

A week in december and bonfire of the vanities essay



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Faulks and Wolfe present the perpetual desire and greed, imperatives which have driven characters within their novels "A Week in December" and "Bonfire of the Vanities". Faulks presents London as multicultural though distinctly uncultured metropolis in the opening page of his latest novel "A Week in December". From the opening sentence, we as the reader envisage this bleak building site from Faulks description of "Shepherds Bush" which we now know as Westfield's shopping centre as "a compression of trade in a city centre".

Wolfe paints a city racked with sin; the "unreal city" that Eliot feared so greatly. The novels are set in conflicting economic; 1980s America at a time of prosperity and 2007 London upon the brink of recession, both writers provide the reader with a social commentary of its time. Wolfe's "Bonfire of the Vanities" introduces the relatively minor character of the Mayor, and the important character of Reverend Bacon, the predominant religious figure, in the prologue which establishes the novel's background of inflamed race relations. This setting immediately contrasts with Sherman McCoy's insular, high-status world.

McCoy does not worry about race; he is preoccupied by his obsession money. His domestic drama seems to be untouched by the discontent brewing in Harlem; only brief run-ins with the "street punks" and "breaking news" on the television bring out his racial consciousness. As a rich, pedigreed white man "a Master of the Universe" McCoy is privileged not to have to think about race. Wolfe presents us with a poisonous atmosphere, fuelled by discontent and social injustice (of which W.

A. S. P. like McCoy enjoy the advantage) and manipulated by shrewd and power-hungry provocateurs like the Mayor and, above all, Reverend Bacon. Reverend Al" Sharpton does not appear to have any political agenda beyond whipping up tensions throughout the city whenever there is even the slightest hint that blacks have been attacked for racial reasons. " this is much like Revend Bacon.

Hypocrisy is rife in this novel, and most evident in the two leaders depicted on opposing sides, Reverend Bacon and the Mayor of New York. Neither of these men are truly concerned with the people of New York, but rather with their own advancement and profit. Each, in his way, is racist, but decries racism at every turn. Each purports to be " of the people" but uses his position of power for monetary gain. Faulks presents us with a similar, yet bleaker, multicultural society. The narrative describes the city geographically through the view of football teams the only way; it seems, to link the different cultures.

Hassan Al Rashid is exposed as the son of chutney magnate Farooq Al Rashid. Unlike " Bonfire" there is no distinct divide between the different social classes, for example the Bronx and Manhattan. There is however a vast amount of controversy when Faulks addresses the religious aspects. Faulks' main focus is on the Islamic fundamentalist; Hassan.

Whilst having a wealthy background, Hassan finds consolation in his religion. His wealth is what sets him apart from others, recognising this from an early age, and was apprehensive about being picked on for this and his parents' religion. Faulks depicts the journey of a young man coming to terms with his

identity, trying hard to find ways to fit in, much like the business men in Wolfe's "Bonfire of the Vanities". Wolfe has two of his main characters, Sherman McCoy and Lawrence Kramer, repeatedly questioning the entire world they have built for themselves.

When Sherman's world is shaken by the threat of his arrest he vacillates between wishing he had given up his materialist high-society rat race life in New York and moved to Tennessee, and trying to salvage that same New York life. Lawrence Kramer, through his fantasies and pursuit of Shelly Thomas, seeks to escape his life of prosecuting and feeding "the chow" (black and Latino defendants) into the criminal justice system in the Bronx. These men search for their social gain. Sherman McCoy and Lawrence Kramer are immoral character within Tom Wolfe's "Bonfire of the Vanities".

Each of these men have chosen and pursued their professions, and have likewise married and had a child, but they each fight against the families and lives they have created. Each of them lack the maturity to accept the responsibilities of husband and father, and seek to "cheat" on that life through fantasy and infidelity. Each of them is intelligent enough to know the imperfection of their lives. Sherman knows that the Park Avenue obsession with wealth and its trappings masks a soulless existence, and Lawrence understands that the criminal justice system he serves is often very unfair, and he is doomed to a life of middle-class struggling in Manhattan, but neither of them have the maturity or courage to break out of their lives to make something different for themselves. And through this lack of moral strength they betray their wives, and vacillate between trying to justify their existence within their flawed worlds, and fantasizing their way out of them.

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This kind of behaviour is paralleled almost directly between the two men, albeit on different social levels.

Each of them lives beyond their means and balm his ego with an affair. Their moral failures are merely symptoms of their shared diseases, cowardice and apathy, coupled with ambition, avarice, selfishness and childishness. Hassan however is searching for himself. The most obvious representation in religion is represented through Hassan who is led to believe Jihad is moral, as a result of being caught up in Islamic fundamentalism.

The religion leads to him having a misconstrued idea of what is morally right. With his strong religious beliefs Hassan find it hard to accept the presentation of other religions; Christianity believing it " disgraceful" and how they seem to have " forgotten the true meaning of religion" however this further emphasises the importance of it within Hassan's life. Faulks presents Hassan as a " product of society. " Arguably religion is the motivation for Jihad; however it is Hassan's extremist interpretation of religion, one fed to him by Salim that would lead to the immoral act he wishes to carry out. We can compare Hassan to his father Farooq, whilst they have the same religion, Farooq's outlook is merely positive unlike Hassan's. Not only is he " Strong in his devotions and pure in his behaviour' but believes his religion and " Spiritual belief is secure'.

' His faith enabled him to ride over financial turbulence and local hostility because he knew there was a truth that lay beyond cash flow and VAT'.

Unlike Hassan Farooq's faith results in creating a character that is morally

aware and stable. Hassan does manage to regain what is “morally correct” and his own identity. With the help of Shahla, whose unrequited love for Hassan brings him to find love himself.

Islam is not the only religion explored with “A Week in December”; Christianity is also portrayed as immoral. ‘They let eternal life slip through their hands’ and they do not seem to care about the ‘truth’ or what is beyond the life they live in. Christians blasphemed and drank and fornicated’ were ‘unfaithful in hotel rooms but got married in a Church’. The morals of Christians as a nation are put under a single stereotype in Hassan’s mind. He sees himself and his race, as Sherman McCoy does later, as superior. Faulks emphasises Christians immorality and the description of Christians does not allow readers to look upon them favourably.

However it is not Christians that he sees as immoral, it comes as a result of the people’s lack of respect for their religion; they mistreat it and ignore its fundamental morals. The people who claim to be religious are immoral.

Reverend Bacon’s immorality regarding his religion comes from his misuse of it in order to obtain power. The trust people have in him due to him being a religious leader allows him to not be suspected of such serious immorality.

Bacon is also able to manipulate the large angry crowd near the end of the novel. He creates such anger within the mob that a riot breaks out in the courts. Ultimately, he uses aggressive techniques, such as the mob and phrases such as ‘there is no escape’ to frighten and intimidates his opponents. Wolfe’s depiction of Reverend Bacon is that like “Reverend Al Sharpton” of the “Tawana Brawley case.

” John Veal’s again is amoral. His cares are for himself, and does not reflect or see any faults. He shows no acknowledgement of his family or anything that goes on around them. His profession is his life, and family a hobby. Whilst having a family he doesn’t not know them, ignoring his drug abusing son whose lack of attention and wishing to escape reality causes him to “whitey”.

Veals’s semi-detached state connects to the novel’s over-arching theme - the contemporary penchant for creating virtual realities. Jenny has a character in an online role-playing game; Finbar has his fantasy football; Gabriel, more traditionally, immerses himself in Balzac; while his brother has the most sealed-off virtual reality of all, as a schizophrenic Veals’ sinisterly unobtrusive plotting, as he sets up a mega-deal that will, incidentally, bring down a major bank and plunge the “real economy” further into disaster, demonstrates the immorality of the character. The literary critic R. Tranter, the junior barrister Gabriel Northwood, the two misguided youths, Finbar Veals and Hassan al-Rashid, are depicted with varying degrees of empathy and plausibility.

But John Veals has the reliable qualities of the monomaniacal villain, whose diabolical plans Faulks unfolds with relish. Veals, who doesn’t read books, (almost) never laughs, does nothing that doesn’t give him an edge in his profession, is a creation of the age, “detached . . . from the real world”, diagnosed by his wife as living in a state of “functional autism”. But he is also a kind of Moriarty figure, a Napoleon of (banking) crime far more effectively wicked than Faulks’s Bond baddie, Julius Gerner.

Veal's, Like McCoy sees himself as a "master of the universe". Whilst John Veal's does not crave the wealth status of McCoy and the American businessmen he does see his superiority among the financiers. Veal's detaches himself from reality and the world he lives in isolating himself from society and his family. He is a determined efficient businessman with a strong work ethic, like Sherman he has positive qualities yet, his cautiousness breaches the point of paranoia.

His dull, bland personality and superficial appearance creates a one dimensional character. However that is the point of bankers and financiers to be, as his wife Vanessa says "functionally autistic" with no interest but hypothetical profit. In the bible it says "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul." Mark 8: 36.

What will the main gain If He becomes rich and have all possession but he has no place in the Kingdom of GOD. Nothing. McCoy and Veal's is representative of this. They disregard any morals to get to the top and become "masters of the universe".

Tom Wolfe ruthlessly exposes the superficiality of 1980s culture. His criticism is not only confined to the very rich, the materialism of middle-class people is derided, too. Sebastian Faulks exposes the materialist obsessed nation with which greed and selfishness has taken over. Both authors provide a commentary upon modern society.

The yearn for possession shadows societies morals and attitudes. Sherman McCoy's downfall comes from his infidelity to his wife; this could be seen as a catalyst. By the end of the novel he labels himself as "dead". Whilst making <https://assignbuster.com/a-week-in-december-and-bonfire-of-the-vanities-essay/>

a realisation that he was the predecessor of his own fate he becomes aware that greed and the want for more caused his downfall. He gained nothing. Without a soul you merely exist.

No emotions. This is similar to Veal's. His life is removed from the conscious state. Yet whilst having the immorality Sherman does, there is no downfall which comes from this.

Veal's gets a "second chance" at life. Both Wolfe and Faulks have produced novels of their time. The reflection upon society that this is a superficial nation which has become fixated on materialism than morality is made evident. Whilst questioning the morality of religion among society and the effect of advancement in consumerism on our nation, both novels portray a society that has lost the true meaning of life.