

# William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* as a Southern Gothic Fiction

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Dvopredmetni sveučilišni diplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i  
mađarskog jezika i književnosti

Ivona Sabo

***Krik i bijes* Williama Faulknera u kontekstu južnjačke gotičke proze**

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Mentorica: izv. prof. dr. sc. Biljana Oklopčić

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## **Abstract**

Published in 1929, *The Sound and the Fury* is one of the most perplexing novels written by William Faulkner. Dealing with many problems of the post-war Southern area of the United States, the novel is set in Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County. Both the novel's setting and themes point out that this masterpiece of Faulkner's oeuvre is a prime example of literary (sub)genre known as Southern Gothic. The first chapter of the paper thus discusses the Gothic genre and the Southern Gothic (sub)genre and how the two of them are connected. The second chapter elaborates the historical background of the post-war Southern area in which *The Sound and the Fury* is set. In the last two chapters, the textual analysis of Southern Gothic tropes shows why *The Sound and the Fury* can be categorized as Southern Gothic. The tropes that are analyzed are the setting, unusual events, a suffering woman who discovers a serious secret, and the usage of Southern female stereotypes of mammy, Dixie Madonna, and Southern belle as (de)constructed by the characters of Dilsey, Caroline Compson, and Caddy and Quentin Compson.

**Key words:** *The Sound and the Fury*, William Faulkner, Southern Gothic, Gothic tropes, Southern Gothic tropes, Southern female stereotypes

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## Introduction

As a way of responding to Enlightenment principles, which were based on rationality and reason, in the second half of the eighteenth century English writers created a new fictional world full of terror, unexplainable events, and dark thoughts. Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1765) is considered to be the first Gothic novel and the genre was soon embraced by many famous writers such as Ann Radcliffe, Mathew Lewis, and Clara Reeve. In the early nineteenth century, the genre came to the United States. Many writers, including Charles Brockden Brown and even more famous Edgar Allan Poe, as well as many supporters and readers, found the new genre inspiring and captivating. Historically, this was the period of abolitionist and proslavery polemics leading to the Civil War, fought between the North and the South over the issue of slavery as the then American racial and economic stumbling stone. After the military defeat in the Civil War, poverty and despair became a part of Southern life as many aristocratic families lost their fortunes, left with a belief in Old Southern values of purity, religion, and racial superiority. The (sub)genre of Southern Gothic was thus created as a way of dealing with the horrifying truth of the Southern defeat and disintegration of old values. William Faulkner masterfully depicted the decay and disintegration of the antebellum and post-bellum South by creating his fictional Yoknapatawpha County as the setting of the majority of his novels, *The Sound and the Fury* included.

First, the paper will offer a theoretical insight into the Gothic and Southern Gothic genre, its characteristics, and the most famous representatives. Next, the important historical information concerning the context of *The Sound and the Fury* will be elaborated upon. The paper continues with the chapter about William Faulkner, providing information about his life as he based his fictional Yoknapatawpha County on Lafayette County, Mississippi where he grew up and spent most of his life. One of his many novels set in this fictional County is *The Sound and the Fury* as well. Dealing with the themes of decay and disintegration of both an individual and the region, the novel depicts a sad truth about the life in the South through the misfortunes of the Compson family. In order to show that *The Sound and the Fury* is, indeed, a Southern Gothic, the last chapters will provide the analysis of the novel by using Gothic and Southern Gothic tropes. As the Gothic trope, the setting has an important role in the construction of the Gothic mood in novels; in *The Sound and the Fury*, the setting is the South – both the Compson ancestral home and the South itself. The essential part of every Gothic story are unusual events that follow a downfall of the main character(s). In *The Sound and the Fury*, the (unusual) events that



contribute to the disintegration of the Compson family are, among other things, promiscuity and alcoholism. Finally, in Gothic fiction, there is always a suffering woman who discovers a frightening secret; in the Compson family's case this woman is Caddy Compson. The final chapter analyzes the novel's Southern Gothic tropes by focusing on female Southern stereotypes: the mammy as embodied by the Compson's African-American servant Dilsey, Dixie Madonna as depicted by Caroline Compson, and anti-belles as portrayed by Caddy and her daughter Quentin. These and other stereotypes were created by Southerners in order to preserve the antebellum Southern values of racial superiority, purity, submissiveness, domesticity, and piety, the only thing that was left for them after the Civil War defeat.

# 1. Gothic Literature

## 1.1. From Gothic to American Gothic

As a genre or a mode of literature, Gothic originated from England of the second half of the eighteenth century. It began as a strong response to Enlightenment principles centered on reason and rationality. The rational was replaced by “irrational, horrific, and transgressive thoughts, desires, and impulses, thereby conjuring an angst-ridden world of violence, sex, terror, and death” (Bjerre 2). *The Castle of Otranto* (1765) written by Horace Walpole is considered to be the first Gothic novel, in which “Gothic’s representation of extreme circumstances of terror, oppression and persecution, darkness and obscurity of setting, and innocence betrayed” (Lloyd-Smith 3) can be observed. Next to Walpole, Ann Radcliffe is considered to be a cofounder of the genre because of her Gothic romance novels *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797). Other important Gothic writers who further developed the genre were Clara Reeve, William Thomas Beckford, and Matthew Lewis. In general, Gothic as a literary term can be defined as “writing that employs dark and picturesque scenery, startling and melodramatic narrative devices, and an overall atmosphere of exoticism, mystery, and dread” (Kennedy). Gothic novels and stories are filled with omens, horror, death, and sometimes supernatural elements.

In Gothic fiction,

taboos are often broken, forbidden secrets are spoken, and barriers are crossed. The key moment in a Gothic work will occur at the moment of boundary crossing or revelation, when something hidden or unexpressed is revealed and we experience the shock of an encounter which is both unexpected and expected. (Gray, “Inside the Dark House” 36)

Gothic novels and stories allow readers, as Jerrold Hogle asserts, to “address and disguise some of the most important desires, quandaries, and sources of anxiety, from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural” (qtd. in Bjerre 2-3). This transforms Gothic literature into “the means by which the secret history of a culture is told” (Gray, “Inside the Dark House” 37). In order to interest their readers, Gothic writers sometimes use supernatural elements, well-known historical figures, and elements of romance such as heroines in distress chased by powerful males. It also involves characters who are driven by evil plans, usually not in favor of an innocent heroine. Characters are shown as highly emotional expressing, among other

things, feelings of panic and fear, which make them uncontrollable. Clergy also plays a very important secondary role. A Gothic novel or story is often set in “a large, ancient house that conceals a terrible secret or that serves as the refuge of an especially frightening and threatening character” (Kennedy). Those houses are castles, mansions or large manors full of carvings, shadows and cervices, which represent darkness and call for mystery. The atmosphere is filled with fear and suspense with elements of the unknown or paranormal, which are either later explained in natural terms or remain a mystery. Omens like portraits and visions are often foreshadowing events that are yet to come.

The genre continued successfully its literary life into the nineteenth century and came to the United States in the early nineteenth century. Charles Brockden Brown is considered to have introduced Gothic novel into the USA with his *Wieland* (1798). Scholars have not, however, been able to identify the exact beginning of the American Gothic era as there exists a considerable “difficulty of defining the genre in national terms” (Bjerre 3). This probably occurred because American writers were still a part of English culture and exposed to English models. Brown was influenced by William Godwin, who wrote *Caleb Williams* (1794) and *Political Justice* (1796), and Brown influenced Godwin’s daughter Mary Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein* (1818). Nevertheless, the differences between two cultures, and literatures, became inevitable since “certain unique cultural pressures led Americans to the Gothic as an expression of their very different conditions” (Lloyd Smith 4). These pressures were, according to Allan Lloyd Smith,

the frontier experience, with its inherent solitude and potential violence; the Puritan inheritance; fear of European subversion and anxieties about popular democracy which was then a new experiment; the relative absence of developed “society”; and a very significantly, racial issues concerning both slavery and Native Americans. (4)

All that led American writers to go in opposite directions from their European forerunners and contemporaries. Although the USA have always been perceived as the land of opportunities, abundance, and progress where people could live their American dream, and as a country founded upon the principles of equality, liberty and pursuit of happiness, it still created “a strain of literature that is haunted by an insistent, undead past and fascinated by the strange beauty of sorrow” (Savoy 167). Even though it may seem that American Gothic is the complete opposite of the American Dream, “they actually interfuse and interact with each other” and

this realization will take us far in understanding the odd centrality of Gothic cultural production in the United States, where the past constantly inhabits the present, where progress generates an almost unbearable anxiety about its costs, and where an insatiable appetite for spectacles of grotesque violence is part of the texture of everyday reality. (Savoy 167)

For some, the opportunity of achieving the American Dream never emerged and Gothic writers wanted to give them their voices again. In order to do that, American Gothic writers have developed the strategy of enabling

the dead to rise, the ghostly voice to materialize out of nowhere, and objects to assume a menacing pseudo-life. It thus achieves the ultimate effects of the haunted, the uncanny, and the return of the repressed while placing these thoroughly in the depths of American life and the American psyche. (Savoy 168)

With a touch of mystery and horror, the Gothic genre made that happen: by using fiction, the writers offered a different point of view on things that were happening at certain points in history of the United States, especially when writing about the Civil War and the life Southern people led after the Civil War was over.

## **1.2. The South and Southern Gothic**

The most praised version of American Gothic occurred in the 1920s-1950s South – Southern Gothic, the origins of which are to be sought in antebellum and postbellum Gothic romances deeply influenced by Southern social, cultural, and economic circumstances. To understand how the antebellum and postbellum South influenced Southern Gothic fiction, a brief look at antebellum and postbellum social, cultural, and economic circumstances is necessary. During the antebellum South, wealthy Southern aristocrats formed an elite class of people that held most of economic and political power in the Southern region. Establishing their own standards of gentility and honor, they defended the ideals of Southern white aristocrats that, in turn, shaped Southern culture. Being traditional, conservative and patriarchal, the Southerners saw the Northerners as too idealistic, emotional, and deceptive, ruled by “female notions.” The Northerners, on the other hand, perceived the South as “another kind of nightmare altogether: a nightmare of patriarchy, a world of male power in extremis in which cruel parodies of the family

were presided over by perverse versions of the father figure” (Gray, “Inside the Dark House” 29). This conflict was also fueled by the South’s “increasingly controversial labor system; archaic social customs; and staple-crop and an export economy” (Cobb 3), where

white southerners often insisted that their society was the true embodiment of the American spirit, and proceeded, by steadfastly and often blindly resisting what they saw as northernization for well over a century, to define themselves primarily in opposition to the North. (Cobb 4-5)

White supremacy, plantation life, and rigid social and moral norms were the basic principles of the Southern way of life, which the Southerners were not willing to give up so easily, especially to the Northerners who wanted to get rid of that way of life and put the past behind them (Cobb 5). Because of the above-mentioned differences between the South and the North, the Civil War occurred, in which “the North’s military triumph ... further secured its role as the true symbol of American society” and for the South “all that was left was the reality of loss and the realization of failure” (Cobb 4; Gray, “Writing Southern Cultures” 3). The South lost the war, which indicated the beginning of the post-bellum or the postwar period in the South. The Civil War left a big scar on Southern society and culture due to the defeat and poverty the South had to live with. The Southerners lost their true identity as well as their social order since the Old South and its values, when aristocrats were at the peak of their power with slaves, plantations and mansions, disappeared and the modernization period, when the Northerners imposed their supremacy in the South through industrialization and urbanization, ensued. On the one hand, the USA romanticized the antebellum South and its values; on the other, this same South “has been seen as a repository for all of America’s shortcomings: a region of sickness and backwardness symbolized by everything from yellow fever and hookworm disease to personal and societal violence” (Bjerre 4).

Even after the Civil War defeat, the South was still showing resistance to the change and modernization as it “was simply too much tied to the past, too wedded to hierarchy, and too wary of innovation and reform to make it much of a competitor as a potential role model for the nation” (Cobb 20). The Southerners still lived in the past with patriarchal order in their families where father was the head of the house, where African-Americans were still oppressed, where white people represented the law, where education was not as important as the land, and where “recalcitrant white southerners had insisted that segregation was the essence of the ‘southern way

of life” (Cobb 5). Then Jim Crow laws were passed, reinforcing racial segregation, which deprived African-Americans of their essential civil and human rights till the late 1960s.

In order to criticize that way of life, to express strong disagreement with what was happening during the war and long after the war was over, Southern writers started to write about everything they were living through, seeing, and witnessing. Out of that experience, Southern Gothic was born, “a genre that arises from the area’s often violent and traumatic history” (Gray, “Inside the Dark House” 2). Although Southern Gothic was present in literature from the early nineteenth century, it was not until the early twentieth century that the genre was formed and that the South, “with its legacy and profound social and economic problems,” became “the principal region of American Gothic” (Crow 124). The term “Southern Gothic” was firstly used pejoratively in 1935 by novelist Ellen Glasgow. Referring to the writings of Erskine Caldwell and William Faulkner, she attached them to what she called the “Southern Gothic School,” criticizing their work. That label stuck, not only for Faulkner, but for other notable writers as well, such as Truman Capote, Tennessee Williams, Carson McCullers, Eudora Welty, Flannery O’Connor, and many others. The term of Southern Gothic “became so common in the modern period that each word came to evoke the other, as southern writers increasingly explored a region burdened with contradictory images,” constantly mixing past and prewar time with changes and postwar times (Bjerre 4). Southern Gothic further refers to the writings “about the return of the past, of the repressed and denied, the buried secret that subverts and corrodes the present, whatever the culture does not want to know or admit, will not or dare not tell itself” (Lloyd-Smith 1). Through Southern Gothic literature, the writers wanted to express what occurred in/with the Southern region of the United States and to tell a story that was not yet told in Southern history, showing that their Southern region had stuck in the past because no one wanted to look into the future. Both Southern region and Southern Gothic are also “characterised by a strong sense of place, nostalgia for a lost past and a Lost Cause, and a history of defeat, articulated by white male writers” (Gray, “Inside the Dark House” 1). Yet, the burden of the past such as the lost ideals and racial hostility, which was “the cornerstone of their regional identity” and “the cornerstone of their resistance to northern intrusions in general,” continued to haunt the present (Cobb 5). So, it can be said that “Southern Gothic is uniquely rooted in the region’s tensions and aberrations” (Bjerre 4) and that its purpose was to question and subvert the myth of the Old South and “the glorification of the Civil War as a ‘Lost Cause’” (Rajakumari 13). Writers such as Tennessee Williams, Flannery O’Connor, and William Faulkner demythologized the South by using Gothic tropes, including grotesque caricatures and excessive and shocking

imagery, to intensify the contradictions and to explore real social issues in Southern society. For example, the idyllic and pastoral setting of the antebellum plantation mansion was contrasted with “many often ruined or decaying plantations and mansions in the South,” testifying to “sins, secrets, and the ‘haunting history’ of the South” (Bjerre 4). Apart from that, some other characteristics of Southern Gothic are the presence of irrational and transgressive impulses, thoughts and desires, dark humor filled with irony, sense of alienation that characters are struggling with, the subversion of Southern myths and stereotypes, racial issues, etc. William Faulkner’s best known novel *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) is a prime example of Southern Gothic fiction as it shows how sins and secrets of a family, holding to their past, can ruin their lives forever and how “the clash between Old South and New South takes on a Gothic hue in which the suppressed sins of slavery, patriarchy, and class strife bubble to the surface in uncanny ways,” leaving the region and the people who live there in poverty and despair (Bjerre 8).

## 2. The Genius Voice of the South: William Faulkner

Born on September 25, 1897, William Faulkner is a Southern Gothic writer from Oxford, Mississippi. According to John T. Matthews, Faulkner is “the greatest novelist America has yet produced” (Matthews 1) and “widely considered the most important and influential writer working in the vein of the Southern Gothic” (Bjerre 8). Faulkner wrote novels, short stories, essays, poetry, and screenplays, for which he “has been credited with having the imagination to see, before other serious writers saw, the tremendous potential for drama, pathos, and sophisticated humor in the history and people of the South” (“W. Faulkner Short Fiction Analysis”). Although his works were largely published during the 1920s and 1930s, it was not until receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954 that he became widely known. What is more, for two of his works, *A Fable* (1954) and *The Reivers* (1962), he won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Probably the most-known short story written by an American is his “A Rose for Emily,” which is Faulkner’s first published story dealing with the “themes of necrophilia, sin, and secrecy,” making it “obviously Gothic” (Bjerre 8). The Modern Library ranked his *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) sixth on the list of the 100 best novels in 1998 (*Modern Library*). On the list, there are also his *As I Lay Dying* (1930) and *Light in August* (1932).

Like many other writers of the modern world, Faulkner also wrote novels about human rootlessness, probably inspired by “the disturbed thoughts of his own life” (Rajakumari 19) and people and events populating this very life: he observed “human nature through the lens of his own experience, one defined fundamentally by its Southernness” (Matthews 4). He came from an old Southern family, consisting of his parents Murry and Maud Butler Falkner and three brothers. The letter “u” in his last name, which “had begun to appear intermittently some years before, is attributed to a printer’s error. Apparently Faulkner himself inserted the ‘u’” (Rajakumari 20). Faulkner did well in school and showed a great talent for writing poetry in his young age, which led him to skipping a grade. He loved to read and even more to write. He went on a lot of school trips, like “hunting and fishing camps, trips that were part of the tradition and ritual of the Southern manhood,” which became a source of inspiration for lots of his stories (Rajakumari 21). Faulkner’s second source of inspiration was his great-grandfather Colonel William Clark Falkner, who was also, in addition to being a lawyer, soldier, and planter, a best-selling novelist. For Faulkner, “the Colonel had been the prototype of the Southern gentleman and he loomed large in Faulkner’s imagination, influencing his writing and his vision of the South” (Rajakumari 22).



Faulkner and his three younger brothers were raised by an African-American woman, Caroline Barr, who was born a slave. Barr's stories about her life and experiences helped him in "his thoughtful exploration of race in his novels, as well as his somewhat progressive stance on Civil Rights issues," which "seemed to have stemmed from his deep attachment to Caroline" (Rajakamuri 22). Like Mr. Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner's father Murry also had drinking problems. Faulkner had, nevertheless, a great relationship with his mother, who was "his friend and confidant throughout his life" (Rajakamuri 22). In 1929, Faulkner married Estelle Oldham, a daughter of the Oxford aristocrats. They lived there together with Estelle's two children from her previous marriage and their daughter Jill Faulkner Summers, about whom Faulkner cared a lot. Their family home, which was an old Southern mansion from 1844 named Rowan Oak, looms large in many of his works. He wanted to live in the South and this decision "tortured him as much as it nurtured him" (Matthews 4). He loved the South, its traditions, and its past times but, at the same time, he was afraid of what the South would transform into.

Initially interested in poetry writing, Faulkner moved to New Orleans in 1925 and turned to prose after meeting Sherwood Anderson, who became his mentor and a friend. He advised him to write about the places and themes he knew well and "that is why he created his fictional county, Yoknapatawpha and shifted his focus from poetry to prose" (Rajakumari 23). Also, "his writing sought to penetrate the deceptions and delusions of a morally bankrupt and obsolete tradition, to see through its hypocrisies and pretensions" (Matthews 4). So, partly thanks to

the mentorship of Oxford, Mississippi, lawyer Phil Stone, partly to his friendship with writers like Stark Young and Sherwood Anderson, partly to his travels, and partly to the University of Mississippi Library, Faulkner had access to a wide range of the literature of the past and to the most avantgarde of current writing, all of which he devoured. (Polk 2)

The peak of his writing was a period between 1929 and 1936, during which he created his greatest works such as *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Sanctuary* (1931), *Light in August* (1932), and *Absalom! Absalom!* (1936). During the next decades, his works were "critically judged to be less powerful and ... not rank[ing] with his finest accomplishments" (Rajakumari 26). They included, in chronologic order, *The Unvanquished* (1938), *The Wild Palms* (1939), *The Hamlet* (1940), *Go Down, Moses* (1942), *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), *Knight's Gambit* (1949), *Requiem for a Nun* (1951), *A Fable* (1954), *Big Woods* (1955), *The Town* (1957), *The Mansion* (1959), and *The Reivers* (1962). In general, "Faulkner's genius never

pandered to mass audiences or mindlessly followed commercial formulas; he compromised ingeniously on issues of artistry, never forfeiting the responsibility of presenting his deeply misunderstood part of the country in complex and subtle ways” (Matthews 8). Faulkner did write about contemporary issues, yet he is at his best when showing the Southern region through his eyes and how people were living before and after the Civil War, in times of the Old South and the imposed modernization. His works thus “play a kind of double game, reflecting on the very market conditions of modern culture under which they appear – especially the mass production and consumption of cultural goods, and the commoditization of human relations” (Matthews 8). What also made Faulkner authentic is his relatedness to the themes and issues depicted in his works:

Personally, it was by living as an outsider within the world that had created him that he could represent the nuances of individual dramatic conflict with such authority and precision. Artistically, it was by subjecting his tradition-steeped Southern culture to the alienation of modernist methods for rendering time, language, consciousness, and history that Faulkner could figure out how to retell the stories of a place he knew too well. (Matthews 4)

Faulkner is probably best known for his fictional Yoknapatawpha County with “swamps, deep woods, and decaying plantations” where his novels and short stories are set (Bjerre 8). It is based on Lafayette County, Mississippi, where he lived for the most of his life. Yoknapatawpha County’s name can be traced back to “the Native Americans who first occupied such places” (Matthews 3). Just like the South, Yoknapatawpha County is a “home to the bitter Civil War defeat and the following social, racial, and economic ruptures in the lives of its people” (Bjerre 2). Although the war ended long after Faulkner was growing up, it was still metaphorically taking place in the heads of the people and in Faulkner’s head as well. As a matter of fact, the famous line from *Requiem for a Nun*: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past” acts as a “clichéd definition of Faulkner’s works” as well as the “definition of the Gothic” (Bjerre 8). That means that he, like many other Southerners, could not move on and look into the future as he got stuck in the past, which was constantly playing in his thoughts. He was obsessed with the Civil War and the themes of decay and disintegration, as his novels *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* show. Furthermore, Faulkner had the ability of seeing a bigger picture in everything and making it whole with smaller parts. He did that by creating his Yoknapawpha County, which was his lifelong project, and “by making so many of his separate novels installments in the description of an entire principality” (Matthews 3).

Characters in Faulkner's fiction are sometimes based on real-life people and sometimes imagined, yet they are very complex and aching "with the burden of unwanted knowledge, their utterances wracked for admitting too much of what they don't want to acknowledge at all" (Matthews 5). Moreover, they are often involved in dramatic actions, ranging "from those who are almost purely intuitive to those who reject intuition and attempt to construct elaborate systems of thought without it" (Howell Custer 14). In fact, "in Faulkner's world, characters struggle to find or make meaning, exposing themselves in various ways to the danger of spiritual self-destruction, of losing their own souls in the effort to find a way of living in a universe that does not provide meaning" ("W. Faulkner Long Fiction Analysis"). Each character struggles with his problems and not always successfully. For example, Quentin Compson constantly struggles with time, tries to escape it, and eventually commits suicide as he loses the battle with it. He desperately tries to turn back the time, which eventually leads him to death. Moreover,

Faulkner's most tragic characters are those who feel driven to impose so rigid a pattern on their lives and on the lives of others as to invite destruction from the overwhelming forces of motion and change. These characters experience the heart in conflict with itself as the simultaneous need for living motion and meaningful pattern. ("W. Faulkner Long Fiction Analysis")

With that, Faulkner wanted to show that Southerners lost their old, traditional, and motionless South, which was being replaced by the new, changed South where modernization was imposed on them by the North. In his works, Faulkner also draws attention to sometimes forgotten voices of the South – African-Americans. Except dealing with the theme of racism in general, he focuses on social tensions between old and new generations, aristocracy and lower-class.

The language Faulkner uses is "complex, modernist, labyrinthine" and provokes "in readers a similarly Gothic sense of uncertainty and alienation" (Bjerre 8). He loved to experiment with different methods and styles by testing new literary forms and "it is the nearly inhuman devotion to making language exceed itself that creates the glory of Faulkner's difficult style" (Matthews 5). What is more, he uses a technique known as stream-of-consciousness where character's thoughts, desires, feelings, and reactions are showed in a continuous flow, not interrupted by anything, often eliminating formal sentence structure and grammar. With this technique, he reveals character's deepest thoughts and concerns to the readers and expresses the difficulty of situation a character is in. The stream-of-consciousness technique is best shown in his novels *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying* and *Absalom! Absalom!*. Because of this literary technique

and his modernist and complex language, Faulkner's works are sometimes hard to understand, especially when they constantly mix the present and the past such as in *The Sound and the Fury*. Faulkner easily changes the chronological order of events, sometimes breaking the time-frame and putting complex parts without a warning. His style is baroque,

noted for its long, difficult sentences that challenge the reader to discern the speaker, the time, and even the subject of the narrative. Faulkner makes considerable use of stream-of-consciousness interior monologues, and his frequent meshings of time reinforce his conviction that the past and present are intricately interwoven in the human psyche. ("W. Faulkner Short Fiction Analysis")

Another technique that can be found in Faulkner's works is juxtaposition. Juxtaposition refers to "two things being seen or placed close together with contrasting effect" (*Oxford Dictionary of English*). In literature, this technique helps writers to illustrate their characters in much detail, to build suspense, and reach a rhetorical effect. Juxtaposition, being

Faulkner's characteristic style, reflects his concern with the problems of living meaningfully within the apparently meaningless flow of time. Because life will not stand still or even move consistently according to patterns of meaning, it becomes necessary to use multiple points of view to avoid the complete falsification of his subject. Juxtaposition, the multileveled and open-ended sentence, and the oxymoronic style heighten the reader's awareness of the fluidity of the "reality" that the text attempts to portray. ("W. Faulkner Long Fiction Analysis")

Juxtaposition is present in Faulkner's fiction when he, for example, describes the differences between past and present times and the different effects this has on different people. In "That Evening Sun," Faulkner, for instance, describes the town of Jefferson both in the present and in the past. Using long descriptions, which is another Faulkner's literary characteristic, the first two paragraphs describe how streets, people, and everything around them appear now and how they appeared in the past.

Faulkner died on July 6, 1962 of a heart attack. His death was a great loss as "he was widely considered the most important American novelist of his generation and arguably of the entire 20th century, eclipsing the reputations of his contemporaries" (Rajakumari 27). Moreover, "Faulkner's contribution to American and World literature is significant. What he knew and

learned, he placed within his characters and thus he passed on his knowledge to his myriad readers” (Rajakumari 27).

## 2.1. About *The Sound and the Fury*

*The Sound and the Fury* is Faulkner’s novel published in 1929, which “has attracted the attention of most major critics and nearly every major critical movement” (Polk 1). It was Faulkner’s fourth novel and not a great success in the beginning. Nevertheless,

writing *The Sound and the Fury* was an immensely powerful experience for him, an experience by which he seemed to have defined himself as a writer, and he must have taken enormous satisfaction in its accomplishment, no matter what he later said about its being his “most splendid failure.” (Polk 4)

It was not until 1931, when Faulkner’s sixth novel *Sanctuary* was published, that *The Sound and the Fury* received critical attention. In 1945, Faulkner included the “Compson Appendix” in future copies of *The Sound and the Fury*. The Appendix describes the history of the Compson family in 30 pages, from 1699 to 1945.

The novel’s title is taken from William Shakespeare’s play, *Macbeth*, to be more specific, from Macbeth’s monologue:

She should have died hereafter;  
There would have been a time for such a word.  
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 127).

Faulkner's usage of Macbeth's words "has a local significance for his novel . . . where . . . the noise of one character and the fury of another constitute the terms of the title" (Stoicheff). "The noise" can be related to Benjy who is mentally impaired and understands everything through noises and smells. The verses "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / and then is heard no more" can be related to Quentin "whose shadow is his nemesis, and whose suicide imposes eternal silence" (Stoicheff). Quentin saw shadows that were following him around, constantly obsessing about them while his time of death was approaching. "The fury" can be related to Jason Compson who is furious about the way his life has turned up. Benjy can also be associated with the verse "it is a tale / Told by an idiot," although, after reading the novel, the verse could be applied to the whole family, especially to "each of the Compson brothers, incapable of liberation from his own visions of things" (Stoicheff). All the Compson brothers are in war with themselves while trying to stay sane.

*The Sound and the Fury* is set in the town of Jefferson, Mississippi. It is "the story of the South and its decline, perceived through the filters of time" (Gray, "Inside the Dark House" 30). The novel follows a Southern aristocratic family who is struggling with disintegration and keeping their family's reputation. When we meet the Compsons in 1928, they have reached the end in almost everything: they are financially ruined, have lost their religious path and the respect of their town, and some of them even die tragically. With *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner wanted to portray a powerful Southern aristocratic family who was not being able to move on into the times of progress and modernization because the past was holding them back. On the other hand, *The Sound and the Fury* is "so astonishingly full of the mainstreams of twentieth-century culture, it stands in a reciprocal relationship to us: it opens itself up to economic, historical, philosophical, religious, cultural, and social analyses, and in its reflecting turn enables us to see how profoundly all these streams are related to each other, and to us" (Polk 1).

The novel consists of four different sections, each written from a perspective of a different character and narrated in the first or third person. The first section, titled April 7, 1928, is written from the perspective of Benjamin Compson, most of the time referred to as Benjy, a 33-year-old who is mentally disabled. Benjy's section is characterized by the first person point of view disjointed narrative style, often leaping from the present to the past and vice versa. Those leaps in chronology are triggered by smells, noises, some objects through which Benjy remembers the past. The second section, titled June 2, 1910, deals with the life of Quentin Compson, Benjy's older brother. Focusing on the events that led to his suicide, it is written in the first person point

of view. The third section is titled April 6, 1928, and is set a day before the first section. Here, Faulkner also writes in the first person point of view through the eyes of the third brother Jason Compson. The fourth and final section, titled April 8, 1928, is written in the third person point of view and set a day after the first section. This section is told by Dilsey, an African-American woman, who is one of the Compsons' servants.

When writing *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner

found himself having to “indict” the South for its grievous sins while longing to “escape” into fantasies of its glorious past. Such powerfully divided sentiments are a product of the massive dislocations of loyalty, faith, and knowledge produced by the shift from one social regime to the next. (Matthews 3)

Thus, *The Sound and the Fury* mostly deals with the theme of the corruption of Southern aristocratic values; it is “about the decline of a Southern family and, by extension, about the simultaneous decline of the Old South” (Polk 14).

### 3. The Gothic Tropes in *The Sound and the Fury*

Gothic tropes are the features of Gothic fiction transferred into the Southern Gothic (sub)genre. The Southern Gothic uses Gothic tropes such as “(1) the setting in an ancestral house; (2) real or imagined occult, supernatural, or unusual events; and (3) a suffering woman who discovers a serious secret” (Oklopcic 1). In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner utilizes all of them by focusing on a suffering Southern aristocratic family, the Compsons.

#### 3.1. The Setting: The South Through the Lens of Yoknapatawpha County

The setting plays an important role in fiction in general, and in *The Sound and the Fury* it is one of the Gothic features that enables the readers to understand the story even better and, possibly, to relate to the novel’s characters; to understand their actions within the plotline(s) of the novel. As a region, the South offers immense setting possibilities and “anyone with even a passing acquaintance with the Southern Gothic has encountered the region’s potential for inspiring ever-verdant myrioramas of beauty and dread” (Sivils 83). This

atmosphere is further enhanced by the common spectacle of abandoned, rusting or otherwise disintegrating shacks, trucks, tractors and other artefacts of a not-too-distant past, which, in their weed-wrapped embrace, seem emblematic of humanity’s legacy in the South. These scenes render a well-known brand of Southern sublime, a lushness flecked with decay. Yet these landscapes are also aligned with a pervasive sense of the grotesque, swallowing, and at times spitting back, the virulence of humanity’s ills. (Sivils 83)

The same applies to *The Sound and the Fury*. The novel is set in Jefferson, Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi after the Civil War and most of the novel’s plot takes place at the Compson mansion or on their property. As already stated, Yoknapatawpha County is based on Lafayette County, Mississippi, where Faulkner was born and raised. Like the South itself, Yoknapatawpha County faced the Civil War defeat, with economic, racial, and social problems people had to deal with. The novel takes place between 1910 and 1928, with the constant flashbacks going back to the 1890s. The town of Jefferson is a small town where the Compsons have lived for



generations. Once a rich family of aristocrats living in abundance, the Compsons are now suffering a financial, social, and cultural downfall, visible through the depiction of their habitat, reflecting Mr. Compson's alcoholism, Mrs. Compson's hypochondria, Quentin's suicide, Benjy's mental state, Caddy's pregnancy, and Jason's jealousy and rage. In the Old South, family's identity was centered around their family estate where "on the mansion's porch sits a gentleman, behind him an angelic wife, both observing children playing" (Oklopčić 1). Yet, after the Civil War, the times of loss, poverty, and sadness prevailed. There were no more big mansions with beautiful porches, only derelict, old houses with small estates. During that period, the Compsons sold the last part of their estate to fund Quentin's education. That affected everyone in the family as they perceived it as the loss of their aristocratic identity, especially Quentin and Benjy: "Let us sell Benjy's pasture so that Quentin may go to Harvard and I may knock my bones together and together" (Faulkner 147). This decision put a great pressure on Quentin, the pressure he found hard to cope with: "*On what on your school money the money they sold the pasture for so you could go to Harvard dont you see you've got to finish now if you dont finish he'll have nothing sold the pasture*" (Faulkner 104; emphasis Faulkner's) as the land, the family estate, was the one of the most important things that defined them as a family, establishing "the genuine relation between a person and his or her region" (Oklopčić 3).

In the novel, there are not many descriptions of the Compson estate, probably because

in so many gothic works the landscape represents more than just a setting; it is a threatening embodiment of the land itself, of that oft-abused supplier of our human needs. Such landscapes not only foster an important element of terror, but also represent a sort of warehouse of cultural and individual anxieties relating to the social issues in play (Sivils 84).

So, it can be assumed that the estate is just like its inhabitants: struggling with the decay and disintegration as the South itself. The whole atmosphere of the novel is dark, sad and regretful, full of old memories. Near the end of the novel, there is a short description of the room where Caddy's daughter Quentin was staying, emphasizing again the mood of disintegration and nothingness: "It was not a girl's room. It was not anybody's room, and the faint scent of cheap cosmetics and the few feminine objects and the other evidences of crude and hopeless efforts to feminize it but added to its anonymity, giving it that dead and stereotyped transience of rooms in assignation houses" (Faulkner 239). The idea of the gone glory is visible in the fact that the Compson's estate also has stables, a kitchen garden, and a cabin where a family of their black

servants lives: “He was sitting on the kitchen steps. We went down to Versh’s house. I liked to smell Versh’s house” (Faulkner 22).

For Faulkner, the South is a land that has no future, a region that will never fully recover from the loss that the War caused. This is evident in the comparison of Mississippi and Massachusetts, where Quentin lives for some time while studying at Harvard. For Quentin, “our country was not like this country. There was something about just walking through it. A kind of still and violent fecundity that satisfied ever bread-hunger like” (Faulkner 95). Even though poor and lacking opportunities, Quentin cannot escape the South and keeps comparing the South with the North: “The road went into the trees, where it would be shady, but June foliage in New England not much thicker than April at home in Mississippi” (Faulkner 94). It is always on his mind, evoked by visual and olfactory images: “There were vines and creepers where at home would be honeysuckle. Coming and coming especially in the dusk when it rained, getting honeysuckle all mixed up” (Faulkner 112). Quentin often thinks of home while he is in Harvard and he does it with nostalgia: “I thought of home, of the bleak station and the mud and the niggers and country folks thronging slowly about the square, with toy monkeys and wagons and candy in sacks and roman candles sticking out, and my insides would move like they used to do in school when the bell rang” (Faulkner 73). Despite his mixed feelings, Quentin loves the South, he is a real Southerner, and that is how the region becomes a part of him, even though the South is depicted as a place where “there’s no future in a hole like this for a young fellow like you” (Faulkner 91).

The novel, too, shows that the South, and Yoknapatawpha County as well, was a place of racial oppression, originating from the institution of slavery, where

for slaves and the otherwise abused, the landscape—especially when allowed to fester into a plantation—transforms from a ‘haven’ into a ‘landscape of disease’, where slavery and institutionalized oppression produce a deceptively verdant scene of economic prosperity that is at the same time a playground for the grotesque. (Sivils 84)

As the Gothic trope of the ancestral house includes all the facets of social, cultural, and economic life the family, who lives in this ancestral house, encounters, *The Sound and the Fury* follows the pattern as it “offers an insight into the inhumanity of Southern society which oppresses or ostracizes marginalized groups such as African Americans, Native Americans, women, and homosexuals” (Oklopčić 2). In the narrative space of the novel, African Americans are still being treated as and called “niggers”: “Lets go down to the branch and find that quarter before them niggers finds it” (Faulkner 1) / “‘Oh.’ Caddy said, ‘That’s niggers. White folks dont

have funerals” (Faulkner 26) / “‘Nigger’s money good as white folks, I reckon.’ ‘White folks gives nigger money because know first white man comes along with a band going to get it all back, so nigger can go to work for some more’” (Faulkner 11), etc.

Lastly, the novel’s setting in the ancestral home reflects another issue, this time gender/sex-related, going back to the (post-) Civil War time: “Southern manhood was presented as incapable, unrestrained, cowardly, and military inefficient and thus humiliated; Southern womanhood was (literally and/or verbally) desecrated” (Oklopčić 4). The traces of this are present in Faulkner’s depiction of Mr. Compson as an alcoholic, Mrs. Compson as a mother incapable of taking care of her own family, Caddy as a nymphomaniac, Benjy as an idiot, etc., thus showing “how the region’s landscapes function not only as sites on which atrocities occur, but also as cultural nexuses where the present is haunted by repressed apparitions from the past” (Sivils 83).

### **3.2. The Crash of the Compson Family: Unusual Events**

The second Gothic trope found in *The Sound and the Fury* is the one dealing with the supernatural or unusual events. In the novel, there are no supernatural elements as such, however there are some unusual events connected with the family’s misfortunes that include an alcoholic father and Caddy’s sexual promiscuity that eventually lead to the disintegration of the Compson family. Mr. Compson, just like Faulkner’s father, is an alcoholic: “*Father will be dead in a year they say if he doesnt stop drinking and he wont stop he cant stop since I since last summer and then they’ll send Benjy to Jackson*” (Faulkner 104; emphasis Faulkner’s). His alcoholism affects the whole family: Mrs. Compson’s hypochondria, Quentin’s suicide, Caddy’s promiscuity and the subsequent pregnancy, Jason’s decision to send Benjy to a mental institution, and his development into a selfish, greedy, and emotionless person. All this contributed to a final downfall of the Compsons and their disintegration. Mr. Compson’s alcoholism can also be observed as “one of the ways in which Southern honour manifests itself through attempts to gain or maintain power for white Southern men” (Buzacott 31). Failing to maintain power in his family/preserve the family honor, Mr. Compson inverts this principle and turns alcohol into a way of escape from his own belief that he could not protect his family and control events that are leading his family to disaster.

Another unusual, at least in aristocratic families of that time, event that could be placed within the unusual event Gothic trope is Caddy's promiscuity, foreshadowed in the Benjy's section of the novel, in the famous tree scene. Curious to see what was going on in their grandmother's room as her brothers and she were forbidden to enter it, Caddy decides to climb a tree to see it for herself: "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 31), her muddy drawers symbolizing her later promiscuity. Another passage hinting at Caddy's promiscuity occurs when Dilsey could not wash the mud off her underwear: "'Just look at you.' Dilsey said. She wadded the drawers and scrubbed Caddy behind with them. 'It done soaked clean through onto you.' she said. 'But you wont get no bath this night. Here'" (Faulkner 61). In this way, Faulkner probably wanted to indicate that Caddy would leave a stain on the family's name in the future. Since the novel's publication,

legions of critics have found his description of the muddy seat of Caddy's drawers a very evocative, and provocative, entrance into the novel's various structures and meanings, and much fruitful discussion has recently emerged from considerations of Caddy as the novel's absent center, its absent presence. (Polk 4)

Caddy is, indeed, a novel's center since she affects every brother in her own way: Benjy felt abandoned when Caddy was banished from the house due to her pregnancy; Quentin could not bear it, too, and Jason resented his sister's failure to ensure him a career worthy of his name. Her brothers became obsessed with her sexual promiscuity, and each of them, "with very different degrees of self-consciousness, 'want[s] to reach out' to their sister. Strangely, doing so involves each of them in forms of more or less recognized miscegenation" (Godden 442), which again fits well into the unusual event Gothic trope.

The descriptions of Caddy's promiscuity or sexually improper behavior are numerous: from undressing herself while she was in the river with Quentin, Versh and Benjy: "Caddy took her dress off and threw it on the bank. Then she didn't have on anything but her bodice and drawers, and Quentin slapped her and she slipped and fell down in the water" (Faulkner 14), to Benjy witnessing Caddy kissing a boy:

Caddy and I ran. We ran up the kitchen steps, onto the porch, and Caddy knelt down in the dark and held me... "I wont." she said. "I wont anymore, ever. Benjy. Benjy." Then she was crying, and I cried, and we held each other. "Hush." she said. "Hush. I wont anymore." So I hushed and Caddy got up and we went into the kitchen and turned the

light on and Caddy took the kitchen soap and washed her mouth at the sink, hard. Caddy smelled like trees. (Faulkner 39),

to being caught with men by her brothers: “*I kept a telling you to stay away from there, Luster said. They sat up in the swing, quick. Quentin had her hands on her hair. He had a red tie*” (Faulkner 39; emphasis Faulkner’s) and their African-American servant Versh: “‘Who come to see her last night.’ he said. ‘I dont know.’ Luster said. ‘They comes every night she can climb down that tree. I dont keep no track of them’” (Faulkner 41). This chain of unusual events connected to promiscuity/miscegenation culminates in Quentin’s suicide after Caddy refuses to run away with him or to confirm their alleged “incestuous” relationship ending up in her pregnancy:

*Got to marry somebody*

*Have there been very many Caddy*

*I don’t know too many will you look after Benjy and Father*

*You don’t know whose it is then does he know*

*Don’t touch me will you look after Benjy and Father* (Faulkner 97; emphasis Faulkner’s)

When Caddy got divorced, she was banished from the house. She lost her daughter; Benjy lost the only person who sincerely cared for him; Jason lost the job opportunity promised to him by Caddy’s ex-husband; Quentin lost his life.

### **3.3. A Hurt Woman: Caddy Compson**

In Gothic literature, women characters are mostly vulnerable and are given a role of a hurt or a suffering woman “who discovers a serious secret” (Oklopčić 9), affecting her entire life. She is usually treated badly by male characters, people around her, or readers. In *The Sound and the Fury*, the character of a hurt woman who discovers a serious secret is Caddy Compson. Her discovery of a serious secret occurs at two levels: literal and metaphorical. The literal secret is Caddy’s first encounter with death. It occurs right after she climbs a tree in order to see what has been happening in the Compson’s house. Her dead relative is her beloved grandmother Damuddy: “‘He does it every night since Damuddy was sick and he cant sleep with her.’ Caddy

said” (Faulkner 21). The children do not even know that a funeral service for Damuddy was held, and what exactly this is:

““Is they started the funeral yet.”

“What’s a funeral.” Jason said.

“Didn’t mammy tell you not to tell them.” Versh said” (Faulkner 26).

Children were not supposed to know that, but they were all curious and that is when Caddy decided to climb a tree: ““We looked up into the tree where she was. ‘What she seeing, Versh’” Frony whispered” (Faulkner 36), and discovered that her grandmother died. So, the first hurtful secret that Caddy discovers “focuses primarily on a personal encounter with the death of a beloved person and is therefore restricted to a private sphere” (Oklopčić 10). The second level of Caddy’s being hurt leading then to another important secret being discovered is more metaphorical as it is connected to the subordination of women in the Southern patriarchal society. This secret that Caddy discovers “goes beyond the limits of individual experience and puts emphasis on the unread and unwritten in the coded matrix of Southern social structure” (Oklopčić 10). Here, Faulkner wanted to show that women in the South were still oppressed by men, be it their husbands, fathers, or brothers. When Caddy violates the ideals of Southern womanhood, everyone discards her as she fails their expectations. She fails Benjy as she cannot be his nurturing and motherly figure any more:

“He went on and we stopped in the hall and Caddy knelt and put her arms around me and her cold bright face against mine. She smelled like trees.

“You’re not a poor baby. Are you. You’ve got your Caddy. Haven’t you got your Caddy.” (Faulkner 6)

Quentin becomes extremely disappointed with her since she failed to act up to a Southern code of purity and virginity. Jason hates her as he lost the promised job because of her. In the end, Caddy’s family even took her daughter away from her and threw her out of the house. Caddy has thus constantly been hurt by her family, the society and even us, the judging readers. And all that she has ever wanted is to be herself as she is.

## 4. The Southern Gothic Tropes in *The Sound and the Fury*

In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner uses a number of different Southern Gothic tropes, the most dominant being deconstructed or subverted Southern myths and stereotypes. Through his characters, Faulkner

subverts Southern men and women stereotypes (Southern belle, mammy, Confederate woman, tragic mulatta, Southern gentleman, poor white trash, cotton snobs, Southern Yankee, Southern yeomen, etc.), deconstructs the plantation and the cavalier myth, depicts the clash of cultures, or shows the demythologized Southern utopia. (Oklopic 1)

In this part of the paper, we will analyze Dilsey in the context of the mammy stereotype; Mrs. Caroline Compson within the context of the Dixie Madonna stereotype; and Caddy and Miss Quentin as Southern belles-gone-bad. These stereotypes are also connected to the gender roles imposed by Southern men as all of these stereotypes are men's depiction of how women should behave, act or think.

### 4.1. Dilsey and the Mammy Stereotype

The first stereotype to be analyzed in this chapter is the mammy stereotype. Mammies are described as "black women" who worked "in white homes, cooked innumerable meals, cared for white children, and surely formed emotional ties to white family members at times" (McElya 4). Although "they have been described and remembered by whites, like all faithful slaves," they bear "little resemblance to actual enslaved women of the antebellum period," as the mammy was just a fiction (McElya 4). It was created simply "in response to abolitionists' charges that the institution of slavery was wracked with sexual depravity and the rape and concubinage of black women by white men" (McElya 8). So, the mammy character is just a myth created out of guilt to show, at least in fiction, that slaves loved their white families and were happy to take care of them. The depiction of the mammy "included not only her physical attributes, which stressed her advanced age or wide girth, but also her spirited character." She loved her white "family and would defend and protect them fiercely, but she could be cantankerous with them and was a disciplinarian of white children" (McElya 8).

Dilsey, an African-American woman, is one of the central characters in *The Sound and the Fury*. She has worked as a servant in the Compson household for a long time. Married to Roskus, Dilsey has three children with him: Versh, Frony, and T.P.; she has a grandchild Luster. Although just the Compsons' cook, Dilsey is much more than that – she has kept the Compson family together while taking care of her own family. She is also the character through which the Compson brothers realize the reality of treatment of African-Americans in the South:

The mammy figure in particular was an essential site for grappling with the meaning and burden of slavery for American capitalist democracy. Loving, hating, pitying, or pining for mammy in the twentieth century became a way for Americans to define the character of the nation, the meaning of freedom, and the racial and gender boundaries of the citizenry. (McElye 13)

Throughout the novel, Dilsey has been the only person who is simple and strong enough to ensure the stability of the Compson household, being a loyal servant and caring for everyone without being self-absorbed. She cares a lot for all her children – both the Compson children and her own as she acts both as their mammy and mummy, taking Mrs. Compson's role. Dilsey holds all the power when it comes to her white children upbringing and at the end of the day she is the one to put children in bed and not Mr. or Mrs. Compson:

“He be gone in a minute.” Dilsey said. “I leave the light on in your room.”

“All right.” Caddy said. She snuggled her head beside mine on the pillow. “Goodnight, Dilsey.”

“Goodnight, honey.” Dilsey said. (Faulkner 36)

It is obvious that Dilsey is like a mother to them, providing them with emotional support and love, while Mrs. Compson is barely a part of their lives. Benjy, for instance, remembers how Dilsey “came and lifted me down and wiped my face and hands with a warm cloth” after telling the children to go to bed (Faulkner 21). The mammy always put white children's needs before her family's or her own. Throughout the novel, Dilsey thus constantly babysits Benjy or orders other members of her family to take care of him: for example, Dilsey's son, Versh, had to ““Take this tray up.’ Dilsey said. ‘And hurry back and feed Benjy’” (Faulkner 45).

Dilsey has multiple roles in the Compson family: a servant, a nanny, and a mother, yet for neither of them she gets even a slightest credit. She is even disrespected and scorned for what she does: Jason, for instance, thinks of her as being “so old she couldn't do any more than move



hardly. But that's all right: we need somebody in the kitchen to eat up the grub the young ones cant tote off" (Faulkner 157).

Even though Dilsey takes an important parental role in *The Sound and the Fury*, she fails to fulfill her mammish part in Caddy's upbringing. She did not try to change Caddy's sexuality and, with that, she subverts her role of the mammy that included preparing Caddy for a role of a Southern belle, a young woman who has to act as a lady holding to the virtues of purity and virginity throughout her life, living up to Southern aristocratic and patriarchal codes. This is further confirmed when Dilsey has an argument with Jason whether Caddy should see her daughter Quentin or not: "I like to know whut's de hurt in lettin dat po chile see her own baby" (Faulkner 176), refusing to see that Caddy made a moral mistake by turning to sexual promiscuity. In the end, Dilsey, nevertheless, stays loyal to her white family, raising another Compson child, Caddy's daughter: "'Dont you bother your head about her.' Dilsey said. 'I raised all of them and I reckon I can raise one more. Hush now. Let him get to sleep if he will'" (Faulkner 25), and remaining the only real parental figure to the Compson children.

#### **4.2. Caroline Compson and the Dixie Madonna Stereotype**

In the South, white women were "expected to contribute to the patriarchy by fulfilling two roles: the first was ornamental if a woman belonged to upper classes or food-providing if a woman belonged to lower classes; the second was reproductive" (Oklopcic 20). White woman's reproductive role is best captured through the stereotype of Southern mother, or Dixie Madonna, whose most important role was to provide her husband with legally white descendants. In *The Sound and the Fury*, this stereotype is depicted in the character of Mrs. Caroline Compson. She is an upper-class woman who has been taught her role from the very beginning of her life; in her youth, "she was treated as a family ornament, a doll, a valuable exchange object in the marriage market" (Oklopcic 21), who had to act as a lady to find a decent husband and give birth to his children. So, "the two perpetuate each other, as the young Belle marries and becomes the Dixie Madonna, and raises Belles of her own" (Symmonds 6). Dixie Madonna was an ideal of a perfect white Southern mother who serves "as wife, mother, and moral guide" (Symmonds 6). Caroline Compson acted like a lady, preserved her purity till she found a socially respectable husband in Mr. Compson, and gave him four children. From that moment on, Caroline Compson is shown as

a woman whose life ceased to be narratable ... She has no stories to tell that can accommodate in a positive way even a grain of her postconsummation experience. Her entry into mature sexuality is swiftly followed by her exit. Having delivered her children, she takes to her bed—the childbed, not the marriage bed acting like a child, exacting from her children the sustenance she should be offering them. (Weinstein 69)

Being an “asexual, childish, and distanced mother” (Oklopčic 21-22), Mrs. Compson is never there for her children, spending most of their lives resting in bed, allegedly sick: “We went to Mother’s room, where she was lying with the sickness on a cloth on her head” (Faulkner 33). Mrs. Compson does not care how much her children need her, are worried about her, or just want to be by her side: “‘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.” (Faulkner 33). Caroline Compson is never there for Benjy who, as a mentally impaired person, needs her the most. In fact, she would always give him to one of her other children or Dilsey, the mammy,:

“Benjamin.” Mother said, “Come here.” I went to the door. “You, Benjamin.” Mother said.

“What is it now.” Father said, “Where are you going.”

“Take him downstairs and get someone to watch him, Jason.” Mother said. “You know I’m ill, yet you”

Father shut the door behind us. (Faulkner 33)

Sometimes, Dilsey’s own family had to take care of Benjy, instead of his own mother and father: “‘Your mommy aint feeling well.’ Dilsey said. ‘You all go on with Versh, now’” (Faulkner 21). Even when Caroline Compson shows that she might care for her children, she does not deal with them on her own, but again hands them over to somebody else, although she does not have anything else to do:

“What is it now.” Mother said.

“He want to go out doors.” Versh said.

“Let him go.” Uncle Maury said.

“It’s too cold.” Mother said. “He’d better stay in. Benjamin. Stop that, now.”

“It wont hurt him.” Uncle Maury said.

“You, Benjamin.” Mother said. “If you dont be good, you’ll have to go to the kitchen.” (Faulkner 2)

She is too self-centered, thinking only about her illness; failing even to be a decent wife to her husband, and not being concerned what is happening around her and her family. What she only cares for are old Southern values and her dignity and position in the community. In fact,

Caroline Compson's investment in the virtues of the Old South render her ineffective as both a woman and a mother, and leave her bedridden with hypochondria and anxiety. For Caroline, the desire to maintain an idealised version of the past leaves her unable to face the present or the future. (Buzacott 22)

Like many Southerners who were living in the past long after the Civil War, Caroline Compson's belief in Southern ladyhood as a means of preservation of her and her family's honor leads her to be a failure as a mother, prevents her to live a life in the present, and even to actually live her life. She is "deformed by her social training—a training shaped by class and race to the requirements of virginity—she abandons her own flesh and blood upon the loss of that virginity. She has outlived her image of herself" (Weinstein 70).

She wallows in constant self-pity:

"There, there." Father said. He touched Mother's face.

"I know I'm nothing but a burden to you." Mother said. "But I'll be gone soon. Then you will be rid of my bothering" (Faulkner 51)

and finds excuses not to be around her children: "'I know.' Mother said. 'Nobody knows how I dread Christmas. Nobody knows. I am not one of those women who can stand things. I wish for Jason's and the children's sakes I was stronger'" (Faulkner 5). She actually does not want to get better; she hides behind her illness, acting childish just to have everyone's attention.

Mrs. Compson is also deeply ashamed of Benjy, of whom she thinks as a punishment: "what have I done to have been given children like these Benjamin was punishment enough" (Faulkner 85-86). She even changes Benjy's name from Maury to Benjamin:

*"He was just looking at the fire, Caddy said. Mother was telling him his new name. We didn't mean to get her started . . .*

*Reckon Maury going to let me cry on him a while, too.*

*His name's Benjy now, Caddy said.*

*How come it is, Dilsey said. He aint wore out the name he was born with yet, is he.*

*Benjamin came out of the bible, Caddy said. It's a better name for him than Maury was.*

*How come it is, Dilsey said.*

*Mother says it is, Caddy said.*

*Huh, Dilsey said. Name aint going to help him.* (Faulkner 46-48; emphasis Faulkner's)

In the manner of an antebellum matron, Caroline Compson further interconnects religion, motherhood, and ladyhood: "I thought that Benjamin was punishment enough for any sins I have committed I thought he was my punishment for putting aside my pride and marrying a man who held himself above me I dont complain I loved him above all of them because of it because my duty though" (Faulkner 86). The mere fact that she considers her marriage a "duty" (Faulkner 86) indicates that she cannot run away from what she has been taught her whole life: "when I was a girl I was unfortunate I was only a Bascomb I was taught that there is no halfway ground that a woman is either a lady or not" (Faulkner 86). Thus, "Mrs. Compson's desire to exist as a "lady" causes her to fail as an effective mother" (Buzacott 88): "It cant be simply to flout and hurt me. Whoever God is, He would not permit that. I'm a lady. You might not believe that from my offspring, but I am" (Faulkner 254). Being so self-absorbed in the socially proscribed vision of ladyhood, she fails to see her true self of a materialistic and selfish mother, with no capacity to love her children. As Caroline Compson is only concerned by keeping her family's name pure, she disavows her only daughter, Caddy and keeps her away from her daughter Quentin: "'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'" (Faulkner 169). Caddy was dead for her the moment she was "cast off by her husband" (Faulkner 169). Out of fear of what the community might think when they discover that Caddy did not marry the father of her child, Caroline Compson took Caddy's daughter Quentin as her own.

Caroline Compson did, however, show affection to one of her children – Jason. Despite the fact that he grew up into an emotionless, sadistic and bitter man, she loves him unconditionally and sees him as the only child who has been worth of her attention: "except Jason he has never given me one moment's sorrow since I first held him in my arms I knew then that he was to be my joy and my salvation" (Faulkner 86). This occurs because other children failed and disappointed her: "a son whose idiocy indicts the very fertilization of egg by sperm; a daughter whose burgeoning sexuality promises, at best, the same disaster she has undergone; another son whose needs she did not (could not) assuage, and who punished her for it by committing suicide"; only Jason "assures her that he is hers alone: no Compson seed in him" (Weinstein 73). Except Jason, for Caroline Compson all the children dishonored the Compson name:

let me have Jason and you keep the others they're not my flesh and blood like he is strangers nothing of mine and I am afraid of them I can take Jason and go where we are not known I'll go down on my knees and pray for the absolution of my sins that he may escape this curse try to forget that the others ever were. (Faulkner 86)

By disowning her other children and not Jason as she saw a Bascomb in him, Caroline Compson believes she could preserve at least her family name pure and with it herself. As she cannot adapt to the changing world, she rather dwells in the past, sticking to the role she was taught from her birth.

### **4.3. Caddy and Quentin Compson and the Southern Belle Stereotype**

The last stereotype that will be examined in this chapter is the Southern belle stereotype. The Southern belle stereotype was re-created by Southern men after the Civil War defeat to “regain both their masculinity and the regional honor symbolically contained in the bodies of their wives, sisters, and daughters” (Oklopčić 20-21). They believed that they “had to protect the purity of white Southern womanhood. To achieve this, they once again confined their wives, sisters, and daughters to Southern women stereotypes where they had been held before the war” (Oklopčić 21). The Southern belle stereotype was centered “in the idea of protection of innocence and chastity of white Southern womanhood as white Southern womanhood was believed to represent innocence and chastity of the white South itself” (Oklopčić 20). The Southern belle was a young, upper-class woman, who “is idealised due to her presumed purity, both sexual and racial, and the supporting role (physical, social, emotional) she plays to white men” (Buzacott 14). Her most important task was to find a decent husband, get married, and raise another Southern belle or Southern gentleman, still holding tight to the past and old values of virginity and chastity. As Mrs. Compson failed in being a mother, Caddy could not grow up being a Southern belle. Instead, she has subverted it. One of the reasons was that she had to take the role of a mother to her brothers, especially to Benjy:

“If you'll hold him, he'll stop.” Caddy said. “Hush.” she said. “You can go right back. Here. Here's your cushion. See.”

“Dont, Candace.” Mother said.

“Let him look at it and he'll be quiet.” Caddy said. “Hold up just a minute while I slip it out. There, Benjy. Look.”

I looked at it and hushed.

“You humour him too much.” Mother said. “You and your father both. You dont realise that I am the one who has to pay for it. Damuddy spoiled Jason that way and it took him two years to outgrow it, and I am not strong enough to go through the same thing with Benjamin.”

“You dont need to bother with him.” Caddy said. “I like to take care of him. Dont I, Benjy.” (Faulkner 52)

This lengthy quote shows that being a mother comes more naturally to Caddy, the child, than to her own mother. Later, Caddy even comforts Caroline Compson, being a mother figure to her own mother: ““Hush, Mother. ‘Caddy said. ‘You go upstairs and lay down, so you can be sick. I’ll go get Dilsey”” (Faulkner 53).

Not believing in the sacred Southern ladyhood like her mother, Caddy tries to escape the social roles imposed on her by Southern society and her family. When she became sexually active, she engaged in sexual relations with more than one sexual partner, which she admits to Quentin after she got pregnant: “*Have there been very many Caddy I dont know too many will you look after Benjy and Father You dont know whose it is then does he know*” (Faulkner 97; emphasis Faulkner’s). Once, Mrs. Compson

happened to see one of them kissing Caddy and all next day she went around the house in a black dress and a veil and even Father couldn’t get her to say a word except crying and saying her little daughter was dead and Caddy about fifteen then only in three years she’d been wearing haircloth. (Faulkner 195)

Mrs. Compson’s reaction just proves how much pressure was put on young women to live up to the standards of patriarchal Southern values. With her promiscuity, Caddy wants to break free from the social conventions of the Old South.

The only person Caddy probably has ever looked up to is her father, a man who was not interested in hers or her brothers’ lives. Mr. Compson is a disappointed man and a nihilist. To him, virginity is not important:

In the South you are ashamed of being a virgin. Boys. Men. They lie about it. Because it means less to women, Father said. He said it was men invented virginity not women. Father said it’s like death, only a state in which the others are left and I said, But to believe it doesn’t matter and he said, That’s what’s so sad about anything: not only

virginity, and I said, Why couldn't it have been me and not her who is unvirgin and he said, That's why that's sad too; nothing is even worth the changing of it. (Faulkner 65)

After hearing these words from his father, Quentin desperately tries to persuade his sister not to engage in sexual affairs and eventually fails, committing a suicide after her wedding. Benjy also senses her loss of virginity:

Caddy came to the door and stood there, looking at Father and Mother. Her eyes flew at me, and away. I began to cry. It went loud and I got up. Caddy came in and stood with her back to the wall, looking at me. I went toward her, crying, and she shrank against the wall and I saw her eyes and I cried louder and pulled at her dress. She put her hands out but I pulled at her dress. Her eyes ran. (Faulkner 56)

This is probably the reason why Caddy grew up to be wild and destructive; she has had no strong parental figure who would tell her what is right or wrong, which, in turn, affects each of the Compson brothers, too. In their eyes, Caddy is seen "as a sister who climbs a tree, who becomes unvirgin, or who is once and always a bitch" (Trouard 26).

Her failure as a Southern belle has been foreshadowed by her muddy drawers. That event "is the primal scene that demonstrates that in order for her brothers' masculine subjectivity to hold, Caddy must behave in a certain way. It is therefore possible to read this moment as an originary revelation of the belle's position as a figure created to shore up Southern masculinity" (Buzacott 86). Caddy does not want to let the pressures of Southern patriarchal society define her, so she decides to go a different path than her mother and, according to everyone in the family, embarrasses her family name by having a baby without marrying its real father. That is why Mrs. Compson decides that her daughter is no longer worthy of her family and calls her "a fallen woman" (Faulkner 187). Caddy is erased from their lives and her daughter Quentin's life, and her name should never be mentioned.

Quentin, however, proves that the apple does not fall far from the tree. Quentin acts just like her mother did when she was her age, maybe even worse. Caddy had at least been embarrassed by her actions, while Quentin just does not care:

"Remember what I say," I says, "I mean it. Let me hear one more time that you were slipping up and down back alleys with one of those damn squirts."

She turned back at that. "I dont slip around," she says. "I dare anybody to know everything I do." (Faulkner 160)

Quentin is a rebellious girl who does not care about the consequences of her actions. She does not feel embarrassed about her sexual activities. She also freely admits that she is bad: “‘I dont care,’ she says, ‘I’m bad and I’m going to hell, and I dont care. I’d rather be in hell than anywhere where you are’” (Faulkner 160). Quentin is anything but a Southern belle: she does not obey Jason, the head of the house, she is not a virgin, she does whatever she wants. She acts like that because of Jason whose hatred towards Caddy she cannot stand. Jason identifies Quentin with her mother: they are both promiscuous and bad women because they share the same blood: “‘Like I say blood always tells. If you’ve got blood like that in you, you’ll do anything’” (Faulkner 202). As Jason has a really low opinion of his sister, he sees Caddy in Quentin. That is why he cannot stand his niece. Even the very first sentence of his section: “‘Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say’” (Faulkner 153) refers to both Caddy and Quentin and their promiscuous behavior. When Mrs. Compson finds “a soiled undergarment of cheap silk a little too pink” (Faulkner 240) in Quentin’s room, the analogy between Caddy’s muddy drawers and Quentin’s soiled undergarment is more than obvious, indicating that Quentin is like her mother Caddy, a sexually free young woman who tries to resist the Southern patriarchal codes of purity and to become an independent woman instead. In a desperate attempt to escape society and Jason’s mistreatment, Quentin runs away from her family: “The window was open. A pear tree grew there, close against the house” (Faulkner 240), taking Jason’s money:

The wire opened. “This is Jason Compson,” he said, his voice so harsh and thick that he had to repeat himself. “Jason Compson,” he said, controlling his voice. “Have a car ready, with a deputy, if you cant go, in ten minutes. I’ll be there—What?—Robbery. My house. I know who it—Robbery, I say. Have a car read—What? Aren’t you a paid law enforcement—Yes, I’ll be there in five minutes. Have that car ready to leave at once. If you dont, I’ll report it to the governor.” (Faulkner 241)

Quentin successfully escapes the decaying Compson house, taking Jason’s money with her, subverting and even destroying the Southern belle stereotype in this way. Through the characters of Caddy and her daughter Quentin, Faulkner tried to show the effects of the rigid distribution of gender roles in the Southern patriarchal society and how Southern women reacted to it. Through the disintegration of the Southern belle stereotype, Faulkner depicted the changing South and sent the message that those changes could only be embraced.



## Conclusion

William Faulkner's brilliantly written novel *The Sound and the Fury* depicts, in the manner of Southern Gothic fiction, the period of the post-war Southern region. As times of poverty and disintegration came to the South, Southerners embraced their past rather than present and modern times. To show that no one can escape the changing times, Faulkner created his fictional Yoknapatawpha County, writing about the reality of the life in the South. Through his characters, in this particular case the Compsons, Faulkner shows the possible consequences of living in the past: the disintegration and downfall of family and, eventually, the downfall of the South itself. That *The Sound and the Fury* is, indeed, a Southern Gothic, is demonstrated by Faulkner's usage of Gothic and Southern Gothic tropes. The setting in a decayed house and a "decayed" region is decidedly Gothic. The unusual events such as Caddy's promiscuity and Mr. Compson's alcoholism led to the downfall of the Compsons, which is another Gothic trope. Faulkner locates the third Gothic trope – that of a hurt woman who discovers a serious secret – in the character of Caddy Compson who faces the death in family at a very young age and is a victim of the subordination of women in the Southern patriarchal society. The set of Southern Gothic tropes was in this paper restricted to the analysis of Southern female stereotypes (mammy, Dixie Madonna, Southern belle) through the Compson female characters and their servant Dilsey. Southern female stereotypes were created by Southern men to preserve the ideals of Southern womanhood and Southern masculinity. The mammy stereotype was depicted through the character of Dilsey. As mammy, Dilsey raised the Compson children as her own, loving them, caring for them, giving them emotional support instead of their real mother. However, Dilsey failed in raising the next generation of Southern belles in the Compson family. Caroline Compson did, indeed, fail as a mother and a wife, subverting the stereotype of Dixie Madonna. She, too, failed in raising Caddy and Quentin as Southern belles. Caroline Compson only cared for preserving Old Southern values and the Compson family name. With that, Faulkner wanted to show how looking back into the past and not focusing on the present can lead to losing everybody else. Finally, depicting Caddy and her daughter Quentin as anti-belles, Faulkner again focused on showing the consequences of living in the past: you cannot escape the present and changing times. Old Southern values of purity and virginity ended with Caroline Compson's generation; both her daughter and granddaughter disgraced the family name by their sexual freedom as the marker of the changing world and new times.

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