



The Sound and the Fury and *As I Lay Dying*: Faulkner's Portrait of the Southern Family

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Abstract

William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* depict the southern family as the root and spring of human dilemmas and their historical and existential context. The Southern culture predetermines the individual's reality and shapes his behaviour and outlook on life. The family mediates between the person and his culture, giving its members a fundamental identity with which to project themselves into the world of experience and making it believable and meaningful as a basis for human action in culture. According to Faulkner, the Southern family is caught in the whirling transformations of time and space, eroding its functional vitality. The family in *The Sound and the Fury* shows how its purpose has collapsed and how its members are inadequate. However, *As I Lay Dying* depicts a family that survives its impending fragmentation and maintains its predominance and sense of human unity. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Dilsey's 'absurd' faith ensures a last connection between the family and its members and the outside world. In *As I Lay Dying*, the Bundren family's hideous tragi-comedian faith is enlarged. *As I Lay Dying* is a pre-tragic dramatization of family fate in suspension, while *The Sound and the Fury* is post-tragic.

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William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* present a contrastive picture of the Southern family as the source and spring-head of the ambiguities within the human personality and its historical and

existential environment. The individual's reality is predetermined by their cultural background in the South, which also sets the tone for all of that person's behaviours and outlook on life. The family is essential in mediating between the person and his culture. It gives its members a main identity to project into an experience and establishes its credibility and significance as the foundation for human action in culture. However, Faulkner's depiction of the Southern family is caught in the turbulent changes in time and space, which negatively impacts the family's ability to operate. The family in *The Sound and the Fury* dramatizes the resulting weaknesses among its members and the complete breakdown of its function. On the other hand, *As I Lay Dying* depicts a family that retains its dominance and idea of human oneness despite, and perhaps even precisely because of, its threatening dissolution. The 'absurd' faith of Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury* provides a sense of penultimate connection between the family and its members and the outer world; this faith is developed into the grotesque tragi-comedy of the Bundren family in *As I Lay Dying*. *As I Lay Dying* is a pre-tragic dramatization of family destiny held in suspension, whereas *The Sound and the Fury* is a post-tragic dramatization of family destiny. Faulkner's perspective on how man endures and 'prevails' is shown by contrasting the two stories.

In *The Sound and the Fury*, a gap in human consciousness that underlies the secular predicament, concern, and misery of a contemporary man dedicated to a rationalistic worldview is revealed, yet frequently perplexed by the irrational forces that govern and order existence. The crisis is represented by the House of Compsons collapsing stance. The novel depicts the downfall of the Compsons from the views of four separate characters, all of whom have radically different viewpoints. They are all a part of its terrible past and play a significant role in its sinister future. But when viewed as a whole, their reactions provide a potential alternative that would have averted their fates and collective damnation. The Compson family had gotten too comfortable with the tenuously exclusive legend of the Compson House. The family's children are affected by the tremendous schism initially caused by the mixing of Compson and Bascomb's blood. The fates of their children are the subject of a power battle between Mr. and Mrs. Compson, two patriarchal opposites. The family is an aspect of Time's boundless evil, for time's natural healing flow has been dammed up by the artifice of family immortality. The challenge is to resist the temptation to believe that rehabilitating the person and the family ultimately depends on regaining their temporal dimension—not in terms of nostalgia or memories, but rather perception and experience. This would imply that, for the Compsons, breaking the family code is necessary and unavoidable to restore Man and Time to their natural state of freedom. Time also transforms human experience and redeems human nature as a result of being thus redeemed. However, each of Compson's unique responses to temporal reality reveals the impossibility of such accommodation and, thus, their collective generic doom.

The section on Benjy initially gives the impression of some form of literary prestidigitation due to its narration, shifting of tenses, and nonsensical sequence of events. However, it accurately and convincingly depicts the foolish boy's psychological activity when taken as a whole. Cretinized Benjy, or Benjamin, somehow notices the ominous surroundings without realising his role or how his presence affects the other household members. For him, life's drama is merely a sequence of hazily sensed sensations accumulating, without any relation to chronology, into a sieve-like frame of primordial response because he lacks a reasoning ability that can translate sensations into sense. As a result, even distant events take on a vivid immediacy, and

his stream of consciousness transports the reader to his early years while illuminating the family tensions, the unique characteristics of the mercenary Jason, the valetudinarian Mrs. Compson, the complacent Quentin, and others. We also discover his strong bond with his sister Caddy, how the golfer's cry of 'caddie' triggers him to wail, Caddy's sensual nature, and the real reason behind Quentin and Caddy's argument. However, Benjy's extraordinary mental abilities do not stop him from objecting to disrupting an established order of things. He can only loudly moan, slobber, and wail when he wants to convey annoyance. His attachment to the golf course, which was formerly Benjy's pasture, his mute protests against Caddy's relationships with several men, and his constant sobbing on the day of Miss Quentin's elopement and during Damuddy's funeral are all examples of his highly developed and almost paralysing perceptual abilities. However, his mentality is primarily stimulated by visual stimuli and does not keep track of any chronological units of time.

Quentin's stream of consciousness reflects the abnormal being's frenetic psychological activity. His excessive ratiocinations, which become hallucinations, distort his perception of reality. Because he exclusively uses his thinking ability and practically becomes a slave to his conscience, he is odd. Despite his disparaging remarks about the world or the "loud world," he is sensitive to its emotions, almost to the point of obsession. Caddy's romantic antics scare him due to the potential scandal they may cause. Faulkner describes Quentin as someone who:

... who loved not his sister's body but some concept of Compson honour precariously and (he knew well) only temporarily supported by the minute fragile membrane of her maidenhood ... who loved not the idea of the incest which he would not commit, but some presbyterian concept of its eternal punishment: he, not God, could by that means cast himself and his sister both into hell, where he could guard her for ever and keep her for ever intact amid the eternal fires. (Cowley 374)

Caddy's loss of virginity foretells the collapse of his family's structure and sets off a chain of events that leads to his suicide. The conflict between reality and his vanity stems from his belief in the "inflexible corrupt less judge" and in the irrational ways of women:

... Women are like that they don't acquire a knowledge of people we are for that they are just born with a practical fertility of suspicion... they have an affinity for evil for supplying whatever the evil lacks in itself... fertilising the mind for it until the evil has served its purpose whether it ever existed or not... (Faulkner 70)

He never misses an opportunity to 'protect' her from this perverse influence. When she scornfully asks him if he has ever 'known' any girls, he even forgoes his inherent honesty and boasts that he has engaged in incest with several girls to wean her away from her chosen path of wickedness. He tries to find a meaningful and logical justification for his terrible suffering, but he can't get her to change her ways. He identifies the underlying cause of all his problems in the unrelenting march of time. He mutilates the timepiece in his rage by ripping off its hands and shattering the crystal, but it continues to function. He quickly finds that while he may damage the watch or block time from his consciousness, he cannot take away the memory of the felt event.

Quentin's vision of life is conditioned by Mr. Compson's authoritarian, nihilistic and fatalistic utterings, and by the specious rationalisation of obvious frailties in terms of metaphysical abstractions. While presenting the watch to Quentin, he says:

... I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; its rather excruciatingly apt that you will use it to gain the *reductio absurdum* of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father's. I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you may forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. Because no battle is ever own, he said. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools. (Faulkner 56)

In contrast to Quentin and Benjy, Jason is a typical egotistical man who is self-centred and has a cruel streak. He introduces himself with the phrase "Once a bitch, always a bitch," and Faulkner calls him "logical, rational, contained, and even a philosopher in the stoic tradition" (750). Jason cares a lot about other people's mistakes but is not fully fixated on them. One sees that his subreptions aren't just driven by his love of money and a nebulous wish to restore the family's prestige to how it was before. Because pragmatism has its practical boundaries and can overreach, which leads to Jason's psychological restrictions, the loss of both of his 'thieving's and savings' ultimately dramatizes, in a sense, the failure of Jason's success.

Despite not receiving a separate section, Caddy takes centre stage in the novel. The pattern of her actions is the product of moral and biological mutations brought about by time, yet none of her brothers acknowledge this. Benjy retaliates by howling when she engages in the childish "necking" with her lovers since his own highly individualised moral code is broken. On the other hand, Quentin dismisses cherished ideals like honour and virginity by attributing her adult actions to the passage of time. Time thus becomes for him both a destructive force and a crushing burden. He seeks to experience a virtual *peripeteia* by attempting to stop time or mentally stopping it. Jason values money, which represents social standing, more highly than time. He believes that Cassy's deeds as a time-bound creature have caused her to forfeit the banking position Herbert Head had promised her. He, therefore, despises Caddy and makes an effort to make amends by cheating on her and abducting her daughter, Quentin.

The final section, devoted to the Negro maid Dilsey, places the Compsons' experiences in a symbolic context. Under caption, 'Dilsey', in the Appendix, Faulkner merely says 'They endured.' The plural 'they' is significant because Faulkner appears to present Dilsey as a symbol for the type of people who can endure or prevail in this world. Despite not being a member of the Compson family, Dilsey is a better 'Compson' than any of them, thanks to her close connection to its varying fortunes. She serves as the prop that supports the collapsing Compson edifice and also bestows on it a sense of security by manifesting these "eternal verities," which have vanished from the warped lives of the Compsons, through her characteristic piety and other regenerative qualities like humility and charity, patience, and compassion. Time is only a continuum in Dilsey's eyes, and interestingly, when she hears a broken clock strike five times, she automatically corrects it to eight o'clock. By refusing to adopt a solely cerebral rationalisation of time as a way of life, Dilsey, the Faulknerian savage, and Caddy, who discovers herself in perfect harmony with nature and natural biological functions, endure the torment of consciousness caused in others by durational time. Being a Compson and a woman of the

white race, Caddy must have experienced suffering, and the understanding of the Manichean realities exercises and atones for her crimes. However, Dilsey is insulated from the suffering of the redeeming experience because of a component of her blood that moves with the ebb and flow of time. The other Compsons are the variables that, via their diverse modes of experience, demonstrate the variety of approximations conceivable in the scenario towards the values symbolised by Dilsey. Dilsey is the constant, expressing the virtues of endurance. The leap of faith is the transcendence of the destructive mechanical time and its identification with the redemptive, natural time. Dilsey emphasises the limitations of reason and shows that only faith may enable one to persevere or triumph. Thus, Faulkner unifies the different activity levels into a single focus by beginning with a syllogistic exposition of the truth of his fictional world. The fact and symbol of time are turned into the myth of time by the artistic discovery of how time affects various personality patterns and levels of consciousness.

As I Lay Dying reverses the theme-form relationship in *The Sound and the Fury*. Time, which serves as a centrifugal force and limits the action in *The Sound and the Fury*, diffuses human energy in three different directions: the individual, the family, and the race. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner uses aesthetics to create a unified artistic vision out of the temporary patterns of human existence. The spatial components of this piece's aesthetic structure successfully contrast the thematic action's temporal nature. On the other hand, the metaphor of space, which, unlike time, is a centripetal force, controls the thematic activity of *As I Lay Dying*. *As I Lay Dying* is space-oriented, it achieves its aesthetic counterstatement in a temporal structuring of its fictional form. The metaphor of the last journey is a dramatization of the inseparable interaction of time and space in the theme-form relationship of *As I Lay Dying*.

Similar to *The Sound and the Fury*, this novel dramatizes the topic of the family as a close-knit family battle against outside influences that threaten to tear it apart. Darl and Quentin share characteristics like Vardaman and Benjy, Jason and Jewel, Mr. Compson and Anse, and Caddy and Dewey Dell. Nevertheless, Addie Bundren is a more focused and engaging character than Mrs. Compson despite her plebian background. The narrative element revolves round the 'Dying' and the progress of the cortege towards Jefferson in deference to Addie's ironically esoteric wish to be buried in her family churchyard.

The fifty-nine sections of the novel, divided among about fifteen characters and with shifting, halting jumps connected to 'the multiple points of view', complete the fugal cycle. The real reason behind the action is revealed and concealed by each character's stream of consciousness, in turn. As a result, the plot develops in a coiling, serpentine manner with glimmering flashes that stand out in the fable, with the connective links implicit rather than explicit. However, as one advances, through several purposefully placed obstacles and traps, one begins to recognise the tragic tensions present in the family and the humorous causes that give rise to them, turning the Bundren brood into a group of siblings lacking a self-consistent survival plan. The crypto-psychic Darl receives most of the story's attention. He discerns that Jewel is an illegitimate child of his mother's adulterous relationship with the preacher Whitfield, thanks to this amazing clairvoyant ability, and he also sees that Dewey Dell is expecting a child without marriage. Even as his family members declare their commitment to Addie's wish, Darl can see through their thinly veiled plots to further their interests. As a result, at the very beginning of this exaggerated voyage, he breaks out in fits of laughter.

The journey overtly covers a segment of space dominated by a single destination; but, at the point of the destined arrival, the concealed springs of individual and private purpose become unwound, and the journey is broken up into separate wanderings. Some of the covert motivations that drive them to travel with Addie's coffin to Jefferson include Anse's desire to get a set of artificial teeth, Dewey Dell's urgency to reach Jefferson so he can buy pills for abortion, Vardaman's curiosity to see a train, Cash's suppressed desire to become known as a master carpenter, Jewel's mother fixation, which is later transferred to the horse, and his hatred and mistrust of others. Addie, or rather paradoxically, her corpse symbolising her authoritarian flat, is the vital unifying centre in the tension-ridden Bundren family. She attempts to impose herself on other people's consciousness because, as a schoolmarm, she feels cut off from the broader flow of existence. She strongly impacts her husband and children and interferes with their sense of reality more in death than in life. Her desire for a dignified funeral represents the despotic power of a person's dying wish on the living. The matriarchal edict changes into a contradictory curse-cum benediction that challenges and tests the family's survivors' resolve and ability to survive.

Ironically, as she creates a new life in response to the reality of death in her own life, Addie develops a new understanding of herself and human existence in general. She understands that there will always be a gap between life and death, word and deed, fact and value and that all life awaits the last reality of destruction. Most people use this middle ground of neutral experience as a vantage point to justify their financial and psychological resources. However, the sensitive nature of the agonised individual gives no room for cover or deceptions against the erratic nature of existence. They develop a void that needs to be supplied externally. The emergence of a psychosomatic personality causes a lack of pride, fear, and faith. Therefore, Addie's pride is only cerebral in its outward signs and manifestations; its underlying cause is a mysterious void, foreboding sterility, and a stretch of wasteland, patiently awaiting the blessings of grace or the consolation of death. After her passing, Addie's motherly psychological inconsistencies and complexity take on an almost legendary intensity. The mother becomes the Matriarch.

The husband, Anse Bundren, is a kind of picaresque pilgrim, taking shelter under the Christian charity of others, while haughtily spurning their offers of assistance. He is revealed to be a smug humbug by his smug consolation, his thinking about the new set of teeth as soon as Addie passes away, his looking for a new spouse as soon as he buries his dead wife and his famous debate about the linear and vertical properties of mobile and immobile objects in defence of his laziness. Again, whenever someone suggests that Addie be laid to rest in the closest churchyard at New Hope, Miss Dell's feline glare reveals her neurotic concern. She informs Mr. Gillepie about Darl's incendiary behaviour and significantly gets him sent to Jackson because she detests Darl for recognising her plight. But ultimately her private purpose in making the trip to Jefferson is foiled, because when Mosely the druggist indignantly refuses to sell her the required pills, she takes the 'treatment' from a soda jerk who cajoles this all-too-credulous Dewey Dell into the cellar for what amounts to a second seduction. Although Cash first struggles with perfectionism in his work as a carpenter and takes it to its absurd extreme by showing Addie the partially finished pieces of the coffin as she lay dying, he eventually transcends himself and develops the ability to evaluate human character. In the end, when, new Mrs. Bundren brings the playback, he

concludes: “Listening to it, I would think what a shame Darl couldn’t be here to enjoy it too. But it is better so for him. This world is not his world; this life his life” (*As I Lay Dying* 208).

Among the Bundrens, Darl is the only one who is genuinely impelled by filial duty and therefore desires to give Addie Bundren literally a decent burial. But when his efforts are foiled by Jewel, and the various members achieve their personal designs and hand him over to the officers to be led to Jackson, he bursts forth into one of his uncontrollable laughing fits. Darl’s psychic transformation from interested involvement to dispassionate detachment offers the perspective from which one can see the complicated spectacle of life with comedic compassion. Darl is a mysterious guy with conflicted morals. On a narrative level, even though he is portrayed as crazy, he has schizophrenia, and Darl’s final portion strongly illustrates his Janus-like nature. It is brought up in the conversation between Darl, who has gone through the anguish of experience, and Darl, who serves as his conscience-keeper, whether a man should go insane to comprehend himself objectively. The dialogue between the Darl who has undergone the ordeal of experience, and the Darl who acts as his own conscience-keeper, raises the pertinent question whether man should go mad in order to get an objective understanding of himself. Darl’s rage of insanity is the demonstration of an understanding sanity of the capacity of life to prevail over personality.

According to Faulkner, the measure of man’s tragic salvation through passion and suffering is the extent of human consciousness. This is illustrated by the degrees of the human consciousness that occur between the mindless compassion of Dilsey the Negress, and the mindless passion of Benjy the idiot. The boundaries and potential of human selfhood are defined by Benjy’s narcissistic rejection of nature (symbolised by his grasping the flower) and Dilsey’s intuitive affirmation of faith in the face of a collapsing reality system. The human predicament in *The Sound and the Fury* remains an irrevocably marginal situation, for, at the centre of life, there is a pervasive nothingness. On the other hand, in *As I Lay Dying*, although the individuals are thrown back on their peripheral, private selfhood, they are held together by the central familial design which is not shattered completely. The person’s nature derives its nourishment from the family’s perseverance as an unbroken oneness. The contrast between Benjy’s stupidity and Darl’s regression highlights the two families’ divergent paths. The human outposts of their family’s fates are Benjy and Darl, although the former is beyond redemption while the latter is amenable to human pity. There is none waiting for Benjy within the family structure to offer him a gesture of solidarity and reintegration; Dilsey’s compassion for him is an impersonal compassion placed beyond the grasp of human personality, for her self-transcending faith has no focal meaning for the idiot who can’t achieve transcendence, let alone the restoration of his normal human selfhood. In contrast, Cash’s adieu to Darl is at least a meaningful gesture of human brotherhood symptomatic of the family’s redemptive power which is preserved, despite its threatened disruption. Benjy’s survival is so worthless that it would make life pointless and unfulfilling, but Darl, despite being on his way to the mental hospital, does not meet the same fate as an idiot. There is still something in nature that would make an ultimate restoration of his status to individuality within the family structure legitimate and worthwhile.

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