

Moral Tenets: Ultimatum of Existence in the Select Works of William Faulkner

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Abstract

Life of integrity and harmony in a community definitely require the code of conduct. This is essentially adjoined by values; these values prove human beings are rational and they certainly possess reason for every action in their day to day life. Their actions bring out their beliefs, attitudes and custom. In the select works of William Faulkner which are taken for the study delivers perfect medium of the values and the integrity in maintaining the values by the characters have become an unquestionable doubt of existence in man. This research work focuses on the absence of moral values which lead to confusion and disorientation in the lives of many characters. All the characters discussed in the select works of William Faulkner gives a perfect medium of trouble not only to self but also to others just because of the least consideration that is given to the values based on morality. Life of harmony and integrity is never given a major consideration by the majority of characters in the select works of William Faulkner which leads to perplexity and sufferings. Sense of betrayal, judgmental, forbidding, no concern about the human race, break of law of a conventional moral code, culture of violence, injustice etc. are clearly portrayed because of the negligence of the moral code that is to be nurtured in every individual.

Key Words: integrity, values, beliefs, negligence, judgmental, disorientation,

If man is to live, as he should, moral guidance is necessary in his every day life. Moral acts are vital acts, flowing from intelligent, living human beings and the meaning should be understood by those who perform the acts. Moral goodness of actions depends on the conformity with rule of right conduct and conscience; this should serve as the basic guide in every act. Conscience is the judgment which one makes about the moral goodness of one's act. Morality deals with the choice of good and bad, of right and wrong. Moral values have been defined as choosing justified means to achieve justified ends. Some basic principles like right to live, avoidance of pain and suffering, consideration of good for all including oneself etc. have been recognized as criteria of morality. Sound morality is based on tradition; culture and religion have been found good from a pragmatic point of view. Moral values include chastity dedication, loyalty, non-violence, truthfulness, concern for environment, obedience, justice etc. To put in brief, morality is the Do's of the society without any kind of botheration to anyone.

William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* clearly records the downfall of Mr. Compson's family. The analyses will certainly state the reason for the decline of the family in terms of the lack in morality. If we start analyzing right from the beginning Mrs. Caroline Compson stands as a terrific picture and it clearly records the reason for the downfall of Mr. Compson's family is mainly due to Caroline Compson.

Mrs. Compson is the cold and self-centered mother who is sensitive about the social status, and her passion towards her son as a curse on her and rejecting the love of the other children and her husband. Cleanth Brooks states:

She is certainly at the root of Quentin's lack of confidence in himself and his inverted pride. She is at least the immediate cause of her husband's breakdown in to alcoholic cynicism, and doubtless she is ultimate responsible for Caddy's promiscuity. There is some evidence that Caddy's conduct was obsessive and compulsive a flight from her family. she tells her brother Quentin "there was something terrible in me some times at night I could see it grinning at me through (my lover's) their faces"(131)

Mrs. Compson is viewed as a mother who has no qualities of a mother. The character of Mrs. Caroline Compson states that the moral values which are guided by the principles are not in her. Mrs. Compson bothers the whole family. It turns out finally that her children reject her. If one searches for a code of honour in Caroline, disappointment will be the result.

It is necessary to analyse whether the family of Mr. Compson has the code of honor to judge moral values. Quentin is the only heir of Mr. Compson who is committed emotionally to the code of honor but with the connection to the reality he has lost it. His continuous rejection of living proves that he has lost it. He goes on torturing himself because he has a deep concern for Caddy's sin. This happens mainly because to him the cause for Caddy's pregnancy is not Dalton Ames but himself, so we can say that Quentin lost the code of honour.

The picture of Caddy given by Faulkner shows us the paradox of her character. It also clearly points out that the present world pities her. But it can be said that it should not be so because we can sense Caddy's betrayal of honor. In Quentin's section he recalls the time when Caddy came home after being with some man. Benjy sees her and begins to howl and tries to force her into bathroom, Caddy escapes and runs to the branch and lay there letting water run over her hips "I ran down the hill in the vacuum of crickets like a breath traveling across a mirror she was lying in the water her head on the sand pit the water flowing about her hips ..."
(*The Sound and the Fury*)

Caddy's lying on the branch letting water run over is a symbol of purification. Since her sexual indulgences are all forms of rejection she feels the need for cleansing or purifying herself after each encounter. This act is also an escape from the responsibility to the self. She gets pregnant by a passing soldier, quickly marries someone else, and then deserts daughter, husband and family alike to lead her own life. Her response to a loveless family is not only to repudiate married love but also to dissolve the boundary between passion and desire. On the whole Caddy's action and character states that she is betraying the code of honor.

If a comparison is made between Mr. Compson and Quentin, they both stand in two different polarities. This just says that Mr. Compson is a man who never has a concern towards the view of Quentin. Mr. Compson's views are totally contradictory to Quentin's, particularly about and woman and virginity. In the beginning of Quentin's section he tries to tell his father that Caddy's pregnancy was due to incest that he committed and Mr. Compson responds to that, "In south you are ashamed of being a virgin. Boys. Men. They lie about it. Because it means less to women, Father said. He said it was men invented virginity not women." (75 *The Sound and the Fury*)

Mr. Compson was not particularly upset to find out that his daughter was pregnant. He tried to make Quentin understand that it was the man who invented virginity and the women don't care about it. Mr. Compson maintains that life is essentially useless and there are no values in life outside those of personal pleasure and acting the role of a gentleman. He looks upon women as essentially inferior and naturally evil, so Caddy's promiscuity is only a bit of natural human folly. He is not really concerned with the horror involved. This shows that Mr. Compson does not consider the code of honor; he tears down any assumed value that Quentin tries to develop. He just wants to be a gentleman without any concern for moral values. His response towards the view of Quentin is that he never takes incest as a moral problem. To him morality is not at all a matter to be analysed and to be judged. This clearly states that he never took pains to be a moral creature.

Stupen in *Absalom, Absalom!* also stands in the same position. According to the view of Rosa, Stupen is a demon and he brought nothing but destruction to her family. Stupen's interest was not in the progress of society, he was very much particular about the progress of the self. His concern about the human race is totally opposite to human race. As Mr. Compson, Stupen also had the same idea about the incest. When Stupen comes to visit Henry to tell him that he must not let Bon marry Judith, for the first time he tells Henry the real reason for forbidding the match: the matter of Bon's Negro blood. Stupen thinks that allowing a Negro blood would cause a taint in his planned dynasty. So he was worried much about allowing Negro blood and he never cared about the incest. It can also be the idea of Stupen that incest can be accepted because that would merely be a break of a law of a conventional moral code for which he had no respect.

Faulkner's novels give a clear picture of the transformation of a culture of peace into a culture of violence. Every day an individual instead of becoming a better person goes in the opposite direction. Violence plays a prominent role in the world of Faulkner. It brings the picture of the modern man. Morality says more about the controlling the senses.

In *Go Down, Moses*, Rider, a strong Negro cuts the throat of a security guard named Bird Song and he accepts the horrific violence. Whatever the kind of injustice inflicted by the white man, violence is not the solution. It shows how modern man is not able to accept the struggles and as a substitute he takes to violence as an answer.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* There are two types of similar incidents, Stupen, who is the main cause for his own decline is killed by Wash Jones for repudiating Wash Jones' granddaughter.

Wash Jones not only kills Stupen but also his granddaughter, her child and finally himself. Stupen seduced Wash Jones granddaughter who was desperate to find his dynasty. This action and Wash Jones also brings out a disorder in the society.

The second incident is that of Henry killing Bon. The cause for this act have two dimensions: one from Mr. Compson that Henry was morally shocked to hear from his father that Bon already had a wife and a child and therefore he left home with Bon to war, hoping that Bon would say that he would not marry Judith. At the last moment as the two enter the gates of Stupen's Hundred and Henry realizes that Bon will go through the marriage, he kills Bon to save Judith for involving in a bigamous marriage.

According to Quentin and Sherve, Stupen have already said to Henry that he and Bon are brothers and Bon is partly a Negro. Stupen leaves the responsibility of stopping the marriage with Henry. Henry through the rest of war hopes either he or Bon will be killed and tries to persuade Bon said that he will not marry Judith. Bon refuses the forbidding of marriage but Henry kills him at the gate.

The incidents will state the reason for killing other will be the strong disorder of morality. Rider kills Bird Song because of racial conflict. Wash Jones kills the three and himself because he thinks that morality has gone in the seduction and rejecting of his granddaughter. Henry kills Bon because of bigamy and racial hatred.

Though the reason has a great impact on morality the most questionable is the act of killing. As already mentioned in the beginning morality is avoidance of pain and suffering and consideration of good for all including oneself and this is the main criteria of morality.

With regard to this act the main criteria of morality is lost. It creates pain not only to the receiver but also to the performer. For this Wash Jones and Rider are great examples. They suffer just because of certain acts of them, this results Rider in committing suicide and the same thing happened to Wash Jones. The might have committed suicide to escape from all (themselves, society and law).

In *The Sound and the Fury* Miss. Quentin represents another Caddy. This can be witnessed in Benjy's section; Quentin kissing her boyfriend and she climbs down the window every night to meet various men. In the same section Jason warns Miss. Quentin not to allow

any people around the house any more. Miss. Quentin also performs a kind of sexual promiscuity, which is the same type of self – destruction performed by Caddy.

Trustworthiness has significant role in morality though it is complicated it concerns variety of qualities like honesty, integrity, reliability and loyalty. All these qualities stand as a strong pillar of trustworthiness. In *The old people* Issac remembers Sam Fathers' history; the son of Ikkembote, the chief who sold the land to the white people and also sold his son and wife into slavery. In both ways there is typical diversion in the moral values first, in the portrayal of the history of Sam Fathers and his betrayal at the hands of the father and the secondly racial discrimination. The act of selling the son and his wife shows that Sam Fathers' father is a person who never valued any kind of relationship concerned with trustworthiness.

Isaac remembers the selling of son and his mother :

He probably never held it against old doom for selling him and his mother into slavery, because he probably believed the damage was already done before then and it was the same warriors' chiefs' blood in him and doom both that was betrayed through the black blood which his mother gave him. (168 *The old people*)

This gives us another kind of justification towards it. It can be any kind of justification but in no way does become a justified means because of honesty, reliability, integrity and sincerity is lost. Morality never Changes. It never differs from country to country or age to age. Egocentricity is not moral and certainly it is pride; which is not a moral value. Moral values take a major part in defining any character. Morals become a set of hereditary or genetic natures. It means having a standard and following that standard, even when it is not popular. In brief moral values are right behaviour. Morality is having respect and love for humans but in Faulkner's novel it is not so. In order to achieve over own ends it is not acceptable to be dishonest or unethical. All the characters, that have analysed, do harm to themselves and mainly to other and these shows they do not lead a life of morality.

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