CHAPTER II

"The Sound and the Fury" : Connections between a Work and its Author's Inner Life

Every Faulkner novel in some way provides the reader with the problem of fitting pieces together, and many readers of Faulkner feel with respect to the meanings of the novel much as Charles Bon did about the meaning of his life. Much Faulkner criticism has been devoted to explaining, both in particular novels and in his works in general, how the pieces do fit together, the patterns of meaning they do form. A good many such patterns have been discovered and offered as the essential meanings of the novels and of Faulkner's vision as a whole. (Slatoff, Walter J. "The Edge of Order: The Pattern of Faulkner's Rhetoric." William Faulkner: Four Decades of Criticism. Ed. Linda Welshimer Wagner. Michigan: Michigan State U.P.,1973. 155)

The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner's masterpiece, deals with a story of the Compson family, which was one-time governor of Mississippi (Quentin II) and a Civil War brigadier general (Jason II) among its ancestors. The family is seen falling into decay by the beginning of the twentieth century. Jason Compson III, the
father of the four central characters in the novel, was trained as a lawyer but gradually let his practice fall off and slipped gently into dipsomania. A basically uncritical, detached man, he now spends his time sitting in his old office or on the porch of the Compson house reading the Latin poets and making up satiric Latin verses about the local townsfolk. His wife Nee Caroline Bascomb, a neurotic, hypochondriac complaining woman, strives to maintain pretensions of gentility despite the decline of the family fortunes. She has little love for any of her children except Jason IV whom she considers her only "true" son, since in personality he is a Bascomb, her family root, rather than a Compson. Her alcoholic and irresponsible brother Maury sponges off the entire household.

The story moves from the remote and strange world of Benjy's idiocy and innocence, where sensation and basic responses are all a reader can have; through the intensively subjective as well as private world of Quentin's bizarre idealism, where thought shapes sensation and feeling into a kind of decadent poetic prose full of idiosyncratic allusions and patterns; to the more familiar of Jason's materialism, where rage and self-pity find full expression in colloquialisms and clichés. Because it is more conventional, Jason's section is more accessible, even more public. Yet it too describes a circle of its won. The final section told by the author mostly dwells on Dilsey Gibson, the faithful Negro maidservant of the Compson family, who finally serves as a probing glass to grasp the reality with which the author is concerned.

The novel has no plot in the sense of the sustained development of action following in a cause and effect manner. In four sections it deals with certain happening within the family over a period of about thirty years. The first section, which
takes place on Holy Saturday, 1928, focuses on the sense impressions of Benjy, an idiot of thirty-three. In the second, Quentin, Benjy's elder brother, lives through a day at Harvard, June 2, 1910. The third is seen through the eyes of Jason, two years Benjy's senior, on Good Friday, 1928. The fourth and final section, narrated objectively by the author, presents the household as it exists on Easter Sunday, 1928, but focuses on Dilsey and Jason.

Like most acknowledged masterpieces, the novel has been the subject of a great deal of study. It is agreed by critics that Faulkner has achieved a breakthrough to mastery in this fiction and John E. Bassett calls him "the most successfully experimental major American Modernist" (1). The novel displays the author's full maturity in technical virtuosity in his career as a fiction writer. But The Sound and the Fury's power is also generated by the very personal nature of its thematic material. Usually connections between a work and its author's inner life remain complicated and this is particularly so in the case of Faulkner. When Faulkner wrote the novel he had an inkling that the novel might not be able to draw readers. But this knowledge did not discourage him, he went on with the work. When he finished writing the novel in 1928, he had no hope of its being published; so he did not want to send it to any publisher. He did typescript of the novel, for he wanted it to be bound for himself. Anyway, Hal Smith, the proprietor of a new firm Jonathan Cape & Harison Smith, ventured to publish the novel and he hired Ben Wasson as an editor. When the proof arrived in July 1929, Faulkner found changes everywhere. He was unhappy with the alteration and requested Wasson not to temper with the original text any more. He restored some of his original form of typescript and wrote to Wasson not to make any more addition to the script, be-
cause, even though he saw a good intention in it, he felt his purpose, seen from
different angle, would be damaged.

The Sound and the Fury addresses conflicts between the sense of lost
innocence and the need to mature, between the privacy of grief and the urge to
express sorrows, between the dream of the South’s moral and spiritual ideals
and the actuality of its history. Faulkner referred to some intensely intimate prob­lems he was suffering at the time of the novel’s composition and at least one
source of the work’s preoccupations must have been his expected marriage to
Estelle Oldham Franklin, the woman he had loved virtually from childhood who
was in the last stage of a divorce from her first husband. Faulkner might be think­ing deeply about what it meant to have lost that innocent love only to be on the
threshold of regaining it, although it was now on the other side of the ‘purity’. This
consideration of loss and desire may have been reinforced by Faulkner’s rumi­nations on the scenes of his own childhood—his intimate play with his two middle
brothers and their cousin, Sallie Murry Wilkins. Record says all the Faulkner brothers
recall the trauma of their grandmother’s death and funeral, an event that took
place in 1906; Faulkner was nine when his own “Damuddy” (the Faulkner
grandchildren’s nickname for their maternal grandmother) died.

Although most readers sense the immediacy of its crisis to the author, The
Sound and the Fury is not an autobiographical novel in the usual sense. Part of
the significance of the novel arises from its universalization of the author’s com­mon experiences. Moreover, these personal circumstances must have seemed
all the more poignant against the background of the social upheavals that seemed
to be changing the face of the rural South. The changes in the Faulkner family’s
status and fortune, the rise of formerly dispossessed classes such as the poor white hill folk and blacks, meant that an old order was passing. The personal nature of the novel’s subject matter may help to account for Faulkner’s own repeated preference for this novel: it was the one he felt most tender towards; he called it “my heart’s darling” (Gwynn 6).

The novel opens with the section of Benjy, a thirty-three year old idiot of the Compson family. We become aware, behind the kaleidoscope of Benjy’s impressions, that a particular day is moving from dawn to dusk with the sun registering, almost unnoticed, the passage of time. Then there are seasonal changes to which the reader’s attention is drawn, even though it is through the disorganized and erratic memory of the Compsons. All these details convey a sense of the inevitable direction in which the family is moving, from light to gloom, in spite of the uncoordinated efforts of the individual members, who in their search for identity and autonomy merely disturb the surface of the Compson destiny. Benjy has no sense of perspective. His world is the one where mere sense impression matters. Although he has no sense of time, he tries to articulate his desires as well as repulsions with his limited consciousness. The howling, the sound and fury Benjy makes ultimately get drowned in the world which is in decadence. The existence of Benjy himself is the symbol of a decadent family. Except Caddy there is no one who tries to mitigate his condition.

Faulkner’s idiosyncratic fascination with the unattainable gives us clue to understand Quentin’s queer desire for incest with Caddy. Quentin even imagines that he has already had incest with her, and tries to convince his father of this imagined act to be real. Although none of Faulkner’s characters assumes role for
the voice of the author, there are elements of intimacy and personal traits of the author in the creation of his novels; and this is particularly so in the case of *The Sound and the Fury*. The sense of despair and an atmosphere of hopelessness in the novel has link to his personal problem. When he wrote the novel he was grappling with personal problems. Referring to Faulkner’s personal problem David Minter says: “Although he protected his privacy and was vague about what troubled him, his problem had probably something to do with Estelle (his lover) and his "lovely vase," and also with his loneliness and despair” (94). It is clear to the reader that these problems ran deep and they became intimately involved in the writing of *The Sound and the Fury*. Quentin’s problem is the writer’s own problem in his personal life, not only in matter of love and marriage but also in the pursuit of his vocation as an artist just like the young man’s process of maturity in James Joyce’s *The Artist as a Young Man*. The novel represents a move back towards Faulkner’s childhood and the family configuration of his earliest years—a move into the past and into the interior. The moving story of the four children and their inadequate parents is thematically regressive, and stylistically and formally innovative. Commenting on the greatness of the novel Irving Howe says: "To speak of greatness with regard to one’s contemporaries is dangerous. But if there are any American novels of the present century which may be called, which bear serious comparison with the achievements of twentieth-century European literature, then surely *The Sound and the Fury* is among them" (122). It represents an astonishing breakthrough through the fictional techniques and strategies the author has used to discover, displace, and transfigure the memories that remained accumulated in the author’s mind.
The order which Quentin had once built around Caddy is as rigid and inflexible as Benjy's and it shares Benjy's fear of change and his expectation that all experience should conform to his pattern. Quentin's system antecedes his experience and so his code is artificial. He looks for an ethical order based on word, on "fine, dead sounds," the meaning of which he has yet to learn. The concept of virginity which is associated with virtue and honour becomes the centre of Quentin's world and since it is physically present in his sister Caddy, it forms a vulnerable link between his world and that of his experience. Quentin's father Mr. Compson remarks that virginity is merely a transient physical state which has been given its ethical significance by men. What they have chosen to make it mean is something that defies nature and that makes artificial isolation of women. Caddy unfortunately becomes the guardian as well as object of that concept with which she cannot comply as we see Caddy going around with her boy-friend Dalton Ames and others. Since Quentin's emotional responses centre on these concepts, he cannot love human being, even Caddy. Despite his preoccupation with ethics, he is unable to perform any ethical actions himself. Quentin's death may be viewed more of a withdrawal than a protest. So Quentin's relation to time is out of joint, not the time itself.

Following Kierkegaard one can say that to become an authentic self is to become a unique sexual self—understanding sexuality as a mystery rooted in the paradox of humanity's finite/infinite nature. Any attempt to solve this mystery or to bifurcate sexuality into the dualism of divine/bestial (as Quentin Compson does) is a reductive approach, because it denies the paradox and mystery of sexuality. Yet viewed from a purely historical or scientific perspective, sexuality is seen as
definable solely by cultural or biological forces. The self as sexual agent is viewed as autonomous; that is without reference to any divine power as the source of creativity and ultimate meaning, or so it assumes. John F. Desmond says, “Sexuality viewed from this perspective is analogous to the notion of a dyadic exchange in language; that is, as a mechanical exchange by organisms within an environment. Such a perspective, however, amounts to a state of spiritual 'suicide', because the human self—that mystery of finite/infinite—effectively is denied” (143).

Where Benjy, his idiot brother, has selected odd fragments of his actual experience to form a pattern, Quentin attempts to coerce experience into conformity with his system. Having rejected the actual life around him, he invents instead his own play into which he introduces the creatures of his own fantasy. From the beginning he wants to see Caddy as one of the role players there, insisting that she may conform to his conception of her. At the Branch he slaps her for disregarding his orders, and occasionally after that he reasserts his control, scouring her head in the grass for kissing boys and smearing her with mud for not being concerned with his behaviour. He becomes disappointed when she refuses to bother herself about his game with Natalie, an indication of his desire of Caddy to play the role of Compson honour.

Quentin’s desire to convert Caddy’s promiscuity into an act of incest is another instance of his attempt to bring experience into conformity with his pattern. As he cannot come to terms with what has happened to Caddy’s virginity that has contradicted his line of thoughts, he hopes to make Compson honour a thing of importance even as he destroys it. This gesture is in contrast to Caddy’s promiscuity which merely slights the honour. Quentin perhaps thinks that incest
can be used to affirm the validity of his ethical pattern. It is significant that he refuses to commit the actual act. Committing incest would destroy his order completely by involving him in the reality of experience. But through a lie he can circumvent experience; like the boys discussing the money they would have received and spent had they caught the fish; he makes of unreality a possibility, then a probability, and then an incontrovertible fact, as people will do when their desires become words.

The reader is projected into the physical universe where suicide does mean a victory of consciousness over the passage of time. The very fact of a first person narration told in the past tense implies the existence of a consciousness looking back upon the events described. Yet the narration seems to take the reader up to the moment of death. The implication is that the point of view from which Quentin narrates is the moment in which his death has, as he anticipated, destroyed time without depriving him of consciousness. With the elimination of time, every object of perception, whether in the past or in the present, has equal reality. Quentin can narrate from a point of view that shifts back and forth, yet holds events in a constant perspective.

This shifting point of view, which reflects Quentin’s despair, is far from identical with author’s attitude. Through the perspective established by the monologues, the reader learns that the boy’s private world is distorted. Quentin cannot evade responsibility by turning his back upon the living present. This judgment is strengthened by implied contrasts between Quentin’s temporal despair and the attitudes of other characters. The boy’s effort first to defeat time and then to destroy it is a direct contrast to Benjy’s acceptance of temporal experience. The
idiot's ability to accept the present enables him to possess the past and future as well. The very form of his monologues indicates that he can move backwards and forward in time without imposing his personality on the events thus recovered.

Closely related to the time symbols is the use of shadowy imagery. When Quentin wakes up on the morning of his suicide he recognizes the approximate times by watching the shadow of his window sash on the curtains. The presence of this and other shadows joins time and death in Quentin's mind. In a number of passages the boy is aware simultaneously of his own shadow and of clock chimes. "The chimes began again, the half-hour. I stood in the belly of my shadow" (100). And again: "The chimes ceased. I went back to the post office, treading my shadow into pavement" (100). Quentin tries to eliminate his shadow by treading upon its "belly" or by trampling its "bones" into the concrete walk (96). Quentin's shadow is the prove of temporal existence which he wishes to eliminate by suicide. Once while leaning over a rail by Boston harbour, he sees his shadow leaning flat upon the water and resolves to "trick it" or "blot it into the water, holding it until it was drowned" (90). He comments: "Niggers say a drowned man's shadow was watching for him in the water all the time" (90).

Quentin's obsession with time derives from his recognition of it as the dimension in which change occurs and in which Caddy's actions have efficacy and significance. His search is for a means of arresting time at a moment of achieved perfection, a moment when he and Caddy could be eternally together in the simplicity of their childhood relationship. The similarity between this conception and the image of motion in stasis which haunted Faulkner throughout his life, especially as embodied in Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," suggests that Quentin
is in some measure a version of the artist. That is why Michael Grimwood calls him "a surrogate of Faulkner, a double who is fated to retell and reenact the same story throughout his life" (51). Anyway Quentin's conception is artificial, rigid, life-denying: as Mr. Compson observes, "purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature. It's nature is hurting you not Caddy..." (116). The inadequacy of Quentin's position is exposed in terms of Caddy and her vitality and humanity. In the Benjy section we recognize Caddy as the principal sustainer for such family unity as survives: we glimpse her as the liveliest spirit among the children and their natural leader, as the protector and comforter for Benjy, and even the pacifier of her mother, and it is highly significant for us as well as for Benjy that she is persistently associated with such elemental things as the fire, the pasture, the smell for trees, and sleep. Her sexual freedom appears as the expression of a natural rebellion against the repressive, contradictory, and essentially self-centred demands made upon her by the different members of the family; it certainly seems spontaneous and affirmative by the side of Quentin's fastidious or even impotent avoidance of sexual experience. That is why Walter Brylowski says "Caddy's courage in climbing the tree for forbidden knowledge is the same courage which allows her to accept life and the forbidden knowledge of sex" (63). Caddy's participation in life naturally results in the loss of the Edenic innocence, which Quentin desires, but which cannot be achieved in post-Edenic world. So Quentin's cause is a lost cause—the path he has taken is a sure lead to self-destruction.

Quentin finds time an enemy of his ethical system. However his very concern with time takes place in time. The inexorable passing of one moment after another gives an emotional and dramatic intensity of his brooding as each instant
brings him one step closer to death. His act of breaking the watch merely increases his awareness of time; the ringing of bells, the lengthening shadows, his own hunger, all show that night is approaching. And time will continue to pass regardless of what he does, even suicide. So man's effort to control even his own allotted time can only result in a mockery, as Quentin realizes when he looks in the shop window. By becoming conscious of time, man tries to oppose its passage only to find that his victory is an illusion and nothing else. Quentin's efforts to circumvent time and to achieve permanence by arresting that steady succession of events confronts the reality of life. He attempts to make first Caddy's purity and her sinning everlasting, and when both attempts fail, he chooses death in order to arrest it at one point forever.

However, Quentin cannot sever his relation to time. Time is man's misfortune and he "a gull with an invisible wire attached though space dragged" (104). The battle against time cannot be fought since defeat is inevitable and victory "an illusion of philosophers and fools." Ignoring the dreams of all human beings, time forms a pattern of its own working through circumstances, and men are only its pawn. Quentin finds this fact difficult to accept and live with. Being a young man he tends to invest even trifles with intense profundity, and instead of facing the change, which is worth waiting as it might even go toward happiness, he takes his own life.

Quentin's desire for death is related to his consciousness of time and more specifically of memory. Although he cannot control the course of events nor alter what has already happened, he cannot stop his awareness of it. Quentin's breaking of the watch given by his grandfather is an indication of how he wants to
make time static. Here, for example, is the account of how he breaks his grandfather's watch: "I went to the dresser and took up the watch, with the face still down. I tapped the crystal on the corner of the dresser and caught the fragments of glass in my hand and put them into the ashtray and twisted the hands off and put them in the tray. The watch ticked on" (80). This act of mutilation symbolizes Quentin's intension of committing suicide; he knows time is making a smooth passage bringing about changes to things around him, and he cannot readjust with the fluidity of experience which demands constant readjustments.

Death wish usually comes when man finds his hope and ideals go asunder. So it is inevitable for Quentin that he should yearn for it: "A quarter hour yet. And then I'll not be. The peacefullest words. Peacefullest words. Non fui. Sum. Fui. Non sum" (174). By declining all further participation in life he can isolate himself and his memory of Caddy from the "loud world." Quentin's vision of death is to separate himself forever from the circumstances in which he is involved.

The fragrance of honeysuckle dramatizes the conflict between his order and the blind forces of nature which constantly threaten to destroy it. Honeysuckle signifies the animality of sex, the incomprehensible and hateful world for which Caddy has abandoned his world; it also symbolizes his defeat. Yet honeysuckle is only a sensation, just as Caddy's affair with Ames is simply a natural event. It is Quentin who makes of the one symbol of "night and rest" and of the other the unforgivable sin. The references to roses have a similar function in that they too are associated with sex, but they are identified with a single scene, that of Caddy's wedding. Therefore, they are at once the symbol of the world he fears and of his irrevocable betrayal by the world. Roses are Caddy's sex, her promiscuity and
her sin made socially respectable. The validity of his world is challenged and
defeated by a counter system; he views Caddy's marriage as a cunning and
serene device to nullify his stance.

In the novel the constant references to the shadows and the mirror
emphasize the barrier between Quentin and reality. It is not only Benjy but also
Quentin who sees Caddy's wedding reflected in the mirror. Caddy, however,
cannot be confined to its surface; she runs not only out of the mirror but also out of
his and Benjy's world. Similarly Quentin sees her and Ames not as people but as
silhouettes distorted against the sky. He is lost amid these shadows, feeling that
they falsify the objects they pretend to reflect, yet unable to reach out beyond
them. It is significant that he sees only those aspects of Caddy as shadows which
he cannot incorporate into his world: it is her love affair and her marriage which
he finds perverse, mocking, denying the significance they should have affirmed.
The same feeling of mockery is present in his insistence that he has tricked his
shadow. A man who is dead needs no shadow, but still it accompanies him
throughout the day as if it were mirroring reality when in truth it is only a projection
of another illusion.

Quentin's problem is not an isolated case. We can trace his predicament
to his predecessors, especially his father. Mr. Compson by 1910 was a defeated
man. It appears that he had always been a weak man, not endowed with sufficient
spirit to save his family. But there are plenty of indications that he was a man of
love and compassion. The condition of Mr. Compson gets worsened by his steady
drinking, which is a sign of his frustration in life. Caddy tells Quentin: "Father will
be dead in a year they say if he doesn't stop drinking and he won't stop he cant
stop since I since last summer...." (124). Evidently, the knowledge of his daughter's sexual escapade with Dalton Ames had hit Mr. Compson hard, and his show of cynicism about women and virginity, so much of which Quentin recalls on the day of his death, must have been only an attempt to soften the blow for Quentin and perhaps for himself. So we cannot think that Mr. Compson was comfortable with and did not care what his daughter did.

Quentin must be very close to his father and the influence of his father on him was obviously very powerful. The whole of the Quentin section is saturated with what "Father said" and with references to comparisons that Father used and observations about life that Father made. Though his father held the view of the meaninglessness of existence, it is clear that Quentin derived his high notion of the claim of honour from his father. Quentin does not have doubt as to what he ought to do: he ought to drive Caddy's seducer out of town, and if he refuses to go, he ought to shoot him. But Quentin cannot take the heroic role. He tries, but he cannot even hurt Dalton Ames, much less kill him. Caddy sees Quentin as simply meddling in her affairs, the oversensitive little brother who is to be pitied but not feared or respected. With the despair and resignation of Mr. Compson, the family code of chastity and honour—once held dear by all family members—falls upon Quentin at a time when things around them seem to be out of joint. The task which Quentin receives from his failing father seems to be too heavy for him. In this light, his predicament may be seen to be somewhat similar to that of Hamlet.

Although Absalom, Absalom! was written years after The Sound and the Fury, Quentin reappears in the novel and we see him talking with his father and narrating the story of Thomas Sutpen and traveling out to Sutpen's Hundred.
Quentin's time in *Absalom, Absalom!* is generally thought to be after his encounter with Dalton Ames, just before he went off to Harvard in September. The Quentin of *The Sound and the Fury* would indeed have been greatly impressed by Henry Sutpen's acceptance of the heroic and tragic role thrust upon him by circumstances, and felt more humiliated to have to acknowledge his own pitiful inadequacy when it became necessary to protect his own sister's honour. The sight of Henry, who had assumed the heroic role and wrecked his life for it, would have deepened Quentin's sense of failure with Caddy's seducer, Dalton Ames.

Quentin is emotionally committed to the code of honour, but for him the code has lost its connection with reality, because reality is in motion and the very task he has inherited from the family tradition has become obsolete. Quentin's suicide results from the fact that he can neither repudiate nor fulfill the claim of the code—death being the only answer or way out.

It is Faulkner's realization that man can find only a false and brief sanctuary from the flux of human existence; but it is the nature of man that he should make a quest for that immunity, and Faulkner's fiction affirms that the quest is as frantic and indefatigable as it is futile. A person may seek the "illusion of iron impregnability" (WP 301) or a "beautiful attenuation of unreality in which the shades and shapes of facts... Move with the substanceless decorum of lawn party charades, perfect in gesture and without significance or any ability to hurt" (AA 211); but either way he is resisting flux, denying the motion which is life, in an attempt to find an "apathy which [is] almost peace" (AA 55). By Faulkner's logic, however, achieving such a static apathy is similar to being dead. He makes that clear in his brief preface to *The Mansion*: "Since 'living' is motion, and 'motion' is
change and alteration...... Therefore the only alternative to motion is un-motion, stasis, death” (M vii). To seek the static is essentially to seek death; but Faulkner’s characters still retreat from flux, hoping to find a sanctuary that is fixed, forever safe from change and alteration.

Jason’s section represents a third possible way of reacting to experience—a distorted one yet thought to be true in the other two sections. Since Jason reacts logically rather than emotionally, his section is more accessible to readers. His method of ordering and explaining his actions in terms of cause and effect is familiar to the readers. Yet logic, the basis of human communication and hence of society, isolates Jason equally as the moral abstractions of Quentin or the complete dependence on sensation of Benjy. In the midst of Jefferson or even in his family he is alone. And instead of being concerned, he justifies his self-sufficiency since to him all the rest of the town and the world and the human race too except himself are Compsons, inexplicable yet quite predictable in that they are not to be trusted.

Jason thinks that he alone has a firm grasp on reality and this result in literalism with an absence of qualification in his thinking. Through it we get a new perspective on the Compsons, but it is just a perspective and not the final word that Jason thinks it to be so. It is his very insistence on facing facts that causes his distorted view of Caddy, his family and the whole human race. He does not see that there might be other facts and other aspects of the situation than the ones that directly affect him. In the process, logic replaces truth, law and justice. He is not concerned with either Caddy or her daughter except as they enter into the pattern of loss and recompense and finally loss again. In short, his is a world
reduced to calculation in which no subjective factors and incidents emanating from human response are tolerated.

This calculating approach to experience pervades his every act, no matter how trivial. For example, he offers Luster a ticket for five cents and burns it rather than give it away in the event of Luster’s inability to give the money. His promise to Caddy to allow her to see her baby is a bargain that he fulfills to the letter but no further. He never permits himself or Earl to overstep the terms of their agreement of so much work for so much pay. Even whether sincere affection is apparently involved, his relationship with Lorraine gives the impression of a contract duly signed. All these arrangements constitute Jason’s way of protecting himself from any intrusion of the irrational. It is his method of assuming control over experience by preventing himself from becoming involved in circumstances he has not foreseen.

His control over the Compson house reveals the same tendency to think in terms of contracts. He fulfills his filial duties by supporting his mother and even her servants in much the same condition as before Mr. Compson’s death. But he expects to receive full value in return, not only in services but also in subservience. In his own home he insists that the dinner should be served on time to all the members of the family even though such familial meals become grotesque parodies of sociability and family life. Special attention is directed to Miss Quentin, who must be made not good but discreet; Jason disclaims all concerns for what she does, providing appearances are not flouted. This preoccupation with social reform functions as a mere ritual which, instead of doing any good, destroys the very purpose it tries to affirm.
Jason's concern with forms of action rather than with the actions themselves is reflected in his legalistic view of society and especially of ethics. Jason justifies his thieving of Miss Quentin's money sent by her mother Caddy. He retrieves his loses his sister Caddy made him suffer at the expense of Miss Quentin without actually breaking any law. Caddy is sending money for her daughter's support and the daughter is being supported. Mrs. Compson retains the pleasure of tearing up and burning cheques even while her account at the bank grows. Meanwhile, Jason recovers what he considers to be his own money in a legal though unethical fashion. However, with her one unpremeditated act Miss Quentin destroys the work of years. Miss Quentin, although she did it heedlessly, is safe from prosecution, because legally she has stolen what already belonged to her. When Jason demands an approval of his just indignation from the sheriff, the latter refuses to help on the basis of the very letter of the law Jason so carefully observed. Thus, he is thoroughly defeated with the same weapon he wields against Quentin.

During his frantic pursuit of Miss Quentin the nature of the conflict that Jason faces becomes clear. He realizes that his enemy is not his niece or even the man with the red tie; rather it is the sequence of natural events and their causes. From the first he had distrusted everything which he could not himself control. Unlike Quentin for whom reality lay in ethical concepts, Jason had learned to believe in whatever he could hold in his hands or keep in his pocket. That alone could be protected from chance or change. The money placed in a strong box, hidden in a closest, kept in a locked room is the symbol of Jason's world or it expounds his philosophy. Yet even that is vulnerable to circumstances, to the accidental juxtaposition in place and time through the agency of Quentin's impulsive action.
Hence his outrage that Miss Quentin should have taken the money more or less on impulse; had her act been deliberate, calculated, he could have foreseen it and so guarded against it. The red tie becomes for him the symbol of the irrational, the antithesis of his own careful logic.

Faulkner has a profound distrust on human intellect as a means of getting at reality. Human intellect through the application of logic tries to grasp reality with finality. But reality, in Faulkner's understanding, can not be grasped by merely applying intellect and logic. Therefore, through Jason's cold logic and justifications, Faulkner wants to show that it is futile to be overconfident with one's knowledge. Under the influence of Henry Bergson Faulkner has believed that the intellect, contrary to the fact, perceives reality as a series of positions connected by an artificial bond. Referring to this phenomenon Bergson says that intellect "substitutes for the continuous the discontinuous, for motion stability, for tendency in process of change, fixed points marking a direction of change and tendency. This substitution is necessary to common sense, to language, to practical life, and even, in certain sense, which we shall endeavor to determine, to positive science" (50). This is because cognitive process involves synthesis and abstraction from a given phenomenon. So the very process of human understanding runs counter to the reality which Bergson perceives to be in a state of motion.

So Faulkner does not hesitate to show Jason thoroughly defeated by the "rearguards of circumstances" which he had challenged by his trip to Mottson. The contents of his inviolate strong box and Miss Quentin—the symbol of his revenge and frustration—disappear from Jefferson. Like Benjy, he violently protests his loss, but, also like Benjy's, his order remains intact despite the loss of certain
elements. Always the practical man, Jason cuts his losses and continues in exactly the same way, discharging his obligations to the letter, slowly accumulating money for another strong box, neither asking for nor giving more than the law requires. In a sense the loss of the money finally is a sort of relief for Jason, because Caddy, even in her absence, represented the threat of the irrational and incalculable Jason thinks.

Still isolated and unrepentant, Jason survives while Quentin is destroyed by the events he can neither accept nor control. On the other hand, that survival is itself futile, for Jason is the last of the Compson line and a childless bachelor. That very childlessness is another indication of his deliberate rejection of any relationship which he cannot control, especially one in which emotions dominate logic and trust replaces contracts. The story of Jason is not limited to the South or to the contemporary scene. The tendency to identify logic with truth and law with justice is not limited to twentieth century America; Jason's case is universal phenomenon, claiming an eye for an eye long before Jesus began speaking of love and forgiveness and pity and sacrifice. There are people of Jason's breed in Jefferson, but since people of his breed are essentially selfish and cannot share the love and compassion propagated by Jesus, he is alone amidst the crowd. Moreover, Jason is rejected by the sheriff, and even old Job, whose Negro wisdom sums up Jason's philosophy and its flaws by the sarcasm that he is too smart for him and that no one in the town would be able to beat him in smartness. Jason is a typical representative of the ruthless modern man to whom money matters everything. Dayton Kohler says, "A few, like Jason Compson, take the coldness of Snopes world as they find it and become henchmen of Southern finance capitalism."
Original dust jacket for *The Sound and the Fury*. The novel was first published in 1929 by Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, New York.
Faulkner's myth is the story of the dissolution of a traditional order and the growth of a new society with its accumulating heritage of enmity, hatred, greed, and guilt" (222).

In the last section the closed world of the Compson Mile opens up to the public world—the people of Jefferson representing the outside world. Being freed from the subjectivity of a single point of view of earlier sections, the outward manifestation of appearance and behaviour assumes a new importance. The primary result is that the whole history of the Compsons is given a wider reference. Absence and time have erased Caddy and Quentin from the scene, even if the promiscuity of the one and the suicide of the other had impact beyond the family. Anyway, Caddy never existed in the novel except in the minds and memories of those whom she had affected. In this larger context, the sound and fury of the family signify very little if anything.

The reverberations of the events set in motion by Caddy's act gradually die down, and the larger number remains untouched or indifferent except for mild curiosity. Only Benjy continues to make some impression basically for his idiocy. The Negroes are excited by his presence, especially the children who watch him with the feeling of doubt and suspicion. The whites regard him as a problem: since he is obviously white, they frown on his attendance at a Negro church, but since he is as obviously an idiot, they are unwilling to receive him into theirs. In the process, the fact that he is a human being is forgotten by all except Dilsey, the Negro maid.

The vision of the artist in this work may be called tragic just as Thomas Hardy's was, while he wrote one of his very important novels "Tess of the
D’Urbervilles. It is necessary for an artist to project a genuinely felt character in a tragic mould in order to bring out the tenderest feeling for the character. The subtitle of Hardy’s novel is “A Pure Woman,” which indicates his deep sympathy with Tess. In the same way Faulkner’s conception of Caddy springs from his genuine feeling for this character, because to the end of his life Faulkner spoke of Caddy with deep devotion. She was both the sister of his imagination and the daughter of his mind. Born of the author’s own discontent, she was for him the beautiful one, his heart’s darling. It was Faulkner’s feelings for Caddy that turned a story called “Twilight” into a novel called The Sound and the Fury. Faulkner said, “I loved her so much that I couldn’t decide to give her life just for the duration of a short story. She deserved more than that. So my novel was created, almost in spite of myself” (Minter 95).

In the last section Dilsey emerges not only as a Negro servant in the Compson household but also as a human being. Her presence and actions in the novel enable the reader to achieve a final perspective on the lives of the Compsons. The reader has clear perception on Miss Quentin’s thoughtlessness through Dilsey’s consciousness. Various contrasts between Dilsey and the others are delineated with striking clarity. The contrast becomes actual conflict where Dilsey and Jason are concerned. She is the only one who challenges his word in the household, who defends the absent Caddy, Miss Quentin, Benjy and even Luster from his anger. But more important, she challenges the validity and efficacy of Jason’s world by a passive and irrational resistance to which he has no counter. That someone should work without pay is so foreign to his system that he is helpless in the face of it.
Dilsey, the compassionate and enduring Negro servant of the degenerate Compson family, is to be taken as the redeeming feature of the novel. There is no self-pity, nor rancour, nor arrogance, nor pride in the character of Dilsey. She is active but not frantic like Jason; her presence gives an air of soothing balm which is the urgent need of the family and is the source of optimism which is tacitly recognized by all the members and without which the Compson family will virtually turn into a hell. Dilsey provides the beauty of coherence against the background of struggling chaos. She recovers for us the spirit of tragedy which the pattern of cynicisms has often made it seemingly lost.

Dilsey represents the ethical norm, the realizing and acting out of one's humanity; it is from this that the Compsons have deviated each into his/her separate world. The mother and her children, Quentin and Jason, have abandoned their humanity for the sake of pride, vanity or self-pity. Both Benjy and Caddy are tests of the family's humanity, he being an idiot and she creating in her conduct a socio-moral problem between the family and Jefferson. Both challenges the family's capacity for understanding and forgiveness, and the family fails both. The Compson Mile not only disintegrates, but also experiences constriction. The property shrinks as the town begins to encroach and nibble away at the estate.

By working with circumstances instead of against it Dilsey creates order out of disorder accommodating herself to changes. She manages to keep the Compson household in some semblance of decency amidst the constant interruptions of Luster's perverseness, Benjy's moaning, Mrs. Compson's complaints, and even Jason's maniacal fury. She shows her attitude of acceptance not only in small matters, but also with regard to Caddy's affair, Quentin's suicide
and the arrival of Caddy's baby. She thinks she can bring up the baby as she had
brought up Caddy herself. Dilsey's attitude, as she lives it, is formed by her
instinctive feeling that whatever happens must be met with courage and dignity in
which there is no room for passivity or pessimism.

Even though it is beyond the power of Dilsey to forestall the complete
breakdown of the Compson family, she does not show any despair but tries her
best to bring a semblance of order. Usually Faulkner's women are sketched with
predominantly negative traits. But we donot see any offensive traits in Dilsey's
character. And this point can be corroborated by his own tender comment on
Disley. Her struggle has a side of dignity and heroism, because she does not do
this only for her won survival, but more for a people with whom she has been
destined to live. She is now gaunt and haggard, yet she manages to trundle on,
and this reminds the trait of Hemingway's heroes who "can be destroyed but not
defeated" (OMS 89). Faulkner seems to emphasize this point when he makes
Miss Quentin, who may be taken as the reincarnation of the dead Quentin, survives
through her escape from Jefferson. She can avoid the hot pursuit of Jason—an
indication of hope out of the gloominess in the world of the Compsons.

Dilsey's ability to stand fast without faltering before the hopeless
circumstance finds further expression in her patient preoccupation with the present,
which is the only possible way of living with time. Dilsey knows the past and its
impact on the present. But instead of trying to perpetuate a part of the past, as
Quentin does, or to circumvent it as Jason tries to do, she utilizes the past effectively
to deal with the present. Indeed, she is a living record of all that has happened to
the Compsons. It is a record of pain and suffering and change.
In his novel prize acceptance speech, Faulkner says that a novelist must deal with “the old universal truths” lacking of which renders a work ephemeral character. He seems to illustrate this statement through the life of Dilsey. Her life is difficult, far more difficult than any other white members of the family. But in spite of her heavy duty and her struggle for existence, she seems to radiate more hope and consolation to the Compson family than anyone else. This is because she has firm faith in her eternal life after this life. Her thought for the world to come has made her more useful on this earth than those pragmatic people who think that there is no such thing as heaven or life after death. She accepts all challenges of life and without giving way to the pressure of the external forces, she depends upon the unseen God for her wisdom and strength to move along.

Dilsey does not profound any ethical system. Neither in her attitude nor in the Easter service itself is there any reference to sin and punishment but only to suffering and its cessation. At no time Dilsey judges any of the Compsons, not even Jason, though she does object at one point to those who frown on Benjy’s presence in a Negro church: “And I knows whut kind of folks,” Dilsey said. “Trash white folks. Dat’s who it is. Thinks he aint good enough fer white church, but nigger church aint good enough fer him” (290). But her presence enables the reader to judge not systems but actions and hence to grasp the truth instinctively. And though she does not judge, Dilsey is never deceived; her comprehension of the relations between Caddy and the rest of the family is unerring.

Dilsey’s participation in the Easter service is the one meaningful ritual in the novel. Dilsey is still conscious of being, in some sense, a member of the Compson household with a certain prestige and obligations. Similarly each
member in the congregation is conscious of his own distinctive position in the society. Even Reverend Shegog begins using the formal language which is expected of him in public addresses like this. However, by the time he concludes, communication has been replaced by communion in which each member loses his identity but finds his humanity and the knowledge that all men are equal and brothers in the suffering.

Out of Dilsey's actions and her participation in the Easter service arise once more the simple verities of human life, "the old universal truth lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed—love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice" (Meriwether 120). It is these truths which throw the final illumination not only on Caddy and the whole sequence of events that started with her affair but also on what each of the Compsons believed her to be. The fragments of truth presented in the first three sections reverberate with the sound and the fury signifying nothing. But out of those same events, the same disorder and confusion emerge Dilsey's triumph and her peace, lending significance not only to her own life but to the book as a whole.

The basic cause of the break up of the Compson family is the cold and self-centred mother who is sensitive about the social status of her own family, the Bascombs, who feels the birth of an idiot son as a kind of personal affront, who spoils and corrupts her favourite son, and who withhold any real love and affection from her other children and her husband. Caroline Compson is not so much an actively wicked and evil person as a cold weight of negativity which paralyzes the normal family relationships. She is certainly at the root of Quentin's lack of confidence in himself. She is at least the immediate cause of her husband's
breakdown into alcoholic cynicism, and undoubtedly responsible for Caddy's promiscuity.

On the final pages of the novel it is the pride, the sin of which has been the downfall of the Compson family, which induces Luster to drive to the left at the monument instead of to the right, and if the final restoration of Benjy's sense of order seems at first to offer a positive conclusion to the novel, we must also remember that the order thus invoked is one purely of habit, entirely lacking in inherent justification, and that it is restored by Jason, whose concern is not with humanity or morality or justice but only with social appearances.

Works cited


—. *The Sound and the Fury*. New York: Random House, 1984. All the page references within this chapter is to this edition.


