

نظرة عميقة إلى الاضمحلال الجنوبي واليأس العائلي في الصخب والعنف بقلم وليم فولكنير

A Deep Dive into Southern Decay and Familial Desperation in The sound and Fury by William Faulkner

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Abstract

This research examines *The Sound and the Fury* as a pivotal text in Southern literature, exploring societal decay and familial desperation the story is well thought out as a modernist narrative for various reasons. First, the book lacks traditional and unified storytelling, as Faulkner utilizes fragmented techniques. In the novel, the writer's description of the Compson family's decline can be explored through the lens of psychoanalysis theory particularly the ideas of repression and the unconscious as defined by Sigmund Freud. The narrative is split into four sections, each with a different narrator. Moreover, time is fragmented, as the novel covers an extended period and the characters travel back and forth between the past and the present. Another important modernist characteristic in the story is

the treatment of Biblical principles' decline and the diminishing of empathy. In modern era, both, religion and faith have been changed and the loss of moral values can be seen throughout the novel and its representation of the American South.

Keywords: decay, familial desperation, identity, fragmentation, race, unconscious

المستخلص

يتناول هذا البحث قصة "الصخب والعنف" باعتبارها نصًا محوريًا في الأدب الجنوبي، مستكشفًا التدهور المجتمعي واليأس الأسري. وقد تم التفكير في القصة جيدًا كسرد حدائي لأسباب مختلفة. أولاً، يفتقر الكاتب "William Faulkner" إلى السرد التقليدي والموحد، حيث يستخدم Faulkner في تقنيات مجزأة. في الرواية يمكن استكشاف وصف الكاتب لانحدار عائلة Compson من خلال وجهة نظر التحليل النفسي وخاصة أفكار القمع واللاوعي التي حددها Sigmund Freud. ينقسم السرد إلى أربعة أقسام، ولكل منها راوي مختلف. علاوة على ذلك، فإن الوقت مجزأ، حيث تغطي الرواية فترة ممتدة ويسافر الشخصيات ذهابًا وإيابًا بين الماضي والحاضر. ومن السمات الحداثية المهمة الأخرى في القصة معالجة تدهور المبادئ الكتابية بالإضافة إلى تناقص التعاطف. لقد تم تحدي الدين وكذلك الإيمان في العصر الحديث، ويمكن رؤية فقدان القيم الأخلاقية في جميع أنحاء الرواية وتمثيلها للجنوب الأمريكي.

1. Introduction

It has been said that this narrative is the finest Southern tale ever penned in America. It comprises discussions of race in a modernist novel, a family drama perspective, and a kind of novel that presents something for everybody. This is why this novel made Faulkner famous quickly and offered him an International Award in Literature. The happenings in Southern society trace the decaying values on which it is based. It depicts the desperation and hopelessness of the three Compson brothers because of their sister's deeds. Her sexuality, early pregnancy, and quick marriage are the heart that beats desperation throughout the novel as the coming incidents are either happening after or in response to the sister's actions (Hempstead: 36).

In *The Sound and the Fury*, the author's depiction of the Compson family's decline can be thoroughly examined through psychoanalytic theory, especially the ideas of repression and the unconscious as defined by Sigmund Freud. The family's collapse reflects profound anxieties and unresolved conflicts that surface in the characters' actions and interactions. For example, Quentin's fixation on time and his family's honor can be seen as a result of repressed guilt and an inability to face the reality of their moral decay

(Freud: 1917). His obsession culminates in a tragic outcome through suicide, representing the ultimate escape from familial pressures and the burdens of legacy. Likewise, Benjy's understanding of reality, characterized by a lack of temporal awareness, signifies a regression to a childlike state, indicating a defense mechanism against the trauma of loss and abandonment (Lacan: 1977). The author's employment of fragmented narrative and stream-of-consciousness technique further highlights the tumultuous inner lives of the characters, demonstrating how their psyches are irrevocably influenced by the familial and social deterioration surrounding them. This psychoanalytic analysis reveals not only the vulnerability of the Compson family but also the wider implications of a Southern society wrestling with its own historical shortcomings.

Thomas L. McHaney suggests that in the American South—a region often viewed as one rich in noble traditions and strong religious faith—the Compson family exemplifies a failure to uphold those ideals. He points out that each son struggles with religion, indicating that none truly embodies a religious belief. (McHaney: 151). None of the members of the Compson family live up to the Christian virtues that their servant Dilsey embodies

The Sound and the Fury is a highly complex tale that opens with an extended sequence by someone whose mind is deranged; thus, the reader does not realize where they are.

This technique, though its difficulty, made Faulkner an innovator; establishing himself as a technically skilled and creative writer. He gained a significant acclaim as a novelist.

2. Historical Background

William Faulkner (1897 – 1962) is regarded as one of the twentieth century's greatest writers. All of his novels are set in Lafayette County, Mississippi, which he referred to as Yoknapatawpha. He is celebrated for his ability to portray the history and culture of the South in his writings. His 1929 tale, *The Sound and the Fury*, is often considered his masterpiece, as it marks the first time he employed an interior point of view and voice—elements that would define his writing style.

The novel's original title was *Twilight*, and the current title references a line from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* from Act V, Scene 5: It is a story told by a fool, complete with noise and passion, but meaning nothing. This shows that the narrative of the Compsons is presented through the perspective of Benjy, who introduces the novel. However, this idea also applies to Quentin and Jason, whose stories highlight their foolishness. In Faulkner's books, there is nothing idealistic about his South; it is more like the emergence of the new era and the decline of the old South. The story is in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County,

which Lafayette County, Mississippi, mainly inspires. "Yoknapatawpha" comes from two Chickasaw words—Yocona and petopha—translating to "split land." Faulkner noted that this term signifies "water flowing slowly through flat land."

The Sound and the Fury (1929) is about a once-prestigious southern bloodline disintegration into ruin. It concerns the Compsons family and its ill-fated errs. It takes place early in the twentieth century and is a metaphor for the crumbling South. Not only that, the novel is a study of the human condition and behavior, hatred, revenge, tragedy, and failure. McHaney further shows how the book portrays the decline of the South through the main characters: Thus, their attempts at restoring the glory of the family on the one hand and the glory of the South, on the other hand, fail drastically and tragically. Jason's investment in the cotton futures market and his decision to send Quentin to Harvard ultimately lead to the disappearance of their pasture and Quentin's tragic suicide.

3. The Role of The South's History in Shaping The Compsons' psyche

In "The Sound and the Fury," the decline of the South is reflected in the Compson family's struggles with their past and their relationships. Their loss of social standing and moral values shows how they break down mentally. For instance, Quentin Compson is obsessed with time and family honor, revealing his deep guilt and the pressure he feels from his family. This overwhelming burden drives him to take his own life to escape his pain.

Benjy, on the other hand, sees the world in a confusing way, which helps him cope with feelings of loss and abandonment. The Compson family struggles to confront their history and emotions, creating a sense of hopelessness. Faulkner uses this theme of decay to illustrate not just the South's decline, but also how history, trauma, and family issues shape people's thoughts and feelings.

In Faulkner's novel, the historical backdrop of the South significantly influences the mental states of the Compson family. Their deterioration reflects the larger narrative of Southern history, particularly the decline of the antebellum elite in the aftermath of the Civil War. This historical setting imbues the Compsons with a deep sense of yearning and loss as they confront their waning social standing and the disintegration of their once-prominent heritage. Quentin Compson exemplifies how historical burdens can lead to psychological distress. His fixation on family reputation and nostalgia reveals an underlying dread of inadequacy and an urgent desire to maintain the ideals associated with Southern refinement. This obsession ultimately drives him to suicide, showcasing how the struggle to align personal identity with familial and societal expectations can spiral into despair. (Lacan, 1977)

Conversely, Benjy symbolizes a tragic yet innocent response to the family's historical challenges. His disjointed understanding of time and reality reflects the tumultuous legacy of the South, where unresolved past traumas heavily influence contemporary life.

His character signifies lost innocence and highlights the detrimental effects of a crumbling family dynamic, indicating that the South's historical decline has left him unable to interact meaningfully with his surroundings. Caddy Compson's sexual indiscretions and her resulting estrangement from her family further exemplify how the strict moral codes of the South contribute to individual despair. Her behavior can be interpreted as both a rebellion against and a consequence of the oppressive societal standards that dictate the Compson family's actions. Her tragic outcome emphasizes the harmful nature of Southern honor and the difficulty of escaping the burdens of history. (Bass: 730)

In summary, the psychological experiences of the Compsons are intricately linked to the historical circumstances of the South, illustrating how legacies of loss, societal pressures, and notions of family honor can result in significant mental anguish and familial breakdown. Faulkner's examination of these themes highlights the unavoidable impact of history on personal identity and the lingering presence of a past that cannot be ignored.

4. Narrative Technique

This novel is divided into four narrations: "Benjy," "Quentin," "Jason," and "Dilsey," respectively. Each chapter shows the family's story from their point of view. Therefore, each chapter will be uniquely characterized by its structure, time, and narrative point of

view. Benjy narrates the first chapter. He is the youngest of the Compson siblings. Originally named Maury Compson, his name was changed to Benjamin in 1900 after it became clear that he had significant intellectual disabilities. His way of narrating is challenging because he does not understand time; he recounts all events as if they are happening in the present, nevertheless, when they took place in his days. He narrates the occurrences as if they were taking place on April 7, 1928; the actual events on this particular date are insignificant, yet the memories they evoke in his memory, and he lives them again (Claridge: 575). Quentin narrates the second chapter. He is the eldest of the Compson children. A sensitive and intelligent young man, Quentin is deeply troubled by his love for his sister, Caddy, and his concern for the family's honor. He ultimately takes his own life by drowning just before finishing his first year at Harvard. Unlike Benjy, Quentin has a much more complex mind; he understands that his flashbacks are merely memories. Faulkner highlights the significance of time and memory in Quentin's life through the recurring presence of clocks and watches. Quentin feels trapped in time, consumed by his past and tormented by memories, leading him to see suicide as his only escape. (Kirik and Klots: 42).

Jason narrates the third chapter. He is the next youngest of the Compson siblings. He is cruel, petty, and highly cynical, a trait evident from the first line of his narration when he states, "Once a troublemaker, always a troublemaker, that's my view." He is obsessed with her, but his obsession is rooted in bitterness and a desire to see her in trouble, which leads

him to manipulate and steal the money Caddy sends for her daughter. The narrative in this chapter is clear, precise, and almost devoid of emotion, allowing for the revelation of several essential plot points that the previous sections only hinted at. Jason confirms that Benjy has been castrated, that Quentin committed suicide and that Caddy has gone through a divorce. (Kartiganer: 69).

The last chapter is narrated from the third-person point of view, defying the expectation that Caddy, whom the novel is all about, should tell the end of the story. This chapter shifts the focus from the Compsons' inner struggles to offer a broader perspective on the unfolding tragedy. The final chapter, set on Easter Sunday, symbolizes the family's downfall while alluding to resurrection and renewal themes. The narration here is objective, akin to Benjy's in its detached view of the Compson world, but it differs in being omniscient and using a more conventional storytelling approach. (Claridge: 642).

5. Race and Class Issues

Separating this novel's themes, characters, and structure is challenging because those features are deeply intertwined. One of the primary themes is time, which Faulkner intricately develops across all four sections of the novel. Each of the central characters handles time in distinct ways. In the initial part, Benjy has a flawed temporal awareness; his mind shift erratically between the present and the past, making it difficult to understand the true significance of events. Benjy exists outside of time, as he cannot

comprehend how it affects his emotions. His memories hinder Quentin's ability to engage with the present, and Quentin struggles to accept the inevitable changes that time brings to his life. The overwhelming sense of loss he feels regarding his innocent love for Caddy becomes unbearable, leading him to choose suicide as an escape from life's transformations. In contrast, Jason is firmly anchored in the present; his actions revolve. (Kirik and Klots: 31).

The second theme is pride. Pride, in itself, is often described as the downfall of the family. The decline in their wealth and social standing profoundly affects the family's oldest members and the parents. This decline leads them to turn inwards, clinging to their sense of family pride. Mr. Compson copes with his feelings of loss through alcohol while his wife isolates herself in her bedroom, consumed by melancholy. Quentin's fixation on the dignity of the parentage, as well as the shame he feels over Caddy's actions, ultimately drives him to take his own life. The younger Jason is also consumed by pride, which becomes his downfall. His pride is mixed with envy; he experiences wrongs and believes he is worthy of more. He feels deceived by Caddy, using that as an excuse to steal from that woman. When Caddy's daughter takes something from Jason, the man feels furious, believing this theft further undermines him. Faulkner illustrates the devastating consequences of the arrogance of the individuals of the family through the experiences. (Kirik & Klots: 35).

The novel delves into themes of the complexities of both genuine and dysfunctional love between siblings, passion, and spiritual passion. Faulkner highlights the affection the brothers own for their sister, Caddy. Benjy cherishes the concern provided during their childhood. When he hears someone call out "caddie" while playing golf, he sighs as memories of her name flood back to him. Feeling her absence, deeply once she departs to get married, reflecting his innocent passion for the kindness she shared with him.

In contrast, Quentin's feelings for Caddy are disturbing; he possesses inappropriate desires towards her. He feels ardent towards her companions and refuses to accept that she has other boyfriends. He even imagines having an unsuitable relationship with other people. However, the writer explores this complexity in a nuanced manner in "writing: "Compson 1699 – 1945" "portraying Quentin as someone who is not drawn to the idea of incest itself, which he would never act upon, but rather to a Presbyterian notion of eternal punishment. Through this, he alone could condemn both himself and his sister to hell, allowing him to protect her safe amid the eternal flames". (Kirik and Klots: 42).

Caddy, as depicted through the voices of her brothers, appears to evolve naturally over time. In her childhood, she expresses affection for Benjy and Quentin. As she grows into a lady, she engages in romantic relationships, becomes enceinte, gets married, and ultimately departs the house. The theme of spiritual passion resonates throughout the

book's conclusion. Through the character of Dilsey, Faulkner conveys a perspective on love rooted in spiritual belief and faith—a passion that perseveres through suffering and embraces truth. (Kartiganer: 166).

The final theme to discuss is irrationality. The distinction between Benjy and Jason highlights the themes rationality and irrationality in the narrative. Benjy, who cannot grasp the truth, reveals a chaotic universe through his spoken thoughts. The author uses his individuality to delve into the futility of emotional responses to echoes, visuals, and speech. Quentin's decision to take his own life may be viewed as a sign of madness, stemming from his struggle to confront the truth. Similarly, Mr. Compson's battle with alcohol addiction resembles a slow form of suicide, representing a withdrawal from reality, much like Mrs. Compson, who retreats toward her sleeping place. The two figures who appear most rational in the novel are Jason and Dilsey. Dilsey's rationality comes from her complete approval of life's harsh truths. While focused on the present, Jason allows his resentments to distort his sense of sanity. (Claridge: 302).

6. Faulkner and the Modern Characteristics of His Wittings

The stream of consciousness in the early chapters is often confusing. Benjy's past experiences happen frequently and unexpectedly, occasionally interrupting sentences. The author uses italicized text to indicate these shifts in time, although he does not always do so consistently. One of the simplest ways to recognize our experience of the present

comes from Luster's presence, who only appears in the scenes set in 1928. Hence, he is an anchor point in time, helping the readers understand who is who and which is which (Claridge: 171).

This approach presents the thoughts of the character as they occur. Robert Humphrey describes this technique as a way to depict the psychological element of a character in fiction, noting that it can be applied with a certain degree of accuracy" (Humphrey: 1). With a stream of consciousness, the characters talk to themselves, have thoughts triggered by free association, or see flashing lists of words or mental pictures. William Faulkner, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf are three famous stream-of-consciousness writers. Stream of consciousness puts the reader inside the character's mind as the writer writes as though they are inside the character's mind. There are rapid jumps from one topic to the next, and this technique captures a snapshot of the internal thought process of the writer's characters.

The narrative is presented through four contrastive approaches, often called parts, and covers 18 years beginning on June 2, 1910, and ending on Easter weekend, from April 6 to 8, 1928. Each section is centered around various descriptions of consciousness. The best example of the stream of consciousness can be found in the initial parts. Benjy who had a mental disability, lacks a genuine understanding of time. What happens in the present time can only trigger memories. It is through the scenes of the golfers golfing and

Luster hunting that he has accounts of the past as he recounts his sister, Caddy's climbing the trees and smelling like trees, her wedding, his name change from Maury to Benjamin, and Caddy's fighting with Quentin when they were children. All these accounts are deliberately written in italics to highlight Benjy's stream of consciousness and recollections of the past: Faulkner here reveals Benjy's internal thought process, and it is clear that his thoughts are jumbled, just like the sentences themselves. It is not easy to understand what is happening inside his mind, and he does not have a sense of time. For him, the past and the present all co-occur. Yet, the stream of consciousness does not only reveal Benjy's confusion and fragmentation. It also shows the inner peace and the passion that he feels whenever Caddy accompanies him. He recollected a memory of when he slept next to his sister at their grandmother's funeral and how he felt at peace despite the bleak atmosphere they were living in at that time because Caddy, for him, represents a mother figure.

On the other hand, Quentin's section is no less complicated than Benjy's. Being a Harvard student, he is quite a clever and different from Benjy; he thoroughly understands time. However, his thoughts seem to race back and forth between the past and the present, like this part traces Quentin's internal reflections just a day before he takes his own life. Faulkner's style here represents Quentin's instability through his stream of consciousness. Quentin's memories of the discussions he has had with his father and his mother exemplify his mental instability and give the reader a deep insight into his character. He

states:" The month of weddings with a voice which lingered. She dashed away from the glass, carried by the fragrant air of Roses. Mr. and Mrs. Jason Richmond Compson declare their union. Not innocent like dogwood or milkweed. I told you, Father, I said I had committed incest. Roses. Clever as well as calm. You should get your money back if you go to Harvard for a year but miss the boat race. Here, the writer reveals Quentin's obsession with his sister Caddy as he mentions her wedding, compares her to roses, and refuses this marriage. Like Benjy, his mind and thoughts trace the past to the present. Eben Bass argues, "the audience finds it hard to grasp any feeling of organization from the character of Benjy, as his understanding of "time" is stuck at the level of a three – year – old. His brother Quentin helps to bring some structure to the narrative but he also halts time for himself by taking his own life" (Bass: 728).

7. Helplessness towards Decay

The individualization of each character is evident in this novel. From an early age, the Compson children display significantly different personalities. Caddy is Benjy's maternal figure, providing him with the only affection he knows. Yet, she appears pretty assertive, as shown when she demands that, her siblings "mind" her rather than Dilsey. Moreover, Caddy's muddy shorts in the flowing water during childhood hint at her future libertinism. Her soiled clothes and Dilsey's inability to clean them imply that Caddy's actions will permanently stain the family's reputation (Claridge: 70). Caddy's suggestive

behavior ultimately destabilizes each brother's emotional or mental health in his narratives. Quentin takes his own life, devastated by Caddy's lost innocence. Jason harbors resentment and anger, feeling that Caddy's promiscuity has ruined his job prospects promised by her husband. Caddy's expulsion from the Compson home disrupts his reality, leaving him bewildered, tormented, and desperately yearning for her to come back. (Kirik and Klots: 31).

These incidents illustrate a trend of ethical decline in the family. The initial signs of that decline emerge through Uncle Maury's relationship with Mrs. Patterson, where Caddy and Benjy unknowingly become complicit in his infidelity. As part of the Bascomb family, Uncle Maury's actions contribute to Mrs. Compson's fixation on her relative's legacy, which is reflected in her choice to give her son a new name. Yet, her attempts to be separated from her brother's wrongdoing prove unsuccessful, as Caddy soon displays the same indiscretions (Kartiganer: 85).

The memories Benjy shares reveal a trend of virtuous decline in the family and a recurring theme of mortality. His initial memory is of Damuddy's death, a character who does not emerge alive in the tale. Representing her ancestors, she symbolizes the traditional South of the 19th century; her passing marks the end of that era. Importantly, this old generation's symbolic death initiates the Compsons' tragic decline. Benjy's castration extends this theme of death to the next generation, as it represents the end of a

family line. Ironically, the individuals in the Compson home, who are most conscious of the family's decline as well as the looming tragedy, are also the most challenged in acting as Benjy and the African American worker. Benjy's heightened perception of what is orderly versus chaotic allows him to detect Damuddy's death, Caddy's reckless behavior, Quentin's demise, plus various signs of the family's deterioration. Yet, his weakness limits his reactions to mere moaning and wailing. Similarly, when Mr. Compson dies, Roskus observes that the family unit is cursed—"There is no luck to be found in this place." Although the African American workers look aware of the Compsons' fate and foresee their downfall, their roles as servants render their warnings unlikely to be heard or taken seriously. (Faulkner: 13)

Conclusion

The Sound and the Fury only crystallizes when the reader approaches it from three different aspects of the Compson brothers. The details of Benjy's tales are gradually assembled and clarified as the novel progresses. Thus, time and order are restored at the end. The Compson family's fragmentation is set against the narrative totality of Dilsey, the black maternal servant, in the fourth part of the tale, which has been said in the third person. Dilsey is the unifying force that is missing in the Compson family. The relationship among the family members is frayed and, therefore, reflected in the narrative through jumbled, disfigured, and nonlinear language spoken by idiots and unstable

characters. Caddy, the only seemingly sane figure in the family, is not given a section to reveal the inner workings of her mind, and there is no clear ending for her. She symbolizes the emotional focal point for her brothers, and everything is set around her, yet we do not hear her voice and thoughts in the narrative. Caddy is associated with different images of water throughout the novel. Water symbolizes purity and cleanliness in the story, especially in the case of Caddy. Unlike her siblings, she seems to be the epitome of purity when playing in the stream as a child, who reveals mental unrest. However, she muddies her underclothes, foreshadowing her later promiscuity. Benjy repeatedly declares, "*Caddy smelled like trees in the rain,*" (Faulkner: 13) associating her childish purity with the scent of the trees she would climb. But, he later realizes the change that occurs when she becomes sexually active, and it shakes his order that he laments the distance between him and his sister by stating that he "lost the ability to scent the trees, and tears began to well up in his eyes." (Faulkner: 26)

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