



The Sound and the Fury

William Faulkner

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Introduction

The Sound and the Fury, published in 1929, was William Faulkner's fourth novel and is considered his first masterpiece. The story is set in the fictional county of Yoknapatawpha that Faulkner created for the setting of his third novel *Sartoris*. Faulkner set fifteen of his novels and many short stories in this geographical location that he invented, the descriptions of which mirror the area in northern Mississippi where he spent most of his life. While he is called a Southern writer, most critics praise this book and many of Faulkner's other fictional works for their universal and humanistic themes. The book was published in the year of the great stock market crash on Wall Street in 1929 and sales were meager. Faulkner did, however, gain considerable critical recognition for the work.

Before writing *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner found himself overly involved with the problem of selling his previous books to publishers. He decided to refocus his attention back on his writing so that he could create a finely crafted work. The result was *The Sound and the Fury*. The inspiration for the novel came from one of his short stories, "Twilight." He had created the character of Caddy in this story. In a scene where Caddy has climbed a pear tree to look into the window where her grandmother's funeral is being held, her brothers are looking up at her and they see her muddy pants. Faulkner claimed he loved the character of Caddy so much that he felt she deserved more than a short story. Thus the idea for *The Sound and the Fury* was born.

Author Biography

The oldest of four sons of Murry Cuthbert Falkner and Maud Butler Falkner, William Cuthbert Falkner was born in New Albany, Mississippi, on September 25, 1897. (He changed the spelling of his name in 1918.) When he was five years old, his family moved to Oxford, Mississippi, where Faulkner would spend much of his life.

Faulkner's ancestors came to America from Scotland during the eighteenth century. William Clark Falkner, his great-grandfather, was a source of inspiration for the young Faulkner. William Clark had been a colonel in the Civil War, built railroads, and had also written a popular romance in 1881 called *The White Rose of Memphis*. He was murdered on the street by a business partner, and Faulkner re-created this event several times in his fiction. Faulkner also used his great-grandfather as the model for his fictional character Colonel John Sartoris in his 1929 novel *Sartoris*.

Faulkner did not complete his last year of high school, nor did he complete a college education, although he was admitted to the University of Mississippi as a special student. He served briefly in the Canadian branch of the Royal Air Force during World War I after being rejected by the United States Army because he did not meet the weight and height requirements. The war ended before he could participate in any action, however. After the war he worked in various clerical and building jobs until he could establish himself as a full-time writer.

Faulkner's writing career began with poems, some of which were published. A play he wrote was performed in 1921, and his first book of poems was published in 1924. In 1925 he met Sherwood Anderson, best known as the author of *Winesburg, Ohio*, who influenced him to become a fiction writer. (The pieces he wrote during the period he spent with Anderson in New Orleans were collected in 1958 under the title of *New Orleans Sketches*.) Following the trend of other American writers, Faulkner made a six-month tour of Europe in 1925. On his return to the United States, he began writing seriously. He produced his first novel in 1926 and his second in 1927. His third, *Sartoris*, in which he introduced the fictional Yoknapatawpha county, was published

in 1929. That year also saw the appearance of *The Sound and the Fury*, the work which first gained him critical notice. In 1929 he also married his high-school sweetheart, Lida Estelle Oldham Franklin. They had two daughters, one of whom died in infancy. He also helped raise two stepchildren.

Except for brief periods during the early 1930s and early 1940s, when Faulkner went to Hollywood as a screenwriter and produced scripts for such films as *To Have and Have Not* and *The Big Sleep*, he spent most of his time in Oxford, Mississippi, writing stories and novels. In 1949, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature and in 1955 he received the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for *A Fable*, a story of France during World War II. Already suffering from failing health, Faulkner suffered a number of injuries caused by falls from horses. After being admitted to the hospital for one such injury, he died of a heart attack on July 6, 1962. Faulkner produced a sizable body of work that includes a number of critically acclaimed masterpieces.

Plot Summary

April Seventh, 1928

Set in Mississippi during the early decades of the twentieth century, *The Sound and the Fury* tells the tumultuous story of Compton family's gradual deterioration. The novel is divided into four sections, each told by a different narrator on a different date. The three Compson brothers, Benjy, Quentin, and Jason, each relate one of the first three sections while the fourth is told from an omniscient, third person perspective. At the center of the novel is the brothers' sister, Caddy Compson, who, as an adult, becomes a source of obsessive love for two of her brothers, and inspires savage revenge in the third.

The first section is narrated by Benjy, a thirty-three-year-old mentally handicapped man who is unable to speak and doesn't fully comprehend the world around him. His perceptions in the present are combined with memories of childhood and adolescence and, as a result, this narrative provides a disjointed and incomplete interpretation of events. In the opening scene, Benjy is standing by a fence near a golf course where the regularly heard cry of "here, caddie" is a constant reminder of the sister who has now married and left home. He is accompanied by one of the family's servants, Luster, who is trying to find the quarter he lost so he can go to the travelling show playing in town that night. As they crawl through a broken place in the fence, Benjy snags himself on a nail and is immediately reminded of a similar experience he had with Caddy. From here, Benjy's monologue continues to shift back and forth between the present and the past.

Although the significance of many of Benjy's fragmented memories is not immediately evident, several important incidents are revealed. What is most apparent is Benjy's strong attachment to Caddy, who smells "like trees." It has been almost eighteen years since Caddy's wedding, yet Benjy continues to await her return at the fence. Besides her wedding day, other significant memories include the changing of

Benjy's name from Maury, the image of Caddy's muddy drawers as she climbs the pear tree, and an incident at the fence involving a young school girl.

June Second, 1910

The novel's second section relates Quentin's final day before he commits suicide. Quentin is a student at Harvard but his obsessive thoughts about his sister's sexuality and marriage of convenience to Herbert Head far outweigh any academic aspirations. Memories of past events again intrude on the present and, as a result, Quentin's narration IS not unlike Benjy's. (The technique, where thoughts interrupt each other and move back and forth, is known as "stream-of-consciousness.") However, Quentin's intense awareness of time lends his section a more coherent structure. He wakes to the sound of his watch, a gift from his father intended to help him "forget [time] now and then," twists off its hands and, instead of attending his morning classes, prepares for his death. He packs a trunk, mails a letter to his father, and purchases some flatiron weights

Quentin makes his way to the train station. Once out of town, Quentin goes for a walk along a river. He recalls his attempt to prevent Caddy from marrying Herbert by proposing that they and Benjy run away someplace where nobody knows them. As he is walking, Quentin encounters a little girl whom he addresses as "sister." He buys the girl an ice cream and is attempting to help her find her way home when her brother suddenly appears and accuses Quentin of kidnapping his sister. Quentin IS eventually cleared of the accusations and drives away with some friends from school. His thoughts, however, remain focused on Caddy. He reflects upon his unsuccessful attempt to confront Dalton Ames, the man who may have impregnated Caddy, and is seemingly unaware of the present moment when he strikes the boasting Gerald Bland in the car. He eventually returns to his room in town and makes the final preparations for his suicide. As he is doing so, he recalls a conversation he had with his father concerning his feelings for Caddy and his desperate attempt to prevent her marriage:

...and he thinks you are too serious to give me any cause for alarm you wouldn't have felt driven to the expedient of telling me you had committed incest otherwise and I wasn't lying I wasn't lying and he you wanted to sublimate a piece of natural human folly into a horror and then exorcise it With truth and I it was to isolate her out of the loud world so that it would have to flee us of necessity and then the sound of it would be as though it had never been and he did you try to make her do it and I was afraid to. I was afraid she might and then it wouldn't have done any good but if I could tell you we did it would have been so and then the others wouldn't be so and then the world would roar away and he and now this other you are not lying now either but you are still blind to what is in yourself you cannot bear to think that someday it will no longer hurt you like this now.

Quentin then brushes his teeth, turns out the light, and leaves the room. It is revealed in the following section that he took his own life by drowning himself

April Sixth, 1928

The confusion and obsession which characterize the first and second sections, respectively, become anger and brutal sarcasm in the third. Jason's opening words set the tone: "Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say." He is referring to Caddy's daughter, Quentin, who has just received a warning from school concerning her frequent absences. Jason brings her to school himself and then stops by the post office and goes to his job at Earl's store. As he is going through his mail, he recalls how Quentin was first sent to live with the family after Caddy was cast off by her husband. Caddy has only seen her daughter once since that time. After her father's funeral, she paid Jason fifty dollars to see Quentin, and he drove by with Quentin in a carriage, allowing Caddy only a glimpse of the girl. The first letter Jason opens is addressed to Mrs. Compson and contains the monthly check Caddy sends to support her daughter. Jason has been keeping this money for himself as compensation for the job he was

promised by Herbert but never got. He replaces the checks with fakes that he burns in front of his mother. A second letter, addressed to Quentin, contains a money order for fifty dollars. He later pressures Quentin into signing it over to him without disclosing its true value.

That afternoon, Jason catches Quentin walking past the store with a man from the show. He eventually chases them down a wagon road with his car, but they manage to give him the slip and leave him stranded by deflating one of his tires. When he finally makes his way home, he cruelly teases Luster by burning free tickets to the show that Luster desperately wants to see. He refuses to sit down to dinner until Dilsey, another of the family's servants, gets the entire family to join him at the table. Quentin and Mrs. Compson come down to dinner and Jason taunts his niece by making up a story about how, earlier that day, he lent his car to one of the show men so that he could pursue his sister's husband who was out riding With "some town woman." He interrupts himself and tells his mother that he will continue the story later because he does not "like to talk about such things before Quentin."

April Eighth, 1928

It is now Easter Sunday and, as Dilsey is serving breakfast, Jason descends from his room and accuses Luster and Benjy of breaking his bedroom window. It is only when Dilsey goes up to wake Quentin that Jason figures out what has happened. He rushes upstairs and finds Quentin's room empty and her bed undisturbed. He also discovers that the metal box he keeps hidden in his closet has been broken into. Jason calls the sheriff to report a robbery and leaves the house. A little while later, Dilsey, Luster, and Benjy attend a special Easter service where they hear visiting preacher, Reverend Shegog, deliver a stirring sermon. Meanwhile, Jason has driven to Mottson, the next stop for the travelling show, and attempts to find Quentin and the twice-stolen money. However, his trip is unsuccessful and he is finally obliged to hire a man to bring him back home because he has a severe headache from a scuffle with one of the showmen. Upon his return to town, he crosses Luster and Benjy as they are approaching the town

square in the family's surrey. Luster swings to the "wrong" side of the monument and Benjy begins to shriek in horror. Jason hurls Luster aside, sets the surrey on the "right" side of the monument and sends the two back home. Benjy finally ends his hollering when he sees that "cornice and facade flowed smoothly once more from left to right," and that "post and tree, window and doorway and signboard [were] each in its ordered place."

Plot

Plot Summary

The Sound and the Fury is a novel in four parts, set in a fictional county in Mississippi and depicting the decline of a dysfunctional Southern family: alcoholic father Jason Compson, self-centered and self-pitying mother Caroline Bascomb Compson, and their four children.

Jason Compson is a caring father, while Caroline is too self-absorbed to have any time for her children. She sees her youngest son's affliction as a curse on the family, and when he is five years old changes his name from Maury to Benjamin, believing that this will cure him.

Her brother Maury is a poor businessman and a weak character that makes unsuccessful investments, usually with money he borrows from other people, including his sister, whom he panders to in order to be able to get money from her. He has an affair with a neighbor, and uses the children to send notes to her.

The youngest child, Benjy, is mute and severely mentally retarded, left mostly to the care of a succession of the family's black servants. He has no understanding of time, and his recollections move backwards and forwards between various periods of his life without any sequence. He spends much of his time watching the golf course through the fence of his garden.

As a young child, Benjy's world revolves around his sister Candace, known as Caddy, the only one of his siblings who is patient and loving towards him, and he spends his days waiting at the gate for her return from school. Caddy understands Benjy and promises him she will never leave him.

As Caddy matures, however, her promiscuity leads to her becoming pregnant. She marries a wealthy banker, who promises her brother Jason a job in his bank. When he finds out that he is not the father of Caddy's child he divorces her, bringing shame on her family and costing Jason his promised job. Caddy names her daughter Quentin, after her dead brother, and sends her to be raised by her mother and brother Jason. Caroline Compson forbids Caddy's name to be mentioned in the Compson household.

Quentin is a romantic and sensitive boy who idolizes Caddy, both desiring her and wanting to keep her pure. He is frequently involved ineffectually in fights defending his sister's honor and reputation. His father sells land to send Quentin to Harvard, but unable to accept Caddy's shame and with his illusions shattered by her, Quentin commits suicide.

The brother Jason is the only one of the children to whom their mother relates, in as far as she can think of anybody but herself. She thinks of him as a Compson, not a Bascomb. He is an unpleasant child who keeps himself apart from his siblings, and grows into a bitter, cruel and avaricious man, disappointed with life and venting his anger on his niece Quentin. He is employed in a local store because the storeowner feels sorry for his mother, and he steals the money Caddy sends for Quentin's upkeep. He has also stolen money from his mother.

Quentin, like her mother Caddy, is rebellious and promiscuous, and runs away with a man from a traveling circus, after breaking into Jason's room and stealing the money he keeps locked up there, most of which rightfully belongs to Quentin. Jason gives chase but fails to catch them.

The family's black servant Dilsey is the person who holds the family together, caring for the children and their difficult mother patiently and selflessly despite her increasing old age and infirmity, and accepting them all unconditionally and regardless of their faults, in the same way that she accepts the kitchen clock that only has one hand and strikes three times less than the real time. At an Easter church service where she takes Benjy with her, they are both moved by the sermon of a

traveling preacher – even Benjy is entranced. Dilsey declares that she has "seen the beginning and the end."

The final scene of the book shows Benjy being driven in the carriage by Luster, to the cemetery where his father and Quentin are buried. Luster drives the wrong way around a monument, leaving Benjy terrified and screaming. Seeing what is happening, Jason turns the horse so that the carriage can pass the monument on the correct side and Benjy relaxes, clenching a broken flower in his fist, calm now that the carriage is going in the usual way.

This is a tale of hopelessness, unfolding through the narrations of the three Compson sons, and it is not until the story is well advanced that it begins to become coherent. Its power is in the way the story is told through the emotions of its principal characters. It needs reading more than once in order to be able to fully enjoy and understand it. There is no happy conclusion; in fact, it does not really have any ending at all.

Considering the bleakness of their domestic situation, the reader can understand why Quentin is driven to find love where she can, in the same way that her mother Caddy was, leading to the disastrous effects on the lives of her three brothers.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

This section of the book is extremely difficult to understand because severely mentally retarded Benjy relates it, and his recollections move from one period of his life to another without any organization or sequence, in a confusion of memories. It is further complicated because there are two characters named Quentin, one male and one female, and two Jasons, one the father and the other the son.

The opening scene is on the day of his thirty-third birthday in April 1928. Through the fence, he is watching golfers on the course adjacent to his garden and following their progress along the fence. When one of the golfers calls "Here, caddie," Benjy starts moaning.

Luster, his companion, and the grandson of the family's cook Dilsey, tells him to stop moaning, reminding him that he had been all the way to town to buy Benjy a birthday cake. Luster is only concerned with finding a quarter that he has lost, because he needs it to go to the traveling show that evening. Benjy continues moaning, and Luster threatens that unless he stops, he will not have a birthday cake. Luster will eat all the cake and the candles. All he wants to do is find his lost quarter, and maybe some lost golf-balls. They climb through a broken place in the fence and Benjy is snagged on a nail.

This triggers a memory for Benjy. It was two days before Christmas, and he wanted to go outside. Versh, the black servant who looked after him and his mother Caroline told him to stop crying, that it was too cold to go out, but Uncle Maury said the cold would not hurt him. Benjy's mother said that if he did not behave he would have to go to the kitchen, but Versh said that Mammy (Dilsey) did not want anybody in the kitchen because she was too busy. Uncle Maury persuaded Caroline to let the boy go out, saying she should not worry so much about him.

Caroline moaned that Benjy was a judgment on her, and Uncle Maury offered to make her a toddy. Benjy continued moaning, and his mother told him to hush, that they were trying to get him out as quickly as they could. Versh dressed Benjy in his overshoes and coat, and as they left the room, Benjy noticed Uncle Maury returning a bottle to the sideboard. Uncle Maury told Versh to keep Benjy outside for about half an hour, and to stay in the yard. Versh said Ben was never allowed out of the yard. Outside it was very cold. Versh told Benjy to put his hands in his pockets. Benjy's hands were so cold that he could not feel the gate he was holding, but he could smell the cold.

Benjy's sister Caddy came home from school and greeted Benjy, rubbing his cold hands and asking why Versh had let them get cold. Benjy tried to talk to Caddy something, but she could not understand him. She took his hand and led him into the house, where Uncle Maury was putting a bottle back into the sideboard. Caddy told Benjy that Christmas would be the day after tomorrow. Caroline complained that Benjy must not come into the house wearing overshoes. Versh took off Benjy's coat and overshoes.

Caddy wanted to go outside again and to take Benjy. Her mother said it was getting colder, but Uncle Maury said that she has been in school all day and needed some fresh air. Caddy said Benjy would cry if he could not go with her, and her mother asked if she had deliberately mentioned it in front of him just to give him a reason to worry her more. She said how she dreaded Christmas- how she wished for the sake of her husband and children that she was a stronger woman. Uncle Maury sent Caddy and Benjy to play, and told their mother not to let the children upset her.

As Caddy took Benjy to the door their mother pointed out that Benjy was not wearing his overshoes, and that Caddy must think for Benjy. Caddy and Benjy went back out, and to Benjy, Caddy smelled like trees.

Back in the present, Luster tells Benjy to stop moaning and slobbering.

Benjy's thoughts move to a time when Dilsey had put him into the carriage, and TP was holding the reins. Dilsey remarked that the carriage was falling to bits and she did not know why Jason did not get a new one. Benjy's mother had come out of the house wearing a veil and carrying some flowers. She asked where Roskus was, and Dilsey replied that Roskus was unwell and TP would drive the carriage. Mrs. Compson complained that one of the servants should be able to drive her one day a week, and said that she asked for little enough. She said she was frightened to be driven in the carriage by a baby, and Dilsey replied that TP was 18 years old and quite capable of driving them. Mrs. Compson said that if something dreadful happened to herself and Benjy, it would be for the best. Dilsey told TP that he was to drive carefully; otherwise, Roskus would punish him. Benjy was moaning, and his mother told him to stop, but he could not stop until Dilsey gave him a flower. Mrs. Compson began to worry about leaving Quentin in the house, and asked TP to turn the carriage around, but they kept going.

When they met Jason, his mother told him they were going to the cemetery and she wished Jason would come with her. He replied that she had nothing to fear from Father and Quentin. She started to weep, and Jason told her to stop before she made Benjy cry. He told his mother that Uncle Maury wanted 50 dollars from her, and asked what she wanted to do about it. She said she did not care, and that she would soon be dead. On the way to the cemetery Benjy's memories returned to when he had gone outside with Caddy, and she had given him a letter to hold from Uncle Maury to be delivered to Mrs. Patterson, that nobody was to see. It was a secret that even Mother, Father and Mr. Patterson must not know. When they reached Mrs. Patterson's house Caddy took the letter from Benjy and gave it to Mrs. Patterson.

Benjy has remembered another time when he had taken Uncle Maury's letter to Mrs. Patterson and she had shouted at him, saying he should never have been sent on his own. Mr. Patterson ran towards them with a hoe and snatched the letter before Mrs. Patterson could get it, and Benjy had seen anger in Mrs. Patterson's eyes.

Benjy is back again with Luster, and they are down at the river where people are washing clothes. Luster tells Benjy to stay away from them and play with some flowers, and then asks if anybody has seen his lost quarter, and he fools around with the other people there, talking about the show that night. They find a golf ball in the water, and hide it as a golfer comes in sight searching for it. He asks if they have seen his ball, but they deny it, and as he walks away, he calls "caddie," making Benjy moan again. Somebody asks why he is moaning, and Luster replies that he does not know, Benjy does that sometimes, and it is probably because today is his birthday. He threatens to whip Benjy if he does not stop moaning, and says he cannot go after the golfers. He takes off Benjy's shoes and rolls up his trousers, telling him to play in the water.

As Benjy gets into the water, his mind returns to a time when he was with Caddy down at the river, and her dress was wet. Their brother Quentin was there too and Versh told Caddy her mother would whip her for getting her dress wet. Caddy ordered Versh to take her dress off, and she and Quentin played in the water, splashing each other and Versh. Their brother Jason was also playing in the water, a little further upstream. Benjy heard Caddy saying that if she were whipped she would run away, and that made Benjy cry. Caddy promised him she would not run away. Her backside was wet and muddy from playing in the river.

Roskus called the children back to the house, and as they walked along arguing, Caddy ordered Roskus to "carry Maury up the hill." Roskus lifted Benjy on to his back.

Benjy thoughts switch to another time, when Quentin and TP were fighting outside a barn and Benjy was having trouble standing up; the ground kept sloping up and Quentin had to hold his arm. The barn went away and then came back. TP was laughing and Quentin was fighting him. TP said that he and Benjy had been drinking "sassprilluh" at the wedding. Benjy stood on a box and through the window, he saw Caddy wearing a wedding veil.

His mind returns to the time when the children had been playing in the river. When they returned to their house, their father was waiting for them. He lifted Benjy up, and told the children that they could eat in the kitchen and must be quiet, because they had company. The children went into the kitchen and their father told Dilsey to keep them as quiet as possible. Caddy asked her father if she could be in charge of the other children, and he agreed. Caddy asked Dilsey why they had to be quiet, and Dilsey replied that they would know in the Lord's time. They could hear their mother crying, which upset Benjy. He cried too, and Caddy comforted him.

Benjy remembers being with TP and watching Roskus milking the cows, and Roskus telling TP that he was losing the use his right hand, and TP would have to take over the milking. TP asked why Roskus did not see the doctor, and Roskus replied that a doctor could not do any good there, because "there's no luck on this place." He referred to Benjy being the sign of bad luck for 15 years and said there have been two incidents, and there would be a third. Later Roskus mentioned the family's bad luck again, and said it was no wonder there was bad luck in a place when they would not speak the name of one of their own children. Dilsey told him to be quiet before he made Benjy cry. Dilsey put Benjy to bed with Luster, placing a piece of wood between them so that Benjy would not hurt Luster.

Benjy recalls seeing his dead father passing in a hearse, and then Caddy climbing a tree to see what was happening inside the house where their grandmother was ill. His mind moves between the funeral of his father, the death of Roskus and the death of his grandmother. Benjy can smell death. His memory of his grandmother's funeral, where Caddy climbed the tree to look in, exposing her muddy drawers, is mixed with his memory of standing on a box watching Caddy's wedding. Caddy had flowers in her hair and wore a long veil like shining wind.

Benjy's memory returns to the time when Caddy had come home and he sensed something about her had changed and she no longer smelled of trees. She was wearing scent. Benjy kept crying and Caddy tried to pacify him, giving him the bottle of scent and telling him to give it to Dilsey. Dilsey said Benjy was old enough to sleep on his

own, in Uncle Maury's room, but Benjy kept crying until Caddy climbed into the bed with him, between the cover and the blanket, keeping on her bathrobe.

Then he remembers Caddy on a swing in the garden with a boyfriend. That made him cry. He tried to pull Caddy away by her dress, and Caddy told him it was just Charlie. She told Benjy to hush, and Charlie to go away. Charlie wanted Benjy to be taken away, but Caddy left Charlie and took Benjy into the house, where she scrubbed her mouth at the kitchen sink and promised that she would not ever leave Benjy.

He is once again looking at the swing, and this time it is Quentin who is in it with a man with a red tie. She is angry with Luster for letting Benjy see her in the swing. The man lights a match and puts it in his mouth, and then offers it to Benjy who goes to put it in his mouth. Quentin angrily brushes the match to the ground, saying that if Benjy gets started he will bellow all day.

Luster asks the man for a quarter, or whether he would like to buy a golf ball, but the man refuses both. Luster gives the ball to Benjy, and the man takes it from him, giving it back when Benjy cries and asking who had come to see Quentin the previous night. Luster says he does not know, but that men come every night when Quentin climbs down the tree outside her room.

Luster takes Benjy along the fence, and Benjy remembers standing looking through the gate, listening to TP telling him that Caddy had gone away, got married and gone away for good. Benjy believes that if he keeps waiting at the gate Caddy will come back. He remembers watching schoolgirls passing with their satchels, and trying to talk to them, but frightening them instead. He had opened the gate and caught one of the girls, who screamed as he tried to talk to her.

Luster tries to sell the golf ball to a golfer who comes near the fence, but the golfer takes the ball and will not pay for it. Benjy cries as the golfer moves away.

Benjy has two flowers in a bottle. Luster takes them from him and makes him cry, telling Benjy that when his mother dies, Benjy will be sent to an asylum. Benjy cries and Luster torments him by shouting "Caddy, Caddy." Dilsey calls out to know what Luster is doing to make Benjy cry, and tells him not to let Benjy bother Quentin.

Benjy remembers sitting by the fire when he was five, and hearing Caddy telling Dilsey that their mother had changed his name from Maury to Benjamin, a name from the bible.

Dilsey lights the thirty-three candles on Benjy's birthday cake, which she has bought for him with her own money. Luster blows out the candles and makes Benjy cry. Benjy burns his hand on the fire, and Dilsey puts soda on his hand and wraps it in a bandage. His mother hears Benjy crying and comes to the kitchen to ask why they cannot keep him quiet, and why they have to disturb her, a sick woman. She asks if Benjy has had his cake, and Dilsey tells her that she bought a cake from the store. Mrs. Compson asks if Dilsey wants to poison Benjy with a cheap store cake. Dilsey tells her to go back upstairs and lay down, and says Benjy will be all right very soon. His mother says she expects they will do something else to him to make him cry again, but that she will soon be dead and they will be better off without her. Dilsey tells Luster to take Benjy to the library. They give him a slipper to hold which comforts him.

He remembers seeing his mother ill in bed, with a cloth on her head, and hearing her complain that his father and Caddy spoiled Benjy too much. She insisted he must be called Benjamin, and not a vulgar nickname. When she held Benjy she took away the cushion he was holding, which made him cry. She said he must learn to do without it; but he would not stop crying, so Caddy gave it back. Caddy and Jason fought because Jason had destroyed all the dolls that she and Benjy had made. Their father whipped Jason.

Jason comes into the kitchen to ask why Benjy is making a noise, telling Luster that he must keep him quiet because they cannot all lock themselves away like their mother. He asks if he is expected to work all day and come home at night to a madhouse.

Dilsey calls Quentin to supper. As they sit down to eat, Luster asks Jason for two bits so he can go to the circus that evening. Jason refuses, although he has two free tickets. He burns them both. Jason reminds Quentin of what he will do to her if he sees her with the man from the show.

Benjy remembers his brother Quentin being in a fight, and his father asking who won. Quentin replied that it was not much of a fight; the teachers had stopped it. His father asked what it was about, and Quentin replied it was not anything.

Quentin says Benjy should be sent to the asylum. She asks how anybody can be expected to live in a house like that, and Jason replies that if she does not like it, she can get out. She says she will. She complains that with Benjy having the dirty old slipper on the table, it's like eating with a pig, and she accuses Jason of sending Benjy out to spy on her and threatens to run away. Jason tells her to go ahead. Dilsey comforts Quentin, saying Jason should be ashamed of himself.

Benjy remembers being in the library where he could look at the mirror and the fire and cushion. His father held Caddy, Jason and Benjy on his lap and said they must be quiet because Quentin was studying and their mother was sick. Jason's eyes were swollen from crying.

After supper, Luster puts Benjy to bed and Mrs. Compson kisses him on the forehead, telling Luster to ask Dilsey if she objects to her having a hot water bottle. If so, she will try to get along without it. As Benjy gets undressed he looks down at himself and cries, and Luster says there is no point in crying, because they are gone, and if Benjy keeps behaving like that, he will not have any more birthdays. He calls Benjy to the window and they watch Quentin climbing from her bedroom window and going across the garden.

Benjy's mind takes him to the time when the children had played in the river. Quentin lay in one bed with his face turned to the wall, and Jason was next to him. Dilsey undressed Caddy, scolding her for having wet clothes and muddy drawers. Caddy said

that their mother and their grandmother Damuddy were both sick. She put her hand on Maury (Benjy) and told him to hush. Their father came into the room and kissed the children. Caddy asked if their mother was very sick, and he replied that she was not. He asked Caddy if she was going to take good care of Maury, and she said she would. Their father stood in the doorway of the bedroom looking at them. When he went out Caddy held Benjy, and he fell asleep.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Caddy is the center of Benjy's tragic life. As a young girl she gives him the maternal care that he lacks from his mother, and promises she will never leave him. His alcoholic father is kindly but distant. Quentin is introverted, and Jason unkind and uncaring. Dilsey mothers Benjy like all the other children, but it's only Caddy who understands him and gives him a sense of security. After her pregnancy and marriage, she goes away, and Benjy stands at the fence watching and listening to the golfers, hearing them shout "caddie" and believing his sister will come back. It is a terrible cruelty that the family home should be located right beside the golf course and thus Benjy is doomed to suffer constantly. Luster, the black boy who looks after him is impatient with Benjy when he cries, not understanding the significance of the golfers in Benjy's world. He has no sympathy for Benjy, who is condemned to a life of longing and waiting for his sister.

Benjy has no comprehension of time, and all his memories mingle and swirl together, triggered by small events. Although his understanding is limited, he senses things by smell. He can smell death, and he can smell the change in Caddy from when she is an innocent girl and smells like trees, to when she has lost her virginity and no longer smells of trees. He remembers seeing Caddy playing in the river and getting her drawers dirty, symbolizing her future promiscuity.

The reader knows nothing about the physical appearance of the characters and world in which Benjy lives, because he only experiences life through fragmented memories and sensations. We are aware of his overwhelming loneliness and misery as he longs

for Caddy, and his need for orderliness and routine. Simple, familiar things comfort him — a bottle with a couple of weeds in it, the mirror on the wall, a cushion and an old slipper that he cuddles.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Quentin relates this section on the day of his suicide on a June day in 1910. He wakes in his room at Harvard, between seven and eight o'clock, hearing the ticking of his grandfather's watch which was given to him by his father, "not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it."

Quentin is obsessed with time and trying to hide from it. He turns his watch face down on the dresser, but from the sun's rays coming through the shutter he can tell the time, so he turns his back to them, and listens to his friend Shreve moving around in the room next door. As soon as he cannot see the time, he begins to wonder what time it is.

Shreve appears in the room and asks if he is ready, and says he should get dressed quickly so he does not miss class. Quentin tells Shreve to go ahead, he will catch up. He watches students in the courtyard below hurrying to chapel. He watches Spoade, who has called him "Shreve's wife," implying that he's homosexual because he isn't interested in whores. His father has told him that all women are immoral, that it's in their nature, which is entirely against Quentin's image of women as pure and virtuous.

A sparrow watches him from the window ledge, first from one eye, and then from the other. The clock strikes while the bird stares at Quentin; as the last chime dies, the bird flies away and the chime vibrates on the air for a long time.

He thinks about the significance of Hell, and telling his father that he had committed incest with his sister Caddy and that it was he who was responsible for her pregnancy, not Dalton Ames. His father had not believed him.

Quentin smashes the glass of his watch on the dresser, and breaks off the hands, but the watch keeps ticking. He packs his clothes into a trunk, which he then locks, and puts the key in an enveloped addressed to his father, and puts his books on a table in the sitting room. The clock chimes the quarter hour, and he listens until the chimes cease, then washes and shaves. He writes two notes and puts them in envelopes.

His mind returns to Caddy's wedding in April, when she came running from the house holding her train over her arm, with her veil swirling, clutching her dress and running to where Benjy was bellowing.

Quentin meets up with Shreve, who asks why he is dressed in a suit, as if he is going to a wedding or a funeral, or as if it was Sunday. He replies that he does not think the police will arrest him for wearing a new suit.

Quentin goes to have breakfast, as the half hour chimes. He stamps the envelopes and posts one to his father. The other is addressed to Shreve. After breakfast, he buys himself a good cigar, which he smokes for a moment before going to a jeweler's shop to ask about having his watch repaired. He tells the jeweler he had accidentally knocked it off the dresser and stepped on it. The jeweler says he could mend it that afternoon, but Quentin says he will bring it back. He tells the jewelers he has forgotten his glasses, and asks which of the watches in the window are right, but tells him not to say what the time is, just whether any of them are right. The jeweler asks him what he is celebrating, because the boat race is not until the following week. Quentin replies that it is a private celebration, a birthday.

He leaves the shop and the ticking noise, but in his pocket, his broken watch still ticks. He goes to a hardware store and buys two six-pound flat irons because "they would look like a pair of shoes wrapped up." He wanders around, riding on a bus and then going to the river where he watches a schooner going under the bridge, and sees his classmate Gerald Bland rowing on the river with his mother dressed in furs driving along beside him in a hired car. He describes Gerald's curly yellow hair and violet eyes, and his eyelashes and New York clothes.

He thinks back to Caddy being with Dalton Ames, and he asked why she did not bring him to the house instead of behaving like a nigger woman in the fields and woods and ditches. Later he was introduced to wealthy banker Herbert Head, who was going to marry Caddy, and would be a big brother to Quentin. Herbert had given Caddy a car, and promised Jason a job in the bank. Caroline Compson has written and told Quentin that Jason would make a splendid banker because he is the only one of her children with any practical sense, as he takes after her and not his father's family. The family had sold their pasture to fund Quentin's studies at Harvard.

As he wanders around, Quentin's thoughts become increasingly confused, focusing on Caddy and her wanton behavior. He meets the Deacon, a black man who waits for the trains at the beginning of term and befriends the students from the South, and gives him the note for Shreve, telling him to deliver it the next day.

Later he meets Shreve again and tells him that he will not be studying until tomorrow. Shreve asks what he is carrying, pointing to the flat irons, and Quentin says it is a pair of shoes he had taken to be repaired. Shreve mentions that a letter came for Quentin that morning, but Quentin is not interested.

Quentin remembers hearing his mother telling his father that she would like to go away with Jason, the only one of her children that she loves. She says that it was bad enough having Benjamin, he was sufficient punishment, but that her daughter should bring such shame on her. She said she looked at Jason every day dreading to see any sign of Compson blood in him, while his sister was slipping out to see men and corrupt the family honor.

He recalls talking with Herbert Head, who told him he had been jealous when Caddy talked about Quentin, because he had not realized that she was talking about her brother, and it had sounded as if she was talking about the only man in the world. Quentin refused his offer of a cigar, and said that he was not going to tell his parents something that he knew about Herbert, inferring that Herbert had been caught cheating at cards. Herbert brushed it aside and said that he wanted to be Quentin's friend and

help him as he was going to help Jason. Quentin rejected his offer and said he would tell Candace about Herbert's cheating.

Despite Quentin's provocation, Herbert refused to fight with him. Caddy came into the room and said she wanted to talk to Quentin, so Herbert left them alone. Caddy told Quentin not to interfere in her life. She had a fever and told Quentin she was sick, but that once she was married to Herbert Head everything would be all right, and she begged Quentin to take care of Benjy and not to let him be sent to the asylum. He promised. He asked Caddy how many men she had slept with, and she said she did not know, but too many. She did not know who the father of the child she was carrying was. She told Quentin not to touch her, but to look after Benjy and their father. Versh had told Quentin about a man who castrated himself with a razor.

Quentin continues walking aimlessly, and finds himself back beside the river where three young boys are fishing near a huge trout. The boys tell Quentin that a store in Boston offers a twenty-five dollar reward for anybody catching the trout, and they discuss what they would do if they won the money. They no longer try to catch the fish, but instead watch the people from Boston who come and try.

He walks on towards town, remembering trying to persuade Caddy not to marry Herbert, telling her that he was a cheat at cards, and asking her to think of Benjy and her father, if not of him. Caddy asked what else she could do. She could not even cry, and she felt as if she had died. Quentin asked her to go away with him and Benjy to somewhere nobody knew them, using the money from the sale of the pasture. Caddy said he must go to Harvard, because otherwise the sale of the pasture would have been for nothing. She believed her father would be dead in a year unless he stopped drinking, and he could not do so because of her behavior. When he died, Benjy would be sent to the asylum.

At the town he goes into a bakery where there is a small dirty Italian child standing by the counter. The woman serving in the bakery tries to chase the child away, but Quentin buys her some bread, and the woman gives her a misshapen cake. The child

cannot speak English, and Quentin feels he must try to find her home. He walks around with her, asking her where she lives, but she is unable to talk to him. He tries to leave her but she follows him, and although he keeps asking people if they know where she belongs, nobody does. Eventually he runs away, fast, giving the little girl a coin and leaving her standing outside a house.

Alone again he recalls asking Caddy why she had let a boy kiss her, and she replied she had not let him; she had made him. Quentin slapped her face and they argued and fought over Caddy's behavior.

The little Italian girl appears again, and as Quentin walks along with her trying to find her home, he's attacked by the girl's brother and arrested by the sheriff for stealing the little girl. Instead of defending himself and explaining that he is trying to find her family, he only laughs at the thought that anybody could suspect him, of all people, of planning to harm a small girl. As he is being taken to the court Shreve, Gerald and Mrs. Bland arrive and persuade the court to release Quentin after he has paid a six-dollar fine. Mrs. Bland said that the incident would never have happened if Quentin had read her note inviting him to a picnic. They all get into Mrs. Bland's car with two girls.

Quentin remembers telling Caddy that he would claim to be the father of her child; he will say he had forced her, and Caddy's honor would be intact. He can only think of Caddy and her behavior, of his jealousy of her lovers and his obsession with her. He remembers fighting with Dalton Ames, and planning to shoot him, but Ames disarmed him and fired the gun into the river. Hearing the shot Caddy came to see if Quentin was harmed. He asked her if she loved Ames, and she held his hand against her throat so that every time he said the name Dalton Ames he felt the blood beating in her throat against his hands.

He becomes aware of his face feeling cold and dead and his eye and finger, which he had cut on his watch that morning, are smarting. Shreve comes up to him with a basin of water, and he tries to see his reflection in it. Shreve says he needs a steak on his

eye, and Quentin asks him whether he had hurt his opponent. He tries wiping blood off his clothing. He does not know what he has done, but his Shreve and Spoade tell him he had attacked Gerald, who had boxed the hell out of him. Quentin says he feels fine; he is only concerned with the blood on his clothes. When asked why he attacked Gerald, Quentin replies that he does not know. Spoade tells him that Quentin had suddenly jumped up and asked Gerald if he had a sister, and when he replied no, Quentin hit him. Shreve said that Gerald had been boasting as usual about women and how he'd made a date with a girl in Atlanta and had stood her up and gone to bed, thinking about how she'd be waiting for him to give her what she wanted, and how all women could do was to lay on their backs.

Spoade and Shreve try to persuade Quentin to return to the picnic, but Quentin says he cannot go with his clothes bloodied, and that he will see them the next day, and asks them to apologize to Mrs. Bland for spoiling the party. He catches a trolley and travels through the twilight, thinking about the smell of honeysuckle, "the saddest smell of all" which to him symbolizes Caddy's promiscuity. He remembers turning off the light and trying to go to sleep, and the honeysuckle coming in and building up in waves until he was panting for breath and had to get up. He also recalls the wisteria the children used to play under when they were small.

When it rained the smell of the wisteria began to come into the house at twilight. Now he can smell the curves of the river and see the lights coming on. He thinks of Benjy, and about the nature of Negroes who laugh when white people see nothing to laugh at, and bet on anything, even the numbers of people who will go to a funeral. The trolley crosses the river, and Quentin gets off and goes back to his room where he finds Mrs. Bland's letter which he tears up. When he has cleaned the blood off his clothes with gasoline, he hangs them beneath a light bulb to help them dry. He washes his face and hands and brushes his hair, listening to the sound of the clock chiming the quarter hour, the half hour and the three quarters, his thoughts become increasingly frantic and confused. As the last chime stops vibrating Quentin dresses himself, and puts a letter to Shreve into his pocket. He puts his broken watch into Shreve's drawer, takes a fresh handkerchief and turns off the light. After brushing his teeth, he squeezes the brush

dry and puts it back in his bag.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Only slightly less disjointed than Benjy's, his account is still fractured and punctuated by reminiscences. Like his brother Benjy, the focus of Quentin's life is his sister Caddy. He places her upon a pedestal as the epitome of virtuous womanhood. He wants to keep her pure, he wants to keep her for himself and as she develops sexually and shows her wanton nature, Quentin is tortured by desire to possess her and equally desire for her to remain pure. He has unrealistic expectations of his sister, and he fantasizes about her. On several occasions when he discusses her behavior with her, they end up lying close together or wrestling. He shares his mother's self-obsession, only aware of himself and how Caddy's behavior affects him, with no thought for her own feelings and needs. His "confession" to his father of having slept with Caddy could also be to hide possible homosexual tendencies. At Harvard, Spode refers to Quentin's friend Shreve as his husband. He is also obsessed with time, and wants to stop it.

He is an introverted character who does not share the strong characteristics of Caddy or Jason, a weak romantic and a loser who never has the courage to carry through any of his plans successfully. He decides to confront Dalton Ames for seducing Caddy and force him to leave town, but when Ames hands him a gun he does not use it, striking out ineffectively with his fists and being overcome by Ames. He loses consciousness and wakes to find Ames asking him if he is all right. He asks whether Ames hit him, and Ames replies that he has, but later Quentin realizes that isn't true, that Ames had only said so in order not to humiliate him, and that he had simply "passed out like a girl."

He suggests a suicide pact to Caddy and although she agrees, he is unable to carry it out. His jealousy of Herbert Head leads him tell Caddy that Herbert is a blackguard who's been found cheating at cards and cheating in his school exams.

When he is accused of kidnapping the little Italian girl and, instead of defending himself he is amused at the thought that he could be suspected of anything like that, leaving it to his friends to speak for him. When he strikes out at Gerald, he ends up being given a beating.

He broke his promise to Caddy that he would take care of Benjy, and his final act of weakness is to drown himself in the river, using the six-pound flat irons to weigh himself down, as he has already drowned himself in despair and weighed himself down with self-pity.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The narrator here is Jason, a racist, misogynist and sadist, but at least his section of the book is told in sequence and the reader is finally able to get an understanding of events.

"Once a bitch always a bitch," is the opening phrase of this section. Jason and his mother are discussing Quentin, Caddy's illegitimate daughter, who lives with them. Jason complains that she is up in her bedroom painting her face when she should be in the kitchen having her breakfast, and Caroline Compson is worried about what the school authorities will think of her if Quentin does not go to school. She says that Jason should see her on the streets, because he is in town all day, and he responds that what Quentin is doing is something she is not doing in public. Mrs. Compson begins to cry, saying that all her family except for Jason has been a curse to her.

Sarcastically Jason replies that he had never had time to drink himself into the ground, or go to Harvard, but if his mother wants him to follow Quentin round all day he'll give up his job and work at night, so he can follow her around in the day, and Benjy can watch her at night. Mrs. Compson continues crying, saying she knows she is a burden. He says that if she wants him to control Quentin she must let him get on with it and not interfere when he tries to discipline her.

Mrs. Compson reminds him that Quentin is his own flesh and blood, and he replies that that is what he is thinking of – flesh and a little blood. And if people behave like niggers, they have to be treated like niggers.

Mrs. Compson says she is afraid he'll lose his temper with Quentin, and he replies that her way has not worked, and she must make up her mind whether or not she wants him to do it his way. He goes downstairs and finds Quentin in the kitchen asking

Dilsey for another cup of coffee, but Dilsey refuses, saying that one cup of coffee is sufficient for a seventeen-year old girl, and telling her to get dressed for school.

Jason summons her, and Quentin asks defiantly what he wants her for. He grabs her arm; Dilsey warns him not to hurt Quentin, who says she will slap him if he does not release her. Jason keeps hold of her and she lashes out at him. He grabs her hands and drags her into the dining room, her kimono nearly coming off. Dilsey tries to follow but he kicks the door shut in her face. Jason asks Quentin why she is missing school and lying and worrying her grandmother. She tells him it is none of his business. Dilsey tries to come into the room again, but Jason tells her to get out, and demands that Quentin tell him what she does when she's not at school, whether she's going into the woods "with those dam slick-headed jellybeans." She swears at him and he pulls off his belt, and is stopped from beating her by Dilsey and the arrival of his mother. Quentin tells Dilsey that she wants her mother, but when Dilsey tries to comfort her, she pushes her away and runs upstairs, past Mrs. Compson, ignoring her calls. Dilsey tells Mrs. Compson to go back to bed.

Jason gets the car out, and asks why Luster has not changed the tire on the back. Luster says he has to watch Benjy until Dilsey has finished her work in the kitchen. Jason says he feeds a whole kitchen full of niggers to look after Benjy but that if he wants a tire changed he has to do it himself. Benjy starts crying and slobbering, and Jason angrily tells Luster to take him round the back so people cannot see him. It was bad enough on Sundays when Benjy kept running up and down the fence watching the golfers and crying.

He decides not to put the tire on the car himself, and Quentin gets in. Jason asks her where the books are that he paid for last September, and she replies that it's her mother who buys her books and clothes, and that she would not take anything from Jason. If she thought he had paid for her clothes she would rip them up. She starts to try to tear her dress, and people in the street are watching. Jason is so furious that for a minute he was blind with rage. He says he will make her sorry if she ever does anything like that again, and she says she is already sorry, and wishes she had never been born.

He drops her at school and warns her what will happen if she does not behave and goes around acting like a nigger wench. Quentin replies that she does not care, she is bad and she is going to hell, and she would rather be in hell than anywhere Jason was.

Jason goes to his job at the store, not caring if his boss Earl notices he is late. He finds a letter from Caddy with a check in it. He takes the check, remarking that it's six days late, just like a woman, trying to make men think they can conduct business. Caddy wants to know why she has not had an answer to her letters to Quentin, and says unless she hears from him she will come there to see for herself. She says she knows that Jason is opening the letters.

Jason puts the letter away and goes to try to get the black employee to work, saying that the niggers should be left to starve for a couple of years to make them appreciate what an easy life they have. Then he gets talking to somebody in the street about speculating in cotton, and the hard work involved in growing a crop all for the benefit of a bunch of dam eastern Jews. Not that he has anything against the Jewish religion, he adds, in case the man he is talking to is Jewish. The man says he is American. Jason says he has nothing against a man's religion, but he resents the Jews who sit in New York manipulating the stock market.

At ten o'clock, he goes to the telegraph office to check his shares, and he sends a telegram to Caddy saying "All well. Q writing today." He tells the operator to send it collect. The operator wonders if it is a coded message about buying shares.

Back at the store, Jason reads a letter from his mistress Lorraine, a whore in Memphis, saying that she misses him, her "sweet daddy." He gave her 40 dollars last time he saw her, and he says he never tells a woman anything, because the only way to manage them is to keep them guessing, and if you can't think of any other surprise for them, punch them on the jaw. He rips up the letter and burns it. He never keeps a piece of paper from a woman, and he never writes to them. He has told Lorraine she can write to him sometimes in a plain envelope, but if she ever telephones him, Memphis will not be big enough to hold her.

There are crowds of people in town because of the circus that night, and Jason is kept busy serving people in the store. Bitterly he thinks to himself that he had not had the advantage of going to university where they teach you "to go for a swim at night without knowing how to swim," a reference to Quentin's suicide. He says Benjy could be sent to the Navy, or the cavalry where "they use geldings," a reference to Benjy's castration after frightening the girl at the gate. He says that instead of him going north to his job, the job has been sent to him, referring to Caddy's baby. When his mother started crying he said he would stay at home and look after the baby if she and Dilsey would go to work to provide for the family, or rent Benjy out to a sideshow.

His mother said thank God he was a Compson, because he was all she had left now that his father had died, him and Uncle Maury. They had gone downstairs and seen Uncle Maury coming out of the dining room with a handkerchief to his mouth. They'd all climbed into the carriage to go to Jason Compson's funeral, and Jason realized that Uncle Maury had been chewing cloves to mask the alcohol on his breath. Jason thinks that instead of selling the pasture to send Quentin to Harvard they would have been better off selling the sideboard (where their father kept his drink) and buying him a one-armed strait jacket. Jason Senior had brought Caddy's baby home one month before his death, and would not tell anybody where Caddy was or what she was doing, but saying Herbert would not let her have a penny. When Dilsey and Jason Junior brought the cradle down from the attic Mrs. Compson would not allow it to be put in Caddy's old room, saying the atmosphere would contaminate the child. She said the baby must never hear her mother's name spoken, and forbade Dilsey ever to mention Caddy. Unless they promised never to speak Caddy's name, she would send the baby away. Dilsey remarked that Jason Senior looked sick, and told him to get into bed and she would bring him a toddy. Mrs. Compson said Dilsey should not encourage him to drink, because that is what was killing him, and that although she suffered she did not resort to whisky.

Jason Senior said that there was no point in getting a doctor, because all they did was advise you to do what you were not doing. During the night, Jason Junior heard his father repeatedly going to the sideboard. At his father's funeral, Uncle Maury wore

expensive gloves that the family had the bill for, and Jason saw Uncle Maury drinking behind one of the gravestones. His mother cried as the grave was filled in, so Uncle Maury drove away with her, leaving Jason to get a lift back home. Jason felt strange as his father's grave was filled in, and then he saw Caddy there. They shook hands, and Caddy said she had only found out about her father's death from a notice in the newspaper. He told Caddy not to think of coming back, that her name was not mentioned in the house, and that she would be better off buried like her brother and father. She said that she knew that, and offered Jason fifty dollars if he would let her see her daughter. She raised it to one hundred dollars and said she would leave town as soon as she had seen her baby, and he asked her to give him the money first. She did not trust him, but as he turned to walk away she gave him the money, and he told her where to wait. He took the baby to the agreed place but only let Caddy catch a glimpse of her through the window as they shot past her "like a steam engine."

Jason wanted to punish Caddy for losing him the job promised by Herbert. The next morning Caddy had come to the store where he worked and confronted him, before cursing him and leaving.

After she had gone, Jason was glad that he had hurt her for depriving him of the job. Then he thinks that Caddy might get around Dilsey, and that Uncle Maury would do anything for ten dollars. So he told Dilsey that Caddy had leprosy and if she looks at her, Benjy, or Quentin they would catch it too. But Dilsey let Caddy see the baby and when Jason came home, Benjy was bellowing and had to be pacified with the slipper that he cuddled. Jason realized that Caddy had been there, and told Dilsey that the next time she would get the sack. He told Caddy that if she tried it again, Dilsey would be sacked and Benjy would be sent to the asylum. Caddy offered him one thousand dollars to let her get Quentin back, and Jason said he knew how she would get the money the same way she got Quentin. Caddy pleaded with him to take care of Quentin, and said that she would send extra checks to buy Quentin nice things. Jason takes the money that Caddy sends for Quentin and keeps it for himself, and he also steals the money she sends to her mother for Quentin's upkeep. Mrs. Compson burns the checks, but Jason has already cashed them and replaced them with forgeries.

Quentin does not come home for lunch. While he is eating dinner with his mother, he can hear Benjy being fed in the kitchen and says the family would be better off if they sent Benjy to the asylum where people could not see him running up and down at the fence lowing like a cow. He says his mother should send Benjy to the asylum and get some benefit out of the taxes they pay. Mrs. Compson says she will soon be dead, and Jason replies that as soon as she is gone he will send Ben away.

He shows his mother a long-winded letter from Uncle Maury asking to borrow money but asking Jason not to tell his mother. He asks his mother what she wants to do about it, and she says she knows Jason begrudges her giving money to her brother. She asks if Earl's business is safe, because Jason tells her his pay is six days late. Jason replies that he tells Earl not to bother paying him until he has collected all the outstanding payments for the month. His mother says she is going to talk to Earl, because Jason has a one thousand dollar investment in the business, but Jason tells her not to get involved because he does not want her to know that the money she gave him to invest in the business he had spent on a car.

When he goes back to the telegraph office, he finds that his investments have gone down further, and blames it on Quentin coming to him and asking for her money.

He gets back to work late, and tells Earl he has been to the dentist. Earl replies that he had expected Jason back earlier, and Jason says if he does not like the way he is, then he knows what to do. Earl tells him that he only keeps him on because he is sorry for Jason's mother, and that he knows the thousand dollars that Mrs. Compson gave Jason to invest in the business was spent on a car instead. Earl says he realizes Jason didn't have the same chance as Quentin, but that if Mrs. Compson came asking about the money he'd have to tell her, because he wasn't prepared to lie for anybody.

Jason asks himself how he's expected to do anything right, with his dam family, his mother not making any effort to control Quentin, and how she went round dressed in black because she'd seen a boy kissing Caddy and saying her daughter was dead. What about Quentin running around with any man she can find, and getting a reputation as a

hot one? He has a kitchen full of niggers to feed and a lunatic to care for.

He sees Quentin in the street with the man with a red tie, and follows her, not wearing a hat and thinking people will say he is crazy to be out without a hat, crazy like the rest of the family – one lunatic, one suicide, one turned out by her husband. How his mother would not allow Caddy's name to be mentioned, and his father sitting drinking himself to death.

Jason gets headaches from the smell of gasoline, but when he sees Quentin and the man with the red tie driving past in a Ford, he gets in his car and chases them across barren farmland. Everybody has gone to town to see the show. He finds the Ford abandoned, and hunts through the woods and bushes to find them, getting his clothes in a mess. After stumbling about trying to find them, he hears a car engine start, and the car hooting as they drive away. He runs back to his car and finds they have let down the tires. He borrows a pump, inflates the tires and drives back to town, to find a telegram telling him to sell his stock because the market is going down. But it's too late, because the market has closed for the day. Once again, Quentin's behavior has lost him money.

Earl gives him two tickets for the circus. When he gets home Luster tells him that Dilsey is upstairs with his mother, keeping her and Quentin from fighting, and Luster asks Jason to give him a quarter so he can go to the show. Jason refuses, but offers to sell him a ticket. Luster says he does not have any money, so Jason burns both tickets. Dilsey tells Luster she will give him money to go to the circus.

During the evening meal, Quentin asks her grandmother why Jason treats her so badly. She asks why if he does not want her, he will not let her go back to her mother. She says that if she is bad, it is because Jason made her so. She wishes they were all dead, and runs up the stairs slamming the door into her room.

Mrs. Compson says she thinks Quentin has inherited the bad traits of her mother and her uncle Quentin. She says that Caddy and Quentin made trouble between her and her

husband, and that they deliberately shut her out of their lives and conspired against her. She locks Quentin into her room at night and sees the light on as late as eleven o'clock some nights. She believes Quentin is studying in her room.

Jason goes upstairs to his room and counts the money he has stolen from Quentin and locked in his strong box. He can hear Benjy, "the Great American Gelding," snoring in the next room. He thinks Ben should have been sent to the asylum after he was castrated. He thinks that if he could just get sufficient money, he would move away.

Chapter 3 Analysis

While Jason is an unlikable character, he is still as much a victim of his family circumstances as his siblings. Unlike his brother Quentin, he did not have the opportunity of a university education; his sister's disgrace deprived him of the good banking job he had been promised by Herbert, and despite his elevated social background, he is reduced to working in a small agricultural store in town. It is no surprise that he is bitter. Unlike his three siblings, Jason alone is still trapped in the stifling atmosphere of the family home, which the other three have escaped from in their own ways. Only Jason is left to contend with his whining and miserable mother, the financial demands of his tiresome uncle, his difficult and rebellious niece, his retarded brother and the upkeep of the servants. He has had to endure the scandals of Ben's handicap, Caddy's shame, his brother's suicide and his father's alcoholism. Although he is his mother's favorite child, she gives him no more love than she gave to the other children, and she lets Uncle Maury get hold of her money.

If he is a misogynist, he has every justification: his mother has done nothing for him; his sister has ruined his prospects, and her niece will not accept his role as her guardian. The reader wonders what it is that keeps Jason at home. With the money he has stolen over the years he could presumably have left and started a new life elsewhere without the demands of the family, but he has stayed and in his own way tried to shoulder his responsibilities as the man of the family.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

This chapter is related in the third person, and is the first time that the reader sees any descriptions. Dilsey steps out of her cabin into a gray and chilly morning; beneath her best clothing, her body is shapeless and tired. She goes back into the cabin and emerges wearing her working clothes, a man's felt hat and an army overcoat. From the kitchen she takes an umbrella, and goes to the woodpile to collect logs for the fire. Mrs. Compson calls her from the top of the stairs, and keeps calling her in a repetitive and monotonous way. She is holding out a hot water bottle for Dilsey to fill. Dilsey says she will fill the bottle as soon as she has boiled some water. Mrs. Compson complains that she has been lying awake for at least an hour and has not heard any sound from the kitchen. Dilsey tells her to get back into bed, and hauls herself painfully up the stairs. Mrs. Compson says she thought that perhaps Dilsey expected her to light the fire herself, and Dilsey explains that Luster has overslept after his visit to the show the previous evening, and that she is going to light the fire herself. Mrs. Compson says that if Dilsey lets Luster behave as he wants, then it is her fault. She listens irritably as Dilsey makes her slow way down the stairs.

Dilsey calls to Luster and is surprised to see him coming from the cellar. When she asks what he is doing there, he replies that he is not doing anything, and Dilsey tells him to bring in more wood for the fire and to get Benjy dressed. Dilsey sings as she prepares the food and the fire starts to heat the room, and then she hears Mrs. Compson calling again. Mrs. Compson is standing at the head of the stairs again, calling Dilsey's name with machinelike regularity. Dilsey says she is bringing the hot water bottle, but Mrs. Compson complains that Benjy is making a noise and disturbing Jason on the one day of the week that he did not have to go to work.

Dilsey says she sent Luster to dress Benjy half an hour ago, but again she says she will come up and dress him and take him down to the kitchen so he cannot disturb Jason

and Quentin. Mrs. Compson asks her if she is not going to make breakfast, reminding her that Jason hates it when breakfast is late. Dilsey says she will do that too, but that she can only do one thing at a time. After she has dragged herself up the stairs, Mrs. Compson asks if she is going to wake Benjy up just to dress him. Dilsey is surprised to learn that Benjy has not woken yet.

Dilsey laboriously makes her way back downstairs, and puts on her overcoat and goes outside to look for Luster, sending him to collect more wood and then to get Benjy up and dressed. Back in the kitchen, she starts cooking and singing again. The one-handed cabinet clock on the wall above a cupboard struck five times. "Eight o'clock," Dilsey says.

Luster comes into the kitchen with Ben, who is shapeless, with hairless skin and pale fine hair brushed smoothly down. His eyes are cornflower blue, and he drools from his thick, open mouth. She asks if he is cold, and feels his hand. Luster replies that it is always cold at Easter, and that Mrs. Compson has said if it is too much trouble to get her a hot water bottle, not to bother. Dilsey fills the bottle and gives it to Luster to take up, while Benjy sits quietly in a chair, still except for his continually bobbing head as he watches Dilsey.

Luster comes back into the kitchen and says Jason is awake, and angry. Dilsey asks why he is angry and Luster replies that Jason has accused him and Benjy of breaking his bedroom window by throwing rocks at it. Luster assures Dilsey that he did not break the window. Benjy gets excited when he sees his food, and Luster feeds him, but Luster's mind is not on what he is doing. His fingers are tapping on the back of the chair.

Dilsey rings a small bell and Mrs. Compson and Jason come down the stairs, arguing about the broken window. Jason asks where Quentin is, and Dilsey replies that Sunday is the one day of the week that Quentin can stay in bed. Jason insists that Dilsey makes Quentin come down for breakfast. Mrs. Compson reminds Jason that she has given Dilsey permission to go to the special Easter service, and Jason says that will mean

they will have a cold dinner. They hear Dilsey climbing the stairs slowly, and then calling Quentin. They listen as she calls at the door, but there is no answer from Quentin. Jason and his mother listen. Jason pushes back his chair and rushes upstairs, demanding that his mother gives him the key to Quentin's room from the huge bunch of rusted keys on an iron ring like a medieval jailer's that she carries. She resists but he snatches it from her, pushing her aside with his elbow and calling her an old fool. He opens the room and they all go in and find Quentin's bed has not been slept in. The window is open next to the pear tree that grows close against the house. Mrs. Compson is convinced that Quentin has committed suicide, and searches for a note.

Jason goes to his room and finds his strongbox broken open, and all his stolen money gone. He phones the sheriff to report a robbery, and demands that they send somebody to the house. They refuse and say he will have to go down to the office. He rushes out of the house.

Luster wonders what has been happening, and Benjy starts whimpering and drooling. Luster tells him to hush up, but Ben only moans and bellows louder, sensing that some disaster has taken place. Dilsey asks what Luster has done to upset him. Luster says Jason has scared Benjy, and Dilsey tells him to take Benjy outside and keep him out of the house, because she has had all she can take. Luster says he and Benjy have seen Quentin climbing out of her bedroom window every night, but it was not their business to tell anybody.

After Dilsey has cleared away the breakfast things and eaten her breakfast, she dresses in her best clothes again. She finds Luster trying to make music from a saw, as he has seen somebody do at the circus the night before. Benjy wails again, a sound "that might have been all time and injustice and sorrow become vocal for an instant by a conjunction of planets."

Dilsey sends Luster for Benjy's cap, saying Benjy can smell the trouble that is in the air. She tries to sooth him, stroking his head. She is sure it is going to rain, and tells Luster to either wear his old hat, or carry an umbrella, and when she meets her

daughter Frony who is wearing a new dress, she asks her what she will do if it rains. Frony says she guesses she will get wet, because she has not ever been able to stop rain. She tells Dilsey that a preacher has come from St Louis, and she wishes Dilsey would not take Benjy to church because it made people talk. Dilsey says that trash white folks think Benjy is not good enough for the white church, but that he is too good for the nigger church, but the good Lord did not mind if Benjy was simple. As they walk through the streets to the church, the Negro children dare each other to touch Benjy.

Dilsey is disappointed when she sees the visiting preacher, because he looks like a small old monkey, and he speaks in a white man's voice. Then he begins talking like a black man, and when he preaches the resurrection, the congregation is entranced; Benjy listens in silent rapture, and Dilsey has tears running down her face. Leaving the church with the tears still on her face, she says that she has seen the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

When they get back to the house Benjy starts whimpering again, and Dilsey tells Luster to keep him away from the house while she prepares the food. She finds Mrs. Compson still in bed with the shutters closed and asking where Jason is, and whether Dilsey has found Quentin's suicide note. She says like uncle, like niece, it is in the blood. Quentin is either like her uncle, or like her mother: she does not know which is worse, and she does not care. She asks why Quentin (her son) killed himself if not just to hurt her.

Dilsey returns to the kitchen, where the clock strikes ten times. "One o'clock," says Dilsey. She keeps repeating that she has seen the first and the last, and that Jason will not be coming home. As she prepares the food, she sings a hymn. Benjy feeds himself because he can manage solid food.

After Jason leaves the house, he rushes to the sheriff's office to make the sheriff chase off in pursuit of Quentin and the man with the red tie. The sheriff tries to pacify him, and as Jason tells him about the missing money, the sheriff watches him with cold

shiny eyes, and says that Jason does not know that it was Quentin who stole his money. He asks why Jason had three thousand dollars in the house and whether his mother knew about it, and Jason replies it is none of his business: his business is to recover the money. He says that Quentin is the cause of him losing his job at the bank, killing his father and shortening his mother's life. The sheriff says it's Jason's behavior that made Quentin run away, and unless Jason has proof of Quentin's guilt, he isn't going to do anything.

Jason sets off furiously in his car towards Mottson where the traveling show will be held that night, and in his mind plans revenge on the sheriff. His head begins to ache and he searches for a handkerchief soaked in camphor, debating whether to return home for one, or to drive on without much hope of finding camphor on Sunday. If he returns home, he will lose an hour and a half. He thinks that maybe if he drives slowly and thinks of something else, his headache will go away. He thinks of his mistress Lorraine, but then he is overwhelmed by the thought that it is Quentin who has humiliated him. It would not be so bad if it were a man. He plans to take Quentin and the man with the red tie by surprise and get the money back so that nobody would know Quentin had robbed him. At Mottson, he finds the circus, climbs into a trailer and threatens an old man to tell him where they are. They struggle and Jason hits the old man on the head, and the old man chases him with a hatchet. Jason thinks he is about to die, and for a moment he wishes it to be over, but immediately a furious desire not to die comes over him and he struggles with the old man. Other people arrive, drag him away and tell him to leave before the old man kills him. The circus owner says he had chased Quentin and the man with the red tie away because he runs a respectable troupe.

Jason goes back to his car and drives around trying to find a drugstore where he can buy camphor, without success. He finds a Negro to drive him to Jefferson. At home, Luster and Benjy are finishing eating, and Dilsey sends them outside. Luster tries to make the saw make music. Benjy begins to whimper and Luster threatens to whip him. He sees that Benjy is crying because the weed in his glass bottle has died, and Luster teases him by taking the bottle away and making Benjy cry even more. He takes Benjy

to watch the golfers, and when they call out for a caddie Benjy clings to the fence watching the golfers moving away and sobbing. Luster torments him even more by whispering "Caddy, Caddy, Caddy." Dilsey hears Benjy's wailing and asks what Luster has done to him. Luster replies that he has not done anything, and that it is the golfers who upset Benjy.

Benjy is inconsolable, and Dilsey takes him to her cabin and holds him, sending Luster to get a white satin slipper that pacifies Benjy slightly. His cry is "the hopeless sound of all voiceless misery under the sun."

Dilsey asks where TP is, and Luster replies that he had gone to St John's, so Dilsey tells Luster he must drive the carriage and take Benjy to the graveyard. She helps Benjy into the carriage, but he is still moaning so Luster goes and gets a flower for him. The stalk is broken, and Luster makes a splint for it and gives it to Benjy. Dilsey tells Luster to drive carefully and that if he hurts Benjy she does not know what she will do. As Luster drives the carriage towards the graveyard Benjy stops crying and sits serenely with the flower in his hand. At the square Luster sees Jason's car parked. Luster drives the carriage to the left of the monument, and after a moment of silence Benjy begins to bellow with horror, mounting to a crescendo of shock and agony. Luster does not know what to do. Jason leaps across the square and hits Luster, and drives the carriage to the right of the monument, hitting Luster again and hitting Benjy and breaking the flower. He screams at Benjy to shut up, and shouts at Luster for driving to the left of the monument, instead of the right.

Benjy keeps roaring until the carriage takes the route he knows, and then he gets quiet and sits peacefully, with the broken flower in his hand and his eyes serene.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The Sound and the Fury closes without ending. Nothing is resolved, and it leaves many unanswered questions. The three most significant emotions in this section are Dilsey's joy at the sermon, Jason's impotent rage and Benjy's terrible unbearable

anguish.

The significance of Dilsey's seeing the beginning and the end is not clear. It could be the beginning and end of the Compson family, or her own death which she believes is approaching "I be His'n too, fo long, praise Jesus." Amongst all the characters, she is the only one who is selfless; despite her age and weariness and aching bones, she uncomplainingly ministers to the demands of Mrs. Compson, struggling up and downstairs to satisfy her selfish whims. She defends Quentin against Jason's bullying and mothers Benjy. She devotes herself to the welfare and happiness of those around her, and despite her hardships is able to sing as she works.

During the fight with the old man, for one brief moment Jason welcomes death "Hurry. Hurry. Get it over with." Then his instinct for survival takes over, and he returns to his home deprived once again, of the money he had been hoarding. In the square when he sees the carriage being driven in the wrong direction he recognizes that as the cause of Benjy's terror, showing that he is aware of Benjy's need for things to be done in the correct order.

Benjy's eternal misery, as he yearns for Caddy, is almost too painful to read. The only solace he can find is in an old shoe of Caddy's, or a weed in a bottle. As long as his sad life follows routine he can endure, but any minor deviation, or the sound of the golfers plunges him into the depths of utter despair. The broken flower symbolizes his own fragility.

The fact that the book ends at this point makes its impact all the stronger, leaving the reader with a powerful image of the hopelessness of Jason and Benjy's situations, and questions such as what will happen to Benjy when his mother dies? What became of Quentin? Would she ever be reunited with her mother? How did Caddy get money, and what happened to her? Why didn't she marry Dalton Ames? Why did she send Quentin to live with her mother anyway, and why wasn't she allowed to have her back? What would Jason do?

The only member of the family who is entirely satisfied with life is Mrs. Compson, whose sole interest is in herself. She relishes any misfortunes that come her way because she can use them to direct sympathy to herself. She has no sympathy for her children, seeing their personal tragedies only as crosses that she has to bear. Her proclaimed devotion to Jason is only because he is the one person left whom she can try to manipulate. All her children are deprived: deprived of her attention; Benjy is deprived of Caddy, the only thing he loves; Quentin deprived of his ideals that are embodied by Caddy; Caddy driven to seek love and attention outside the family; Jason deprived of his future. Despite her breeding as a refined Southern lady, she has no personal strength and no virtues. It is the black cook Dilsey who has all the desirable qualities that she lacks. But why did Mrs. Compson agree to have Quentin? Was it her behavior that drove her husband to alcoholism? Was it Benjy's affliction that made her a hypochondriac, or was she always like that?

The abrupt ending and the unanswered questions make the story all the more powerful, leaving a haunting picture of two brothers locked into a bleak and uncertain future.

Characters

Dalton Ames

One of Caddy's lovers who may have made her pregnant. In his monologue, Caddy's brother Quentin remembers his failed confrontation with Dalton Ames over Caddy and tries to deny Ames's role in Caddy's life.

Sheriff Anse

Jason tries to get the sheriff to help him catch his niece Quentin after she robs him and runs away from home. The sheriff refuses to help him, saying he figures the money was probably not Jason's to begin with.

Maury L. Bascomb

Mrs. Compson's brother and an uncle to the Compson children. Benjy is named after Uncle Maury when he is born, but Mrs. Compson changes his name to Benjamin when she learns he is retarded. Uncle Maury appears in Benjy's monologue, humoring his sister's complaints. In Jason's story, Uncle Maury is shown borrowing yet another sum of money from his sister in order to pursue a dubious business deal. In his "Appendix: Compson 1699-1945," Faulkner describes Maury as a "handsome flashing swaggering workless bachelor who borrowed money from almost anyone."

Gerald Bland

One of Quentin's acquaintances at Harvard. He is spoiled by his indulgent mother, who puts on parties for him and allows him a car. When Gerald begins boasting of his success with women, a distracted Quentin tries to punch him. Gerald is a boxer,

however, and blooms Quentin without damage to himself.

Charlie

One of Caddy's boyfriends. He appears as a memory in Benjy's section. Charlie IS obviously trying to make out with Caddy and she is pushing him away because Benjy is with her.

Benjamin Compson

Benjy is the youngest of the Compson brothers. He had originally been named after his uncle Maury, but when the Compsons discover that he is retarded, they change his name to Benjamin. The first section of the book, "April Seventh, 1928," is Benjy's monologue. Benjy sees the world in terms of sights and sounds, and his narration reflects this emphasis. At the time of this section, Benjy is thirty-three years old, making him the same age as Jesus was when he was crucified. His brother Jason has despised him since childhood, when he destroyed the paper dolls Benjy and Caddy made. As head of the family, Jason has Benjy castrated when he makes advances to a young girl. After their mother dies, Jason has Benjy put into a mental hospital.

Benjy loves his sister Caddy, and his monologue mainly consists of memories of her. Caddy treats him with love and affection, unlike his mother Caroline, a complaining, dependent woman who treats him as a shameful nuisance. Benjy has never recovered from Caddy's leaving the family after her pregnancy. His thoughts reflect this loss, and his memories focus on Caddy's budding sexuality as if he knows this was the cause of her exile. His positive memories of his sister include her "smelling like trees," and his sad ones relate his bellowing whenever she shows signs of womanhood-putting on perfume or sitting with a boyfriend. At the conclusion of the novel, Benjy hears a golfer call for his "caddie" and bellows his grief once again: "it was horror; shock; agony eyeless, tongueless; just sound." Benjy can be seen as a personification of innocence in the novel.

Caddy Compson

Caddy is the central character of the novel, even though none of the narration is seen through her eyes. In each of the three sections that represent the internal monologues of her brothers, she is of primary concern to them. The reader learns about Caddy through each of her brothers. They are all involved with her, but each in a different way. To a large extent, the brothers' characters are formed around their responses to Caddy. Benjy and Quentin love her in two distinct ways. Jason despises her as he does everything and everyone else. Caddy is the most normal of the Compson children. As the novel progresses and the pieces of her life unfold, she is seen as a young girl. She is loving in her relationships to Benjy and Quentin, but she also matures and has boyfriends. When Caddy becomes pregnant by one of them (perhaps Dalton Ames), she does the socially correct thing and marries another man, Herbert Head, who will be able to provide financially for her and her child. After her husband learns that her daughter is not his child, he turns her out. Caddy leaves her daughter, whom she has named after her dead brother Quentin, with the Compsons. She leaves the Compson home but sends money to support her daughter. In his "Appendix: Compson 1699-1945," Faulkner describes how Caddy travelled to Mexico and Paris after a second divorce and was never heard from again. According to the author, Caddy was "doomed and knew it, accepted the doom without either seeking it or fleeing it."

Candace Compson

See Caddy Compson

Mrs. Carolyn Bascomb Compson

The mother of Benjy, Jason, Quentin, and Caddy. Mrs. Compson is depicted as a negligent mother. She is a self-absorbed hypochondriac and spends a great deal of time in bed. She does not show any maternal feelings for her children. Their care and

nurturing are left mostly to Dilsey, the Compson's African-American housekeeper.

Jason Compson III

The father of Quentin, Jason, Benjy, and Caddy. Mr. Compson is a retired lawyer and has become an alcoholic. He is already dead at the time of the novel in 1928, and is shown in flashback during Benjy's and Jason's narrations. His deterioration accelerates after losing his oldest son Quentin to suicide and his daughter Caddy to marriage. He also loses much of his social position, because he has had to sell the last of his inherited estate in order to pay for Caddy's wedding and Quentin's tuition to Harvard. In his conversations with his children, especially Quentin, Mr. Compson is shown as cynical.

Jason Compson IV

The middle son of the Compson family. After his brother Quentin's suicide and the death of his father, Jason is the head of the family. Throughout the novel Jason is shown as a cold-blooded person. Mrs. Compson, however, sees him as the only one of her children with any common sense, in his "Appendix: Compson 1699-1945," Faulkner describes him as "the first sane Compson since before Culloden and (a childless bachelor) hence the last." Jason does seem attached to the real world more than his other siblings. He sees the necessity of succeeding in society, which he translates as the need to make money. Because of his rationality, the only person he fears and respects is Dilsey, the family's black housekeeper--"his sworn enemy since birth."

Jason is embittered by whatever seems to get in his way. He resents his parents for sending his brother Quentin to Harvard and seems eaten up by jealousy. He is angry with his sister Caddy because he believes her promiscuity caused her divorce and thus his chances of getting a job in her husband's bank. When Caddy leaves her daughter Quentin with the Compsons after her divorce, he schemes to keep the money Caddy

sends for Quentin's support for himself. He further takes revenge by preventing Caddy from seeing her daughter, even briefly, and by treating the girl spitefully and with contempt. When his niece Quentin attempts to assert herself, Jason reacts cruelly and angrily. He finds her behavior a reflection of Caddy's actions, which he believed caused his present unhappy state. Quentin finally rebels and steals Jason's money and runs away--not just the \$4000 he swindled from her but an additional \$2800 in his own savings besides. Jason is beside himself and tries to find her and have her arrested. In terms of his anger, Jason is a man out of control, even though he is able to meet the practical demands of making a living. Although he is later seen as a moderately successful businessman, Jason is the final representation of the Compson family's downfall.

Maury Compson

See Benjamm Compson

Quentin Compson

The eldest son of the Compsons. Quentin's monologue, the second section of the book, takes place on June 2, 1910, while he is a student at Harvard. It is the day Quentin decides to commit suicide and the whole monologue details the events of this day and the events that led up to his decision to take his life. Faulkner's themes of family pride and the changes wrought on an individual over time are played out in Quentin's character. He cannot stand the changes that have taken place in his relationship with his sister Caddy, for whom he has incestuous feelings. He is devastated when she reaches sexual maturity and obsesses over her relationships with men. But as Faulkner writes in his "Appendix' Compson 1699-1945," Quentin loves "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 maidenhead."

The notion that Quentin's preoccupation with an outdated ideal of family "honor" has been much commented on by critics. The loss of the innocence that Quentin witnesses in Caddy's "fall" is something that he finds intolerable. He cannot accept his father's reassurances that in time his pain "will no longer hurt like this now," for that would make his pain meaningless. Unable to adjust, seeing no other alternative, Quentin commits suicide. As the child for whom the Compson parents sacrificed so much, his death is a terrible loss to the family, His death is also symbolic of the feeling of meaninglessness of life for the Compson family, particularly for Mr. Compson, who uses alcohol to blunt his sense of purposelessness.

Damuddy

The Compson children's grandmother. In his narration, Benjy recalls the day of her funeral, when Caddy climbs up a tree to peer in a window while her brothers and Dilsey's children watch her muddy underpants.

Deacon

An African-American porter at the train station near Harvard who hires himself out to Southern students he meets at the station. He has been "guide mentor and friend to unnumbered crops of innocent and lonely freshman," Quentin says. Deacon tells Quentin that "you and me's the same folk, come long and short". This parallels Quentin's observation that "a nigger is not a person so much as a form of behaviour" and that "the best way to take all people, black or white, is to take them for what they think they are."

Earl

Jason's supervisor at the store where he works. He puts up with Jason's lateness and rude talk, even though he suspects Jason of robbing his own mother, because he feels

sorry for Mrs. Compson.

Dilsey Gibson

The Compson housekeeper, who is seen to be the most positive character in the novel. Dilsey is the person who nurtures the Compson children, since both their mother and father are incapable of displaying love and affection. Her service to the family, even as she suffers from arthritis, is in stark contrast to Mrs. Compson's neglect due to imagined illnesses. She is the only character that is able to embrace the meaning of life and accept a sense of family history. Her section is the fourth and final one and takes place on Easter Sunday, a time of resurrection. An inspiring sermon is an important part of the section and both Dilsey and Benjy, whom Dilsey has brought along to church, are spiritually moved. Dilsey's response, unlike Benjy's, is more than an emotional one. She experiences an epiphany--a sudden perception of truth--and tells her children "I seed de beginnin, en now I sees de endin." Some critics have interpreted this as a comment on the fall of the Compson family.

Through what is often called the "Dilsey" section of the novel, the author's point of view is expressed. Faulkner handles this by telling her story through the third person. It is through Dilsey's tireless caring for the elder Compsons and their children that the author expresses his belief in the enduring quality of humanity. She is portrayed as a selfless and realistic person. She understands the behavior of all the children and accepts life in all its aspects because of a faith which flows from Christian love.

Frony Gibson

Dilsey's daughter. When Dilsey, Benjy, and Frony are at church on Easter Sunday, Frony has to speak for her mother when Dilsey refuses to answer some youngsters who ask how she's doing. Frony answers for her out of a sense of common courtesy. Dilsey is shown here to have the capacity to be somewhat scornful of others, a quality that has also been attributed to the author.

Luster Gibson

Dilsey's grandson, whose primary function is as Benjy's caretaker. As Faulkner writes in the "Appendix: Compson 1699-1945," Luster is "a man, aged fourteen" who is "capable of the complete care and security of an idiot twice his age and three times his size." He is with Benjy during the opening scenes of Benjy's monologue. They pass the golf course where Benjy begins to cry upon hearing the word "caddie" called it. This reminds him of his sister Caddy. Luster sometimes teases Benjy, but for the most part he comforts and guides Benjy.

Roskus Gibson

Dilsey's husband. Roskus appears in Benjy's monologue. Benjy sees him milking the cow in the barn. Roskus is critical of the Compsons in many ways. Among other things, he disapproves of their changing Benjy's name after they realized he was retarded.

T. P. Gibson

One of Dilsey's sons, who is beginning to take jobs over from his ailing father Roskus. He appears in Benjy's section struggling to control the horse Queenie when he is told to take the reins. Mrs. Compson is uneasy about his handling the reins also. When Benjy recalls Caddy's wedding, he remembers his brother Quentin hitting young T.P. and knocking him into the pigpen. The good-natured T.P. seems to take it all in fun, and continues his care of Benjy. Later Luster is shown taking over similar tasks from T.P.

Versh Gibson

Another son of Dilsey's. Benjy likes to go to Versh's house for the smell of the fire.

Sydney Herbert Head

Called Herbert, he is Caddy's fiancé and later her husband. He turns Caddy out when he discovers that he is not the father of Miss Quentin. While he is engaged to Caddy, he has a conversation with her brother Quentin about cheating that illustrates Quentin's rigid view of ethics and morality.

Uncle Maury

See Maury L. Bascomb

Miss Quentin

Caddy's daughter, whose father is uncertain but may be Dalton Ames. When Caddy's husband Herbert Head discovers Quentin is not his, he divorces Caddy. The Compsons also disown their disgraced daughter. Unable to support Quentin, Caddy brings her daughter home to be brought up by the Compsons. She leaves but sends support money for her daughter. Jason uses the money to save for himself. When at age seventeen Quentin has had enough of Jason's mistreatment, she steals the money from his strong box--including some of his own savings--and runs away. Jason attempts to pursue her to recover his money. He has nothing but contempt for her, seeing in her a reflection of Caddy, whom he blames for all his troubles.

Reverend Shegog

The guest preacher at the Easter Sunday service Dilsey attends with Frony and Benjy. He is a fiery speaker and moves both Benjy and Dilsey to tears. His appearance, which is small and undistinguished, contrasts sharply with that of the regular preacher at Dilsey's church, who is large and impressive. Rev. Shegog's sermon, which progresses from a cold tone to a rousing, passionate plea, leaves Benjy rapt and Dilsey in tears.

Shreve

Quentin's roommate at Harvard. He is friendly and concerned for Quentin's well-being, so much so that Spode teasingly calls Shreve Quentin's "husband." He is one of the two people for whom Quentin leaves a suicide note.

Spode

One of Quentin's friends at Harvard. He has "cold, quizzical eyes" and teasingly calls Shreve Quentin's "husband." Although he is Quentin's friend, he is puzzled by his behavior.

St. Louis preacher

See Reverend Shegog

Themes

The themes in *The Sound and the Fury* are so closely interwoven with the characters and structure of the novel that it is difficult to separate these elements. In all four sections of the novel, however, time is an important theme that Faulkner develops. The central characters of the four sections each cope with time in a different way. In the first section, Benjy's sense of time is defective. His thoughts move from present to past time without the ability to grasp the real meaning of events. Benjy is free from time because he cannot understand its impact on his feelings. Quentin's efforts to cope with the present are impeded by his memories. He cannot accept the changes in his life that time inevitably brings. His sense of loss over the innocence of his childhood love of Caddy is unbearable. Rather than deal with life's changes over time, he puts an end to time by committing suicide. Jason, on the other hand, lives in time present, around which all his actions flow. By living in time present, Jason reacts to events as they occur, unlike Quentin who acts on time past. In the last section of the book, Dilsey represents another view of time. Hers is a historical view. She embraces all of her life experiences and those of the Compsons with a religious faith about the timelessness of life. Her view most closely reflects the author's viewpoint on time. By having the novel cover four days, each section representing one day, Faulkner is able to use time to give the novel a tight framework.

Pride

Pride is the undoing of the Compson family. The loss of their property and status demoralizes the elder Compsons, Caroline and Jason III, the parents of Benjy, Quentin, Jason, and Caddy. Out of their sense of family pride and their economic and social decline, they turn inward. Mr. Compson turns to alcohol in his sense of loss. Mrs. Compson retreats to her bed and self-pity. Quentin's concern over the family "honor" and how Caddy has shamed the family lead him to kill himself. The younger Jason is racked with pride and it is his undoing. with him it is both pride and jealousy. He feels cheated and feels that he deserves better. Caddy deceived him, he thinks, and

he uses this to justify stealing from her. When Caddy's daughter, Quentin, steals from her uncle, Jason, he is outraged that he has been undone. Faulkner shows the tragic results of pride in the characters of these Compson family members.

Love and Passion

Natural and unnatural love among siblings, love between the sexes, and Christian love are themes that pervade *The Sound and the Fury*. Faulkner shows the love the Compson brothers have for Caddy. Benjy loves the care she gave him when they were young. When he hears the word "caddie" called out on the golf course, he moans because it sounds like her name. He misses her after she leaves home to marry. Benjy's love is the love of an innocent for someone who has shown him affection. Quentin's love for his sister Caddy is an unnatural one. He has incestuous feelings for her. He is jealous of her boyfriends and denies that she has had lovers. He fantasizes an incestuous relationship between them, although Faulkner writes in his "Appendix: Compson 1699-1945" that Quentin "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 forever and keep her forevermore intact amid the eternal fires." Caddy, as she is presented through her brothers' monologues, seems to develop in a natural way. As a child, she shows love toward Benjy and Quentin. As a young woman, she has lovers, becomes pregnant, marries, and leaves home. Christian love is the thematic note on which the book ends. Through Dilsey, Faulkner presents the view of love that springs from religious faith, a love that endures pain and accepts reality.

Sanity and Insanity

The contrast between Benjy and Jason reflects a theme of sanity and insanity in *The Sound and the Fury*. An idiot who does not comprehend reality, Benjy displays a world in chaos through his monologue. Faulkner uses his character to explore the meaninglessness of sensory reactions to sounds, sights, and language. Quentin's

suicide also can be regarded as an act of insanity because it comes from his inability to deal with reality. Mr. Compson's alcoholism can be seen as a slow suicide. It is an unnatural retreat from reality, as is Mrs. Compson's retreat to her bed. The two characters who emerge as sane in the novel are Jason and Dilsey. Dilsey's sanity is rooted in her total acceptance of the realities of life. Jason also deals with the here and now, but his sanity is perverted by his resentments.

Style

Structure

Faulkner has created an unusual structure in *The Sound and the Fury*. The story takes place over a period of four days, each of which is seen through the eyes of a different character. The first part of the book is the monologue of Benjy on April 7, 1928, the day before Easter. The second part of the book belongs to Quentin on the day of his suicide on June 2, 1910. Jason, the son, is the focus of the third section, April 6, 1928, which covers Good Friday, the day before Benjy's monologue. The fourth and final section takes place on Easter Sunday, April 8, 1928. The story is not related by a single individual, but is often referred to as Dilsey's section. In a fragmented way, the story of the Compson family and their tragedy is gradually pieced together. Each section adds bits and pieces of the history of the Compson family. Benjy's account covers a period of twenty-five years. Quentin's story ends earlier than the other two brothers, since he has committed suicide in 1910. In this section the reader learns more about the family's early relationships. Jason's section, the third in the book, reveals more of the dark side of the Compson family. This section echoes the religious events of Christ's betrayal on Good Friday. The betrayal is by young Quentin, who steals money from her Uncle Jason and runs away from home. Dilsey's section, the fourth and last, reveals Faulkner's affirmation of her endearing qualities. It is Dilsey who has cared for and tried to keep the family intact for decades. The final section contains an Easter Sunday service in an African-American church. The church service affirms Dilsey's acceptance of Christian love, an event some critics have interpreted as echoing the resurrection of Christ.

Point of View

By dividing the story into four sections, Faulkner is able to present the Compson story from four separate points of view. As he moves from Benjy's perspective to Quentin's

to Jason's and finally to the voice of an omniscient, third-person narrator, the author presents the story as if it were a patchwork quilt. It is only when all the pieces are finally put together that the reader knows the tragic events of the Compson family and the extent of their decline. While this changing point of view adds to the complexity of the book, it also adds a depth of understanding to the individual characters and their story. Faulkner seemed to understand that if he told the story from only one point of view, he would not be able to delve deeply into the nature and motives for his characters' behavior. When one person tells a story, something is always left out. When many tell a story, it is never quite the same story, but the listener or reader then becomes more involved because he or she must think about it from those different perspectives. This is the effect of reading *The Sound and the Fury*. The first three sections that focus on the Compson brothers also explore their distinct perceptions of their sister Caddy. In this way she also becomes a central character, but only as she is seen by others, never from her point of view. By writing the final section in the third person, Faulkner can present his overview through Dilsey. Her perception of the Compsons and their decline reflects the author's tragic vision of the universal human struggle to find meaning in life.

Interior Monologue

Except in the last section, the narrations of *The Sound and the Fury* are interior monologues. Interior monologues are narratives in which characters' thoughts are revealed in a way that appears to be uncontrolled by the author. The chaotic thoughts of Benjy narrate the first section. He also records what is said around him without understanding it. Quentin's inner voice relates his experiences in the Compson family and details his thoughts and behavior on the day of his suicide. Jason's inner voice relates the third part of the book. By this method, Faulkner lets the reader see the nature of all three characters without describing them. Because we know what these three characters are thinking, they are clearly focused in the novel. Many of the other characters, particularly the Compson parents and Caddy, are less clearly drawn, because we always see them through the eyes of Benjy, Quentin, or Jason. Dilsey's

section is not written as an interior monologue and the reader sees her character from her behavior and her dialogue.

Stream of Consciousness

"Stream of consciousness" writing is designed to give the impression of the ever-changing, spontaneous, and seemingly illogical series of thoughts, emotions, images, and memories that make up real life thought. Faulkner was influenced by the writings of Irish novelist James Joyce, who had developed the use of stream of consciousness in his novel *Ulysses*. Many writers of the period, including Faulkner, were influenced by Joyce's use of this technique. Within some of the interior monologues in *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner uses techniques peculiar to stream of consciousness. An absence of punctuation and capitalization characterizes stream of consciousness, as well as the repetition of words and phrases. Changes in type, such as switching to italics, can also be used effectively to portray changes in thought. While the writing of this book came early in his career, Faulkner showed a mastery of this technique. It has been largely abandoned by contemporary novelists, who still frequently use the interior monologue.

Setting

Although most of the action of *The Sound and the Fury* is communicated through the characters' inner thoughts, their physical situation also plays a significant role in the novel. Faulkner created the fictional Mississippi county of Yoknapatawpha in his third novel, *Sartoris*, and revisited it in many of his subsequent works, including *The Sound and the Fury*. This setting of the South in the 1920s figures very prominently into the character of Quentin. He is holding on to an outdated ideal of the Southern gentleman, one who upholds the family's honor and protects those in his care, especially women. His sister Caddy, who acts according to more liberated standards of behavior, forces him to realize his ideals cannot survive in the modern world. When she becomes pregnant out of wedlock, it is both a stain on the family honor and a sign that Quentin

has failed to protect her. Changing ideas of race relations also figure in Quentin's narrative, which takes place in the Northeast. This contrast in setting causes Quentin to consider the difference in race relations in the North and South. From this difference he gains the insight that "the best way to take all people, black or white, is to take them for what they think they are, then leave them alone."

Historical Context

The Impact of the Civil War on the South

The loss of the Civil War in the nineteenth century had a profound impact on the psyche of the south. The region not only lost the war, but their whole way of life as well. The aristocratic structure of slavery was destroyed when the South lost the war, but many of the social values remained. Whites still controlled the economic and social structure of the region. Blacks, while no longer slaves, were generally under the rule of white society. What evolved over the next hundred years in the South was a society where blacks were legally free, but socially disenfranchised from an equal education and equal economic opportunities. The relationship of the blacks to whites depicted by Faulkner in *The Sound and the Fury* reflects that social and economic divide. The blacks in the novel are servants of the Compsons. Their role as servant is expanded by Faulkner to that of spiritual caretaker, especially as he portrays the "Character of Dilsey.

In conjunction with the South's defeat in the Civil War was the area's lessening economic influence. During the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, industrial and manufacturing businesses came to dominate the U.S. economy. Agriculture, the mainstay of the Southern economy, was less profitable, especially for relatively small family farms. The economic problems of the South can be seen in the way Faulkner portrays the Compsons. Their economic decline spans several generations, each one experiencing a greater decline. By 1910, Jason's father is forced to sell the last of the family's land to pay for Caddy's wedding and Quentin's tuition. Jason, the central character of section three, is left to work in a local store to support the family. He reflects the attitude expressed by President Calvin Coolidge during the prosperity of the 1920s that "the business of America is business." Even during the boom period of the 1920s, the textile industry suffered a depression. As a cotton-producing region, the South was hurt economically. The stock market crash of 1929 came just as *The Sound and the Fury* hit the book market. The Great Depression

that followed in the 1930s made it difficult for Faulkner to succeed economically with his writing.

The "Lost" Generation

A counterpoint to the bleakness that followed the 1929 stock market crash and the depression of the 1930s was the proliferation of artistic accomplishments. No other period in American history had a generation that produced so many important works in literature, music, and the arts. Beginning after World War I and up until World War II, America saw writers like Faulkner, Eugene O'Neill, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Wolfe, Sinclair Lewis, Dashiell Hammett, and Dorothy Parker emerge on the literary scene. Georgia O'Keeffe and Thomas Hart Benton were a few of the American artists who were productive during this period. Theaters on Broadway and other places were alive with new productions and Hollywood was grinding out new dramas and musicals every week. In December 1928 George Gershwin debuted his famous symphonic piece "An American in Paris." The Chicago Civic Opera building opened in 1929 with a 3500-seat auditorium. In popular music, 1929 was the year Guy Lombardo began his New Year's Eve radio broadcast. Songwriter Hoagy Carmichael wrote his famous "Stardust" in 1927, and "Georgia on My Mind" in 1930. America was alive with creativity. It was as if the economic downturn unleashed a volcano of creative energy that had not been seen in this country before--or since. This generation of young creative people has been called "The Lost Generation," for many of their contemporaries were killed during the Great War (World War I), which lasted from 1914 to 1918. The disillusionment inspired by the war led many creative artists to explore what it meant to be American in the modern world, and what it meant to be human.

When Faulkner accepted the Nobel Prize in 1950, he made a speech that became a famous statement of the modern world and the artist's place in it. He spoke of the threat of physical destruction to the human spirit. What he expressed was the prevalent feeling of the Lost Generation that human beings had lost a sense of the meaning of

life. In his speech, he expressed his belief that "man will not merely endure; he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of the past." Old values had been shattered by the events of the first half of the twentieth century. It was not yet apparent what the new values would be.

Critical Overview

Critical reaction to *The Sound and the Fury* was by no means universally favorable when it first appeared in print in 1929. While finding the novel powerful and sincere, Frances Lamont Robbins, writing in *Outlook and Independent* commented that "the theme, dramatic and potentially moving, loses much of its force and clarity by being presented, almost wholly, through subjective analysis. It takes a stronger hand than William Faulkner's to divert the stream of consciousness into channels of perfect usefulness and beauty." In the 1929 book *On William Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury,"* however, Evelyn Scott congratulated the publishers for "presenting a little known writer with the dignity of recognition which his talent deserves." The critic called Faulkner's book "an important contribution to the permanent literature of fiction." "Hardly Worth While" was the title Clifton Fadiman used in his 1930 review in the *Nation*. The main problem with Faulkner's book, Fadiman felt, was that "the intelligent reader can grasp the newer literary anarchies only by an effort of analytical attention so strained that it fatigues and dulls his emotional perception." He did praise Faulkner for his portrayal of Benjy, but ridiculed it as too much of a good thing to listen to "one hundred pages of an imbecile's simplified sense perceptions and monosyllabic gibberings." Fadiman also thought Quentin and Jason were not interesting enough "to follow the ramifications of their minds and memories."

Since its publication, *The Sound and the Fury* has come to be recognized as one of Faulkner's masterpieces. *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *Go Down, Moses* are his other heralded novels. Faulkner has long been considered a major American writer and many critics regard him as the most important American novelist of the twentieth century. Terry Heller, in a 1991 essay in the *Critical Survey of Long Fiction*, wrote that Faulkner "dramatizes in most of his novels some version of the central problem of modern man in the West," which he feels is an uncertainty about the meaning of human history. Linda W. Wagner compared Faulkner to Shakespeare, Dostoevski, Dickens, Milton, and Dante for his moral point of view. Her 1981 essay in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* commends the author for his

inventiveness and vigor. "Faulkner faces the problematic existence of the modern world, and he insists that human beings can surmount those problems," she remarks.

The strongest praise for *The Sound and the Fury* centers around its moral message. In "Worlds in Counterpoint," Olga W. Vickery's 1964 essay, the critic praises Faulkner for his structure, themes, and characterizations. "Out of Dilsey's actions and her participation in the Easter service arise once more the simple verities of human life," writes Vickery. "The splinters of truth presented in the first three sections reverberate [Out] of those same events ... come Dilsey's triumph and her peace, lending significance... to the book as a whole," Vickery concludes. "*The Sound and the Fury* is a moral book," comments Robert J. Griffin in his 1963 essay in *Essays in Modern American Literature*. He continues: "Integral to its structure is the depiction of four distinct ethical points of view.... The novel is definitely a moral book, and ultimately a sort of religious book," Griffin contends. Arthur Mizener called the portrayal of Jason Compson, "Faulkner's finest portrait of a poor white." Continuing in his 1967 essay in *Twelve Great American Novels*, Mizener echoes other critics in his assessment of the novel for being "in a quiet way quite unlike the melodramatic religiosity of much twentieth-century literature." It "is a religious book," asserts Mizener. After Faulkner received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1949, he emerged from a period of obscurity. The Nobel Prize was the first of many other awards and his reputation grew steadily after receiving it. His books have been translated in many other languages. Few writers since William Shakespeare have had so much written about them.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

*In the following essay, Lilburn, a teaching assistant at the University of Western Ontario, analyzes how each of the novel's narrations comes to focus on Caddy Compson. He notes that while a reader of *The Sound and the Fury* can only learn of Caddy through the observations of her family, interpreting her character is central to understanding the novel.*

William Faulkner's fourth novel, *The Sound and the Fury* is a haunting and sometimes bewildering novel that surprises and absorbs the reader each time it is read. The novel was Faulkner's personal favorite and, along with James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* and T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*, is generally thought to be one of the greatest works of literature in English of the twentieth century. *The Sound and the Fury* also signalled the beginning of the "major period" of Faulkner's own literary creativity; four of the five novels that followed--*As I Lay Dying*, *Sanctuary*, *Light in August*, and *Absalom, Absalom!*--are, along with *The Sound and the Fury*, often regarded as the best in Faulkner's oeuvre. Not surprisingly, the novel has received an extraordinary amount of critical analysis, much of which has been devoted to explaining Faulkner's technical experimentations. Critics have also widely discussed Faulkner's treatment of issues such as race, suicide, incest, time, history, and religion. Central to any reading of the novel, however, is the character that Faulkner claimed was his source for the novel--Caddy. Richard Gray has described Caddy as the novel's "absent presence" and each of the four sections as "another attempt to know her." But to the reader, Caddy remains an elusive mystery whose enforced silence prevents her from ever being known. To her three brothers, she is a source of obsession and irritation that cannot be forgotten or overcome.

The Sound and the Fury explores the break down of the familial relationships that lead to the Compson family's tragic deterioration. Few readers would disagree that the family's demise is indeed tragic, but the precise reasons for the downfall are still debated. David Dowling has suggested that the tragedy of the Compsons is that they

are slaves to themselves and to the past. This argument is particularly relevant to the novel's first two sections. Benjy's monologue, for example, is uttered in the present--Easter weekend, 1925--but is mainly comprised of memories from his childhood and adolescence. Most of these memories are connected to his sister, Caddy, whose departure following her marriage to Herbert Head leaves a void in Benjy's life. Because Caddy was the one family member to provide Benjy with the nurturing love that he needed, and because, as Margaret Bauer observes, Mrs. Compson does little else but whine about being punished by God for her family's transgressions, Caddy was more of a mother figure to Benjy than Mrs. Compson was. Through his monologue, which often obscures the boundaries between present and past, Benjy reveals both a deep-seated attachment to a past inhabited by Caddy and a desperate yearning for her return. Like his companion, Luster, who is busy searching for a lost quarter, Benjy, too, hopes to find that which he has lost.

As many critics have noted, Benjy's memories are largely concerned with Caddy's sexuality. His disapproving cries after catching Caddy and Charlie on the swing provide merely one example of his preoccupation with his sister's sexual awakening. It is in the second section, however, that Caddy's sexuality emerges as the central issue of the novel. , Quentin is totally obsessed by the subject and, throughout the morning, afternoon, and evening of June 2, 1910, can think of little else. His relationship with his sister is anticipated by the childhood scene at the branch where Caddy, ignoring Quentin's protests, removes her dress in front of her brothers and Versh. Quentin slaps Caddy, who then falls on her behind and muddies her drawers. This highly symbolic scene prefigures Caddy's future as a so-called "fallen woman" and shows Quentin's futile attempts to protect his sister's honor and body. Some readers also believe that the scene suggests Quentin's implication in his sister's later promiscuity, as well as his own incestuous feelings towards her.

When Caddy reaches sexual maturity, Quentin is still trying to protect her but his attempts are always unsuccessful. Just as he fails to prevent Caddy from taking off her dress at the branch, so he fails later in life when confronting Caddy's lover, Dalton Ames. His final defeat occurs on the afternoon of June 2, 1910, as he is driving with

Mrs. Bland and some friends from school. One of his friends, Gerald Bland, begins "blowing off" about his many women and Quentin, who has just been thinking about the humiliating incident with Caddy's lover, automatically repeats the same question he had asked Dalton: "Did you ever have a sister?" Ironically, the beating Quentin then receives from Gerald occurs just moments after Quentin was himself accused of kidnapping a little girl. The girl's brother, Julio, threatens to kill Quentin, thereby reproducing--and mocking--Quentin's threats against Dalton.

Like Benjy, Quentin is determined to maintain--or rather recapture--some elusive ideal that, in childhood, seemed genuine and permanent. His need to protect his sister stems from an anachronistic sense of honor that derives from what Richard Gray describes as "an authoritative discourse issuing out of some epic past." That discourse, Gray explains, is based on notions of gentility traditionally attached to Southern plantation aristocracy and gives Quentin "an instinctive sense of how life should be." But unfortunately, Quentin's notions of how life should be do not, David Dowling argues, allow women any space between saint and sinner. As Diane Roberts explains, in the South, ideologies were based on hierarchies or oppositions; as a result, a person is defined not by what he or she is, but by what he or she is not. Mrs. Compson, for example, has a very rigid idea of what it means to be a lady: "I was taught that there is no halfway ground that a woman is either a lady or not." In her eyes, Caddy occupies the second half of the virgin/whore pairing and is incontrovertibly a "fallen woman."

Quentin's section has been described as a dialogue, or debate, in which he struggles to determine the validity of these notions of honor and Southern ladyhood. As he wanders through the final day before his suicide, Quentin finds himself caught between his beliefs and the surfacing realization that his beliefs have no foundation. His main problem, Dowling and others have argued, is that he cannot bring himself to accept changes in meaning. He tries to come to terms with his sister's unconventional behavior and marriage to Herbert but the thought, suggested to him by his father, that someday his despair "will no longer hurt [him] like this now" is intolerable to him. To acknowledge such a change would mean that even Caddy "was not quite worth despair." It would mean that the "authoritative discourse" he clings to is not only

outdated, but that it was never more than one fiction among many others. His suicide thus becomes symbolic of both his inability to accept the fluctuating nature of meaning and, as Kevin Railey shows, of the futility of attempting to "assert the power of a displaced class and its fading values" in the South of the twentieth century.

The third section marks a drastic shift in the novel. Whereas Quentin struggles with his inability to renounce the anachronistic values discussed above, and wishes he could maintain the relationship he and Caddy had as children, Jason feels only contempt for his family and his past. He does not mourn Caddy's absence like Benjy does; instead, Jason's thoughts of the past are accompanied by feelings of resentment and rage. The only loss he mourns is that of the job he was promised at Herbert's bank. Jason's pettiness is evident throughout his monologue, but the grudge he bears over this one lost opportunity is unparalleled. He believes that Caddy's promiscuity deprived him of the job because Herbert would not have left her had her daughter, also named Quentin, not been born too early. As a result, he views his niece Quentin as the symbol and joint cause of his present misery and acts out his revenge on Caddy through her. Not coincidentally, Quentin is now about the same age Caddy was at the time of her pregnancy, and Jason's brutal treatment of his niece may have as much to do with her own promiscuity as it does with his desire for revenge

It is evident that Jason enjoys tormenting his niece and will go well out of his way to do so. He spends much of the Easter weekend attempting to foil Quentin's rendezvous with a man from the show and often appears preoccupied by what his niece is wearing. Diane Roberts has argued that this excessive attention paid to the young girl's body and boyfriend suggests "barely concealed desire."

She even describes Jason's treatment of Quentin as "sadistic eroticism." Jason's own words appear to support this interpretation. When his mother, attempting to foster kindness towards her grand-daughter, reminds Jason that the girl is his "own flesh and blood," his response suggests that his brother Quentin may not have been the only family member to harbor incestuous desires. "That's just what I was thinking of--flesh. And a little blood too, if I had my way." Whether or not Jason's desire for revenge is

mingled with a sexual desire for his niece's body shall be left for the reader to decide. What is now finally clear, however, is that the Compson brothers' obsessive pre-occupations with female sexuality play a significant role in the family's downfall. Benjy's disapproving cries and Quentin's psychological turmoil have become open hostility in Jason. His cruel treatment of both Caddy and her daughter in the final two sections provides what is perhaps the best view of the destructive forces operating within the Compson household.

The final section of the novel is often referred to as the "Dilsey section." But while Dilsey is one of the main characters of this section, her story, like Caddy's, is told for her, not by her. Also, much of this section is again devoted to Jason and his mad pursuit of his niece and her money. The result is a jarring contrast between Dilsey's epiphany-like experience at the Easter service and Jason's frustrating failure in Mottson. Richard Gray has noted how, in this section, Jason's pride, rage and isolation are countered by Dilsey and the Easter Day congregation's collective voice and "feelings of spiritual consummation." Other critics, however, have suggested that Dilsey's repeated refrain following the Reverend Shegog's moving sermon refers to the end of the Compson family. "I seed de beginnin, en now I sees de endin," she says, seemingly foreseeing the Compsons' final downfall.

Yet, the exact fate of the Compson family remains unknown at the novel's end. After turning the final page, readers may find themselves looking for something that isn't there, the conspicuously absent "Caddy Section." Although Faulkner did offer some additional information in the Compson Appendix that he wrote to accompany the publication of *The Portable Faulkner* in 1946, the fact remains that Caddy's voice is never heard. Why is Caddy the only Compson sibling who is not given the opportunity to express her own story? Roberts reports that Faulkner thought Caddy "too beautiful and too moving to reduce her to telling what was going on" and felt it would be "more passionate" to represent her through the voices of others. Another explanation might be found by returning to the scene that inspired the novel. When a young Caddy climbed the pear tree to look into the parlor window, she demonstrated courage, adventurousness, and a willingness to defy authority. Her male onlookers, meanwhile,

could merely stand below and watch the muddy seat of her drawers. Is it a coincidence then that, in this novel, Caddy remains imprisoned within the narratives of three brothers whose obsessions and preoccupations reveal that, in a sense, they are all still fixated on those muddy drawers? Certainly, Caddy's unchosen silence signifies more than the desire to make her seem "more passionate."

Source: Jeffrey M. Lilburn, in an essay for *Novels for Students*, Gale, 1998.

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Castille argues that the character of Dilsey is more developed than many critics have seen her. He interprets her actions after hearing the Reverend Shegog's sermon as leading her away from the Compsons and back to her family, a change that reflects the Christian idea of redemption.

The main action of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* occurs during Easter Week, 1928. Because Easter is the holiest event in the Christian calendar, and because the Passion Week serves as the book's main organizing device, many readers have sensed the presence of religious themes in this often opaque work. But over the past five decades, critical interpretations have ranged from Christian spirituality to existential nothingness. While there has been no consensus on the meaning of the novel, Faulkner scholars have agreed over the years that the structure of *The Sound and the Fury* follows the Modernist "mythical method." Much as the *Odyssey* gives form and sequence to Joyce's *Ulysses*, episodes and images from the Christian Holy Week provide an external framework to Faulkner's narrative. Members of the Compson family undergo experiences which rehearse episodes from the last days of Jesus' life. The four sections of the novel form four Compson gospels, which like the biblical originals develop and expand the story they retell. These parallels to the gospel tradition are most insistent during the Sunday church service in the fourth section of *The Sound and the Fury*. By means of his powerful if unorthodox rendition of the Passion narrative, the Reverend Shegog awakens in Dilsey capacities for spiritual renewal. Her visionary Easter experience then rouses her to secular acts of rejection and affirmation.

Dilsey Gibson, the kindly and long-suffering domestic worker at the Compson place, is the major non-Compson character in *The Sound and the Fury*. A long-standing scholarly interpretation is that Dilsey represents a moral norm in the decadent Compson world and her actions set a standard of humane behavior. Opposing such a "religious" reading of the novel is the nihilistic view, in which Dilsey's Christianity is

meaningless or irrelevant. Both approaches tend to regard Dilsey, whether noble or absurd, as static. Few critics of *The Sound and the Fury* see her as a developing character, although some describe her at the end of the novel as more devoted to the Compsons. My view is that the novel's fourth section, as well as the "Appendix: Compson," suggests the opposite--that she turns away from the Compsons after the Easter Sunday service. Her conversion is religious in that the Reverend Shegog's sermon revitalizes her faith in the Christian God. Yet her Easter experience also has practical consequences. Her life changes as she begins to distance herself from the Compsons and to reaffirm her membership in her African-American family.

Although she appears in the novel's first three sections, Dilsey figures most importantly in the fourth chapter--so much so that it is frequently called "Dilsey's section." She wakes to a cold, gray dawn on Sunday and works to warm the tomblike Compson house. It is worth noting that Easter means nothing to the Compsons (although Dilsey leads the retardate Benjy Compson uncomprehending to Sunday service). Her morning chores done, she makes the long walk to church. Dilsey, her daughter Frony, and her grandson Luster follow the wet streets of Jefferson, Mississippi, until the pavement runs out. Then they step down a dirt road to "a weathered church" outside town, where a revivalist minister from St. Louis preaches the Easter sermon. At first they are disappointed with the "shabby" little traveling minister, with his "monkey face" and "monkey body." But when his voice glides from the "level and cold" inflections of a white man into African-American intonations, they respond warmly.

However, the Reverend Shegog's use of Black English to stir his Mississippi congregation apparently has led some readers to underestimate him as a thinker. His Easter sermon is an acknowledged masterpiece of style and showmanship, but it is also impressive for its artistic skill and intellectual understanding of the Christ story. The Reverend Shegog reveals himself in Faulkner's text to be a learned man whose unconventional exegesis combines material from Christian, Hebraic, and Near Eastern sources to reconstruct the Passion narrative. By advancing a renovating vision of the power of life over death, his homily prompts Dilsey to break free from the Compsons

and to renounce her years of resignation and denial.

The Reverend Shegog's sermon is based on the Christian concept of divine love, the mainspring for the redemption of humankind. But at the same time it insists that God's grace and forgiveness are not boundless. When the Last Judgment comes, the Almighty sternly warns, "I aint gwine load down heaven!" God's mercy and the granting of salvation are presented as inherently limited and conditional. This sermon depicts an angry God who denounces those who reject goodness and deny His love. In effect He says, you have murdered my innocent Son; for that, you will be destroyed. God the Father in heaven looks down on the cross on Calvary and cries in fury, "dey done kilt Jesus; dey done kilt my Son!" In punishment for the crucifixion, God drowns the world. "O blind sinner! Breddren, I tells you; Sistuhn, I says to you, when de Lawd did turn His mighty face, say, Aint gwine overload heaven! I can see de widowed God shet His do'; I sees de whelmin flood roll between; I sees de darkness en de death everlastin upon de generations."

As many commentators have shown, and as he insisted, Faulkner knew the Scriptures well; his fiction includes many biblical parallels as well as Christ and Adam figures, such as Joe Christmas or Isaac McCaslin. In *The Sound and the Fury* the Reverend Shegog does not merely repeat the well-known events of the Easter story. Instead, he refashions the details of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to develop a mythological pattern consistent with the Passion narrative.

The most significant of these scriptural rearrangements occurs when the Reverend Shegog places the destruction of the world by water *after* the crucifixion of Christ. When Jesus dies on Calvary, His Father sends down global ruin in the form of a flood, an audacious reworking of the Noahflood story from Hebrew Scripture. Then, amid total devastation caused by the scourging waters, there arises the promise of renewal in the figure of the risen Christ. The millennium arrives all of a sudden at the darkest hour:

"Den, lo' Breddren' Yes, breddren' Whut I see? Whut I see, O sinner? I sees de resurrection en de light, sees de meek Jesus saying Dey kilt Me dat ye shall live again, I died dat dem whut sees en believes shall never die. Breddren, O breddren! I sees de doom crack en hears de golden horns shoutin down de glory, en de arisen dead whut got de blood and de ricklickshun of de Lamb!"

In a dramatic departure from creedal orthodoxy, the Reverend Shegog's sermon abruptly asserts the power of life (the resurrection of Jesus) precisely at the moment when the power of death seems all-engulfing (the destruction of the world by flood after the crucifixion). While this account revises the orthodox Passion narrative, it has a mythic or poetic logic which recalls the classical literary form of the elegy. In "a rebound as sudden as that in 'Lycidas,' [the Reverend Shegog] makes the typical elegiac turn from universal despair to universal comfort and joy" [according to Richard P. Adams in *Faulkner: Myth and Motion*]. Tills ancient pre-Christian parabola of death and resurrection gives the Reverend Shegog's sermon its formal structure: borrowing from elegiac tradition, the Reverend Shegog alternates death images (such as the total darkness caused by the flood) with rebirth images (such as the breaking dawn heralded by the resurrected Jesus).

In addition to form, his resounding sermon recalls pre-Christian religious ritual and belief, which Faulkner had studied in the twenties... In *The Golden Bough* [James] Frazer documents that the Christian Easter story is not unique in world religion. Instead, it draws upon the widespread Near Eastern springtime practice of worshipping "dying and reviving gods," from which the elegiac poetic tradition springs....

My point is that Frazer's theory of mythology and his comparative approach to religion seem to inform Faulkner's technique in section four of *The Sound and the Fury*. In the Reverend Shegog's sermon, Faulkner employs the idiomatic language of twentieth-century Southern Afro-Christianity, which he knew first-hand, to dramatize anew the ancient mystery of springtime resurrection, which he read about in Frazer.

Consistent with nature cult imagery, the Reverend Shegog's sermon portrays the Holy Land before the redemption as a dark estate, steeped in misery. The suffering falls hardest on mothers and children. The Reverend Shegog depicts a terrified Mary as she tries to shield her baby Jesus from the Roman death squads: "Mary jump up, sees de sojer face: We gwine to kill , We gwine to kill! We gwine to kill yo little Jesus". "Under the nightmare of oppression and deprivation, the country groans with" 'de weepin en de lamentation'" as "'de long, cold years rolls away!'" Then the scene shifts to the evil hour on Calvary. The mourning women keen their "evening lamentations" as the apocalyptic darkness falls and the world sinks beneath the all-destroying flood. But when Jesus rises from the grave on Easter, golden comets on high sound a new anthem of victory and freedom to mark His glorious return to the regenerated earth.

The Reverend Shegog's revisions to the Passion story serve to strengthen its message that God's life-giving love can redeem the past from apparently total defeat. Amid circumstances of overwhelming desolation, the redemptive force of His grace remains a present reality. The pattern of death and rebirth which shapes his rendition of the resurrection implies the immediate possibility of self-transcendence. "I sees it, breddren! I sees hit. Sees de blastin, blindin sight,"shouts the Reverend Shegog. His verbs are all in the present tense, signifying that the past is transfigured and time begins again. Existence is no longer a curse or affliction but a means of revelation and transformation....

In *The Sound and the Fury* [Faulkner] brings his "Passion Week of the heart" metaphor to fulfillment in the Easter service. According to the Reverend Shegog' s sermon, the evil past can be immediately redeemed and all things made new again under the auspices of the resurrection of Jesus. That is, the mystery of rebirth calls upon us personally to rise up from deep hurt and hopelessness and to start over. But for those who lack vision in spring, who shut their eyes and harden their hearts, no salvation is possible.

The Reverend Shegog's jarring retelling of the Passion narrative, with its double emphasis on the power and the limits of love, leaves Dilsey profoundly moved. As

light falls through the "dingy windows" of the church, she sits bolt upright, awed by a great sense of discovery, and cries unashamedly. There is no evidence that anyone else is deeply affected by the homily, although it is well received by the congregation. Frony is embarrassed by her mother's open emotionalism; she has not herself been touched. "Whyn't you quit dat, mammy?" she hisses, "Wid all dese people lookin." Luster is plainly unmoved. As the crowd drifts away, nothing in the text suggests that Dilsey's spiritual awakening is shared. The church goes chat "easily again group to group" on their way home, much as they did before the service. But Dilsey, silent and weeping, has been granted an epiphany. Suddenly, winter has ended. The morning clouds part under "the bright noon" as she proclaims to Frony, "I seed de beginnin, en now I sees de endin," with emphasis on the word *now*. According to the theologian Gabriel Vahanian [in *Wait without Idols*, 1964], Dilsey seems to mean that "the fullness of time is a possibility even within time. Eternity does not 'begin' after time; it happens within time. The resurrection does not take place after one's physical death; it is the only experience by which here and now the human reality can be transfigured, by which man can become that which he is not; it is the possibility of authentic existence."

The consequences of Dilsey's Easter conversion occur in distinct phases. In the first phase Dilsey gives up her long and fruitless effort to "save" the Compsons from themselves. Through her participation in the death and rebirth cycle traced by the Reverend Shegog, she is able to lay her past bare and see it truly. She perceives that the thankless devotion she has given the Compsons has been wasted because no love can reach them. She comes to understand that the Compsons are beyond salvation, beyond even help, because God has turned "His mighty face" and "'shet His do" to them for their cruelty and hatred.

Charged with this revelation, Dilsey immediately evidences a new attitude and purpose. As she and her companions walk home from the church, Dilsey chides her grandson, "You tend to your business en let de white folks tend to deir'n." This reflects a sharp alteration from her previous concern about Compson matters and her long struggle to bind them together. When Luster tries to pique her curiosity with hints

of Miss Quentin's intrigues, Dilsey shows no interest; she no longer wants to know about Miss Quentin. Nor does she care to try further to protect Miss Quentin from her Uncle Jason or her grandmother. With the past at her back, she approaches the Compson place and looks at "the square, paintless house with its rotting portico," the first time in the novel that the house takes on a detailed, objective reality. This description suggests that, like the crumbling mansion they inhabit, the Compsons are beyond renovation, and Dilsey now knows it. As a result of the Reverend Shegog's sermon, she foresees the end of the Compson line.

Although at basis Dilsey's act is a renunciation, it includes an important affirmation. Years earlier her husband Roskins had warned her that nothing but bad fortune would come from remaining on the Compson place. But she had ignored him and pursued the illusion of preserving the Compsons as a family by lavishing them with her compassion. In the second phase of Dilsey's Easter conversion, she realizes that her years of service to the Compsons have drawn her away from Roskins and her children. She gains a new perspective on her own family and moves toward reunion with them.

Dilsey eventually will leave Mississippi to reassume her matriarchal role in the Gibson family. This breakthrough apparently occurs in 1933, when Jason sells the moldering Compson house and is "able to free himself forever... from the Negro woman." The dispersal of the Compsons--anticipated by Miss Quentin's departure on Easter Sunday, 1928--is now complete: Mrs. Compson is dead, Benjy is in an asylum, and Jason is a "childless bachelor" whose twisted sexual urges are gratified only by prostitutes. Dilsey calls upon Frony, who has moved to St. Louis with her husband, a railroad porter. Frony goes "back to Memphis to make a home for her mother since Dilsey refused to go further than that." Averting the doom of the Compsons, Dilsey renews her lapsed family ties and puts the barren past behind her....

In summary, before Dilsey participates in the 1928 Easter service, she shares the doom of the Compsons. But the Reverend Shegog's sermon reinvigorates her belief in redemption. After hearing him preach, she attains a transforming vision, one which has spiritual as well as secular consequences. Her hope for salvation is rekindled as

she is reminded that the Passion of Jesus is an immanent reality. In temporal terms, her "ricklickshun of de Lamb" leads her to remember that despite everything, the future still lies open before her. She undergoes a conversion which allows her to break free from the morbid past represented by the Compsons. She perceives that they are a dying family in a rotting house, and that her integrity as a woman, wife, and mother has been undermined by her useless devotion to them. Like the fed-up God of the Reverend Shegog's sermon, she resolves to leave them to the extinction that awaits. In time she redirects her life toward reunion with her own family.

However, as Cleanth Brooks cautioned nearly thirty years ago [in *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*, 1963] Faulkner makes no claim in *The Sound and the Fury* for Christianity, "one way or the other." Faulkner's religious beliefs, particularly in the early phase of his career, remain ambiguous. When Faulkner uses Christian imagery and narrative, they are organizational devices; they are not devotional. He always subjects religion or mythology to his artistic purposes. He does not relinquish control to the legends or their authority.

My feeling is that *The Sound and the Fury* uses its persistent Christian analogues not to evangelize but to stir the human need for hope and renewal. From Frazer, Faulkner found that he could appropriate the lore of Christianity without endorsing its creed. The Reverend Shegog's Easter sermon in section four of the novel sounds a triumphant note of affirmation which draws upon Christian doctrine without submitting to it. His homily, delivered to Dilsey and the reader, draws us by means of its unorthodox rendition of the Easter story into a symbolic recapitulation of the death-and-rebirth pattern. Using the comparative methodology of *The Golden Bough*, Faulkner has the Reverend Shegog revise the Christian Passion by fusing several ancient religious traditions. This technique universalizes the message of his sermon and emphasizes that the human longing for salvation is not contained by any single doctrine or tradition. As Frazer stressed, all springtime ceremonies on behalf of dead and risen deities are periodic efforts to restore a necessary faith in the future.

Christianity served Faulkner's artistic needs by providing him with a formal tradition to shape Dilsey's conversion experience. By means of his "Passion Week of the heart" metaphor, he sought to convey the message that redemption means being vulnerable to the saving moment, when time falls away and life starts again. Like Christ and many other dying and reviving deities--as well as their celebrants--Dilsey is reborn in spring. Christianity, as a religion of incarnation which stresses the transforming presence of the divine in the human, provides the specific context for Dilsey's deliverance. Her Easter conversion miraculously elevates her to an incommunicable vision of heavenly salvation. But it also leads her to forge a new secular identity independent of the Compsons and to recover an enduring family heritage of her own.

Source: Philip Dubuisson Castille, "Dilsey's Easter Conversion in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*," in *Studies in the Novel*, Vol 24, No 4, winter, 1992, pp. 423-33.

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Longley states that the novel is about "the death of a family and the corresponding decay of a society," and explores how the character of Caddy is central to the actions of all three of her brothers.

The subject-matter [of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*] is the death of a family and the corresponding decay of a society. More narrowly, the novel is about the various Compson's--parents and children, brothers and sisters--and how they are able or not able to love each other, and how the failure of love destroys them all. The central focus is the beautiful and doomed Candace Compson. We never see her full-face or hear her speak in her own *persona*. She lives for us only in the tortured and highly subjective recollection of her three brothers: Benjy, the congenital idiot; Quentin, the moral abstractionist and suicide; Jason, the sociopath who lives only for money ("who to me represented pure evil. He's the most vicious character in my opinion I ever thought of.") These recollections form the first three sections of the novel. They are followed by Section Four, describing the events of Easter Sunday, 1928. This part belongs mainly to Dilsey, but is told from an outside, third-person point of view, magnificently distanced and controlled....

If the dominant theme of the novel is love--love between members of the family, and how they are able or not able to give that love freely--then the accidents of time and place [of the setting] fade in importance. The evil that the Compson children experience is conventional enough. Much of it is not evil at all, but simply the heartbreak of loss of innocence and the inevitable corruption that comes with growing up. There are evil characters in the book--Jason, certainly. But there are others who are merely weak, irresponsible, and self-serving, like the whining hypochondriac Caroline Compson and her brother Maury. Most of these people, whatever their pretensions, are examples of love defective or love perverted. Only three persons in the novel are able to give pure, whole-hearted, unselfish love. Caddy, Mr. Compson, and of course Dilsey. There are many scenes of love and affection between the

children and their father, and with each other when they were younger...

Caddy's tragedy is that she will never find anyone commensurate with her own capacity to love: not father, mother, brothers or lover. Again, it is her misfortune to be born in the wrong age. The general moral climate of rural, southern, Victorian America--a religious atmosphere of morbid Calvinism gone decadent--can view Caddy's tentative sexual experience only as the ultimate horror. She has loved her father as a child and as a young woman. She has defended Benjy from Jason, and treats him always as if he were no different from other children. She is especially close to Quentin in childhood and adolescence, until his morbid obsession with her chastity drives them apart.

At the point in her life when she is old enough to turn away from father and brother, and begin courtship, she finds she has nowhere to turn. There is literally no one to help her, certainly not among the jellybeans and town squirts of her adolescence. When she meets a man in Dalton Ames, she does not know how to resist him. Ames is the ultimate *macho*: handsome, powerful, violent, and totally amoral. When Quentin confronts him, and orders him to leave town, Ames is able to subdue him literally with one hand.

Foreshadowing the fate of her daughter, Caddy is driven to nymphomania by the hysterical posturings of her mother and the increasing pressure from Quentin. When Caddy was about fourteen, she was caught kissing a town boy. For three days Caroline Compson walks around the house wearing a black veil and declaring her daughter is dead. She attempts to spy on Caddy's movements, until Mr. Compson forbids it.

Already pregnant, Caddy accompanies her mother to the spa at French Lick. She returns, engaged to marry Herbert Head. One may only imagine the emotional process she has gone through; the forces that have pushed her into marriage with someone like Head, a man who has been expelled from Harvard for cheating at cards and on examinations. He is vulgar, loud, and falsely hearty. On Caddy's wedding day, T. P. finds the champagne for the reception stored in the basement, begins drinking it and

giving it to Benjy. Benjy begins to bellow, and the result is pandemonium.

When Head discovers Caddy is pregnant, he divorces her. When her daughter is born, Caddy names her Quentin, for the brother who is now dead by his own hand. Mrs. Compson agrees that the family will take the child and raise it. With the weight of community mores heavily on her side, together with her own hysterics, she is able to impose these conditions: 1) Caddy shall never enter the house again; 2) never see her child again; 3) her name shall never be mentioned to the child.

Occasionally, Mr. Compson will violate this heartless pact by letting Caddy into the house to see her baby. After he is dead, Jason is the remaining competent male Compson, and he enforces the pact even more brutally, including the episode of the hundred dollars and the momentary look at the baby. After Quentin reaches adolescence, takes Jason's accumulated money, and runs away with the showman, Caddy's last viable link with the Compson house is gone. We have one more glimpse of her in a picture magazine, as the mistress of a Nazi *Stabsgeneral*. The librarian believes the woman in the picture is Caddy; Jason does not. Dilsey will not say. Perhaps it is; perhaps not.

This, in brief, is the life of Candace Compson. Whatever else, that life is the central definitive presence in the lives of her brothers. She is an obsession with each of them, but in different ways....

Benjy loved three things: firelight, his sister Caddy, and the pasture that was sold to pay for Quentin's year at Harvard and Caddy's fancy wedding. His mental retardation is severe; he cannot speak at all. Yet, he is sensitive to color, light and dark, heat and cold, and above all, smells. He has emotions, and responds to the slightest shift in what he is used to. He hates and fears change, and bellows with outrage and terror at any upset in his routines. He whimpers when he is unhappy. Chronology is beyond him; he cannot distinguish *then* from *now*. All time is the same to him; a sort of continuous present in which he does not know his memories are only memories. Thus he cannot "... remember his sister but only the loss of her, and firelight was the same

bright shape as going to sleep, and the pasture was even better sold than before because now he and TP could not only follow timeless along the fence the motions which it did not even matter to him were human beings swinging golfsticks."

Dilsey takes care of him, and Caddy is his champion and defender when they are little. It is to Caddy and only Caddy that he looks for emotional support ("You're not a poor baby. Are you"). He relies on her to bring him the physical objects that have a queering effect on him--the paper dolls and the box of tinsel stars. As Caddy grows up, many things become disturbing to Benjy: her interest in boys, her use of perfume, the change to long dresses....

[Eventually] Caddy goes away on her honeymoon. From here on, Benjy will not have a sister; only the loss of her to remember. What can we say of him; his child-like nature, his man's body, and his eyes empty and blue and serene? Benjy is, as Ratliff once said of another unfortunate, "... something that don't want nothing but to walk and feel the sun and wouldn't know how to hurt no man even if it would and wouldn't want to even if it could..." Perhaps we could leave him at that, except for the powerful and violent last scene of the novel....

Quentin is clearly the most intelligent of the Compson children. He is thoughtful and sensitive. His segment of the novel is a *cri du coeur* uttered silently on the last day of his life. We go with him that day, following his apparently aimless actions, witnessing the obsessive, fugue-like images and sets of words which he repeats over and over again. We watch as he buys and then conceals the flatirons he will use to weight his body when he drowns himself. He is twenty years old and has his life before him. What has brought him to this pass?

The answer is clear but not simple. He ends his life because of what life has done to him. The world cannot be changed into what he wants it to be. He cannot change Caddy back into what she was. He is sure he cannot live knowing what he knows; his father tells him he will, and he will not risk that. *[T]hats it if people could only change one another forever that way merge like a flame swirling up for an instant then blow*

cleanly out along the cool eternal dark....

Surely; surely the main thrust of [Mr. Compson's] words is to show his son that his anguish can be endured, that the pain will lessen, that he can go on, and even make something of his life. Just as surely, the advice does not have its desired effect. Quite clearly, Quentin kills himself not because he cannot stand his agony, but because he too believes it will grow less and will someday fade away.

"Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say." Jason is speaking of his niece, but it could very easily be his sister. In the way his hatred functions, he does not always clearly distinguish between the two of them. As noted earlier, Benjy and Quentin love Caddy, however twisted and self-seeking that love may be. Jason's one great sustaining passion is " Immortal hatred and study of revenge."

In the Compson Appendix, Mr. Faulkner calls Jason the first sane Compson since Culloden; "... rational contained and even a philosopher in the old stoic tradition." All the human race are Compsons; that is, predictable if essentially inexplicable, hence not to be trusted. The rest of humanity operates on the basis of emotion (pity, love, generosity, pride) which is why they are insane and Jason is not. This is the cream of the Jest, because the central defining obsession in everything Jason does is the Job promised to him by Herbert Head. If Jason were one-third the businessman he thinks he is, or were at all capable of rational, objective assessment, he could see what impulsive, irrational people (like you and me, or Quentin Compson) know at one glance: Herbert Head is a tinborn blowhard, a liar, and a cheat. How good is his promise? Who knows where his money comes from? Yet this is precisely the point. The "lost job" is Jason's crutch, his security blanket, his justification for every sadistic, criminal thing he does. *I reckon you'll know now that you cant beat me out of a job and get away with it* he says, after he has taken Caddy's hundred dollars to let her see the baby "just for a minute." *The bitch that cost me a job, the one chance I ever had to get ahead* he says to the sheriff, describing his niece....

Jason embodies the instinctive, irrational love of self; the monstrous, incestuous self-concern that leaves no room for love of others. Since we dare not admit the fear of imperfection in the self that is loved, we seek out and punish others in retaliation for any frustration or thwarting that the self encounters. Jason is paranoid and sees the world with a paranoid's logical consistency. He sees himself as a long-suffering, put-upon man, doomed to live as the only sane human in a world of irrational, incompetent fools. It seems clear that Jason does not recognize the ultimate motivation of his actions, how they grow out of his crippling inadequacy of the soul, his total inability to love.

Jason's most complex, most sensuous wound is his relation to his niece, Quentin. She is for him both the outward visible proof of Caddy's shame and the living reminder of the lost job. Thus she is both the constant focus of his hatred and the most gratifying target for his cruelty and retaliation. Probably, he does not himself realize the source of his constant neurotic anxiety over Quentin's chastity or what he is sure is the lack of it. In the monologues of his incessant inner fantasies, he can at the same time believe she is beyond redemption and still complain of the effort he is making to save her. He can assert that he does not care what she does, even when running up and down back alleys to spy on her....

Jason's day of reckoning dawns on Easter Sunday. He is sitting at breakfast, savoring his latest theft and anticipating the entire day in which to torment his family. He has begun on the topic of the broken window in his bedroom, not yet realizing its significance. He begins the ritual of refusing to eat until Quentin is up at the table. Only when he realizes that Quentin is not in her room does the edge of an apprehension, too terrible to be thought of, intrude itself. "... he stood... as if he were listening to something much further away. His attitude was that of one who goes through the motions of listening in order to deceive himself" .

The great sensuous wound of Jason's complex relation to his niece is far too precious to relinquish. He still wishes, hopes, wants to believe that he will be able to slip stealthily up to Quentin and the man with the red tie, beat them both severely, and

regain every cent of the money. He is not yet ready to accept what his common sense might have told him long before. The agonizing headache that strikes him at this point does not deter him. Still full of the fictitious role he has constructed for himself, he roughs up the elderly carnival cook, who retaliates by almost splitting Jason's head with a hatchet. Rescued by the carnival owner, Jason sits in his car, blind with pain, haggling futilely with a series of Negro youths to drive him back to Jefferson. People who pass in their Easter clothes look at him, "the man sitting quietly behind the wheel of a small car, with his invisible life raveled out about him like a worn-out sock." Eventually he pays the price one of the youths is asking.

In the middle of these sordid events is the Easter service in the Negro church. It rests like a jewel in the setting of Jason's insane pursuit, Mrs. Compson's vindictive whining, the needless tormenting Dilsey is put through. Everything contrasts: all this shabby and futile materialism against the impassioned and beautiful promise of resurrection and life. Dilsey's own family, what is left of it, is with her: her daughter Frony and her grandson Luster. And of course Benjy, who can be taken to the Negro church because the white people don't want him in theirs. This congregation is surely the despised and rejected, the outcasts of the earth. The preacher is a famous black evangelist, brought in for the occasion....

Only one scene remains to be played out. Back at the house, Benjy begins moaning again. He knows, powerfully and unanswerably, that Quentin is gone, as her mother was gone before her. Dilsey tries everything to comfort and quiet him. There is only one recourse left. Much against her better judgement, Dilsey allows Luster to drive Benjy in the ancient ramshackle lorry for his usual Sunday visit to the cemetery. Luster is very full of himself, bantering with the other Negroes. He notes that Jason's car is back, parked on the Square. In his self-importance, Luster drives to the wrong side of the statue of the Confederate soldier. Instantly terrified by the dislocation of tangible objects, Benjy begins his loud terrified bellowing: "There was more than astonishment in it, it was horror; shock; agony eyeless, tongueless; just sound. " Jason's apathy and resignation vanish as this old focus of his festering resentment presents itself. In Jefferson, at least, Jason will still be able to control and abuse his

own family, or at least Benjy and the Negro children who depend on him for a living .

Like Dilsey, we have seen the beginning. This is the ending. No effort can explain the intricate web of all the themes of the novel, nor account for the power of this closing scene. It is all there: cruelty, hatred, race, the family, tradition, history, time, the dead and buried past that will not rise again. In the Appendix, one can learn what eventually happened to the Compsons. Jason will turn up a few times, a cotton-buyer now, who will take another heavy loss when he tries to outsmart Flem Snopes. Benjy lives on in the asylum at Jackson. Perhaps it is Caddy in the photograph, perhaps not. Dilsey, who lived long enough to see that too, will not tell us. These endured.

Source: John L. Longley Jr., "'Who Never Had a Sister' . A Reading of *The Sound and the Fury*", in *Mosaic*, Vol. VII, No I, fall, 1973, pp. 35-53.

Media Adaptations

Jerry Wald produced and Martin Ritt directed a film version of *The Sound and the Fury* in 1959. Jason was played by Yul Brynner and Benjy by Jack Warden. Margaret Leighton portrayed Caddy and Joanne Woodward played her daughter, Quentin. Ethel Waters was cast in the role of Dilsey. Unavailable on video.

Topics for Further Study

Research mental retardation and discuss the accuracy of Faulkner's portrayal of Benjy. Compare public attitudes toward mental impairment and illness today to the attitudes shown in Faulkner's novel.

Discuss the importance of Dilsey's role in the novel. What do you think is Faulkner saying about race relations in the book and how does his portrayal compare with current depictions of African Americans in literature or the media?

Find information about other cultures' attitude toward incest. Discuss the concept of incest as a taboo, and from both a moral and biological perspective

Compare Faulkner's style in *The Sound and the Fury* with James Joyce's use of the subjective point of view in *The Dubliners* or *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

Compare & Contrast

1929: Black and white relations in the South were stratified along racial lines. Education was officially segregated, with facilities for black and white children "separate but equal."

Today: In the urban South, many African Americans, as elsewhere in the United States, have gained economic and professional status. Poor blacks everywhere in America are experiencing poverty and poor education at record low levels. Education is supposedly integrated, but neighborhood racial patterns have worked against equalizing education.

1929: While the family structure was beginning to disintegrate because of social changes in the country, most families had two parents and extended families living close together was common.

Today: The two-parent "nuclear" family structure has been shattered by high rates of divorce and remarriage. A relatively high percentage of children in the United States live in single-parent families.

1929: Creativity in the arts was flourishing in the United States. Reading novels and short stories was a major form of entertainment. Only a few writers were financially successful.

Today: Much of the literary creativity of Americans has become channeled into team efforts for television sitcoms and dramatic serials. The novel is still a significant form of recreation, but the film has superseded the novel as the primary form for written creative expression. A few novelists write best sellers which make lots of money, but writers for television and movies generally make more money than novelists or short storywriters.

1929: illegitimate pregnancy among middle class women was a social disgrace that could lead to ostracization.

Today: There is little stigma attached to unwed motherhood, at least for older women who are financially independent. Single women who want children become pregnant deliberately, either through artificial insemination or a relationship they do not wish to make permanent.

1929: Mental retardation was considered a curse and a burden that a family had to bear. Families felt ashamed and guilty when they had a retarded child.

Today: The mentally impaired have many educational programs and opportunities to help them be productive and independent.

What Do I Read Next?

A tale of incest in the Sutpen family set in the South, Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) features Quentin Compson as a character.

Truman Capote's 1948 novel *Other Voices, Other Rooms* is the story of alienated youth set in the author's usual Southern Gothic atmosphere.

Margaret Mitchell's Pulitzer Prize-winning romantic novel *Gone with the Wind*, published in 1936, depicts the destruction of Southern culture during the Civil War.

Robert Penn Warren's 1946 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *All the King's Men* portrays a charismatic Southern politician who has been compared to the real politician Huey Long.

Both of Tennessee Williams' Pulitzer Prizewinning plays *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) depict the sexual frustration of his characters in the context of Southern society.

For Further Study

Margaret D. Bauer, 'The Evolution of Caddy: An Intertextual Reading of 'The Sound and the Fury' and Ellen Gilchrist's 'The Annunciation', " in *Southern Literary Journal*, Vol. 25, No. I, fall, 1992, pp 40-51.

Bauer describes Caddy as both a strong woman who chooses to live according to her own value system, and as a victim who is ultimately broken down by her family. In addition to reviewing the question of incest, Bauer also discusses parental neglect and Caddy's abandonment of her daughter.

Michael H Cowan, compiler, *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of "The Sound and the Fury" A Collection of Critical Essays*, Prentice-Hall, 1968.

This book collects important essays on the novel that were previously published in other books or Journals.

David Dowling, *Macmillan Modern Novelists William Faulkner*, Macmillan, 1989.

In his section on *The Sound and the Fury*, Dowling touches on many of the novel's major themes, including time, loss, and incest. He also suggests that the Compson parents offer two theories of language that represent the two extremes of meaningless flux and frozen meaning

Richard Gray, *The Life of William Faulkner: A Critical Biography*, Blackwell, 1994.

Gray's discussion of *The Sound and the Fury* is largely concerned with language: language is not only the medium of the novel but also its subject. He argues that Faulkner obliges the reader to recognize "how we constitute our reality, personal and social, with the words we use."

Vernon T. Hornbeck, Jr., "The Uses of Time in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*," in *Papers on English Language and Literature*, Vol I, No.1, winter, 1965, pp. 50-8.

Hornbeck analyzes how Faulkner relates time in *The Sound and the Fury* to each of his central characters.

Cheryl Lester, "Racial Awareness and Arrested Development: 'The Sound and the Fury' and the Great Migration," in *The Cambridge Companion to William Faulkner*, edited by Philip M. Weinstein, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 123-45.

Arguing that mainstream historiography in the post-Reconstruction South has been constructed primarily from a white Southern viewpoint, Lester focuses on the story told by African-American historiography, and in particular, the phenomenon of black migration from the South to the North.

Noel Polk, editor, *New Essays on "The Sound and the Fury"*, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

A collection of interpretations of the novels written specifically for the volume.

Kevin Railey, "Cavalier Ideology and History: The Significance of Quentin's Section in 'The Sound and the Fury'," in *Arizona Quarterly*, Vol 48, No 3, autumn, 1992, pp. 77-94.

Railey argues that Quentin symbolizes the ideological conflict experienced by those who felt alienated by the changing world of the New South, and that his section epitomizes the struggle of the Cavalier Ideology.

Diane Roberts, *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood*, The University of Georgia Press, 1994.

Roberts interrogates the stereotypes of the Southern woman in Faulkner's fiction. Her book includes detailed discussions of Caddy Compson and Dilsey.

Sources

Clifton Fadiman, "Hardly Worth While," *Nation*, January 15, 1930, pp. 74-75.

Robert J. Griffin, "Ethical Point of View in *The Sound and the Fury*," in *Essays in Modern American Literature*, edited by Richard E Langford, Stetson University Press, 1963, pp 55-64.

Terry Heller, in *Critical Survey of Long Fiction*, Salem Press, 1991, pp. 1088-1110.

Arthur Mizener, "William Faulkner: *The Sound and the Fury*," in *Twelve Great American Novels*, New American Library, 1967, pp. 120-59.

Frances Lamont Robbins, in a review in *Outlook and Independent*, Vol. 153, No. 7, October 16, 1929, pp. 268-69.

Evelyn Scott, in *On Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury"*, Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1929.

Olga W. Vickery, "Worlds of Counterpoint" in *The Novels of William Faulkner*, Louisiana State University Press, 1959.

Linda W. Wagner, in *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 9: American Novelists, 1910-1945*, Gale, 1981, pp. 282-302.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to

information about the work. Part of Gale's For Students Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on classic novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students; The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of classic novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members educational professionals helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.

- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as *The Narrator* and alphabetized as *Narrator*. If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name *Jean Louise Finch* would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname *Scout Finch*.
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the *Subject/Theme Index*.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the *Glossary*.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first

received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.

- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).
- **Sources:** an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- **Further Reading:** an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- **Media Adaptations:** a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- **Topics for Further Study:** a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- **Compare and Contrast Box:** an at-a-glance comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- **What Do I Read Next?:** a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures,

and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes *The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature*, a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how *Novels for Students* can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing *Novels for Students*

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of *Novels for Students* may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

Night. *Novels for Students*. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the *Criticism* subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. *Critical Essay on Winesburg, Ohio*. *Novels for Students*. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. *Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition*, *Canadian Literature* No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in *Novels for Students*, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. *Richard Wright: Wearing the Mask*, in *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography* (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in *Novels for Students*, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of *Novels for Students* welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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