

# Human Nature and Willam Faulkner ( I )

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## Introduction

Although there are many races of people in the world with different colored skin, manners and customs there is little difference in their human nature. The purpose of this paper is to analyse human nature through a study of William Faulkner's works. In particular an attempt is made to clarify understanding and sharpen appreciation of Faulkner's thought regarding human nature in relation to his Christian background, since American literature is greatly influenced by puritanical and orthodox christianity. The relationships existing among the symbols, images and allegories of his various works have been considered and it is noted that, Popeye in *Sanctuary*, Joe Christmas in *Light in August*, and Jason Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* are on a parallel to Christ.

William Faulkner's years of greatest literary achievement were from 1929–1942. *Sartoris*, his first book, was published in the spring of 1929. *The Sound and the Fury* was written before *Sartoris*, but wasn't published until six months later ; it describes the fall of the Compson family, and it was the first of Faulkner's novels to be widely discussed. The books that followed, in the Yoknapatawpha series are ; *As I Lay Dying* (1930), about the death and burial of Addie Burdren ; *Sanctuary* (1931), always the most popular of his novels ; *Light in August* (1932), in many ways the best ; *Absalom Absalom!* (1936) about Colonel Sutpen and his ambition to found a family ; *The Unvanquished* (1938), a book of interrelated stories about the Sartoris dynasty ; *The Wild Palms* (1939), half of which deals with a convict from back in the pine hills ; *The Hamlet* (1940), a novel about the Snopes clan ; and *Go Down, Moses* (1942), in which Faulkner's theme is the Negroes. There are also many Yoknapatawpha stories in *These Thirteen* (1931) and *Dr. Martino* (1934).

From this period his novel "Light in August" has been selected. It is believed to strike somewhere near the center of what Faulkner tried to do and did do.

## The Time Sequence in Faulkner's Novels

The different levels of consciousness are rendered by Faulkner's thought. Variations in style range from the dialect of actual speech to the intricate imagery and poetic rhythms of the unconscious.

In all of Faulkner's novels, the characters are confronted with a series of event for example in "As I Lay Dying" each of the Bundrens is affected by Addie's death. This is apparent in Whitefield's statement ; "When they told me she was dying, all that night I wrestled with Satan, and I emerged victorious. I woke to the enormity of my sin ; I saw the true light at last, and I fell on my knees and confessed to God and asked His guidance and received it."<sup>(1)</sup>

It is Addie, not as a mother or person but her hereditary which dominates and shapes their complex psychological reactions.

Their driving force is a result of this element. Her death is the source of their tension.

In contrast to life and death, is the soul and the body. Walt Whitman's poetry is suffused with the soul and body. Consider, for example, the passage on the prostitute in the "Song of Myself".

I bequeath myself to the dirt to  
grow from the grass I love  
If you want me again look for me  
under your boot-soles.<sup>(2)</sup>

He celebrated the body as well as the soul. One of the chief characteristics of nineteenth-century romanticism was the "return to nature". And the kind of nature which interested most romantics was not the geometric Newtonian universe but nature which could be apprehended immediately by the five senses. It is significant in this connection that Whitman took "Leaves of Grass"—the common people of the Vegetable world—as the symbol of his poetry.

These considerations are obviously related to Faulkner's handling of time and his use of history. There has always been a strong and very proper interest on the part of critics in these aspects of the work. Jean-Paul Satre notices that "Faulkner appears to arrest the motion at the very heart of things and like Proust he decapitates time at the conclusion "I make a similar point in slightly different terms.

I think that he handles time in a way similar to that in Greek Tragedy. In Sanctuary Faulkner creates a world where man is always violated. In this case time as well as "doom" and "fate" are the reason. Faulkner's work often changes between past and present but he always considers consciousness to be in the past. In "Light in August" Hightower's consciousness follows this pattern. However, Faulkner's characters are not imprisoned in the past. For example, we have seen that some of his characters, such as Lena Grove and Byron Bunch, do move with the motion of life. Their motion in the present carries them toward the future. They cannot clearly foresee however, precisely because it is future. Most discussions have assumed, as Robert Humphrey puts it, that Faulkner's characters fall within the 'stream of

consciousness'<sup>(3)</sup>

Joe Christmas has attained 'the stillness' that will finally us to see him.

Then his face, body, all, seemed to collapse,  
to fall in upon itself, and from out of the slashed  
garments about his hips and loins the pent up black  
blood seemed to rush like a released breath. It  
seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush  
of sparks from a rising rocket ; upon that blast the  
man seemed to rise soaring into their memories  
forever and ever.<sup>(4)</sup>

All things are fated. Man is at any place because God moved him there. His past sets up the positions into which he falls.

Previous Life	Past	Present	Future	Death
		(Light in August)		
	Hightower			
		Lena		
Christmas				
		Byron		
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		(As I Lay Dying)		
		Addie		
Jewel				
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### Conclusion

Faulkner both embodied and dramatized the basic Christian concepts. He can be regarded justly as one of the most profound Christian writers of this time. The basic promise of Original Sin is everywhere in his writings. Faulkner said in the Stockholm speech, "I believe that man will prevail." Prevailing for Faulkner is never an easy matter. Faulkner's characters are nearly always in trouble, and nearly always surrounded by hell.

Faulkner has taken the Christian view that man is a battleground. For man embodies both

good and evil. God and Devil are still active in the world, and man's spiritual victories are won with God's help, in spite of the devil. This is what Faulkner means by man's "prevailing".

That man is an imperfect being is typified by the case where Joe Christmas was killed by a Centurian from Yoknapatawpha. Faulkner's characters show the tragedy of man.

#### NOTES

- (1) William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*  
(London ; Chatto and Windus 1970)
- (2) Walt Whitman, Edited with Notes by N.Nabeshima and T.Niikura, *Song of Myself*  
(Tokyo ; Shinozaki Shorin 1963) P.95
- (3) Robert Humphrey, *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern novel*  
(The Regents of University of California 1954)
- (4) William Faulkner, *Light in August*  
(Penguin Books Ltd. 1971) P.349

#### Additional References

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