

A Study of the Lost Generation in William Faulkner's *Soldiers' Pay* (Part III)

by
Yoshifumi NISHIOKA*

Abstract

William Faulkner's first novel *Soldiers' Pay*, published in 1926, is a typical "lost generation" novel. Its milieu is an imaginary town of Charlestown, Georgia in the aftermath of World War I. The culture portrayed in the novel has lost its bearings and lost its faith in itself and in its purposes. Its religion has finally caved in, and though Faulkner is not concerned with religion in any narrow denominational sense, he knows that a loss such as has been suffered is devastating, for historically religion has always been the ultimate base of values for every culture. The main goal of this paper is to scrutinize Emmy, Januarius Jones and the Reverend Mahon, focusing on the theme of "love and sexuality and Christianity."

Key Words: lost generation, alienation, love, sexuality, Christianity

1

Soldiers' Pay is a typical "lost generation" novel, in which William Faulkner depicts the people of an imaginary town of Charlestown, Georgia in the aftermath of World War I. Most of the characters in the novel seem to be "caught in a malaise of disillusionment"¹ and have a strong sense of alienation. Their conspicuous loose sexual behavior is presented in the novel as a reflection of their new sexual mores. Most of them seem to have no Christian faith. Although the older generation goes to church, their religion is "form without meaning."² Even Mahon, an Episcopalian minister, is skeptical of the tenets of Christianity, as will be fully discussed in this paper.

* Professor, American Literature

The main goal of this paper is to scrutinize the three characters in *Soldiers' Pay*, Emmy, Januarius Jones and the Reverend Mahon, focusing on the theme of "love and sexuality and Christianity."

2

Emmy is a young woman capable of loving and whose sexuality is based on love. Faulkner's description of her as a "wild creature" clearly shows her innocence and purity in heart.

"There was something *wild* in Emmy's face," (116)³ (*Italics mine*)⁴ writes Faulkner. Emmy is also described as being "like an animal." (88) She once stares at Margaret Powers "with *beast-like*, unresisting hopelessness." (120)

Like Margaret, Emmy has "*muscular* arms" (120) and a "*hard* little hip." (162) As Margaret says, "Emmy might be one of them epicenes, too." (286) Faulkner seems to present her as a different type of a lost generation girl—a girl capable of loving, unlike Cecily Saunders or Margaret. When the wounded Donald Mahon returns to his home, Emmy meets him after a long absence. Against her expectation, however, Donald doesn't even recognize her. Faulkner depicts Emmy in this scene as follows: "Emmy stood for a space and her black eyes became wide and the blood drained from her face slowly. Then she put the back of one red hand against her mouth and fled, blundering into the door." (106) This is because she loves him so deeply that his failure to recognize her is so humiliating and shocking.

Right after this scene, Emmy confesses to Margaret Powers her former relationship with Donald:

"I liked him better than anybody. When we was both younger we dammed up a place in a creek and built a swimming hole and we used to go in every day. And then we'd lie in a old blanket we had and sleep until time to get up and go home. And in summer we was together nearly all the time. Then one day he'd just disappear and nobody wouldn't know where he was. And then he'd be outside our house some morning, calling me.

"The trouble was that I always lied to pappy where I had been and I hated that.

... "And then when I was fourteen pappy found out about how I like Donald, and so he took me out of school and kept me at home all the time. So I didn't hardly ever get to see Donald. Pappy made me promise I wouldn't go around with him any more. He had come

for me once or twice and I told him I couldn't go, and then one day he came and pappy was at home.

...“And so I didn't see Donald for a long time. Then folks said he was going to marry that—that—her. I knew Donald didn't care much about me: he never cared about anybody. But when I heard that he was going to marry her—

...“And I went to him. And it was like old times because I forgot all about him marrying her, because he still liked me, to come for me after so long.

...“But I knew he would come back. And so he did, with some blackberries.

...“...he wanted to go all the way home with me, only I wouldn't let him: I didn't care what happened to me now. And when I went through the gate there was pappy standing on the porch.”(121-4)

In this way Donald and Emmy had a sexual relationship, although he was engaged to marry Cecily at that time. Yet obviously Faulkner describes their sexual act as something favorable. Daniel Singal points out that when they “make love by a stream in the moonlight, there is no hint of erotic passion; rather, their liaison is a natural, spontaneous encounter between two wild creatures who can no more be held accountable to moral standards than animals in the forest.”⁵ When they made love in the woods, Emmy was in love with Donald, but it is questionable if Donald truly loved her, because this affair never made him change his plan to marry Cecily. Emmy knew it and she told Margaret, as quoted above, that Donald “didn't care much about me: he never cared about anybody.” (122) Probably not out of love, Donald had a sexual relationship with Emmy; however, she never forgot his tenderness, as no one else had shown her such tenderness and kindness before.

Emmy sustains an emotional hurt when Donald fails to recognize her, because her love for Donald is still pure and genuine. This makes a sharp contrast with Cecily, who also suffers humiliation when Donald doesn't recognize her. Donald's inability to recognize her, however, doesn't hurt her; instead, the sneer—which is her own imagination, though—of Margaret, her rival in love, does. Cecily's lack of love for Donald is sharply contrasted with Emmy's love.

Emmy possesses two kinds of an inferiority complex. One is that she is self-conscious about her ugliness. The other is that she is from a poor family. Faulkner depicts her as “Her face was *wrung* with weeping, *ugly*” (106) (Italics mine)⁶ and “her *awkward wrung* body.” (106) Emmy thinks

of Margaret as “You are *prettier* than me, with your black hair and your painted mouth.” (292) Margaret gives Emmy one of her dresses to console her, but she at first refuses it, saying, “You are *rich*, you don’t have to, I guess.” (118)

The following episode of her childhood given in the latter part of the novel clarifies how much Donald meant to Emmy:

When she was young, going to school in the spring, having to wear coarse dresses and shoes while other girls wore silk and thin leather; being not pretty at all while other girls were pretty—

Walking home to where work awaited her while other girls were riding in cars or having ice cream or talking to boys and dancing with them, with boys that had no use for her; sometimes he [Donald] would step out beside her, so still, so quick, all of a sudden—and she didn’t mind not having silk.

And when they swam and fished and roamed the woods together she forgot she wasn’t pretty, even. Because he was beautiful, with his body all brown and quick, so still...making her feel beautiful, too. (270)

From this episode of their childhood, we learn that Donald helped Emmy forget about her inferiority complex and even made her feel beautiful. This explains how much Emmy is thankful for Donald and how deeply she loves him. He gave meaning to her drab existence.⁷

After Donald goes to war and her letters to him go unanswered, Emmy talks to herself, “I won’t never marry nobody.” (116) Repeating these words twice, she declares, “I think I’ll just die.” (116) This declaration is regarded as a sign of her deep love for Donald.

Even after her humiliating experience with Donald, Emmy decides to look after him. The following scenes reveal her deep love for Donald, again sharply contrasted with Cecily’s perfunctory words and attitude toward her fiancé Donald:

...Emmy saw it and felt her heart contract as she remembered that head above her against the sky, on a night long, long ago.

But now the back of it was toward her and he no longer remembered her. She entered that room silently as the twilight itself and standing beside his chair, looking down upon

his thin worn hair that had once been so wild, so soft, she drew his unresisting head against her hard little hip. His face was quiet under her slow hand, and as she gazed out into the twilight upon which they two gazed she tasted the bitter ashes of an old sorrow and she bent suddenly over his devastated head, moaning against it, making no sound. (162)

...Donald and Emmy sat side by side so that Emmy could help him. Emmy enjoyed mothering him, now that she could never have him again for a lover; she objected with passionate ardor when Mrs. Powers offered to relieve her. The Donald she had known was dead; this one was but a sorry substitute, but Emmy was going to make the best of it, as women will. (266–7)

However, Emmy, as Edmond Volpe suggests, might separate the Donald of the present from the Donald whom she remembers in the moonlight beside the lake.⁸ That is why she helps the Donald of the present “with effacing skill, seeming to envelop him, yet never touching him.” (267) This, however, doesn't mean her love for Donald has gone.

Witnessing Emmy taking good care of Donald, Margaret convinces that she ought to be the woman for him. So she abruptly asks, “Would you marry him, Emmy?” (269) Emmy's reaction to it is ambivalent:

“Me? Me marry him? Me take another's leavings? (Donald, Donald.) And her leavings, at that, her that's run after every boy in town, dressed up in her silk clothes?”

...She shan't see me cry! she whispered passionately, bending her head lower, waiting for Mrs. Powers to ask her again. (Donald, Donald....)

...Marry him? Yes! Yes! Let him be sick: she would cure him; let him be a Donald that had forgotten her—she had not forgotten: she could remember enough for both of them. Yes! Yes! She cried, soundlessly, stacking dishes, waiting for Mrs. Powers to ask her again. Her red hands were blind, tears splashed fatly on her wrists. Yes! Yes! trying to think it so loudly that the other must hear. She shan't see me cry! she whispered again. But the other woman only stood in the door watching her busy back. ...she carried the dishes...waiting for the other to speak again. But the other woman said nothing and Emmy left the room, her pride forbidding her to let the other see her tears. (269–70)

This passage betrays Emmy's mixed feelings, a mixture of her grudge, jealousy and love. Her love for Donald finally prevails and she wishes to marry Donald. But she can't speak out her wish due partly to her inferiority complex, and partly to her pride.

On the day of Donald's funeral, her grief is deeper than anybody else's. Faulkner deftly depicts her despair in the following scene, which reminds us of a similar scene in *As I Lay Dying*.

Emmy sat at the kitchen table, her head between her hard elbows, her hands clasping behind her in her hair. How long she had sat there she did not know but she had heard them clumsily carrying him from the house and she put her hands over her ears, not to hear. But it seemed as if she could hear in spite of her closed ears those horrible, blundering, utterly unnecessary sounds: the hushed scraping of timid footsteps, the muted thumping of wood against wood, that passing, left behind an unbearable unchastity of stale flowers—as though flowers themselves getting a rumor of death became corrupt—all the excruciating ceremony for disposing of human carrion. (292)

Emmy returns to her old memory with Donald as “remembering that night long, long ago, the last time she had seen Donald, her Donald—not that one! and he had said, ‘Come here, Emmy,’ and she had gone to him. Her Donald was dead long, long ago.” (293) At this time Januarius Jones, taking advantage of her deep sorrow and despair upon the death of Donald, successfully seduces her. Embraced by Jones, Emmy tells herself these words from the Bible: “(I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord...)”; “(Whosoever believeth in Me, though he were dead...)”; “(...yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die...)” (293) This scene reveals her Christian faith, though she might not be fully aware of her faith.

After the seduction, Emmy visits the place where she had a wonderful time with Donald before the war. Here she remembers her happy days with Donald once again: “...she saw him standing there across the pool with her beside him; leaning above the water she could almost see them darting keen and swift and naked, flashing in the moon.” (296)

Then Emmy declares to herself to abandon her past memory and lives for tomorrow: “After a while she rose slowly, feeling her damp clothes, thinking of the long walk home. To-morrow was washday.” (297) With this strength and optimism, she can be regarded as a prototype of Lena Grove in *Light in August*.

3

Januarius Jones teaches Latin at a small college. Although he grew up in a Catholic orphanage, one of his outstanding characteristics is his atheism. Faulkner writes, "Januarius Jones, caught in the spire's illusion of slow ruin, murmured: 'Watch it fall, sir.'" (52) And this: "The illusion of slow falling is perfect." (53) Jones tells the Reverend Mahon that we "purchase our salvation as we do our real estate." (54) Our God, Jones continues, "need not be compassionate, he need not be very intelligent. But he must have dignity." (54) He also asks the rector, "How do you find the hand of Providence here?" (59)

But his most conspicuous trait is his lasciviousness. His greatest joy seems to fulfill his sensual joy, especially his sexual desire. Jones believes, "A man could very well spend all his time eating and sleeping and procreating." (55) "He had a passion for food, and an instinct," (60) writes Faulkner.

Let us see, first, how overtly he speaks about sexuality. The following is a dialogue between Jones and the Reverend Mahon:

... "But one must always generalize about *fornication*. Only after—"

"Mr. Jones!" the rector exclaimed heavily.

"—the *fornication* is committed should one talk about it at all, and then only to generalize, to become—in your words—specious. He who kisses and tells is not very much of a fellow, is he?"

... "As far as the kiss itself goes, women do not particularly care who does the kissing. All they are interested in is the kiss itself." (70–1) (*Italics mine*)

Jones tries to seduce the young women, Cecily Saunders, Margaret Powers and Emmy, but he is successful only once with Emmy. His lasciviousness is expressed with his "yellow, goat's eyes." Jones' eyes are "clear and *yellow*, obscene and old in sin as a *goat's*." (63) (*Italics mine*)⁹ "Jones' *goat's eyes* immersed her[Cecily] in *yellow* contemplation." (66) He gives Emmy "a remote *yellow*" (70) stare. Cecily "stared into his unblinking *goat's eyes*." (76) Jones watches Margaret "with his *yellow* unwinking eyes—like a *goat's*." (79) "Jones' stare was calm, bold and contemplative, obscene as a *goat's*." (220) "His eyes were bold and lazy, clear as a *goat's*." (244) "Jones' eyes, clear and *yellow*, obscene and old in sin as a *goat's*, roved between them." (282)

There are many others: “his *yellow* unabashed stare” (68); “his *yellow* gaze” (70); “his *yellow* eyes” (79); “Jones’ *yellow* eyes, unabashed” (129); “his *yellow* eyes expressionless as a dead man’s” (130); “Jones’ own *yellow* eyes” (134); “Jones’ *yellow* idol’s stare” (214); “Jones’ *yellow*, fathomless eye, like a snake’s” (215); “His *yellow* stare” (216); “his fathomless, *yellow* stare” (228); “his *yellow* stare” (246) (283); “His *yellow* eyes” (282); “Jones’ *yellow* stare.” (293)

Next, let us see how he tries to seduce these women with his “yellow, goat’s eyes.” The rector calls Jones “an authority on women.” (68) Faulkner writes, “Jones was a disciple of the cult of boldness with women.” (72) When he meets Cecily for the first time, “Jones’ goat’s eyes immersed her in yellow contemplation.” (66) Faulkner further describes him as “This is going to be easy, he thought. ...She did something to her eyes and it seemed to Jones that she had touched him with her hands.” (68) When Jones and Cecily are alone in one of the rooms at the rectory, he successfully kisses Cecily:

She stared into his unblinking goat’s eyes as his hands sliding across her arms met at the small of her back, and Jones did not know the door had opened until she jerked her mouth from his and twisted slimly from his clasp. (76)

But he can’t go further than kissing with Cecily. He can’t do anything to Margaret Powers. That is why Margaret says to him, “For all your intelligence, you seem to have acquired next to no skill with women.” (245) This is partly because his carnal desire is more like a sort of a psychological play than seeking after corporal pleasures. In the following two scenes—in the latter scene, for example, Cecily tries to offer him her body in order to learn how much Jones has eavesdropped her talks with George Farr—Jones cannot succeed in having a sexual relationship with her:

Jones dragged her resisting among shadows. A crepe-myrtle bush obscured them.

“Let me go!” she said, struggling.

“What’s the matter with you? You kissed me once, didn’t you?”

...He held her until her nervous energy, deserting her, left her fragile as a captured bird.

...“Let me go,” she repeated piteously, and finding herself suddenly free, she fled across grass.... (205)

"Why are you so fat?"

"Hush," he told her, "you'll spoil it."

His embrace but touched her and she, with amazing tact, suffered him. Her skin was neither warm nor cool, her body in the divan's embrace was nothing, her limbs only an indication of crushed texture. He refused to hear her breath as he refused to feel a bodily substance in his arms. Not an ivory carving: this would have body, rigidity; not an animal that eats and digests—this is the heart's desire purged of flesh. "Be quiet," he told himself as much as her, "don't spoil it."

... "Hush," he said, "don't spoil it."

The sentries in her blood lay down, but they lay down near the ramparts with their arms in their hands, waiting the alarm, the inevitable stand-to, and they sat clasped in the vaguely gleamed twilight of the room, Jones a fat *Mirandola* in a chaste Platonic nympholepsy, a religio-sentimental orgy in gray tweed, shaping an insincere, fleeting articulation of damp clay to an old imperishable desire, building himself a papier mache Virgin....

No, no, he thought, with awakened despair, don't spoil it. But she had moved and her hair brushed his face. Hair. Everyone, anyone, has hair. (To hold it, to hold it.) But it was hair and here was a body in his arms, fragile and delicate it might be, but still a body, a woman: something to answer the call of his flesh, to retreat pausing, touching him tentatively, teasing and retreating, yet still answering the call of his flesh. Impalpable and dominating. He removed his arm. (221–2)

The highly poetic and philosophical description of the second passage clearly shows that Jones' sexual desire is a psychological one and the real body of Cecily makes him lose his sexual desire. In other words, Jones gets more excited sexually in the process of seducing a woman than a real sexual act. His sexuality is thus rather pervasive. Jones gives a following excuse to Cecily about his abortive sexual relationship with her: "Dammit, do you think all a man wants of you is your body?" (223) When Margaret says he has no skill with women, he retorts, "[M]y dear lady, can you imagine anyone making love to her? Epicene." (245) These comments are only self-justification for his sexual pervasion.

Frederick Karl points out that the sexual play Jones forces on all women may be a thin disguise for a total disdain for the sex.¹⁰ "Like Gordon in *Mosquitoes*," suggests Judith Sensibar, "what

he really wants to experience is what he calls 'bodyless lust,' not the real thing."¹¹ Sensibar also stresses that Jones' disgust with human sexuality verges on the pathological.¹² His following description of the way falcons make love proves the validity of the above interpretation of Jones' sexuality:

"Do you know how falcons *make love*? They embrace at an enormous height and fall locked, beak to beak, plunging: an unbearable ecstasy. While we have to assume all sorts of ludicrous postures, knowing our own sweat. The falcon breaks his clasp and swoops away swift and proud and lonely, while a man must rise and take his hat and walk out." (223)
(Italics mine)

Together with Cecily, Jones eyes on Emmy as well. Sensing his intention, "the virgin Emmy gave him a haughty antagonistic stare. He returned her a remote yellow one. I'll see about you later, he promised her mentally...." (70) He tries to seduce her unsuccessfully as follows:

He was so close behind her that her hair brushed his face. Clutching her iron, she shrieked.

"Hah, my proud beauty!" hissed Jones in accepted style, putting his arms around her.

"Let me go!" she said, glaring at him.

"Your speech is wrong," Jones informed her helpfully.

"Release me, villain, or it will be the worse for you,' is what you should say."

"Let me go," she repeated.

"Not till you divulge them papers," he answered,...his yellow eyes expressionless as a dead man's.

"Lemme go, or I'll burn you," she cried hotly, brandishing the iron. They stared at one another. Emmy's eyes were fiercely implacable and Jones said at last:

"Dam'f I don't believe you would."

"See if I don't," she said with anger. But releasing her, he sprang away in time. Her red hand brushed her hair from her hot face and her eyes blazed at him. "Get out, now," she ordered.... (130-1)

Jones persistently chases after Emmy. He can't think about anything other than Emmy. Of course, this is not love. Anyway, he doesn't love anybody. His sexual desire for Emmy becomes obsession. His obsession is described as follows:

He manufactured chances to see her, only to be repulsed; he lay in wait for her like a highwayman, he begged, he threatened, he tried physical strength, and he was repulsed. ... Yet he knew that if he didn't get her soon he would become crazy, an imbecile.

After a time it assumed the magic of numbers. He had failed twice: this time success must be his or the whole cosmic scheme would crumble, hurling him, screaming, into blackness, where no blackness was, death where death was not. Januarius Jones, by nature and inclination a Turk, was also becoming an oriental. He felt that his number must come: the fact that it would not was making an idiot of him.

He dreamed of her at night, he mistook other women for her, other voices for hers; he hung skulking about the rectory at all hours, too wrought up to come in where he might have to converse sanely with sane people. (279–80)

Joe Gilligan and Margaret witness "Jones, like a fat satyr, leaping after her, hopelessly distanced." (282) Margaret notices "the heave of his breathing." (282) Emmy is in great despair on the day of Donald's funeral, because she was so much in love with him. Jones takes advantage of her despair and has a sexual relationship with her successfully. Faulkner describes this incident as follows:

Jones' yellow stare enveloped her like amber, remarking her sun-burned hair and her foreshortened thigh, wrung by her turning body into high relief.

...Emmy's sobbing died away: she knew no sensation save that of warmth and languorous contentment, emptiness, even when Jones raised her face and kissed her. "Come, Emmy," he said, raising her by the armpits. She rose obediently, leaning against him warm and empty, and he led her through the house and up the stairs to her room. (293–4)

This is the only success Jones has made sexually. Emmy never has a sexual relationship with him after this. Jones, however, never gives up chasing after her. But he is not necessarily happy

about his acts. He is just a slave to his sexual desire. That is why he heaves “a sigh of pure ennui.” (311)

In *Soldiers' Pay*, both Margaret Powers and Emmy are described as having masculinity. On the other hand, male characters, including Jones, lack masculinity. Margaret thinks of Jones as follows: “The feminine predominated so in him, and the rest of him was feline: a woman with a man’s body and a cat’s nature.” (218) She also likens him to “the cat that walks by himself.” (244) In a quarrel with Gilligan, Jones “fought like a woman, kicking, clawing, biting.” (310)

“He sees other persons as ‘things,’” remarks Cleanth Brooks, “and usually treats them so. They are there for his exploitation—sexual, if they are women; social and economic, if they are men.”¹³

Jones is also depicted as a serpent in the Garden, which suggests that he is a symbol of the Original Sin.

4

The Reverend Mahon, as Daniel Singal remarks, symbolizes the old culture.¹⁴ Although he is an Episcopal minister, Mahon seems to begin to lose his faith. Let us examine his personality, first.

Faulkner uses the word “kind” or similar words to describe the Reverend Mahon. His glance toward other people is very mild. Mahon looks at other people “kindly” (56)(66)(68)(250) or with “affability.” (67) He also regards Jones “with *benevolent* curiosity.” (52) (Italics mine)¹⁴ His smile is depicted as a “*kind*, puzzled one.” (67) The “rector said, touching her shoulder *kindly*.” (179)

Faulkner, however, regards Mahon as a weak person who cannot cope with reality. That is why Faulkner often uses the word “dream” to describe the rectory. The “rambling façade of the rectory was a *dream* in jonquils and clipped sward” (53) and it “*dreamed* in the afternoon.” (176) The rectory is also described as “the *dreaming* façade of the rectory” (283) and “the darkly *dreaming* house.” (288) Mahon often enters into his dream: “Occasionally he entered some *dream* within himself.” (278) There are other examples: “the rector, tramping huge and oblivious in his *dream*” (280); “the rector, entering his *dream* again.” (280)

No wonder he is in total despair when his son comes back home moribund. After meeting Donald, Mahon is in great agony: “The divine’s face was gray and lack as dirty snow. At the

steps he stumbled slightly and Jones sprang forward, taking his arm." (90) Even Cecily feels sorry for him, saying, "His poor father.... It is so hard on him, isn't it?" (127) Margaret says, "I could weep for him, Joe," (164) and Gilligan answers, "So could I—if it would do any good." (164) Mrs. Burny, who has lost his son in the war, also sympathizes with the rector, saying, "Oh, the poor man, how bad he looks" (176) and "how gray his face, poor man." (177) One of the important roles for the clergy is to give consolation to those like Mrs. Burny who are in trouble and tribulation. Mahon, however, is not the one to give consolation, but the one to be given it. This can be regarded as a sign that his Christian faith has lost the power to support even himself spiritually.

Mahon is too weak to face reality, so that he clings to his self-deception in various ways. For example, he tries to believe that Cecily still loves Donald, despite his terrible scar on his face and his fatal wound: "But she really cares for Donald, thank God. Her affection for him is quite pretty. You have noticed it, haven't you? (165); "It's too bad she is not strong enough to come every day. But she is quite delicate, as you know, don't you? (165); "Thank God, there is one thing which has not failed him." (165)

Another example is his conviction that Donald, who is actually going to die, is recovering. So Mahon says, "I am anxious for you to see Donald this morning. You will notice a marked improvement" (104-5); "I believe Cecily is the best medicine he can have?" (109); "You should have seen him yesterday, to discern the amazing improvement in him." (112) Finding out Donald's lack of memory, he explains: "Merely a temporary condition, though, I assure you. Quite to be expected" (110); "But this happens quite often, the young man—a soldier himself—tells me, and that it will all come back to him some day." (110) Even when Donald's death is foreseeable for anyone, Mahon still clings to his self-deception: "He is much better, thank you. Give him a few weeks' rest and he will be well again." (178-9)

Sometimes Mahon tries to face reality. He once tells Margaret about a doctor's diagnosis of Donald: "He doesn't give us much hope for Donald's sight." (125) But when Margaret consoles him, saying, "But he's only a general practitioner. We'll get a specialist from Atlanta," (125) he goes back to his self-deception. Later on, another doctor suggests that Gilligan tell Mahon the truth that Donald has lost his eyesight. Faulkner describes Mahon's self-deceptive stance as follows: "The rector gazed at Gilligan. Don't say it, his eyes seemed to plead." (163)

Margaret and Gilligan knew the real situation of Donald in an early stage:

“Joe, do you know he’s going blind?” she said abruptly.

After a time her face became a human face and holding it in his vision he said:

“I know more than that. He’s going to die.”

“Die?”

“Yes, ma’am. If I ever seen death in a man’s face, it’s in his. Goddam this world,” he burst out suddenly. (35)

Faulkner uses the word “powerless” (105) for Mahon. His powerlessness to heal the soul of his wounded son can be found in many scenes: “As they passed the study door they saw the rector and his son gazing quietly into a rain-perplexed tree, and Gilligan sprawled on his back upon a battered divan, smoking and reading” (119); “In the study where Donald sat, his father wrote steadily on to-morrow’s sermon. The afternoon slept without” (147); “Mahon and his father sat in the dusk, quietly watching the darkness come slow and soundless as a measured respiration.” (162) Mahon’s despair is shown in the following scene right after Donald’s wedding: “His father’s heavy face hung over him in the dusk like a murdered Caesar’s.” (290) After the funeral we find the following scene: “The rector, bareheaded, walked slowly, unconscious of the rain and the dripping trees, beside his daughter-in-law across the lawn, houseward, and they mounted the steps together, passing beneath the dim and unwashed fanlight.” (295)

The Reverend Mahon’s above behavior derives from his skepticism of the Christian doctrine. His nihilism also comes from the same root. Let us examine his skepticism of Christian faith and his nihilism deriving from it.

Janurius Jones, an atheist, has an illusion of the slow falling of the spire of the church. Faulkner insinuates Mahon’s religious crisis by writing that the spire is “imminent with ruin.” (278) When he confesses to Jones the problem of his Christian faith as “one of my cloth is prone to allow his own soul to atrophy in his zeal for the welfare of other souls that—,” (53) Jones finishes the rest as “that not only do not deserve salvation, but that do not particularly desire it.” (53) Although the rector promptly rebukes Jones, Jones’ words would be no difference with Mahon’s. He also confesses that he “unworthily” (53) wears a minister’s cloth.

However, he hasn’t totally given up his Christian faith. When Jones says, “We purchase our salvation as we do our real estate. Our God...need not be compassionate, he need not be very intelligent. But he must have dignity,” (54) the rector retorts, “No, no. You do them injustice.”

(54) Jones asks, "How do you find the hand of Providence here?" (59) Mahon answers, "In this way: it enables man to rise and till the soil, so that he might eat." (59)

Nihilism is dominant in his mind, though: "As I grow older, Mr. Jones, I become more firmly convinced that we learn scarcely anything as we go through this world, and that we learn nothing whatever which can ever help us or be of any particular benefit to us, even." (65) His nihilism reminds us of Mr. Compson's in *The Sound and the Fury*.

The following words that Mahon tells Gilligan reveal the crisis of his Christian faith:

"Circumstance moves in marvellous ways, Joe."

... "God is circumstance, Joe. God is in this life. We know nothing about the next. That will take care of itself in good time. 'The kingdom of God is in man's own heart,' the Book says."

... "We make our own heaven or hell in this world. Who knows: perhaps when we die we may not be required to go anywhere nor do anything at all. That would be heaven."

... "You are suffering from disappointment. But this will pass away. The saddest thing about love, Joe, is that not only the love cannot last forever, but even the heartbreak is soon forgotten.... I know that is an unbearable belief, but all truth is unbearable. Do we not both suffer at this moment from the facts of division and death?" (313-4)

This belief of the rector's is obviously heretical. He denies the existence of the heaven and the hell. He even denies the Almighty God. Love is no longer of primary importance to him, and nihilism is dominant in his view of life.

His view of sex is also a sign of his losing Christian faith. Donald, as a young man of nineteen, had a sexual relationship with Emmy. Finding it out, Emmy's father forbade his daughter to see him again. "Donald always told his father: he never lied about nothing he ever did," (121) but Mahon never gave his son any warning or advice about his sexual act. As a clergy, he should have told Donald about the sin of adultery.

Mahon cannot regard his son's pre-marital sexual act as adultery. This is because he has lost confidence to preach that his son's sexual experience is a sin. Even when visitors engage in blasphemy, blatant insincerity, or sexual misconduct in his presence, he either fails to notice it or chides them gently.¹⁶ Even if Jones' intention of walking around the rectory is obvious, Mahon

just says, “Ah, Mr. Jones...good morning. ...You are out for a walk?” (280) And in another time, “Good evening, Mr. Jones. ...Walking again, eh?” (282)

Mahon, however, doesn't advocate the freedom of sexual acts. Against Jones, who advocates sexual freedom, Mahon admonishes, “Man's life need not be always filled with compulsions of either sex or food, need it?” (66)

Callie, a black woman who was a nurse for Donald, visits the wounded Donald, hearing the news of his return. Her words and attitude toward him are full of love, which obviously derives from her Christian faith:

“Bless de Lawd, done sont you back ter yo' mammy. Yes, Jesus! Ev'y day I prayed, and de Lawd heard me.”

...“Donald, baby, look at me. Don't you know who dis is? Dis yo' Callie whut use ter put you ter bed, honey. Look here at me. Lawd, de white folks done ruint you, but nummine, yo' mammy gwine look after her baby.” (166)

This impressive scene clearly shows what Mahon has lost—the love and power of Christian faith. Callie reminds us of Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury*.

5

In the final scene of the novel, Mahon and Gilligan take a walk and go into the district where black people live. When they pass by a shabby black church, they overhear their church service. Faulkner depicts this impressive scene very skillfully:

Within it[the black church] was a soft glow of kerosene serving only to make the darkness and the heat thicker, making thicker the imminence of sex after harsh labor along the mooned land; and from it welled the crooning submerged passion of the dark race. It was nothing, it was everything; then it swelled to an ecstasy, taking the white man's words as readily as it took his remote God and made a personal Father of Him.

Feed Thy Sheep, O Jesus. All the longing of mankind for a Oneness with Something, somewhere.

...Feed Thy sheep, O Jesus. The voices rose full and soft. There was no organ; no organ

was needed as above the harmonic passion of bass and baritone soared a clear soprano of women's voices like a flight of gold and heavenly birds. (315)

In the black church, the true faith is preserved, which Mahon and most of the characters in the novel have lost. The problem of sex is also grasped as that of the Christian faith. Mahon's church service is sharply contrasted with the above scene:

"He conducted services in the dim oaken tunnel of the church while his flock hissed softly among themselves or slept between the responses...." (278)

Mahon and Gilligan, however, have to go back to their own district, which dominates "sex and death and damnation." (315) They leave the place "feeling dust in their shoes." (315) The "dust" here symbolizes their sin or damnation.

In his first novel *Soldiers' Pay*, Faulkner presents, through Emmy, Jones and Mahon, the problem of love and sexuality closely related to that of Christian faith.

Notes

1. Cleanth Brooks. *William Faulkner: Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 93.
2. Edmond L. Volpe. *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1974), 50.
3. William Faulkner. *Soldiers' Pay* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1997). All page references are from this edition.
4. Italics is all mine in this paragraph and the next one.
5. Daniel J. Singal, *William Faulkner: The Making of a Modernist* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 65–6.
6. Italics is all mine in this paragraph.
7. Volpe, *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner*, 54.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Italics is all mine in this paragraph.
10. Frederic R. Karl, *William Faulkner, American Writer: A Biography* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), 232.
11. Judith L. Sensibar, *The Origins of Faulkner's Art* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1984), 155.
12. *Ibid.* 157.
13. Brooks, *William Faulkner*, 71.

14. Singal, *William Faulkner*, 63.
15. Italics is all mine in this paragraph and the next one.
16. Singal, *William Faulkner*, 63.

Bibliography

- Adams, Richard P. *Faulkner: Myth and Motion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968. 34–40.
- Bleikasten, Andre. *The Ink of Melancholy: Faulkner's Novels from The Sound and the Fury to Light in August*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. 17–22.
- Blotner, Blotner. *Faulkner: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1974), 23.
- Brooks, Cleanth. *On the Prejudices, Predilections, and Firm Beliefs of William Faulkner*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987. 124–6.
- . *William Faulkner: Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978. 67–99, 366–70.
- Brylowski, Walter. *Faulkner's Olympian Laugh: Myth in the Novels*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1968. 43–51.
- Davis, Thadious M. “From Jazz Syncopation to Blues Elegy: Faulkner’s Development of Black Characterization” Fowler, Doreen and Ann J. Abadie. eds. *Faulkner and Race: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha 1986*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987. 77–85.
- Howe, Irving. *William Faulkner: A Critical Study*, Third edition, revised and expanded. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975. 17–9.
- Irwin, John T. *Doubling and Incest / Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975. 166–7.
- Karl, Frederick R. *William Faulkner, American Writer: A Biography*. New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989. 209–12, 226–34.
- Longley, Jr., John Lewis. *The Tragic Mask: A Study of Faulkner's Heroes*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963. 26–7.
- Millgate, Michael. *The Achievement of William Faulkner*. New York: Vintage Books, 1971. 61–7.
- Minter, David. *William Faulkner: His Life and Work*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. 52–4, 59–60, 93–4.
- O'Connor, William Van. *The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner*. New York: Gordian Press, 1972. 27–30.
- Putzel, Max. *Genius of Place: William Faulkner's Triumphant Beginnings*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. 1985. 27–41, 47–8, 129–31.
- Richardson, H. Edward. *William Faulkner: The Journey to Self-Discovery*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press. 1970. 142–63.
- Rogers David. “Maternalizing the Epicene: Faulkner’s Paradox of Form and Gender” Kartiganer, Donald M. and Ann J. Abadie eds., *Faulkner and Gender: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1994*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996. 104–5.
- Sensibar, Judith L. *The Origins of Faulkner's Art*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984. 34–6, 135–6, 149–57, 160–2.

A Study of the Lost Generation in William Faulkner's *Soldiers' Pay* (Part III)

- Seyppel, Joachim: *William Faulkner* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1971) 22–7.
- Singal, Daniel J. *William Faulkner: The Making of a Modernist*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 1997. 62–70, 74–5, 79–80.
- Singer, Irving. *The Nature of Love Volume 3: The Modern World*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1987.
- Swiggart, Peter. *The Art of Faulkner's Novels*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970. 31–2.
- Tillich, Paul. *Theology of Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press. 978. 42.
- Vickery, Olga W. *The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964. 1–8.
- Volpe, Edmond L. *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner*. New York: The Noonday Press, 1974. 49–56.
- Waggoner, Hyatt H. *William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966. 1–8.
- Watkins, Floyd C. *The Flesh and the Word: Eliot, Hemingway, Faulkner*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1966. 169–80.