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Critical Reception of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* in America and in Romania

Aliz FARKAS
Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania
Institute of Humanities
farkasaliz@yahoo.com

Abstract. The history of reception of William Faulkner's most cherished work, *The Sound and the Fury*, tellingly reveals the changes that have occurred in reader attitude toward the novel since its first publication in 1929. The main purpose of this paper is to explore the modalities of interpretation employed by three, culturally and historically distinct "interpretive communities" (Fish 1980): American literary critics and reviewers evaluating the novel upon its first publication, Romanian literary critics and reviewers expressing their opinion on the Romanian translation of the novel published in 1971, and contemporary Internet bloggers and commenters discussing their reading experience with the novel.
Relying on Hans Robert Jauss's notions of "aesthetic distance" and "horizon of expectation" (Jauss 1970, 1982), I have raised two questions that I will try to answer at the end of this paper. First, I would like to see whether the literary career of *The Sound and the Fury* follows the trajectory from initial rejection to wide acceptance with increasing aesthetic value, as predicted by Jauss's theory. Second, I am interested in finding out whether those features of the novel that were initially perceived as unfamiliar and incomprehensible were indeed incorporated into the later readers' horizon of expectations, so that they no longer pose problems for the readers.

Keywords: William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury, aesthetic of reception, interpretive communities

Introduction

Benjy's narrative, the introductory section of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* is a challenging text for both the simple reader and for the translator. It is conceived as a discourse produced by a mentally disabled person, who at the age of 33 is considered by the people surrounding him to be stuck in his intellectual development at the stage corresponding to that of a three-year-old child. All this

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information about Benjy's state is not made clear from the beginning, but as the narrative unfolds the reader comes across some hints and clues that guide him to the conclusion that the narrator is an "idiot". In spite of its apparent simplicity, the text reveals an intricate system of cognitive and linguistic stimuli to the reader, which all converge in the direction of triggering an affective response. These cognitive and linguistic stimuli include such devices as the use of perception verbs for triggering temporal shifts in the discourse (from the time of the narrated events to a more distant past or the other way round) instead of using appropriate temporal or spatial deictics – an apparently emotionless, precise, camera-like record of the physical and social environment and of the events through the eyes of the narrator. The whimsical juxtaposition of the story details that appeal to the reader's instinctive pursuit to complete and organize the fragments into a coherent and logically interpretable story.

In Hans Robert Jauss's aesthetic of reception (1970, 1982), the effects of the reader's reception of a particular literary work are twofold: aesthetic and historical. In Jauss's words:

> The aesthetic implication is seen in the fact that the first reception of a work by the reader includes a test of its aesthetic value in comparison with works which he has already read. The obvious historical implication of this is that the appreciation of the first reader will be continued and enriched through further "receptions" from generation to generation; in this way, the historical significance of a work will be determined and its aesthetic value revealed. (1970: 8–9)

By pushing this train of thought a bit further, I assume that the first readers of a literary work are more prone to misjudge its aesthetic value if it fails to satisfy their expectations shaped by earlier literary experiences. Another implication of Jauss's idea would be that the appreciation of a particular work adds up in a cumulative fashion, so that the further it moves in time the more aesthetic value it gains.

Another point made by Jauss is that once the aesthetic distance between reader expectation and literary work starts to shrink, the original negativity of the work fades away, and what was initially perceived as a "pleasing alienating new perspective" (1982: 25) builds into the reader's horizon of expectations.

The main goal of this paper is to test the relevance of Jauss's hypothesis regarding the reception and acceptance of a literary work of art that apparently flouts the literary conventions of the time of its first publication. I would like to find out whether it is the case that – as Jauss predicts – subsequent reading communities become more receptive to the innovative aesthetic aspects posed by Faulkner's novel. And, as a corollary to this, I would also like to see if those features of

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the novel that were initially perceived as unfamiliar and incomprehensible were successfully incorporated into the later readers' horizon of expectations. From a sociological perspective, the question can be reformulated by making use of Stanley Fish's concept of "interpretive communities": does the reception of the novel vary according to the social and aesthetic norms held by different interpretive communities? To put it another way: do interpretive communities separated by temporal and geographical distances (or both) display differing aesthetic and thematic sensibilities leading to significant differences in the reception and appreciation of the novel?

In search of answers, I will survey the book reviews, critical works, and comments of three, culturally and historically distinct reader communities, namely: American first readers evaluating the novel upon its first publication, Romanian literary critics and reviewers expressing their opinion on the Romanian translation of the novel published in 1971, and contemporary Internet bloggers and commenters discussing their reading experience with the novel.

Discussion

1. Early American reviews

In my attempt to gain general insight into the early American reception of the novel, I relied heavily on a number of works that reproduced either entirely or in part some of the original book reviews. I am indebted to Thomas M. Inge for his book *William Faulkner: The Contemporary Reviews* (1995), Nicholas A. Fargnoli, Michael Golay, and Robert W. Hamblin for their William *Faulkner: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* (2008), O. B. Emerson for *Faulkner's Early Literary Reputation in America* (1984) as well as to John Bassett for his two important books, *William Faulkner: An Annotated Checklist of Criticism* (1972) and *William Faulkner: The Critical Heritage* (1975).

With regard to the main topics of the reviews, two patterns seem to emerge: some of them focus on the local and universal significance of the Compson family's tragedy as well as on ethical and moral interpretations, whereas some others raise questions of text intelligibility and reader attitudes. Since the purpose of the present paper is to reveal the changes occurring in reader attitudes over time, I have selected for discussion reviews falling into the latter group.

Clifton Fadiman chose a telling title for his book review: *Hardly Worth While* (1930). He appreciates Faulkner's technique but dismisses the content of the novel: "The theme and the characters are trivial, unworthy of the enormous and complex craftsmanship expended on them" (Inge 1995: 38). The review addresses

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other questions too, which I regard as important. First, there is the question of intelligibility, a problem raised by many early readers. According to Fadiman, the confusion the novel creates in the reader is symptomatic to the whole contemporary "revolutionary" trend of novel writing: "Frequently the intelligent reader can grasp the newer literary anarchies only by an effort of analytical attention so strained that it fatigues and dulls his emotional perception. He is so occupied in being a detective that by the time he has to his own satisfaction clarified the artist's intentions and technique he is too worn out to feel anything further" (id. 38).

These words reveal a reading strategy that gives primacy to the analytical level of comprehension over any other levels (e.g. emotional). This strategy seems to be based on the assumption that one has to arrive at a rational understanding first in order to be able to experience emotions. This is an expectation that *The Sound and the Fury* refuses to satisfy bringing about a lot of criticism from readers who employ this reading strategy.

Curiously enough – and this is another equally relevant observation made by the reviewer –, it is precisely the unintelligibility of Benjy's monologue that elicits Fadiman's appreciation, the only objection being that it goes on for too long: "I admit that the idiocy of the thirty-three-year old Benjy is admirably grasped by Mr. Faulkner, but one hundred pages of an imbecile's simplified sense perceptions and monosyllabic gibberings, no matter how accurately recorded, are too much of a good thing" (id. 39).

In many reviews, the problem of unintelligibility is closely associated with Benjy's section, which is also praised by others for its high artistic value, a thing that sometimes gives rise to contradictory evaluations. Howard Rockey's review entitled *Fiction, Largely European and Very Good in Average* (1929) is a perfect example in this respect: despite the positive title, the writer can hardly conceal his irritation over this "example of perfection in idiotic expression", even confessing his compelling urge as a reader of Benjy's section: "After reading a few pages the reader feels tempted to apply for admission to the nearest insane asylum" (Fargnoli et al.: 292).

In his review *Southern Family Sinks into Dark Mental Decadence* (1929), Harold W. Recht praises Faulkner's performance of genuinely grasping the way Benjy perceives the world around him: "The first day is presented through the eyes of Benjy, the idiot son, and here, unless I am misled by the novelty of the idea, Mr. Faulkner has done a brilliant piece of writing. No tale heretofore told by an idiot was nearly so sad or so beautiful" (Inge: 34).

However, he accuses the writer of disrespect towards his readers for deliberately driving them into confusion. He objects to Faulkner's careless selection of the kind of information that he wishes to communicate to the reader: his withholding of crucial information on the one hand and divulgation of unimportant details on the other (Id.: 34–35).

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Nevertheless, Recht claims that the merits of the novel richly compensate for such annoying features, and he even considers the possibility of a second reading – a suggestion made by several other reviewers as well: "However, these are minor matters which need not detract from the merit of a novel much above the average, and if they inspire a second reading, so much the better" (Id.: 35).

The idea of multiple reading mentioned by the reviewers and repeated by later critics reveals one of the basic effects of Benjy's section: in an unusual way, once it is read, it is not exhausted as would be the case with many other most conventional narratives: rather it invites the reader to a second and third reading after he has read the whole novel. It leaves a kind of unsatisfied curiosity in the reader, a kind unsettling feeling comparable to that one which might urge one to turn around and look back on something he has passed by earlier so that he can see it from a different angle and in a different light.

This confusion inviting to a second reading is exactly what Ted Robinson remarks in his review *Full of Sound and Fury, Horror Tale Sinks Spurs into Snorting Nightmare* (1929). After stating that he "was sadly confused" during "the first part of this horrid story" (Inge: 37), he goes on to explain how he would have proceeded unless prevented by lack of time: "If I had had time I should have gone back and read the first part again, after I finished the book, just to get the chronological order straightened out" (Ibid.). Robinson even credits Benjy with the performance of successfully conveying his story in spite of all appearances suggesting utter chaos. In doing so, Benjy contradicts the title of the novel since "from the standpoint of plot and atmosphere, this idiot's tale signifies a good deal. The confusion referred to results from the fact that in the idiot's consciousness there is no sense of time, and any chance smell, sound, or other physical stimulus will take him back to some past event that impressed him" (Ibid.).

Admitting that the "manner" of the novel might prevent many readers from accessing the book, the reviewer concludes that: "I shall credit its author with a large share of that proper proportion that constitutes what we call genius" (Ibid.).

As opposed to this, in a review entitled *Two Aspects of Telemachus* (1930), Dudley Fitt points out the style as the main strength and attraction of the book: "It is the study of Mr. Faulkner's style, the consideration of the book as a rhetorical exercise, as a declamation, that repays the reader", specifying that "Joyce is the ultimate source" (Fargnoli et al.: 292).

However, not all critics find the confusion created by Benjy's narrative so inspiring. In his review entitled *Of Making Many Books* (1929), Walter Yust voices his discontentment about some "tricks" played by Faulkner at the expense of the reader, such as the confusion created by the use of the same proper name for different persons (see also Harold W. Recht's objection, already discussed): "he descends to the rather unforgiveable trick, or so it seems to me, of delaying the identification of personalities. (It's a tossup, for the greater part, which of two

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Quentins you are reading about, or which Jason, and whether Quentin is a girl or a boy.)" (Inge: 35). Yust, too, considers that the technique used by Faulkner creates too much confusion, and in this way he is unfair on the reader (Id.: 35–36).

He identifies Benjy as the culprit with whom everything goes wrong right at the beginning of the novel, and as a final argument he questions the plausibility of the character: "The impress on the idiot's mind starts the confusion. I can't say that Mr. Faulkner has actually given us an idiot's mind; the matter's sort of hit and miss; who knows, anyway, what a deaf mute idiot sees?" (Id.: 36).

In her review *Literature and Less* (1930), Julia K. W. Baker hails the dream-like inconsistency of the novel as an improved version of James Joyce's stream of consciousness technique: "But the style and method of approach—fluid and fragmentary and inconsequent as dream—represent something new in the world of letters that James Joyce more than any other one person brought into it" (Inge: 39).

In opposition to the analytical reading strategy proposed by Fadiman, which the novel refuses to comply with, Baker thinks that the text requires a more delicate approach in order to be comprehended, and that it is likely to necessitate subsequent readings: "No doubt two careful readings are necessary merely to clarify the simple outline of the history" (Ibid.).

With regard to Benjy's confused narrative blamed by so many reviewers, Baker claims that it is a designed confusion compatible with the content, which completely fulfils its role of initiating the reader into the events and the story (Ibid.).

Many critics acknowledge the universal validity of *The Sound and the Fury* by comparing it to masterpieces of world literature. The name associated most often with that of Faulkner after the appearance of the novel is James Joyce (Julia K. W. Baker, Abbott Martin, Arnold Bennett, Dudley Fitt), but he is also compared to Dostoevsky (Lyle Saxon, Ted Robinson), and his novel to Greek tragedy (Abbot Martin, Evelyn Scott). The grounds for such comparisons seem to reside in the fact that in Abbot Martin's words: "His analysis of mood and emotion is very subtle" (Bassett 1975: 83).

Abbot Martin's review *Faulkner's Difficult Novel Has Sin and Decay as Theme* (1929) is relevant to this discussion about the reception of the introductory section of the novel for two main reasons. First, the author confesses in it that the reading of Benjy's section made a great impression on him: "Never had I adequately known the meaning of pathos until I read the first part of this book" in which "an idiot utters with simplicity and pathos and beauty its imperfect understanding of the life that goes on about it" (Id.: 84). Second, he addresses the reader directly, suggesting the best way to read this book is to surrender oneself entirely to it (Ibid.). The strategy of reading proposed by him is very different from the one employed by Clifton Fadiman discussed above. While Fadiman's rational approach to the text resulted in fatigue and frustration, a more relaxed, trustful approach could bring about genuine pleasure.

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Apparently, Faulkner's text requires a special kind of reading, which differs from that of reading more conventional literary works. Readers who are less predisposed to tolerate ambiguity and feel secure only if they can rationally understand and follow the plot are more likely to become frustrated and stop reading. In a later review, Abbot Martin does not predict a hopeful future for the novel in terms of popularity, but he considers that it is imbued with Greek tragedy and beauty despite its dealing with such depressing topics as madness, poverty, and decay (qtd in Emerson 1984: 7).

2. The reception of the Romanian translation of the novel

The circumstances of the reception of the novel by the Romanian public was completely different from those of the early reception which took place in a critical vacuum. First, the time lag between the original publication (1929) and the Romanian translation (1971) was more than four decades – therefore, long enough for the aesthetic distance between the readers' horizon of expectations and the aesthetic novelties represented by the novel to diminish significantly. Besides, the readers and the literary critics had to do with an already acclaimed novelist, a Nobel Prize winner, whose works had become the subject of a consistent amount of literary criticism. Moreover, the Romanian literary scholars and writers had also vastly contributed to the dissemination of Faulkner's work by then. During the sixties, Eugen Barbu and Andrei Ion Deleanu translated no less than four novels in four years: *Intruder in the Dust* and the Snopes trilogy consisting of *The Hamlet*, *The Town*, and *The Mansion*. Sorin Alexandrescu published an impressive monograph in 1969, and a number of critics were involved in writing book reviews and articles about Faulkner. So, when Mircea Ivănescu's translation of *The Sound and the Fury* appeared in 1971, it was expected by an appreciative reading audience.

In this section, I will discuss some critical reactions to the translated novel as well as further developments of the American author's reception in this country. In order to gain insight into the Romanian reception of the novel, I surveyed the 1971 editions of the following periodicals and magazines: *Amfiteatru*, *Convorbiri literare*, *România literară*, *Steaua*, *Viața românească*, and various issues of *Cronica*, *Revista bibliotecilor*, *Ramuri*, and *Secolul 20*, looking for book reviews and articles about Faulkner. I also looked for essays and studies on Faulkner's novels, especially those on *The Sound and the Fury,* in collections and volumes, prefaces and postfaces in more recent editions written and edited by Romanian literary scholars.

In his review on the translated novel, Aureliu Goci describes Benjy as "decrepit", "incapable to discern the importance and the tension of the events"; his narrative appears to be "chaotic at first sight" (1971: 2). However, as a compensation for his lack of verbal expression, he possesses "an exceptional

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acuteness of perception" (Ibid.). The reviewer appreciates Faulkner's refusal to analyse, his method of introducing his characters through their behaviour as well as the way in which identities and consciousnesses overlap. With regard to the translation, he describes it as "easy to understand" and "in line with Faulkner's spirit" (Ibid.).

Virgil Stanciu also emphasizes that the book is "chaotic at first sight, fragmentary, and deliberately labyrinthic", but defends Faulkner's technique by arguing that it only reflects the "unselective character of life itself" (1971: 33). In Stanciu's view, Faulkner's professional conscientiousness as an artist compelled him to search for an adequate narrative structure through which he could render the "complex, often contradictory nature of the human personality" (Id.: 32). He appreciates Faulkner's technical performance, which – he admits – sometimes leads to "obscure meanings if one does not read very carefully" (Id.: 33). The novel is the chronicle of the Compson family, which shares a lot in common with Faulkner's own family (Ibid.). Benjy's memory reconstructs for the reader a world that he grasps on a primary, spontaneous level, "the biological level of sensations" (Ibid.). Stanciu concludes that the novel is "a strange and fascinating novel" (Id.: 32).

In his review, Valeriu Cristea focuses on the way consciousnesses are represented in the novel for – he states – "Faulkner does not operate with characters any more, but rather with consciusnesses" (1971: 13). In doing so, he draws attention to the old epistemological problem that humans have faced, namely that consciousness is always interposed between the observer and the events. As Cristea aptly notices, "it is curious how hard it is for us to adapt ourselves to our own mode of contemplating the world when it is transposed into literature" (Ibid.). For this reason, he easily predicts that "the common reader of novels will certainly be confused by *The Sound and the Fury*" (Ibid.). Instead of analysing these consciousnesses, Faulkner tends to state who they are, and in this way he paradoxically applies the technique of behaviourist representation to the domain of traditional analysis of the psyche (Ibid.).

What prevails in Benjy's section is the mechanical recording of the external sources of excitement since the half-witted narrator has very few ideas to communicate. And still, "how majestically the author cuts out from a damaged brain the film of a day" (Ibid.) Cristea concludes that in spite of all the obstacles it poses to the reader at almost every step, "*The Sound and the Fury* leaves an extremely strong impression on the reader" (Ibid.).

The 100th anniversary of William Faulkner's birth was commemorated in Romania by a new edition of the Romanian translation of *The Sound and the Fury* to which Ştefan Stoenescu's thought-provoking postface "Dincolo de patimă şi mînie" [Beyond Passion and Fury] is added. The author contends that the successful reading of the novel is comparable to obtaining an experimental pilot licence (1997: 275). According to Stoenescu, the modernist writer in general

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"does not seem interested to captivate his readers' benevolence" (Id.: 276). It could even be postulated that this is an authorial strategy meant to discourage unprepared readers and to select the experienced ones "capable of constructing a plausible interpretation on their own from the disparate and dispersed data offered to them" (Ibid.).

With regard to the first narrator, Stoenescu highlights the paradox noticed by other critics as well that despite his incoherence Benjy provides the most objective and most credible account of the events: "Benjy's mind is a machine that restores the recorded reality without any gaps or interpretive distortions" (Id.: 286). For Benjy, Caddy represented "the quintessence of the harmony in nature" to whom he transferred "a baby's innocent confidence" – a state from which Benjy was never able to escape (Id.: 287). The perplexity induced by the final scene of the novel almost compels the reader to go back to the beginning and start reading the novel again with a different attitude (Id.: 294).

Four decades after Sorin Alexandrescu's monograph, Mircea Mihăieş published a new one in 2012 entitled *Ce rămâne. William Faulkner şi misterele ţinutului Yoknapatawpha* [What Is Left: William Faulkner and the Mysteries of Yoknapatawpha County]. This insightful book proves that the proliferation of Faulkner criticism has not dried up the subject matter: there are still undiscovered paths leading to a better understanding of Faulkner's novels.

The chapter about The Sound and the Fury is ambiguously entitled *The (Lack of) Logic of Tragedy*, part of which was published as the foreword to a 2003 edition of the novel. The reader's plight is largely discussed by Mihăieş. He sees Faulkner's act of assuming the failure of an unsuccessful narrative as a gesture meant to "soothe the stupefaction of the unsuspecting reader, adherent of classical narratives and fluent plotlines" (2012: 467). His judgment of the intelligibility of the text is somehow contradictory. First he claims that "the temporal distortion does not represent a major difficulty in reading" (Id.: 468) since the sequence of the events can be established with varying degrees of precision after the first reading clues have been detected. Later on, however, after calling Benjy's section "the most spectacular chapter of the novel" (Id.: 472), Mihăieş considers that this part poses most problems for the reader (Ibid.). The problems are not caused by the scrambled chronology but reside in the narrator's mind: the reader's confusion is generated by his/her being thrown into "the autistic world" of a narrator with an atrophied body whose only intact organs are his eyes, described as "cold, incapable of discrimination" (Ibid.), "the impersonal eye of this human camera" (Id.: 473).

Mihăieş takes up and extends earlier characterizations of Benjy as a machine-like, camera-eyed creature: his visual organ is a "camera obscura" within which photocopies selected by the unrelenting camera lenses are continuously being developed (Id.: 472) (cf. Kartiganer 1979: 8, Mellard 1980: 59, Reed in Minter 1987: 354). But unlike many other critics, he does not think that Benjy's language

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is a faithful reflection of his way of perceiving the world. Mihăieş insists that Faulkner's characters are literary conventions and Benjy is an idiot for the simple reason that we are told so, but "his text is not that of an idiot's" (Id.: 474). If "the subjective slippages from one sentence to another" are not taken into consideration, "the text itself does not bear the mark of idiocy" (Ibid.). In Mihăieş's view, Benjy's part is the most obscure of all, but at the same time it is the most suggestive not because it is the first narrative of the novel, but because it is the most elliptical, "a masterpiece of minimalism" (Id.: 476).

3. Reader attitudes towards the novel expressed in digital genres: blog posts and comments

As I was collecting material for this paper, I came across several webpages on which *The Sound and the Fury* was discussed from the "average" reader's perspective. Since I consider these channels as carriers of spontaneous and genuine opinions, I decided to conduct an informal pilot survey about the way the novel is discussed on these pages. The time span within which these blog posts and the comments accompanying them were posted covers about ten years, the first opinion being posted in 2006 and the last one in 2016.[1]

I focused on the bloggers' and commenters' general appreciation of the novel and on the terms they used in describing their reading experience. According to these criteria, two categories of opinions emerged.

The first category of bloggers/commenters describes the book in negative terms: they all complain about the (considerable) reading difficulties raised by Benjy's section. They find it "a bit discouraging" [3], "hard to follow" [5], "troublesome, almost tormenting" [3], even "nerve-wrecking" [1] because it is difficult to figure out who narrates and about what. Blogger Cristian Teodorescu suggests that being confused is an indication that the reader is on the right track [1] and encourages the readers to go on. The majority reports several reading attempts [2], [3], [4], 7]. Some readers [3], [7] share the tricks and strategies they used in order to "connect" to the novel. A commenter, for instance [3], started with the character list at the end of the book and then went on to the third and fourth sections, leaving Benjy and Quentin to the end. Another one [7] sought help in book reviews, and she was able to proceed with the reading after finding out that Benjy was mentally ill.

The bloggers and commenters falling into the second category [3], [4], [6] acknowledge the reading difficulties triggered by the unusual technique, but they consider the reader's confusion as a necessary part of the experience. A commenter [3] points out Faulkner's and Joyce's method of subverting the

1 In view of the specificity of the genre, the author of the blog or comment can only rarely be identified by name – so, I decided to categorize the opinions mainly by their content. The numbers in the square brackets send to the counted website references at the end of the paper.

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author–reader relationship, which leads to a selection of the "readers' profile". According to this commenter, the first part of the novel forces the reader to connect to the novel. Several bloggers and commenters (e.g. [3], [4], [6]) single out Benjy as the most important character, an "epitome of sensitivity" [4] whose way of seeing and feeling the world is impressive. One of them [4] considers *The Sound and the Fury* a "masterpiece", while another one [4] confesses that this book propelled Faulkner to the top of the list of his favourite writers.

Conclusions

As the contemporary reviews show, *The Sound and the Fury* generated puzzlement, incomprehension, frustration but also aroused interest, curiosity, and delight. Many reviewers singled out Benjy, the first narrator of the novel, as the main reason for their incomprehension or even bewilderment, and thus Benjy soon became either the embodiment of artistic storytelling or the scapegoat ruining the reading experience of the unsuspecting readers. Most of the contemporary reviewers were concerned with the difficulties the readers of the novel had to face in Benjy's section of the book – a concern that prevailed throughout the many decades of criticism on *The Sound and the Fury*. Benjy's narrative was either qualified as the incomprehensive "gibberish" of an idiot or as the linguistic version of a child-like vision, depending on the personal preference of the readers. But the fact that the narrative was unsettling and intriguing and that it was likely to trigger emotional reactions were aspects that even the most vehement critics had to agree about.

Romanian critics and writers had publicly discussed the novel even before it was translated. The reception of the book in our country was significantly smoother than in the United States. By the time it appeared in Romanian, Faulkner was a Nobel Prize winner, and the novel had earned its place in the literary canon. None of the critical works that I have consulted object to the fragmentariness of Benjy's section, which caused so much irritation with American early readers. But all the critics anticipate the problems looming over the reader, and they try to dissipate them by explaining the aesthetic effects of Faulkner's technique: some of them even give clues beforehand to ease the reader's task.

While reading the Romanian critical works, I had the impression that Faulkner found a genuinely appreciative reading public in this country. Reviewers and critics approach Faulkner's works in a very subtle way, always discussing them in a larger context, looking for and finding analogies and common points of discussion with other great works of world literature. No doubt, Faulkner criticism has been enriched by the contribution of the Romanian scholars. Literary critics, especially if they come from a different cultural milieu or a different historical

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era, can discover new perspectives and yield new insights into the interpretation of issues that appeared to have been sorted out long ago.

I would like to conclude this chapter by turning back to the questions formulated in the introduction: Has the literary trajectory of *The Sound and the Fury* followed the stages in Jauss's reception theory, i.e. from initial rejection to wide aesthetic acceptance by specialized readers? According to the survey presented above, this seems to have been the case. While at the time of its publication many reviewers and critics contested the artistic value of *The Sound and the Fury*, the appreciative voices became much more numerous with the passing of time. However, I have to add, my research does not confirm the claim made by some critics that it once was a unanimously rejected work. There were literary voices who recognized from the very beginning the fingerprints of a genius on it.

As for the second question, on whether the fragmentariness of Benjy's section has been incorporated in the horizon of expectations of later ("common") readers, so as not to pose reading problems anymore, the answer is more ambivalent. If we look at the critics' response, it seems to be a mainly positive one. On the other hand, according to the "common" readers' opinions, as expressed on their websites, the answer is a predominantly negative one.

Stanley Fish's sociological explanation of meaning construction with repercussions on critical reception is also partially confirmed by my investigation. While generally it is true that the reception of the novel varies according to the aesthetic and social norms held by the different interpretive communities, it is also true that there is a certain degree of overlap in the sense that some aspects of the novel are perceived and appreciated similarly by interpretive communities separated by significant geographical and temporal distances (e.g. the fragmentariness of Benjy's narrative presents a challenge for both early American literary critics and modern-day Romanian common readers).

Apparently, eighty years of reception of a literary piece were not enough for uncertainty of meaning and tolerance of ambiguity to become part of the average readers' expectations.

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List of webpage addresses used for writing the *Reader attitudes towards the novel expressed in digital genres: blogposts and comments* section:

1. http://www.catavencii.ro/cartea-zilei-zgomotul-si-furia/
2. https://cesafaciintimpulliber.blogspot.ro/2011/10/william-faulkner-zgomotul-si-furia.html
3. http://www.bookblog.ro/literatura-contemporana/zgomotul-si-furia/
4. http://www.isuciu.ro/2009/09/zgomotul-si-furia-de-william-faulkner.html
5. http://www.ghenea.ro/2007/10/15/zgomotul-si-furia-de-william-faulkner/
6. http://citestealtfel.ro/gandeste-altfel/carte/william-faulkner-zgomotul-si-furia
7. http://lorellei.com/2016/09/18/recenzie-zgomotul-si-furia-de-william-faulkner/

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