All right.” Caddy said. “Mother’s not coming in tonight.” She said. “So we still have to mind me.”

“Yes.” Dilsey said. “Go to sleep, now.”

“Mother’s sick.” Caddy said. “She and Damuddy are both sick.”

“Hush.” Dilsey said. “You go to sleep.”

The room went black, except the door. Then the door went black. Caddy said, “Hush, Maury” putting her hand on me. So I stayed hushed. We could hear us. We could hear the dark.

It went away, and Father looked at us. He looked at Quentin and Jason, then came and kissed Caddy and put his hand on my head.

“Is Mother very sick.” Caddy said.

“No.” Father said. “Are you going to take good care of Maury.”

“Yes.” Caddy said.

Father went to the door and looked at us again. Then the dark came back, and he stood black in the door, and then turned black again. Caddy held me and I could hear us all, and the darkness, and something I could smell (...) Then the dark began to go in smooth, bright shapes, like it always does, even when Caddy says that I have been asleep.”  
(Faulkner 75)

This fragment corresponds to the night of Damuddy’s funeral. Here, the same pattern that has been discussed above is repeated: Caddy is eager to fill the void left by Caroline’s absence, and to adopt a maternal role. By claiming that since their mother is not coming, they must obey her; Caddy explicitly demands and reinforces her maternal authority over her three siblings. Moreover, Jason III substantiates Caddy’s authority and duty to protect her brothers in his and his wife’s stead, by asking Caddy to “take good care of Maury”.

In this fragment, we are shown that Caddy is able to fulfill the maternal role she demands. She is able to comfort Benjy—who at this point in the plot is still referred to as Maury—in spite of his instinctive knowledge that death surrounds them: “Caddy held me and I could hear us all, and the darkness, and something I could smell (...) Then the dark began to go in smooth, bright shapes, like it always does, even when Caddy says that I have been asleep.” (Faulkner 75) Caddy’s love towards Benjy is able to successfully act as a buffer between him and his intuition that there is an unwanted energy among them, that is, death. Although he is able to smell death (“something I could smell”), Caddy’s love is able to surmount his discomfort, overcome this presence, and lull Benjy to sleep.

This fragment is one of the few instances where Benjy remembers Caddy’s love as free from the threat her sexuality poses to him. As an asexual mother figure, Caddy is able to provide for all of Benjy’s needs. She can do so, because during her childhood she is contented to fulfill Benjy’s affective needs, which at its time fulfills her own affective needs. However, as Caddy reaches puberty, she can no longer be contented only by a filial relationship to Benjy or Quentin. As she reaches sexual maturity, Caddy’s affective needs become more complex; she also craves for a sexual love.

This is where the root of the Benjy-Caddy conflict lies. Because Caddy’s needs are not asexual in nature; she cannot find fulfillment by being only a mother figure. I believe this is a fact that Benjy intuitively understands. However, I also believe he intuitively understands that Caddy’s love must be of his exclusive property and not shared with her lovers if she is to remain as his source of motherly love. To share her, implies necessarily to lose her; because if Caddy were to succeed in forming a real attachment to a man, she would have to leave the Compson household in order to create a household of her own, whereupon she will have to perform a maternal role with her own children. Thus, an offspring of her own necessarily means that she will have to relinquish the maternal role she has assumed for Benjy.

Although Caddy’s life does not unfold in this manner, the sexuality that Benjy fears brings in the end similar consequences for him. In Caddy’s search for the satisfaction of sexual love, she becomes pregnant with Quentin and is thus obliged to marry Herbert, and subsequently divorced by him. As a result, Benjy loses her loving presence forever. Thus, Benjy is driven

apart from Caddy due to her offspring. However, Benjy's loss brings forth no generation of new relationships: Caddy remains severed from both her brother and her own daughter.

The following fragment conveys an episode where Benjy's perception of Caddy's sexuality as a threat can be observed:

*"Benjy, Caddy said, Benjy. She put her arms around me again, but I went away. "What is it, Benjy." She said. "Is it this hat." She took her hat off and came again, and I went away.*

*"Benjy." she said. "What is it, Benjy. What has Caddy done."*

*"He dont like that prissy dress." Jason said. "You think you're grown up, dont you. You think you're better than anyone else, don't you. Prissy."*

*"You shut your mouth." Caddy said. "You little dirty beast. Benjy."*

*"Just because you are fourteen, you think you're grown up, dont you." Jason said. "You think you're something. Dont you."*

*"Hush, Benjy." Caddy said. "You'll disturb Mother. Hush."*

*But I didn't hush, and when she went away I followed, and she stopped on the stairs and waited and I stopped too.*

*"What is it, Benjy." Caddy said. "Tell Caddy. She'll do it. Try."*

*(...)*

*I went to the bathroom door. I could hear the water.*

*"Benjy." T.P. said downstairs.*

*I listened to the water.*

*I couldn't hear the water, and Caddy opened the door.*

“Why, Benjy.” She said. She looked at me and I went and she put her arms around me. “Did you find Caddy again.” She said. “Did you think Caddy had run away.” Caddy smelled like trees.” (Faulkner 40-42)

In this episode, Caddy is fourteen and Benjy is about ten. Caddy, who is already an adolescent, tries on some perfume to which Benjy reacts to badly. Apparently, the new smell unsettles Benjy acutely. After Caddy washes of the foreign smell, Benjy recognizes her usual scent (“Caddy smelled like trees”) and calms down.

Benjy is disturbed by the perfume’s foreign smell in Caddy’s body, because it obscures the smell he is used to, her natural scent which he connects to the smell of trees. In contrast, he appears to link the perfume’s scent to Caddy’s sexual bloom. This smell to him symbolizes the threat posed by Caddy’s sexual drive. Thus, Benjy appears to instinctually understand by using his sense of smell that Caddy’s sexual maturity will take her away from him. This thought, although cannot be voiced by Benjy himself, is hinted at by Caddy’s utterances: “Did you find Caddy again” and “Did you think Caddy had run away”.

To Benjy, the foreign perfume smell represents Caddy’s sexuality, which to him is a threatening and uncontrollable force. Benjy apprehends Caddy’s sexuality as something contrary to her motherly nature; as shown by the contrast he establishes between the tree scent which is related to nature, and the artificial perfume scent. However, Caddy’s sexuality is in no extent contrary to nature; it is as natural as the love she feels towards her brother. But, in virtue of its natural essence, Caddy’s sexuality is uncontrollable. In spite of Benjy’s tears, Caddy cannot repress it. Even though she can wash off the perfume which in Benjy’s mind stands as a sensual manifestation of his sister’s sexuality, she cannot obliterate her sexual nature.

Because Caddy’s sexuality cannot be repressed, it becomes the uncontrollable force that will cause Benjy to lose his sister, thus creating a vacuum in place of the love that she once provided.

### **The Compson brothers.**

For both Quentin and Jason, Caddy's sexuality is also deemed an uncontrollable force that brings forth loss. However, what is lost by each of them is quite different from Benjy's loss. For Quentin and Jason, Caddy does not represent love but rather more complex ideas—they identify Caddy to the loss of social constructs; morality in Quentin's case and prosperity in Jason's case—that are beyond Benjy's understanding. Nevertheless, due to space constriction, in this thesis we will only be able to analyze and interpret how Quentin extrapolates Caddy's sexuality as the uncontrollable force that causes loss. In this manner, we will be able to provide a more in depth interpretation of this phenomenon. However, as it was hinted in the first chapter, this apprehension is shared also by Jason: like Quentin, he consciously believes that the losses he suffers, namely, the failure to reach economic prosperity, are caused by the uncontrollable force which is presented by Caddy's sexuality.

### **Quentin's moral standards.**

To Quentin, Caddy represents the failure to sustain the moral standards he holds above everything else. These are such a fundamental part of how he understands the world, that he is unable come to terms with her sister's transgressions of them:

“And I will look down and see my murmuring bones and the deep water like wind, like a roof of wind, and after a long time they cannot distinguish even bones upon the lonely and inviolate sand.” (Faulkner 80)

This fragment is representative of Quentin's thoughts about death. He believes that the only way to escape the horror of Caddy's sexual promiscuity—which is for him the biggest transgression a woman can commit—is by committing suicide. Thus, to him is more acceptable to put an end to his existence, rather than living with the knowledge that his sister has broken the moral values to which he abides.

For him, death is the ultimate purification. The metaphor “they cannot distinguish even bones upon the lonely and inviolate sand” conveys the idea of death as a purified state: by dying,

all the thoughts that torture him will be disintegrated; that is, only by becoming nothingness, he will be purified.

### **Morality: reverting to the antebellum South.**

Quentin's moral standards are aligned not to his own epoch, but rather they remount to the past; a past that does not correspond to Quentin's own experiences but rather to his southern heritage. This disparity, that is, Quentin's moral identification to a set of values that do not longer hold in the times he lives in, creates an insurmountable gap between the moral rules he upholds and Caddy's morality.

Sundquist writes the following about the relationship between Faulkner's fiction and the antebellum South:

“ (...) the estrangement of present from past is absolutely central to the Southern experience and often creates the pressured situation in which the past becomes an ever more ghostly and gloriously imposing model to the same extent that (. . .) it cannot be recaptured, relived, or even clearly remembered.” (Sundquist 130)

Quentin Compson is one of the southerners described here, who have been seduced by the “ghostly and gloriously imposing model” of the antebellum. Due to this idealization of The Old South; he invests his identity with the moral system abided by the antebellum south society. Furthermore, Quentin abides to an idealized construct of the antebellum moral system. As a result, he finds himself estranged from the society to which he actually belongs. For example, at Harvard, he is continuously tortured by his friends' conversations about sex and women: “Shreve said if he's got no better sense than to chase after little dirty sluts and I said Did you ever have a sister? Did you? Did you?” (Faulkner 78). A trivial comment such as this, since it relates to people whose values differ from his own—such as Caddy—triggers his disgust, and painful and confusing thoughts about his sister's sexuality.

### **Defiance of the traditional southern morality.**

Because Quentin upholds antebellum moral expectations for Caddy and himself, he cannot come to terms with her sexual practices. Above all, he expects Caddy to comply with the patriarchal southern standards for women; she fails to do so, because she practices pre-marital

intercourse, does not act submissively to the male sex, and in short does not resemble the archetype of the asexual, innocent and pure southern woman. Caddy, unlike Quentin, behaves more accordingly to their own times. For instance, she does not behave submissively to the male sex. Even as a child, she shows assertiveness by defying Quentin:

““Your mommer going to whip you for letting your dress wet”

“She’s not going to do any such thing.” Caddy said.”

“How do you know.” Quentin said.

“That’s all right how I know.” Caddy said. “How do you know.”

“She said she was.” Quentin said. “Besides, I’m older than you.”

“I’m seven years old.” Caddy said. “I guess I know.”

“I’m older than that.” Quentin said. “I go to school. Dont I, Versh.”

“I’m going to school next year.” Caddy said. “When it comes. Aint I, Versh.” (Faulkner 18)

This fragment shows the female/male rivalry dynamic that exists between Caddy and Quentin since their childhood. On the one hand, Quentin demands that Caddy should respect him because he is male and older. On the other hand, Caddy rebels against the submissive role Quentin expects her to fulfill. When Quentin asks Caddy how does she know that their mother won’t punish her for having wetted her dress, Caddy replies that she just does, and challenges him by asking the same: “How do you know”. Quentin, who claims to know better, is angered at Caddy’s insistence that she knows better than him. Moreover, Quentin is angered at Caddy’s defiance and lack of submissiveness: she pays no heed to his seniority or (according to traditional southern values) his sexual superiority, and considers herself his equal. This rivalry between the siblings is also voiced by Caroline:

“I always told your father that they were allowed too much freedom, to be together too much. When Quentin started to school we had to let her go the next year, so that she could be

with him. She couldn't bear for any of you to do anything she couldn't. It was vanity in her, vanity and false pride." (Faulkner 261.)

She, like Quentin, believes that Caddy improperly challenges male supremacy; she acts the same way as her brothers when she should behave with proper female modesty. In short, because Caddy lacks the submissive behavior that a woman must show men, she transgresses the traditional social order.

However, Caddy's sexuality, more than her challenging attitude to male dominion, is apprehended by Quentin as the severest offense to his traditional moral values. The fact that Caddy has irrepressible sexual drives inspires true horror in Quentin: "*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 the faces it's gone now and I'm sick*" (Faulkner 112).

As it was discussed in the first chapter, whether Caddy says this or Quentin imagines it, it is uncertain. However, the fact remains that Quentin fears Caddy's sexuality as an uncontrollable force that drives her to have intercourse in spite of her unwillingness. This "something terrible at night" cannot be controlled.

Moreover, Caddy's sexuality is apprehended by Quentin as an uncontrollable force because he himself is not able to put a stop to it, neither by stopping Caddy nor by just letting it go. Quentin suggests the incest idea to Caddy, because he desperately wants to believe that by lying about who fathered Caddy's baby, they can together somehow achieve purification: "*Only you and me then amid the pointing and the horror walled by clean flame*" (Faulkner 117). Quentin, desperately trying to deny that Caddy has been in a number of sexual relationships, suggest that by telling their family that they have committed incest, somehow they will be purified from the taint that is Caddy's promiscuity ("walled by clean flame").

However, because he cannot free himself from the knowledge that her sister is driven by what he considers to be almost "evil urges"—the "something at night" that grins at Caddy—and neither can he repress her sister's sexuality, he is dragged by this uncontrollable force into deep emotional instability. As a result, Quentin's irrational rationalization perceives Caddy's sexuality as the canker that corrupts and debases not only her, but him also. For this reason, Caddy's



sexuality is understood by him as an uncontrollable force that bares and desecrates all morality ideals.

## CONCLUSIONS

Firstly, I would like to remark how the writing process dragged me to unexpected places. During the initial stages, when I was researching and conceptualizing the many scattered ideas that bloomed from every single page I read; there were many issues that I failed to consider. However, once the typing got started, some highly relevant but un contemplated issues were made evident.

More concretely, when I started writing I thought I would focus chiefly on the uncontrollable forces phenomenon that lies at the core of Faulkner's fiction. And I did. However, as I started articulating my ideas on how Caddy's sexuality represented the most important expression of these forces, another issue unexpectedly sprung forward: what exactly is Caddy?

Obviously, anyone who has read The Sound and the Fury—that is, anyone who has read the novel more than one time—will be able to answer that she is one of the novel's main characters and that she has three brothers. Nevertheless, the more I pondered over this issue, the less certain I was of this: whether Caddy is a character in the novel to the same extent as her brothers. The outcome is that this issue became as important a topic as the uncontrollable forces phenomenon.

These are my findings. First of all, the initial suspicion about Caddy was justified. I do not dare to deny her character status, however, there is definitely something particular about her. I believe that more than a character as such, she embodies an idea: she is a symbol. She is the symbol at the nucleus of The Sound and the Fury's meaning. As such, Caddy symbolizes absence and loss itself: absence of love, of parenting, of success, of morality, etc.

Moreover, it is important to stress that all the knowledge we obtain about Caddy as a character is derived from Benjy, Quentin or Jason. In this sense, she exists only as obsession created by her brothers. For this reason, we cannot discover a great deal about her as a character: she is a construct of three different narrators. The question isn't which

narrator are we to believe in, but rather what the construct of each narrator tells us about each character. E.g. what do we learn about Benjy from Benjy's Caddy?

Now that I have given some answers about Caddy, we can discuss the uncontrollable forces phenomena. As I mentioned before, this is related to how Caddy's sexuality is perceived by her brothers as an uncontrollable force that overrides their actions and more importantly their volition.

Firstly, I have to remark that the uncontrollable force does not correspond to Caddy's sexuality; it corresponds to Caddy as a sexual symbol.

I understand symbols as defined by Ricoeur, that is, as an amalgam of two discursive elements: a linguistic and a non-linguistic one. The non-linguistic aspect of the symbol—Ricoeur proposes—is linked to our sacred experiences. The sacred element is not necessarily connected to religion; moreover, it is connected to the most basic elements of life. In this case, female sexuality.

According to Ricoeur, a sacred element cannot be reduced to words. We can try, but we will fail. From my point of view, the impossibility to linguistically explain a symbol is at the core of the novel. We are told the same story three times. Every time, the character-narrator tries to explain what happened and why did it happen. Why was Benjy castrated? Why Quentin did kill himself? What happened to Jason? The answer always reverts back to Caddy as a sexual symbol.

I have tried to give account of it through words. However, I am not convinced by the answers. How the uncontrollable forces phenomenon is expressed in the novel? By Caddy as a symbol of female sexuality. I have analyzed how this is seen by Quentin and Benjy as the cause for the absence of something in their lives: morality and love respectively. Additionally, I can add that female sexuality is uncontrollable because it is natural and as such irrepressible. However, I believe this subject has great potential to be developed further.

For me, this investigation work is a draft which requires extensive polishing. It requires more investigation and a deeper development of the ideas that are presented

here. However, I do believe that it this work is a contribution—however small—to Faulkner studies. One aspect that I have noticed about the extensive literature on Faulkner is that his insight are highly esteemed. I think we need to learn to distrust these insights as much as we distrust the narrators in The Sound and the Fury. Because Faulkner has discussed his oeuvre extensively, critics and readers tend to remount back to the source. Nevertheless, we must not forget the text's autonomy: there is only so much Faulkner can say about his works, the rest is discovered by ourselves. This is something I have endeavored to do in my interpretation of The Sound and the Fury: I have listened to the author's opinion, but I also have trusted my own.

Lastly, in order to produce literary criticism about Faulkner's novels we need—besides the essential southern dialect dictionary—to approach cautiously the text's plurivocity. Faulkner's works hold so many different levels of interpretation, that one must approach the book carefully, with fixed goals. Otherwise, it is hard to decide which the object of study to tackle.

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