

Caddy and quentin compson

Sociology



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Justine Weng Dickinson AP English III-1 24 March 2011 One Step Forward, One Step Backward Challenging traditional taboos is a factor that contributes to the development of society. Such rebellion was prevalent among the youth of the early twentieth century, introducing fresh societal values that overtook the older, rooted values. In order for an individual to progress with society, he must let go of outdated traditions, for the refusal to do so brings about disastrous results. Those who do adapt to modernization save themselves from ignorance, while those who cling onto values of the past allow their own social undoing. In Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, the contrast in behavior between Caddy and Quentin displays the results of those who step forward with modernization versus those who remain in the past. While Caddy portrays a modern, independent woman through her unorthodox behavior, Quentin stands less willing to accept the destined modernization of society as he holds tightly to fading southern traditions and values. Caddy's refusal to comply with traditional societal expectations for women strengthens Quentin's grasp on his outdated southern values, leading to his incestuous relationship with his sister. Interactions between Caddy and Quentin as children foreshadow the development of Caddy as a modern woman along with her conflicting relationship with Quentin. Even in their youth, "Quentin's futile attempts to protect his sister's honor and body" are displayed in the scene describing the children at play in the branch (Lilburn 312). Her continuous backtalk towards her older brother illustrates Caddy's rebellious nature against traditional roles of females. She refuses to fulfill characteristics of southern women, such as submission and docile. Not only is her request for Versh to unbutton her dress inappropriate, Caddy's ability to enforce her way displays her strong nature that

contributes to the disruption of Quentin's mindset of distinctive masculine and feminine societal roles. As is with Caddy's nature, evidence of the cause of Quentin's conflicting relationship with Caddy can be traced back to their childhood. In an attempt to protect Caddy's purity, "Quentin slapped [Caddy] and she slipped and fell down in the water" (Faulkner 12). Quentin's response to Caddy's unorthodox behavior foreshadows his overprotective nature towards Caddy, igniting his eventual obsession with her. As Caddy becomes increasingly promiscuous, she steps farther from tradition, causing Quentin to further attempt to bring her back into his ideas of feminine roles. Southern values call for women "to be virtuous, chaste, virginal" (Miller). However, Caddy refuses to fulfill her role as a pure, innocent woman and instead strays from societal expectations, leaving behind her past. Quentin, in contrast, attempts to closely adhere to traditions, which contributes to his untraditional obsession with Caddy. Quentin's fascination with Caddy's virginity was the result of his clinging onto of the past. He desires so badly for Caddy to satisfy his idea of a traditional southern woman. As a result, he acts according to how he believes a southern gentleman ought to in an attempt to bring Caddy back into traditional behavior of the Old South. Unfortunately, his valiant effort is twisted into an incestuous obsession. "Quentin is attempting to play his masculine role by applying something very old-honor-to his modern situation" (Miller). The paradox between Quentin's hold on tradition and his incestuous relationship with Caddy is the root of Quentin's troubles. His untraditional methods to achieve tradition prove to be ineffective. The modern manner through which Quentin tries to maintain traditional values stunts him from succeeding in achieving masculinity and protecting Caddy. By trapping himself in between the old and the new South,

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Quentin ends up disarray, unable to clearly recognize his true identity. Instead of figuring out how to find himself, he focuses completely on trying to redeem Caddy's fleeting identity as a southern woman. Quentin holds onto an outdated honor code in an attempt to keep Caddy in his mindset of the way southern women ought to behave by consuming his life with trying to maintain social order between males and females. In accordance to his southern gentleman upbringing, Quentin believes that he must prove his masculinity by saving his sister. However, "in order to step into the public world of masculine honor to defend his sister, his sister would first have to be domestically chaste instead of publically sexual" (Miller). Caddy's inability to maintain chastity makes it impossible for Quentin to fill the traditional masculine role in their relationship. On numerous occasions, Quentin involves himself in gun or fist fights as an attempt to prove his masculinity, but each time, he is easily defeated and humiliated. In order for Quentin to achieve masculinity in modern society, he needs to leave behind the old honor code of purity and immorality. Unfortunately, Quentin's refusal to let go of the past along with Caddy's rejection of the past results in the switching of orthodox roles, with Caddy preventing Quentin from immorality rather than vice versa. "Caddy and Quentin played reversed cultural roles: she, the sister, plays the sexually active role and he, the brother, plays the demure virgin" (Miller). The reversal of Quentin and Caddy's societal roles is further portrayed when Quentin breaks down when he is unable to kill the two of them and Caddy pleads of him to not "cry poor Quentin...but [Quentin] couldn't stop [Caddy] held [Quentin's] head against her damp hard breast" (Faulkner 96). By holding onto past and attempting for fulfill the traditional masculine role while reaching for a modern woman, Quentin finds

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himself unable accomplish either. Due to his failure to “rescue” Caddy, Quentin finds himself trapped in between the old and new South, overwhelming him with feelings of uselessness and incapability. His “troubles with his sister’s impure state only heighten his own feelings of inadequacy” (Dobbs). Because Quentin cannot save Caddy’s purity and fulfill his role as a southern gentleman, he becomes overcome with hopelessness. Quentin’s inability to either renounce tradition and accept modernism or to restore his relationship with Caddy to their childhood status forces him to seek escape through suicide. He longs for his modernized sister while hanging onto tradition. Because he is trapped in between the past and present world, Quentin concludes that there is but one way out. “Quentin is simultaneously moving outside of and within the various modes of historical meaning available to him, manifesting instability which he will only be able to anchor with suicide” (Miller). The past that is so dear to him clashes with the inevitable present, pulling him apart and resulting in his end. The mentality of Quentin is trapped in the past while society is rapidly progressing resulting in an unbearable contradiction. Meanwhile, Caddy represents the opposite end of the spectrum, portraying a forerunner in modernization. Through the contrasting natures of Caddy and Quentin Compson, Faulkner illustrates the effects of modernism on those who fail to progress with a changing society. In order for an individual to function in modern society, he must progress as society progresses; an attempt to live in accordance to values and traditions of the past is social suicide. Works Cited Dobbs, Ricky Floyd. “Case Study in Social Neurosis: Quentin Compson and the Lost Cause.” *Papers on Language & Literature* 33. 4 (1997): 366. Literary Reference Center. EBSCO. Web. 6 Feb. 2011. Faulkner, William. *The* <https://assignbuster.com/caddy-and-quentin-compson/>

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