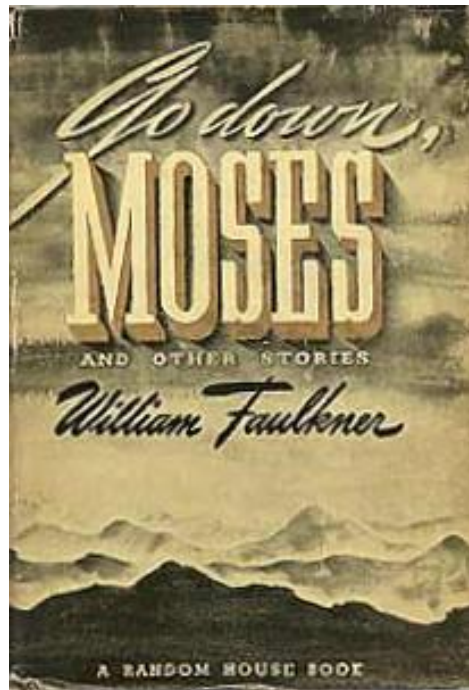


The Shifting Stand – A Shift in Primitive Values in William Faulkner's *Go down, Moses*

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Courtesy: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Go_Down,_Moses_\(book\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Go_Down,_Moses_(book))

Abstract

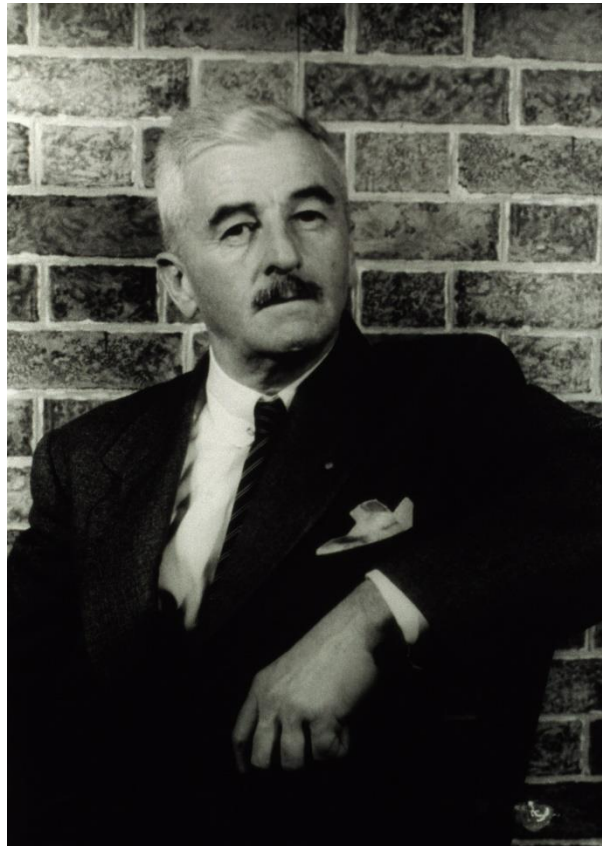
William Faulkner is one of the greatest novelists of the prominent American contemporaries. He was able to bring in a society which has lost its values and the required principles. This paper aims to bring out shift in the primitive values that man has for himself. Change in values and its system has brought a catastrophe in the lifestyle of the community. This paper concentrates on shift in the primitive values in *Go down, Moses*, a collection of short stories.

Keywords: William Faulkner, *Go down, Moses*, Primitive values, Change, Catastrophe

Introduction

William Faulkner is one of the great novelists of American south and he is on a number of counts the most interesting contemporary American writer of fiction. He is able to bring out the shift in the

primitive values in his novels. This article is aimed to picture the shift in the primitives in his collection of short stories titled as *Go down, Moses*. The connection between man and nature plays a major role in the book. Faulkner's technique in *Go Down, Moses* is to present stories with full significance in the overall history of his characters. Each character in *Go Down, Moses* brings out the startling reality of modern corrupted society. Though the book is suffused with characters, all the characters are handled according to the vision of Faulkner. William Faulkner's novels point out that modern man is a being of imperfection. He is not really to cope with the problems of modern life. In order to escape from this situation, he wanders away from the set of principles, or standards that a society expects from him.



William Faulkner 1897-1962

Courtesy: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Faulkner

The Shift - Primitive Values

Go down, Moses is a collection of short stories. They tell the composite history of the McCaslin family, of the descendants of Carothers McCaslin and the residents of the plantation he founded. With the bits of information appearing in the stories the complete history of Carothers McCaslin is clarified. Each story is independent of the other and has its own plot. This collection is interrelated with a number of themes, which are intertwined and spread out among a multitude of stories and characters.

Go down, Moses can be said that another brilliant set piece, which takes a probing look to understand the south as a whole. It is also proof to the modern American south. Among the creations of God man is the highest. He plays a prominent role right from the time of creation. But he is not the same

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as he was at the time of creation. Changes have happened. From the primitive thinking and acts to rational thinking and behaviour man has evolved. Everything in this world is coming closer towards his grasp. In today's world he is considered as a supreme power by taking charge over the whole world. Though man has power over all the things, he is supposed to lead a life filled with values.

It can be said that man's significance is composed of the values that he lives and dies for. The actions of man are like the index of a book, only the remarkable in them is pointed out. If this point of view is lost, then there will be a disordered confusion in his life.

Primitive values are the practice of the faith and custom, they are the principles that sustain connection with the environment. They help to feel connected with a large community of people with same thoughts. When one has a genuine concern for others, one is said to be social. A socially matured person adjusts himself to the laws, and not only to society laws and also to the laws of nature and animals. Man has been of the view that animals had the capacity of suffering. He should not cause them to suffer regardless of particular characteristics they have. Animals deserve the right to treat as ends in themselves, rather than simply as means of human ends. Preserving the life of animals comes as one of the basic qualities of being primitive, not only animals need it but also the forests. All these come as a basic to have certain values of man's primitive nature.

Deforestation – The Plight of the Bear

In *Go Down, Moses* deforestation of primitive values acts as a prominent aspect. This deforestation states about the decline of the ancient values. Faulkner, points that this is happening in and around the world and in his novel *The Bear* comes as a proof to it. The pioneering character Issac grows older and becomes an expert and woods man, and continues going with the hunting party every time. The group becomes increasingly preoccupied with hunting old Ben, almost immortal bear. Sam Fathers who teaches Issac old Ben's ways says that it will take an extraordinary dog to bring Old Ben down.

Issac sees Old Ben several times but he is not able to do what he intended to do because he felt a sense of danger. Finally, they find a dog capable of bringing the old Ben to bay.

The Bait

Lion a huge, wild Airedale mix with extraordinary courage and savagery. Sam makes Lion semi tame by starving him until he will allow himself to be touched. Boon Hogganbeck has devoted himself to lion and even shares a bed with him. Some time later in the deep woods, near the river, lion leaps at old Ben and takes hold of his throat. Old Ben seizes Lion and begins shredding his stomach with his claws. Boon Hogganbeck draws his knife and throws himself on the top of the bear, slitting his throat. Old Ben dies, and a few days later, lion dies as well. Sam Fathers collapses after the flight and dies no longer after lion. Lion and Sam are buried in the same clearing.

The Bear – Symbolic Exploration

The Bear, the longest story in the book is Faulkner's most intense focused and symbolic exploration of the relationship of man and nature. Old Ben the legendary bear is the symbol of power and inscrutability of nature. He is nearly immoral, nearly invulnerable, capable of overpowering virtually anything and capable of wreaking wider spear destruction on human settlement and establishments. The men, who put their minds to work on a single purpose of hunting him, are in some way representative of

man's drive to control nature. In the earlier stage hunting has been portrayed as a noble and respectful act, but here it becomes in part a symbol of man's attempt to conquer nature.

Cleanth Brooks says that:

The basic symbolism of story is clear. Old Ben obviously represents the wilderness itself, nature against which man must pit his strength. Nature is awe some, powerful, terrible and yet must be respected and finally loved. One can "possess" the wilderness only by respecting and loving the wilderness not by filing legal title and turning its tree in to so many board feet of lumber or even more abstractly, into so many shares on the stock exchange [...].

Man's attitude towards nature is a function of the health of his own nature. (270)

A Symbol of Untamed Nature

Old Ben is virtually mythic force and only over the course of years are the men able to bring him down. The earth of old Ben at the hands of Boon Hoogganbeck is also somewhat ambiguous- it is a moving devastating scene but it is clear the death of the old Ben indicate that there is something wrong in it.

Contrasted with the wild, solemn, primal forest in the story is the dry, orderly human commissionaire, where Issac reads Buck and Buddy's old ledgers and imprints a sense of the evil of land ownership and the warped thinking that justifies it. Issac traces the curse of ownership from Biblical parables to European history to the institution of slavery and down fall of south during the Civil War. In this story Old Ben becomes a symbol of untamed nature and of some principles of freedom. Though it is very hard to destroy, man is continuously working to collapse it.

Human Personality and Environmental Factors

Faulkner is having much concern towards nature. In the earlier days men were trying to grow trees and his attitude towards animal is preventing them from danger. He looked animals as a creature which too bears a life. But today's man is not willing to do so. He thinks he wants to conquer nature and he never wants to be a responsible person to preserve nature. He never has loyalty towards it.

Environmental factors play an equally important role in creating the human personality. It is not good to merely be passive to things around the humanity. As each and every thing has value the nature to have its own value. Nature plays prominent role in human's life. Thinking that he developed mentally started destroying the nature which is the basic source to create human's personality. *The Bear* shows that man is trying to conquer nature, which is a loss to primitive values.

Faulkner's work highlights the kinder social problem of human being as basis and an incessant search for a meaningfulness of life. Social criticism in Faulkner is implicit and his fictional voice is the voice of human despair. In fact, Faulkner has used fiction as a platform for his social appeals. In all novels, he has rendered a bitter commentary on the decaying values and ethics of a degenerating civilization.

Faulkner and Dickens

Faulkner can be compared with Dickens, for exposing the trivialities of everyday life, the little worries, the little pleasure, the little hardship, and the little tragedies and ever flowing sympathy. But Faulkner does not allow a ray of humor to radiate his novels. He has charted the inner crisis of the modern

man. The problem of meaninglessness is so pervasive that it threatens to corrode every sphere of human life.

Faulkner's Technique in *Go Down, Moses*

Faulkner's technique in *Go Down, Moses* is to present stories where the full significance in the overall history of his characters is not apparent until later in the book. The book explores the history and development of the McCaslin family, which is descended from Carothers McCaslin and occupies the plantation he founded. Faulkner incorporates into McCaslin family many of the characters he viewed as essential to an understanding of the south as a whole including the painful racial divide between whites and blacks that defined south history in the decades before and after the Civil War. He does this by splitting the McCaslin family tree in to two branches one white and the other black. The white branch obviously descends from Carothers McCaslin; and his wife the black descends from Carothers McCaslin and the slave girl Tomey, with whom McCaslin had a sexual affair.

The first part of the book is *Was* which is a brilliant set – piece which gives a probing look at the past and a handy opportunity for Faulkner to establish some of the major characters. The second part *The Fire And The Hearth* earth explores the themes of property, patrimony, family, and inheritance. Though the third part *Pantaloon in Black* is the least connected of all stories in *Go Down, Moses* it shows the crazy behavior of a Negro with the shocking extent of misunderstanding, racial hatred and casual acceptance of horrific violence, which stands close to the topic. Sam Fathers history in *The Old People* is another example of cultural displacement with mixed racial status of the child. *The Bear* makes magnificent hunting story. This hunting story in another aspect provides a clear vision of deforestation and it is the centerpiece of *Go Down, Moses*. The story in *Delta Autumn* takes up the question of gender difference, and the last part *Go Down, Moses* is centrally about the wall of racial misunderstanding.

Conclusion

Faulkner's vision is coloured by a certain love of primitivism as against modern society. Being a genuine artist he transposed the aspects of reality. He does not want to make a mere mechanical copy of things. He enriched his work of art with experience like naturalists, his aim is to observe closely and tell everything including every detail and to portray the environment exactly as it is. His imagination and creativity drawn from real life situation, and it plays a very significant role in all his artistic works.

Faulkner, with the touch of realism weaves the stories around the psychic imbalances and impulsive actions of their characters and thus introduces uncommon occurrences into the customary recognizable world. He deviates from the method of portraying characters, which are endowed with individual traits, essential and decisive characteristic of the environment, and the social milieu to which they belong. His characters are highly individualistic. They are against the existing code of social life and they indulge in actions, which are irrational. They try to work out their destruction in their own way. The heroes of his work are finding with the psyche and a kind of mental imbalance

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