

**NARRATIVE POLYPHONY AND THE REPRESENTATION OF
THE HUMAN PSYCHE IN “THE SOUND AND THE FURY” AND “AS
I LAY DYING” BY WILLIAM FAULKNER**

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Abstract. *With an emphasis on “The Sound and the Fury” and “As I Lay Dying”, this research explores the connection between narrative polyphony and the portrayal of the human psyche in William Faulkner's books. Beyond merely providing a descriptive account of narrative techniques, the research tackles a fundamental theoretical question: why is human psychological experience better represented by the fragmentation of narrative authority into multiple, competing, and epistemologically limited voices than by unified, linear narration? The research explores how Faulkner's use of polyphony creates a sophisticated model of subjectivity based on perception, memory, and temporal dislocation. It is situated at the nexus of narratology, phenomenology, and the psychology of consciousness.*

Key words: *narrative polyphony, psychological depth, human psyche, stream of consciousness, multiple narrators, subjectivity, modernist fiction, dialogism, narratology, phenomenology, cognitive narratology.*

The term “polyphonic novel” first appeared in Bakhtin’s analysis of Dostoevsky, where it refers to a narrative structure where several character-voices have true intellectual autonomy and participate in unresolved debate rather than just being ventriloquized by the author. This idea's application to Faulkner has been controversial as well as fruitful. “The Sound and the Fury”’s multiple narrators display “symptoms of psychological complexities” that support “the rhetoric of authors' self-assertion in polyphonic novels”, according to Daneshara and Ameri, who contend that Bakhtinian theories of external and internal polyphonies are directly applicable to the book.¹ By implying that polyphony functions not just between narrators but also inside each mind, their reading highlights how inner polyphonies - the dialogic quality within a single narrator's consciousness - complicate the Bakhtinian paradigm. However, there is a fundamental conflict raised by this very expansion of the polyphonic idea. If we identify polyphony inside individual

¹Daneshara, S., & Ameri, M. (2016). Polyphony and psychological complexity in Faulkner’s The Sound and the Fury. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*. –P. 45.

consciousness, we are discussing the internal fragmentation of subjectivity itself rather than the characters' ideological independence from the author. With regard to "As I Lay Dying", Gulomovna expands on this reasoning by claiming that "the polyphonic method serves to highlight the incommunicability of the human soul" - that the Bundren family members "remain" psychologically isolated despite their physical proximity, each monologue a sealed chamber rather than a true dialogic exchange.² The Bakhtinian promise is reversed by this interpretation, which turns polyphony into proof of dialogue's inability rather than a medium for it. The most persistent theoretical question in the scholarship concerns the degree of genuine autonomy possessed by Faulkner's narrators. The most sustained treatment of this problem in the retrieved set, examines the "complexity of the narrative structure in As I Lay Dying" and the way each narrator's "mind has to do with the connection" between the novel's formal architecture and its psychological content. The fifteen narrators of "As I Lay Dying" present a more radical version of the polyphonic challenge than the four sections of "The Sound and the Fury": with fifty-nine monologues distributed across characters of vastly different cognitive capacities, the question of whether these voices are genuinely independent or orchestrated by a hidden authorial intelligence becomes acute. Daneshara and Ameri specifically characterize this as an issue of "authors' self-assertion" contending that the patterning of psychological themes among narrators reveals Faulkner's authorial presence despite the impression of polyphonic polyphony.³ In "The Sound and the Fury", an unidentified writer on point of view similarly presents polyphony as "a key narrative technique" that poses "questions about truth and the accuracy of narrative representation" implying that the diversity of viewpoints undermines rather than strengthens epistemological certainty.

The connection between non-linear chronology and the depiction of psychological experiences is a second major subject. Radical interruptions of chronological sequence are used in both works, but the psychological framework used determines how this approach is read theoretically. In his phenomenological analysis of "The Sound and the Fury", Erlandsson presents the ideas of "experientiality" and "sensorial Gesamtkunstwerk" contending that the novel's temporal disruptions are attempts to replicate the sensory totality of embodied experience, including its temporal distortions, rather than just being structural devices. ⁴ According to this theory, "the sound of his cries" existing in

² Gulomovna, M. (2021). Polyphony and the incommunicability of the human soul in Faulkner's As I Lay Dying. *Journal of Literary Studies*, –P. 85

³ Daneshara, S., & Ameri, M. (2016). Polyphony and psychological complexity in Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*. –P. 45.

⁴ Erlandsson, M. (2020). Experientiality and temporal perception in The Sound and the Fury. *Narrative*. –P. 67.

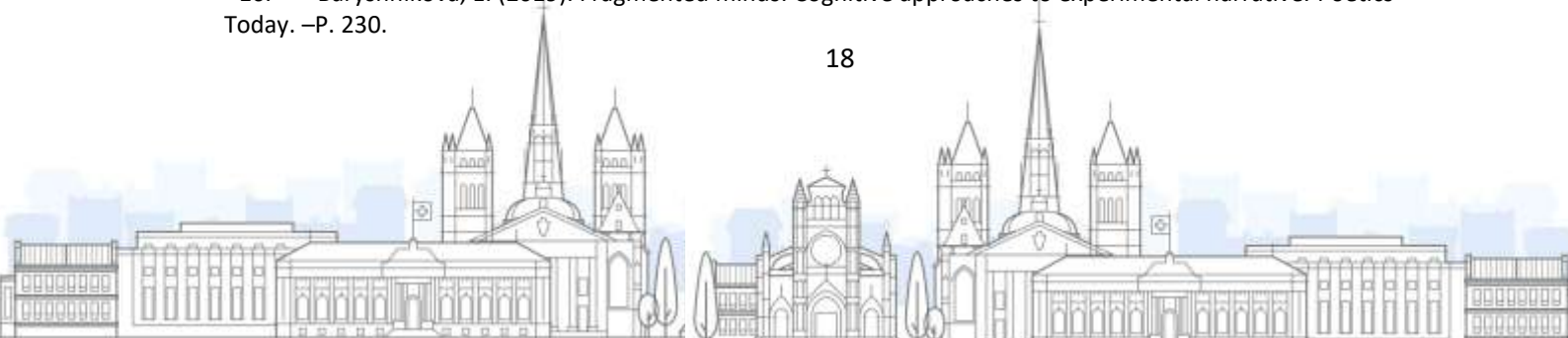
polyphonic connection to the chronological unfolding of the story, and Benjy's confusion of past and present is not a deficit but rather an alternate way of temporal consciousness.

Faulkner's formal experiments are viewed by the phenomenological method as investigations of lived time (Bergsonian *durée*), which is prioritized over clock time. The created aspect of temporal dislocation is highlighted by Baryshnikova's cognitive research of "fragmented minds" in experimental narratives, which contends that such methods replicate "fictional mental functioning" rather than real cognitive processes.⁵ This method, which is based on cognitive narratology, views temporal fragmentation as a reading experience, the reader has to piece together chronology, and this process is what the text creates psychologically. Working on a larger canvas of modernist narrative experimentation, Hossain and Islam frame multi-perspective storytelling and non-linear narrative as strategies that determine "how readers associate with (the text's) emotional" content, implying that the psychological representation at issue is as much the reader's as the character's.

The boundary instances of narrative awareness, or narrators whose existential or cognitive circumstances push the boundaries of what story may portray, are the subject of a third theoretical stream. In "As I Lay Dying", Addie Bundren offers a monologue from beyond death, while Vardaman's juvenile awareness blurs categories ("My mother is a fish"). "In The Sound and the Fury", Benjy Compson's section portrays a consciousness arranged by sensory association rather than logical cause. Benjy's narration "shakes the reader's understanding of narration" and raises concerns about "how disabilities in narratives can be represented in favorable" terms, according to Smith's study of disabled narrators, which views these boundary cases as locations where narrative conventions are most obviously strained. Theoretically, polyphonic structure tests the boundaries of story as a medium for psychological representation by including viewpoints that are categorically distinct from normative consciousness, rather than just pluralizing them.

With special focus on "The Sound and the Fury" and "As I Lay Dying", this research has looked at how narrative polyphony serves as a key tool for depicting the human mind in William Faulkner's novels. The research has shown that the fragmentation of narrative authority is inextricably tied to the representation of psychological experience, rather than seeing plurality of voices as a simply formal novelty. According to Faulkner's books, awareness itself is scattered among changing viewpoints, temporal dislocations, and subjective interpretations rather of being cohesive or steady. By combining psychoanalytic, phenomenological, and cognitive methods with Mikhail Bakhtin's theoretical framework,

⁵ 16. Baryshnikova, E. (2019). Fragmented minds: Cognitive approaches to experimental narrative. *Poetics Today*. -P. 230.



the study has demonstrated that no single model can adequately explain the intricacy of Faulkner's narrative technique. Although Bakhtinian dialogism sheds light on how voices interact, it does not fully address the issue of authorial control. In a similar vein, stream-of-consciousness techniques - which are frequently interpreted as mimetic depictions of mental life - appear here as deliberate tactics that both mimic and mold the reader's access to interiority. In this way, Faulkner's psychological depth is created through narrative form rather than merely exposed.

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