

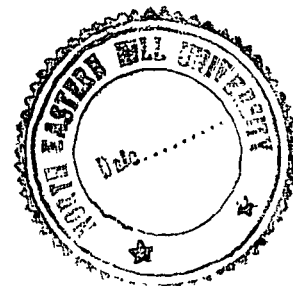
**A STUDY OF WILLIAM FAULKNER'S CONCEPT
OF FAMILY WITH SPECIAL REEERENCE TO
THE COMPSON FAMILY IN THE**
The Sound And The fury

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A DISSERTATION

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the Degree of
Master of philosophy in English**

TO



**THE NORTH—EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY
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I certify that the dissertation entitled "A STUDY OF FAULKNER'S CONCEPT OF FAMILY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE COMPSON FAMILY IN THE SOUND AND THE FURY" for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English of the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, embodies the record of original investigation carried out by Manjusri Baruah under my supervision. She has been duly registered and the thesis presented is worthy of being considered for the award of the M.Phil Degree. This work has not been submitted for any degree of any other University.

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CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

William Faulkner, when he addressed the students of the University of Virginia in 1958, said that an author "is writing about people in the terms that he is most familiar with. That is (though his writing) could have sociological implications .. he is not too interested in that. He's writing about people". Faulkner's novels are filled with references to the history of the south, its geography, its customs, its language.

However, the American Southern Society which Faulkner portrayed in his novels was an exclusive society. It differed from the Northern American Society in its outlook, in its economy, in its social set up. The defeat in the Civil War brought in far-reaching consequences in the Southern Society and this defeat left deep scars which were difficult to erase. The southern society was thus inward-turning, it was not forward looking and suffered from a sense of alienation from the rest of the country. It was different from the nineteenth century Northern American Society. In the Northern Society the environment was filled with the sense of spaciousness, the invitation to mobility, the atmosphere of independence, the encouragement to enterprise and to optimism. The Northern American Society in the nineteenth century, as stated in the chapter "The Nineteenth Century

American" in Commager's book 'The American Mind'¹, was a society "which flowed with optimism, with full confidence in the infinite possibilities of human development". The men were brave, gregarious and chivalrous. It was a society which was markedly different from the southern society. The American Optimism, so very present in the American Society, was absent in the Southern Society. This backward-looking society presented a sad and a painful image. It was this dark side of the social scene that particularly caught Faulkner's imagination. The tragic image of the unchangeableness of human condition roused his interest and he delves deeply into the social structure of the American south.

It is through the study of some of the families which Faulkner portrayed in his novels that we can comprehend his feeling for the south. He realised the importance of the family as a unit of the society, but he does not show the family to be a glorified institution of society. Sociological studies reveal that a progressive society is one which has ingrained in its social fabric some healthy, forward-looking families for it is the family which is the basic foundation of the society. But most of the families that Faulkner portrayed fail to hold together. The various family chronicles that he wrote about show the fall of the family

1. Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind* (Bombay, Kirloskar Press, 1968), p.39.

and its subsequent weakening force in the society. The failure of the family to hold together, its damaging consequences in the social scene, Faulkner feels, is responsible for the decay of the old southern way of life. This study aspires to probe into the decay of the family as a unit of society and consequently into the decay of the Southern Society.

Before we study the decay of the family and the southern way of life, it is necessary that we look into the family as a unit of society in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century and early twentieth century in Northern America and the sociological changes in other parts of the world.

In the late eighteenth century the family played an important role in society. Family status, continuity of the family were strong feelings that governed the social scene. In the European society major changes were taking place in the political and industrial fields. New political ideologies brought changes in the government; new inventions and discoveries shook the industrial field. Despite these changes, the family continued to hold together as a unit of society. However, it is interesting to note the role of the father and the mother. It was mainly the mother that kept the wheels of the family moving. The lady's only place was her home. She played a completely domestic role, confining herself to her home and family alone. Thus the woman was

assigned this "secondary" role in society. But in reality her role was vital in the holding or breaking the society eventually.

In the European society around the early nineteenth century, the role of the lady was always considered to be subordinate to the gentleman. She usually played a passive role and this affected the society. Dynamism, intellectual brilliance, a little bit of arrogance are qualities usually not associated with a lady's character. She must be basically a submissive person. Her world centred round her husband's house and raising her children. She had to uphold the family status and see to its continuity. A socially well-connected lady, and a lady who showed promise of being a good breeder was always more preferable. The woman was always a means to an end - an instrument for man's happiness.

It was only around the mid-nineteenth century that a major change came in the social pattern. The industrial revolution brought in marked reforms in the social and economic field. A welcome change was the social emancipation of woman. The woman no longer stood by to be a mere foil for the man and she started to play an important role in society with an identity of her own. She became a writer, a teacher, and a social reformer. She found a place in society. Stow Persons in *The Decline of American Gentility*²

2. Stow Persons, *The Decline of American Gentility* (New York and London, Columbia University Press, 1973); pp.73-74.

said

"The nineteenth century nuclear family played a crucial role which led from a gentleman's lady to the modern emancipated woman. In a world of rapid change immense emotional energies were invested on the American home. The young were trained in an atmosphere of self-sacrificing labour and love".

The nineteenth century American Society believed that the home was woman's chief responsibility. She maintained the sacredness and power of the family institution. She was also expected to have a basic knowledge of aesthetics, economics, education, health care, and ethics. She must be well-read, well-informed about the latest developments in science and arts.

However, with the rapid industrial developments there was a major upliftment in the economic status of the society. There was born in man the love for money and the pursuit for more and more wealth. In his quest for money, he became very busy in improving his economic status. He had little time for his home and family and he started to neglect his familial responsibilities. It was in the early twentieth century that we begin to see the decline in the family as an institution. Author W. Calhaun in *A Social History of the American Family*³ states that the American family was in a very poor state and that "social history since 1920 has left the only existing survey of this crucial social institution quite obsolete". The family was slowly breaking

3. Arthur Calhaun, *A Social History of the American Family* Cleveland, Barnes and Novel, 1960, p.21.

up. We see parents going away from each other, we find children turning away from parents. There set in a general trend of disregarding old values. Children from socially well-placed families were callous and ill-mannered. They did not feel the need to uphold the family tradition. There was a spurning of familial values and in disregarding the family, the American was disregarding the basic institution of society.

In order to understand the role of the family in society it is necessary to know about the basic social function of the family. Paul Schrecker in his book "The Family Its Function and Destiny"⁴ tells us that the family played two social roles. First, when a child is born into a family it changes the child from a social biological entity into a human being. The values endorsed by his culture is instilled into the child preparing him to meet the demands that his society will make upon him. The second important role that the family plays is that it passes on the cultures and values from one generation to another and thereby helps in the social continuation - it perpetuates the culture. Thus the chief function of the family is to see that the child is accultured to the values of the society. However each society's method of acculturation may differ depending on where the society emphasizes its values.

4. Paul Schrecker, *The Family: Its Function and Destiny*, ed. by Ruth Nanda Anshen (New York, published 1949); pp.106-107.

With industrialisation setting in, the American Society was undergoing a definite change. The rapid economic progress brought in many material comforts but man lost his peace of mind and happiness, for it made him, materialistic and restless. In him was born the love for money and the more he had the more he wanted. Children were being fitted in for life in a society which was predominately materialistic.

The rapid economic progress had its due consequences on the society. David Potter in his book *People of Plenty*⁵ states

"... as new lands, new form of wealth, new opportunities came into play, clamouring to be seized upon, America developed something of a compulsion to make use of them. The man best qualified for this role was the completely mobile man..... mobility became not only an optional privilege but almost a mandatory obligation and the man who failed to meet this obligation had, to some extent, defaulted in his duty to society".

The completely "mobile man" was a busy man with very little time for his home and family. The family thus suffered as the father completely ignored his domestic responsibilities. The task of raising the child fell largely on the mother and as she was not competent enough, the family started to show signs of disintegration.

The American Family was in a state of confusion because it had misplaced its values. In many American houses, elders were treated with utter disrespect. Chaos and misrule

5. David Potter, *People of Plenty* (Chicago, Chicago Press, 1954), pp.96-97

dominated the homes. The children had their own way, not recognising at all the authority of the parents. This growing independence however gave place to two pronounced traits in the American character - self-reliance and self-direction. Moreover, some new values that the early twentieth century American society emphasized were impersonality and emotional non-dependence. These qualities helped the young American to find fresher pastures in his field of material progress but he failed as a family man. He shirked his domestic responsibilities, turned a deaf ear to the needs of his children and consequently the family suffered. It is therefore not in the south alone but in North America too that the family fails as a social institution. However, the causes that led to the fall of the family in both the regions were very different.

Many are the causes that contributed to the fall of the family in the south and consequently to the southern way of life. It is the tendency of every southerner to hold the defeat of the civil war as responsible for the breakdown of the old south and this defeat had deep repercussions on the morale of the southern society and it is this negative aspect that Faulkner mainly focussed. This aspect is shown in the rise and fall of the many families that he portrayed in his fiction. The society which he painted was supposed to be haunted by ghosts of the past. The editorial on New York Times commented on Faulkner's award of the Prize in 1950.

"His (Faulkner's) field of vision is concentrated on a society that is too often vicious, depraved, decadent, corrupt." 'It was always the darker side of life that attracted Faulkner and he chequered the tragic course and history of many families which inhabited his imaginery Yoknapatawpha county. The legendary Yoknapatawpha county is the scene and setting of most of his work. It was in 1928 that Faulkner told an interviewer for the Paris Review⁶

"With Soldiers' Pay and Mosquitoss I wrote for the sake of writing because it was fun. Beginning with Sartoris I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it, and that by sublimating the actual into the apocryphal I would have complete liberty to use whatever talent I might have to its absolute top. I opened up a gold mine of other people, so I created a cosmos of my own".

It is against the backdrop of "the little postage stamp" - the Yoknapatawpha county that we find Faulkner has written nine of his novels and quite a few short stories. Each book is filled with references to its history, its social customs. He explored and exploited the south but it was never an end in itself. It was always his ulterior motive to tell about people - "men and women in their universal humanity".⁷

The legendary Yoknapatawpha County is the scene and setting of most of his work. This country is supposed to

6. Writers at work: The Paris Review Interviews, ed, Malcolm Cowley.

7. Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: First Encounter (Yale University Press, 1983); p.10.

be situated in North Western Mississippi, with Jefferson as its county seat, on the south-eastern side is Memphis and Oxford is forty miles away. The Tallehatchie river lies to the north of it and to the south is the Yoknapatawpha river from which we derive the name of the country. Yoknapatawpha county is Faulkner's "mythical kingdom" as Malcom Cowley calls it and Faulkner claims to be "the sole owner and proprietor".

Yoknapatawpha has an area of over 2,400 sq. miles with a population roughly around 15,611 persons. A few of the families live in big plantation houses which Malcolm Cowley says are "relics of another age" but most of them live in wooden farm houses. The families that Faulkner portrays in his novels belong to two classes - the wealthy planters and the poor whites. The Sartorises, the Sutpens, the Compsons belong to the upper class; The McCallums, the Snopses, belong to the poor whites.

Faulkner's world was one which was not economically prosperous. There was very slow industrial progress with few mills and factories. The southern community was mainly agrarian with cotton as its chief crop. The nature of the cotton plant is such that it robs the soil of its rich minerals. The poor quality of the soil affected the agricultural output and consequently its economy. And it is mainly the poor economy that hampered the progress of the

southern community. In the rise and fall of the many families which Faulkner portrayed the economic factor played an important role, and in most cases as in the Compsons, the Sutpens, the economic factor largely contributed to its ruin.

In Faulkner's fiction there is always a social pattern - a social scale, based on the economic status, and there is always a family to represent the social class. It was Malcolm Cowley's view that⁸

"Faulkner might divide his work into a number of cycles: one about the planters and their descendants, one about the towns people of Jefferson, one about the poor whites, one about the Indian - and one about the Negroes. Or again, if he adopted a division by families, there would be the Compsons - Sartoris saga, The McCaslin saga... and the Ratcliff-Bundrea saga... all the cycles and sagas are closely inter connected".

However, we find that whatever may be the division of his families, Faulkner, through the many families emphasised certain values and his views as expressed in his speech when he addressed the Japanese youth that "man himself will prevail" is significantly present in all his fictional work. In *The Sound and the Fury* we see the fall of the Compson family, in *Sartoris* we see the fall of Sartoris family, in *Absalom, Absalom!* we see the Sutpen family completely eclipsed. When we probe into the causes of fall of the different families we will find that each family had a complete disregard for the essential values that should

8. Malcolm Cowley, ed. *The Portable Faulkner* (New York, 1966); pp. 45-46.

basically be present in a family. Love for every member of the family, concern for each other's welfare without giving dominance to selfish motives, close family loyalty, virginity of unmarried daughters, care for the retarded and sickly, pride in family honour, reverence for ancestors are some of the values that a family should emphasise on. However, we only find faint traces of these values in Faulkner's families. It is the spurning of these values that brought in the decadent behaviour in the Southern Community. The disregard of the essential values brings out the inherent flaw in man's nature and it is this evil that eventually brings about the tragedy in man.

In Faulkner's fiction we see the fall of the family. This fall is brought forth by the evil working through the different characters. In *Sartoris* it is young Bayard Sartoris which brings about the ruin of the family. It is the restlessness and recklessness in his nature that brings about his end and eventually his families end too.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* it is Thomas Sutpen who brings an end to the Sutpen family. Thomas Sutpen's actions were always governed by cold logic. He was never a loving husband or a loving father and it was this lack of love that proves to be his undoing. Faulkner shows that the Sutpens are wiped out because Sutpen showed utter disregard of accepted values and this can only bring ruin and unhappiness in the end.

It is in *The Sound and the Fury* that we meet the last generation of the Compson family. The Compsons were an aristocratic family where Quentin Maclacan Compson II was the governor of Mississippi and his son Jason Lycargus Compson II was a brigadier. In *The Sound and the Fury* we meet Jason Compson the lawyer, his wife and four children. The four children are the main characters - the unself-conscious agents that help to complete the fall of the great house of Compsons.

Despite its rich, aristocratic heritage the Compsons family fails to hold together. Inherent in the nature of every member of the family we find some decadent force working. Faulkner feels that it is this weakness in the nature of man that brings the tragedy.

Through the fall of the Compsons family Faulkner shows that there is a dissolution morally, and spiritually, of the old aristocracy of the south and we find that there is a rise of a materialistic commercial class in whom the moral and spiritual elements are completely lacking as is seen in Jason Compson IV of the Compson family. Faulkner thus views the decline of the family as the main cause of the disintegration of the southern society.

Though Faulkner confined his writings to a particular regional culture he never allowed the southern culture to become an end in itself. His aim was always to probe into

the human heart: men, women in their universal humanity. Through the use of the southern culture he delved into universal problems and relationships. He goes deeply into the human soul probing its dark corners and in his fiction he dealt with themes that were always universal human issues.

Though Faulkner shows the disintegration of the family and its weakening force in society, he does not lose faith in man. In his address to the Japanese youth, Faulkner explained his stand clearly

"... man himself will prevail over all his anguishes , provided he will make the effort; make the effort to believe in man and in hope - to seek not for a mere crutch to lean on, but to stand erect on his own feet by believing in hope and in his own toughness and endurance".

In the study that follows, the endeavour will be to trace the 'reasons' for the decay of the 'family' in some of the major works of Faulkner. The Sutpen family and the Sartoris family will be discussed, with special reference to the Compson family in *The Sound and the Fury* and ultimately to see if by a curious process of recreation through destruction, there is a vindication of his own dictum that "man will prevail" and "stand erect on his own feet by believing in hope and in his own toughness and endurance".

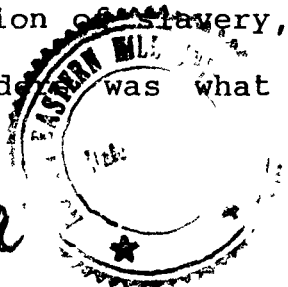
CHAPTER - I I

THE DECAYING SOUTHERN TRADITION THAT LED
TO THE FALL OF THE FAMILY AS AN INSTITUTION

The American Southern Society, which Faulkner so carefully recorded in his novels, was one which was cut off and was distinctly different from its neighbouring states. We do not find the free, open and happy atmosphere as it existed elsewhere in the country. The American optimism was missing. The Southern Society was one which continued to be plagued by a variety of problems - problems of race relations, of industrial and agrarian poverty, of economic problems and social problems. The defeat in the war had devastated the economy of the South and its rehabilitation after the shock of the defeat was not an easy task because of the deep pockets of poverty, of inadequate educational facilities, of the race conflict, and because of the continued obsession with the imaginary glories of the past.

The Southern Culture was markedly different from that of the northern culture because of its background, its economy, its social attitudes. It was the geographic setting, and agricultural pattern of life based on a largely one-crop economy, the support of the institution of slavery, the racial bias, the distrust of the outside world, was what gave a distinct stamp to the Southern culture.

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The underlying tragedy of the people of the south is that they attached a lot of importance to the past - a rich, glorious, and mostly imaginary past. Though they knew that such a past was a myth, yet they continued to believe in it. It is in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* that the Northern Shreve mocks at Quentin Compson about the tendency of the people for clinging on to the past.¹

"We (Northerners) don't live among defeated grandfathers and freed slaves and bullets in the dining room table and such, to be always reminding us to never forget. What is it? Something you live and breathe in like air? A kind of vacuum filled with wraith-like and idomitable anger and pride and I glory at and in happenings that occurred and ceased fifty years ago? A kind of entialed birth-right father and son and father and son of never forgiving General Sherman, 'Gettysburg', Quentin said. 'You can't understand it. You would have to be born there'".

The South believed itself to be unique because of its plantation aristocracy, because of the institution of slavery and because of the lost cause.

It was, however, towards the end of the eighteenth century that we see the first traces of the so called genteel behaviour first setting in among some of the prosperous families that settled in the South. A few, rich families with holdings of a thousand acres or more began to set standards of genteel behaviour for all to admire and many to immitate. They set the standard tradition of hospitality,

1. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York, Modern Library edition, Random House) p. 361.

polite entertainment and standards of courtesy which, then, became an essential part of Southern behaviour.

Just beneath these few prosperous families there was a large number of middle class yeoman farmers with cultivated areas of one hundred to four hundred acres. It was this group, later, that prospered with its cotton plantation and developed vast cotton empires of the Black Belt. It was this group that took the lead in defending the institution of slavery and stressed the necessity of continuing the institution.

Just next to the middle class farmers came the poor-whites. Though poor, the level of poverty of the poor-whites was not very low and they could afford the few comforts required for plain and simple living. The Snopses and the McCallums were the poor whites in Faulkner's novels. When the land was fertile the poor-white could support the basic needs of life.

It was the Negro, in the lowest rung of the social ladder who for more than a century acted as an indispensable base in the Southern economy. It was the presence of the Negro that gave a different course in shaping the history of the southern culture.

Slavery was at first more a convenience than a necessity. They were first brought to America in the year 1619 as house

servants. With the setting up of the Tabacco, Indigo and cotton plantations, black labour was introduced and used very widely. In 1671 Governor Berkely of Virginia reported 2,000 slaves in the colony, but after 1680 the Negro population increased and there were approximately 700,000 slaves in the colonial population. The economy being purely agricultural it depended greatly on black labour. As the new landowners and new planters improved their economic status they became more dependant on the advantages of slavery. Cotton was a plant that had to be planted, cultivated and picked by hand and with millions of acres under production there was the necessity of an enormous amount of cheap labour all the year round, U.B. Phillips in his book *Life and Labour in the South*² states that the price of slaves went up very high and slave holdings through the antebellum period represented one of the principal investments of the Agrarian south and was the most important element in the sustaining of its economy.

The Negro, however, was not subject to any extreme physical cruelty. Although there were laws against teaching slaves to read and write, these regulations were not strictly followed, and many a young Negro learned his letters. The slaves were provided with proper food, clothing and shelter. However, in showing consideration towards his slaves the intelligent farmer was only showing the same kindness and

2. U.B. Phillips, *Life and Labour in the South* (Boston, little, Brown, 1929), pp.173-74.

concern as one would show to his livestock, which he knew was an important source of income. Moreover, behind his kindness there lurked in the dark corners of his heart feelings of both fear and guilt, fear for a possible insurrection and guilt for enslaving a fellow human being in a society which proclaimed that all men are equal.

Despite the benefits derived from the institution of slavery, the Reform Movement spread in the United States in the 1820's and proclaimed that the enslavement of the black man was a moral crime and there was a growing consciousness among the people for the need of the abolition of slavery. At the initial stage of the movement the south supported the cause of the removal of slavery and Thomas Jefferson, a leading Southerner spoke vehemently for the abolition of slavery. To him slavery was an outrage to human justice.

Soon all the Northern States abolished the slave trade. However, in the South, with the cotton revolution, the Southern mind changed and the economic survival became a more sensitive issue. The Southern attitude towards the abolition of slavery and thoughts of putting an end to the institution of slavery was temporarily removed.

Humanitarians all over the world voiced their opinions against the South which did make the conscience of the

Southerner rather uneasy³. However, the sociologists of the south argued that the presence of the institution of slavery was beneficial to both races. When the whites were free from manual labour they could pursue the higher aims of culture. For the Negro too, the Southerner agreed, that life in the New world was much preferable to the wild life in the Jungles of Africa.

There was an intense debate between the Southerner and the Northerner over the institution of slavery. The South had its specters of guilt and of servile insurrection to fight with. It was after forty years of controversy and four years of the Civil war fought on its own soil, where the South was defeated, did the south agree to put an end to the institution of slavery. By 1865, the south agreed that slavery was long doomed to end. Many Negroes left the plantation but some slaves stayed on and continued to serve their old masters as long as their basic needs were fulfilled. So, though the south ultimately agreed reluctantly to the abolition of slavery yet it had a dark spot on the social scene and it left its curse on the Southern society.

It is not the curse of slavery alone that contributed to the fall of the southern way of life. The tendency of every southerner was to hold the defeat of the Civil war as responsible for the breakdown of the Old South. There are

3. Clement Eaton, *The Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South*, (New York, Harper and Row, 1964), Chap. VIII.

nevertheless, other reasons that hastened the decaying process, reasons which are physical, social, economic and political.

Under the physical cause the geographic element comes in and the Yoknapatawpha River which flows towards the Mississippi River figures significantly in the geography of the south. It runs just within the country's southern border and the Tallahatchie River forms the eastern half of the southern border. The inhabitants were an agrarian community and the quality of the soil is an important factor for agricultural prosperity. The soil was red and relatively poor and only a small portion of the land is the black, alluvial bottom land and the poor quality of the soil effects the agriculture.

The larger planters in the beginning took to cotton plantation and there was an over production and subsequently the supply being more than its demand the price of cotton went down making many a farmer bankrupt. Moreover, cotton is a plant that gradually deprives the soil of nitrogen and other minerals. It is a plant which can not hold the soil together and is largely responsible for soil erosion and soil depletion. The southern economy thus was badly hampered by the cotton plantation and Wilbur J. Cash in his book *The Mind of the South*⁴ says that it is not the Civil War so much as the cotton plant that helped in the

4. Wilbur J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1954), p.152.

ruin of the south.

However, the south, did have a rich economy at one time. It is presumed that the first white settlements were made by the French along the Mississippi River. The Chickasaws and the choctaws, the two Indian tribes also inhabited the south. However, the presence of the Indians did not effect the cultural scene very much and by 1839 many of the Indians moved away to other regions. It is the white settlers that started to be rich by setting up large plantations of Tobacco and Indigo. Soon, people from the neighbouring states came to make their fortune and there was a conflict between the new entrants and the earlier settlers. The new settlers were not wealthy or well-educated. There was always a clash between the two classes. However, with the agricultural output going down, the cotton plant, as noted earlier, robbing the soil of its rich minerals and the economic crisis that confronted the southern community was hailed unitedly as a common disaster by both the classes.

In Industrialism too, the south lagged behind. Till the mid nineteenth century the south had no mills, no factories or any other Industries. It was only in the 1870's and 1880 that the steel Industry was started. This slow industrialization hampered in the development of the south and there was many a young man who suffered from depression because of this.

The educational system was also far from satisfactory. It was, in fact in a deplorable state. Much importance was not given to education and the schools were ill equipped with poor teachers. Only 20 per cent of the children of school going age attended school, and the teaching programme was far from attractive⁵. Students were not encouraged to read interesting subjects as science and Mathematics. At the University level the teaching programme included classes in mental and moral philosophy, political economy and international law. The curriculum was inadequate, impractical and incomplete.

The poor means of transportation was another factor that hampered the progress of the South. Steamboats, going up the Tallahatchie River were the main means of transport. Stage coaches to Memphis and to other towns were the first attempts at organized transport. But most of the rivers and streams during the 1840's and 1850's were without bridges and the stage coaches had to depend on ferries.

We thus see that there were many causes that contributed to the fall of the southern society but it is mainly the Civil War as every southerner feels, that brought the South to a state of total collapse. The defeat in the Civil War was accompanied by a deep feeling of loss and unhappiness. After the defeat the south made a desperate struggle to keep itself intact and there were some radical and dramatic

5. Ward L. Miner, *The World of William Faulkner* (Grove Press Inc. New York, 1952).

changes; there were deep tensions, new despairs, new moral problems and the defeat in the war set in a Depression that shook the whole south with a deep cultural shock.

Ernest E. Leisy in *The American Historical Novel*⁶ notes "For all its tragedy and loss, the south was never so deeply stricken as it believed it was. (The legend of War) became the somnabulent alibi for every fault of the section and for every deficiency of its people". But it is undeniable that the war thus left a strong stamp on the people of the south and the defeat and fall of the homeland became the main theme of the southern Myth.

Ward L. Miner in his book *The World of William Faulkner*⁷ poses certain questions about the decay of the south:

"What produced this decay? What wasted not only the soil of this county but the minds of these people? Why do all civilizations decay? We do not yet know. But the comprehension of what is involved in the decay of a small community such as Oxford should contribute to the comprehension of why large civilizations decay. Why are large cultural patterns swallowed and, as it were, discarded by people?"

It was this decay that Miner questions, this dark side of the social scene that inflamed Faulkner's imagination. He analyses the social structure of the American south and in the fall of the various families Faulkner tries to probe into the inherent flaw underlying man's nature and how it is

6. Ernest E. Leisy, *The American Historical Novel*, (Okhalama, Norman Press, 1950), p.190.

7. Miner - p.20.

this flaw in his nature that brings him ruin.

When Faulkner is writing about his own land, and his own people he illuminates the human soul, and he works deftly into the nature of man. His works are no doubt filled with images of violence, but as Edger Allen Poe states, these images are not of the south, but of the soul. Though the different families which Faulkner portrayed in his fiction the Sartoris family the Sutpen family, the Compson family - belonged exclusively to the south, his genuine concern, through his works are with human beings and human values.

CHAPTER - I I I

**THE SUTPEN FAMILY AND THE SARTORIS FAMILY -
ITS DISINTEGRATION**

Faulkner's various family chronicles reiterate the universal truth that the family, as a unit of society, is an important force. A well-knit, organised family helps build a healthy society. Cleanth Brooks states in his book *William Faulkner : The First Encounters*¹ "The family is still important, whether as a sustaining force or a suffocating force". In his novels Faulkner does full justice to the "family's blessed and its baleful aspects" The main endeavour of this study is to show, with a special reference to the Compson family, the disintegration of the family, as a force in society, and how it ultimately led to the fall of the Southern way of life.

As pointed out earlier, the final push towards the disintegration of the southern society was accomplished by its defeat in the Civil War. Hence it could not participate fully in the normal development of the American Society.

The south had fought the war with heroism yet the homeland fell and from this fall came misery and loss of faith among the descendants of the defeated. Most of the stories therefore deal in ancestral glory and about the

1. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The First Encounters* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1963), p.6.

fall of the homeland, which make up the psychology of the "lost cause".

In his novels and stories, Faulkner probes into the Southern Myth. He sets his pride in the past as against the despair and disillusionment over the present and Irving Howe in his book *William Faulkner: A Critical study*² states "that from this counterpoint has come much of the tension in his work".

The main substance and burden of all his fictional work, thus, is an effort to identify the persistence of the past in Southern life. He shows us how the past haunts the lives of the new generation. The tragic tension in much of the novels is derived from this source, be it Henry's dilemma in *Absalom, Absalom!* or the restless attitude of Bayard Sartoris in *Sartoris* or the more complex pattern of decay of the Compson world in *The Sound and the Fury*.

When Faulkner portrayed the different families it was always his endeavour to emphasise certain values. It is when we go into the causes of the fall of the different families we find that each family disregarded the essential values such as Love, Sympathy, that should basically be present in a family. Through the fall of the various families Faulkner tries to prove that it is this rejection of these values that brings its own ruin. We shall see this principle

2. Irving Howe, *William Faulkner: A Critical Study*, (London University of Chicago Press, 1975), p.12.

at work in the disintegration of the two families discussed in this Chapter.

Before we discuss the Sartoris family and the Sutpen family a brief look into Faulkner's own family history becomes somewhat necessary. We shall find that his own family history throws some light on the saga of the different families. It was colonel William Cuthbert Falkner, the great grandfather of the writer who was a great man and his extraordinary qualities greatly influenced William Faulkner. He was of Welsh descent and was born in Knox county, Tennessee July 6, 1826. He fought in the Mexican War and was the leader of an anti-Catholic, anti-foreign, secret society known as the Know-Nothing Party. When the Civil War started he raised his own company and was elected Colonel of the Second Mississippi Regiment. In 1862 Falkner returned to Ripley. It was after the war that he became a very active man. He organised the Ripley Railroad, raised a large plantation, set up a college, became a lawyer. He soon took to writing and he wrote a play, a book of travels, and two novels, the most popular of which was *The White Rose of Memphis*, 1882. J.H. Thurmond his political and personal enemy shot him dead. The Faulkner's moved away to Oxford around 1902. They sold the Railway and Murrey C. Falkner, the writer's father became business Manager for the University of Mississippi. After the First World War, during which William Faulkner trained himself in the RAF in Canada, lived in

New York and in New Orleans, but he returned to Oxford and settled down as a writer. We thus find that it is within Faulkner's own family that we see a rich, aristocratic past and a relatively poor present. That Faulkner was influenced by his own family is seen when we read Sartoris. There is much semblance between the old Colonel Bayard Sartoris and Faulkner's great grandfather. In Sartoris too there is the aristocratic past and a relatively poor present. Michael Milgate in his book *The Achievement of William Faulkner*³ states,

"Almost every novel of Faulkner's in some way exploits and explores this contrast, and, as often as not, in terms of his own family Faulkner's own family history first got him started as a writer, and his deep Mississippi roots have sustained him every since".

With the declining Southern aristocracy as a backdrop Faulkner chequered the course and history of many a family in his imaginary Yoknapatawpha county. The Compson family, the Sartoris family are but embryonic remnants of an old aristocracy and Faulkner shows the gradual dissolution of the Family in the chivalric recklessness and self-destruction of the Sartorises, in the tragic disintegration of the Compsons, in the coldness and cruelty of Thomas Sutpen that wiped out all the Sutpens.

It is in *Absalom, Absalom!* that we see the rise and fall of the Sutpen family. The Sutpens failed to hold together

3. Michael Milgate, *The Achievement of William Faulkner*, (New York, Barnes and Noble Inc. 1966), p.6.

despite their landed wealth and property, their home collapsed and all that is left of the huge estate is Jim the idiot, a half-breed lunatic. It was Thomas Sutpen's ardent wish to see that his family is respectably established with "land and niggers and a fine house"⁴. This was his "design". But we find that Sutpen failed in his design, and it is only when we make a study of Thomas Sutpen's life that we shall understand the causes that led to the dissolution of the Sutpen family.

Thomas Sutpen was born in 1807 in the West Virginia Mountains of Scottish - English stock. His family belonged to the poor-whites. It was at the age of thirteen that an important event occurred that worked havoc in the young mind of Thomas. He is turned away from the front door of a plantation house ("the biggest house he had ever seen") by a house slave. This behaviour overwhelms the boy. He leaves home in 1820 and goes to Haiti, where he manages a plantation, puts down a slave uprising and marries. He married a Haitian woman of part Negro descent, who bears him a son, Charles. He soon abandons both mother and son, because of their Negro blood. To him it is "impossible that this woman and child be incorporated in my design". (AA, p/264). He soon moves over to Jefferson with money and slaves and acquired a large plantation called the Sutpen Hundred.

4. William Faulkner *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York, Modern Library Edition, Random House, 1936), p.238 Hereafter cited as A.A.

Soon Sutpen set about to realize his dream and as he himself says,

"You see, I had a design in my mind. Whether it was a good or a bad design is beside the point; I had a design. To accomplish it I should require money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family - incidentally, of course, a wife. I set out to acquire these, asking no favor of any man" (AA, p/263).

The "design" gradually flourishes. Sutpen married Ellen Coldfield from the respectable Coldfield family. The townspeople of Jefferson are no longer hostile to Sutpen's strange and solitary ways. Two children are born - Henry in 1839 and Judith in 1844. The family dynasty is gradually taking shape and the Suptens have entered into the world of aristocratic power and prestige. But in 1860, Charles, whose relationship is secret enters into the lives of his half-brother and half-sister and becomes a very close friend of Henry and fiance of Judith. Sutpen mysteriously forbids the marriage and prevents an incestuous union. Later he tells Henry why Charles should not marry Judith: "He must not marry her Henry. His mother's father told me that her mother had been a Spanish woman. I believed him; it was not until after he was born that I found out that his mother was part Negro" (AA, p/354-355).

Charles, on the other hand, very fervently wishes that Thomas Sutpen should acknowledge him as his son and he was even ready to leave Sutpen's Hundred forever if his father should show him a little fatherly affection. The

son yearns for fatherly love and the tragic note is struck in the father's refusal to accept the son. Acceptance of Charles Bon as his son would only imperil his 'design'. Charles is very hurt when his father shows him no sign of affection or sympathy. His yearning for fatherly affection is seen when he tells Henry:

"And he sent me no word? He did not ask you to sand me to him? That was all he had to do, now, today He didn't need to tell you I am a nigger to stop me. He could have stopped me without that, Henry" (AA, p/359).

Henry, on the other hand, could accept his half-brother as a brother-in-law but he cannot accept a Negro as one, and he kills Charles by shooting him to prevent the marriage. Henry soon leaves his father's household, but he returns after a few years, assumes the responsibility of the crime and he dies in his home.

Thomas Sutpen and Henry are victims of the terrible taboo that separates black from white. Many lives, black and white, are destroyed by Sutpen's inability to acknowledge Charles. The tragedy is typically southern.

Sutpen behaves ruthlessly with anyone who does not act according to his dictates. The white French architect whom he had brought to build his home runs away. Sutpen hunts him down with dogs. The white architect is as much a slave as his black servants.

Sutpen goes to the war and after four years he returns and finds that his wife is dead. With Henry missing Sutpen wished to carry on his 'design', and he proposes to Rosa Coldfield, his sister-in-law. The matter of fact proposal of Sutpen only helps us to know him still better. Rosa's hatred for Sutpen became still deeper when he said, "that they try it first and if it was a boy and lived, they would be married" (AA, p/284). After Rosa Coldfield's outright refusal Sutpen seduces the grand daughter of Wash Jones, his poor - white worker, but the girl gives birth to a daughter. Sutpen's callous attitude towards the girl and the baby disgust Wash Jones and he kills Sutpen. Henry returns after a long span, but he soon meets his end when the house is burnt and all that is left of Sutpan's design is Jim the idiot.

Though Henry Sutpen resembles his father in his courage, he has what his father does not have: love. Both in Judith and Henry we find love, affection and sympathy. Judith not only accepts Bon as her fiance even after knowing about his Negro blood, but she also welcomes Bon's part - negro son and asks him to call her 'Aunt Judith'. These are human actions motivated by love. She not only nurtures Bon's son but nursed him when he was suffering from yellow fever. She died nursing him. Judith, in her humanity stands in sharp contrast from her father. The father who refused to acknowledge the "forlorn, nameless and homeless lost child" (AA, p/267) as his own son. Charles had come to his father not for any inheritance,

but he came just for a word, a look, a touch of love. But he got no acknowledgement, he got nothing. He fails to realize that Charles is demanding only the same sort of recognition that was denied to him as a boy when he was thirteen at the plantation door.

Sutpen, in his mad pursuit of his "design" had completely forgotten that permanent relationships can only be established through bonds of love and sympathy. He was not at all aware of these lapses in himself. "Sutpen's trouble" as Quentin's grandfather observed, "was innocence" (AA, p/220) Mr. Compson further says, "He believed that all that was necessary was courage and shrewdness and the one he knew he had and the other he believed that he could learn it if it were taught" (AA, p/244). He married Ellen Coldfield who is not very beautiful nor does she have great social prestige but being the daughter of a steward in the Methodist church she is considered to be very respectable and Thomas Sutpen had a great weakness for respectability - a quality, he was painfully aware he lacked. He was never a loving husband and he treated his wife with cold respect. Towards his children too he was not a loving father. It was always cold logic that governed his activities. His feelings and passions are totally committed to the design, "anyone could look at him and say, Given the occasion and the need, this man can and will do anything" (AA, p/46).

All the relationships in the Sutpen family are abnormal and tragic. The Sutpens often did not know the full truth about themselves and could not realize their identity and humanity. We see this in the different relationships: Henry and Charles were brothers, yet not brothers; Judith and Charles were sister and brother, yet they were not so; Sutpen and Charles were father and son, yet not father and son. It was the father, Thomas Sutpen, who determined the fate and character of the others. He is a force in the Southern Culture no doubt, but in the realization of his 'deisgn' his innocence has hardened into moral blindness, and his strong eogism was a force that destroyed not only his self, but his family and his society too. He tried to build a dynasty and in doing so he had lost a family, in establishing himself as a southern planter he had lost his humanity, and lost the power to see into himself and this completed his ruin.

There is a feeling of despair and futility in the fall of the Sutpen family. It is the bitter end that strikes a tragic note. The big mansion, Thomas Sutpen's dream house, goes up in flames. Only the idiot survived. Faulkner has presented Thomas Sutpen as an evil character, but in the story he seems to be the only heroic figure. He is simultaneously the pride and shame of the South. In him we find both success and defeat, innocence and guilt, pride and defensiveness. His design contains his own destruction and his course of action is only a series of failures.

Harvey Breit in his introduction to the Modern Library edition of *Absalom, Absalom!*⁵ questions the causes that was responsible for Sutpen's failure.

"Was it the "design" that had devoured Sutpen and prevented him from avowing the very thing that would have saved the design? Was it something in the South itself, in its social, political, moral, economic origins that was responsible for Sutpen and for all the subsequent tragedy? Quentin can make no judgement: Sutpen himself had possessed courage and innocence, and the same land had nourished men and women who had delicacy of feeling and capacity for love and gifts for life".

It was this 'delicacy of feeling' and 'capacity for love' that was completely missing in Sutpen's nature. It was this that brought an end not only to him but to his whole family. Through the dissolution of the Sutpen Family Faulkner tries to show that it is not 'money, a house, a plantation, slaves' that can build a family. It is the finer feeling of love, affection and sympathy that alone can keep a family going.

The Sartoris family first appears in 'The Unvanquished' but the later generation figure in *Sartoris* and it is the later generation that shall be our subject for study. The Sartoris family is an aristocratic family portrayed by Faulkner. In spite of its rich, aristocratic background the Sartoris family also shows signs of decay and gradual disintegration.

5. Ibid.,

In *Sartoris* we meet Old Bayard and his aunt 'Miss Jenny'. Old Bayard was the banker in *The Unvanquished* John Sartoris, Old Bayard's son is dead and the only young Sartoris alive is Old Bayard's grandson, "Young Bayard". Young Bayard is now twenty five years old. Both he and his twin brother John had joined the Royal Air Force and John had died while fighting in the air. Somehow young Bayard always felt responsible for his twin brother's death. While he was still fighting his wife and son died. The novel opens with Old Bayard and Aunt Jenny awaiting patiently for young Bayard's return from War. He returns, but before presenting himself before his grandfather, he prowls about like a thief, and he is not too happy returning home after such a long time. He is restless and unhappy and there is in him very little love and affection for his Old grandfather or his Aunt.

Young Bayard soon marries Narcissa Benbow. The Benbows come of a good family, and Narcissa is a young, quiet, shy and a beautiful girl. Even after his second marriage young Bayard continues to feel restless. Narcissa's bashful nature is wrongly interpreted for she is, in truth, attracted to no man. There is in her a deep-rooted coldness towards all men and Narcissa thinks to herself "that there would be peace for her only in a world where there are no men at all" (S,p/245). But Narcissa did try to make her marriage

a success and desperately tries to bring her young husband close to her, but Bayard is a restless man, and cannot settle down to a life of homely bliss. Miss Jenny once asks Narcissa "Are you worrying because maybe he don't love you like you think he ought to?" Narcissa honestly replies, "It isn't that. He doesn't love anybody. He won't even love the baby. He doesn't seem to be glad, or sorry, or anything" (S, p/298) Bayard and Narcissa are not close to each other, and though married there's is a cold relationship. Bayard Sartoris in his restlessness is "a case of physical courage gone sour" (S, p/246). In all his activities we find that he is heading towards self-destruction - his heavy whiskey-drinking, his riding an unbroken stallion, and his racing car. The reckless nature of his mind found expression in his physical activities.

Bayard's perverted nature comes out when he takes Old Simon, a Negro servant, who has never seen a car, for a ride. He scares Simon, out of his wits through his reckless driving, gets a sadistic delight in tormenting the poor servant. When Simon is finally released he lies in the ditch holding the rabbit's paw which hangs around his neck as a charm against witchcraft. Later on however, Bayard "felt savage" and "ashamed".

Speedy driving was a great passion for Bayard. It was an expression of his restless nature. He was driving

recklessly once with his grandfather, the Old Colonel. Through his careless and reckless driving, he wrecks his car and kills his grandfather. It is an act which puts him to shame and he cannot face his family. He rides into the country to stay with the hospitable McCallums.

The McCallums are a poor-white family and they represent a very different, social order from that of the Sartorises. Though poor, they lead a simple life, in the woods, with hunting and fishing as their favourite pastime. The McCallums cannot be compared with the Snopses. Unlike the Snopses they are honest, self-sufficient and do not covet other's property. In their dignity and discipline, they differ from the Snoposes who represent a part of a sick society.

After the reckless drive, and after his grandfather is killed Bayard goes to stay with the McCallums. The McCallums brothers live with their father away from town. What Bayard sees within the McCallum family surprises him. Their hard, simple life in their modest surroundings makes Bayard wonder at his own useless life. The McCallums house was bare with minimum comforts. The walls of the house "were of chinked logs. On them hung two or three outdated calenders and a patent medicine lithograph in colors. The floor was bare, of hand-trimmed boards scuffed with heavy boots and polished by the pads of generations of dogs;

two men could lie side by side in the fireplace" (S, p/309). Against the backdrop of the purposeful life of the McCallums Bayard sees his own life as one which is full of "heedless wastefulness". In the warm and harmonious relationship of the McCallums there is a quality of innocence, a freshness that makes life more meaningful. Bayard sees it all and feels wretched with his own life. He soon leaves the McCallums in their wagon and stays for the night with a poor Negro family, telling them that he has lost his way.

What he encounters inside the poor Negro cabin stirs and surprises Bayard. It is Christmas and it is celebrated in extreme poverty. There are little children, very poorly dressed, but happy, clinging to their small toys and their bite of peppermint Candy. The Christmas dinner is served with yams, ash cake, coffee, bananas and coconut. It is a poor dinner but the whole family dined together with Bayard as their guest. They are poor but their happiness lies in their being together. Bayard is touched to see their contentment, despite their poverty, their feeling of love and togetherness. Seeing the close-knit, happy Negro family Bayard realizes what he himself has missed in his life. He feels uncomfortable with the homely Negro family and he leaves the place. Soon, after a few months he dies in an airplane accident, as a test pilot flying an experimental plane.

His young widow is with child and at the end of the novel she has born another male Sartoris. Although the young Bayard will carry on the line, the Sartoris family represents now a declining aristocratic tradition. Through the Sartoris family, Faulkner is analysing the decay of an aristocracy and of the aristocratic ideal. The family, unlike the Compsons, is still rich, still living in the ancestral country-house, but the family had lost its aristocratic glamour living on old memories. The family lived on its past - the Civil War mystique, the old sense of honour, the reckless heroism, the family legends, and family relics. It is only the past glories which somewhat sustain them because the present and the future were bleak.

It is the reckless, restless nature that led Bayard Sartoris to his doom. Aunt Jenny attributes this recklessness to something in his blood. The Sartorises, she says, are "Savages, every one of them" (S, p/299) Bayard Sartoris is a good example of the decadance of the Southern aristocratic tradition. Bayard seems to be suffering from some kind of world-weariness. Although he does not feel yet he seems to be a spirit of a heroic past, he does not care to know anything of the past or what it is meant to be. He only makes a progress towards destroying himself and the whole Sartoris family.

Through the fall of the Sutpen family and the Sartoris family Faulkner attempts to show that a family fails when it does not emphasise the essential human values. The finer feelings of love and affection are missing in both the characters of Thomas Sutpen and Bayard Sartoris. Sutpen was not concerned about the feelings and aspirations of the other members of his family. There was only in him a show of respectability and his mad pursuit of his 'design'. On the other hand in Bayard Sartoris we see his reckless attitude, his cruelty, his lack of feelings towards his family and his young wife, and his world weariness. All this led to his self-destruction and the destruction of his family.

At another level, the fall of the Sutpen family and the Sartoris family, contributes to the ultimate collapse of the decadent southern culture. The inherent pathos of these sages is that the state of the society itself is a debilitating factor, in a family's ruin ultimately leads to the disintegration of the society. The tragic interaction of these two factors, present in the saga of these two families are portrayed in a much more poetic dimension in the fate of the Compson family which is discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER - IV

THE COMPSON FAMILY

In *The Sound and the Fury* Faulkner depicts the decline of the Compson family. In it we meet the father, mother and the four children of the Compson family at a stage when the family has lost much of the past glory, its rich aristocratic background and is soon to fade into complete extinction. The family is in a state of disorder and disintegration. The Compson family's intellectual, moral and spiritual confusion is the subject matter of the novel - the internal chaos of the various members of the family that finally brought its ultimate ruin.

The Compson family make brief appearances in *Absalom, Absalom!* and in the short stories *The Evening Sun* and *Justice* but it is *The Sound and the Fury* that records the fall of the family. The novel covers a period of eighteen years ending in 1928, yet the genealogy goes back to the battle of Culloden in 1745 and moves ahead to the year 1945, when Jason, the last of the Compsons has sold the family mansion and Caddy is heard of as the mistress of a German General. The book moves from the childhood of Quentin, Caddy, Jason and Benjy to Easter Sunday 1928, when Quentin, Caddy's daughter runs away from home with a man from a visiting fair. The four children are the main characters - the unknowing agents that bring about the fall of the great

house of the Compsons. To Benjy, the idiot son, the past is only sensation, and he lives in the broken images that crowd his mind. Dilsey, the negro-servant and Caddy are the two persons that loved him sincerely. Towards the end, Benjy is put in a lunatic asylum by his brother Jason. Quentin Compson is the eldest son who is aware of the predicament of his family but is unable to transcend it. He broods over the lost honour of the family, Caddy's sexual behaviour, and finding everything intolerable he commits suicide. Caddy is the most loveable character, the girl who wants to see things for herself. It is her sexual behaviour which brings about her fall. Her calculated marriage with Herbert Head fails and she finally ends up being the mistress of a Nazi General. Jason, Quentin's brother rejects the code of honour and welcomes a purely materialistic way of life. He finally disposes of the family property and lives with his mistress, thereby wiping out all traces of the genteel tradition that the Compson family at one time embodied.

In the study of all his characters Faulkner goes deep into the dark corners of the human heart, working intensively into the nature of man, and showing to us that it is an inherent flaw that lies dormant in the nature of man that brings about his fall. Faulkner shows this weakness working in the hearts of the four children and how it helped in the fall of the family. The family suffered as a result of rejecting the old virtues and codes of honour. It is

not possible for man, Faulkner tries to show through the Compsons, to live a life bereft of traditional virtues. The cause of their fall is both spiritual as well as psychological. The economic factor too was no less responsible for the fall of the Compsons. The economic condition towards the end is in a very poor state: the Compson House with its spacious ground, its barns for the cows and horses dwindled into decay with only Dilsey and Luster to look after the house which is also in a dilapidated condition the carriage is rundown, the barn is empty. As a last desperate attempt to stem the inevitable collapse, Jason tries hard to be a materialist but having had no previous experience in these matters, he fails miserably.

There are indeed many inherent causes that led to the fall of the Compson family. A brief historical account however, will help us to understand the background of the Compson family. The Compson genealogy goes back from the year 1745 to the year 1699 when Quentin Maclachan Compson was born to a Glassgow printer. His childhood was not an easy one as he was orphaned at a very young age. He took part in a revolt for Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1745, but he soon fled to the Carolinas from Scotland and again to Kentucky as he did not wish to fight against the English King. In the year 1782, his son, Charles Strart Compson, who had fought for the British joined him. However, the older Compson soon died and he was buried in Central

Kentucky. Charles started to teach in a school, but soon lost interest in the teaching profession, and went away with his young son.

Jason Lycargus Compson was the name of Charles Compson's son who in 1811 rode up the Natchez Trace at Okatoba and enrolled himself as a clerk in a Chickasaw agency. Ikkemotube or Doom, who was a close relation of the chief man of the Chickasaws gave the square mile of land to Jason Lycargus Compson. The land was given in return for a speedy horse. It is in this plot of land that Jason Lycargus Compson settled and produced the Compson dynasty of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha saga.

While discussing the aristocratic background of the Compson family mention must be made about Quentin Maclachan Compson II who was the Governor of Mississippi in 1861 and of Jason Lycargus II who was the Brigadier. However, the Brigadier failed at Shiloh in 1862, and at Resach in 1864. He also put the first mortgage on the still intact Square Mile to a new England Carpetbegger in 1866; and he spent the next forty years by selling fragments of the Square. He died in 1900, in a hunting and fishing camp near the Tallahatchie River.

The seeds of decay in the Compson family had already been sown, as we have seen during the days of Brigadier Jason Lycargus II when he started selling portions of land

from the Compson mile. Nevertheless it was the last generation of the Compsons that was solely responsible for the ultimate extinction of the Compson family. In our course of study of the fall of the Compson family we shall see how each member knowingly or unknowingly, contributed to the disintegration of the family.

✓ Sociological studies stress that parents are the backbone of the family, they provide the emotional anchor to the children. All children expect some love, concern and sympathy from their parents. It is only the presence of these feelings that keeps the wheels of the family running smoothly. In the Compson family, we shall find that there was no love, no concern for each other, no sympathy. Each of the Compsons failed in their duty towards each other; each member feels unloved and unwanted.

Jason Compson III is the father of the four children. He is a lawyer by profession. It is usually the father that upholds the family tradition and honour, though he was a loving father, and loved and cared for his children in their young days. In the story *The Evening Sun* we see him as the caring father, taking his three children along with him to drop the Negro Servant, Nancy, who is afraid that her husband will murder her during the night. The father found it easy to love his children during their young days, for they were young, free and happy with no problems. But as

they enter the adult world complications rise. It is these complications that the father found it difficult to face. The children leave their innocent world of childhood; and as they attain adulthood the pattern of their life changes. It is the four children's tragic pattern of life that upsets the father. He had cherished high hopes for Quentin, and he sold the pasture to send him to Harvard for higher study. But Quentin is obsessed with the past with no hope for the future. Quentin's future is bleak and it is the past that holds him back. He is troubled with thoughts of virginity, honour, incest. There is young Jason who turns out to be a hard-hearted man and has no love for anyone. He turns all relationships to commercial transactions. The physical and mental retardation of Benjy is another cause of pain to the father. It was, however, Caddy's behaviour that hit him hardest. Caddy was his loving daughter and her sexual promiscuity had upset him most. Caddy feels for her father and tells Quentin, "Father will be dead in a year they say if he doesn't stop drinking and he won't stop, he can't stop since I ^{saw} since last summer" (The S & F p/143)¹ Caddy, here, refers to her relationship with Dalton Ames. Mr. Compson develops a cynical attitude towards virginity because of caddy's promiscuity.

To Quentin's young mind the father was the sole source

1. William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (New York, Jonathan Cape, Modern Library edition Hardson Smith, 1929), p.143, All subsequent references are to this edition, cited as S&F.

of authority and advice, and his father had a great influence on him. Tradition, honour, Family, Virginity were some of the problems that obsessed Quentin and it was to his father that he looked up to know more about these problems. However, instead of good counsel and guidance all that the father does is drink heavily and write cynical verses.

It is in Irving Malin's book *William Faulkner: An Interpretation*² where Malin states that Mr. Compson lives intellectually writing bitter elegies about his fellow townspeople. He is said to be a philosopher as well as a fool because he does not believe in victory but only in defeat. He does not find any contentment anywhere within his family. He takes delight in transmitting his views to his adolescent son Quentin. For as Malin states "In spite of his emphasis upon man's insignificance he feels inwardly that he is better than most men, for he has seen the meaning of life in a clear way. He is proud to give his son, Quentin, his knowledge, which will, he feels, help him to live properly according to the authoritarianism he himself has adopted."

It is the hard realistics of life that both father and son try to avoid, both go for abstractions - it is thus we find Quentin choosing suicide and the father taking to drinking. Quentin was never a man of action and he was an idealist with his conceptions very set and rigid. Compson

2. Irving Malin, *William Faulkner: An Interpretation* (California, Stanord University Press, 1957), p.16.

well understands his son and tells him, "Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature. It's nature is hurting you not Caddy...." (S & F p/143).

Jason Compson had the misfortune of having a whining self-centred woman as a wife. To the many problems that confronted the Compson family he found no support or cooperation from his wife. Caroline Compson was only interested with the social status of her family, the Bascombs. It is mainly because of his uncaring wife that Mr. Compson gradually turns into a nihilist.

Mr. Compson acknowledges the fact that his family is in a state of decay and it is the decadant behaviour of the children that upsets the father. But instead of guiding the family during its hour of crisis, the father takes up a completely indifferent attitude and thus paves the way of his family's ruin. He loses interest in life and feels good only when he is drinking from a decanter on his desk. He dejectedly sits in his office and broods over the loss of Compson's Mills, the square mile owned by his forefathers. He spends his time writing satiric verses and ruins himself completely. He has failed his children and has lost complete control of the family situation. He is a beaten man and completely worn down. It is his defeat that spells the ruin of the Compson family.

It is Caroline Compson, the self-centred mother of

the Compson family who has a cold, negative influence, on the members of the family and paralyses all normal family relationships. It is only Dilsey, the old faithful Negro servant, managing the whole house, cooking and serving food. Mrs. Compson never felt it to be her duty to look after the physical and mental well-being of the members of her family. It is always the mother who is ever busy catering to the varied needs of the family, but here we find that Mrs. Compson is always confined to her upstairs room, complaining of a headache, her head was always covered with a camphor soaked handkerchief. It was always the status of her own family, the Bascombs, that was the most important issue to her. It was always her fervent desire that she be considered as a lady. She is a vain and selfish woman and she feels it is very important to assert that her family is as good as the one into which she has married. Cleanth Brooks in his book *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha County*³ tells us about Mrs. Compson, "The basic cause of the break up of the Compson family... is the cold and self-centred mother who is sensitive about the social status of her own family, the Bascombs, who feels the birth of an idiot son as a kind of a personal affront, and who withholds any real love and affection from her other children and her husband. Caroline Compson is not so much an actively wicked and evil person as a cold weight of negativity which paralyses the

3. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner, Yoknapatawpha County* (New York, Yale University Press, 1963), p/334.

normal family relationships. She is certainly at the root of Quentin's lack of confidence, .. her husband's breakdown into alcoholic cynicism, and doubtless she is ultimately responsible for Caddy's promiscuity". It is Jason who reveals to us Mrs. Compson's neurotic reaction when she comes to know that Caddy was kissed by a boy, "all next day she went around the house in a black dress and a veil and even father couldn't get her to say a word except crying and saying her little daughter was dead and Caddy was fifteen then (S & F p/247)". It is the neurotic exaggeration of the act that humiliates Caddy and soon she does things that is worse than kissing. Had she been a wise and conscientious mother, concerned about her daughter's well-being, she would have chided her daughter, helped her to reform her ways and taken her across the right path. She would thereby have averted the tragedy that befell the family. If Mrs. Compson had taken a sympathetic attitude towards Caddy and the other members of her family, perhaps the course of the Compson family may have taken a very different turn. Mrs. Compson, in her selfishness, does not possess any quality of a mother. When there is a major breakdown in the family she does not guide her children, but all she does is cover herself up in a veil and cry. Caddy rebels against her mother's neurotic behaviour and it is her mother's callous attitude that drives her into a life of promiscuousness.

She had no affection for her children. The little affection that she showered was on her son Jason. She, surprisingly, had no love for her son Quentin and thus we find him saying, "I have mother" (S & F p/190). Lawrence Bowling⁴ says that the Compson children were doomed by "the general state of lovelessness into which all the Compson children were born without any choice on their part". The cold attitude of the mother estranges everybody from her, and on the last day of Quentin's life he says to himself, "If I only had a mother" (S & F p/191)*. He also associated his mother with a scene pictured in one of the books in the library. They showed "a dark place into which a single weak ray of light came slanting upon two faces lifted out of the shadow". To Quentin, deprived of parental affection, the pictures remind him of his father and mother. There were times when he would turn back to the picture until "the dungeon was Mother herself. She and Father upwards into weak light holding hands and as lost somewhere even then without even a ray of light" (S & F p/191) His last thought about his brother is 'Done in mother's mind though. Finished. Finished. Then we were all poisoned' (S & F p/121). It is a cry of anguish from a son yearning for a mother's love. It is the deprivation of this love, that brought a tragic turn in the lives of all the four children.

4. Lawrence Bowling, *Faulkner and the Theme of Innocence*, Kenyon Review (Vol. XX, 1958), p.479.

* William Faulkner *The S & F*.

Mrs. Compson's only concern is with gentility and social position. That is why when Caddy's daughter Quentin elopes with a man from the fair, she does not understand why such a misfortune has befallen her. "It can't be simply to hurt and flout me. Whoever God is, He would not permit that. I'm a lady. You might not believe that from my offspring, but I am" (S & F p/315)*. In her weakness for social position, she forgets her duties and responsibilities of a mother. Thus Mrs. Compson brings ruin to her family, through her own egotism and self-pity, qualities deeply ingrained in her.

We thus see that both the Father and the Mother fail in their duty. It is the Father's callous and indifferent attitude, the mother's neurotic behaviour that upsets all normal family relationships and this largely contributes to the disintegration of the Compson family.

It is not the parents alone but the children, too, through their deplorable behaviour bring about the fall and add to the general decay of the family. Caddy is the loving, sweet natured daughter but in her desperate bid to get out of the gloomy atmosphere of her home she brings ruin to herself. Quentin the eldest child is unsure of himself and obsessed with thoughts of honour, Virginitly, Suicide. Jason, the youngest son, is a hard-hearted man, who looks

* William Faulkner The S & F.

contemptuously at his father and elder brother, and he regards his sister as a bitch. Benjy is the youngest son, who was born an idiot, to whom the past is indistinguishable from the present. The past for Benjy, is sensation and it lives in the broken images that crowd his mind.

In 1928 Benjy is thirty-three years old, physically mature but mentally retarded. His unspoken monologue is like⁵ "primitive poetry, a poetry of the senses, in which the world for Benjy is a kind of confused, blooming buzz-registers with great sensory impact but with minimal intelligibility". Though he may be said to be subhuman he has some elements of humanity still in him. In his world full of confusions and helplessness his heart broods for the lost Caddy, after she goes away, the one person who sincerely loved and cared for him. All his warm associations are centred round her because she takes care of him, protects him from the ill treatment of Mrs. Compson. To him she smelled like tress. When she goes away Benjy hugs her soiled slippers. Benjy's attachment for Caddy is of much significance, because⁶ "She is the only human factor in Benjy's life which gives it meaning, for the other things he loves are inanimate objects - the fire, the pasture, the red and yellow cushion, the blue bottle, and the jimson weed".

5. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner, Yoknapatawpha County*, (New York, London Yale University Press, 1976), p/326.

6. *Modern Fiction Studies*, (Vol 13, Spring 1967-68) Catherine B. Baum, "The Beautiful One" : Caddy Compson as heroine of "The Sound and the Fury" (p/34).

It is through Benjy's relationship with other members of his family that we can find out their true nature. Mrs. Compson talks to him in a harsh, cold tone - "You Benjamin" (S & F p/60) or she orders the other members of her household to keep him quiet. Mr. Compson is too busy and he is not very interested in Benjy's affairs. The most that he asks is, "well, Benjy .. Have you been a good boy today" (S & F p/83). Quentin does not go out of his way to hurt Benjy, but he doesn't show much concern for him. Jason regards Benjy as a nuisance and as a child he hurts and teases Benjy by cutting up his paper dolls. Luster wickedly whispers "Caddy" in his ears to remind him of the painful absence of Caddy and to make him cry. Dilsey, loves Benjy and is protective towards him but she is too busy with her household chores to spend much time with him. Quentin, Caddy's daughter, finds Benjy's table manners intolerable and she is disgusted with him, when Benjy sees Quentin with her boy friend in the swing, she is very angry and calls him an "old crazy loon" (S & F p/67). It was only Caddy who was sincerely concerned with Benjy's happiness. She used to feed him, sleep with him, dress him up, soothe him when he was hurt. Her first thought was always for Benjy. When he was unhappy to see Caddy with Charlie, she quickly runs to comfort Benjy after she is married.

We see Benjy as a person who required a lot of delicate

handling, but in the Compson household, except for Caddy and Dilsey, he did not get this sympathy from anyone. Cleanth Brooks in his book *William Faulkner: First Encounters*⁷ states that "Faulkner is interested in Benjy because he tells us something about humanity at large and because he represents the human being reduced to its ultimate dimensions and essentials. In short, Faulkner uses Benjy not to debunk humanity, but to affirm its distinctive quality and value. Benjy calls forth love, and in his own manner he is able to return love". For it is in Benjy's monologue, as Brooks states, that we get "some sense of the quality of the Compson household: a father, defeated and cynical, who drinks too much; a mother who lacks maternal feeling; a chronic unhappiness between the mother and father; a worthless uncle, Mrs. Compson's brother, who is a sponge, an encumbrance, and a disgusting caricature of the cultivated gentlemen; and the four children". Benjy in his helplessness thus is a pitiable figure in a hopeless situation and everything to him is beyond his comprehension.

Caddy, may be said to be the central figure of the novel for each brother reacts to her and in the process reveals his own nature. Faulkner's own view of Caddy is also very sympathetic. "To me she was the beautiful one", he said at the University of Virginia⁸, "She was my heart's

7. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner, First Encounters*(New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1983), pp.48-49.

8. Gwrynn & Blotner, eds. *Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia 1957-58* (Charlottesville, 1959), p.104.

darling. That's what I wrote about and I used the tools which seemed to me the proper tools to try to tell, try to draw the picture of Caddy ... Caddy was still to me too beautiful and too moving".

To Benjy, who had never known mother's affection Caddy is a warm and a loving person. She is clear and life-giving. She gives him, Faulkner says⁹, "The tenderness to shield him in his innocence". Her love is unselfish and she genuinely loved her two brothers Quentin and Benjy. Caddy knows as to what are the few things that can keep Benjy happy. The other members donot care to know about the things that makes Benjy happy. She knows that Benjy likes the "red and yellow cushion" (S & F p/82). She knows that he feels happy when she tells him about Christmas. "Sant~~f~~ claus, Benjy, Santy Calus" (S & F p/22). She puts him to sleep, she is concerned when his hands are cold. In her relationship with Benjy she is warm, innocent and loving.

To Quentin, Caddy is the main interest. She must uphold the tradition of the Southern woman, but she fails him. For as Caddy enters adolescence she loses her innocence. It is in her relationship with Charlie that she leaves behind her innocent world. But she is still in control of her feelings and can give up Charlie to please Benjy. But when she meets Dalton Ames she loses control of her feelings.

9. Robert A. Jellife, Faulkner at Nagano (Tokyo, 1956), p.104.

When Quentin asks if she loves Dalton she takes Quentin's hand and places it on her heart, "she moved my hand up against her throat, her heart was hammering there" (S & F p/169). It is only her beating heart that can speak about her love for Dalton. Quentin who is "incapable of love" (S & F p/169) wonders at Caddy's overflowing love. For Caddy the communication of love is very important and it is this love which is lacking in the Compson household that compels her to seek for love beyond her home. It is this human bond that Caddy tries to assert and Robert Penn Warren in his article on 'William Faulkner and his South',¹⁰ states that it is "those who deny the human bond" that are responsible for much of the unhappiness in the world. She is well aware of the fact that her relationship with Dalton hurts both Benjy and Quentin but she is too involved with Dalton, little realizing that Dalton views woman as "bitches" (S&F p/179) It is only when he goes away, leaving her pregnant, that she begins to despair with a sense of loss and deep anguish. After Dalton there are many men that come in Caddy's life. It is her indifferent attitude towards virginity, and her need to love that makes her give in to the numerous men.

In her selflessness and in her willingness to put other's interest first she is even willing to commit incest when Quentin suggests, even if it is only to comfort him. She marries Herbert Head to give a name to her illegitimate

10. Robert Penn Warren, *William Faulkner and his South* (Seminar in Prose and Poetry, No.6, Virginia, 1951), p.14.

child. Soon Head divorces her and Caddy sends her daughter back to Jefferson with Mr. Compson. Though sending the little daughter causes her a lot of pain, yet she was left with no other alternative. Mrs. Compson does not allow her to come home and this seals her fate and she goes completely astray. She is last heard of as a mistress of a Nazi general. She does not, however, shirk her responsibility towards her daughter and sends two hundred dollars every month for fifteen years, though Jason misuses the money and pockets it himself.

It is in Jason's hands that Caddy is defeated. When she wants to see her daughter she only gets a passing glimpse after paying him one hundred dollars for the privilege. He censors her letters to Quentin, her daughter, and to hurt her he says, "we dont even know your name at that house" (S & F p/221). Though she knows that Jason does not have 'a drop of warm blood in him" yet she pleads with him to take care of Quentin. "Just promise that she'll - that she - You can do that. Things for her. Be kind to her. Little things that I can't" (S & F p/224). She is full of love and concern for her daughter, but she knows that it is futile to plead with the hard hearted Jason, and this makes her still more helpless.

The innocent, self-reliant, courageous and independent girl that Caddy was in the beginning of the novel slowly changes into a feverish, anxious and a helpless women. This

change in her character can be traced in her relationship with the seven men that figured in her life Benjy, Charlie, Dalton, Quentin, Herbert, Jason and the Nazi general. This change is a culmination of many forces working against her: the want of guidance from her father, the cold negative attitude of the mother, the cruel behaviour of Jason. All these factors led to Caddy's ultimate severance from the tradition bound life. With Caddy's departure all the warmth and love that the Compson family had known through her go away. All that remains of Caddy is her "white Satin slipper ... yellow now, and cracked and soiled" (S & F p/332). This slipper is symbolic of Caddy's life which was clean at one time but is dirty and useless now.

Quentin, the eldest son of the Compsons, was a very sensitive child. He was decent and noble by nature, but in his decency and nobility there is a strong puritanical strain. We thus find him fussing over Caddy when she gets her dress removed by Versh when they had been splashing water on each other.

There is always in him a horror of contamination. He is thus very upset with Caddy's loss of virginity. He slaps her when he comes to know that Caddy has kissed a boy.

Quentin feels defeated after Caddy's loss of innocence. He wanted her to uphold the honour of the tradition of the

Southern women. He yearned to keep Caddy inviolate and if she was to be violated he would want to be the violator by committing incest. In his unwillingness to accept Caddy's sexual promiscuity he entertains the idea of incest. He feels that even incest would endow the Compson honour with appropriate significance. "If he could commit incest .. then he and Caddy might roast together in sexless innocence, purified by the clear flames of hell. They would roast, ... since the fact of sin, its horror and its magnitude would be negative proof that innocence exists, that morality is real" (S & F p/147).

✓ Caddy's surrender to Dalton Ames forms the most crucial element of Quentin's psychological experience. The whole incident disturbs him deeply. His psyche has been upset and he is very badly hurt in spirit. He feels lost, lonely, estranged, afraid of reality, because he is virginal about sex. His father's words fail to help him. "It's nature is hurting you, not Caddy" ... it's because you are a virgin don't you see? Women are never virgins (S & F p/143) "These words do not console Quentin's hurt spirit. Quentin is aware of his disposition but he cannot endure it or even transcend it. In his appendix to *The Portable Faulkner*¹¹ the novelist speaks that Quentin was a person "who loved not his sister's body but some concept of Compson honour". In truth Quentin was not in love with his sister's body but was in

11. Appendix to *The Portable Faulkner*, edited by Malcolm Cowley (New York, The Viking Press, 1946), p.14.

love with the notion of virginity and he begs his father to believe that they have committed incest.

It is the loss of his sister's honour and his desire for incest that seems to dominate his own mind, and it is these distorted ideas that have much to do with the decay of the Compson family. When he broods over the idea of incest, he says to himself: .. "until after the honeysuckle got all mixed up in it the whole thing came to symbolise night and unrest I seemed to be lying neither asleep nor awake looking down a long corridor of grey halflight thinking I was I was not who was not was not was".(S&F p/149).

For Quentin Honeysuckle means Caddy's sexuality William Van O'conner in his book *The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner*¹² states that when Quentin talks about Honeysuckles he means Caddy's, sex,

"Her honor and the traditional preoccupation with personal honor merge. Quentin's desire for incest with Caddy suggests social disorder, a family that is narcissistic. Insistence upon honor and dignity have become extreme forms, of self love. Living in the midst of decay with the glories of the family's past is living with ghosts"

Quentin wants to be away from the world and has built for himself a private world where Caddy plays a prominent role. Emotions and concepts are the two bases on which Quentin builds his private world. With the passage of time many concepts change, but Quentin cannot accept these changes

12. William Van O'Conner *The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner*, (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1963), p.39.

and this is what destroys him. It is his extreme awareness of time that makes it so very difficult for him to accept things. He is full of despair and he can neither accept or reconcile himself to the change, and the possibility of future changes as time passes and makes his despair even deeper. It is because of this despair, that he chooses death.

To Quentin virginity is a concept that is associated with virtue and honour. This concept is the centre of Quentin's world. This virginity which was physically present in Caddy, makes her a link between Quentin's private world and the world of experience. Mr. Compson says that it is only men that give virginity an ethical significance and that it is only a transient physical state. Olga W. Vickery, in her book **The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation**¹³ says that despite Quentin's feverish preoccupation with ethics, he is unable to perform any ethical action himself. Thus it is not the time that is out of joint but Quentin's relation to time.

It was always the puritanical strain in his nature that made Quentin afraid of any kind of contamination. He thus does not like roses which are coloured but not pure white. Even a few hours before his death he is worried about blood stains on his clothing, he is worried about the bruised spot on his eye and takes a clean handkerchief instead of

13. Olga W. Vickery. **The Novels of William Faulkner : A Critical Interpretation** (Louisiana, Louisiana State University Press, 1964).

a soiled one; he brushes his teeth, dries the brush, and brushes his hat.

While Quentin is in the University he readies himself for suicide: he broods over the lost honour of his family, he broods over his mother's cold and unsympathetic attitude towards her children, he broods over Caddy's sexual behaviour and her calculated marriage to Sydney Herbert Head. His experiences during the last day of his life (Jun 2, 1910) show his preoccupation with the past. It is a day of retrospect, although it is an eventful day with two fights, an arrest and a court hearing.

Quentin is not interested in the future. He feels he has no future. In his obsession with the past he denounces the future. This apathetic attitude towards the future is a strange pattern of behaviour. Rollo May, in his book, *Existence : A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology*¹⁴ comments on this apathetic attitudes towards future, "Severe anxiety and depression blot out time, annihilate the future the most painful aspect of the sufferer's predicament is that he is unable to imagine a future moment in time when he will be out of the anxiety". This state of condition exactly, fits in Quentin's case: he is unable to envisage a future.

14. Rollo May, *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology* (New York, Basic Books, 1958), p.68.

It is this sense of failure that works disastrously on the young and innocent mind of Quentin. The vigour to live is lost in him and thus his wish for death. He is destroyed by events he can neither accept nor control. He chooses death which alone can terminate his disinterested involvement in life. It is true that Quentin was in love with Death and he embraces it without any hesitation. But what was the cause for this death-wish? It was not Caddy's illicit involvement with men that was the sole cause of his failure. The despair that finds place in Quentin's mind found its roots during his childhood. The sensitive child hungered for love, for sympathy, for understanding, but the cold and selfish mother could not give her children any love or affection, she has a negative influence on her children. She is the main cause of Quentin's lack of confidence. Thus we find Quentin on the last day of his life, thinking of his mother, he says of his family "Finished, Finished. Then we were all poisoned" (S & F, p/192). He says again, to himself, "If I could say Mother, Mother (S&F p/192). It is a cry of anguish from a boy who has been deprived of a mother's affection. His cynical father also does not understand him. His father, being a source of authority. Quentin had looked up to him for advice, but he does not get any help from him. We can thus say that it is the parents mishandling of a sensitive child that eventually compelled him to commit suicide.

Jason, the youngest of the Compson children, believes in no code of honour. Among the Compsons he is believed to be the best adjusted to the world and in his appendix on the Compsons Faulkner declares that Jason was "the first sane Compson since before Culloden" (p/16) Jason does not believe in the past and he has no use of traditional values. He is a complete contrast to his two brothers and does not at all feel attached to his family. He is hard, detached, rational and of course very pragmatic. We can call him pragmatic because he is the only Compson who can tackle and face the social implications of Caddy's sexual promiscuity. Jason can adjust himself to the situation and turn it to his own advantage and benefit. He is the only one in the Compson family who has accepted the present reality and dismisses the myth of the Southern past. He believes in nothing except the almighty dollar and turns every action to its cash value.

Jason is Mrs. Compson's favourite child and she feels that he is the only Compson who tries to salvage the family fortunes. To her he is the breadwinner, the head of the household and the only person who tries to keep the decaying walls of the house intact.

As the head of the Compson household he says, "I haven't got much pride, I can't afford it with a kitchen

15. Appendix to *The Portable Faulkner* edited by Malcolm Cowley, (New York, The Viking Press, 1946).

full of niggers to feed and robbing the state asylum of its star freshman. Blood, I says, governors and generals. It's a damn good thing (the Compsons) never had any kings and presidents; we'd all be down there (in the insane asylum) at Jackson chasing butterflies" (S & F p/286).

Jason's role as a breadwinner, however, needs no acclaim. He works in a hardware store and he can retain his job because the Earl is sorry for his mother. His sense of business is not very shrewd, though he makes a great deal of fuss for being the bread-winner for the family.

He never entertained any warm feelings towards his family. He is brutal and cold-hearted. This is seen when he demands one hundred dollars from Caddy if he will let her see her baby just for a minute. Jason wants to be paid in advance but Caddy prefers to pay him afterwards. He asks her: "Dont you trust me", to which Caddy replies. "No, I know you. I grew up with you". (S & F p/288). When Jason agrees to let Caddy see her baby, he gives her only one glimpse and takes the baby away. This is a cruel way to play with a mother's feelings. When he comes to know that Caddy sees her baby for a second time with Dilsey's help he is very furious. Dilsey tells him. "You's cold man Jason, if man you is" (S & F p/290).

Sadism is also another trait in Jason's character. This is seen when he burns the tickets for the show one

by one, knowing fully well that Luster was desperate for one ticket.

His cruelty is seen in the harsh treatment he metes out to his niece Quentin. He refers to her, "Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say" (S & F p/198). Quentin turns out to be a cheap wanton because of Jason's cruel behaviour towards her. His only concern is her money which Caddy sends regularly. His love for the dollar alienates him from everybody. He is ready to pay his mistress Loraine forty dollars, but does not want to have any emotional involvement. Jason declares that he has "every respect for a good honest whore". He has an undying hatred for Caddy and Quentin. He has a deep grudge against his brother Quentin for being sent to Harvard. In order to be rid of the nuisance of looking after an idiot he sends Benjy to a lunatic assylum. Though he is the favourite child of his mother, who calls him a Bascomb he does not hesitate to misbehave even with her and even cheat her. When Quentin does not come down to breakfast on Easter Morning, Jason fears the worst. He asks for the key to her room from Mrs. Compson, and when the key is not immediately available he shouts at her, "Give me the key, you old fool!" (S&F p/281). The disrespect that the son shows to his mother is an instance of the decadent behaviour of the Compson family.

It is when Miss Quentin runs away with all his ill-gotten money, with a man from the fair that really galvanizes

Jason into action. He had always boasted of managing matters by himself, "Besides, like I say I guess I don't need any man's help to get along I can stand on my own feet like I always have" (p/224). But when Jason goes in hot pursuit of Quentin and her money, he approaches for help from the Sheriff, from the man at the fair, but he gets no help. He has to come back beaten and defeated.

Jason thus may be said to be the villain in the novel. His villainy is seen in his treatment of his sister, his idiot brother and his niece. In all Faulkner's villains there is seen a lack of any capacity to love. This lovelessness is seen in their attitude towards woman and towards nature and we find that Jason Compson had no interest in nature or in woman except, as objects to be used for one's profit, Cleanth Brooks in his book *William Faulkner The Yoknapatawpha County*¹⁶ states, that

"To be truly human one must transcend one's mere intellect with some overflow of generosity and love. Faulkner tells us that Jason is able to compete with, and even hold his own with, the Snopeses. This is the worst damnation that he can utter. When a Compson turns Snopeses, then the family has indeed run out, and the end of an order has come."

We thus see that though Jason is isolated, and even though he is unrepentant he manages to survive, but Quentin is destroyed by events he can neither accept nor control. Jason is the last to survive in the Compson line, but his

16. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha County* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1976) p/338.

survival is meaningless. He rejects any kind of relationship, and remains a bachelor and childless thus putting an end to the Compson line.

✓ We also see Miss Quentin, through her wanton behaviour contributing to the fall of the Compson Family. Miss Quentin as we know is Caddy's illegitimate daughter who has been named after her dead uncle. She has been brought as a baby to the Compson household to be reared. It is Dilsey who takes care of her ungrudgingly. At the age of seventeen Quentin is seen to be a cheap little girl giving herself to any man that comes her way. It is because of Jason's cruel behaviour that Quentin turns out to be what she is. Though Quentin also absorbs some of the cruelty from her uncle she does try in the beginning to maintain some family harmony. It is she who gives Luster the quarter he so desires to see the show.

Quentin has been brought up in a loveless atmosphere. She was deprived even of the little care and attention that her mother Caddy had got as a child. Caddy was full of selfless love, she sincerely loved her brothers Benjy and Quentin. But Miss Quentin is a frustrated and an unhappy girl because of the cold atmosphere inside the Compson household. Jason always holds Quentin responsible for being deprived of the bank job promised to him by Herbert Head and thus he justifies his harsh treatment towards her.

It is the cold atmosphere in which she grew up that makes out Quentin to be the a harsh girl. Quentin dislikes Benjy and finds his table manners despicable. It is only Dilsey who really cares for Quentin, but she doesn't hesitate to speak harshly even to this old, faithful servant. When Dilsey sympathetically puts her hand on Quentin, she quickly removes it, calling her, "You damn old nigger" (S&F, p/203).

It is out of sheer frustration that Quentin exclaims, "I don't see why I was ever born" (S&F p/207). When Jason rebukes her for her wanton behaviour she says "I don't care. I'm bad and I'm going to hell, and I don't care. I'd rather be in hell than anywhere where you are" (S&F p/207).

At times she wonders at Jason's cruel treatment towards her and cannot figure out the cause. we thus find her asking her grandmother, Mrs. Compson, "Why does (Jason) treat me like this, Grandmother? I never hurt him" (S&F p/276). Mrs. Compson for whom Jason is her favourite child, tells her that Jason, "is the nearest thing to a father you've ever had. It's his bread you and I eat. It's only right that he should expect obediensêe from you" and Quentin in her anger says to Jason "Whatever I do it's your fault. If I'm bad, It's because I had to be. You made me. I wish I was dead. I wish we were all dead". (S&F p/277).

When Miss Quentin runs away with a man from the fair

it may be presumed that she runs away not out of a sense of adventure or out of love for the man, but only to escape from the stifling atmosphere of the Compson household which she regards with utter disgust. Cleanth Brooks in his book *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha County*¹⁷ states, "With the girl Quentin's departure, the sad story of the Compson family is now at an end. All are dead or departed except the whining hypochondriac Mrs. Compson, the cold and sterile bachelor Jason, and the uncomprehending Benjy".

It is, however, Dilsey, the Negro servant who completes the story of the Compson family. With her we move from the cramped atmosphere of the Compson household to the outer world. If there is a note of affirmation in the novel, however faint, it is to be found only in Dilsey. We come to realize through Dilsey, that life is not at all as it had been depicted in the decadent behaviour of the Compsons and that it is not without meaning and value. For it is not as a Negro servant of the Compson household that Dilsey emerges, but as a human being.

It is Dilsey's acceptance of whatever time brings that gives her the sustaining force, She adjusts herself to all the situations and circumstances that life brings and she never goes against it. Thus she manages to create order out of disorder. She gets accustomed to the many changes

17. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner, The Yoknapatawpha County* (New Haven and London Yale University Press, 1976), p/346.

that the Compson household faces and thus manages to run the home.

She is not an extraordinarily virtuous person, but an ordinary servant who does her daily chores very sincerely. The difference in her is that she is full of love, full of feeling and concern for the welfare of the Compson family. She goes about doing her chores cheerfully humming to herself. Though Mrs. Compson is the mother of the house, yet it is only Dilsey who manages the whole household. We thus see her dressing up Benjy, and when she is half-way through, she is asked to prepare breakfast for Jason. She sees to the various needs of Benjy, soothes him when he is irritated and even manages to bake a cake for him on his birthday. She makes the fire and at the same time give Mrs. Compson her hot-water bottle. To Mrs. Compson's constant whining she rebukes her and says, "I don't see how you expect anybody to sleep, wid you standin in de hall, hall in at folks fum de crack of dawn" (S&F p/287).

She faces everything with calmness, be it Benjy's moaning, Mrs. Compson's complaints, Jason's fury or even Caddy's affair and Quentin's suicide. The same calmness is seen when she brings up Caddy's baby. Whatever comes must be accepted with courage and dignity giving no place to passivity or ~~p~~essimism - this is Dilsey's attitude. After Caddy's departure she is the only one who cares and looks after Benjy. It is from her only that Miss Quentin gets

some love and sympathy.

After Jason goes away in hot pursuit of Quentin Dilsey attends the church service with Luster, her daughter Frony and Benjy. Frony feels uncomfortable because of Benjy's presence "Folks talkin". Frony says and Dilsey answers: "What folks? ... and I know what kind of folks. Trash white folks. Dat's who it is. Thinks he ain't good enough for white church, but nigger church aint good enough for him ... Dont nobody but white trash keen dat" (S&F p/306). After the sermon Dilsey is much moved because she feels that the Sermon has some special application on the Compsons. She knows very well that Quentin has gone away forever. With Quentin's departure she knows that the Compsons line has ended. We thus find her saying "I've seen de first en de last ... I seed de beginning, en now I see de endin" (S&F p/313). But there is no cynicism or nihilism in Dilsey's moral vision. She has more faith in God than in man. Love, sympathy, honour, compassion and sacrifice are the simple virtues that is to be seen in Dilsey's nature.

In the whole novel it is Dilsey who stands out as a noble character, an ethical norm. It is from such an ethical norm that the Compsons have deviated into a world of disorderliness and confusion. In showing Dilsey to be a noble character who, though unconsciously, emphasises the essential values of life, we can only recall Faulkner's words that "Man himself will prevail". In making Dilsey a negro woman,

to uphold these values we see that Faulkner makes no demarcation between human beings. Though surrounded by the Compsons it is Dilsey alone who manages to survive and survive triumphantly. Though poor and her status is that of a servant she manages to stand out in her nobility. The Compsons had a distinguished, aristocratic background but it is Dilsey, an old, obscure, Negro woman without any false pride, or idealism, who manages to stay close to a concrete world of values.

Dilsey is moved and tears run down her cheeks when she comes out of the church for she knows that the Compson line has come to an end. Jason will never marry or have a child. Benjy, being an idiot, his existence is useless. Caddy has gone away, Quentin is dead and now it is Miss Quentin who has also gone away. Cleanth Brooks in his book *William Faulkner: First Encounters*¹⁸ says, "She is moved by the spectacle of human waste, of promise that has come to nothing, of love and human concern that have been spilled on the ground, of potential goodness that did not fit itself".

The Sound and the Fury thus records the disintegration of the Compson family. In our discussion of all the varied characters that figured in the novel, we find that each character in his or her own peculiar way contributed to the fall of the Compson Family. Each member of the Compson family lacked the courage or strength to face reality, to

18. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner, First Encounters* (New Haven and London Yale University Press, 1983) p/74.

face the many changes that come with the passage of time. It is only Dilsey who has the courage to face all the events that come with the cruel onslaught of time.

It is when Jason becomes the head of the family that disintegration sets in rapidly in the Compson household. The economic factor is also an important cause of the fall of the family. Jason's sense of business was not very shrewd, he works as a clerk in a store, and he mainly survives by stealing the money sent by Caddy for Quentin's upkeep. There being no other source of income the Compson family faced much economic hardship, and reached the lowest depth of fortune. The house is in a deplorable state, the barn is empty, and instead of a houseful of Negro servants there is now only Dilsey and Luster.. The economic deprivations have their most telling effects on Mrs. Compson and to withstand hardship of any sort. Their actions ultimately seal the doom of the Compsons.

The fall of the Compson family may be seen symbolically as the fall of the Southern way of life. The Southern setting of the novel became more significant because the southern society was an old fashioned society with its own set of values and the family was still an important force of that society. The dissolution of the Compson family, with its rich aristocratic background becomes all the more poignant because the earlier generations were committed to old fashioned

ideals such as family loyalty, care for children, virginity of unmarried daughters.

Though the novel depicts the tragic fall of the Compson family, Faulkner does not make us lose hope and through the strong and noble character of Dilsey he seems to assert his view that man will not only endure but also prevail and Dilsey also strongly asserts 'I does de bes I kan" (S&F p/396).

Though the *The Sound and the Fury* is about the disintegration of a family, of a tradition, and of a culture it can also be taken as a disintegration of the modern world and the modern man. The disintegrating force that break up a family are the same throughout the world. Love, Compassion, sympathy, tolerance are the chief requisites of Faulkner's ideal of a family. He tries to show, through the Compsons, that it is the absence of these finer qualities that leads to a family's ruin and disintegration. The absent qualities thus become the requisites of Faulkner's ideal of a family.

CHAPTER - V

CONCLUSION

William Faulkner, when he accepted the Nobel Prize in 1950 said,

"He (today's writer) must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid, and teaching himself that, forget it forever, having no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemereal and doomed - love and honour and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice. Until he does so he labours under a curse".

These words are an eloquent testimony to the truth that Faulkner, through his fiction, touched the very core of reality and was always interested in men and women in their "universal humanity" and his themes were always "universal human issues". These themes were played out by the many families that inhabited his imaginery Yoknapatawpha County. It is in the rise and the fall of the families that we see Faulkner's realistic handling of the "human issues".

The American Southern Society which Faulkner so beautifully portrayed in his novels can be analysed in a better light when we study the various family chronicles. In our course of study of the Sutpen family, the Sartoris family and the Compson family we have seen that Faulkner shows the disintegration of the family and consequently the disintegration of the Southern way of life. This study

has endeavoured to show, through the emphasis on these novels that the fall of the family leads to the fall of the Society. It has also tried to focus on the fact that it is only when a family emphasises and gives due importance to the essential human values it can hold together as a unit. A family bereft of these values, as is seen in the Sutpens, the Sartorises and the Compsons, will only lead to ruin and disintegration.

The Southern Society which we see through Faulkner's fiction, is one which moved forward very slowly, in fact it was more backward looking. It was a society which had some inherent problems set in its pattern - racial problems, economic problems, social problems as elaborated best in Hesselstines book *The South in American History*.¹ The optimism that was part of the Northern society was also missing in the Southern society, and hence there was a marked difference in the economy, culture and social attitudes of the Southern Society.

Faulkner shows through his novels that there are many causes that contributed to the backwardness of the Southern Society. The defeat in the Civil War had a great impact on its morale making the people feel lost and unhappy. The rehabilitation process after the defeat in the war was delayed because of the poor economy, the deplorable educational system, the racial conflict. It was also the presence of the institution of slavery, which was an indispensable factor

1. W.B. Hesselstine, *The South in American History* (Englewood Cliffs. N.J. Prentice Hall, 1943) p.235.

in the Southern economy that Wertebaker states in *Patrician and Plebian in Virginia*² greatly hindered the progress of the Southern Society. It left a ugly spot in the social scene of the Southern Society. The southerner was against the abolition of slavery because of economic reasons, their need of slave labour in the Cotton plantations. Though the south ultimately agreed to the removal of slavery. Filler in his book *The Crusade Against Slavery*³, says that it seemed to have left its curse on society. Another cause for the lagging behind of the south, as we have seen in Faulkner's novels, was mainly due to the Southerner's tendency to be obsessed with the imagined glories of the past.

We can thus infer that some of the causes that led to the fall of the family are the defeat in the war, its poor economy, its racial conflict, its poor educational system. It is the negative aspect of society that Faulkner mainly focussed his interest and this is seen in the rise and fall of the many families that he so beautifully recorded. Faulkner never tried to avoid the negative side of life. It was the darker side that always held his attention. As Guntur Blocker in his article on *William Faulkner*⁴ states

2. J.J. Wertebaker, *Patrician and Plebian in Virginia* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1910), p.198.

3. Lorris Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery* (Harper and Row Torchbook, 1960), p.19.

4. Guntur Blocker, *William Faulkner from Faulkner* (Edited by Robert Penn Warren, Prentice-Hall), Inc. Englewood Cliffs, p.125.

that "The essence.... of the Faulknerian narrative as a whole, lies in this double journey through Hell - namely, that we can overcome our fear not by avoiding it but by facing up to it". It was the decadant side of life that always caught Faulkner's imagination and he portrayed the tragic course of the many families that inhabited his imaginary Yoknapatawpha County. Though Faulkner wrote about his own land, his own people, and though the setting in most of his novels was his own region, the Yoknapatawpha County may be taken to be the microcosom reflecting the different forces of human destiny. For we find that Faulkner's "provincialism" is universal, for though the setting of his novels is geographically confined to his own province he feels the full intensity of existence and in telling the story of his own own homeland he is actually telling the story of the world. Faulkner, through his fiction, always emphasised certain universal values and it is these values that should be an integral part of a family. It is the disregard shown to the essential values that led to the decay of the family and consequently to the decay of the Southern way of life. Love, compassion, tolerance, concern, sympathy are some of the values that should basically be present in a family. Absence of these human values, as revealed in the fate of the Compsons, the Sutpens and the Sartorises, will only lead to decay and disintegration. Though Faulkner's fiction is confined primarily to Yoknapatawpha, to the South,

and we do come to know much of its history, geography, social customs Faulkner's primary concern is to talk about men and women in their humanity. It was always the universal human issues, as noted earlier, that was the subject matter of his fiction and the basic humanity was to be found in his characters. So what was exclusively a Southern human experience gains a wider and more universal implication and through his fiction Faulkner dramatizes the fact that "man himself will prevail". This is evident in the story of the Compsons. The decadent behaviour in the Compson family led to their complete extinction but it is Dilsey, the old Negro servant that manages to emerge as a human being. Her actions and her very presence help in giving a final perspective on the lives of the Compsons. The Compsons have deviated into their separate worlds but Dilsey through her sincerity, simplicity and goodness represent the ethical norm.

Through the disintegration of the Sutpen family Faulkner tries to show that the disintegrating forces that led to its fall are the same throughout the world. In Sutpen's desire to establish the "design" and in his weakness for a certain standard of respectability Stupen disrgarded those essential values that were required to perpetuate his family. It was his life's ambition to settle down as a respectable man and his life is dominated by the design where there was security, social eminence and respectability. He wanted

to gain individual recognition through material progress. Sutpen did not have in him the love and concern for a fellow human being. Slavery was then an accepted institution and the plantation owner like Thomas Sutpen did not hesitate to exploit the slave to the maximum limit. Sutpen's ideas about slavery was set and rigid and he wished to hand down to his son the same concept of slavery. It was through men like Thomas Sutpen who accepted and recognised this institution that brought in the material decay of the Southern Culture. Sutpen was a cold man, and he eyed the slaves simply as an object that picked cotton, an object necessary to carry out his plan. All his activities were governed by cold logic. He treated his wife Ellen Coldfield with cold respect, his children Henry and Judith were there only to carry out his design. The essential values of love, affection, tolerance were completely missing in the character of Thomas Sutpen and it was mainly due to this absence that the Sutpen family failed. In the fall of the Sutpens, though the tragedy is typically southern we see some universal issues at play. In the father's refusal to accept his son, Chales Bon, and in his disrespect to the essential human values the tragic pathos is not only southern but universal.

The main theme in Sartoris is the aristocratic ideal and its decadance. Through the character of Bayard Sartoris Faulkner analyses the decay of an aristocracy and its aristocratic ideal. The Sartorises were an old family that

gradually disintegrated. Faulkner shows through the reckless behaviour of Bayard Sartoris that recklessness is an attribute in man's nature that can only bring ruin and unhappiness. In his passive reaction towards his young and beautiful wife, in his disregard for his elders, and in his world weariness we find in the ruin of Bayard Sartoris story not of the south alone but of an anguished human soul.

When he encounters the happy and content McCallums family in their dilapidated surroundings Bayard realizes what he has missed in life. Faulkner, through the McCallums tries to show that happiness and contentment can be found even in poverty-stricken surroundings. In the harmonious relation of the McCallums we find that the family manages to hold together despite its poverty because in the McCallums we find the presence of the essential values of life. There was love, tolerance and compassion and it is these values that keep the familial bond very strong. In the Negro family too Bayard finds the same content atmosphere. They are poorer than the McCallums, but even this poor Negro family manages to hold together, the children and the parents enjoy the simple pleasure of eating together the poor Christmas meal. Bayard watching the Negro family only realizes the futility of his existence. It is his inability to involve himself in human companionship he drifts on lonely and destructive and finally kills himself. Here Faulkner shows that it is

Bayard's recklessness, his disinterestedness in life that forms an inherent flaw in his nature that brings about his ruin and also the ruin of his family. Bayard is, without his awareness, like a spirit of the heroic past, though he does not care to know of the past, but through his actions he seems to be moving towards self-destruction. Bayard symbolizes not only the decaying southern tradition, but also the decaying behaviour of a young man, whose actions can bring about the fall not only of the family but also of the society at large. Irving Malin in his book *William Faulkner: An Interpretation*⁵ states that in portraying characters like young Bayard Sartoris "Faulkner shows that the weak man is a man of paradox, that he tries to fit his view of history into his personal design because of his inbred failure to face the present a design only leads to destructive existence. Faulkner shows us that the inability of the individual to accept temporal change is a result of the failure to integrate past and present experiences into the meaningful order of life".

The *Sound and the Fury*, as we have seen, depicts the decline of the Compson family. Benjy, Quentin and Jason narrate the story as they reflect it and in each monologue we hear a different tone and a distinct voice. Faulkner takes us through the thirty years of Compson history through the heart and mind of the narrator that is within his power.

5. Irving Malin, *William Faulkner: An Interpretation* (California, Stanford University Press, 1951), p.12.

Benjy, the idiot can only express himself through sensation. Though he cannot reason, yet at the deeper level he stands as a man of feeling, good and noble in the modern world. Quentin expresses himself through his somewhat tortured sensibility. He is obsessed with the idea of virginity and the old codes of honour with distorted concepts of sin and morality. Through Jason's section we find that he is the best adjusted to the world, very sensitive to the current social values and keeping pace with the commercial current. He turns every situation to his own profit. It is only Dilsey, who takes us out from the suffocating atmosphere of the Compson House to see the larger world. In her calmness and steadiness and in her acceptance of whatever time brings Dilsey manages to survive in the Compson household where there is only disorder and confusion.

Through the study of the Compson family, we find that the gradual disintegration of the family as an institution was responsible for the decay of the southern Society. The dissolution of the Compson children can be viewed not only with reference to the Southern past but with reference to the contemporary modern world and an analogy can be drawn between the disintegration of the Compson children and the disintegration of the modern man.

Thus the study of the Yoknapatawpha saga since 1900 is one of decay of the descendants of the old families.

Absalom, Absalom!, Sartoris The Sound and the Fury are shown to be tragedies of despair and frustration. The Sutpens, the Sartorises and the Compsons feel frustrated because they have lost belief in their old faiths, in their old virtues. Interestingly, Faulkner makes the Negroes watch the decay and destruction about them. The Negro manages to survive healthily because of their faith in human values. Ward L. Miner in his book *The World of William Faulkner*⁶ states about the Negroes, "The maintain their roots much better than do the whites The patience, kindness and durability of the Negroes are the qualities that the whites have lost and now badly need". Thus Faulkner tries to show, through the Negroes, that it is only in our regard and respect for the human values that we can hope to survive in this world.

It is in the noble character of Dilsey, the Negro servant, that we find that life is not without its value and meaning. The Compsons have moved into a world of disorderliness and confusion. But Dilsey manages to stand as an ethical norm close to her world of values through her Love, Affection, Compassion, Tolerance for all those who are around her. She displays an enduring faith in God and virtue in man. It is her faith that helps her to face all the calamities that confront the Compson household with calmness. In this context it can be mentioned that it was

6. Ward L. Miner, *The World of William Faulkner* (New York, Grove Press, 1952), p.83.

the Compson family's want of religious feelings which contributed towards their ruin. The Compsons had completely lost its religion. Though in Quentin's sad reflections we find references to Jesus and Saint Francis but he actually retreats into some kind of stoicism and his father advises him, "We must just stay awake and see evil done for a little." Quentin's reply is that "it doesn't have to be that long for a man of courage" (S&F p/195). Again on knowing that the girl Quentin has eloped Mrs. Compson asks Dilsey to bring her the Bible, but she knows nothing about sin or redemption, the only thing she knows is gentility and social status. Jason, too has nothing to do with God and only worships money. It is in their lack of faith in God that leads them to their fall. On the other hand, Dilsey endures even in the cramped Compson household because of her faith in God.

In the story of the Compsons we see Faulkner's own moral vision Lawrence Thompson in his book *William Faulkner: An Introduction and Interpretation*⁷ says that in Faulkner's fiction the only subject worth writing about is the problem of the human heart in conflict with itself and in his vision he finds good and evil inextricably related. Faulkner has also said that it is man's free will that functions against a greek background of fate. Thus he portrays his characters sometimes as victims of fate and sometimes an error in judgment which precipitates a "tragedy of character". Faulkner

7. Lawrence Thompson, *William Faulkner: An Introduction and Interpretation* (New York. Princeton University Press, 1963),

says that man fails because he has only a limited and partial perception of "truth" and that the odds and obstacles of life are always in man's favour and that it is within his capacity to survive, endure and prevail.

Faulkner thus tells us, through the tragic histories of these families that man cannot live in isolation. It is only when he makes the traditional human values a part of his life that he has the capacity to face the odds and obstacles of life. It is necessary that every man must live with love, respect and dignity. If he wavers from these values he will face the same fate as the Compsons. However the story of the Compsons ends on a hopeful note. That man will not only endure but also prevail is explicitly shown in the noble character of Dilsey.

The *Sound and the Fury* is not only about the disintegration of a tradition and of a culture, we can also view it as the disintegration of the modern world and the modern man. The restlessness, the uncertainty, and the insecurity which Faulkner projects in *The Sound and the Fury* only shows the problematic nature of modern life. Robert Penn Warren in his article on William Faulkner⁸ has thus said that "Faulkner's works be regarded not in terms of the South against the North, but in terms of issues which are common to our modern world. The legend is not merely

8. Robert Penn Warren, *William Faulkner* (From *Literary Opinion in America*) Vol. II. Edited by Morton Danwen Zabel, New York, Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), p.466.

a legend of the South, but is also a legend of our general plight and problem. The modern world is in moral confusion. It does suffer from a lack of discipline, of sanctions, of community of values, of a sense of mission It can look back nostalgically upon the old world of traditional values and feel loss and perhaps despair". It is the traditional values of Love, Compassion and Sympathy that become the main requisites of Faulkner's ideal family, and in the absence of these values there is only ruin and disintegration and thus the Compson's story is one of torment, anguish and suffering, but through Dilsey's love, dedication and endurance Faulkner shows that "man himself will prevail.... in his own toughness and endurance". In the same measure, the ruin and disintegration of the other families also can be attributed to such a void as seen in the Compson saga.

By thus focussing on the absence of these values in the different families, Faulkner seems to endorse their absolute necessity to maintain a human and stable society. He also makes it amply clear that these values are universal qualities and are not circumscribed by high-birth, position and wealth or colour of the skin. Only when these 'human affections' are given their due importance in family life and human relationships can a society and a nation truly 'endure' and 'prevail' in the Faulknerian vision.

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