

“The Sum of Our Misfortunes”: Plot Organization as Resistance in Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*.

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Abstract

This research is aimed to investigate the plot organization of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, taking the plot as perhaps its most important formal procedure, that which makes it an ambitious modernist work. The plot is investigated through a *close reading* of the book; in particular, we discuss the role it plays in the book's dynamics and how it contributes for the general structure of the story. We show how this specific modernist literary work tends to resist the interpretative attempts to decipher it. Underlying this research is the conception that the break of representational boundaries in modernism takes place through the development of new formal procedures.

Key words: Modernism, Criticism, Faulkner.

Introduction

The Sound and the Fury is a novel composed by four sections and one appendix, which are told by the three Compson brothers plus a third-person narrator (fourth section and appendix). The novel is broadly developed under the *stream of consciousness*, or *interior-monologue*, technique. Although the narrators are not intended to work as simple different points of view for the very same event, their narrative lines must be juxtaposed so that the reader may get the “whole picture” – but even this is a difficult thing to achieve as there is no “whole picture” at the end but only strong fragments about a fragmented history of downfall.

Results and Discussion

Differing from the traditional plot, where the occurrence of events in a given timeline leads to some sort of resolution, the plot in *The Sound and the Fury* is organized by the impressions and marks of absent events left by the narrators. They bring the notion of time as something perceived and lived and not as only chronologically experienced.

Content and form are unified: the theme of the Compson's decay is brought upon the traditional narrative structure as well. While the fall of the Compson family points to the possibility of renewal and rebirth of the American South past the Civil War and its outcomes, the dissolution of the traditional narrative points out to the demands of new aesthetic techniques that could still be critical and self-centered.

Through his peculiar work on language Faulkner delivers the most poignant images without telling them: Benjy, a boy with Down Syndrome, is incapable of making sense of the things that surround him; Quentin is obsessed with Old South values; and Jason refuses to face his own inner self. Their constant attempts to hold on to a memory, to make sense, to fit in the present are

not effective and are rendered by their specific syntax, not primarily themed by the content itself.

The plot is sustained and slightly reconstructed by the reader by confronting and juxtaposing all the sections, but they are not linear, they do not intend, even together, to form a “whole picture”.

Conclusions

The Sound and the Fury undermines a traditional sense of plot proposing a new one that expands the boundaries of the horizon of representation in literature. That is the way the novel can resist the oversimplification brought about by the increasing industrialization of narratives and the standardization of stories carried out by the culture industry already in the 1920s. The way the plot is organized is marked by a strong verisimilitude to the way people experience time and make sense of their own past; which has a relation to the large social and cultural context (as a symptom, a result, or a way to deal with it).

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