

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Problem of the Study

Among American novelists of the present century only William Faulkner has created an imagenary world that is complete in itself, or perhaps one should say almost complete in itself (Howe, 1975). Faulkner has written many books which for range of effect, philosophical weight, originality of style, variety of characterization, humor, and tragic intensity, are without equal in contemporary time. As O'Connor wrote in William Faulkner(1959):

Faulkner is a great writer, possibly the finest American novelist, but an essential simplicity of mind is a part of his genius. He is not a sophisticated writer in the sense that Henry James or Joseph Conrad or James Joyce is sophisticated. When he undertakes subjects of a certain magnitude and order, as he did with Pylon and A Fable, he flounders badly. But when he is treating subjects and themes that he feels in his bones - the frustration of the Negro in "Dry September", the decency of Dilsey in The Sound and the Fury, the self-preoccupation of Anse Bundren in As I Lay Dying, or the anguish of young Sarty Snopes in "Barn Burning" - Faulkner is magnificent. (38-39)

His interest in the predicament of Southern life, especially that of the Mississippi, has attracted him to choose it to be the material which Faulkner is going to exploit in his masterpieces. He provides many "living"

characters that no other American novelist has created since Henry James and possibly he has not been equalled in implying the entire mode of life (Howe, 1975).

The prominent characters in Faulkner's novels concern with ordinary men in fatalistic struggle for both idealism and self individuality. His characters are mostly charged with destiny and entrapped by their own struggles for idealisms. As Hoffman wrote in William Faulkner (1961) :

His characters are intense creatures, obsessed with their isolation in the world, abnormally puzzled over the character and degree of the burdens they must assume, and desperate to assert themselves before death close in on them. In this respect, the complex of past and present, assuming both "the burdens" of history and the struggle of self definition, becomes a means of classifying Faulkner's characters. (28-29)

Since individuals in Faulkner's world have the "southern code" heritage, they are deeply troubled by the racial situation which is a constant source of agitation as long as they live. The need for discovering self-identity in an environment in which it leads them to inevitable choice to destroy themselves through their rejections of life. A housewife who finally relies on her death to violate her aloneness can be found in As I Lay Dying. Thomas Sutpen, a self-destroyed white man, is a victim of a crime which embodies the denial of equal human status to men of different color, or social and economic rank is the main observed character in Absalom, Absalom! Quentin in The Sound and the

Fury is a white man, who sees himself as the inheritor of a tradition of nobility and as the patron for Negro, destroys himself through his isolation from the present reality.

Faulkner's style is subjective to him. He is fond of employing extended passages. In almost all of Faulkner's works exist a realistic colloquialism, expressing lively dialogue that it is unsurpassed in contemporary American fiction (Warren, 1966). He also uses the devices of the stream of consciousness technique to establish transitions between thoughts.

Like his other novels, Light in August also shows the characteristics of his work; that is, the Southern ordinary life in fatalistic struggle for idealism. The characters are white woman who is advocate for Negro, a past romantic minister, and a young man who is a mulatto. In addition to being idealists, the characters are fatalists and several of them even live under the severe pain of entrapment.

Light in August records a life journey of a young man, who is partly black and partly white, seeking for self-individuality as a study of man's self-destructiveness. It is telling about the Southerners who are still obsessed with the terrible effect of the slavery. They are entrapped in the predicament which is caused by their hostility over the racial cases. Such condition and situation causes dilemma for Joe Christmas, who is the protagonist in the novel. He is

considered as a mulatto, partly white and partly black, who has no self-confidence to determine his racial division. On the one hand, he refuses to be categorized either as a white or black. But, on the other hand, the society must demand his choice to which race he belongs. Consequently, he seems to live in the destruction of his individuality since he never lets himself have individual freedom. He isolates himself from the people to prevent them from knowing his secret. In addition, Joe Christmas himself keeps trying to deny his origin of being partly white. He does not want his white self and prefers to be a black, though he can live among the whites because of his white complexion. He often shows his bad manners toward any one whom he always considers as a destroyer of his isolation. However, he destroys himself through all his resistance of life, such as his isolating himself and his denying his own origin. He lets himself have no self-confidence because of his unreasonable fear to assume the consequence of being neither a white nor a black. In this matter, Joe Christmas has performed self-destructiveness since he himself develops his destructive character, but unconsciously he perfects the character in his self destruction; that is, his being castrated.

Light in August conveys the self destructiveness of "modernism" in Joe Christmas. The writer of this thesis is interested in the presence of self-destructiveness in this

novel because it concerns with the relation between a man's social role and his private being. This novel gives the emphasis on both the terrors of isolation and the erosion of the relationships which are represented in the protagonist's inevitable choice to destroy himself for his idealism.

The problem that will be discussed in this thesis is why Joe Christmas, the protagonist, commits self-destructiveness, then, how the protagonist performs self destructiveness in Faulkner's Light in August. To solve this, it will be more extensively described in chapter 4.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to find out self destructiveness in Faulkner's novel entitled Light in August. The study will prove that man's selfishness and lack of self-confidence can be the cause of his own self-destructive ness which is manifestated in his isolating and rejecting himsel. It is about a "modern" man who is an idealist as well as fatalist. Since every man is always liable to human defects, it is hoped that he will not be entrapped in such predicament.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study is aimed at extending our knowledge of literature in general and American in particular, especially

Faulkner's work. What Faulkner is telling about his characters is a common phenomenon that may exist in our modern world. Therefore, more students and ordinary men will be able to understand Faulkner's works better, especially his novels. And, the study will help them understand the characteristics of self-destructiveness from the literary perspectives.

1.4 Theoretical Background

The theory applied in this study is the objective theory. Using the theory, the writer will be able to represent properly the nature of the novel to achieve the aim of the study.

The objective theory concerns with the intrinsic elements of literary work which consist of : plot, setting, point of view, characterization, style, and theme (Abrams, 1979). However, the writer will only limit the discussion on plot, characterization, setting, and theme which are representative enough to achieve the understanding of self-destructiveness. The theory deals with the work of art itself as it is said in The Mirror and The Lamp by Abrams:

..., the 'objective orientation,' which on principle regards the work of art in isolation from all these external points of reference, analyzes it as a self-sufficient entity constituted by in parts in their internal relations, and sets out to judge it solely by criteria intrinsic to its own mode of being (p. 26).

Since in this study self-destructiveness is described as the development of the mental deviation of the protagonist from his childhood until his adulthood, the psychological approach will also be used in this study to support the literary approach.

1.5 Method and Technique of the Study

The method used in this study is library research since the writer explains the idea of self-destructiveness based on some references, including the novel itself. This activity, then, results in the discovery of relating data on self-destructiveness.

The technique consists of two steps namely (1) the analysis in which the main activity includes the effort of understanding the novel, (2) interpretation in which the data obtained from the analysis is interpreted as well as explained. In this case, the writer uses the content analysis technique.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

Several terms used in this study are sometimes confusing in their understandings, therefore, the writer feels obliged to put the definition of the terms taken from Webster's Dictionary (1954) :

- Individualism** : the leading of one's life in one's own way without regard for others. In philosophy, the tendency to be self-centered, or to consider only oneself and one's own interests; selfishness
- Predicament** : a condition or situation, especially one that is dangerous, unpleasant, embarrassing, or, sometimes, comical. A complicated, perplexing situation from which it is difficult to disentangle oneself;
- Self-confidence** : the quality of being self-confident; belief in or reliance on oneself or one's abilities.
- Self-destructiveness:** a condition or situation that is potential self-destruction; the tendency of destroying oneself.