

Theme Of Masculine Sensibility In William Faulkner's *The Hamlet*

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Abstract

Faulkner is one of the leading professional novelists for him the real source of writing novels are the everyday occurrences in the life of Americans. All his novels are a refreshing treat for a reader as his performances are to spectators with the innovative use of style and technique writing and presentation of arguments reach a high standard in the research article. On the whole the article gives a clear explanation of the work providing sufficient details of methods adopted therein. The article retains the clarity of objective and technically sound, stylistically the article is well and the language is highly readable. The research article is a fraction of genuine effort consciously brought out and to appreciate Faulkner's fictional writings. Of course it is more intensely researched, carefully structured and comprehensive. Also, it seems too accessed to a wide range of critics on Faulkner's writings.

Key Words: Irrational Covetousness, Irrelevant Manoeuvrings, and Complicated Deception

Introduction:

Although Faulkner's novel with women of admirable virtue and undeniable stoicism and even presents Eula Varner as a virtual Dionysian goddess or as the Earth –Mother personified. Faulkner's one of the most successful novels, *The Hamlet* is essentially a novel about men; the compulsive lusts, petty intrigues, and elaborate hoaxes which it details are entirely masculine affairs. It is, furthermore, a novel viewed from an exclusively masculine perspective in that no matter how far the narration strays into the pasture, forest, or deserted mansion, it inevitably returns to the group of men who sit on the gallery before Will Varner's store. They seem only to sit there and gossip, as men will, throughout the several-year course of the novel. They view and review the astonishing, fantastic goings-on in Frenchman's Bend, but always they seem to remain at the store, implacable and imperturbable.

Key concept: The theme of masculine world is termed by Faulkner not only "unwomaned" "masculinity, almost monastic", but also "out of life" and "out of living". That he associates the masculine with the "out of life" existence illumines an important perspective of *The Hamlet*: among these men, misconceived standards of masculinity have been predicated upon disengagement from vital concerns of the human heart. In Frenchman's Bend, the men have structured their existences according to a code which demands that a man, to fulfil his masculinity, do battle with a woman and subjugate her; his only alternative is to remain "unwomaned" and to do combat with his own impulses and subjugate them; either way, his manhood demands struggle and conquest. While Olga Vickery may assume that, in *The Hamlet*, "the battle between the sexes is ultimately creative," (2) a close examination of the novel will, I think, disclose that hostilities between male and female, rather than being creative, are instead psychologically debilitating. Codes of conquest do mothering more than dehumanize the victor, devitalize the victim. Conducting a marriage as a contest for supremacy destroys in fact all changes of harmony, mutual responsibility, and joy between a man and a woman.

Mink Snopes and his wife offer a case in point. Despite the deeply passionate nature of their marriage and their complete commitment to each other, Mink persists in seeing his woman chiefly as an object for his will. Mink has been "bred by generations to believe invincibly that to every man, whatever his past actions, whatever depths he might have reached, there was reserved one virgin, at least for him to marry: one maidenhead, if only for him to deflower and destroy" (22). Mink's desire for a virgin is not determined so much by "moral precepts" (as Olga Vickery suggests) but rather by his compulsion to "deflower and destroy," to assert his masculinity in conquest. With the woman he marries, however, he is denied any illusions of conquest since he has to compete "not only once but each time and hence . . . forever" with the "ghostly embraces of thirty or forty men" (242). Embittered, Mink does what he can to destroy, even if he can't "deflower," the woman he does get. He is pleased to see that the two children though slow in coming, do at last shackle her "irrevocably" (3); then as signal of his ascendancy and "seal of [her] formal acquiescence" (p. 13), he has his wife grow her hair long dyed blond, since in her days as a nymphomaniac it had and cut short like a man's.

Mink can no more forgive his wife for making him admit his incompleteness, his need of her, than he can forgive Jack Houston. He has to get his own back from both of them-by humbling his wife Mink himself on them, as they have on him. Mink then, despite love, and destroying Houston-to leave a mark of despite his independent sturdy manliness, still requires a publicly demonstrable token of his ascendancy. He relegates his wife to the status of property; her long hair is

simply signal of his property rights. Mink Snopes is, of course, the only character in *The Hamlet* man enough to disregard social stigma and marry for love. It is unfortunate, indeed tragic, that pernicious notions of masculinity have made human commitments seem insufficient and have rendered the man Mink Snopes, as he masks love as conquest, utterly ashamed of human interdependence.

The critic and reviewer Cleanth Brooks has already commented upon the "elaborate counterpointing of love and honour" and Michael Millgate has established how "the parallel and often inter-reflecting investigations of love and greed, of men dominated by the desire for sexual or economic possession, are pursued"(5). Indeed, the counterpointing device suggests that the men folk in *The Hamlet* who assert their masculinity in possession of a woman are not so very different from Flem Snopes. Flem uses people for economic ends; these men use them for psychological ends. Either way, human beings are treated as tools, merely means to an end, and are hopelessly vitiated by the treatment.

Throughout *The Hamlet* the character's desire to own things is obsessive: it reaches the point of absurdity when "Miz Snopes" (Ab's wife), to buy the milk separator, trades off her only cow; the point of depravity when Henry Armstid, to buy a worthless runaway horse, spends the money his children need for shoes and food. That people need to own things to compensate for their feelings of personal inadequacy is sad; but that they need to own other people is disastrous. The devastated lifelessness of Armstid's wife and all Snopes' women testifies to the viciousness of a system that equates masculinity the possession and dominance of a woman. That Mrs. Armstid has been reduced to a "motionless," "insensate," "inanimate" (12), "blasted tree-trunk" (13), a mere lifeless shape, evidences the disastrous human consequences of a code which encourages a man to believe that only through subjugation of another can he manifest masculinity.

The code is, furthermore, disastrous even for the "unwomaned" bystander. Since it has brought him to conceive of masculinity only as conquest yet to understand that in any battle there is some risk of losing, such a man prefers not to fight; he leads instead a desperate, unfulfilled "'out of life" existence. Before such females as Mrs. Tull whose "grim and seething outrage" is directed "at all men, all males, and [it is an outrage] of which Tull himself was not at all the victim but the subject" (329), the fearsome man stands in danger. He recognizes that such women reduce their husbands to being "themselves but the eldest daughter of their own wives" (9) (indeed, they debilitate men just as ruthlessly as Ab Snopes and Henry Armstid do women), and he considers even such a woman as Eula Varner to be "only another mortal natural enemy of the masculine race" (15). Like Snopes who tries to run or Jody Varner who tries to remain impervious, such a man feels his masculinity rests precariously either upon dominance, failing that, upon independence. Seeing marriage only as a battle for ascendancy and preferring not to risk ravishment, man assumes he can retain some vestige of inviolable manhood only by avoiding womankind.

Jack Houston offers a telling example of such an assumption. When he returns from Texas to marry Lucy Pate, who will be neither owned nor dominated, Houston assumes, absurdly enough, that he is the one who must be dominated. Lucy and Mink are lack of understanding of human interdependence. Since childhood their relationship has been nothing more than "a feud, a gage, wordless, uncapitulating, between that unflagging will [Lucy's] not for love or passion but for the married state, and that furious and as unbending one [Houston's] for solitariness and freedom" (21). Knowing her "female ruthlessness" (22), Houston sees marriage only as acquiescence to and capitulation before Lucy Pate's unflagging will, only as a sacrifice of masculinity. So he buys a stallion to represent that "polygamous and bitless masculinity which he had relinquished" in marriage; to the horse he makes an "actual transference, the deliberate filling of the vacancy of his abdication" (23). But something in Houston will be neither tamed nor subjugated. After only six months of marriage to Lucy, some principle of masculine self-assertion rebels. Fittingly, the representative of Houston's bitless masculinity-the stallion-destroys the woman who was herself interested not in love but in possession, whose marriage to him was predicated upon the demand that, for her, Houston abandon his manhood.

While, then, in *The Hamlet* a man like Armstid may try to purchase "bitless masculinity" in the shape of a horse, and a man like Houston may try to abrogate "bitless masculinity" to a horse, there is yet another type of man who tries only to repress his masculinity. He is unwomaned, but he neither flees woman nor does battle with her; he does battle constantly, but he seeks to conquer, not woman, but himself. Labove is such a man. He is like an ancient monk who "with actual joy" could forsake the world to battle "not to save humanity about which he would have cared nothing... but with his own fierce and unappeasable natural appetites" (106). Monk like, Labove can readily eschew the world without a moment's self-doubt. He can sacrifice most human concerns for an ambitious design not unlike Sutpen's in *Absalom, Absalom*, but Labove can suppress his sexuality. Eula Varner's rampant femininity finally subverts Labove, even after years of self-torturing resistance, from his plan.

As his compulsion to possess Eula Varner becomes more and more obsessive, Labove reaches a state of fanaticism as mad as Henry Armstid's desire for spotted horse and buried and more obsessive, Labove reaches state money. Maddened by his own desire, Labove finally

did not even want to make love to her but her, see blood spring and run, watch that serene face warp to the indelible mark of terror and agony beneath his own; to leave some indelible mark of himself on it and then watch it even cease to

be a face. Then he would exorcise that. He would drive it from him whereupon their positions would reverse. It would now be himself importunate and prostrate [before Eula Varner]... (23).

The implications are obvious. Like the other men in *The Hamlet*, Labove conceives of sex as conquest, ravishment, but with Labove the principle of sex as a matter of beating or being beaten reaches its utmost extremes of sadistic and masochistic desire. After crying to Eula, " 'That's it... Fight it. Fight it. That's what it is: a man and a woman fighting each other' " (24), but failing to arouse even fear in her, denied as object for conquest, Labove turns on himself. His self-flagellation, his battle with his own appetites, is the result of transference, from Eula to himself, of his destructive compulsion for conquest. With Labove, pain offers a perverse surrogate for sex.

This same substitution of self-torture as an alternative for the conquest of a woman appears also, after Lucy's death, in the person of Jack Houston. Houston is linked with Labove by the motif of the "monk like iron cot" (92) where he sleeps now that Lucy is gone and where he lies "rigid, indomitable, and panting" (22) as Labove had lain "naked, rigid," "prone and sweating" (24) on his narrow bed. Placing his monk like cot beneath the window where the full moon of April (said to guarantee the fertilizing act) had fallen across his marriage bed, Houston inflicts torturous grief on himself; he fact, seeks out "fibred and durable grief for despair to set its teeth into" (32). Houston's grieving in "savage, indomitable fidelity" (p. 208) to Lucy is part service to the woman who demanded his subjugation, part penance for the masculine principle which in its reassertion killed her, and part the sadism which, denied an object to victimize, reverts, as masochism, upon the would-be victimizer.

Conclusion:

The themes of Masculinity, isolation, violence, abstinence, fanatical devotion to hard work, and of impotent wrath appear in Labove and Houston and are re-iterated too in the story of that anonymous barn owner who, having subdued his victims, appears to have turned with renewed vigour on himself. Indeed, the ascetic monasticism of such men as Labove and Houston is only the obverse side of the principle of masculine conquest epitomized in most of the other men of *The Hamlet*.

These theories, however, do not quite cover all the men in *The Hamlet*. Flem is omitted because he is too mechanical, ahuman and sexless, even to care about masculinity. But also there is Eck whose marriage is apparently happy, certainly prolific. And there is the idiot Ike who without lust, greed, and blood thirsts or conscience loves and protects his own, understanding that there is "something in passion . . . which cares for its own" (p. 196). Throughout *The Hamlet* Ike and Mink are the only men capable of separating love from greed. The tragedy is that, while Mink's love involves also his need for retaliation and subjugation, Ike's love, though it remains pure and selfless, is also a mindless love squandered on a mindless beast. Ratliff, of course, is only temporarily obsessed by greed, and he comes very close to being the Faulknerian hero; Warren Beck explains that "Ratliff epitomizes a type Faulkner strongly believes in, the exceptional common man, unsophisticated but intelligent, responsible, principled, and plainly capable." Mr. Beck writes, Ratliff does display "a calm rational integ⁹ which the reader deeply admires. But Faulkner is presenting Ratliff as the ideal man. Ratliff falls short of ideal, of course, at least twice in this novel.

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