Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well.

(ROLAND BARTHES)

The writer’s work must be open to displacement, otherwise it will remain an object of consumption rather than an object of knowledge.

(PIERRE MACHEREY)

Readings of *The Sound and the Fury* have been complicated by William Faulkner’s unusual, extensive “supplementing” of the novel during the years between its publication in 1929 and his death in 1962. He wrote about the Compsons in a few short stories and *Absalom, Absalom!* in the 1930s, added a long Appendix in 1946 that was published with the novel for nearly forty years, and commented on the novel at length in several interviews and in classroom discussions at the University of Virginia during the 1950s. Faulkner’s drafts of an introduction to the novel (written in 1933) and letters to his editors were published posthumously. It is almost impossible to overstate the influence these later texts have had on how *The Sound and the Fury* has been understood. In Thadious Davis’s phrase, both casual readers and critics have long found it “curiously seductive” to have these words from Faulkner the author at hand.¹

Malcolm Cowley, for whose *Portable Faulkner* anthology the Appendix was initially written, later described that 1946 text as “an integral part”

of Faulkner's novel, "the last change he would make in what was to remain his favorite among his own works."\textsuperscript{2} Cowley's statement reflects critical premises that were central to the postwar critical rehabilitation of Faulkner, a process in which his \textit{Portable Faulkner} was, by design and in reception, a central text. Influenced by formalist aesthetics and humanism, Cowley's approach to Faulkner was grounded in the notion that an author's work is characterized by unity and wholeness and the idea that the author, as creative genius, is the best reader of his own work. Robert Penn Warren, who reviewed the Cowley anthology when it first appeared, would identify it twenty years later as "the great watershed for Faulkner's reputation."\textsuperscript{3} This transformation, which has been delineated by Cheryl Lester and Lawrence Schwartz, refashioned Faulkner, in Lester's words, from a writer who had received a "predominantly unfavorable reception" at home into one deemed worthy to "enter into the American canon, receive the Nobel Prize, and travel abroad as an ambassador of American culture."\textsuperscript{4}

Faulkner's later texts about \textit{The Sound and the Fury} have thus long been read as clarifications of—or as of a piece with—the original novel. In the 1931 short story, "That Evening Sun," for example, Quentin recalls the occasion when the Compson family laundress Nancy, pregnant by a white man, attempts suicide. For Michael Millgate, writing in the 1960s, this story helps to explain \textit{The Sound and the Fury}: "the Compson children are again placed in a situation whose adult significance they do not wholly comprehend." The parallel enables readers "quite readily [to] disentangle" the fragmented recollections in the novel's Benjy section and read them as a short story, thus giving what Millgate sees as proper attention to the image of Caddy Compson in muddy drawers, climbing a tree and peering into a window (which Faulkner described in retrospect as the novel's origin).\textsuperscript{5}

In \textit{Absalom, Absalom!} (1936), Quentin Compson and his father Jason reappear in Yoknapatawpha several months prior to Quentin's suicide on a June 1910 day which had been narrated in detail in \textit{The Sound and the Fury}. Critics since have generally conflated these versions of Quentin, and


each has come to affect how the other is read. Cleanth Brooks’s 1963 observation is representative: “we must exercise caution in using the Quentin of the later novel to throw light upon the Quentin of the earlier. But Faulkner, in choosing the character Quentin for service in Absalom, Absalom! must have deemed the choice a sound one. He must have felt that the experience that Quentin was to undergo . . . would be compatible with, and relevant to, what he had Quentin undergo in The Sound and the Fury.” Writing over thirty years later, Richard Godden offers a late variation on this theme: in a study of three novels “linked by the death, revival, partial demise, and semi-resurrection of one character,” he reads Quentin as a contradictory focal figure through whom Faulkner examines “the formation, resilience, and failure of a southern owning class.”

The readings of The Sound and the Fury which have been granted virtually definitive status, however, are those found in Faulkner’s unfinished introduction, Appendix, letters, interviews, and classroom discussions. All of these texts come tied quite pointedly to the authority—in the last case, even the person—of the author. The Appendix places the characters of The Sound and the Fury in a larger historical framework from an omniscient position strikingly at odds with the novel’s distinctly limited narrative points of view. In introduction drafts, interviews, classrooms, and letters Faulkner repeatedly claims for the novel a mysterious, mythic centrality in his career as a writer, implying that to understand the text properly readers must do so on the author’s own terms. His own rereadings of the novel did in fact quickly become accepted as basic premises in Faulkner criticism: for example, the idea that Benjy “loved three things: the pasture . . . his sister . . . firelight,” the claim that Quentin “loved not his sister’s body but some concept of Compson honor precariously and (he knew well) only temporarily supported by the minute fragile membrane of her maidenhead,” and the description of Caddy as the writer’s “heart’s darling.” Phillip Novak writes that it has “often been noticed” that


“Faulkner’s commentary on his work is invariably less interesting and less sophisticated than the work itself.”9 In the case of *The Sound and the Fury*, however, such observations have been very infrequent and largely ineffectual. Eric Sundquist, for instance, effectively discusses how the Appendix and comments recast *The Sound and the Fury* as the mythic center of Faulkner’s career, but not how they determine which issues most critics even find worthy of discussion. John Matthews discusses Faulkner’s mythologizing as the source of one prominent line of criticism but does not address its pervasive influence on other critical approaches as well.10

As Philip Weinstein noted in the late 1980s, “the amount of critical exegesis dependent upon” the Appendix (and, I would add, other retrospective texts) “is weighty indeed, and it is not limited to undergraduates who don’t know better.”11 Writing almost a decade later, Godden noted the same problem: “I make no excuse for attributing an active consciousness to Benjy. Too many readers continue to listen to the dissimuls of Faulkner’s Appendix (1946) and of his *Paris Review* interview (1956).”12 The weight given these texts has indeed been extraordinary: virtually all critical analyses of the novel cite the unfinished introduction, Appendix, and/or interviews, often accepting these texts without question as authoritative sources for readers working to make sense of a difficult narrative. It is common for critics to use lines from the Appendix and interviews to provide unqualified ground or closure for their interpretations. In over half a century of criticism published since the Appendix first appeared, this practice has been so common that most of the best-known phrases and lines of interpretation in *The Sound and the Fury* criticism come from Faulkner’s retrospective comments rather than from the text of the novel itself. Yet critics have yet truly to examine the full implications of the canonical interpretive role these later texts have assumed.

It is not surprising that Faulkner’s rereadings of *The Sound and the Fury* had a kind of canonical status from their initial publication into the 1970s. Cowley opens his account of his literary friendship with Faulkner with an anecdote from the late 1920s about the need for authoritative interpretation. Harrison (Hal) Smith, who had been Faulkner’s editor at Harcourt Brace, had recently founded a small publishing house:

One morning his editorial reader, Lenore Marshall, came running downstairs to say, breathlessly, “I think I have found a work of genius.”

Hal must have suspected that it was *The Sound and the Fury*, since he had heard about the book—he may even have read it—while he was still with Harcourt. But he only said, according to Mrs. Marshall, “What’s it about?”

“I don’t know,” she confessed. “I’m just starting it.”

“Finish it.”

She did, that day, and thereupon reported that *The Sound and the Fury* was indeed a work of genius, though she still didn’t know what it was about.

Cowley invokes images—the puzzled (not to mention breathless and female) reader, the modernist genius—which are congruent with his own notions of authorship, reading, and the relative significance of authors and readers. In this literary-critical context, Faulkner’s retrospective texts are readily presumed to have an authorial imprimatur comparable to that of the original novel. Indeed, for Cowley they may even supersede that text, for in his view “the story lived in Faulkner’s mind, where it grew and changed like every living thing.”

But in the wake of the last thirty years of literary theory, Faulkner’s continued, largely unquestioned claim to that status is—at the very least—puzzling. Since the publication of Roland Barthes’s “The Death of the Author” and Michel Foucault’s “What is an Author?” the critical conception of the author upon which Cowley relied has certainly been severely qualified, if not wholly discredited. Foucault describes modernity’s “author function” in terms quite reminiscent of Cowley’s reading of Faulkner:

The author provides the basis for explaining not only the presence of certain events in a work, but also their transformations, distortions, and diverse modifications. . . . The author is also the principle of a certain unity of writing—all differences having to be resolved, at least in part, by the principles of evolution, maturation, or influence. The author also serves to neutralize the contradictions that may emerge in a series of texts: there must be—at a certain level of his thought or desire, of

13. Cowley (n. 2 above), pp. 4, 41.
his consciousness or unconscious—a point where contradictions are resolved, where incompatible elements are at last tied together or organized around a fundamental or originating contradiction.

For criticism, Foucault explains, the author serves as “a certain functional principle by which . . . one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction.” The “author” is thus “the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning.” 14 Faulkner’s repeated rereadings of The Sound and the Fury—and the authority critics have granted those rereadings—offer an intriguing illustration of the author function at work. Foucault’s pointed challenge could scarcely find a more apposite target.

Remarkably, however, this bedrock layer of Faulkner criticism has remained largely impervious to poststructuralist thought. Even deconstructive, feminist, materialist, and other theoretically informed readings of The Sound and the Fury have continued to rely upon (rather than to question) the retrospective authority of William Faulkner. There are exceptions: for example, Mick Gidley remarks that Faulkner’s “explanations” are also “compositions”; Lester sees the Appendix as “a critique, before the fact, of what has since become, in the United States, the canonical representation of this author’s writing”; and Matthews notes that reading the Appendix prior to the novel “short-circuit[s] the intended shock and confusion Benjy’s section was . . . surely meant to produce.” 15 But most critics who have reservations about the later texts make them as a caveat and proceed apace. Philip Cohen and Doreen Fowler point out that reading the novel in light of different retrospective texts—the unfinished introduction and the Appendix—“creates two different novels,” but at the same time they describe the introduction drafts as “revelatory.” Gidley notes how influential Faulkner’s comments have been, yet finds “no great gap of kind between Faulkner’s public comments on his own fiction and the fiction proper” and closes with reference to “their non-canonical glory.” 16


challenges some of Faulkner’s rereadings and provocatively declares that “Faulkner’s post-publication statements about The Sound and the Fury swaddle the book in maidenheads.” He contends with this “swaddling,” yet takes it to be central for understanding the novel: “Why should a sister’s hymen matter so much?” frames his discussion of the novel’s contradictions, which he argues “can be relocated within Faulkner, through a notion of the author as a subject who ‘authors’ himself by means of the story he tells.”17 The Author, it appears, never really died in Faulkner studies.

This persistent author effect in the critical history of The Sound and the Fury appears especially suspect in the context of the novel itself. As numerous critics have observed, the novel’s four narrators challenge the premise that one vantage point can ever claim to tell the “true” story of a human experience. The three first-person narrators, who recount interior monologues of the three Compson brothers, speak in very distinct voices, each highly subjective and self-absorbed in its own way: Benjy by mental limitations, Quentin by neurosis, Jason by defensive self-justification. The fourth does not resolve them but instead demonstrates, in conjunction with them, the impossibility of an omniscient point of view.18 While the four narrators complement each other in various ways, few critics since the 1970s have shared Cowley’s presumption that the work is inherently unified; indeed, most have focused on its contradictions and the ways it complicates attempts at resolution and undermines attempts at closure. Peter Stoicheff, for example, quoting Foucault, writes that “the novel’s exploration of language and voice implies that the author loses his very individuality, or ‘endlessly disappears’ in the endeavor to write.”19 The Sound and the Fury, contemporary critics generally agree, repeatedly, dialogically undermines truth claims, orderly histories, monologic narratives, and notions of certainty.

Over the last decade Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories about discourse and the novel have proved particularly useful in examining Faulkner’s

17. Godden (n. 6 above), pp. 8, 21, 48.

It turns out that Bakhtin’s critical concepts also challenge the ways in which Faulkner-as-author has been granted retrospective authority over this particular text. Historically, Bakhtin argues, the genre of the novel begins when “the homogenizing power of myth over language” has been destroyed, creating “[a] distance . . . between language and reality”: “Language is transformed from the absolute dogma it had been within the narrow framework of a sealed-off and impermeable monoglossia into a working hypothesis for comprehending and understanding reality.”

The novel develops in a world that is thus fundamentally heteroglot, filled with multiple languages it understands as “historically concrete and living things”: “The prose art presumes a deliberate feeling for the historical and social concreteness of living discourse, as well as its relativity, a feeling for its participation in historical becoming and in social struggle; it deals with discourse that is still warm from that struggle and hostility, as yet unresolved and still fraught with hostile intentions and accents; prose art finds discourse in this state and subjects it to the dynamic-unity of its own style.”

Bakhtin’s understanding of the novel’s existence in a heteroglot and unfinalizable environment suggests new ways to read, question, and subvert Faulkner’s voice as author in and about *The Sound and the Fury*. His descriptions of the novelist’s creative work and of authoritative discourse also help to illuminate both Faulkner’s many rereadings of *The Sound and the Fury* and his critics’ uncritical acceptance of them as authoritative texts. His concept of novelistic discourse makes such retroactive efforts to control meaning appear, finally, quite questionable: in a Bakhtinian light, it is difficult to see Faulkner’s re-visions and critical reliance upon them as anything other than repeated attempts at the final, definitive version of “the Compson story” that *The Sound and the Fury* proves impossible.


22. Ibid., p. 331.

23. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson describe the term ‘unfinalizability’ as “an all-purpose carrier” of Bakhtin’s conception of the world as open, unresolved, and filled with as-yet-unrealized potential; see Mikhail Bakhtin: *Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 36.
The later texts undoubtedly claim an authoritative status: the Appendix offers an encyclopedic format with clear-cut characterizations; the interviews provide myths of origin and original meaning. In effect, they claim retrospective, monologic authority over a text characterized by dialogue, heteroglossia, and inconclusiveness. As Matthews says of *Absalom, Absalom!* and the Appendix, each of these new accounts offers a “retrospective framing” that claims to present definitive “truth” about *The Sound and the Fury* and, in so doing, to prescribe what that text might mean. The Appendix burdens the Compsons with a history of doom and a closed future that refuse other plausible readings, while the interviews insistently mythologize the novel as a failed rendition of the image of Caddy Compson. The notion of Yoknapatawpha as a “unique fictional world” which evolves in Faulkner’s introduction drafts and interviews, Stoicheff points out, serves as a “form of mock writerly authority,” a nostalgic and “rueful gesture” toward the failed traditional ideology of the author. Stoicheff invokes Foucault, not Bakhtin, but while Bakhtin’s view of the author is in certain ways more humanist than Foucault’s, they nonetheless share complementary views of writing’s inexhaustibility. In these later texts, Faulkner writes and speaks authoritatively, as author.

While novelists may attempt to speak from such a privileged position (and readers may listen to them as though they do), Bakhtin proposes that they cannot sustain it. In the novel, the genre of modernity, the author does not occupy a discrete plane; rather, “the creating consciousness stands, as it were, on the boundary line between languages and styles.” The author’s language is but one of many in and about the literary text: “Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia [raznorečie] can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization—this is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel.” The novelist, whose avowed goal is “compelling language ultimately to serve all his own intentions,” does


so not by speaking a singular language, but by speaking “through language” to “refract” his intentions in and through heteroglossia. Heteroglossia works against the writer’s impulse to override other discourses; it undermines the attempt to claim the authority traditionally vested in the author. Bakhtin’s understanding of novelistic discourse suggests that critical discussion of The Sound and the Fury must approach Faulkner’s later narratives about this narrative much more skeptically than in the past. Thirty years after Foucault and Barthes questioned the privilege and function of the authorial word, this point seems belated, but necessary. For although on occasion even Faulkner disavowed his performance as author, criticism has seldom taken note. In 1933 he drafted a story of The Sound and the Fury’s origin; in 1946, he reread it and wrote to editor Robert Linscott: “I had forgotten what smug false sentimental windy shit it was.” Until his death, however, he would retell—and retail—that same genesis story in interviews and college classrooms. That Faulkner’s readers continue to take his comments authoritatively only compounds the necessity and significance of a critique.

* * *

The title of the Appendix announces its claim to authority:

APPENDIX
COMPSON: 1699–1945

The inclusive dates subsume the years recounted in The Sound and the Fury in a much larger continuum of history, while the word ‘appendix’ asserts that this text is something other than—and truer than—fiction. Faulkner’s blend of genealogical and encyclopedic formats similarly implies that this text contains the true chronicle of the Compsons from beginning to end. Robert Dale Parker compares the “problematic relation” between the Appendix and The Sound and the Fury with that between the narrative of Absalom, Absalom! and its chronology and genealogy. His comments on the latter are equally applicable here, for in each case the supplementary texts depend “on some implied notion that the chronology holds superior authority because it comes directly from the author, who, the unspoken assumption implies, holds superior authority because in an appendix he speaks with the privileges of omniscience instead of the mediated and therefore tenuous authority

of a character or even an author who speaks in the text proper.” An “appendix,” Parker continues, brings with it an “implicit claim to exterior and final authority.” 28 It thus presents itself as what Bakhtin calls “authoritative discourse”: “we encounter it with its authority already fused to it.” It “remains sharply demarcated, compact and inert: it demands, so to speak, not only quotation marks but a demarcation even more magisterial, a special script, for instance.” 29

Faulkner’s explanations for writing the Appendix—he had promised Cowley merely “a page or two of synopsis” to introduce the Dilsey section in the Portable Faulkner anthology—make these implicit claims explicit. In several letters to his editors, he identifies the Appendix as an authoritative key for confused readers, designed to help “the 4 sections as they stand now fall into clarity and place” and “clear up its obscurity.” 30 To editor Robert Linscott, Faulkner writes: “So maybe instead of an unconscious willful tour de force in obfuscation the book was rather the homemade, the experimental, the first moving picture projector—warped lens, poor light, clumsy gears and even a bad screen—which had to wait eighteen years for the lens to clear, the light to steady, the gears to mesh and smooth.” 31 The impetus behind the Appendix, as Faulkner repeatedly explained, was to transform a very complicated dialogic text into a strictly monologic account, to constrain the centrifugal Compson stories until “the whole thing would [fall] into pattern like a jigsaw puzzle when the magician’s wand touched it.” 32 Rather than accommodating his new text neatly to Cowley’s editorial purposes, as Lester astutely observes, he writes with other ends in mind. Specifically, I argue, he writes to institute an authoritative rereading of The Sound and the Fury. Once the Appendix was finished, Faulkner requested that it be published at the beginning of The Sound and the Fury in the forthcoming 1946 Modern Library edition to ensure that readers approached the novel with the focused vision that he desired. 33 His publishers in the United States thereafter included the Appendix in all


editions of the text from 1946 to 1984, first at the beginning and then, from 1966 onward, at the end. (It was not included in Spanish editions, however, until 1961, and in 1970 James Meriwether noted that French critics seldom committed the "critical faux pas" that result from "reading the appendix more closely than the novel," perhaps because the two texts had never been published together in France.)

The "corrected text" edited by Noel Polk, published in the United States in 1984, aimed to restore the novel to its original state and thus omitted the Appendix, yet the paperback edition inexplicably cited Faulkner’s retrospective comments of the 1950s on its jacket cover. The subsequent new Modern Library edition (1992) included a "corrected text" of the Appendix.

Adding the Appendix to postwar editions of The Sound and the Fury had a substantial effect, one deepened by the fact that it was in the late 1940s and 1950s that Faulkner—newly rehabilitated as a literary figure—finally received widespread attention. Faulkner’s new critical and popular acceptance, fostered by the Portable Faulkner and his receipt of the Nobel Prize (1949), escalated further as he was made a beneficiary of the new aesthetic sensibility fostered by Brooks, Cowley, and other postwar critics. Little substantial criticism on The Sound and the Fury had been published prior to the author’s addition of the Appendix, and major studies of Faulkner’s work did not appear until late in his career as laureate or after his death. With little disagreement—mostly over discrepancies in detail and plot—critics followed Faulkner’s lead in using the Appendix to guide their reading of the novel. Whatever reservations they had were usually relegated to footnotes or mentioned only to be set aside: even well into the 1980s, the poststructuralist “death of the author” registers nowhere. Indeed, textual scholars Meriwether and Polk are perhaps the first to observe in print that


readers who read *The Sound and the Fury* with the Appendix inevitably understand the novel differently because the Appendix makes the text markedly different from that published from 1929 to 1946. Each specifically criticizes U.S. editions from 1946 to 1966, which, at Faulkner’s request, printed the Appendix at the beginning, thus giving readers an entirely different initial experience of the novel and, in Meriwether’s words, “reliev[ing] them of the burdens which [it] was originally designed to impose upon them.”39 A decade later, Matthews and Walter Taylor first caution against using the Appendix (wherever it may be located) to teach *The Sound and the Fury*. The Appendix narratives, Taylor writes, “undermine” both “the process of discovery” and the effects of the novel’s style; teachers, Matthews proposes, should “intensify the readerly vertigo Faulkner induces” rather than “serving as Faulkner’s 1946 appendix” themselves.40 The contrast between the experience of reading *The Sound and the Fury* beginning with the Benjy section and that of reading it beginning with the Appendix could hardly be more pronounced.

Because of the interpretive weight it has been made to bear, the text of the Appendix requires careful examination. Faulkner presented the text to Cowley as an unbiased account of Compson history—“a piece without implications,” “a sort of bloodless bibliophile’s point of view.”41 But the authoritative form he gives it, the details it emphasizes, and the narrator’s often ironic tone contradict this claim: throughout the Appendix Faulkner redefines his characters with a decisiveness and slant that have enormous implications for the novel he would revise. In place of the rich ambiguities of the original novel, in which characters take shape gradually through their own voices and actions juxtaposed with—and remembered through—others, the Appendix offers explicit character definitions that claim the authority of retrospection. Here we are told with certainty that Quentin “loved death above all . . . loved only death,” that Jason was “[t]he first sane Compson since before Culloden . . . Logical rational contained,” that Benjy “could not remember his sister but only the loss of her,” and that Caddy, “[d]oomed and knew it, accepted the doom without either seeking or fleeing it.”42 The brothers appear as more rigid versions of their earlier selves, and Jason’s own voice echoes throughout the Appendix account of him. These definitions quickly became central in virtually all analyses of

41. Blotner, ed. (n. 27 above), pp. 205, 206.
42. Faulkner, “Appendix” (n. 8 above), pp. 411, 420, 423, 412.
these characters. The notion that Benjy is unable to remember, for example, became a commonplace despite the fact that the first section of the novel, set when he is thirty-three years old, is filled with scenes recollected from his childhood. 43 Faulkner represents Caddy as fundamentally changed. In the magazine photo that librarian Melissa Meek discovers, Caddy looks “ageless and beautiful, cold serene and damned”—more like the specter her brother Quentin envisions just prior to his suicide than the impassioned, independent figure of the original novel. 44 The futility of Melissa’s attempts to “save” Caddy underscores Faulkner’s rereading of Caddy as damned. 45

The Appendix provides a detailed historical and social context for understanding the Compson family, but it does so at the price of encumbering them with a genealogy of doom and failure that renders any future or freedom impossible. Taylor finds that its “short, pithy statements . . . identify core aspects of personality,” but they do with a finality that reduces the novel’s ambiguous, unresolved characters and cuts off their open-ended stories. 46 At the end of The Sound and the Fury, “each in its ordered place” is clearly only a transient, ironic illusion. Benjy is filled with memories and Jason frantic at the thought of ruin. Quentin’s voice has been so prominent in the narrative that it belies his long-ago death. Caddy alone has broken out of the vortex of Compson history, while her brothers have yet to think past her. Her daughter Quentin’s escape from home and the overbearing Jason opens the possibility of creating her own future. (Her first act toward that future, stealing back from Jason money that Caddy has sent over the years for her care, makes Caddy the indirect means of her escape.) In retrospectively straightening out the novel’s convoluted narratives, however, Faulkner insists on precisely the kind of tidy, final closure that the novel itself refuses. Thus in the Appendix Jason has an approximation of what he wants, Benjy can remember nothing, the brother Quentin is forgotten, the niece doomed, and Dilsy, retired and near death, refuses to have any further interest in Caddy. “Doom” makes Caddy the mistress of a German staff general by 1943 (certainly a very heavy-handed fate to write for a character in 1946). Denied her own section in the novel, she is denied a voice here as well, appearing only as others represent


44. Faulkner, “Appendix” (n. 8 above), p. 415.

45. That this characterization is at odds with the novel has been noted briefly, but only Davis (n. 1 above) considers it in the context of the Appendix as a retrospective effort to contain the novel.

46. Taylor, p. 64.
her. Davis writes that this silences Caddy’s disruptive voice in the novel proper, “debasing” her “into an icon of evil” and making of her a “spectacle” of “corruption.” Her daughter Quentin remains voiceless as well. The Appendix pronounces her “doomed to be unwed from the instant the dividing egg determined its sex” and fated to be a mediocre echo: “whatever occupation overtook her would have arrived in no chromium Mercedes; whatever snapshot would have contained no general of staff.”

Discrepancies of fact between The Sound and the Fury and the Appendix troubled Cowley, but Faulkner, who wrote the later text without rereading the novel, defended them:

Would rather let the appendix stand with the inconsistencies, perhaps make a statement (quotable) at the end of the introduction, viz.: The inconsistencies in the appendix prove to me that the book is still alive after 15 years, and being still alive is growing, changing; the appendix was done in the same heat as the book, even though 15 years later, and so it is the book itself which is inconsistent, not the appendix. That is, at the age of 30 I did not know these people as at 45 I now do; that I was even wrong now and then in the very conclusions I drew from watching them, and the information in which I once believed.
(Cowley, p. 90)

While some critics read this passage to reflect a commitment to an elastic sense of narrative, Faulkner’s words suggest that his chief interest lies in determining how the novel is to be read, in providing a certain source of right answers about the Compsons. He deliberately presents the Appendix as a totalizing image for The Sound and the Fury, one that authoritatively exchanges the vertiginous modernism of the original text for a much more tightly constructed version of the Compson story. As Sergei Chakovsky wryly notes, the Appendix “contains the plan of The Sound and the Fury as it could have been written . . . but luckily never was.” It fixes in place a very different Compson history, one written from an authoritative stance, structured around lineage, and bounded by a closing date. The Appendix, Davis rightly points

47. Davis, pp. 238, 246.
50. J. Hillis Miller discusses several passages in Absalom, Absalom! in which a narrator provides a totalizing image for the events of the novel, in effect expressing “the failure of realistic mimesis” to “get the story to come out right”: see “The Two Relativisms: Point of View and Indeterminacy in the Novel Absalom, Absalom!” in Relativism in the Arts, ed. Betty Jean Craige (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983), p. 155.
out, “enacts a repositioning of the author himself from the margins to the center,” claiming for Faulkner the privileges of the author.  

* * *

Faulkner’s recentering as author of _The Sound and the Fury_ occurs most emphatically in the extensive comments he made in interviews and classroom sessions in the 1950s. While a few critics caution against relying upon these comments, most take them seriously, quote them, and build key elements of their interpretations of the novel around them. In his influential and provocative _The Play of Faulkner’s Language_, for example, Matthews writes at length on ambiguity in _The Sound and the Fury_ but does not address the issues of authority raised by Faulkner’s later texts, which he cites in framing his arguments. Like the Appendix, the interview comments provide succinct external character assessments in place of the novel’s complex and contradictory interior monologues. The most influential of these have been the definition of Benjy as an “idiot” and the claim that Quentin only imagines some of the events and conversations in his interior monologue. Throughout the interviews and classroom discussions, Faulkner describes Benjy as an “idiot” who “himself didn’t know what he was seeing” and as an “animal” who “doesn’t feel anything.” This characterization has been echoed widely in Faulkner criticism, where Benjy has generally been read as a passive, blank slate upon which events are written—and thus as a wholly reliable narrator. Faulkner’s claim about Quentin came in a question-and-answer session at Virginia when a student asked if a conversation in which Quentin told his father about his (imagined) incest with Caddy had “actually” occurred. Faulkner replied: “He never did. He said, If I were brave, I would—I might say this to my father, whether it was a lie or not, or if I were—if I would say this to my father, maybe he would answer me back the magic word which would relieve me of this anguish and agony which I live with. No, they were imaginary. He just said, Suppose I say this to my father, would it help me, would it clarify, would I see clearer what it is that I anguish over?” Critics since have relied upon this statement as an


52. Matthews, _The Play_ (n. 18 above), pp. 22, 63–64.


instance of authoritative deciphering, citing it almost as a matter of course in their analyses of the difficult Quentin section of the novel. Matthews, for instance, mentions it in support of his reading of the multiple, blurred voices in the novel, while Stephen Ross and Noel Polk note it as a source of clarity in the face of the novel’s ambiguity: “Faulkner said that Quentin only imagined that he confessed incest . . . though there is no internal evidence in the novel to determine whether Quentin is remembering or imagining.”

Most important, the interviews foster two crucial arguments that have become widely accepted, basic premises in The Sound and the Fury criticism: first, that the genesis and thus “conceptual or symbolic center” of the novel lie in the image of young Caddy Compson with muddy drawers, climbing the tree and looking in the window, and second, that the novel is a series of frustrated attempts to tell a story that could never quite be made right. Faulkner first began to articulate these readings in the 1933 introduction drafts. In the 1950s, as a sought-after subject for interviews and a visiting writer at Virginia, he reiterated them often, and the image of narrative they present has dominated most discussions of the text’s multiple narrative voices. Faulkner describes writing The Sound and the Fury as a process of trying to explicate a persistent image: in this telling, image far supersedes narrative. The most detailed and influential of these genesis stories appears in the 1956 Paris Review interview, in response to the question “How did The Sound and the Fury begin?”

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. By the time I explained who they were and what they were doing and how her pants got muddy, I realized it would be impossible to get all of it into a short story and that it would have to be a book. . . . I had already begun to tell it through the eyes of the idiot child since I felt that it would be more effective as told by someone capable only of knowing what happened, but not why. I saw that I had not told the story that time. I tried to tell it again, the same story through the eyes of another brother. That was still not it. I told it for the third time through the eyes of a third brother. That was still not it. I tried to gather the pieces together and fill in the gaps by making myself the spokesman. It was still not complete, not until 15 years after

the book was published when I wrote as an appendix to another book the final effort to get the story told and off my mind, so that I myself could have some peace from it. It’s the book I feel tenderest towards. I couldn’t leave it alone, and I could never tell it right, though I tried hard and would like to try again, though I’d probably fail again.  

This creation myth, told nearly thirty years after the novel was published, has had an extraordinary effect on Faulkner criticism. Read as urtext rather than as competing narrative, it quickly became the foundation upon which interpretations of The Sound and the Fury were built. Among the many readings it has influenced are those assessing the novel as a psychoanalytic account of its originary image, those seeing the Compson world as a microcosm of larger myths about loss and remembrance, those focusing on formal relationships between the novel’s four parts, and those understanding the novel as an account of language’s insufficiency in the face of human experience.  

For Godden, more recently, Faulkner’s “swaddling” reads as a response to the historical contradictions that produced the novel—contradictions which neither it nor Faulkner can answer—and thus remains the necessary framework for reading this text. 

Faulkner, in short, seems to want it both ways: he says that he and the Compson brothers can never quite narrate Caddy’s story at the same time as he ingrains a “true” plotline about her, consigns her to fate with a Nazi general, and refuses to let her narrate her own story on the grounds that she is “too beautiful and too moving to reduce her to telling what was going on.” Particularly in a Bakhtinian context, Faulkner’s words remind us in spite of themselves that there are no final words, for narratives occur in a heteroglot world in which one more story may always be told and a mythic image is a monologic, contestable gesture. In the case of The Sound and the Fury, as numerous critics have shown, Caddy Compson’s are the most conspicuous such images and the most conspicuously absent of the not-yet-told stories.  

57. Meriwether and Millgate, eds., Lion in the Garden, p. 245 (cf. pp. 146–47, 244). Meriwether and Millgate note the possibility that Faulkner, following Paris Review custom, “may have had a hand in revising or polishing the final text” of this interview (p. 237). See also Gwynn and Blotner, eds., pp. 1, 17, 31–32.  

58. For extended, influential examples, see both Bleikasten, Most Splendid Failure (n. 18 above); and Matthews, The Play.  


60. Gwynn and Blotner, eds., p. 1.  

Appendix makes Caddy into an ageless, “frozen” image in a photograph.62 His later myth of origin makes her an overdetermined object, the monument about which the novel is written and in terms of which alone it can be understood.63 Together, these later texts demand that critics pay attention to a character they had largely ignored and—in pointed terms—prescribe exactly how she is to be read. Faulkner’s myth and its underlying desires celebrate Caddy as icon, making her “a visual symbol of masculine desire and longing, of male need and loss.”64 As Matthews shrewdly observes, this mode of commemoration leaves “no space for Caddy’s subjectivity, her version of her story.”65

Yet Caddy’s vital presence in the dialogues overheard, remembered, and imagined by the novel’s narrators suggests her penultimate, barely voiced words hovering on the edges, refusing to be contained. Interestingly, critics who write about Caddy question Faulkner’s retrospective narratives earlier and more insistently than do critics working on other topics. He may have caught their attention by describing her as his “heart’s darling,” but as soon as critics begin to examine Caddy with any care, they begin to read against the authorial grain. Eileen Gregory, for example, opens her 1970 reading of Caddy’s unconventional “vitality” by dismissing critical reliance on the Appendix as “irresponsible.” Douglas Hill’s important 1976 essay may take its cues from the author, but it centers on the reader’s apprehension of Caddy’s centrality to the novel. Hill argues that the reader’s sense of her character, as refracted through her brother’s narratives, is so substantial that “the Caddy of the novel” overrides the “stock female characterizations” of the Appendix. Only by reading Caddy against Faulkner-the-author’s narratives about her—first by way of reader response and then of feminist theories—are critics able to make discursive room for her subjectivity and story in their readings of The Sound and the Fury. When they do, they find rich but elusive glimpses of a character whose language and actions (not merely her presence and absence) give shape to the entire text. Hill maintains that despite Faulkner’s refusal (or inability) to write her as a full character rather than an abstraction, Caddy-as-subject is so fully established by the end of the Benjy and Quentin sections that readers confidently reject Jason’s view of her as false. Caddy’s dialogic engagement with Benjy, Quentin, and

63. Compare Gwynn and Blotner, eds. (n. 8 above), pp. 139–40.
64. Davis, p. 246.
Mr. Compson is so significant, even though secondhand reports of her voice vanish by the novel’s last section, that Linda Wagner proposes she may plausibly be read as one of the novel’s “essential narrators.” 66

Readers “may begin to hear the whisper of Caddy’s voice,” Minrose Gwin writes, precisely because Faulkner cannot claim traditional authority over the text but, rather, both makes and is unmade by it. 67 Once heard, Caddy’s voice refuses to heed the boundaries set by others’ words. Bakhtin describes characters in Dostoevsky’s fiction who “do furious battle with such definitions of their personality in the mouths of other people.” Such characters “acutely sense their own inner unfinalizability, their capacity to outgrow, as it were, from within and to render untrue any externalizing and finalizing definition of them . . . Dostoevsky’s hero always seeks to destroy that framework of other people’s words about him that might finalize and deaden him. Sometimes this struggle becomes an important tragic motif in the character’s life.” 68 While Dostoevsky, in Bakhtin’s account, refuses the privilege of “literary finalization” and turns “[e]verything that the author-monologist kept for himself . . . over to his hero,” Faulkner tries, retrospectively, to retain it all. 69 Even from the margins of the text, however, Caddy undermines the efforts of the novel’s four narrators and the author to control meaning in (and about) The Sound and the Fury. That Faulkner “could never get it right” says little if anything about Caddy’s beauty, but it does say something about subjectivity and narrative. Novak observes that Faulkner “invariably spoke as if the substance of the novel lay at the very limits of narratability.” 70 This narrative difficulty, it appears, reflects the ineluctable contradiction between the novel’s unusual, experimental fidelity to a notion of heteroglossia and its preoccupation with a subject to whom it denies voice.

* * *

Bakhtin’s outline of the historical development of novelistic discourse helps to explain Faulkner’s attempt to have it both ways as author

66.  Hill, pp. 37, 33;  Wagner, p. 61. Later readings of Caddy in terms of presence and absence include Kaivola and Gwin.

67.  See Gregory, pp. 101, 90;  Hill, p. 36;  Gwin, p. 35.

68.  Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, trans. and ed. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 59. Compare Chakovsky (n. 18 above): “the dignity of Faulkner’s character always lies in his attempt to maintain his individuality, to demonstrate his independence from the ‘idea’ or ‘type’ which pretends faithfully to represent him” (p. 301).

69.  Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, pp. 58, 52.

70.  Novak (n. 9 above), p. 64.
and, later, giver of the final word regarding *The Sound and the Fury*. With the development of the novel in modernity, Bakhtin argues, comes a profound shift in the “positioning of the author”: “The novelist is drawn toward everything that is not yet completed. He may turn up on the field of representation in any authorial pose. . . . The underlying, original formal author (the author of the authorial image) appears in a new relationship with the represented world. . . . The ‘depicting’ authorial language now lies on the same plane as the ‘depicted’ language of the hero, and may enter into dialogic relations and hybrid combinations with it (indeed, it cannot help but enter into such relations).”

Writing novels thus involves risking the traditional prerogatives of authorship, for it produces implied authors who lie or who are mistaken, unreliable narrators who claim knowledge they do not have, authors who are limited readers of their own texts, and other narrative uncertainties. Even if the writer attempts to keep heteroglossia at arm’s length and speak authoritatively, "he knows that such language is not self-evident and not in itself incontestable, that it is uttered in a heteroglot environment, that such a language must be championed, purified, defended, motivated. In a novel even such . . . language is polemical and apologetic, that is, it interrelates dialogically with heteroglossia. It is precisely this that defines the utterly distinctive orientation of discourse in the novel—an orientation that is contested, contestable and contesting—for this discourse cannot forget or ignore, either through naiveté or by design, the heteroglossia that surrounds it.”

The modern novelist may pose as a traditional author but cannot actually be one. Faulkner’s retrospective narratives about *The Sound and the Fury* demonstrate this predicament particularly well. For the most part, they have yet to be read as novelistic discourse. Rather, as designed, they have largely been accepted, even championed, as authoritative clarification rather than as narrative, as sources of fact rather than as “competing” texts. *The Sound and the Fury* has been read within the terms they establish, but they themselves have yet to be read against and contested by the original novel.

A few critics have examined the Appendix as a text preoccupied with authorship; others have suggested that it should be read as a distinct fiction. Given how it has constrained readings of *The Sound and

72. Ibid., p. 332.
73. Parker (n. 28 above), p. 193.
74. On the Appendix and authorship, see Lester (n. 4 above); Donaldson (n. 49 above); and Davis (n. 1 above); on its separate status, see Rollyson (n. 38 above), and Mary Jane Dickerson, “‘The Magician’s Wand’: Faulkner’s Compson Appendix,” *Mississippi Quarterly* 28 (1975): 317–37.
the Fury for over fifty years, however, the Appendix’s complicated relationship with the novel is surely the more crucial topic for further study. The exegetical role played by the interview comments, which have enjoyed an even more exceptional status—much quoted, seldom discussed—merits equally rigorous consideration. The time is long overdue for readers of The Sound and the Fury to examine Faulkner’s retrospective narratives skeptically and to contest his readings as well as (or rather than) to embrace them.

How these multiple narratives engage one another dialogically is in part the province of readers, who bring their own voices and heteroglot environments to bear as well. The Sound and the Fury, with its radical disjunction between narrators, and Faulkner’s later narratives, with their omnipresent author-as-reader, certainly invite and require such interaction. Faulkner critics have of course long seen that the novel complicates the conventional role of the reader: Olga Vickery noted as early as 1959 that “by fixing the structure while leaving the central situation ambiguous, Faulkner forces the reader to reconstruct the story and to apprehend its significance for himself.”75 As Wolfgang Iser and others have demonstrated, modernist novels (with their multiple narratives and time lines) exaggerate the usual process of reading by leaving many questions open-ended for the reader, whose answers will always be provisional, subject to change as other readers reach different interpretations. The Sound and the Fury provokes this dialogic participation from its first pages, for as soon as a reader recognizes the severe limits of Benjy’s perceptions, he or she attempts to supplement what that difficult narrator has to say. The result, Iser describes, is that the reader “experiences Benjy’s perspective not only from the inside—with Benjy—but also from the outside, as he tries to understand Benjy.”76 Once initiated, this dialogic mode of reading both inside and outside becomes the way readers read the various narrators and narratives that follow; the text itself establishes that no one voice has the entire story.

In this context, to grant the Appendix and interviews separate, authoritative status is, simply, to misread badly. Putting the Appendix at the beginning of the text in 1946 “short-circuited” more than just the disorienting experience of diving into the Benjy section headfirst; it undermined the very process of reading that the novel itself instigates. For The Sound and the Fury, as Warwick Wadlington writes, requires

considerably more than conventional “reconstruction of an inferable narrative line,” and in doing so it provocatively demonstrates that one can and must “read in several ways, and in several ways at once, with no necessity of seeing contradiction and epistemological gaps in this multiple functioning.” This discomfits many readers, from students unsettled by Faulkner’s experimental narrative technique to Faulkner himself, wanting to set the story straight. Susan Donaldson argues that the Appendix “implicitly . . . insist[s] upon the never-ending process of reading.” In a long critical history in which Faulkner has held lasting authority over the novel, however, the Appendix has generally been understood and used as a means toward closure. Lester reads the Appendix as a “portable text” because “its details stretch in plural and contradictory ways in several directions at once,” but most Faulkner criticism fails to take those rich ambiguities into account. Rather, the aspects of the Appendix and interviews most congenial to such arguments have been overshadowed almost entirely by the more explicit claims these texts make about their own authoritative status. Bakhtin sees this impulse to resolve contradictions and close off plots as, historically, one result of the novel’s ascendancy: in the modern world, “The absence of internal conclusiveness and exhaustiveness creates a sharp increase in demands for an external and formal completedness and exhaustiveness, especially in regard to plot-line.” In the case of Faulkner, such demands are evident across the critical spectrum, beginning but not ending with Faulkner and Cowley. Even as he told his publishers the Appendix should be placed at the front of The Sound and the Fury and continued to rehearse his genesis myths, Faulkner claimed—rather dubiously—to distrust the idea of an introduction: “To me, the book is its own prologue epilogue introduction preface argument and all. I doubt if any writing bloke can take seriously this or any other manifestation of the literary criticism trade.” But Faulkner did take the notion seriously. Such literary historical details cast the critical contradictions of modern authorship in sharp relief.

Wadlington observes that the Compsons typically err by experiencing “difference as contradiction, multiplicity as a stalemate war,” the world

78. Donaldson, p. 38.
79. Lester, p. 389.
as "a universe of antagonisms." 82 Too often, Quentin and his father, Jason, and Mrs. Compson read their world like conventional readers in search of clear solutions; they are the sort who would read The Sound and the Fury, misunderstand its "inconclusiveness" as a flaw, and turn to the Appendix with relief. 83 Their error frustrates their purposes and even helps drive Quentin to suicide when he comes to see meaning as unstable, difference as unresolvable, history as empty. For in a heteroglot world difference and uncertainty are the inevitable, often difficult, yet always potentially productive state of things. Through the Compsons’ misunderstandings and dialogues, implicit and explicit, The Sound and the Fury motivates readers to read both critically and creatively, pushing us to set routine reading habits aside and, in André Bleikasten’s words, to meet the text "on its own ground, to heed its uncertainties and indeterminacies, its disjunctions and dissonances," and to engage them dialogically. 84

Faulkner’s repeated retelling of The Sound and the Fury, finally, reminds us that “novelistic representation is always an open, unresolvable conflict of representations.” 85 Bakhtin’s theories suggest that critical discussion of The Sound and the Fury will inevitably come to read Faulkner’s later texts far more dialogically—and thus skeptically—than in the past. Indeed, the process of decentering Faulkner-as-author is already under way, and has been for some time, though criticism has been slow to notice it. The most telling examples to date have been in readings of Caddy Compson, which have had to dismantle Faulkner’s iconography in order to read her unpredictable “voice of alterity.” 86 In 1957, University of Virginia graduate students astutely asked Faulkner why Caddy didn’t have her own section in the novel and whether there was “any way of getting her back from the clutches of the Nazis, where she ends up in the Appendix?” In response, Faulkner, the eminent visiting author, recited yet again his story of the novel’s genesis and failure and spoke of Caddy as being “too beautiful” to narrate. To bring her back to life “would be a betrayal,” an “anti-climactic” move, he told the students: “it is best to leave her where she is.” 87 Faulkner criticism, in turn, ignored their questions and canonized his answers. But Faulkner’s statements of the 1940s and 1950s—spoken and heard

82. Wadlington, pp. 69–70.
83. Compare Bleikasten, Most Splendid Failure (n. 18 above), p. 204.
84. Bleikasten, "Reading Faulkner," p. 17.
86. Gwin (n. 25 above), p. 61.
as authoritative—find quite a different audience half a century later. As Matthews remarks, contemporary college students simply “will not accept Faulkner’s explanation why a novel devoted to the absent nurturing female never permits her to tell her own story.”88 For readers skeptical of the author as best reader or final signified, “betrayal” far more accurately describes Faulkner’s late rejection of his own experiment in modernism. 89 For in his rereadings of The Sound and the Fury, he betrays his own earlier project by choosing objectivizing iconography over a more complicated representation of subjectivity, one open to “the independence, internal freedom, unfinalizability, and indeterminacy of the hero.”90

Bakhtin describes the life of the literary work as one of continual creative engagement: real and represented worlds “find themselves in continual mutual interaction” as readers with “differing time-spaces” “recreate and in so doing renew the text.”91 The history of The Sound and the Fury criticism, from its most formalist moments to the possibilities opened by poststructuralist and feminist approaches, demonstrates this process with particular clarity. Equally, and more important, it reveals how easily critical readings of texts can become conventionalized, and how narrow the space may be between renewing a text creatively and reifying it. The challenge of rethinking Faulkner’s dialogic relationship with the novel he loved most serves as a provocative reminder that for readers, as for Benjy Compson, “each in its ordered place” is an always provisional condition that time and language will change.92

91. Weinstein (n. 11 above) quotes Balibar and Macherey: “Works of art are processes and not objects, for they are never produced once and for all, but are continually susceptible to ‘reproduction’; in fact, they only find an identity and a context in this continual process of transformation” (p. 193, n. 26).