

“WILLIAM FAULKNER” THE SOUND AND THE FURY”

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Annotation: The Sound and the Fury, novel by William Faulkner, published in 1929, that details the destruction and downfall of the aristocratic Compson family from four different points of view. Faulkner's fourth novel, The Sound and the Fury is notable for its nonlinear plot structure and its unconventional narrative style. The Sound and the Fury was always the book that Faulkner felt "tenderest toward," he said, "the most gallant, the most magnificent failure" of all his novels. "I couldn't leave it alone, and I could never tell it right, though I tried hard and would like to try again, though I'd probably fail again."

Key words: Aristocratic, nonlinear plot, idealism, modernism, soliloquy.

The title of this novel comes from Shakespeare's Macbeth, Act five, scene five, in Macbeth's famous speech about the nonsensicality of life. He states that it is “a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

William Cuthbert Faulkner (September 25, 1897 – July 6, 1962) was an American writer. He is best known for his novels and short stories set in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, a stand-in for Lafayette County where he spent most of his life. A Nobel laureate, Faulkner is one of the most celebrated writers of American literature and often is considered the greatest writer of Southern literature. Faulkner was born in New Albany, Mississippi, and raised in Oxford, Mississippi. During World War I, he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force, but did not serve in combat. Returning to Oxford, he attended the University of Mississippi for three semesters before dropping out. He moved to New Orleans, where he wrote his first novel Soldiers' Pay (1925). He went back to Oxford and wrote Sartoris (1927), his first work set in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County. In 1929, he published The Sound and the Fury. The following year, he wrote As I Lay Dying. Later that decade, he wrote Light in August, Absalom, Absalom! and The Wild Palms. He also worked as a screenwriter, contributing to Howard Hawks's To Have and Have Not and The Big Sleep, adapted from Raymond Chandler's novel. The former film, adapted from Ernest Hemingway's novel, is the only film with contributions by two Nobel laureates.

The first, reflecting events occurring and consequent thoughts and memories on April 7, 1928, is written in the voice and from the perspective of Benjamin "Benjy" Compson, an intellectually disabled 33-year-old man. Benjy's section is characterized by a disjointed narrative style with frequent chronological leaps. Faulkner's reputation

grew following publication of Malcolm Cowley's *The Portable Faulkner*, and he was awarded the 1949 Nobel Prize in Literature for "his powerful and unique contribution to the modern American novel." He is the only Mississippi-born Nobel laureate. Two of his works, *A Fable* (1954) and *The Reivers* (1962), won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Faulkner died from a heart attack on July 6, 1962, following a fall from his horse the month before. Ralph Ellison called him "the greatest artist the South has produced".

The Sound and the Fury is a brilliant but demanding novel that immerses readers in the disintegration of the Compson family in a way few works manage. Faulkner's approach is intense and unapologetically complex, capturing a family's tragedy with fragmented timelines and deeply flawed characters. The novel's structure can be disorienting, especially with Benjy's stream-of-consciousness perspective. This disorientation, however, mirrors the characters' own inner chaos and the decay of Southern aristocratic values, which Faulkner critiques without sentimentality.

In some ways, it's a novel about memory and loss, particularly in the South, where people like the Compsons cling to their past glory even as it slips away. The fact that the Compson family is trapped in an endless loop of resentment, shame, and disillusionment gives the story a universal quality. Readers see the destructive effects of toxic family dynamics, from Quentin's tortured idealism to Jason's embittered greed.

At the same time, Faulkner counterbalances this descent into despair with Dilsey's steady, grounded presence, which suggests resilience amid collapse. Her unwavering faith and perseverance offer a kind of moral counterpoint to the family's self-destruction, hinting at the strength that marginalized characters often show, in contrast to the privileged but broken Compsons.

Reading *The Sound and the Fury* is not easy. The novel almost demands readers engage with it repeatedly, teasing out meaning from its fragmented narratives and abstract language. But for those willing to grapple with it, it offers one of the most intense literary portrayals of family dynamics, cultural decline, and psychological depth in modern literature.

The Sound and the Fury, published in 1929, is one of William Faulkner's most celebrated novels and a cornerstone of Southern Gothic literature. The novel is known for its complex narrative structure, which employs stream-of-consciousness, shifting points of view, and nonlinear timelines to explore themes of loss, family, and decline.

The story follows the Compson family, a once-aristocratic Southern family now in ruins. The novel is divided into four parts, each focusing on a different family member's perspective and revealing the family's gradual downfall.

The novel's title, *The Sound and the Fury*, references a line from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." This alludes to the Compson family's chaotic and tragic descent, filled with emotional intensity but ultimately leading nowhere.

The Sound and the Fury remains a landmark in American literature, recognized for its innovative techniques and deep psychological insight into its characters, capturing both the beauty and agony of human experience.

The first fifth of the book is notoriously difficult, because of the narrator. After that though, it's very typical Faulkner and if you enjoyed *As I Lay Dying* I'm surprised you're having as much difficulty with the rest of the book.

It takes some flipping back and forth to figure out what's happening in what timeline for each narrator, but the language is similar to *AILD*.

I did find it a more difficult read than the average classic, but with a good payoff that was definitely worth the effort. Herbert immediately divorces Caddy and rescinds Jason's job offer when he realizes his wife is pregnant with another man's child. Meanwhile, Quentin, still mired in despair over Caddy's sin, commits suicide by drowning himself in the Charles River just before the end of his first year at Harvard. The message in *The Sound and the Fury* is that moral and social decay can take even a previously prestigious family. In the end, the Compsons decay, morally and socially, but Dilsey, a servant, comes to embody everything the Compsons wanted for themselves. In Jason's absence, Dilsey, Luster, and Benjy attend Easter service at Dilsey's church. The visiting minister preaches about redemption, and Dilsey, thinking of the Compsons and the events of the morning, begins to cry. She reflects: "I've seed de first en de last...I seed de beginning, en now I sees de endin." Dilsey's words foretell the end of the novel: soon after, Faulkner brings it to an uneventful, inconclusive close.

An appendix to the novel, published in 1946, details the fates of the surviving Compsons. According to the appendix, Benjy was committed to an asylum in 1933; Jason moved into an apartment above the supply-store; and Caddy moved to Paris, where she lived at the time of the German occupation of France (1940-44). Neither Caddy nor her daughter returned to Yoknapatawpha County.. *The Sound and the Fury* was written (and is set) in the postbellum American South, in the period after Reconstruction (1865–77). At this critical moment in American history, the South was in the process of redefining itself and its values in the absence of slavery. Certain Southern families (typically old landed families) refused to participate in this process. Instead, they turned inward; they clung to their traditions and values-to vague notions of honour, purity, and virginity. *The Sound and the Fury* documents the decline of these families. The Compsons, as Faulkner casts them, are direct descendants of the planter-aristocrats. They are the inheritors of their values and traditions, on whom the survival

(or ultimate extinction) of this Southern aristocracy depends. The Compsons, for the most part, shirk this responsibility. Quentin, however, does not. The burden of the past falls heavily upon Quentin, who, as the eldest son, feels he must preserve and protect the Compson family honour. Quentin identifies his sister as the principal bearer of the honour he is to protect. When he fails to protect that honour—that is, when Caddy loses her virginity to Dalton Ames and becomes pregnant—Quentin elects to commit suicide. Quentin’s suicide, in conjunction with Caddy’s pregnancy, precipitates the fall of the Compson family. Still, for nearly two decades, the family survives. Its death knell is tolled on April 8, 1928, by Miss Quentin, who “swung herself by a rainpipe” to the locked window of her uncle’s bedroom, took her mother’s money, “climbed down the same rainpipe in the dusk,” and vanished, taking with her not only the money but the last semblance of the Compson family honour. At the end of the novel, the Compson family is in ruins and, on a larger scale, the Southern aristocracy is too. *The Sound and the Fury*’s form is distinctly Modernist: Faulkner employs a number of narrative techniques, including unreliable narrators, interior monologues, and unconventional syntax, that are recurrent features of literary Modernism. Faulkner’s conception of time, particularly as expressed in his nonlinear representation of time, is a cause of disagreement among scholars, who argue over which different philosophies influenced Faulkner and to what extent. A number of scholars, for example, have made the case for a link between Faulkner’s conception of time and the theory of duration formulated by French philosopher Henri Bergson. Such an argument places Faulkner among a number of Modernist writers influenced by Bergson, including Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and T.S. Eliot. The title of Faulkner’s novel alone expresses Faulkner’s concern with time. *The Sound and the Fury* takes its name from a soliloquy given by the title character of William Shakespeare’s play *Macbeth*. In that soliloquy, *Macbeth* reflects on time and the meaninglessness of life:

Used literature

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