

CHAPTER IV

REQUIEM FOR A NUN

The idea went back to October 1933, when he wrote to Harrison Smith about "Requiem for a Nun," a story about "a nigger woman. It will be a little on the esoteric side,"¹

Nancy Mannigoe's behaviour and actions as Faulkner depicted in *Requiem For A Nun* tend to be esoteric in the sense that when Nancy acts, she thinks as if she is guided by a higher authority and that this experience of hers is personal and singular. Nancy sees her climactic act of smothering and killing her employer's six-month-old infant as an act that transcends its criminal nature, as a sort of last resort - an act with what she deems to have positive moral consequences. Nancy is subsequently tried and hanged for the killing of the baby.

... - a Negress, quite black, about thirty - that is, she would be almost anything between twenty and forty - with a calm impenetrable almost bemused face, ... with all eyes on her but she herself not looking at any of them, but looking out and up as though at some distant corner of the room, as though she were alone in it.²

Nancy's age is uncertain and she expresses a sense of ambiguity about her. Nancy appears to be caught up in her own world - and she is drawn into herself unconsciously, almost naturally. The words, " calm ", " impenetrable ", " almost bemused " convey an image of Nancy that is composed and at the same time withdrawn. Note that this scene where Nancy is described, is set in the courthouse where she stands trial for smothering her employer's baby. She displays no remorse, guilt or fear. Can this impassivity be a form of insanity? I think that Nancy is fully aware of what she has done - she has

smothered a helpless infant . Nancy seems unconcerned at the horror other people show for what she has done. Nancy sees that act as the only means to bring about stability in her employer's troubled home. To Nancy the act of killing the child has saving graces but Nancy's reasoning cannot possibly be accepted by others as killing is humanly considered morally and legally wrong.

The ironic twist to this situation is that Nancy believes she has killed the infant in order to stop an adult, Temple Drake, her employer, from leaving the family with another man and to prevent the baby's brother from not being able to see his mother anymore should she leave. Nancy did not kill in a fit of rage nor in a moment of madness ; but she killed the infant because she had exhausted every other way known to her to stop Temple from leaving.

She is - or until recently, two months ago to be exact - a domestic servant, nurse to two white children, the second of whom, an infant, she smothered in its cradle two months ago, for which act she is now on trial for her life. But she has probably done many things else - chopped cotton, cooked for working gangs - any sort of manual labor within her capacities, or rather, limitations in time and availability, since her principal reputation in the little Mississippi town where she was born is that of a tramp - a drunkard, a casual prostitute, being beaten by some man or cutting or being cut by his wife or his other sweetheart. Her name -or so she calls it and would probably spell it if she could spell - is Nancy Mannigoe.³

There was no secret about Nancy's reputation prior to her engagement as domestic servant ; " ... tramp, a drunkard, a casual prostitute ..." The Nancy as described then hardly fits the description of Nancy the servant who went a step too far to save her employer by killing her employer's baby. If before she had led a shiftless, aimless life, with no direction - Nancy now seems to have taken a religious turn and she bases her actions on spiritual beliefs.

JUDGE

Have you anything to say before the sentence of the court is pronounced upon you?

Nancy neither answers nor moves; she doesn't even seem to be listening.

That you, Nancy Mannigoe, did on the ninth day of September, wilfully and with malice aforethought kill and murder the infant child of Mr and Mrs Gowan Stevens It is the sentence of this court that you be taken hence back to county jail ... be hanged by the neck until you are dead. And may God have mercy on your soul.

NANCY

(quite loud in the
silence, to no one,
quite calm, not
moving)

Yes, Lord.

There is a gasp, a sound ... of shock at this unheard-of violation of procedure ... above which, Nancy herself does not move.⁴

Nothing can change the fact that Nancy did smother the infant and thus killed the baby but I do not think that Faulkner intends us to believe that she killed with malice . Nancy hardly reacts to anything while she stands trial for killing Temple's baby daughter. The climactic end to this scene occurs when Nancy answers unperturbedly and almost matter-of-factly, not to the judge who pronounces her sentence nor to anyone else present in court, " Yes, Lord " after her sentence is passed. Nancy is described as being oblivious to what is around her, yet her answer to the judge's passing of her sentence will not sound unusual if we try to see how Nancy herself takes this situation.

Nancy answers to a higher spiritual authority - thus it would seem to Nancy as if God Himself were handing out this sentence . What is more obvious is Nancy's automatic acceptance of her lot. Nancy does not feel resignation or of having been wrongfully coerced into doing something . Strangely enough, Nancy is in this world and yet she does not seem to be of this world. Thus Nancy's sanity may also be doubted by a spectator but I do not see Nancy as mad or mentally unbalanced - it is just that she thinks in a way peculiarly her own and she draws upon religion into a means of justification for herself. Yet, she does not strike me as fanatically religious. Nancy, to describe her in plain terms, is just different.

What I propose to discuss in this chapter is the reasoning behind Nancy's act. What induced Nancy to take an innocent life in order to save another? How can her action be religiously justified? More importantly - this study of Nancy Mannigoe will debate whether to view Nancy's actions as being Christian Humanistic. That is, Nancy's behaviour and character, seen and presented through the eyes of those who come into contact with her, will be studied as possibly containing Christian Humanistic traits. The weight of this discussion will have to lie in contemplating how Nancy's killing the baby and what led her to that act, can ever be viewed as an act with positive moral consequences, let alone an act with Christian Humanistic elements.

Initially, Faulkner depicts Nancy as having wrongfully repaid her employer's treatment of her with the murder of her employer's baby.

GOWAN

... - a nigger whore, a drunkard, a dope-fiend -

STEVENS

- a vagabond, a tramp, hopeless until one day Mr and Mrs Gowan Stevens out of simple pity and humanity picked her up out of the gutter to give her one more chance - ... And then in return for it -- 5

However there are gradual revelations on Nancy's behaviour. Nancy may have been what Stevens described her to be, " a vagabond, a tramp, hopeless ..." before her employment as a servant at the Stevens' place, but in her capacity as domestic servant to the Stevenses - Temple and Gowan, Nancy has demonstrated that if anything, she has definitely changed. She does not think nor act like a " nigger whore, a drunkard, a dope-fiend ..." as Gowan calls her.

Nancy was the confidante, at first, while she - Nancy - still believed probably that the only problem, factor, was how to raise the money the blackmailer demanded, without letting the ... husband find out about it;

... not realising until after she had discovered that, although Temple had taken the money and the jewels too from her husband's strongbox, she - Temple - still hadn't paid them over to the blackmailer and got the letters, that the payment of the money and jewels were less than half of Temple's plan.

... That was when Nancy in her turn found where Temple had hidden the money and jewels, and - Nancy - took them in her turn and hid them from Temple⁶

Temple was planning to run away with Pete, the blackmailer, and Nancy got to know about the arrangement. Nancy's attempt to conceal both the money and the jewels was to stop Temple from leaving her own family. Temple and Pete, when they discover that it was Nancy who stole the money and the jewels, try to locate her. Unknown to them, Nancy is watching them and has been listening in on their conversation. Then Pete catches sight of Nancy.

He sees Nancy across Temple's shoulder, and reacts. Temple reacts to him, turns quickly and sees Nancy too. Nancy comes on into the room.

TEMPLE

(to Nancy)

What are you doing here?

NANCY

I brought my foot. So he can hold that cigarette against it.

TEMPLE

So you're not just a thief: you're a spy too.

PETE

Maybe she's not a thief either.

Maybe she brought it back.

(they watch Nancy who doesn't answer)

Or maybe she didn't. Maybe we had better use that cigarette.

(to Nancy)⁷

Nancy's answer to Temple's question, " I brought my foot. So he can hold that cigarette against it ", depicts a decidedness and an absence of fear in Nancy. She also shows defiance. To begin with, Nancy must have believed that she had to stop Temple from running away with Pete and leaving her own family. So Nancy tried to hide what she thought must have been essential to Temple and Pete in their bid to run away - that is, the money and the jewels. At this point, Nancy is not afraid of being punished for having taken and hidden her employer's jewels and the money - hence she challenges Pete and Temple to force her to reveal the whereabouts of the jewels and the money.

Nancy is only a domestic servant with no special ties to her employers. Why is she going to such lengths to protect the family from disintegrating? We are not told of Nancy's personal and private reactions as to how she has been treated in the house nor are we told whether Nancy is grateful or even aware that Temple Drake Stevens, by employing her as domestic servant, has also given Nancy a chance to lead a better life than that she had previously lived as " a vagabond, a tramp ".

However, I feel that Nancy's motive in trying to stop Temple from running away with Pete stems from a genuine desire to help keep an already deteriorating family from completely breaking up. She especially has the welfare of the children in mind. In doing her best to deter Temple from leaving, Nancy has demonstrated that she does care about the welfare of others. She must feel concern for the children in the worsening situation of the Stevens family.

Her concern and willingness to stop an impending family break-up is both a humane and selfless act. Her primary concern may be the children, for she sees them as helpless victims of the adults' errant decisions. I see this concern and willingness on Nancy's part as positively being traits of Christian Humanism.

Christian humanism ... is an enthusiastic expression of the greatness of the human creature which is fully Christian.⁸

Nancy in wanting to do whatever she can to prevent a family break-up shows above all that she values and respects the worth of other people. She must accord some level of dignity to others. If she does not, why does she have to initiate measures such as hiding the money and the jewels which she sees as a necessary preventive of disaster? Her involvement in this affair between Temple and Pete demonstrates nothing less than Nancy's desire to act for the best, regardless of the consequences which may occur. Her involvement does not stem from malice or ill-feeling towards Temple. Nancy also does not go to such lengths for her own personal gain. Nancy gets entangled in this to somehow show Temple that Temple's place is not with Pete, (who blackmailed Temple before) but with her own two children. These are not bad reasons for her to get involved.

Temple is no kin to Nancy, she is Nancy's employer; yet Nancy is willing to do anything that she thinks will save her employer. This heightens the fact that for Nancy there is no barrier, racial or social, where the need to help others arises. Nancy feels that Temple needs to be shown what is right.

I think that even if Nancy's preventive measures of taking and hiding the money and the jewels after listening in to Temple's and Pete's conversations do not succeed and are not exactly praiseworthy, her motivation to act and obtain results so that she can assist another without thoughts of any personal gain, is commendable.

NANCY

Maybe I was wrong to think that just hiding that money and diamonds was going to stop you.

TEMPLE

So you did steal it. And you saw what good that did, didn't you?

NANCY

If you can call it stealing, then so can I. Because wasn't but part of it yours to begin with. Just the diamonds was yours. Not to mention that money is almost two thousand dollars, that you told me was just two hundred and that you told him was even less than that, just fifty.

... He aint even worried about whether or not you'll have any money at all when you get out to the car. He knows that all he's got to do is, just wait and keep his hand on you and maybe just mash hard enough with it, and you'll get another passel of money and diamonds too out of your husband or your pa. Only, this time he'll have his hand on you and you'll have a little trouble telling him it's just fifty dollars instead of almost two thousand -

Temple steps quickly forward and slaps Nancy across the face. Nancy steps back. As she does so, the packet of money and the jewel box fall to the floor from inside her top coat

Yes, there it is, that caused all the grief and ruin. If you hadn't been somebody that would have a box of diamonds and a husband that you could find almost two thousand dollars in his britches pocket while he was asleep, that man wouldn't have tried to sell you them letters ... Maybe if I was to take it out to where he's waiting in that car right now, and say, Here, man, take your money -

TEMPLE

Try it. Pick it up and take it out to him, and see. If you'll wait until I finish packing, you can even carry the bag.

NANCY

I know. It aint even the letters any more. Maybe it never was. It was already there in whoever could write the kind of letters that even eight years afterward could still make grief and ruin. The letters never did matter. You could have got them back at any time; he even tried to give them to you twice -⁹

This verbal exchange between Nancy and Temple is vital for Nancy as she begins to realize that whatever she has done up to this point has had no effect on Temple. Nancy warns Temple about Pete, whom Faulkner describes as ... having a hard, ruthless quality, not immoral but unmoral.¹⁰

Earlier on, Pete had got hold of some letters which Temple had written to Red, his brother. The letters were used as a threat, a means to extort money from Temple. Eventually Nancy herself begins to understand that Temple was not running away with Pete because he influenced or forced her to but because Temple herself wanted to do so. "I know. It aint even the letters anymore ... The letters never did matter."

In order to understand why Nancy finally resorted to killing the infant, it is necessary to know that Nancy has realized what Temple actually wants. Temple was also planning to take her six-month-old baby with her, and Nancy argues with Temple over the issue of how the children will be affected by their mother's decision to run away with another man. Again it must be noted that Nancy is not described as having any special ties of emotion with the children, she is after all only the domestic servant. Why then does Nancy feel that Temple her employer, is throwing caution to the winds and not being concerned at all over her young children? What can the two young children possibly mean to Nancy?

Nancy's earnest argument with Temple to reconsider her intention to leave with Pete now highlights an added emphasis - two young children. Nancy brings this emphasis in after she learns that Temple had wanted and decided of her own accord to leave with Pete. Nancy could have seen another side of Temple's nature, which hinted that Temple may not be concerned over the welfare of her children.

NANCY

... I'm talking about two little children.

TEMPLE

So am I. Why else do you think I sent Bucky on to his grandmother, except to get him out of a house where the man he has been taught to call his father, may at any moment decide to tell him he has none? As clever a spy as you must surely have heard my husband -

NANCY

(interrupts)

I've heard him. And I heard you too. You fought back - that time. Not for yourself, but for that little child. But now you have quit.

TEMPLE

Quit?

NANCY

Yes. You gave up. You gave up the child too. Willing to risk never seeing him again maybe.

(Temple doesn't answer)

All right. We'll say you have answered it. So that settles Bucky. Now answer me this one. Who are you going to leave the other one with?

TEMPLE

Leave her with? A six-months-old baby?

NANCY

That's right. Of course you cant leave her. Not with nobody. You cant no more leave a six-months-old baby with nobody while you run away from your husband with another man, than you can take a six-months-old baby with you on that trip. That's what I'm talking about. So maybe you'll just leave it in there in that cradle; it'll cry for a while, but it's too little to cry very loud and so maybe wont nobody hear it and come meddling, especially with the house shut up and locked until Mr Gowan gets back next week, and probably by that time it will have hushed -

TEMPLE

Are you really trying to make me hit you again?

NANCY

Or maybe taking her with you will be just as easy, at least until the first time you write Mr Gowan or your pa for money and they don't send it as quick as your new man thinks they ought to, and he throws you and the baby both out. Then you can just drop it into a garbage can and no more trouble to you or anybody, because then you will be rid of both of them - ¹¹

Based on this exchange between Nancy and Temple it is difficult to picture Nancy as that "nigger, dope-fiend whore, vagabond tramp". Nancy is relentlessly admonishing and challenging Temple over the subject of her two children. I see this as another psychological approach of Nancy's to persuade Temple not to run away with Pete. This time, Nancy uses bold and disturbing hints to make Temple see she cannot leave the children with anyone else, let alone Pete. Nancy has gone a step further. She is somehow pushing Temple into a corner, forcing Temple to face up to the actuality and reality of what will happen to her two children. There is also a sense that Nancy herself is now emotionally involved in Temple's dilemma. Nancy is fighting to ensure Temple understands that she has to be with her two children and not with Pete. Also, Nancy suggests rather startlingly that Temple's plan is to leave the child even to die, one way or another.

NANCY

I've hushed.

She doesn't move. She is not looking at Temple. There is a slight change in her voice or manner, though we only realise later that she is not addressing Temple.

I've tried. I've tried everything I know. You can see that.

TEMPLE

Which nobody will dispute. You threatened me with my children, and even with my husband ... You even stole my elopement money. Oh yes, nobody will dispute that you tried. Though at least you brought the money back. ¹²

Nancy's words, " I've tried. I've tried everything I know. You can see that " and the manner in which she says them suggest that Nancy is communicating with someone else, not Temple, and that "someone", as suggested by her words in the courtroom scene is God. Of course Temple does not realize this then. What happens here is that Nancy explains to God that she has definitely done all she can to stop Temple from leaving with Pete. To speak to God, naturally Nancy must believe in the existence of God.

Christian humanism is ... a way of looking at and valuing men and women in the light of the definitive reality which is Jesus Christ.¹³

Nancy is concerned over what will happen to the two children should Temple leave with Pete. Nancy is also concerned that Temple may be making a serious mistake by running away with Pete. More significantly, Nancy is only an employed servant but the fact that she has tried her utmost to prevent what she thinks is wrong implies that Nancy is no indifferent hired worker. She believes she should step in to help Temple and especially the two children.

This is Nancy's " way of looking at and valuing men and women ", and to Nancy, God proves to be the source of motivation by which she feels her actions are guided . Nancy must see that the need to help others and the ability to feel for others stems from the belief that God commands every human being to help others and to feel concern for others. Hence Nancy says, " I've tried everything I know. You can see that."

Nancy is firm in her belief that she has tried everything, and the implication here is that she knows that God knows she has tried everything and that His knowledge of this fact is essential to her motivation for further action.

No one can please God without faith, for who comes to God must have faith that God exists and rewards those who seek him.¹⁴

TEMPLE

(quieter)

Nancy.

(Nancy looks at her)

I'm sorry. Why do you force me to do this - hitting and screaming at you, when you have always been so good to my children and me - my husband too - all of us - trying to hold us together in a household, a family, that anybody should have known all the time couldn't possibly hold together? even in decency, let alone happiness?

NANCY

I reckon I'm ignorant. I don't know that yet. Besides, I aint talking about any household or happiness neither -

TEMPLE

(with sharp command)

Nancy!

NANCY

- I'm talking about two little children - ¹⁵

Temple here acknowledges that Nancy has "been good" to her family and her acknowledgement becomes a validation of Nancy's not having been indifferent and detached towards the Stevens family. In short, Nancy was not just detachedly dispensing her required domestic services; she must have reacted with anxiety when she learnt of Temple's plan to run away. The reason for this could be that Nancy worried over this misjudgment of Temple's.

However Nancy's negation of whatever Temple had commended her for earlier on seems to me to be a subtle warning to Temple. I do not think Nancy can be actually ignorant of what she has provided the family with.

" I dont know that yet. Besides I aint talking about any household or happiness neither - ... I'm talking about two little children -"

Nancy has subtly mentioned the two children because she feels that Temple is trying to justify her running away with Pete, an unmoral man, a blackmailer. Nancy also talks about the need not to shirk one's responsibility, to do one's duty even if it hurts.

" ... a family that anybody should have known all the time couldn't possibly hold together? even in decency, let alone happiness?"

The words " couldn't possibly hold together, even in decency " convey an impression that Temple had to leave, no matter what. Nancy determinedly pushes the subject of the two children to perhaps jolt Temple into realizing that these children, her children will suffer the consequences of their mother's leaving.

TEMPLE

I said, hush.

NANCY

I cant hush. I'm going to ask you one more time. Are you going to do it?

TEMPLE

Yes!

NANCY

Maybe I'm ignorant. You got to say it out in words yourself, so I can hear them. Say, I'm going to do it.

TEMPLE

You heard me. I'm going to do it.

NANCY

Money or no money.

TEMPLE

Money or no money.

NANCY

Children or no children.

TEMPLE

... Yes! Children or no children! Now get out of here.¹⁶

Nancy, still intent on making Temple comprehend that her children need her here, endeavours again to change Temple's mind. This is Nancy's final attempt to talk Temple out of leaving. Undoubtedly, Nancy has forced Temple to admit she will leave in spite of the children. Nancy takes Temple's confession as final. This situation becomes tragic in that Temple has in effect condemned her baby to death. Nancy, ironically enough, does not give up. She resorts to killing the baby.

NANCY

... Then Nancy stops and looks back at Temple, with something so strange in her look that Temple, about to resume putting the money into the bag, pauses too, watching Nancy. When Nancy speaks, it is like the former speech: we don't realise until afterward what it signifies.

I tried everything I knowed. You can see that.

TEMPLE

(peremptory, commanding)

Nancy.

NANCY

(quietly, turning on)

I've hushed.

TEMPLE

... Nancy.

(Nancy pauses, still not looking back)

Don't think too hard of me.

(Nancy waits, immobile, looking at nothing. When Temple doesn't continue, she moves again toward the door)

If I - it ever comes up, I'll tell everybody you did your best.

You tried. But you were right. It wasn't even in the letters. It was me.

(Nancy moves on)

Good-bye Nancy.

(Nancy reaches the door)

You've got your key

You can get it -

(Nancy exits)

Nancy!

There is no answer¹⁷

Nancy at this juncture has " hushed " - in the sense that she is no longer communicating with Temple - the situation now is similar to that in the courtroom where Nancy seems oblivious to everything around her.

TEMPLE

... The police came, and the murderess still sitting in a chair in the kitchen in the dark, saying 'Yes, Lord, I done it,' and then in the cell at the jail still saying it -¹⁸

Nancy's sudden change of behaviour continues and with her saying " Yes, Lord, I done it " , it would seem as if she has admitted killing the baby but not to the police nor even to Temple - she is communicating with God as she will also do in the courtroom when the sentence is passed.

The inevitable question for the spectator and the reader now would be : is Nancy insane? Is she a cold-blooded murderess? Killing is a condemnable act legally and morally. How can Nancy's action ever be considered Christian Humanistic?

I wouldn't go so far as to label Nancy insane but there is no doubt she is different from Temple and the other characters in this work. The physical act of killing the helpless six-months-old baby or of killing anyone is unjustifiable and wrong. What is necessary for us is to contemplate why Nancy had to kill the infant.

... for Nancy Mannigoe, the assertive house servant, and Temple Drake Stevens, her errant mistress, the question of guilt moves beyond conventions of conduct or the law's provisions into a theological context.¹⁹

For Nancy, her need to dissuade Temple from leaving with Pete was impelled by her desire to keep the children from eventual suffering and pain.

NANCY

To leave one with a man that's willing to believe the child aint got no father, willing to take the other one to a man that dont even want no children -²⁰

Nancy has stated succinctly that if Temple leaves, her leaving will be at her children's expense. Temple was supposed to take the baby with her but she was leaving Bucky, her son, with his grandparents. Nancy also implies that Temple is not concerned over her children's welfare - the baby's welfare especially, seems unimportant to Temple. Nancy sacrifices her life to save Bucky and Temple as well for in the end Temple does not leave with Pete. She remains with Bucky.

Undeniably nothing can change the fact that Nancy did kill the infant but she was motivated so strongly to help prevent the children from feeling eventual pain and torment, that she acted out of a sense of urgency and desperation when nothing she had tried could stop Temple from leaving. Her intense motivation is demonstrated in how she tries to restrain the mother from leaving, and in an ironic twist of fate, she has to in the end kill one child to save the other or else have both die for she saw no way anymore of saving both of them.

Nancy's final act, if it be not madness, stems from a lapse into despair, but this she transcends remarkably, through her inclusive and integrated view of sin, suffering and salvation.²¹

Although Nancy's persistence paid off only in a tragic manner - nevertheless it is important to note that Nancy did not give up. For her it was a tireless effort once started, to do all she could to help the children and in a way, their mother. The fact that Nancy pursued her goal determinedly for children not even related to her must mean something but the killing of a helpless infant cannot be justified to any human conscience. However Nancy's death sentence can also symbolize an atonement for what she did. She may not have shown that she felt remorse or guilt at the killing but she thought that the baby should not be left in circumstances where Pete was around. Furthermore, Temple verified that her own children will not be taken into account in her plan to run away. Nancy's behaviour and actions could be described as interfering but I choose to see her actions before the killing of the baby as evidence that she has taken pains to salvage and protect the innocent children. The outcome to the situation surrounding Temple, her family and Nancy could only be tragic given Temple's insistence to leave with Pete at any cost. Nancy is noble because she diverts the tragedy onto herself - she smothers the infant and is prepared to hang for the act.

The crux of this study is how does one view Nancy's actions and behaviour as being Christian Humanistic? Firstly it is essential to stress that Nancy had no other reason in relentlessly trying to dissuade Temple from leaving except for the thought of the two young children's uncertain future. She was concerned for them and in some way for Temple, too, because she did not hesitate to point out that running away with Pete is worse than taking a risk, it would be a seal on Temple's fate. Thus for Nancy, her intentions were noble but her ultimate measure to carry out her intentions cannot be vindicated.

What is of special emphasis then are Nancy's intentions and her beliefs but Nancy's drastic action was necessary to stop Temple from leaving.

Nancy feels that man should choose salvation over hope because for Nancy, having salvation signifies that she has reached a state in her life whereby she is able to trust God implicitly and unconditionally. That is why Nancy does not seem affected nor does she seem to be aware of what she has done to Temple's baby, because to her, she has got salvation and that enables her to believe and trust that henceforth her "fate" lies not in ordinary men but in God's.

NANCY

Because that would have been hoping: the hardest thing of all to break, get rid of, let go of, the last thing of all poor sinning man will turn a loose. Maybe it's because that's all he's got. Leastways, he holds onto it, hangs onto it. Even with salvation laying right in his hand, and all he's got to do is, choose between it ; even with salvation already in his hand and all he needs is just to shut his fingers, old sin is still too strong for him, and sometimes before he even knows it, he has throwed salvation away just grabbling back at hoping. But it's all right -

STEVENS

You mean, when you have salvation, you dont have hope?

NANCY

You dont even need it. All you need, all you have to do, is just believe.

STEVENS

Believe what?

NANCY

Just believe.

....

TEMPLE

... But let Him tell me how. How? Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and still tomorrow. How?

NANCY

Trust in Him.

TEMPLE

Trust in Him. Look what He has already done to me. Which is all right; maybe I deserved it; ... But look at what He did to you. Yet you can still say that. Why? Why? Is it because there isn't anything else?

NANCY

I dont know. But you got to trust Him.²²

On the eve of Nancy's execution, Temple and Gavin Stevens visit Nancy and Nancy reveals what she holds as religiously important - salvation, belief in God and trust in God. These are fundamental tenets of Christianity.

The Gospel According to St. Luke explains trust in God.

"Look at the crows: they don't plant seeds or gather a harvest; they don't have storage rooms or barns; God feeds them! You are worth so much more than birds! ... Won't he be all the more sure to clothe you?²³

(Luke 12:24-28)

This is the trust Nancy must have had in mind when she advocates this trust to Temple. For Nancy belief in God implies the acknowledgement of the existence of God. With this belief secured, Nancy can trust in God to give salvation to her.

What is clear also is Nancy's *simple attitude* towards these fundamental tenets of Christianity; salvation, belief in God and trust in God. For Nancy - her faith is an unquestioning faith that can overcome pain, anxiety and death.

Being able to believe and trust in God would necessitate some form of communion with God on her part.

At the heart of Christian humanism, now as yesterday, is the conviction, supported by centuries of experience in the lives of men and women of all cultures and races, that the fullest realization of what it means to be human can be known through personal communion with Jesus Christ....²⁴

Nancy is not conscious of this fact, but her absolute belief and trust in God must surely create an effective communion between her and God. For Nancy too this communion is the ultimate human expectation for herself.

For Nancy, one can trust completely in God when one sees suffering as an essential prerequisite to attaining salvation.

NANCY

... But you got to trust Him. Maybe that's your pay for the suffering.

STEVENS

Whose suffering, and whose pay? Just each one's for his own?

NANCY

Everybody's. All suffering. All poor sinning man's.

STEVENS

The salvation of the world is in man's suffering. Is that it?

NANCY

Yes, sir.

STEVENS

How?

NANCY

I dont know. Maybe when folks are suffering, they will be too busy to get into devilment, wont have time to worry and meddle one another.

TEMPLE

... Do you have to suffer everybody else's anguish just to believe in God? ...

NANCY

He dont want you to suffer. He dont like suffering neither. But he cant help Himself. He's like a man that's got too many mules. All of a sudden one morning, he looks around and sees more mules than he can count at one time even, let alone find work for, and all he knows is that they are his ...²⁵

Nancy's theology as conveyed to Stevens, suggests that Nancy feels God has to look after too many things. Perhaps this is why Nancy is emboldened to take such a drastic act. She feels she must help at any cost, to save the baby from a painful and worse death. She sacrifices her life in sacrificing the baby's life, but Nancy feels it would ultimately be better for the baby to die now and be ironically saved, than for the baby to die from neglect at her own mother's hands.

Nancy sees good coming out of suffering and Nancy's view of suffering is collective in the sense that she sees suffering as a preventive measure against evil for everyone. Getting into "devilment", "worrying and meddling one another" - these are Nancy's definitions of the troubles one can cause others. Nancy sees a possible way out of "getting into devilment" for humans and this indirectly reflects her concern for humankind.

... Nancy's saying the world's salvation is in man's suffering had a religious insight beyond her defining; ...

Since human suffering often springs out of societal disorders, or from interpersonal offenses through falsehood, greed, and cruelty, or by self-inflicted harm through ignorance, illusion and recklessness, a mundane view if not of sin at least of human misdoings and consequent sorrows may be suggested, and present ameliorations might be envisioned.²⁶

Thus Nancy's concern for how "folks" may avoid getting into trouble can indirectly imply that this concern of hers is Christian Humanistic in principle. For Christian Humanism,

... points to the deep interest in human beings, their life, well-being, culture, and eternal significance, that belongs to the Christian faith.²⁷

Nancy's stand on sin and suffering is connected to her belief in free will as well.

STEVENS

You have got to sin, too?

NANCY

You aint *got to* .You cant help it. And He knows that. But you can suffer. And He knows that too. He dont tell you not to sin, He just asks you not to. And He dont tell you to suffer. But He gives you the chance. He gives you the best He can think of, that you're capable of doing. And He will save you.²⁸

What Nancy has said suggests that man has the autonomous power of self - determination.

Nancy relies solely on faith alone although she does act also, and her absolute faith is inclusive of her trust and belief in God and Nancy's calmness before her execution signifies that she feels she has been saved. How does she come to that feeling ? She simply believed.

TEMPLE

... Is there a heaven for it to go to so it can forgive you? Is there a heaven, Nancy?

NANCY

I dont know. I believes.

TEMPLE

Believe what?

NANCY

I dont know. But I believes.

...

TEMPLE

(quickly)

Nancy.

(Nancy doesn't pause. Temple continues, rapidly)
What about me? Even if there is one and somebody waiting in it to forgive me, there's still tomorrow and tomorrow. And suppose tomorrow and tomorrow, and then nobody there, nobody waiting to forgive me -

NANCY

(moving on after the Jailor)

Believe.

TEMPLE

Believe what, Nancy? Tell me.

NANCY

Believe.²⁹

Clearly, Nancy's strong belief in God is based solely on her power to believe. She doesn't know what to believe in exactly or even whether a heaven exists. Nancy makes a strict distinction between two modes of thinking, both good but not the same. She believes what she doesn't know. Truly Nancy does exhibit simple religious beliefs but that does not make her unChristian Humanistic. Contrary to Nancy's strong belief in God is Temple's doubt and confusion as to the act of believing in God. Hers is a passive view of life's emptiness and her opinion of God is that God is unforgiving and indifferent.

To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see.³⁰

(Hebrews 11: 1 - 2)

St. Paul urges Christians to be faithful. Nancy in her own right is faithful and she demonstrates an essential belief in Christianity - that of faith.

She has demonstrated that she has the determination and the motivation to want to help others although her killing the baby can never be in any earthly way justified. The thing to remember here is that Nancy sacrifices her life too in the end and she strove hard and sacrificed in order to save.

Nancy's intentions are sincere and theoretically Christian Humanistic in that, in thought she depicts traits of Christian Humanism . For her act of of smothering the infant, Nancy does pay with her own life.

The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them - that's the essence of inhumanity.³¹

And that is what Nancy was not - she was not indifferent to the family who picked her out of the gutter. Nancy intended the best for those she wanted to help - this should be considered humane for she was not distant and unmoved by what she considered to be the plight of others.

Endnotes

1. Frederick Karl, *William Faulkner : American Writer , A Biography* , London: Faber and Faber, 1989, 791.
2. William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*, New York : Vintage Books, 1975, 43-44.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 44-45.
5. Ibid., 59-60.
6. Ibid., 148.
7. Ibid., 155-56.
8. Wiliam Franklin and Joseph Shaw, *The Case for Christian Humanism*, Michigan : William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991, 219.
9. William Faulkner, 157-59.
10. Ibid., 151.
11. Ibid., 159-61.
12. Ibid., 162.
13. William Franklin and Joseph Shaw, 219.
14. William Faulkner, 163.
15. Ibid., 163-64.

16. Ibid., 166.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 167.
19. Warren Beck, *Faulkner: Essays by Warren Beck*, Madison : The University of Wisconsin Press, 1976, 583.
20. William Faulkner , 164.
21. Warren Beck , 615.
22. William Faulkner, 233,234, 236,237.
23. Luke 12 : 24-25, Good News Bible, New York : American Bible Society, 1978, 100.
24. William Franklin and Joseph Shaw , 44.
25. William Faulkner, 236-38.
26. Warren Beck, 626.
27. William Franklin and Joseph Shaw, 5.
28. William Faulkner, 238.
29. Ibid., 241-43.
30. Hebrews 11 : 1, Good News Bible , New York : American Bible Society, 1982, 305.
31. George Bernard Shaw , *The Star Newspaper* , 1994.

Thus, this study of the possible existence of Christian Humanistic strains in these women is essential to show that these Afro-American women characters - Dilsey, Molly, Clytie and Nancy - have in their own individualistic ways depicted that they are capable of doing more than they themselves are conscious of.

Now I will attempt to answer some questions put forth in the first chapter regarding the characterization of the women as portrayed in the novels.

1. What does it mean for these Afro-American women characters to be Christians ?

For Dilsey Gibson in *The Sound And The Fury* , being Christian conveys the sense that she can empathize with whoever may be in distress. Dilsey acts as the moral force amidst the degenerating Compson family. Dilsey does not hesitate to come to the aid of an ungrateful Quentin when she thinks Quentin is being ill-treated by her uncle, Jason. Dilsey dares to challenge Jason, who at that time is supposed to be in charge of the household. Dilsey's challenge takes on a physical note when she goes further to dare Jason to hit her for coming in between Jason and Quentin.

Dilsey reassures Mrs. Compson of Quentin's safety when Quentin runs away from the house. What is most memorable and significant about Dilsey's concern for others is displayed in her attitude towards Benjy, the retarded son of Mr. and Mrs. Compson. Dilsey maintains that Benjy is no less human than the others because of his mental retardation and she religiously affirms this by saying that the Lord would not care if Benjy "were smart or not".

Dilsey has grasped and is practising an integral issue in Christianity , that God created all men equal, and she demonstrates this belief in her refusal to treat Benjy differently. Dilsey's adamant refusal to heed what the other " folks " may be talking about

her bringing Benjy to a black church show her independent mind and spirit. I see her bringing Benjy to church as important, for Dilsey's act symbolizes her belief that God truly does not care whether Benjy is "smart or not" and that Benjy has the right to be in church - as with everyone else.

Dilsey's treatment of the members of the Compson family - particularly of Benjy - is suggestive of Christian Humanistic traits because her treatment of Benjy becomes a cogent reminder that Dilsey acknowledges everyone as being someone. She places importance in human life and this is encouraged or instilled by her spiritual sustenance of Christianity or what she understands by Christianity. Dilsey exhibits positively what it means to be Christian for her actions and behaviour are a reminder of what Jesus said,

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.²

(John 15:9, 12)

Significantly, Dilsey also acknowledges that Christ died for man's sins in order to save man. She has got "de ricklickshun en de blood of de Lamb...."

Clytie Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!* is not described as either practising Christianity or as being a Christian. Clytie's character is not as simply understood as that of Dilsey's. Clytie's role in the novel may not be as pivotal as Dilsey's role in *The Sound And The Fury* but her determined action to protect and safeguard the boy, Charles Etienne, from the outside world - which Clytie considers the world outside of Sutpen's Hundred - the home which the boy is brought to live in, should be considered positively. Clytie's action is commendable in the sense that she reacts with sympathy to an orphan's plight.

There is no doubt Clytie overreacts in that she guards the boy fiercely but I believe she does that because she feels and is aware of the boy's vulnerability.

Clytie's other significant gesture in the novel is the dramatic and tragic setting of the house on fire - with both herself and her half-brother, Henry in the house. At that point of time, Henry was emaciated and corpse-like and Clytie set the house on fire when she saw a wagon and some people approaching the house, who she thought had come to take Henry away for a shooting he committed forty over years ago.

We cannot deny that Clytie should not have taken the law into her own hands, but living at close quarters with Henry and knowing what he must have suffered all these years, Clytie decides that Henry should not be hanged for a crime he had already paid all his life for. Clytie's act is both sacrificial and difficult to measure in Christian terms. I think the debatable point here is that we have to take into account Henry's situation. I do not want to label Clytie a mercy-killer but there is also the fact that Clytie sacrifices her life to carry out what she thinks would ultimately save Henry.

Thus what it means to be Christian for Clytie is not clear but what can be said to be Christian about her behaviour and action is her willingness to concern herself with the welfare of others, across racial barriers, and even to the point of sacrifice.

For Clytie, there is no stated belief in one religion but Clytie behaves in a manner that shows she is not untroubled or unbothered by the plight of others. In Clytie's case, it is not so much what one holds on to externally such as beliefs and religious tenets but for Clytie, what is important are internal matters such as compassion and empathy for others.

Molly Beauchamp in *Go Down, Moses* resembles Dilsey Gibson in *The Sound And The Fury* in that she embodies a maternal figure. As with Dilsey, Molly is strong not in the physical sense but she is enduring. She has to care for and nurse a white infant child and she stays on in Zack Edmond's house to do so. Molly's husband, Lucas is angered by

Molly's staying on in Zack's house for he suspects Molly may have been more than just a nanny to the infant. Molly, however stands up to Lucas over this matter. She had her own child to look after but Molly must have been moved by the motherless baby for she tells her husband she couldn't leave the motherless baby unattended to in the "big house". Hence she had to bring the baby back to her own home - and to the anger of Lucas, her husband.

We see Molly's compassion in her silent but strong decision to nurse the infant. In Molly's situation, what it means to be Christian for her must surely be the ability to understand and be sensible to the condition of others.

Molly's compassionate and uncalculating nature is depicted also when Molly desires a decent burial for her grandson who was actually tried and executed for murder in the North. The familial fact that Samuel is the child of her own first child - the child she helped raise in her old age becomes an important element in strengthening Molly's feeling for her grandson. Also, Molly regards her grandson as a person, she accords him that dignity, hence her need for a decent burial for Samuel regardless of what he had done or of what had happened to Samuel in the North during his absence from home for five years.

As with Molly's firm decision to nurse Zack's son because she recognizes the child as a pitiable child worthy of care and concern, similarly, Molly must feel the same if not more, for her own grandson, her "last child of her old age". She sees her family obligations in Biblical terms - for Samuel is " Benjamin ", the child of her old age, as was Benjamin to Jacob in the Bible.

Thus, I believe what is Christian about Molly's behaviour and actions is her readiness to acknowledge the singular individuality of everyone and that she has honoured God's creation of man in honouring the needs of a helpless white infant, and in honouring the fact that her grandson is a person.

Nancy Mannigoe in *Requiem for a Nun* shares a similarity with Clytie Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!*, for both Nancy and Clytie sacrificed their lives and took the responsibility in their hands to sacrifice the lives of another for what they each believed would save a hopeless situation. Nancy's action however, would seem more severe and tragic, for she smothered a helpless six-months-old infant. Nancy believed that smothering the baby was the only means to save the brother of the baby and ultimately the mother of these two children - Nancy's employer.

For Nancy, being Christian necessitates having complete faith and trust in God. There is no doubt as to Nancy's simple belief in the basic Christian tenets of salvation, trust and belief in God. Her killing the infant cannot be justified, but what Nancy has demonstrated, albeit unacceptably to some, is her self-motivated determination to try whatever avenue available to her to help those whom she thinks need help.

2. Are these Afro-American women characters aware of Christianity as a means to live?

Among the four - Dilsey, Molly, Clytie and Nancy, Dilsey and Nancy do show awareness of using the Christian religion as a means to live life. However Nancy's view of religion is exclusive and singular in that Nancy seems to have transcended her spiritual concerns into a private and personalised communication between God and herself. What Nancy does makes her out to be a middle person interceding for man, between God and the

rest of mankind. Thus, she replies directly to God even in the presence of others, and Nancy remains oblivious and absorbed in her own world while doing so. When Nancy answers to God in the presence of others, she does not do so intentionally.

Nancy's answers of,

" I've tried. I've tried, everything I know. You can see that."

" Yes, Lord. "

are natural and to the point.

What is evident among Dilsey, Nancy and even Molly in a way, concerning Christianity is their straightforward and simple attitude towards religion.

..but he had special sympathy for simple piety. This becomes especially clear in his portrayal of black religion.³

In other words, Faulkner seems to put far less credence in the postulates of Christianity, or even in their associated sentiments, than in certain of its practices, and these practices bear the marks not only of divine mercy but even more significantly of simple human kindness.⁴

The words, "simple piety" and "simple human kindness" aptly describe what Dilsey, Molly, Clytie and Nancy manifest in their contact with others.

The fact that Faulkner himself seems to advocate these simple but basically noble human emotions and that he portrays these emotions in Dilsey, Molly, Nancy and even Clytie should prove that these women are in actual fact bearers of essential sentiments required to perhaps ameliorate human suffering.

3. Can a notion of Black Christian Humanism exist in the following novels,

The Sound And The Fury (1929)

Absalom, Absalom! (1936)

Go Down, Moses (1942)

Requiem for a Nun (1951)

via their depiction of Dilsey, Clytie, Molly and Nancy in the selected novels?

Black Christian Humanism is not different from Christian Humanism nor is Black Christian Humanism a deviation from Christian Humanism. I use the term Black Christian Humanism to depict how individualized a view of Christian Humanism these Afro-American women characters can offer in my study of these characters.

The four of them - Dilsey, Clytie, Molly and Nancy are not conscious Christian Humanists in that they are not depicted as being aware of Christian Humanism as a codified doctrine, but this does not prevent them from being studied as possible Christian Humanists based on what they have done for others - in other words, their behaviour and actions are essential albeit indirectly in some situations, in suggesting that Dilsey, Clytie, Molly and Nancy do embody traits of Christian Humanism.

Dilsey Gibson in *The Sound And The Fury* exemplifies most clearly in her relationship with the Compsons, Christian Humanistic elements in her actions.

Of primary importance is Dilsey's trust in God to guide her through her daily life and whatever adversities she may encounter. Christian Humanism places importance in human faith in God for faith is a fundamental element of Christianity.

Dilsey is also concerned for the welfare of those with whom she comes into contact, especially the Compson family - the white family she is housekeeper for. Christian Humanism celebrates the uniqueness and significance of the individual human life and Dilsey in showing concern for others, shows that she is honouring this belief of Christian Humanism where human life is valued and held as special.

Dilsey does not hesitate to stand up for what she believes in where human life seems threatened. Human life is sacred and should be preserved and protected. Dilsey in offering her willingness to bring up an additional member of the Compson family, Quentin, who bears the stigma of illegitimacy, depicts a concern for protecting life. The subject of illegitimacy does not bother Dilsey. Dilsey believes what is more important is that this child be given an opportunity to grow. Dilsey even continues to protect Quentin when she feels Quentin is threatened by her uncle. Christian Humanism highlights the need to protect and safeguard human existence and Dilsey has proved that she is capable of protecting and safeguarding human existence.

The most notable characteristic about Dilsey is her humaneness - her very human outlook on life. This quality is noble and should be emphasized, for Dilsey's humaneness makes her innately kind and sympathetic to the troubles of others. Being intrinsically humane, Dilsey positively illustrates the need to respect all human life which must form the basic prerequisite for Christian Humanism.

I feel the most poignant and touching aspect of Dilsey's being Christian Humanistic comes from her treatment of Benjy - the white retarded son of Mr. and Mrs. Compson. Dilsey brings Benjy to a black church and at that point of time, Benjy is chronologically thirty-three years old.

Dilsey's compassionate and sympathetic treatment of Benjy is rendered more significant when Dilsey firmly declares that Benjy is no less a person to the Lord in spite of his retardation. Her ability to accept Benjy for what he is marks Dilsey's ultimate celebration of human life, for this celebration is a recognition of Benjy's existence as a human.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* Clytie Sutpen's actions like those of Dilsey's in *The Sound And The Fury* are central in suggesting that Clytie like Dilsey, does portray traits of Christian Humanism in her behaviour. Two crucial periods in Clytie's life - her looking after Charles Etienne and the sacrificial setting of the house on fire are studied in order to explain the possibility of Clytie's actions in these situations being Christian Humanistic.

Clytie takes a very serious concern in Charles Etienne's welfare and bringing up. Her serious attitude often borders on ferocity. The fact that Clytie exerts herself to such an extent in order to guard a boy and the extreme measures Clytie undertakes to ensure that the boy remains safe from foreign influence speaks of effort on Clytie's part, however overdone and over-zealous. Clytie views this strange boy as someone needing protection. Like Dilsey, Clytie shows a need to protect human existence in protecting Charles Etienne. Her action is reminiscent of Christian Humanistic behaviour in that Clytie has shown a respect for human existence in wanting to safeguard what Clytie thought to be Charles Etienne's vulnerable existence.

Clytie's responsible nature towards those whom she regards as family - her half-sister Judith, her half-brother Henry and Charles Etienne - indicates a side of Clytie that is capable of fostering familial relations and in these familial relations - Clytie is perhaps also capable of a love for people whom she feels are family to her.

Clytie's uncalculating nature becomes fundamental in linking her actions to those actions bearing signs of Christian Humanism, for Christian Humanism has its source in the Gospel and the Gospel proclaims that human behaviour should be motivated and inspired by love.

Lastly, Clytie's controversial setting of the house on fire which killed both Henry and herself can be unexpectedly seen as being Christian Humanistic. Clytie sees Henry's life-long suffering after his shooting of Charles Bon as a sort of atonement for what he did. When Henry comes home after being absent for over forty years - Clytie ensures that Henry will die as he desires to - in his own house. Clytie is pushed to set the house on fire and to sacrifice both her life and Henry's when she thinks the authorities have come for Henry.

Her sacrificial act is desperately motivated by genuine concern for Henry's situation.

Clytie's literal laying down of her life for another reiterates Christ's saying to man about the power of love. Clytie is fiercely anxious to protect Henry's existence in terms only she herself must comprehend - but this factor should not negate her regard for her half-brother's existence as a person and his individual rights to that existence, and Clytie's actions can be explained as being Christian Humanistic, for she wants to keep her brother's existence from being violated by Rosa and the authorities when they do come to take him away.

" Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. " ⁵

(John 15 : 13)

Molly Beauchamp in *The Fire and The Hearth* helps bring up the motherless Roth Edmonds even to the initial consternation of her husband. Molly displays fortitude and discipline against her husband Lucas in not bending her will to not look after or nurse the infant. She knows how doubtful her husband is concerning the arrangement of her living at Zack Edmonds' house in order to attend to the motherless infant. Yet Molly remains firm in her role as surrogate mother to Roth. Molly's efforts and sacrifices to bring up Roth are acknowledged by Roth himself, albeit silently but nevertheless Roth's acknowledgement of all that Molly has done and all that she has been to him externalize Molly's sincere attempts in raising him towards actions that are more meaningful.

In *Go Down, Moses*, an older Molly ties hard to locate her grandson and decides to give him a decent burial at all costs even when she is told of what had happened to Samuel. Molly's regard for Samuel does not lessen when she learns how and why Samuel died. Molly's endeavour for her grandson to "come home right" explains her need for her grandson to come home to her symbolically.

Hence, I choose to see Molly's actions as being Christian Humanistic in that like Dilsey and Clytie, Molly exhibits a regard for human life. In nurturing the growth of another individual and in respecting the individuality of her convicted grandson, Molly has indeed honoured the important message of Christian Humanism to nurture a love and an interest for all humankind.

Dilsey, Clytie and Molly are possible exemplifiers of Christian Humanistic behaviour. A common factor visible when examining these three characters is their ungrudging nature in reaching out to aid others.

I do not think their actions are interfering or meddlesome - in the light of viewing Clytie's fiercely independent actions of guarding Charles Etienne and the debatable act of setting the house on fire.

Basically these women are kind. What they should be commended for is their ready assent to do what they can in alleviating pain for others without thought of gain or at cost to themselves. Essentially, what is Christian Humanistic about their attitudes and actions towards life is their regard for human existence.

Nancy Mannigoe in *Requiem for a Nun* like Dilsey, Clytie and Molly is also motivated by a genuine desire to help others. However, Nancy's drastic act of smothering a helpless six-month-old infant makes the study of her actions as Christian Humanistic difficult.

(Question) Q : In the title of *Requiem for a Nun* , does the *Nun* have to refer to Temple Drake or to Nancy ?

(Answer
Faulkner) A : The nun was Nancy.

Q : She was very separated from the world as a nun ?

A : Well, it was in the - that tragic life of a prostitute which she had had to follow simply because she was compelled by her environment, her circumstances, to be it. Not for profit and any pleasure, she was just doomed and damned by circumstances to that life. And despite that, she was capable within her poor dim lights and reasons for an act whether it was right or wrong was of complete almost religious abnegation of the world for the sake of an innocent child. That was - it was paradoxical, the use of the *Nun* for her, but I - but to me that added something to her tragedy. ⁶

The title of the work in which Nancy is featured, *Requiem for a Nun* and the fact that Faulkner attaches the term "nun" to Nancy is significant in trying to come to terms with Nancy's actions.

The word "requiem" suggests rest. Applying the title then to Nancy's characteristics and life - it would seem as if Nancy was perhaps meant by Faulkner to come across as a sympathetic and tragic figure. Her death then could imply something sacrificial in that she has paid for something with her own life. Nancy truly desired to help prevent Temple from leaving her two children.

Nancy is not indifferent and callous. She was humane in her own way. In Nancy's situation - her intentions are inherently sincere.

In fact, what can be said of all four of these women - Dilsey, Clytie, Molly and Nancy is that they indicate taking a personal and individualized interest in the welfare of others for whom they feel responsible for in some way - for instance those whom they work for. Also, they expect nothing from those whose welfare they take an interest in.

These women are definitely not motivated by greed but what inspires them to behave the way they do is not explained directly. What I propose to present at the close of this dissertation is that these women are inspirational, albeit unknowingly to themselves, in their behaviour to others and that their simplicity of nature only enhances the value of their actions because they are motivated solely by an inner will to help.

they're the verities of the human heart.
They are courage, honor,
pride, compassion, pity...

That is they are the verities to be practiced
because that's the best way to live in peace with yourself and your
fellows...⁷

And Dilsey, Clytie, Molly and Nancy do possess and portray these "verities of the human heart" - "courage, honour, pride, compassion, pity .." As Faulkner himself puts it, I believe these verities are practiced by these women not because they want to show others how "virtuous" they are by doing so but because they unconsciously desire a better environment for whoever they feel is in need. Most essentially, these " verities of the human heart " are somehow manifested as being an unconscious part of them. They do not realize the existence of such "verities" in themselves.

4. With the passage of time, does Faulkner's characterization of Afro-American women characters become more complex and challenging ?

I think the portrayal of a unique character such as Nancy in *Requiem for a Nun* , which was published in 1951, when compared to the character of Dilsey Gibson for instance in *The Sound And The Fury* , which was published in 1929, shows an attempt at presenting a slightly more challenging role for an Afro-American woman character. Undoubtedly Dilsey is given a distinctly stereotypical role as black nanny and housekeeper to a white household.

Although Nancy is cast into the role of domestic helper to the Stevens household, Nancy does not come across as maternal a figure as Dilsey. Before Nancy comes to the Stevens household she is said to have been a " nigger whore, a drunkard, a dope-fiend ". These descriptions are derogatory descriptions and compared to Dilsey's stereotypical attributes of black nanny, housekeeper and maternal figure, Nancy seems to be more of a negative deviation from the norm and not so much a positive breakaway from black stereotypical portrayal.

traits because, for them to be able to be charitable to others necessitates primarily on their part, respect and honour for others. Christian Humanism clearly points basically to the safeguarding and enhancement of humankind. Already Dilsey, Clytie, Molly and Nancy have fulfilled this basic Christian Humanistic requirement.

I would like to reiterate that these women are not conscious followers of Christian Humanism but I see that applying Christian Humanistic elements to their behaviour, mannerisms and actions is possible.

Remember, the writer must write out of his background. He must write out of what he knows and the Christian legend is part of any Christian's background, especially the background of a country boy... I grew up with that. I assimilated that, took that in without even knowing it. It's just there. It has nothing to do with how much of it I might believe or disbelieve- it's just there. ¹⁰

Indirectly I would like to compare Dilsey's, Clytie's, Molly's and Nancy's possible Christian Humanistic behaviour to Faulkner's explanation of his stand on the link between Christianity and his writing.

For these women - the Christian Humanistic factor is

'... just there ...'

Whether they believe in Christian Humanism or not is not the issue at hand. What is the primary concern here is that the possibility of seeing them as Christian Humanists based on what they do and how they are motivated to act - is,

'... just there ...'

in themselves as persons.

Endnotes

1. Frederick L. Gwyn and Joseph M. Blotner (eds.). "Session Ten , April 15 1957 Visitors from Virginia Colleges, " *Faulkner in the University Class Conferences at the University of Virginia* , 1957-1958, 2nd printing, 86.
2. John 15:12, The Holy Bible, New King James Version, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982, 727.
3. Wilson Charles Reagan, " William Faulkner and the Southern Religious Culture, " *Faulkner and Religion Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha* , eds. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie, Jackson and London : University Press of Mississippi, 1991, 39.
4. Ibid., 61.
5. John 15 : 13 , The Holy Bible , New King James Version , Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982, 727.
6. Frederick I. Gwyn and Joseph M. Blotner " Session Twenty-Two, May 30, 1957, University and Community Public, " *Faulkner in the University Class Conferences at the University of Virginia*, 1957-1958, 2nd printing, 196.
7. Ibid., 133, 134.
8. Geoffrey Chapman, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Avon : The Bath Press, 1994, 404.
9. Ibid., 405.
10. Frederick L. Gwyn and Joseph M. Blotner " Session Ten, 86, April 15 1957, Visitors from Virginia Colleges, " *Faulkner in the University Class Conferences at the University of Virginia* , 1957-1958, 2nd printing, 86.