

William Faulkner's Influence of 'Stream of Consciousness Technique' in the *Sound and the Fury*

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Abstract

In the paper, I intend to explore the Stream-Of-Consciousness technique employed by William Faulkner (1897-1962) in his novel *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) is among the best novels of the 20th century American Literature and the world at large. His best works and his finest writing feature from 1929 to 1936, the years of turbulent times due to the Great Depression in America where in, the economy fell to shambles and revived soon after.

Introduction

Faulkner once claimed that the books he read were *The Bible* and *Greek Tragedies* from which he derived his style. In 1949, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for his "powerful and artistically unique contribution to modern American novel". The chief emphasis laid out in his novels was on the embodiment of southern sensibility having risen from southern state of Mississippi himself. The decline of south in terms of moral degeneration of white people and the inability of black people to shake off the impact of slavery.

Faulkner's thematic representation is largely based around his fictional Yoknapatawpha County, where his characters are placed. The characters in his novels do not necessarily have one point of view but rather multiple points of view. The works and narrative style of Faulkner are so compelling that many blooming novelists find it strikingly relevant even today and have employed them in their works.

Review of Literature

- 1.) "Destiny, Identity and Coincidences" Preeti Zachariah (2014) *The Hindu Metro Plus*. In the article, Kalyan Ray, Author of "No Country" admitted that the structure developed for his novel was influenced from the works of William Faulkner. He further clarified that his characters in the novel begin to write their own stories much similar to the narrative style employed by Faulkner.
- 2.) "Story from Macondo", Aruni Kashyap, (2014) *The Hindu Sunday Magazine* talks about famous novelist Gabriel Marquez's stand that he considered Faulkner to be his master. And he quoted one of Faulkner's famous lines "Every writer wants to beat the writer he admires him in his own game"
- 3.) Marco Caracciolo (2012) "Fictional consciousnesses: a reader's manual." *Style Spring*. Caracciolo mentioned the fictional consciousness that is found in narrative styles. He resonated John Searle's words, on consciousness that it is "an inner, first-person, qualitative phenomenon"
- 4.) Peter Lurie (2011) "Faulkner's literary historiography: color, photography, and the accessible past." *Philological Quarterly*. A Critical Essay: University of Iowa reiterated on Faulkner that he forged his modernist method and discovered the pure "joy" and "ecstasy" of writing. He further added that "*The Sound and the Fury* can be described using a specifically photographic metaphor: a widening of his narrative perspective or lens, as he approaches first Dilsey, individually, then several other members of her family, her community, and her church.
- 5.) Marjorie Pryse (2009) "Textual duration against chronological time: graphing memory in Faulkner's Benjy section." *The Faulkner Journal* 25.1. He quotes "Faulkner begins where he understands his reader's concept of consciousness to reside--in the reflective awareness of the apparently discontinuous inner states Bergson describes in the opening pages of *Creative Evolution*".
- 6.) Nehama Baker (2009) "The novel as a work of mourning (trauerarbeit)--a performative response to loss: reading William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *Requiem for a Nun* as 'prose elegies'--an alternative to postmodern melancholy." *Journal of Social and Psychological Sciences* 2.1. In the essay, Nehama portrayed that "Faulkner was performing an active work of mourning for his own personal healing purposes". Nehama quoted "With plots that centre, like a great number of Faulkner's works, on funerals or recent losses, and narrative that unfolds murders, destruction, frustration and failure, Faulkner's text easily lends itself to an accumulation of terms, situations and feelings that warrant the sense of darkness and melancholy".

Influence

Influenced by James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1923), Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* (1915 – 1938) and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Faulkner employs the stream-of-consciousness technique in his novels. Some Major critics define it "Interior Monologue" The potential to explore the techniques employed largely

arrives in the detailed compartmentalization of Faulkner's style. His brilliant narrative style is often challenging to interpret as he gives his characters equal turns to reiterate their bone of contention in a given space. The central truth in the novel revolves around them irrespective of their place and time they belong. This mastery of technique leaves the readers attached to the novel and its brilliance attaches greater values.

According to Joseph W. Reed Jr, The narrative styles of Faulkner could be characterized as "powerful and bold interactions":

1. Between characters
2. Between characters and narrator
3. Between characters, narrator, and reader.

The Stream-of-consciousness technique is largely employed and its deconstruction becomes vital in order to comprehend the mind of the author. Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith published the novel, his fourth on 7 October 1929. Faulkner said:

"The one that failed the most tragically and the most splendidly...the one that I worked at the longest, the hardest, that was to me the most passionate and moving idea, and made the most splendid failure."

Faulkner's Introduction: (written in 1933, Eventually published in 1973). Faulkner stated that the novel was essentially the story of Caddy Compson.

"When I began the book, I had no plan at all. I wasn't even writing a book...The story is all there, in the first section as Benjy told it. I did not try deliberately to make it obscure: when I realized the story might be printed, I took three more sections, all longer than Benjy's, to try to clarify it"

Faulkner also indicates in the introduction that the writing of *The Sound and the Fury* represented a turning point in his career, one that had personal as well as professional significance. He claimed that the writing of the novel taught him about reading and writing, and that since the writing of the book he had discovered

Stream of Consciousness

Let us consider William James' "Principles of Psychology (1890 Refined in 1920). "Stream of Consciousness; A Study in Literary Method (1955) as it describes the unbroken flow of perceptions, thoughts and feelings in the waking mind. It has been adopted to describe a narrative method in modern fiction. It contains long passages of "introspection" describing in detail what passes through a character's awareness are found in novelists like Samuel Richardson and Henry James.

The scenes and events of the story are impinged upon the consciousness of the central character. It deals extensively with the character's mental process and random association. It is a special mode of narration that undertakes without the narrator's intervention and the continuous flow of character's mental process. Critics call it "Interior Monologue" (Perceptions mingle with Consciousness and Half Consciousness).

It is a process that occurs in a central character's mind. It is the exact presentation of the author's process of consciousness because perceptions, mental images, feelings and some aspects of thoughts are non-verbal. The matter is of narrative conventions rather than unedited point-for-point reproduction. James Joyce developed a variety of Stream of Consciousness technique that was employed in *Ulysses* (1923). Dorothy Richardson focused exclusively on the mind and perceptions of her heroine *Pilgrimage* in 12 volumes (1915.38).

Virginia Woolf's primary works although not exclusively narrative mode in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Light House* (1927). *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), the novel with four narrative voices. We meet the Compson's family in several books. The dynasty has been traced 1695 – 1945. One of the brothers Benjy is a severely mentally handicapped. The first section in his stream of consciousness voice is extraordinary. Another brother Jason Self-Pitying and tyrannical succeeds their father as the head of the family. In the background, the Compson Negro servant's watch and witness in Faulkner's own words they endured.

The novel describes the decay and fall of aristocratic Compson family and implicitly often entire social order from four different points-of-view. The first three sections are presented from the perspective of three Compson's Sons; Benjy an idiot, Quentin a suicidal Harvard freshman, Jason the eldest. Each section is focused primarily on a sister who has married and left home. The fourth section comments on the other three, The Compson's black servants, whose chief virtue is endurance, reveal the family's moral decline.

Chronology & Time

The symbolism of Time assumes a great significance in the novel, as it's the primary reason for Faulkner to reproduce the exact mindset of his characters without any priority attributed to chronology of time. It is also through this way; Faulkner constantly shifts the thoughts of his characters between past and present through the novel. Quentin, who is one of the major characters in the novel, breaks his watch. The watch was symbolic to Quentin himself because his father gifted it to him. Quentin's obsession to time is no exception to the Compson family at large because, the family is also obsessed to it.

Quentin realizes that he is too obsessed with it and hence chooses to abandon it. The Compson family, at every instant in the course of the novel tries and escapes time and garner efforts to manipulate it to their advantage. The civil war and Reconstruction devastated many of these once great Southern (American) families economically, socially and psychologically. And the Compson Family is one of the families that were largely affected by it. Quentin is trapped by time and is unable to move beyond his memories of his past.

Jean-Paul Sartre in his essay “On *The Sound and the Fury*: Time in the Work of Faulkner” argues “Man’s misfortune lies in his being time-bound. A Man is the sum of his misfortunes. One day you’d think misfortune would get tired, but then time is your misfortune. Such is the real subject of the book. Among the other major characters in the novels, Benjy has no concept of time in his endeavors and cannot distinguish between the past and the present. On the contrary, Jason is materialistic. He finds no use for the past and focuses on the present and immediate future.

Dilsey the Black servant of the Compson family is the only who seemed to be at peace with time. Unlike the members of the Compson family, Dilsey realizes that her life is small and compartmentalized in the boundless range of time and history. She finds comfort in taking care of the children of the Compson family much like her own although she is bound by slavery and filled with agony.

Conclusion

Faulkner’s technique of laying particular emphasis on time has been hailed as revolutionary by renowned critics of his times. Through out the course of the novel we find that Faulkner thoroughly suggests that time is never consistent or objectively understandable entity, and humans can interact with it in numerous varieties of waves. Faulkner employs time in his novel with the right justification through his characters.

Time plays an essential role in both of the novels and yet again we find both of them are pre-occupied by time. There is symbolic significance of passing episodes. Though the plot is meager in the novel, the circumstances that arise out of situations are vividly dramatic. Faulkner contends that the Compson family and other similar southern families, lost touch with the reality of the world around them and became lost in a haze of self-absorption. This self-absorption corrupted the core values these families once held dear and left the newer generations completely unequipped to deal with the realities of the modern world.

It through the application of Stream of Consciousness technique by not attributing particular emphasis on time and chronology Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* achieved great distinction as he considered the prospect of showcasing the exact mindset of his characters. Therefore, he is able to capture the emotions of his characters as well without any dilutions. And William Faulkner in *The Sound and the Fury* also masters the technique pioneered by Dorothy Richardson and James Joyce respectively.

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