

The Sound of the Southern Aristocracy Dying a Slow and Painful Death

The strategy of Caddy's creation through her brothers' points of view allows Faulkner to take literary stream of consciousness to new heights. His ability to uniquely intertwine events between the Compson siblings produces a butterfly effect rippling through the plot. The fulcrum of such an ironically tragic history can arguably be found within the day of and period surrounding Caddy's wedding. It is here that the reader is exposed to an array of upsetting truths about the Compson family; from childhood neglect to malignant hypocrisy. Quentin's neurotically obsessive feelings towards his sister, as well as his participation in the lack of care given to their mentally disabled brother, forces the intensity of the Compson's self-absorption into focus. This becomes evident even further as Faulkner uses Jason's narrative to depict a man filled with a near lethal combination of resentment that can be traced back to his missed opportunity for an established banking position as a result of Caddy's marriage abruptly ending in divorce. Through its raw examination of the moral decay within the Compson family *The Sound and the Fury* provides a more profound understanding of the southern aristocracy and its agonizing final moments.

Faulkner's genius lies within his placement of the rising and falling action randomly as time moves between past and present through the triggering of specific memories. An arguably superior portion of this genius is displayed in the procedure of delivering such an idea through the eyes of a grown man with the mind of a three year old. Benjy's brief and blurred recollections of Caddy's wedding day are directly shown as much as can be through his drunken state. Despite his supplementary mental instability, Benjy's description of Quentin's actions that he witnesses on this day adds to the initial impressions of Quentin as someone else in the family that doesn't care about Benjy or his wellbeing. This is supported from the very first glimpse of

the wedding through a flashback where Quentin is physically fighting with T.P. in front of an intoxicated Benjy causing him to panic and cry, and ending with Quentin giving Benjy even more to drink. “‘Drink this Benjy,’ Quentin said. The glass was hot. ‘Hush now,’ Quentin said. ‘Drink it,’” Benjy recalls, immediately followed by T.P. requesting hazily for Mr. Quentin to give him back the “sassprilluh” so he could have some more (Faulkner, 22). Benjy’s uniquely innocent and childlike narrative initiates the development of Quentin as a character too overly consumed by his own skewed honorable ideologies to give extra thought to anything outside of Caddy and her supposedly destructive and promiscuous choices.

The precision of placing Quentin’s piece at the center followed by Jason’s builds an escalating hierarchy of emotional insecurity. Faulkner brings the reality of the brokenness within the Compson family closer to light during Quentin’s personal account of the day that ends in his suicide directly following Caddy’s wedding. Throughout his preparations on this particular day Quentin’s mind is flooded with memories, several of which lead to his fixation on Caddy’s sexuality through the pair’s private conversations apart from the ceremony. Quentin’s desire to obtain a form of repentance for Caddy’s “indiscretions” through finding a way to somehow keep her to himself are made apparent with his persistence in calling off the marriage saying “If you’re sick you can’t,” in reference to her already being pregnant by another man (Faulkner, 112). Quentin’s assertiveness becomes reminiscent of his past irrational notions that his sister should kill herself with him in a double-suicide, or run away with him and use his Harvard money to start a new life together. However, it is through Quentin’s experiences with Caddy that the reader can evolve a new understanding of his character as a young man perhaps only so disturbed as a result of a mother, and dangerous societal expectations, that left him with nothing but a misguided conscious and an unhealthy, estranged interpretation of women in general.

Selecting Jason as the finale of internal perspectives from the Compson brothers digs the collapse of their family to its deepest point. Faulkner reveals that even after nearly two decades the greatest share of the heritage that has been passed down to Jason is his mother's ability to carry every ounce of bitterness around with her while simultaneously playing the victim as if it were a calling. Jason's pessimistic outlook incessantly falls back to Caddy's divorce and the perceived consequence of his dreams for a better job becoming non-existent. This draws again to the theme of Caddy's sexuality saturating through the novel as her secret pregnancy is the reason behind the divorce. The subtle reiteration of Caddy's wedding during Jason's monologue, like Benjy's and Quentin's, illustrates how perceptions of morality can corrupt a mind into a repetitive cycle of negativity similar to that of a parasite consuming everything in its path. Jason's deplorable personality is provided with another chance to shine through his clear obliviousness to the reasons surrounding his own brother's suicide. He not only isn't hurt by it, but almost as if to go several steps backwards he quite literally references the incident in a joking manner that is borderline sadistic as his self-pitying thoughts trail off to "...I never had university advantages because at Harvard they teach you how to go for a swim at night without knowing how to swim..." (Faulkner, 196). While Quentin may have chosen a cowardly escape, Jason's decisions of greed and selfishness amidst holding a grudge at the core of his being arguably makes him the biggest coward of the Compson family.

These combined narrations of the Compson brothers create a more relative comprehension of not only the individuals themselves, but of the family name's destruction as well. Faulkner's decision to craft a story of such a tragedy through vastly different, yet eerily similar chronicles concentrated around a slow-dying patriarchal idea of sexuality proves that he was certainly ahead of his time.

Works Cited

Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury: The Corrected Text*. New York: Vintage, 1990.

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