

**THE POETICS OF SOUTHERN GOTHIC AND ITS SENSORY DIMENSION IN
WILLIAM FAULKNER'S WORKS****T.X. Suleymanov,**

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[*suleymanov.timka@gmail.com*](mailto:suleymanov.timka@gmail.com)**Abstract**

William Faulkner is one of the major writers of literary modernism, yet his prose is inseparable from the cultural and historical reality of the American South. This article examines the poetics of Southern Gothic in Faulkner's works, with particular attention to its sensory dimension. It argues that such abstract categories as the past, guilt, decay, and fate become materially perceptible through smell, sound, sight, and touch. Sensory imagery in Faulkner is not only a means of creating atmosphere but also an essential instrument of world-building. Through sensory details, Faulkner constructs a specific Gothic chronotope in which the past invades the present and historical trauma acquires physical form.

Keywords: William Faulkner; Southern Gothic; modernism; sensory imagery; decay; grotesque; chronotope; narration

Introduction

William Faulkner occupies a central place in twentieth-century literature not only as a modernist writer but also as one of the most important representatives of Southern Gothic. His fiction combines Gothic motifs with the historical experience of the American South and the formal experimentation of modernist prose. In Southern Gothic, the ruined castle of European tradition is transformed into the decaying plantation house, while the ancestral curse becomes the burden of slavery, defeat, and collective guilt [3, p. 45].

American Gothic differs from European Gothic in one important way: it tends to internalize horror. Terror is found not only in external settings, but also in the human psyche, memory, and moral corruption [8, p. 235]. This feature becomes especially important in Faulkner's prose, where the Gothic is inseparable from psychological fragmentation and subjective perception.

The aim of this article is to analyze the main features of Southern Gothic in Faulkner's works and to show how sensory imagery functions as a key mechanism for materializing abstract categories such as the past, guilt, decay, and fate.

Materials and Methods

The material of the study includes Faulkner's major Southern Gothic texts: *The Sound and the Fury*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, "A Rose for Emily," "Dry September," and "Barn Burning." These works were selected because they clearly represent the core themes of Southern Gothic: the burden of the past, decline, violence, and psychological instability.

The research is based on literary-historical, comparative, and linguopoetic methods. The literary-historical approach makes it possible to place Faulkner within the tradition of Southern Gothic. The comparative method helps distinguish inherited Gothic motifs from Faulkner's modernist innovations. The linguopoetic method is used to analyze the lexical and syntactic means through which sensory experience is represented in the text. The article also relies on Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope in order to explain the unity of space and time in Faulkner's artistic world [1, p. 234].

Results and Discussion

Faulkner and the Southern Gothic Tradition

Southern Gothic is built around several recurring themes: the burden of the past, decay, grotesque imagery, violence, and fatality. All of them are central to Faulkner's fiction. His characters exist under the pressure of memory and family inheritance, and the past in his prose is never fully gone. It remains active in the present and shapes human destiny [4, p. 78].

The motif of decay is especially important. In Faulkner's works, ruined houses and declining families symbolize the collapse of the old South. The Grierson house in "A Rose for Emily" and the Compson home in *The Sound and the Fury* are not merely settings; they are material signs of historical exhaustion and moral disintegration. The old Southern house becomes a space where time seems frozen and life is replaced by ritual, dust, and silence [10, p. 523].

Violence is another major component of Faulkner's Southern Gothic. However, it is never purely sensational. In "Dry September," violence reveals the irrational cruelty hidden beneath social order, while in "Barn Burning" it grows out of humiliation, resentment, and class tension. Thus, Faulkner gives Gothic violence both historical and psychological meaning [9, p. 211].

Modernist Transformation of Gothic Poetics

Faulkner does not simply reproduce Southern Gothic conventions; he transforms them through modernist techniques. One of his main innovations is the psychologicalization of the

grotesque. In his fiction, monstrosity often lies not in the body but in consciousness. Fragmented memory, trauma, and unstable perception become the real source of horror.

This is especially clear in *The Sound and the Fury*. Benjy Compson's consciousness is organized as a flow of disconnected sensations and memories rather than logical thought. Reality appears broken and unstable, and the reader experiences the family tragedy through sensory fragments. In this way, Gothic terror becomes internalized and subjective [8, p. 47].

Faulkner also uses multiple perspectives and stream of consciousness to make reality uncertain. Events are presented through incomplete and often unreliable points of view. As a result, Gothic mystery becomes not only a plot element but also a problem of perception and interpretation. This subjective structure intensifies the sense that the past is not something over and done with, but something still present and inescapable [5, p. 235].

The Sensory Dimension of Faulkner's Prose

The most distinctive feature of Faulkner's Southern Gothic is the sensory materialization of abstract categories. The past, guilt, decay, and fate are represented not only as ideas but as things that can be smelled, heard, seen, and physically felt.

Smell plays a particularly important role. In "A Rose for Emily," the odor coming from the Grierson house is not a minor detail; it is a direct sign of death, concealment, and arrested time. Smell makes decay concrete and unavoidable. Dust and stale air function in the same way, suggesting lifelessness, neglect, and the physical presence of the past [2, p. 145].

Visual imagery reinforces this effect. Faulkner often describes interiors through dim light, shadows, faded colors, and closed windows. Such details create a visual atmosphere of stagnation and relate physical space to temporal immobility. Gray, pale, and dusty colors dominate the Gothic palette of his prose and emphasize the intermediate state between life and death [10, p. 520].

Touch and temperature are also meaningful. In Faulkner's texts, houses often feel cold, damp, and airless, while open Southern space is marked by oppressive heat. In "Dry September," heat becomes the physical equivalent of emotional tension and latent violence. Climate is not merely background; it shapes the emotional reality of the narrative [7, p. 96].

Sound is no less important. Repetitive natural noises, silence, and monotonous sounds create a sense of immobility and inner pressure. In Faulkner's prose, sensory details rarely serve only decorative purposes. They organize the reader's perception and translate metaphysical or historical problems into bodily experience [6, p. 6].

Recent studies also confirm the importance of sensorics in Faulkner's style. T. Kh. Suleymanov emphasizes the synthesis of visual, auditory, and tactile images in "Barn Burning"

and “A Rose for Emily,” showing that sensory interaction is essential for character perception and atmosphere [7, p. 93]. In another study, Suleymanov demonstrates that sensory representation in Faulkner is closely connected with lexical and syntactic choices, which shape the rhythm and intensity of perception [6, p. 5].

From this perspective, Faulkner creates a specific Gothic chronotope in which space and time are united through sensation. According to Bakhtin, the chronotope expresses the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relations in literature [1, p. 234]. In Faulkner’s prose, this unity is felt through sensory imagery: time smells of dust and decay, space feels oppressive, and guilt becomes atmospheric.

Conclusion

Faulkner’s prose demonstrates that Southern Gothic is not simply a set of motifs, but a complex artistic system shaped by history, psychology, and sensory experience. He preserves the central themes of the tradition the burden of the past, decay, violence, grotesque imagery, and fatality but transforms them through modernist subjectivity and formal experimentation.

The sensory dimension plays a crucial role in this transformation. Through smell, sound, sight, and touch, Faulkner materializes abstract categories such as guilt, fate, and historical memory. Sensory imagery in his works performs a world-modeling function and helps create a distinctive Gothic chronotope in which the past remains physically present in the world of the living.

Thus, the study of sensory imagery is essential for understanding the poetics of Faulkner’s Southern Gothic. It reveals how language turns abstract historical and psychological forces into tangible artistic reality.

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