

The sound and the
fury essay:
psychological
criticism of caroline
compson



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Southern aristocratic mothers generally did not take care for their children, and instead, they usually had an “ African-American woman [care] for (and essentially raise) Southern white children” (Tucker, 35). Caroline Compson is the neurotic and inconsiderate mother of Quentin, Caddy, Jason, and Benjy. Incapable to show any love to her children, Caroline is essentially the reason for the downfall to the Compson family. William Faulkner’s novel ‘ The Sound and The Fury’ asserts the problems of Caroline Compson through her children in order to prove that she causes harm to her family due to her manipulative ways. Mothers have a lasting impression on their children, as they are usually the first to connect with the children. Neglecting and manipulating children leave a psychological impact on them and cause problems later in life.

In Benjy’s section, it is easy to pick up on Caroline’s distaste for her youngest son. She is inconsiderate of Benjy’s condition and does not quite understand it. When the family is in the room with the fireplace, Caroline is sitting in a chair and Caddy is trying to give Benjy a cushion to calm down, but he continues to cry. Caroline believes that “ he must learn to mind [her]” (64) and tells him to “ stop that [crying]” (64), but Benjy just keeps crying which leads to Caroline to begin crying from frustration. Caroline also feels obligated to keep Benjy in Jefferson, Mississippi instead of sending him to the insane asylum in Jackson. She is laying in bed, feigning sickness when Benjy burns his hand and begins to holler. Caroline acts like she cares when she asks “ What is it now. Cant [she] even be sick in peace. [Does she] have to get up out of bed to come down to him, with two grown negroes to take care of him.” (59). Caroline has never once in her life lifted as much as pinky for

Benjy, but because she feels as if she has been purposely disrupted, she acts like she is the only one capable of handling Benjy. Caroline is sure that “ Benjamin [is] punishment enough for any sins [she has] committed [she] thought he was [her] punishment for putting aside [her] pride and marrying a man who held himself above [her]” (103). This thinking causes Caroline to reject Benjy, ultimately treating him like a pest.

Jason and Caroline’s relationship is an odd mother-son relationship. While Caroline wails and complains, Jason simply mocks her throughout the novel. The manipulative mannerism of Caroline really comes out as she tries to make Jason feel bad for her. When Jason is trying to leave for work, Caroline claims that she is “ just a trouble and a burden to you” (181). Since Jason is quite immune to his mother’s manipulative ways, he simply mocks her. Despite the fact Caroline possibly knows that Jason is not affected by her self-pitying personality, she still attempts to get attention from him by pretending to be a victim. Caroline also constantly states that Jason is her favorite because “[he] is not a Compson except in name” (196). She is trying to make him feel loved, but in truth, she only cares because he acts more like her family, a Bascomb. Only one person truly cared for Jason is Damuddy. Caroline does not like the fact that “ Damuddy spoiled Jason” (63), and even complains that it “ took him two years to outgrow it” (63), much too long in her opinion. Caroline may act like she cares for Jason, but she is simply trying to get him to do what she wants by trying to make him feel guilty.

Several factors play into why Caroline might have purposefully neglected her children. The time in this book is post-Civil War and it is known that the <https://assignbuster.com/the-sound-and-the-fury-essay-psychological-criticism-of-caroline-compson/>

Compson family was a higher class, possibly first or second. Caroline was most likely raised by black servants, as she married into a higher class family. It is possible that due to the “ patriarchally enforced notion of the mammy provides for a chasm between white mothers and their children, mentally, physically, and emotionally” (Copland). Thus, Caroline is simply filling in the fact that “ middle-upper class white woman was supposed to produce children [and] let the black ‘ mammy’ raise and care for the child” (Copland). Dilsey, the black servant, is the one who cares for all the children, raising them since birth alongside her children. Caroline has a “ difficulty in white mothering and/or establishing close connections with their children” (Copland), and in a sense, it makes a reasonable amount of sense on why Caroline neglects her children.

The second reason why Caroline is unable to provide her children with love and care is due to being a hypochondriac. Most of the times, throughout the novel, when Caroline is in the scene, she complains of being sick and/or is in bed ‘ sick’. When Benjy wants to go outside, Uncle Maury is quick to pick up on the fact that “[Caroline will] worry [herself] sick over him” (5). She agrees with him. Although it is unknown exactly why Caroline acts the way she does, her narcissistic mannerism can be based off of a type of trauma or psychological and emotional event that happened in her life while growing up. Parents who suffer problems in their childhood are more likely to repeat the same behavior seen in their parents.

The psychological reasoning behind Caroline’s bad parenting and harsh personality remains a mystery, it is no mystery that her cruel ways are the true reason for the Compson family downfall. The negligence seen in the <https://assignbuster.com/the-sound-and-the-fury-essay-psychological-criticism-of-caroline-compson/>

novel is the foreshadowing of her children's lives: Benjy ends up being sent to an insane asylum in Jackson; Quentin kills himself; Caddy has an illegitimate child and disappears; and Jason is a hateful and manipulative man. Caroline not only sets herself up for failure in properly raising her children, she also sets her own children up for failure, whether it be intentional or not.

Works Cited

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