INTERSECTIONS OF RACE AND CLASS IN "DRY SEPTEMBER" AND "WASH"

“Dry September” and “Wash” are stories written by Faulkner. These stories are placed in the South, and they are from the early decade of 1930s. Between North and South, racism was one difference: “You better go back North where you came from. The South don't want your kind here.” (171) Referring to “niggerlovers”.

The stories have some similarities. The main characters in both stories are white: in “Dry September” are Minnie Cooper and John McLendon, and in “Wash” are Wash and Sutpen. John McLendon and Sutpen had both gone to the war, even though they were different wars: McLendon “had commanded troops at the front in France and had been decorated for valor” (171) and Sutpen went to the Civil War and came back “with his citation for gallantry from the hand of General Lee” (539).

In “Dry September” the story takes place because Will Mayes, a black man, has been accused by a white woman, Minnie Cooper. After being accused, all men at the barber shop do not care if he is guilty or not, as in this society black people were oppressed and powerless (racial prejudice): “Wont you take a white woman's word before a nigger's?”. (169). In this society, black people belong to the lowest class: “You mean to tell me," McLendon said, "that you'd take a nigger's word before a white woman's?” (172).

In contrast, in “Wash”, Wash belongs to the lowest class as Will, even though he is white. Wash lives in a shack that used to belong to Sutpen. Negroes were superior to Wash, and this is the reason why they laughed at Wash and called him “white trash”: “It was not the first time they had laughed at him, calling him white trash behind his back” (536). However, Wash does not consider himself at the bottom of society not only because he had created a fantasy where he is about to become Sutpen’s friend and associate, but also because he considered himself to be superior to the black people. Wash misinterprets the Bible, believing himself superior to the black people: “Negroes, whom the Bible told him had been created and cursed by God to be brute and vassal to all men of white skin” (538).

Moreover, in both stories the theme of class is important. In “Dry September” white people are superior to black people, but Minnie does not belong to the upper class. Minnie is around forty years old, she was no longer slender, and she was still not married: “She watched the girls with whom she had grown up as they married and got homes and children, but no man ever called on her steadily” (174). This is the reason why she uses Will as a scapegoat, so she has an excuse for not being married yet. All the people will believe her, as the accused is black: “Do you accuse a white woman of lying?” (170).

In “Wash”, Sutpen represents the traditional Southern aristocracy before the war. He had a plantation, and he was related to slavery. When he came back from the war, he: “returned (…) to a ruined plantation” (539), exemplifying the degeneracy of the aristocrats.

In conclusion, in both stories the theme of race and the theme of class are essential. In “Dry September”, the story could not have taken place if Will Mayes was not powerless and black for the time. In “Wash”, as Wash lived in the lowest position, it was easy for him to escape from reality creating his own fantasy.

Word count: 587.