Cubism in William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*.

**A. Rajkumar,**

Ph. D. Research Scholar,

Department of English, Annamalai University.

**Dr. G. Arputhavel Raja,**

Assistant Professor,

Department of English, Annamalai University.

**ABSTRACT**

William Faulkner was an American writer and Noble Prize laureate from Oxford, Mississippi. Faulkner wrote novels, short stories, poetry, essays, and screenplays. He is principally known for his fictional Yoknapatawpha County, used in his novels and short stories. This research article entitled, “Cubism in William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury,*” describes the artistic vision of Faulkner in writing the novel. It also focuses on Faulkner’s use of various cubistic techniques in the novel to paint the novel through words. This research paper emphasis how Faulkner use Stream of Consciousness to visualize the inner working mind of human being effectively like cubistic painting? And how is Stream of Consciousness connected with Cubism, the artistic movement. It also describes the novel’s artistic vision to show the reality of life instead of its photocopy.

**Keywords:** Cubism, Stream of Consciousness, Dimensions, Angles, Color, Reality, and Shapes.

Cubism was one of the most important visual art styles of the early twentieth century used by many painters. It was first created by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in Paris between 1907 and 1914. In cubist work, the subject of a picture was usually discernible. Although figure and object were analyzed into a multiple small facts, and these were then reassembled after a shape, to recall those same figures. This movement influenced many modernist writers like James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, and Michael Ondaatje to use this painting technique in writing. This research paper examine how effectively William Faulkner, reflect cubistic painting through words in the novel *The Sound and the Fury.* It also emphasizes the artistic vision of Faulkner, which reflects the reality of life through the protagonists of his novel. This article also visualizes the multi-dimensional way of reading his text to enjoy the pleasure of art. William Faulkner is one of the most acclaimed writers in American Literature. He was a prolific writer who becomes very famous during his lifetime. He was lawyer, politician, soldier, and pioneer who involved in several murders, trial and including two in which he accused. He was also America’s bestselling novelists. He was the most revered writers of American south having written about both outcast and aristocrats. He was the Nobel Prize winning novelist from American South who is the author of challenging works.

Stream of Consciousness is a technique drawn from cubism to literature. It helps to view the inner mind of a human through words. Sigmund Freud’s work *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) emerged during this period. His psychoanalytical work contributed more to cubism. Freud focuses on personas internal struggles of mind and even divided the human psyche into three distinct parts called, Id, ego, and super ego. Cubist authors like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, and William Faulkner reflected Freud’s focus on internal struggle by writing stories that were not so much about where characters went, but were more about the internal emotional struggles of characters. In cubistic painting, human mind is drawn in a collapsed manner in which all the sides can be seen from a single side. First, James Joyce in *Ulysses* narrated the space and time. Later, this technique is mastered by a British writer Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway.* William Faulkner adapt this technique in his work *The Sound and the Fury,* to mix present with past through the image of major character’s mind. Faulkner uses this technique to break Aristotelian theory of a novel,
'Beginning, Middle, and End'. Stream of Consciousness is also one of the cubist forms used by Picasso and Braque’s paintings to unleash the real picture of human emotion and their mental stage.

Faulkner is best known for his artistic novel *The Sound and the Fury*. The novel is known for its verity of popular techniques like cubism, stream of consciousness, settings, imagery, symbolism, impressionism, different narration, genre and tone experimented by Faulkner in the twentieth century. The novel is an achievement on an essential development of his life to understand and portray his inner struggle in an exploratory and conclusive way. As a modernist writer he was aware of progressing movements in literature. He was very much influenced by one of the popular modernist movements known as cubism. It is a modernist movement which is firmly related to fine art. The Cubist style underscored the horizontal, two-dimensional surfaces of the picture plane, dismissing the traditional techniques of perspective, shortening, modeling and chiaroscuro, and refloating time-honored theories that art should imitate nature. Cubist painters were not constrained to photocopy form, texture, color, and space from reality, but instead of copying they conferred a new reality in painting that depicts radically fragmented objects. Familiar person with Picasso can easily identify the various plane and angles of perception in his paintings.

Modernist writers used this technique to display how narrative realities can change through the subjective of different characters. Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* is the result of his experimentation in the cubist theory. Cubism is actually the art of creating the abstract shapes of three dimensional object on a two dimensional surface. An artist who wants to go for cubism should be able to produce an object in numerous planes, so a cubistic writer should show more than a single view at a time. The impact of cubism for Faulkner during a short period shows that he was an immense learner, experimenter and discoverer through his agitation. The novel, *The Sound and the Fury* is based on four elements such as cubist theory, picture of extinct aristocratic Mississippi family, stream of consciousness and different perspective of pessimistic narration. Cubism is used to show strong visionary talent and affluent sense of poetic emotion to analyze the adversity of crumbl Compson family who are shown as pathological perverts, idiots and drunkards. The title of the novel *The Sound and the Fury* is extracted from Shakespeare’s soliloquy in *Macbeth* Act V, Scene V as:

```
Life’s but walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,

Signifying nothing. (24-28)
```

Macbeth signifies that life is the shade of the past and a contemporary man like himself is inadequate, equipped and unable to achieve anything near the greatness of the past in his soliloquy. Faulkner implies the idea that if man doesn’t choose his own path in life is helpless to detect life is more than a meaningless sequence of images, sounds, and memories. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin has chosen his own life but a materialist Jason, and an idiot like Benjy has failed to choose their own life which is reflected through the stream of consciousness narrative in the novel.

The phrase “sound and the fury” describes the content of various monologues in the novel. Space, time, self-interest, subjective perception and family are the five dimensions painted by Faulkner in the novel through which it can be read. Reader’s only gets a sense of completion to the novel after they combine the content of various monologues in the novel. The novelist has effectively experimented cubism along with narrative technique in the four part of the novel which is in non-chronological order. Faulkner pictured the inner working minds of Compson brothers in vertical and horizontal shapes. He also shows the change of their mind from vertical to horizontal, and then horizontal to vertical by their environment. In a modern artwork, horizontal image dominates the canvas without a fundamental viewpoint of reference which receives more emphasis than any other, so the four districts are not in sequential order. Faulkner has successfully analyzed and arranged them in an abstract manner in the novel. For example, the first part of the text is been narrated by a mentally affected character called Benjy. Faulkner, through Benji, tells the past and present fable of the Compson people through stream of consciousness technique which makes the readers confused right from the dawn to the deadline of the novel, but he managed it throughout the novel successfully. Faulkner helps the readers to visualize the events that happened in reality and extend their boundary of imagination through the novel.

In the novel, all the events occur according to the applicability and significance, but it does not occur according to the time sequence. The first three parts “April Seventh, 1928, Benjy Section,” “June Second, 1910, Quentin Section,” and “April Eighth, 1928, Jason Section”, were in the first man point of view, which is narrated by male characters of declining and dysfunctional Compson family. The fourth section “April Eighth, 1928, Dilsey Section,” is adapted from omniscient mode by Faulkner. In *The Sound and the Fury*, writer use the visual art cubism to visualize the reality of life to the readers in words as:

```
The road rose again, to a scene like a painted backdrop. Notched into a cut of red clay crowned with oaks the road appeared to stop short off, like a cut ribbon. Beside it, a weathered church lifted its crazy steeple like a painted church, and the whole scene was as flat and without perspective as a painted cardboard set upon the ultimate edge of the flat earth, against the windy sunlight of space and April and midmorning filled with bells. (182)
```
And like cubism, everyone will get a look at the same events from different perspectives, each not more or less valid than any other. The features of cubism are the important key to analyze the novel. He had arranged all incidents in a non-sequential and non-chronological order which raise the concern of the audience and make the novel a great success.

The novel exemplifies Faulkner’s bold style and formal innovations. It reflects his establishment of unforgettable powerfully tone and characters. His brilliant insight into psychological, economic, and social realities of life in American South during the transition period from civil war to modern age makes the reader more interest. Many critics suggested him to change the novel chapters in chronological order to avoid its failure, but Faulkner followed his own way of puzzle making through cubistic style to reflect the reality of human mind. Cleanth Brooks in his essay, “Primitivism in The Sound and the Fury,” describes Faulkner’s incoherent section arrangement is a way to attract readers as: “Faulkner deliberately began with the most incoherent of four parts of the novel presenting his readers with a puzzle to unravel rather than a narrative exposition of the general situation” (45).

The innovative techniques of William Faulkner rendered the essential life of a character through the amending flow of thoughts, emotions, images, memories and moving mind of the character. The character Benjy is seen as a prominent artistic vision than any other in the novel because he observes every event in an artistic manner as:

‘Caddy,’ Father said. Jason was crying. He wasn’t fighting anymore, but we could see Caddy fighting in the mirror and Father put me down and went into the mirror and fought too. He lifted Caddy up. She fought. Jason lay on the floor, crying. He had the scissors in his hand. Father held Caddy. ‘He cut up all Benjy's dolls.’ Caddy said. 'I'll slit his gizzle.' 'Candace.' Father said. 'I will.' Caddy said. 'I will.’ She fought. Father held her. She kicked at Jason. He rolled into the corner, out of the mirror. Father brought Caddy to the fire. They were all out of the mirror. Only the fire was in it. Like the fire was in a door. (64-65)

This part of Benjy’s section combines Cubist and Surrealist effects. First, from where he stands, and from the angle he looks, “we could see Caddy fighting in the mirror” (65). When Benjy states, “Father went into the mirror and fought too, (65)” he has effectively doubled the images of these figures, seeing them both front and back, which is the effect of observing figures that attitude in front of a speculum. When Caddy kicks Jason, he rolls into the corner, out of the mirror, and it is as though Jason exits the frame of perception, as if he had truly been inside the mirror physically, rather than merely a surface image. As Benjy perceives it, the mirror multiplies perspectives like a cubist painting. It also, for Benjy, provides a substitute a surreality for reality.

In another part of the first fragment of the novel, Benjy describes: “There was a fire. It was rising and falling on the walls. There was another fire in the mirror, I could smell the sickness” (61). From where he stands, Benjy sees two fires instead of one and counts the reflection of the fire as a second real fire. Another character would not have the same perception, but for Benjy, there are two fires. At the beginning of the novel, Caddy insists, “Keep your hands in your pockets, Caddy said. Or they’ll get froze. You don’t want your hands froze on Christmas, do you” (5). Variations of the same sentence are repeated on different pages by other characters, as well. Also, at the beginning of his narration, Benjy claims:

I could hear Queenie's feet and the bright shapes went smooth and steady on both sides, the shadows of them flowing across Queenie's back. They went on like the bright tops of wheels. Then those on one side stopped at the tall white post where the soldier was. But on the other side they went on smooth and steady, but a little slower. (11)

The previous paragraph has a unique in Dilsey’s section as:

Ben's voice roared and roared. Queenie moved again, her feet began to clop-clop steadily again, and at once Ben hushed. Luster looked quickly back over his shoulder, then he drove on. The broken flower dropped over Ben's fist and his eyes were empty and blue and serene again as cornice and facade flowed smoothly once more from left to right, post and tree, window and doorway and signboard each in its ordered place. (320-21)

The repetition of words and images makes it appear as though the novel sits between two mirrors, each reflecting the other. This imitation occurs between other Faulkner’s characters as well, such as between Quentin Compson and Darl Bundren, Benjy and Vardaman, Caddy and Addie, and Mr. Compson and Anse.

Benjy is obsessed with Caddy and her soiled image is like his two brothers Mr. Quentin Compson and Mr. Jason Compson IV. Benjy’s mind moves without transition to an occasion nearly thirty year’s earlier when he had been snagged on same nail in the pasture and Caddy had been with him. In this way, we are gradually made familiar with Benjy’s mind and begin to recognize the extent to which his chaotic consciousness is governed by a few simple feelings, above all, by his love for Caddy. He is attentive of the things which happen literally. He experiences his love for Caddy, but he didn’t realize that it does not have sufficient power of generalization, to say to himself. Stream of consciousnesses and interior monologue are repeatedly used by Faulkner to continue his narration and to make the reader shift his mind focus from Benjy to Quentin. Quentin Compson, the brother of Benjy is made to recount through first-person narration, the events and unstable emotions he experiences on the day of his self-slaughter. William Faulkner highlights the attention of time and memory in Quentin’s world through the constant appearances of clocks and watches. Quentin is adequately captured in time obsessed with his prior and memories. He always notices the bells of the Harvard clock tower. The ticking sounds of his watch hangout him even after he cracks the watch against his dresses. Quentin asks the owner of the clock shop about the clocks in the shop but he refused to ask the time of the present.

In the modern age, a man doesn’t have a peace of mind because of psychological pressures like being awake, asleep, hyper-alert, tension, a mental struggle for existence, daydreaming, hypnotized or intoxicated. The novel The Sound and the Fury reflects all these features among the four children of the Compson clan. It is a novel of individuation. Each of the four narrators represents a
different aspect of a greater whole, the artist’s self and then because the work is visionary, by extension it becomes the collective self of humankind. This gets reflected in Jung’s concept of the Mandala and the four psychological functions demonstrated in each of the Compsons. The evolution from Benjy’s part to Jason’s part through Quentin’s is escort by an increasing touch of social reality. Benjy is isolated in his insanity and innocence, and Quentin moves from the isolation of his half-mad idealism into total withdrawal leading to suicide, but Jason is fully present in the world, which is keenly sensitive to social attitude, swimming with the contemporary commercial present.

In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner uses the stream of Conscious impressions of four very different members of the Compson household to relate the events of their life as a family. He leaves the reader to piece together a family portrait and history of what actually happened based on these various impressions of Compson family life. The effect is similar to that of Cubist art where everyone can see a portrait from all viewpoints at the same time. Faulkner literally facets the design of this novel, like a cubist painting. Here, we have a work of fiction that comes remarkably close to being an exercise in pure design, a cubist novel. The modern novelist, Faulkner like the Cubist painter has explored the ways in which form can concentrate the meaning. In the simplest terms, the Cubist novel is one in which a linear narrative is broken so that the structure of its parts itself form a level of meaning, which results as much from the patterning of the four sections as from the tale of the deterioration of the Compson family.

Reference