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The Influence of Selfishness on the Characters in William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury

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Abstract
This paper sheds light on the theme of selfishness in William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury. This novel reflects the selfishness of the southern American society as a result of the Civil War. In The Sound and the Fury, selfishness is represented in the Compson family in which the parents are selfish in the way they treat their children. In consequences, the children become so selfish towards each other that their selfishness causes the family deterioration. In addition, the deterioration of the Compson family reflects that of the south society.
Key words: selfishness, Civil War, immorality, southern America, deterioration.

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1.1.Selfishness and William Faulkner's Biograghical Sketch

Selfishness means that the needs of other people are not taken into consideration and not noticed. It also means that the focus of a person is concerned with him/ herself only. A selfish desire concentrates on the interests of oneself. Besides, a selfish person seeks his/ her own advantages only, disregarding these of others. Problems of hidden resentment often develop selfishness in people.[1]

Selfishness is one of the negative aspects that results from the American Civil War (1861-1865). The war happened between the northern and southern America, the southern part was defeated. It also influenced the economy of the south which was decreased at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. The economic depression caused various social and psychological problems to the southern people. As a result, people turned to be materialist. Each person looked for his/ her own advantages. Materialism traces selfishness; therefore, people became selfish.[2]

One of the writers who sheds light on the difficulties of the southern America is william Faulkner (1897- 1962). Faulkner is one of the most significant novelists in the twentieth century. He got the Noble Prize for literature in 1950, and the National Book Award as well as the Pulitzer Prize in 1955.[3]He was brought up in a southern family in Mississippi. When he was a child, Faulkner heard about the war from his grandfather. At university, he started his work as a writer to write about what he had heard from his elders concerning the war that destroyed the south. In his writings, Faulkner shows that the south was destroyed economically, socially, and psychologically. It is also mentioned that: "In his works he deals with problems and difficulties of life in the American south."[4]Faulkner was interested in the south troubles. He argues the rising as well as the deterioration of the aristocrats in the American history after the Civil War.

Faulkner presented his novel The Sound and the Fury (1929) to shed light on the changes happened to the southern American society after the Civil War. Faulkner described this novel as "the most grief and anguish"[5], and he likes it like that of "the mother [who] loves the child who became the thief or murderer more than the one who became the priest."[6]The Sound and the Fury explains the effects of selfishness on the Compsons' family, who is an aristocratic family lives in the south, and gradually falls down because of the pressure of life.Moreover, it "portrays the downfull of a once very influential, Southern family, the Compsons"[7]

In The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner deals with people who cannot live as they want, instead they are affected by everything around in their world. People also become selfish as they are materialist or mentally disabled. They are unable to understand the meaning of life but are involved in thinking. In other words, this remarkable novel reflects the life of corruption and selfishness which is prompted from the effects of the Civil War.

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The Role of Selfishness in William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury (1929)

In The Sound and the Fury, the Compson family, which represents all the southern American families, is influenced by selfishness in the way of their living. Selfishness exists in the parents' way of bringing their children up. Life is difficult, so the material way of thinking increases people's selfishness.

The Compsons who live in Jefferson, Mississippi town, start to decline since the Civil War. Their ancestors try to save their areas at that time so as not to be destroyed. However, their attempts are in vain. The Compsons' wealth, land, and status deteriorate gradually. They own a great mansion but according to the disturbance, their mansion is broken down. Their father sells a large part of the mansion due to his children's needs.Faulkner describes the deterioration of the Compson family and the society in which they live as: "a deteriorating world, represented symbollically by Faulkner in the physical and spiritual maladies of its inhabitants."[8] Minter also describes this novel as: "a moving story of four children and their inadequate parents."[9]

On the one hand, Mr. Compson, the father, is drunker and unable to lead his children well. He is wasteful and spends money to drink alcohol. His indifference to his children makes him a selfish father. Though the father is supposed to be wise, Mr. Compson is depicted as: "a weak, nihilistic alcoholic who toys with the emotions and needs of his children."[10] On the other hand, instead of taking care of her children, the mother gives money to the servants to take care of them. She is lazy, self-pitying, pre-occupied with her own interests, and likes appearances only. She is also depicted as: "cold, self-involved woman who expends her energies worrying about her ailments, complaining about her life, and clinging to her notions of respectability."[11]

The parents' selfishness to neglect their children's needs for love and intamacy, makes the lives of the children bitter and harsh. The parents who are responsible for their children's care, show no love and no guide. So, the relationship within the family: "... can be read as a failureof love within a family, an absence of self-respect and of a mutual respect."[12]In this way, Caddy and her three brothers,Quentin, Benjy, and Jason are deprived from the parental warmth. Besides, the loss of parental care makes Caddy play the role of a mother as well as a sister.

Caddy is interested in spending free time with her brothers to discover the world around. Minter states that: "Like Benjy, Quentin and Jason also turn towards Caddy, seeking to find in her some way of meeting needs ignored or thwarted by their parents."[13] Nevertheless, Caddy, who is a source of love for her brothers, turns to be selfish. Because of the lack of her parental love, Caddy beginsseeking love through her relationships with men. The aristocratic Compson family wants to preserve its honour. ButCaddy

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commits incest and doesn't respect her family's history. She is full of pity but stubborn and behaves recklessly. Though she feels guilty, yet her promiscuous behaviour annoys and torments her brothers alot.

Caddy is the lost girl who is neglected by her parents, and is described as: "the fatherless and motherless girl climbing down the rainpipe to escape from the only home she had, where she had never been offered love or affection or understanding."[14] When making love relationship with Dalton Ames, Caddy becomes pregnant and brings shame to her family. She loses her innocence and virginity. The loss of Caddy's virginity means the loss of her brothers. To cover up her heedless action of pregnancy, Caddy marries Herbert Head who promises to get a good job in a bank for Jason. But when discovering that Caddy's pregnancy is from another man, he divorces her immediately.

Caddy's selfishness is shown in the state of her indifference to her family's reputation. Besides, the state of casting her out of the family after getting birth to her illegitimate daughter, Quentin, doesn't depress her. Rather, Caddy keeps up her strength and: "...establishes her independence and achieves freedom."[15]This refers to the loss of the old traditional values of the elders. Before the war, the most important thing for a woman is her virginity. On the contrary, after the war, women are interested in sexuality to satisfy their own desires.

Quentin always expresses his dissatisfaction with Caddy's love relationship with Dalton Ames, watching her and saying:

I ran down the hill in the vacuum of crickets like a breath traveling across a mirror she was lying on her back in the water her head on the sand spit the water flowing about her skirt half saturated flopped along her flanks to the water motion in heavy ripples going nowhere.[16]

He warns Caddy to stop such relationship mentioning: "get out of the water are you crazy" (SF, 168). When practising sexuality, Quentin wishes that she is dead, asserting that: "I wish you were dead" (SF, 170). He tells Dalton Ames that he has to go away to a distant place. In fact, Quentin is a weak person but tries to pretend that he is strong telling Caddy that: "I'm stronger than you" (SF, 172). Anyway, Quentin blames his mother for his weakness and disappointment saying: "I'd just had a mother so I could say Mother" (SF, 190). He also declares that his mother is careless that she neglects her children and leads them to dispair. For Quentin, life is meaningless.

Quentin intends to fight against Caddy's seducer asserting that: "did he make you then he made you do it let him he was stronger than you and he tomorrow I'll kill him I swear I will... Caddy you hate him don't you don't you" (SF, 95). Quentin tries to impose his thoughts upon his sister claiming that he commits incest with her and she is pregnant from him. In consequences, Caddy is indifferent to the state of losing her virginity when saying: "I didn't let him I made him" (SF, 84). So, Caddy refuses to be weak, under the superiority of her brother, alerting him that his behaviour is

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unaccepted. Quentin is unable to face reality in which he: "has not commited incest with Caddy, that she has several lovers, that she is pregnant with one man's child and married to another a 'blackguard'"[17]

As a matter of fact, Quentin is selfish in the way that he wants to own and control Caddy. Moreover, he is still dissatisfied with what happens to him, his desire, and his quest to posses Caddy.In addition to that, Quentin is: "uniquely qualified to relate this tale of family destroyed by its own helplessness, perversion, and selfishness."[18] He is deprived from his mother care and seems to be motherless. He also tries to be alone with Caddy, away from the outer world. His love desire towards Caddy is expressed as he: "... loved not his sister's body but some concept of Compson honor... who loved not the idea of incest which he would not commit..."[19] But Caddy's dishonourable situation causes him mind turmoil. Quentin is victimized and oppressed by the disgraceful condition of his family.

Quentin is overwhelmed by the event when as children they are under the leadership of Caddy, playing in the stream on the day of Damuddy's death. Caddy gets her dress wet unintentionally, and she gets it off to dry it in order not to be reproached by her parents, she: "took her dress off and threw it on the bank...[she] did not have on anything but her bodice and drawers... Quentin slapped her and she slipped and fell down into the water" (SF, 18). In this situation, Quentin wants to take the role of his indifferent parents to disapprove Caddy's behaviour even though it is innocent and without intention.

Quentin's recurrent disagreement with Caddy's immoral deeds, urges him to slap her, saying: "red print of my hand coming up through her face like turning a light on under your hand her eyes going bright" (SF, 133). When losing her virginity, Caddy sits in the stream. In this scene, Quentin asks her: "do you remember the day Damuddy died when you sat down in the water in your drawers.... I held the point of the knife at her throat.... It won't take abut a second just a second then I can do mine I can do mine then" (SF, 151-52). Here, Quentin remembers the day of Damuddy's death as she sits in the water. Quentin is also annoyed with Caddy's loss of virginity to the extent that he gets a knife to kill her and himself as well. His aim is to preserve his family's reputation. Anyway, his reaction is futile since her honour is completely lost.

Quentin likes the purity of water and considers it as a means to purify Caddy's sin: "Quentin introduces water as a purifying agent....he finds Caddy...lying in the water...the water flowing about her hips...her skirt half saturated" (SF, 548-49). Quentin also attempts to express his anger or grief to his selfish father. Yet, the father is not engaged with Quentin's sorrow and regret. Moreover, the father considers Quentin's reaction as:

too serious…[and that he is] blind to what is… general truth, the sequence of natural events and their causes which shadows every man's brow...you cannot bear to think that someday it will no longer hurt you like this

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now…and he [considered the word temporary to be] the saddest word of all there is nothing else in the world it's not despair until time and it's not even time until it was (SF, 177-78).

Here, Mr. Compson assures that Quentin's grief about Caddy's immorality would pass. He also adds that: "no battle is ever won…. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an allusion of philosophers and fools."[20] So, man cannot control things as he wants. Besides, Mr. Compson presents his opinion concerning Caddy's loss of virginity admitting that it: "means less to women…. He said it was men [who] invented virginity not women" (SF, 78). Mr. Compson expresses his despair due to Caddy's immoral behaviour only through drinking alcohol heavily as he is unable to think well.

According to Faulkner, Caddy's immorality is inevitable and man cannot change anything happens before. Quentin wishes to free himself from the restrictions imposed upon him in reality that he is dishonoured. The smell of honeysuckle that Quentin loves in Caddy represents a negative aspect as he hates her after the change, saying: "damn that honeysuckle I wish it would stop" (SF, 191).

For Quentin, death is the comfort that: "underlies his suicide, which is not an act of deliberate self destruction, but an attempt to free his consciousness from the inevitability of change and decay."[21] Furthermore, Quentin neither overcomes Caddy's dishonourable behaviour, nor he is satisfied with his father's opinion that the events in this life are temporary and not everlasting. So, he decides to depart life by suicide.

Like Quentin, Benjy is unable to accept Caddy's change of loss of her virginity. Though Benjy is thirty three years old, his mentality is that of a child, and he: "does not want change; it upsets him. He is quite incapable of seeing Caddy as a person who will change" (SF, 53). Nevertheless, he is so sensitive to Caddy's immoral behaviour to the extent that he discovers it. Besides, Benjy, who is an idiot and unable to express his thoughts by words, is upset with Caddy's conduct of climbing the tree. At childhood, Caddy disobeys her fathers' orders that she should not spy on the family talking about Damuddy's death. She climbs the tree wears only her underpants and all the children look at her, and they "watched the muddy bottom of her drawers" (SF, 39). So, to show his objection, Benjy screams.

Benjy is loved by Caddy instead of his mother. So, when Caddy disappears, he seems to be sorrowful without her care. The relationship between Caddy and Benjy is that: "... the trust that he had for his sister, that he knew that she loved him and would defend him, and so she was the whole world to him."[22] Then, Benjy is disturbed by Caddy's change of putting make up, wearing neat dress, and walking like a woman. He also criticizes Caddy showing that he "could not smell trees anymore and [therefore, he] began to cry" (SF, 40). Here, he asks Caddy to take a shower because water is the only way that washes her to return the innocent girl as it is known to him. Benjy thinks of

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the lack of principles and immorality. Therefore, after washing, Benjy reveals that: "Caddy smelled like trees again" (SF, 42). This means that Caddy's real smell comforts Benjy.

Caddy loses her virginity by her sexual relationship with Dalton Ames. She is selfish because she thinks of herself and her desire for love. She forgets the reaction or the reputation of her family. So, when returning back home, the feelings of guilt are noticed when: "she opened the door to her room, but I pulled at her dress and we went to the bathroom and she stood against the door, looking at me. Then she put her arm across her face and I pushed at her, crying" (SF, 88). Here, Caddy realizes that her fault is never purified. Therefore, Benjy weeps bitterly.

Dilsey, the maid, who is depended on by all of the Compson family, comes to be: "...the final means of judging the Compson family [as] a final perspective upon the Compson story" (SF, 58-9). She advises Benjy to be quiet and calm down. Whenever he becomes angry, she asserts: “you’s de Lawd’s chile, anyway. En I be His’n too, fo long, praise Jesus” (SF, 317). The family's conditions comes to be collapsed and deteriorated. Everyone has his/ her own perspective. They donot cooperate with each other. The concept of love in the family is neglected due to the selfishness that lies in the family.

Jason is engaged with his own psychological affairs that he loses his job presented to him by Caddy's previous husband, Herbert Head. He feels that Caddy is selfish in the sense that she affects him with her problems. As his parents are selfish and indifferent, Jason has to work in order to support the family. Jason trusts money and valuable things instead of human beings. So, he is obsessed with materialism, saying: "I took the box down and counted out the money and hid the box again and unlocked the door and went out" (SF, 296).Jason becomes indifferent to the family ties and connections.

From the beginninig of Caddy and her brothers' childhood, Mrs. Compson feels shameful of her children except Jason. She always thinks that he is resemble to her family, saying: "Jason will make a splendid banker his 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" (SF, 296). In fact, the care of his mother which is not a real care leads Jason to hate women in general. Jason always alerts his sister to stop her immoral conduct. When being unable to express his emotions, Jason comments, saying: "you think you are grown up... just because you're fourteen... you think you are something" (SF, 41). His embarrassment from his sister's immorality expresses his hatred towards Caddy and her daughter, Miss Quentin, who lives with the Compsons. Jason mentions that: "one a bitch always a bitch, what I say" (SF, 223). He also adds that: "I never promise a woman anything nor let her knew what I'm going to give her. That's the only way to manage them" (SF, 240). So, he distrusts women.

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Jason considers his niece Miss Quentin, sinful and Wicked. She is her mother's moveable sin. Jason wants to protect his niece from young boys so as not to be seduced by them like her mother. He hates her love relationships with other boys, her manners, her clothes, and make up. The torture that Jason causes to her is just to express his revenge from her mother. Jason teases her by stealing the money that Caddy sends to her. Therefore, Miss Quentin is the victim of her mother's immorality. The selfish way in which she is raised, makes her rebellious against Jason's desires.

Eventhough Caddy supports her daughter with money, the latter loses her mother's spiritual love. She misses her mother as she lives away from her. In consequences, she becomes disobedient and selfish as she thinks of her desires only. Jason chases his niece from one place to another pretending to keep up the family's reputation, mentioning: "I try to uphold to have her with no more respect for what I try to do for her than to make her name and my name and my mother's name a byword in the town" (SF, 146). However, the factors that influence Jason's personality is the reason for his cruelty. His family's disintegration, his loss of education and job, and Caddy's change are significant points in his life.Besides, selfishness is strongly shown in Jason's behaviour as he wants to impose his power and orders on Miss Quentin.

As can be understood, the bad behaviours of the children are the result for the bad parents' treatment. Faulkner presents the Compson family as an example of the all southern families to show its decline due to selfishness. Generally speaking, the selfishness of the parents affects the lives ofQuentin, Caddy, Benjy, and Jason who are miserable and depressed. Miss Quentin is victimized by her mother's immoral behaviour which makes her live under Jason's control.The lack of love and cooperation among the family members leads to their failure. Moreover, the parents' defects in the way of bringing up their children leads to their deterioration.

Conclusion

It is revealed that the theme of selfishness plays a significant role in In The Sound and the Fury. In the novel,Faulkner focuses on the relationship of the Compson family members who are spiritually distant from each other. Throughout the novel, Faulkner tries to show that people in the south lose their old traditional values through the characters' manners, and present new ones.

Mr. Compson is alcoholic and selfish who doesn't pay attention to his children. Mrs. Compson is also selfish that she neglects her children for her own sake. The selfishness of her self-pity and self-love leads to her childrens' inevitable disaster.The selfish way of the parents' treatment to their children is the main reason behind Caddy's immoral deed of loss of her virginity. Caddy who is loved by her three brothers, Quentin, Benjy, and Jason, suffers from the lack of parental love.In consequences, She becomes selfish and decides to compensate herself by making love relationships with

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men without respecting her family's reputation. Caddy is seduced by men to do sexuality but then she is left by them. She pretends to be honourable, and wants to marry, yet, her marriage fails and she remains lonely. Her family also disowns her. Moreover, Caddy's attempt of returning back to the Compsons is impossible due to her disgrace.

Caddy's real sin results in giving birth to her daughter, Quentin. The latter is also victimized as she loses the motherly love and warmth as she lives away from her mother. Miss Quentin is mistreated by Jason who tortures her as a matter of revenge from her mother. Jason feels that Caddy is the main reason behind his deterioration as he loses his job in a bank.

Quentin prefers to drown himself in water. He chooses death in order not to live in shame because of Caddy's sinful deed. On the contrary, Jason is never influenced by Caddy's change. He is so selfish to the extent that he doesn't consider himself as partially sinful according to his sister's sin. His disaster is financial rather than spiritual.

The loss of Caddy represents the loss of her three brothers. Caddy who begins her life as a mother and a sister for her brothers, causes the family decline by her immorality. Yet, her sin is the result of her parents' failure of bringing her up. Even Benjy, who is an idiot, and his mentality is like that of a child, rebels against Caddy's loss of virginity. He expresses his refusal through crying. He is unable to accept Caddy's change by lamenting her new manners of going out with men, her very neat clothes, and her make up.

It is worth mentioning that selfishness is regarded as a main theme in the southern society after the Civil War. According to the economic depression, life becomes complex and this lets people be selfish. Southern people adopt the new values that even parents give up their responsibilities of bringing up their children in a moral way. As a result, instead of the blood relationship which relates each of the four children, they choose to live in mental alienation. Their seperation from each other, is the result of the selfishness that is imposed on them first by their parents. So, each member of the family is selfish on his/ her own way through his/ her bad conduct.

Notes

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9. Quoted inDavid Minter, "Faulkner, Childhood, and the Making of The Sound and the Fury," American Literature 51, no. 3 (November 1979): 379.
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14. Quoted in Malcolm Cowley, The Faulkner-Cowley File (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), 38.
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16. William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury (New York: Vintage, 1984), 168. All the subsequent quotations references to the novel are taken from this edition, with the abbreviation (SF) and the page number (s).
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