

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

by
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Abstract

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. 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. This paper is to scrutinize the three young characters, Margaret Powers, Joe Gilligan and Julian Lowe, focusing on the theme of “love and sexuality and Christianity.”

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

1

As we know, not a few Americans lost confidence in past values after World War I.¹ Historically, religion has always been the ultimate base of values for every culture,² so that the phenomenon of changing values after the War could be interpreted as a sign of their loss of religious faith. William Faulkner's first novel *Soldiers' Pay*, published in 1926, is a typical “lost generation” novel. The milieu of the novel is an imaginary town of Charlestown, Georgia in the aftermath of World War I. The younger generation depicted in *Soldiers' Pay* is “caught in a malaise of disillusionment.”³ They are “rootless, confused, and insecure”⁴ with a strong sense of alienation. Faulkner depicts their loose sexual behavior, one of their most conspicuous traits, as a reflection

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of their new sexual mores. Moreover, most characters in the novel lack Christian faith. The older generation, to be true, goes to church, but their religion is “form without meaning.”⁵ Even an Episcopalian minister Mahon is skeptical about the tenet of Christianity as his total inability to face the reality indicates.

The main goal of this paper is to scrutinize the three young characters, Margaret Powers, Joe Gilligan and Julian Lowe, focusing on the theme of “love and sexuality and Christianity.”

2

Margaret Powers, a twenty-four-year-old war widow, is an attractive, aloof woman drawing young men’s attention: “Lowe remarking her pallid distinction, her black hair, the red scar of her mouth, her slim dark dress, knew an adolescent envy of the sleeper. She ignored Lowe with a brief glance. How impersonal she was, how self-contained. Ignoring them.” (28)⁶ Unlike Cecily Saunders, she is not a flapper, but she possesses some characteristics of a new type of women in the 1920s.

First of all, she is depicted as a masculine woman, despite her feminine feature. That is why she is also called an “epicene” in the novel. Mr. Saunders, after visiting Donald, “took her *firm* proffered hand and felt her clean, *muscular* clasp.” (115) (Italics mine)⁷ When Margaret puts her arm over the Reverend Mahon’s shoulder to console him, her arm is “*firm*, latent in strength.” (146–7) She also touches him with her “*firm* hand.” (273) When Dr. Baird leaves after seeing Donald, Margaret shakes “his hand *firmly*.” (153) Her embrace of Joe Gilligan is a “*firm sexless* embrace.” (161) Margaret knows that her conduct is not an ordinary woman’s. That is why she says to Gilligan, “So you are surprised to find a woman doing something without some obvious material end in view. Aren’t you?” (157) “I just happened to be the first woman you ever knew,” says Margaret, “doing something you thought only a man would do. You had nice fixed ideas about women and I upset them.” (157)

Joachim Seyppel’s following interpretation of a woman’s masculinity fits into Margaret: “[P]sychic hermaphroditism means that parallel to the female inversion of the sexual object, a transformation of female psychic traits, drives, and character features into the corresponding male counterparts takes place.”⁸

Secondly, her abhorrence of sex is conspicuous. We easily recognize Margaret’s repetition of the word “ugly,” which refers to her dead husband. These are as follows: “Dick, Dick. *Ugly* and

dead." (35); "Dick, Dick. Dead, *ugly* Dick." (40); "young and passionate and *ugly*" (40); "your beautiful, young, *ugly* body" (40); "Dick, dear, *ugly* dead" (41); "Your body is so *ugly*." (178); "yours [your body] is so *ugly*" (178); "with all your *ugly* body" (178); "dear, *ugly* Dick" (178); "dear, *ugly*, dead Dick" (180); "*ugly* dead Dick." (258) (Italics mine) However, we must not overlook the fact that she also expresses her attachment to her dead husband by calling his name repeatedly and by using the word "dear" quite often.

This extraordinary repetition of the word "ugly" proves her abhorrence of sex, and the understanding of its cause requires a thorough examination of a relationship between Dick and Margaret.

During the War, they met at a canteen in New York and had a good time dancing together. Dick was then in an officer's training camp. After he left New York, he sent letters to Margaret, and then he came back to New York in preparation for going to war. "I think we both had agreed that we were not in love with each other for always," confesses Margaret, "but we were both young, and so we might as well get all the fun we could." (159) Then, Dick proposed to marry her three days before his departure. "I told him I had other men friends and I knew that he knew other women," she explains, "but neither of us bothered about that. He told me he expected to know women in France and that he didn't expect me to be a hermit while he was gone." (159) So the next day, they got married. Spending only three days with her, he departed.

Margaret continues her story as follows:

"Sometimes at night I'd wake up, wanting Dick, but after a time he got to be a shadowy sort of person, like George Washington. And at last I didn't even miss him any more.

... "I made up my mind that the best thing for both of us was just to call the whole thing off."

... "I received an official notice that he had been killed in action. He never got my letter at all. He died believing that everything was the same between us."

... "You see, I feel some way that I wasn't square with him. And so I guess I am trying to make it up to him in some way." (159-60)

The bottom line of this story is that Margaret feels that she had a sexual relation with Dick without love in her three-day marriage life. Discovering this fact, she tried to make up for her "sin" by telling him the truth and getting a divorce. However, Dick's sudden death robbed her

of a chance of expiation forever, and her guilty feeling remained in the bottom of her heart. As seen above, they got married, knowing that they were not in love with each other. Then, why does she have a sense of guilt after getting married? Besides, it was only a three-day marriage life. The only feasible explanation is that she didn't recognize the importance of love in her sexual life in marriage. Before marriage, Margaret had had sexual experiences with other men without love, but she hadn't had any guilty feeling about her sexual behavior. Judging from her story, her sexual acts were unlikely to be based on love. Then the only difference between the two kinds of her sexual experiences is that one is a sexual relationship outside marriage, and the other, in marriage. In other words, one is the problem of "love and sex," and the other, that of "love and sex and marriage."

Margaret's following monologue is quite a poetic description of her guilty feelings:

(Dick, Dick. How young, how terribly young: to-morrow must never come. Kiss me, kiss me through my hair. Dick, Dick. My body flowing away from me, dividing. How ugly men are, naked. Don't leave me, don't leave me! No, no! we don't love each other! We don't! we don't! Hold me close, close: my body's intimacy is broken, unseeing: thank God my body cannot see. Your body is so ugly, Dick! Dear Dick. Your bones, your mouth hard and shaped as bone: rigid. My body flows away: you cannot hold it. Why do you sleep, Dick? My body flows on and on. You cannot hold it, for yours is so ugly, dear Dick... "You may not hear from me for some time. I will write when I can....") (177-8)

(I miss you like the devil, Dick. Someone to sleep with? I don't know. Oh, Dick, Dick. You left no mark on me, nothing. Kiss me through my hair, Dick, with all your ugly body, and let's don't ever see each other again, ever.... No, we won't, dear, ugly Dick.) (178)

(Dick, my love, that I did not love, Dick, your ugly body breaking into mine like a burglar, my body flowing away, washing away all trace of yours.... Kiss and forget me: remember me only to wish me luck, dear, ugly, dead Dick....) (180)

Cecily has nothing to do with the word "sin," nor "a sense of guilt," because she has never thought of or talked about religion. On the other hand, Margaret's awareness of her "sin" and

her guilty feeling must have derived from her religious faith she unconsciously holds. This can be the only plausible explanation of her abhorrence of sex and her inability to love.

We find a lot of episodes showing Margaret's abhorrence of sex and her inability to love. When she senses that Lowe wants to make love to her, she snaps, "I don't want to be made love to." (47) When Lowe asks her if she is in love with Donald, she answers, "No, certainly not. I am not in love with anybody." (48)

Faulkner depicts her inability to love in detail through her relationship with Joe Gilligan. He is in love with Margaret, and she knows how he feels toward her. But when he insinuates their marriage, she refuses it, saying, "I couldn't marry a man named Gilligan." (301) Of course, this is a joke. She explains her refusal as follows: "[D]on't you see, I have been married twice already, with damn little luck either time, and I just haven't the courage to risk it again. But if I could marry anyone, don't you know it would be you? Kiss me, Joe. ... Bless your heart, darling. If I married you you'd be dead in a year, Joe. All the men that marry me die, you know. ... I'm too young to bury three husbands." (302)

We, however, shouldn't take her words at face value. The cause of her hatred of sex and her inability to love is what Margaret herself doesn't know.

Despite this fact, Margaret, as Cleanth Brooks points out, "has retained kindness and concern for other human beings."⁹ She has pity for other people. She happens to meet the wounded Donald on a train and takes him home with Gilligan and Lowe. After delivering Donald home, she tries to protect his father, the Reverend Mahon, too, as she finds that he is not strong enough to face the reality that his son is seriously ill and has no chance of recovery. Looking at Mahon at the breakfast table on the next day they took Donald home, Margaret "lowered her gaze to her plate feeling hot moisture against her lids. What have I done? she thought, what have I done?" (105) In this monologue, her deep sympathy toward the rector is clearly shown.

In order to make Cecily visit Donald, her advice to Mr. Saunders is very precise: "[Y]ou must see that she does come, that she acts just as she acted toward him before." (115); "You must not let her mother dissuade her. You must not. Remember, he might have been your son." (115) These words reflect her sincere wish for Donald's recovery.

When a physician's diagnosis of Donald is not a favorable one, Margaret touches the sleeve of the disappointed rector and encourages him to be hopeful, saying, "We'll get a specialist from Atlanta." (125) When Dr. Baird, the third doctor to see Donald, tells Margaret that Donald is

dying, she requests that this fact be hidden from Mahon. She insists that “it isn’t a violation of professional ethics to let his father believe as he wishes to believe, is it?” (150) Furthermore, she declares to the doctor that she is going to marry Donald. When the doctor says, “So you are meddling with Providence, are you?” (151) she retorts, “Wouldn’t you have done the same?” (151) When Dr. Baird says to her with sympathy and even with respect, “You’ve let yourself in for something that is going to be unpleasant, young lady,” (153) she answers, by giving him a straight face in return, “I’ll take the risk.” (153)

After Mr. Baird diagnoses that Donald has lost his eyesight, Margaret takes despaired Mahon’s arm and tries to give him consolation: “I hate that man. ... Damn little snob. But don’t you mind, Uncle Joe. Remember, that Atlanta doctor told us he would lose his sight. But doctors don’t know everything: who knows, perhaps when he gets strong and well he can have his sight restored.” (164) After saying this, she expresses her feelings to Gilligan: “I could weep for him, Joe.” (164)

When Mahon tells her in despair, “Cecily has broken the engagement, Margaret. So the wedding is off,” (273) Margaret says right away, “I’m going to marry him myself. I intended to all the time. Didn’t you suspect?” (273) In this way, she marries Donald, but of course this is not based on love, but with sympathy for Mahon.

The scene that follows Donald’s funeral betrays Margaret’s deep sympathy with Mahon:

She took his arm and led him into the study and to his chair. He sat obediently and she took his handkerchief from the breast of his coat and wiped the rain from his temples and face.

... She watched him as he sprinkled tobacco liberally over the desk-top, trying to fill the bowl, then she quietly took it from his hand. “Try this. It is much simpler,” she told him, taking a cigarette from her jacket pocket and putting it in his mouth. “You have never smoked one, have you?” (295)

Margaret is fully aware of her own personality. That is why she talks to herself as follows: “Can nothing at all move me again? Nothing to desire? Nothing to stir me, to move me, save *pity*?” (148) (*Italics mine*) Her pity, however, never gives her satisfaction or happiness. Faulkner writes how she feels after marrying Donald: “Married, and she had never felt so alone.” (275)

To generalize Margaret’s personality, Faulkner uses the word “calmly,” “impersonal” and

"impersonally." Faulkner writes that "she had *calmly* decided that they had taken advantage of a universal hysteria for the purpose of getting of each other a brief ecstasy," (32) and that "she had decided *calmly* that they were better quit of each other." (32) (*Italics mine*)¹⁰ He writes, "How *impersonal* she was, how self-contained." (28) Or this: "[S]he must be notified casually and *impersonally* that he [Dick] had been killed in action." (32) She is also depicted as "her gaze was *impersonal* as a dissection." (79) Or this: "She looked at Emmy *impersonal* as Omnipotence." (267) Obviously, Faulkner describes her personality both positively and negatively. He praises her as a stoic woman who can face difficulties, as the word "calmly" suggests, but she lacks love as the word "impersonal" indicates.

Margaret Powers is quite a complicated and enigmatic figure. Together with Cecily Saunders, she epitomizes the new generation. Her sense of alienation must come from her lack of trust on the traditional values. Furthermore, it could be derived, according to Faulkner, from the decline of Christian faith in the post-war America. The service at the black church in the last scene of the novel suggests this point clearly.

3

Joe Gilligan is a thirty-two-year-old man, who is altruistic and moralistic. Although he is still young, his behavior and way of thinking is not exactly that of the lost generation, but rather of the older generation. In the first chapter of the novel, he appears as a returned soldier by the name of Yaphank. He is drunk on the train and keeps bothering other passengers and the conductor, complaining that people don't treat soldiers like them with respect, who have fought for and saved their country. He complains that "he [the conductor] don't want us here. And this is the reward we get for giving our flesh and blood to our country's need." (8) Gilligan continues, "You have refused the hospitality of our train to the saviors of your country." (8) Furthermore, he complains, "Ain't that one hell of a way to treat soldiers?" (20) And this: "Remember, we got to protect our uniform from insult." (21)

For him people's cold attitude toward soldiers is a sign of the United States having greatly changed. As a young man who holds the traditional American values, people on the train look so impassive and egocentric. This is the main cause of his indignation.

Gilligan, as mentioned above, is altruistic, unlike most of the characters in the novel. Frederick Karl notes, "Gilligan's virtues are endurance, integrity, silence, qualities Faulkner admired

and respected; such virtues, strong in themselves, are highlighted when opposed by Jones's greediness."¹¹ When he meets Donald Mahon, a former pilot seriously wounded, on the train, he looks at him "with compassion" (14) and takes care of him. Then he decides to deliver him home with Margaret Powers. To be true, the chief motive for this altruistic action is his love for Margaret, but this cannot be his sole motivation. That is why Gilligan, after taking Donald home, is always with him, almost twenty-four hours a day, and takes good care of him in practically everything, such as helping him to change clothes and have a meal. During day, Gilligan keeps on reading a book for Donald in great patience. If he didn't have deep compassion for Donald, he wouldn't be able to do this reading day after day. He also sympathizes with Donald's father Mahon. As quoted before, when Margaret says, "I could weep for him, Joe," (164) he answers somberly, "So could I—if it could do any good." (164)

John Longley, Jr., who regards Gilligan as a comic hero, writes, "Joe performs the usual actions of the comic hero: protecting the helpless from cruelty and exploitation. He eases the pitiful remnant of life that Mahon has left. He fends off Jones's efforts to seduce Margaret and protects Emmy, the maid, until the very end of the book."¹²

Joe Gilligan falls in love with Margaret Powers and within a few days after they met on a train, he proposes to marry her, saying, "Ma'am, let's get married." (38) Margaret, disillusioned in marriage, turns down his proposal softly, explaining, "You are a good fellow, Joe. If I felt like marrying anybody now, I'd take you." (38)

If Gilligan were more egoistic, he would push harder trying to marry her, but he cannot be bold with women. This is because he is so considerate to other people's feelings, much more to the woman he is in love with. His monologue clearly shows this mentality: "Margaret, tell me what you want. I will do it. Tell me, Margaret." (148)

He also lacks masculinity and is, in this respect, rather a lost generation man. In the following passage, he believes he can't match Margaret:

She put her arm over his shoulder. It was firm, latent in strength, comforting. He knew that he could embrace her in the same way, that if he wished she would kiss him, frankly and firmly, that her eyelids would never veil her eyes at the touch of his mouth. What man is for her? He wondered, knowing that after all no man was for her, knowing that she would go through with all physical intimacies, that she would undress to a lover (?) with this same

impersonal efficiency. (He should be a—a—he should be a gladiator or a statesman or a victorious general: someone hard and ruthless who would expect nothing from her, of whom she would expect nothing. Like two gods exchanging golden baubles. And I, I am no gladiator nor statesman nor general: I am nothing. Perhaps that's why I want so much from her.) He put his arm over her shoulders. (146–7)

However, he can't give up his love for Margaret. When they talk each other, he confesses to Margaret that “none of ‘em [women] ever made me lose a night's sleep until I saw you.” (157) To this, she answers, “It isn't me that made you lose a night's sleep. I just happened to be the first woman you ever knew doing something you thought only a man would do. You had nice fixed ideas about women and I upset them. Wasn't that it?” (157) Then she “looked at his averted face, at his reliable homely face.” (157) Gilligan here must be thinking that what Margaret has said is not entirely true, because he knows he is in love with her, and that is the main cause of his sleepless night.

When his love for her intensifies and his longing for her becomes beyond control, Margaret wouldn't let him do any sexual act. In the following scene, Faulkner depicts Gilligan's longing and despair in a very impressive way:

He took her hand and rubbed his cheek against it. Her hand turned in his and patted his cheek, withdrawing.... She leaned down, peering into Gilligan's face. He sat motionless, taut. Take her in my arms, he debated, overcome her with my own passion. Feeling this, she withdrew from him though her body had not moved.

“That wouldn't do any good, Joe. Don't you know it wouldn't?” she asked.

“Yes, I know it,” he said. “Let's go.”

“I'm sorry, Joe,” she told him in a low voice, rising. ... “I wish I could, Joe,” she added.

He made no reply and she said: “Don't you believe me?”

He strode on and she grasped his arm, stopping. He faced her and in her firm sexless embrace he stood staring at the blur of her face almost on a level with his own, in longing and despair. (160–1)

When Cecily breaks the engagement with Donald, Margaret decides to marry Donald to

relieve the agony of the rector. Gilligan wouldn't make any opposition to it, but he is hurt. He talks to himself as follows: "I'm jealous, I guess...seeing the loot [Donald] getting married when neither or 'em want to 'specially, while I can't get my girl at all...." (247) In another monologue he says, "He is dying, he gets the woman he doesn't want even, while I am not dying.... Margaret, what shall I do? What can I say?" (259) In the following scene, Gilligan refuses his routine reading for Donald, showing his jealousy of the latter and, at the same time, his guilty feeling about his cold attitude toward the moribund Donald:

"Well, Joe, I'm married at last."

"Yes," answered Gilligan. His careless spontaneity was gone. Even Mahon noticed it in his dim oblivious way.

... He said at last: "Carry on, Joe."

"Not now, Loot. I don't feel so many. Think I'll take a walk," he answered, feeling Mrs. Mahon's eyes on him. He met her gaze harshly, combatively.

"Joe," she said quietly, bitterly.

Gilligan saw her pallid face, her dark unhappy eyes, her mouth like a tired scar and he knew shame. His own bleak face softened.

"All right, Loot," he said, quietly matching her tone with a trace of his old ambiguous unseriousness. (275)

Fully aware of how Gilligan feels about her, Margarete says, "Poor Joe." (279) Then Gilligan answers, "I'm all right. I ain't married." (279) Margaret knows that Gilligan can make a good family, so she retorts, "You can't escape forever, though. You are too nice--safe the family...." (279)

In the following dialogue carried out right after Donald's death, Margaret points out Gilligan's personality very precisely:

"Stupidity. That's the reason I can't get the one I want."

She put her hand on his arm. "You aren't stupid, Joe. And you aren't bold, either."

"Yes, I am. Can you imagine me considering anybody else's feelings when they's something I want?"

"I can't imagine you doing anything without considering someone else's feelings."

Offended, he became impersonal. "Course you are entitled to your own opinion. I know I ain't bold like the man in that story...." (300-1)

Gilligan, still unable to give up on Margaret, asks her once again to marry him, but her determination of not getting married doesn't change. So Margaret is leaving for Atlanta, whereas Gilligan decides to remain in Charlestown for a while. Feeling sorry for him, Margaret finally suggests, in order to make him "happy for a short time," (303) that they go to Atlanta and live together. "Then when we get fed up," she continues, "all we need do is wish each other luck and go our ways." (303)

This suggestion gives him a shock, because his idea of sex and marriage is a traditional one. For example, when he observed young people's highly sexual dancing, he cried out in amazement: "Look at them two: look where he's got his hand. This is what they call polite dancing, is it? I never learned it: I would have got throwed out of any place I ever danced doing that. But I had a unfortunate youth: I never danced with nice people." (192) Looking at Cecily dancing, he said, "Wow, if the loot could see this it'd sure wake him up, wouldn't it?" (193) He also comments, "Where I come from you'd have to have a license to dance that way." (204)

That is why Margaret's suggestion meant having sex without marriage. The dialogue carried out right after Gilligan had a shock shows a sharp difference in the view of sex between Gilligan and Margaret:

"Damn your *Presbyterian* soul, Joe. Now you think I'm a bad woman."

"No I don't ma'am. But I can't do that...."

"Why not?"

"I dunno: I just can't."

"But what difference does it make?"

"Why, none, if it was just your body I wanted. But I want—I want—"

"What do you want, Joe?" (303) (*Italics mine*)

Of course, what he wants is her love. Joseph Blotner records the following words Faulkner mentioned in his twenties: "Do you know what the trouble is with me? I'm a puritan."¹³ From this comment, we can assume that Gilligan's Puritan view of sex is the author's.

The time of their separation comes. At the station Margaret gets on a train bound for Atlanta after saying farewell. Gilligan, even at this stage, has a second thought: "But why not? he thought with cinders under his feet, why not take her this way? I could persuade her in time, perhaps before we reached Atlanta." (304) And he jumps on the train, but he cannot find her. He jumps off the train already moving, thinking she changed her mind and got off the train to be with him. But the fact is she was standing on the rear platform to see him again. Gilligan cries out her name, his arms stretched, running after the train. Finally he stops, "actually weeping with anger and despair, watching her figure." (305) Then he consoles himself thinking, "I'll go to Atlanta to-morrow, find her, make her marry me." (307)

About their separation, Brooks writes, "What Joe and Margaret have is their honesty. In the 1920s some seemed to feel that honesty was almost the only virtue left. It is this very virtue that keeps Joe and Margaret apart. Margaret won't say she loves Joe when she doesn't, and she refuses to fake it. Joe, on the other hand, will not accept her body, which, out of compassion, she offers him, for he will not accept anything less than love."¹⁴

In the final scene of the novel, Gilligan and the rector take a walk and pass by a shabby church for black people. Unlike the white church, it preserves Christian faith. But Gilligan—and the rector, as well—has no solid Christian faith unlike these poor black people. Although Gilligan has a Puritan view of sexuality, this doesn't mean he has Christian faith. So although he is altruistic and moralistic and he can love, he is one of those who have lost faith and feel a sense of alienation due to lack of religious faith.

4

The nineteen-year-old Julian Lowe is in disillusion as a young man of the lost generation. In the novel, the same words are repeatedly used to describe him. For example, "disappointed," "disappointment" and "despair" are repeatedly used: "young and dreadfully *disappointed*" (27); "Young and belligerent and *disappointed*" (27); "with passionate *disappointment*" (42); "his old dull *despair*" (47); "His *disappointment* and *despair*" (48); "he said with such *despair*" (48) (Italics mine)

This is because Lowe's dream of becoming a flying hero was frustrated by the armistice. That caused his disappointment and despair. His disappointment is more strongly felt when he meets Donald, who joined the war as a pilot and was badly wounded. In the novel, there are many scenes that reveal his disappointment and despair. Faulkner depicts Lowe when he meets Donald

for the first time on a train as follows:

Cadet Lowe pressed the bell, regarding with a rebirth of that old feud between American enlisted men and officers of all nations the man's insignia and *wings* and brass, not even wondering what a British officer in his condition could be doing traveling in America. Had I been old enough or lucky enough, this might have been me, he thought jealously. (21) (Italics mine)

Even after this scene, the word "wings" is frequently used whenever Lowe appears in the novel. Let us see the following scene in which Lowe sees Donald in jealousy and admiration in a hotel:

To have been him! He moaned. Just to be him. Let him take this sound body of mine! Let him take it. To have got *wings* on my breast, to have *wings*: and to have got his *scar*, too, I would take death to-morrow.

... To be him, to have gotten *wings*, but to have got his *scar* too! (41–2) (Italics mine)

In this passage, the word "scar" is used twice together with "wings." His longing for Donald, an airplane pilot wounded in the war, is skillfully expressed. After this scene he thinks, "If I had *wings*, and a *scar*." (43) (Italics mine) In the hotel, he tells Margaret Powers that "he had forty-seven hours flying time and would have got *wings* in two weeks more." (46) (Italics mine) When Margaret says, "You would have been an ace, too, if you'd seen any Germans, wouldn't you?" (47) he is deeply hurt. Then he declares, "I am as good a flyer as any ever was at the front—flying or any other way." (47)

Lowe, too, falls in love with Margaret Powers. This is a kind of a puppy love and Margaret treats him as a child. Lowe feels envy toward both Donald and her late husband killed at the front. Lowe assumes that the reason Margaret is not attracted to him is that he didn't join the war, much less being wounded like Donald. The following dialogue between Lowe and Margaret betrays his psychological wound very clearly:

"Tell me, you don't like him better than me because he has *wings* and a *scar*, do you?"

"Why, of course not." She looked at him a moment, calculating. Then she said: "Mr.

Gilligan says he is dying.”

“Dying?” he repeated and “Dying?” How the man managed to circumvent him at every turn! As if it were not enough to have *wings* and a *scar*. But to die.

“Margaret,” he said with such despair that she gazed at him in swift pity.... “Margaret, are you in love with him?” (Knowing that if he were a woman he would be)

... “I would have been killed there if I could, or wounded like him, don’t you know it?”... “I would have been, if I’d had a chance,” he repeated.... His disappointment and despair were more than everything now.

... “I wanted to be,” he confessed more than he had ever believed, “I would take his *scar* and all.”

“And be dead, like he is going to be?”

But what was death to Cadet Lowe, except something true and grand and sad? He saw a tomb, open, and himself in boots and belt, and pilot’s *wings* on his breast, a wound stripe. ... What more could one ask of Fate?”

“Yes, yes,” he answered.

“Why, you have flown, too,” she told him, holding his face against her knees, “you might have been him, but you were lucky. Perhaps you would have flown too well to have been shot down as he was. Had you thought of that?”

“I don’t know. I guess I would let them catch me, if I could have been him.” (48–9) (Italics mine)

For Lowe, his death is less important than gaining honor as a war hero. He has to go back home separated from Margaret and Gilligan as the latter are delivering Donald home. He continues to declare his undying love for Margaret, by telling her that he will work hard and make money and come back to see her again to get married. Then, a total of five letters are sent to Margaret. His letters show his immaturity very clearly. It is interesting to know that his love for or enthusiasm with Margaret becomes less and less in each letter.

5

Margaret, Gilligan and Low are all suffering from disillusion and a sense of alienation. Margaret’s and Gilligan’s stoic outlook of life cannot fill the vacancy in their heart. They are

not aware that this vacancy may have derived from their lack of religious faith. However, they unconsciously seek after a "Oneness with Something, somewhere," (315) which the black church has achieved as is seen in the final scene of the novel. As we have discussed in this paper, Faulkner presents the problem of sex and love as something deeply related to the problem of religion in his first novel *Soldiers' Pay*.

Notes

- 1 Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978) 93.
- 2 Ibid., 77.
- 3 Ibid., 93.
- 4 Edmond L. Volpe, *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1974) 50.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 William Faulkner, *Soldiers' Pay* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1997) All subsequent references to this novel are from this edition.
- 7 Italics is all mine in this paragraph.
- 8 Joachim Seyppel: *William Faulkner* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1971) 25.
- 9 Brooks, *William Faulkner*, 91.
- 10 Italics is all mine in this paragraph.
- 11 Frederick R. Karl, *William Faulkner, American Writer: A Biography* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989) 229.
- 12 John Lewis Longley, Jr., *The Tragic Mask: A Study of Faulkner's Heroes* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963) 27.
- 13 Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1974), 23.
- 14 Brooks, *William Faulkner*, 81.

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