

The decay of the compsons in william faulkner's the sound and the fury

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The Sound and The Fury by William Faulkner : Theme Analysis

In *The Sound and the Fury*, William Faulkner's main theme is about the decay of the Compson family, which also parallels the decay of the South in America. The Compson family is composed of Jason Compson III, the alcoholic father, Benjamin (Benjy), the retarded boy, Quentin, the suicidal, Caddy, the calm and somewhat central character of the book, and Jason, the rude and racist. Faulkner gives each one of them a quality that emphasizes how much their family has declined, morally, physically, and intellectually.

Benjamin (Benjy) Compson is the narrator of the first chapter of the book. He is a mute guy who can neither take care of himself nor express himself, only by crying. That's why he's always been taken care of either by Caddy, or Luster. His inability to communicate reflects one of the values lost by the Compson family, genuine and honest communication. Whenever he is presented with something he hates, he starts crying, whether it's when Caddy was all wet and muddy or when he smelled the perfume on her. As a family, the Compsons do not have any form of genuine communication among each other, just like Benjy cannot communicate with others, and this is the reason why all their kids went into their own cheap way. Quentin ended up committing suicide because he couldn't make up his mind, judging that his father's advice was useless.

Ben

Another way Faulkner highlights the decline of the Compson family is by drawing our attention to the somewhat paranoiac attachment to traditional

values of Quentin Compson. Quentin strongly believes in deep traditional Southern values such as honor, honesty, and purity, which have clearly lost their meaning in the Compson household. Quentin however still holds on to these values and is unable to bear the pain of his family weakening in such matters. His relationship with Caddy is important because when she loses her virginity, Quentin feels betrayed that her own sister has broken an essential value. His father as well seem to have forgotten the meaning of those values. By giving Quentin a watch, he hoped that he “ wouldn’t remember time, but that [he] might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all [his] breath trying to conquer it”(). Even though he was the one to inculcate those values into him, he now wants him to forget about them. This recession in values from both her father and beloved sister, frustrates him to the point of punching his friends(), and ultimately committing suicide.

All characters display a sense of kindness, and longing for the lost values of the past, except for one, Jason IV Compson. He is a cruel man who is self-absorbed and only thinks of personal wealth. He is a racist who doesn’t hesitate to crudely address their black servants. Of all the characters, he is the one who best show just how deep the Compson family has sunk.