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William Faulkner , George Garrett (Introduction)

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Here, published in a single volume as Faulkner always hoped they would be, are the three novels that comprise the famous Snopes trilogy, a saga that stands as perhaps the greatest feat of Faulkner's imagination. *The Hamlet*, the first book of the series chronicling the advent and rise of the grasping Snopes family in mythical Yoknapatawpha County, is a work that Cleanth Brooks called "one of the richest novels in the Faulkner canon." It recounts how the wily, cunning Flem Snopes dominates the rural community of Frenchman's Bend - and claims the voluptuous Eula Varner as his bride. *The Town*, the second novel, records Flem's ruthless struggle to take over the county seat of Jefferson, Mississippi. Finally, *The Mansion* tells of Mink Snopes, whose archaic sense of honor brings about the downfall of his cousin Flem. "For all his concerns with the South, Faulkner was actually seeking out the nature of man," noted Ralph Ellison. "Thus we must turn to him for that continuity of moral purpose which made for the greatness of our classics."

Snopes Details

Date : Published March 15th 1994 by Modern Library (first published 1959)

ISBN : 9780679600923

Author : William Faulkner , George Garrett (Introduction)

Format : Hardcover 1072 pages

Genre : Fiction, Classics, Literature, Novels

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Lee Thompson says

Takes forever to read, but time well-spent. Now I'm inspired.

Janice (JG) says

I have just finished the first novel of this Snopes trilogy - The Hamlet. It was grand storytelling, it was funny and it was sad and sometimes it was unbelievable, but that last bit didn't matter because the characters were so terrific I couldn't put it down. This is Faulkner the Storyteller at his finest as he familiarizes us with Jefferson City and the folks of Yoknapatawpha County. There is nothing dense or difficult about The Hamlet, altho' some Southerners have taken issue with Faulkner's characterizations of the citizens of Yoknapatawpha County, insisting that people of the south are not as they have been represented in this story.

As for me, I think these characters are bigger than some geographical identity. I think Faulkner has painted pictures of our humanity. Sometimes we are great, and sometimes we are very silly. Most times, tho', we are a soupy mixture of both whipped up and thrown on top of ordinary. I will return to this trilogy and the second novel - The Town - in a month when I finish the trilogy with a GR group, and I'm really looking forward to it.

K. Wills says

Faulkner wrote this trilogy over a long period of time - decades, in fact. "The Hamlet" was written in the 1920s, with "The Town" and "The Mansion" completed much later, in the 1950s. I found "The Hamlet" to be more entertaining than the others, though the plot thickens and the characters deepen as the story goes on. But the enjoyment is not quite up to par in the later works, primarily because Faulkner developed a somewhat overwrought style of writing in his later years that detracts from, rather than adds to, the overall experience of his work. For me, his earlier works, such as "As I Lay Dying," are far better for being a bit less flowery. However, I will say this: The Snopes clan are unique in literature, and everyone should read at least "The Hamlet" to get an idea about them. I realized about halfway through "The Hamlet" - and this sense continued as I read the later works - that Faulkner, very subtly and cleverly, wrote in such a way as to make the reader feel just as frustrated and bewildered with the Snopes as the characters in the book are. I've never experienced anything quite like it. The reader isn't simply drawn into the story. The emotions - the confusion over their actions ("What the hell are they up to?"), the slow creep of surprise as we - the characters and reader alike - realize we've all been duped, and then the growing frustration as we further realize that though the Snopes appear to be clueless idiots, they are actually far more clever even than we and there is not one damn thing we can do to alter the course of events or our feelings about them. There is no way for the reader to know what they are about until the citizens themselves know - Faulkner doesn't drop any clues or provide any foreshadowing. And in this sense the later works are brilliant in their way, for Faulkner uses verbage to enhance the reader's confusion, to make us feel that we have no idea what's going on. And that's exactly how all the citizens of Jefferson feel with respect to the Snopes and their various plans. And then, as the story spins out, thread by thread, the plans become more and more clear, until the reader, like the citizens of Jefferson, can trace back and see exactly what the Snopes did, and how. But if you don't have a high tolerance for frustration and are not patient enough to wait for the plot to show itself, you won't care for the two later books in the trilogy. "The Hamlet" is the most straightforward of the three and is the best read, in

my view. Give that one a try, and if you like it, proceed to the others.

Ronald says

Reading Faulkner by starting with *The Sound and the Fury*, as my college literature professor forced me to do, is a big mistake. The Snopes trilogy is much more accessible, filled with dark humor and simple plots. I reread the Snopes Trilogy every three or four years just for the pure pleasure of the language. To fully enjoy Faulkner it helps to have been raised in a small town in the pre-modern South, but it isn't necessary.

Lawyer says

Faulkner tells the story of the rise of the Snopes family through three novels, "The Hamlet"; "The Town"; and "The Mansion." It is a stunning cycle of stories depicting the decay of the south as it is overtaken by new social values at odds with the past.

At times the story is told by an apparent omniscient narrator. At others it is solely told from the perspective of specific voices, especially the attorney Gavin Stevens, his nephew Chick Mallison, and V.K. Ratcliff, a travelling salesman, vending sewing machines on the installment plan.

The Snopes clan arrives in Yoknapatawpha County in force in the late 1890s, although Faulkner gives us glimpses of the family in "The Unvanquished" and "Sanctuary." However, Faulkner's ultimate symbol of the changing south appears in the form of Flem Snopes in "The Hamlet," published in 1940.

Consider Flem Snopes synonymous with amoral greed, the darkest side of capitalism. Flem will rise from sharecropper to banker over the span of forty years. In an effort to portray himself as a respectable member of Jefferson, i.e. Oxford, Mississippi, society, he will rid the town of his own family members, using them for his own purposes until he discards them when they are no longer useful.

In addition to Flem, Faulkner creates more memorable Snopes: Mink, Wallstreet Panic, Montgomery Ward, and Clarence Eggleston Snopes. Then there is Eck Snopes, so innocent, so decent, that V.K. Ratcliff insists he could not have been a Snopes at all, surmising that Eck's mother had improved the family gene pool by trysting with someone outside the Snopes family.

On simple terms, the Snopes trilogy indicates that you can have love or money, but you can't have both. Flem's greatest opportunity comes from his marriage to Eula Varner after she becomes pregnant by a young man from one of the old aristocratic families. He will provide a name to a bastard child. However, he will never be Eula's lover. She will find that comfort from another source. Flem will accept playing the cuckold as long as it serves his purposes.

Gavin Stevens, his nephew Chick, and Ratcliff will make it their mission to protect Jefferson from the Snopes clan. This trio represents the decency of democratic progress in the face of southern decay. These men are the moral foils to the amoral greed of Flem Snopes.

The Snopes novels have waxed and waned in their value in the Faulkner Canon through years of critical analysis. For this reader, these novels establish Faulkner's true place in post modern literature. While maintaining the major aspects of southern literature in the use of legend, myth, time and place, Faulkner's County is a microcosm for a larger universe of human values.

These three novels provide enough material for a review much more in depth, and deserving of much critical study. For the purpose of this review, however, it is enough to say that these novels show Faulkner's storytelling ability at its finest, covering humor, farce, pathos, and tragedy. Perhaps it is because I have waited to attaining the age of 59 to read these novels, that I find them as accessible as they are. My earliest encounters with Faulkner were more than forty years ago when I lacked the maturity and experience to understand the complexities of his earlier works.

Through my life I have returned to Faulkner's earlier works and understood many things I did not as a young high school student, just as Chick fails to understand the significance of the social change in his town when he tagged along at the heels of his Uncle Gavin. By the time of Faulkner's publication of "The Mansion" in 1959, Chick is equally capable of interpreting the significance of Flem Snopes and his influence on Jefferson society. Perhaps so it must be for all of us. And it is an illustration of why we must return time and again to the works of literature to reexamine their significance in light of our own growing experience as human beings. So it is with Faulkner's trilogy of Snopes novels.

As has been my custom, this review may appear to be quite generic. However, it is always my purpose to avoid spoilers so I do not deprive the reader of the joys of the discovery of Faulkner's twists and turns of plot and structure. There are countless joys to be found in these three novels. By all means, mine these books to find the treasure they contain.

Terry Gorman says

I am not a person to reread too many books, but this book has a permanent place on my nightstand. Before bed, if I'm not in the mood to read anything that I'm currently reading, I grab this book, randomly flip it open and start reading. It's just that amazingly enjoyable!

Gerbik says

The BEST Faulkner. This is the first time the trilogy has been published as such, and reading these novels successively is crucial if you're going to read them at all. An interesting thing about the trilogy is that, more often than not, the characters/narrators are dealing with their own confusion about what is going on. They don't understand what Snopes is up to and all of their efforts to keep up with him and his closed-door dealings make them guess, revise, tell half-truths, and so on. If you trust in the fact that the book makes everything clear eventually, and it does, then you can just sort of immerse yourself and forge ahead. Every story that's told gets returned to and retold from other perspectives as you go along. One suggestion is that you look to Ratliff as the pragmatic conscience and guide to what's "really going on," while Gavin Stevens represents an idealistic desire to make things better than they are (in a way, these are two sides to Faulkner's narrative impulse). Ultimately, Flem Snopes is trying to exist outside of history and narrative, and thus it's difficult for the citizens of Jefferson and Frenchman's Bend to maintain their sense of community and identity when he's dominating all their local "plotlines" with confusion. The trilogy itself is about storytelling and history, so Faulkner sort of interrogates the reader's need to master every detail as it unfolds; he'd rather put the reader in a more immediate sense of things, sort of like what William James called "the blooming, buzzing confusion" of present time. That said, it's really a very controlled and ultimately reliable series of novels.

John says

When Faulkner wrote about the Southern aristocracy from which he sprang, his stories were psychologically complex, but not really complimentary. His subjects are often thuggish and brutal.

But here, in his most epic set of novels, he reaches back and finds a special sort of loathing -- common throughout the world, and by no means unique to the US South -- of the old-money aristocrat for the grasping, small-minded nouveau riche.

It is striking how -- apart from the outcasts Mink (a cracker murderer) and Linda (who becomes a Communist) -- the Snopes family are rarely allowed to speak for themselves, and as characters they are more ciphers than real people. Flem Snopes himself -- like the Julius Caesar of Shakespeare's telling -- is the eponymous character but not really the protagonist, and everything we know about him is related by the set of respectable small-town lawyers and salesmen who observe his family's rise in stupefied helplessness. Flem, like some sort of satanic monk, is single-minded in his pursuit of money and power, but also impotent. His wife is a studied contrast to him: plucked from the rural gentry into which Flem Snopes has insinuated himself, she is also barely allowed to exist as a person and instead is presented as a sexual goddess, of whom Faulkner and his characters write and speak in explicitly mythological terms.

The last of the three novels (*The Mansion*) was completed late in Faulkner's life (1959), and so it takes Yoknapatawpha County up to the very cusp of the time when the Old South would have changed forever. You have to wonder how the scions of the various Compsons, Sartorises, McCaslins and Snopeses would have reacted when the first SNCC volunteers showed up to register the black sharecroppers to vote.

Lew says

I like this Faulkner better than the self-consciously literary one of 'Absalom, Absalom'. This is more of the back porch Bill, I guess, "just" a storyteller. My favorite scene is when V.K. Ratliff, the sewing-machine agent, a bit of an outsider to the Yoknapatawpha world and a cannier man than most, realizes that he, too, has been taken in by one of Flem Snopes's schemes.

Hugo says

What would later be known as the Snopes trilogy, chronicles the rise of the Snopes family which represent to Faulkner all that is greedy, white trash, cunning and terrible about the rise of ruthless country-come-to-town folks in the modern south.

The Hamlet is loosely about the rise of Flem Snopes the family's patriarch who drags his family from the poverty and darkness of the deep woods and into economic dominance of the small village of Frenchman's Bend.

As with many Faulkner novels, the main character is understood indirectly from the experiences that he or she causes in the lives of others.

This book while fractured in its narrative and overall a bit scatterbrained, is full of rich surprises.

I found myself at the beginning of the book being somewhat impressed with Flem even though I had expected to see him as a villain.

The description of Flem's future wife Eula through the wrecked desires of her schoolteacher are unforgettable.

Also there is an extremely strange section where Faulkner describes the world through the eyes of one of Flem's idiot cousins who is deeply in love with a cow.

Yes it sounds crazy I found this particular section to be some of the most beautiful prose I have ever read.

Overall a very strange book but one unlike I have ever read before.

Sue says

Just finished The Hamlet portion of the trilogy today. Aside from a portion of Eula's chapter that I found a bit unfathomable, I really enjoyed this book, with Faulkner's creative use of language and construction, the apparently highly fertile and seemingly without scruples Snopes clan, so many features.

Looking back to Eula's chapter, and keeping in mind past reading of Faulkner, I'm wondering if any incoherence in this chapter is reflecting the acknowledged state of Eula's mind. She did not take in or comprehend the world around her, so the chapter devoted to her shares some of the same cognitive failings.

I'm looking forward to returning to complete the trilogy after which I will complete my review.

Mike says

Faulkner remains an enigma to many, even to students of 20th Century American Literature. I struggled most of my younger days with Faulkner, knowing he was an acclaimed, Nobel Laureate, but feeling like a tourist in a strange land. After a bout with him in a HS English class I left with the feeling I just witnessed something significant but impenetrable. College level courses shed no light on the density and at times obtuseness of his prose. I heard glowing praise of his work but sensed even the professors were a bit bewildered. Yes there was something big going on here but its damn hard to explain it.

I became stubborn about my grasp of this icon and through good fortune was given an opportunity to travel to Oxford, Miss and spend some time in "his own postage stamp of native soil".

It was like Dorothy opening the door to Oz. Maybe it was the air, or the latitude of Northern Mississippi or perhaps best the visual understanding that being there in his town, his house, his own "Yaknapawtha" that lit the bulb but things began to fall in place.

The "Snopes Trilogy" (The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion) is on the surface the epic tale of cunning, cleverness, deceit and ruthlessness winning over honesty, hard work and integrity. Its a dark opinion and a dishartning road trip but as in all Faulkneria there is justice, there is humanity and there is a universality that begets "I know someone like that" and "this can happen today".

Taking on this trilogy is no day at the beach, but with a heads up attitude and a willingness to be transported will result in a sense of having witnessed the decent and rebirth of the human spirit.

breathed one bit of breath on these novels. Oh, but the insights into the Southern mind, no, the Mississippi mind, of the first half of the 20th century. The characters, the charlatans, the vices, the ideologies, the humanity... sho' now.

Jacob says

Anyone who really wants to love Faulkner must spend quality time with the snopes. Just reading these three alone will give you an amazingly comprehensive view of everything this man accomplished with his work.

Elizabeth (Alaska) says

I appreciated reading this trilogy on my Kindle. I might not have finished the individual titles as readily had I picked them up separately. The books are paginated, but not individually. The series has 1066 pages, and, for instance, *The Mansion* starts on page 677. There are few typos, but very few, and when they do occur, the meaning is easily discerned.

Reviews will be found under the individual title:

The Hamlet

The Town

The Mansion

Anthea Carson says

This book made me want to move to Yoknapatwa county. I don't know if that's spelled right. I don't care. Because Yoknapatwa county is the intentionally silly made up name county that surrounds Oxford, Mississippi where William Faulkner lived. It's a real place. I don't know how many of the characters are based on real people, but it sure feels like they are. You can actually research the history of the characters and the people who inspired them, because there are volumes and volumes written on Faulkner, Yoknapatwa county and those who peopled it.

It's an unbelievable place, Yoknapatwa county. I seriously wish I could just move there. That's the only way to describe these three books. They make me want to go live there.

Sue says

Wal now, iffen I were ta tell ya jest sommat about this ere book, jest enuff so's you'd be wantin ter read it but not so much that ye wouldn' half ter read it, then I reckon about alls I could say is that it's this ere sorter soap oprey set up in the north of Mississippi runnin down inter Memphis a bit, durin the early part, or leastways the first half of it, of the 20th centery and that theys Snopes and dramy and reglar folks jest livin or tryin to and Snopes, and color and Snopes and tragedy and Snopes and comedy (cause who caint laugh or leastways

chuckle a bit at folks who ud name their own children names like Wallstreet Panic or Admiral Dewey or Watkins Products or Montgomery Ward -nor even Flem)and more Snopes what sometimes jest seem ter crawl outten the woodwork and sometimes stay put fer good and all and sometime come an go and sometimes aint even really true Snopes but what has the name anyway and I reckon you jest have ter read it yerself ter really git the gist of it but iffen yer goin ter (read it that is) you'd best do it when yer brain pan is sparking real good cause this ere Faulkner feller he writes real writin and as you already probly noticed, readin real writin takes a heap more thinkin and listin and heart than jest readin regler readin does.
