

CHAPTER - IV

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CHAPTER - IV

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Faulkner's conception of Old protagonists has universal dimensions. The old protagonists in this chapter do not belong to the fictitious world of Yoknapatawpha. The old protagonists in this Chapter undergo the unusual experience of great social and emotional upheaval as they live through the World War-I and the Great Depression of 1929. Through the portrayal of these old protagonists Faulkner presents the theme of change, decay and death. Even the change of metaphors from horses and scythe to trains and plains signifies the tremendous mobility acquired by the industrialized world. The theme of change is suggested through the change in the language spoken by his characters from the ghetto to the American English. The portrayal of the old protagonists begins with the ante-bellum South and reaches the European background. Hence, this has universality of meaning. The stage of the action is shifted from rural South to urban South, from Southern America to European countries like Italy. The post-war society does not confine itself to the values which were held dear by the agrarian South.

War is the powerful and destructive weapon through which changeability is manifested in its worst form. It was the Civil War that uprooted the decayed class of aristocrats from its land based stable society. After the World War I, there appeared a new mock-aristocracy i.e. a class of arrogant army officers. The law of changeability gave rise to modernism which has created a new set of values. It has given rise to the sense of alienation, in the disintegrated social milieu.

The theme of change is suggested through the change in the professions of the old protagonists. The old protagonists in the first chapters were closely associated with the agrarian social structure, but the old protagonists in this chapter are associated with the urban society. In this chapter, the old protagonists are a captain, a businessman, a doctor, a priest and a beggerly tramp. It is equally important to note that with the advent of industrialism through a long war, the conventional order of the society was disintegrated, which finds expression in a number of ways. The first prey to it is the institution of family. The change is quite obvious. In the first place the old persons have lost the hold over the young generation. The conjugal relationship between man and woman, between husband and wife established by the past traditions and

customs has undergone a great change. The mutual doubt, sense of alienation and frustration and newly acquired materialistic values have brought about a serious change in outlook. As a spill over effect of this, change is traceable in offsprings of the old protagonists and their attitudes towards them. The assertion of individuality, and defiance of the established are offshoots of the law of changeability.

It is common among Faulkner's old protagonists to carve out their future. Like Thomas Sutpen("Wash"), Capt. Alec Grey in "Victory" has a grand design and some ideas of social prestige. But unfortunately their greed for mundane things is not fully realised as their end is quite tragic. The parallel between them is found in their course of action. In "Wash" Thomas Sutpen returns from the Civil War to his plantation that is ruined. In the end he is reduced to a very beggarly position. In the same way Captain Alec Grey in "Victory" cherishes false ideals of social prestige. For the sake of society and to belong to the class of aristocrats Sutpen rejects his wife with negro blood. In the same way Capt. Alec too rejects his god-fearing Scottish family only to belong to the class of officers in the army. But in the end he is reduced to a beggarly position.

The Greys reflect materialism and indifference of the post-war modernism. Old Alec Grey's attitude towards war is quite different. He appears to be more concerned about the industrial activity rather than the welfare of the country. He expects Captain Alec to grab and exploit the opportunity for making money. Faulkner attempts to show that if the agrarian economy of the past produced the staunch supporters of nationalism and stable society and guarded by them zealously then the industrial economy through war created the individuals like Captain Alec Grey who are opportunistic and indifferent, which is the result of the lack of stable society. Faulkner's haughty old protagonists who cling to the past are perished often violently by the impersonal force of changeability. The behavioural pattern of the old persons in a way laid the foundation of their destruction in the fast changing atmosphere. They have to reap the terrible harvest of violent and unnatural death and decay.

Captain Alec Grey, like most of Faulkner's old protagonists is cold, rigid and indifferent. It is his inherent arrogance and steadfastness to the pre-war ideals of social prestige and conception of being a gentleman in the post-war period, that bring about his total

downfall. In Faulkner's old persons there is no repentance for any crime nor any admission of guilt. Rigidity, arrogance and criminality are the inborn instincts in Faulkner's old protagonists.

Alec Grey's sense of superiority complex and reluctance to accept the herd-values are the objective equivalents of his posture. Faulkner writes:

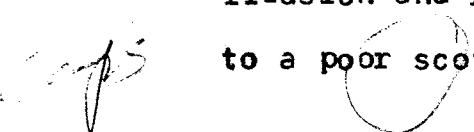
He drank some wine, "What deplorable, that man who ave, " the Swiss said, "But it is finish now. Not ? " Again the other said nothing. He was not looking at the Swiss. He did not seem to be looking at anything, with his rigid moustaches upon his rigid face . . . He turned and went towards the stairs. The two men at the bar watched him, his stiff and deliberate back.¹

The repetitive reference to Alec Grey's posture is the fundamental behavioural pattern often found in old protagonists (of Faulkner) for whom decay and destruction in their terrible form are promised. It is their superiority complex, rigidity and resistance to any sort of change in the changed conditions that resulted in the loss of their dignity. The mobility of life, time and change is well contrasted with the rigidity and motionlessness of Alec Grey as he travels by a train accompanied by some peasants. Faulkner attempts to accentuate the conflict between the agrarian society and the

industrial society in post-war modernism. Faulkner comments:

Presently they got out; the train went on. Then others entered the carriage, other peasants with muddy boots, carrying baskets or live or dead beasts; they in turn watched the rigid, motionless figure leaning at the window while the train ran across the ruined land and past the brick or iron stations among the tumbled ruins, watching his lips move as he read the names.²

Alec Grey tries to resist the time. Most of the old protagonists of Faulkner possess criminal mentality. The careful study of Grey's rise and fall reveals his close affinity with Faulkner's other old protagonists. Like Sutpen in "Wash" he too is defeated by the forces of change. The Civil War deprives him of his honour, title and property. Similarly the World War I renders Alec Grey useless and helpless. Sutpen returns to the ruined plantation like a beggar and Grey is reduced to a beggarly position and he returns to the spiritual wasteland. Both Sutpen and Grey cling to the false notions of prestige and are doomed to death. The war as the agent of time renders him rootless. In the end he is deprived of his identity. Grey is torn between illusion and reality. The reality was that he belonged to a poor scottish family and his earnest desire was to



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11 belong to the highclass of army officers. But the War brought about the downfall of the new class. It disintegrated the traditional structure of society. Grey's dilemma is the result of the multitudinous choices offered by the modernism. In order to build a lasting identity, which is quite unusual and non-traditional, Grey makes a futile attempt in the fast changing world. It results in the loss of the sense of self which can be attributed to his rejection of family like Sutpen of "Wash".

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1 The mobility of time dissolved the military society of high frowned, conceited and arrogant officers like Alec Grey. The arrogant and rigid Grey is rejected by the peace-time society. The past life of Grey is full of crime. While in army as a young soldier he had murdered his immediate boss who had punished him for not having shaved on the day of parade.

The end for Faulkner's old protagonists is always tragic and pitiable. They are humiliated, defeated and alienated from the rest of the world.

II

Faulkner's world of old protagonists consists of spinsters and old widows. The seventy year old Samantha

Ewing belongs to Faulkner's memorable matriarch figures. But in her change is apparently reflected as she and her businessman son Ira Ewing live through the period of the great financial crash of 1929.

Old Samantha Ewing asserts herself. She is rigid, obstinate and yet considerate. She clings to the past agrarian life in Nebraska, her native place. She is a woman of independent will. Faulkner comments :

And only reason she had no servant was that even at seventy she apparently clung stubbornly to the old habit of doing her own cooking and household work. ³

Her resistance to change comes to the surface when she is brought to a Californian city from Nebraska after the demise of her husband Ira, senior. She refuses anything finer and elaborate and thereby indulges in the memories of her puritanic past, as any deviation from it is death-like for her. The change in the sitting posture of Samantha Ewing is suggested by Faulkner while other old protagonists sit always rigid and bolt-upright signifying their class; Old Samantha sits stooped. This posture signifies a surrender and a change (brought about by time) and decay of the class of rigid personalities. In the domestic affairs of her son's family she has no 'say' whatsoever. Like other matriarch figures of Faulkner,

she too is reduced to nothing. She tries to get solace by sitting in the chair that has been brought by her from Nebraska. The particular old chair signifies her close affinity with the agrarian past. By sitting in that chair the old woman knits a shawl which serves as a cocoon of the past round her existence as she is suspended between the past and the present. Faulkner writes :

But she would have no other, just as she would have neither servant, car, nor telephone a gaunt spare slightly stooped woman upon whom even California and ease had put no flesh, sitting in one of the chairs which she had insisted on bringing all the way from Nebraska.

. . . Sitting so, a knitted shawl about her shoulders, she looked less like she lived in or belonged to the house, the room, than the son with his beach burn and his faintly gray temples and his bright expensive suavely anti-phonous garments did. She had changed hardly at all in the thirty-four years; she and the older Ira Ewing too, as the son remembered him, who, dead, had suffered as little of alteration as while he had been alive. ⁴

The old woman is shocked to see the corruption of her son and his family. She is disappointed to see that her grand children indulge in immoral activities. Her

(X) Retreating to the womb, I think, for
recession, a place of safety, a flight from
life, not death. 83

daughter-in-law represents materialism of the West.

There is a conflict between the puritanic ideals of
Samantha and the materialism and corruption of the new
generation of her daughter-in-law in which the grand old
lady is defeated and subdued. She is shocked into the
realization of the fact that her son has acquired
materialism and foul means, her granddaughter has become
the centre of sex-scandal and her grandson has become a
homosexual. Hence she prepares to return to Nebraska,
the primitive Nebraska where life has always been full
of hardships and calamities. To go back to Nebraska
means to invite death. This is a sort of her yearning
to return to the womb, that is death. Like most of
Faulkner's old protagonists she fails to make life worth
living, as she fails to transmit puritan values to her
grandchildren, and experiences death-in-life.

Her authority comes to be questioned by the
external agent in the form of her daughter-in-law as
is the case with most of the old matriarchs of Faulkner.
The centre of authority is snatched away from her.
Faulkner writes:

By that time she had given up the son and she
had long since learned that she and her
daughter-in-law were irrevocable and implacable

moral enemies. It was in the fifth year. One day in her son's home she saw the two children take money from their mother's purse lying on a table. The mother did not even know how much she had in the purse; when the grandmother told her about it she became angry and dared the older woman to put it to the test. The grandmother accused the children, who denied the whole affair with perfectly, straight faces. That was the actual break between herself and her son's family . . . ⁵

For the realization of their goal Faulkner's old protagonists do not hesitate to go to any length. There is a change in her stand as she wants to go back to Nebraska to breathe her last. While Faulkner's other old protagonists faced any situation boldly and rigidly, Samantha opts for escapism. She had been rendered helpless by the forces of change. In the materialistic milieu of the city she has lost her identity, and independence. Faulkner comments:

Her next move was curiously direct; there was something in it of the actual pioneer's opportunism, of taking immediate and cold advantage of Spartan circumstance, it was as though for the first time in her life, she was able to use something, anything which she had gained by bartering her youth and strong maturity against the Nebraska immensity, and this not in order to live further but in order to die, apparently

she saw neither paradox in it nor dishonesty. She began to make candy and cake of the material which her son bought for her on credit, and to sell them to the two grandchildren for the coins which their father gave them or which they purloined also from their mother's purse, hiding the coins in the vase with the timetable, watching the niggard hoard grow.⁶

This clearly suggests that she too has been corrupted by ~~the~~ materialism. This is the aspect of change in her stand. She has acquired the opportunism of the materialism of the urban society. She is waiting patiently for the proper time to come. It is worth noticing that the active obstinacy has been transformed into a passive one which finds reflection in Samantha's tryst with her destiny, her speculation, calculation and compromise. In the changed circumstances and a state of depravation Samantha undergoes the suffering for salvation, that is death. Faulkner writes:

It was still high, still afternoon; the land lay sprawled and myriad beneath it the land, the earth which spawned a thousand new faiths, nostrums and cures each year but no disease to even disprove them on - beneath the golden days unmarred by rain or weather, the changeless monotonous beautiful days without end countless out of the halcyon past and endless into the halcyon future.⁷

Through this Faulkner's strong dislike for growing materialism is apparent. The concluding part of the story throws light on Samantha's outlook on life in changing times. The end signifies that she accepts California, as the proper place for thoroughly corrupt persons, where everything is done, thought and felt in terms of money; this is the place where man is reduced to a bestial stage; where man is alienated from nature through materialistic progress of civilization. She considers that for corrupt persons this changeless atmosphere, from where nature seems to be permanently exiled, is the only destination. It occurs to her that she would have to drag on her meaningless and dead existence in the spiritual waste land, in the event of her failure to return to Nebraska. Through this Faulkner's affinity with agrarianism is accentuated.

M.E. Bradford comments:

The peace which Faulkner pictures as the elder Ewings, the peace which Samantha wishes to return to and die at the end of "Golden Land" is expressive of Faulkner's abiding agrarianism.⁸

III

The careful study of Faulkner's world of old persons reveals the disintegration of the institution of family

and society through the world war, industrialism and the materialism brought about by the forces of change. There is a subtle change in Faulkner's delienation of the old protagonists. Gradually, the old persons seem to be losing the battle in the crisis for identity. In the last stage, they appear to be helpless and hapless, alienated and ignored by the world.

Through the old narrator of "Pennsylvania Station" and his old sister he presents the last phase in the life of a decayed race of haughty old protagonists and how the forces of change have brought about the extinction of arrogance, and stubbornness in their character. The old protagonists in the pre-War period tried to resist the time in the face of any impending doom. They fought ceaselessly for their survival and even did not hesitate to sacrifice their loved ones. But in the later stage Faulkner has presented a subtle change. In Old Samantha Ewing of "Golden Land" we find compromise, as she has to adjust herself with the situation and wait for the proper time to return to Nebraska. In "Pennsylvania Station" the fall of Faulkner's unyielding persons is complete. The sister of the narrator stands for the helpless old persons in the wake of the Great Depression of 1929. The old narrator is a presented as a loafer. In the

changed circumstances they have no other way than to suffer. Through the transition from the Civil War, the World War I to the Great Depression of 1929, gradually they have lost their authority. Loneliness, hardship and meaningless existence are promised for them. The railway train is an apt metaphor of mobility. In the crowds of ~~the~~ people on the railway station the old narrator is lost. He has no other commitment than to observe the tragic end. His narration of the tragic life and death of his sister, is a realistic commentary on life after disillusionment. The old protagonists have no chance to exert their authority but they suffer in isolation. While other old protagonists of Faulkner were well fed and did not have to put in any physical labour but this position has been completely changed. While other matriarch figures of Faulkner did not have to fight for their bread and as they had their own home that could provide them a protective shield but in "Pennsylvania Station" Danny's old mother has to do the manual labour for her survival. Faulkner's world of old persons has suffered and in a way disintegrated because of the socio-economic process of change. The Yoknapatawpha female protagonists were possessive, bold and adamant and unyielding. They were prepared to go to any extent to retain the centre

of action, but the old female protagonists in the later stage appear to be defeated by the changeability. One common aspect about the tragedy of these old protagonists is that, in every case it is their loved ones who give a fatal blow to the very foundation of their existence by forgery and deception. In "Pennsylvania Station" the old woman is deceived by her own son Danny who indulges in forgery and runs away with her money she had saved with the insurance agent. Her sheer puritanism is defeated by the materialism & opportunism of her son. Like Samantha of "Golden Land" she wants to embrace death, but she wants a beautiful coffin. She has no other business rather than to prepare for death. Throughout her long span of life she had saved money for her coffin that is death. She has become convinced of the fact that death alone would permanently settle her problems and put an end to her meaningless existence and sense of alienation. Samantha and Danny's old mother have accepted their fate and sought a compromise. They don't have any opportunity to assert themselves. Samantha experiences death-in-life and disillusioned Danny's mother dies of a shock at the instance of her deception by her own son. She seems to have lost her capacity to endure, to struggle. Most of Faulkner's matriarch figures are widows and there is always the absence of a leading male person in the family. Danny's

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mother and Old Samantha are widows and had to bear with the consequences as they are exposed to ravages of changeability, decay and death. Hence, in them there is absence of arrogance and destroying rigidity. Samantha Ewing and Danny's old mother are eagerly looking forward to death. The beautiful coffin, for Danny's mother, is a materialistic America, it is a sort of sepulchre for a puritan woman like her. The beautiful coffin is her protest against the material prosperity of America.

These two old matriarch figures appear to be aware of the changing times. Hence in them there is forced patience arising out of helplessness.

IV

The priest in "Mistral" and Dr. Martino in "Dr. Martino" form the epilogue to Faulkner's saga of possessive old protagonists. Corruption in different hues and shape is found in them. Faulkner's old protagonists belonging to different walks of life appear to be affected by corruption. The external change in the form of decay has penetrated in these characters. External corruption can be rectified but innate corruption of soul cannot be. The change here from external to internal, from social to individual has manifested itself in a very

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horrible form. And hence if ~~thought~~ from a religious point of view there is no hope of salvation and resurrection for them as they never feel guilty of their deeds nor do they ever feel repentance for their inhuman activities. Their death is never lamented or mourned. Because of their tragic fate, of which they are the architect, they die a lonely death that is hedious death.

The consumptive process of decay and change begins with Old Samantha Ewing's act of secretly appropriating money for her return and it may be called a manifestation of the internal corruption which finds culmination in the priest of "Mistral". The course of action of these two old protagonists (priest and Dr. Martino) reveals that the transition from external corruption to internal through change, decay and death is total.

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The priest in "Mistral" belongs to the category of Faulkner's possessive protagonists. The story has Italian background, through which Faulkner launches bitter criticism on the religious hypocrites of the world. Hence, it has a universal dimension of meaning. Two young wandering army men are the narrators of this story. Through their reactions Faulkner presents a very awe-inspiring moral horror and spiritual corruption that has become

How can he
be so much
more inspiring

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quite prominent in the rapidly changing world. The priest is supposed to represent the classical conception of religious authority but his actions are quite contrary to his avowed profession.

The priest has reared the beautiful ward as he had brought her to the church after she had been deserted by her mother of dubious character. But with the passage of time there is subtle change in his intentions. At first he wants her to devote her life to church but afterwards he wants to marry her to a very rich young person of the village who dies mysteriously on the eve of his wedding. The priest's lust for his beautiful female ward is hinted ^{at} by the narrator. The girl's secret love-affair with a local youth named Guilio makes him change. The corruption of the priest is hinted ^{by} the old and the young narrators of the story. His possessiveness and illicit passion for the girl become evident when all of a sudden the young Guilio is enlisted. The sudden recruitment of Guilio in the army has created some doubts in the minds of people in the village. It is quite clear that it is the part of priest's wicked design. The old narrator tells the two young American wanderers about it. The conversation between them is as follows:

" And at the same time, Guilio got drafted suddenly. It would have surprised you. Everything was sudden except somebody's eagerness for the wedding to be : There did not seem to be any hurry about that, did there ? "

" I don't know. I no spika. "

" In fact, they seemed to stop being sudden altogether until about time for Guilio to come home again. Then it began to be sudden again. And so I think I'll ask if priests serve on the draft boards in Italy. " ⁹

The priest's intentions are surely sexual. He wants to possess a girl who is young enough to be his daughter. He attempts to control her life and in a way tries to go against the natural and spiritual law. For successive three years the marriage of the girl is postponed till the mysterious death of the young fiance. About this Lisa Paddock comments :

And the priest, who again discovers her deceit by spying, also responds unpredictably. Instead of insisting that the wedding take place immediately, thereby putting a stop to her flirtations with the other men of village, he allows the betrothal to stretch out over an unseemly length of time, perhaps the pain his voyeurism brings him is more bearable than the thought of handing his ward over to another man.¹⁰

The priest's ward stands for mobility and change. He fails to check her activities. In an attempt to defy the natural law, the priest experiences agonies of hell. He does not realize that man is man even under the priestly garb. His illicit passion is reminiscent of Thomas Sutpen of "Wash" who marries the granddaughter of his servant. The elderly priest in an attempt to go against the heavenly law is defeated by the young ward who stands for new morality. Charles C. Clark comments:

The padre, earthly surrogate of God the Father, looking with lust on his ward, and unbalanced by lust and jealousy, cowardly murdering by poison, is thrice damned (for "adultery," "interest", and "murder"). After the murder his hypocritical continuance in his priestly office, even while he is the compulsive witness of - the trysts between his ward (the anticipation of the sensual Eula Warner) and the Soldier, drives him into a psychopathic state. ¹¹

The priest stands for the total corruption, within and without, to his avowed profession. Faulkner's old protagonists are deprived of any sort of fulfillment of their intent whether good or bad. Hence, frustration and disillusionment are promised for them. The priest experiences death-in-life, it is his emotional and

spiritual death, as he uses his priestly garb to possess and hide his sinful acts. For such a diabolic religious monster there is constant suffering.

The priest and Dr. Martino are two sides of the same coin. Dr. Martino's profession is next to God. Both Dr. Martino and the priest represent total corruption from the professional point of view. Dr. Martino, like the priest plays havoc in the life of a young girl Lousie King. Dr. Martino is a wicked and possessive old protagonist who tries to go against the current of time. Like most of Faulkner's old protagonists, Dr. Martino sits motionless signifying his reluctance to accept change or to admit any deviation from the rigid, stagnant and horrible world of possessive old persons. The priest and the doctor are the so-called social guides who do not care for the consumptive process of change and decay. Like priest's ward, Lousie King, is under the influence of an old person. Dr. Martino does not have any companion as he leads a very mysterious and secluded life. During his frequent visits to a particular Mississippi town he casts his spell on Lousie King. He wants to exploit her and wants her to die, but in the end he is frustrated by the dominant forces of change represented by Hubert Jarrod, the fiance of Lousie. In Faulkner's world of

old persons the old ones die unnatural death. The physical inability to control and possess the young girl is brought about through the metal rabbit which he had given to Lousie King. This is reminiscent of the brooch in "The Brooch" through which Old Mrs. Boyd tries to control the life of Amy, her daughter-in-law, and ceaselessly attempts to resist the flow of change. As soon as the symbol is lost the young ones are freed. Dr. Martino's age and profession do not allow him to indulge in lust. He is supposed to cure the physical needs, but his actions are adverse to his humanitarian profession. So is the case with the priest in "Mistral". The priestly garb is supposed to generate love and humanism but the priest uses his priestly garb to hide his sinful intentions. Faulkner's old protagonists are generally bed-ridden, physically weak and occupy a particular corner in the house. Their death-like existence resists change but they are defeated. The physical inability of Dr. Martino to possess Lousie King forces him to indulge in the emotional masturbation. Dr. Martino dies of a shock very mysteriously as soon as the metal rabbit is thrown away by Lousie's mother and Jarrod. The decayed old protagonist is silenced by the forces of change.

Most of Faulkner's Old female protagonists are widows. In their violent world they fight for their existence in the absence of their husbands or any other male companion. Mostly, the old male protagonists lead a very lonely and alienated life. The old protagonists try to live by the age old habits, idiosyncrasies. They are always guided by the past. They are deprived of ~~the~~ matrimonial bliss. Their own children bring about their downfall. They spare no opportunity to exert their powers and assert themselves in the crisis for identity. In the pursuit of their ambition or design they go to the extent of physical violence. The world of old persons is full of violence, possessiveness and arrogance. They die an unnatural death which is not lamented.