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THE SYMBOLIC METAPHORICAL MEANINGS OF FEMALE CHASTITY IN *THE SOUND AND THE FURY*

XUE JIANG¹, PENGYU CHEN^{2*}

¹Associate Professor, School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China

²Masters Student, School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China.

*E-mail: 1404689803@qq.com



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Abstract

The Sound and Fury is a famous novel written by William Faulkner who is one of the most influential writers in the history of American literature. This paper aims to study the the symbolic metaphorical meanings of female chastity in *the Sound and the Fury* which are rarely studied from the aspects of biblical metaphors, people's reaction or behaviors and natural images. Then, the social, family and personal reasons or meanings of the setting of the female chastity are analyzed further, which discloses the significance and functions of the female chastity in the female images in the novel.

Keywords: symbolic metaphorical meanings; female chastity; *the Sound and the Fury*

Introduction

In all William Faulkner's works, *the Sound and the Fury* has been studied the most by many domestic scholars. Since 1980, there have been increasingly more papers on *the Sound and the Fury* than on William Faulkner's other works. However, in the past, most scholars' researches mainly focused on the novel's theme analysis, writing techniques, characterization, male's role and space-time analysis, while more or less ignoring the aspect of female images. There are some studies of symbolism of the methods or skills, religious images, only one or two female images, while there are few studies of the symbolic metaphorical meaning of female chastity in *the Sound and the Fury*, especially for the aspects of all the unchaste women including Lorraine who is an unchaste woman which is rarely

mentioned by people. What's more, in this novel, there are many abstract or concrete things and events which are related with women's chastity and contain symbolic and metaphorical meanings. Therefore, from the perspective with regard to the meaning of female chastity, the reasons for the setting of the three female characters in the novel will be further analyzed in this paper, so as to explore the symbolic and metaphorical significance of the three different women: Caddy, Miss Quentin and Lorraine.

1. Brief Introduction

1.1 The Author

William William Faulkner (1897~1962) is a well-known American novelist and writer all around the world. He is regarded as a "modern classic writer" in

the western literary and was the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1949. He wrote nineteen novels and more than seventy short stories. William Faulkner's novels mainly tell the stories of several generations of families in different social classes in Jefferson Town from the time before the War of Independence to the late World War II. Among them, the main characters will appear alternately in his works, which truly shows the multidimensional history of social changes in South America. Particularly, one of his most famous works is *The Sound and the Fury*, which describes the decline of the Compson family in the town of Jefferson. Also, there are some other famous works written by him, such as the novel *As I Lay Dying* (1930), describing the tribulations of the delivery of his wife's coffin with his son for burial, and the novel *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) that describes the outcome of a sinful manor owner and his children, etc.

1.2 The Book

The Sound and the Fury is a famous novel written by William William Faulkner in 1929 and is regarded as his most representative work. The name "The Sound and the Fury" derives from the lines in Shakespeare's tragic drama *Macbeth* in Act V: *Life is but a dream, full of sound and fury, without any meaning*, which to some extent sets the tone of this novel. *The Sound and Fury* is consists of four separate chapters, each of which deals with what happens within a day. The first, second and third chapters are narrated from the perspective of Benjy, Quentin and Jason respectively, and the fourth chapter is narrated by the black slave Dilsey.

The novel mainly tells us stories about the family tragedy of the Compson family in the social condition of the southern plantation. There are some main events in this novel: childhood, four children playing beside the stream; the funeral of grandmother in 1899; Caddy's love affair with Dalton in 1909; the wedding of Caddy and Herbert in April 1910; the subsequent birth of Caddy's illegitimate daughter little Quentin; the suicide of Quentin in June 1910; the death of Mr. Compson in 1912; the escape of little Quentin in 1928 and Jason's search for her. In this novel, Mr. Compson is idle and drunk. And his wife, Mrs. Compson is selfish and indifferent,

complaining all day. Although the eldest son Quentin receives good education in Harvard University, he still stubbornly adheres to the so-called old tradition of the South affected by his family. Then, he cannot tolerate his sister Caddy's loss of virginity, thinking that it's the degrading and disgrace of "southern lady", so he finally commits suicide by drowning with despair and helplessness. The second son Jason is cold, greedy and selfish. Then, the third son Benjy is an idiot who is thirty-three years old physically but behaves like a three-year-old child mentally. The family's daughter, Caddy, who is regarded as the center character, goes on the path of depravity and has to leave home after the birth of her illegitimate daughter and then becomes a mistress of a Nazi officer. The so-called "southern lady", Mrs. Compson, although being a seemingly elegant lady from a great family, is in fact an incompetent and mentally morbid mother. Through the inner monologue of the three sons, the whole text revolves around Caddy's depravity and finally complements the plots by the black maid Dilsey's "limited perspective" of the former three parts.

2. The Three Women and Their Chastity in the Novel

2.1 Caddy

Caddy is recognized as the central female figure in this novel which creates a kind and beautiful but degenerate image of Caddy for us from the perspective of her three brothers Benjy, Quentin and Jason. At first in her life, Caddy can be regarded as one of the most energetic and compassionate members in the Compson family. She has shown superior qualities to other children since she was a child: she is of passionate, aggressive, and energetic qualities among her siblings. Undoubtedly, Caddy is a girl who is naturally kind and friendly, especially with regard to her little brother Benjy.

However, as the only female figure among these children, her fate affects the whole development of the Compson family and she gradually slides into the abyss of depravity in chastity. In the narrative section of Benjy, the sexual maturity of Caddy and her gradual process of declining to the unchaste women are well-reflected. Specifically, at the age of fourteen, Caddy first wore

adult's clothes and used perfume; at the age of fifteen, she lost her first kiss by a boy; At the age of sixteen, she swang with a man secretly and intimately; At the age of seventeen, Caddy lost her identity as a virgin and had to get married at eighteen. During the process of her loss of virginity, she dated Dalton and was soon pregnant, and finally she had to marry a man who is wealthy but with a poor reputation, only aiming to hide the shameful fact that she was pregnant before marriage. However, after marriage, Caddy's husband found out that she had lost her virginity before marriage so he resolutely abandoned her quickly.

Since then, the infamous Caddy had to foster her illegitimate daughter little Quentin in Compson's home. Then, unfortunately, she was forced to leave home and wandered around, finally becoming the mistress of a German Nazi officer in Paris, which made her completely become a whore.

2.2 Quentin

Quentin is Caddy's illegitimate daughter and is also considered a rebellious while tragic women in this novel. William Faulkner once said that *The Sound and the Fury* was the tragedy of two fallen women: Caddy and her daughter. Miss Quentin, though also brave and lively like her mother, she does not possess the qualities of kindness, affability, love and compassion by nature. Caddy always gives the poor brother Benjy the most selfless care and love, while the little Quentin is very impetuous and arrogant. She not only looks down on her uncle Benjy who is mentally retarded, but also lacks due respect to the black servant Dilsey who gives her most care and tolerance.

Moreover, she even often skips classes and sneaks out every night to meet with different kinds of men. After Jason became the head of the family, the disintegration of the family is finally reflected in Miss Quentin. Quentin is denounced by Jason as "a cheap little whore", willing to sell her body to any man who are interested in her. And in the first sentence of the Jason section in the novel: Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say (William Faulkner, 2018: 153). She is similar to her mother, Caddy, in the dissolute ways. "We sees her doin hit ev'y night," Luster said. 'Clamb right down dat pear tree'"

(William Faulkner, 2018: 237). From the conversation between Luster and Dilsey, it is clear that Miss Quentin will crawl out of the window almost every night to hang out with other men.

In the end, in this constant depravity and because of the aversion of this family, she elopes with a man who is in the troupe and never returns.

2.3 Lorraine

As the most unremarkable female character in the novel, few people have studied the role of prostitute Lorraine. Among the novels, there are three references to Lorraine, and there are relatively few descriptions of this mistress of Jason, but this supporting role also plays an important role in shaping other characters.

The first time when Lorraine is mentioned is when she writes to Jason "Dear daddy wish you were here. No good parties when daddys out of town I miss my sweet daddy" (William Faulkner, 2018: 164). From the dressing term which Lorraine calls Jason "Daddy", the male-centered controlling or subordinate relationship can be found here. Jason said: "I never promise a woman anything ... That's the only way to manage them" (William Faulkner, 2018: 164). Lorraine often writes to Jason, but he never replied to her, and Lorraine is not allowed to call him. "I reckon she does. Last time I gave her forty dollars. Gave it to her" (William Faulkner, 2018: 164). Besides, Jason has always stressed that he "gave his mistress Lorraine forty dollars" and repeats "Gave it to her" twice. Therefore, through this female role of Lorraine, it indirectly reflects that Jason attaches too much importance to money and he tends to control and distrust any women, which makes us realize the status of women and the social status of man who is always taking the dominant male power as the central position in that time.

The second time when Lorraine is mentioned in the novel is after Jason's fruitless search for Miss Quentin and her lover. Here is Jason's thought about Lorraine: "I'd like to see the good, church-going woman that's half as square as Lorraine, whore or no whore" (William Faulkner, 2018: 206).

The third place where Lorraine is mentioned is in the appendix at the end of the novel: "on

weekends there would be seen a big plain friendly brazenhaired pleasantfaced woman ... the middleaged cottonbuyer and the woman whom the town called, simply, his friend from Memphis" (William Faulkner, 2018: 276).

From these three parts of the indirect description of Lorraine, it can be found that as a male mistress role, even if she has been no longer very young, she is willing to be a man's mistress docilely. Every weekend they buy food and go to the movies like a couple, but they don't own a couple's real relationship, she cannot but only be a man's mistress for the rest of her life.

3. The Symbolic Metaphorical Meanings of Female Chastity of the Three Women

In the Puritan Southern society, in order to ensure man's own privileges in the male world, they artificially elevate southern women as "goddesses, holy saintess, mothers, as symbols of purity, kindness and love, or condemn them as prostitutes, witches, seducers, as symbols of treachery, malice and lewdness" (D.C.Carmody, 1989: 108). *The Sound and the Fury* is a modern novel full of symbolic meaning, in which there are many symbolic images of the unchaste women in the process of losing virginity. Under the repeated switching of the stream of consciousness, all kinds of images and things that appear repeatedly have strong symbolic significance.

3.1 Biblical Metaphors

In Christianity, human beings are created by God, and human depravity is caused by Eve stealing forbidden fruit; Likewise, Caddy's loss of virginity symbolizes the decline of the Compson family. William Faulkner successfully uses biblical metaphors to reveal the depravity of the modern Garden of Eden – the collapse of traditional American Southern morality. In the novel, when their grandmother Damdi died, Quentin, Caddy, Jason and Benjy were curious to know what was going on at home. So Caddy climbed up the tree to see the situation inside home, and her brothers saw her dirty underwear under the tree. i.e. "We watched the muddy bottom of her drawers ... We could hear the tree thrashing" (William Faulkner,

2018: 38). Faulkner once said that this is a very moving image. "The dirty underwear" symbolizes Caddy's loss of virginity as well as the decline of the Compson family and the death of the old Southern system, the old tradition and the old moral values. William Faulkner's designed plot in *the Sound and the Fury* is similar to Eve's plot of stealing forbidden fruit, symbolizing and heralding the destiny of loss of virginity, death and tragedy.

3.2 People's Reaction or Behaviors

Caddy's depravity is a deadly blow to the crumbling family. In the face of every step of Caddy's depravity, Benjy's reaction is unusually strong and intense by crying. For Mr. Quentin, he is shocked by the depravity and misfortune of his sister Caddy. For Jason who is Caddy's brother, he hates the scandals of Caddy who is being abandoned by her husband for losing her virginity, making him lose his chance to work in a bank. Accordingly, he hates lewd women in particular and threatens to retaliate against Caddy's daughter Miss Quentin.

"Benjy's cry" symbolizes his efforts to save Caddy's depravity. And the "tree incense" is mentioned many times in the article symbolizing Caddy's purity and beauty. When Caddy was only fourteen years old, she used perfume for the first time, Benjy began to cry, but when she washed it off with water, Benjy thought that she smelled like trees again. When Caddy was sixteen years old, she kissed Charlie on the swing, which made Benjy cried violently. But when "Caddy took the kitchen soap and washed her mouth at the sink, hard. Caddy smelled like trees" (William Faulkner, 2018: 45).

Quentin's weakness, his pain for Caddy's loss of chastity, nostalgia: for childhood, "Honeysuckle was the saddest odor of all, I think" (William Faulkner, 2018: 145); "There were vines and creepers where at home would be honeysuckle" (William Faulkner, 2018: 116). There is the dishonor of the Compson family and the confusion and pain of Quentin's thoughts, "waves of honeysuckle coming up the air" (William Faulkner, 2018: 131); "leaves the gray light drizzling like the honeysuckle coming up in damp waves" (William Faulkner, 2018: 133).

"The red tie" is also a special image in the text. i.e. "His tie was red in the sun, walking" (William Faulkner, 2018: 47). The man who meets Miss Quentin on the swing wears a red tie, which, as we can see, symbolizes sexual desire and restless heart, but also represents Caddy's loss of virginity and depravity.

3.3 Natural Images

The image of water also appears many times in the book, symbolizing moral purification. For example, every time Caddy goes out on a date, after her coming back, Benjy will cry out loudly to drag her to the bath, in order to let her wash the filth of her body so that the fragrance of the tree can be re-diffused. In addition, the image of water also symbolizes Mr. Quentin's desire for death, the mystery of life and the attribution of life. When Quentin knows that his sister Caddy has lost her virginity, he feels so anguished that he thinks it is meaningless to live, so he jumps into the river to commit suicide to defend his reputation and integrity.

The image of fire symbolizes light, warmth, purification and sanctity, and also stands for disaster, punishment and destruction. For the image of purification, Mr. Quentin has always wanted himself and Caddy's soul to be surrounded by hellfire "The clean flame the two of us more than dead. Then you will have only me then only me then the two of us amid the pointing and the horror beyond the clean flame" (William Faulkner, 2018: 103).

In Miss Quentin's part, the image of honeysuckle appeared more than 30 times. "The smell of gray honeysuckle" came from the door after Caddy lost her virginity: "the smell of honeysuckle upon her face and throat" (William Faulkner, 2018: 127). What's more, the image of "the scent of honeysuckle" reappeared in Quentin's and Caddy's conversation. It is obvious that the image of flower in the book, actually the honeysuckle, appears many times, symbolizing sex. i.e. "Especially the honeysuckle it had got into my breathing it was on her face and throat like paint her blood pounded against my hand" William Faulkner, 2018: 130). For another, i.e. "I could smell the honeysuckle on the water gap the air seemed to drizzle with

honeysuckle and with the rasping of crickets a substance" (William Faulkner, 2018: 129).

4. The Reasons and Meanings for Losing Chastity of the Three Women

4.1 Social Meanings and Reasons

Firstly, William Faulkner's setting of these three roles in *Sound and the Fury* largely depends on the social environment. At that time, the Civil War broke out and ended in the defeat of the South with the collapse of the traditional values of the South. However, the rapid disintegration of the South, the impact of World War I and the spread of the "lost" trend of thought in American society after the war prompted people to reflect on tradition and to make new thinking of reality. They saw the sins of slavery in the South, exposing the corrupt, cruel and inhuman facts of planters. In the development of capitalism, the simple interpersonal relationship in the new south is replaced by the money of material desire, and the quiet and harmonious life is destroyed by the chaotic and noisy urban life.

Therefore, in this kind of industrial civilization brought by the north and the old trend of thought in the south, people feel confused and numb gradually, so they cannot help turning to the old tradition and lifestyle. And the generation of the women is precisely due to this kind of people's blindly conservative expectation, resulting in the incomplete female resistance under the old tradition and finally to the tragic result of depravity.

4.2 Reasons of the Family

Secondly, the family environment affects the character and destiny of every character in the Compson family. Naturally, the tragic fate of the characters in this novel also shows the whole process of the Compson family from prosperity to decline.

One of the important reasons why Caddy and her daughter little Quentin have fallen into the image of unchaste women after the collapse of this family is the failure of Mrs. Compson who is a mother and grandmother of them respectively. In a normal family, wife and mother can be regarded as a harbor of love, while Mrs. Compson is cold,

hypocritical, and selfish. She regards her idiot son Benjy as a punishment, and even as a shame to her. She feels that the reason why his son Mr. Quentin has committed suicide is to laugh and hurt her. She always laments and complains about the misfortune of this family, the injustice of her fate, lacking care and love for her husband and children. She thinks that all the children except Jason are not her children and they have nothing to do with her.

In particular, for Miss Quentin, she not only lives in an environment without father and mother in the process of growing up, but she is also often blamed by her grandma and uncle Jason, so her life can not get due and good care and advice. Even Jason has to admit when he is talking to his mother: "You had somebody to make you behave yourself," I say. 'She hasn't" (William Faulkner, 2018 : 198). It is natural that we can't expect Quentin, who grows up in such harsh conditions can be a well-behaved child. For example: "How the hell can I do anything right, with that dam family and her not making any effort to control her" (William Faulkner, 2018: 193). Latter, Miss Quentin becomes extremely depressed. Without care and warmth, Quentin, like her mother, approaches to the men for fun and seeks the substitutes for love.

Afterwards, she hungrily indulges in lust, leading to her rebellious behavior which is opposite to the image of the southern "lady", thus being regarded as the so-called "bitch" and "whore" by society and her families. In a quarrel between Miss Quentin and Jason, she angrily accuses Jason: "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" (William Faulkner, 2018: 216). Mrs. Compson poisons the atmosphere of the family and ignores the care and discipline of her children, so that Caddy and her daughter Quentin depraved one after another, making the idiot Benjy more pitiful, Quentin too pessimistic and stubborn, and Jason extremely selfish and morbid.

4.3 Personal Reasons

Thirdly, although Caddy, Quentin, and Lorraine are partly victims in that kind of family and society, their own subjective wills could have influenced their choices towards life.

For Caddy, she shows a spirit of extraordinary bravery, leadership and free rebellion since she was very young. 'Let them mind me tonight, Father.' Caddy said" (William Faulkner, 2018: 26). Before going to bed, the novel mentioned little Caddy three times to let everyone listen to her management and instructions: "'You have to.' Caddy said. 'Come on, now. You have to do like I say'"(William Faulkner, 2018: 28). Also, while she is playing with her brother Quentin, she is determined to take off her skirt to dry it, but her brother Quentin is adamant and not to allow it, while she resists to do that: "I bet I will.' Caddy said" (William Faulkner, 2018: 21). In order to get rid of being punished for playing with wet clothes she even said "I'll run away and never come back"(William Faulkner, 2018: 22).

For Jason's mistress, Lorraine, she is actually the representative of many ordinary women who are forced into the profession of mistress. We do not know her origins or what happened to her before, but the only thing we know is the fact that she relies on Jason who regards the interests and money as paramount in his life. "'I'm one of the boys.' I never promise a woman anything nor let her know what I'm going to give her. That's the only way to manage them"(William Faulkner, 2018: 164). Even though Jason is just trading her as a tool to meet his needs, she is willing to be his mistress all her life. Thus, they finally succumb to social and family pressures, to traditional dogma and morality. They chose to become adulterers, which is evidenced by their own personal choice of incomplete deformed paths of resistance.

As for Miss Quentin, she is similar to her mother and has a spirit of rebellion since her childhood. Quentin's tragic living environment is similar to Caddy's. Quentin, like her mother, is also a victim of society and family, however, she is not crushed completely. By contrast, she succeeds in defeating Jason, and defeats him in the only way that Jason could understand— taking away the money that should have belonged to her but has been usurped by Jason. So Quentin's brave and rebellious behaviors add a bright color of life and hope to these "three fallen women", making her also become the representative of an indestructible woman.

5. Conclusion

Through the analysis of the female chastity in *the Sound and the Fury*, the detailed process of becoming unchaste women of Caddy, Miss Quentin and Lorraine are explained respectively. Then, from the perspective of the symbolic metaphorical meaning, this paper illustrates the symbolic and implied meanings images related with the female chastity of these three women in the novel. Furthermore, the reasons why they become unchaste women are analyzed from the perspectives of society, family and individuals, which to some extent makes up for the gaps in the study of *the Sound and the Fury* before, making other readers understand the importance and functions in the description of female chastity on American literature better.

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