



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 9. Issue.3. 2022 (July-Sept)

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

WALTZING ODIUM AND WITHERING SANITY: DESUBJECTIVIZATION OF SELFHOOD
AND BIRTH OF ILLUSION IN QUENTIN COMPSON'S WORLD

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Article information

Received:25/08/2022
Accepted: 27/09/2022
Published online:30/09/2022
doi: [10.33329/ijelr.9.3.122](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.9.3.122)

ABSTRACT

The study of moods of protagonists and other major characters of literary pieces have been one of the hot debating areas of research for both psychoanalysts and literary critics. The role of subjectivism in modern studies has led critics to more deep and delicate understanding of texts. Freud, Lacan and Zizek were the most eminent pioneers of this movement towards the establishment of theoretical and methodological elements of such analysis. But a combined Nietzschean-Foucauldian approach under the name of 'Desubjectivization' in this study has a very new and untouched approach to analysis in literary texts.

The present paper explores the impact of power relations over the unconsciousness of subjects in an ideological society of Southern America and the way in which these subjects turn into matters of objectivization in such situations. In the first step, the dominant ideology of 1900th South America and the powerful impact of its functionality are identified in Quentin Compson's section of *The Sound and the Fury*. Then, the process of metamorphosis from a coherent and active subject into an object of illusion is analyzed. At the final step, the study shows how subjects become highly preoccupied with the matters of value, beliefs, and shame that forget their role as a living creature capable of reasoning, and change into objects. In other words, they (subjects) become the things and all these things' externalizations do overshadow the events of the stories. For instance, in Quentin's case, this is not the Quentin who commits suicide, but it is the odium which devastates him.

The current study sheds light upon the hidden function of power relations in societies and delineates their subversive nature over their targets. This method and its results of the analysis can be applied to other literary texts that have gloomy moods throughout their whole narratives. Additionally, this analysis makes brilliant the role of specific concepts, including ideologies, shames and set of values, in the portrayal of novels, as the main elements overrunning the whole narratives.

"What, then is praise? A sort of restoration of balance in respect of benefits received, a giving in return, a demonstration of our power--for those who praise, affirm, judge, evaluate, pass sentence: they claim the right of being able to affirm, of being able to dispense honours. A heightened feeling of happiness and life is also a heightened feeling of power: it is from this that man praises (--from this that he invents and seeks a doer, a "subject"--). Gratitude as virtuous revenge: most strenuously demanded and

practiced where equality and pride must both be upheld, where revenge is practiced best.” (The Will to Power, 2011: 406-7)

This excerpt from Nietzsche can be considered as the start of the new conception of desubjectification in postmodernism. This new concept has been highly developed and applied by eminent critics and philosophers of the twentieth century such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Slavoy Zizek. Whereas Lacan and Zizek's focuses were mainly on the psychological functions of this concept, Foucault's analysis rested on its impact over the correlation of psychological and social power relations of the achievement of the desubjectification.

The concept of desubjectification, on Foucault's perspective, has been implicitly mentioned in his several works and there is a lack of direct hints on its main concerns. In his International article namely “Revisiting Foucault through Reading Agamben: Implications for Workplace Subjectification, Desubjectification and the Dark Side of Organizations,” Richard Ek believes that the desubjectification, for Foucault, meant “processes of diminishment and destruction of subjectivity” or “processes of breaking free from subject positions.”(2007) In this regard, Foucault is uneasy with the ways social apparatuses take the control of its inhabitants and change their role from being complete free-willed subjects into objects.

Nietzsche, like Foucault, had the same idea on the nature of the man when his will to power changes the subject's active role into a passive object. His first hints on this theme come out from his skeptical mindsets towards morality. Travis J. Denneson writes “the concepts “moral” and “immoral” have arisen ... from a psychological error.” What Nietzsche contends about psychological error signifies an idea that man is an altruist creature who is in favor of disregarding all his own desires for the sake of another. Actually, Nietzsche is pessimistic about the concept of morality mainly for two reasons; that is, they enslave the man and take the happiness away from his life. The former is achieved when the control of the man is deprived and he becomes the targets of ideologies or, as Foucault says, the soul becomes the prison of the body. The latter one also does occur when the person becomes anxious about his own desires and passion and attempts to annihilate them. This annihilation is in contradiction with man's direct desire of having power or will to power

When all the direct ways of gaining power are blocked, the transformations in the behaviors of the desire for the power do occur. These transformations, or secondary phases, according to Denneson, are called disguised forms, “...meaning that they appear to stem from something else, such as altruism or sympathy, when they really originate in one's instinct to bring someone under one's own power.”(2014) These disguised forms do appear in several modes, one of which is the act of praising; “Yet another disguised form lies in the act of praising others. When a person praises another, he/she appears to be conceding the superiority of the other in the area of whatever has been accomplished by that person.” (2014) Or as Nietzsche says “So long as men praise you, you can only be sure that you are not yet on your own true path, but on someone else's.” Developing this new concept, the current study does generate its main idea on the objects other than the persons. In other word, the praising act as one of the disguised forms of the will to power is applied to the inanimate things or ideologies and its consequences are shown in William Faulkner's Quentin section of *The Sound and the Fury*.

The Second section of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* is narrated by the eldest son of a South American family, Quentin Compson. The novel itself is narrated by several characters of whom Quentin's section stands in ultimate prominence because of its subjective and ideological content. According to Sepehr Daneshara and Firouzeh Ameri, writers of the article “Transnational Dialogism and Symptoms of Psychological Complexities: The Rhetoric of Authors' Self-assertion in Polyphonic Novels of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and Reza Baraheni's *Secrets of my Native Land*,” Quentin can stand as William Faulkner himself because “not only for his being the eldest of his family like William, but also for his delicate style of language usage, his intelligence as a Harvard student and his being a person in head-breaking moaning of his age.” (2014)

Quentin Compson, in his section, is harassed by two important facts of his life, each of which is directly and indirectly related to the concept of power in general. First of these two facts which preoccupies Quentin's whole mind is his physical weakness throughout his life. He is extraordinarily obsessed with the ideological concept of honor and family gracefulness. This obsession makes him take sudden actions for any deeds endangering his family honor and members, but his physical weakness for achieving that goal is not sufficient.

One explicit example of his physical weakness is on his fight with Dalton Ames when he warns him to leave the town:

“I hit him my open hand beat the impulse to shut it to his face his hand moved as fast as mine the cigarette went over the rail I swung with the other hand he caught it too, before the cigarette reached the water he held both my wrists in the same hand his other hand flicked to his armpit under his coat behind him the sun slanted and a bird singing somewhere beyond the sun we looked at one another while the bird singing he turned my hands loose.” (1929)

This physical weakness which disturbs his natural sense of will to power changes itself into disguised forms that I stated in previous paragraphs. Actually, in Nietzsche’s view, According to Denneson, morality- or the metamorphosis of Moralities- suppresses the natural desire of man for Power (will to power:)

“As Nietzsche puts it, the idea of there being selfless actions is a psychological error, out of which the concepts “moral” and “immoral” have arisen. He attributes this error, of course, to the Judeo-Christian priestly type, who professed the sinfulness of man and the accompanying instinctual drives that govern his actions. Since man’s actions and drives are egoistic by nature, as Nietzsche believes, the priestly types were compelled to prescribe actions that were selfless and unegoistic, if one wanted to act in a way that would be free from sin. Thus it became moral to act in ways that are outside of one’s own interests, and immoral to act self-interestedly.” (2014)

As it can be inferred from the above mentioned excerpt, any parallelism between the natural tendencies of a man and his actions on gratifying his own self is doomed to be immoral. Likewise, it is immoral to act against the ideological codes, moralities and anything that can bring a peaceful and ecstatic life which has its roots directly and indirectly in instinctual desire of will to power. As Quentin is deprived of this prime desire, he is unconsciously in an attempt to replace it with other disguised modes.

The second obsession of Quentin is the disguised form he is chosen to carry, and that is, the praise of strong moral codes. It should be pinpointed that although Nietzsche is skeptical towards moralities, he believes that people do hang on moral codes because, indeed, they want to attach themselves to the strong power of the ideological hegemonies. Strictly speaking, it is the power of the repressive force of the ideology which attracts the subjects. So, while Quentin is infatuated by Caddy’s promiscuity and his father’s alcoholism, he unconsciously becomes trapped by the unreal, or virtual, power of the moralities.

This process of moral and ideological codes, which Althusser names as Interpellation, has the role of safety valves for Nietzsche. Interpellation or hailing of subject refers to the “process whereby the dominant hegemony or prevailing ideology forms the attitudes of people in society.” (Bressler, 2007) For Nietzsche, any disobediences from these moral codes are carried with a sense of uneasiness in the consciousness of people. This uneasiness is the hidden power for entrapping the subjects that have not been docile. Nietzsche is very critical to this sense of regret and challenges it harshly: “bad conscience came about with the transition from hunter-gatherer societies to permanent settlements. All our animal instincts of life in the wild became useless, and, in order to survive, we had to rely on our conscious mind rather than our unconscious instincts.” Accordingly, if it is to obey the conscience, then the enslavement of subjects does occur for several times. One of the ways of coping with this sense of uneasiness in the conscience is to forget the past and to hang on to the moral codes once more, as Quentin’s father; “...That’s sad too, people cannot do anything that dreadful they cannot do anything very dreadful at all they cannot even remember tomorrow what seemed dreadful today...”

For a postmodernist philosopher like Nietzsche, being a regretful person means either to be a slave under the ideological and moral values of the time, like Quentin’s father, or to be annihilated by the virtual pressures of such concepts(moralities,) as Quentin himself. In *The Sound and the Fury’s* case, Quentin cannot recover himself from what Caddy has done. Her promiscuity diminishes Quentin’s psychology and makes him avoid the disgracefulness in any possible way. He is not privileged to forget the past, even his own incestuous thought on Caddy. He has no other way except devastating the shame. By committing suicide, this is not him that gets devastated; it is, in fact, the shame that is going to be demolished. In other words, Quentin’s obsession with the

promiscuity and the disgracefulness made his identity, and finally his being, as something offensive and immoral. Quentin has been changed from being a subject into a virtual object under the control of ideology of the time. Quentin has been left selfless and changed to the shame itself; as Nietzsche puts it, "He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you"(1886).

The representation of hidden processes of power relations in shaping the identity of the subjects can be applied to several realist literary pieces. The fundamental role of power in society, which has its own root from both Nietzsche and Foucault is brilliant in many literary pieces, but the role of objectivization (changing subjects into objects through power relations) and its consequences, as according to Nietzsche, is a new ground of literary analysis. Because as Nietzsche claims, "All things are subject to interpretation whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of power and not truth."

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