

The Eternal Return and Ricoeur's Theory of Time in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*¹

(El eterno retorno y la teoría
del tiempo de Ricoeur en
El sonido y la furia, de Faulkner)

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ABSTRACT

This article provides in-depth information concerning the treatment of time, as circular and recurrent rather than rectilinear and progressive, by most American and Latin American writers. After an overall view of research on the history of circular time in philosophy and literature, follows the application of Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative time to the novel *The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner. Ricoeur's theory proposes that readers move backwards and forward in narrative time and this study shows how the circularity of the imaginary travel and the linearity of the quest as such are thus put together.

RESUMEN

Se analizan aspectos referidos al tratamiento del tiempo circular y recurrente en escritores estadounidenses e hispanoamericanos. Después de una amplia investigación sobre la historia del tiempo circular en filosofía y literatura, se procede con la puesta en práctica de la teoría narrativa de tiempo de Paul Ricoeur a la novela *El sonido y la furia*, de William Faulkner. Conforme a la teoría de Ricoeur, los lectores se mueven de manera circular en

1 Recibido: 18 de mayo de 2014; aceptado: 4 de noviembre de 2014.

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la narrativa, por lo que se comenta la circularidad del viaje imaginario y la linealidad de la búsqueda y su puesta en conjunto.

Keywords: eternal return, narrative theory, temporality, American narrative

Palabras clave: eterno retorno, teoría narrativa, temporalidad, narrativa estadounidense

The concept of the *eternal return* or cyclical time appears frequently in twentieth-century literature. This notion of time as circular and recurrent rather than rectilinear and progressive is a key element in the work of a number of the leading figures in modern American and Latin American literature. The purpose of this article is first to discuss research that reveals the presence of circular, non-linear time as a prominent theme in the modern Latin American novel, and then to compare the way it has been dealt with by certain novelists and poets—most notably twentieth-century American, Irish, and Latin American writers. After presenting a general overview of the history of the idea of circular time in philosophy and literature, this research on how the *eternal return* operates in literary texts will lead to the application of Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative time to the novel *The Sound and the Fury*,³ by William Faulkner.

Ricoeur is a French theorist who has exercised an enormous influence on literary studies and theory. He is a professor of philosophy at the University of Paris, and his works have been accepted positively by critics and scholars in North America as well as in Latin America. Therefore, this difficult but intriguing novel—*The Sound and the Fury*—presents a circular narrative structure in which readers are moved back and forth in narrative time and “temporality springs forth in the plural unity of future, past, and present.”⁴ Writers such as James Joyce, Gabriel García Márquez, Franz Kafka, Jorge Luis Borges and William Faulkner are difficult for audiences to read

3 William Falkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (New York: Random House, 1929).

4 Paul Ricoeur, “Narrative Time,” *On Narrative*, Ed. W. J. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 167.

and understand due to the concept of the stream of consciousness used in their novels.

A good place to begin a general recapitulation of the notion of cyclical time, or the *eternal return*, especially in a study which focuses on modern Latin American literature, is with Jorge Luis Borges, who can be cited as one of the best known modern authors to fictionalize the concept of circular time in such works as “Las ruinas circulares” [“The Circular Ruins”], “El acercamiento a Almotásim” [“The Approach to Al’Mutásim”], “El inmortal” [“The Immortal”], and in other short fiction⁵. Borges has also developed the theme of the *eternal return* in his verse, the most obvious example of which is short metaphysical poem “La noche cíclica” [“The Cyclical Night”]⁶. It bears citing here because of the formal circularity achieved by repeating the same thematically significant verse: “Lo supieron los arduos alumnos de Pitágoras...” [It was known by the arduous pupils of Pythagoras...]. This is both its initial and its final line.

This procedure, which Ana María Barrenechea has identified as an “artifice...common to folk ballads and narratives of never-ending stories,”⁷ reveals a key structural similarity to other prominent examples of Latin American circular poetry dealing with the theme of cyclical time, as well as to various novels that will be discussed below as representative of “circular” fiction. For instance, the foremost manifestation of this is in “Piedra de sol” [“Sun Stone”], by the Mexican poet Octavio Paz: as José Emilio Pacheco explains, like the Aztec calendar which inspired it, “no termina sino vuelve a empezar” [it does not end but starts all over again] with a repetition at its conclusion of the six hendecasyllables with which it begins. This poem is simultaneously the end of a cycle and the beginning of another. Its circular structure does not include periods but rather

5 Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1956).

6 Jorge Luis Borges, *Obra poética* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1960) 125.

7 Ana María Barrenechea, *Borges, the Labyrinth Maker* (New York: New York UP, 1965) 173.

commas and semicolons, depicting that cyclical repetition and seasonal transformation of nature.

Borges is also one of the twentieth-century's leading authorities on the history of the notion of *eternal return* within formal philosophy and literature. His most comprehensive essay is in *Historia de la eternidad* [*A History of Eternity*], and bears the title "El tiempo circular" ["Circular Time"]. Borges begins this essay by declaring his propensity to "regresar eternamente al eterno retorno" [come back eternally to the eternal return], and then proceeds to outline what Juan Nuño calls "the three fundamental modes in which the myth of the [eternal return] can be represented;" he summarizes this as follows⁸:

El que pudiera denominarse 'astrológico,' en el que creía Platón, que es aquel que infiere del ritmo cíclico de los astros similar movimiento repetitivo en la humana existencia. El de Nietzsche, basado en el postulado (falso) de un número finito de combinaciones cósmicas, y un tercero, menos ambicioso, en el que los ciclos considerados vuelven a repetirse no de forma idéntica, sino apenas semejante.

In the process of outlining these three categories of circular time and indicating Borges' personal preference for the third one, which he relates to a "negación de toda novedad" [negation of all novelty] as well as to an "exaltación del presente" [exaltation of the present], Borges links the concept of the *eternal return* not only to Plato and Nietzsche, but also to Vanini, Thomas Browne, Bertrand Russell, Spengler, Emerson, Shelley and Poe, as well as to some ancient philosophers and poets such as Seneca, Vergil, Marcus Aurelius and Heraclitus. Particularly relevant to the Latin American novels discussed below are Heraclitus and Nietzsche.

8 Juan Nuño, *La filosofía de Borges* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986) 123; [What can be defined as "astrological," what Plato believed to derive from the cyclical rhythm of the stars, is a similar repetitive movement of human existence. That (philosophy) of Nietzsche based on the (false) postulate of a finite number of cosmic combinations, and a third one, less ambitious, in which the cycles involved are repeated not in an identical form, but in a similar way] (My translation).

A central theme contained in the aphorisms of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus is the “notion of periodicity, of measure and equality preserved by regular recurrence over time.”⁹ Moreover, it is clear in the one hundred ninth fragment attributed by Kahn to this philosopher: “The beginning and the end are shared in the circumference of a circle.” This idea is also reflected in another of Heraclitus’ aphorisms by what is described as a “ring effect, suggesting a cycle of recurrence, produced by the repetition of the same verb as first and last word in the sentence”¹⁰, in much the same manner as the poems by Borges and Paz and in the structure of several Latin American novels.

A good example of distinct structural circularity symmetry common to the writing of Heraclitus is his ninety-second fragment, which, combined with other fragments of his prose (XCVI-XCVIII), leads to one of the most relevant facets of his philosophy of cycles, namely that of metempsychosis of the transmigration of the soul at death. This aphorism reads: “Immortals are mortal, mortals immortal, living the others’ death, dead in the other’s life.”¹¹ It suggests a tight pattern of unity between life and death or what Charles Kahn defines as a “mundane equivalent to that ‘terrible, grievous wheel’ of rebirth from which the mystic initiative hoped to escape.”¹² Hence, it is precisely those conclusions concerning the text attributed to Heraclitus that have led some scholars to interpret his fragments as anticipating Nietzsche’s hypothesis of the *eternal return* or what Borges has called “la idea más horrible del universo” [“the most horrible idea of the universe”].¹³ A similar nightmarish vision of the perpetual repetition or reincarnation of the soul pervades those twentieth century novels described here as “circular.”

9 Charles H Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 150.

10 Kahn, 235.

11 Kahn, 235.

12 Kahn, 236.

13 Nuño, 120.

Alejo Carpentier and Gabriel García Márquez are also important writers who make use of circular time in their novels. The notion of history as an *eternal return* is often associated to several works by the former. A circular or spiral vision of Latin American history, for example, has frequently been linked by critics to the novels *El reino de este mundo* [*The Kingdom of this world*], *El siglo de las luces* [*Explosion in a Cathedral*], *El recurso del método* [*Reasons of State*], and several of Carpentier's short stories—most notably those contained in the volume *Guerra del tiempo* [*The War of Time*—have also been interpreted as demonstrating history as recurrent or cyclical rather than progressive. Carpentier's novel *Los pasos perdidos* [*The Lost Steps*] can also be cited as highly pertinent to the present study because of the fact that—as Carlos Fuentes declares in *La nueva novela hispanoamericana*—its “voiding of time by the time is repeatable because time is mythic in the novel and is mythic because it is exemplary, because it is eminently ‘presentable.’”¹⁴

Several major and minor Latin American writers make use of mythical time in their novels to represent their cultures' origins. It may seem to most readers that their literary works are saturated with Latin American myth and history, as Roberto González Echeverría points out in *Myth and Archive*.¹⁵ An illustration of this obsessive use of history and myth is Carlos Fuentes' *Terra Nostra*, which “retells much of sixteenth-century Spanish history, including the conquest of Mexico, while also incorporating pre-Colombian myths prophesying that momentous event.”¹⁶

Fuentes acknowledges the predominance of a “tiempo presente absoluto del mito” [“absolute present mythical time”] in *Cien años de soledad* [*One Hundred Years of Solitude*] as well.¹⁷ Perhaps

14 Carlos Fuentes, *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1969) 51.

15 Roberto González Echeverría, *Myth and Archive* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 5.

16 Fuentes, 5.

17 Fuentes, 64.

the best summary of the use of mythical time in this novel, however, is that provided by Raymond L. Williams:

This concept of time negates the lineal progression of normal chronology and history, the Buendías do not make the type of temporal distinctions that history demands: rather, they regularly fail to integrate themselves successfully into the flow of history and civilization. Their actions inevitably reflect a pattern of cyclical repetitions instead of lineal progression. The constant repetitions within the Buendía family; for example, contribute to an experience of an eternal present: the names of the members of the family as well as specific types of personalities... All the actions and events in Macondo eventually appear as the inevitable repetition of probably futile previous actions.¹⁸

This summary by Williams demonstrates how myth is used in the novel to serve its circular structure. The whole novel has this mythic air, from beginning (foundation) to ending (destruction), about the history of the Buendía family and Macondo. Here, myth also reveals the mind and character of a people, this being a symbolic projection of a people's hopes, fears, values and aspirations. Indeed, this summary of mythical time suggests "the origin and source of a culture's own version of its values, beliefs and history through a culling and re-telling of its myth."¹⁹

Other scholars who have identified and analyzed the many manifestations of circularity in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* have pointed to the conclusion drawn by one of the minor characters, the fortune teller, Pilar Ternera:

18 Raymond L Williams, *Gabriel García Márquez* (Boston: Twayne Publisher, 1984) 80.

19 Echeverría, 364.

la historia de la familia era un engranaje de repeticiones, una rueda giratoria que hubiera seguido dando vueltas hasta la eternidad, de no haber sido por el desgaste progresivo e irremediable del eje.²⁰
[the history of the family was a machine with unavoidable repetitions, a turning wheel that would have gone on spinning into eternity were it not for the progressive and irremediable wearing of the axle].²¹

This is one of the most significant statements contained in the circular structure of the novel, precisely because of the fact that it compares the history of the Buendía family with a machine that repeats names, characters and actions cyclically. García Márquez provides a context for a characteristic phenomenon of Latin American literature: the fact that events repeat themselves cyclically.

The most comprehensive study done yet on mythical time defined as the *eternal return* is a long essay first published in 1949 by the Rumanian religious historian Mircea Eliade. This study can serve to more fully explain the function of circular temporal structures in novels like *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Sound and the Fury*. Eliade's work concludes that "recent orientations tend to confer value upon the myth of cyclical periodicity" and represent "a revolt against historical time"; that is, "an attempt to restore... historical time...to a place in the time that is cosmic, cyclical, and infinite."²² Eliade also tells about how the creation of the world, then, is reproduced every year. This eternal repetition of the "cosmogonic act," by transforming every new year into the inauguration of an era, permits "the return of the dead to life, and maintains the hope of the faithful in the resurrection of the body."²³ This continuous regeneration occurs because modern men and women have the need to renew themselves. For instance, settling in a new house would revive for

20 Gabriel García Márquez, *Cien años de soledad* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1967) 334.

21 Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Avon Books, 1971) 402.

22 Mircea Eliade, *The Myth and the Eternal Return*, Trans. Willard Trask (Princeton: UP, 1954) 153.

23 Eliade, 62.

them this experience of renewal, as for many other people the new year still preserves the prestige of the end of a past and the fresh beginning of a new life.

Cyclical time is also an essential element in the fiction of James Joyce, and any overview of the presence of *eternal return* in literature would be incomplete without mentioning both *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*, which most directly bear on the present research because of the emphasis they give to cyclical repetitions and to the distinctly circular structure that they possess. *Finnegan's Wake* shows this by "ending" in an unfinished sentence that is continued by half a sentence at its "beginning," as follows:

...riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs (4). The keys to. Given! A way a lone a last a loved a long the....²⁴

The work of another significant twentieth century writer is saturated with nostalgia for the myth of eternal repetition and the abolition of time. Thus parallels deriving from the concept of cyclical history and circular narrative structure can be drawn between *Finnegan's Wake* and some of the Latin American works discussed in this article. Carlos Fuentes also incorporates a Meso-American indigenous consciousness of the *eternal return* in his fiction. As Luis Leal reminds us, the title of Fuentes' first book, *Los días enmascarados [The Masked Days]*, refers to "the Aztec myth of the five days at the end of the year when time stopped in readiness for the new life, the rebirth, the eternal return."²⁵ Much of the Mexican author's subsequent fiction is likewise based on this pre-Colombian cosmology. The works of Carlos Fuentes that perhaps most dramatically reveal the author's fascination with

24 James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Viking Press, 1967) 628.

25 Luis Leal, "History and Myth in the Narrative of Carlos Fuentes," *Carlos Fuentes: A Critical Review* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982) 5.

circular time, however, are the novels *Una familia lejana* [*Distant Relations*] and *Cambio de piel* [*Change of Skin*].

The first of these novels is cited because of its treatment of what Leal defines as the “myth of the cycle life-death-life.”²⁶ On the other hand, *Cambio de piel* merits more attention not only because of its theme of the “mystification of history,” but more significantly, for its use of the symbol of the *eternal return*, namely that of the “serpiente que se muerde la cola” [“snake that swallows its own tail” (11)]. It is in *Cambio de piel* where Fuentes most effectively utilizes the image of the ancient Mexican god Quetzalcoatl as represented in the large circular sculpture found at Xochicalco of a “serpiente emplumada que se devora a sí misma” [feathered snake that devours itself] as a symbol of the ancient Náhuatl concept of cyclical repetition and of the circular structure of the novel itself. It is a ritual in which the snake swallows itself like in a domino effect, giving the sense of renewal and resurrection because of the cycle “life-death-life.”²⁷ This event, which is related to the moon, water and life, symbolizes the regeneration of nature linked to the cyclical repetition of the novel.

Discussing the novel’s “structural configuration” in “Tiempo y mito en *Cambio de piel*” [“Time and Myth in *Change of Skin*”], Donald Fogelquist notes that near the end of the novel’s first epigraph, the reader encounters the statement: “Terminado, el libro comienza” [“Finished, the book starts”]. He goes on to emphasize the significance of an inscription written in a notebook by the character named Javier²⁸:

Estás en un momento en que el tiempo parece correr y sin embargo parece estar detenido... El principio y el fin son idénticos, como la serpiente . . . y por lo tanto no son ni el principio ni el fin, pero una eterna pesadilla opaca durante en la cual en vano se espera.²⁹

26 Leal, 14.

27 Leal, 18.

28 Donald Fogelquist, “Tiempo y mito en *Cambio de piel*,” *Cuadernos americanos* 231 (1980): 96-107 (96).

29 Fuentes, 105.

[You are in a moment in which time seems to run but which nevertheless is motionless.... The beginning and the end are identical like the snake that swallows its own tail, and therefore, there is neither beginning nor end, but an eternal nightmare in which one waits in vain].³⁰

The repeated presence of this perpetual nightmare is noteworthy because it serves to reiterate the Náhuatl symbol for the *eternal return* common in the fiction of Fuentes, Borges, Carpentier, García Márquez and other Latin American writers, and because—as is the case with *Cambio de piel* and several others contemporary novels—it effectively functions to mirror the circular structure of the novel itself.

Like many other of the novels mentioned here whose form evokes the *eternal return*, *The Sound and the Fury* contains a number of images that reveal its essential consciousness of this philosophical concept and that function as a metaphor of its circular narrative shape. This novel will be analyzed by applying a narrative theory of time proposed by the French theorist Paul Ricoeur. This research is intended only as a preliminary approach to the relevance of the concept of circular time in the modern Latin American novel. The circularity of time and human existence is a topic which deserves a more detailed analysis not only in the novels that have been discussed here, but in various other examples of new fiction that evoke the constant implications of the *eternal return*.

No other contemporary American novelist of equal greatness has been as frequently criticized for his way of writing as Faulkner. His writing represents a challenge for all readers because of its difficult treatment of time. He is obscure but very original in his style due to the use of the stream of consciousness, a literary convention in which the author undertakes to represent the flow of thoughts and images passing through the mind of characters. Thus, most readers are liable to have a very difficult time and charge him with coquetry and games. *The Sound and the Fury* is a complicated novel in

30 Fuentes, 128.

matters of narrativity and temporality; therefore, it will serve as a good case to illustrate some aspects of Ricoeur's theory of narrative time, and contribute to a more thorough understanding and appreciation of Faulkner's writing style.

Time, in particular, undergoes a strange treatment in Faulkner's narrative. In reading the novel, readers are immediately struck by the intersection of present events with memories of the past. These shifts give us a sense of reciprocity between narrativity and temporality. Faulkner, without warning the reader, places one moment into another and shuffles the order of events. The story is continuously delayed and unfolds backwards, instead of proceeding toward the future as one would normally expect. Each episode is difficult to understand and sends the reader back to another one, equally or more difficult, which took place years before. As readers, we move back and forth between the narrative of the present and narratives from the past as if actual lives are not lived chronologically.

We find it difficult to understand what happens in the novel while it is in the process of happening because although there is a present time, the seventh and eighth of April 1928, we face events that are continually interpolated by the pasts of different characters. We are forced to become Faulkner's accomplices, if we want to decipher his enigmas, because he refuses to surrender his meanings to us too easily. At every moment during our reading, we are forced to stop abruptly since the present is often chaos, and the future is never quite accessible because of the non-chronological order of the novel. On the contrary, chronological order would ruin the past of the novel, because the entire succession of events in the present would be isolated, with no identification or relation to the past.

One of Ricoeur's terms, "within-time-ness,"³¹ depicts this moving back and forth in narrative time in which the past is evoked by the present. The first section of the novel, a monologue of the

31 Ricoeur, 157.

idiot Benjy, illustrates how he jumps back and forth always in “with-in-time-ness.” Benjy remembers his sister Caddy when he hears the golfers shout “caddie!” He also goes back “in” time remembering Damuddy’s death and Caddy’s wedding. As Faulkner said of Benjy in 1955, “to that idiot, time was not a continuation, it was an instant, there was no yesterday and no tomorrow, it all is this moment, it all is [now] to him.”³² The present for Benjy converges with the past, so that what is lived in the present is no more real than what was lived in the past. Italicizing in the novel suggests those changes back and forth in narrative time, as well as, what kind of process is going on in Benjy’s mind³³:

“What’s a funeral.” Jason said.

“Didn’t mammy tell you not to tell them.” Versh said.

“Where they moans.” Frony said. “They moaned two days on Sis Beulah Clay.”

They noaned at Dilsey’s house. Dilsey was moaning. When Dilsey moaned Luster said, Hush, and we hushed, and then I began to cry and Blue howled under the kitchen steps. Then Dilsey stopped and we stopped.

“Oh.” Caddy said. “That’s niggers. White folks don’t have funerals.”

“Mammy said us not to tell them, Frony.” Versh said.

Benjy’s concept of time is actually a contradiction, for Benjy cannot conceive of time. For him, time does not exist, and everything happens in the present. He is not aware of the passage of time, or of the continuity of events. Benjy lives in a world where the past is indistinguishable from the present, and his lack of a concept of time is consistent with the qualities of his mind.

This level of “within-time-ness,” which is not linear, tells us how narrative time in *The Sound and the Fury* is circular, instead

32 Donald M Kartiganer, *The Fragile Thread* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979) 9.

33 Faulkner, 37-38.

of rectilinear and progressive, always presenting a different version of story and time. Ricoeur's suspicion regarding anti-narrativist epistemologists and structuralist literary critics, for claiming that whenever there is time, it is a linear time,³⁴ is supported in Faulkner's novel because time is not laid out chronologically as most common readers expect.

We are moved back and forth because of the characters' pre-occupations. For instance, while Quentin is fighting with Gerald Bland, we read about a first fight he had with his sister's lover, Dalton Ames, which took place some time previously, and this is what he is actually experiencing because he confuses his present time with this past key event. He lives in a present that is constantly being intruded on by the past. Therefore, Quentin confuses time because he is extremely preoccupied with time. He reckons with a present time and past events, making time his main concern throughout the novel.

Ricoeur's idea that characters reckon with time because there is a time to do this and a time to do that, can also be applied to Quentin's experience of death. During the evening before his suicide, for example, he measures his time returning to his dormitory room. He cleans himself up for death, stands in front of his mirror and brushes his hair. He also has time to trouble himself with the idea that Shreve, his roommate, may return soon and ruin his suicidal plans. Throughout a whole day of quite extraordinary incidents—with two fights, an arrest, a court hearing, and many encounters—Quentin's mind remains preoccupied with the past. As Michael Millgate says, "It is almost as though Faulkner were playing on the idea that a drowning man sees his whole life pass before him, and we come to realize that this last day of Quentin's is a kind of suspended moment before death."³⁵

All three characters in the novel, Benjy, Quentin, and Jason, determine a sense of time because of this preoccupation with their heroic quest, which, in this case, I dare to say, is to find their sister

34 Ricoeur, 167.

35 Michael Millgate, *The Achievement of William Faulkner* (New York: Random House, 1966) 102.

Caddy once again. As Ricoeur says, "this heroic quest is the narrative of preoccupation."³⁶ Caddy is never a character-narrator; instead, she is represented in all four episodes by her brothers showing the progressive phases of her growth. Quentin, Benjy, and Jason are always preoccupied and concerned about Caddy.

As an illustration of this preoccupation, we have seen how Quentin's fight with Gerald Bland is overwhelmed in his consciousness by his fight with Dalton Ames who offended Quentin's idea of his sister's honor. Quentin is thinking of Caddy most of the time. It is an obsession that keeps him preoccupied with the past, always searching for the moment in which he and Caddy can be eternally together. Moreover, this is the reason why he lies to his father and insists on the idea of committing incest with his sister, so that he can have Caddy forever, even if it is only an imaginary completion of the quest.

Benjy's relationship to Caddy, also the object of his quest, is very different from Quentin's relationship. Every brother has his own self-centered demands to make upon her, each with his own limitations and obsessions. In Benjy's case, she is like a mother for him. Caddy herself is love, she is the only one who can quiet Benjy down with the simple touch of her hand.³⁷ She has given Benjy the kind of motherly attention and support denied to him by his mother's inadequacies and failure to love him.

In this dysfunctional family, in which both the father and the mother are incompetent, Caddy is not only the great sustainer of the family, but also Benjy's pacifier and protector. Throughout Benjy's section, we can read the statement, "Caddy smelled like trees,"³⁸ suggesting this as one way Benjy relates to Caddy. She serves as the archetypal symbol of the Good Mother, representing all the positive aspects of the Earth Mother for Benjy such as nourishment, warmth, growth and protection. Caddy is related to fire, trees, and pasture, all

36 Ricoeur, 173.

37 Kartiganer, 11.

38 Faulkner, 21-51.

elements of nature that provide comfort to him. She is like the wood for the fire that keeps Benjy warm and alive. If Caddy is gone, there is no more wood to feed the fire and Benjy fades away. Her presence is Benjy's joy, but her absence is his grief.

Ricoeur's idea of the quest as travel in the labyrinth is interesting to apply in this novel because the entire book, which refers to a tragedy caused by the family's alcoholism, madness, theft and promiscuity, may be compared to a huge labyrinth in which the characters are trapped. Faulkner's present is truly chaotic and his characters, with the exception of Jason, never look ahead. However, in this circular journey, their quest is to become new beings. Some fail, but others succeed. For instance, Caddy has abandoned Benjy, leaving him to be lost in the labyrinth of his grief and longing. Quentin also fails because somehow he feels partially responsible for the moral degeneration of Caddy. When he loses her to other men, he decides to evade life by committing suicide.

On the contrary, Jason is the only Compson who comes out of the labyrinth during this tragic journey. He is the only one in the Compson family who is able to cope with the practical and social implications of Caddy's defection. Jason, we can say, adjusts cleverly to the situation and turns it to his own advantage and profit. Obviously, his main concern is not with morality or justice, but only with social appearances and his own greed. Although this is a Southern novel, Jason seems to be the least Southern of the characters, detaching himself from his family. As Ricoeur says, "if one succeeds, getting out of the labyrinth, then he becomes a new being."³⁹ Thus, Jason becomes a representative of the new commercial South. He is mean, ironic and his instincts are commercial and materialistic, making him the only Compson male with some practical competence.

Another interesting aspect of Ricoeur's theory of time is plot as a way of establishing human actions not only within time, but

39 Ricoeur, 182.

also within memory.⁴⁰ Memory repeats events in the course of time so that some narratives establish human actions at the level of historicity.⁴¹ This narrative repetition takes place in *The Sound and the Fury*, as we can observe in the relationship of Caddy's daughter, Miss Quentin, and her Uncle Jason.

Again, the novel revolves around Caddy as the object of her brothers' quest. She escapes from them but her daughter's tragedy, which is presented more directly, repeats the experience. In some ways it is more moving than Caddy's. For instance, the result of the antagonistic relationship between Jason and Miss Quentin comes to a climax when she finally steals Jason's hoard of money. This event gives a dynamic extension to the novel, but there is no sense of closure. Faulkner never resolves this conflict. We, as readers, if we think of Jason at all, think of him as still out there chasing his niece. So historicity emphasizes the weight of the past through memory and takes us back to Caddy's past and forward to the present with Miss Quentin being the object of Jason's quest.

History and memory then repeat past human actions in the present. Because Caddy escapes, we may consider her as being dead for her brothers. Miss Quentin's repetition of her mother's behavior serves as a kind of resurrection of the dead, a resurrection of Caddy's tragedy. However, Miss Quentin's situation is not as tragic as her mother's tragedy because she escapes taking with her what was right fully hers—her money. In doing this, Miss Quentin achieves a certain measure of revenge against her Uncle Jason, freeing herself from him.

The narrative repetition presented in *The Sound and the Fury* shows us how to read time backwards by reading the end into the beginning and the beginning into the end. Certainly, Miss Quentin's case is an extension of her mother's tragedy in which the past is evoked by the present. Moreover, if Quentin is partially responsible

40 Ricoeur, 176.

41 Ricoeur, 180.

for Caddy's moral degeneration, so is Jason responsible for the moral degeneration of his niece.

Quentin creates, in his illusory world, the whole story about incest, which pushes Caddy into a relationship with Dalton Ames. This does not mean that Quentin has any power over Caddy; on the contrary, he is just a jealous brother who cannot cope with his sister's awakening to sexuality. Caddy is a symbol of social disruption and her individuality makes her brothers' attempt to possess her almost impossible. Similarly, Jason pushes Miss Quentin perhaps unwillingly into stealing, missing classes, and amorous adventures. These situations parallel Ricoeur's object of the quest in the labyrinth, having Caddy and her daughter as prey to the chase.

Faulkner expresses the difficulty he went through writing the novel:

And that's how that book grew. That is, I wrote the same story four times. None of them were right, but I had anguished so much that I could not throw any of it away and start over, so I printed it in four sections . . . and that's the reason I have the most tenderness for that book, because it failed four times (qtd. in Kartiganer).⁴²

These remarks show how Faulkner arrived at four different perspectives or tales in which each one speaks to the other. The four sections of the novel are somehow isolated and unorganized giving a sense of lack of closure between a beginning and an ending. Even the appendix, written sixteen years after the novel, is supposed to clarify events occurring in the book. However, with all its contradictions, it might well be considered another unsuccessful attempt to give the novel that missing sense of closure.

Faulkner destroys chronology and throws time out of working order. We can witness this in a symbolic act when Quentin rips the hands off his watch. Also Benjy cannot tell time, and in Dilsey's section, the clock in the kitchen does not tell the correct time. Only in

⁴² Kartiganer, 4.

this way can we enter real time in the novel, a time without clocks, because as Faulkner says, “clocks slay time. Time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life.”⁴³ All of this is summed up by Eliade: “If we pay no attention to it, time does not exist; furthermore, where it becomes perceptible—because of man’s sins, when man departs from the archetype and falls into duration—time can be annulled.”⁴⁴

Faulkner’s novel disrupts chronology and instead makes it circular, moving back and forth throughout the narrative. Indeed, we may say that narrative form in *The Sound and the Fury* is circular because there is no beginning and no ending properly speaking, and therefore, no logical point of entrance. While reading about Quentin, just a few pages later we read about Miss Quentin with no clarification at all that both uncle and niece have the same name. This disconcerting framework, in which the novel unfolds, leads readers to confusion as being moved backward or forward into other times. We, as readers, are tempted to look for guides and re-establish the chronology for ourselves, but finally we must yield, and follow the circling of the narrative throughout the novel with its new angles and different points of view.

43 Millgate, 122.

44 Eliade, 85.