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FAMILY, MEMORY, AND THE SOUTH IN WILLIAM FAULKNER'S THE SOUND AND THE FURY

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ABSTRACT. William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* is a seminal work of Southern literature that explores the complexities of family, memory, and regional identity. Through the fragmented perspectives of the Compson family members, the novel portrays the decline of a Southern aristocratic household, reflecting broader social and cultural transformations in the American South. Memory, both as a personal and collective experience, shapes the characters' identities and highlights the tension between the past and present. Faulkner's experimental narrative techniques—stream of consciousness, shifting timeframes, and multiple perspectives—allow readers to engage with the subjective nature of memory and the inescapable influence of family legacy. This study examines the interplay of family, memory, and Southern identity, arguing that the novel critiques both personal and cultural decay while offering profound insight into human consciousness and historical consciousness.

Keywords: *Family, Memory, Southern Identity, Cultural Decay, Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury, Psychological Perspective.*

INTRODUCTION. *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) is one of William Faulkner's most innovative and influential novels, set against the backdrop of the American South during the early twentieth century. The story centers on the Compson family, whose decline mirrors the transformation and disintegration of traditional Southern aristocracy after the Civil War. Faulkner uses multiple narrative voices, most notably Benjy, Quentin, and Jason, to explore the subjective experience of memory, the burden of family expectations, and the influence of a historically rooted regional identity. The novel's fragmented structure reflects the characters' psychological complexity and the disorientation caused by the passage of time. This study focuses on three interconnected themes: the significance of family, the role of memory in shaping identity, and the representation of the South, arguing that Faulkner's novel offers a critique of both personal and social decline while preserving the profound cultural legacy of the region.

FAMILY AND THE COMPSON LEGACY

In *The Sound and the Fury*, the Compson family symbolizes a declining Southern aristocracy, demonstrating how the burden of history, tradition, and family heritage can influence—and ultimately limit—personal lives. The





Compsons are connected not only through their lineage but also by a collective history that encompasses both advantages and hardships. Faulkner depicts the family as representative of the traditional Southern aristocracy, whose societal significance is dwindling amid contemporary economic and cultural changes. The family's deterioration is evident in both ethical and economic aspects, highlighting the vulnerability of social standing and the repercussions of not adjusting to evolving situations. Every member of the Compson family represents various facets of this heritage. Benjy, whose cognitive impairment separates him from typical comprehension, is still profoundly attuned to the family's emotional interactions, illustrating how family ties can be both nurturing and restrictive. Quentin, fixated on the Compson family's reputation and the integrity of Southern customs, battles to align his romanticized view of history with the truth of decline, which ultimately results in his heartbreaking end. In contrast, Jason welcomes cynicism and materialism, taking advantage of the family's assets and others for his personal benefit. Faulkner uses these characters to illustrate how inherited expectations, values, and histories can profoundly shape personalities in varying ways, impacting moral decisions, relationships, and the ability to empathize.

The Compson family exemplifies the conflict between shared memory and personal experience. Family heritage instills a feeling of obligation, guilt, and identity that endures through generations, frequently leading to clashes between individual aspirations and passed-down duties. Faulkner illustrates that the family's downfall represents a personal tragedy and a wider cultural critique of the South's transformation, as traditional hierarchies, social customs, and ideas of honor collapse due to economic strain and societal shifts. In this manner, the Compson family functions. The Compson family also illustrates the tension between collective memory and individual experience. Family legacy imposes a sense of duty, guilt, and identity that persists across generations, often creating conflict between personal desires and inherited responsibilities. Faulkner shows that the family's decline is both a personal tragedy and a broader cultural commentary on the transformation of the South, as traditional hierarchies, social norms, and notions of honor erode under economic pressures and societal change. In this way, the Compson family serves as a microcosm for the complexities of Southern life, revealing how family legacy can be a source of both identity and suffering, shaping the lives of individuals in ways they cannot easily escape.

MEMORY AND SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE

Memory serves as a core theme in *The Sound and the Fury*, influencing the novel's narrative framework and exposing the inner emotions of the Compson family members. Faulkner uses a stream-of-consciousness approach to engage readers in the personal experiences of characters such as Benjy, Quentin, and Jason, illustrating how memory shapes perception, feelings, and choices. For Benjy, memory is not linear and is influenced by the senses; his memories are sparked by visuals, sounds, and scents, frequently merging what was and what is.





This disjointed experience highlights the fluidity and intricacy of memory, showing that personal history cannot be separated from emotional reactions and identity development.

Quentin, on the other hand, is overwhelmed by fixated memories of familial dignity and Southern customs. His recollections are deeply analytical and ethical, showing an effort to create order and significance amidst the tumultuous passage of time. Quentin's obsession with the past eventually alienates him from reality, highlighting the harmful power of memory when it transforms into an obsession. Jason's recollections, influenced by anger and disdain, help to bolster his pessimistic perspective. In contrast to Benjy's emotional memories and Quentin's moral reflections, Jason's viewpoint employs the past to rationalize current exploitation and financial benefit, demonstrating how memory can be twisted for personal advantage. Faulkner likewise examines the communal aspect of memory through characters such as Dilsey, whose memories of the Compson family's past are linked with her personal experiences and cultural awareness. From her viewpoint, the novel highlights the enduring nature of memory as a stabilizing element, maintaining moral and cultural continuity even in the face of individual and societal deterioration. Memory in *The Sound and the Fury* serves as both a narrative tool and a thematic issue, demonstrating how past experiences—whether painful, glorified, or ordinary—deeply influence human perception and ethical comprehension. Faulkner's portrayal of memory underscores its subjectivity, highlighting the ways in which individuals reconstruct and interpret their histories to navigate identity, emotion, and the challenges of an evolving social environment.

THE SOUTH: REGIONAL IDENTITY AND CULTURAL DECAY

In *The Sound and the Fury*, William Faulkner places the fall of the Compson family against the larger backdrop of the American South, utilizing the area as a perspective to explore social transformation, historical recollection, and cultural identity. The South, illustrated in the novel, is a region rich in tradition, structure, and longing for the pre-Civil War period, while also grappling with the challenges of modernization, economic change, and ethical deterioration. Faulkner depicts the area as simultaneously stunning and deteriorating, emphasizing the contradictions present in Southern identity: pride mixed with guilt, elegance obscured by corruption, and stability disrupted by social and economic turmoil. The Compson family's decline reflects the cultural decline of the South. While the family fights to uphold its honor, social standing, and moral principles, the area contends with the degradation of its traditional values. The strict social hierarchies, gender roles, and racial systems that previously characterized Southern life are becoming more unstable, unable to endure the pressures of transformation. Amidst the family's deterioration, Faulkner examines the endurance of antiquated values, illustrating how a bond to tradition can both influence and obstruct individual and communal advancement.





Additionally, Faulkner highlights the relationship between memory, history, and regional identity. Figures like Quentin hold onto a romanticized notion of the South, highlighting values such as honor, refinement, and the Compsons' noble heritage. However, this nostalgia cannot be separated from decline, as current reality opposes the ideal of a dignified and lasting Southern history. The novel also depicts the daily lives of African American characters such as Dilsey, who offer continuity and moral stability in the face of decay, representing the strength of cultural memory and ethical principles that surpass the collapse of elite Southern society.

Ultimately, Faulkner presents the South as a character in its own right—complex, morally ambiguous, and historically burdened. By intertwining personal, familial, and regional narratives, the novel explores how cultural identity, memory, and moral decay intersect, revealing the fragility of social and ethical structures in a transforming society. The South's decline is both a backdrop and a mirror for human experience, emphasizing the inescapable influence of history and culture on individual and collective lives.

CONCLUSION. In *The Sound and the Fury*, William Faulkner masterfully interweaves themes of family, memory, and Southern identity to explore the complexities of human experience and cultural transformation. The Compson family's decline exemplifies the interplay between inherited burdens and individual failings, illustrating the profound influence of familial and historical legacy on personal destiny. Memory serves as both a guide and a constraint, shaping characters' perceptions and moral judgments, while the South itself emerges as a character, reflecting both continuity and decay. Faulkner's novel critiques the erosion of ethical, social, and cultural values, offering readers a rich, multi-layered exploration of human consciousness and historical consciousness. Ultimately, *The Sound and the Fury* reveals how family, memory, and regional identity are inseparable, emphasizing the inescapable impact of the past on the present.

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