

William Faulkner and Contemporary Society



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ABSTRACT

William Faulkner is one of the best social scientist. He has a mastery over the representation of the contemporary society in his literature. He wants to paint the picture of present dehumanized society, so in order to give more clarity to his view point, he creates the imaginary primitive society, lived in a golden age, for comparison, but it is the present which is the focal point. As the bitter winter is compared with the memory of the bright gay summer, full of care and comfort and enjoyment, likewise the present Chaos is compared with the order of the golden past. And, as the ritual action assures the return of fertility of the earth, so the ritual actions can restore cosmos to the Chaos of the present. If we endure the normality of sufferings we will gain patience to forbear the hardships, so the reading of moral history is insisted upon.

While commenting upon the causes of hatred for Negro in the South, Faulkner himself says:-

There's a class of Whiteman that hates the Negro simply because he is afraid that the Negro will beat him at his own job, his own economic level, and he would feel the same towards anything that he believes would beat him at his economic level¹.

Thus, according to him, the exploitation of land and the Negro is an economic problem which has been given a different shape by the society, however, the author has taken the reflection of this problem i.e. hatred for Negro as a moral guilt. The order of the anticipated Golden Age is shattered in the Chaos of the civil war and the sufferings compounded by the reconstruction as certain laws and compulsions are imposed upon the Southern people, which have shattered the fabric of the Society. But the author feels that though South is suffering, still through patience he can transcend, as he is capable to do so and after solving his own moral problems, he should help other sections in the country to improve them. Charles H. Nilon says "the people from the South were aware of the evil in the Society which they formed. With evil they carried some virtues. With the advancement of the time, the South would remove those evils."²

Thus, it is an emotional and mythical reading of the history, unlike that account offered by Southern agrarians in their manifesto. The moral degeneration visualized, when compared with the assumed Cosmos of the golden era can be restored into order, when the scapegoat of industrialism (Industrial or mechanical spirit only) which has created the whole Chaos in the South and also formed the distinction between man and man, is scarified.

In almost all of his works, he has tried to paint, one or the other, immediate social problem of his country and given it a moral shape, so that the people of his country may try to wipe away all those problems which are the cause of chaos in the country and bring harmony. Brylowski W. comments that "Throughout Faulkner's work we find the attempt to deal with the immediacy of suffering, the desire to annual time and the pressing need to understand the cause of Chaos of

suffering. In Absalom, Absalom; this necessity of understanding the suffering of South, as it is embodied in the tale of Sutpen, provides the structural frame work"³.

Even in the end of the book Absalom, Absalom! we see that moral guilt is not wiped out in the gothic flames. Brylowski W. says that, "The house wants to play the final role in the cycle of the myth; the final and the ultimate Catastrophe, the conflagration that should mark an end to, Sutpen's world. Sutpen's idiot great grandson haunts the scene at the close and the moral guilt remains, not wiped out by the gothic flame."⁴

Jim Bond, the idiot is not seen but his voice is overhead from all sides. Thus, we may presume that there is not one Jim Bond, but he represents the whole class of idiots born in the South, who are alarm for the present generation to expiate their own moral guilt and follow a more humanized code of life, and if still the white people do not realize the real gravity of the truth and the Negroes or the downtrodden become conscious of the prevailing situations and lose patience, there would be a Chaos. The same Negro will keep a vindictive attitude for the white people and there would be confusion and disorder all around. Such as study cannot be called a pure history, but are certainly deals with the historical problems in its own way.

The father son myth is traced in his novels, right from Sartoris the first in the Yoknapatawpha series to A Fable, but it is successively developed from distinct to clear personification of God and Christ.

In Sartoris is Bayard, who represents a son, revolts against his father, however, he does not meet him in an open conflict. We find Bayard observed with an inherited sense of dooms. Irving Malin says that "In his desire to rebel against an unknown desire to rebel against an unknown cause and to destroy himself"⁵.

He realizes the inadequacy or the shortcomings of the code and thinks to rebel against that Code. Through this Oedipus-Complex the authorities to symbolize that the older generation maintains a rigid attitude towards the new generation. Of course, the rigidity of the older generation is caused due to certain existing social customs and religious beliefs, traditions and conventions. Thus, their compulsions show how they are forced by certain limitations of their own to believe in their particular way, while the new generation tries to overrule the older generation. It is the obligatory duty of the older generation to try to understand the changeling new values and try to adjust with them. The new generation looks toward the older generation to gain clarification for better understanding of life, but when they fail to get any clarification, they get frustrated and once frustrated they get abnormal inwardly and this abnormality transpires and reflects on their outward actions, which are generally, very abnormal. With the help of this pattern, he has compared the old values with the new values and shown the distinctive shortcomings of both of them.

In The Sound and the Fury, Mr. Compson, who is a link in between two generations, is not a heroic figure like John Sartoris, but leads life idly, reading Horace and Livy and writing elegies about his fellow town people, believed that life in the South is grotesque and the man who escapes from the life is fortunate; but his own escape is a folly for him. He gives the knowledge to his son in an ineffective way. Any knowledge passed to a man without explaining its value is sure to prove abortive, but he hopes that he, too, would leads the life in the pattern, he lived himself.

He is sure that his own lot is comparatively better than many, which is clears in the following lines:

It was grand-father's and when father gave it to me he said, Quentin, I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it's rather excruciatingly apt that you will use it to gain the reduction absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than to filled his or his father's⁶.

But Quentin's heart is rebellious. He wants to escape from the problem posed on the family's innocence. He wants to overrule the existing Presbyterian Conception of morality, but the father fails to either punish him or provide any alternative. Quentin is perplexed, because he cannot yield to his desire; still he wants to be punished. Mr. Compson says that incest is not evil, but he fails to give any satisfactory account of the existence of the old values. So at Howard Quentin does not think to return to his father, because he insists upon him to follow the old values, in which he himself believes that they have no substantial base to stand upon. Mr. Compson only says that:-

Father said, that's sad too, people cannot do anything dreadful. They cannot even remember tomorrow; what seems dreadful today.⁷

It clearly shows that Mr. Compson has no solution to the problem raised by Quentin, but simply believes that with the advance of the age he, too, like him would be more sober, worldly wise and would follow the path without ever caring to

which way it leads. Irving Malin says that "The son recognizes the fact that his father refuses to consider his personal doubts. The father is too intent upon his own compulsive behavior to take the time to look at problems which he believes do not pertain to his design."⁸

In *As I Lay Dying*, Addie Bundren is the domineering parent, so symbolically she plays the role of a father in the family. She fails to air the doubts of her intellectual son Darl, which creates a conflict in his mind. She simply tries to impose her rigid conduct upon her husband and children. She is sure that she can exercise her will upon them, even after her death, to bury her in Jefferson.

And that my revenge would be that he would never know I was taking revenge. And when Darl was born I asked Anse to promise to take me back to Jefferson when I died⁹.

She wants to perpetuate her design, which accepts the certainty of opposition, in opposition to the certainty of life. She says:-

My father said that reason for living is getting ready to stay dead¹⁰.

Irving Malin commenting upon the design of Addie says that, "Addie is only representative of design which neglects pity for pride, understanding for domination, life for death"¹¹.

She feels that if her family carries her corpse to Jefferson for burial, facing every torment in obedience to her desire, she would be getting satisfaction even in her death, so the corpse of Addie triumphed over the living Addie. Like Mr. Compson she gains satisfaction in exercising her power over her children who are immature and yet to gain a particular form.

Darl wants to understand the action, so he tries to delay the burial earlier in carrying Jewel away on another Cart load and then in setting fire to the barn. He thinks it is against God's will to carry the Corpse to Jefferson for burial; but in exacting a promise she is shirking her responsibility towards her children. He feels perplexed and also unsecured after her death and struggles for some stability in the world to stand upon, but he is doubtful about the chastity of his mother because of her partiality with Jewel. Addie never tries to air the doubts of Darl; in giving a solution to his problem, since she prefers domination over understanding, thwarting her own values over the children, which proves to be the cause of Darl's insanity.

In *Light in August*, McEachern, Percy Grimm and Doc Hines and Joanna Burden etc. all are the symbolic fathers of Joe Christmas. They all resemble Thomas Sutpen, the symbolic embodiment of evil forces of a class society, who in her blind devotion fails to understand the relationship of father and son.

Joe struggles to gain the identification which he fails to get. His crucifixion in the hands of Percy Grimm is symbolically our crucifixion. Whether McEachern is dead in the theatre or otherwise is all secondary. While Joe like McEachern wants to assume the air of righteousness, he confronts the father who fails to understand him. Though, he is his adopted father, still in his subconscious he believed that Joe is a nigger, all the while and this action of striking McEachern is a mere outburst of his inner feelings. Irving Malin commenting upon the relations of Joe and the Society says that "An entire society composed of many personal designs, forces the son to declare his integrity as one individual in the midst of hostility.... The continual moment of Christmas is important not as obsessive flight but in the search for new direction of love"¹².

Doc Hines is the grandfather of the child. He murders his father and forces his mother to die in labour pains; became a janitor of the boarding house in which the child lives, simply to tell dietitian and others not only to force him to leave the only home he has on this earth, but also inculcates in his mind that he is a nigger and ultimately, discloses at Mottstown and Jefferson, that he is a nigger, which is taken as an evidence, sufficient to crucify him without giving him adequate chance to defend himself. Thus, we find this religious fanatic, never tries to understand the feelings of his grandchild and during the formative period play an important role to develop him into a chaotic figure.

Percy Grimm, who is the representative of pharisaical society and symbolically the father of Joe, discovers his chaotic son Joe and punishes him for shattering the fabric of the society and violating the order of the society. It means that the father (society) fails to understand his son (Joe).

Joanna Burden is the defender of the rights of Negroes, but, in fact she believes in the class distinction herself; when we probe into her subconscious we learn that:-

In the close, breathing half dark, without walls, with her wild hair, each strand of which would seem to come alive like Octopus tentacles and her wild hands and he breathing; Negro! Negro! Negro! ¹³.

She forced him to accept that he is a nigger, which is not possible for Joe, because to accept one is to accept the existence of the other, and the acceptance would be the denial of his past.

'No, if I give in now; I will deny all the thirty years that I have lived to make me what I choose to be', He said. ¹⁴

Thus, he does not get the love from her, which he longs for, consequently, his hatred for the society is increased. He goes to the Church to curse the Calvinist Lord. This outburst is the culmination of the hatred for the Society, which gives him birth and makes his Satan, instead of giving love, which he needs to become a Law abiding Citizen.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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