**Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)**
***A Peer Reviewed (Refereed) International Journal***
Impact Factor 6.8992 (ICI) http://www.rjelal.com;
Email:editorrjelal@gmail.com ISSN:2395-2636 (P); 2321-3108(O)

**Vol.8.Issue 3. 2020**
**(July-Sept)**

RESEARCH ARTICLE

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD SERIAL NUMBER INDIA
2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

# THE SIGNIFICATION(S) OF NOTHING: A DERRIDEAN READING OF WILLIAM FAULKNER'S *THE SOUND AND THE FURY*

**Dr. JIJU VARGHESE JACOB**
Asst. Professor of English, Govt. Arts and Science College, Elanthoor, Pathanamthitta (Dist.), Kerala
E-mail: jijumulamootil@gmail.com

**Dr. JIJU VARGHESE JACOB**

Article Received:13/06/2020
Article Accepted: 12/07/2020
Published online:17/07/2020
DOI: 10.33329/rjelal.8.3.1

**Abstract**
*The Sound and the Fury* is a classic specimen in Faulkner's linguistic experimentations. Faulkner's experimentations with language are inextricably associated with his conviction that, maugre the claims of theories of literary representation; language cannot adequately represent its object, for there is no actual or true object to be represented. *The Sound and the Fury* supports this view by presenting Caddy, the object of her brothers' language, as no actual character. The very fact that *The Sound and the Fury* does not present Caddy as a character with a substantial and identical being demonstrates that Faulkner was concerned less with what is represented through language, than with how language embodies its object. This paper attempts to read *The Sound and the Fury* exclusively from a Derridean stance which necessitates the construction of a metatext where the entire enterprise takes on the character of a mission. Whilst the word "idiot" carries metaphorical value in Shakespeare's play, it is wholly real in Faulkner's novel in the character of Benjy. The novel assumes an elevated fictional status despite the medium-message dichotomy. From a deconstructionist standpoint, the novel can be deemed a diffusion of meaning along a series of signifiers. This view, while bringing about a revolution in the field of literary semiotics, challenges the notion of the determinacy of meaning in the text. The medium of the novel and its message assume a contrapuntal relationship providing a unique reading experience.

**Key-words**: supplement, play, metatext, polyvalence, dichotomy, signifier

*The Sound and the Fury* occupies the central position in Faulkner's oeuvre. There exists a distinct correlation between the full blossoming of Faulkner's creativity, and the conception of this complex novel about the decline of an aristocratic southern family. The story is narrated in four separate sections, bearing four dates: April 7, 1928, June 2, 1910, April 6, 1928, and April 8, 1928 respectively. Each section focuses on a single narrator. First three sections are given to three Compson brothers: Benjy, Quentin and Jason. The fourth section is given to Dilsey, the black servant of the family. The four-fold division, the strategy of having four narrators is designed to throw light on the central problematic of the novel from multiple angles of vision. The contradictions, thrown up by the transition from the vanishing mores of the landed aristocracy to the emerging period values of cash nexus, impart specificity to the central problematic.

The broad pattern of critical response that *The Sound and the Fury* has evoked since its publication in 1929 reveals a marked involvement with the exploration of the metaphysics of time, the theme of decay of a great southern family, the interaction of nature and nurture, the tragedy of two lost women, and the tension between self-love and self-sacrificial love. Some critical studies have dwelt on the mythological resources that the novelist has tapped in this novel. Some other studies draw attention to the Bergsonian and Joycean influence on the novel. Mostly the critical perspective on the novel partakes of the subjective tendencies of literary humanism and 20th century literary modernism. While the former attaches singular significance to the intending author who embodies an empirical view of the representation of reality in fiction, the latter by violating the accepted conventions and properties, not only of art but of social discourse, sets out to create ever-new artistic forms and styles, shocking the sensibilities of the conventional reader in the process. The present study makes a palpable departure from both these approaches by anatomising the text in a conceptual, relational, and oppositional frame.

*The Sound and the Fury* occupies a preeminent position among 20th century novels and along with *Absalom, Absalom!* is rightly regarded as one of the greatest fictional works of the last century. Philip M. Weinstein says, "*The Sound and the Fury*, *Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *Go Down, Moses* have enjoyed canonical status for some forty years now . . . Indeed, *The Sound and the Fury* has been . . . the supreme American novel for our century" (*Faulkner's Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns* 3). Melvin Backman, admiring the characterization of this novel, remarks that "[t]here are few passages in modern literature that compare with Mrs. Compson's monologue or the interior monologues of Jason in their terse power to render into life the mind and personality of a character" (13). Besides the motif of loss in the perspective of the central characters in each section, *The Sound and the Fury* focuses on themes associated to its disjointed structure, in addition to the concerns of race and gender.

Faulkner's conscious experimentations with language impart a distinctive quality to this novel. Recent critics are in agreement that the central concern of *The Sound and the Fury* is indeed language. At the award of the Nobel Prize to Faulkner, Gustaf Hellstrom remarked that "Faulkner is the great experimentalist among twentieth-century novelists. . . . [The] desire to experiment is revealed in his mastery, unrivalled among modern British and American novelists of the richness of the English language," confirming that Faulkner is best recognised for his mastery of language and his experimentations with the same (Hellstrom). His experimentations with language are closely linked to his conviction that, whatever be the claims of theories of literary representation, language cannot adequately represent its object, for there is no actual or true object to be represented. *The Sound and the Fury* upholds this view by depicting Caddy, the object of her brother's language, as no actual character. When Eric J. Sundquist says that Caddy is not a character but an idea, he is talking precisely from this point of view: ". . . 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 submerged to the point of invisibility" (10).

The way in which Faulkner shows Caddy in the scene where she climbs up a tree, being watched by her brothers and boy-servants symbolically shows that Faulkner conceived Caddy as an abstract idea rather than as a solid, physical persona. The novel's non-presentation of Caddy as a character who possesses a substantial and identical being demonstrates that Faulkner was preoccupied more with how language embodies its object than with what gets represented through language. So it might be fruitful to study how the Compson brothers' language represents its object (Caddy) in non-representational ways. This could also serve to reveal the means by which their narratives are made to expose the playful operation of their language.

The novel comprises four sections told by four different narrators, the three Compson brothers and one anonymous third-person narrator. Except for the third person narrator, the other three narrators attempt to represent Caddy Compson,

who had disappeared eighteen years ago. Despite all their efforts; perhaps, owing to their limited perspectives and acutely personalised perceptions, the brothers do not succeed in their representations. Whilst the novel progresses, the narratives of her brothers complicate Caddy's image rather than bind the fragmented images of her, resulting in their failure to present a consistent picture. In Quentin's narrative Caddy appears as a lover and a little Italian girl; Jason's narrative fixes her image as a bitch, along with her daughter, and in Benjy's inchoate narrative Caddy is represented as a loving mother. The failure of representation is attested by Faulkner's statement that in *The Sound and the Fury* he wrote the same story four times and he failed four times (*Faulkner at Nagano* 105). More than any other critic, Andre Bleikasten attaches the greatest weight to Faulkner's remark on *The Sound and the Fury* as a failure. He surmises that Faulkner's failure was crucial for him to develop a realisation of the potential of language. To quote Bleikasten,

> . . . whenever he (Faulkner) was questioned about *The Sound and the Fury*, he referred to it in terms of "failure." True, he considered it "the most gallant, the most magnificent failure," but a failure it was all the same. There had been others before; with this book, however, Faulkner met failure in a deeper, more inescapable sense—failure as the very destiny of all artistic endeavor. What then became evident to him was the sobering truth that, as Samuel Beckett put it, "to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail," and that "failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion." Had Faulkner remained a writer of talent only, he would never have reached that awareness. Less paradoxically than it might seem, it was when the powers of language appeared to be within his grasp as never before that he came to recognize the *necessity* of failure. (*The Most Splendid Failure: Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury* 48)

As Bleikasten suggests, Faulkner's loss in *The Sound and the Fury* guided him to admit the potential of language, which in turn made him an authentic artist. From this standpoint, his failure was quite a 'providential fall,' in Miltonic phrase.

The self-reflexiveness of language, or to put it differently, the metalinguistic aspect of language is implied in Bleikasten's further comments on his concept of "the powers of language":

> Hence an increased self-reflexiveness. Novels tend to turn into extended metaphors for the hazardous game of their writing. . . . Instead of following a logical sequential pattern, events are subordinated to the process of the fictitious discourse itself as it takes shape, or fails to do so—unfolding, infolding, progressing, regressing, turning in on itself, spiraling, endlessly doubling back on itself in a never-completed quest for form and meaning. (51)

Speaking of this in terms of *The Sound and the Fury*, the Compson brothers fall short in representing their sister Caddy. However, their failure shows the hypocrisy and futility of representation, the unproductiveness of the attempt to reinstate the presence of the signified through language in Derridean terms. It also illustrates that the nature of language actually affects mainly the playfulness of linguistic signs. A comprehensive explanation shows that the brothers' failure of representation reveals that what initiates language is not the presence of something, but the absence of something whose being is always understood "as already disappearing; . . . already the trace that is an origin [of language]"; therefore, any attempt to restore the presence of the signified through language is doomed to failure (*The Play of Faulkner's Language* 64). And the brothers' language, while pursuing Caddy, the ever-retreating signified, displays only its playful modes of operation such as supplementing, "unfolding, infolding, progressing, regressing, turning in on itself, spiraling, endlessly doubling back on itself." In the sense that Caddy performs as the ever-retreating signified in the Compson brothers' narratives, Andre Bleikasten describes Caddy "an empty center, a center which one might paradoxically call eccentric, or define—to borrow a

phrase from Wallace Stevens—as a 'center on the horizon,' . . ." (51).

Derrida's *Of Grammatology* rehearses a moment in Rousseau's "Essay on the Origin of Languages" that imagines the incursion of gesture into the immediacy of love. Rousseau believes that love invents the gesture of drawing: "How she could say things to her beloved, who traced his shadow with such pleasure! What sounds might she use to render this movement of the magic wand" (234)? The drawing and speaking make up original articulation—an endeavor to signify within the moment of full pleasure and presence. Derrida methodically exposes Rousseau's own admission of the unfeasibility of such concurrence, and yet for the moment, he reiterates Rousseau:

> The movement of the magic wand that traces with so much pleasure does not fall outside of the body. Unlike the spoken or written sign, it does not cut itself off from the desiring body of the person who traces or from the immediately perceived image of the other. It is of course still an image which is traced at the tip of the wand, but an image that is not completely separated from the person it represents; what the drawing draws is almost present in person in his shadow. The distance from the shadow or from the wand is almost nothing. She who traces, holding, handling, now the wand, is very close to being the other *itself*, close by a minute difference—visibility, spacing, death—is undoubtedly the origin of the sign and the breaking of immediacy. (*OG* 234)

Benjy is bent upon some of the objects in his collection just because they are cut off from the body of his beloved Caddy. He unwittingly preserves the substance that has helped him to describe her body for him. In her absence Caddy also 'becomes' the fragrance of trees; such a relationship stretches the rule of selection operating here, for a scent is both part of and already different from the body. It seems to remain and drift between absolute presence and absence. Benjy remembers the mirror (which by 1928 has faded into a dark spot on the wall) for similar reasons. The outlines of childhood pass into a not quite present, not quite absent state when they become visible in the mirror: "we could see Caddy fighting in the mirror and and Father put me down and went into the mirror and fought too . . . Father brought Caddy to the fire. They were all out of the mirror" (*SF* 79). The mirror is the location where "visibility, spacing, death" signals the "breaking of immediacy."

Benjy's reaction to loss with the barest of articulations assumes relevance when considering the fact that he has hardly emerged into time. And yet the time presents dead spaces in the very nucleus of Benjy's relics. The objects can neither substitute fully for Caddy nor reclaim her presence; they assume meaning only as they embody Caddy as already dying from the abundance of full presence. The firelight 'contains' Caddy, but when Benjy reaches into it to recover her, he burns his hand in its strange, vicious difference. Likewise, Benjy links the fragrance of trees contradictorily—both with Caddy's virginal purity and with the advent of her sexual betrayal. That she always "smelled like trees" renders the illogicality of natural innocence and natural maturation sensible to Benjy's nostrils. In the core of his memory of her full presence is already the trace of her disappearance. And when Caddy steps into the mirror she does so to fight—to flee the mirror herself or to drive another out of it. Benjy's flawed efforts to defuse grief begin the crisis of articulation that informs the novel. This idea is revitalized by Derrida's discussion of the trace at the origin and of the unavoidable deathliness of the supplement.

Benjy has fully surrendered Caddy to the difference of signs, once he commits himself to filling the void. Consequently, some of his souvenirs become much more subjective designates of loss: the jimson weed, its bottle, and the narcissus—for all the symbolic traits evident to the reader—do not enthuse Benjy. They possess no essential meaning. Interestingly, this arbitrary situation of one presence for a first, more natural presence remains at the implied centre of *The Sound and the Fury*. It is quite ordinary in psychological discussions of the novel to recognize Mrs. Compson's aloofness and detachment as the root of the brothers' sickly

fixation with their sister, who voluntarily takes on the responsibility of surrogate maternity. But we might also consider Mrs. Compson herself as a shadow of whatever the total plenitude would have been. For Derrida, such a site cannot survive, for the moment it has been signified it is no longer: at the absolute origin one discovers only the architrace. To the extent that *The Sound and the Fury* is about the relationship between the felt loss of plenitude and the necessity to substitute, one might tend to describe Caddy's role in the novel as the architrace. She is what she is, that is, a supplement.

Unquestionably, Faulkner situates Caddy at the centre of *The Sound and the Fury*. Linda W. Wagner asserts that "she is central to all the Benjy section, much of the Quentin section, and then—in the form of her daughter Quentin, but in her own voice—much of the Jason section and Part IV. Like Addie Bundren in *As I Lay Dying*, Caddy motivates nearly all the action of the novel" ("Language and Act: Caddy Compson" 108). The significance of her centrality is attested by Faulkner's claim that *The Sound and the Fury* is about Caddy. In an interview, Faulkner said that the novel sprang from a single stirring image, a little girl climbing a tree with her muddy drawers. In the novel, the little girl is embodied through Caddy. The "single stirring image" is realised through the scene in which, in the evening of Damuddy's funeral, the child Caddy climbs up a pear tree to see into the parlour window while her brothers and the negro boys are watching her on the ground beneath. Faulkner went on to say that like this, the character Caddy motivated him to write the novel; hence, *The Sound and the Fury* was about Caddy: "To me she was the beautiful one, she was my heart's darling. That's what I wrote the book about and I used the tools which seemed to me the proper tools to try to tell it, try to draw the picture of Caddy" (*FU* 6).

Thus, Faulkner employs the Compson brothers, Quentin, Jason, and Benjy, as "the tools" to "draw the picture of Caddy" by allowing her to become the primary concern of her brothers. In an interview with Jean Stein Faulkner says, "It began with a mental picture. I didn't realize at the time it was symbolical. The picture was of the muddy seat of a little girl's drawers in a pear tree, where she could see through a window where her grandmother's funeral was taking place and report what was happening to her brothers on the ground below" ("William Faulkner: An Interview" 44).

To say that Caddy is dominant in the narrative of Benjy is to state the obvious. Benjy's consciousness orbits around several events of the past and of the present in which Caddy climbs up a tree on the funeral day of their Damuddy while the other children are watching her from below. Benjy is waiting by the gate for Caddy to return from school; Caddy gets wet in the branch. On Caddy's wedding day Benjy gets so high that he does not stop yelling; Benjy reacts to the sound "caddie" that golfers yell out. In short, the events which fill Benjy's consciousness all relate to Caddy. All through his narrative, Benjy repeats the broken images of the events as they take place in his mind irrespective of the chronological order. Benjy, having spent his childhood in the compassionate presence of Caddy, who supplanted Mrs. Compson, the egotistical and punitive mother, can't free himself from the wound of the poignant moment when he realized that the place of Caddy remained a void. Benjy endured excruciating pain when Caddy disappeared eighteen years earlier. Therefore, he constantly tries to recover the presence of Caddy, and he conveys his grief by crying or yelling as and when he experiences her absence. In this sense, all the relevant events in Benjy's life revolve around Caddy; she is Benjy's raison d'être.

That Caddy is the predominant motif in his drowning himself is revealed in Quentin's extremely sensitive and philosophical narrative. Throughout the section, Quentin shows a compulsive concern with Caddy's loss of virginity. The fact that Caddy lost her virginity to Dalton Ames, an outsider, makes Quentin recognize that he is a "failure as both brother avenger and brother seducer in relation to his sister Candace" (Irwin, "Quentin and Caddy" 59). Quentin's consciousness on the last day of his life is saturated with events relating to Caddy's loss of virginity, including his own fight with Dalton Ames, his attempt to commit suicide with Caddy, and Caddy's marriage to Herbert Head. The concrete events of the present day, June 2, 1910, are subdued to the stimulating memories of past episodes that

spontaneously break into Quentin's consciousness. Even though he wishes to erase his memories of the painful events, Quentin is forced to relive them. His deep-rooted frustration is manifested in the unruly movement of his mind that grudgingly retraces the past events. Caddy is undeniably the object of this deep-rooted frustration.

In Jason's narrative too, Caddy turns out to be at the centre, though she rarely appears in the section. Caddy dictates Jason's consciousness as a good source of income plus the cause of his exasperation in the person of her daughter Quentin. Further, in Sergei Chakovsky's words,

> Jason cannot help coming back to Caddy again and again in his story—she is not only his guilty conscience, but the secret object of his envy and admiration. Even in terms of enterprise Caddy by far surpasses Jason. She never fails to astound him with her resolve and impudence and with her absolute contempt for Compsonian mores, of which he himself is incapable. (298)

But more significantly, Caddy controls Jason's consciousness as the object of his rage and revulsion. Jason is livid because of Caddy, since he adamantly believes that he has lost the banking job promised by Herbert Head, Caddy's fiancé, as a result of her divorce. Jason remains embroiled in his memory of Caddy owing to this sense of loss and hurt.

Thus it becomes rather clear that Caddy becomes the focus of her brothers' consciousnesses and the brothers' accounts. However, in the brothers' accounts Caddy is simultaneously the focal and the ever-receding point. This implies that in the novel Caddy is not presented as herself, but depicted only in relation to the contextual network. Since it is drawn into different verbal milieus from one section to another, woven into different textures, it is endowed with ever-renewed significances. In this sense, Caddy is a sign, rather than a significant being to be signified by signs. To put it differently, the meaning of Caddy is not an existent waiting to be signified by signs; on the other hand, the meaning is, as Derrida contends, made by "the indefinite referral of sign to sign" (*WD* 25). The understanding of language in its signifying function is shared by Faulkner and Derrida in this respect.

As regards Caddy's role as a sign in her brothers' narratives, it is remarkable that Caddy is a sign of Mrs. Compson, among others. There is a broad critical consensus that Mrs. Compson is the cause of the Compson family's downfall. For instance, Sally R. Page argues that the tragedy of the Compson family was the result of Mrs. Compson's utter failure as a mother: "The Compson family is dying because Mrs. Compson is incapable of loving or caring for her children; she is a total failure as a mother" (50). Moreover, Wagner explains the title *The Sound and the Fury* as the frantic cry of the Compson family pushed to the wall by Mrs. Compson's rejection of them: "Caroline's [Mrs. Compson's] punitive judgments, her banishment of both child and child's name, have led the family into the impasse that has no culmination—only further sound [of Benjy] and further rage and fury [of Jason's and Caroline's]" (116).

Entrapped in the past exploits of the Compsons, Mrs. Compson hardly comes to terms with the reality that the grandeur of the family is on the wane. Using Benjy as an excuse for her condition; she is then engrossed in a pathological self-contempt and shirks her responsibility for her children. Mrs. Compson's approach towards Benjy speaks volumes about her sheer inability to love her children, and her callousness. Once she understands that Benjy is an abnormal child, she harshly discards him. This becomes evident where Mrs. Compson changes the name of Benjy, who was initially named after her brother, Maury, to Benjamin. Furthermore, instead of giving more attention and love to her idiot child Benjy, she attempts to regulate his behaviour as if he were an ordinary child: "'Well, I don't want him [Benjy] carried, then.' Mother said. 'A five year old child. No, no. Not in my lap. Let him stand up' . . . 'Benjamin.' She [Mrs. Compson] said. 'Take that cushion away, Candace.' 'He'll cry.' Caddy said. 'Take that cushion away, like I told you.' Mother said. 'He must learn to mind'" (*SF* 62-63). Benjy takes in Mrs. Compson's stark indifference towards him; therefore, he cries and bellows whenever he senses her proximity. In Benjy's words,

> Then we quit eating and we looked at each other and we were quiet, and then we heard it again and I began to cry. 'What was that.' Caddy said. She put her hand on my hand. 'That was Mother.' Quentin said. The spoon came up and I ate, then I cried again. . . . 'Hush, now. ' Caddy said. I hushed and ate. Quentin wasn't eating, but Jason was. 'That was Mother.' Quentin said. (*SF* 30)

Mrs. Compson denies her love to all of her children except Jason, whom she identifies with her own people, the Bascombs. She condemns all her children but Jason, and proposes to her husband that he take the three children so that she and Jason can leave and start with a clean slate. Quentin's recollection of his childhood when he used to spend time with Caddy reading a book discloses his sense of abandonment by his mother. The book showed a picture of "a dark place into which a single weak ray of light came slanting upon two faces lifted out of the shadow" (*SF* 156). While this picture made Caddy furious, Quentin was immersed in worn out and desperate sentiments. He recollects, "I'd have to turn back to it until the dungeon was Mother herself she and Father upward into weak light holding hands and us lost somewhere below even them without even a ray of light" (157). The frantic cry of Quentin on the final day of his life reveals his deep feelings for his mother. Reflecting on his family, he says, "*Finished. Finished. Then we were all poisoned*' (95); *"if I'd just had a mother so I could say Mother. Mother* . . ." (156). Since Quentin deems Mrs. Compson no mother at all, he has acutely suffered the lack of his mother. From a psychological perspective, it can be inferred that Quentin's perverse fixation for Caddy was the offshoot of the vacuum created by his mother. That there is a failure of the mother at the core of a man's morbid mania for a particular woman is a commonplace assumption of classical psychology.

In place of her failed mother Caddy plays the surrogate mother to Quentin and Benjy. Their craving for motherly love is satiated by Caddy's emotional tenderness and energy. Mainly for Benjy she performs the responsibility of a dedicated nurse and protector through their entire infancy. Unlike Mrs. Compson, she never blames him; rather, she tries to teach him with a lot of patience and tolerance: "'What is it.' Caddy said. 'Did you think it would be Christmas when I came home from school. Is that what you thought. Christmas is the day after tomorrow. Santy Claus, Benjy. Santy Claus. Come on, let's run to the house and get warm'" (*SF* 14). Here, "Caddy is definitely a mother surrogate; it is she who replaced Mrs. Compson, the failing mother" (Bleikasten 78). However, Caddy's playing the surrogate mother is not without its share of tragic consequences. Among other things, it develops in her brothers, an unhealthy attachment towards her. For example, Caddy afflicts Benjy with tremendous pain of loss by leaving him, and she also tragically arouses Quentin's feeling for her, which ultimately leads him to commit suicide. But it must be borne in mind that it is Mrs. Compson's retreat from her motherhood that leads to Caddy enacting the surrogate mother. In this sense we can say that Mrs. Compson is in fact the origin of the tragedy. Thus, Mrs. Compson is the focal point of the brothers' narratives, standing behind Caddy. Mrs. Compson herself remains as a shadow of the absolute plenitude. For Derrida such a presence existing in the form of absolute plenitude, as claimed by Western metaphysics cannot exist. This is because the moment it has been signified it does not exist any longer and one discovers only the architrace at the absolute centre. We can interpret Caddy's role in the novel as the architrace to the point that the novel is about the relationship between the felt loss of plenitude and the inevitability to substitute. Caddy is what she is, a supplement. The metaphysical quest for presence as the absolute centre of all beings is refuted by the ways in which Caddy serves as the centre in the novel.

The analysis of Caddy's role in her brothers' narratives assumes relevance in this context. In the novel Caddy does not exist as completely present, although she functions as the focus of her brothers' language. Consequently, the brothers' efforts to bring back the presence of Caddy through their language end up in nothing more than the creation of three different stories. From the simple feelings of Benjy to the dense and involved passions of the introvert Quentin, and the brutal aggression of Jason, these narratives deconstruct our stereotyped,

linear, and chronological notions of the novelistic discourse.

It could be a fruitful endeavour to focus on the brothers individually in order to bring out the nuances in their narratives that construct Caddy in quite unique terms. The Derridean views of language are pivotal to such a reading since they largely contribute to our linguistic analysis of the text. In Faulkner's view, the nature of language bans the illusion that any original idea, image, or sense can be represented in words. On the other hand, *The Sound and the Fury* reveals, the fun of writing is in the play of failures, in the indefiniteness, deferment, and replication of texts. The fiction takes sharp turns, from resolution and completion so as to extend its life. Therefore, the novel makes two types of movement towards silence, the first gesture towards the refusal to speak, the other towards intentional alterations of the narrative's self-assurance.

A theoretical analysis of Benjy's section makes it clear that, here, signification is conceived as a sequence of signs. Benjy, (Benjamin), one of the four Compson children, is an idiot. He is the narrator in the first section of *The Sound and the Fury*. It is dated April 7, 1928 which is also his 33rd birthday. He spends most of the day, in the company of his keeper, the young black servant Luster. For most of the day, his undeveloped mind remains immersed in recollections of his own childhood, and of his sister Caddy. These incoherent memories are the stuff his disorderly discourse is made of. Its fundamental order becomes apparent when we get used to the grammar of his primeval insight.

Introducing Benjy as one of the protagonists of the novel is a solid strategy, tracing back to the ancient custom of primitive magico-religious thinking, and the mythical/literary discourse. The abnormality of the mutilated person is considered as the price the individual has to pay for some gift of primordial awareness. In modern psychological thinking, the powers of perception of a defective person are regarded as compensation for the idiocy. From this perspective, Benjy strikes us as a metaphor for primordial innocence. He is the signifier, the customary apparatus which produces the signified: the idiot savant.

Faulkner borrows the title of the novel from the speech of Macbeth, the Scottish king in Shakespeare's drama, to show the collapse and decline of Southern society after the Civil War. In the speech, Macbeth mourns his wife's death, comparing life to a candle:

> To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
>
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
>
> To the last syllable of recorded time,
>
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
>
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
>
> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
>
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
>
> And then is heard no more. It is a tale
>
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
>
> Signifying nothing. (Shakespeare 697)

Faulkner uses the image of an idiot who tells a tale "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" as the nucleus of the novel by starting the novel with Benjy's narration. In so doing, he lets the dreadful mood of *Macbeth* and its message that life is chaotic and transitory invade the whole novel, *The Sound and the Fury*. However, the other brothers seem not much better than Benjy in that their accounts also do not count for much. Quentin and Jason and Benjy are all enmeshed in their hyper-subjective worlds, so that their versions provide little information for us to make out who Caddy is. Hence, they fail to represent Caddy. This means that the brothers' narratives do not produce a reliable image of Caddy, but construct Caddy as pure differentiation or play. All over the brothers' narratives Caddy appears as something different from the compassionate mother of Benjy, and as something different from the lover, the object of consanguineous desire of Quentin, and again as something different from the whore of Jason. As a result, at the end of the novel there

remains no thing that we can call "Caddy." There is only laid naked the ever-receding play of the brothers' language—in terms of Derrida, we can interpret this play of language as differance or supplement. In this sense, we can say that there is not the truth in *The Sound and the Fury*, but only a truth or truths.

The last section of the novel is unique in that, the limits of narration are fully stretched. In section four, we experience an omniscient narrator. Here Faulkner attempts a narrative from without, qualitatively different from the preceding ones. For example, the third-person narrator says, "The day dawned bleak and chill, a moving wall of grey light out of the northeast, . . . when Dilsey opened the door of the cabin and emerged, . . ." (*SF* 236). With this apparently disconnected and objective view, the novel seems to shift away from the restricted and subjective beliefs of the Compson brothers. However, it turns out that even the third-person narrator is incapable of resolving the problems of representation which the brothers have grappled with. The narrative style of section four is characteristically illustrated by the description of Dilsey:

> The gown fell gauntly from her shoulders, across her fallen breasts, then tightened upon her paunch and fell again, ballooning a little above the nether garments which she would remove layer by layer as the spring accomplished and the warm days, in colour regal and moribund. She had been a big woman once but now her skeleton rose, draped loosely in unpadded skin that tightened again upon a paunch almost dropsical, as though muscle and tissue had been courage or fortitude which the days or the years had consumed until only the indomitable skeleton was left rising like a ruin or a landmark above the somnolent and impervious guts, and above that the collapsed face that gave the impression of the bones themselves being outside the flesh, lifted into the driving day with an expression at once fatalistic and of a child's astonished disappointment, until she turned and entered the house again and closed the door. (*SF* 236)

The narrator, on the one hand, gives a naturalistic picture of Dilsey by referring to "her fallen breasts" and "the nether garments." Yet, on the other hand, his language depends on symbolic expression so that we can hardly imagine that his understanding of Dilsey is comprehensive and right. For instance, the narrator compares Dilsey to royalty saying that she is clothed in "regal" colour—implying purple. He thus endows her with royal solemnity. The royal figure of Dilsey, as offered by the third-person narrator, is different from Quentin's view of her as a dutiful and substitute mother, and from Jason's view of her as an intrusive and inefficient old servant. The "regal" colour of Dilsey's dress associates her with Jesus Christ. With specific reference to the Reverend Shegog's sermon on Easter Sunday which Dilsey attends, Dilsey's figurative status of Christ invests the whole story with a moral vision. That the third-person narrator offers interpretation as well as description based on his subjective impression is clearly seen in that he often uses conjectural expressions such as "seemed," "appeared," and "might have been." For example, he says:

> Then Ben wailed again, hopeless and prolonged. It was nothing. Just sound. It might have been all time and injustice and sorrow become vocal for an instant by a conjunction of planets. (*SF* 255)

> He [Reverend Shegog] was like a worn small rock whelmed by the successive waves of his voices. With this body he seemed to feed the voice . . . . And the congregation seemed to watch with its own eyes while the voice consumed him, . . . (*SF* 261)

His subjective viewpoint is reinforced by the narrator's search for credible explanations through speculation.

In this manner, all through his section the narrator not only describes but also interprets what he observes. His narration then invariably reflects his opinions and individual impressions. From this angle, the narrator's "point of view is neither that of an all-seeing and all-knowing narrator nor that of a

detached and strictly objective observer" (Bleikasten 175). It is only less subjective than those of the Compson brothers. In this sense, Michael Millgate considers section four as a continuation of previous sections. He contends that "In fact, the section [section four] contributes relatively little to our understanding of the narrative events touched upon in earlier sections; rather it forces us to view some aspects of those earlier sections in a radically different way" (*The Achievement of William Faulkner* 101). Therefore, the narrative of section four told from a third-person's perspective validates the Compson brothers' failure to represent Caddy by proving that, with any kind of narrative, the novel cannot achieve the comprehensive vision of its object. However, given that Faulkner is of the view that there is no actual or true object behind the text that is fully present apart from language, the brothers' failure is not so much a failure as the triumph of Faulkner's view of language per se. Also, the paradigm of origin that Faulkner insists on throughout the novel supports the claim that, from the beginning, Faulkner did not choose Caddy as the object whose presence should be re-established through language. Thus the meaning of *The Sound and the Fury* becomes the Compson brothers' "failure" to represent Caddy. The novel turns out to be the signification(s) of nothing.

It is true there exists a general assumption that a Derridean approach essentially renders the text dull and reading vapid. A tangential goal of this study is to temper that entrenched assumption through this reading of *The Sound and the Fury*. A Derridean reading of *The Sound and the Fury* necessarily involves the construction of a metatext. In the metatext, the whole investigation assumes the shape of a pilgrimage from the inchoate and discordant sounds to the definite pattern of a symphony of meanings. The metatext is a sort of superimposition which throws up fresh perspectives on the four discourse 'voices' in the narrative.

From the Derridean angle the novel could be considered an instance of patterned communication in the fictional modality. Apart from the verbal channels of communication, the non-verbal channels: the body language, the object language, the visual, the tactile, the olfactory, the kinaesthetic and the proxemic aspects of communication must be taken into consideration to validate the formulations regarding the four narrators in the discourse universe of the narrative.

In his *Literary Theory* (1983), Terry Eagleton observes that the locuses and the context of the signifiers are identified in order to take into account the dispersal of meaning. This Derridean view presupposes that everything in the text is significant or nothing is significant. Claude Levi-Strauss, reinforcing this position contends that "either everything or nothing makes sense" (*The Savage Mind* 173). The deconstructionist formulation regarding the dispersal of meaning along a chain of signifiers is a reworking of the structuralist position. It has brought about a breakthrough in the sphere of literary semiotics and changed the idea of the fixity of meaning in the text.

A Derridean analysis does not preclude the possibility of multiple layers within the text of the novel. The polyvalence of the text does not spring from the culture specific response of the reader/critic to the text. It emerges from the text's innate potential of creating multiple layers of meaning. The study of the sign systems, operative in the text of Jason's discourse, emphasises the socio-economic aspect of the novel. It also highlights the interaction of objective reality and sexuality that accounts for Jason's fixation upon the trauma of the loss of the job in the bank. Similarly the study of the signification system of Quentin's discourse dramatises the psycho-sexual aspect of the novel, but at the same time it throws into focus the factors of heredity, biology and environment which play a formative role in shaping the warped minds of the Compson children. The interplay of signifiers in Benjy's text not only illustrates the point that he is the measure of the humanity and devilry of the dramatis personae but also suggests that he is patterned on mythical/folkloric motifs that celebrate the flawed person's special giftedness in the sphere of perception and intuition. The study of patterns of signification in Dilsey's discourse is not confined to the white/negro dichotomy but goes beyond it. It is inherent in her status as the symbolical mother of Benjy, and the archetypal mother image that she represents. The theme of the

regeneration of man is reinforced by her transformative experience, signified by her emotional partaking in the Easter service.

The substratum of logical patterns which crystallise into two inversely correspondent recurrent motifs: the loss motif and the search motif are also laid bare by the Derridean approach. Benjy suffers multiple losses, the foremost being the loss of Caddy. His unrelenting search for Caddy, after she has gone away, leads him on to molest a school girl, and this culminates in his castration, signifying symbolic death. The loss of money causes a traumatic dent in Jason's psyche. His search for lost money brings about his encounter with a furious old man who threatens to kill him. Caddy's loss of virginity affects Quentin's sanity and strengthens his self-destructive impulses, and brings to climax his search for death. Luster's never-ending search for the lost quarter further reinforces the pervasive search motif.

At the level of archetypal imagination, the three loss models bear the implications of the innocence/compensation/curse myth, the American success myth, and the Southern myth respectively. As a whole, the search motif is evocative of the legendary Quest of the Grail. The identification of motifs, archetypal patterns, and mythic structures in the text is not to rob *The Sound and the Fury* of its specificity and impose primordial patterns on the fictional discourse; on the other hand, it forms part of the Derridean examination which is concerned with exploring the essential meanings, derivable from archetypal motifs and mythic patterns.

A Derridean pattern is also apparent in the collective response of the Compson family to the sexuality of Caddy. It takes the form of a psycho-pathological plague or curse that afflicts Caddy's father, mother, and brothers. The father is rendered an alcoholic, mother a neurasthenic, Quentin a neurotic/suicide, Jason a desexed sadist, and Benjy a bellowing gelding. The family's fixation upon the honour cult of a bygone age accounts for Caddy's nymphomania and her daughter's promiscuity which take the form of afflictions. Thus the exploration of the signifiers in *The Sound and the Fury* shows how the fluidity of sound and the turmoil of fury attain the pattern of a symphony of the architectonic unities in the text of the narrative. The semiological patterns are intrinsic to what Umberto Eco calls 'intention of the text' which forms an alternative to the intention of the author and the intention of the reader/critic (*Interpretation and Overinterpretation* 78).

**Works Cited**

Bleikasten, Andre. *The Most Splendid Failure: Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1976. Print.

Chakovsky, Sergei. "Word and Idea in *The Sound and the Fury*." *New Directions in Faulkner Studies*. Ed. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1983. 283-302. Print.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. 1967. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: JohnsHopkins UP, 1998. Print.

---. *Writing and Difference*. 1967. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978.Print.

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1983. Print.

Eco, Umberto. *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*. Ed. Stefan Collini. 1st ed.Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1992. Cambridge Books Online. Web. 03 May 2015.

Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury*. 1929. New York: Vintage, 1990. Print.

Hellstrom, Gustaf. *Nobel Foundation*. Web. 13 Jan. 2009.http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1949/press.html

Levi-Strauss, Claude. *The Savage Mind*. Trans. La Pensee Savage. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1966. Print.

Millgate, Michael. *The Achievement of William Faulkner*. New York: RandomHouse, 1966. Print.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Social Contract and Discourses*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.1913. Web. 12 Jan. 2015. <www.bartleby.com/168/>

Shakespeare, William. "Macbeth." *Shakespeare's Principal Plays*. Ed. Tucker Brooke, John William Cunliffe, and Henry Noble MacCracken. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1935. 653-710. Print.

Sundquist, Eric J. *Faulkner: The House Divided*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1983.Print.

Wagner, Linda W. "Language and Act: Caddy Compson." *Caddy Compson*. Ed.Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1990. 108-118. Print. Major Literary Characters Series.

Weinstein, Philip M. *Faulkner's Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992. Print.