

The Paradox of “Other” in William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* and *Light in August*

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to manifest the paradox of “other” in William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* and *Light in August*. Under the light of dialogism, the researcher tries to prove that, on the one hand, the two novels are dialogic and, on the other hand, the culture represented in them is monologic. In other words, while Faulkner’s works become meaningful depending on the “other,” the culture introduced in them denies alterity. This is a big paradox. Although Faulkner writes his books based on the culture he has been raised with, he renders an indirect criticism of it only through depicting it in his books and showing its corollaries to his readers. In order to prove that Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* and *Light in August* are meaningful based on the “other”, it should be mentioned that they have a corroborative dialogue with Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization*. In other words, they stylize it. In addition, to prove that the culture imbedded in these works denies alterity, several levels of discrimination could be examined. They could be put under the general title of discrimination against the “other.”

Key Words: William Faulkner, other, alterity, discrimination, culture.

Not only we have a right to assert that others exist, but I should be inclined to contend that existence can be attributed only to others, and in virtue of their otherness, and I cannot think of myself as existing except in so far as I conceive of myself as not being the others: and so as other than them. I would go so far as to say that it is of the essence of the Other that he exists. I cannot think of him as other without thinking of him as existing. Doubt only arises when his otherness is, so to say, expunged from my mind. (Marcel, *Being and Having* 104)

Introduction

Dialogism is Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of language as a social phenomenon based on an interaction between at least two agents. Bakhtin believes that language is incepted through a challenge between two opposing sources: the centrifugal and centripetal forces. The former attempts to retain the incoherence of things while the latter leads things to coherence. This shows that language is dynamically oscillating between "center and periphery" (Dentith 35). Such a linguistic view necessitates a "network of social relationships" (39). It highlights the duality of the individual speakers which is comprised of "the simultaneous presence of features that are idiosyncratic to the speaker and features that s/he shares with others" (Holquist 44). The duality causes a movement from the "self" (center) to the "other" (not-center). So when something is uttered by a speaker, it has several distinctive characteristics: "a referentially semantic element (its theme), an expressive element (the speaker or writer's attitude toward the theme), and, most importantly, an element of responsiveness or 'addressivity' (its relation to other utterances)" (Zappen 3). It is the element of responsiveness or addressivity that distinguishes Bakhtin's concept of language as dialogue. Bakhtin believes that speech happens only when it is addressed to the "other" and this "other" may be a person, the speaker's own

self or consciousness, a literary product, a philosophy, an ideology, a policy, and so forth. The “other” is so significant that in its absence all meaning is lost, since all meaning is relative in the sense that it comes about only as a result of the relation and interaction between two bodies occupying simultaneous but different spaces. In other words, it is only in relation to/with alterity or “other” that a speech or utterance becomes meaningful. Here, one can mention the idea of intertextuality that is inherent in dialogism and proves that dialogism is not just a passive and eclectic mass or amalgamation of different philosophies and theories brought together. Dialogism as a good example of intertextuality requires interacting with diverse discourses in terms of constructing a new version of those discourses through making use of the materials inherent in them. “Other” or alterity plays a very important role in Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism. His theory rejects monologia where only the author has the “direct power to mean.” His theory does not refuse differences and oppositions; it rather juxtaposes them and creates interaction among them. He does not give the “finalizing image” (Morson & Emerson 259).

In this line, Bakhtin’s philosophical notions could also be seen in his views about art and literature. He believes that the aesthetic form which best represents alterity attempting to “give form and meaning to another’s life” is the genre of the novel (Dentith 12). Thus, the novel is the best arena to show the relation of the “self” with the “other” because it is the only literary form that contains an amalgamation of diverse and endless voices and discourses such as social, religious, professional languages or discourses and voices germane to a particular genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular individual, a generation, an age group, the day and hour, and so forth (Todorov 15). In a novel, a genre, a discourse or a philosophy may be addressed and reacted to or against. In his definition of the concept of the voice in the novel, David Lodge notes that Bakhtin distinguishes three types of discourses that could be exploited in a literary text like the novel. The first

type is called “direct discourse” through which the speaker communicates his ideas to the listener immediately. The second type is called “represented or objectified discourse” in which the author’s own discourse intentions are communicated via the speech of the characters but is the “object” of the author’s own discourse. And the third discourse type is called double-voiced. In this type, the author exploits the other’s discourse for his own purposes. In the novel, this type could be employed in a form like stylization which is examined in this paper.

Stylization is the adoption of a given style “related to other” with the same general intentions germane to the original style (Lodge 85). This adoption could be described as appropriation of the “other” which ends up in a corroborative dialogue. Stylization is the reusing of another’s style and its sum total of stylistic devices. The style belonging to another person should possess a “direct and unmediated intentionality.” It should also express “an ultimate semantic authority,” so that it could be stylized. In this process, stylization forces another person’s “referential ... intention to serve its own purpose,” that is “its new intentions.” Thus, the stylizer exploits “another’s discourse precisely as another” and, this way, s/he “casts a slight shadow of objectification over it” (Bakhtin, *The Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* 189). The new discourse, based on Bakhtin’s discussion, becomes conditional and is characteristically a double-voiced discourse including two “individualized linguistic consciousnesses”: the one that “represents” (stylizer) and the one that is “represented” (stylized). Through stylization, some of the elements of the stylized text are highlighted and others are left in the shade. Here, Bakhtin concludes that the style of the “other” acquires new meaning and significance (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 362), because the stylizer’s own interests are carried into it by means of an “alien language” (363). Stylization is a good example of movement from the “self” to the “other.”

Now based on this discussion, it will be argued that Faulkner’s *The*

Sound and the Fury and *Light in August* are stylizations of Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization*. There are two reasons: First, the style and stylistic devices of *Madness and Civilization* have been similarly used in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Light in August*; second, there are possible similarities and differences between Foucault and Faulkner’s intentions. Before discussing and illustrating the above strategies, some points should be made clear. As for the first reason, according to Abrams, stylistic devices include diction, sentence structure, syntax, density and type of figurative language, patterns of rhythm, component sounds, rhetorical aims and devices (Abrams 203). These devices, on the whole, comprise the style of a writer which is the manner of linguistic expression used by that writer. So the stylizer reuses these devices to stylize the original text. But here, there are some problems with respect to Faulkner’s stylization of Foucault’s text. First, the writer whose text is stylized is the French Foucault who writes in French, while the stylizer is the American Faulkner who writes in English. This demonstrates that Faulkner could not have stylized a French text using all of the stylistic devices of that text in his English novels. At most, he could have appropriated his figurative language and his tone of speech. Second, Foucault is not a literary figure, but a philosopher and a psychologist (Mills 97). Thus, his texts are composed of ideas, concepts and themes rather than literary stylistic devices. The researcher is going to prove that Faulkner’s texts appropriate Foucault’s concepts and themes as “other.” By the way, reading *Madness and Civilization*, one finds out that Foucault uses memorable images and themes in his discussion of madness. These images and themes could be detected in the texts of *The Sound and the Fury* and *Light in August* with some degrees of variation.

Madness and Civilization contains Foucault’s opinions about madness in history. Foucault gives his own definition of madness as “a way of seizing in extremis the racinating groundwork of the truth that underlies our more specific realization of what we were about” (Foucault vii). He claims that

madness is an invented concept to distinguish sanity from insanity. The distinction puts idiots, mentally deranged people, lepers, sexual offenders, free thinkers, prostitutes, vagabonds, blasphemers, suicides, etc. in one category labeled as insane. Those who, on the other hand, are not infected with diseases of the insane group are automatically labeled as sane. Therefore, madness is a word with diverse connotations, making it more complex than merely deficiency of the mind. The categorization is fundamentally based on a sort of difference between normalcy and abnormality. The difference endows the sane with authority over the insane so that the normal ones come to control the abnormal ones in order to prevent the threat of inconvenience on the part of the mad. This strategy is advanced to protect the sane from the insane.

To illustrate the imposed separation between the normal and the abnormal, Foucault employs several images among which one could refer to two of the most important ones: the image of the ship of the mad and water; and the image of the circus animal. Foucault depicts the first image with reference to the Medieval time when madmen were gathered from city streets and put on board a ship. Harboring at a certain destination, the captain of the ship would drop the madmen and depart. One could imagine a vessel full of madmen and madwomen amidst the vast ocean, sea or river headed for an unknown city, committed to the “uncertainty of fate” (8). It was not certain whether the mad could set foot on land again. Madmen on board were “delivered to the river with its thousand arms” or “the sea with its thousand roads.” In a more tangible statement, the mad were prisoners in “the midst of what is the freest, the openest of the routes.” Foucault believes that “water and madness have long been linked in the dreams of European man” (9). This image also implies the notions of purification, isolation, and cure.

Earlier it was mentioned that Foucault’s discourse of madness has been stylized in Faulkner’s texts. In this line, a varied version of the image of the

ship of the mad has been appropriated in *The Sound and the Fury*. Based on Foucault’s definition of madness and abnormality, some of the abnormal characters like Ben (the idiot), Caddy (the prostitute), and Quentin (the neurotic and suicide) could be considered as insane or mad. Interestingly, they have close affinities with water too. Water purifies Caddy’s sins as Ben “shoves her up the stairs to the bathroom door” (*The Sound and the Fury* 135) or as he forces her, after her affairs with her lovers, to wash her mouth in order to be purified of the sin she has committed:

Then she was crying, and I cried, and we held each other. ‘Hush.’ She said. ‘Hush. I won’t anymore.’ So I hushed and Caddy got up and we went into the kitchen and turned the light on and Caddy took the kitchen soap and washed her mouth at the sink, hard. (49)

It seems that water compensates for the moral deficiency of the abnormal Caddy, gives her peace and renews her. Water also cures the mad as mentioned by Foucault in *Madness and Civilization*: mad men were “shocked by sudden immersion in cold water” (Mills 100) to be gradually cured. In *The Sound and the Fury* too, this function represents itself when Luster, Ben’s guardian, takes off his shoes and rolls up his trousers and puts him in the branch water to play. As a result, Ben stops crying and howling:

He [Luster] pulled me back. ‘Sit down.’ I sat down and he took off my shoes and rolled up my trousers. ‘Now, git in that water and play and see can you stop that slobbering and moaning.’

I hushed and got in the water. (*The Sound and the Fury* 23)

So as Foucault explains, water physiologically balances the chemical substances and temperature of the madman’s body and placates his inconvenience significantly. As for the isolating power of water, Quentin Compson is a good example. He nourishes delirious and hallucinatory

thoughts and isolates himself from the society. He finally drowns himself in the river after one of his deliriums. Thus, water separates him from all for good exactly the same way that it separated the mad from their families in Foucault's book. Here are Quentin's hallucinatory thoughts about suicide in the river; it is as if water soothes his pain:

My nose could see gasoline, the vest on the table, the door. The corridor was still empty of all the feet in sad generations seeking water. *Yet the eyes unseeing clenched like teeth not disbelieving doubting even the absence of pain shin ankle knee the lung invisible flowering of the stair-railing where a misstep in the darkness filled with sleeping Mother Father Caddy Jason Maury door I am not afraid only Mother Father Caddy Jason Maury getting so far ahead asleep I will sleep fast I door Door door.* (157)

The second major image present in Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* is that of the circus animal. Foucault employs this image to describe madmen's real situation within the society. He writes of a report presented in the House of Commons as late as 1815: "the hospital of Bethlehem exhibited lunatics for a penny, every Sunday." He adds that the "annual revenue from these exhibitions amounted to almost four hundred pounds" with the high number of "69000 visits a year." Sometimes the keeper would display the madmen the way "the trainer at the Fair of Saint-Germain put the monkeys through their tricks." They would make the mad do dances and acrobatics "with a few flicks of the whip" (Foucault 64). Thus, in addition to being excluded from the society, the mad became included as the object of a public scandal for the general delight whenever needed. The mad became degraded to the level of animals and even less than that. Similar observations could be traced in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and *Light in August*. In the former, Ben's idiocy causes his being insulted as an animal. His brother

Jason always complains about Ben’s presence at home. He thinks that there is little pride left for the family, because the 33-year-old Ben plays around the yard with a nigger boy, runs up and down the fence and lows “like a cow” whenever he sees the golfers playing (*The Sound and the Fury* 199). Jason even suggests that the idiot Ben be sent to something like a circus and displayed as an animal: “Rent him out to a sideshow; there must be folks somewhere that would pay a dime to see him ...” (177). To crown all, Ben is castrated after grabbing a schoolgirl from behind. He is falsely accused of rape. Thus, like an animal, he is castrated, debilitated and controlled.

Another example of this case would be Joe Christmas, the illegitimate boy in *Light in August* who grows up to be a murderer and bootlegger. He is pursued by the soldiers and the sheriff. They trace his tracks and unleash their hounds to catch him. This treatment may not seem extraordinary at the first glance, but it turns out into a frightening nightmare as soon as it reminds the reader of “The Most Dangerous Game” where General Zaroff reduces the lost sailors to the object of his most favorite game: the hunt of human beings. In the same manner, Christmas is chased into the swamps and marshes, where he has to eat, sleep and run like frightened animal. Finally, the hunt ends with Christmas being pierced, castrated and killed:

For a while he had been hungry all the time. He gathered and ate rotting and wormridden fruit; now and then he crept into fields and dragged down and gnawed ripened ears of corn as hard as potato graters.... He would make himself eat the rotten fruit, the hard corn, chewing it slowly, tasting nothing. He would eat enormous quantities of it, with resultant crises of bleeding flux. (*Light in August* 251)

Through the appropriation of these two images in Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* and *Light in August*, one could hear Foucault’s voice. Thus, beside Faulkner’s voice there is the voice of “other” in these stories. This dependence upon “other” manifests its significant role in rendering the texts

of the two novels meaningful. Moreover, one finds out that these texts have interaction with the “other.” It means that “other” is not excluded but at least regarded or considered. This shows Faulkner’s reception of “other” which is in total contrast with the culture with which he was raised. Paradoxically, the American culture, as Faulkner gives its portrait in his novels, is very racial. It puts the division line between itself and “other.” The theme of division is one of the most conspicuous ones among Faulkner’s themes. His exploitation of this theme is again similar to Foucault’s use of such concept in his *Madness and Civilization*. Foucault demonstrates division of the insane from the sane in the form of the ship of the mad. He adds that in the period of confinement, division is depicted in the mad being imprisoned in gaols and dungeons. Finally, the very birth of the asylum is the most modern representation of the theme of division. He finds out that all of the above systems are one guise “to suppress madness, to eliminate from the social order a figure which did not find its place within it;” so they elucidate what madness essentially is: “a manifestation of non-being” (Foucault 109). They emphasize the social ideology that “those who have lost the use of reason must be hidden from society” (216). In other words, the systems are voids that isolate madness, or denounce it “for being irreducible, unbearable to reason” (217). Here, one could argue that madness is the same as “otherness” which is divided and sometimes exterminated.

With some differences, Foucault’s theme of division has been stylized in Faulkner’s two mentioned novels. In fact, all the above abnormal, insane and mad characters within these two texts have been the victims of the division imposed on them by society. So different American manifestations of the theme of division associated with the mad characters of *The Sound and the Fury* and *Light in August* are: confinement (Ben), oblivion (Caddy), self-elimination (Quentin), social elimination (Christmas), and exclusion or exile (Hightower).

First of all, the division applied to Ben is in the form of sending him to an

asylum. Ben goes to the madhouse of Jackson after Mrs. Compson's death. He is got rid of, since he is unable to understand the relation of things with one another and of himself to the world (Polk 140). Ben's relationship with the blacks undermines the issue of racism (168). Snead also agrees that Ben's condition undercuts linguistic and political expectations (Snead 19). He senses no hierarchy and, this way, he is a criticism on social ideology of hierarchy and caste system within the Southern American society (21).

Oblivion is another form of division applied to Caddy in *The Sound and the Fury*. She is divorced by her husband and turned into streets. Neither is she accepted by her family, because Mrs. Compson forbids her presence or even her name to be spoken at home. She is eliminated from memories.

Quentin's case is essentially the same but only diverse in form. It is right that the society did not directly kill or exclude him; rather the ideology of that society drove him to insanity and suicide. In other words, it indirectly pushed him toward the division line. Since the pressures of the Puritanic and absolutist society could not give him a place to live in this world, it found him a place in the other world.

The next form of division is the social elimination imposed on Christmas. His is perhaps the worst kind of exclusion or division practiced in the Southern America. His activities within the society of Yoknapatawpha show signs of abnormality and difference. He is a bootlegger suspect of having black blood. He rapes white women. So he is the "other" and is eliminated by the self-defined law of an American soldier. He is chased, castrated and shot with all the bullets of a pistol.

Eventually, exile is another type of division practiced regarding Hightower. The ex-minister of the church, Hightower is ousted from the church and the society, because of his heretic religion. At the same time, he atones for his adulterous wife murdered in a hotel. So he is categorized as another mad or abnormal agent that should be exiled and excommunicated for the safety of the sane townspeople. Hightower sees his own mad version

of religion as the cause of his expulsion from the church and the town:

He seems to watch himself among faces, always among, enclosed and surrounded by, faces, as though he watched himself in his own pulpit, from the rear of the church, or as though he were a fish in a bowl He seems to see reflected in them a figure antic as a showman, a little wild: a charlatan preaching worse than heresy, in utter disregard of that whose very stage he preempted, offering instead of the crucified shape of pity and love, a swaggering and unchastened bravo killed with a shotgun in a peaceful henhouse, in a temporary hiatus of his own avocation of killing. (*Light in August* 367)

All of the above cases of madness pose a threat to the social and conventional ideology of the people of the South the same way that the blacks were regarded a threat to the economical profits of the South. They undermine the convenience of the white and normal race. They undercut racism, hierarchy, language, morality and ideology of the South. Therefore, to guarantee its welfare, the South decides that these “others” are destructive and should be disposed of. Communal welfare authoritatively lies in the citizens’ productive activities and obedience of rules set by the government. Thus, according to McCallum, the political power desires well-adjusted personalities so that it could regulate them (McCallum 70). This is how Faulkner’s texts become meaningful with relation to another text. In both texts, the “other” is segregated or eliminated. Both show the racial attitude of their societies.

As mentioned above, based on the theoretical discussion of Bakhtin, the stylizer uses the point of view of another person and objectifies it; meaning that, the stylizer not only appropriates another’s point of view, but imposes his own interests on it and renders a new point of view which includes both his and the other’s voice. This is Faulknerian text’s stylization of the “other” for its own purposes. Here, both writers seem to use very similar and close images, themes, and concepts in the form of the image of water, circus

animal and the theme of division; however, the intentions of the two writers are different. Foucault's discussion in *Madness and Civilization* is a criticism about the way Europe, particularly France, treated madmen. He undermines all psychiatrists' attempts to improve the madman's situation. He claims that the asylum no longer punished the madman's guilt, it is true; but it did more, it organized that guilt; it organized it for the madman as a consciousness of himself, and as a non-reciprocal relation to the keeper;" furthermore, "it organized it for the man of reason as an awareness of the Other, a therapeutic intervention in the madman's existence." In other words, "by this guilt the madman became an object of punishment always vulnerable to himself and to the Other" (Foucault 234-35).

Compared with Foucault, Faulkner's intention of stylizing *Madness and Civilization* is not to undermine psychiatrists' attempts to control the mad or to improve their situation. Rather, his intention seems to show the fact that those Southern American people who claim to be sane and accept the responsibility of controlling and punishing the mad, are not eligible for the task, since they are not less than mad. In addition, they nourish racial ideas in their mind and their judgment could not possibly be fair and accurate. He portrays the men of reason in this society as hollow men like Jason Compson and Percy Grimm. The former is devoid of any sympathy. He is a sheer capitalist ready to do anything for money. The latter is a fervent racist full of American dreams and American superiority. Percy Grimm's self-orientation and sadistic repression of the "other" could be seen in his faith as [a] sublime and implicit faith in physical courage and blind obedience, and a belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American is superior to all other races and that the American uniform is superior to all men, and that all that would ever be required of him in payment for this belief, this privilege, would be his own life. (*Light in August* 339)

Faulkner's portrait of the South contains an implicit criticism of the issues of racism and caste system. His Yoknapatawpha County includes the

frontiers' exploitation of America up to the post-war society. This society was incepted with racial considerations: first, exploiting and abusing the Indians; then enslaving and taming the blacks for economical purposes. The ideology behind the whites' exploitation of the Indians and the blacks and their exclusion in case of rebellion or idleness is identical with the ideology behind the sane man's exclusion of the mad or the "other." This ideology speaks for the superiority of all white people over the others: those who are neither white nor sane. Paradoxically, this ideology is totally in opposition to Faulkner's own ideology. His texts not only do not deny the other but also show strong signs of addressivity and responsiveness to alterity. His texts remind the audience of Sandywell's account that alterity is "a constructive condition of individual and collective identity: ... without alterity, no difference; without difference, no meaning; without meaning, no world" (198-99).

Conclusion

As a result, Faulkner's canon is comprised of a big paradox. On the one hand, Faulkner's texts represent the biased culture of the Southern America that denies all traces of alterity. On the other hand, these texts themselves address alterity and obtain enumerable meanings. This paradox inherently contains an implicit but strong criticism on the one-dimensional ideology and principles of the American culture undercutting its value system.

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