
Hightower Brought Low

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28 January, 2003

In his novel *Light in August*, William Faulkner creates two different families, the Hineses and the Hightowers, with a few striking similarities. These similarities were written in order to draw the reader into a comparison, which leads to an important insight into Faulkner's purpose in writing the book: the women who do not fit into the mold of Good Women nonetheless have the greatest benefit to society.

It is necessary to begin by drawing some basic parallels between Doc Hines and Gail Hightower. One parallel between the two is that they are both grandfathers of characters in the novel. Hines, of course, is the grandfather of Christmas. Hightower's grandson, on the other hand, is Hightower himself, as he says: "I am my dead grandfather on the instant of his death," (491). In order to emphasize the similarities between generations, Faulkner gives both generations of Hightowers the same name, Gail, employing the same technique that he does when Joanna Burden gives her family history with all its generations of Calvins.

A more significant similarity is that Hightower serves the same unrest as Hines, although Hightower serves it more unconsciously. Hightower, in his epiphany, "seems to see the

churches of the world like a rampart . . . against truth and against that peace in which to sin and be forgiven which is the life of man,” and then admits, “I served it,” (487). Hines, similarly, serves unrest by “trying . . . to get the folks worked up to lynch [Christmas],” (372). A lynching is an act of civil unrest, and of unforgivingness. Hightower and Hines might disagree about God’s will, but both serve the same inability to find peace.

The two are more strikingly similar when their families are considered: Mrs. Hightower’s life parallels Mrs. Hines’. Both of them have a connection with Memphis: Christmas, Mrs. Hines’ grandson, spends his early years in an orphanage there, and Mrs. Hightower spends time with her false husband there. Both of them spend time dead, or in hibernation, but return. Of course, Mrs. Hightower falls or jumps from a hotel window in Memphis, and dies (67). Gail Hightower does not worry about her thereafter until his epiphany at the end of the novel, when she is remembered and understood at last. Mrs. Hines, on the other hand, is only in hibernation. When she finds out that Christmas is in Mottstown, she prefixes her demand for information about him with, “You got to listen to me. . . . In thirty years I aint worried you. But now I am going to,” (348). Faulkner puts the two plot lines together so that both women “worry” their husbands after a long absence from thought.

Finally, Both women end the book with a great deal of influence over their husbands. Doc Hines seems, in the end, “to be in a state of catelepsy,” (444), with Mrs. Hines leading him around. When Gail Hightower’s flashback leads to his epiphany in the end of the novel, only when he thinks of his wife (478-491) does he realize what he has done; thoughts of his parents and of the church alone do not force him to realization. She is the last, longest

thought of his former life, transforming him for the better (or perhaps killing him), and therefore controlling him.

Thanks to her suicide, it does not seem plausible that Hightower will preach again, and if he were to do so, there is great hope that his epiphany has changed him. Doc Hines is catatonic, finally controlled by the woman whom he denied all knowledge of their grandson and his life. The men of these two families, both societal evils, are rendered impotent by their wives. Their wives, then, do great good for society.

Neither of them, though, is a Good Woman in the sense that would be understood by a character in the novel. Neither attends church regularly: Mrs. Hightower attends only immediately after her trips to Memphis (66), and Mrs. Hines has never been seen by much of her own town, implying that she does not get out of the house much (345). Mrs. Hightower has two husbands. Mrs. Hines is dumpy and old, and talks funny.

Here is Faulkner's point: the women who do not fit into the mold that society makes for them are the freest to do good for that society. This point is emphasized by the fact that he makes it twice in parallel. Like these women, Jesus was an outcast. A revolution requires a different kind of person.