

Concept of time and narrative temporality in “The Sound and The Fury”

Abstract: Temporal-spatial analysis in narrative is the key milestone for understanding fiction. Time has always played an important role in theories of narrative, as we tend to think of stories as sequences of events. Space has often been set in opposition to time, associated with static description which slows up and intrudes into the narration of dynamic events. Temporal and spatial relationships are essential to our understanding of narratives and go beyond the specification of a date and a location. Time and space are the leading themes in Faulkner’s texts that very often become the subject of criticism due to the temporal-spatial ambiguity the author applies. The most complicated text in this sense is considered “The Sound and The Fury.” The research deals with temporal patterns the author utilizes in the first section of “The Sound and The Fury.”

Keywords: flashbacks, temporal patterns, order, duration, frequency

1 Introduction

“The Sound and the Fury” is Faulkner’s fourth novel, and many consider it to be his finest work. The novel is divided into four parts, each told by a different narrator. “Nearly all critics consider it a technical masterpiece for the way Faulkner incorporates four distinct narrative modes in telling the story of a little girl with muddy drawers” (Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1929:2). Despite the fact that there are a lot of essays and research on “The Sound and The Fury,” used temporal structure in the novel still attracts the researchers’ attention and remains the subject of discussion.

The article is aimed to analyze the temporal relationships between “story” and “discourse” based on Genette’s suggestions: “order”, “duration”, and “frequency”, and the illustrative narrative that we will focus on is above mentioned temporal patterns in “The Sound and The Fury”. Temporal-spatial complex structures take a leading role in William Faulkner’s fiction, he is often criticized for his narrative mode and “The Sound and The Fury” is distinguished in this respect. The first to recognize its importance in the novel was Jean Paul Sartre. His influential essay on the novel first published in 1939 was the earliest analysis of the theme, though it remains to this day an indispensable point of reference. For us uncovering the information concerning temporality in “The Sound and The Fury” is of paramount importance, as it will enable us to understand the text and have an access to the actions and emotions of the characters. We are particularly interested in the first section of the text, since is where the issue of temporality is most in evidence.

2 Approaches to time in narrative

Theorists posit two basic temporalities of narrative which are generally referred to as “story” and “discourse.” The essential distinction here is between the “story” as the basic sequence of events that can be abstracted from any narrative telling and the “discourse” as the presentation and reception of these events in linguistic form (in other words, the act of writing resulting in the written text and the act of reading that text). “In some texts story and discourse times may roughly correspond, but in most texts they will differ in some way or other as will be shown below” (David Herman, 2005: 54).

Whatever the temporal patterns set out within fictional worlds – whether they are those of a nineteenth-century novel that moves toward a defined and anticipated ending, or whether they are those of a postmodern narrative, operating by “disjunctions”, “loops”, and “effacements”- Faulkner’s texts are the exact examples of these temporal patterns– “it is inescapable that these patterns will be set against the reader’s temporal experience of the text, founded on memory and anticipation, and the reader’s attempt to relate these two kinds of temporality will be an important part of the effect of the text” (Teresa Bridgeman, Time and space, 2005:55).

Genette suggests three main areas in which temporal relationships between story and discourse can produce interesting effects. The first relates to the order of events; the second

concerns how long events or scenes last; and the third concerns how often an event occurs. They are known respectively as “order”, “duration,” and “frequency.”

3 Analysis of the text based on Genette’s Narrative Discourse

Order

To begin with the order, “all reading is a combination of memory and anticipation. Our focus on whatever moment in the text we have reached will invariably be colored by our memory of what has gone before and our anticipation of what is to come. The order in which events are presented in the text is therefore crucial to our temporal experience of narrative. Many narrative texts employ flashback (analepsis, in Genette’s terms) as a matter of course, in order to fill in the past history of protagonists while avoiding a lengthy introduction or in order to reveal new facts” (Teresa Bridgeman, *Time and space*, 2005:56). In some narratives, events are told strictly in the order in which they occur but they may also be told out of order, as in Benji’s case in “*The Sound and The Fury*”. He is the narrator of the first section of the novel. Benji is weak-headed, an “idiot”, it’s how the critics call him. Taking into consideration that Benji can’t speak and he is the narrator of the first section, we have an access to the plot of the story through his perceptions and feelings. He cannot reason abstractly, his experience seems “a flood of chaotically unrelated sensations and images”. The author uses flashbacks in order to emphasize “mental aberration” represented in this section, therefore, fragmentation of narrative line into nonchronological segments is one of the leading techniques used by the narrator throughout the Benji’s section. Benji recounts via flashbacks the earliest events in the novel. “Reading this section is profoundly difficult, however, because the” idiot” has no concept of time or place- sensory stimuli in the present bring him back to another time and place in the past.” Most of his memories concern his sister Caddy, who is in some ways the central character in the novel. Key memories regarding Caddy include a time when she uses perfume, when she loses her virginity, and her wedding. Benji also recalls his name change (from Maury to Benjamin), his brother Quentin’s suicide in 1910 and the sequence of events at the gate which lead to his being castrated, also in 1910.

We will try to strengthen our arguments with some examples from the text:

1. “My poor baby.” mother said. She let me go. “You and Versh take good care of him, honey.” “Yessum.” Caddy said. We went out Caddy said, “You needn” go, Versh. I”ll keep him for a while.” He went on and we stopped in the hall an Caddy knelt and put her arms around me and her cold bright face against mine. She smelled like trees. “You aren’t a poor boy. Are you. Are you. You have got your Caddy. Haven’t you got your Caddy.”
2. Can’t you shut up that moaning and slobbering, Luster said. Ain’t you shamed of yourself, making all this racket. We passed the carriage house, where the carriage was. It had a new wheel.
3. “Git in, now, and set still until your maw come.” Dilsey said. She shoved me into the carriage. T.P. held the reins. “Clare I don’t see how come Jason wont get a new surrey.” Dilsey said. “This thing going to fall to pieces under you all some day. Look at them wheels.

Three different episodes are told one after another without any coherent link between them, because the idiot has no concept of time or place-sensory stimuli in the present bring him back to another time and place in the past, instantly and without warning, except for a change in typeface from Roman to italic. In our example, we can get some sense of the time by noting who is taking care of Benji. Three black servants look after him at different times: Versh when Benji is a small child, T.P. when Benji is approximately 15 years old, and Luster in the present, when Benji is 33. The episodes in the example refer to different times. In the first one, Benji is with his family members in the house, mother expresses sympathy for Benji and calls him “my poor baby”, Caddy is trying to correct her mother’s mistake explaining that he is not a “poor boy”. “You aren’t a poor boy. Are you. Are you. You have got your Caddy. Haven’t you got your Caddy.” Caddy’s warm rudimentary speech reminds

Benjy of Luster's scolding and memory image (flashback) appears instantly. The last episode is also thematically different from the previous ones. "The technique of shifting from one of Benjy's remembered time zones to another-without warning or transition of any sort-constitutes Faulkner's strategy for showing how Benjy remains innocent of the abstraction of passing time" (Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith ,1929:3) Benjy has no consciousness of time, but his consciousness is in time. Benjy doesn't act or talk or reflect; His only function is to lead directly and without comment into the past.

Faulkner uses organic use of punctuation to indicate the shift of time, flashbacks are expressed in italics. The italics have further function as we have already mentioned: they signal to the reader that there is a shift in time. "It is a shift which is usually sudden. Unless the reader is aware of this important function of the italics, he is likely to be confused" (Robert Humphrey 1999:57) .

We assume that one illustration will be enough. Benjy is being guided along a fence overlooking a golf course by Luster, his keeper.

The excerpt begins with Luster speaking aloud to Benjy.

1. "You snagged on that nail again. Cant you never crawl through here without snagging on that nail."

2. *Caddy uncaught me and we crawled through. Uncle Maury said to not let anybody see us, so we better stoop over, Caddy said. Stoop over, Benjy. Like this, see. We stooped over and crossed the garden, where the flowers rasped and rattled against us. The ground was hard. We climbed the fence, where the pigs were grunting and snuffing. I expect they're sorry because one of them got killed today, Caddy said. The ground was hard, churned and knotted. Keep your hands in your pockets, Caddy said. Or they'll get froze. You don't want your hands froze on Christmas, do you.*

3. "It's too cold out there. "Versh said. "You don't want to go out doors" "What is it now". mother said.

Benjy's snagging himself reminds him of another time eighteen years before when he snagged himself while he was with his sister, Caddy. This memory is presented in the italics. The dialogue after the italicized section doesn't represent a continuation of the dialogue that had preceded the italics; it is a continuation of Benji's stream of memory of the past. "When italics do appear again (two pages later), they indicate a shift of time to the present" (Robert Humphrey 1999:58) .

Duration

The treatment of duration is an important way of foregrounding certain events and reducing the status of others. "If an episode is narrated in great detail, this leads us to assume that it is of some significance" (Teresa Bridgeman, 2005:60) .Variations in duration can be used to show which scenes are the most important. A scene which is narrated briefly will usually be considered less important than a scene which it takes many pages to narrate, such as Benjy's castration. Throughout Benjy's section, we see the blows fall on the Compsons family; there is series of events in Compson's family- grandmother dies, Mr Compson dies, Caddy gets pregnant and must be married off, Quentin commits suicide, Benjy attacks a neighbor girl and is castrated to neutralize his sexual urges. This scene obviously takes place at the end of Caddy's wedding, and is which we discover in Quentin's section (the second section) to have occurred on April 25, 1910. After Caddy's marriage, Benjy developed a habit of standing at the gate and watching schoolchildren. By standing at the gate, Benjy hoped eternally that someday Caddy would walk back. On one fateful day, "Benjy chased one of the passing girls in order to substitute the little Burgess girl for Caddy he may never have again". Since Benjy was mentally retarded, the neighbors interpret the event as a sexual assault and as a result he

was castrated. Despite series of events that happened in the first section, it is one of the dominant scenes described in great detail that indicates the author's special attitude towards it. Besides the depressing fact that happened, narrator tells us more with this episode, it reflects the fatal destiny of a disabled person, merciless of human beings, cruelty of the society.

"Scene which is narrated more than once may show a narrator's obsession or it may reveal different views of the same events by different characters"(Teresa Bridgeman 2005: 65). For Example, Caddy's wedding, from Quentin's section we know that Caddy and Herbert Head got married, Caddy's wedding is mentioned in two words- despite the fact that Caddy had a huge influence on Quentin's life, he suffered when his sister lost virginity; for him it meant profanation the purity of the family that became one of the reasons of his suicidal death-though Caddy's wedding is not an important occasion for the narrator. Quentin just muses on the wording of the wedding invitation. As for Benjy, he recalls the wedding reception at the Compson house several times during his section. This repetition emphasize Benji's sadness and depression caused by the separation with Caddy. "The scenes tumble with disjointed images and sensations. Dominant sensation of the scene is Benjy's prolonged agony. The scene that follows upon this flashback suggests that the underlying cause of Benjy's disturbance is his apprehension that Caddy will be leaving him." (Irving How 1991:105)

Frequency

The number of times an event is narrated can influence the reader's interpretation of a narrative. Repetition involves more than one occurrence at the level of discourse of a single story event, while iteration involves the single telling of multiple events. "Repetition can be used to portray more than one view of events in epistolary novels (i.e., novels told via exchanges of letters between characters), and in modernist stream-of-consciousness novel" (Teresa Bridgeman 2005:66). Stream of consciousness technique or interior monologue is widely used in Benjy's section. Being weak-headed, Benjy presents symbols as substitutes for rationally formulated ideas. We have identified three symbols that signify everything for Benjy, e.g. *firelight*, *the pasture* and *Candace*, here we can show only a few examples of this repetition.

E.g. "Here, Caddie." He hit. They went away across the pasture. I held to the fence and watched them going away.

They were hitting little, across the pasture. I went back along the fence to where the flag was. It flapped on the bright grass and trees.

It was red, flapping on the pasture. Then there was a bird slanting and tilting on it.

The words (*firelight*, *the pasture* and *Candace*) are used so frequently in Benjy's section that they come to dominate not only Benjy's consciousness, but the reader's also. "Yet, such repetition has a naturalness about it because it comes from a mind as simple as Benjy's is" (Robert Humphrey 1999:59).

4 Conclusion

On the basis of the above discussion, we can conclude that time and space affect reading at different levels. First, the process of reading is itself a temporally situated experience of the physical space of the text. Although we may temporarily suspend our engagement with our own world while reading, the temporal dimension of reading remains significant, as does the space of the page as the means by which order, frequency, and duration are regulated.

Second, time and space are components of the basic conceptual framework for the construction of the narrative world. Much of this research has been devoted to demonstrating the mechanisms by which the temporal aspects of the world can be constructed and understood in the text.

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