

A Study of Tragic Existence of Characters in “Dry September”

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“Dry September” depicts many tragic characters, and it is significant to analyze tragic existence of characters. In this paper, by grasping the survival of each individual, we can have a better understanding of the theme.

Keywords: “Dry September”, tragic existence, identity crisis

Introduction

William Faulkner, the representative of stream of consciousness novel, incorporated the history of the American south and human survival into his novels. As an American genius who was good at capturing the struggles of human heart, he often presented men’s psychological and physical collapse. His short story, “Dry September” demonstrated the racial problems of the south as well as a series of abnormal movements of Miss Minnie Cooper. Particularly, their abnormal behaviors show completely in the process of constructing their identity. Hawkshaw, McLendon, and Miss Minnie Cooper come on the stage are full of tragic color. The same root of tragic existence is that these main characters get trouble into their identity crisis. The rumor happens on between Will Mayes and Miss Minnie Cooper. Will Mayes is a nigger; Miss Minnie Cooper is a white woman, and accuses the nigger of raping her; Miss Minnie Cooper’s existence is tragic. In the beginning of the story, the whole story is covered with a dignified, murderous atmosphere, which lays a sad and emotional tone for the whole story. All these environmental description implies “The dust permeates everything, and the murder happens” (Zhang, 2016, p. 151). Characters are put into the heavy atmosphere and the destinies of characters are demonstrated. Everyone is miserable. In reality, Miss Minnie Cooper is the creator of the event, at the same time, she is the victim. Her destiny is the pathetic.

Hawkshaw’s Tragic Existence

Hairdresser Hawkshaw is also caught up in an identity crisis. As a white man, he declares that Miss Minnie Cooper’s rumor about her connection to the blacks was neither black nor Miss Minnie fault. He is not paranoid. This conflict happens among a group of people in the barber room, confirming that Hawkshaw’s life is challenged. Under the circumstances, Hawkshaw does not understand his identity. When one asks why Hawkshaw is so sure that the black man is innocent, and as a white man, he would rather defend the black man than believe the white man, and the reader is very perplexed here, which lays the groundwork for the tragic fate of

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the Negro. In the barber shop, there are two groups of people: One is the barber Hawkshaw; the other is barber and the customers. The former stands for justice for the negro, and the latter claims that the white man is the supreme race, defaming the negro at will. They even have no judgment of themselves at all. There is no doubt that Hawkshaw's tragedy is evident in the story, when one culture is overwhelmingly dominant and other small forces are doom to death. Hawkshaw will pay a heavy price for his persistence, so the hairdresser's tragedy is inevitable; he is wandering about between the two cultures, full of confusion about his living status.

Mclendon's Tragic Existence

The second character, Mclendon, wanders through the crossroad of his identity. On the one hand, as a veteran, in order not to drown his talent, he subconsciously lynches himself to prove that he is still a soldier. In the text, he is not only a savage, but also a brutal. What's more, this is an example of the harsh natural environment with "the screen door crashed behind them reverberant tin the dead air" (Faulkner, 1931, p. 8). Mclendon's identity here is a soldier on the French frontline, a medal, but a white voice without knowing what was going on. To prove that a black man rapes a white woman, he decides to lynch the black man. As the black victims, the theme of racial discrimination is reflected here. Prove him to be a qualified soldier. As soldiers, they could not find evidence to prove the Negro's sins, but to make decisions entirely by their own authority, just as "a Niger is no significant; It's not cruel to make him die" (Jin, 2009, p. 46). A group of men show their ugly faces, and carry out lynching at will, and their humanity have been greatly destroyed. It accuses white invaders of their cruelty, their lack of humanity, their natural hatred of the black race; they use every means to subdue them, especially, when the black man was arrested, others tried to kill the black man on the spot, but Mclendon demands that the nigger should be brought to the car to solve it. When the black man repeatedly complains about himself, Mclendon asks him to jump out of the car, and as a result, the black man takes actions to explain it. As a result, struggling to prove that he is innocent. Negro is a tragic character who has no right to exist and is discriminated against by white people in the full text, which shows that black man is oppressed in human nature and exists as a tragic individual in the story.

When Mclendon's wife was waiting for her to come back, he has a terrible feeling about her wife, a woman who lives in the shadow of her husband. She is also an insecure, and a tragic figure. In the end, when Mclendon returns home, the impression of his home as small as a birdcage. Mclendon himself is confined to a small space, and in reality, he is a huge monster, and the incongruity of his inner world and outer world puts him of tune. People are extremely confused about the future of Mclendon. "The dark world seemed to lie stricken beneath the cold moon and the lidless stars" (Faulkner, 1931, p. 16). Through imagination of the fate of Mclendon it illustrates the helplessness of his life and the uncertainty of his identity. After his treatment of the Negro, he needs to pay the price of his criminal, so that his life is extremely confused.

Miss Minnie Cooper's Tragic Existence

The third tragic character is Miss Minnie, a white woman whose tragic color is particularly evident throughout the story. The result is constrained by the traditional patriarchal system. She makes up the gossip; she is 38 or 39 years old, and the story mentions that he is a sociable woman when he is young and old. Under the traditional ideas of that time, women should be stable, dignified, and not frivolous. It is very important for women

to be chastity. But Miss Minnie's personality is clearly out of step with the times. And day after day, she finds that the women who have grown up with her are married. The ridicule of the people around her shows great indifference, from which we could see that Miss Minnie is in a crisis of survival. The pressure comes not only from her inner pressure, but also from the sarcasm of others, and she loses into deep thinking. She ends up having a good time with a bank teller for a short time, but she is eventually abandoned. The people around him are even more disdainful of him and she faces a huge blow in life, so that they end up with symptom that is similar to fever. From his clothes you can see the solitude of her appearance and soul, because she wants to use the some outer items to keep her beauty, although she is no young. She still desires to gain the sexual joy. Finally, she does not make it; she tends to be desperate. In the center of the square, the comments of the people around her, and the strange eyes of the people in the cinema, so that Miss Minnie could not behave himself, she could not stop laughing boisterously. It is an outlet for her pain. "It is not only the elegy of the past years of youth, but also the despair of the future life" (Pi, 2009, p. 143). Finally, under the attack of both inside and outside, the other persons come to know in fact; there is nothing happened. However, she has fallen down. This sentence is ironic. The implication is that the white woman is trying to attract the attention of the opposite sex. She deliberately fabricates the rumor with black that she is both a tragedy maker and a victim, and in short, her fate is tragic, which accuses a society of oppression and devastation against women. Therefore, by reading the tragic characters in this story, we can better grasp the profound theme behind the article.

Other Litter Characters' Tragic Existence

In addition to present the reader with tragic individuals, the story also focuses on a group of small people. They are just a group of people gathering at the barbershop, who are also looking at things from the white people's perspective, without their own judgment. They are mentally numb, namely, they are a group of people who are extremely hostile to the black. But in real life they feel the extreme emptiness and depression of life. The barbershop, a particular place, is where one can peek into the world. In the novel, the author chooses the barbershop as the place where the story takes place. Including other than Hawkshaw, other barbers and customers, they all prove racism and its prevalence in the south of the United States at that time. As an individual in order to survive, it would only be fatal, so that even individuals with their own opinions would stifle their own voices. In this way, they can seek their own safety. Apparently, defending a black man is equal to betray a white man, who is excluded from the south at the time. People agree on Hawkshaw's return to the north. He is not a welcome person in south. It is ironic, and it is evident in the lines that Hawkshaw is in a very difficult position at that time. On the one hand, it is the description of men's gossip, but on the other hand, it is the black people's tragic situation. The rest of the people sit uncomfortably, don't look at each other; people are hesitated. In the light of thought of possible consequences, they support Mclendon. These details show that the tragic fate of a group of people in southern society at that time was equivalent to an empty shell without thought.

Conclusion

In a word, in the story of "Dry September", characters are confronted with the problem of tragic existence, especially three main characters, including hawkshaw, Mclendon, and Miss Minnie Cooper who are getting involved into the identity crisis, so that they are full of too many uncertainties, as a result, they suffer with huge

tortures. Furthermore, these little characters also play a crucial role in the theme. All characters are constructed as an organic whole, thus, to analyze a work should grasp the every little character. The main conflict is focusing on the race; the black is excluded at that time in the south, exposing the injustice treatment imposed by the white people; besides, the womanhood's personality is stifled by the prevailing patriarchy culture, which causes women's spiritual crisis. Consequently, by depicting individuals' survival situation, most of us have a good command of the theme behind story, which is helpful for us to comprehend the core of the story.

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