

**NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES AND REFLECTION OF SELF IN
FAULKNER'S *THE SOUND AND THE FURY* AND FITZGERALD'S *THE
GREAT GATSBY***

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ABSTRACT

Experiencing same events at one time and in one society mostly results in similarity in composing and achieving any work specially the literary work production of that society. What has happened in William Faulkner and F.Scott Fitzgerald's major novels *The Sound and the Fury* and *The Great Gatsby* proves the identical case of such thing. Their rootedness belong to one society, they lived in one period of time, and witnessed the same great events such as the great depression and the national war. Consequently, their literary work produced is similar in genre and they deal with themes similarly through using their similar narrative techniques and similar literary methods. This paper is an attempt to provide insights into the most memorable works, particularly on the theme of Reflection of self and the use of narrative techniques in the respective novels.

Key Words: Self, counterpoint, stream of consciousness, reflection, omniscien, similarity, narrative, doppelgänger, technique, "I" as a witness" narrative.

Abbreviation:

The Sound and the Fury (SF)

The Great Gatsby (GG)

F. Scott Fitzgerald, (1896-1940), is a great modern American short-story writer and novelist famous for his depictions of the Jazz Age. His works are the paradigmatic writings of the Jazz Age, a term he coined on the Roaring Twenties. This means that he is the leading writer of America's Jazz Age, one of its glittering heroes and an essential member of the Lost

Generation. He is a major new literary voice with a wide international literary echo in the world of literature and his contribution in literature is significant through his literary achievements in screenplays, short stories, and through his masterpiece novels such as *The Beautiful and Damned*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Tender is the Night*. Fitzgerald's work has inspired all intellectuals and writers. For example, Salinger says that he is a mere successor of Fitzgerald, T. S. Eliot praising *The Great Gatsby*: "It seems to me to be the first step that American fiction has taken since Henry James ..." (Franklin.2010.p137). Millions of copies of *The Great Gatsby* and his other works have been sold, and *The Great Gatsby* became a recommended material in several literary schools and universities around the world. Even a *New York Times*, November 9, 1941, after his death, wrote Fitzgerald "was better than he knew, for in fact and in the literary sense he invented a generation ..." [1]

In fact, before winning literary medals and titles, he could win hearts of readers worldwide with his incomparable literary creativity and with his insight about life. His sharp social insight and breathtaking lyricism qualify him to stand out as one of the most important American writers of the twentieth century that "he has been inducted a 2009 inductee of the New Jersey Hall of Fame. He is also the namesake of the Fitzgerald Theater in St. Paul, Minnesota". [2] Besides being a member of the Lost Generation of the 1920s, he is widely regarded as one of the greatest American writers of the 20th century for his unique literary method, techniques and style in writing. Another trait that makes him a successful reputed literary figure is "his ability to be both a leading participant in the high life he described, and a detached observer of it". [3]

Equal description is applied on William Faulkner, (1897-1962) who is considered one of the giants of modern literature not only in the American South and the United States, but also in the world. He stands as one of the most preeminent American writers of the twentieth century and his significant literary achievements influence both the American as well as the international modern literature. His literary contribution was in poetry, novels, short stories and screenplays. He won two Pulitzer Prizes for Fiction and the Nobel Prize in Literature. But what makes him more international pioneer literary figure with a high literary rank is the creation of his own unique fictional world called *Yoknapatawpha*, the use of his own new style and narrative techniques such as stream of consciousness and mythic method. Such usage of the multiple literary puzzles challenging reflects his themes are enduring and important to all as well. In their preface of *A William Faulkner encyclopedia*, [Robert W. Hamblin](#) and [Charles A. Peek](#) start with:

"Sometimes called the American Shakespeare, William Faulkner is known for providing poignant and accurate renderings of the human condition, creating a world of colorful characters in his fictional Yoknapatawpha County, and writing in a style that is both distinct and demanding. Though he is known as a Southern writer, his appeal transcends regional and even national boundaries. Since winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950, he has been the subject of more than 5,000 scholarly books and articles. Academic interest in his career has been matched by popular acclaim, with some of his works adapted for the cinema..."

It would be of immense help probing into the family background of both writers: Faulkner and Fitzgerald. Both writers belong to the South. Scott Fitzgerald's attitudes toward the American South are shaped by the two most important relationships in his life: with his wife, Zelda and with his father, Edward Fitzgerald of Maryland. This tendency to glamorize

the South, inherited from his father, has never been lost. The reader can notice such a "sense of the fundamental deficiencies" in Nick Carraway's observation on the first page of *The Great Gatsby*. Even in the first draft of *Side of Paradise*: "Father had a distinct class sense? I suppose because he is a Southerner..." Fitzgerald feels a deep nostalgic affection for his father's native state. He states in 1924, Maryland is the "loveliest of states, the white-fenced land" (Scott Donaldson, 1973). Fitzgerald had lived for four years in three separate places with Zelda when she was mentally sick under the medical care. However, Fitzgerald feels more comfortable at home in Maryland than anywhere else on earth. He describes Baltimore as "warm and pleasant." He adds "I love it more than I thought; it is so rich with memories. I belong here, where everything is civilized and gay and rosy and polite." (Jonathan Schiff, 2001) Fitzgerald's spiritual home is the flatlands of his father's Maryland and Rockville is his favorite place where he wishes to lie in a grave alongside with Zelda and his parents: "Both of the Fitzgeralds' remains were moved to the family plot in Saint Mary's Cemetery, in Rockville, Maryland, in 1975" [4]

Compared to Fitzgerald, William Faulkner was born in South in New Albany, raised in the state of [Mississippi](#) and died at Wright's Sanitarium in Byhalia in Mississippi too. His family, the region in which he lived and the history and culture of the [American South](#) all had a great influence on him and on his writing: "Mississippi marked his sense of humor, his sense of the tragic position of Black and White Americans, his characterization of Southern characters, and his timeless themes..." [5]

Nancy D. Hargrove, *Reflections of the 1920s in The Sound and the Fury* states that many of America's most enduring literary figures sprang into real prominence in the 1920s and their creations share similarities in content, technique, imagery, and allusions. In this regard, Randall Waldron in *Faulkner's First Fictional Car Borrowed from Scott Fitzgerald* confirms that the parallel made by Blotter between Fitzgerald and Faulkner suggests likeness in narrative situation and similarities that make deliberate echoing by Faulkner seem virtually certain.

The narrative techniques the two writers use in *The Great Gatsby* and *The Sound and the Fury* include "...modernist techniques as stream of consciousness, impersonal narration, time-shifts, structural counterpoint and so on" (Ed. Donald, Kartigane & Badie, 2000.) Michael Millgate, in *Scott Fitzgerald as Social Novelist: Statement and Technique in The Great Gatsby*, affirms that *The Great Gatsby* has a cinematic technique, achieving economy, speed and tautness by building up the narrative through the scene rather than the chapter unit, cutting abruptly from one scene to another, using the flash-back, creating a total pattern through recurrent phrases, scenes, situations and images. Similar observations could be made about Faulkner with Evelyn Scott as she notes, in her famous, 1929 review, that the narrative method of presenting *The Sound and the Fury* is unique. Edward Murray also suggests that *The Sound and the Fury* is highly cinematic novel. [6]

Faulkner uses referential writing rather than chronological writing to show meaning through association through leaps in thought. The first three sections are narrated in a stream of consciousness technique, in which Faulkner takes down the character's thoughts as they occur to him, paying little attention to chronology of events or continuity of story line. One example shows such technique is Quentin's obsession with the memory of Caddy looking at him through a mirror. Looking back to Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby*, reader finds him following a stream of consciousness, too. Nick is the narrator and the protagonist who frames the narrative for readers, as with a stream of consciousness, he tells the story as he sees it unfolding. He serves to reveal the corruptive power of wealth, and the illusory nature of American Dream.

Another similarity in the use of the narrative technique is in counterpointing and Doppelgänger usage which in, *The Double as Incomplete Self*, Clifford Hallam refers to it literally as “double-goer” (Clifford Hallam.1979) It is careful patterns of words and images to create an artistic unity that transcends the fragmented perspectives on display. Frye points out that it is the modal counterpoint which makes much of our greatest literature great. Such technique makes structural contrasts between antithetical narrative modes, such as romance and irony or tragedy and comedy.

Characters in *The Great Gatsby* do not necessarily fall into contrived categories through using such technique, but participate in ‘play’ between different archetypes. Fitzgerald uses counterpointing in characterization, setting and narrative structure in order to “place character against character, setting against setting, and one plot against another to demonstrate for the reader the moral change and ethical growth of his narrator, Nick Carraway”(Mellard1966). Take the relationship between Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby as a good example of counterpoint use in characterization of *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald counterpoints both sides of the narrative pattern in order to “comment ambivalently about the rather Edenic elements of the American dream, the romantic and tragic aspect of the myth are presented through Jay Gatsby, while the ironic and comic aspects are seen through the narrator Nick Carraway”. [7]

According to Gwynn & Blotner in their book, *Faulkner in The University 1959*, writer is like a musician, needs counterpoint or Fugue, or discord to balance or underlie discrete parts and make them cohere not by the simple direct line or logic or causality, but by the echoic entwining of unlike parts. A new pattern of fragments embodied in one another organizes the works with indeterminate structural form. For Faulkner, the counter point seems to be a significant narrative technique that he uses it in several of his novels. For instance, the romantic comedy, of *Light in August*, is contrasted to its tragic irony. In *The Bear*, Faulkner states “Now at this point I will need counterpoint .I will need discord or I will suspend this theme for another...” In *The Wild Palms*, Faulkner suggests that the particular richness of it lies in what he himself has called the counterpoint relationship developed between the two parts. Most importantly, In *The Sound and the Fury*, counterpoint is remarkable in Dilsey’s chapter and in Mr. Compson's wearied cynicism and nihilistic outlook which are a counterpoint to Quentin's adherence to abstract concepts such as honor and purity. Michael Millgate in *The Composition of The Sound and the Fury* notes that, at the Nagano Seminar in 1955, Faulkner gives his fullest account of how *The Sound and the Fury* came to be written: “... Then there had to be the counterpoint, which was the other brother, Jason...” (Jonathan.2006). The truly innocent idiot in *The Sound and the Fury* offsets the vicious Jason, who also provides a counterpoint to the protagonist Quentin.

The narrative method called “‘I’ as a witness” is used in *The Great Gatsby*. Such a narrative technique makes the story more reasonable and deepens connotative meanings. Using “I” as witness to narrate the story, Fitzgerald lets readers feel things directly in the story. Booth believes that “This non-individualistic technique makes the novel get a true effect” (Booth 1997:302). Regarding *The Sound and the Fury*, it is divided into four sections, each is told by a different narrator on a different date. The three Compson brothers, Benjy, Quentin, and Jason, each relates one of the first three sections while the fourth is told from an omniscient, third-person perspective. Each of the novel’s four narratives constitutes in itself a startling and original experiment in technique.

It is interesting to note that those narrative techniques helped both Faulkner and Fitzgerald to voice their thoughts. These works lucidly reflect the alienated self and liberating the

southern repressed voices. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner liberates the repressed voices of Benjy, Quentin, and Jason Compson, to reflect the cultural impotent self of the south. Further, the characters narrative technique usage helps Faulkner in representing those selves struggle to make connections with other selves. The selves that try hard to get out and integrates with the outer world through rejecting finality and looking for unity and integration with the Whole. The Reader shares this sense with The Compson disintegrated tragic family members.

Most of the Compsons are tragic mourners. That is to say, Faulkner reflects self in mourning state. Benjy mourns in his graveyard gambol, Quentin mourns over Caddy's loss of virginity and Mrs. Compson repents and mourns being inflicted with hypochondria by the repeatedly going to the Cemetery. They all mourn the paradise they have lost and the waste land they live in. It is in the Freudian mourning and melancholia The Compsons, different to what Caddy claims ___ "that's niggers. White people don't have funerals" (SF: 21) ___ repeat the scenes of their respective losses to overcome the aforesaid fright in death throes.

The deprived self reflected, in *The Sound and the Fury*, is embodied in Quentin depriving of life, Benjy of virility and Jason of competence. Compsons are all deprived of certain forms of property and possession. Benjy is deprived of an heirship to the pasture he haunts, Jason is deprived of a promised bank career and Quentin is deprived of his romanticized vision of the sibling incest.

Both Faulkner and Fitzgerald represent similar models of self which reflect the tragic, destructed, alienated, and fragmented self of the American Society. Faulkner reflects self as an obsessive and victimized self that suffers a lot by losing history, honour, and their myth. Individuals are veiwed as tragic figures rather than mechanical victims and relate their meaning to a large structure of events and to the history of their societies. [8] At the center of the novel is the brothers' sister, Caddy Compson, who, as an adult, becomes a source of obsessive love for two of her brothers, and inspires savage revenge in the third.

Moreover, self is also reflected as Ideological dominant by Quentin when he comes out of plantation elitism. Mr. Compson sends Quentin in an espionage trip to Harvard because he is worried and anxious that a self pitiful stereotype of agrarian south is contributing a decline in the regional competence and "anxiety over a traditionalist southern economic system in the process of disintegration, a system which had long regarded itself as opposed ___ and superior ___ to capitalist marketplace. (Yu-Te kuo.2008: p.64)

One finds out the self represented, in *The Sound and the Fury*, is death seeking self. Mr. Compson encapsulates the human tragedy: "there is no being that is not being-toward-death. From the shadow of death, the patriarchal order retreats in denial. Mr. Compson, for example, seeks oblivion in alcoholism that brings on death, and Quentin takes refuge in suicide. Both, seeking to repudiate being toward-death, cast away life with death". (Doreen Fowler1997: 166).

Regretted and despaired vision of Southern self is the vision Faulkner shows in *The Sound and the Fury* through the shadowy and gloomy picture of everything around: "... Where all stable things had become shadowy paradoxical all I had done shadows all I had felt..." (SF: 89). The case of regretting is when Caddy lost her virginity "Caddy puts her arms around me... and I couldn't smell trees anymore and I began to cry..." (SF: 19). In this regard, there is another view of man that the south had held since Thomas Jefferson. Accordingly, man is seen "as best in his relation to the soil. Southern writers used this myth of a good order in the past as a weapon of attack against the bad order of modern industrialism" (C. Hugh Holman.2008:p90)

Faulkner displays the awakening self that instigates and motivates southerners that it is the high time to stand up again, speak out against the decaying and deteriorating state they live in and to reconstruct their individuality and community: “The clock tick-tocked, solemn and profound. It might have been the dry pulse of the decaying house itself, after a while it whirred and cleared its throat and struck six times” (SF: 151).

Since *The Great Gatsby* is a modern novel concerned with the construction of a new self in a new globe in which personal identity inhabits in the perception of others, Fitzgerald reflects a new constructed self in the gloomy eyes of Dr Eckleburg which proposes how dependent the sense of the outer world is on how others see it. When James Gatz becomes Jay Gatsby, it is a new self existing in a world whose outlines he clearly understands, but unfortunately such a new self construction is not strong because it has been disfigured by Tom Buchanan’s disdainful dismissal of “Mr. Nobody from Nowhere”(GG:123).

Like Faulkner, Fitzgerald reflects the two kinds of selves: the destructed self shown in the characters of Buchanans, Jordan Baker and Dan Caddy, and the constructive self reflected in the character of Nick Carraway in the Midwest. Self Conceptualized is embodied in Dan Cady and the idea of the frontier. It is played out in the urban world of Tom Buchanan in Terms of the American Past that, according to Fitzgerald, generates selves with a perishable life. Such perishability is as a result of the believed past that takes them backward instead of forward. “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past...” (GG: 182). In other words, such selves’s nostalgia for a past time guides them not to wholeness, but to alienation and fragmentation. Nick insinuates that Gatsby’s relationship with Daisy becomes a desperate economic grasping which typifies Gatsby’s fragmented existence.

F. Scott Fitzgerald represents self as corrupted and shallow. Such shallowness and corruption are embodied elements shown in the characters of Buchanans, Jordan Baker and Dan Caddy. Shallow self of Daisy makes Gatsby unable to achieve his quest. “She is as shallow as the other hallow people who inhabite Fitzgirald’s long Island”. [9] She can never become a legitimate actualization of Gatsby’s illegitimate dream.

The obsessive defensive self is symbolized in Gatsby’s death and exists in the quest of Daisy possession which makes Gatsby protect her by pretending that he is himself the driver who makes the accident. Such obsession to have or to become like someone else leads to self-punishment. The scene of Daisy when she swerves the car and runs over the passerby woman to avoid crashing with the coming car is a vision of defensive self and justification that choosing is not intending. She does not mean that just to protect herself.

The restored self is reflected clearly in Antony’s identity represented prior to his dissipation is depicted basically as a ripple effect of the restoration of the original version of patch’s Will. Hence, if Antony is not able to restore his grandfather’s original will and inheritance, he will not be able to restore his former self. In *The Great Gatsby*, loveless Self is in the pursuit of fulfilling love. Readers find out characters tend to lose the essence of who they are so as to get it. Gatsby desperately wants to win Daisy’s heart, and in doing that he believes he must drastically change his lifestyle.[10] Therefore, he changes his name, his address, his standard of living, and his entire personality simply to impress the girl he claims to love.

That was not all about self reflection; Fitzgerald still represents a beauty seeking, aimless and materialistic model of modern Selfas well. Both Gatsby and Tom Buchanan, Daisy’s husband, possess wealth Gatsby in the end uses his wealth looks for beauty and claims it for himself. Buchanan the lecher lacks any larger goals. In the end, Daisy prefers to remain with

Buchanan. Jordan Baker is a woman with whom Nick becomes romantically involved during the course of the novel. As a competitive golfer, Jordan represents one of the new women self “of the 1920s—cynical, boyish, and self-centered. She is beautiful, but also dishonest: she cheated in order to win her first golf tournament and continually bends the truth” [11].

Shadow of resemblance of the self which suffers a lot and which lives in a decay in *The Great Gatsby* is also noticed in *The Sound and The Fury*: “the responsible self is represented by emphasizing on the importance between Nick’s and Ivan’s self proclamations of guilt and that their consciences equally burdened by the social consequences of their actions” (John D. Rockefeller.2008). It also seems clearly that not only William Faulkner, refers to the Mythic reflection of self correction by adopting a contrary to fact self construction method to suggest an exhausted self which is noticeable in Quentine’s self- correction in the sound and the fury “... majestic in the face of god gods. Better.Gods” (SF:56) , but also Fitzgerald does the same through his Platonic conception of Self and through his use of the divine self which is merged in the character of Gatsby as an innocent man-god figure or as the text states “he was son of God”. Such godlike vision resembles the Dionysusian one. Fitzgerald is aware that the real story of god is not only in the heavens or on earth, but in the reconciliation of the two _____ in the romantic intensity which transforms the physical. Thus, Gatsby half self vision is made up with such intensity and the other half is given to the physical power _____ the realm of Tom Buchanan and the city in the novel. Henry Adams refers to the connection between these two realms in his ‘virgin and the Dynamo’ Chapter in *The Education of Henry Adams* “The virgin is a mythic vision and self _____ the vision of self that Gatsby uses to create himself and that Organizes the medieval culture...” (Jackson, Bryer, Alan Margolieb & Ruth2000:81).

Briefly, this paper assumes that the ripple effect that begins from the Great Depression, Jazz age, lost cause and heading for a painful past felt at the verdict of Appomattox had brought the two writers thoughts closer to each other and had left marks of resemblance in their literary production. Reader can notice those marks in the similarity of using similar narrative techniques in *The Sound and the Fury* and *The Great Gatsby*. Both writers use almost similar narrative techniques with slight different style and structures. William Faulkner uses stream of consciousness, counterpointing, impersonal narration, time-shifts, and omniscient, third-person perspective narration. Applying all those narrative techniques makes Faulkner’s narrative referential writing method unique and enables him to reflect different models of self in *The Sound and the Fury*, such as the tragic, the destructed, the alienated, the obsessive, the dominant and the fragmented self of the American society.

It is the same case with Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby* when he uses stream of consciousness, doppelganger, counter pointing, “I as a witness” narrative method and the cinematic technique. The result of using such various techniques in narration makes *The Great Gatsby* more reasonable and deepens its connotative meanings. Thus, helps Fitzgerald to reflect the exact self of the American society then as tragic, corrupted, destructed, alienated, obsessive, and as pessimistic self. Therefore, using similar narrative techniques makes them able to represent similar models of self. It is worth concluding that such similarities did not merely come from using similar narrative techniques, but also come due to the effect of the political and social upheaval they experienced in their society then, due to having a similar cause they struggle for and due to the mutual identity and rootness they share as southern citizens before being American citizens.

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