

A Sinner's Justification

In *The Unvanquished*, Rosa Millard is a complex character, specifically when it comes to her morality. This is especially true as it relates to religion and her relationship to the Lord. Rosa appears to be a Southern lady by attending church regularly. Her physical appearance and actions support this image as she wears dresses, hats, holds umbrellas and sews by the fireside.

Enhancing this image is the description provided by Bayard of Granny polishing the silver service every Tuesday and calling a room in the house a "library" rather than an office, because the room has one bookshelf in it which contained a variety of books. Bayard also describes how Granny would whip him and Ringo first when they told a lie or kept quiet about something, and then make them kneel down with her and ask the Lord for forgiveness. While outward appearances make Granny seem highly religious, her actions during the war suggest the opposite. There are several circumstances where her actions would not be considered moral and do not align with Christian values and beliefs. How can this be supported by a quote from the book and by Digital Yoknapatawpha?

Rosa's prayer occurred when she went to church with Ringo and Bayard to discuss her past actions. Normally when someone goes to pray, they beg for forgiveness or ask for repentance. Perhaps this quote wasn't actually a prayer, instead a confession or a discussion of justification. This is because she never mentioned the words forgiveness or apologizes in her prayer like others would. Instead, she explains her actions. This can be seen when she says "I sinned" frequently throughout the quote. She repeats it many times because she wants to emphasize the fact that she recognizes that hiding Bayard and Ringo, lying to the Yankee soldier, borrowing horses and the mule selling business was sinning. She says, "I defy you or anyone to

say I did” to try to convince God about her justification of her actions. The “you” in this quote represents God and she indicates she is right and God and anyone else is wrong about her sinning for the wrong reasons. With the use of the word “defy”, she uses a powerful word to challenge God and to show how certain of herself she is that she didn’t sin for revenge. In addition, the you is Rosa because, even as she speaks, she is trying to convince herself of everything she is saying to God. This is because she is talking out loud to God, but she is also hearing herself say these words out loud. She is telling herself the positive side of her hiding Bayard and Ringo and the mule-selling business. With the emphasis of “I sinned”, it is evident she is realizing what she did and wants to make her sins sound positive to God and herself.

As mentioned in the quote, her most recent sin was scamming the Yankee soldiers to give her mules so she could sell them back to the Union Army for money. Rosa was able to get away with this with the help of Ringo, Bayard, and Ab Snopes. Ringo signed letters with different Colonel’s signatures that indicated a certain number of mules were needed. Rosa, Bayard, and Ringo gave the Yankees the letter to get the mules and, subsequently, Ab sells them to the Union Army for money. These actions are not ones of honesty and are not morally right which goes against Christian beliefs. However, Rosa tries to make this action right by using the money to give back to the poor in her town. In the quote, she references this when she says, “I sinned for the sake of food and clothes for Your own creatures who could not help themselves.” She is explaining that she is sinning so she can help those who can’t afford the necessities in life. With the use of the words “Your own creatures”, it is putting ownership on God for creating poor people. “Your” is a possessive word which shows it is God’s wrongdoing and God’s own people. Also, Rosa is trying to blame God for making people perpetually poor when she is telling him the situation is his fault with the use of the words “You have seen fit to make it a lost cause”. The

“You” is showing Rosa giving God responsibility for what he did. Rosa also attempts to make her mule-selling business sound more innocent when she says, “to make it a lost cause.” Rosa is trying to show how serious the situation of the poor in her town is with the use of the words “lost cause”. It shows the situation is unfixable and this makes her look heroic for the mule-selling business and the help it provided the poor. In addition, “You have seen fit to make it a lost cause” proves that Rosa thinks highly of herself and puts herself over God since she is helping problems that he is creating. This is because her believed superiority over God is not typical in Christianity where God is above all. This prayer shows what Rosa does when she commits a sin. She makes her actions seem honorable because of her intentions. This goes back to deciding what is morally right versus wrong in religion.

In the beginning of the quote, Rosa also discusses when she first sinned. This was when she lied to the soldier that Ringo and Bayard were not in their house when they were. She hid Ringo and Bayard under her clothing while she sat in her rocking chair. Rosa did this because Ringo and Bayard fired a gun at a Yankee soldier and ended up killing one of their horses. Ringo and Bayard were going to get in trouble with the Yankee, so Rosa hid them and lies to the sergeant to protect them. Even when specifically questioned by a Colonel she continues to hold to her story and does not tell the truth. Once the house is clear, Rosa’s religious values show when she knelt and asked the Lord to forgive her for telling a lie. However, when Rosa is in church later on she says that “I did not sin for revenge”, she is acknowledging what Christian value she will be perceived as breaking and offers what she sees her actions as instead. Revenge has a negative connotation because it is when someone retaliates against another due to them not agreeing with their actions. She says, “I sinned first for justice”. Justice can be seen as positive when it is someone doing something for moral correctness. She turned the negatively connotative

word *revenge* into the positively connotative word *justice*. During this situation, Rosa hid Bayard and Ringo so they didn't get in trouble for shooting the Yankee's horse. She showed she wasn't mad at them about the shooting itself but more about them using a curse word. This was seen when Rosa had them get a pan of water and a new bar of soap to wash their mouths out.

Another instance where Rosa does something that might be considered sinful is when she "borrows" horses for her return home from Jefferson. She shows up with strange horses pulling the wagon. When asked where they came from she said she borrowed them, and that nobody was there – so she doesn't even know who she borrowed them from. Later, she makes Ringo and Bayard walk to Mrs. Compson's house rather than take the horses because "They are borrowed horses" and "I'm going to take care of them until I can return them". Later she also insists on driving the wagon because she was the one who borrowed them. In reality it could be argued that Rosa stole the horses, but in her mind, she had borrowed them. She continues to justify the action as borrowing by making sure she is the one responsible for the horses, not anyone else. She is also protecting others from getting in trouble if they were in possession of the horses.

Rosa's relationship with her family and religion can be confirmed on Digital Yoknapatawpha. If the person visiting the website goes to her Characters by Location in Events Graph, they can see how many times she is mentioned at a specific location in the book. In the graph, it shows the Sartoris Plantation Cabin as number 1, Sartoris Plantation as number 2, and Episcopal Church as number 3. This order of locations that Rosa spends the most time at is important to show where her priorities lie. Rosa's activity is seen at her family's cabin and plantation the most followed by the church. This provides evidence that she puts her family, and their needs, first as she is seen there most frequently in the book. An example of this comes early in the book as she reads a cookbook to the boys. It is evident that she does this regularly because

Ringo chooses to read about Cokynut cake every time, indicating that this is a frequent activity. In addition, the plantation is where Rosa chooses to bury a chest of valuables early in the book. This demonstrates her life centering around the plantation. Her devotion to her family is clear in the way she protects both Bayard and Ringo – making sure that they don't get in trouble for shooting the horse and making sure they are never in possession of the borrowed horses. The next most frequent location after her family's plantation is the church which shows that going to church and her religion is relevant in her life as well. Another important factor of this graph is the number of times she was mentioned at each location. Rosa was mentioned at the Sartoris Cabin fifty-four times, Sartoris Plantation fifty-one times, and the Episcopal Church twenty-two times. The other locations vary from one to fourteen times she was mentioned at them. You can infer that the plantation and the church are the most important locations to her since there is a large difference between the times she was mentioned at her plantation and the church versus the other locations. Since Rosa puts her family and church above all else, that leads to them being sources of complication in her life. However, with her priority of family over religion can explain why she hid Bayard and Ringo, lied to the Yankee soldier, and why she is trying to defend her sinning in her prayer. She won't choose being true to her religion over her family.

To conclude, Rosa Millard is a complex character in *The Unvanquished* because of her relationship with religion. Religion is clearly important to her, and she tries to teach the boys religious ways. At times, her actions go against her Christian beliefs and values, but it is always to help her family and others. This can be confirmed on Digital Yoknapatawpha on her Characters by Location in Events Graph. It proves that she is mentioned the most at her family's plantation and the church above any other locations. Where Rosa spends the most time indicates where her priorities lie and hence how complicated this relationship is.

My Quote:

“I did not sin for revenge; I defy you or anyone to say I did. I sinned first for justice. And after that first time, I sinned for more than justice: I sinned for the sake of food and clothes for Your own creatures who could not help themselves; for children who had given their fathers, for wives who had given their husbands, for old people who had given their sons, to a holy cause, even though You have seen fit to make it a lost cause. What I gained, I shared with them. It is true I kept some of it back, but I am the best judge of that because I, too, have dependents who may be orphans, too, at this moment for all I know. And if this be sin in Your sight, I take this on my conscience too. Amen.” (Faulkner, 1938, pg.147).