

Title of *Dry September*

In William Faulkner's short fiction "Dry September," we are presented with a vision of small town Southern life during reconstruction. This story has it all: a crime of passion, racism, and violence. Faulkner has riddled this story with violence issues and shows us what kind of effect it can have on individuals and society. Small town life can be scary when everyone knows everyone else. Rumors run like water. The violent nature of man has a slippery slope affect in society. The violent actions of one man lead to the actions of another, and the ones this violence is used against are affected and will continue to affect others in society. In addition to these currents of brutality Faulkner includes other subjects like racism and the position of women in this society. Faulkner is showing us what is happening underneath all of the problems on the surface.

"Dry September" touches on a subject that many authors of Faulkner's time chose to comment on: Black relationships with the white community. Faulkner shows us men who had to make the decision of the times by asking themselves the question, "Am I okay with black people?" It is a question many people are faced with even today. The men of the barbershop are pondering this idea in the opening scenes of the story. The first line in "Dry September" reads, "Through the bloody September twilight, aftermath of sixty two rainless days, it had gone like a fire in dry grass – the rumor, the story, whatever it was." The first line of the story is one of the most effective and meaningful lines in the entire work. The title of the story is "Dry September," and the story takes place in one dry September in Jefferson, Mississippi. Rumors fly in small towns just like fire in a dry field. It moves fast and burns everything in its path. After sixty-two days with no rain, the grass is dead, and apparently the town has been dead, with no excitement and not much to do or talk about. The rumor gives the town something to talk about. Faulkner describes the scene as bloody. The blood could be symbolic of the life that rumor will soon fill the town with. The bloody twilight could be a simple description of the color of the sky, or perhaps a comment on a Southern sunset. The blood could be symbolizing death or injury, the reader cannot be to sure, of Will Mayes, or the general disgust and injury of the town. This short line is full of description of the town and the characters that live in it.

The story revolves around a rumor that Will Mayes, a young "black son" in Jefferson, attacked Miss Minnie Cooper, the resident old maid. Faulkner describes the air as vitiated, which means corrupt, perverted, debauched, debased, and degraded. The air is of the people of the town, who are in fact, perverted and vitiated in thought, and in action. The men of the town are out to defend the honor of a southern white woman. The problem is the truth is unknown, and no one seems to care. The idea of harming this man without knowing the truth is disgusting, but it was the way of the South, and Faulkner makes this clear in many of his works including "Dry September." The vitiated air is the air of the South. The ceiling fan, stirring but not freshening, is symbolic of the barber's unsuccessful efforts to convince the town's men that Will Mayes is not a bad man. He is about as convincing as the ceiling fan is triumphant is at cooling down the tempers of the entire collection of racists in the South. Cooling down and calming down are the tireless efforts of the barber. In the story, the fan stirs up the shop goes stale breath and lotion. It is in the barbershop that their feelings about the "black son" are stirred up. Though the barber is trying to calm their emotions, the fact that he believes a black man over a white woman of the South only further infuriates the men. Even though Faulkner establishes the barber as a

benefactor of Mayes, Faulkner still remembers to have the barber refer to Mayes as a "good nigger" instead of a "good man", ensuring that the walls of separation between black and white are recognizable and obvious to the reader. Will Mayes is severely beaten and taken somewhere away from town and presumably left to die.

The town's men in the shop are appalled at the barber's disbelief of the white woman, Minnie Cooper. Faulkner is sure to describe Minnie's unmarried status and what is thought of unmarried women in the south in his time. Women were expected to marry, and when they did not, something fishy must be going on. Women could not be single and "okay." A woman's place in society was strict.

Another important line in the story is when Faulkner tells us "The Barber held the razor above the half – risen client." This is the barber's false sense of control. He only has the power to make them listen while he is holding a razor to the clients' throats. He feels he will be able to stop the men from hurting Mayes when the time comes, however he, as the sole advocate for Mayes, is not strong enough to overpower the vicious John McLendon and his cohorts.

When one of the barbershop goers comments, "It's this durn weather. It's enough to make a man do anything," we are taken back to the weather. Hot weather and hot tempers are mentioned often. The weather is blamed throughout the story and Faulkner constantly reminds of its ominous presence. The title cast a shadow over the plot. There has been no rain for some two months. The weather is uncontrollable and overseeing. It is powerful and can be beautiful, as well as one of the most destructive forces on the face of the earth.

The barber seems to believe that these men are reasonable, and that the truth will make a difference, but even if Minnie Cooper herself came forward and offered evidence in Mayes favor, it is likely not to make a difference in the world. John McLendon the typical trash-talking Southerner, and he is dangerous because he acts on his convictions. McLendon is looking for an excuse to kill a black man because he is hateful. He doesn't care if the crime was actually committed, he believes he should set an example before one of their white women is actually harmed. He is an angry man and needs a way to express his hatred. Many of the men in the shop are curious at best about the truth behind the accusations, but McLendon is irrational and because of his fear of others not supporting his convictions, he wants to act immediately on his suspicions. McLendon is the leader of the pack. His energy and confidence in his beliefs convinces the doubtful and inspires the youth. He is an example of how racism and violence affect society. Anyone who is vocal and convincing has a profound affect on society. Prohibition was widely spread by convincing preachers. Movements begin with strong leaders. McLendon's violence affects everyone. Violence is a slippery slope. Like a snowball, it starts off small, but as it moves its way along down the slope, gathering more support, it becomes a huge, destructive and uncontrollable beast. McLendon is one man, but as he moves through town gathering more and more members for his posse, by nightfall, the time he plans on "taking care of" Will Mayes, he is ready with an angry mini – mob. McLendon's violent nature affects everyone in Jefferson, both those who contribute to his vehemence and those who are victims. McLendon's violence can also most likely be attributed to some one else before him. Given his vehemence towards his wife in the last scene, it is feasible to say, according to Freudian philosophy, that McLendon has violence and control issues, which tend to manifest in the early stages of childhood

development. The dry September is having an affect on McLendon. He sweats profusely. If the blood and decay throughout the land is symbolic of the death/injury of Will Mayes, what is the sweat of McLendon? Sweat is excrement. Sweat cools you off, sweat is wet, and sweat stinks. No matter how much McLendon wipes off, more comes back. McLendon keeps sweating but he won't cool off, his temper that is. Maybe this is why he continues to sweat, even after the deed has been done. His hate and anger have not gone away. Sweat stinks, like McLendon and dry air. It is also noted that Will Mayes stinks. This is a connection between the white man, the black man, and the air in-between. It all stinks. He is a slippery fellow as well, he talks big during the day, but by night his actual actions concerning Will Mayes are covert and clandestine. Faulkner also includes the barber's momentary lapse, which shows us that everyone is subject to influence and there are no exceptions. Peer pressure is often the culprit in situations like these. McLendon is wet in the dry September. He stands out in the crowd. The last scene is mysterious. Faulkner leaves the reader with many questions. This last scene tends to lead the reader to a subject Faulkner often comments on, the way of Southern life during those years of reconstruction/post reconstruction. The author leaves us to question weather or not the rumor is reality or fantasy. We are not given any facts or information, except for the word of the hand of rationality in the story, the barber, which leads us to believe that Mayes is in fact innocent of his crime. However, innocence and reality do not seem to be an issue, the actual violence and punishment of the man is more important. McLendon is intent on setting an example for the other "black sons" in Jefferson. Does he really want to protect the women of the world? Given the hostility towards his wife, and the indication that this anger isn't just from his hard day, I think his problem with Mayes is hardly the questionable assault of Minnie Cooper. She is an old maid, an unmarried woman in her late thirties. She is a woman of questionable reputation, assumed as an adulteress in her town. She is alone, probably starved for attention, and concerned about what others think. By accusing a man of attacking, peeping, or whatever at her, she can convince her self that she is desirable. Maybe she is seeking the affection of the colored man in reality and in order to compensate for her social mistake, she accuses the man of coming at her with force. As Minnie Cooper moves on after her attack, she goes to a "moving picture" with the other women of the town, when she burst out in an uncontrollable fit of laughter. There is no explanation in the story for her laughter. She is probably laughing at what she has accomplished. After going into town, and realizing what she has done, and that the whole town is aware of her situation, she laughs. She is laughing at her town, and laughing at the ways of the South. She is laughing at the foolishness of her town, and how one person can have such an affect on a whole town, but when a town is as DRY as Jefferson, it is easy to see what can happen with a few simple accusing words. She is laughing at how fast rumors can fly and spread in a dry September and at how much damage they can do, almost like bloodshed at wartime.

The story shows how we affect each other's lives. Each of our actions affects how we live and interact with each other on a day to day basis. Violence only produces more violence. Many movements and periods in history are the causes of society's beliefs and convictions about race relations and individuals positions in society. This short fiction, "Dry September," comments on how these positions relate to one another as well as the consequences at hand when a social rule is broken. Faulkner also includes the race element. We see how difficult it was to be a black man in the South when nearly the entire white population was out to get you because of race. "Dry September" is a passionate story that truly opens the eyes of society to the problems that lie underneath the surface.

