THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE WORK OF

WILLIAM FAULKNER

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THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE WORK OF
WILLIAM FAULKNER

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During William Faulkner's tenure as writer-in-residence at the University of Virginia he was asked whether it was easier to create a male or female character in literature. To this the author replied, "It's much more fun to try to write about women because I think women are marvelous, they're wonderful, and I know very little about them, and so I just— it's much more fun to try to write about women than about men—more difficult, yes."¹

Yet many critics have divined in Faulkner's work an attitude of suspicion and distrust toward women. Olga Vickery states that in Faulkner's writing, the woman is viewed as the male's enemy "because her attraction deprives him of the freedom of choice and of rational control over his own actions."² In the same vein, Irving Howe asserts, "Faulkner is all too willing to proclaim the subtle and insidious powers of women, to evoke a sense of their dizzying attraction, even to speculate, in the style of legend, on female malevolence as one of the root terrors of

¹Faulkner in the University, edited by Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1959), p. 45.

existence." Continuing, Howe cites examples of this attitude in Faulkner's work:

In Absalom, Absalom! Henry Bon learns that "you can't beat women anyhow and that if you are wise or dislike trouble and uproar you don't even try to"—a lesson Faulkner never tires of repeating, though always with the certainty that men, being victims of themselves, must prove incapable of learning it. Quentin Compson goes further than Bon: "women," he says "are like that . . . they have an affinity for evil." But on the other hand an equal amount of material could be quoted in which Faulkner expresses high admiration for women. For example, in The Town Gavin Stevens thinks "how apparently all Snopeses are male, as if the mere and simple incident of woman's divinity precluded Snopesishness and made it paradox," and in The Reivers Lucius concludes that "women are wonderful. They can bear anything because they are wise enough to know that all you have to do with grief and trouble is just go on through them and come out on the other side."

During his lectures at Nagano, Japan, Faulkner was questioned on this point. "Whenever I read your novels I feel

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4 Ibid., op. 142-143.
that you have been obsessed by the idea that women are causes of all evil and trouble. . . . Would you say something about that?" The author replied by citing examples of admirable women such as Dilsey and Rosa Millard whom he had created, and concluded, "The opinion that women cause the trouble is not my own. . . . I would be sorry to think that my work had given anyone the impression that I held women in morally a lower position than men." Continuing, Faulkner remarked, "The women that have been unpleasant characters in my books were not created to be unpleasant characters, let alone unpleasant women. They were used as implements, instruments, to tell a story, which I was trying to tell." Yet these statements must not be taken as conclusive, for Faulkner's public statements do not always coincide with the points of view found in his writing. Only by an examination of the body of Faulkner's work can one effectively evaluate his literary opinion of women. Such a study does reveal certain consistent attitudes toward various kinds of women. So persistent are these types of characterizations and subsequent points of view, that the women in Faulkner's work readily fall into several categories from which one may

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8 Ibid., p. 70.

9 Ibid., p. 67.
ascertain at least the author's subconscious view of the female sex.

Thus this study attempts to categorize the major women characters of Faulkner, and with a brief description of each, cast light both upon the relationship of that character to Faulkner's other women and to the author's ultimate view of womankind.
CHAPTER I

GALLANT WOMEN

During his lectures at Nagano Faulkner said,

I think that as fine an influence as any young man can have is one reasonable old woman to listen to, an aunt, or neighbor, because they are much more sensible than men, they have to be. They have held families together and it's because of families that a race is continued.¹

A group of older women in Faulkner's work parallel this description, and exhibit those qualities of endurance, courage, and love which the author deemed necessary for a woman to rise "to actual stardom in the role of the matriarch, arbitrating from the fireside corner of a crone the pride and destiny of her family."² Both Negro and white, these women are distinguished by their ability to realistically face the problems of life and effectively cope with them.

Mrs. Rosa Millard (Granny) is the earliest example of Faulkner's matriarch-type woman. Though an elderly person, she manages to not only care for her grandson and Negro


servants during the Civil War, but also sets up a system of illegally requisitioning mules from Union troops which even the crafty Ab Snopes regards with awe. Snopes exclaims, "When Kernel Sartoris left here, he told me to look out for you against General General Grant and them. What I wonder is, if somebody hadn't better tell Abe Lincoln to look out for General Grant against Miss Rosa Millard."³

Granny believes in the traditional moral values of honesty and integrity, and her grandson Bayard reflects that Granny never whipped his Negro companion, Ringo, or himself "for anything . . . except lying, and that even when it wasn't even a told lie, but just keeping quiet . . . she would whip us first and then make us kneel down . . . to ask the Lord to forgive us."⁴ But the old woman does not use her traditional values as a crutch on which to base unthinking behavior. Rather, like Huckleberry Finn she transgresses her own code of behavior in order to commit acts which her deeper conscience tells her she must.

The first instance of this sort of action is the episode in which Granny hides Bayard and Ringo under her hoop skirt while a Union officer questions her about the whereabouts of two young boys who have just shot the regiment's finest horse.


⁴Ibid., p. 31.
Aided by the officer's decency, Granny courageously fibs and routs the enemy from her home, assuring them that there are no children in her family.

This lie in defense of the two youngsters is a prelude to her more significant mule-trading activities. After acquiring paper imprinted with Union letterheads, Granny and Ringo set up an intricate system of requisitioning mules from one set of Federal troops and selling them to another. Granny loans the mules on which she cannot blot out the U.S. brand, and most of the money which she gains from this illegal venture, to the poverty stricken hill people and freed Negroes.

The grandmother—Robin Hood suffers pangs of guilt for these robberies, yet she undauntedly, courageously, defends her acts even to God. Kneeling in church she prays,

I have sinned. I have stolen, and I have borne false witness against my neighbor, though that neighbor was an enemy of my country. And more than that, I have caused these children to sin. I hereby take their sins upon my conscience.

But I did not sin for gain or greed. I did not sin for revenge. I defy You or anyone to say I did. I sinned first for justice. And after that I sinned for the sake of food and clothes for Your own creatures who could not help themselves.  

Granny's death comes as a result of her concern for the return of her son-in-law, John Sartoris, to a ruined plantation and desolate future. Tempted by the fifteen hundred dollars which Snopes promises her, Granny succumbs to his

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5 Ibid., p. 113.
plan to requisition four thoroughbred horses from the fierce raider, Grumby, so that she might have money with which John can begin life anew.

Bayard tries to prevent this perilous expedition, but Granny is as convinced of her invincibility as the Ringo who earlier said, "And don't yawl worry about Granny. She 'cide what she want and then she kneel down about ten seconds and tell God what she aim to do, and then she git up and do hit. And then that don't like hit can git outen the way or git trompled."  

But Grumby does not accede to Granny's conviction that "Even Yankees do not harm old women," and Bayard and Ringo find the indomitable old lady murdered in Grumby's cabin.

Mrs. Virginia Sartoris Du Pre (Miss Jenny) is perhaps Faulkner's most admirable woman character. First appearing as a young widow in The Unvanquished, Miss Jenny dominates the characters in Sartoris, and is seen still unsubdued before her death in the short story, "There Was a Queen."

Miss Jenny's husband was killed at the beginning of the Civil War, and having no other family, she traveled alone from North Carolina to Mississippi in order to live with her brother, John Sartoris. With her she brought only a lace parasol, two bottles of old sherry, two jasmine cuttings, and

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6 Ibid., p. 75.  
7 Ibid., p. 119.
some panes of colored glass which she had salvaged from the family home in North Carolina.

In The Unvanquished, with her eyes "intent and very wise instead of intolerant," she is the only person who advises Bayard not to shoot his father's murderer and thus forsake the Southern code of vengeance. Like Rosa Millard, Miss Jenny possesses the courage necessary to value her personal morality above the behavioral codes of the society in which she lives.

Olga Vickery contends that the women in Faulkner's work possess no individual identity and gain their status in the world solely from the men with whom they are associated. But, on the contrary, Miss Jenny relies only on her own character for identity and in fact disdains the importance of the men by whom she is surrounded.

Firmly believing in the superiority of women over men because of the former's ability to suffer and endure, Miss Jenny declares,

"Men can't seem to stand anything. . . . Do you think a man would sit day after day and month after month in a house miles from nowhere and spend the time between casualty lists tearing up bedclothes . . . to make lint, and watching sugar and flour and meat dwindling away, . . . and hiding in nigger cabins while drunken Yankee generals set fire to the house your

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8 Faukner, The Unvanquished, p. 173.

great-great-grandfather built and you and all your folks were born in? Don't talk to me about men suffering in war.

Miss Jenny is seen by Narcissa as the embodiment of this indomitable spirit of women, who through the chaos of war, passively prevail in situations which would defeat men. "And she [Narcissa] thought how much finer that gallantry which never lowered blade to foes no sword could find; that uncomplaining steadfastness of those unsung (ay, unwept too) women than the fustian and useless glamour of the men that obscured it."11

Miss Jenny does not regret her unmarried state, and in fact feels marriage to be something of a necessary evil. When Narcissa Benbow asks if she should marry, the older woman replies, "I wouldn't advise anybody to marry. You won't be happy, but then, women haven't got civilized enough yet to be happy unmarried, so you might as well try it. We can stand anything, anyhow."12

Although Miss Jenny fulfills the feminine role of "mothering" the men in her life, she does not indulge in the feminine weakness of excessive, smothering concern for them. She makes old Bayard remove his wet boots and commandeers him into seeing about the wen on his face and she makes young Bayard drink milk and sits all night by his bedside when he

11Ibid., p. 286.
12Ibid., p. 212.
returns from the war. But she laughs at Narcissa’s concern for Bayard’s whereabouts after he is thrown by the horse, and she later tells the young woman, “I’ve lived with these bull-headed Sartorises for eighty years, and I’ll never give a single ghost of ‘em the satisfaction of shedding a tear over him.”

Miss Jenny is a memorable character not only for her moral strength and endurance, but also for the humor, fire, and audacity with which she faces life. In one of the first episodes of Sartoris Miss Jenny, an eighty-year-old matron, is seen shocking the younger women at her bridge table with the off-color stories which she cheerfully persists in telling at the wrong moment and to the wrong people. Not inhibited by the traditional image of the soft-spoken Southern Lady, Miss Jenny “had a fine command of language at all times, but when her ire was aroused she soared without effort to sublime heights. Hers was a forceful clarity and a colorful simplicity and a bold use of metaphor that Demosthenes would have envied and which even mules comprehended.”

Miss Jenny successfully combines a veneration for the traditions of the past with a lively interest in the present. She proudly tells of the exploits of the first Bayard during the Civil War and speaks with a voice “proud and still as banners in the dust” of the time she danced a walse with

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13 Ibid., p. 42  
14 Ibid., p. 47.  
15 Ibid., p. 32.
the Confederate hero, Jeb Stuart. Yet on her first ride in young Bayard's new car the eighty-year-old lady exclaims, "I wished I smoked cigarettes," and then demands, "Is that as fast as it'll go?"

The events in the short story, "There Was a Queen," occur ten years after those in *Sartoris*, and the title obviously refers to Miss Jenny. Ten years of living with Narcissa have revealed to Miss Jenny the uglier aspects of Narcissa's character, but the old lady will allow no one to condemn Bayard's widow. Elnora, the Negro servant, tells her son that Miss Jenny acts in this way because she, unlike Narcissa, is "quality." Quality, Elnora tells her son, is "something you don't know nothing about, because you born too late to see any of it except her."

Outraged when Narcissa brings the Yankee Federal agent to her home for dinner, Miss Jenny stoically listens when the young woman tells her that she has spent a weekend in Memphis with the man in order to recover her illicit love letters. Miss Jenny then retires to her darkened room, dons the ancient black hat she wears when worrying, and later that night Elnora finds the old lady dead.

Mrs. Grier, who appears in the companion short stories "Two Soldiers" and "Shall Not Perish," is a modern example of

16 Ibid., p. 77.  
17 Ibid.  
the courage and endurance with which women face the circumstances brought about by war. Olga Vickery maintains that in Faulkner’s work "it is only during the absence of the father and the husband that the woman exercises her latent and repressed strength,"¹⁹ but in these stories Mrs. Grier exhibits a much greater fortitude than her easy-going husband, who is characterized as being perpetually behind in his farm work.

When Pete tells his father that he has voluntarily enlisted in the Army so he can go fight the Japanese, Mr. Grier’s first reaction is "What’ll I do for help on the farm with you gone? It seems to me I’ll get mighty far behind."²⁰ But Mrs. Grier instinctively realizes the importance of this action to Pete although she cannot rationally understand the reason behind it. She explains,

I don’t want him to go. I would rather go myself in his place, if I could. . . . But I remember my brother Marsh in that other war. He had to go to that one when he wasn’t but nineteen, and our mother couldn’t understand it then any more than I can now. But she told Marsh if he had to go, he had to go. And so, if Pete’s got to go to this one, he’s got to go to it.²¹

When the family receives "the little pale envelope that didn’t even need a stamp on it"²² Mrs. Grier knows before she

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¹⁹ Vickery, p. 259.
²⁰ Faulkner, Collected Stories, p. 85.
²¹ Ibid., p. 84.
²² Ibid., p. 101.
opens it that Pete has been killed. But it is only when the wealthy Major De Spain's son is also killed that Mrs. Grier's family become aware of the decision which she made when she learned of Pete's death. The younger Grier son explains,

So Father and I found out that Mother not only knew all the time it [another war death] was going to happen again, but that she already knew what she was going to do when it did, not only this time but the next one too, and the one after that and the one after that, until the day finally came when all the grieving about the earth, the rich and the poor too, . . . could say, "At least this there was some point to why we grieved."23

Mrs. Grier takes her family to the grieving De Spain home where she is greeted by Major De Spain with the bitter words, "I remember now. You too were advised that your son poured out his blood on the altar of unpreparedness and inefficiency. What do you want?"24 As the visit progresses Major De Spain becomes aware that the purpose of Mrs. Grier's trip is to convince him that she is certain their sons did not die in vain, although a rational explanation for their deaths eludes her. The stalwart woman explains,

Maybe women are not supposed to know why their sons must die in battle; maybe all they are supposed to do is just grieve for them. But my son knew why. And my brother went to the war when I was a girl, and our mother didn't know why either, but he did . . . and my son knew why he had to go to this one, and he knew I knew he did even though I didn't, just as he knew that this child here and I both knew he would

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23 Ibid., p. 103. 24 Ibid., p. 107.
not come back. But he knew why, even if I didn't, couldn't, never can. So it must be all right, even if I couldn't understand it.

At this De Spain's bitter face softens and breaks into tears, and the valiant Mrs. Grier says, "That's right... Weep. Not for him: for us, the old, who don't know why." 26

Mrs. Samantha Ewing, who appears in the short story "Golden Land," is not drawn in the depth of Miss Jenny or Granny Millard, but in the glimpse of her presented in the story she is seen to possess the vigor and fortitude characteristic of the other two women.

Brought from Nebraska to California by her son, Ira, Mrs. Ewing's needs are provided for by the various charge accounts set up for her by him. The old lady, who had learned honor, courage, and pride by enduring the hardships of frontier Nebraska, tries to impart these virtues to her California-bred grandchildren, Samantha and Voyd, but her efforts are blocked by Ira, who with his money intends to give his children the life of ease and luxury denied him in his childhood.

The results of this life devoid of challenge are seen in the state of the Ewing family at the time of the story. The younger Samantha is the center of a front page sex scandal, Voyd is effeminate and shiftless, and Ira's marriage is a hollow relationship which he tries to replace with affairs and drink. But the depth of the family's depravity is seen

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26 Ibid.
in their reaction to Samantha's scandal. Voyd comments that at last Samantha has found a part which she plays well, and Ira accepts a 30 per cent cut of the money paid for a front page scoop of his connection with the story. Only the elder Mrs. Ewing retains the human dignity and compassion to be truly concerned about Samantha's welfare.

Mrs. Ewing begs Ira for money with which to return to Nebraska but after his final refusal, with that "strange peace gained through fortitude and the will and strength to endure," she accepts his decision and staunchly resolves, "I will stay here and live forever."

Miss Worsham in Go Down Moses is obviously the same character as the Miss Habersham who briefly appears in The Unvanquished and is later more fully developed in Intruder in the Dust.

In The Unvanquished Miss Habersham is allied with Drucilla's mother in the battle to solemnize the girl's marriage to John Sartoris, but in Go Down Moses Miss Worsham assumes the stature which makes the woman in Intruder in the Dust so admirable. Having grown up as a sister with Mollie Beauchamp, the once rich but now penniless Miss Worsham, with great sacrifice, helps the Negro woman properly bury her executed criminal grandson. Similarly in Intruder in the

27 Faulkner, Collected Stories, p. 712.

28 Ibid., p. 726.
Dust, with only the aid of young Chick Mallison, Miss Habersham produces evidence which extricates Mollie's husband, Lucas, from charges of murder.

At the time of the novel the seventy-year-old spinster lived in "the columned colonial house on the edge of town which had not been painted since her father died and had neither water nor electricity in it," and for a living raised and peddled chickens and vegetables. The old woman was a descendant of one of Jefferson's best families, and although now living in a state of near-poverty Miss Habersham wore $40 shoes and $15 gloves with her $2.98 Sears Roebuck print dresses. In the best sense of the word the woman was still undeniably a lady.

After being found standing over the dead Vinson Gowrie with a gun in his hand, Lucas is taken to jail and accused of murder. The fact that Lucas is a Negro incites the town, and rumors of a lynching are heard.

At this point sixteen-year-old Chick Mallison visits Lucas in jail, and the man tells him that it was not his pistol that shot Gowrie. When the boy tells Miss Habersham this the woman confidently replies, "So he didn't do it." Although Chick is not completely convinced of Lucas' innocence, he, Miss Habersham, and Aleck Sander make a midnight journey

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30 Ibid., p. 87.
to the Gowrie graveyard in order to dig up the body to ascertain what type of pistol was the murder weapon. Urging the boys on, Miss Habersham tells them that it is their responsibility to see that Lucas is not unjustly accused. She asserts, "Lucas knew it would take a child—or an old woman like me: someone not concerned with probability, with evidence. Men like your uncle and Mr. Hampton have had to be men too long, busy too long." Thus outside of the mainstream of society because of the extremes of their ages, both old Miss Habersham and the young boys are able to view Lucas with less bias than are the town's leaders.

When the unlikely trio does exhume the grave they find not Gowrie's body but that of a man named Montgomery. Returning to town Miss Habersham relates these events to the sheriff. He and his deputies return to the burial ground and find Gowrie's body in nearby quicksand, and in this body they find a large bullet hole which could have been made only by the German-built gun which Gowrie's brother owned.

When the sheriff's entourage leaves for the cemetery he asks the seventy-year-old lady to guard Lucas from lynching attempts. Miss Habersham then asks, "Hasn't Mr. Hampton got other deputies... What are they for?" Lawyer Stevens replies, "They're just men with guns... Legate himself

\[31\] Ibid., pp. 89-90. \[32\] Ibid., p. 117.
told Chick and me last night that if enough men made up their minds and kept them made up, they would pass him and Mr. T ubbs both in time. But if a woman, a lady, a white lady—. 33 In answer

Miss Habersham leaned slowly back until her back came against the seat. She said: "So I'm to sit there on the staircase with my skirts spread or better with my back against the balustrade and one foot propped against the wall of Mrs. T ubb's kitchen while you men who never had time yesterday to ask that old nigger a few questions and so all he had last night was a boy, a child—. 34

With the same courage shown the previous night, Miss Habersham accepts the task, asking only that she be taken home to get her mending first, and when the men return to town Lucas is freed.

33 Ibid. 34 Ibid., p. 118.
CHAPTER II

SIMPLE NEGRO WOMEN WHO ENDURE

Faulkner called female victory the ability to "endure and then endure, without rhyme or reason or hope of reward—and then endure."¹ This strength of endurance is best manifested in a group of matriarch-type Negro women who maintain integrity, courage, and serenity in the midst of chaos and destruction.

The initial model for this group of characters was most likely the Faulkner family servant, Mammy Caroline Barr, to whom Faulkner dedicated Go Down Moses. The novel's inscription, "To Mammy Caroline Barr: who was born in slavery and who gave to my family a fidelity without stint or calculation of recompense and to my childhood an immeasurable devotion and love,"² testifies to Faulkner's admiration for the woman and this esteem is further indicated in the sermon which Faulkner presented at Caroline's funeral.

Caroline has known me all my life. It was my privilege to see her out of hers. After my father's death, to Mammy I came to represent the head of that family to which she had given a half century of fidelity and devotion. But the relationship between us never became that of master

²William Faulkner, Dedication of Go Down Moses (New York, 1942).
and servant. She still remained one of my earliest recollections, not only as a person, but as a fount of authority over my conduct and of security for my physical welfare, and of active and constant affection and love. She was an active and constant precept for decent behavior. From her I learned to tell the truth, to refrain from waste, to be considerate of the weak and respectful to age. I saw fidelity to a family which was not hers, devotion and love for people she had not borne.

As many critics have noted, Dilsey, the Negro servant in The Sound and the Fury, is the novel's sole ethical norm. In the early short story "That Evening Sun" Dilsey first appears as the compassionate maternal figure who alone remains capable of giving order and purpose to the Compson household during the chaotic decay of the family recorded in the later novel.

In "That Evening Sun" when Mr. Compson urges Dilsey to stay in bed a day or two longer after an illness the capable Dilsey replies, "What for? ... If I had been a day later, this place would be to rack and ruin. Get on out of here now, and let me get my kitchen straight again." Mrs. Caroline Compson is coldly contemptuous of the terrified prostitute, Nancy, but Dilsey responds to the woman's fear with understanding. Dilsey reassures Nancy, "You go down to the cabin, ... Frony will fix you a pallet and I'll be there soon."


5Ibid., p. 298.
The juxtaposition of the sympathetic Dilsey and the neurotic Mrs. Compson is continued in The Sound and the Fury. In the deepest sense Dilsey is the only mother either Caddy, Jason, Quentin, or Miss Quentin ever know. The whining Mrs. Compson who refuses to allow Caddy's name to be spoken in the house after the girl's departure, believes Quentin committed suicide "simply to flout and hurt me," and thinks of Benjy as only a burden which must be tolerated because she is a "lady," is too self-centered to fulfill the role of mother in the lives of the children. In contrast, Dilsey faithfully manages to create a pocket of stability and serenity in the chaotic Compson household. She placates whining Mrs. Compson with hot water bottles and soothing words, and not only cooks the children's food and washes their clothes but also is the mother-figure who is their primary source of discipline, love, and justice.

When Mr. Compson brings Caddy's baby girl home, Mrs. Compson reacts with characteristic hysteria, but Dilsey calmly accepts the situation and tells Jason, "And whar else do she belong? . . . Who else gwine raise her 'cep me? Aint I raised eve'y one of y'all?" Dilsey continues to be the bulwark of the decaying family even after Quentin and

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7 Ibid., p. 246.
Mr. Compson's death, and Caddy's disappearance. For Miss Quentin she provides the same maternal security as she had provided for the former generation of Compson children. Even though the young girl pushes Dilsey's hand away from her and calls her 'You damn old nigger,' it is the old Mammy to whom she cries, "Dilsey . . . Dilsey, I want my mother."  

Dilsey staunchly defends Quentin from Jason's vengeful pettiness and Mrs. Compson's spineless acquiescence to her son's antics. When Jason comes home after chasing Quentin and the show man all day, he asks Luster where Dilsey is and the young Negro replies, "She upstairs wid Miss Cahline . . . Dey been going hit. Ever since Miss Quentin come home Mammy up there keepin um fum fightin."  

Dilsey then comes downstairs and accuses Jason, "Quentin come in a while ago and says you been follerin her around all evenin and den Miss Cahline jumped on her. Whyn't you let her alone? Cant you live in de same house wid your own blood niece widout quoilin?"  

Undaunted by the supposedly master-servant relationship, Dilsey instructs Jason, "Well, you tend to yo business and let her alone . . . I'll take keer of her ef

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\(^3\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 230.\)

\(^9\text{Ibid.}\)

\(^10\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 316.\)

\(^11\text{Ibid.}\)
you'n Miss Cahlinc'll let me. So on in dar now and behave yoself twell I git supper on."

Benjy also receives Dilsey's fierce protection and love. Luster is warned by Dilsey, "En of you hurts Benjy, nigger boy, I doot know what I do. You bound fer de chain gang, but I'll send you dar fo even chain gang ready fer you." While Jason regards Benjy as an animal and Mrs. Compson views him as a curse, Dilsey realizes that, although an idiot, the boy is still human and makes him eat at the table with the rest of the family even though Miss Quentin objects. When Dilsey's daughter tells her that people talk because she takes Benjy to her Negro church, the old lady replies, "Trash white folks. Dat's who it is. Thinks he aint good enough fer white church, but nigger church aint good enough fer him. . . . Tell un de good Lavrd dont keer whether he smart er not. Dont nobody but white trash keer dat." But Dilsey does not believe that evil is confined to white people. When Luster says of the Compsons, "Dese is funny folks. Glad I aint none of em," Dilsey replies, "Lemme tell you somethin, nigger boy, you got jes es much Compson devilment in you es any of em."
Despite all this Mr. Compson in mock-heroic tones tells Dilsey, "You're not the one who has to bear it ... it's not your responsibility. You can go away. You don't have to bear the brunt of it day in and day out. You owe nothing to them, to Mr. Compson's memory." 17 But the fact that Dilsey does feel responsible to stay and hold the family together because it is the decent thing to do, and not because of any legal or blood ties, is precisely the reason she is such an admirable character.

As Cleanth Brooks notes, Dilsey is the only character in the novel who successfully deals with time and the changing circumstances which it brings. 18 Because she has faith in the constancy of God Dilsey is able to face the transitory nature of this life with serenity. When Maury's name is changed to Benjamin Dilsey reflects,

Name aint going to help him. Hurt him, neither. Folks dont have no luck, changing names. My name been Dilsey since fore I could remember and it be Dilsey when they's long forgot me. How will they know it's Dilsey, when it's long forgot, Dilsey, Caddy said. It'll be in the Book, honey, Dilsey said. Writ out. Can you read it, Caddy said. Wont have to, Dilsey said. They'll read it for me. All I got to do is say Ise here. 19

17 Ibid., p. 339.


As Dilsey's name will never change, so she believes that God's love and salvation are also eternal and not subject to time. The eloquent Easter sermon heard in the Negro church is an expression of the simple yet effective faith which pervades Dilsey's life. As the St. Louis preacher moves the congregation "until he was nothing and they were nothing and there was not even a voice but instead their hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words," one sees that the congregation's religious experience is authentic and heart-felt and thus they are not bound by the sometimes hypocritical front of "words." Likewise in Dilsey's life are found true expressions of love, fidelity, and patience while for Mrs. Compson these virtues are just words with which to verbally assert one's gentility.

After the Easter sermon Dilsey leaves the church weeping, and Prony, believing that her mother is merely carried away with the sermon, implores Dilsey to hush because people are watching. But the old Negro woman is not a sentimental emotionalist. For her the sermon brings home the tragic implications of Quentin's flight and the ultimate disintegration of the Compson family. With resignation Dilsey laments, "I've seed de first en de last... I seed de beginnin, en now I sees de endin."  

20 Ibid., p. 367.  
21 Ibid., p. 371.
But even in the face of the final loss of the family she has loved and cared for, Dilsey remains ever-capable and practical. She soothes Mrs. Compson, telling her that Quentin certainly hasn't committed suicide and will probably be home by dark, and fixes dinner for the family as she has every day for years. When Benjy, who instinctively senses disaster wails and moans, Dilsey strokes his head and holds him saying, "I does de bes I kin. . . . Lawd knows dat." 22

The fact that all through her life Dilsey does do the best she can for both her own family and the white Compson family attests to the magnitude of her character and her possession of Faulkner's "female victory." But the writer's final tribute to Dilsey and her family is found in the two-word summation of them in the novel's appendix: "They endured." 23

Clytemnestra Sutpen, the mulatto daughter of Thomas Sutpen and a Negro slave, assumes somewhat the same position in the Sutpen household as does Dilsey in the Compson family. Clytie is a half-sister to Judith and Henry Sutpen, but because of her Negro blood she is relegated to and accepts her position as a servant. Thus Clytie's loyalty is in reality to the father and family who reject her, while Dilsey's is to non-kin. While Clytie is not acknowledged as a member of the Sutpen family and given the privileges

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22 Ibid., p. 396.  
23 Ibid., p. 427.
therein, she accepts what she feels to be her responsibility to them and in fact gives her life in protection of Henry.

While Thomas and Henry Sutpen are engaged in fighting the Civil War, Sutpen's Hundred is inhabited only by Judith Sutpen, her Aunt Rosa Coldfield, and Clytie. Rosa later reflects that during this time the three women "led the busy eventless lives of three nuns in a barren and poverty-stricken convent."²⁴ In the fight for survival there were no racial or social distinctions and the three women lived together amicably, not as two white women and a negress, not as three negroes or three whites, not even as three women, but merely as three creatures who still possessed the need to eat but took no pleasure in it, the need to sleep but from no joy in weariness or regeneration, and in whom sex was some forgotten atrophy like the rudimentary gills we call the tonsils for the still-opposable thumbs for old climbing.²⁵

After the war Sutpen returns to the desolate plantation and is later murdered by his white tenant, Wash Jones. Rosa then returns to her home in town, but Judith and Clytie remain in the decaying Sutpen mansion.

Although Miss Rosa contends that the three women became sexless non-woman creatures during the war, in the period following Sutpen's death Clytie exhibits a fierce maternal

²⁴Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 155.
²⁵Ibid.
affection for a little boy named Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon. The little boy is the son of a New Orleans octoroon and Charles Bon, the part-Negro unacknowledged son of Thomas Sutpen's first marriage.

Bon, who was incestuously engaged to Judith, is killed by Henry in order to prevent not incest but miscegenation. Clytie first sees her little nephew when Judith invites the octoroon and her child to view Bon's grave at Sutpen's Hundred.

Perhaps because like herself the little boy is a descendant of Thomas Sutpen but not acknowledged as such, Clytie is immediately drawn to him. She pampers him with what crude luxuries she can produce and appoints herself Charles' protectoress. From time to time Clytie would leave the kitchen and search the rooms downstairs until she found that little strange lonely boy sitting quietly on a straight hard chair in the dim and shadowy library or parlor, with his four names and his sixteenth-part black blood and his expensive esoteric Fauntleroy clothing who regarded with an aghast fatalistic terror the grim coffee-colored woman who would come on bare feet to the door and look at him, who gave him not tea-cakes but the coarsest cornbread spread with as coarse molasses (this surreptitiously, not that the mother or the duenna might object, but because the household did not have food for eating between meals) . . . and who found him one afternoon playing with a negro boy about his own size in the road outside the gates and cursed the negro child out of sight with level and deadly violence and sent him, the other, back to the house. 26

26 Ibid., p. 195.
Then the news reaches Sutpen's Hundred that Charles Etienne has been orphaned. Clytie, who had never been further from the plantation than the neighboring town of Jefferson, journeys alone to New Orleans and brings the little boy home with her. The old Negro woman at once assumes a near ruthless guardianship over Charles. She teaches him to chop wood and plow and while he worked,

Clytie watched, never out of sight of him, with that brooding fierce unflagging jealous care, hurrying out whenever anyone white or black stopped in the road as if to wait for the boy to complete the furrow and pause long enough to be spoken to, sending the boy on with a single quiet word or even gesture a hundred times more fierce than the level murmur of vituperation with which she drove the passerby on. 27

But this fierce insistence on isolation is not prompted by malice, for Clytie's love for the boy is obvious. A prime example of this is that she feeds Charles food "which he himself could discern to be the choicest of what they had, food which he realized had been prepared for him by deliberate sacrifice." 28

Thus Clytie's attitude toward Charles is puzzling, especially if one accepts Dorothy Tuck's assertion that the boy lives his adult life married to a very black ape-like woman because "Judith and Clytie raised the boy, who was white in appearance, to think of himself as a Negro." 29 But, 27

if one accepts the view that Charles thought of himself as a Negro in spite of the efforts to the contrary of Clytie and Judith, much is made clear. This point of view is supported by Mr. Compson, who tells Quentin,

So he (your grandfather) believed that it was neither of them [Clytie or Judith] who was responsible for his [Charles'] going with Negroes. Not Clytie, who guarded him as if he were a Spanish virgin . . . not Judith who could have refused at any time to let him sleep in that white child's bed in her room. 30

Because Clytie, even though a Sutpen, has suffered the pangs of society's rejection because of her Negro blood, she seeks to isolate the young kinsman with whom she identifies from the same fate. By preventing Charles' intercourse with the society outside Sutpen's Hundred the old woman hoped to preserve the racial innocence of the little boy who had neither "heard yet nor recognized the term 'nigger,'" who even had no word for it in the tongue he knew, 31 and whose home in New Orleans had been "a padded silken vacuum cell which might have been suspended on a cable a thousand fathoms in the sea, where pigmentation had no more moral value than the silk walls and the scent and the rose-colored candle shades." 32

Thus on Charles' first visit to Sutpen's Hundred Clytie fiercely drives away a Negro child whom the boy is playing with, although at this time the woman could have had no

30 Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom, p. 200.  
31 Ibid., p. 198.  
32 Ibid., p. 199.
knowledge that her nephew would ever live at Sutpen's Hundred and come under her care. When the boy does come to live in her home Clytie jealously guards him from the outside world which might reveal the fact and implications of his Negro blood. Perhaps the most revealing action concerning Clytie's attitude toward Charles and the race to which she feels he should belong is the fact that she

thrust him into tubs of water too hot . . . and scrubbed him with harsh rags and soap, sometimes scrubbing at him with repressed fury as if she were trying to wash the smooth faint tinge from his skin as you might watch a child scrubbing at a wall long after the epithet, the chalked insult had been obliterated. 33

Only when Charles becomes too old to be completely supervised by Clytie is he confronted with a black and a white society and the difficulty of finding a place in one or the other.

After Judith and Charles die of smallpox, Clytie remains at Sutpen's Hundred to care for Jim Bond, the idiot son of Charles Bon and his animal-like ebony wife. During the next twelve years, by much scrimping and sacrifice, Clytie pays out the price of Judith's tombstone with "nickels and dimes and frayed paper money." 34

Twenty-six years after Judith's death Clytie and Jim Bond are still living in a decayed cabin on the original Sutpen's Hundred. Their peaceful existence is interrupted by

33 Ibid., p. 198.  
the vengeful visit of Rosa Coldfield, who brings Quentin Compson to the rotting cabin to validate her theory that someone besides Clytie and Jim live there. Clytie attempts to block Rosa's entrance and begs Quentin, "Make her go away from here. Whatever he [Sutpen] done, me and Judith and him have paid it out." 35 But Rosa is implacable and at the top of the cabin's stairs she finds the dying Henry Sutpen whom Clytie has sheltered for four years.

Three months after this visit Rosa returns with an ambulance to take Henry to a hospital. But Clytie, believing that they are coming to hang Henry for the murder of Charles Bon fifty years ago, sets fire to the cabin and she and Henry are burned to death before Rosa can reach them.

Thus Clytie sacrifices her life for the son of the father who would never call her daughter. Clytie loved despite rejection and thus her endurance and fidelity can be seen as even more magnanimous than that of Dilsey.

Nancy Manningoe, the saintly murderess of *Requiem for a Nun*, is another example of the endurance and faith of simple Negro women.

Forsaking the life of prostitution and drug addiction which is depicted in the short story "That Evening Sun," Nancy is hired by Mrs. Temple Drake Stevens as maid and nurse for her two children. Ostensibly this is done from altruism but

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in reality Mrs. Stevens hired Nancy because she thought this "ex-dopefiend nigger whore was the only animal in Jefferson that spoke Temple Drake's language." 36

But Mrs. Stevens does not get what she bargained for. Temple's "reform" consisted merely of presenting a respectable front to society's eyes, but Nancy's amendment of character is genuine. When Temple is blackmailed by her former lover's younger brother, Pete, Nancy helps her employer secure the money with which to recover the scandalous love letters. But after realizing that Temple actually doesn't want the letters back and in fact wants to run away with Pete, Nancy hides the money and jewels with which Temple intends to make her escape.

On the day of her departure Temple confronts the Negro servant with the disappearance of the money, and as she hits Nancy the packet of money and jewels falls from the Negro woman's overcoat. Temple then says,

I'm sorry. Why do you force me to do this--hitting and screaming at you, when you have always been so good to my children and me--my husband too--all of us--trying to hold us together in a household, a family, that anybody should have known all the time couldn't possibly hold together? even in decency, let alone happiness? 37

Nancy replies, "I aint talking about any household or happiness neither . . . I'm talking about two little children." 38

But Nancy's pleas to Temple to stay for the children's sake


37Ibid., p. 188.  
38Ibid., pp. 188-189.
are dismissed. Nancy then says, as if to herself, "I tried everything I know. You can see that."\(^{39}\) On the pretext of warming the baby's bottle Nancy then goes into the nursery and with a blanket smothers the baby daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Gowan Stevens. Nancy is later tried and convicted of this murder and is sentenced to die.

During a lecture at the University of Virginia Faulkner stated that the Nun in the play's title refers to Nancy because "she was capable within her poor dim lights and reasons of an act which whether it was right or wrong was of complete almost religious abnegation of the world for the sake of an innocent child."\(^{40}\)

Thus with the murder of one child Nancy sought to bring Temple to the realization of her duties to the other. As Olga Vickery observes, "Having tried argument and threat to no avail, she [Nancy], in desperation, sacrifices her own and the life of the child in the belief that pain and suffering may at last prove strong enough to break through Temple's egotism."\(^{41}\)

But Millgate contends that

it is almost impossible to accept on any terms the murder of Temple's child: Nancy's self-sacrifice

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\(^{39}\) Ibid., p. 191.

\(^{40}\) Faulkner in the University, edited by Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1959), p. 196.

is overshadowed by an act whose symbolic portentousness is destroyed by the outrage it commits not simply upon our moral sensibilities but on our credulity. Faulkner insists on Nancy's ignorance and on the simplicity of her faith, but the murder seems the act of a fanatic, worthy rather of a Doc Hines than of Dilsey whom Nancy in many ways suggests.42

While a case could be made for this point of view, every character in the play, and thus apparently Faulkner, strongly affirms the value of Nancy's act, and the picture drawn of Nancy other than in the act of murder is one of faith, sacrifice, and love. Even if Nancy's act does not seem to be justified by the situation, there is no doubt that she sincerely believes that her sacrifice will in some way contribute to Temple's salvation and the other child's security. Thus if the unquestionably valuable travail of Nancy and Temple after the murder is to have any significance, one must arbitrarily accept the motive which Faulkner gives for Nancy's act.

To Gavin Stevens' question, "The salvation of the world is in man's suffering. Is that it?"43 Nancy's reply is a solemn "Yes, sir."44 Temple realizes Nancy's intention when she tells the governor,


43Faulkner, Requiem for a Nun, p. 276.

44Ibid.
What we came here and waked you up at two o'clock in the morning for is just to give Temple Drake a good fair honest chance to suffer—you know: just anguish for the sake of anguish, like that Russian or somebody who wrote a whole book about suffering, not suffering for or about anything, just suffering, like somebody unconscious not really breathing for anything but just breathing.  

Here Faulkner seems to be supporting Nancy's formula for salvation by pointing out that it is essentially the same as that found by Alyosha in Dostoyevsky's The Brothers Karamazov.

Gavin feels that Nancy's prime murder motive was to save the two children from anguish by ending the little girl's life and preventing the little boy's mother from deserting him. The lawyer tells Temple that they went to the Governor's office "to affirm the very thing which Nancy is going to die tomorrow to postulate: that little children, as long as they are little children, shall be intact, unanguished, untorn, unterrified." Even the hardened Temple attributes the murder to Nancy's concern for her and her children and when Gavin tells her that the Governor "wasn't even talking about justice... He was talking about a child, a little boy," Temple replies,

That's right. Make it good: the same little boy to hold whose normal and natural home together, the murderess, the nigger, the dopefiend whore, didn't hesitate to cast the last gambit... she knew and had: her own debased and worthless life. Oh yes, I know that answer too; that was brought

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out here tonight too: that a little child shall not suffer in order to come unto Me. So good can come out of evil.  

Nancy's strong but inarticulate faith revolves around two words, "believe" and "suffer." When Gavin asks her if people must sin Nancy replies,

You aint got to. You cant help it. And He knows that. But you can suffer. And He knows that too. He dont tell you not to sin, he just asks you not to. And He dont tell you to suffer. But He gives you the chance. He gives you the best He can think of, that you are capable of doing. And He will save you. 

To Temple's question, "What about me? Even if there is one [a heaven] and somebody waiting in it to forgive me, there's still tomorrow and tomorrow . . . and then nobody there, nobody waiting to forgive me--." Nancy replies, "Believe," and Temple counters, "Believe what, Nancy? Tell me." But Nancy only reiterates, "Believe." 

Nancy's assertion that life may gain meaning through suffering and her concern that Temple face her own guilt may be compared to a Camus-like affirmation of man's ability to find order within himself in a chaotic world. As Dorothy Tuck observes,

The suffering of which Nancy speaks can easily be seen as the existential anguish of living responsibility--suffering that is not repentance or contrition.

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48 Ibid., p. 203.  
49 Ibid., p. 278.  
50 Ibid., p. 283.  
51 Ibid.  
52 Ibid.  
53 Ibid.
but a full realization of one's own guilt and an acceptance of responsibility for one's acts. Only through this suffering can one's past be redeemed from insignificance, one's present from meaninglessness.54

Mollie Beauchamp, who appears in two sections of Go Down Moses, is obviously patterned after Caroline Barr, the Faulkner family servant who died in the year the work first entitled Go Down, Moses, and Other Stories was copyrighted and to whom it is dedicated.

The wife of a McCaslin-descended Negro, Lucas Beauchamp, Mollie is called to the house of their white relative, Zack Edmonds, to assist his wife in childbirth. Lucas goes through flood waters to fetch a doctor, and when the two return the white woman has died and in her place Mollie has been instated in Edmond's household to care for the infant. Six months later Lucas demands the return of his wife, and she comes, bringing with her the little white boy, Roth Edmonds.

Thus Mollie is the only mother Roth ever knows, and his later reflections of her are almost verbatim those of Faulkner's eulogy at Caroline's funeral. Roth realized that Mollie had been the only mother he . . . ever knew, who had raised him, fed him from her own breast . . . who had surrounded him always with care for his physical body and for his spirit too, teaching him his manners, behavior—to be gentle with his inferiors, honorable with his equals, generous to the weak and considerate of the aged, courteous,

54 Tuck, p. 120.
truthful and brave to all--who had given him, the motherless, without stint or expectation of reward that constant and abiding devotion and love which existed nowhere else in this world for him."55

But although Mollie taught these virtues, evidently she does not believe Roth follows them, for years later she blames him for the death of her grandson, Butch. After the boy was caught breaking into his commissary store, Roth banished him from the plantation and Butch moved to Jefferson. There he was later jailed for breaking into one of the town's stores. Escaping from the Jefferson jail, Butch flees to Chicago, kills a policeman, and at the beginning of the story is awaiting execution for the murder.

Although she has not heard from Butch in five years Mollie instinctively senses that the child she has raised is in trouble and goes to Lawyer Stevens to obtain help in finding him. The old woman patiently explains to Gavin, "I come to find my boy. . . . Roth Edmonds sold my Benjamin. Sold him in Egypt. Pharaoh got him. . . . And you the Law. I wants to find my boy."56

Mollie's knowledge beyond reason proves accurate, for that afternoon Stevens finds in the county newspaper office a dispatch from Chicago reporting the execution of a young Mississippi Negro, Samuel Worsham (Butch) Beauchamp.

55 Faulkner, Go Down Moses, p. 117.
56 Ibid., p. 371.
Gavin shields Mollie from the details of the boy's death, and he and Miss Worsham make arrangements for Butch's body to be brought home "right" as Mollie wishes.

The Jefferson newspaper editor refrains from printing the story of Butch's execution, and Mollie asks, "Is you gonter put hit in de paper? I wants hit all in de paper." The editor later tells Stevens he believes even if Mollie had known the truth she would still have wanted the details printed, and the lawyer agrees with him. Like Dilsey's concern for the Compson children, Mollie's love for Butch was not dependent on his good behavior or respectability. Having no false pride, Mollie would not have been affected by the fact that the town knew Butch died as a criminal. The grandmother's only concern was that the boy be brought home where she could be certain that his last needs were taken care of in the "right" way.

57 Ibid., p. 383.
CHAPTER III

"EARTH MOTHER" FIGURES

Jenny Steinbauer in Faulkner's early novel, *Mosquitoes*, is not an important character in her own right, but she is interesting as a forerunner of the later earth-mother figures, Lena Grove and Eula Varner.

Invited by strangers to join a week-long boating party, Jenny permeates the group with her bovine voluptuousness. "In the dust Jenny's white troubling placidity bloomed like a heavy flower, pervading and rife like an odor lazier, heavier than that of lilies." ¹

Like Lena, Jenny instinctively senses that her destiny in life is to "be fruitful and multiply," and viewing her profile in the mirror she tells Pat, her hostess' niece, "'I expect to be bigger than that, in front, someday.' 'So do I--when I have to. But what do you want one for?' 'Lord,' said Jenny, 'I guess I'll have a whole litter of 'em. Besides, I think they're kind of cute, don't you?'" ² Realizing this natural creativity of Jenny, another guest comments, "Women can do it without art--old biology takes care of that... A woman conceives: does she care afterward whose seed it was?

²Ibid., p. 115.
Not she. And bears, and all the rest of her life—as her young troubling years, that is—is filled."  

The clear link between these sentiments and the later characterizations of the placid, voluptuous Eula and procreative Lena are undeniable. Apparently Faulkner's conception of this type of woman was already crystallized at the writing of Mosquitoes and only awaited the development of his talent to bring forth the highly significant Lena and Eula.

Far along in pregnancy, Lena Grove travels alone by foot from Alabama to Mississippi, searching for the fleeing lover who she believes has gone ahead to prepare a home for her. Placidly accepting the kindness of strangers along the way, Lena displays "an inwardly lighted quality of tranquil and calm unreason and detachment."  

In sharp contrast to the sterile Joanna Burden, Lena presents a picture of healthy animal fecundity. Never doubting that God will see she finds Lucas Burch before the child is born, the young woman feels no self-consciousness about her condition or her dependence on people's charity. On the contrary, Lena takes a great deal of pride in her travels and thinks, "Although I have not been quite a month on the road I am already in Mississippi."  

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3 Ibid., p. 264.  
5 Ibid., p. 3.
During his lectures at the University of Virginia Faulkner said that this novel's title referred to a few days in Mississippi's August when suddenly there's a foretaste of fall, it's cool, there's a lambence, a luminous quality to the light, as though it came not from just today but from back in the old classic times. It might have fauns and satyrs and the gods and—from Greece, from Olympus in it somewhere. It lasts just for a day or two, then it's gone, but every year in August that occurs in my country, and that's all that title meant, it was just to me a pleasant evocative title because it reminded me of that time, of a luminosity older than our Christian civilization. Maybe that connection was with Lena Grove, who had something of that pagan quality of being able to assume everything, that's—the desire for that child, she was never ashamed of that child whether it had any father or not, she was simply going to follow the conventional laws of the time in which she was and find its father. But as far as she was concerned, she didn't especially need any father for it, any more than the women that—on whom Jupiter begot children were anxious for a home and a father.  

One of the most significant differences between Lena and Joanna is their attitude toward God. A child of a rigid Calvinistic heritage, the guilt-ridden Joanna sees God only as a force which will eternally damn her for her sins. But like the ancient Greeks Lena is not bothered with any concept of Original Sin, and for her God is a benign force who will take care of her and see that she finds Lucas before the baby is born.

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Lena's very name, Grove, is evocative of the closeness to nature in which she lives. Neither fighting what she is nor apologizing for it, the woman tranquilly accepts her state of being and is happy in it. After delivering Lena's child, Kightower remembers "the young strong body from out whose travail even there shone something tranquil and unafraid," and thinks, "more of them [children]. Many more. That will be her life, her destiny. The good stock populating in tranquil obedience to it the good earth."  

Eula Varner Snopes, a central figure in The Hamlet and The Town, is the embodiment of female sexuality to the point that she becomes more of a universal symbol than an individual character. At age sixteen Eula had reached physical maturity, and "her entire appearance suggested some symbology out of the old Dionysic times—honey in sunlight and bursting grapes, the writhen bleeding of the crushed fecundated vine beneath the hard rapacious trampling goat-hoof." Placidly unconcerned with her power of attraction, the girl allowed her brother to take her to school every day where she brought "into the bleak, ill-lighted, poorly-heated room dedicated to the harsh functioning of Protestant primary education a moist blast of spring's liquorish corruption, a pagan triumphal prostration before the supreme primal uterus."  

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7 Ibid., p. 356.  
8 Ibid.  
10 Ibid., p. 114.
Thus, like Lena Grove, Eula's being is likened to the Greek mode of existence rather than the Christian. After her seduction by Noake McCarron and subsequent pregnancy there is no evidence that the girl feels pangs of guilt, but to preserve respectability the Varner family pays Flem Snopes to marry Eula. After a year's stay in Texas the couple return home with a daughter remarkably developed for the age her parents state she is.

Having exhausted the financial possibilities of Frenchman's Bend, Flem brings Eula and her baby daughter, Linda, to Jefferson. In *The Town* Eula is still seen as that "incredible woman, that Frenchman's Bend Helen, Semiramis--no: not Helen or Semiramis: Lilith: the one before Eve herself."\(^{11}\)

But in this second novel Eula assumes more depth than she displayed in *The Hamlet* or than either of her counterparts, Lena or Jenny, ever attain. Married to the impotent Flem, Eula begins an eighteen-year affair with Manfred De Spain which lasts until her death. The town suspects this relationship, but unaffected by public opinion the woman "was what she was and looked the way she looked and wasn't ashamed of it... [or] afraid or ashamed of being glad of it."\(^{12}\)

In harmony with nature, Eula explains her philosophy of life to her troubled knight-errant, Gavin Stevens. "Dont

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\(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 75.
expect. You just are, and you need, and you must, and so you do."\textsuperscript{13} Continuing, Eula challenges the man, "Stop being afraid of things. . . . Why are you afraid?"\textsuperscript{14}

Years later after a confrontation between her husband and De Spain Eula commits suicide. Believing that De Spain was ready to expose the scandal to save his bank from Snopes, the town is confident that Eula reached the point where she had "to choose death in order to leave her child a mere suicide for a mother instead of a whore."\textsuperscript{15} But this point of view is entirely inconsistent with Eula's character as revealed in both \textit{The Hamlet} and \textit{The Town}. Neither ashamed nor afraid, Eula always placidly accepted herself and her state of being, and thus a suicide out of shame for her actions is hardly believable. While the suicide is ultimately not credible, more believable is Gavin's thesis that Eula killed herself because "she was bored. She loved, had a capacity to love for love, to give and accept love. Only she tried twice and failed twice to find somebody not just strong enough to deserve, earn it, match it, but even brave enough to accept it. Yes . . . of course she was bored."\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 94. \textsuperscript{14}Ibid. \textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 34. \textsuperscript{16}Ibid., p. 359.
CHAPTER IV

WOMEN WHO TRANSCEND TRADITIONAL MORALITY

As Olga Vickery notes, in Faulkner's work there are "three modes of response to experience—words, action, and contemplation."¹ The criteria which Faulkner set up for his strong character seems to include the ability to experience non-verbal reality and the ability to differentiate between such action and the hollow words or contemplation which sometimes replace the authentic experience. Slatoff also observes Faulkner's preoccupation with the dilemma of words against action and goes so far as to suggest that the author's difficult syntax and shifting metaphors are "designed to prevent his readers from substituting language and 'mind's reason' for the actual experiences he is trying to suggest."²

Several women in Faulkner's work whose actions might be viewed by society as evil may, in a larger context, be seen to possess a higher virtue than that gained by a rigid adherence to the rules of traditional morality. With a redeeming awareness and acceptance of the non-verbal realities of life,

these women intensely grasp human existence and thus are able to both give and engender love.

Of this group of women Addie Bundren most vehemently asserts her belief in action over words. After an unrewarding stint of teaching school Addie marries Anse Bundren, but the ritual of marriage and the words "husband" and "wife" contain no deeper significance for Anse than the legal connotations. When their first child, Cash, is born Addie suddenly realizes that empty words have blocked her from meaningful emotional experience and that a significant action such as giving birth is the remedy for this void. In the chapter which she narrates in As I Lay Dying Addie says,

And when I knew that I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it. That was when I learned that words are no good; that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at. When he was born I knew that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn't care whether there was a word for it or not. I knew that fear was invented by someone that had never had the fear; pride, who never had the pride.3

The birth of her second son elicits a different reaction from Addie because, realizing that for Anse the word "love" is "like the others: just a shape to fill a lack,"4 she wants nothing more to bind her to him.

4 Ibid., p. 164.
When the self-righteous, word-ridden Cora Tull chides Addie for not accepting her responsibility as a mother, Addie reflects,

I would think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it, so that after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle from one to the other; and that sin and love and fear are just sounds that people who never sinned nor loved nor feared have for what they never had and cannot have until they forget the words.5

In her adulterous affair with Reverend Whitfield Addie searches for salvation in the act which lies behind Anse's empty word "love," and Cora Tull's empty word "sin." In this brief relationship Addie finds the meaning which enables her to live the rest of her life with purpose.

As Vickery observes, "Through sin Addie seeks to find and enact her own humanity, and if her solution seems extreme, so is her provocation. For the alternative, as she sees it, is the moral myopia of those who live by words 'because people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too.'"6 Continuing, Vickery says, "The adultery thus becomes a moral act, not, of course, in the sense of 'good' or 'virtuous,' but in the sense that it re-establishes the reality of moral conduct and of the relationship between God and man."7

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5Ibid., pp. 165-166. 
6Vickery, p. 54. 
7Ibid., p. 54.
Addie's success in giving meaning to her life and to the lives of those around her is verified by the reactions of her sons to her death. In the successive chapters of As I Lay Dying narrated by Cash, Darl, Jewel, and Vardaman, the reader becomes aware that each boy is attempting to clarify the state of his relations with Addie before her death and his place in the world after it. For Cash this evaluation leads to a greater maturity, for Darl, insanity, for Vardaman a sense of unbelief, and for Jewel a distorted attempt to isolate himself with Addie's memory. Even the shallow Anse and Dewey Dell seem to realize that Addie has been the focus point of their lives, and they go to great lengths to carry out the wish of the woman to be buried with her people.

Candace Compson (Caddy) is another example of the woman who, although immoral in society's eyes, possesses an awareness of the realities of experience, and thus a higher morality which enables her to love. Three of the Compson children, Caddy, Quentin, and Jason, first appear in the short story "That Evening Sun." In this story of the paralyzing fear of the Negro woman, Nancy, the seven-year-old Caddy is seen to be much more courageous and independent than either her older brother, Quentin, or younger brother, Jason. Terrified by the return of her husband, Nancy implores the children to go home with her, and Caddy replies, "I'm not

afraid to go. . . . Jason is the one that's afraid. He'll tell." 8

Benjy, the idiot Compson son, first appears in *The Sound and the Fury*, and in Caddy's relationship to him she again exhibits the emotional depth which is lacking in the rest of the family. Benjy narrates an episode in which Caddy brings him to their mother in order to ask permission to go outside and Mrs. Compson whines, "Why did you come in here. To give him some excuse to worry me again." 9 The mother then realizes that she has broken her mask of affection and quickly tries to rectify the situation with the words, "Come here and kiss Mother, Benjamin. . . . My poor baby." 10 But these are mere words and no real love lies behind them. Only Caddy and the Negro servant, Dilsey, are able to break through the meaninglessness of words and establish a truly human relationship with the idiot.

Time and again Benjy narrates incidents which indicate both Caddy's love for and sensitivity to him. When Caddy begins to wear perfume Benjy senses the change in his sister which heralds the loss of her innocence, and he cries until she washes the scent off. After Caddy understands what Benjy


10Ibid., p. 8.
is disturbed about, she lets the little boy give the bottle of perfume to Dilsey and says, "We don't like perfume ourselves."  

Benjy becomes upset when he finds Caddie and Charlie in the swing, and again Caddy submits to Benjy's wishes. Benjy remembers that 'Caddy knelt down in the dark and held me. I could hear her and feel her chest. 'I won't!' she said. 'I won't anymore, ever. Benjy. Benjy.'" 

After Caddy's affair with Dalton Ames and the subsequent arranged marriage with Herbert Head, Caddy's parting request to Quentin is "look after Benjy and Father." But Quentin is so absorbed in juggling abstract concepts that he cannot truly concern himself with the essential non-verbal realities behind the words "love" or "care."

As Cora Tull is juxtaposed against Addie Bundren, so Caddy's honest approach to experience is made clearer by a comparison with Quentin's obsession with words such as "honor," "chastity," and "sin," for which he can find no meaning.

Quentin commits suicide, not because of despair over a beloved sister's plight, but, as the novel's appendix states, because of Caddy's violation of "some concept of Companion honor" which he felt to be supported by "the minute fragile membrane of her maidenhead." He is obsessed not with

\[^{11}\text{Ibid., p. 51.} \quad ^{12}\text{Ibid., p. 58.} \quad ^{13}\text{Ibid., p. 143.} \quad ^{14}\text{Ibid., p. 411.} \quad ^{15}\text{Ibid.}\]
carrying out the act of incest but with "some presbyterian concept of its eternal punishment." The crux of Quentin's difficulty is his inability to humanly relate to those around him. Unlike Caddy, Quentin sees the members of his family not as individual human beings, but as symbols of the abstract concepts which permeate his mind.

Quentin narrates a conversation in which Mr. Compson, realizing his son's dilemma, tells Quentin, "Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature. It's nature is hurting you not Caddy and I said That's just words and he said So is virginity and I said you don't know. You cant know and he said Yes. On the instant when we realise that tragedy is second-hand." 17

The appendix which Faulkner added to the novel fifteen years after The Sound and the Fury was first published describes a Caddy who was "doomed and knew it, accepted the doom without either seeking it or fleeing it," 18 and who loved not only her brother but "loved in him that bitter prophet and inflexible corruptless judge of what he considered the family's honor and its doom." 19 Also described here are Caddy's divorce from Herbert, her marriage and divorce with a minor moving picture magnate, her disappearance from Paris during the German occupation, and the magazine picture in Xh

\[16\text{Ibid.}\]
\[17\text{Ibid., p. 143.}\]
\[18\text{Ibid., p. 412.}\]
\[19\text{Ibid.}\]
which she appears "ageless and beautiful, cold serene and
drawn." beside a German staff general.

But the harshness of the evaluation of Caddy found in
the appendix does not seem to be substantiated by either the
body of the novel or Faulkner's multiple remarks on Caddy
during his tenure as writer in residence at the University
of Virginia. When asked by a Virginia student if he intended
the reader to view Caddy "negatively" Faulkner replied, "To
me she [Caddy] was my heart's darling. That's what I wrote
the book about and I used the tools which seemed to me the
proper tools to try to tell, try to draw the picture of
Caddy." When asked why Caddy narrates none of the novel
Faulkner said,

That--the explanation of that whole book is in
that. It began with the picture of a little
girl's muddy drawers, climbing that tree to
look in the parlor window with her brothers that
didn't have the courage to climb the tree wait-
ing to see what she saw.

And later he adds that 'it took the rest of the four hundred
pages to explain why she was brave enough to climb the tree
to look in the window." "Caddy was . . . to me too beauti-
ful and too moving to reduce her to telling what was going

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20 Ibid., p. 415.
21 Faulkner in the University, edited by Frederick L.
Gwynn and Joseph Blotner (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1959),
p. 6.
22 Ibid., p. 1.
23 Ibid., p. 31.
on, that it would be more passionate to see her through some-
body else's eyes, I thought."

It is thus difficult to reconcile the courageous, inde-
pendent girl who appears in the novel and on whom Faulkner
says the novel is based with a placid Caddy who "accepted
... [her] doom without seeking it or fleeing it." Equally
difficult to accept is the realistic Caddy who, only of her
family, loved Benjy in deed and not merely word, as a woman
who loved in Quentin his abstract quality of "bitter prophet
and inflexible corruptless judge of what he considered the
family's honor and its doom." But it is the librarian's assertion in the appendix that
is least credible. Caddy, she says, "doesn't want to be saved
hasn't anything anymore worth being saved for nothing worth
being lost that she can lose." One can believe that Caddy
loses her virginity, her husband, her "respectability," but
nowhere in the body of the novel is it even implied that
Caddy might ever lose her most precious possession: her
ability to love. Through Benjy's, Quentin's, and even Jason's
eyes Caddy is seen to be the only character in the novel
besides Dilsey capable of love. She tenderly cares for Benjy,
understands Quentin's despair, and wants desperately to see

24 Ibid., p. 1.
26 Ibid., p. 412.
27 Ibid., p. 420.
her child although Jason allows her only one glance. Certainly neither Jason's greed, Mrs. Compson's hypochondria, or Benjy's limited understanding of the world is more "worth saving" than Caddy's ability to love.

In Sanctuary, although the town brands Ruby Goodwin with the words 'adultress,' "street walker," and "murderess," she displays more genuine virtue than any other woman in the novel. Unlike Temple or Narcissa, Ruby experiences the non-verbal realities behind the words "love," "loyalty," "courage," and "fear." Through Goodwin's multiple prison sentences she maintains a singular devotion to him even though such devotion necessitates her prostitution, and one of Goodwin's offenses is murder over another woman. Ruby tells Temple,

I have slaved for that man. . . . I worked night shift as a waitress so I could see him Sundays at the prison. I lived two years in a single room, cooking over a gas-jet, because I promised him. I lied to him and made money to get him out of prison, and when I told him how I made it, he beat me."28

Yet Ruby feels no regret at having endured these hardships, because they were for the man she loves.

In contrast, Temple hasn't the depth of character to submerge herself in life, but merely plays at it, and Ruby rebukes her with, "You haven't the guts to be really afraid, any more than you have to be in love."29

29 Ibid.
When Temple appears at Goodwin's home Ruby repeatedly warns the young girl of the danger which her antics are provoking, but Temple pays no heed. Even so Ruby does all in her power to protect the red haired intruder and patiently spends the night with Temple in the barn.

But Ruby cannot deter the inevitable amalgamation of the evil natures of Temple and Popeye, and this and the subsequent murder of Tommy destroy the life with Goodwin for which she has sacrificed everything else. Goodwin is familiar with Ruby's power of endurance and even in this situation says, "Ruby'll be all right. Won't you old gal?" 30

Ruby again offers all her resources, including her body, to effect Goodwin's acquittal, but the town's hate causes Goodwin to be burned even before his legal sentence is carried out.

In Faulkner's last novel, The Reivers, there appears another example of the woman, who despite her lack of 'respectability,' is a loving and effective person. Out of financial necessity and her aunt's direction, Miss Corrie had early entered a life of prostitution in Arkansas. At the time of the novel she is working in Miss Reba's house in Memphis where she has carried on a long-time, but sporadic, friendship with Boon Hogganbeck of Jefferson, Mississippi.

30 Ibid., p. 112.
Seizing the occasion of 'Boss' Priest's week-long absence from Jefferson Boon "borrows" the man's automobile of which he is caretaker, and drives with eleven-year-old Lucius Priest to Memphis. There Boon takes the unsuspecting little boy to Miss Reba's house where he meets Corrie and her vicious little cousin, Otis. After a series of complicated entanglements with a stolen race horse and the police Lucius and Boon return to Jefferson, but the little boy's influence on Corrie changes her entire life.

Lucius' first description of Corrie is, "She was much too big a girl, there was too much of her, for smugness or coyness. But she was exactly right for serenity."31 Admiring the woman, Lucius is thunder-struck when Otis tells him that back in Arkansas he made money by charging a dime to let men look through a knothole at Corrie while she was at work. The enraged Lucius strikes Otis and a brawl ensues in which Lucius receives a cut hand. Corrie hurries in, reprimands the boys, and dresses Lucius' cut hand.

At first the two refuse to tell why they have been fighting, but Otis later reveals the reason, and with tears in her eyes Corrie tells Lucius,

You fought because of me. I've had people--drunks--fighting over me, but you're the first one ever fought for me. I aint used to it, you see. That's why I dont know what to do about it.

Except one thing. I can do that. I want to make you a promise. Back there in Arkansas it was my fault. But it won't be my fault any more.\textsuperscript{32}

Thus Corrie vows to spend the rest of her life in honorable work, but she gives herself to the loutish deputy, Butch, when it becomes apparent that this is the only way for Boon and Lucius to regain the horse which they desperately need. At first Lucius is stunned by this apparent back-sliding, but later he realizes that Corrie has done this out of love and concern for his well being.

Subsequently Boon asks Corrie to marry him and the couple move to Jefferson. When their first child is born, Lucius is invited to come see it. Once there the boy asks Corrie what they are going to call it. She says "Can't you guess? . . . His name is Lucius Priest Hogganbeck."\textsuperscript{33}

Linda Snopes and Charlotte Rittenmeyer present unique problems in classification. While both display a great ability to love, and neither the deaf Linda nor passionate Charlotte allow mere words to take the place of authentic human relations, both are ultimately somewhat destructive. Their dominant flaw is perhaps that each clings with fanatic zeal to the plan of life she has envisioned, and neither is able to alter her dreams when such action becomes necessary.

While Charlotte Rittenmeyer is not an entirely admirable character she does embody the struggle of the individual

\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 159-160. \textsuperscript{33}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 305.
against society which Faulkner felt to be so important. Fleeing from her bourgeois husband and two children, Charlotte persuades Harry Wilbourne to leave his nearly completed medical internship and with her live a life of love in a materialistic world.

The woman possesses a romantic vision of renunciation of all for romantic love, which many critics have compared to that in Madame Bovary or in the novels of Hemingway. Charlotte dogmatically tells Wilbourne, "Listen: it's got to be all honeymoon, always, forever and ever, until one of us dies. It can't be anything else. Either heaven, or hell: no comfortable safe peaceful purgatory between for you and me to wait in until good behavior or forbearance or shame or repentance overtakes us."\(^{34}\)

Drifting from job to job the pair eventually go to a remote mining community in Utah where they hope to escape the demands of society and live only according to the dictates of nature. But even there they feel the pressure of the desertion of the mine's paymaster and the friend's wife who persuades Wilbourne to perform an abortion on her. Soon after Charlotte and Harry leave the mining camp Charlotte discovers that she is pregnant, and because of their financial problems she urges Harry to perform an abortion on her. At

first the man determinedly refuses, but under Charlotte's pressure he at last performs the operation in her fourth month of pregnancy. Perhaps because Charlotte is so precious to him Harry bungles the operation and Charlotte dies. The man is then indicted for manslaughter and even though Charlotte's husband offers him first bond and escape, and after the sentence of fifty years at hard labor a cyanide tablet, Harry refuses both. At first Charlotte's lover is tempted to take the tablet, but after reflecting that after death he would not even have the memory of their love Harry decides, 'Yes . . . between grief and nothing I will take grief.'

Thus, much of Charlotte's vision of love is good: the old doctor and his wife imprisoned by their Baptist dogma of duty are certainly less admirable than the lovers who at least actively seek love. As Hillgate notes, the lovers ultimately fail not because escape from society is wrong but because, like Thomas Sutpen, Charlotte inflexibly holds to her magnificent plan for life. Unable to bring a child into poverty and thus jeopardize the romance of her relationship with Harry, Charlotte demands an abortion and dies. Yet this does not take away from the grandeur of her dream.

nor from her strength and endurance. As Millgate concludes,

The "Palm" story ends with the image of the palm . . . which Faulkner must have seen as embodying so much of his conception of Charlotte: not only her grandeur, her lonely defiance, and her deep rooted strength, but also those qualities of sterile fanaticism which ultimately destroyed her and which he invokes through repeated insistence on the wildness and dryness of the palms, and on the frenzied clashing of their leaves. 37

Linda Snopes is first seen in The Town as an awkward young teen-ager to whom Gavin Stevens transfers his affection after giving up the hope of establishing a relationship of any kind with her mother, Tula. Unlike her voluptuous mother, Linda is not a beauty, but the young girl is very intellectually gifted. Stevens plies her with ice-cream sodas while suggesting books with which to improve her mind, and evidently this is effective, for Linda graduates as valedictorian of her high school class. Stevens then attempts to send Linda away to college, but Flem Snopes, whom Linda falsely believes to be her father, at first prevents this. The man feels that if Linda leaves Jefferson and marries someone over whom he has no financial hold, he will thus lose his hold over Tula and her inheritance.

But later, changing his tactics, Flem allows the girl to go to the University of Mississippi, and in gratitude Linda has a document drawn up in which she bequeaths any inheritance she might receive from her mother to Flem. In

37 Ibid., pp. 174-175.
The Mansion Ratliff remembers this action and says, "What Linda wanted was not just to give. It was to be needed: not just to be loved and wanted, but to be needed too; and maybe this was the first time in her life she ever had anything that anybody not just wanted but needed too." 38

When Bula commits suicide Linda returns home from school. In contradiction to the town's opinion that the mother killed herself in order to save Linda from a scandal, the girl states her knowledge of the affair between her mother and Manfred De Spain and in defiance of society compassionately says, "Oh yes, I knew about Manfred. . . . I'm glad. I want her to have loved, to have been happy." 39

Gavin had early realized that Linda needed "love, something worthy to match not just today's innocent and terrified and terrifying passion, but tomorrow's strength and capacity for serenity and growth and accomplishment and the realisation of hope and at last the contentment of one mutual peace and one mutual conjoined old age." 40 Believing that the girl could best find such a husband in Greenwich Village, Gavin sends her there and Linda soon falls in love with a Communist Jewish sculptor named Barton Kohl. Although Barton wishes to

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40 Ibid., pp. 288-289.
marry Linda, she refuses, and the pair live together unmarried. Again Linda flouts society and condones love.

Later Barton persuades Linda to marry him, and in order to fight Hitler the couple go to Spain where Kohl is eventually killed and Linda deafened by an explosion.

The woman then returns to Jefferson to live with Flem, although she now realizes that he is not her natural father. Continuing her Communist affiliation, Linda is investigated by the F.B.I. and made the object of derogatory remarks and signs. Imbued with the necessity of aiding humanity, and feeling that Communism presents the best method of doing this the woman attempts to help Negro school children, but the town's prejudice and the Negro's distrust ultimately void her actions.

Linda resumes her platonic relationship with Gavin, but insists that he must fall in love and marry someone else in order that he might experience the happiness she felt in married life. She says, "You must. I want you to. You mustn't miss that. Nobody must never have had that once." 41

Several years later Linda makes possible the release from prison of Mink Snopes, who had sworn to kill Flem because the latter refused to aid him during his trial. Mink swiftly travels to Jefferson and fatally wounds Flem, and the next day, although morally responsible for the murder, Linda leaves Jefferson.

Ultimately this last action of Linda's is not credible in the light of her earlier life and character. A disciple of love, Linda cared enough about justice to fight a war in Spain and enough about humanity to flout society and try to uplift Negro education in Jefferson. To cause the release of a man certain to murder the man who at least had served as her father, shows neither love, justice, nor courage. Gavin offers the thesis that Linda caused the murder of Flem because the man had stolen her Communist party card and was holding this over her as he had earlier held Linda over Eula. But the usually more reliable Ratliff asserts that she did this because if she didn't, she thought someday in heaven "her maw would be saying to her, 'why didn't you revenge me and my love that I finally found it, instead of jest standing back and blind hoping for happen-so? Didn't you never have no love of your own to learn you what it is?'"  

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42 Ibid., p. 431.
CHAPTER V

WEAK WOMEN

Women who attempt to escape life's realities are invariably seen as weak characters in Faulkner's work. Whether they find refuge in the rituals of society or religion or in self-created fantasy worlds, these women live ineffective, ultimately worthless lives.

Cora Tull, the self-appointed guardian of public ethics in *As I Lay Dying*, lacks stature as a character because as she "elbows her way to heaven" she has neither the perception nor compassion to truly care for those around her. Thus the two words which permeate Cora's conversation are "duty" followed by "reward." Unlike Addie Bundren, this woman never experiences the reality of experience behind words.

Cora's prime concern in life is that both man and God be fully aware that she is fulfilling her "duty." After she finds that the lady for whom she baked the cakes does not want to buy them, Cora feels it necessary to defend her "righteousness" from the accusation of waste. Rehearsing her speech to Mr. Tull, Cora thinks, "But it's not like they cost me anything except the baking. I can tell him that"

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anybody is likely to make a miscue, but it's not all of them that can get out of it without loss, I can tell him. It's not everybody can eat their mistakes, I can tell him."²

Cora firmly believes that she does her good works in the spirit of Christian love and charity, but many of her utterances belie the fact that she sees each such act as another rung in the ladder to her heavenly "reward." During Addie's illness Cora extols her own virtues with, "Why, for the last three weeks I have been coming over every time I could, coming sometimes when I shouldn't have, neglecting my own family and duties so that somebody would be with her in her last moments and she would not have to face the Great Unknown without one familiar face to give her courage."³

But the pious woman's ultimately selfish motives are revealed when she continues, "Not that I deserve credit for it: I will expect the same for myself."⁴

Cora does not hesitate to judge either the state of her own soul or that of others. When Vardaman comes to tell the Tulls of Addie's death, Cora declares, "It's a judgment on them. I see the hand of the Lord upon this boy for Anse Bundren's judgment and warning."⁵ But in her own actions

³Ibid., p. 21.
⁴Ibid.
⁵Ibid., p. 68.
this woman sees only virtue which will inevitably lead to an eternal reward. She says,

I have tried to live right in the sight of God and man, for the honor and comfort of my Christian husband and the love and respect of my Christian children. So that when I lay me down in the consciousness of my duty and reward I will be surrounded by loving faces, carrying the farewell kiss of each of my loved ones into my reward.6

But the fallibility of Cora's judgment is pointed up when she labels Eddie's lover, Reverend Whitfield, "a godly man if ever one breathed God's breath."7

Even Cora's husband sometimes suspects that the woman's good works are not primarily prompted by compassion and remarks, "I reckon it does take a powerful trust in the Lord to guard a fellow, though sometimes I think that Cora's a mite over-cautious, like she was trying to crowd the other folks away and get in closer than anybody else."8 As Vickery concludes,

Kindness such as Cora's is essentially selfish, debasing both the giver and the recipient and destroying the possibility of any personal relationship between them. In her eyes even family ties are moral rather than emotional. As a result, Cora is totally unaware, in any real sense, of those agonizing and exalting human experiences which stand outside her rigid system of ethics, resisting and disrupting its smooth simplification of existence.9

6Ibid., p. 22.  
7Ibid., p. 159.  
8Ibid., p. 67.  
9Vickery, p. 64.
Although Mrs. Merridew, the do-good church lady in "Uncle Willy," is primarily a comic figure, she parallels Cora Tull in many ways. Confident that her mission is to save Uncle Willy Christian from a life of drug addiction whether he wants to be saved or not, Mrs. Merridew proceeds to do so with frightening truculence.

Enlisting the aid of her preacher, Mrs. Merridew abducts Uncle Willy from the church service to her home. There in a prison of Christian kindness, fried chicken, and lemonade she isolates him from morphine and his old way of life. Although Uncle Willy implores, "Won't you please quit? Won't you please go to hell and just let me come on at my own gait?" Mrs. Merridew piously insists, "No, Mr. Christian. . . . We are doing this to save you."

Uncle Willy is sent to Memphis for a "cure" and when he returns he is no longer addicted to morphine, but has begun to depend heavily on alcohol. After a year of comparably "clean living" the old man returns from a trip to Memphis one July morning with a huge wife of questionable appearance and reputation. By afternoon the ever-vigilant Mrs. Merridew is on the telephone indignantly shouting, "Married! Married! Whore! Whore!" to the other good ladies of Jefferson, and

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., p. 236.
by the next day Uncle Willy's wife is on her way back to Memphis with a new car and a thousand dollar check from the old man's sister.

Mrs. Merridew does rid Uncle Willy of dope addiction and even of his gaudy wife from Memphis' Manuel Street, but she does not ultimately triumph over him. The old man escapes from the hospital to which Mrs. Merridew has had him committed, sells his drugstore, and buys an airplane which he insists he will learn to fly. On the day of the planned flight Uncle Willy's servant, Job, telephones Mrs. Merridew asking her to come immediately and stop the flight which he is sure will end in disaster.

But Uncle Willy takes the plane into the air and crashes it, thus killing himself before Mrs. Merridew can recapture him. The narrator concludes,

Uncle Willy was the finest man I ever knew, because even women couldn't beat him, because in spite of them he wound up his life getting fun out of being alive and he died doing the thing that was the most fun of all because I was there to help him. And that's something that most men and even most women too don't get to do, not even the women that call meddling with other folks' lives fun. 13

In the short story, "That Evening Sun," when Mr. Compson offers to walk the terrified Negro cook home Mrs. Compson whines, "You'll leave me alone, to take Nancy home? ... Is her safety more precious to you than mine?" 14 This shallow,

13 Ibid., p. 225.  
14 Ibid., p. 293.
self-centered picture of Caroline Compson drawn in the story is expanded, yet not tempered, in the later novel, The Sound and the Fury.

From one point of view Mrs. Compson can be seen as the ultimate cause of the tragic sequence of events in the novel. Concerned with social and not moral or emotional values, the woman fails to provide her family with either an atmosphere of love or a model of successful living. As Howe observes, Mrs. Compson is "always a lady and never a mother."15

Caddy senses the sense of security Benjy receives from being held, but the mother instructs her,

"He's too big for you to carry. You must stop trying. You'll injure your back. All of our women have prided themselves on their carriage. Do you want to look like a washerwoman." "He's not too heavy." Caddy said. "I can carry him." "Well, I don't want him carried, then," Mother said. "A five year old child. No, no—not in my lap. Let him stand up."16

Years later when Caddy becomes pregnant, Mrs. Compson displays the same lack of empathy for her daughter as she did for Benjy. The woman's main concern in this situation is not for Caddy's well-being, but that her daughter maintain social respectability. Thus Mrs. Compson takes the girl to a resort

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to find a husband and marries her off to the first prospect, even though this happens to be the loutish Herbert Head.

Quentin's obsessive love for Caddy may in part be explained by his lament, "If I'd just had a mother so I could say Mother Mother." Since Mrs. Compson obviously fails in her role of mother, the boy turns to his sister for all-encompassing maternal love, and when circumstances make it impossible for Caddy to fulfill this need, Quentin commits suicide.

As Caroline was not a mother, neither was she a wife. Distraught over his family's tragedy, Mr. Compson begins to drink, and instead of the sympathetic comfort which might have erased his need for liquor Mrs. Compson offers only spite. "Look at me, I suffer too, but I'm not so weak that I must kill myself with whiskey."  

The only child which Mrs. Compson ever states she loves is Jason, whom she believes to have inherited her Bascomb qualities in contrast to the rest of the children's Compson traits. But even the vicious Jason is also a victim of the woman's pettiness, and in the discourses between the two one's sympathy is drawn toward the son. When Mrs. Compson discovers that Caddy's daughter, Quentin, has been truant from school, again the woman's concern is not for the child but for what society will think of her. She cries, "But to have the school

17 Ibid., p. 213.  
18 Ibid., p. 248.
authorities think that I have no control over her, that I
cant--." The old woman then breaks down with self-pity and
whines, "I know I'm just a trouble and burden to you." "I ought to know it," Jason replies, "you've been telling
me that for thirty years."  

Although Dilsey is the mainstay of the family Jason
derides her, asking his mother if she ever had a servant
worth killing. Mrs. Compson defensively exclaims, "I have
to humour them . . . I have to depend on them so completely.
It's not as if I were strong. I wish I were. I wish I could
do all the house work myself. I could at least take that much
off your shoulders." "And a fine pigsty we'd live in,
too," Jason replies.

Mrs. Compson's selfish traits are most clearly seen when
juxtaposed with the loving fidelity of Dilsey. When it is
discovered that Benjy is mentally retarded, his mother's
family pride causes her to change his name, which had been
Maury as was her brother's. But Dilsey knows that such pride
is useless and says, "Name aint going to help him. Hurt him,
neither." When Miss Quentin runs away Mrs. Compson tells

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19 Ibid., p. 223.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., p. 224.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., p. 347.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., p. 71.
Dilsey that she has committed suicide, but the sensible Dilsey says that there is no reason to suspect such an act. With characteristic self-centeredness the white woman replies, "What reason did Quentin have? Under God's heaven what reason did he have? It can't be simply to flout and hurt me. Whoever God is, He would not permit that. I'm a lady. You might not believe that from my offspring, but I am."  

Thus enveloped in self-concern and pity Mrs. Compson maintains her gentility, never perceiving that her own inability to love has been a major factor in the destruction of those around her.

Ellen Coldfield Sutpen is another example of the woman who, immersed in the dictates of society, lacks the perception necessary to cope with life realistically. When the whole town refused to attend her marriage to the notorious Sutpen, Ellen cried, not because of whom she was marrying but because of the town's attitude. Later when Sutpen's wealth accumulated to the point where no one dared speak against him, Ellen seemed "not only to acquiesce, to be reconciled to her life and marriage, but to be actually proud of it."  

Unwilling to face life as it was, the woman "escaped . . . into a world of pure illusion in which, safe from any harm, she moved,

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27 Ibid., p. 374.

lived, from attitude to attitude against her background of chatelaine to the largest, wife to the wealthiest, mother of the most fortunate."\textsuperscript{29}

When her son, Henry, brought the handsome Charles Bon home from school, Ellen immediately saw the social possibilities of a marriage between the eligible young bachelor and her daughter, Judith. Thus scarcely after the pair met the mother began "shopping, buying the trousseau for that wedding whose formal engagement existed no where yet save in Ellen's mind."\textsuperscript{30}

This petty woman's hierarchy of values is perhaps best seen in her attitude and aspirations toward Bon. Divorced from the emotional realities of life, Ellen sees all human relationships in terms of the artificial expectations of society. Ellen's sister, Rosa, reflects that

Ellen did not once mention love between Judith and Bon. She did not even hint around it. Love, with reference to them was just a finished and perfectly dead subject like the matter of virginity would be after the birth of the first grandchild. She spoke of Bon as if he were three inanimate objects in one, or perhaps one inanimate object for which she and her family would find three concordant uses: a garment which Judith might wear as she would a riding habit or a ball gown, a piece of furniture which would complement and complete the furnishing of her house and position, and a mentor and example to correct Henry's provincial manners and speech and clothing.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 69.  
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 103.  
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 75.
When Sutpen tells Henry that Bon is actually Judith's and his half-brother, the two boys flee to New Orleans, and Ellen, unable to understand her son's departure, retires to her room, staying there until the day of her death two years later. At this time the town believed that the woman was prostrate "not at the upset of the marriage but at the shock of reality entering her life."³²

But reality never actually touches the woman, even during the privation of the Civil War. At this time Ellen is characterized as a butterfly, the moth caught in a gale and blown against a wall . . . not in particular pain since it was too light to have struck hard, nor even with very much remembrance of the bright vacuum before the gale, but just in bewildered and uncomprehending amazement--the bright trivial shell not even changed to any great extent despite the year of bad food.³³

Continuing the image, preceding Ellen's death Miss Rosa observed,

Ellen had lost some flesh of course, but it was as the butterfly itself enters dissolution by actually dissolving: . . . the pattern of the spots drawing a little closer together, but with no wrinkle to show--the same smooth, almost girlish face on the pillow . . . the same almost plump soft . . . hand on the coverlet, and only the bafflement in the dark uncomprehending eyes to indicate anything of present life by which to postulate approaching death.³⁴

³²Ibid., p. 79. ³³Ibid., p. 85. ³⁴Ibid., p. 86.
Ineffective, unperceiving, Ellen passes through and out of life never touched by, and more tragically, never touching those around her whom she could have loved.

In *Sartoris* Narcissa Benbow is a relatively mild young girl, who even after her marriage to the violent young Bayard Sartoris and her subsequent widowhood is primarily known for her "constant serenity." The only ripple in this calm exterior is the fact that against Miss Jenny's advice Narcissa refuses to destroy the obscene anonymous love letters which she receives. But after her marriage these letters come no more, and nothing else in Sartoris mars her benign countenance.

But in *Sanctuary* Narcissa emerges as a malignant force of society. The woman's earlier personality of constant serenity evolves into a character possessing "a broad, stupid, serene face."  

When Horace Benbow undertakes the defense of the accused murderer, Lee Goodwin, and aids the man's ex-prostitute common-law wife, Ruby, Narcissa is horrified. When the ladies of the town refuse to rent Ruby a room in which to stay while the trial takes place, Horace offers to let her stay at the old Benbow home; but his sister stubbornly asserts that no street walker will ever stay in her family home.

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Narcissa self-righteously complains, "I cannot have my brother mixed up with a woman people are talking about." Horace assures Narcissa that Goodwin is innocent and that despite the lack of a marriage license Ruby is a loyal and loving wife. Narcissa's sense of ethics is revealed when she caustically replies, "I don't see that it makes any difference who did it. The question is, are you going to stay mixed up with it?" When Horace asks his sister if she believes the rumor that he is sexually involved with Ruby, the woman placidly replies, "I don't think anything about it. I don't care. That's what people in town think. So it doesn't matter whether it's true or not."

Thus, "living a life of serene vegetation like perpetual corn or wheat in a sheltered garden instead of a field," Narcissa is completely subservient to the petty laws of society and completely oblivious to the higher dictates of human morality and responsibility.

These values are vividly demonstrated in the short story "There Was a Queen." Twelve years after her husband's death, a federal agent comes to tell Narcissa that the obscene love letters she received before her marriage, and which were later stolen from her, have been found at the scene of a bank

\[37\text{Ibid., p. 178.}\]
\[38\text{Ibid., p. 179.}\]
\[39\text{Ibid., p. 179.}\]
\[40\text{Ibid., p. 103.}\]
robbery. Horrified at the prospect of people knowing that a man thought such things about her, Narcissa offers to buy the letters and when the man refuses this, she offers herself to him. This he accepts and the pair travel to Memphis to complete the transaction. Narcissa returns to Jefferson the next day and with obvious self-satisfaction tells Miss Jenny that she has recovered the letters and burned them. Miss Jenny is aghast at Narcissa's reasoning and behavior, and later that night she dies. Perhaps the indomitable old lady did not care to live longer in a world where those closest to her sacrifice their morality to save their reputation.
CHAPTER VI

DESTRUCTIVE SPINSTERS

In Faulkner's work are a group of spinsters who because they are unable to face reality, escape in fantasy and illusion. This lack of ability to cope with life often results in injury not only to the woman but also to those around her. Miss Minnie Cooper, who appears in "Dry September" is depicted as a thirty-eight- or thirty-nine-year-old spinster who lives with her invalid mother and a "thin, sallow, unflagging aunt" in a small frame house in Jefferson. The woman had been something of a belle in her youth, but as the years passed 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 until the children of the other girls had been calling her 'aunty' for several years.\(^1\)

The man who did call on her was a forty-year-old widowed bank cashier who "owned the first automobile in town, a red runabout"\(^3\) and who always smelled faintly of whiskey. After Miss Minnie asked her friend's children to call her "cousin" instead of "aunty" and then began to spend her Sunday


\(^2\)Ibid., p. 174.

\(^3\)Ibid.
afternoons riding about town in the red car the woman "was relegated into adultery by public opinion."\(^4\) This affair lasted four years, after which the cashier moved to Memphis and Miss Minnie assumed a bright haggard air and began to drink.

For eight years after this the spinster's daily schedule consisted of sitting in the porch swing from ten until noon, taking a nap after dinner, going to town in the afternoon, and sometimes going to an evening movie with a woman friend. "Against that background Minnie's bright dresses, her idle and empty days, had a quality of furious unreality."\(^5\)

Minnie attempts to fulfill her life vicariously through the evening movies, but the paired young men and women there only point up the lack of love in her own life. This means of escape from reality failing, Minnie then takes refuge in fantasy and spreads the rumor that Will Mayes, a Negro man, has attacked her. The element of savage racial distrust in Jefferson seizes the rumor as proof of Negro attacking Southern White Womanhood, and disregarding the sensible barber who reminds them of Miss Minnie's previous "man scares," they murder Will Mayes.

The Saturday after the supposed incident Minnie goes to the movies with a group of women friends, but as the feature begins the spinster begins to laugh hysterically and has to

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 175. \(^5\)Ibid., p. 175.
be led from the building. Once home the woman is put to bed and as her friends apply ice packs to her head even they wonder, "Do you suppose anything really happened? . . . Poor girl! Poor Minnie!"  

In Absalom, Absalom! Rosa Coldfield desperately sought love to fill her life, but when it was emphatically denied her she substituted a vengeful hate as the purpose for which she lived. The spinster's childhood was spent with a passive, puritan father and a vindictive maiden aunt who later ran away with a horse trader, leaving little Rosa in charge of the house. After this Rosa reflects, "I did not have time now to play, even if I ever had any inclination." Occasional trips were made by the child to visit her older sister, Ellen, her husband Thomas Sutpen and their children, Judith and Henry, but at an early age Rosa was taught by her father to think of Thomas Sutpen as a sort of ogre and monster.

During the Civil War Rosa's father boarded himself up in his attic and starved to death, and thus the girl was completely orphaned. The Sutpen family continued to prosper financially, and excitement was engendered in the house by Judith's supposed engagement to Charles Bon. Although Rosa was Judith's aunt she was four years younger than her niece,

6Ibid., p. 182.
and the imminent marriage brought forth all the lonely orphan's yearning for love. Rosa watched Judith with myopic and inarticulate yearning and not one whit of jealousy, projecting upon Judith all the abortive dreams and delusions of her own doomed and frustrated youth, offering Judith the only gift (it was Ellen who told this, with shrieks of amusement, more than once) in her power: she offered to teach Judith how to keep house and plan meals and count laundry.8

Although Rosa never met Bon, she fashioned a world of illusion around the photograph of him which she saw once, and in this manner experienced the love which reality had denied her. The woman was fully aware that in the fantasy in which she became Bon's beloved she was vicariously playing Judith's role, but for her niece Rosa felt no jealousy. Rosa insisted that she loved Bon "not as women love, as Judith loved him"9 but in a worshipful manner which neither gave nor asked anything of him. But when Henry killed Bon even this mode of escape vanished for the spinster.

Ellen died during the Civil War leaving Judith, Clytie, and Rosa to scrape subsistence from the decaying plantation until the return of Colonel Thomas Sutpen. When the defeated Colonel did return home he spoke briefly to Judith, nodded to Clytie, but he did not recognize his dead wife's sister until Judith explained, "It's Rosa. Aunt Rosa. She lives here now."10

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8 Ibid., p. 71.  
9 Ibid., p. 146.  
10 Ibid., p. 159.
For several months Sutpen furiously worked to salvage his plantation, but one night he interrupted this single-minded drive to bluntly propose marriage to Rosa. "You may think I made your sister Ellen no very good husband. You probably do think so. But even if you will not discount the fact that I am older now, I believe I can promise that I shall do no worse at least for you."\textsuperscript{11} Not waiting for an answer, the man slipped Ellen's wedding ring onto Rosa's finger.

Such was Rosa's need for love that without protest she became engaged to the man whom she had viewed from childhood as a villain. This engagement lasted for several months with Sutpen paying no heed to his fiancee until one afternoon he spoke the words which with finality severed Rosa from her last hope of love. The man proposed to Rosa that they "try it" first, and if a son were born to her they would then be wed. Years later the embittered spinster recalled that the demon spoke those "bald outrageous words exactly as if he were consulting with Jones or with some other man about a bitch dog or a cow or mare."\textsuperscript{12}

At this point in her life Rosa quitted her search for love, and in its place made an active and vehement hate for Sutpen the purpose of her life.

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 164. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 168.
It is this hate which forty-three years later prompts Miss Rosa to summon Quentin Compson to hear her story of the demon Sutpen, even though the man is now dead and his desolate land is inhabited only by Clytie, his half-Negro daughter, and Jim Bond, his idiot great-grandson. The spinster tells Quentin that she wants him to hear the tale so that after he is married he can submit it to a magazine and make some extra money, but the boy senses her true motive.

It's because she wants it told, he thought, so that people whom she will never see and whose names she will never hear and who have never heard her name nor seen her face will read it and know at last why God let us lose the war: that only through the blood of our men and the tears of our women could He stay this demon and efface his name and lineage from the earth.\(^{13}\)

Dressed in the "eternal black which she had worn for forty-three years now, whether for sister, father, or nohusband none knew,"\(^{14}\) the embittered old woman sat in the dusty September afternoon and with an air "of impotent and static rage"\(^{15}\) related her tale of Sutpen to Quentin. Then, telling Quentin that she believes someone besides Clytie and Jim have been living on what remains of Sutpen's Hundred, Rosa persuades the young man to go there with her to find out.

When the two reach the old boarded-up house Miss Rosa produces a hatchet with which Quentin forces a shutter open

\(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 11. \(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 7. \(^{15}\)Ibid.
and enters. In the dark a match is struck and old Clytie appears with a bunch of rusty keys and opens the front door for Rosa. Without a word the vengeful woman heads for the stairs as Clytie pleads to Quentin, "Dont let her go up there, young marster. . . . Dont you go up there, Rosie."16 At the top of the stairs the spinster finds the sick and dying Henry Sutpen.

Apparently satisfied, Rosa departs, and it is not until three months later that she returns with an ambulance to take Henry to a hospital. But seeing the ambulance approach, Clytie believes they are coming to hang Henry for the murder of Charles Bon, and so sets fire to the house and burns Henry and herself to death before Rosa can reach them.

When Quentin tells his Harvard roommate this, Shreve asks, "And she waited three months before she went back to get him. . . . Why did she do that?"17 Receiving no answer, Shreve continues,

Do you suppose it was because she knew what was going to happen when she told it, took any steps, that it would be over then, finished, and that hating is like drink or drugs and she had used it so long that she did not dare risk cutting off the supply, destroying the source, the very poppy's root and seed?18

Shreve's analysis proves correct, for a short time after the fatal fire at Sutpen's Hundred Miss Rosa dies. Although

16Ibid., p. 369. 17Ibid., p. 373.
18Ibid., pp. 373-374.
outraged at the time of Thomas Sutpen's death, Miss Rosa could at least transfer her hate to his descendants. But with the death of Henry and Clytie and flight of Jim Bond the hate, which had sustained the spinster's spirit since she had ceased to hope for love, had no object. With her "grim and implacable unforgiving" Miss Rosa finally destroyed the last vestige of the man who had presented a final chance of love and had then destroyed it, and so for her there was no longer any reason to live.

The short story "A Rose for Emily" contains one of Faulkner's most masterful characterizations of the love-denied spinster. Miss Emily Grierson, who dies at the age of seventy-four after over forty years of seclusion in the decaying Grierson mansion, is at her death viewed by the town as a fallen monument.

As a girl she and her father had constituted the last of one of Jefferson's best families, and in the town's opinion had "held themselves a little too high for what they really were. None of the young men were quite good enough for Miss Emily and such." When her father died, leaving Emily only the house and the memories of the young men he had driven away, "in a way, people were glad. At last they could pity

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20 Faulkner, Collected Stories, p. 123.
Miss Emily. Being left alone, and a pauper, she had become humanized.\textsuperscript{21}

Emily was thirty at the time of her father's death and thus even though she was now free of the domineering father, her chances for matrimony in Jefferson were rather slim. But the summer after Mr. Grierson's death the town let a contract for paving its sidewalks and a construction company moved in to do the job. The foreman of the company was a man "named Homer Barron, a Yankee—a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face. . . . Pretty soon he knew everybody in town. Whenever you heard a lot of laughing anywhere about the square, Homer Barron would be in the center of the group."\textsuperscript{22}

This was hardly the type of man whom one would expect an over-thirty Grierson woman to be interested in, but soon the town began to see Homer and Miss Emily driving around on Sunday afternoons in the yellow-wheeled buggy from the livery stable. The younger town people were glad that Miss Emily had found some companionship, because they were certain that a Grierson would never form a serious relationship with a day laborer and a Northerner at that. But the older people soon convinced the town that Emily was a fallen woman.

'Do you suppose it's really so?' they said to one another. 'Of course it is. What else could . . . .'\textsuperscript{21,22}

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid. \textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p. 124.
This behind their hands, rustling of craned silk and satin behind jalousies closed upon the sun of Sunday afternoon as the thin, swift clop-clop-clop of the matched team passed: "Poor Emily."\(^\text{23}\)

After this the town wavered in its opinion as to whether Homer, who had stated he was not a marrying man, would relent and marry Miss Emily. But when the spinster ordered a man's silver toilet set with the initials H.B. and bought a man's outfit of clothes and a nightshirt, the general consensus was that the couple would soon be married. The whole town was relieved at this turn of events for before it had been so obvious that Homer was going to marry Miss Emily, the woman had commandeered a box of arsenic from the druggist, refusing to state what she intended to use it for. Even though the druggist labeled the package "for rats," everyone felt that Miss Emily meant to commit suicide.

But now when Homer left Jefferson, the town believed he had gone to prepare a place for Miss Emily or perhaps to give her time to get rid of the two Alabama cousins who had come to live with her at the request of the Baptist minister's wife. Sure enough, Homer returned to Jefferson within three days after the cousins left town, for one of the neighbors saw Miss Grierson's servant, Tobe, let him in the house. But after that no one saw Homer Barron again, and for a long time Miss Emily wasn't seen in public. When she finally did appear, she had grown fat and her hair had turned iron gray.

\(^{23}\)Ibid., p. 125.
After this, except for a short time in her forties when she gave china painting lessons, Miss Emily remained in seclusion with only Tobe as servant and companion. The only times the town was bothered with her was when she refused to pay her taxes, when she refused to "have a mailbox affixed to her house, and when men had to furtively spread lime in the spinster's basement and outhouses because of the smell of what they assumed was a dead rat.

(Thus the town came to Miss Emily's funeral in order to see the inside of the house which had cloistered the solitary old woman for almost half a century. Only after she was decently buried did the men force the door to the upstairs room which no one had seen in forty years. There, under the heavy dust, was a room prepared as if for a bridal night, and on the dresser was a man's silver toilet set, so heavily tarnished that the monogram was obscured. In the bed lay the decayed skeleton of a man in the remains of his night shirt. In the pillow beside him was the indenture of a head, and in the indenture was a strand of iron-gray hair.

Although many critics have seen this story as an expression of Faulkner's ambivalent view of the South, in the author's remarks during his lectures in Japan he relates the theme of the story solely to the character of Miss Emily. When asked what "Rose" in the title meant Faulkner replied,

Oh, that was an allegorical title; the meaning was, here was a woman who had had a tragedy, an
irrevocable tragedy and nothing could be done about it, and I pitied her and this was a salute, just as if you were to make a gesture, a salute to anyone: to a woman you would hand a rose, as you would lift a cup of sake to a man.24

When asked if he liked Emily the author replied that he felt sorry for her tragedy.

At the time when she could have found a husband, . . . her father . . . said, "No, you must stay here and take care of me." And then when she found a man, she had had no experience in people. She picked out probably a bad one, who was about to desert her. And when she lost him she could see that for her that was the end of life, there was nothing left, except to grow older, alone, solitary; she had had something and she wanted to keep it, which is bad—to go to any length to keep something, but I pity Emily.25

Nevertheless, the role of the South or at least of society cannot be discounted in interpreting the story. Significantly, the only information we receive about Miss Emily is given by a narrator who feels it important to state the town's or society's view of the woman at each stage of her life. One is constantly reminded that society hovers over Miss Emily, judging not only her actions but what it feels should be her attitudes. Before her reverses, the town resented Miss Emily's aristocratic air, but when she deigned to love Barron they were displeased that she would forget her pride and be seen with a common day laborer.


25 Ibid., p. 70.
Thus perhaps Miss Emily should be primarily seen as a forerunner of the modern woman who dares to flout not only the petty edicts of society, but in desperation, with murder, will also defy God's law. Yet at the same time it must be remembered that the woman's ultimate objectives in these acts were society's institution of marriage and more important, God's directive to love. Sister Mary Bride convincingly concludes that the story is a complex image of "a rose offered in admiration to a woman of indomitable spirit who clung, in the very process of dissolution, to the vision of an ideal."\(^\text{26}\)

Like Miss Emily, Joanna Burden in *Light in August* is a victim of her own father's fanaticism. A Unitarian abolitionist, the old man forges into his daughter's mind the belief that it is her eternal duty to uplift the Negro race in order to expiate the sins of her own race against the dark-skinned one. Young Joanna can not accept this and early thinks of Negroes "not as people, but as a thing, a shadow in which I lived, we lived, all white people, all other people . . . and I seemed to see the black shadow in the shape of a cross."\(^\text{27}\) After having terrifying dreams in which little babies were strung on black crosses, the child tells her

\(^{26}\)Sister Mary Bride, *The Explicator*, XX (May, 1962), item 78.

father that she "must escape, get away from under the shadow" or she will die. To this the father replied,

You cannot. . . . You must struggle, rise. But in order to rise, you must raise the shadow with you. . . . But escape it you cannot. The curse of the black race is God's curse. But the curse of the white race is the black man who will be forever God's chosen own because He once cursed Him. 29

But apparently the woman reconciled herself to her father's plan for her life, for in the novel she is first seen as an over-forty spinster dedicated to the advancement of Negro schools and colleges. Living alone in a large house outside Jefferson, the northern woman is ignored by the town's white society and the only visitors who enter the house are Negro neighbors seeking advice.

The spinster first sees the man who will bring her both fulfillment and death when he enters her darkened kitchen to steal food. Unalarmed, Joanna tells the thief that if it is just food he wants he will find it, and equally calm the thief, Joe Christmas, merely stops chewing for a moment to listen to these words.

Subsequently Joanna gives Joe a cabin near her home in which he lives while working at the town mill, and in a short time the man becomes the Calvinistic spinster's lover. For Joe, a thirty-three-year-old orphan who although white in appearance believes himself to be part Negro, the affair

28 Ibid., p. 222. 29 Ibid.
begins as a mere diversion. But for Joanna the affair represents not only a frenzied release from the renunciation of her womanhood, but also the ultimate depth of degradation to which her puritan soul could fall.

After their first sexual encounter Joe reflects,

My God . . . it was like I was the woman and she was the man. But that was not right, either. Because she had resisted to the very last. But it was not woman resistance, that resistance which, if really meant, cannot be overcome by any man for the reason that the woman observes no rules of physical combat. But she had resisted fair, by the rules that decreed that upon a certain crisis one was defeated, whether the end of resistance had come or not.30

But later, when Joanna comes to his cabin with her hair uncovered Joe realized, "She's trying to be a woman and she don't know how."31

But soon Joe comes to equate this relationship with being in a symbolic sewer. The staid spinster, by day dressed in clean calico dresses and starched bonnets, became at night a mad nymphomaniac who compelled the man to "seek her about the dark house until he found her, hidden, in closets, in empty rooms, waiting, panting, her eyes in the dark glowing like the eyes of cats."32 At first "the abject fury of the New England glacier exposed suddenly to the fire of the New England biblical hell"33 shocked Joe.

Perhaps he was aware of the abnegation in it: the imperious and fierce urgency that concealed an actual despair at frustrate and irrevocable years, which she appeared to attempt to compensate each night as if she believed that it would be the last night on earth by damming herself forever to the hell of her forefathers, by living not alone in sin but in filth.34

Joanna's conscience told her she was living in sin, but her feminine instinct told her that the time of sexuality left her was short and she must fast compensate for her barren years. The dissipated woman implored,

"Don't make me have to pray yet. Dear God, let me be damned a little longer, a little while." She seemed to see her whole past life, the starved years like a gray tunnel, at the far and irrevocable end of which, as unfading as a reproach, her naked breast of three short years ago ached as though in agony, virgin and crucified; "Not yet, dear God. Not yet, dear God."35

For the woman who had for so long submerged her own desires beneath her father's conception of duty the affair with the mulatto Joe Christmas takes on the added perversion of a symbolic sacrifice to the race toward whom she feels a guilt. For in the throes of passion Joanna would whisper to her lover, "Negro! Negro! Negro! Negro! Negro!"36

Eventually, Joanna believes herself to be pregnant and musingly tells Joe, "A full measure. Even to a bastard Negro child. I would like to see father's and Calvin's faces."37

But the "pregnancy" proves to be the beginning of menopause for the woman and with the loss of sexual desire the spinster sees Joe in a new light.

With temptation alleviated there is no real virtue in Joanna's repentance, but the woman now returns to her rigid ethical system more staunchly than ever. She attempts to force Joe to accept the role of the Negro whom she, the benefactress, lifts from darkness. Her plan is to send the man to a Negro school, any of which will accept him, she says, "on my account. You can choose any one you want among them. We won't even have to pay." \(^{38}\) Joe would then read law in the Memphis office of Miss Burden's Negro lawyer and later be put in charge of the woman's financial philanthropic labors directed toward Negroes. At this point it is obvious that Joanna's purpose is neither to redeem Joe's soul nor help him find a place which he can accept in society, but only to make her former lover "be" a Negro. The woman tells Joe,

Then I will turn over all the business to you, all the money. All of it. So that when you need money for yourself you could ... you would know how; lawyers know how to do it so that it ... you would be helping them up out of darkness and none could accuse or blame you even if they found out .... even if you did not replace ... but you could replace the money and none would ever know. \(^{39}\)

\(^{38}\) Ibid., p. 241.  \(^{39}\) Ibid., p. 242.
This idea Christmas violently rejects, telling Joanna that the whole scheme is brought about by her loss of sexuality. "There is not anything the matter with you except being old. You just got old and it happened to you and now you are not any good any more." To this the woman replies, "Maybe it would be better if we both were dead." 

Joanna then reverts to missionary tactics to both figuratively and literally bring Joe to his knees and thus regain her self-image of benefactress. She pleads, "not to school, then, if you don't want to go . . . Do without that . . . your soul. Expiation of . . . hell . . . forever and ever and ever."

But Joe's one answer to this is "No." The harshness of his foster father's Calvinism had conditioned Christmas to be repelled by religion, and when he seemed to see the imprint of kneeling knees beside his former mistress' bed "he would jerk his eyes away as if it were death that they had looked at."

On the night of the crucial episode of their relationship Joanna is on her knees praying when Joe enters her room. "'Kneel with me,' she said. 'No,' he said. 'Kneel,' she said. 'You won't even need to speak to Him yourself. Just kneel. Just make the first move.' 'No,' he said. 'I'm

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40 Ibid., p. 243.  
41 Ibid.  
42 Ibid., p. 244.  
43 Ibid.  
44 Ibid.
The woman then prays aloud, asking God to forgive both of them for their sins, and then standing, she says quietly, "Then there's just one other thing to do. 'There's just one other thing to do,' he said."

On the final night of the guilt-ridden spinster's life Joe enters her darkened bedroom armed with a razor. As William O'Connor observes, here Joanna reveals that like Doc Hines she sees herself as God's instrument, for when she again asks her lover to kneel with her she says, "I don't ask it. It's not I who ask it. Kneel with me." But Joe again refuses, and from under her shawl Joanna pulls the gun, loaded with two bullets, with which she intends to kill them both. As Tuck notes, "Significantly, her weapon is an old Civil War pistol, a relic, as she herself is a relic, of her family's past." But Joe grabs the pistol from her and with his razor murders the woman who through barren passion furtively sought to escape her father's decree that her life must be lived to expiate the black shadow of racial guilt.

Miss Sophonsiba Beauchamp, the spinster of "Was" in Go Down Moses, is primarily a comic figure, and while she also

45 Ibid., p. 245.  
46 Ibid.  
48 Faulkner, Light in August, p. 247.  
escapes reality in fantasy her dreams do not cause tragedy as do those of the other women in this group.

Having convinced herself that her brother is in reality an English earl, Miss Sophonsiba coerces everyone into calling her plantation "Warick," and from there vents her coy attention upon the confirmed old bachelor, Uncle Buck McCaslin. The spinster's finest opportunity to allure Uncle Buck comes when he, his brother and their nephew, McCaslin Edmonds, come to the Beauchamp plantation to find Tomey's Turl, their Negro slave who periodically runs away to visit his sweetheart at the Beauchamps.

Miss Sophonsiba greets the trio with a red ribbon around her neck, attired in her Sunday dress, and immediately begins her campaign for Uncle Buck. The then nine-year-old McCaslin recalls,

Miss Sophonsiba said how seriously now neighbors just a half day's ride apart ought not to go so long as Uncle Buck did, and Uncle Buck said Yessum, and Miss Sophonsiba said Uncle Buck was just a confirmed roving bachelor from the cradle born and this time Uncle Buck even quit chewing and looked and said, Yes Ma'am, he sure was . . . and Miss Sophonsiba said ah, that maybe Uncle Buck just aint met the woman yet who would accept what Uncle Buck was pleased to call misery, but who would make Uncle Buck consider even his freedom a small price to pay, and Uncle Buck said, "Nome. Not yet."50

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50 William Faulkner, Go Down, Moses (New York, 1942), pp. 11-12.
Miss Sophonsiba's tactics continue with offers to show Uncle Buck her garden and to sweeten his toddy by the touch of her own sweet lips. Still ignoring the designing woman, Uncle Buck and the other men escape to the woods to hunt the runaway slave. But the old bachelor soon discovers that even in the masculine domain of the woodland he is still prey for a determined woman. For the romantic Miss Sophonsiba who feels herself to be an earl's sister, it is no long step to picturing herself as Lady Sophonsiba whose Knight must wear her token in battle. She sends a small package to Uncle Buck by a servant and McCaslin reports the man's reaction.

Then Uncle Buck took it and unwrapped it. It was the piece of red ribbon that had been on Miss Sophonsiba's neck and Uncle Buck sat there on Black John, holding the ribbon like it was a little water moccasin only he wasn't going to let anybody see he was afraid of it, batting his eyes fast at the nigger. Then he stopped batting his eyes. "What for?" he said. "She just sot hit to you," the nigger said. "She say to tell you 'success.'"51

The hunt for Tomey's Turl is unsuccessful and Mr. Beauchamp retires, followed by the McCaslins. As Uncle Buck and young McCaslin climb the stairs in the darkened house to find a room in which to sleep, the wary Uncle Buck says, "Likely hers will be in the back . . . where she can holler down to the kitchen without having to get up. Besides, an unmarried lady will sholy have her door locked with strangers

51Ibid., p. 16.
in the house." But Uncle Buck forgot that the lady's most cherished wish was to alter her marital state. Hearing no sound from the first door they find, the man and boy enter and in the darkened room undress. Only when Uncle Buck climbs into the bed does Miss Sophonsiba sit up on the other side and scream.

Despite Uncle Buck's protests that the incident was purely accidental Mr. Beauchamp insists that the bachelor is obligated to marry Miss Sophonsiba and delightedly exclaims, "Yes, sir. She's got you, 'Pilus, and you know it. You run a hard race and you run a good one, but you skun the hen-house one time too many." Although Uncle Buck escapes Miss Sophonsiba this time through wagers on a card game with her brother, it is evident that she later catches him, for the narrator of "Was" is the child of that marriage.

52 Ibid., p. 20.  
53 Ibid., p. 23.
CHAPTER VII

WANTON WOMEN

Howe states that "there is hardly a young woman in Faulkner's novels . . . who does not provoke quantities of bitterness and bile,"¹ and that "few writers have trained such ferocity on the young American bitch"² as Faulkner. These are perhaps overstatements, but it is true that wanton, unfeeling young women appear regularly in Faulkner's work. These women characteristically use their sexuality with neither love nor responsibility, and are both self-centered and insensitive in their relationship with others. Lacking the capacity to love, these women destroy their own humanity and void any possibility of genuine human relationships.

Dewey Dell lacks the moral and emotional depth to be genuinely affected by any of the circumstances which befall the Bundren family in As I Lay Dying. The young girl has no moral convictions of her own and relies on circumstances which she feels to be directed by an "it" to determine whether she will allow Lafe to seduce her. As she and Lafe pick

²Ibid.
cotton Dewey Dell thinks, "If the sack is full when we get to the woods it won't be me. I said if it don't mean for me to do it the sack will not be full and I will turn up the next row but if the sack is full, I cannot help it. It will be that I had to do it all the time and I cannot help it." When she reaches the end of the row Dewey Dell's sack is full of cotton, so with no feeling of either guilt or love she gives herself to the man. Even after she realizes that she is pregnant Dewey Dell feels no great disturbance and admits, "I try to but I can't think long enough to worry." When Addie becomes ill the perceptive Darl accuses his sister, "You want her to die so you can get to town: is that it?" After Addie's death the young girl does appear to be more interested in the opportunity to buy bananas in town than she does in the fact that her mother is dead. Dewey Dell, who at first irrationally believed that if no one knew about her condition it didn't exist, finally realizes that she must contend with the situation. During Addie's funeral journey the girl, with blind confidence, tries to buy the abortion pills which Lafe has assured her are to be bought for ten dollars in any drug store. In her pursuit of a quick remedy for her predicament Addie's daughter placidly allows

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 57. 
\(^5\)Ibid., p. 38.
herself to be seduced by a drugstore clerk even though she realizes that the medicine and "operation" he gives her are worthless.

Darl intuitively realizes that his sister is pregnant and tells her so. For this Dewey Dell hates Darl because she knows that he sees to the core of her being. She says, "The land runs out of Darl's eyes; they swim to pinpoints. They begin at my feet and rise along my body to my face, and then my dress is gone: I sit naked on the seat above the unhurrying mules, above the travail."\(^6\)

When Darl sets fire to the barn in which his mother's stinking corpse lies, Dewey Dell seizes the opportunity to remove the threat of Darl's knowledge from her otherwise torpid existence. Although she had been closer to Darl than the other members of her family, Dewey Dell tells Gillespie that her brother set fire to his barn and then in Cash's words, "It wasn't nothing else to do. It was either send him [Darl] to Jackson, or have Gillespie sue us, because he knowed some way that Darl set fire to it."\(^7\) Thus Darl is taken by train to the mental institution while Dewey Dell rides home in the wagon, bovinely munching bananas.

The bigamous marriage of Laverne Schumann forms the basis for the novel *Pylon*. This woman who by mutual consent

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\(^6\)Ibid., p. 115.  
\(^7\)Ibid., p. 222.
is a wife to both Roger Schumann and Jack Holmes is described as "a woman not tall and not thin, looking almost like a man in the greasy coverall, with the pale strong rough ragged hair actually darker where it was sunburned, a tanned, heavy-jawed face in which the eyes looked like pieces of china." 8

The cold, china-eyed girl is first seen living with her sister and sensual brother-in-law. Laverne runs away with the young barn-storming pilot, Schumann, and in the reader's next glimpse of her she is seen giving birth to a child "on an unrolled parachute in a hangar in California," with both Schumann and Jack Holmes waiting outside. None of the three know whether the child is Schumann's or Holmes', so by a roll of the dice it is decided that Schumann will marry Laverne and give the child his name.

The nameless reporter through whose eyes the novel is seen first becomes acquainted with the strange "family" during the flying exhibitions and races connected with the opening of the New Valois airport. He becomes enamored with Laverne and provides the near-destitute group with food and lodging. The reporter sees the flyers as a courageous, almost super-human race of people, and after Schumann's violent death he hides $175.00 in the child's toy airplane which he thinks will enable Laverne, Jack, and Jackie to stay together until he can join them.

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But Laverne has no intention of retaining the youngster, whose name is Schumann, to be a shadow over the relationship with her remaining lover. As one of the reporter's friends concludes,

Before, they might not have known whose the kid was, but it was Schumann's name he went under and so in comparison to the whole mess they must have lived in, who had actually fathered the kid didn't matter. But now Schumann's gone; you asked a while ago what she [Laverne] was thinking about while he [Schumann] was sitting up there waiting for the water to hit him. I'll tell you what she and the other guy were both thinking about: that now that Schumann was gone, they would never get rid of him. Maybe they took it night about: I don't know. But now they couldn't even get him out of the room: even turning off the light wont do any good, and all the time they would be awake and moving there he will be, watching them right out of the mixedup name, Jack Schumann that the kid has. . . . So if you will tell me that Schumann has some folks in a certain town, I will tell you where she and the kid--[are going]. 9

This evaluation proves correct, for Holmes and Laverne take the little boy to the home of Schumann's father and leave while the child is asleep. Old Dr. Schumann easily evokes a promise from Laverne that she will never try to see the child again, telling her,

When you came here with Roger that day before the boy was born you and I talked and I talked different to you. I was different then; I meant it when you told me you did not know whether or not Roger was the father of your unborn child and that you would never know, and I told you, do you remember? I said "Then make Roger his father from now on." And you told me the truth, that you would not promise, that

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9Ibid., p. 176.
you were born bad and could not help it or did not think you were going to try to help it: and I told you nobody is born anything, bad or good God help us, anymore than anybody can do anything save what they must: do you remember? I meant that then. But I was younger then. And now I am not young. 10

Without a backward glance Laverne, who is again pregnant, turns from Dr. Schumann's home and irrevocably deserts her first-born child.

Cecily Saunders, the "papier mâché Virgin" of Soldier's Pay, is another example of the woman who is destructive because her sexuality lacks love and responsibility. Infatuated by a shiny uniform, Cecily became engaged to Donald Mahon before the dashing young lieutenant went away to fight the war. But when the disfigured, dying Mahon, whom everyone presumed to be dead, is unexpectedly brought home, Cecily lacks the stature to accept and love a maimed hero.

When Cecily first sees Donald's scarred face she screams and faints and later whimpers, "If I have to see him again I'll--I'll just die. I can't bear it, I can't bear it." 11 But at her father's urging Cecily tells Donald she will marry him, although she continues to see George Farr and on one occasion, with little thought, gives herself to him.

10 Ibid., p. 184.
The lascivious Januarius Jones is also attracted to "the prettiness of shallow characterless planes"\(^\text{12}\) which makes up Cecily's face, and by threatening to reveal her forbidden meetings with Farr forces his attention on her. But even this obese sensualist is repelled by Cecily's shallowness and demands of her, "What makes you so beautiful and disturbing and so goddamned dull?"\(^\text{13}\)

Cecily's renewed engagement to Donald is short-lived, and with the appropriate tearful exhibition she tells Dr. Mahon, and perhaps her own conscience, that she can't marry Donald because of her affair with George. With a placated conscience, Cecily does marry George, but she exhibits little more fidelity to him than she did to Donald.

After Donald's death Margaret Powers reflects, "Do you think she's [Cecily] satisfied? . . . Think how much fun she could have got out of being so romantically widowed, and so young. I'll bet she's cursing her luck this minute."\(^\text{14}\) This statement proves prophetic, for the next day at the train station Margaret and Joe "saw Cecily's stricken face as she melted graceful and fragile and weeping into her father's arms. And here was Mr. George Farr morose and thunderous behind her. Ignored."\(^\text{15}\) Margaret asks, "What did I tell you?" and Joe replies, "You're right. . . . It's a sweet honeymoon he's had, poor devil."\(^\text{16}\)

\(^\text{12}\)Ibid., p. 56. \(^\text{13}\)Ibid., p. 157. \(^\text{14}\)Ibid., p. 210. \(^\text{15}\)Ibid., p. 212. \(^\text{16}\)Ibid.
The short story "Elly" presents one of Faulkner's most virulent portraits of a young, unfeeling woman. Living in a large house in Jefferson with her parents and grandmother, on the house's dark veranda Elly entertains nightly "youths and men of the town at first, but later . . . almost anyone." This continues until she meets and becomes fascinated with Paul de Montigny, who is reputed to have Negro blood.

Several nights after this meeting, Paul and Elly leave the veranda for the seclusion of the lawn's shrubs, and there Elly's grandmother discovers them. Certain that the grandmother will tell her parents, Elly begs Paul to marry her, and when he refuses she quickly becomes engaged to a "grave, sober young man of impeccable character" whom she has known since childhood.

But after an engagement of two months the girl suddenly thinks, "What was I about to do?" and telephones Paul. Telling her parents that her fiance is driving her to her uncle's house to pick up her grandmother, Elly takes Paul on the trip instead. Once there, the grandmother is outraged that Paul, whom she feels to be a Negro, is to drive her home and the old woman threatens to tell Elly's father what she has seen.

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18 Ibid., p. 214.

19 Ibid.
That night Elly tells Paul that he must either marry her, or run the car off the road the next day in order to silence the grandmother. The wanton girl argues, "She is old; it wouldn't take much; maybe even the shock and you are young and maybe it won't even . . . Paul! Paul!"  

The next day as the three drive to Jefferson Elly asks Paul for the last time to marry her. When he refuses she grabs the wheel, hurling the car over a precipice, as she shouts in her grandmother's face, "Then die."  

When Elly regains consciousness she is sitting amid broken glass, and sighting her bleeding palm she whines, "And now they are dead; it's me that's hurt, and nobody will come." As cars continue to pass without stopping, the young murderess complains, "There goes another one. . . . They won't even stop to see if I am hurt."  

Temple Drake is one of the most wanton, insensitive characters to be found in Faulkner's work. Morally numb, the girl is shown in Sanctuary to be solely concerned with her own well-being and gratification. A belle at the University of Mississippi, Temple is taken to an out-of-town ball game by Gowan Stevens, a young man who prides himself on his ability to hold liquor. But, becoming intoxicated, Gowan wrecks the car and the pair walk to the home of Lee Goodwin,  

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20 Ibid., p. 221.  
21 Ibid., p. 223.  
22 Ibid.  
23 Ibid., p. 224.
a local bootlegger, where they are forced to spend the night because there is no one to drive them to town.

Obsessed with her own attractiveness, Temple flirts with Goodwin and the visiting Memphis bootlegger, Popeye, although Goodwin's common-law-wife, Ruby, warns her that such coquetry is dangerous. As Temple begins to realize what kind of situation she is in, she becomes frightened and comforts herself, saying, "if bad man hurts Temple, us'll tell the governor's soldier, wont us?" The fact that the girl relies only on society's power, as opposed to some higher moral force, is revealed when she tries to pray. Lacking any humility the only prayer she can think of is to remind God, "My father's a judge; my father's a judge." Although still frightened, Temple persists in teasing the men, and to protect the girl Ruby spends the night with her in the barn. Later the next day Temple returns to the barn with the mentally retarded Tommy as her guard. But Popeye had earlier hidden himself in the building, and when the pair arrive, he murders Tommy in order to rape the unresisting Temple with a corn-cob.

Popeye then takes Temple to Memphis, where he installs her in a house of ill-repute and showers her with gifts. Because he is impotent, the man then hires another gangster,

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25 Ibid., p. 50.
Red, to be Temple's lover, and thus Popeye vicariously enjoys the woman. But feeling some sort of affection or perhaps lust for Red, Temple disregards Popeye's orders and tries to see Red alone.

Subsequently Popeye swears to murder Red, and sets the scene for the murder by taking Temple to the night club where her lover works. The full impact of Temple's self-centeredness is felt when, aware of the danger Red is in, she nevertheless can think only of her own sexual gratification. Sighting Red, Temple grabs him, "her hips grinding against him, her mouth gaping in straining protrusion"\textsuperscript{26} and begs him, "Please. Please. Don't make me wait. I'm burning up."\textsuperscript{27} Red escapes her and leaves the room, but Popeye follows and murders the man.

Back in Jefferson, Goodwin has been accused of Tommy's murder, and his lawyer travels to Memphis in order to persuade Temple to testify that Popeye is Tommy's murderer. Temple agrees, but unexplainably, when she appears at the trial she states that Goodwin is guilty. Goodwin is subsequently murdered by a mob, Popeye is hung in Alabama for a murder he didn't commit, and unchanged, Temple goes to Europe with her father.

In \textit{Requiem for a Nun} Temple is shown eight years after Goodwin's trial. Now married to a repentant Gowan Stevens, \textsuperscript{26}Ibid., p. 232. \textsuperscript{27}Ibid., p. 233.
Temple and her husband have two children and are leaders of Jefferson's younger social set. The children's nurse is Nancy Mannigoe, a former dope-addict and prostitute, whom Temple later says she hired because the Negro woman was the only person in Jefferson who spoke the language she was used to.

But behind her facade of respectability Mrs. Gowan Stevens is in reality still the old Temple Drake. Red's brother, Pete, attempts to blackmail the woman with some letters Temple wrote to her first lover, but perhaps attracted to him by her memories of Red, Temple makes plans to run away with the blackmailer. Nancy realizes what her employer is about to do and the effect such action will have on the children, and in desperation the Negro woman murders the Stevens' youngest child. Having forced Temple to feel the realities of life and the moral responsibility for the child's death, Nancy goes to jail at peace with herself. After Nancy is sentenced to death, Temple shows possibility of redemption, for the woman seems to genuinely understand that Nancy has sacrificed her life in order to help save Temple's soul. With increasing awareness of the responsibility of life, Temple visits Nancy's prison cell and implores, "I know what to do, what I'm going to do; I found that out that same night in the nursery too. But let Him tell me how. How? Tomorrow,
and tomorrow, and still tomorrow. How?" To this Nancy serenely replies, "Trust in Him." 

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29 Ibid.
FAULKNER'S WORK PRESENTS A MYRIAD GROUP OF FEMALE CHARACTERS WHO REPRESENT VASTLY DIFFERING SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND MORAL POSITIONS. BUT OUT OF THESE SHARPLY INDIVIDUALIZED PORTRAITS EMERGES A TOTAL VIEW OF WOMANKIND WHICH REVEALS NOT ONLY THE AUTHOR'S OPINION OF WOMEN, BUT ALSO SHEDS LIGHT ON HIS VIEWS OF HUMANITY.

IN HIS OPINION OF WOMEN FAULKNER SEEMS TO BE A VICTIM OF THE DILEMMA WHICH HE OFTEN STATED WAS ONE OF HIS MAJOR THEMES: THE HUMAN HEART IN CONFLICT WITH ITSELF. SOME OF THE AUTHOR'S STRONGEST CHARACTERS ARE THE GROUP OF INDOMITABLE OLD WOMEN SUCH AS DILSEY AND JENNY DUPER. POSITIVE, OPTIMISTIC CHARACTERS, THESE WOMEN EMBODY THE QUALITIES OF LOVE, FIDELITY, AND COURAGE FOR WHICH FAULKNER FELT EVERY PERSON SHOULD STRIVE. HE OFTEN COMMENDS THE INSTINCTIVE KNOWLEDGE, SENSIBILITY, AND ENDURANCE OF WOMEN. FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE REIVERS LUCIUS SAYS, "IT'S NOT MEN WHO COPE WITH DEATH; THEY RESIST, TRY TO FIGHT BACK AND GET THEIR BRAINS TRAMPLED OUT IN CONSEQUENCE; WHERE WOMEN JUST FLANK IT, ENVELOP IT IN ONE SOFT AND INSTANTANEOUS CONFESSION OF UNRESISTANCE."  

One of Faulkner's major themes is the opposition of words and actions, and as early as *Soldiers' Pay* he comments, "Women know more about words than men ever will. And they know how little they can ever possibly mean."²

On the one hand Faulkner openly admires young women such as Caddy Compson and Ruby Lamar who flout the dogmatic rules of society in order to give and engender love, and he looks favorably on the simple steadfastness of women such as Lena Grove. But more often the author seems to be distrustful of woman's sexuality and assumes an almost puritanic attitude toward it. Despite the cover of the early novel, *Soldiers' Pay*, which in large print proclaims: "Sex and Death: Faulkner's Major Themes," the author, compared to say Joyce or D. H. Lawrence, never becomes sexually explicit. It seems almost as if after reaching a certain point of frankness, the Southern gentleman in Faulkner overrules the creative artist.

Howe asserts that "Nature and society, freedom and women, form the opening terms of Faulkner's moral dialectic,"³ and to a large extent this is true. But this statement also contains a contradiction because women as a force of nature often destroy the social and business ambitions of men. In


Sanctuary Horace Benbow says that "nature is 'she' and Progress is 'he,'" and from one point of view it could be said that the downfall of many of Faulkner's major male characters such as Thomas Sutpen, Joe Christmas, and Harry Wilbourne can be ultimately traced to woman's natural functions of sexuality. As Vickery notes, the insistent attraction of women forces man to enact the ritual of sexual pursuit even though it means the surrender of his cherished masculine freedom, his engrained beliefs, and his personal plans and ambitions. . . . The triumph of emotion and desire over reason, ethics, and society itself is inevitable. In the process men are reduced to a common denominator—the male."

On the other hand, as Howe notes, women are also seen as instruments of society who hinder man's natural freedom. With a near obsessive repetitiousness Faulkner expresses repugnance for the woman-initiated institution of marriage. In Absalom, Absalom! Hightower bitterly tells Byron, "Women made marriage." and in Intruder in the Dust Gavin tells young Chick that he has known a lot of women and "few of them were interested in love or sex either. They wanted to be married."
Even Chick later says that the conditions in pilot training of "unflagging mutual suspicion and mutual distrust and in time mutual hatred which you even come to endure . . . is probably the best of all training for successful matrimony." 8

In a slightly more humorous vein it is stated in Absalom, Absalom! that to women "any wedding is better than no wedding and a big wedding with a villain preferable to a small one with a saint." 9

Significantly, the marriages in Faulkner's work are almost without exception unhappy and limiting rather than fulfilling. The marriages of Mr. and Mrs. Compson, Ellen and Thomas Sutpen, the Bundrens, Temple and Gowan Stevens, and Eula and Flem Snopes are only the major examples of this. In A Fable we are told that Marthe and her husband are happy, although neither is drawn in depth, and Chick Mallison's parents, who are minor characters in several novels, seem to have a healthy relationship. But these are minor exceptions in comparison with the overwhelming number of dissatisfying marriages.

Nevertheless, perhaps because of his Southern upbringing, Faulkner seems to feel that marriage is necessary for both society's and woman's well-being. The barber in the short story "Hair" says, "There's not any such thing as a woman

9 Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 52.
born bad, because they are all born bad, born with the badness in them. The thing is to get them married before the badness comes to a natural head." The long list of destructive spinsters and the fact that, with the exception of Miss Habershaw and Clytie, all of Faulkner's grand old ladies were at least at one time married, attests to this. But it is also significant that these admirable ladies such as Dilsey and Jenny DuPre are all past the age of childbearing, and thus they no longer pose a sexual threat to man. In fact, nowhere in Faulkner's work is there found a young woman who is admirable in society's eyes and at the same time possesses the moral depth necessary to be a loving and effective human being.

The majority of young girls in Faulkner's work refuse to live by society's moral code. While some such as Caddy transcend society's dogma, many young women merely abdicate moral responsibility. Temple Drake, Cecily Saunders, and others in this group are the object of some of the author's fiercest castigations. It is interesting to note that no young Negro girls appear in this group, and that there are no major figures of young Negro girls in Faulkner's entire work. Perhaps suffering from racial guilt such as Joanna Burden's, Faulkner writes only of Negro women who exhibit love, fidelity, and endurance.

Thus, although most of Faulkner's work is based on the masculine hierarchy of the South, women are nevertheless essential catalysts who are the cause of much of the men's action. Never doubting the importance of women, Faulkner at once admires their durability and strength and at the same time views most female sexuality as a threat to society and the male individual. Yet in several novels he overcomes this rural Southern suspicion, and placing love above morality, creates such memorable characters as Caddy Compson and Addie Bundren.

Perhaps Faulkner's attitude toward women is essentially the same as that he felt for the South. When asked if he loved the South the author replied, "Well, I love it and hate it."\(^\text{11}\) The presence of this same ambivalence in his view of women is perhaps the primary conclusion that can be drawn in evaluating Faulkner's women characters.

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