

William Faulkner and His Narrative in Short Stories

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Abstract

William Faulkner was born near Oxford, Mississippi, in 1897. Faulkner's grandfather had been one of the wild characters of the south. Most readers and critics associate Faulkner with the South as automatically as they associate Thomas Hardy with Wessex, Robert Frost with New England, and W. B. Yeats with Ireland. Such an association can carry a pejorative weight in the sense that it might brand one a narrow regional writer. This accusation might have arisen in the case of Faulkner as he has dealt with the South in many of his fictional works. His short stories have an underlying unique pattern, which gives us better understanding and knowledge about them. This pattern is threefold with varying types. This paper proposes to analyse some of the stories of William Faulkner in which the point of encounter and the point of termination are present in narratively significant manner. Encounter in these stories logically and narratively leads to termination. But, whereas in the narrative pattern discussed so far termination leads on to initiation but initiation in these stories does not occur. And even if there is an appearance of initiation, it seems to be dubious or ambiguous. There seems to be enough potential in the protagonist to become an initiate after the encounter and termination. But, ultimately, it is doubtful whether the protagonist moves on to a new world or a new way of life.

Introduction

In "*Fox Hunt*" Faulkner has given a successful treatment of initiatory pattern. This story also is concerned with sexual triangle.

Harrison Blair is a wealthy man fond of hunting fox. He does not care about his wife in anyway. He is monomaniacal in his pursuit of the fox. Harrison Blair does not love his wife and is even contemptuous of her because she cannot ride well.

Mrs. Blair eventually turns to other men simply because her indifferent husband denies her attention. She first turns toward Allen, a wealthy Yale student. Likewise, Steve Gawtreys whom she loathes pursues her. The narrator indirectly states that Mrs. Blair is a fox. While Harrison is pursuing a fox to kill Gawtreys is pursuing Mrs. Blair (a fox) to seduce her.

The conventional line of encounter takes place at the very end where Mrs. Blair lets Gawtrety to seduce her. When she comes to know that Allen has married a show girl, she, lets Gawtrety to cuckold Harrison Blair:

... Projecting, trying to project himself, after the way of the young, toward that remote and inaccessible trying to encompass the rain and inarticulate instant of division and despair which, being young, was very like rage: rage at the lost woman, despair of the man in whose shape there walked the tragic and inescapable earth her ruin. 'She was trying', he said, and then he began to curse, savagely... (Collected Stories: 607).

Mrs. Blair's encounter with Gawtrety takes her to the termination of filial and familial norm. By her act of allowing Gawtrety to seduce her she is paving the way for estrangement with her husband. Mrs. Blair's act does away with faithfulness which is the bond between husband and wife.

Mrs. Blair gets "initiated" into disloyal sexual act by Gawtrety at the same time that Harrison Blair succeeds in killing the fox he has been pursuing. The fulfilment of his chase is also the moment of his being cuckolded. Desertion of care and faith and violation of the codes of married life can never be considered initiation or the consequence of initiation.

Faulkner presents in "*Victory*", as Nordenberg points out (1983:26) the nature of military establishment that may contribute to the fate of the lost generation.

The protagonist of the story, the Scotsman Alec Gray, is a Youngman in the battalion. One day during the parade the Sergeant-major scolded him for a bad turn out and put him in the penal battalion as punishment. This encounter seems initially to snap the military career of Gray because he could have been thrown out of army by the Sergeant-major. But he was only sent to the penal battalion. After the period of punishment, he returns to the battalion and proves his mettle as a soldier in the war. During the battle he kills his own Sergeant-major who was tossing bombs, and Gray was behind him while others were forwarding at a distance. Gray kills the Sergeant-major using his bayonet that pierced into the throat of the Sergeant-major. In the midst of heavy bomb-blowing Gray's act was unnoticed. After this he intrudes into the enemy's frontline as a lonely man and extirpates the camp of enemy with the support of his battalion which arrived a little later. Gray's encounter with the Sergeant-major can be considered the ladder for his success. At the end of the war he is given citation.

After the citation Gray comes out of the army. First, his military career is at an end. Another important point of termination in his life is his determination not to resume the ancestral trade. Thus, Gray's connection with his ancestral business of shipbuilding is once and for all terminated. He goes to London for a higher position:

HIS POSITION WAS WAITING. It was in an office. He had already had cards made: Captain Alec Gray. M.C., D.S.M., and on his return to London he joined the officers' Association, donating to the support of the widows and orphans (Collected Storie: 455).

Alec Gray seems to experience initiation like other protagonists but in a different form. Initiation may here be his exposure to war and the opportunity to prove his mettle as a soldier. He is promoted to the rank of Captain. But Gray's act of killing the Sergeant-major is not a normal act. It may be the spirit of vengeance. And vengeance is not a mark of initiation. After the war, when he is out of the army and comes to London, he finds things changed. His position is gone, and he cannot get one that will keep him up economically and socially. But he chooses to eke out a life of poverty but in arrogance.

Though he could have returned to his family in Scotland and continued the family trade, he does not go and instead sells marches for livelihood in London. Even at this stage he does not give up his arrogance and pride. Nordenberg aptly puts the reasons for his fall:

The pride in him which is a prominent trait of the Grays in Alec's case turnout to have disastrous effect when it clashes with the demands of the military systems. This corruption of one of the basic values in his family tradition leads Alec onto a road that will eventually lead to tragedy (Faulkner: War Stories.1985:27).

Alec Gray's choice of a life of poverty is not a mark of humility or the result enlightened initiation. It is the working of pride and hence initiation seems out of the sphere of Gray.

The story "*The Tall Men*" which is not much appreciated as other stories of Faulkner deals with the McCallum Family in conflict with the draft, or, more exactly, with an investigator the State Draft Head Quarters has sent to Jefferson to find out what's the matter with the local draft board that the McCallums haven't registered. (Ward Miner cited in Hashiguchi.1963:8).

The McCallums are seven in all---Jackson, Stuart, Raphael, Lee, Buddy and Buddy's twin sons, Anse and Lucius. Mr. Pearson is the draft board investigator who brings the warrants for the McCallum boys. Gombault, the marshal assists Pearson in his job.

The encounter occurs between Buddy's twin sons, Anse and Lucius, and Pearson when the later brings warrants to them for having not registered in the draft:

'That's not the question, Mr. McCallum, the investigator said. 'All required of them was to register. Their numbers might not even be drawn this time, under the law of averages, they probably would not be. But they had refused and failed anyway- to register' (Collected Stories: 47-8).

'I intend to take to Jackson', he said', 'My reservation is already made. Serve the warrant and we will ----'(Collected Stories: 48).

This encounter took place because the McCallums did not register their names in the draft. The immediate consequence of this encounter is termination of a few things. First of all when Mr. Pearson announced the purpose of his visit, there was no alarmed of hateful reaction on the faces

of McCallums. The investigator could discern no change whatever. (Collected Stories: 47). Seeing the genteel acts of McCallums, Pearson's preconceived idea about them is completely repudiated. Buddy's sons Anse and Lucius leave for Memphis to enlist themselves, and, thus, their old way of life is terminated.

Both Anse and Lucius are at the threshold of a new way of life. So far they have been living the peaceful farmers' life. Now they are forced to enter into military life, if not immediately, later on. Like the other protagonists, Anse and Lucius also seem to reach the point where initiation occurs. Initiation to them is being enlisted in the army. But initiation in their case is not self-chosen as it is in the case of Sarty in "Barn Burning", of Hawkshaw of "Hair". Instead, it is something imposed on them by Buddy. Consideration of legal consequences for having not registered and fear of punishment lead to their enlistment. So, their entry into a new existence is not a self-motivated phenomenon, but something forced from outside. Therefore this cannot be considered proper initiation.

This paper has analysed two shortstories of William Faulkner in the light of how the protagonist of each story experiences a vital encounter and termination and how this seems to launch the protagonist into the initiatory process. But initiation in these stories is not full-fledged and not significant narratively. In many cases, initiation is conspicuous by its absence.

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