

From Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft: The Social Transformation as Reflected in *The Hamlet*

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ABSTRACT Popular criticism tends to consider that Faulkner is preoccupied with formal experimentation to the point of obliviousness and indifference to the tenor of the times. However, Faulkner's works especially his late fiction is not only socially challenging but also politically radical. Based on Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, two key concepts by Ferdinand Tönnies', this paper analyzed the social transformation in American South through the portrayal of FlemSnopes' economic reform and innovation in Faulkner's *The Hamlet* and revealed its profound effect on the whole society on which the identity of the modern American South are founded. In the dramatization of FlemSnopes and his kin, Faulkner depicts them as an allegory and challenges the blind faith in the so called progress of human society.

INTRODUCTION

The social transformation from community to society or in Ferdinand Tönnies' terms, the Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, was a dichotomy that lay at the heart of 19th century social thinking. These two concepts are employed to define two forms of group lives, both separate and contrasting. Gemeinschaft means a kind of organic or natural group life that is considered to precede industrialism and capitalism. This "organic" community is innately "bound together by ties of kinship, fellowship, custom, history and communal ownership of primary goods" (Tönnies 2001). Permeated with formal rituals, Gemeinschaft is deemed rooted in the family, whose members identify themselves not as individuals but as members of the group. This so called "collectivism" stipulates that all the members enjoy "mutual possession and enjoyment, and possession and enjoyment of goods held in common...common goods-common evils, and common friends-common enemies" (Tönnies 2001). Therefore, Ferdinand Tönnies was convinced that in a degree, many dangers, if not all, of oppression and exploitation in an organic community could be checked by shared religious values, mutual rights and duties, same kinship and common ancestry (Odimegwu and Okemgbo 2016). This forms a sharp contrast to the unlimited exploitation for profit justified by

rationality and legitimacy in a modern society. According to Tönnies, the three typical forms of Gemeinschaft are family, neighborhood and friends, which are respectively grounded on blood and kinship, locality and common spirits. Many scholars like Chen (2017) have elaborated its significance in urbanization and in the analysis of literary classics.

Faulkner's works are imbued with both narrative experiments, avant-gardism and also deep social consciousness exemplified by his particular attention to American South the place from which all his works are originated. Faulkner's backward-look perspective determined his abundant nostalgia to a lost and romanticized past that has been corrupted by the modern market economy represented by the invasion of the north. Faulkner's great achievements in this aspect are evidenced by prominent scholars like "Eudora Welty's familiarity and admiration" (McHaney 2016). With the encroachment of mass marketing and industrialization in American South, the traditional culture of households, villages and small-scale civic communities are dying away. Meanwhile, a mechanical society emerged, "where free-standing individuals interacted with each other through self-interest, commercial contracts, a 'spatial' rather than 'historical' sense of mutual awareness and the external constraints of formally enacted laws" (Zagarell 2007). The burgeoning economic development in the American South delineated in

The Hamlet was a quintessential example of an emerging Gesellschaft, where the individual was the fundamental unit and group life was by nature contractual and joined by individuals on the basis of self-interest. Tönnies reckoned that people in Gesellschaft were essentially detached though they were geographically proximate. He said that “in Gemeinschaft they stay together in spite of everything that separates them, and in Gesellschaft they remain separate in spite of everything that unites them” (Tönnies 2001). The isolated members of Gesellschaft were suspicious of each other and also welfare maximizing. Therefore they could never be expected to achieve an integrated personality.

Objectives of the Study

Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft are two key concepts in Ferdinand Tönnies’ study of the evolution of human society, which separately refer to an organic community in which exploitation and oppression can be checked by shared religious values, mutual rights and duties, same kinship and common ancestry, and a society where individuals existed on the basis of self-interest. This paper analyzed the social transformation in American South through the portrayal of FlemSnopes’ economic reform and innovation in Faulkner’s *The Hamlet* and revealed its profound effect on the whole society on which the identity of the modern American South are founded. This paper aims to investigate Faulkner’s reflection on social change in the modernization of American South and its possible revelation for the modernizing China.

METHODOLOGY

This paper studies the connotation of social and economic reform in the southern part of the United States which is reflected in the *The Hamlet* from the perspective of social transformation. Based on the key terms of sociology, this paper adopts the methods of internal research, external research, and a comparative study of Chinese and Western modernization, which has certain originality.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Social Transformation in the Hamlet

The Hamlet is set in a remote and backward area called The Old Frenchman’s Bend. It is lo-

cated in the depth of the country. The hamlet was built around Will Varner’s store and together with the small farms that surround it they constitute “a world of poor whites” (Brooks 1963). Because there were only one or two blacks in this area, the white-black racial conflict that had dominated most of Faulkner’s previous works was never an important issue in *The Hamlet*. Though the researchers stated that this was a study of the social transformation from community to society in the hamlet, it was not accomplished till the end of the novel. That is to say, on Flem’s departure from the hamlet to Jefferson, the hamlet is not transformed into a society in real sense but rather acts as an abandoned mine that is consumed and exploited by Flem with his modern innovations. Therefore, this essay is more of an analysis of the transforming process with conflicts mingled in it rather than the outcome of transformation. *The Hamlet* initiated the social movement that would continually to be expanded in the subsequent works.

Four decades after the Civil War, the supercilious posture held by former plantation owners together with their enormous house, slaves, ladies and wealth has evanesced into history and become part of the southern myth of a lost prosperity. Faulkner used concrete and realistic images to convey the sense of historical vicissitude. For example, there is the unrecoverable desolation of the place, an emblem of the wane of the planter civilization. The great plantation that has deteriorated into its primitive ruins symbolizes that the grand design and ambition of those perished lords of manors are all dissolved and obliterated. The only trace that can be spotted is those records in some forgotten and faded documents. “The original boundaries now existed only on old faded records in the Chancery Clerk’s office in the country courthouse in Jefferson” (Faulkner 1940). The formerly cultured land again reverted to the jungle from which their first master had hewed them.

When the eclipsing planter economy abdicated, some of the previously marginalized peasants quickly burgeoned and inchmeal rose to the position pertaining to the former plantation owners but of a shrunk scale. As Faulkner described, these latecomers are mostly the poor whites from Tennessee Mountains and the Atlantic seaboard. While most of these poor whites were immersed in dire poverty and backwardness and seemed never able to rise out of it, a

number of landowners and merchants prospered in the vacuity of puissance in the aftermath of the Civil War. In this process, the crossover and conversion between land owners and merchants were especially frequent, which could be found in the example of Ratliff of *The Hamlet*, who was both a traveling merchant and a property owner. The industrialization of the New South and development of transportation propelled this conversion. "Railroads penetrated previously isolated areas and brought greater access to distant markets for sales and purchases...(so) the roles of the landlords and merchants intermingled. Landlords sometimes opened their own stores, and certainly many supplied their own sharecroppers directly. Many merchants acquired landholdings as a result of land foreclosures when debts went too long" (Cooper and Terrill 1991). Those equipped with money and property, in most cases, the merchants and the better-off landowners evolved to be the chief men of the country. In Frenchman's Bend, it was Will Varner who not only purchased the Old Frenchman's land but also the tracts of "mortgaged farms" (Faulkner 1940). Varner became the kernel of power in the community, who impinged on every aspects of the community life.

Shrewd, lusty and nothing in common with the chivalric norms that were esteemed in the plantation culture, Will Varner was a hybrid of kindness and ruthlessness, justice and shrewdness, and morality and villainess. For more profit, Will Varner relentlessly exploited the underprivileged sharecroppers. He fornicated shamelessly with his sharecroppers, for example Mink's wife when she was desperate. Yet, somehow in his rascality, kindness loomed. He exhibited impartiality towards Mink, whom he despised, in the adjudication over the cow case. He commiserated with the poverty-stricken Labove and made generous arrangements for him. He was also pleasant, humorous and friendly with all the villagers.

Will Varner was of the *Gemeinschaft*, while his rival and son-in-law Flem was typically of the *Gesellschaft*. This is shown in his dismissal of human bonds evidenced by his innovative practice of cash transaction. The termination of the dominant credit business marked a significant diversion from Jody Varner's business mode, who insisted no cash in trade. After he took over Varner's store, Flem terminated credit, which had been practiced for such a long time that both the

owner of the store and its customers took it for granted. It became an economic formula of the sharecropping economy. Credit is of great significance in the sharecropping system, and as a personal arrangement it can tighten the connection between landowners and sharecroppers. With the reform in trading methods, the hamlet life in Frenchman's Bend has evolved from the organic Community of Tönnies' definition that is "the self-sufficient household...living in a communitarian way", to "the market-oriented Civil Society" (Tönnies 2001).

Flem's introduction of a new economic system, the cash system into the closed community can be understood as the inchoation of the consumer society, for "Flem is the leading figure in converting Yoknapatawphans into consumers" (Ownby 1999). It is climaxed in the episode of spotted horse. Flem and his "deputy" aroused a consumption carnival among the community citizens of Frenchman's Bend, where they sold wild horses to those poor sharecroppers, which these destitute farmers did not need, could not afford and would never hold. This was the essence of commercialism. Through kindling the habitants' desire of consumption, Flem and his deputy turned them into frenetic consumers.

"The Spotted Horse" was not the initial effort of Faulkner to touch upon this topic, because other than *The Hamlet* in short stories like "There Was a Queen" and "Dry September", there also were directly or indirectly presented "scenarios of commodification, consumption or the production of acquisitive desire through modern practices like advertising and 'the mystifying power of group desire'" (Matthews 2009). However, in the episode of the auction of the spotted horses, Faulkner portrayed most vividly the intense longing of the farmer customers and the empty promise of gratification held forth by the spirited, almost otherworldly ponies. The bidding for these foreign ponies was originated from an impulse to gratify their want instead of need, which echoed the essence of modern consumption where goods were abstracted from its practical use. The consumption activity was in essence a consumption of the signifier or the symbolic meaning that it stood for rather than the signified itself, which was to make the consumers' appetite for consumption insatiable and therefore make them prey to the commodity. In the frenetic auction of these wild horses, these poverty-stricken farm-

ers were more captivated by the freedom, masculinity and wildness that these horses exuded rather than by these horses themselves. They were willing to pay to hold and preserve this delusion. In this sense, it could be concluded that *The Hamlet* demonstrated Faulkner's insight into the mechanisms of commodity fetishism and consumption. "As tricked up consumer goods... Their (the horses') dreamy, almost erotic appeal derives from the thrill of competitive acquisition itself" (Matthews 2009). Also, their exotic background imbued with mystery was far too appealing for these men to act rationally, who were stuck in monotonous and strenuous farming work. Through the sale of those ponies, Faulkner vividly described how commercial theatrics loosened a contagion of mass indulgence upon the hamlet. When the team of wild spotted horses was first presented in front of the Varner's store, they immediately arrested the spectators' attention. They watched curiously at these self-invited alien creatures and noticed the uncommonness about the horses (Faulkner 1940).

Different from the domesticated cattle, these horses were much smaller, only larger than "rabbits" with subdued peril and wildness betrayed in their eyes. Fatuous these men of the Frenchman's Bend might be, they were not simpletons. More than one of them recognized that these horses were newly captured wild horses that were unfit for farm work and therefore useless in their life. For example, when the Texan warned the onlookers to keep away from the horses that he called "kind of skittish" and said that it was because that they had not been ridden for a long time. One of the spectators, Quick, immediately retorted that they had never been rode before. When some farmers demanded that whether these ponies fed on corn, the Texan's reply made it clear that they were not tamed for they had never seen any of corn in their life. In view of the fact that no one volunteered to purchase, the Texan attempted to induce the artless Eck Snopes to buy one of them. To this, Eck just replied that he refused to possess a horse he had to use a bear-trap to catch.

Until then, these farmers were rather self-controlled and remained indifferent to the Texan's blandishments. The Texan chattered in the famous high tale tradition by characterizing the ponies as gentle as dove and claimed those who bought them would get the best price of horse-flesh. He did not deny that his horses had more

spirit than others and went a step further to proclaim that it was a shame for him a Texan to sell crow-bait. But he also ensured the farmers that it would not be a couple of days before they became so tame that they had to be "put out the house at night like a cat" (Faulkner 1940). Of course, the farmers were aware of his exaggeration. They sniffed at his false promise and glib tongue. Therefore, none of them would comply with the Texan's vending tricks but just watch curiously. It seemed that the flowery words and cunning statements would end in nothing. However, just then, the turning point in the whole situation appeared. The Texan offered a horse to Eck for free on the condition that he would start the vending. This demonstrated that the Texan was a born master of psychology and he was proficient at the maneuvering of human instinct for mileage. This act brought an immediate effect. With the Texan's words a hush fell on the spectators. While avarice began to brew inside, sensibility drifted even further away. In fact, when Eck showed interest in the Texan's offer, he and all the other onlookers had slumped into the vending trap set by the horse trader. The other farmers could resist all the allurements but the enagement about the prospect that one of them neighbors profited when they could not. What's more, there was the rumor that some farmer named Anse McCallum once brought two of them horses back from Texas, which turned out to be a good team and worked ten years for him. The desire to make even with their neighbors rather than trade with the Texan prompted these people who were already enchanted by the foreign flavor and wildness of these spotted horses to compete for the bidding of the rest of the horses.

Apart from the inclination for profit, these farmers also saw exotic excitement, lost manliness and dynamite in the wildness of these horses. The hamlet's first glimpse of them compared them to "vari-sized and colored tatters torn at random from large billboards and circus posters" (Faulkner 1940). Figments of rudimentary advertising promised a more colorful and provocative world than the tedious farming life (Matthews 2009). The purchase of these ponies signified a possession of the wilderness and primitiveness abound in these ponies, recuperation for what was lost in their sharecropping life. What counted most in the trade was not the practical use of these horses but the symbolic

meaning attached to the possession of these horses. In the consumption of the symbolic value of the goods instead of the actual value contained the tenets of modern consumer society.

As typical consumers, they conspired with the auctioneer in a hallucination of their desirability. With their initial scorn and discretion at the Texan's advertisement blast away, they all dived into the bidding for the horses that they knew they could not manage. The introduction of modern consumer fanaticism into the hamlet and conversion of the agricultural farmers into consumers evoked Faulkner's apprehension. Though Faulkner never intended to romanticize the sharecropping society as a pastoral contaminated by the foreign commercial force or vilify the modern consuming behavior as great scourges, he apprehended that a possible scathe of humanity inherently contained in forthcoming consumerism. In this sense, fiction that dealt with the "would-be" world excelled the historical by dismantling the obligation of loyalty to historical reality. Aristotle defined the artist's task as this, that is, a poet was concerned not with what had actually happened but with what was possible. In the germination of consumer culture in the countryside Faulkner foretold the drawback that accompanied it that would probably eventually pose a serious crisis in humanity. The spotted horse that functioned like fluid dynamite-nitroglycerin not only represented the lost manliness of the farmers, but also the potential and the finally realized violence and destructiveness of certain modern force in the form of Snopes family in general and FlemSnopes in particular. Brooks made a keen observation when he said that "it is an account of the world of advertising...the people of Frenchmen's Bend are stirred up to buy what they do not want and cannot afford and will not be able to use...the spotted ponies...spread destruction throughout the country" (Brooks 1963).

As it was described in *The Hamlet*, horses were luxury to the farmers in Frenchman's Bend, which could be afforded only by the prosperous Varner, Ratliff and Huston. Sharecroppers usually rode their farming mules to the town on special days. On his first day to work in the Varner's store, FlemSnopes also rode their farming mule. For other poorer sharecroppers, like Mink, they had to walk on their feet all the time. For example, when Huston refused to turn out the

mule that Mink had deliberately let group with Huston's livestock during the winter because he had nothing to feed it, Mink went to Varner for intercession. Mink had to walk all the way to and fro. What hindered the poor farmers from owning horses was not only the fact that they lacked cash to purchase but also that they had no corn to feed them. Under the direct control of their landlords, all the land were usually planted with cash crop, cotton in most cases, in order to ensure the largest revenue. The sharecroppers had to buy food on credit from the stores for their families. In this case, horses were extravagances beyond the sharecroppers' means and could only make them sink into further debt. For them horses meant more predicament rather than comfort.

In *Community and Civil Society*, Tönnies proffered that in the exchange between the country and city the former obviously had the advantage because "it holds the necessary rather than the dispensable commodities" (Tönnies 2001). Compared to the city economic mode, the country belonged to an economy that "supplies all its own basic needs or supplements them with the help of neighbors and workers in the community" (Tönnies 2001). However, with the arrival of the consumer society, in which individuals no longer simply pursued what they needed but also what they wanted, trade was not limited to the exchange of necessity. It was the city that produced and possessed the conspicuous consumption, while the country had no edge of advantage in this bout. The spotted horse auction was such a typical example, which excited consumption fanaticism among the villagers and demonstrated power of advertisement to sell things to those people who did not need, could not afford and would never hold. This was an essential feature of commercialism that was to arouse the habitants' desire to consume. This dramatic spectacle echoed the commercialization in the American South at the beginning of 20th century and the transformation of traditional trading mode into modern consumption. Moreover, Faulkner's hamlet was already reduced to a specialized function of cotton production and had lost the foundation of a self-sustainable economy. All the villagers purchased necessities on credit from Varner's Store rather than produce by themselves. Mail order for more fashionable and luxurious goods was not rare, especially in *The Town* and *The Mansion*.

In the auction of the feckless and flamboyant Texan ponies to the farmers of Frenchman's Bend, Faulkner seemed particularly repulsed by the naked money-grubbing of FlemSnopes and his "monomaniacal pursuit of profit" (Matthews 2009) in the deal with the Armstids. This seemed to be Faulkner's most eloquent denunciations of economic exploitation. Of course, Faulkner was aware that the merchants' dependence on merchandising and consumption made it impossible to establish complete moral height, but he seemed unbearable to witness Flem's enforcement of the strict letter of market law so heartlessly.

This vision of modernization where humanity qualities are stripped off repulses Faulkner so much that he turns to the past for consolation. This may betray Faulkner's somewhat "sentimental nostalgia for a golden past...(but later) free competition was modernized into an impersonal power politics that dehumanizes and destroys society" (Nichol 1993). However, this apprehension over the humanity crisis in social transformation is often misinterpreted into that Faulkner is an obstinate backward looking conservationist who clings to a set of corrupted mores. Many critics also interpreted Sartre's metaphor that Faulkner was a passenger looking backward at the scenery while driving forward in this fashion. What this dissertation aims to demonstrate is that Faulkner holds no aversion towards modernization or consumerism but he does repel the trend of dehumanization in the name of progress. The belief in progress does not necessarily result in the inferiority of the past, which cannot and should not be brushed away just because people pursue changes. This history attitude runs through Faulkner's works that is "let the past abolish the past when...it can substitute something better, and not us to abolish the past simply because it was" (Welty 2003).

Besides the economic reform that Flem initiated in *The Hamlet*, his commodification of the popular myth of the buried wealth that the Southerners were convinced in led to the defeat of the ever-invincible Ratliff. His blind pursuit of self-interest deluded his sound judgment and made him prey to Flem's intrigue. Ratliff could always gain upper hand on the condition that he safeguarded the public interest the disadvantaged rather than his own. In the corruption of the public righteousness, some critics compared this

story to *The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg* (1899) and concluded that like the mysterious stranger Flem also used the bait of few sacks of gold bewildered and corrupted the brainpower of the Frenchman's Bend. But in view of the social circumstances, the significance of this episode transcended the literal meaning and indicated the further development of both the trilogy and the curve of Flem's life. As it was described more vividly in *The Town*, Flem's intrusion or corruption power was no longer limited to economic sphere but pervaded into human emotions to capitalize the marital relationship, paternity, and kinship. In this sense, one can say that the capitalization of the southern folklore, the buried treasure, is just a warm-up for the more inhuman exploitation in the next two books.

W.C. Jameson pointed out that the stories of buried treasure prevailed throughout the world especially in those countries where the plantation system held sway. It was constant in the collective imagination that the belief of the family fortune having been buried before or in the wake of a catastrophe. For example, the French Revolution, the victorious Haitian Revolution, and the Civil War in the American South were all occasions for "secret burials of gold, jewels and silver" (Jameson 1992). In America the sources of these legendary treasures were mainly based on three sources of the legends of the Indians, the Spanish colonialists and southern plantation owners. There were also tales of buried treasure in Massachusetts, but their popularity and influence could not be put on par with the southern legends. Long before the Spanish explorers ever arrived in America, in the tales passed down in oral traditions native Indians in the region had been mining gold and silver from the rocks of the Appalachian Mountains. The Spanish colonialists also contributed to the treasure tales, because initially they were inspired by the lore of precious minerals in America and came to locate them. After their arrival, they became infatuated with plundering the gold and silver possessed by some of the tribes they encountered and mined the ore they discovered in the mountainous regions. People were fascinated by stories of how the riches taken from the mines in the mountains of the American South were transported across the Atlantic to the Old World. The third source was the buried treasure of the plantation owners in the wake of the Civil War. In

view of the fact that this dissertation focused on the Yoknapatawpha County, illustration would focus on the southern versions of buried treasure.

Compared with people in other areas of America, the American Southerners are particularly obsessed with such folklore. These people are more inclined to take stock in myths, among which the biggest three are “the Lost Cause (the war for southern independence was a noble cause, ignoring slavery as the root cause), the Great alibi (the war made the South economically backward), and the old south (the antebellum South was an idyllic world peopled by genteel masters, gracious ladies, and happy slaves)” (Cooper and Terrill 1991). The fourth legend is the buried treasure either by the extinct and mysterious Indian tribes or by the Croesus-like plantation owners, for which until now the search has always been in full swing. Flem made use of this fanaticism and reduced Ratliff, Bookwright and the nemesis Armstid to blockhead at the end of *The Hamlet*.

Besides William Faulkner, the buried treasures also loomed in the works of other American writers, for example Mark Twain and Toni Morrison. In Faulkner's works, other than the frantic digging of treasures in the abandoned Frenchman's garden, there are also the treasure hunts by Lucas Bauchamp in *Go Down, Moses* and hidden treasure in *The Unvanquished*. In *Go Down, Moses*, by day Lucas Bauchamp attended to his crop, while by night he sought to extract buried treasure from an Indian mound, with the aid of a metal detector, in which the residual or prehistoric and the modernistic met and clashed. The three treasure hunters in *The Hamlet* resorted to a more primitive method, the witchcraft of Uncle Dick (Faulkner 1940). The legend of the buried treasure in Frenchman's garden like all the others was based on the myth of an affluent antebellum South which Flem, a poor white, scorned. Due to this sober penetration, Flem discerned the fallacy behind the tale. By his sharp instinct for profit he detected a chance to exploit the citizens' obsession with it. Flem's non-conformity and disdain for the popular illusion indicated a rupture of the organic village as Tönnies (2001: 28) defined, in which “the gods and spirits of land and water, which confer blessing or threaten disaster, have to be implored for grace and mercy.” Though Tönnies was talking about the natural divinities worship

that was essentially different from the widespread myth, the uniformity of all the village members in their veneration was the same.

In *The Hamlet*, the witty Ratliff, who formed a contrast to Flem, was a deep believer of the lost treasure, which was actually a fancy of the romanticized past (Faulkner 1940). In his obsession with the myth of buried treasure, which was in nature the greed inside Ratliff, Flem spotted his weakness and finally vanquished Ratliff. In fact, from the very beginning, Ratliff had gambled his success on the assumption that Flem and Varner were too clever to purchase anything valueless, such as a ruined Frenchman's Bend without treasure buried underground. He was convinced that Will Varner kept this seemingly valueless and dilapidated place for a good reason (Faulkner 1940). Ratliff and his company were so presumptuous and opinionated that they convinced themselves that it was only because of the depth of the buried treasure that people were ignorant of them, which according to Ratliff could account for Varner's day-long sitting in “that flour-barrel chair and watch” (Faulkner 1940).

The other assumption behind the whole scheme was that Ratliff and his company were as resourceful as Flem and his father-in-law if not more so. Therefore they, instead of other villagers, recognized the trick of Will Varner and Flem and were able to avail themselves of this chance to gain profit. It must be admitted that Ratliff and his team brought ruin on themselves, for they initially determined to take advantage of Flem's “ignorance”. It was against the mutual beneficence among community members, just as Flem behaved in the spotted horse auction. The only difference between these two incidents was that Ratliff suffered discomfiture and setbacks, while Flem profited from both the situations. Flem saw Ratliff's contemplation through and all he needed to do was sitting around, while pretending to dig in the garden at night, waiting for Ratliff to swallow the bait. Ratliff's failure above all stemmed from a kind of pride, first overwhelming faith in another man's acumen and then in his own cleverness. But it also came out of their greed, which Faulkner revealed most distinctly in the description of how they scrambled for the buried treasure. When they suspected that someone was tailing them, Armstid's first reaction was to clamor, “kill him... Watch every bush and kill him” (Faulkner 1940). After they

found the most probable place to dig, Uncle Dick was completely out of their mind. "They hadn't even missed him" (Faulkner 1940). Rapacity and apathy were rooted not only in Flem's mind but also in his pathetic victims, which could easily disorient them and deprive them of reason. With the development of *The Hamlet*, Faulkner seemed to be more pessimistic.

For fear that some other hamlet residents might purchase the Frenchman's place before him, Ratliff designedly came two miles to meet Flem on his way back from Jefferson with his wife and his parents-in-law and went two miles back to talk to him. Will Varner immediately sensed Ratliff's earnestness and warned Ratliff humorously by saying that "you got better sense than try to sell Flem Snopes anything... And you surely are not fool enough by God to buy anything from him" (Faulkner 1940). But the impetuous Ratliff would not take in any objection at that time. This scene surely reminded people of Ratliff's dissuasion for the farmers who were determined to acquire those spotted horses. The din of the words having scarcely died away, Ratliff himself became the victim to Flem's scheme and to his own rapacity. When the spotted ponies were metamorphosed into the buried treasure, Ratliff's good sense and sound judgment were discarded.

After they acquired the Frenchman's place, Ratliff, Bookwright and Armstid decided to sojourn in the ramshackle house that used to be a majestic symbol of affluent and sumptuous life. Decades after the Civil War, this house had fallen to ruins to such a degree that it disheartened all the latecomers (Faulkner 1940). The dilapidation was not of the mansion itself but also of the whole Southern culture whose destruction in the past had been attributed to the Civil War with the Yankee invaders. But here, in the gradual wreck of this symbolic house, Faulkner pointed out that the local residents also contributed to the breakdown of the culture because of their ignorance, lack of respect and dire poverty. Critics criticized Faulkner on the ground that he extolled and yearned for the life of the slavery time. But Faulkner's deep anxiety was not over the lost prerogative of his family but over the sacrifice of precious human values together with the civilization. Call it an idealization or nostalgia, but what Faulkner missed was neither the slavery system nor the racial segregation and prejudice but a past Faulkner endowed with great

humanism. He exalted it again and again, pride, compassion, dignity and endurance. It was undeniable, due to the family background, that Faulkner would more or less hold some grudge against the wane of family status both socially and economically. But George Luckacs said, "the ruthlessness towards their own subjective world...(is) mark of all great realists." (Luckacs 1970) The great men of letters like Faulkner had transcended the bias of their "subjective world". In this sense, it might be a kind of parochialism to think that Faulkner just repined at his own misfortune or that of his family and his class. In a way, Faulkner used the house to symbolize all the precious qualities or all the good things that he cherished. Whether it was a house or a pasture of the antebellum made no difference. What counted was that they were valuable and it was a great sorrow to see its destruction by war or by the foreign economic invasion or by the capitalism penetration.

The Hamlet mainly concerned the far-reaching impact of the patriarch of the Snopes family, Flem's economic reform in Frenchman's Bend, which was demonstrated in his decision to give up farming for commerce, his replacement of credit business by cash while clerking the store, the consumption stimulation in the auction of spotted horses and his superb scheme to profit from the popular myth of buried treasure, also a dalliance with southern collective fantasy. Faulkner deliberately put *The Hamlet* "during a decade of radical class transformation" (Godden 2003), which mirrored the greater tableau in the Southern society. In a sense, it is safe to say, "Flem's career change belongs to important changes taking place in the Southern economy. The plantation pattern of agriculture remained, but its share of Southern prosperity was declining as industrialization and merchandizing supplanted it" (Currell 2006).

CONCLUSION

The Hamlet serves as the epitome of the social transformation from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft. Of course it was not Flem that single-handedly changed the situation and accomplished the social reform, but rather as a catalyst he accelerated the process. Before him, the village had already undergone gradual and piecemeal changes. For example, his precedent, Will Varner actually practiced a relentless predatory

mercantilism under his carefree masks, which had “introduced the hamlet to the harsh reality of profiting from your neighbor’s ineptness or bad luck.” Flem imitated the existing mode and advanced it to acme. In the depiction of social vicissitude, Faulkner lamented the erosion of affection-laden interrelationship in the traditional community, which was more of a criticism of the fake bliss promised by progressivism than a nostalgic longing to retreat into the past. As it was delineated in *The Hamlet*, the arrival of modern techniques and commercialism, the advent of alienation and dehumanization seemed to be unavoidable. Faulkner’s concerns over the fragmentation of the modern society and estrangement among its members are echoed in the modernization of China. Faulkner’s reflection and insights will shed light on the problems we Chinese are facing or might encounter in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evolution course of Faulkner’s research has gone through a long and fruitful course. The early scholars made a preliminary introduction to Faulkner’s works. Recent research on Faulkner has got great developments that are evidenced by various versions of translation and a great quantity of related writings. Popular criticism tends to consider that Faulkner is preoccupied with formal experimentation to the point of obliviousness and indifference to the tenor of the times. However, as the critical analysis here has demonstrated, Faulkner’s works especially his late fiction is not only socially challenging but also politically radical. In the future, the scholars should guard against the tendency of “de-socialization” in Faulkner’s works, because as a brave humanist, Faulkner never defies and shuts his ears to public appeal. In the dramatization of Flem Snopes and his kin, Faulkner depicts them as an allegory and challenges the blind faith in the so called progress of human society.

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