

Faulkner's Religious Concepts Revealed in *The Mansion**

Yayoi OKADA**

In a similar manner to the way T. S. Eliot deals with the character of Sweeny, William Faulkner seems to be obsessed with the Snopes clan, and he worked on Snopes throughout his career. Beginning with “Father Abraham” (c.1926–1927), he continues to write about the clan in various forms, which culminates in the Snopes trilogy, *The Hamlet* (1940), *The Town* (1957) and *The Mansion* (1959). As Warren Beck says, “To look into *The Mansion* is to look out upon *The Town* and back to *The Hamlet*—and beyond,”¹⁾ *The Mansion* unifies the human situation of the trilogy, man in tension between guilt and salvation, with its enigmatic concluding phrase, “Helen and the bishops, the kings and the unhomed angels, the scornful and graceless seraphim” (*M* 436).

In the introduction to *The Mansion*, Faulkner explains that he came to understand the characters in the chronicle from having “lived with them.”

This book is the final chapter of, and the summation of, a work conceived and begun in 1925. Since the author likes to believe, hopes that his entire life's work is a part of a living literature, and since “living” is motion, and “motion” is change and alteration and therefore the only alternative to motion is un-motion, stasis, death, there will be found discrepancies and contradictions in the thirty-four-year progress of this particular chronicle; the purpose of this note is simply to notify the reader that the author has already found more discrepancies and contradictions than he hopes the reader will—contradictions and discrepancies due to the fact that the author has learned, he believes, more about the human heart and its dilemma than he knew thirty-four years ago; and is sure that, having lived with them that long time, he knows the characters in this chronicle better than he did then.²⁾

Furthermore, Faulkner was over sixty when he wrote *The Mansion*. When he was hospitalized during that time, he took with him *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying* as well as *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living* by Anglican Bishop Jeremy Taylor.³⁾ We can say Faulkner's keen awareness of the approach of death and sympathy toward the transformation of Mink, who is sixty-three at the end of the story, are manifested in the novel.

It seems that at first Mink does not believe in “Old Moster (Master),” “Supreme Being, God,”⁴⁾ but in a kind of “a simple fundamental justice and equity in human affairs” (*M* 6):

He had simply had to trust *them*—the *Them* of whom it was promised that not even a sparrow should fall unmarked. By *them* he didn't mean that whatever-it-was that folks referred to as Old

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**Professor, School of Sociology, Graduate School of Language, Communication and Culture, Kwansei Gakuin University

Moster. He didn't believe in any Old Moster. He had seen too much in his time that, if any Old Moster existed, with eyes as sharp and power as strong as was claimed He had, He would have done something about. (*M* 5)

However, at the end of the story, he seems to believe in Old Moster as the adequate name for 'they' or 'it'. And it is Gavin Stevens and V. K. Ratliff who see the transformation of Mink Snopes. Hence the aim of this paper is to clarify Faulkner's religious concepts at his last stage of life as revealed by Gavin and Ratliff through the story of Mink Snopes.

The Mansion begins with the events of 1908. Truly, Mink kills Jack Houston not for his personal profit but for the sake of his desperate pride against the impersonal power of justice.

. . . because he, Mink, was not a contentious man. He had never been. It was simply that his own bad luck had all his life continually harassed and harried him into the constant and unflagging necessity of defending his own simple rights. (*M* 7)

Mink thinks the wealthy Houston, "the arrogant intolerable man" (*M* 7) who owns "the bad-eyed horse and the dog that bared its teeth and raised its hackles any time anybody went near it" (*M* 7), dominates him due to his economic power. Considering that Houston is "not only rich enough to be able to breed and raise beef cattle, but rich enough to keep a Negro to do nothing else save feed and tend them" (*M* 9), Mink leaves his cow in Houston's field for the winter to be fed and bred to Houston's bulls so that he could pay back Houston's previous disgraceful attitude toward him.

Yet, instead of repaying, Mink has to buy back the cow from Houston with money "with which he, Mink, could have bought a gallon of whiskey for Christmas, plus a dollar or two of the gewgaw" for his wife and two daughters (*M* 12-3). Furthermore, "he would have to go fawning and even cringing a little when he went to recover his cow" (*M* 13). Mink tries to endure the test with dignity; "his pride was that he was not reconciled" (*M* 13).

When Houston refuses to return the cow for the eight dollars that Mink offers him and threatens Mink with a pistol, Mink senses that he is tried by "them," who are "still testing, trying him to see just how much he could bear and would stand" (*M* 16), and takes his case to Varner, the justice of the peace, only to find that Varner supports Houston in the suit. Mink "was not really surprised at what happened," but "he had simply underestimated *them*" (*M* 16).

Due to the lack of the eighteen dollars and seventy-five cents to reclaim his cow, he is obliged to work out the price by digging post holes at fifty cents a day for "thirty-seven days and from light till noon to the next one" (*M* 17). Mink could do nothing but to accept these conditions that seemed to him another test of his will to endure.

In this way Mink has to continuously work for Houston. Finally, when his crop is planted and the post holes finished, he has Houston wait one night, until the cow has been fed for the last time before getting her back. To his great disappointment, Houston claims from Mink an extra one dollar pound fee. Mink, who with desperate patience has endured all of the outrage that Houston could heap upon him, cannot bear the disgrace anymore and kills Houston with "the tremendous ten-gauge double-barrelled shotgun which had belonged to his grandfather" (*M* 38). Between the roar of the gun, he exclaims his unbearable outrage to Houston:

“I aint shooting you because of them thirty-seven and a half four-bit days. That’s all right; I done long ago forgot and forgive that. Likely Will Varner couldn’t do nothing else, being a rich man too and all you rich folks has got to stick together or else maybe some day the ones that aint rich might take a notion to raise up and take hit away from you. That aint why I shot you. I killed you because of that-ere extry one-dollar pound fee.” (*M* 39)

To the very last day of his trial, Mink’s utmost regret is for Flem’s absence. For him Flem is “the one Snopes of them all who had risen, broken free, had either been born with or had learned, taught himself, the knack or the luck to cope with, hold his own, handle the They and Them which he, Mink, apparently did not have the knack or the luck to do” (*M* 35). Mink vainly looked for Flem to save him until “The jury said ‘Guilty’ and the Judge said ‘Life’” (*M* 3, 40), and he is sent to the penitentiary at Parchman.

Time passes, Mink being “not anything at all; no record of run-in or reprimand with or from any guard or trusty or official, never any trouble with any other inmate” (*M* 50), but he was never free from his grudge against Flem. What is worse, Montgomery Ward Snopes’s plan of escape with Mink dressed in women’s clothes, adds him twenty years to be confined by chains in prison. Deceived by Montgomery Ward, Mink expresses a fatalistic view of life:

He remembered how at first he had cursed his bad luck for letting them catch him but he knew better now; that there was no such thing as bad luck or good luck: you were either born a champion or not a champion and if he had been born a champion Houston not only couldn’t, he wouldn’t have dared, misuse him about that cow to where he had to kill him; that some folks were born to be failures and get caught always, some folks were born to be lied to and believe it, and he was one of them. (*M* 89–90)

In this long term of “waiting,” Mink is deprived of all human rights. In fact all his life he has suffered from outrage and injustice:

[he was] involved in some crisis of the constant outrage and injustice he was always having to drop everything to cope with, handle, with no proper tools and equipment for it, not even the time to spare from the unremitting work it took to feed himself and his family. (*M* 405)

At last in 1946, after thirty-eight years, Mink comes out of the Parchman gate and he finds himself in a world which is quite different from what he used to know. However, having declined Gavin Steven’s two hundred and fifty dollars which would have been given him “on the condition that he don’t never lay eyes on Flem Snopes again as long as he lives” (*M* 369), at last he feels really free.

With about twelve dollars in hand he reaches Memphis, where he buys an ancient pistol and three bullets for eleven dollars. By now Mink’s belief in *them* who repays a man of ceaseless suffering has somehow united with a sense of “Old Moster,” “who just punishes; He don’t play jokes” (*M* 407, also in 398, 414). Finally Mink faces Flem and kills him.

In actualizing his long-held desire, it is notable that Mink comes to call “them” by the name “Old Moster,” which shows it is likely that he has reaffirmed his belief in “Old Moster” on his own. He tells the warden that “I didn’t need no church, . . . I done it in confidence” (*M* 100). When Mink

knows that he was protected by the law from Stillwell, who escaped from the penitentiary at Parchman and who wants to get rid of Mink, since Mink had not cooperated with the others in their plan to escape and thus caused Barron's death, Mink puts God to work on Stillwell, remembering the days when he "used to go to church ever Sunday and Wednesday prayer meeting too" (*M* 99).

Though he has never been inside the chapel since he came there back in 1908, as it was "one of the small violent irreconcilable nonconformist non-everything and . . . small fierce cliques and groups" (*M* 100), Mink now acquires the crucial truth of the way of God. He confesses that faith is receiving the unconditional grace or mercy of God:

"You dont need to write God a letter. He has done already seen inside you long before He would even need to bother to read it. Because a man will learn a little sense in time even outside. But he learns it quick in here. That when a Judgment powerful enough to help you, will help you if all you got to do is jest take back and accept it, you are a fool not to." (*M* 100)

What Mink knows by now is that a divine power will care for him (*M* 100), even though he "hadn't asked for justice since justice was only for the best, for champions" (*M* 94). Actually it was a time when he learned that Stillwell had been killed near San Diego, as a deconsecrated church collapsed on him, Mink's conviction concerning God's mercy was confirmed.

The other crucial moment was just after Mink got out of prison, when suddenly, in October splendor, somewhere deep in his memory, there was the apparition of "a tree, a single tree" (*M* 104). As "tree" connotes to us the "Tree of Life,"⁵⁾ it reminds Mink of his most precious relative, his Christian stepmother. Though she was not even kin to him, she cared for him. "He could always depend on her," and he wanted her "simply to be there" (*M* 105).

At one time, because she was beaten and could not eat "the fatback, the coarse meal, molasses" (*M* 105) that was the normal dinner of the family, Mink shot a squirrel for her to eat. He remembers slaying the animal, lugging "the clumsy weapon even taller than he was, into the woods, to the tree, the hickory" (*M* 105), and their "relishing" of the meal together, both trembling. Delivered from confinement, Mink recalls the moment of love which, he realizes, is "inviolable and immune" (*M* 106), and he sees that one is oriented not by a literal place but by "what he remembers" (*M* 106). That recollection of his warm relationship with his stepmother leads him to a realization of life in grace in its fullest sense.

After Mink has killed Flem, Gavin and Ratliff come upon him in the cellar of his old home as they predicted: "half-squatted half-knelt blinking up at them like a child interrupted at its bedside prayers" (*M* 432). They warn him that he cannot stay there and Gavin gives him money from Linda Kohl.

When Gavin asks Mink where he can be reached in three months, Mink, with an air of dignity, says, "Send it to M. C. Snopes" (*M* 433). He is not just Mink any more. He is free now, and has chosen to accept the earth as his dwelling and "he could feel the Mink Snopes that had had to spend so much of his life just having unnecessary bother and trouble" (*M* 435) finds himself mixed among his fellows with "the shining phantoms and dreams which are the milestones of the long human recording" (*M* 436). While Mink's faith was formally in the impersonal power of justice, to his desperate pride's end, he is now free from his grudge, being dependent on divine power.

Gavin and Ratliff look back at the event and say after all, "There aren't any morals" (*M* 439),

pointing out the terrible moral ambiguities surrounding the murder of Flem Snopes, whose “ramshacking and foreclosing and grabbling and snatching” (*M* 428) culminated in his ownership of the De Spain mansion, which was finally “gift-free-for-nothing” for the two remaining descendants of the De Spain family.

It is notable that in spite of many religious references, one of the distinguished characteristics of the story is its moral ambiguity. *The Mansion* connotes the difficulty of distinguishing between good and evil, where Mink is described as a sympathetic character even though he murdered two men.

The same ambiguous nature of morality is displayed in John Synge’s three-act play, *The Playboy of the Western World*, from which the phrase “Helen and the bishops” is derived. The story is about Christy Mahon, a young man who ran away from his farm, claiming he had killed his father with a “loy” [a type of spade used in Ireland]. Instead of blaming him, the locals are interested in his story, and Christy caught the attention of the bar-maid Pegeen Mike, “a wild looking but fine girl.” Christy, overwhelmed with the joy of love, says to her, “If the mitred bishops seen you that time, they’d be the like of the holy prophets, I’m thinking, do be straining the bars of Paradise to lay eyes on the Lady Helen of Troy, and the abroad, packing back and forward, with a nosegay in her golden shawl” (Act III).⁶

Pegeen once accepts his love and wants to get married with him. However, when the villagers realize that Christy’s father is alive, everyone shuns and rejects him as a liar and a coward. In order to regain Pegeen’s love and the respect of the people, Christy attacks his father a second time. Contrary to his expectation, Pegeen and the villagers prepare to hang him. However, Christy’s life is saved when his father crawls back onto the scene. As Christy and his father leave to wander the world, Pegeen laments her betraying and losing Christy: “I’ve lost the only playboy of the western world.”⁷

Considering such ambiguous and unstable human nature which cannot be judged only by morality, Gavin and Ratliff repeat the same phrase: “The pore sons of bitches,” Ratliff said. “The poor sons of bitches,” Stevens said (*M* 429). The phrase is repeated by Miss Reba, madam of the famous Memphis whorehouse, after hearing Montgomery Ward Snopes tell of his cousin Mink’s murder of Jack Houston, who says that neither one of them was poorer than the other, but “Both of them . . . All of us. Every one of us. The poor son of a bitches [sic]” (*M* 82). Also it is repeated by Reverend Goodyhay in his preaching about repentance: “Save us, Christ, the poor sons of bitches” (*M* 271, 282). Thus everyone in the novel is included under the category of “poor sons of bitches” who need something beyond morality.

It is understandable that, due to their age, both Gavin and Ratliff know the limitation of man. Furthermore, the time that they face is that of the cataclysmic modern wars of World War I and World War II and (between them) the Spanish Civil War (1936–39). After Gavin and Ratliff return from New York, where they witnessed the wedding ceremony of Linda, they watch “the light go out in Spain and Ethiopia, the darkness that was going to creep eastward across all Europe and Asia too, until the shadow of it would fall across the Pacific islands until it reached even America” (*M* 177–78). In that devastated dark world, their need for light rather than morality was urgent.

Gavin, who was in Heidelberg and used to think Germany had the “closest tie with the modern virile derivations of the northern branch of the old Aryan stock” (*M* 131), now sees German culture as arising from darkness, and he denies German music and their splendid musical ideas that are no longer mysterious, while he sees, France, with its habit of speaking “epicene exactitudes to ladies” (*M* 132) as the successor of the culture of light, controlled by Helen of Troy. As a result, he fought on the

French side.

Gavin says to Ratliff, “Man must have light” (*M* 132), and adds “Helen was light. That’s why we can still see her, not changed, not even dimmer, from five thousand years away,” and he adds that “Semiramises and Judiths and Liliths and Francescas and Isoldes” are “not like Helen” (*M* 133), because “the others all talked. They are fading steadily into the obscurity of their own vocality within which their passions and tragedies took place” (*M* 133).

The presence of Eula, who is continuously identified with Helen in *The Mansion*, is contrasted by Ratliff to Snopesism, which grows by cunningly protecting the system of acquisition and retention of money:

Ratliff said the reason Snopeses were successful was that they had all federated unanimously to remove being a Snopes from just a zoological category into a condition composed of success by means of the single rule and regulation and sacred oath of never to tell anybody how.⁸⁾

The people who “have light” (*M* 132) and walk in light, “where all shadow will be defined and sharp and unique and personal” (*M* 132–33) are characterized by their life of renunciation and sacrifice. With unpreoccupied humble hearts they accept light, perpetually astonished by the grace of God. Ratliff mentions it as; “when you can see and feel and smell and hear and taste what you never expected to and hadn’t never even imagined until that moment, maybe that’s why Old Moster picked you out to be the one of the ones to be alive” (*M* 173).

Eula Varner, a Helen of Troy, who was light (*M* 133) dies in order that her daughter Linda may live because “all Helen’s children would have to inherit something of generosity” (*M* 141). And Linda does more than anyone else in the novel, renouncing herself completely to the degree of the miserable state of Mink, like the suffering servant who “has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (Isa. 53:4) and entering into a life of self-sacrifice: “So she was lost” (*M* 219), “Yes, [she was] lost” (*M* 219), “[She was] lost” (*M* 222). Furthermore, what she wanted was not “just to give,” but it was “to be needed too” (*M* 143). For a while she devotes herself to the Negroes, trying to improve their schools. Then the war “not only killed her husband and blew the bejesus out of the inside of her skull, but even at that price the side she was fighting for still lost, without finding that out” (*M* 230).

In his explanation of why Linda Snopes participated in Mink’s killing of Flem, her father-in-law, Ratliff imagines heaven as a continuation of human relationships and obligations from the earth: “If there wasn’t no folks in heaven, it wouldn’t be heaven. And if you couldn’t recognise them as folks you knowed, wouldn’t nobody want to go there” (*M* 431). He also imagines Linda meeting Eula who would admonish, “Why didn’t you revenge me and my love that I finally found it, instead of jest standing back and blind hoping for happen-so?” (*M* 431).

In fact Linda has not just stood back, but has fulfilled the role as the repentant Magdalen just as Gavin has mentioned: “She is doomed to anguish and to bear it, doomed to one passion and one anguish and all the rest of her life to bear it, as some people are doomed from birth to be robbed or betrayed or murdered,”⁹⁾ as “the inviolate bride of silence, inviolable in maidenhead, fixed, forever safe from change and alteration” (*M* 203) since according to Gavin “the entire dilemma of man’s condition is because of the ceaseless gabble with which he has surrounded himself, enclosed himself, insulated himself from the penalties of his own folly” (*M* 236).

It is true that Faulkner interprets man as a pitiful creature full of contradictions and ceaseless gab-

ble. However, as Jeremy Taylor writes, “God’s mercy is above all His works, and above all ours, greater than the creation and greater than our sins,”¹⁰⁾ Faulkner also describes that in spite of the fear of sins and guilt, with the help of God, man can renounce himself in order to live in the light of God. In that sense mercy is not conceived as a thing, but it is the transformation of human life. Thus like Linda both Gavin and Ratliff have chosen the life of renunciation, and moreover, Gavin becomes a fighting man and sincerely carries out his principles, and Ratliff single-mindedly devotes himself to a life of communion and abundance.

Certainly what man needs beyond morality is God’s mercy which, Faulkner writes, is far greater and inclusive, even in His dealings with the seraphim who “merely looked on and watched” man in his struggle:

During all this time [since God created the earth and man to cope with it], the angels (with one exception; God had probably had trouble with this one before) merely looked on and watched—the serene and blameless seraphim, that white and shining congeries who, with the exception of that one whose arrogance and pride God had already had to curb, were content merely to bask for eternity in the reflected glory of the miracle of man, content merely to watch, uninvolved and not even caring

But this one’s opinion of man was even worse than that of the negative and shining ones. This one not only believed that man was incapable of anything but baseness, this one believed that baseness had been inculcated in man to be used for base personal aggrandizement by them of a higher and more ruthless baseness. So God used the dark spirit too.¹¹⁾

Here Faulkner uses the word “seraphim”, though seraphim is mentioned only once in the Bible, in Isaiah 6:2, where they are described as sixwinged creatures who sing God’s praise (“holy, holy, holy”).¹²⁾ However, as we find in Genesis in the story of Jacob’s ladder, which is a symbol of the angelic hierarchy that links man to God, the Christian tradition, following the Judaic tradition, teaches that there are nine orders of angels: Angels, Archangels, Principalities, Virtues, Powers, Domination, Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim. Each angelic order represents one aspect of the powers and virtues of God.¹³⁾ Originally the Seraphim are the first to receive the divine emanations of love.¹⁴⁾

In the Snopes trilogy, “seraphim” is used five times: twice in *The Hamlet* as “the fallen and unregenerate seraphim”¹⁵⁾ and “Helen and bishop, the kings and the graceless seraphim,”¹⁶⁾ once in *The Town* where Flem is identified with one of “the lost infernal seraphim,”¹⁷⁾ and twice in *The Mansion* as “that fallen seraphim” (*M* 135), and “the scornful and graceless seraphim” (*M* 436) at the end. Though it cannot be specified what Faulkner connotes by these expressions, at least we understand from the citation above that “that fallen seraphim” might be “this one,” which is worse than “the negative and shining seraphim,” “the scornful and graceless seraphim.”

Thus Faulkner has expanded the sphere of the trilogy to include angels and heaven, together with the living and the dead. He even refers to Greek mythology. But nevertheless, the Snopes trilogy concludes within the Christian scheme of redemption¹⁸⁾ of “poor sons of bitches,” of which even the monstrosously cold-blooded Flem, who was killed by Mink without making any resistance, is not excluded by the utmost grace of God at the cost of Christ’s suffering. Truly as is expressed in Roman 8:22; “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” for its fulfillment.

The fundamental meaning of the title, “mansion,” is derived originally from the Latin word “manere,” “to stay or remain” (*OED*). The lives on earth, the records of the deeds, are carried along into heaven. The “long human recording” is kept in both spheres, so that “Nothing is ever lost” (*M* 218). As Gavin and Ratliff looked above, they saw “Overhead, celestial and hierarchate, the constellations wheeled through the zodiacal pastures: scorpion and Bear and Scales; beyond cold Orion and the Sisters, the fallen and homeless angels choired, lamenting” (*M* 433). With the death of Flem Snopes, Gavin and Ratliff are given a final religious connotation through the act of Mink lying on the ground. There, under the light of the great mercy of God, “equal to any, good as any, brave as any” (*M* 435), Mink joins “the shining phantoms and dreams” (*M* 436) of which Eula, as “Helen,” and “the bishops, the kings and the unhomed angels, the scornful and graceless seraphim” are now one.

NOTES

Respecting the intentions of the author, mistakes in English usage are left as they are in the quotations.

Text: Faulkner, William. *The Mansion*. 1959. New York: Vintage, 1965.

- 1) Warren Beck, *Man in Motion: Faulkner's Trilogy* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1961) 203.
- 2) *The Mansion* (New York: Random, 1965) ix. Subsequent references to this book will be identified in the paper by the abbreviation *M*, followed by the page number.
- 3) [in 1961] When Estelle and Blotner arrived to help him with the process of leaving the hospital, he sat in the bedside armchair in what seemed a state of quiet exhaustion. On the night table lay his standard hospital reading: the Bible, Taylor's *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying*, and Boccaccio's *Decameron* (Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* [New York: Random, 1984] 698). As for the influence of Jeremy Taylor (1613–1667) on Faulkner, please refer to my papers: “The Access to Life's Flux: A Study of Hightower in *Light in August* in Reference to Henri Bergson and Jeremy Taylor,” *Kwansei Gakuin University Humanities Review*, vol.6 (Kwansei Gakuin University, 2002) 79–102; “Dispute against Faulkner's Direct Influence by Henri Bergson and his Affinities with Jeremy Taylor in his Concept of Time,” *School of Sociology Journal* 96 (Kwansei Gakuin University, 2004) 149–61; “The Source of Faulkner's Essential Image, ‘Time is Christ’ in Reference to Jeremy Taylor,” *School of Sociology Journal* 100 (Kwansei Gakuin University, 2006) 85–100; “An Assertion that Faulkner Is Not a Pelagian by Reference to Jeremy Taylor,” *Kwansei Gakuin University Humanities Review*, vol.17 (Kwansei Gakuin University, 2013) 111–24.
- 4) *The Facts on File Dictionary of American Regionalism*, ed. Robert Hendrickson (New York, 2000) 115.
- 5) Tree of Life is a tree whose fruit gives immortal life to those who partake of it: a frequent mythological symbol found in Semitic and other cultures (e.g., Mesopotamian, Greek, Persian, and Indian). . . . The motif is used in the biblical account of the Garden of Eden, where the tree of life is mentioned alongside the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gn. 2: 9). . . . There is much difference of opinion among commentators as to the precise meaning and relationship of the two trees in the parable story. Apocalyptic literature promises the righteous that they will partake of the tree of life after the final judgment . . . In kabbalistic literature, the symbolism of the two trees, and of the tree of life in particular, is developed in mystical fashion (*The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, ed. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder [New York: Oxford UP, 1997] 703–4).
- 6) John Millington Synge, *The Collected Works of John Millington Synge* (BiblioBazaar, 2008) 96. Cf. William Faulkner, *The Hamlet* (New York: Vintage, 1964) 54, 181, 186.
- 7) *The Collected Works of John Millington Synge* 111.
- 8) William Faulkner, *The Town* (New York: Vintage, 1961) 107.
- 9) William Faulkner, *The Town* 351.
- 10) It was mercy that preserved the noblest of God's creatures here below; he who stood condemned and undone under all the other attributes of God was only saved and rescued by His mercy; that it may be evident that God's mercy is above all His works, and above all ours, greater than the creation and greater than our sins. ‘As is His majesty, so is His mercy,’ that is, without measures and without rules, sitting in heaven and filling all the world, calling for a duty that He may give a bless-

ing, making man that He may save him, punishing him that He may preserve him (*The Whole Works of the Right Reverend Jeremy Taylor, D.D. with a Life of the Author* IV, ed. Reginald Heber [Georg Olms Verlag, 1970] 633).

- 11) *Essays, Speeches and Public Letters*, ed. James B. Meriwether (New York: Random, 1966) 136.
- 12) *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* 621.
- 13) Jacob came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the Lord stood beside him. Cf. Aïvanhov, Omraam Mikhaël. *Angels and Other Mysteries of The Tree of Life* (Prosveta, 2000) 19–20. The influence of Jewish mysticism on Faulkner has been considered in relation to Jeremy Taylor in “‘The Source of Faulkner’s Essential Image, ‘Time is Christ’ in Reference to Jeremy Taylor.”
- 14) *Angels and Other Mysteries of The Tree of Life* 44.
- 15) *The Hamlet* 183.
- 16) *The Hamlet* 186.
- 17) *The Town* 270.
- 18) Redemption, meaning *buying back*, implies that a situation has existed in which an individual or a society has been brought into some kind of bondage. . . . The central theme represented such words as redemption, deliverance, liberation is that of divine compassion leading to active succor on behalf those oppressed and unable to help themselves. . . . The writers of the NT insist that the divine redemption involved identification with the human lot, refusal to use physical instruments of compulsion, submission to man’s last enemy, death. By identifying himself with humans in their temptations, trials, hopelessness, suffering and death he [Christ] paid an immeasurably costly price and brought into being a new humanity, bearing his own image and committed to following his example. The most eloquent celebration of Christina redemption is found in the Epistle to the Ephesians (1:7, 14, 4:30). . . . All earthly deliverances are but types and models of the eternal redemption (Heb. 9:14) which Christ has obtained for us (Alan Richardson and John Bowden, eds., *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* [Philadelphia: The Westminster P, 1983] 487).

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ABSTRACT

William Faulkner's *The Mansion* (1959) unifies the human situation of the Snopes trilogy, *The Hamlet* (1940), *The Town* (1957) and *The Mansion* (1959), with man continuously in a state of tension between guilt and salvation. With its enigmatic concluding phrase, "Helen and the bishop, the kings and the unhomed angels, the scornful and graceless seraphim," one of the distinguished characteristics of the story is its moral ambiguity, since Mink is described as a sympathetic character even though he murders two men. However, *The Mansion* is given a final religious connotation through Mink lying on the ground after the ordeal. There, under the light of the great mercy of God, "equal to any, good as any, brave as any" (*M* 435), Mink joins "the shining phantoms and dreams" (*M* 436) of which Eula, as "Helen," and "the bishops, the kings and the unhomed angels, the scornful and graceless seraphim" are finally one.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to clarify Faulkner's religious concepts during the last stage of his life, which presents the spiritual drama of Christian redemption, as revealed by Gavin and Ratliff through the story of Mink Snopes who has come to believe in "Old Master" in God's fullest grace.

Key Words: moral ambiguity, redemption, God's mercy