
The shadows of flashback technique in William Faulkner's novels

Dr. NADA HASSAN MOHAMMED AHMED

English language Department
Sattam University, KSA

Abstract:

This paper aimed to find out the use of flashback technique in the following novels: "The Sound and the Fury" and "As I lay dying". Faulkner was an American modernist author. He has used this literary technique in his two novels; He reflected the shadows of flashback in the analysis of characters. These shadows present Faulkner's ability to portray old memories in organized images, to reflect characters impressions through these images. This technique enabled Faulkner to focus on the previous events connecting with specific attitudes. Faulkner concerned with old memories to portray a character's emotions in a different style with specific psychological dimension. He focused on old memories and events of the character to present their effects.

Faulkner presented the trend of internal images to penetrate feelings and emotions of characters and explore their attitudes which formed their personalities. Flashback tended to draw internal and stored images inside a character. It found out the merits of human memories to reveal the character's analysis in psychological style. Flashback tended to find out different images and incidents of a character.

Key words: flashback, Faulkner, images

INTRODUCTION

Flashback is the interruption of the story's continuity to portray an episode or incident that occurred earlier. It is based on the idea of a vivid memory, it enables the writer to provide the reader with background information that appear not to be part of the story that being told but is considered essential by the writer for the understanding of the meaning of the story.

According to Richard Taylor flashback is defined as "an episode from a distant and seemingly unrelated past introduced as though it were happening in a present time. (a time machine or flashback so called it). It is to give some relevant information as to character formation or motive on the one hand on to focus attention towards a resulting pattern of ideas on the other hand)¹

According to Merriam Webster said that "flashback is an interruption of chronological sequence by interjection of events of earlier occurrence."

By using flashback, writers allow the readers to gain insight into characters motivation and provide a background to a current conflict. Dream sequence and memories are methods used to present flashback. There are three common forms of flashback they are:

1. The use of an event to bring back vivid memories of past event.
2. The use of old pictures which remind a character of the good old days.
3. The use of old letters that a character comes across, which refer to a specific event or events in the past, it is used to convey to the reader information regarding the character's background and give them an idea of the

¹ Richard Taylor, *Understanding the elements of literature*(McMillan press,1981), page50-51

characters motives for doing certain things later in the story therefore it deepens inner conflict in the story.

It provides stimulus for the conflict deepens the touching effects and allows the reader to sympathize with the villain. It increases tension, mention of the past event makes the readers wish to know the secret so the reader finds what the secret is and how terrible is the secret and provides the motivation for the conflict in the story.

Flashback has several purposes either move the story forward or reveal information about the character , to bridge time , place and reveal a past emotion event or physical conflict that affects the character, it gives insight and understanding into character's behavior or solves a past mystery and to reveal why an event happened .

Flashback has different kinds, they are:

1. External retrospection

In this kind previous event recalled in the text directs the space of time covered by the primary story; this kind provides the reader with information about what has happened before the story has started.

2. Internal retrospection

The reader while facing new events recalls past events from inside the space of time covered in the primary story. The importance of these past events is that at the point of their insertion they serve to supplement in the text. Past event are presented as the origins of the new events can be understood.

Rimmon Kenan states that both internal and external retrospection can be either heterodiegetic or homodiegetic in nature. heterodiegetic retrospection provides information about another character, event or story line. Homodiegetic retrospection provides past information about the same character event or story line. Homodiegetic retrospection

provides past information about the same character, event or story line.

The characteristic of internal retrospection is that during the course of event the focus will shift and go back to events that events happened within the plot itself.

3. Mixed retrospection

Is a combination of both external and internal retrospection in mixed retrospection the contents of the flashback begin in the pre-story and extend right into the primary story's space of time.

4. Flashback to complicate events

It includes two sub-groups: firstly, flashback inserts events and secondly, the change of chronological order of events it is to insert events actually comprises external, internal and mixed retrospection.

5. Flashback of similar events

A particular event is presented at the beginning of a text and ignored at this point, but later the end of the story recalled by the narration of an event similar to the first event.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Flashback has been used by modernist writers in 20th century. It is one of the distinguishing features of psychological novel. Psychological novel is a novel that focuses on the complex mental and emotional lives of its characters and explores the various levels of mental activity. This study intends to find out whether William Faulkner reflects shadows of flashback in his two novels to analyze his characters through old memories and images.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This paper focuses on the analysis of the characters in Faulkner's novels ("The Sound and The Fury", and "As I lay Dying") through flashback as a narrative technique.

OBJECTIVES

This paper aimed to investigate the use flashback in two selected novels ("The Sound and The Fury" , "As I Lay Dying". More specifically, it answered the following objectives: to identify the shadows of flashback technique; to determine flashback analysis in the two selected novels.

METHOD

The researcher used content analysis in two selected novels namely: "The Sound and The Fury", "As I lay Dying". They were chosen based on their models of the genre under the study. This paper attempted to present how the selected novels prove the shadows of flashback as a literary technique.

Faulkner was born in New Albany, Mississippi in 1897. His family had accumulated a great deal of wealth before the American civil war. His family like many southern families had lost all of its financial power during the conflict. They moved to oxford Mississippi. Faulkner would use Oxford as the basis for the fictional town of Jefferson in Yoknapatawpa County.

Narrative techniques provided Faulkner different ways of unfolding narratives which came to him unconsciously and instinctively and provided him a form of automatic writing. His techniques affording, whether conscious or unconscious whether original or borrowed create effects which help him to guide and control the readers' awareness of relationships between how he told a story and what he made that story mean.

Faulkner innovated some techniques that suited his themes. He has also extensively used the techniques of interior monologue. His plots usually do not follow any chronological order. He holds up the revelations and creates nerve racking suspense. The plots within plots created to add to the weight of its meaning. His stories are complicated and oblique. They unfold themselves in a manner which determines both the subjective world of the character as well as his relationship with the outer world. He compels the readers' maximum participation in his experience.

Faulkner took advantage of an innovative narrative structure which utilized multiple view points, often expressed by a characters' shift from conscious to unconscious thought, time shifts are that not always presented sequentially. He employs a narrator within the tale, who reveals the plot situated most often in the past based on his own experiences or what the others tell him. He uses several character narrators to provide different in sight in to specific events.

The problem of point of view in Faulkner's' works embraces some of his fiction of techniques. He was highly influenced be Joseph Conrad and James Joyce, the unvanquished (1940) and the Rievers (1962) are told entirely from the single point of view in other works. Faulkner has used a multiplicity of points of view. He makes effective use of first person narration, third person narrative and stream of consciousness. In all his works, he has used his narrative techniques to express his views of men's position in the modern world, he makes his readers participate both in the process of the story and in the extrication of the truth from the point of view of an omniscient narrators. He places several characters as the narrators of the same tale who convey the plot to the reader in the light of their own experience without the intrusion of an intermediary. The unusual treatment of the concept of time is one of Faulkner's innovations. His techniques

were not only fundamental to an understanding of the modernistic form but heralded much of what would come later. His use of characterization, narrative, foreshadowing and symbolism are the four key factors which make Faulkner's work to be idealistic and something new all readers.

The narrative techniques which introduced in Faulkner's fiction are stream of consciousness, direct interior monologue, first person narrative mode, omniscient point of view, soliloquy, multiplicity of narrative voice, symbolism, allegory, flashbacks, imagery unrealism, point of view, allegory, flashback, imagery unreliable narrative, foreshadowing, temporal repetition disorders time, sequences, counter point or juxtaposition and elaborate speculation are the techniques used by Faulkner.

Faulkner's Yoknapalwpha was seen as linguistic realms inhabited and dominated by the artist-god who makes and populates them. His South made up of bits and pieces, a few old mouth to mouth tales, scattered and fragmentary letters without salutation or signature as Mr. Compson put it in *Absalom, Absalom* page 180. He engaged in constructing a geography of the imagination that bears some mediated, formalistic relation to the messiness of reality and the deformations of time passing. He attempted to erect world orders that within the mythos of modernism enacted a break with the dead past. The characters who inhabit Faulkner's Yoknapalwpha were locked into the tragic repetitions of their personal pasts-repetitions that recur through the generations of the Sutpens and the Compsons and the Sartorises in a landscape cursed by the twin specters of slavery and the Civil War.

Faulkner was commenting on the state of literature but more importantly, the uncertainty that literature creates as it all returns to mythology as he suggested "we as readers have to realize that every story that is told is merely a representation of another and each a mere representation of reality". His style in the novel was more oral than literary and the novels flow

through thoughts and character dialogue that seem like Faulkner himself was orally relating the story to his listeners.

A characterization of Faulkner's novel required understanding of what it meant to be a piece of fiction. He played with piece of fiction to comment on the story about his literature and how he viewed his past accomplishments. His fiction abided by Lacon's stages of linguistic development and he developed as an author and critic of language just as a child and matures. He dealt with the approaches to language after evolving into the symbolic and imaginary stages.

FAULKNER WORKS

Novels:

- Soldiers' pay
- Mosquitoes
- Sartoris
- The sound and the furry
- As I lay dying
- Sanctuary
- Light in August
- Pylon
- Absalom , Absalom
- The unvanquished
- The wild palms
- The hamlet
- Go down , Moses , and other stories
- Intruder in the dust
- Requiem for nun
- Affable
- The town
- The Mansion
- The Reivers , a reminiscence
- Flags in the Dust

Short fiction

- New Orleans sketchers
- These thirteen
- Doctor Martino – and other stories
- The portable Faulkner
- Three famous short novels
- Knights gambit
- Collected stories
- Big woods
- Selected short stories
- A Faulkner miscellany

UNCOLLECTED STORIES OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

Poetry

- Vision in spring
- The marble faun
- This earth , a poem
- A green bough
- William Faulkner : early and poetry
- Mississippi Poems
- Helen

Drama

- Today we live
- The road to glory
- Slave ship
- To have and have not
- The big sleep
- Land of the pharaohs

Flashback in *The Sound and the Fury* novel

Benjy's age was thirty three years old. He remembered events although he blended between the past and the present but when he heard or saw a specific incident his memory working and connecting it with events happened to him.

He remembered when his mother changed his name from Muary to Benjamin when he was five years old. He remembered the death of his grandmother; also he remembered the trip to a cemetery with his mother to visit the graveyard of Quentin and his father.

When Quentin went to the bakery and met an Italian girl there, he remembered his girlfriend Nathlie whom Caddie did not like her; she called her a dirty girl. He also remembered when Caddie saw them kissed each other. His meeting with Dalton a man whom Caddie had a sex with him and his quarrel with each other. His father's words that virginity was not important for women but for men.

Jason remembered when his sister asked him to see her daughter for one hundred dollars and he let her saw little Quentin through the window of a kitchen and when she was brought by his father to live with them in the house.

Flashback in *As I Lay Dying* novel

When Dewel remembered her sexual intercourse with Lafe. He was a worker on the Bundren's farm. She went harvesting with him. She had been heading towards the woods with him. They slept together and she realized that Darl found out her and Lafe. She remembered that when Darl was standing in the doorway saying good-bye for his mother.

When Darl remembered how his mother used to hide Jewel's mistakes and how his siblings quietly took over his chores. How he spent his nights with a married woman but they didn't reveal his secret. When Jewel came home on a new horse that he purchased from Quick clearing land by the light of a lantern in order to get money. His father became angry with him. But Jewel said that his horse would not eat a single grain of Anse's food. His mother was crying beside Jewel who was asleep in bed.

Cora remembered her discussion with Addie about religion. She criticized her that judge would be left for god not for human beings. She qualified Addie that she was proud and vain.

Addie remembered when she was a teacher school before her marriage. She was happy and enjoyable when she was beating her students. Anse's terse courtship and their marriage. When she gave birth to their eldest children, Cash and Darl, she felt if her aloneness had been violated. She declared that Anse was dead to her and bemoaned the uselessness of words. Her sexual intercourse with Whitefield and her passion with him. The result of that love affair was Jewel.

Her giving birth to Dewel and Vardaman , she described them as the final payments in an emotional debt to Anse. After that she was free to die.

Varaman remembered when Darl was taken to mental institution. His scene when he was crying and laughing uncontrollably. He remembered the eagles' scene over his mother coffin.

REFERENCES

1. Faulkner, William, (1991) *As I Lay Dying*, Vintage international.
2. Faulkner, William, (1993) *The Sound and the Fury*, Norton Critical Editions
3. Richard Taylor, (1981) *Understanding the elements of literature* (McMillan press),
4. Singal, Daniel (1995) *From William Faulkner: The Making of a Modernist*, The university of North Carolina press.
5. West, Paul (1967) *The Modern Novel* volume 2, Hutchinson.
6. Wikipedia, The free encyclopedia.