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Faulkner's View of the Moral and Social Dissolution of the South

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Faulkner's View of the Moral and

Social Dissolution of the South

(TITLE)

BY

Patricia Lindsay Kerr

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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The Negro-white situation in the post-Civil War South concerned William Faulkner through most of his writing career. One finds it from Sartoris (1929) through Intruder in the Dust (1948). There is a chronological movement from the implicit toward the explicit in Faulkner's depiction of the South's situation. The purpose of this paper is to show the progression of this movement. This will entail a chronological discussion of various of Faulkner's works. Faulkner continuously suggests that the South will decline further if its white residents do not grant the Negroes full privileges as citizens, love them, and work with them for the revitalization of the South, all without northern intervention. The reader soon realizes that the author's actual dream for the South is the achievement of the millennium. This concept does not come from any one book but is formulated after one peruses several of Faulkner's works. Faulkner intimates that Heaven on Earth does not consist of the maintenance of slavery or of increased affluency in the South. These conditions should gradually be eliminated until the Negro will not do all the white man's work and will reap some benefits from a harmonious society.¹

Faulkner's concern for the relevance of racial relations to the decline of the South appears in his writing in 1929, with the composition of Sartoris. Here Faulkner portrays the effect of World War I on the Negro's attitude toward the white man. Caspey, the son of old Bayard Sartoris' servant, Simon, returns home from Europe and declares,

¹One may discover something of Faulkner's vision in most of his works, but several of them are especially significant. If one were to concern himself with all of Faulkner's novels, he would, in studying Faulkner's view of the South's struggle for the millennium, encounter repetition and sparse material in some instances. For this reason, I have omitted discussion of Go Down, Moses. I have concerned myself with those books which I consider to be most revealing in defining Faulkner's attitude toward ideal life in the South. These are Sartoris, Light in August, Absalom, Absalom!, The Unvanquished, and Intruder in the Dust.

"I don't take nothin' fum no white folks no mo'. War done changed all dat."² The ex-soldier subsequently states that the Negroes deserve the same rights as the white soldiers because both races served equally well.³

These statements express an attitude drastically changed from that following the Civil War, when the freed slave was reluctant to express himself concerning what rights he should be given and patiently waited until his saviors would grant him the privileges of full citizenship. The Negro endured a great deal of suffering and hoped that he would soon be treated humanely. Faulkner intimates that the movement toward complete Negro liberation has been a slow one and it had not progressed very far by World War I. Caspey, the typical young Negro of the period, feels that he has paid his debt to white society by his participation in the war. Simon's son feels that the score is now even and that the Negro should not be ashamed, for the military equality of World War I should prevail in civilian life. Caspey represents the new generation Negro who is outspoken and aggressive and who feels that the Negro should make substantial social and financial advances.⁴ Caspey's type is developed more fully in the person of Lucas Beauchamp in Intruder in the Dust. Here Faulkner portrays the seeds of the disorientation and unrest which are later to fully ripen.

The opposing attitude is seen in the statement of Simon, Caspey's father: "You go'n git dat mare and save dat nigger freedom talk fer town-folks: dey mought stomach it. Whut us niggers want ter be free fer, anyhow? Ain't we got ez many white folks now ez we kin

²William Faulkner, Sartoris (New York:Random House, 1956), p.62.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p.56.

suppo't?"⁵ Simon seems to believe that such talk is foolish and that the people of their community will not listen to it. He apparently realizes that the attitude of the southern white toward the Negro has not significantly changed since the Civil War. He understands that the equality which the Negro desires will not materialize while an attitude such as Caspey's is prevalent among his race. Simon contends that the Negro is already contributing enough to the support of the white people and that equality will mean increased responsibility for his race. Caspey and his father agree about the importance of the Negro in the white community, but they disagree on how he is to conduct himself in view of this fact. Faulkner is pointing out the divergent attitudes among southern Negroes of his day. He subsequently shows that the failure of the southern whites to nourish and deal with either attitude properly initiates the moral downfall of the South.

We learn two opposing views of the Civil War in a conversation between young Bayard Sartoris and Miss Jenny Du Pré. Young Sartoris refers to it as a "two-bit war" and a "war that was so sorry that grandfather wouldn't even stay up there in Virginia where it was."⁶ Bayard further ridicules the war by calling it a "war on a horse."⁷ Miss Jenny seemingly considers it a very exciting and romantic war, for she says, "At least he got himself decently killed. He did more with a horse than you could do with that aeroplane."⁸ Miss Jenny apparently believes that modern warfare is immoral and indecent and that the Civil War was a gentleman's conflict, where men could die gallantly. Faulkner portrays the change in attitude toward

⁵ Ibid., p. 93.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 230-231.

⁸ Ibid.

the Civil War which occurs between the end of the conflict and the outbreak of World War I. Faulkner seems to say that the Civil War came to be less and less respected, though remembered by the whites and mainly ignored by the Negroes. It was, I feel, an event whites wanted to recall with pride and Negroes tried to forget. The white southerner can find no good reason for his participation in a war which he undertook on the pretense of protecting slavery. He must, however, protect and romanticize his futile effort to avoid losing his pride. Because of the intervention of northerners, the southern whites do not feel an obligation to attempt living harmoniously with the Negro. Faulkner implies that the white people of the South have put pride and self-esteem above love and concern for their fellow man. This is part of their moral degradation and shame and part of the reason why the South has not become the best place on Earth to live.

Faulkner portrays the hatred of southern whites toward those whites who uphold the Negro's rights with the episode of the carpetbaggers being killed by John Sartoris, the father of young Bayard Sartoris. One day in 1872 two northerners attempt bringing some Negroes into a Jefferson store to vote. John stands in the doorway of the store, the carpetbaggers turn around and walk off, and John fires a gun over their heads. Sartoris reloads his gun and goes to the house where the carpetbaggers reside. He politely asks Mrs. Winterbottom, the owner of the house, if he may see her two boarders, marches upstairs to their room, and shoots them. Straightening his clothing, John walks back downstairs, tips his hat to Mrs. Winterbottom, and apologizes for musing up her guest room and

exterminating "vermin" on her premises. Sartoris offers to pay for having the room cleaned and tips his hat to the men who are waiting outside when he leaves.⁹

Here Faulkner implies that the southern Caucasian's attitudes will make it difficult for the nation to bind the moral and spiritual wounds incurred during and after the Civil War. It will also prohibit the South from reconstructing itself from Civil War devastation. Faulkner appears to feel that the South might be restored with the cooperation of its inhabitants in rebuilding its moral character and a better social structure. If this is not accomplished, the South will continue to decline. The southerner violently repels the Negro, while none of his fellows attempt to stop his violence. I contend that, because they are immoral, apathy and violence must be abolished before the South will prosper again. Southerners should learn more self-respect and more respect for their fellow man and for the South if they are to heighten their sense of responsibility. Faulkner seems to realize that only a complete reversal of attitude will save the South from further ruin and will help to create a virtuous society.

In Light in August (1932) Faulkner becomes slightly more explicit in his views of the South's dissolution. Here we see a specific example of the moral precepts which Faulkner expounds in Sartoris. Joe Christmas becomes alienated from society and undertakes a life-long search for his true identity. The attainment of the millennium for Christmas would apparently consist of his learning who he really is. He is orphaned as a baby and, therefore, never knows his parents. Joe's grandfather leaves him in an orphanage, watches over his

⁹Ibid., pp. 235-236.

grandson, but never lets the boy know who he is: "So old Doc Hines he watched and he waited. From God's own boiler room he watched them children, and the devil's walking seed unbeknownst among them, polluting the earth with the working of that word on him."¹⁰ Christmas cannot establish the fact that he is a human being, who is loved, who knows his origin, and who has goals in life. Joe does not even know his name but is given a "mocking label"¹¹ by a dietitian and a young doctor at the orphanage where he is left on Christmas Eve. His is worse than a real name, for it signifies not only that he has no background, but also that he is regarded as a "tabula rasa", a blank sheet of paper on which anyone can write out a believable identity for him. Joe Christmas is taunted at a very tender age with the fact that he is a Negro: "Why don't you play with them other children like you used to?" and he didn't say nothing and old Doc Hines said, 'Is it because they call you nigger?'¹² Even the children at the orphanage treat him as someone to ridicule. They thus try to establish an unwanted identity for Joe. Joseph Gold contends that the fact that Christmas has "Negro blood" represents the divided society in which he lives, a society which will not discard its senseless bigotry and recognize its common humanity.¹³

In his book William Faulkner: A Study in Humanism from Metaphor to Discourse Gold says, "Joe Christmas, a victim of society, is also an

¹⁰William Faulkner, Light in August (New York: Random House, 1959), p. 335.

¹¹Alfred Kazin, "The Stillness of Light in August," in William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1960), p. 248.

¹²Light in August, p. 335.

¹³Joseph Gold, William Faulkner: A Study in Humanism from Metaphor to Discourse (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), p. 42.

image of society itself."¹⁴ He is restless, immoral, confused, and disillusioned, wandering for fifteen years trying to find himself, never staying in one place for any length of time. Faulkner refers to this phase of Joe's life as "the street which was to run for fifteen years."¹⁵ The author depicts Christmas' depravity in this manner: "From that night the thousand streets ran as one street, with imperceptible corners and changes of scene, broken by intervals of begged and stolen rides, on trains and trucks, and on country wagons with he at twenty and twenty five and thirty sitting on the seat with his still, hard face and clothes (even when soiled and worn) of a city man and the driver of the wagon not knowing who or what the passenger was and not daring to ask."¹⁶ Joe travels from Mississippi to Oklahoma, Missouri, Mexico, Chicago, Detroit, and back to Mississippi. His first opportunity to establish his identity comes when he is adopted by the McEacherns. Here he rejects religion and the love of Mrs. McEachern, the only mother he has ever known, as a means of finding himself. Mr. McEachern tries to convince the boy that religion is the way for him to know himself. Christmas fails to find the love and acceptance which he craves, for the man who preaches the religion of love does not truly practice it. McEachern, rather than being patient with the boy, tries to brow-beat Joe into accepting an abstraction which he cannot understand.

Christmas then establishes an immoral relationship with Bobbie Allen, a waitress-prostitute at a restaurant near McEachern's home. Joe falls in love with Bobbie, strikes McEachern when he tries to prohibit their relationship, and is greatly disillusioned as time

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Light in August, p.195.

¹⁶ Ibid.

passes. He ultimately seeks his identity in an illicit relationship with Joanna Burden, with whom he lives for several years and who "gets religion" and renounces their relationship, leaving Joe disillusioned again. Faulkner implies that immorality, confusion, and disillusionment are characteristics of the southern society which he depicts in Light in August. They are also components of the microcosm which Joe Christmas symbolizes. His difficulties and the actions resulting from them may represent, in miniature, the tragedy of life in the South. Faulkner seems to use Joe's life as one example of the meaningless existences of most southerners. Christmas lives in a microcosm which, Faulkner implies, is immoral, irreligious, and insignificant.

In his article "The Stillness of Light in August" Kazin claims that Joe Christmas is caught not between virtue and sin but between two virtues. He has been proud of and sought the rejection and fear which have confronted him. Pushed too far, Joe goes too far, and, unable to reconcile opposing responsibilities, commits the brutal murder of Joanna Burden. Christmas ultimately accepts the responsibility for the freedom of choice he exercises and pays the price of his freedom. Kazin contends that "...he will not practice a mere lethargic passivity, and wait for the men to come and shoot him. He actively seeks his human reconciliation..."¹⁷ Joe Christmas stops running from the men who are chasing him to impose the punishment decreed by human justice for the murder of Joanna Burden. Christmas quits attempting to escape the death which must inevitably come to him. He finally realizes that allowing the men to enforce the law will be his last chance for being recognized as a real man. Joe's problem, according to Kazin, is how to reenter humanity. This is difficult because he has been isolated for too many years. Joe

¹⁷ Kazin, p. 272.

attempts the reconciliation by reaccepting the limitations of time, one of the most human and communal inventions.¹⁸ Christmas has held on to his life until the most significant moment comes to relinquish it.¹⁹ Joe apparently wants to die in dignity and pride and not like an animal. He, therefore, quits trying to escape his destiny. Christmas seems to fulfill his wish, for of his death Faulkner says, "It his blood seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever."²⁰ Joe Christmas has ultimately achieved an identity in the hearts of men, but, Faulkner implies, the South, because its atmosphere lends itself to such treatment of its residents, is still imperfect.

The author's more explicit expression of the South's crucial problems in Light in August is again shown in his depiction of Reverend Gail Hightower. Christmas and Hightower are brothers of circumstance, for Hightower is also the victim of the bigotry, injustice, and insensitivity of the Jefferson citizenry. The residents feel that the Presbyterian minister is to blame for his wife's untimely death. The people contend: "...if Hightower had just been a more dependable kind of man, the kind of man a minister should be instead of being born about thirty years after the only day he seemed to have ever lived in — that day when his grandfather was shot from the galloping horse — she would have been all right too."²¹ The Jeffersonians attempt to place the ultimate cause of Mrs. Hightower's death on an external rather than on an internal force. They contend

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 274.

²⁰ Light in August, p. 407.

²¹ Ibid., p. 53.

that Reverend Hightower's inadequacy as a husband forces his wife to undertake illicit relationships with men in Memphis and ultimately compels her to commit suicide. Faulkner implies that the citizens of Jefferson fail to comprehend that the existence of a moral flaw deep within Mrs. Hightower's soul induces her downfall and demise. What should be considered a secondary cause is termed a primary cause.

The citizens cannot prove that Hightower's supposed sexual inadequacy is the cause of Reverend Hightower's wife's leaving him. His inadequacy as a lover has long been suspected by them and the tragedy seems to confirm their belief. However, the Jeffersonians may be entirely wrong. They refuse to attend Hightower's church and listen to his sermons. The minister is evidently stricken deeply, feels that his congregation is missing the point of his sermons, and begins talking about his grandfather's exploits in the Civil War. Faulkner says, "...he tried to tell them on the street about the galloping horses, it in turn would get all mixed up with absolution and choirs of martial seraphim, until it was natural that the old men and women should believe that what he preached in God's own house on God's own day verged on actual sacrilege."²² Hightower, therefore, withdraws from life and wastes his potential for the ministry. Faulkner suggests that a virtuous man cannot flourish in the malevolent South.

Faulkner continues his depiction of the South's moral and social ruin by portraying the career of Thomas Sutpen in Absalom, Absalom! (1936). The author is being slightly more explicit than he is in Light in August by briefly depicting the lives of several people. Here we

²² Ibid., p. 55.

learn a few more of his ideas concerning the South's downfall. Sutpen's life holds a fascination for Quentin Compson, the modern man in search of a moral tradition, because it provides a key to an understanding of a whole society and its foundations. Sutpen, like Flem Snopes in The Town, becomes accepted by society:

...he was accepted; he obviously had too much money now to be rejected or even seriously annoyed any more. He accomplished this -- got his plantation to running smoothly (he had an overseer now; it was the son of the same sheriff who had arrested him at his bride-to-be's gate on the day of the betrothal) within ten years of the wedding, and now he acted his role too -- a role of arrogant ease and leisure which, as the leisure and ease put flesh on him, became a little pompous.²³

He has measured up to the demands of his peers, and, ironically, they are forced to recognize and acknowledge their own parody. I believe that Sutpen's rise in the plantation system involves the total absence of morality, materialism, and a search for social dominance. Sutpen amorally pursues his design. However, these faults are not original in Sutpen, for they are part of his mimicry of his society:

Yes, mad, yet not so mad. Because there is a practicality to viciousness; the thief, the liar, the murderer even, has faster rules than virtue ever has; why not madness too? If he was mad, it was only his compelling dream which was insane and not his methods.²⁴

Sutpen's dream, I contend, is the dream of many of his contemporaries. They, too, evidently want to build dynasties from southern plantations and they seem as willing as Sutpen to act amorally to achieve that end. I feel that most southerners apparently wish to own a plantation with a large mansion standing in the center of it. In my opinion, if they had not envied Sutpen, they would not have been interested in the progress of Sutpen's Hundred. These men would have tended to their own business instead of frequently watching the construction of Sutpen's abode.

²³William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (New York: Random House, 1964) p. 72.

²⁴Ibid., p. 166.

Faulkner suggests that Charles Bon and Henry Sutpen must look to their father for the cause of their problems and for guidance. Henry or Charles may say, "All right. I am trying to make myself into what I think he [Sutpen] wants me to be; he can do anything he wants to with me; he has only to tell me what to do and I will do it; even though what he asked me to do looked to me like dishonor, I would still do it."²⁵ They look to their father for moral leadership and want to fulfill his highest expectations of them. I feel that Henry and Charles mistakenly believe that Sutpen can provide the type of guidance which one expects from a responsible parent. They fail to realize that Sutpen has never really been a father to them, especially to Bon, whose kinship to him Sutpen denies. Sutpen, Faulkner suggests, has never lived his life according to moral principles and cannot be expected to encourage morality in his sons. Faulkner implies that Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon assume their father's amorality because they have not been taught morality. If Sutpen had told them to do the right thing, they would have done it. However, Henry and Charles are not told to behave properly and follow their father's poor example of conduct. It is as Quentin says of himself and Shreve, "Yes. Maybe we are both father."²⁶ Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon could very well say this of themselves. I believe that such people cannot be expected to make the South an ideal place in which to live.

Faulkner contends that Sutpen's downfall does not lie in madness but in his design itself. The plan is doomed from inception because it is amoral. Faulkner comments:

...If he was mad, it was only his compelling dream which was insane and not his methods: it was no madman who bargained and cajoled hard

²⁵ Ibid., p. 330.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 261.

manual labor out of men like Jones; it was no madman who kept clear of the sheets and hoods and night-galloping horses with which men who were once his acquaintances even if not his friends discharged the canker suppuration of defeat....²⁷

I suggest that the evil plan of such a demented man can never fully succeed because it is unnatural for it to do so. Such a procedure may be somewhat effective but will never completely prevail. Something better will appear to end its predominance, for nothing in this world is perfect, and Faulkner's plan is full of flaws. Revealed in the form of the book, this is the primary meaning of Absalom, Absalom! According to Joseph Gold, the need to re-examine the past is proof of Sutpen's and southern history's failure. Sutpen is amoral rather than immoral. The amoral person can perpetrate evil because he has no conscience. The horror of Sutpen lies not in his being a "demon" but in his total amorality and lack of humanity. He is the epitome of all greedy men who use human beings as means rather than as ends.²⁸ This is exemplified in Sutpen's relationship with his first wife, Eulalia Bon, whom he used to bear him a son and whom Sutpen discarded when he discovered she had Negro blood, and with Wash Jones, whom Sutpen used to keep Sutpen's Hundred going, and with Milly Jones, whom Sutpen wanted to bear him a son. These relationships reveal Sutpen's animalistic treatment of Negroes and convey his hatred of that race.

Judith Sutpen finds herself hopelessly confused about the meaning of life, just as Quentin is confused about his purpose in life. None of the young people in the novel possesses any real morality, any guidance, or any durable belief with which to combat adversity. As Judith says:

²⁷ Ibid., p. 166.

²⁸ Gold, p. 34.

You get born and you try this and don't know why only you keep on trying it and you are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs and the others all trying and they don't know why either except that the strings are all in one another's way like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug; and it can't matter, you know that, or the ones that set up the loom would have arranged things a little better, and yet it must matter because you keep on trying or having to keep on trying.²⁹

Everyone in Sutpen's world is trying to weave his own pattern on the loom, rather than working together to make the South a glorious place to live.

Gold contends that the "loom" metaphor is a reference to the presence of disharmony, evil, and chaos. Judith's world has been one of opposition and exploitation. No one has ever thought of her, Henry, or Ellen for their own sakes. Gold suggests that harmony can only be achieved by a common respect for humanity. Faulkner portrays the evil which Sutpen creates. He forces Henry to kill his brother and uses the Coldfields, destroying their unity. Judith is denied marriage and a family. Sutpen forces Wash Jones to kill his cherished granddaughter and great granddaughter. Sutpen is an integral part of a way of life, for his history is the key to Quentin's southern heritage. The placing of Sutpen in the comprehensible context of humanity and history conveys Faulkner's faith in man, for there are only a few people like Sutpen.³⁰ They are too much a part of the South which Faulkner indicates needs improvement.

Faulkner's view of the South's decline is further amplified in The Unvanquished (1938). Here the author tends to be more explicit than he is in Absalom, Absalom!, for Faulkner's ideas become still clearer, as he applies them generally and specifically. Faulkner describes the relationship between the southern whites and Negroes during and shortly

²⁹Absalom, Absalom!, p.127.

³⁰Gold, pp.35-36.

after the Civil War. We find Loosh, one of the Sartoris' servants, obsessed with the idea that the Civil War will completely and irrevocably free the Negro. He reveals, therefore, the location of the Sartoris silver to Union soldiers and flees with them. Loosh's viewpoint is opposed by that of Louvinia, his mother, who screams: "You black fool! Do you think there's enough Yankees in the world to whip the white folks?"³¹ This statement provides some interesting food for thought about Faulkner's theories concerning the decline of the South.

Louvinia seems to echo Faulkner's contention that the Negro will not be freed solely through the military efforts of outsiders.³² Faulkner has voiced this belief in Go Down, Moses, The Sound and the Fury, and The Reivers, but it is conveyed more firmly and clearly in The Unvanquished. Louvinia's statement implies that it will take much peaceful effort on the part of both southern Negroes and whites to correct the Negro's plight. It firmly asserts Faulkner's proposal that the people of the South must solve their own problems, without northern interference. Inner decadence must be obliterated from within. To solve a problem one must find its source and destroy it. Faulkner appears to feel that the basis of the South's decay lies within the structure of southern society, in which the Negro is deemed to be little better than an animal who is not to be given many human rights. The author apparently believes that southern whites must realize that Negroes are humans and must be treated accordingly. Only then will the South become a locale where virtue abounds.

Later in The Unvanquished Faulkner, in speaking of the South, gives a more explicit viewpoint by discussing the universal theme of

³¹William Faulkner, The Unvanquished (The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1959), p. 27.

³²Ibid.

environment. Of southern residents, he says, "They believed that land did not belong to people but that people belonged to land and that the earth would permit them to live on and out of it and use it only so long as they behaved and that if they did not behave right, it would shake them off just like a dog getting rid of fleas."³³ Here Faulkner expresses his belief that man is a product of his environment because it provides his sustenance. The relationship of the land to its inhabitants is analogous to that of the parent to his child. Both give life to their products, nurture them through good and bad times to maturity, and ask very little of them in return for such magnanimity. However, both the parents and the "fatherland" ask that their "children" be respectful and virtuous in return for the life which they have given them. If the children do not "behave right," the "parent" will turn against them and will withdraw support. Faulkner's "parents" ask good in return for good. If the "offspring" are rebellious, they will shake them off like a dog getting rid of fleas. Faulkner seems to contend that this is frequently the case in reality. Parents sometimes disinherit their children for highly improper conduct.

The relationship of the Negro and the southern white is also similar to those of the land to its inhabitants and of a dog to fleas. The Negro is in the position of the dog and the white is in the position of the flea. The Negro spends many hard years in service to his white master, receives little in return for his labor, endures more than seems humanly possible, and is finally freed. While some Negroes remain with their master, many feel no obligation to continue supporting their ungrateful parasites. The Negroes, therefore, "would shake them off just like a dog getting rid of fleas."³⁴ Faulkner contends that

³³ Ibid., p. 45.

³⁴ Ibid.

the South can be reconstructed with the cooperation of both races and not with blacks trying to get rid of whites or vice versa. To prove his point, he cites the example of young Bayard Sartoris' uncles, Buck and Buddy, who "...had persuaded the white men to pool their little patches of poor hill land along with the niggers and the McCaslin plantation, promising them in return nobody knew exactly what, except that their women and children did have shoes, which not all of them had had before, and a lot of them even went to school."³⁵ This cooperation, Faulkner implies, becomes impossible with the adamant attitudes on both sides. The whites do not "behave right" and the resulting chaos and disharmony are inevitable.

In The Unvanquished Faulkner very aptly points out that part of this disharmony involves the Negro's education being behind that of the white man. Here we find young Bayard, Ringo, and Granny are heading toward Hawkhurst, Bayard's uncle's estate. Bayard has told Ringo that there are a railroad and train at Hawkhurst. Ringo has never seen either one of these objects and cannot conceive how something so powerful can be constructed by man. To him they are something terrible and wonderful. The railroad and the locomotive are only two examples of the scientific advancements of which the Negro will remain unaware. It is as young Ringo, referring to seeing Hawkhurst, Bayard's Uncle Dennison's estate, says, "Seem like I been waiting on hit all my life. I reckon you'll tell me next the Yankees done moved hit too."³⁶ There are many similar sights which leave him awe-stricken. All this is due to the neglect of the southern Negro's education. During the period which Faulkner depicts, the average Negro does not even know

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., p. 71.

how to read or write, let alone comprehend the technological advances which have been made. Faulkner implies that the Negro is supposed to know only how to plant and pick cotton, how to raise a family, and, occasionally, how to read and write. The Negro is to be kept in ignorance because he is inferior to the white man and because he must not know what he is missing. The Negro's illiteracy will also dispel any slave insurrection. Faulkner appears to believe that the southerner does not realize the potential he is wasting by not utilizing the abilities of the Negro to help the South progress from stagnation and immobility. Faulkner predicts that the Negro, in striving for intellectual equality with the white man, will long be "looking for something which he would have to find in order to catch up"³⁷ and "which he would have to recognize only through hearsay when he saw it: 'Where is it? Where?'"³⁸ Faulkner suggests that the Negro's illiteracy is a great moral wrong, for it allows one race an unfair advantage in trying to better itself. Here Faulkner continues his more explicit depiction of his ideas by applying them to both a particular life and life in general. This helps to make his viewpoint more clear.

Later in The Unvanquished Faulkner implies that the South is like a "barking dog," which has not been completely quieted by its superior and which continues to bother the Negro and many northern whites. The author seems to fear that this "dog" will forget its punishment and cause trouble again — something that causes great emotional excitement and unrest within Faulkner. He does not appear to understand how someone may sleep at such a time. Faulkner evidently feels that southern ante-bellum life was glorious and worthwhile.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

One lives like his ancestors because the South was founded on the proud and honorable tradition of gentlemen. Faulkner may be intimating that the South's prosperity in the future depends upon its inhabitants' carrying on the honor and glory of the South and not by denying it.³⁹ He seems to believe that the southerner's life should be built upon all the goodness of his heritage, without which the South cannot construct an honorable and dignified society because it will have broken off most of its ties with virtue and morality. It seems that, in Faulkner's viewpoint, a southern society in which morality abounds is quite a way from becoming a reality.

In The Unvanquished Faulkner makes an interesting statement concerning the religion of southern whites and Negroes. Young Bayard speaks of the size of the white and Negro congregations when he, Granny, and Ringo attend church one Sunday during the Civil War. Both groups are small and Bayard reminisces about when the congregation was much larger. The young man also recalls that the Negroes used to be ten times more numerous than the whites.⁴⁰ Faulkner depicts the decline of organized religion which takes place during the war. Many people lose partial or total faith in God. They become disillusioned with a Higher Power because of the atrocities which they witness during the war, for fighting against one's countrymen and seeing death is demoralizing. Those who undergo it feel that life has become sordid, meaningless, and spiritless.

The southerners feel that their cause is sacred and, when they are defeated, they feel that God has abandoned them. It is almost impossible to conceive of God's permitting the war to end as it did. The people of the South seem no longer to be able to worship a deity who has

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 81-82.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 106.

deserted them in their hour of need. Not only does God favor the black man, whose cause the white man considers to be "wrong", but God also favors what the Caucasian believes is the wrong race. Faulkner appears to believe that southerners can only believe in a God who blesses them and no one else. They believe in a white man's God and not in a God for all. The author implies that when the southerners realize that God does not have their human prejudices, they abandon Him.⁴¹

The Negroes are lost, alone, and need God's sustenance very badly, but He seems to have forsaken them. The colored people, Faulkner hints, can no longer worship a deity who ignores them when they truly need him. They apparently cannot believe in a God who does not bless them in the only way they want to be blessed — by a physical and spiritual victory over oppression. The Negroes seem to believe that God is the white man's God and not the black man's deity. Since the Negro is traditionally considered to be an emotional and religious being, he is affected by this diminished religious faith, and feels physically and spiritually defeated. However, in having gained his freedom, the Negro has attained a partial physical victory. As the author portrays them, the colored people have not completely lost their faith in God and, therefore, not all is lost. Hope remains, Faulkner says, for "...victory without God is mockery and delusion, but that defeat with God is not defeat."⁴²

Later in The Unvanquished Faulkner discusses the post-Civil War atrocities which occur at the hands of the vigilantes and at the expense of the Negro. These southern watchmen are self-authorized to murder or mutilate Negroes and to burn their homes and crops, for they have no

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., pp.106-107.

temporal or divine authority to destroy their fellow man or his property. The self-appointed guardians apparently believe that the Negroes have destroyed the order which existed prior to the Civil War and the vigilantes are, therefore, going to annihilate them.⁴³ Faulkner intimates that, in attempting to create order out of chaos, they have produced more disorder. Faulkner is portraying the atmosphere of violence which permeated the South. He seems to contend that the new order which is needed may best be created by obeying the laws of God and man and not by making one's own laws. Thus, a solid and virtuous order may help reconstruct the South. This is, the author seems to believe, the best path to redemption for Faulkner's beloved region, for the immorality which permeates the South has become violence.

Faulkner subsequently proposes a solution to the South's dilemma. John Sartoris utters the words, but one feels that Faulkner might say, "I'm for my land. If every man of you would rehabilitate his own land, the country will take care of itself."⁴⁴ Faulkner loves the South and wants it to get back on its feet as soon as possible. He seems to believe that the way to do this is for everyone to tend only to his own business. Faulkner implies that each individual should maintain high morality before he attempts to correct others' immorality. The effects of the Civil War upon the southern population have been devastating and every person has enough to do to care for himself without trying to help all his fellow southerners. Faulkner may have in mind the advice, "The Lord helps those who help themselves." This precept would certainly apply to the highly moral society which the author seems to believe the South can become. Faulkner has seen such dwellings as Hawkhurst, which he depicts in The Unvanquished. It is a typical

⁴³Ibid., p.117.

⁴⁴Ibid., p.169.

southern estate which flourishes and is the scene of much happiness. Religion, morality, and gentility are practiced in such a home, as they are in many abodes in the ante-bellum South. The residents are healthy, affluent, and appreciative of the fine arts. The Civil War changes all this, for the prosperity is gone, as are the men of many families. However, Faulkner apparently feels that, with the cooperation of all the southerners who remain, their domain can be restored and life can attain a higher level than that at which it stood before the Civil War. If southerners utilize the lessons which they have learned during that conflict, existence may reach a new height of virtuousness.

Faulkner's contention that the South's decadence is moral and spiritual greatly concerned him when he wrote Intruder in the Dust in 1948. Here Faulkner gives his explicit statement concerning all aspects of the South's problem. One feels that the problem has solidified in Faulkner's mind in the ten years which have passed since he wrote The Unvanquished. In the earlier book Faulkner deals with the situation more generally but in the latter book he discusses it more specifically. The plot of Intruder in the Dust revolves around the struggle of Charles Mallison, a twelve year old boy, and Miss Eunice Habersham, a seventy year old woman, to prove that Lucas Beauchamp, a proud Negro whose grandfather is white, is innocent of the murder of a white man.⁴⁵ The fact that only the very young and the very old are willing to help a downtrodden Negro shows that the majority of southerners do not aid their black brothers. Most southern residents are not as young as Chick or as old as Miss Habersham, both of whom are not reacting as most southerners do. The majority of them allow a Negro to be unjustly accused of a murder. The southerners even permit a Negro

⁴⁵William Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust (New York: The Modern Library, 1948), p. 18.

to be lynched for it without a trial, standing by and watching an innocent man being murdered. The southerners appear to be unconcerned about justice when it involves a Negro, an inferior being who does not deserve equality before the law. Lucas Beauchamp is another nuisance to eradicate. The southerners apparently fail to realize that they must maintain law and order to restore their region. Otherwise the South may be a worse place to live than it was before the Civil War.

Chick Mallison, an atypical southerner, knows that he owes his life to Lucas Beauchamp, for the Negro saves the boy from drowning in a pond one winter day. Lucas pulls Chick out of the water, takes the boy to his home, dries him and his clothes, feeds him, and probably prevents him from having pneumonia. Chick realizes that Lucas does not have to do these things, for he is a white boy to whom the Negro owes nothing. Lucas could have taken out his hatred of the white race on the boy, but he chooses to treat Chick as a human being.⁴⁶ The Negro has probably never been treated as such, but he is going to treat Chick with the concern and dignity with which men should treat one another. Lucas practices a moral principle which his actions imply he would like to see applied to himself and to his race. The Negro tries to teach the white man morality by example, but the latter does not learn the lesson. The black man seems to believe in practicing the Golden Rule, but the typical southern white man apparently does not. Faulkner suggests that Chick believes in the Golden Rule and does the same thing for Lucas that the Negro does for him. The boy saves the life of a fellow human being. Faulkner evidently contends that the South can learn a great lesson from such citizens, for the innocent and the wise are willing to accept and work with the Negro for the good of the South.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 42.

Faulkner implies that only the Negro can release the white man from the moral obligations of helping the black man recover from the Civil War. Chick Mallison goes to the jail to see if there is anything he can do for Lucas, who informs the boy that he wants to have Chick's lawyer-uncle, Gavin Stevens, defend him. The boy knows that his uncle can do so and feels that he has repaid Lucas for saving his life. Chick later learns that he must do still more to repay his debt. The boy knows that he must take more drastic action to fulfill his moral obligation. It is not enough that Chick secure a competent lawyer to save Lucas' life. He must risk his life to secure justice for the Negro.⁴⁷ Chick must exhibit bravery by stopping a mob from lynching Lucas. He must be willing to die so that a fellow human being will not perish unjustly. Here one feels that Faulkner has in mind the Biblical passage which tells that the greatest love which man can have is to be willing to forfeit his life for a friend. Young Mallison acts like a Christian in practicing still another Biblical principle — that of being willing to die so that another may live. Faulkner suggests that the South needs many more people like Chick if it is to regain its former pride and dignity, without which its residents cannot progress much.

After depicting the ideal southern gentleman, Faulkner specifically describes his opposite, the type of man who causes the downfall of the South. This man is under forty, unmarried, homeless, and a member of the middle class. The occupations of such a person are varied and he may be unemployed. He owns a car and spends money of unknown origin in New Orleans or Memphis brothels. Such men permeate the South, never actually organizing or leading mobs, but always willing to be a part of

⁴⁷ Ibid.

their large core. This type of individual composes a large segment of the southern population. He is a ubiquitous vagabond who is a relatively free man, with few responsibilities. The wandering southerner does not have to worry about a home or family. He is only concerned with himself. The itinerant wants only to earn enough money to live as he wants to live, which is not ideally. He is erratic, prejudiced, and perverted.⁴⁸ The southern degenerate believes that the free Negro will steal his jobs and he is, therefore ready to squelch him by mob action. He forgets that he would be unable to live his chosen way of life if the Negro does not handle his white compatriot's responsibilities. The man who helps cause the South's dissolution apparently understands love only in the physical sense of the word and cannot really like a person of another color. He is a shallow man, who does not seem to care whether or not the South is reconstructed. Such a man prefers to subsist in his immoral rut and seemingly does not realize that improving the South is a motivation for climbing out of it.

In saving Lucas Beauchamp's life, Chick Mallison becomes a man. The transition is rapid and almost unnoticed by Chick, who is so busy with the physical aspects of saving Lucas that he nearly does not perceive the spiritual metamorphosis within him. Chick has assumed a great responsibility in supporting a man's life.⁴⁹ Chick's quick actions and bravery can save Lucas. He will indeed need great courage, for Chick faces the punishment of an angry mob. By helping a Negro and violating a grave, Chick has committed two of what the southerners consider major crimes. He may even be killed if the mob catches him. Chick, however, appears to know that he is doing the right thing and never falters. He realizes what he must do to accomplish it. The young man must overcome

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 43.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 96-97.

the great physical obstacles of the nocturnal journey and of lifting the casket from the grave. Faulkner seemingly believes that this would prevent men of greater physical stature from helping Lucas, but Chick subdues his fears and proceeds. Young Mallison perseveres, endures, and triumphs over the forces of evil. He may physically be only twelve years old, but, the author implies, he is spiritually and morally a man. Faulkner believes that the South needs many more such moral men to help her transcend the evil within her soul.

Chick's situation portrays a lack of human identity on the part of many young southerners. Chick Mallison sees people around him whose skin is the same color as his and who speak the same language as he does. Some of them even bear the same name as he does, but he apparently does not feel that they are his kin. Communication between them has broken down and will soon be destroyed completely. Chick seems to want to tell them that their attitude toward and treatment of Negroes is wrong. Young Mallison apparently also wishes to convince them that they are instilling immorality in their children.⁵⁰ Faulkner intimates that Chick is one of the few southern youngsters who have been taught morality and the young man cannot seem to understand why anyone would teach his children to despise his fellow man. Chick seemingly believes that everyone should learn to love his brothers. I feel that he does not understand his elders and his elders do not understand him. They cannot, therefore, reciprocally communicate how they feel and nothing worthwhile can be accomplished with a lack of communication. Therefore, the South will not very soon or very easily restore itself. Faulkner portrays how young southerners try to rebuild the pride and dignity of the South, but their elders tear it down. Unfortunately, the youngsters are outnumbered and have a

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 152-153.

difficult task in trying to reconstruct their region. Faulkner intimates that they need the help of the elder southerners in order to succeed, for they cannot do it alone. It takes the cooperation of both groups to create a durable moral atmosphere.

The author suggests that Chick feels that another reason the South resists the North is that, since the Yankees have tried to free the Negro and have failed, the southerners themselves must free the black man. Faulkner intimates that if the northerners cause the complete freedom of the black man, it will seem forced, insincere, and will be more physical than spiritual or moral. Unless the southern whites free him, the Negro will feel that his liberation is a nominal one, is incomplete, and may not be permanent. Faulkner apparently hopes that the northerners' allowing the southerners to liberate the colored people will prevent further violent mob action.⁵¹ I believe that the shame will still be there, but that is what southerners must endure for what they did to the Negro. Eventually the Negro will have the same rights as the white man. This will take time, effort, and patience and will not happen immediately. The black man appears to believe that it can be accomplished sooner than it is humanly possible for it to happen. The northerner seemingly has forgotten that the strong emotions which this situation raises are hard to eradicate. Faulkner intimates that it is a change which must take place from within rather than from without.

Faulkner attributes the Negro's ability to endure mental and physical torture to his patience, vision, and a love of the simple things of life. All he wants is "a little of music (his own), a hearth, not his child but any child, a God a heaven which a man may avail himself a little of at any time without having to wait to die, a little earth for his own sweat

⁵¹Ibid., p.154-155.

to fall on among his own green shoots and plants."⁵² The Negro apparently has a love of beauty, a love of people, and a love of God. Faulkner implies that these are the moral attributes which enable a man to withstand the most tremendous pressures which life can place upon him. They build the strong character which the Negro needs to survive anywhere. The important word here is, I believe, "love", the most durable of emotions and the one which accomplishes the most good. Faulkner suggests that southerners are filled with hatred toward the Negroes and Yankees and have inculcated it in their children. The South's present is dismal and its future does not look any brighter, unless its young people can be taught to love their neighbors. The southern whites, Faulkner seems to believe, must acquire patience, vision, and a love of simple things and be able to live peacefully with their colored brethren.

We have seen the chronological progression of Faulkner's thought from the implicit to the explicit between 1929 and 1948. The movement begins with Sartoris, where Faulkner contends that the southern white's failure to nourish either the attitude that the Negro deserves his freedom, or the contention that he does not merit liberation, initiates the dissolution of the South. Here Faulkner also intimates that some people feel that the Civil War was purposeful and that others believe it was purposeless. White southerners, Faulkner implies, have put pride above concern for their fellow man. Faulkner also apparently believes that the southern white's attitudes will make southern reconstruction difficult. In Light in August (1932) the reader discerns all of those concepts and some others. One of these involves the use of Joe Christmas and Gail Hightower as symbols of the meaningless lives of many southerners. Faulkner may believe that a good man cannot flourish in the evil of southern society.

⁵² Ibid., p.156.

In Absalom, Absalom! (1936) Faulkner presents us with most of his earlier views about the South's downfall in addition to some new ones. Through the person of Thomas Sutpen, Faulkner conveys a new slant on the type of man who helps the South's dissolution. This is a man who is amoral, materialistic, and searching for social dominance. He not only leads a meaningless life but also may cause the lives of those in his family to be insignificant. In The Unvanquished (1938) Faulkner introduces the additional ideas that the southerners must solve their own problems, without northern interference, that man is a product of his environment, and that the Negro's education should equal that of the white man. Here the author also expresses his apparent beliefs that most southerners are seemingly religiously disillusioned, and that the solution to the South's dilemma lies in everyone minding his own business. Because most of the ideas expressed in the four earlier books are found in Intruder in the Dust (1948), I propose that this book is the most explicit of those works which I have considered in this paper. Of the five, Intruder in the Dust is the book which contains Faulkner's clearest over-all appraisal of the South's moral and social dissolution.

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