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“Once a bitch always a bitch, What I say:” A Murderous Innocence in *The Sound and the Fury*

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Abstract:

The *Sound and the Fury* is a story about materialism, lust, lack of emotions and family on fire. The story of a great house in decay. The elusive Candace "Caddy" Compson is a difficult character to know because she never tells her own story. Faulkner introduces three main characters but he forgets to introduce Caddy as an individual being. At the same time, he only focuses on Caddy throughout the novel. So, Faulkner never takes up inside Caddy's mind, she gradually becomes the central figure of the book. This research paper attempts to discover and analysis the different layers in Caddy's character and how we can compare her with Aristotle's tragic hero. The tragic hero (protagonist) must be essentially admirable and good. Caddy presents as a loving and affectionate woman. We get to know about her through her three brothers Benjy, Quentin and Jason. Her three brothers are all obsessed with her and each in his different but wholly selfish and self-centred way. None of them is capable of loving her. Each wants to impose upon her, for his selfish purposes, a rigid and restrictive pattern of behaviour. This research endeavours to examine the following elements such as *harmatia*, *Catharsis*, *catastrophe* in the context of Caddy, an untold protagonist in this novel.

Keywords: *harmatia*, *Catharsis*, *catastrophe*, *anagnorisis*.

In the very first scene, we encounter a fearless and fiery girl. One who wants to break free from the society and seems to be in pursuit of happiness and freedom. This is the story about family decay. According to Aristotle, tragedy depicts the downfall of a basically good person through some fatal error or misjudgment, producing suffering and insight on the part of the protagonist. In "*The Sound and the Fury*" by William Faulkner, as Faulkner said in an interview

at the University of Virginia, Caddy is "too beautiful and too moving to reduce her to telling what was going on." Instead, she is seen only through the eyes of her brothers Benjy, Quentin and Jason.

The action of the book extends from the childhood of Quentin, Caddy, Jason and Benjy. *The Sound and the Fury* is divided into four quite separate sections: the first of these, Benjy's, second Quentin's, third Jason's and while the fourth one, told from the point of view of the omniscient author. One approach to *The Sound and the Fury* is by evaluating each brother's relationship to Caddy. We have no direct view of her only the reports of Benjy, Quentin, and Jason. From these reports, we have to judge what type of person she actually is.

Caddy's virginity as the embodiment of Compson family honour, has conceived the idea of persuading the world that they have committed incest so that the world will withdraw from them in honour and they will live, though in Hell, eternally isolated, eternally together, his and her honour eternally intact. The Greeks believed that everything happened for a reason, and that the path they led in life was prescribed for them by the Gods: there was no escaping their fate.

As Caddy grows older, she sees through the neurotic whining of mother and the weakness and cynicism of her father. She feels the need to reject this artificial world and look for some way to reject everything concerned with the Compson world. She later admits that she does not love the men with whom she has sex, and she also says that she made them have sex with her. Why Caddy's actions are deliberate forms of rejection. She has seen through the false concept of honor and the superficiality of the entire so-called aristocratic world. She becomes the complete realist, someone who simply cannot tolerate the hypocrisy and artificiality and false pride of the Compsons; therefore, she turns to unorthodox behavior in an attempt to assert her own independence and individuality. This sense of freedom becomes the ultimate reason of her decay.

According to Aristotle, there is no such thing as an innocent victim of tragedy, nor can a genuinely tragic downfall ever be purely a matter of blind accident or bad luck. Instead, authentic tragedy must always be the product of some fatal flaw and/or mistake (*harmatia*), for the tragic hero must always bear at least some responsibility for his own doom and the supposed

force, principle, or power that predetermines events. In our earliest view of Caddy, we see her at the branch as a rather daring young girl. She is not concerned with appearance; instead, she searches for the truth and reality of any situation. It is Caddy who climbs the tree to see exactly what is happening at her grandmother's funeral. There is no denying to say that Caddy is a complicated protagonist who is both loved and hated by men. Her character and dispositions are brought into being mainly by social factors at her time. As old saying goes: Where there is oppression, there is resistance. The whole social environment suppresses the nature of human, however, there still exist the solutions to it though it is a long way to go.

She was a special girl who was powerful enough to internalize the independent and pioneering spirit; she still remained a bit bewildered though she was like other women oppressed in the same patriarchal pattern. Caddy always tended to rival for priority since childhood. No matter what happened or what would happen, she would always make every effort to take the first place in any competition.

A promiscuous, young Caddy meets Dalton Ames and becomes pregnant. She then marries Sydney Herbert Head, a banker, who divorces her the next year because he finds out that Caddy's daughter is someone else's child. Disgraced, Caddy is not welcomed home by her family, but they keep her baby and later forbid her from seeing the child. On Mrs. Compson's instructions, Caddy's name is not allowed to be uttered in the home. The family would not even accept the \$200 that Caddy sends regularly for her daughter. Mrs. Compson burns the checks, although they are fake since Jason has kept the real money for himself. Mrs. Compson says, "God sees that I am doing right." (Faulkner 2) By the last section of the novel, Caddy has disappeared. As Faulkner said in "The Paris Review," the novel is "a tragedy of two lost women: Caddy and her daughter." (Baum 1967)

In Book I, Caddy is presented aurally and sensually. She is the voice Benjy hears as well as a comforting and loving presence. She is also a pleasant, natural odor and a predominant visual image for Benjy. Benjy is mentally disabled, so he has always been in need of constant care. Called an "idiot" by others, he constantly remembers Caddy's motherly chastisements, such as "Keep your hands in your pocket ... Or they'll get froze." (Faulkner 1) Caddy functions as a mother for him. Even in the early scenes, Mr. Compson asks Caddy to look after Benjy because Mrs. Compson is sick. As a consequence, Benjy develops a strong love and need for Caddy. She

replaces the love that is denied him by his own mother. Whenever Mrs. Compson tries to correct Benjy, it is only Caddy who can quiet Benjy. She even sends her mother upstairs "so you can be sick." (2) Caddy, at a very early age, has to perform the functions of a mother. She is also a pleasant, natural odor and a predominant visual image for Benjy. "He went on and we stopped in the hall and Caddy knelt and put her arms around me and her cold bright face against mine." (6) She smelled like trees. You're not a poor baby. Are you. You've got your Caddy. Haven't you got your Caddy." (8)

The protagonist should be renowned and prosperous, so his change of fortune can be from good to bad. The tragic hero's powerful wish to achieve some goal inevitably encounters limits, usually those of human frailty (flaws in reason, hubris, society), the gods (through oracles, prophets, fate), or nature. Caddy is a headstrong, wanting to do everything her way despite familial and societal expectations. She defies custom and propriety, though her promiscuity leads to her downfall and banishment from the Compson household. Caddy does not enjoy her relationships with men and tells Quentin that "when they touched me, I died." (185) Her relationships are deliberate forms of rejection of the Compson world. When Quentin offers suicide or incest to her, Caddy is willing to do either of these because either act would be a strong act of rejection. She believes that there is a curse on the entire Compson family, and, therefore, she is willing to attempt any violation of order (even incest or suicide) in order to escape from the horror of the Compson world. Her acts are performed in an attempt to assert her own individuality against a mother and father who have essentially rejected her or have, in some way, failed her.

There is little question that Caddy dominates the novel. She opens the book (in the "caddie" scene and two flashbacks about Caddy and Benjy); she is central to all the Benjy section, much of the Quentin section, and then--in the form of her daughter Quentin, but in her own voice much of the Jason section and Part IV. Like Addie Bundren in *As I Lay Dying*, Caddy motivates nearly all the action of the novel. What is most brilliant about Faulkner's methods of fixing her so prominently is that his manner, of characterizing her changes with each section of the novel, and that his narrative method in each section is particularly appropriate both for the brother "narrating" that section and for the role Caddy plays in that brother's life.

Virginity is presented in the novel is as a “state” that is unnatural, and this idea is set forth by the elder Jason Compson, whose words give Caddy a freedom in the novel many times over that her brothers lack. According to her Father, women are never pure. Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature. Its nature is hurting you [Quentin] not Caddy . . . ” (116). Because Caddy is so closely affiliated with nature by smell (trees for Benjy, honeysuckle for Quentin) and also in repeated instances of her being dirty or soaked in some sort of natural water, virginity is consequently proven to be unnatural, for every other part of Caddy is associated with the natural. Her “unvirginity” must then be natural as well, and not a corruption of her soul, or the image of her family. Yet Caddy’s succumbing to nature is still what leads to the downfall of the Compsons. In this case, the text implies that to go against one’s nature is to remain socially secure in the Old South. For the society in which these characters live, it is unnatural for a female to exemplify a male quality in the ways Caddy effectively does: agency, intellect, aggression, curiosity, and sex drive. Therefore the novel does not merely illustrate a struggle between male and female gender norms, but between the natural world and the socially constructed world that imposes a structured nature on its citizens.

Sexual desire becomes a reflection of her own consuming desires, not necessarily a desire for another person. Fascinated by Dalton Ames, Caddy starts a relationship with him and quickly becomes pregnant. Her pregnancy, the death knell of the family (if you ask Mrs. Compson, anyway), serves as the reason for a quick and unhappy marriage to a skeezy guy who works in a bank. Herbert Head even sounds like a tool. After her marriage, she effectively disappears from the novel. Benjy’s memories of Caddy as the girl who “smelled like trees” and Quentin’s obsessive convictions that he can clear all of Caddy’s sins by convincing their father that they’ve committed incest. Caddy’s virginity has become the basis of her downfall. According to our society, a woman should be pure and chaste. Quentin wants to protect the women of his family from “one another and themselves” (96), as well as the world around them; in doing so he fails to notice Caddy’s indelible connection to nature, a thing that negates an obligation in her to uphold such chaste concepts for herself or her family.

When Caddy began to wear adult clothes and use perfume to date men, which was different from what she used to be; Benjy could not bear it first, because his little sister was like an angel, pure and simple, so that she could not be desecrated by other men. He was so

infatuated with her chastity that in order to protect her, he tried to prohibit Caddy from pursuing love.

“He must value about all not her but the virginity of which she was custodian and on which she placed no value whatever” (412). A woman’s chastity was valuable in a noble family, especially for family Compson so that in this sense, Caddy was committed incest.

Caddy’s young brother, Jason, held a complicated feeling to her, both contempt and resentment. Jason was not only another spokesman of man-dominated society, but also a product of capitalist economy. For one thing, he despised and loathed women and viewed their chastity as the honor and reputation of the family. For another, with the development of capitalist economy, he became a follower of money worship and believed that money meant everything to him. However, when Caddy’s husband discarded her, Jason lost his job as well so that Caddy meant nothing just like deserted rubbish in the eyes of Jason. Later, he harbored indecent thoughts about Caddy’s daughter in order to revenge her. Caddy was not allowed to see her daughter unless she gave him money. Finally, Caddy’s daughter stole Jason’s money, which indicated a threat on man’s authority.

A true tragedy should evoke pity and fear on the part of the audience. Pity and fear are the natural human responses to spectacles of pain and suffering, especially to the sort of pain and suffering that can strike anyone at any time. The effect is that we feel relief in the end through catharsis (purging/cleansing of emotions). To achieve catharsis is the purpose of a tragedy. The fall of a scoundrel or villain evokes applause rather than pity. Audiences cheer when the bad guy goes down. On the other hand, the downfall of an essentially good person disturbs us and stirs our compassion. As a rule, the nobler and more truly admirable a person is, the greater will be our anxiety or grief at his or her downfall.

In a man-dominated society, men held that mediocrity was the virtue of women so that many traditional women became the victims. Caddy’s mother, Mrs. Compson, was a good example because she held that women were born to take care of men and to teach children, so women should maintain traditional images. Nevertheless, fortunately and amazingly, Caddy never followed in her mother’s steps and she took men as her example and almost acquired the rights as a man had. She went to school like boys at the age of seven which seemed to be unbelievable as for a girl. Caddy started to date different kinds of men when she became an adult, which was the public rebellion to her family. Just as what she said: “I will run away and

never come back” (18). That was her declaration to fight against imprisoned social system in patriarchal society. In another scene, Caddy refuses to allow Jason and her mother to keep her away from her child. The headstrong Caddy defies Jason’s order that she stays away and speaks to Quentin while he is not home, telling her daughter that she’ll send money. She presents her rebellious attitude and the pursuit of freedom and independence.

What she did could not be understood by her family and society, but nobody could deny that it was the strong rebellion to the patriarchal tradition for she ran in the opposite position to the image of ladyhood. As a result, she touched the baseline of the society. Virtue stood for family’s fame and deep-rooted traditional value, so in man-dominated society, a woman’s body belonged to a man and family, which could be his inviolability property. As Faulkner once put it: “The value of women only lies in virtue, and it is more important than life. To keep their virtue, men prevent their physical desire and deprive of right of voice” (194). If a woman failed to maintain an image of ladyhood, she could be regarded as the atrocious demon for the society was flooded with gender prejudices and discrimination. Caddy’s most powerful blow to the Compson legacy is in her indirect desexualization of her brothers, which ends the family bloodline – something already portrayed as diluted in the symbolic drowning of Quentin. It is through her transgressive behavior, though, that Caddy acts as an even greater literary force that redefines gender roles in society.

Although Caddy was harshly denounced finally, she still survived in the man-dominated society. After surviving the collapse of family and disillusion of dream, she became a symbol of liberation, freedom, and hope for women eventually. With such skills of plot knitting, Faulkner never disregards or disrespects women at all, instead, he respects and admires women. What he intends to express is his love and sympathy for women like Caddy through the perspective of three brothers.

Aristotle says that the tragic hero should have a flaw and/or make some mistakes (harmatia). The hero needs not die at the end, but he/she must undergo a change in fortune (catastrophe). In addition, the tragic hero may achieve some revelation or recognition (anagnorisis) about human fate, destiny, and the will of the Gods. What is most brilliant about Faulkner's methods of fixing her so prominently is that his manner, of characterizing her changes with each section of the novel.

“Once a bitch always a bitch, What I say:” A Murderous Innocence in *The Sound and the Fury*

The centrality of Caddy Compson to *The Sound and the Fury* is one of those critical commonplaces that may become blurred through the years. Every reader respects Caddy's importance; Faulkner himself told us the book was about Caddy. It began with the image of the child in the tree, muddy drawers clearly in view, and grew into his most important and most moving novel. Most of the criticism on *The Sound and the Fury*, however, has seemed to find Caddy less interesting than Faulkner's characterizations of Quentin, Jason, Benjy, and even Dilsey. There are comparatively few studies that deal primarily with Caddy, and even fewer that suggest Faulkner's actual means of creating this central figure.

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