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The Sound and The Fury: Cubist Painting In Words

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Abstract: The study on The Narrative Techniques in William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha Novels: *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *As I Lay Dying* (1930) throw light on the thought processes, attitudes and behaviour of the modern man in his personal life as well as in public life. The two novels reflect man's internal and psychological struggles which are minutely observed by William Faulkner. In both the novels, Faulkner has presented the thought patterns, attitudes, psychological imbalances, and memories from the past through the different kinds of narrative techniques. The narrative techniques employed by Faulkner are unique which have never been experimented by the other writers of Stream of Consciousness technique. This paper throws light on the unique techniques, especially cubism, used by Faulkner in *The Sound and the Fury* and its relevance today.

Key Words: Cubism, stream of consciousness technique, interior monologue, flashback technique.

Introduction: William Faulkner, the master of narrative techniques and art, the great writer, thinker, novelist, short story writer, Nobel Prize winner, and also the world recognized narrator, developed his narrations from his mind. He was a great experimenter, who used new techniques to express his views of man's position in the modern world. We can witness the same in his nineteen novels and near about one hundred and eighty short stories with a variety of narrative techniques. William Faulkner's magnum opus *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) is a well-received classic in American literature. The novel is known for its variety of popular techniques experimented by him in the twentieth century. He was very much a writer who was aware of the ongoing movements in literature. *The Sound*



and the Fury is a product of Faulkner's effort at a crucial movement in his life to understand and depict his personal struggles in an exploratory and definitive way. He confronted his problems with much sensitivity and penetration that they finally acquired a universal significance. He was greatly influenced by a popular movement known as *Cubism*. *Cubism* is a movement which is related to fine arts. Faulkner experimented *Cubism* in his fiction. Though *Cubism* is related to arts and sculpture, *The Sound and the Fury* is the result of his experimentation in the Cubist theory.

Cubism: Cubism was a twentieth century avant-garde art movement. The word Cubism is derived from French by Louis Vauxcelles in 1908 after seeing a picture by Georges Braque. It was pioneered by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. It revolutionized European painting and sculpture, and inspired related movements in music, literature and architecture. The first branch of Cubism, known as *Analytic Cubism*, was both radical and influential. It was a short but highly significant art movement between 1907 and 1911 in France. In its second phase, *Synthetic Cubism*, the movement spread and remained vital until around 1919, when the Surrealist movement gained popularity.

In Analytic Cubism, artworks or objects are broken up, analyzed, and re-assembled in an abstracted form instead of depicting objects from one viewpoint. The artist depicts the subject from a multitude of viewpoints to represent the subject in a greater context. It was introduced in United States in 1913 at Armory Show in New York.

Cubism is basically the art of creating abstract shapes of three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional surface. An artist who wants to opt for Cubism should be able to represent an object in multiple planes. Therefore, in simple terms, a Cubist artist is a literary writer or a painter basically shows more than one view at a time. The overall look of a painting that is created in this style appears in the form of little cubes. An artist uses the style of little cubes to depict an object or a person from different viewpoints.

Cubism in Faulkner's Works: This movement was a preparation ground for Faulkner to write his classics, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *As I Lay Dying* (1930). They can be read as an interaction with the Cubist mode. Each novel features narratives of the diverse experiences of his multiple narrators, when, taken together they produce a single cohesive body. The impact of Cubism on



Faulkner in a short span of time proves that he was a great learner, experimenter and innovator in his fiction. Within a period of sixteen years, Cubism got its full flowering in the fiction of Faulkner. Both emotionally and technically this novel proved to be one of his most powerful ones. Lyle Saxon, writing for the *New York Herald Tribune*, called *The Sound and the Fury* “a great book” (Minter, 1987: ix).

The Sound and the Fury, a novel in four movements like Cubist theory, paints the decay of an aristocratic Mississippi family, a dissonant, pessimistic narrative shattered into radically different perspectives. Both the South and the family resonate loudly with the spirit of modernism. The disorganization of the family translates into the disorganization of life. The South also serves as an appropriate setting to explore failure, order, and temporality. Most of America is a timeless, commercial, Mickey Mouse fantasy world; the land of happy endings is expressed in the novel through the four different narrators. The novel is great because of Faulkner’s use of Cubism, strong creative talent and rich sense to poetic emotion in analyzing the tragedy of disintegrated Southern Compson family of gentle blood which is shown in decay, its members, petty failures, drunkards, pathological perverts and idiots.

Faulkner was wise in choosing titles for his novels. The **title** of the novel is extracted from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. He was very much impressed by the protagonist Macbeth’s soliloquy;

*Life’s but walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.”*

(Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* Act-V Scene-V lines 24-28).

In this soliloquy, Macbeth implies that life is a shadow of the past and that a modern man, like himself, is inadequately equipped and unable to achieve anything near the greatness of the past. Faulkner interprets this idea, implying if man does not choose to take his own life, as Quentin does, the only alternatives are to become either a cynic and materialist like Jason, or an idiot like Benjy, unable to see life as anything more than a meaningless series of images, sounds and memories.



The Sound and the Fury literally begins as “a tale/ Told by an idiot,” as the first chapter narrated by the mentally disabled Benjy. The tale is made relevant in the words of an omniscient narrator Faulkner through Dilsey. The novel’s central concerns include time much like Macbeth’s ‘*tomorrow, tomorrow*’ (Shakespeare’s *Macbeth Act-V Scene-V lines 19-23*); death, recalling Macbeth’s dusty death; and nothingness and disintegration, a clear reference to Macbeth’s lament that life signifies nothing.

Additionally, Quentin is haunted by the sense that the Compsons have disintegrated to a mere shadow of its former greatness. The phrase ‘sound and the fury’ aptly describes the content of the various monologues in the novel. Time, space, self-interest, subjective perception, and family are the five dimensions through which the novel can be read. Considering it all into a coherent image gives a sense of completion. This novel is far more aural than almost any other novel. Sounds echo at key moments to provide critical meaning. The novel often speaks without sounds, but there is much fury when the words are internal. Some of the sounds, especially Benjy’s, help to cause the fury. The readers enjoy the inter relationship of the story with the title.

The novelist has effectively experimented *Cubism* along with narrative techniques in the four sections of the novel which are non-chronological, fragmented and disordered. The four sections which Faulkner has made in this novel are unique and deal with inner workings of the mind of the Compson brothers. But nothing organizes itself vertically into a hierarchy. Like modernist artwork, the horizontal dominates, without a central viewpoint or an objective point of reference, with no portion of the canvas receiving more emphasis than any other. Though the sections are not in chronological order, Faulkner has successfully handled, analyzed, and arranged them in an abstract manner.

The events in this novel occur according to relevance and significance, but not according to time sequence. The first section is titled as ‘*April Seventh, 1928, Benjy section*’; the second ‘*June Second, 1910, Quentin section*’; the third ‘*April Sixth, 1928, Jason section*’; and the fourth ‘*April Eighth, 1928, Dilsey section.*’ The first three sections of the novel are in the first-person point of view, narrated by the male members of a declining and dysfunctional Southern family, the Compsons of gentle blood; its members, petty failures, drunkards, aristocrats, suicide’s, and psychological parrots. Whereas, in the fourth section, an omniscient mode is adopted by Faulkner.



The features of Cubism are the keys to analyze this novel. The success of the novel is attributed to Faulkner's arrangement of the incidents in a non sequential and non chronological order which heightens the curiosity of the readers. The reader's movement through the book is a progression from darkness to increasing enlightenment, and this is natural since we start with the mind of an idiot and go on next through the memories and reveries of Hamlet, like Quentin, and come finally to the observations of the brittle, would be rationalist, Jason.

A Complex Novel: Several factors are responsible in making the novel difficult for the readers to understand. First, one of the narrator's is a person with mental deficiencies. Second, use of an unusual flashback technique in the first section that cannot be understood very clearly until one reads the whole book (perhaps more than once). Third, Faulkner is careful in his clues of how the stories weave together. One has to watch carefully for them. Fourth, the sensibilities of the day mean that much is implied rather than stated overtly. But, we have to understand what those hints are about, or we miss the story. There is much dense Southern black dialect that requires slow reading to capture the sense. Fifth, the interior dialogues are interspaced with external dialogues, which can create confusion. Sixth, there is a lot of crude Stream of Consciousness material which will not enchant us as Joyce's or Proust's will. Seventh, the book is heavy with unusual symbolism that is easy to miss. Eighth, the center of the story is often drawn in by looking at the edges rather than looking directly at the center. *The Sound and the Fury* is a novel which remains to be a challenge to the modern readers. After going through the novel, the reader will be amazed, confused, and psychologically feels that where he is. In case of interested readers who love and admire to get new experiences, they will find the book truly rewarding. The researcher will try to find his way out through the maze of this novel hoping against the hope not to get lost.

Germination of the novel: Faulkner claims that the novel *The Sound and the Fury* began with as a single idea that an image of a little girl climbing up a tree with muddy drawers and grew into a short story entitled *Twilight*. But, because of Faulkner's love for Caddy's character, this short story has been developed into an entire novel. Faulkner remarks to Jean Stein that, "the novel is constructed upon a successive retelling of a single story from four different points of view" (Faulkner, Qtd in Fredrick, J.



Hoffman,1967: 52). The facts and figures of the story are very few and fairly easy to record; ‘the death of grandmother’ is the earliest significant event which took place in the year 1898. The next incident is ‘Caddy’s affair with Delton Ames in 1909,’ which is the first series of the affairs, ‘her marriage to Herbert Head in April 1910’ and ‘subsequent birth of her illegitimate child Miss Quentin,’ which causes the breakdown of Caddy’s marriage, ‘the suicide of Quentin in June 1910,’ ‘the death of father in 1913’; and ‘elopement of Miss Quentin with the contents of Jason’s money box,’ and ‘Jason’s futile effort to capture her,’ Easter Sunday of 1928.’

He continued to say, ‘*I like the one which caused me the most trouble,*’ he declared in an interview. There was an inner struggle in Faulkner while making a number of drafts of this novel. He wrote it several times and revised and revised till he felt that it was a work of art to be presented before the readers. The efforts of his work are described in his own words; this time, however, the story soon began to grow into a narrative: a narrative into which, as Faulkner later put it, “*I had written my guts*” (Faulkner quoted in Gray, Richard, 1994: 137).

Innovations in the novel: This novel exemplifies Faulkner’s bold stylistic and formal innovations. It reflects his creation of unforgettably powerful voices and characters, and brilliant insight into the psychological, economic and social realities of life in American South during the transition period from Civil War to the modern era. Because of all these stylistic qualities, innovative narrative techniques, and Faulkner’s deep concern for the people of the South after the Civil War, it has been recognized as the strongest contribution to the fiction of modernism and generated countless critical interpretations in the modern era.

Reviews of the Novel: The four sections were arbitrarily and capriciously distorted, and was the point of discussion for the critics and the readers. They were confused by Faulkner's decision to begin the novel with the Benjy section. Many critics felt that Benjy section of the novel, narrated through the mind of a thirty-three-year-old man, presented a number of obstacles to the reader. Some critics thought that the novel should begin with the final section; others suggested that Jason's section should come first. Some of these objections are still offered. It is indeed a difficult task to get through Benjy section without throwing up one's hands in despair. “Faulkner deliberately began with the most



incoherent of the four parts of the novel presenting his reader with a puzzle to unravel rather than a narrative exposition of the general situation” (Brooks, 1954: 45). But still Faulkner was right in his own ways to begin with Benjy section.

It is a memorable and sometimes puzzling novel that surprises and absorbs the reader each time it is being read along with James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* and T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*. It also signaled the beginning of the major period of Faulkner's own literary creativity. The question of form and technique arises and further generates an unavoidable critical issue in the discussion of its structure. There may be possible reasons for the particular arrangement of the four sections and for the use of Stream of Consciousness technique in the first three sections and not in the fourth.

Yoknapatawpha Region: Faulkner was desirous to present Yoknapatawpha, the fictional region of American South. To visualize this mission, he felt the downfall of the Compson family as the subject of this novel. The family consists of Jason Compson III and his wife Caroline, their four children Jason IV, Quentin, Canduce (Caddy), and Maury (whose name is changed to Benjamin), and Caroline's brother Maury Bascomb, and their family of black servants: Dilsey and Roskus and their children Versh, T.P. and Frony. In 1928, when the story mainly takes place, two other important characters Miss Quentin, Caddy's illegitimate daughter, and Luster, Frony's son appear.

Techniques Employed: *The Sound and the Fury*, a novel in four movements, (Cubism) paints the decay of an aristocratic Mississippi family, a dissonant, pessimistic narrative shattered into radically different perspectives. The story of the Compson family, and by extension, the decline of the old South is narrated in four sections, each focused upon the daughter, Canduce (Caddy) who is seen only through the consciousness of the others. Three of the four sections use the **interior monologue**, while the fourth, Dilsey section is narrated from an omniscient point of view.

The **Stream of Consciousness** was the modernistic technique employed by the novelist which was a matter of concern for the readers during the time of its publication. In the first chapter of the novel, Faulkner starts to describe the story of the Compsons through the eyes of Benjy, the youngest son who is severely retarded and also regarded as the idiot of the novel. Benjy, maturely immature man of thirty-three, the real mouth piece of the novelist, expresses himself merely by inarticulate moans and



cries. The readers are made to follow him through his interior monologue which is the unique way of Faulkner's unique experimentation of Stream of Consciousness.

Benjy remembers going to sleep the day when his father died in 1912, then a view from his father's funeral comes to his mind and, finally, in the present of 1928, he begs his caretaker Luster for a ball to play with.

Even though readers probably get confused while reading the first chapter of the novel, it introduces them perfectly into Benjy's curiously fixed world and enables them to actually participate in his experience of time and reality. This way, when they overcome initial difficulties of the Stream-of-consciousness narrative, Faulkner lets his readers plunge in to the family situation so that they get to know what the other members are like.

The innovative techniques experimented by William Faulkner, render the inner life of a character through an unending flow of thoughts, emotions, images, memories and other associations moving through the character's mind. Faulkner, therefore, by making use of various narrative devices, guides the reader's imagination throughout the first section of the novel in such a way that he or she experiences the world of the thirty-three-year-old retarded narrator, Benjy. The past and the present are differentiated by the employment of non-chronological narration, Stream of Consciousness and multiplicity of narrative techniques.

Faulkner intended to tell a tale of the **decline of the post Civil War Southern family**. To make it more effective, he opted to present it through the characters of the Southern family, to capture the graveness of the situation. He has used the variety of techniques like Stream of Consciousness, Interior monologue and multiple points of view. It is true that the Civil War has had a profound impact on the psyche of the South and its people. The region was completely disturbed mentally, spiritually, economically, socially and culturally. The rich aristocratic families suffered a lot losing hope and faith in their life. The youth started doing nothing except thinking of their past life.

Faulkner gives us **multiple perspectives of the disintegrated and disturbed Southern Compson family** where the father is cynical and passive. He truly loves his four children, but he had loved to promote his habit of drinking which resulted in the end of his life. In contrast, the mother has no love for her children and continuously demands that she herself be taken care of by her children. She



feels inferior, ashamed of Benjy being the mentally retarded son. She is castrated after he begins to exhibit sexual behavior. Quentin, the neurotic and romantic son who goes off to Harvard to fulfill his mother's life long wish and commits suicide there. Caddy, the only daughter, becomes pregnant while still a teenager and quickly marries a man who turns her out of the house when he discovers that their child is not his. Jason, the favorite son of his mother loses his chance at a lucrative job because of Caddy's marriage which resulted in failure. Jason had no other alternative to support his family than by working in a general store. Caddy's daughter named after her brother Quentin is brought up in the unhappy Compson family. The family is morally supported and taken care by a family of black servants led and held together by the matriarch Dilsey. The story of this novel is very simple but it becomes complex because of its multiple perspectives and non chronological order of four sections of the novel.

Faulkner is an innovative artist who has the knack of beginning every section in this novel in his unique way. He builds an image in such a manner that the reader feels that it has come from the unconscious level of his mind rather than intentional conscious plan on the part the artist. This helps us to establish at least some of Faulkner's stories as visionary. The first sentence of each section reveals a lot about the tone and themes of that particular part; this is especially true with Quentin's and Jason's section. In Quentin's section, the **first sentence** draws the reader into his obsession with being caught 'in time' and includes two most common symbols in the section: time and shadows.

Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say, (The Sound and the Fury,1987: 109) the above line speaks high volume of Faulkner's unique way of beginning each section of this novel. This line of Jason's section introduces Jason the man to the readers. We also learn both Jason's irrational anger not only toward his sister and her daughter, but also towards the world in general. We also learn the rigorous logic that runs through Jason's section. Jason's world is dominated by logic. *Once a bitch, always a bitch; like mother, like daughter (The Sound and the Fury,1987: 112)*. Caddy was a whore, so is her daughter. He is furious at Caddy for ruining his chances at getting a job and the way she ruined his chances was to bear an illegitimate daughter; therefore, the way he will get revenge on her and simultaneously recoup the money he lost is through this same daughter. Caddy should have got him a job, but instead she has questions; therefore, it is his right to misappropriate the money she sends to Quentin (Caddy's daughter) in order to make up for the money he lost when he lost the job.



Sections & Narrators	Section I Benjy	Section II Quentin	Section III Jason	Section IV Dilsey
Dates of the Narrations Non-Chronologically	April Seventh 1928	June Second 1910	April Sixth 1928	April Eighth 1928
Days of the Narrations	33 rd birthday, A day before Easter Sunday	The day of his suicide	Good Friday	Easter Sunday
Seniority among the Compsons existed in the novel Non-Chronologically	3 rd Compson son	2 nd Compson son	1 st Compson son	Black Servant
Point of view of narrations	First person narrator	First person narrator	First person narrator	Omniscient Third person narrator
Chronologically as per date	3 rd narrator	1 st narrator	2 nd narrator	Outside narrator
Chronologically as per age	3 rd narrator	2 nd narrator	1 st narrator	Outside narrator

The above representation shows the dates and days of the narrations narrated by the Compsons and Dilsey chronologically and non-chronologically.

One of the reasons for the **success of *The Sound and the Fury*** as a great novel involves the intersection of formal and thematic sophistication. On the one hand Faulkner experiments as an artist with the purely formal aspects of his craft. He saw the works of past impressionists and cubist painters and admired them in the year 1925, during his stay in Paris. After going through their narrative works, Faulkner as a modernist invented new modern narrative techniques just leaving away the conventional narratives. He tries to render the same subject from a variety of angles, telling the ‘same’ story from several narrative techniques.

“In this last section we finally emerge from the closed world of the Compson mile into the public world as represented by Jefferson (Yoknapatawpha County). No longer colored by the subjectivity of a



single point of view, the out-word manifestations of appearance and behavior assume a new, importance” (Vickery, 1992: 110).

Caddy Compson: The Missing Centre

Caddy Compson of Faulkner is one of the most admirable characters of the novel. The novelist himself calls her as ‘My Heart’s Darling.’ He spoke of Caddy outside the novel with an intensely passionate devotion. “To me she was the beautiful one,” he said at the University of Virginia, that is why I wrote the book about and I used the tools Caddy” (Qtd from Faulkner in an Interview, 1959).

The centrality of Caddy Compson to *The Sound and the Fury* is one of those critical commonplaces that may become blurred through the years. Every reader respects Caddy’s importance; Faulkner himself told us the book was about Caddy. It began with the “image of the child in the tree, muddy drawers clearly in view, and grew into his most important and most moving novel” (Faulkner, 1959 .6). William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* attempts in each section to capture an image of the novel’s central character Caddy Compson. Caddy is the central character who is fully responsible for the breakdown of the Compson family. “It is Caddy’s sexual relationship with Delton Ames before her marriage to Herbert Head which has become the real cause for the mental imbalance of her brothers and also for their attitudes towards their life” (Hinrichsen, 2008: 23).

In everybody’s life obsession is common but in the case of Compson children it is more active and dynamic. It is obsession that makes Benjy and Quentin to lead fruitless life. Caddy Compson remains the centre of attraction of her brothers, who themselves are narrators in the novel. Faulkner uses Caddy’s character to create this effect for the readers. In this novel, all the three brothers of Caddy are longing for her. Her love for Delton Ames, her marriage with Herbert Head, divorce from her husband, birth of a child to her named Miss Quentin, these incidents of Caddy’s life form the substance of the novel which becomes the focal point.

What we’re left with, then, is something like a one thousand piece jigsaw puzzle missing the last piece. The picture almost makes sense – but we’re certain that it would look completely different if we could just find that piece! That’s our novel without Caddy. We hear so much about her. We just never



actually get up close and personal with the wild, passionate, loving girl that captured the hearts of all her family members. She's the image that generated his novel. And the sense of loss that we feel as readers that nagging feeling that there must be something that could make this novel make sense is what's left in the wake of her absence. It's what's left at the end of the novel.

Caddy is the character who prompted Faulkner's writing of the novel. He had previously written a short story with her in it and felt she needed a place of her own. Ironically, she does not have a voice of her own. She is not included among the four narrators who tell us the story of the Compson family. Caddy is the second child of Jason (III) and Caroline Compson. Because her parents are emotionally unavailable, she becomes a surrogate Mom for Benjy and Quentin who both become obsessed with her. Of the Compson's, she is the most understanding and caring for Benjy.

Conclusion: We can come to the conclusion that, in the modern age, a man doesn't have a peace of mind because of psychological pressures like being awake, asleep, hyper alert, tension, mental struggle for existence, daydreaming, hypnotized or intoxicated. The novel *The Sound and the Fury* reflects all these features among the four children of the Compson family. It is a novel of individuation. Each of the four narrators represents a different aspect of a greater whole, the artists self and then because the work is visionary, by extension it becomes the collective self of human kind. This gets reflected in Jung's concept of the Mandela and the four psychological functions demonstrated in each of the Compsons.

The progression from Benjy's section to Jason's section through Quentin's is accompanied by an increasing **sense of social reality**. Benjy is remote in his idiocy and innocence, Quentin moves from the isolation of his half mad idealism into total withdrawal leading to suicide, but Jason is wholly in the world, acutely sensitive to social values, swimming with contemporary commercial current. The action of the novel is thus presented increasingly in terms of social, economic and political perspectives; it is Jason who first refers, however ironically, to the family's more distinguished past.

In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner uses the Stream of Conscious impressions of four very different members of the Compson household to relate the events of their life as a family. He leaves the reader to piece together a family portrait and history of what actually happened based on these various



impressions of Compson family life. The effect is similar to that of Cubist art where we see a portrait from all viewpoints at the same time. It would be nice to think that by seeing all sides of something at the same time people would be presented with the most impartial and most accurate way of viewing it. However, the result is actually more confusing and less clear than if we were only exposed to one viewpoint. Faulkner actually facets, like a cubist painting, the design of this novel. Here, we have a work of fiction that comes remarkably close to being an exercise in pure design, a cubist novel.

The modern novelist, Faulkner like the Cubist painter has explored the ways in which form can concentrate the meaning. In the simplest terms, the Cubist novel is one in which a linear narrative is broken so that the structure or arrangement of its parts itself form a level of meaning, which results as much from the patterning of the four sections as from the 'story' of the decline of the Compson family.

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