
CULTURAL DECADENCE IN WILLIAM FAULKNER'S THE SOUND AND THE FURY

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“The nation’s morals are like its teeth: the more decayed they are the more it hurts to touch them”—by George Bernard Shaw

Abstract: American south which was once rich and glorious for its values and culture of repute has begun degradation. What made America to decay in its values was exactly not clear. This paper highlights the degenerated family relations, moral and ethical values of Compson family through the characters like Benjy, Caddy, Quentin and Jason in the novel *The Sound and the Fury* written by William Faulkner, a great American novelist of 20th century. All the members of the Compson family are victims of lust, incest, and suicide. The novel depicts the existence of disharmony between the individual and the society which is the result of cultural degeneration. Apart from this Faulkner introduces the character Dilsey, who is the faithful servant of the Compson family and tries to hold together the crumbling aristocratic family against the prevailing broken relationships, recklessness and psychological perversion. The paper avers that there is a necessity of restoring human and cultural values in the wake of decadence in human bonds and death of harmony.

Keywords: Paramount Quest for the Restoration of Systems and Traditions.

Introduction: William Faulkner, a great American novelist was born in New Albany, Mississippi in 1897. He started his literary career with the publication of an imitative book *The Marble Faun* in 1924. *Solder's Pay*(1926), *Mosquitoes*(1927), *Sartories*(1929), *The Sound and the Fury*(1929), *The Reivers*, *Abshalom Abshalom*, *The Requiem for the Nun* are some of the novels written by Faulkner. Among all the works of Faulkner, many of his admirers believe that *The Sound and the Fury* is the best and greatest novels written in the 20th century.

Title & Description of the novel: Faulkner collected the title of the book “The Sound and the Fury” from Shakespear’s drama *Macbeth*. *Macbeth* says in his short soliloquy that—“*life is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.*” In his soliloquy *Macbeth* implies that life is nothing but a shadow of the past which is glorious. But the modern man is spoiling the glorious past instead of achieving anything near the greatness of the past. Faulkner used the technique known as *stream of consciousness* in this novel. This is the fourth novel of William Faulkner which brought him commercial success. In 1998, the modern library ranked the sound and fury sixth on its list of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century. The story falls into four sections. The first section is a first person narration of Benjamin Compson. Quentin is the narrator of the second section. The third section is explained by Jason Compson and Faulkner himself explained the fourth and the last section of the novel.

Decadence in the individual characters: All the characters in the novel, except Dilsey, exhibit degradation in their behavior. Decay of values and culture starts with the heads of the Compson family, Mr&Mrs. Compson. As a mother Mrs Compson does

not restrict the sexual freedom of her daughter. When Quentin talks about Caddy’s illegal relations with men his father does not take it in a serious way. Moreover he says that virginity is the invention of men. It results in that Caddy’s marital life ends in divorce. Mr. Compson himself is a drunkard and he fails to guide his sons and daughter in a right path. Even Mrs. Compson, when there are four children in the family, she is very much worried about Benjy. He is of thirty three year old but behaves like a three year old child. He is very much fond of the fire, the golf court, and his sister Caddy. Always he needs someone’s assistance otherwise he moans, cries and slobber all day long. The only person who can make him quite is Caddy his sister. Candance loves Benjamin very much and she protects him from the teasing of other children and the servants of the house. She is the only daughter of the Compson family who is lovable, loyal and responsible at her young age.

But when we examine the character of Caddy as a grown up girl, she loves not only Benjamin but every man she meets. She becomes perverted and cause for the decay in Compson family. She marries Sydney Herbert head, one of the lovers she has. Very soon the marriage ends in divorce due to her illegitimate daughter Quentin. Even Candace does not know the father of this girl, probably Dalton Ames. Caddy's sexual freedom is also to be taken as a symbol of social disruption. Americans strongly believe that a woman be subordinate to her husband and dedicate herself to rearing god-fearing children to the best of her ability. But it is not realized in the case of caddy and her mother. She violates traditional and cultural values of America. Even after divorce she doesn't repent for her mistakes.

Quentin Compson is another son of Compson who is a moody and morose boy. He is a student of Harvard. He is over sensitive and weak in his heart. He feels that he has not given proper love by his mother and guidance from his father. He loves his sister Caddy as a woman and he has the desire to commit incest with her. He contemplates his sister's marriage with Sydney Herbert Head. Therefore he lied his father about Candace's virginity. But his father says virginity is an ideal invented by men. When we explore the character of Quentin, we feel that he is responsible towards women. Therefore he tries to control Candace's free movement to all men. Finally, as he fails to get love from his family members including caddy, he committed suicide by drowning himself.

Of the whole family Jason is the only Compson who is able to cope with the practical and social implications caused by caddy. He is in his twenties. He works as a clerk in the country store. He is loyal to his mother but takes delight in torture, both himself and those who are near to him. He does not like Caddy and her behavior. So he gives torture to his niece, Quentin, who is an illegitimate daughter of caddy. He is egocentric, aggressive and ungenerous to Quentin and the colored servants at home. By petty thievery he saves lot of money which is sent by caddy for her daughter Quentin. As she was unable to bear the torture, Quentin elopes with a carnival by stealing all the money saved by her uncle, Jason. Jason becomes furious and tries to catch her but in vain. Faulkner introduces this character only to show the cunning and deceitful nature of the people.

The last par is told by the author himself. Here Faulkner introduces the character Dilsey a faithful and loyal negro servant of Compson family, who tries to maintain the family standards against the degenerating values and culture. She nurtured all the children of the family just like a mother. She takes lot of pain to maintain peace in the family. She deeply concerns about the Benjamin, the unfortunate Quentin and resists egocentric Jason. She worries a lot about the broken family relationships. She is

decent in her behavior, faithful in her approaches, responsible to her duties. She is one of the most memorable characters created by William Faulkner. Faulkner introduces this character to say that still there are people with values even the declining modern days.

When we read the novel intensely it will be clear to us that the novel is about a southern family descending social position in its values and cultures. Cultures and traditions are part of life which makes the life meaningful. If cultures and traditions are violated then people become sensitive or over sensitive like Quentin, perverted like Caddy, irresponsible like Mr&Mrs Compson, cunning and deceitful like Jason. But society requires people like Dilsey who will protect family relations, cultures and traditions of the society. We can draw many moral conclusions from the text just like the life. Quentin is an example for many youth for not to loose the heart even in adverse conditions of life. Caddy is an example for women who break their families by loosing their values. After reading caddy's section women should be careful about their relations, responsibilities and values in the society. Jason is a good example for cunning and egocentric personality. Readers should understand that one must not be cunning and self-centered like Jason. Faulkner also explored the theme that "as you sow, so you reap". This is what exactly happened in the case of caddy and Jason. Caddy brings shame to the Compson family. Her daughter Quentin also like her mother left the home by bringing shame to the family. Jason deceives caddy and her daughter Quentin by stealing their money. At the end he was deceived by Quentin in the same way.

Conclusion: finally, I would like to conclude by saying that The Sound and the Fury highlights the paramount need of restoring values and cultures. People should be faithful, humble, responsible and careful towards the society. Then only decadence can be prevented and the glorious past can be achieved.

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