

SparkNotes analysis of the Dilsey Section

Source: <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/soundfury/section4.rhtml>

Summary

Whoever God is, He would not permit that. I am a lady. You might not believe it from my offspring, but I am.

It is Easter Sunday, 1928, the day after Benjy's narration and two days after Jason's. Dilsey walks up to the Compson house and manages to get the kitchen up and running despite the interference of Mrs. Compson and Luster. Luster tells Dilsey that Jason is angry because someone has broken the window in his room. Benjy eats his breakfast and whimpers. Jason emerges and testily sends Dilsey to call Miss Quentin to breakfast. There is no answer from Miss Quentin's room. Jason suddenly springs up the stairs, seizes his mother's keys, and unlocks Miss Quentin's door. The window is open and Miss Quentin is gone.

As Dilsey tries to comfort Mrs. Compson, Jason rushes to his strongbox and finds that it has been forced open. His papers are there, but all his money is gone. Jason calls the police and asks them to send a deputy to the house. He storms out. Meanwhile, Dilsey takes Luster, Frony, and Benjy to an Easter service at the local black church, where Reverend Shegog gives a boisterous sermon about the life and death of Christ. When they return to the house, they find that Jason still has not returned. Jason has gone to see the sheriff to demand help in tracking down Miss Quentin. However, the sheriff is suspicious of Jason's claim and sharply critical of the way he runs the Compson family. The sheriff refuses to help without more substantial evidence of Miss Quentin's wrongdoing.

Jason gasses up his car and goes to find Miss Quentin. On the way, Jason thinks about Lorraine, his mistress in Memphis. This thought reminds him of how angry he is to have been ripped off by a woman yet again. Jason drives to the town where the minstrel show is stopping next, since he believes that Miss Quentin's lover—the man with the red tie—works for the show. Jason rudely asks an old man where Miss Quentin and her lover are, but the old man takes offense and becomes violent, and Jason knocks him down. Jason tries to leave, but the old man comes after him with a hatchet. The man who runs the minstrel show rapidly leads Jason around the corner and convinces him that Miss Quentin and her lover are not there. Jason pays a black man to drive him back to Jefferson.

Back in town, Luster is driving Benjy in the carriage. As they arrive at the cemetery, Luster deviates from the usual course T.P. used to take, and Benjy begins howling at the unfamiliar route. Jason comes across Luster and Benjy. He hits Luster across the head, ordering him never to turn off the route Benjy is used to taking, and strikes Benjy in an attempt to quiet him. Benjy continues to howl. However, as Luster drives Benjy home, the familiar façades, doorways,

windows, signs, and trees of the town of Jefferson all appear to Benjy in their ordered place, and he finally quiets.

I seed de beginnin, en now I sees de endin.

Analysis

The Sound and the Fury ends with the symbolic completion of the Compsons' downfall, but also hints at the possibility of resurrection or renewal. Importantly, this last chapter takes place on Easter Sunday, the day of Christ's resurrection and thus a powerful symbol of redemption and hope.

We may expect Caddy to narrate the last section, since she is in many ways the most important character in the novel, and the only one of the Compson children who has not had a chance to speak. However, Faulkner narrates this section himself, from a third--person perspective. This viewpoint takes us a step back from the Compsons' inner world and provides a more panoramic view of the tragedy that has unfolded. The narrative voice Faulkner adopts is an objective one—similar to Benjy's in its ability to view the Compson world without resentment, but unlike Benjy's in that it is omniscient and relies on a more traditional mode of storytelling.

When Miss Quentin flees, the Compson name is definitively ruined. Caddy has been banished and neither of the remaining brothers is emotionally or mentally capable of passing the Compson name on to an heir. The storied, near-mythic past of the Compson family has disintegrated, with nothing remaining but a slobbering idiot and a bitter, wifeless, and now penniless farm-supply clerk. The Compsons are finished.

Miss Quentin's successful escape emphasizes the impotence and failure of the Compson men, especially in relation to the Compson women. Mr. Compson sets this precedent, constantly bowing to his wife's complaining and allowing her to pervert the family with her self-pitying and dependent nature. Likewise, we have seen that Benjy, Quentin, and Jason have all been dominated by Caddy in one way or another: Benjy cannot function without the sense of order Caddy provides him, Quentin cannot carry on with the knowledge of Caddy's promiscuity, and Jason cannot get past the fact that Caddy's out-of-wedlock pregnancy cost him a job. However, Caddy has never actively attempted to dominate her brothers. Each brother's impotence comes from an internal weakness or a form of self-absorption: Benjy's internal sense of order that relies entirely on Caddy, Quentin's neurotic ideal of feminine purity, and Jason's relentless self-pity. Caddy herself has never really *done* anything to harm her brothers directly.

Despite the Compsons' weakness and downfall, one source of hope and stability remains to hold the family together—Dilsey's simple, strong, protective presence. Dilsey adheres to the same traditional Southern values of religion and family upon which the original Compsons built their

name. However, unlike the Compsons, Dilsey does not allow these values to be corrupted by self-absorption. When Dilsey arrives at the house to cook breakfast, she stays true to the task of setting the house in order despite constant interruption by the rest of the family. Unlike the rest of the family, she is not ashamed to bring Benjy to church with her. She loves Benjy as only Caddy has, and believes that God loves Benjy regardless of his lack of intelligence. Dilsey is not obsessed with the passage of time as Quentin is, and she is not overcome by the chaos of experience as the other Compsons are. Rather, she endures happiness and sadness with the same incorruptible will to carry on and sense of duty to protect those she loves. She looks on the Compson tragedy with sadness, but does not let it contaminate her own spirit. In her words, "I seed de beginning, en now I sees de ending."

Dilsey's words imply that the Compsons' downfall is part of a larger cycle. Indeed, Dilsey has, in effect, resurrected the original values of the Compsons' ancestors. The Compsons become carried away with the greatness of their own name, neglecting the strength of family in favor of self-absorption. Dilsey, on the other hand, is the antithesis of self-absorption. She maintains a strong spirit and a profound respect for an unpretentious, unadorned, yet powerful code of values. Dilsey is the redeemer of the Compson legacy, and provides an almost graceful landing after the resounding fall of the once-great household. In some respects, Dilsey's new role represents a reversal of the traditional Southern order: a black servant, once considered the lowest position in Southern society, is now the only torchbearer for the name of a prestigious white family.

The novel closes where it started, with Benjy. For a brief moment, we return to the world of order and chaos that exists in Benjy's mind. Benjy is almost unable to bear it when the carriage turns in an unexpected direction, as this deviation shatters his familiar, ordered routine. When Luster steers back onto the familiar route, Benjy becomes peaceful. Order prevails, and the elements of Benjy's experience return to the places where he expects to find them. Faulkner implies a hope that the Compson name itself, under Dilsey's guardianship, will likewise be set in order.