THE PROBLEM OF REVEREND GAIL HIGHTOWER: SACRIFICE AND COMMUNAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN WILLIAM FAULKNER'S LIGHT IN AUGUST

MARWAN M. OBEIDAT
Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan

Abstract

"Man will prevail, will endure because he is capable of compassion and honor and pride and endurance," suggests William Faulkner. In Light in August Gail Hightower's only friend in Jefferson, Byron Bunch, draws Hightower, a one-time Presbyterian Preacher who now is an outcast because he has driven his wife into dementia by his obsession with the gallant death of his grandfather, into a compassionate and sacrificial interest in Lena Grove's and Joe Christmas' dilemma. Although Hightower prefers to stay detached in a cell of sheer dissociation, he is obliged to undergo a contributory experience of sacrifice and communal consciousness upon abandoning his desolate world of isolation. Such an experience demands that he be one responsible to and for other people in his community; that he enter into communal relationships with them and assume a responsible position in Yoknapatawphian society. Hightower does not do it willingly, yet he does it--possibly as an unconscious expression of his own internal agony.

In some novels Faulkner does in effect seem to have focused attention on certain characters who are placed in a chaotic, if not anarchic, situation eventually to participate in solving the state of chaos in the society in which they live.¹ As Faulkner points out in his Nobel Prize speech, these characters are to demonstrate, in a certain way, that "man will prevail, will endure because he is capable of compassion and honour and pride and endurance."² In Faulkner's view, the notion of endurance implies not only man's ability to withstand the world's evil and whatever hardships and difficulties that face him, but his capacity to overcome and create values out of them as well.

In Light in August Byron Bunch, Gail Hightower's only friend in Jefferson, draws Hightower, a one-time Presbyterian preacher who now is an outcast because he has driven his wife into dementia by his obsession with the gallant death of his grandfather, into

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a compassionate and sacrificial interest in Lena Grove's and Joe Christmas’s dilemma. Although Hightower prefers to remain detached in a cell of utter dissociation, he is obliged to undergo a contributory experience of sacrifice and communal consciousness upon abandoning his desolate world of isolation and segregation. Such an experience demands that he be one responsible to and for other people in his community; that he enter into communal relationships with them and assume a responsible position in Yoknapatawphian society. Hightower does not do it very willingly, yet he does it—possibly as an unconscious expression of his own internal agony.

When we first meet Hightower in the novel, we meet a man who has withdrawn from life into seminary and art, a man who has lost and neglected his wife and his church ministry. Hightower lives without regard to society; he is content to watch the world from the study window of his darkened house on "the quiet and remote and unpaved and little used street" (p. 53). Hightower's life became locked into time past when his grandfather was shot from his galloping horse in the Civil War: "time had stopped there and... nothing had happened in time since, not even him" (p. 59). He had lived "dissociated from mechanical time. Yet for that reason he has never lost it" (p. 346). His death-in-life world is still controlled by clocktime.

On the day which follows Lena's arrival in Jefferson to search for her lover and seducer, alias Lucas Burch, now Joe Brown, Hightower is sitting in his study window, as is his custom, listening to "the sonorous waves of massed voices from the church" (p. 70). The life-denying music to which he listens has "a quality stern and implacable, deliberate and without passion so much as immolation, pleading, asking, for not love, not life, forbidding it to others, demanding in sonorous tones death as though death were the boon, like all protestant music" (p. 347). (At a later point in the novel, when Byron begins to report the stories of Lena, Christmas, and Burden, the music of death grows faint and finally fades.) Then Hightower sees "punny man... come up the dark walk toward the dark door; he hears the man stumble heavily at the dark bottom step" (p. 07) and he recognizes Byron Bunch's on his doorstep. This act is significant; Byron has just been described as

moving with that precarious and meretricious cleverness of animals blanced on their hinder legs; that cleverness of which the man is so fatuously proud and which constantly betrays him by means of natural laws like gravity and ice, and by the very extraneous objects which he has himself invented, like motor cars and furniture in the dark. (p. 70)

And Hightower has become so proud of his situation that he ignores for a time the natural and communal laws which he must abide by. He is, therefore, neglectful of the mass
of mankind because he has neglected these laws. The darkened study window of his "sanctuary" is an obstacle for Byron because he is stepping into Hightower's desolate world, where natural as well as human laws are undermined.

In a "flat, inflectionless, countrybed singsong" (p. 93) voice Byron tells Hightower about his meeting with Lena. Byron is not able to decide what to do with the girl. Since she is very close to her delivery time, Byron does not want to disturb her; he withholds part of the Brown-Christmas Burden story from her (that Joe Christmas has Killed Miss Joana Burden-Christmas' benefactress and mistress, and that Christmas' partner, Joe Brown, is suspected.). He must take immediate action, however, for he cannot prevent her from finding out the truth, and he cannot keep her at his house any longer under the assumption that her "husband" is going to come for her as the sheriff is holding Brown in jail. Before he can expect any advice from the uninformed Hightower, Byron must bring him up to date on the events of the murder.

Listening, Hightower appears still and motionless. As the narrator remarks, "his skin is the color of flour sack and his upper body in shape is like a loosely filled sack falling from his gaunt shoulders of its own weight, upon his lap" (p. 72). He listens to what Byron tells him but without concern: his "face is merely grave and interested" (p. 73). When he learns more about mindless Brown and cruel Christmas, Hightower begins to be concerned but he does not want to be involved in the world of these men. He appears "as though he were listening to the doings of people of a different race" (p. 74).

Although Byron sees "something latent, about to wake" (p. 74) in Hightower's face, he does not apprehend that this is a dormant sign of life which is about to emerge into a live and real activity. Byron is not able to recognize it, perhaps because he wants to escape the responsibility of being a member of an organization, as Hightower has done for so many years. "All day I have been thinking how easy it would be if I could just turn back to yesterday and not have any more to worry me than I had then" (pp. 75-76), Byron tells Hightower. The latter tells Byron he need not worry himself further. As Byron tells him about his concern about Lena, Hightower begins to realize the degree of Byron's commitment: "And now there begins to come into Hightower's puzzled expression a quality of shrinking and foreboding...Hightower watches him with that expression of shrinking and denial" (pp.76-77). Finally, Hightower learns that his peaceful life of contemplation is threatened; Lena may call upon him to marry her and Brown. "He sits rigid; on his face now that expression of denial and flight has become definite" (p.82).

Having a feeling that Byron has withheld part of the Brown-Christmas-Burden story,
Hightower asks Byron to tell him more of it. He prepares himself for what he wants to hear. He looks as if he were a Budhisattva figure. However, although secluded and cut off from the mass of other beings, Hightower cannot control his immediate response to what Byron tells him: "His voice sounds light, trivial, like a thistle bloom falling into silence without a sound, without any weight. He does not move. For a moment longer he does not move. Then there seems to come over his whole body, as if its parts were mobile like face features, that shrinking and denial..." (P.83). And "Byron sees that the still, flaccid, big face is suddenly slick with sweat" (p.83). Byron tells Hightower about the savage murder. The monotonous sound of Byron's voice and the "steady shrilling of insects" (P.83) are two life forces which disturb the solitude of Hightower's inner sanctuary. Even when Byron is not talking, the insects continue their rhythmic chorus: "the steady insects pulse and beat, drowsy and myriad" (p.85) Byron completes his recounting of the murder and he realizes that hearing it has not been easy on Hightower. Byron looks "at Hightower with that look compassionate and troubled and still" (p. 93). Hightower has been deeply moved; he "sits there with his eyes closed and the sweat running down his face like tears" (p. 93), and he is concerned about Christmas' fate; he fears lynching, which is a poor and unfair way for a man to die, something which belittles the whole human community: "Poor man. Poor mankind, " (p. 93) Hightower says in pity. Byron leaves and he still does not know what to do with Lena.

Byron returns to Hightower's house on Tuesday night. He is about to commit himself to Lena and is preparing himself for the resultant rejection of the community. At this point he has already decided to accept the community's denial. However, he believes that his act of loving concern is sinful. Hightower's task in this regard is not unhard; not only does he represent his own isolated situation, but he also reveals his theological ideology, an ideology which he himself has abandoned. Byron refers to Hightower as the righteous and to himself as the sinful when he enters the latter's house:

... he feels the corners of his nostrils whiten and taughten with the thick smell of the stale, mankept house. And when Hightower approaches, the smell of plump unwashed flesh and unfresh clothing-- that odor of unfastidious sedentation, of static overflesh not often enough bathed-- is well nigh overpowering...Byron thinks...' It is the odor of goodness. Of course it would smell bad to us that are bad and sinful'.

(p. 282).

When Byron tells Hightower that he is going to find another place for Lena, he behaves like someone who has committed wrong and expects to be punished: "His voice is sober, stubborn...He sits motionless, downlooking; his face is stubborn, still" (pp. 282-83). Byron has come seeking but not expecting his friend's advice and approval of what he in
tends to do; Hightower, "the unbending minister...[with] the face of a hermit who has lived for a long time in an empty place where sand blows," (p. 185) tells Byron that the only thing which he thinks it is right to do is to send Lena back to her own people. Immediately Byron says no, "with immediate finality, as if he has been waiting all the while for this to be said" (pp. 285-86).

Byron betrays his emotions and the feelings he has toward Brown, when Hightower enquires if Brown knows that Lena is in Jefferson: "For an instant Byron almost smiles. His lip lifts: a thin movement almost a shadow without mirth" (p. 286). Byron has not told Brown or the sheriff about Lena and he has still kept information about Brown's involvement in the murder from Lena. Lena, however, has told him that she wants to have the child in Brown's cabin on the Burden place where Brown and Christmas used to stay until the murder. When Hightower Challenges him, Byron tries to Justify his intended actions believing that helping Lena in this would be doing something secret, but not evil. He finally reveals his true motive. When Hightower asks him about confronting Brown with Lena and a new-born child, Byron points out that Brown would run away, which is just what Byron wants:

He does not look up. Yet through him there seems to go a wave of exultation, of triumph, before he can curb and hide it, when it is too late to try. For the moment and hide it, when it is too late to try. For the moment he does not attempt to curb it; backthrust too in his hard chair, looking for the first time at the minister, with a face confident and bold and suffused (p. 290).

Hightower accuses Byron of interfering between "husband" and "wife", and Byron defends himself by explaining that they are not officially married. Hightower does not accept his explanation. When Byron asks Hightower for another idea, Hightower tells him to leave. Yet he can see in Byron's eyes that he will not go away. Hightower is confident that Byron does not want his help because the devil is Byron's guidance.

The following day Hightower is still deeply affected by Byron's need for his advice and approval, and Hightower goes to town to do his "semiweekly marketing" (p. 291). The grocer tells him about the latest news regarding the sheriff's search for Christmas, which intensifies Hightower's inner psychological agitation to the extent that "the earth itself were rocking faintly, preparing to move" (p. 292). Preferring to remain cut off from the events of the communal world, Hightower protests: "I won't I won't! I have bought immunity. I have paid. I have paid" (p. 292). When the grocer gives Hightower his change, Hightower's hands feel like ice. "Like a man on ice," he goes uncertainly
outside into the afternoon heat and walks down the street. He does not even hear the pass-
erby who speaks to him. His inner turmoil is very obvious:

[The] heat quivered up from the asphalt, giving to the familiar buildings about the
square a nimbus quality, of living and plangent chiaroscuro....The street shimmers

and swims; he has been sweating, but sweat, heat, mirage, all rushes fused into a fi-
nality which abrogates all logic and justification and obliterates it like fire would: I
will not! I will not! (pp. 293-94).

Self-confident, Byron returns to Hightower's house that evening. Seeing him from
the study window, "Hightower says to himself As though he has learned pride,
or defiance Byron's head is erect, he walks fast and erect" (p. 294). For the first time
ever Byron does not stumble when he crosses the threshold of Hightower's house. "He
enters immediately, with that new air born somewhere between assurance and defiance"
(p. 295). As Phyllis Hirshleifer remarks, this implies in a way Byron's decisive act of
not abiding by Hightower's grim philosophy and of accepting life as it is. And Edward
McCamy suggests that such an act "signifies cessation of the conflict within Byron, and
though he may have some moments of doubt at times later in the narrative, they merely
indicate that, like all disciples, he has not attained the perfection of the master, has not
attained the full serene acceptance of a Lena." Byron's struggle with his fatuous and newly
sown pride suggests little more than "some moments of doubt;" it suggests cessation
of a very disturbing conflict within him.

Reporting in a "new voice: that voice brief, terse, each word definite of meaning, not
fumbling," (p. 296) Byron tells Hightower that he has taken Lena to the cabin and raised
a tent for himself. Hightower again assumes the position of a contemplative "figure" and
beseeches Byron to leave forever "this terrible place, this terrible, terrible place" (p. 298).
Hightower goes on to say that Byron believes he had learned love, but to Hightower it is
just hope. The kind of future which Hightower would envision for Byron's emotional re-
relationship with Lena leads to either of the following two apparently unsatisfactory situa-
tions: living in sin or marrying a nonvirgin, the second of which is even more unacceptable
to Hightower. Therefore, Hightower tells Byron that if he is to marry, he must mar-
ry a virgin, a "good" woman who has not suffered from any brute. Refusing to depart
from his conviction, Byron tells Hightower that each individual must stick to his own
ideas and views; Hightower agrees. Then, showing abrupt concern, Hightower asks if
Byron needs any assistance and demands that Byron inform him of the birth. He also in-
quires if Byron has arranged for a doctor, recalling an unsuccessful attempt to deliver a ne-
gro baby (p. 68).
When Byron leaves, Hightower watches him from the darkened window and is drawn out of his dusky world of death-in-life by the motion of Byron's feet:

And Hightower leans there in the window, in the August heat, oblivious to the odor in which he lives—that smell of people who no longer live in life: that odor of over-plump desiccation and stale linen as though a precursor of the tomb—listening to the feet which he seems to hear still long after he knows that he cannot, thinking, 'God help him.' (p. 300).

When he ceases to hear Byron's feet, he hears "the myriad and interminable insects" and he breathes "the hot still rich maculate smell of the earth," (p.300) and he recalls the nights when he was active to life and filled with pleasure. Then he recalls going to seminary and losing his fear of natural life and his habit of praying. At seminary he closed himself into walls filled with artificial light. Hightower turns from the window and his wish to enter life again, chooses a volume of Tennyson which he has had since seminary and starts reading

...the fine galloping language, the gutless swooning full of sapless trees and dehydrated lusts begins to swim smooth and swift and peaceful. It is better than praying without having to bother to think aloud. It is like listening in a cathedral to eunuch chanting in a language which he does not even need to not understand (p. 301).

As Hightower allows himself to get back to life, he can as well maintain his isolation from people by immediately turning to an intellectual activity; he reads perhaps to deflect from any emotional or social relationships. On one Sunday afternoon, however, Byron goes to Hightower and and mentions that Christmas has been captured. Byron subsequently realizes the great pain, Hightower's worry about lynching, that he has caused to Hightower: "Once before Byron saw him sit while sweat ran down his face like tears; now he sees the tears themselves run down the flabby cheeks like sweat" (p. 344). Now Byron is about to involve Hightower more deeply than he has ever done. Byron is wanting to bring Mrs. Hines, Christmas's grandmother, to see Hightower.

That night, as Hightower listens to the lifeless church music, he sees Byron and two others come near the house. Byron leads Mrs. Hines; she is "a dumpy woman in a purple dress and plume and carrying an umbrella, with a perfectly immobile face," and her husband, Doc Hines, "a man incredibly dirty and apparently incredibly old, with a tobacco stained goat's beard and mad eyes" (p. 348). Mrs. Hines reports the grim events of Christmas' birth and his young mother's death which Doc Hines let happen; Doc Hines takes Joe Christmas to an orphanage to distort Christmas' young life. At this point, the old man urges the spectators of the jailhouse to lynch Christmas, whom Mrs. Hines
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wants to protect. Hightower watches Mrs. Hines "with the expression of glaring amaze-
ment... that quiet and desperate amazement" (p. 353, 361) as he listens to her. During the
interval between Mrs. Hines' narration of the events and Doc's mad outbursts they hear
no church music this time: "only the peaceful and myriad sounds of the summer night"
(p. 365) come through the open study window; they can hear "the steady insects whirl"
(p. 366). Mrs. Hines wishes that Christmas' gruesome past could be erased in the hope
that he could have one day of freedom to be the grown grandchild she never knew.

Hightower feels that he is going to engage himself in this comfortless affair:
"Though he has not moved, though the knuckles of the hands which grip the chairarms
are taut and white, there begins to emerge from beneath his clothing a slow and repressed
quivering" (pp. 367-68). It is Byron who enables to make the request for Mrs. Hines. By-
ron reminds Hightower, "I mind how I said to you once that there is a price for being
good the same as for being bad; a cost to pay" (p. 369). The cost which Byron wants
Hightower to pay is to suggest a lie; to say that Christmas was at Hightower's house on
the night of the murder. His weak body quivering and his face "wrang and twisted" (p.
370) and slick with sweat, Hightower indicates his refusal. "'It's not because I can't, don't
dare to,' he says; 'it's because I won't! I won't! do you hear?'" (p. 370). He shouts refusal
once again "with his hands raised and clenched, his face sweating, his lips lifted upon his
clenged and rotting teeth about which the ling sagging flabby and puttycolored flesh
falls away" (p. 370). He angrily asks them to leave the house and falls forward onto his
desk. They do so. Despite this, Hightower seems to be wanting to act: "Byond the open
window the sound of insects has not ceased, not faltered" (p. 370).

The next morning Byron hears Lena cry out in labor, and we are told that "something
terrible happened to him" (p. 376). Mrs. Hines calls him his tent. He goes into the cabin
and sees Lena in labor. She does not look at him. As he rides his mule to Hightower's
house and when he later goes to bring a doctor "Some where in him the clawed thing
lurked and waited" (p. 377) but he has to act immediately, and he wakes Hightower
whose snoring appears to have

...a quality of profound and complete surrender in it. Not of exhaustion, but surrender,
as though he had given over and relinquished completely that grip upon that blending
of pride and hope and vanity and fear, that strength to cling to either defeat or victory,
which is the I-Am, and the relinquishment of which is usually death(p.372).

Byron asks Hightower to bring his medical book and ride the mule to the Burden place,
and Byron goes to the doctor's house. Riding the mule, Hightower reaches the cabin be-
fore the doctor and Byron do, who ride a car, and he delivers Lena's child who is the "son
of Burch, foster son of Bunch, the godson of Hightower, the apparent grandson of the
Hineses ("...and I think his pa is that Mr.--Mr. Christmas too --"). The child is inheritor from the all."¹⁹

Following Lena's delivery, Hightower goes home, and he starts to prepare breakfast when "there goes through him a glow, a wave, a surge of something almost hot, almost triumphant. "I showed them! he thinks. "Life comes to the old man yet"..." (pp. 382-83). After breakfast he goes to his customary study, walking "like a man with a purpose now, who for twenty-five years has been doing nothing at all between the time to wake and the time to sleep again" (p. 383). Significantly, this time he does not read Tennyson; rather he chooses "food for a man" (p. 383), Shakespeare's Henry IV. He goes to his chair under the mulberry tree and lies down, "plumping solidly and heavily into it" (p. 383). Then he goes to sleep, sleeping calmly. Hightower's rebirth comes through his commitment to young life, to regeneration and to hope in "Lena's baby as a principle of life and reincarnation of the Christ figure," as Langston suggests.¹⁶ Later when, in his own house, confronted with Christmas, who is also identified with "new life," Hightower does in effect defend the murderer against his pursuers.

When he wakes up, Hightower shaves, dresses and walks toward the cabin. As he walks through the woods, he thinks to himself that he should do this more often wishing that his habit of prayer could return also. Now he can sense the existence of nature: "feeling the intermittent sun, the heat, smelling the savage and fecund odor of the earth, the woods, the loud silence" (p. 384). When Hightower approaches the cabin, Lena is alone with her child. For the first time in the novel Lena loses her quietness. There are two things which have disturbed her. First, Mrs. Hines has been mumbling over the baby, referring to him as Joey and confusing his birth with Christmas' birth to her daughter, mill, and Lena admits to Hightower that she is afraid, that Mrs. Hines mixes her up to the extent that she is uncertain of the identity of the child. Secondly, Hightower asks her to forget about Byron, believing that none of them will "cast back and undo" (p. 389) their pasts. Byron had told Lena that he has arranged a meeting for her and Brown, and so she thinks that Byron has forgotten her. Thus when she tells Hightower that she doesn't know where Byron is, she screams "not loud and not hard, but with a patient and hopeless abjedness, not hiding her face" (p. 390). Hightower then goes to the mill to ensure that Byron has left. He discovers that Byron has indeed abandoned his job. He also finds out that Christmas has not been lynched and is being brought before the Grand Jury. Hightower goes back home grateful that Byron has left, but regretful that he has done so without saying goodbye to him: "'After all he has done for me. Fetched to me. Ay; giv- en, restored to me" (p. 392). Hightower thinks that the story is concluding the way he had expected and wanted it to, and with it, he believes, ends his task. "But it is not all.
There is one thing more reserved for him" (p. 392).

The ensuing chase of Joe Christmas leads him and his pursuers to Hightower's "sanctuary." Hightower becomes involved, once again, in this struggle in which Christmas is to die and Hightower to reintegrate into communal consciousness. As soon as he enters Hightower's house, Christmas, "his raised and armed and manacled hands full of glare and glitter like lightning bolts, so that he resembled a vengeful and furious god pronouncing a doom, had struck him[Hightower] down" (p. 438). Grimm and the three other pursuers immediately come "rushing into the hall, pausing, bringing with them into its stale and cloistered dimness something of the savage summer sunlight which they had just left" (p. 438). Sensing Christmas' furious glitter and the pursuers' brutality and cruelty, Hightower suddenly becomes full of power; "he too with his bald head and his big pale face streaked with blood, was terrible" (pp. 438-39). When Grimm asks which room Christmas has gone into, Hightower commits perjury, as Byron has suggested to him earlier: "'Men!' he cried. 'Listen to me. He was here that night. He was with me the night of the murder. I swear to God--" (p. 439).

His claim does not save Christmas from his catastrophic fate at Grimm's hands that shoot and castrate Christmas but it does reflect that Hightower has come back into the life of the common world (at least for a moment). As he looks through his study window, the world which Hightower sees is no longer referred to in black and white, but in relatively vivid colors. As "the final copper light of afternoon fades" (p. 441), Hightower reflects on his past, his childhood and youth. Then he remembers how he used to wait for full blackness of night so that he could enter the romantic world of the gallant death of his grandfather: "waiting for twilight to ease, for night and the galloping hooves" (p.443). But of all the nights, this one particular night is different: "The copper light has completely gone now; the world hangs in a green suspension in color and texture like light through colored glass. Soon it will be time to begin to say Soon now. Now soon" (p. 443). In order to achieve and approach this highly significant moment of reintegration Hightower must fully accept his life. In the long rethinking process through which Hightower goes he admits one of his past faults, his relationship with his wife: "my ego... instrument of her despair and shame" (p. 464). Hightower turns from confronting the full truth, but he suffers through this difficult ordeal: "sweat begins to pur from him, springing out like blood, and pouring" (p. 464). He finally decides to accept other people without considering their particular short-comings, since he has become seriously involved with a story about the real world: "In the lambent suspension of August into which night is about to fully come, it seems to engender and surround itself with a faint glow like a halo. The halo is full of faces" (p. 465). This halo includes By
ron, Lena, Christmas, and Grimm. However, when Hightower eventually accepts the world and its intermingled good and evil, he undergoes, to use Christian terminology, a cleansing baptism: "some ultimate damned flood within him breaks and rushes away" (p.446) on the water with which he is to carry out the act of cleansing the soul. Towards the end of the novel Hightower's pathetic journey of reviewing the dark realities of his lifetime moves on a wheel in much the same way as did the wagon which took Lena to her "divine" moment:

The wheel turns on. It spins now, fading, without progress, as though turned by that final flood which had rushed out of him, leaving his body empty and lighter than a forgotten leaf and even more trivial than flotsam lying spent and still upon the window ledge which has no solidity beneath hands that have no weight; so that it can be now Now (p. 466).

The wheel is an image of Hightower's difficult "meditation," an image of cyclical thinking which shows the complicated and uneasy nature of the man. At the moment when Hightower has freed himself from his illusions, the wheel of life spins on leaving him as lonely, desolate, and secluded as he has always been.
Notes

1In *The Reivers*, for instance, Lucius Priest who, although tempted into death wishing when openly confronted with evil, and although sheerly involved with it, is assisted by Ned McCaslin to struggle against the forces of corruption, to maintain a meaningful social and moral order, and ultimately to atone for the sin and serious betrayal that he knows he has made.

In *The Hamlet* V. K. Ratliff acts as a counselor for the people. He has the wit to challenge Flem Snopes in business affairs, sells people sewing machines to make clothes, threatens to have I. O. fired as the village schoolteacher in order to keep the Snopes name respectable in the community, does an arduous deed in attempting to protect others from Flem while staying out of Flem's reach himself. And from him comes the explanation of why Ab was "soured" on the world. In brief, he is the moral voice of the novel against whose wit Flem's greed and inhumanity are measured.


6Hightower's refusal here is reminiscent of Ratliff's (*The Hamlet*, p. 321).


8"Byrom Bunch," *Shenandoah*, 3 (1952), 8-12.


10Langston, 55.
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