

Stream of Consciousness in *the Sound and the Fury*

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ABSTRACT: *William Faulkner is a famous American writer and a master of stream of consciousness literature in the 20th century. His novel The Sound and the Fury undoubtedly is one of the most experimental and creative works in the history of modern literary. Faulkner fully uses the stream of consciousness, such as interior monologue, multi-perspective narration, montage, free association, unconsciousness and unlike the traditional narrative characters, he breaks the limits of time and space to let readers fully feel the variety and complexity of the flow consciousness. The Sound and the Fury is not only the first real stream of consciousness novel in American literature also is the inheritance and development of that in English literature.*

KEYWORDS: William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, stream of consciousness

William Faulkner, born in 1897, is one of the most influential writers in the history of American literature and an American representative of the stream of consciousness literature. Faulkner was born in a noble family, in which his great-grandfather played many roles, such as the planter, soldier, writer, etc. However because of the broken of family and his physical weakness, Faulkner depended on imagination more than enjoyed it. When he was a child, he had been determined to be a person like his great-grandfather who he respected very much. And he began to read Shakespeare, Dickens, Balzac and Conrad's works when he was 10 years old. Especially *The Old Testament* that Faulkner often read had a lot of influences on his later creations. As a writer, Faulkner wrote many works, among which *The Sound and the Fury* won him the Nobel Prize.

The Sound and the Fury is a classical work of Faulkner, because it is his first novel of

the stream of consciousness. This book describes a tragedy about the Compsons—a declining southern landlord. The name of this book comes from Macbeth's lines in the fifth act of Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth*: "it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."(Shakespeare, 1999: 312)The entire novel concentrates on degenerate Caddy through the description of the Compsons' three sons' interior monologues.

After its publication, *The Sound and the Fury* has attracted the attention of many critics and scholars domestic and abroad. Jeffrey J, Folks explores in his paper, *Crowd and Self: William Faulkner's Sources of Agency in The Sound and the Fury*, the conditions under which Faulkner wrote the novel and Faulkner's own understanding of the novel through the description of characters. Jeffrey thinks "Faulkner transmuted his own desperate sense of failure into victory through his creation of a novel of great depth and understanding."(Folks, 2002: 43) Ross Labrie also, in *Thomas Merton on Art and Religion in William Faulkner*, points out "the truths of the self that had been revealed by depth psychology, comparative religion, and social anthropology had brought forth a sapiential harvest, one that was present in a number of Faulkner's novels and stories is a harvest. In this way, Merton argued Faulkner both shaped and enriched theology."(Labrie, 2010: 416) Yang Aiyong states "Faulkner, using Benji's consciousness as the beginning, vividly expresses an idiot's pathological inner activities to show us the practical part. This novel also demonstrates Faulkner's philosophy of time well because every narrator's expressions change all the time and they include all their consciousness like a continuous stream."(Yang, 2012: 41) Sun Qian thinks "the suicide of Quentin is either his desire or his choice. In her essay, she analyses Quentin from two aspects: keeping watching the old tradition and slavery; keeping watching the family honor and sister's chastity to show his characteristic, emotion, value as well as his pleasure and pain, contradiction and failure."(Sun, 2013: 38) Other scholars also analyze this novel from different angles, such as, female characters, the time, themes and writing styles.

Stream of consciousness was first proposed by an American philosopher and psychologist William James to show the nature of stream of consciousness—the experiential consciousness of an individual is a unified whole, but the content of consciousness constantly changes and never stands still. James explains that consciousness is not fragment divided arbitrarily but is always flowing, therefore it is figuratively considered as a "river" or a "stream", which seems to be much more natural. According to James, consciousness is a purely subjective thing that breaks the limitation

of time and space. And then this theory is used in literature, leading to the generation of “stream of consciousness literature”.

But in fact, Freud’s psychoanalysis theory is another inducement that can explain it. He confirms the existence of sub-consciousness, putting forward the theory of consciousness and sub-consciousness, which states that the sub-consciousness and unconsciousness are the foundation of human life and conscious activities; the behavioral motivation comes from human's instinct impulse; human’s instinct impulse is often bounded by social norms and rational conscience, making people full of contradictions. Writer’s creation is a process to break through the rationality and to play instinct impulse for releasing restrained instinct.

Stream-of-consciousness was taken as the technique of literature creating in the late 19th century in France, and it prevailed after the 1920s. Faulkner largely uses the technique in *The Sound and the Fury*, including interior monologue, multiple-perspective narration, narrative montage, consciousness and sub-consciousness.

Strategies of Stream of Consciousness in the Novel

Faulkner focuses on the interior monologue, multi-perspective narration, narrative monologue and the consciousness and unconsciousness to show the characters’ interior world.

Interior Monologue

Interior monologue regulates people's thoughts in the process of action in a particular situation. In literature, it is one of forms of writing skills and Faulkner fully uses the technique in *The Sound and the Fury*. In the first section of this novel, direct interior monologue is widely used, showing characters’ consciousness to readers directly without any intervention, with the help of some suggestive words like “he thought”, “he believes...”, “he feels” and so on. Benjy, as an idiot, flows his consciousness naturally like a river without logic or rationality. So from his interior monologue, his feelings can be caught clearly. There is an example of the direct interior monologue from this novel.

“The bones rounded out of the ditch, where the dark vines were in the black ditch, into the moonlight, like some of the shapes had stopped. Then they all stopped and it was dark, and when I stopped to start again I could hear Mother, and feet walking fast away, and I could smell it. Then the room came, but my eyes went shut. I didn’t stop. I could

smell it. T.P. unpinned the bed clothes”(Faulkner, 2013: 25).

This paragraph describes that Benjy has a penetrating feeling because he is the only one who can smell “death”. In a world in which normal people live, Caddy and Frony are talking about the funeral but Benjy can’t do this. The picture of bones, dark vines, black ditch in Benjy’s mind indicates “death”. The noise heard by Benjy is real and from his true feeling, a strong scent of death can be felt. Although Benjy can’t describe the scene with accurate words, he still tells readers what has happened through his feelings.

There are also other examples like “Caddy put her arms around me, and her shining veil, and I couldn’t smell trees anymore and I began to cry”(Faulkner, 2013: 31) “So I hushed and Caddy got up and we went into the kitchen and turned the light on and Caddy took the kitchen soap and washed her mouth at the sink, hard. Caddy smelled like tress”(Faulkner, 2013: 37) In fact, Benjy’s interior monologue is replaced by his feelings and behaviors. In this novel, “Caddy smelled like trees” appears many times. In Benjy’s eyes, Caddy is fresh and pure like nature and it is deeply rooted in his heart. When he can’t smell something that only belongs to Caddy, he will cry and when Caddy washes her mouth he is quiet again. It shows us Benjy has his own rules even though he can’t express them.

Quentin, as the oldest child in the Compson, is educated in Harvard at the price of selling Benjy’s pasture. He is a tragic figure and commits suicide after a month of her sister’s wedding. His interior monologue, to some degree, explains his tragedy.

“And I will look down and see my murmuring bones and the deep water like wind, like a roof of wind, and after a long time they cannot distinguish even bones upon the lonely and inviolate sand. Until on the Day when He says Rise only the flatiron could come floating up. It’s not when you realize that nothing can help you—religion, pride, anything—it’s when you realize that you don’t need any aid.”(Faulkner, 2013: 65)

In this paragraph, Quentin imagines the scene that his bones sink into the river after his suicide. When he fails to kill Dalton and to escape from the reality, he intends to commit suicide. From his inner monologue, it can be found that Quentin’s murmuring bones are the symbol of hopelessness. Because he has no idea about how to face up to Caddy’s indecent behavior. Here the deep water represents the end of life. For Quentin, only the deep water can wash off his pain and despair and deeply buries his bones. Of course, God will help only if a man gives up the hope, namely Quentin chooses death to end up the fury of the real world and gets resurrection from death. Obviously, at that time, in Quentin’s mind, there is nothing left except endless despair.

On the other hand, Quentin never lives positively in the world. He is sensitive to time but always rejects it. Hence, in the later, he breaks his watch for not being confused and controlled by the time. It implies Quentin dislikes the present and prefers to live in the past and he always wants to keep his family's honor once they had. So when he knows his sister loses her chastity, he says he has committed incest "I said Father it was I it was not Dalton Ames"(Faulkner, 2013: 65) Why does he have to commit something that never happens? He would believe Caddy is as pure as before rather than accept the fact that Caddy has grown up and she really does a shameful thing. Painfully, whatever he does, Caddy's matter turns up in his mind again and again. His love to Caddy is too much to be accepted by the society. Then it is not so strange that Quentin chooses to end his life to escape the reality and pains.

Jason, the second boy of the Compson, seems to be not so harmonious with his siblings. Caddy fights with him for he cuts up all Benjy's dolls. Caddy says in such a tone "I'll slit his gizzel", "He did it just for meanness"(Faulkner, 2013: 52) It is obvious to see Caddy and Jason dislike each other, less alone after Caddy is driven out from the house, Caddy admits that actually they know each other very well and she doesn't trust him. Likewise, from Jason's own interior monologue it could be found he really hates Caddy. "And so I counted the money again that night and put it away, and I didn't feel so bad. I says I reckon that'll show you. I reckon you'll know now that you cant beat me out of job and get away with it."(Faulkner, 2013: 163).

According to the section of Jason, the author describes him as a gentle man but much more snobbish. He is the last master of this family after both his father and brother's death. But as his consciousness is placid, he prefers to live in present as a staff in a small shop and at the same time he secretly does something immoral. All his life and his consciousness are controlled by avenging, cursing others and gathering money. His little brother is a fool. His big brother commits suicide. His father does nothing for him before his death. His sister is deserted by her husband, leaving a baby and destroying his future but he has to support the broken family. Of course, he blames all his misfortunes on Caddy, which can also explain his metamorphic behaviors.

These three characters' interior monologues truly show their particular mental activities. Benjy's illogical words, which can be considered as the balderdash, unreservedly describe the childhood of these children and show his deep love to Caddy. Quentin's mental world is as muddy as the bog, filling with endless despair. Jason enjoys living in unrealistic fantasy and simultaneously performs his perfect revenge. In

this way, Faulkner vividly describes the three characters and through their interior monologues, readers can deeply understand their thoughts and feelings.

Multi-perspective Narration

Stream of consciousness in *The Sound and the Fury* develops with multi-perspective narration focusing on the same object. Faulkner successfully describes the Compsons' decline by observing in different angles.

Faulkner doesn't intend to write the novel in a traditional way, as he himself has said "I choose Benjy as the first narration, because told by him who only knows something literal but not knows why, the story will be much more vivid. But after finishing this section, I'm not satisfied, so I continue the second, the third and the fourth part." (Yang, 2011: 123) In this way, with incessant transformation between characters and scenes, the narration can never be burdensome and boring. Even though readers will feel confused when they respectively read every section, to put them together it forms a complete picture. These four narrators live in the same family, but they have their own feelings and understandings toward the abnormal atmosphere in this family. Hence four different narrations make the story much more real and living.

In first three parts, Faulkner lets family members narrate the story in their own ways from internal focalization. Thus, without any efforts of the author, these narrators themselves will show what really they are. Benjy's section is about his consciousness of his 33rd birthday on April 7, 1928. He is a fool without logical thinking ability or time concept, so his narration is totally the presentation of what he has seen, heard or felt. That's why so many changes of consciousness occur in his part. Such as past and present mix together, different scenes change quickly and desultorily, different characters alternately show up, however readers have no difficulties in reading and understanding. On the contrary, it can be found how much Benjy loves his sister! Therefore, owing to the narration of an idiot, his story is able to fill with purity. From the second and third section, Quentin and Jason's characters seem to be clear. Quentin is trapped in despair in that he can't bear Caddy's fall and he has no way to save the family or only Caddy or himself. He is always entangled with Caddy's virginity and from the beginning to end he is controlled by the time. To conclude with Yang Ruyue's words "Quentin can't quit old life and has no idea to protect it, so death is his only choice." (Yang, 2011: 124) Jason, whose mind is full of avenge and money, is different from any of his siblings because he deserts his family and humanity in his deep heart. Using the internal focalization, how the family declines gradually and what about these

children's attitudes and feelings to this family can be seen in a moment. However, unlike the first three parts, in the last part of this novel, Faulkner uses the third person to give readers a much more objective, plain and vivid description. Dilsey, the major non-Compson character in *The Sound and the Fury*, is experiencing much more than those children. So her narration may disclose the truth.

Namely, in the last part of the novel, the author makes a supplement through an omniscient perspective which is a narrative form that is usually used in writing. Generally, it is shown with the third person. In this way, Faulkner himself can be a person who knows everything that occurs in this family and express his ideas and attitudes to the whole family freely. Meanwhile, the transformation between internal focalization and omniscient perspective can influence readers' aesthetics.

Dilsey is a kind and guileless black servant as Min Xinzhou evaluates "In such a cold world, only she can give warmth"(Min, 2011: 114) She loves all those children of this family except Jason. When she is threatened by Jason, she could bravely say "You're a cold man, Jason, if man you is, I thank de Lawd I got mo heart den cat, even if hit is black".(Faulkner, 2013: 164) She seldom interferes with the deal about the Compsons. "Years earlier her husband Roskus had warned her that nothing but bad fortune would come from remaining on the Compsons place"(Castille, Winter92: 429) However, she ignores him and pursues the illusion of preserving the Compson by lavishing them with her compassion. "Undoubtedly Dilsey's kindness and conscience lead her to forge a new secular identity independent of the Compson and to recover an enduring family heritage of her own"(Castille, 1992: 431)So Dilsey's moral quality guarantees the truth and objectiveness of her narration.

The author writes the novel from different angles deliberately for inducing readers' own imagination and meditation. After all, in the first three sections, the narrator has his own values and emotions, so he can not know and narrate the whole story in an omnipotent way. Then Dilsey's narration makes up for the deficiency and fills the blank of former narration. Hence, readers could renew their perceptions and judgments to understand the novel in their own ways, which is also the another effect that author intends to express.

Different characters can truly express distinctive emotions and value judgments, which is also the feature of multi-perspective narration. Faulkner sets different angles to describe the story with combination of various sensory impressions through using conscious activities to free from the limits of one-dimensional narration. Hence, readers

can deeply feel the tragic atmosphere collected by different conscious activities.

Narrative Montage

The use of montage in this novel is frequent. In this fiction, the physical time runs through about 30 years, however, the time span in the whole fiction only constitutes four days and each day contains many different memory fragments, which seems to be a film that tells a complete story in two hours.

The day on April 7, 1928 is Benjy's birthday. On this day, many memory fragments jump out of his head. When Luster is looking for his quarter for watching a show, Benjy snags on a nail and remembers a similar scene—Caddy and he send a letter for uncle Maury and then some scenes continues to appear—he goes out to play with Caddy, goes to the graveyard with his mum, comes back to reality and goes back to send the letter again. Everything similar repeats in his mind like a circle and always a new circle starts again. How disordered and illogical Benjy's consciousness is, the past and present are always connected closely, which is the feature of narrative montage. Here is an example: "I hushed and got in the water and Roskus came and said to come to supper and Caddy said, It's not supper time yet I'm not going. She was wet. We playing in the branch and Caddy squatted down and got her dress wet."(Faulkner, 2013: 12) .Subsequently, the scenes about granny's death, present, Caddy's wedding and Quentin's death transform alternately. Montage makes "Macross" possible and matches the trait of the stream of consciousness well.

On April 8, 1928, the narration begins with the "day dawned bleak and chill".(Faulkner, 2013: 209) In this part, it is difficult to find the flow of consciousness, but the lens become clear and real. On a cold morning, Dilsey is busy in preparing breakfast, which seems to be clumsy because she is old. The dialogue between Dilsey and Luster adds bit warmth for this morning. Finally the event of broken windows reveals a secret that little Quentin runs away from home with a large sum of money stolen from Jason who has collected for many years. Ironically, the money should belong to little Quentin if Jason didn't privately take it from his sister. The scene continues to change and then Dilsey goes to the church for Easter while Jason is looking for his dear niece angrily. There is such a description:

"The air brightened, the running shadow patches were now the obverse, and it seemed to him that the fact that the day was clearing was another cunning stroke on the part of the foe, the fresh battle toward which he was carrying ancient wounds. From time to

time he passed churches, unpainted frame buildings with sheet iron steeples, surrounded by tethered teams and shabby motorcars and it seemed to him that each of them was a picket-post where the rear guards of Circumstance peeped fleetingly back at him. "And damn You, too," he said. "See if you can stop me," thinking of himself, his file of soldiers with the manacled sheriff in the rear, dragging Omnipotence down from his throne, if necessary; of the embattled legions of both hell and heaven through which he tore his way and put his hands at last on his fleeting niece"(Faulkner, 2013: 241).

After the sheriff refuses to help Jason, he decides to look for little Quentin himself. Nevertheless, he is so angry that everything in his eyes is ominous. So even if it is a shiny day, he prefers to believe "It's going to rain", "Get me half way there, and rain like hell"(Faulkner, 2013: 241). At that time, he has no mood to feel the atmosphere of Easter but full hates to little Quentin. He abuses those imaginary guards and imagines himself that he drags God from his throne. Obviously, Jason shows no faith to God and in his mind, nothing can be much more important than catching his niece. Surely, he thinks of it as a cruel battle. In brief, Jason drowns into a river called secular society. Quentin's fleeing undoubtedly means what Jason has done is in vain and he is beaten twice by the same enemy.(He recognizes Caddy as his enemy.)Such a close-up shot perfectly shows Jason's anger and his ridiculous fantasy. Compared to Jason's former performance, his crazy reflection this time suggests he only cares about his own benefits and he will protect them even at the cost of deserting conscience and humanity. Consciousness changes anytime and anywhere, it is untouched and disordered. However, with the help of montage, fragmentary consciousness is organized together and forms a net. Wherever it flows, that what it expresses is still complete.

Consciousness and Unconsciousness

Factors that affect our lives and natures are not only consciousness but much more are our sub-consciousness. In consciousness, apart from several kinds of technique proposed above, free association and unconsciousness are also remarkable features of the stream of consciousness.

Free Association

Free association is another main skill of stream of consciousness in the novel. From the evolutionary perspective, free association is people's advanced feature and there is no fixed form of it. Usually the character is faced with one thing and suddenly the scene changes and another unrelated thing emerges. However a few lines later, it jumps back

to the original pattern.

“Mother’s sick, Father said. Dilsey will put you to bed. Where’s Quentin. Versh getting him, Dilsey said. Father stood and watched us go past. We could here mother in her room.....Caddy and Jason were fighting in the mirror.....Jason came in.....You can look at the fire and the mirror and the cushion too, Caddy said.....”(Faulkner, 2013: 49) .

When reading this part, it seems to be confused because the flow of Benjy’s consciousness is quick. “Granny’s death”, “change name”, “present” repeat in Benjy’s mind. But such a stream of consciousness conforms to Benjy’s physical and mental characters. For him, he only has feelings because he can not think logically like a normal person. Therefore his consciousness is always following scenes visualized before his eyes and then forms unrelated association and memories. Take the following as an example:

“ ‘Hush.’ Luster said. ‘How can I make them come over here, if they aint coming. Wait. They’ll be some in a minute. Look yonder. Here they come.’ I went along the fence, to the gate, where the girls passed with their book satchels. ‘You, Benjy.’ Luster said. ‘Come back here.’ ”

“You cant do no good looking through the gate, T.P. said. Miss Caddy done gone long ways away. Done got married and left you. You cant do no good, bolding to the gate and crying. She cant bear you”(Faulkner, 2013: 40).

At the beginning, Luster and Benjy are near the fence and then Benjy’s memory comes back to a day in 1910. The pasture is one of Benjy’s important things. He often goes there to see those golfers playing golf. Then he remembers those girls outside the gate. These two matters have no connection but it is normal for Benjy. As when he sees cows come jumping out of the barn, the scene of Caddy’s wedding appears in his mind. When he sees water, he remembers the picture that Caddy gets wet again. In the later part of his narration, the transformation among scenes— “father’s death”, “Quentin’s death”, “granny’s death” fully show us the feature of free association. On the other hand, free association is scientific and the content of association often expresses our deep desire which usually can not be realized. As Fant, Jr proposes, in his paper *Faulkner’s The Sound and the Fury*, says that “Benjy’s confusion of “Caddy” with “caddie” creates the novel’s most famous linguistic pun.”(Fant, 1994: 104) In the family, only Benjy will confuse “caddie” with “Caddy”. His mistake can be understood but his reflections to any words pronounced like “Caddy” or some objects—matches, light which can be

equal to Caddy suggest Caddy is important and distinctive for him. It is a theme that the author wants to express.

Manifestation of Unconsciousness

In Freud's psychoanalytic theory, human's spiritual consciousness is divided into three levels and they are consciousness, pre-consciousness and unconsciousness. Unconsciousness usually refers to those things that are not normally considered as conscious components. Such as pent-up desires, secret thoughts and fears that can't be really realized. "Freud believes that children are born with sexual instinct, namely 'libido' —a kind of power and impulse. And the repression of libido of childhood will lead to Oedipus Complex"(Gan, 2008: 36) In *The Sound and the Fury*, the manifestation of unconsciousness is best shown in Quentyn.

After reading the fiction, it is not difficult to find Oedipus Complex in Quentyn. First, Mrs. Compson is a woman who shows little love or care to her children. Of course she only admits Jason as her son because she once writes to Quentyn "Jason will make a splendid banker he is the only one of my children with any practical sense you can thank me for that he takes after my people the others are all Compson"(Faulkner, 2013: 76). And for most of time, complaining is the only thing she can do, especially she regards Benjy as her sin and punishment given by God. Instead Caddy loves Benjy and plays a role of mother rather than a sister which is a reason why Quentyn loves Caddy so much that he can't help saying to his father "I have committed incest I said Father it was I it was not Dalton Ames."(Faulkner, 2013: 65) when Caddy loses virginity. "Some unconscious behaviors are caused by experiencing trauma"(Gan, 2008: 36) Quentyn's trauma to some degree is caused by his mother's dereliction. Then he puts his hope on Caddy who is a beautiful girl and also is Faulkner's beloved person. Such a displacement is not surprising for readers but is fatal for Quentyn and inevitably it leads his death in the end.

Quentyn loves Caddy too much to beyond the ethical criterion so that the abnormal emotion causes his unconscious behavior. He once fantasizes "Because if it were just to hell; if that were all of it. Finished. If things just finished themselves. Nobody else there but her and me. If we could have just done something so dreadful that they would have fled hell except us."(Faulkner, 2013: 65) Why here is hell but not heaven because in his sub-consciousness, it is incest that is not accepted by the society alike. During this miserable process, Quentyn tries to kill Dalton Ames but he gives up for being afraid to fall into hell with Caddy. He even fails the plan that killing Caddy first and then

himself. All these show that in Quentin unconsciousness, he considers Caddy as his lover. And he is suffering from the pain brought from such an immoral emotions.

Quentin's tragedy, to some extent, has something to do with Caddy. But usually the main reason is potential. His tragedy is caused by his experience of trauma and failing displacement of libido. In Quentin's deep mind, death is the best way to end his desire, namely ashes to ashes and dust to dust as Dilsey finally says "I've seed de first en de last."(Faulkner, 2013: 234)

CONCLUSION

Faulkner, as a famous writer in the history of American literature in the 20th century, is a master of stream of consciousness. For his literary attainments, Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1950. The central theme of Faulkner's novels is the human heart in conflict with itself and the creative method is capricious. He adopts symbolic and modernistic techniques but has his own development.

In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner breaks the limitations of time and space and makes the best of the characters of stream of consciousness to show depraved and abnormal atmosphere of the Compson.

Using multi-perspective, montage, interior monologue and free association, stream of consciousness can be well understood systematically. Consciousness is abstract and alterable, but from their interior monologue, different emotions can truly be shown in the writing. Free association highlights the characters of these figures in the novel as well as how unconsciousness subtly affects a person's behaviors in the life. Also the author uses an internal visual angle and an omniscient perspective to completely describe the Compson's ups and downs and let readers have a new recognition of confusions and blanks of each narration. Multi-perspective narration, instead of traditional narrative model, makes the novel much more real and active. Likewise, the author expresses his writing style and creates a movie show through the montage.

In brief, in this novel, stream of consciousness is perfectly realized through using these writing techniques, which show the writer's outstanding writing skills and reveals the theme of selfish, greed and ugliness of humanity and the incisive criticism to social ethical standards.

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