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Introduction

William Faulkner's "Shingles for the Lord" (1943) is the third story about the Grier family, who also appear in "Two Soldiers" (1942) and "Shall Not Perish" (1943).¹ A farmer named Res Grier in Frenchman's Bend departs from his home with his son, the narrator of "Shingles for the Lord," to engage in the labor of replacing the shingles of a church in Yoknapatawpha County. Res, however, is late for the beginning of the work because he has to borrow some tools from his neighbor, so that he ends up working late to compensate for his delay. Following an attempt to outwit his co-worker, Solon, Res continues to work at the church during the night. Later on, he accidentally drops a lamp on the floor, which leads to the collapse of the whole church in a fire.

Certainly, the conversations among the farmers and the narration by the son of Res, who observes the events of the story, color the whole story with humor. In addition, the well-structured story enables itself to be evaluated highly in the later works of Faulkner. Some scholars have already pointed out that Faulkner applauded "the indestructibility" and endurable spirits of the peasants through the tales of the Griers, "Two Soldiers" and "Shall Not Perish" in addition to "Shingles for the Lord" (Volpe 272).²

¹ See, for example, Jones 34, Volpe 271, or Theresa M. Towner and James B. Carothers 21.

² Besides, Towner and Carothers note that "['Shingles for the Lord'] has been read, with 'Two Soldiers' and 'Shall Not Perish,' as merely the funny one of Faulkner's three tales of the Grier family; as an encomium to the yeoman farmers of Yoknapatawpha County; and a trivial coda to 'Barn Burning'" (21). In addition, Michael Millgate notes that "'Shingles for

The latter humorous tale, however, reveals some conflicts concerning labor among the farmers in Frenchman's Bend. It is obvious that the farmers engaged in replacing the shingles have experienced or heard about the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a part of the New Deal, established by Franklin D. Roosevelt. Solon, for example, went to Jefferson for the purpose of joining the WPA to get a job (CS 29). Take Res, who says, "I ain't had no WPA experience in dickering over labor" (CS 32), for another example. Inaugurated in 1935 and ending in 1943, the New Deal aimed to provide the unemployed with jobs during the Great Depression. In particular, the WPA created new jobs for people and constructed a lot of monuments such as bridges, hard-surfaced roads, airports and schools in the South.³ It seems reasonable to say that the New Deal achieved some great successes. On the contrary, Faulkner "resented any intrusion of the federal government in the lives of American citizens and was critical of Roosevelt's New Deal programs" and seems to have opposed the programs by Roosevelt (Volpe 272).⁴

This paper is intended as an investigation of the labor to replace the shingles of a church by the farmers in the third story of the *Griers* for the purpose of revealing some conflicts between the South and the United States in the era of the New Deal. Some close studies on Faulkner and the New Deal have already been made; John T. Matthews, for example, noted that "'Shingles for the Lord' voices a number of explicit complaints about how the New Deal has apparently infected Southern life with unwanted 'modern ideas'" (223).⁵ However, Matthews has little to say about the labor of the story in his argument in general. The purpose of this

the Lord' speaks more explicitly, ... the terms 'indestructability, durability' here applied to Whitfield could equally be used of Ab Snopes in 'Barn Burning' as well as of other men in 'Shingles for the Lord' itself" (271).

³ For the facts of the New Deal by Roosevelt and the background, see Tindall and Shi 1081 – 1095.

⁴ Ted Atkinson actually points out that "... Faulkner's fiction offers keen insight into the urgent imperative to bring order to the upheaval of Depression America. Of paramount concern in American society, this effort manifested most vividly in the flurry of initiatives that coalesced around Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal" (8).

⁵ For other references to Faulkner and the New Deal, see Atkinson and Elmo Howell (1959).

paper is to add a new interpretation of "Shingles for the Lord" to the previous studies and reveal Faulkner's perspective about the South and the United States during the New Deal.

1. Res Confronts Solon: Pre-Industrial Farming and Mechanized Labor

We will begin by considering Res Grier, the main character of "Shingles for the Lord." Res is a peasant living in Frenchman's Bend, a part of Yoknapatawpha County. While it has been questioned whether or not he is the father of the Griers in "Two Soldiers" and "Shall Not Perish,"⁶ he seems to be as poor as in the previous tales, so that he has to borrow some tools required in the labor of replacing the shingles. Res leaves home before sunrise to visit Old Man Killegrew and borrow the tools. Old Man Killegrew, however, has gone out to hunt foxes in the woods. Eventually, the sun has already risen when Res meets Old Man Killegrew. Later, Res is blamed for delaying the start of the work by the Reverent Whitfield, waiting for him at the church. Res tries to explain the reason he is late, but Whitfield tells him that he should have borrowed the tools the day before. Res replies by way of an excuse; "I reckon the Lord will forgive it. He ain't interested in time, nohow. He's interested in salvation" (CS 28), only to irritate Whitfield more. Here are some humorous elements of the Southern peasants seen in other works by Faulkner.

On the labor of replacing the shingles, the first point to notice is that Res is a slow worker. The narrator describes Res thus: "If he [Res] had just swung the maul half as fast as he swung it hard, he would have rove as many shingles as Solon and Homer together" (CS 31), which indicates that the swings by Res are powerful, however, he moves sluggishly. One may notice that the narrator in "Two Soldiers"

⁶ Hans H. Skei reports that "Res Grier, the principal character of the story, is not necessarily identical with the father of the two earlier stories, and if he is, it is probably the older brother, Pete, who narrates this story rather than the young narrator of the two former Grier stories" (271).

says about his father, "... pap was still behind, just like he had been ever since me and Pete had knowed him" (CS 82).

We must draw more attention to the description of the way Res works with the maul:

... [Res] swinging the maul half up over his head and holding it there for what looked like a whole minute sometimes and then swinging it down onto the blade of the froe, and not only a shingle flying off every lick but the froe going on into the ground clean up to the helve eye, and [Res] setting there wrenching at it slow and steady and hard,
(CS 31)

The point to observe is that Res swings the maul on the blade of the froe, but "not only a shingle flying off every lick but the froe going on into the ground clean up to the helve eye." It means that Res forces the tools too strongly to move fast. In other words, he doesn't have to swing the maul so strongly to split or "rove" a shingle. From the description of Res, we notice that his way of "swinging the maul half up over his head and holding it there for what looked like a whole minute sometimes" seems to represent a farmer cultivating a field, even if he has no intention to work hard or diligently.

Faulkner seems to depict Solon critically in contrast to Res. Solon swings the maul lightly and steadily and piles more shingles than Res, who forces the maul upon the froe with all his strength. Solon once worked as a driver of a public bus assigned by the WPA, but quit when he found that he had to abandon his farm for the assigned duty. Besides, compared to Res, Solon is a smart guy who works quickly and anticipates all around him. Solon comes to the church before they were scheduled to begin, waiting for Res with Homer. While replacing the shingles, Solon has already made way for Res before Res says, "Get out of the way" (CS 32). These features indicate his smartness, as opposed to Res.

For the present, we shall confine our attention to the features of Solon. His movement at work is depicted as a machine operates. It is compared with Res, who indicates a farmer cultivating the land. Solon and Homer remove the shingles,

"working light and easy and steady as two clocks ticking" (CS 31). There is one further depiction of Solon and Homer that we must not ignore. During the labor, the narrator compares Res with Solon and Homer at the point of the sound from their swinging the mauls onto the froes:

Up to this time I could tell [Res'] licks from Solon's and Homer's, even with my back turned, not because they was louder or steadier, because Solon and Homer worked steady, too, and the froe never made no especial noise jest going into the ground, but because they was so infrequent (CS 34)

While Res carries the maul up with all his strength and swings down infrequently, Solon and Homer move steadily and accurately, as a machine operates. Here one gets a glimpse of the secret background of labor in the 1940's. On the one hand, Res personifies a farmer working with his hand; on the other hand, Solon and Homer represent machineries introduced by industrialism. Pursuing these descriptions, we almost reach the core of an interpretation; the labor image Res represents is one of pre-industrial features.

2. Farmers Confront Modernization: Nature Compared to Measured Time

It was observed in the preceding section that the pre-industrial labor represented by Res is vividly contrasted with the mechanized labor represented by Solon. The same may be said, no doubt, of the concept of the time Res or Solon keeps in mind. Let us devote a little more space to examining a watch Whitfield has as a symbol of the concept of time in "Shingles for the Lord." Res describes Whitfield as "standing there right this minute, straddle of that board tree with his watch in his hand" (CS 27). It is easy to associate the Reverend with a clock tower telling the time to people in a village.

It is noteworthy that Res rarely mentions the time ticked or measured by any watch or clock in spite of Whitfield standing just as a clock tower. Res accords his

labor pattern with the movement of the sun as he begins to work at sunrise. The narrator describes Res as follows:

[Res] got up a good hour before daylight and caught the mule and rid down to Killegrews' to borrow the froe and maul. He ought to been back with it in forty minutes. But the sun had rose and I had done milked and fed and was eating my breakfast when he got back (CS 27)

Res leaves home before sunrise and tries to visit Old Man Killegrew, which shows an attitude to begin working at sunrise. In addition, a figure working from sunrise reminds us of peasants farming in the field. Similar examples will spring to mind: Solon. He said to Res, "... I was here at sunup to start it. When the sun goes down, I will consider I have done finished it" (CS 30). He also seems to determine the ending time as well as the beginning of the labor, depending upon the sun. Add to this, Res considers his labor as follows: "What modern ideas? ... I didn't know there was but one idea about work – until it is done, it ain't done, and when it is done, it is" (CS 30). It means that his labor time is not measured by a watch but by the sun, that is, by nature. To put it another way, when he has done the labor assigned to him on that day, it is done.

Solon, despite his intention to start his work at sunrise and finish at sunset, measures his labor time with a watch. The following serves as an example: the narrator observes that "... every now and then [Solon] would turn up with something all figured down into work units..." (CS 29). About the idea of "work units" in "Shingles for the Lord," a person is assigned to three units per hour and it is implied that the idea is from the WPA. Res is late by two hours. Solon and Homer, however, are waiting for Res' arrival without working. Therefore, Solon insists there are six units for which they have to compensate in total. Viewed in this light, Solon can be regarded as a person who depends upon the concept of time measured with a watch.

We must draw more attention to Solon and Res; one tends to measure time with a watch, the other does not. Res, nevertheless, gets involved in the concept of

measured time when he tries to contrive a strategy to outwit Solon. Solon proposes to Res an idea that he can use a dog part-owned by Res to compensate for the work units. Namely, Solon offers to do Res' labor in exchange for Res' share of the ownership of the dog. The dog is jointly owned by Res and Tull, a farmer in Frenchman's Bend. On hearing the suggestion, Res' face and his attitude toward the labor change dramatically. The narrator describes Res as follows:

For about *ten seconds* more, [Res] set there with the maul up over his head, looking at Solon. Then for about *three seconds* he wasn't looking at Solon or at nothing else. Then he was looking at Solon again. It was just exactly like after about *two and nine-tenths seconds* he found out he wasn't looking at Solon, so he looked back at him as quick as he could. (CS 33 emphasis added)

Here, Res seems to take it into his head to outwit Solon in a way that compensates for the delayed work units without discarding his ownership of the dog,⁷ but we

⁷ When Solon suggests that Res should compensate six work units with the dog, the narrator describes Res as "... he [Res] began to laugh. It was laughing all right, because his mouth was open and that's what it sounded like. But it never went no further back then his teeth and it never come nowhere near reaching as high up as his eyes" (CS 33). His smile here is not the one which expresses his humor as he usually does, rather, he thinks of something more seriously. It probably means that Res finds an idea to outwit Solon at this time. In my opinion, Res can realize how to outwit Solon on the trade of the work units and the part-owned dog, for Solon takes the dog into the matter about their labor trade. Therefore, Res finally understands he is afraid of losing his property, in other words, the dog. Faulkner "loves country people and deals lovingly with them and with plant and animal life especially" (Howell 1968, 209), so we can see a strong bond between Res and the dog as there are close bonds between people and animals in other works by Faulkner. In addition, it is ironic that Res can understand the structure of Solon's idea of their labor trade through the technical term of the WPA. Faulkner perhaps used this irony as a critique of Roosevelt's project as

should notice that the narrator depicts Res' movement through units of measured time such as "*ten seconds*," "*three seconds*," and "*two and nine-tenths seconds*." It would be better to say that the narrator interprets Res, who is based on the time determined by nature, through the measured time ticking second by second. Added to this, the duration of the measured time gradually become shorter and shorter, such as "*ten seconds*," "*three seconds*," and "*two and nine-tenths seconds*." This indicates Res moves faster and faster in his labor. In fact, he dramatically improves his efficiency in his labor of replacing the shingles: "But from now on [Res'] sounded jest as light and quick and polite as Solon's or Homer's either, and, if anything, even a little faster, with the shingles piling up steadier than I could stack them, almost ..."(CS 34). Res, interpreted through the measured time, piles up the shingles as fast, and as orderly, as Solon and Homer do. Above all, the transition occurring in Res is symbolic, as his movement is no longer that of a farmer cultivating his field by his hand, but similar to that of machines. That is to say, Res apparently modernized based on the idea of work units from the WPA by way of industrialization.

3. The South Confronts the United States: the Appropriate Way of Life

Central to this issue is the problem of Res, who is caught in the concept of measured time, in other words, work units contrived from the WPA. At the end, Res' actions finally lead to a disaster at the church. Compensating for the delayed work and saving the ownership of the part-owned dog from Solon, Res returns to the church after sunset with his son and starts to replace the shingles with a lamp in the dark. He tries to finish his labor before Solon comes back to the church at sunrise. In order to do that, Res has to work throughout the night and complete the labor before sunrise. Accordingly, Res, who works following to the movement of the sun and during the daytime, is opposed to his labor routine. As a result, Res

Volpe observes (272).

accidentally drops the lamp on the floor of the church, which results in the collapse of the whole church in a fire and he is stigmatized as an "Arsonist" (CS 41) by the Reverent Whitfield. Res shows his willingness to build a new church, but Whitfield bans Res from participating in the reconstruction, saying, "But not one hand shall you [Res] lay to this new house until you have proved to us that you are to be trusted again with the powers and capacities of a man" (CS 41).

What has to be noticed is that Res works not with but against nature, represented by the movement of the sun, which causes the destruction of the church in Yoknapatawpha, the South. The destruction of the church might be interpreted as saying that labor based on industrialized or modernized ideas does not fit in the South, or harms Southerners. As Whitfield prohibits Res to join the reconstruction of the church, Res is finally eliminated from the people in the village, in other words, a community. It is interpreted that the collapsed church might represent the dissolution of the community.⁸

The most important addition about the collapse of the church is that the idea from the WPA or New Deal caused the community in the South to break up. As I have mentioned above, Res violates his own natural labor pattern and literally breaks up the church. It is the result of the fact that Res got involved in the ideas from the WPA such as work units. Considering the conflict between the WPA ideas and Res, here it is useful to quote from *I'll Take My Stand: the South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930) to take an idea of farming according to nature into consideration. One of the authors, Andrew N. Lytle, states in his essay as follows:

⁸ William T. Ruzika suggests that "Yoknapatawpha churches are what churches are everywhere, gathering places for congregations, sacred spaces where a community assembles in the belief that God will manifest Himself But Faulkner's churches always seem to be in difficult circumstances, with congregation or structure in near dissolution, in which the practice of faith becomes genuinely heroic and the working of grace particularly strenuous" (81).

Certain seasons require certain kinds of work: there is a breaking season, a planting season, a cultivating season, a laying-by time, a marketing time. This very loose organization is *determined by nature*, not by man, and points to the fundamental difference between the factory and the soil. (241 emphasis added)

The labor “determined by nature” is seen in the characters of “Shingles for the Lord.” Res provides one example because he indicates a labor pattern determined by the movement of the sun when he borrows tools from Old Man Killegrew in the early morning.

Let us now return to the collapse of the church. The disaster is caused by Res, abandoning the labor pattern along with nature and returning to the church at night with a lamp to work for the purpose of outwitting Solon. Res should be interpreted as a person involved in the concept of work units from the WPA. Thus, the destruction of the church in Yoknapatawpha is interpreted symbolically as the harmful effect of modernization, including industrialism and the New Deal, for people in the South. Namely, the way of life contrived by the government does not fit in the South. The situation can be seen in “The Tall Men” (1941) as well; the McCallums “make the cotton like [they] always done”, despite the Government’s interference with their way of farming (CS 56).⁹ Here, it seems reasonable to conclude that the appropriate way of life of the Southern people should be found by their own means; enforcement by the national government, that is, the United States, causes disasters for the South.

Conclusion

This paper focused on the peasants in “Shingles for the Lord” and revealed that the comical story depicts conflicts between the South and the United States caused by modernization led by the national government, such as industrialization

⁹ As for “The Tall Men,” Howell declares it “is [Faulkner’s] first deliberate attack on the social policies of the New Deal administration” (1959, 324). Or else, Joseph Blotner notes that “[‘The Tall Men’] was about the way politics and war were affecting even the most remote residents of places such as Lafayette County” (1070).

or the idea of work units from the WPA. Moreover, the collapse of the church in Yoknapatawpha symbolizes the dissolution of the communities in the South. These interpretations reflect on the author, as Frederick Karl argues: "Faulkner found himself in the anomalous position of defending every aspect of our technological recovery while lamenting what it meant to our individual lives" (661). Faulkner might be warning people in the South as well as the United States to find their own way of life, otherwise a catastrophes happens sooner or later.

*This is an expanded and revised version of the paper read at the 61th general meeting of The Kyushu American Literature Society held at Kagoshima University on May 9th, 2015. I gratefully acknowledge helpful discussions with the audience on several points in the paper.

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