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Narrating the Chaos: A Study of the Narrative Technique in William Faulkner's The Sound And The Fury



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ABSTRACT

Narratology is the study of story structure in any narrative. It has wider implications when it comes to the impact of literature on its reader. It highlights the way narrative structure influences the perception of its readers. Writers use many narrative structures and techniques to reflect the inner worlds of characters in the form of words and dialogues.

Different kinds of narrative techniques are utilized by writers suitable to their mode of expression. One of the best known is stream of consciousness technique to narrate the inner thoughts and cognitive processes in the minds of character. Major proponents of this technique are James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner. At first, this technique was used by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

William Faulkner used the stream of consciousness technique to discover and expose the unspoken thoughts of his characters in this novel. William Faulkner has also used this technique splendidly in The Sound and the Fury. This novel is considered as a brilliant example of narrative techniques. Present paper is an attempt to trace the stream of consciousness technique used by William Faulkner in his novel The Sound and the Fury. Present paper attempts to shed light on the process of this technique by examining its rules as they are used in one of the major works of the modern period

KEYWORDS

Stream of consciousness, technique, the Sound and the Fury

RESEARCH PAPER

Introduction

Narratology is the study of story structure in any narrative. It has wider implications when it comes to the impact of literature on its reader. It highlights the way narrative structure influences the perception of its readers. Writers use many narrative structures and techniques to reflect the inner worlds of characters in the form of words and dialogues.

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The stream of consciousness is considered one of the multifaceted techniques used by modernist writers to suggest certain states of mind and depict specific aesthetic values in various literary or creative works. The psychological element is the main factor in this technique which is mainly used and firstly applied to narrative texts, especially novels.

Stream of consciousness is an expression coined by William James in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890) to describe narrative devices. Faulkner has used the literary technique called 'Stream of Consciousness' to discover and expose the unspoken thoughts of his characters. He used it to give the readers the best fiction of his times.

Stream of Consciousness is defined as "a person's thoughts and conscious reactions to events, perceived as a continuous flow." William James introduced the term in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890). It is a literary style in which a character's thoughts, feelings, and reactions are depicted in a continuous flow uninterrupted by objective description or conventional dialogue. James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Marcel Proust are among its distinguished early supporters.

The Oxford Companion to English literature (2009) records, "Stream of consciousness is a phrase coined by William James in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890) to describe the narrative methods whereby certain novelists describe their characters' unspoken thoughts and feelings without resorting to objective or conventional dialogue." (Dinah Birch, p. 528)

Stream of Consciousness is a creative literary device that is used to describe the multitudinous thoughts and feelings of the human mind. Joseph Warren Beach, an American poet, novelist, academic and scholarly critic in his book, *The Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique* (1960), said:

“The Stream of Consciousness kind of narrative is a new and drastic development from the subjectivism of the well-made novel. Its important feature is mistreatment of the element of incoherence in our conscious process. This confusedness symbolizes both our normal and abnormal states of mind. The natural association of ideas is extremely variable. Our psyche is such an imperfect, integrated bundle of memories, sensations and impulses, that unless strictly controlled by some controlling motives it is likely to be at the mercy of every stray wind of suggestion” (Beach, p. 518)

Stream of Consciousness:

William Faulkner is an American novelist who has a large number of readers across the world. On September 25, 1897, he was born in New Albany, Mississippi, as the oldest of four brothers. Because of the civil war 1861-1865, his father, Murry Cuthbert, and his mother, Maud Butler, lived in poverty. In honor of his great grandfather, William Faulkner was named in honor of who had written the famous novel the *White Rose of Memphis* in 1880. Like his grandfather, William Faulkner was a creative writer in his literary works during his lifetime. William Faulkner is one of the most significant writers in modern American literature. His literary works reflect the clear image of the American south.

William Faulkner uses the stream consciousness technique to make it easier for readers to discover the characters' thoughts. As a narration technique, psychologist William James first used a stream of consciousness in his book *Principles of Psychology* (1890) for describing the narrative methods. William Faulkner used this technique to give the readers the best fiction of his time.

Stream of consciousness is a narrative technique used to describe the feelings and thoughts inside the character's mind. Joseph Warren Beach Said:

"The stream of consciousness type of narrative technique is a new and essential development from the subjectivism of the well-made novel. Its defining quality is an exploitation of the element of incoherence, confusion in our conscious process. This incoherence portrays both our normal and abnormal states of mind. The normal association of ideas is exceedingly freakish. Our psyche is such an imperfect, integrated package of memories, sensations, and impulses, that except sternly organized by some dominating motives, it is likely to be at the mercy of every stray wind of suggestion." (Beach, p. 517)

As a literary device, stream of consciousness refers to the writer's effort to represent the conscious and subconscious thoughts in the characters' minds. This type of technique takes the readers deep inside the mind of the narrator.

It is clear that William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) rich in the stream of consciousness technique, particularly in the first sections of the novel. In the first section, known as Benjy's section, Faulkner uses the stream of consciousness to mirror the thoughts inside Benjy's mind.

The first section of this novel is narrated from the viewpoint of Benjy Compson. Like an idiot, Benjy is the key to the novel's title, which alludes to Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth*. For most of the novel, Benjy's language is both simple and short sentences and basic vocabulary. Every reader is aware of the simplicity of Benjy's speech style, and the opening monologist gives Faulkner the impression that an unconscious idiot is responsible in some way for the narration. But the monologue's job is to make a dramatic presentation while creating a delusional atmosphere of psychological chaos. Benjy remarks many times in his section that:

“Caddy smells like trees.” (Conrad, p. 41)

Caddy is Benjy's mother who provides the cornerstone of comfort and order in Benjy's mind. He has relied heavily on his sister, and her absence plunges him into chaos. When Caddy becomes pregnant, Benjy is upset, so she begins to avoid him. Benjy lamented the new distance between himself and his sister and said:

“Caddy suddenly does not smell like trees.” (Conrad, p. 43)

Much of the monologue is devoted to actions which the idiot Benjy cannot understand. William Faulkner narrates in a Separate and impersonal way what the idiot Benjy sees and experiences. Benjy's dialogue is mainly symbolic and well-suited to this section since the symbols come from simple perceptions and feelings. This can be established in both Benjy and Quentin's sections as an alternative to rationally formulated ideas. The two kinds of mental perversion are naturally manifested in images and symbols since they come directly from William Faulkner's narrative style in *the Sound and the Fury*. Even while using this technique, Faulkner differs in every section. For instance, in the Benjy section, Faulkner's style is simple, which means that each sentence is a simple and somewhat uncomplicated sentence. There are no problematic words as Benjy's Vocabulary will be simple, of course, because his mind does not think logically.

Caddy is one character who has been presented through the monologues of others. She lavishes her attention and affection on Benjy, covers him with her own warm love that makes Benjy deeply attached to Caddy. After her marriage when he sees her slipper, he calms down. He said:

“Caddy and father and Jason were in Mother’s chair. Jason’s eyes were putted shut and his mouth moved, like tasting. Caddy’s head was on Father’s shoulder. Her hair was like fire and little points of fire were in his eyes, and I went and my father lifted me into the chair too, and Caddy held me. She smelled like trees.” (Conrad, p. 46)

William Faulkner tries to record thinking in terms of essential images. Thus, he is not bothered by the details of life, nor is he interested in images and impressions. The orderliness and simplicity of Benjy's section are the results of his lonely voracity. William Faulkner uses the stream of consciousness again in the second section of this novel, Quentin's section. The Quentin section is easier to read than the Benjy section. One can continue with what he is saying whether or not italics are used to indicate his moving to relate memory. This section opened with Quentin, who noticed the shadow of the past and reminded him of the watch his father gave him. Mr. Compson advises him to forget time. Quentin's father believed that there are no values worth anything in life when we try to live in all things. Quentin was unable to deny this philosophy. He was time-conscious, not in love with his father. Quentin's section is characterized by an intense flow of thoughts upon recollection of some memories during his last day before suicide.

Much of the thought of the Compson appears to have taken possession of Quentin. The following piece of memory appeared in Quentin’s saying that:

“An so I told myself to take that one. Because Father said clocks slay time. He said time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels, only when the clock stops does time come to life. The hands were extended, slightly off the horizontal at a faint angle, lie a gull tilting into the wind.” (Conrad, p. 54)

This is a typical example of a stream of consciousness where there is no capitalization, punctuation, or full stop. This style helps Quentin to reflect his thought without any kind of interruption. Additionally, Quentin uses an earlier stream of consciousness to connect specific episodes of his life. It is because the day he speaks is the last day before his death. Quentin commits suicide soon after the last page of this section. In Quentin's Section, we find long, difficult, complex, and difficulties of ideas. Quentin attempts to solve complex ethical issues. Quentin's mind is a more advanced mind whose thoughts jump from one idea to another very

quickly. Faulkner's technique to give an order to Quentin's intent to kill himself at the end of a Monologue was necessary to intensify the dramatic tension between past and present through a stream of consciousness.

Quentin is a very sensitive person who needs attention and love. He feels pride in the family's noble past and tries to discover some reason for the family's present downfall. In his last monologue, he tries to discover some meaningful values in life. He tries to do positive things, but he found negative things made by his father. Finally, Quentin recognizes his powerlessness and feels that life is useless, so he resolves to commit suicide. Quentin is obsessed with the outer reality and then said: "and I was in time again, hearing the watch." (Conrad, p. 93)

Quentin contemplates again and again the interchangeable images of his death, shadows, and time. While standing on a bridge looking into the water:

"Where the shadow of the bridge fell I could see down for a long way, but as far as the bottom." (Conrad, p. 143)

It is clear that the Stream of Consciousness technique is not used in Jason's section, as used in Benjy's and Quentin's sections. Jason is not as passionate about the past as Benjy and Quentin. He is obsessed with his current financial situation. He only thinks about money and how to earn enormous amounts of money. He is even ready to steal from others, and this is what happens with his niece. He takes most of the money that her mother sent her. The stream of consciousness technique occurs in Jason's section when Jason recalls a series of past events, such as belonging to the Compson family and has an idiot brother and a second brother who is a student at Harvard and later committed suicide. Jason also remembers his sister Caddy who committed promiscuity, and since then, her name does not mention anymore in their house. William Faulkner uses the stream of consciousness technique in the first three sections in a distinguished way. William Faulkner employs the stream of consciousness technique in first-person narration, making him unique in his choice. William Faulkner uses first-person narration that enables him to show the contrast between dramatic action and the mental reactions of a character. William Faulkner reflected the meaning of a psychological novel by using a stream of consciousness technique in narrating his novel. He focused on the inner life of a character to present traits of his characters in the novel. William Faulkner allows his readers to penetrate the depths of his character's minds by using a stream of consciousness. In *The Sound and the Fury*, he uses this technique skillfully. William Faulkner creatively used the stream of consciousness technique that is well known for his experiments.

Conclusion

William James introduced the term 'Stream of Consciousness' in his Principles of Psychology (1890). It is a literary style technique in which a character's thoughts, feelings, and reaction are depicted in a continuous flow continuous by objective description or conservative dialogue.

William Faulkner used it to give the readers the best fiction of his times. He created several characters, themes, plots, issues, and incidents with a local emphasis, and even insignificant details were managed to make universal. William Faulkner used this narrative style, the stream-of-consciousness, according to his experiments. This style is categorized by a use of language imitating thought, often eliminating conventional grammar and formal sentence structure for creative modes.

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