

**A STUDY OF WOMEN CHARACTER-TYPES  
IN NOVELS OF WILLIAM FAULKNER**

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**A Thesis**

**Presented to  
the Faculty of the Department of English  
University of Houston**

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**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts**

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**by**

**Betty Lee Elgin Watson**

**August 1958**

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Through Faulkner's portrayals of women characters, certain value-judgments of that not-always-fairer sex are revealed; expressed implicitly or explicitly, these assessments vary with his particular forms of femininity. His earliest heroines, seen in Soldier's Pay, Mosquitoes, and Sartoris, foreshadow types of womanhood later depicted by Faulkner in major novels; the women portrayed in The Sound and The Fury, As I Lay Dying, Light in August, Sanctuary, Requiem for a Nun, and Absalom, Absalom! embody qualities he abhors or praises, and exemplify traits he deems virtues or vice. Faulkner places his females in patterns which appear prescribed; consequently few of his women are individuals - they tend to be types who share similar traits, and, according to which category he places them within, they are either adulated and admired, or deservedly doomed and damned.

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## INTRODUCTION

William Faulkner is a writer of varied ability; during his career as an author he has published poetry, short stories, and novels. He has received wide acclaim for his short stories and international recognition for his novels. The main characters in most of his novels are men; women characters, with slight exception, play subordinate roles. Critics consequently tend to neglect analysis of women in the novels of Faulkner; it is the hero, rather than the heroine, who is investigated.

Nine of Faulkner's novels were selected for this discussion. Soldier's Pay, Mosquitoes, and Sartoris, his three earliest novels, show his initial conception of heroine and hussy; The Sound and The Fury, As I Lay Dying, Light in August, Sanctuary, Requiem for a Nun, and Absalom, Absalom!, generally considered major works, were selected because the women therein portrayed best represent his characteristic delineations. The novels excluded are Intruder in the Dust, The Wild Palms, The Harvest, and A Fable; women presented in these novels are either repetitions of the others in depiction or are less striking examples of character-types common to the author's work. Analysis of women in the short stories lies outside the scope of this study.

Faulkner's various appraisals of women may indicate a general cultural attitude of American writers toward that sex which

might merit literary investigation; all of his novels should be considered in such an analysis. The purpose of this thesis, however, is to analyze, in chronological order, his depiction of particular female character-types. Faulkner, concerned more often with the male sex, pays his females slight attention but for the way they affect man and his world. A result is that his heroines are, for the most part, superficially or inadequately characterized. He glances at them, judges, dooms - and so thwarts their very growth.

## CHAPTER I

A central character in Faulkner's first novel, Soldier's Pay, is a woman, one around whose movements the story unfolds. As Faulkner's first heroine, Margaret Powers holds a unique position. One may ask not only what purpose she fulfills in this earliest work, but what significance, if any, does she hold for Faulkner as woman. Has she a place in, perhaps, a hierarchy of heroines? His first female character may foreshadow a conception of womanhood recreated or recurrent in later works.

Soldier's Pay, a book about men and women who have lived through a world war and have suffered accordingly, is a poignant study of human emotions in the postwar period. Margaret Powers seems to express a leading idea for the novel; it is formulated for her in an unanswered question: what is everything all about? Hers is a stifled search for an answer in a world completely shattered for some, no longer familiar to many. It is peopled by others who move in patterns determined by their own degree of contact with and reaction to the strange and rough reality of severe conflict.

Recently widowed, Margaret Powers, ex-Red Cross hostess, finds a young lieutenant, suffering with a brain injury, on a train and decides, along with an older soldier, to help bring him home to his father, a rector, who has believed him to be dead.

The boy, Donald Mahon, is, for all practical purposes, already dead, for his world is one of shadows; he knows no one,

nothing, and neither remembers nor recognizes the inhabitants of his former world: his fickle fiancée, Cecily; a devoted young servant girl, Emy, to whom he has once made love; and his faithful father, who steadfastly refuses to accept his son as hopelessly changed.

Margaret and Gilligan, the older soldier, linger on, caring for Mahon; and when Cecily elopes with a new lover, Margaret marries Donald so that he - and his father - may have a wedding before the boy dies. After his funeral Margaret moves on, alone, refusing Gilligan's plea for marriage with him. It is this sequence of events which comprise the narrative; it is the reaction of all the characters to their situations and to each other which tells the tale.

Much of the telling comes through Margaret's movement, motivation and thought; to ask what meaning may be found is also to ask what manner of woman this may be.

Introduced early in the novel, Margaret's first appearance on the train is casual and unobtrusive, set at the same pace of her subsequent behavior; for throughout the ensuing incidents she moves calmly, almost impassively, usually impersonally. Yet an occasional surge of deep restlessness is revealed through her stream of consciousness and through her conversations with Gilligan, showing the inner state perhaps compelling her movements.

Going to sleep in her hotel room, after meeting the soldiers, she is "filled with a remembered, troubling sadness."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William Faulkner, Soldier's Pay, p. 36.



Hers is a usually subdued restlessness springing from a deep sense of futility. Her marriage had been one made hastily in a "universal hysteria . . . [~~For~~] brief ecstasy . . ."<sup>2</sup>; after deciding to dissolve the marriage honestly so that nothing might "mar the memory of their three days together,"<sup>3</sup> she wrote him so, "wishing him luck," and then was notified of his death, being "tricked by a wanton Fate: a joke amusing to no one."<sup>4</sup> He had not received her letter, and this "in some way seemed the infidelity: having him die still believing in her . . ."<sup>5</sup> Margaret Powers is an honest woman.

Fate, she says, has played her a "rotten trick." And

. . . she being young must again know all the terror of parting, of that passionate desire to cling to something concrete in a dark world . . . . She recalled those nights during which they had tried to eradicate to-morrows from the world. Two rotten tricks, she thought.<sup>6</sup>

Her feelings seem fostered by a sense that not only is there nothing to cling to, but that which she has tried to hold was in its essence fleeting and ephemeral.

Expressing her disillusionment and a consequent inward numbness, she compares her "smug, impersonal room . . . [~~to~~] an appointed tomb (in which how many discontents, dreams, passions, had died?) high above a world of joy and sorrow and lust for living . . . ."<sup>7</sup> This is a world in which she tends to move as an

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

observer rather than as a true participant. Most of her actions are impersonal; many of them are mechanical or automatic.

She has always complete presence of mind - at least outwardly. She is cool and level-headed, unruffled and unperturbed, almost masculine in her firmness. But the seeming serenity soothes something else; the outward passivity protects a keenly sensitive, war-wounded being.

It could be an enforced barrenness she unconsciously bemoans.

Dead, ugly Dick. Once you were alive and young and passionate and ugly, after a time you were dead, dear Dick: that flesh, that body, which I loved and did not love, your beautiful, young, ugly body, dear Dick, become now a seething of worms, like new milk. Dear Dick . . . .<sup>8</sup>

Seemingly incapable of feeling anything for herself, her ready manifestations of sympathy for others are evident throughout, the prime example of which is her marriage to Donald Mahon. Completely meaningless to her, she is aware only of its significance to others.

Margaret's physical appearance seems to follow with her character. Slim, dark-haired, pallid, her mouth a red scar, Aubrey "Beardsley would have sickened for her . . ."<sup>9</sup>; she seems as beautiful and impervious as a painting. Her dress is always dark, always simple. Such simplicity may reflect the honesty and lack of ornamentation in her character, expressing as well a certain starkness,

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

which is also complex; "that black woman," as she is sometimes referred to, is like the dark: simple, stark, yet full of complexity and the unknown.

She remains essentially unknown, a stranger to all but Gilligan; at least it is he who comes closest to her. He is the only one to whom she actually reveals any of herself. Yet he cannot really reach her, apparently by any means; it was after "she drew his face down and kissed him with slow fire . . . [that] they knew that after all they were strangers to each other."<sup>10</sup>

When Gilligan speaks to her of marriage, she tells him it would be better just to live together; then "when we get fed up all we need do is wish each other luck and go our ways."<sup>11</sup> For ritual holds no meaning for her, and her conviction is that nothing lasts; she desires only an honesty, a purity. Gilligan expresses it thus: "What man is for her? he wondered, knowing after all that no man was for her . . . . He should be . . . someone hard and ruthless who would expect nothing from her, of whom she would expect nothing. Like two gods exchanging golden baubles."<sup>12</sup>

Isolated, almost a stranger, Margaret seems more than a woman who is searching for something. She seems to feel already that a search for anything palpable would be one in vain.

"Am I cold by nature," she asks herself, "or have I spent all my emotional coppers, that I don't seem to feel things like

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 305.    <sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 307.    <sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

others?"<sup>13</sup> Nothing seems really to touch her, and hers seems an eternal sadness. She goes through only the motions of living. Yet many of the motions she makes, while often automatic, seem truly sympathetic reactions to another's plight.

Perhaps it could have been as Cilligan said; perhaps he "could have made it up to her for everything that ever hurt her, so that when she remembered things that once hurt her she'd say: was this I?"<sup>14</sup> Something perhaps would be rekindled, would hold meaning again; it is not desolation she feels, nor despair - but a kind of resignation to unfeelingness.

✓ Margaret Powers Mahon is, in many ways, an earth-mother kind of person. Perhaps her barrenness is a seeming one, a necessary winter which will wane. Numbed, estranged, yet serenely sincere, she embodies an effect as well as dramatizes a question. She cannot find an answer, perhaps because she has stopped looking for one. Margaret Mahon can only still wonder "why everything was as it was . . . ." <sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 309.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

## CHAPTER II

Faulkner's second novel, Mosquitoes, was published a year after Soldier's Pay. Of the several woman characters in this early novel, three are sketched who are completely contrasting types; they are females who perhaps fall into a pattern - personalities who may be prototypes of later longer-limned ladies.

One whose epicenity reappears in succeeding novels is Patricia, a young girl, "sexless, yet somehow vaguely troubling."<sup>1</sup> She is the niece of the wealthy New Orleans matron owning the yacht which serves as the setting, upon which gather the assortment of New Orleans characters, literary and otherwise, whom Faulkner satirizes in this early novel. She is virginal, breastless, untrammelled. Her firm brown body is like that of a young boy; and her manner is as free, her mind as fresh.

Her qualities are distinct ones: simple innocence, sincere maliciousness, dangerous naiveté, pure perversity. The combination is one which, sparked by a restless, boundless youthful energy, is destined to be disturbing. Yet Patricia possesses something else, more ephemeral - and much more troubling.

This essence has been caught in marble by the sculptor present:

As you entered the room the thing drew your eyes; you turned sharply as to a sound, expecting movement . . . . And when you tore your eyes away and turned your back upon it at last, you got again untarnished and high and clean that sense

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<sup>1</sup>William Faulkner, Mosquitoes, p. 24.

of swiftness, or space encompassed; but on looking again it was as before: motionless and passionately eternal - the virginal breastless torso of a girl, headless, armless, legless, in marble temporarily caught and hushed, yet passionate still for escape, passionate and simple and eternal in the equivocal derisive darkness of the world. Nothing to trouble your youth or lack of it: rather something to trouble the very fibrous integrity of your being.<sup>2</sup>

And this is what Patricia does to those able to discern the "something" so caught in marble, the "something" also present, though fleeting, in the girl, who is unconscious of what she represents - and of the effect she has upon the two men who yearn toward her. A silent and unlearned steward (who she insists accompany her on an impulsive and thwarted jaunt which leads them through the swamps) follows her with a dumb and longing adoration; the brooding sculptor silently worships her as an embodiment of his own attitude, for she is a concrete representative of that which he has caught in marble, and of which he says: "This is my feminine ideal: a virgin with no legs to leave me, no arms to hold me, no head to talk to me."<sup>3</sup>

Patricia, unaware of her virgin appeal, intrigues in an impersonal way. "Her frank curiosity in things, her childish delight in strenuous physical motion, . . . her hard unsentimentality . . .,"<sup>4</sup> her boyish manner, all add up to the epicene purity which is her charm.

She is the direct opposite of Jenny, a girl she has met and asked aboard the yacht the same day. Jenny is blonde, soft, shapely,

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

and slightly soiled. She has a

sheer passive appeal to the senses . . . . [This appeal is] an utterly mindless ripeness of young, pink flesh, a supine potential fecundity lovely to look upon: a doll awaiting a quickening and challenging it with neither joy nor sorrow.<sup>5</sup>

Placid, vague, and utterly unconscious of anything other than her pink physicality, Jenny moves through the pages with bovine, blond abandon, stopping now and then to pet and to entertain herself by gazing at her reflection.

All her movements are passive ones; and her mind seems a vague, pinkish realm into which she delves only occasionally. Accompanied by one young man aboard the yacht, one by one all the other male guests (except the sculptor) volitionlessly follow in her pale orbit. She is ineffably unaware of anything beyond the blond mist which surrounds her. Her enchantment lies in her static ability to envelop any creature coming close to her.

Both girls contrast strongly with Mrs. Maurier, the matron who arranges the yachting party. At first apparently the most simple woman character, she is finally revealed as something other than that which she appears to be. It is the sculptor, again, who finds in her something of which she herself had not been aware.

Plump, swathed in silks, bracelets, and rings, Mrs. Maurier wears constantly an "expression of infantile trusting astonishment. [She goes] . . . through the world continually amazed at chance,

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

whether or not she had instigated it."<sup>6</sup> Constantly flitting about her yacht, waving her hands about, Mrs. Maurier tries to direct her party, occasionally simpering at the men, glancing about with a "decayed coquetry," and more successfully confining the women who are less able to escape her. Constantly alarmed and amazed at the behavior of her niece Patricia, she is futile in her attempt to do anything about it. "Haul in your sheet, Aunt Pat," Patricia says, "you're jibbing."<sup>7</sup> Only occasionally is she truly effective in asserting her prime position as proprietor, aunt, and hostess.

Babbling with the others, she parrots phrases about Art, which seem not insincere, but mechanically contrived and meaningless. The one apparently true artist among the group, the sculptor, is silent - aloof, arrogant.

When Mrs. Maurier joins him at the rail one night and begins her usual discussion, he answers her shortly, then turns and stares at her.

He faced the old woman again, putting his hand on her and turning her face upward into the moonlight. Mrs. Maurier knew utter fear . . . . "I'm not going to hurt you," he said harshly . . . . "Tell me about her," he commanded. "Why aren't you her mother, so you could tell me how conceiving her must have been?" . . . His hand moved over her face . . . . "There's something in your face, something behind all this silliness," he went on in his cold level voice . . . . "I suppose you've had what you call your sorrows, too, haven't you?"<sup>8</sup>

The effect upon Mrs. Maurier is one which leaves her visibly shaken, enervated, depleted. That night in her darkened

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 153-154.



room she goes into a soundless hysteria, weeping shuddering, long sobs. The next night she whispers to herself,

"It has come, at last," . . . aware of her body, heavy and soft with years. I should feel happy, I should feel happy, she told herself, but her limbs felt chill and strange to her and within her a terrible thing was swelling, a thing terrible and poisonous and released, like water that has been dammed too long; it was as though there were waking within her comfortable, long familiar body a thing that abode there dormant and which she had harbored unaware.<sup>9</sup>

Earlier it had been hinted that there was something in her background; one of the guests had mentioned knowing something about her former marriage. He tells what he knows when they see her image molded in clay by Gordon.

It was clay . . . . Her chins, harshly, and her flaccid jaw muscles with verisimilitude. Her eyes were caverns thumbed with two motions into dead familiar astonishment of her face; and yet, behind them, . . . behind all her familiar surprise, there was something else - something that exposed her face for the mask it was, and still more, a mask unaware.<sup>10</sup>

All of her silliness had a reason. When she was young and quite beautiful, she had fallen in love with one of the penniless aristocracy of New Orleans. Her family, from the North, forced her to marry a much older man, "humorless and shrewd," for money. They had had no children; the guests speculate upon the reasons, seeing "something thwarted back of it all, something stifled, yet which won't quite die."<sup>11</sup> One suggests she is yet a virgin:

She missed something; her body told her so, insisted, forced her to try to remedy it and fill the vacuum. But now her body is old; it no longer remembers that it missed

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 322.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 326.

anything, and all she has left is a habit, the ghost of a need to rectify something the lack of which her body has long since forgotten about.<sup>12</sup>

These passages seem those most predictive of the later Faulkner. This woman is one whose past possessed power to mask her, one whose possibilities were stifled, shut off so long ago that she had forgotten them. Her leftover life seems now used only to collect things and people.

The group she has crowded upon her yacht, who are characterized by the title of the novel, are truly a strange assortment. These three females found among them are diverting creatures, each one characterized by or stamped with a special mark. Epicene, placid, or secret - Patricia, Jenny and Mrs. Maurier may prove to be shadows, if not sisters, of women later written of - personalities whose presence they predict.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

### CHAPTER III

Sartoris, William Faulkner's third novel, is the first of his books to introduce the clan of people so integral to his later work. Two women introduced in this novel, Aunt Jenny Du Pre and Narcissa Benbow, not only reappear as themselves in later narratives, but perhaps are prototypes as well - women whose characteristics recur in other feminine forms. They may be models, shown in Sartoris in an early fashioning, for types or traits which are later recreated and rearranged.

Although their ways of living are similar, Miss Jenny and Narcissa differ characteristically; in manners they are almost contradictory. One is hardy, bold, and courageous, unflinching in the face of tumult and tragedy; the other is serene yet insecure, shrinking from violence with fear and trembling.

Miss Jenny is an unforgettable personality, one whose character is delineated with a true and sure touch. Though conventional in type, she is quite convincing. More than matriarch, Aunt Jenny is the exemplification of female fortitude. Forthright, brusque, uncompromising and indomitable, her spirit was

. . . born with a woman's body into a heritage of rash and needless men and seemingly for the sole purpose of cherishing those men to their early and violent ends, and this over a period of history which had seen brothers and husband slain in the same useless mischancing of human affairs; had seen, as in a nightmare not to be healed by either waking or sleep, the foundations of her life swept away . . . - a period at which men themselves, for all their headlong and scornful

rashness, would have quailed had their parts been passive parts and their doom been waiting.<sup>1</sup>

Miss Jenny has never been one to quail. Younger sister of John Sartoris (patriarch of the Jefferson clan), she had come war-widowed from Carolina in 1869, bringing, with her own shattering experiences, the tales of Cavalry General Jeb Stuart and of wild civil war Sartorises, whose actions became more than legend, permeating the atmosphere with the color and mood which surrounds and pervades and becomes the Sartoris heritage.

Sartoris records the story of the clan just after World War I, relating the experiences of those Sartorises and weaving in the background of the earlier ones, essential to and intrinsic for Faulkner's entire mythology. Through Miss Jenny the heritage is revealed; and through her the tone and tempo of the past is also presented - the faded glamor, the sad futility, the reckless, hopeless glory of those vanished are made vivid and vital again. Miss Jenny recognizes the endless reverberations of a wild rhythm inherent in the name: "Sartoris. It's in the blood. Savage, every one of 'em. No earthly use to anybody."<sup>2</sup>

At the time of the novel's beginning, Miss Jenny lives with the two remaining male descendants, her nephew Bayard, seventy year old president of the Sartoris bank, and his grandson Bayard, just returned from the war which killed his fighter-pilot twin, John.

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<sup>1</sup>William Faulkner, Sartoris, p. 357.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 298.

"The war," snorts Miss Jenny, "just gave John a good excuse to get himself killed. If it hadn't been that, it would have been some other way that would have been a bother to everyone around."<sup>3</sup>

Miss Jenny knows her Sartorises. She superintends them, attempting to direct their lives, although knowing her efforts are vain, toward preventing the violence and destruction which typify their natures. Yet she is unwavering in the responsibility thrust upon her. When young Bayard returns from World War I, she enters "his life again without a by-your-leave, taking up the snarled threads of it after brisk and capable fashion . . . ."<sup>4</sup> Running the place with tireless efficiency, assisted by the doddering and irresponsible negro Simon, she exhibits still the characteristics of the hardy, steadfast Southern woman whose gallantry, less glamorous, is obscured only by the more lusty action of her menfolk.

Miss Jenny at eighty is a strong woman, resolute, brusque, yet kind and tender. She is what Faulkner calls a "true optimist - that is, expecting the worst at all times and so being daily agreeably surprised."<sup>5</sup>

White haired, small, straight, and slender, Miss Jenny possesses the erect grenadier back and a "delicate replica" of the high-bridged Norman nose belonging to the Sartorises. Dressed in black silk, she wears her small black bonnet perched squarely on her head. "Her nose glasses hang on a slender silk cord that rolled

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

on a spring in a small gold case pinned to her bosom . . . . [And behind the glasses] her eyes . . . [are] cold and piercing as a surgeon's."<sup>6</sup>

Her attitude toward both the old and the young Bayard is that of contempt for their foolhardiness; yet her scorn is mingled with a fierce pride, an impatient protectiveness, a belligerent tolerance. Men "can't stand anything," according to Miss Jenny. They don't even suffer in war; it is "just a good excuse for 'em to make nuisances of themselves and stay in the way, while the women-folks are trying to clean up the mess they left with their fighting."<sup>7</sup> Women, she feels, have to take their revenge wherever they can get it. She takes a negative one: "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."<sup>8</sup> She even disclaims them as her men: "They ain't my Sartorises . . . I just inherited them."<sup>9</sup>

Miss Jenny has a command of language which is forceful, clear, and colorful. When her ire is aroused, she has "a bold use of metaphor that Demosthenes would have envied and which even mules comprehended and of whose intent the most obtuse persons remained not long in doubt . . . ."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 53-54.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

Her exchanges with the servants are particularly enlivening; her speech, always pithy and precise, is also often embarrassing to more gentle folk.

Miss Jenny traveled very little, and in Pullman smoking rooms not at all, and people wondered where she got her stories, who had told them to her. And she repeated them anywhere and at any time, choosing the wrong moment and the wrong audience with a cold and cheerful audacity.<sup>11</sup>

She makes a wonderful comic character; yet there is something sad and compellingly touching about her. One is ever aware that even at thirty she had worn "that expression of indomitable weariness which all Southern women had learned to wear."<sup>12</sup>

At eighty she still commands respect from everyone. She directs others the way she does her household, with brusque imperturbability. Her ways are martinetish; she argues with old Bayard and attempts to order her young nephew about, yet "at times she entered his room at night and sat for a while beside the bed where he slept."<sup>13</sup> Her kindness and concern are also shown in her relationship with Narcissa, who marries Bayard and bears his child.

When the younger man manages to get himself killed, Miss Jenny does not flinch. Her back remains erect and her eyes dry when she hears of his death. Of old Bayard, who dies of a heart attack in his grandson's car, "Miss Jenny felt that he had somehow flouted them all, had committed lese majesty toward his ancestors and the lusty glamor of the family doom by dying, as she put it,

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

practically from the 'inside out.'<sup>14</sup>

Reviewing the tempestuous life she has experienced, "she remembered something Narcissa had said once, about a world without men, and wondered if therein lay peaceful avenues and dwellings thatched with quiet; and she didn't know."<sup>15</sup>

Narcissa Benbow stands in almost direct contrast to Aunt Jenny. Although she possesses a certain calmness of temperament, her nature is one which shrinks from reality, from anything which disturbs the serenity of her as yet untouched world.

Narcissa is the sister of Horace Benbow, whom she loves with the possessiveness of a jealous protectress, and whom she cares for with an exasperated but fond tolerance. Narcissa is twenty-six years old; dressed usually in the white or lavender which reflects her reticent personality, she is well-suited for playing the piano in the dusk, an activity she practices for both her brother and Miss Jenny. Although her nature is sensitive, there is a certain coldness or frigidity about her - a selfishness of sorts (shown later in Sanctuary as an almost frigid bitchery). Although kind and seemingly tender-hearted, she is somewhat strait-laced and rather rigid in her conceptions, cringing from the unconventional with a distaste which nears disgust, and fearing the tempestuous with a dread which becomes anxiety. She is quiet, dreamy, somewhat withdrawn. She seems fragile, easily breakable,

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 354.    <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 376.



yet exhibits a hostility toward those forces which threaten her and her neatly patterned world with a strength which belies her fragility.

Her dread of violence is an extreme one. The actions of the Sartoris twins have always filled her with terror - and her first reactions to Bayard are those of timidity and fear.

At times Miss Jenny sat watching the two of them with a sort of speculation and an exasperation with their seeming obliviousness of one another. "He treats her like a dog would treat a cut-glass pitcher, and she looks at him like a cut-glass pitcher would look at a dog," she told herself.<sup>16</sup>

Narcissa seldom releases her tensions. The rage she feels toward the aggressive, the tempestuous, is exhibited only occasionally. Her feelings are shown when she screams at a cat who has just grabbed a bird - "You Sartoris!"<sup>17</sup> and once to her brother: "'I hate Bayard Sartoris,' she said with sudden vehemence; 'I hate all men.'"<sup>18</sup>

Narcissa has a more concrete problem - and her handling of it also indicates her neurotic tendencies. She has received a number of distasteful, anonymous letters. She shows them to Miss Jenny, but insists on her not telling anyone about them.

"I wanted to tell somebody. It - it - I thought I wouldn't feel so filthy, after I had shown it to somebody else. Let me have it, please."<sup>19</sup>

"Don't be a fool," Miss Jenny snaps. "How can this thing make you feel filthy? Any young woman is liable to get an

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

anonymous letter. And a lot of 'em like it. We are all convinced that men feel that way about us, and we can't help but admire the one that's got the courage to tell us, no matter who he is."<sup>20</sup>

Although Narcissa insists not, and professes her disgust, Miss Jenny accuses her of being flattered by the letters. "You want to keep it . . . . Just like a young fool woman, to be flattered by a thing like this."<sup>21</sup>

Apparently she has a point. Why else Narcissa's reaction when Aunt Jenny wants to show them to Bayard? Narcissa protests, "'No. No. I'd hate for him to know, to think I would - might have . . . .'"<sup>22</sup>

Narcissa's inhibitions and fears are indicated again in her possessive relationship with her brother. "'I shall never marry,' she told herself. Men . . . that was where unhappiness lay, getting men into your life. 'And if I couldn't keep Horace, loving him as I did . . . .'"<sup>23</sup> Horace, who speaks of Narcissa as "thou still unravished bride of quietness," is involved with a married woman (Belle, whom he later marries and with whom he reappears in later work). He is a gentle man, intellectual and impractical, boyish and adoring.

Narcissa's attitude toward more violent men is one of dread and fear and hostility; but toward Horace she is protective, possessive and gently commanding. Aunt Jenny has her usual definite ideas

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 259.

about Horace, as about all men. Her attitude toward them is bel-  
ligerent, yet more accepting than Narcissa's; she has no fear, but  
much contempt and an impatient tolerance of the creatures. Discuss-  
ing the situation concerning Horace and Belle, Narcissa says,

"But that woman . . . . She's so dirty."<sup>24</sup>

"All women are, if that's what you mean," snorts Aunt Jenny. She sat stiffly indomitable contemplating the other's shrinking shoulders. "Hmph," she said again, "Horace has spent so much time being educated that he never has learned anything . . . . It'll do him good if she'll just turn around and make a doormat of him . . . ." <sup>25</sup>

Aunt Jenny is glad that Horace is entangled. She tells Narcissa he is making an old maid of her.

"Would you advise me to marry?"<sup>26</sup> Narcissa asks.

"I wouldn't advise anybody to marry. You won't be happy, but then, women haven't got civilized enough yet to be happy unmar-  
ried, so you might as well try it. We can stand anything, anyhow."<sup>27</sup>

Narcissa finally does marry, after the tension in her rela-  
tionship with Bayard lessens. The marriage, though temporarily  
calming and serene, does not alter his basic nature, and only in-  
creases Narcissa's sadness and sense of futility. He never sees the  
son she bears him. Her attitude toward the child is similar to that  
toward her brother - around both she wants to build a firm, protective  
barrier. Looking at a miniature of Bayard's twin one morning, before  
her child is born, she sees shining in it

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 201-202.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

. . . like a warm radiance something sweet and merry and wild, [and] she realized as she never had before the blind tragedy of human events . . . . It was as though already she could discern the dark shape of that doom which she had incurred . . . . "No. No." she whispered with passionate protest . . . . She was . . . glad Miss Jenny had shown her the thing; she was now forewarned as well as forearmed.<sup>28</sup>

Narcissa's desire to build a garrison around those belonging to her seems more than a desire to protect them from the outside world. She needs to assure herself that her world will remain unshaken. She wants to be able to cling to something safe, something firm and familiar.

Narcissa, whose name indicates her self-centeredness, seems a representative of the clinging, sensitive female who is essentially selfish. She needs to be protected; although showing a certain strength, she is basically insecure and emotionally inhibited.

Aunt Jenny exhibits a truer strength, an unflinching fortitude. She is also sensitive; yet she has withstood severe shocks to her sensibilities; her courage, her convictions, have sound foundations. She may represent, to Faulkner, femininity in, perhaps, its finest form - a personality whose attitudes attest his sense of womanly worth, a character whose virtues he reveres, revealing his incipient concept of heroine.

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 356.

## CHAPTER IV

The Sound and The Fury, Faulkner's fourth novel, is considered by many as the most complex of his works; its several themes concerning time, order, and disorder have been extensively analyzed and discussed. Cleanth Brooks feels that "the novel deals with the disruption of the institution of the family";<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Bowling claims that the "disorder, disintegration, and absence of perspective in the lives of the Compsons . . . [is] symbolic . . . of a whole social order . . . [or] disorder";<sup>2</sup> and Carvel Collins states that "the major theme of the novel is not the sociology of a section of the south but the psychology of certain aspects of human life wherever found."<sup>3</sup> The main subject of the novel, Collins says, is the "general effect of lack of love in a family . . . with chief emphasis to the specific problem of the family love relationship of a son."<sup>4</sup>

This controversial novel is presented in four sections, three of which are in stream-of-consciousness form. There is no conventional presentation of characters or chronological order except in the last section. The reader himself must make order of

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<sup>1</sup>Cleanth Brooks, "Primitivism in The Sound and the Fury," English Institute Essays, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup>Lawrence Bowling, "The Technique of The Sound and the Fury," William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery, p. 179.

<sup>3</sup>Carvel Collins, "The Pairing of The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying," The Princeton University Library Chronicle, Spring, 1957, p. 118.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

the narrative and in this manner also form a conception of the various characters.

There are four women portrayed in The Sound and The Fury: Candace Compson; her mother; the negro servant, Dilsey; and Candace's daughter, Quentin. Candace (Caddy), Mrs. Compson, and Dilsey are women who differ distinctly from each other in character type, motivation, and movement, while Quentin, though not fully developed in character, is substantially similar to her mother in temperament and traits.

It is Caddy around whose actions the novel evolves; it is she to whom the other characters react. Yet one hesitates to call her "heroine"; she is, rather, the main woman protagonist, one whose character is doomed and damned because of a lack.

The main action of the novel concerns the tragic results of Caddy's behavior as she becomes a young woman. Her three brothers (whose streams-of-consciousness comprise the first three sections of the book) and her parents are variously affected. Benjy, born an idiot, is ever aware of the loss; Quentin, her older brother, commits suicide after Caddy's forced wedding; Jason blackmails his sister and persecutes her illegitimate daughter; Mr. Compson drinks himself to death; and Caddy's mother, already self-righteous and long suffering, becomes a martyr as well. It is Dilsey alone who endures.

It has been noted by Bowling that an episode in Benjy's section "presents all the main characters in situations which

foreshadow the main action."<sup>5</sup> He calls it "the whole novel in miniature."<sup>6</sup> Caddy, as a child, gets her dress wet and pulls it off to avoid punishment. This bothers Quentin, who slaps her; she then falls down in the water, getting her underclothes wet.

He then feels partly responsible for Caddy's guilt and says they will both get whipped. She says it was all his fault . . . Dilsey . . . discovers the stain on Caddy's buttocks, but she is unable to remove the spot.<sup>7</sup>

When they are older, Caddy

. . . soils her honor with a serious stain which will not come off; Quentin assumes responsibility for her shame and finally commits suicide in an attempt to expiate her sin; Jason, true to form, makes the most of Caddy's shame by blackmailing her for all he can get.<sup>8</sup>

It is Caddy's transgression which results in the disintegration of the family and sets up the series of reactions which comprise the narrative. Caddy becomes sexually promiscuous; and when she finds herself pregnant, marries the first available man, one who is not the father of her child. Her father sells the last of the Compson property to a golf club for money which is used to pay for Caddy's wedding and for a year at Harvard for Quentin. The man Caddy marries is a wealthy ex-Harvardite, one who had been expelled for cheating. She meets him at a resort where she goes with her ever-suffering mother, who wants the talk about Caddy's escapades

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<sup>5</sup>Bowling, op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

to die away and who determines to find a husband for her.

When her baby is born she is cast off by her husband and leaves the child, whom she names Quentin after her brother, with her family. Her mother refuses to have Caddy's name spoken in the household again, and Caddy, after making a few futile attempts to see her child, is not heard from again except through Jason, who receives monthly checks from her for Quentin's support.

In 1946, Faulkner added an appendix to The Sound and The Fury, which serves as a commentary on the characters as well as an introduction and a summary. He says that Caddy was "doomed and knew it, accepted the doom without either seeking or fleeing it."<sup>9</sup>

Caddy's actions are those of one who cannot help herself, whether she wants to or not. The pattern of life she accepts does indeed seem preordained; yet it is self-determined, as though she had early formed a conception of herself which she feels she must follow.

The child Caddy shows rather definite characteristics, pointing in the direction she later follows. Hers is a determined independence. She tends to flout authority, flaunting her self-sufficiency and equality before her older brother with childish pride. She is never actually defiant, but is headstrong, aggressive, and daring. As a child she says of tattletelling Jason, "'Let him tell . . . . I don't give a cuss.'<sup>10</sup> Hers is a continuing devil-may-care

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<sup>9</sup>William Faulkner, The Sound and The Fury, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 39.



attitude which in later years becomes dangerous. Although she bluffs a bit, her desire to flirt with danger does not wane.

She possesses as well other, more feminine characteristics, which are also seen in childhood. She is tender and motherly toward Benjy, attending him with care and concern. He "loved three things: the pasture . . ., his sister Candace, firelight."<sup>11</sup> He "lost none of them because he could not remember his sister but only the loss of her . . . ."<sup>12</sup> When she knows she has to leave her family, she tries to make Quentin promise to take care of Benjy and her father. Caddy hardly has a chance to put the earth-mother characteristics she does possess into full practice.

Quentin is preoccupied with his sister's loss of honor; Caddy realizes, however, that he valued "above all not her but the virginity of which she was custodian and on which she placed no value whatever: the frail physical stricture which to her was no more than a hangnail would have been."<sup>13</sup>

Quentin commits suicide two months after Caddy's marriage which he had tried to prevent, even going so far as telling his father he had committed incest with Caddy, and "by that means cast himself and his sister both into hell, where he could guard her forever and keep her forever more intact amid the eternal fires."<sup>14</sup> When his father asks him ". . . Did you try to make her do it . . . ?"

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

he says ". . . I was afraid to I was afraid she might and then it wouldn't have done any good . . . ."15

It is to Quentin that she speaks of her inner feelings.

"There was something terrible in me sometimes at night I could see it grinning at me I could see it through them grinning at me through their faces it's gone now and I'm sick"16

When he asks, "Have there been very many Caddy" she replies "I dont know too many . . . ."17 To his urgent ". . . did you love them Caddy did you love them . . . ." she answers, "When they touched me I died"18

Caddy acts as though she feels her behavior has had little significance or meaning, yet she seems inwardly horrified when she is confronted with its results.

Her state of mind before her marriage is shown through snatches of conversation appearing in Quentin's stream of consciousness:

Caddy that blackguard can you think of Benjy and Father and do it not of me

What else can I think about what else have I thought about . . . . I cant even cry I died last year I told you I had but I didnt know . . . what I was saying . . . . But now I know I'm dead I tell you!19

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 131. Passages from footnotes 16 through 23, 34, 38 and 49 are italicized in the novel; I have omitted underlining for readability. The apostrophes in contractions are omitted in the original.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 134. <sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 168. <sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 142-143.

Showing her desperation and expressing her concern for her father, she tells Quentin:

. . . they sold the pasture for you so you could go to Harvard dont you see you've got to finish now if you dont finish he'll have nothing . . . . Father will be dead in a year they say if he doesnt stop drinking and he wont stop he cant stop since I since last summer and then they'll send Benjy to Jackson I cant cry I cant even cry . . . .<sup>20</sup>

Her feelings of guilt are apparently as strong as her feelings of protectiveness. Quentin remembers the way she looked once when Benjy sensed her shame:

. . . one minute she was standing in the door the next minute he was pulling at her dress and bellowing . . . and she shrinking against the wall getting smaller and smaller with her white face her eyes like thumbs dug into it until he pushed her out of the room his voice hammering back and forth . . . .<sup>21</sup>

Benjy seems to be able to sense disaster; Dilsey says he can smell it. Throughout his section his impressions of Caddy reveal her personality and her later chaotic inner state. She releases her tensions rarely: ". . . I could hear Caddy standing behind me, and I could hear the roof. It's still raining, Caddy said. I hate rain. I hate everything. And then her head came into my lap and she was crying, holding me . . . ." <sup>22</sup>

Caddy tells Quentin: "why must you meddle with me dont you know it wont do any good I thought you'd have left that for Mother and Jason

"did Mother set Jason to spy on you I wouldnt have"<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

Caddy's relationship with Jason is also foreshadowed in childhood. "He cut up all Benjy's dolls." Caddy said, 'I'll slit his sizzle . . . . He did it just for meanness.'"24

In adolescence, when Caddy is comforting Benjy:

"What is it, Benjy. What has Caddy done."

"He dont like that prissy dress" Jason said. "You think you're grown up, dont you. You think you're better than anybody else, dont you. Prissy."

"You shut your mouth." Caddy said, "You dirty little beast. Benjy."

"Just because you are fourteen, you think you're grown up, dont you." Jason said, "You think you're something. Dont you."25

Jason's attitude toward Caddy continues through adulthood. It is Jason who uses her daughter Quentin's illegitimacy to blackmail Caddy "not only into staying away for the rest of her life but into appointing him sole unchallengeable trustee of the money she would send for the child's maintenance . . . ."26

The girl Quentin, like Caddy, seems also to have had her fate determined for her. Quentin was "fatherless nine months before her birth, nameless at birth and already doomed to be unwed from the instant the dividing egg determined its sex."27

The girl tends to duplicate her mother's behavior. She too lingers in the swing late at night and slips from the window of her

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 59-60.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

room after dark. Jason persecutes her, and her grandmother locks her in her room at night. This treatment has adverse effects upon her; she skips school at will, paints her face, associates with circus men. She seems another Caddy, yet one without even the benefits of brother and father relationships her mother has had.

Only Dilsey protects her. Usually defiant toward Jason and his cruelty, she once pathetically appeals to Dilsey:

"Dilsey . . . , Dilsey, I want my mother!"<sup>28</sup>

Quentin is perhaps more lost, more doomed, than her mother, yet more fortunate in her absence of guilt and in that she did not have to leave those she cared about. She is not forced to go; she escapes both Jason and her grandmother when she runs away, swinging from a window of her locked room on a drainpipe to Jason's room and stealing the money he has hoarded. Jason is

. . . robbed not only of his thievings but his savings, too, and by his own victim . . . , by a child who did it at one blow, without premeditation or plan, not even knowing or even caring how much she would find when she broke the drawer open . . . .<sup>29</sup>

Apparently the path she is destined to follow will be a bit stonier than that of her mother's; ". . . Whatever occupation overtook her would have arrived in no chromium Mercedes . . . ,"<sup>30</sup> as it finally had for Caddy.

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

Quentin too seems to have formed a conception of herself similar to that of her mother's. She hardly has a chance for self-esteem; she is nurtured by neither her grandmother nor her uncle. "Why does he treat me like this, Grandmother?" she says. "I never hurt him."<sup>31</sup>

Mrs. Compson answers, "He is the nearest thing to a father you've ever had . . . . It's his bread you and I eat. It's only right that he should expect obedience from you."<sup>32</sup>

Defending herself and her behavior, Quentin says,

"He makes me do it. If he would just - " she looked at . . . them, her eyes cornered, kind of jerking her arms against her sides.

"If I would just what?" . . . [asks Jason.]

"Whatever I do, it's your fault . . . . If I'm bad, it's because I had to be. You made me. I wish I was dead. I wish we were all dead."<sup>33</sup>

Her self-rejection, her feelings of emptiness, of being "dead", reëcho those of her mother. Mrs. Compson perhaps is largely responsible. After Caddy had kissed a boy, when she was about fifteen, her mother put on black mourning clothes and went around the house moaning. This behavior had its effects; Caddy's remarks concerning her being "dead" no doubt refer to this incident as well as to her feelings.

The brother Quentin had early recognized his mother's attitude toward his sister. "Done in Mother's mind though.

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 276.    <sup>32</sup>Ibid.    <sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 276-277.

Finished. Finished. Then we were all poisoned . . . ."<sup>34</sup> Their mother seems to have instigated the tragedy; she has never felt kinship or sympathy for either Caddy or her son Quentin, and of her grandchild she says: ". . . She has inherited all of the head-strong traits. Quentin's too."<sup>35</sup>

"They were both that way . . . ." she tells Jason.

"They would make interest with your father against me when I tried to correct them. He was always saying they didn't need controlling, that they already knew what cleanliness and honesty were, which was all that anyone could hope to be taught . . . . They deliberately shut me out of their lives . . . . They were always conspiring against me. Against you too . . . . They always looked on me and you like outsiders . . . ."<sup>36</sup>

It seems she had long ago condemned her children. She had no trust in them; in Caddy's girlhood she had Jason spy on Caddy. When Mr. Compson objected, she said,

". . . Dont you know I can look at her eyes and tell you may think she'd tell you but she doesn't tell things she is secretive you dont know her I know things she's done that I'd die before I'd have you know . . . . Accuse me of setting him to watch her as if it were a crime while your own daughter can . . . ."<sup>37</sup>

Mr. Compson declared he would not have his daughter spied upon regardless of what the mother thought she had done. Yet he excused his wife somewhat to Quentin: "She didn't mean that that's the way women do things its because she loves Caddy . . . . Women have no respect for each other for themselves"<sup>38</sup> The excuse for her behavior, in Mr. Compson's eyes, is simply that she is a woman.

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

Mrs. Compson fully acts out and relishes her martyrdom: "what have I done to have been given children like this . . . . I've suffered for her dreamed and planned and sacrificed I went down into the valley . . . ."39 One wishes she had stayed there. Yet despite all her complaints and constant illness she outlives all her family but Jason and Benjy. And when her granddaughter runs away, Mrs. Compson, "like so many cold, weak people, when faced at last by the incontrovertible disaster she exhumed from somewhere a sort of fortitude, strength. In her case it was an unshakable conviction regarding the yet unplumbed event."<sup>40</sup> She thinks Quentin has committed suicide like her uncle, though Dilsey tries to reassure her.

It is Dilsey who "'seed de first en de last, . . . [who] seed de beginnin, en now . . . sees de endin."<sup>41</sup>

Throughout the novel she serves as a chorus or a prophetess as well as a protectress of the young, the helpless, the innocent. This old Negress, simple, stoical, possesses a spiritual wisdom which marks her as one of Faulkner's "chosen people". As one of the elect, she has a "Weltanschauung of past, present and future."<sup>42</sup>

It is Dilsey who possesses qualities which "enable the human being to endure . . . . The qualities are abnegation and immolation. It is Dilsey's living of these values that allows . . . [her] to

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 316, 313.

<sup>42</sup>Irving Malin, William Faulkner: An Interpretation, p. 75.



define herself as human."<sup>43</sup>

Dilsey is one of the few Faulknerian characters who achieves an "individuation"; she, as an "image of fulfillment . . . , experience [s] a certain kind . . . of completion . . . ."<sup>44</sup>

It is she who loves Caddy, tolerates Mrs. Compson, and protects Quentin. It is Dilsey whom Jason is afraid of, "whom he could not even force to leave, even when he tried to stop paying her weekly wages . . . ."<sup>45</sup> He "respect [s] only the Negro woman, his sworn enemy since his birth and his mortal one since that day in 1911 when she . . . divined by simple clairvoyance that he was somehow using his infant niece's illegitimacy to blackmail its mother . . . ."<sup>46</sup>

It is also Dilsey who instinctively understands about Caddy. Faulkner tells the reader in the appendix that Caddy had "vanished in Paris with the German occupation . . . ."<sup>47</sup> The county librarian finds a magazine photograph of her standing beside a German staff general and takes it to Jason, who only laughs, and then brings it to Dilsey.

The Caddy pictured seems one strange and unfamiliar:  
". . . The woman's face hatless between a rich scarf and a seal coat, ageless and beautiful, cold, serene and damned . . . ."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Marjorie Kimball McCorquodale, William Faulkner and Existentialism, p. 72.

<sup>44</sup>Malin, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>45</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

Dilsey says she cannot see the picture. But ". . . she didn't want to see it know whether it was Caddy or not because she knows Caddy doesn't want to be saved hasn't anything anymore worth being saved for nothing worth being lost that she can lose"<sup>49</sup> Caddy might be called an Eve, one whose transgression makes disaster and whose departure means disintegration.

It is Dilsey alone who holds together, who apparently possesses the necessary strength and fortitude to do so. Faulkner makes a single comment concerning her: "DILSEY. They endured."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

## CHAPTER V

As Addie Bundren lies dying she listens to the rasping sound of the saw which is being used to fashion her coffin. Apparently she does not object to the noise which seemingly grates on only one pair of ears. "She'll rest easier for knowing it's a good one, and private. She was ever a private woman."<sup>1</sup>

Addie has been more than private. She has been alone, alienated, inviolate, and finally, willingly and meaningfully violated - which constitutes the "violence", the action or the true communication which, to her, is reality and life.

Addie Bundren is central to Faulkner's fifth novel, As I Lay Dying. It is the exodus to Jefferson with her rotting corpse which comprises the narrative, and it is the influence and interaction of her way of life with that of the other characters which constitute the problem of the novel.

Addie is mother of five children, four of whom are of her husband Anse. Her third son, Jewel, is the result of a liaison with a preacher, Whitfield. The conception one first has of Addie is formed through the series of impressions given by the soliloquies of the other characters. It is through her single, posthumous soliloquy that the reader learns of her inner life, her secret life.

Before her marriage, Addie had a sense of aloneness, of isolation. As a country school teacher, she had manifested her

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<sup>1</sup>William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying, p. 350.

frustration and alienation in her attempts to achieve some sort of bond or involvement.

I would have to look at them [her pupils] day after day, each with his and her secret and selfish thought, and blood strange to each other blood and strange to mine . . . . I would look forward to the times when they faulted, so I could whip them . . . . I would think with each blow of the switch: Now you are aware of me! Now I am something in your secret and selfish life, who have marked your blood with my own forever and ever.

And so I took Anse.<sup>2</sup>

Her sense of aloneness, however, continued into her marriage. She did not find the expected escape or release. Anse is a man of words in the worst sense; and Addie's conception of life is one in which words themselves have no validity. After her first son, Cash, was born, she knew that

. . . living was terrible and this was the answer to it. That was when I learned that words are no good . . . [they] don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at . . . . [And] I knew it had been, not that my aloneness has to be violated over and over each day, but that it had never been violated until Cash came. Not even by Anse in the nights. He had a word, too. Love, he called it . . . . [But it was] just a shape to fill a lack . . . . It didn't matter. My aloneness had been violated and then made whole again by the violation . . . .<sup>3</sup>

Anse, to Addie, remains "outside the circle," beyond her vital life. In her soliloquy her concern with her "separation of word and act"<sup>4</sup> is emphasized. She distinguishes between words,

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 461-462.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 463.

<sup>4</sup>Olga Vickery, "As I Lay Dying," William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism, ed. Frederick Hoffman and Olga Vickery, p. 203.

which are meaningless to her as divergent from reality, and action. Life to her must be a "violence" not needing words, and any identification with another is a felt communication truer than words, which are apart from reality, could ever be.

Anse is subsequently apart from her meaningful life; and, with the birth of her second son, Darl, Addie felt outraged, as though Anse had somehow tricked her. Olga Vickery, co-editor of William Faulkner: The Records of Criticism, suggests "she had considered . . . [Darl] an outrage and a violation because the lines of thinking and doing had diverged too far for him [Darl] to be possible."<sup>5</sup> Addie says, "But then I realized that I had been tricked by words older than Anse or love . . . My revenge would be that he would never know I was taking revenge."<sup>6</sup> She made Anse promise, after Darl's birth, that upon her death he would take her to Jefferson to be buried with her own family. She repudiates Anse - and repudiates Darl.

The effects of the rejection of her son are manifold. And her vision of life is one which is far-reaching in its subtle influence on all her children. "As each child tries . . . to discover in himself a sense of son-ship or brotherhood, or both, Addie's influence remains and her edicts of love and rejection find fruition in the children."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>6</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 464.

<sup>7</sup>Lonnie Dean Harner, "The Concept of Love in Novels of William Faulkner," (unpublished Master's Thesis, The University of Texas, 1955), p. 69.

Their "father", Anse, is ever unaware of his wife's inner conflict, her turmoil, her suppressed hostility and her "revenge". Her vital experience with Whitfield also remains a secret - to all but Darl. Anse is imperceptive, given to words, not acts. He is also selfish. Dr. Peabody accuses him of having worn Addie out, and also upbraids him for not having called him sooner. The doctor knows, like Addie, that Anse is not a man of action, but a parasite whose phrases only fill a lack.

Anse, to Addie, had been "dead" since the birth of Darl; to her he is as empty, void, and nullified as his words. The preacher who makes love to Addie represents life to her -

. . . he had had to deny the word of God, of which he was the guardian, to come to her. To sin with him was to live at last, for their meetings were a violation of infinite degree, a violation of his calling, of society, and of God.<sup>8</sup>

Whitfield to her is not just man; he is violence, action, instrument and symbol.

Her son Jewel, the result of this "violence", signifies a fulfillment. It is after his birth that Addie balances accounts. She gives Anse Dewey Dell "to negative Jewel . . . [and] Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed . . . [Anse] of . . . ." <sup>9</sup> After this "atonement" in the form of Dewey Dell and Vardaman, Addie gets ready to die. She remembers what her father had said - that the

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>9</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 467.

reason for living was to get ready to stay dead for a long time.

Addie is now ready.

Her death results in more "action" on the part of Anse than he apparently had shown during her life, but even so he is always a bystander. Part of Addie's revenge upon him was extracting his promise to bury her in Jefferson; he then must make some attempt at action - with her corpse as the goad.

It is Addie's influence on her children as mother, however, not as a rotting corpse, which is the "source of the tension and latent violence"<sup>10</sup> exhibited on the journey to Jefferson. As they push on, this influence is ever present. It is seen in the action and interaction of her family. It is the "circumstances of the birth of each of the children which establishes the level of their awareness of her and the mode of their participation in her burial."<sup>11</sup>

There had always been an empathy between Addie and her first born, Cash. They had never needed words. It was through his birth that "she reached her peculiar understanding of life; to have needed words for communication would have been a betrayal of this new found insight."<sup>12</sup> It also is Cash who is removed from the tension exhibited by the rest of the family.

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<sup>10</sup>Vickery, op. cit., p. 192.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>12</sup>Herner, op. cit., p. 60.

Ironically, the son she rejects, Darl, is her most perceptive child, as well as the one who carries with him his mother's sense of alienation. To her, he belonged only to Anse. He himself says constantly he has no mother - "I cannot love my mother because I have no mother."<sup>13</sup> He is isolated as she had been, and her repudiation of him is the source of his being an outcast - emotionally and finally physically. This non-relationship - which of course is a relationship - is the source of his being more aware and perceptive enough to guess her secret about Jewel. He had watched his mother cry beside the bed of her sleeping Jewel (a reaction to her finding out about Jewel's working all night for months to earn money for a horse of his own); it was "then [Darl says] I knew that I knew. I knew as plain on that day as I knew about Devey Dell that day."<sup>14</sup>

The hostility Addie has provoked in Darl, Darl turns against Jewel, who, for Darl, is a projection of their mother. "The rivalry between the two is one of sonship; when Darl attacks Jewel, he is attacking Addie."<sup>15</sup>

Darl's attempted destruction of his mother's putrescent corpse may be construed as a retaliation for his outraged sensibility. Olga Vickery states that Darl's setting fire to the barn in

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<sup>13</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 406.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 435.

<sup>15</sup>Hefner, op. cit., p. 68.



which Addie's coffin lies "is as if he were attempting to dispose of her in the same terms in which she had conceived him."<sup>16</sup>

Darl, knowing the circumstances of his half-brother's birth, is well aware of the relationship between Jewel and his mother, whom he apparently knows better than does anyone else. "She cried hard, [over Jewel, Darl says] maybe because she had to cry so quiet; maybe because she felt the same way about tears she did about deceit, hating herself for doing it, hating him because she had to."<sup>17</sup>

Any outward deceit Addie had to practice was one necessary for her lover only. Addie herself says, "I hid nothing. I tried to deceive no one. I would not have cared."<sup>18</sup>

Addie perhaps is more emotionally tied to Jewel because he has no father. He is of her alone. Their relationship is an intense one, "bordering on emotional incest."<sup>19</sup> In Jewel's single soliloquy he says, cursing the sawing and hammering of her coffin,

. . . If there is a God what the hell is He for. It would just be me and her on a high hill and me rolling the rocks down the hill at their faces, picking them up and throwing them down the hill, faces and teeth and all by God until she was quiet and not that goddam adze going One lick less. One lick less and we could be quiet.<sup>20</sup>

They are a true part of each other. Olga Vickery says that

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<sup>16</sup>Vickery, op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>17</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 435.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 466.

<sup>19</sup>Vickery, op. cit., p. 200.

<sup>20</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., pp. 347-348.

Jewel's roots are grounded in Addie's violence and love and his burial of her is carried out in the same terms. Only he of all the characters sees her emotionally and the emotion is shot through with violence. Blows and caresses, curses and endearments - the echo of Addie "hating herself for doing it, hating him because she had to."<sup>21</sup>

Addie has made a prediction concerning Jewel which comes true: "He is my cross and he will be my salvation. He will save me from the water and from the fire. Even though I have laid down my life, he will save me."<sup>22</sup> It is Jewel who rescues Addie's coffin from the flooded river and from the burning barn which Darl had set afire.

Darl constantly taunts Jewel, first with Addie's death, and periodically with the refrain "Jewel's mother is a horse." One critic suggests that the horse upon which Jewel may expend his love and hate is indeed a "mother symbol, [as well as] a partial denial of the real mother."<sup>23</sup> When Jewel lets Anse trade his horse for mules necessary to the journey, it is a surrender of sorts which permits "the full intensity of act and emotion, no longer separated . . . , [to revert] to Addie."<sup>24</sup> The elements of Addie in Jewel's blood are warring ones; and they begin to be integrated only with her burial.

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<sup>21</sup>Vickery, op. cit., p. 200.

<sup>22</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 460.

<sup>23</sup>Hefner, op. cit., p. 69.

<sup>24</sup>Vickery, op. cit., p. 200.

Addie's only daughter, Dewey Dell, was given Anse, in Addie's words, to "negative" Jewel. The child intended to replace Jewel is Vardaman, Addie's last child. He is the victim of Addie's withdrawal from responsibility . . . ,<sup>25</sup> according to one critic, "a complete negative in Addie's life . . . ."<sup>26</sup>

It is Vardaman who repeats over and over that his "mother is a fish." A fish had been caught just before Dr. Peabody's visit to Addie's deathbed. Vardaman blames his mother's death on Peabody, and the fish then "becomes translated into a symbol of her alive . . . ."<sup>27</sup>

Both Dewey Dell and Vardaman are as unessential to their mother's life as Darl has been. "And now he has three children [Darl, Dewey Dell and Vardaman] that are his and not mine. And then I could get ready to die."<sup>28</sup>

Dewey Dell has little in common with her mother other than sex. She is truly a child of Anse. One may guess what the relationship, if any, between the two women had been. Dewey Dell's reaction to her mother's dying seems an automatic one, as automatic as the motions she makes fanning her dying mother, and undoubtedly their relation to each other was as mechanical.

<sup>25</sup>Hefner, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 467.

Dewey Dell actually has little time to think of her mother's death. Her immediate problems are centered within her expanding womb. "When mother died I had to go beyond and outside of me . . . to grieve . . . ."29 And "I heard that my mother is dead. I wish I had time to let her die. I wish I had time to wish I had."30 Her urgency to get to Jefferson is so that she may secure an abortion.

Her act with Lefe, her seducer, is the source of all her thoughts. Her behavior was compulsive: ". . . I cannot help it. It will be that I had to do it all the time and I cannot help it."31

She is necessarily self-centered. Watching Dr. Peabody, she says, "He could do everything for me . . . . It's because I am alone. If I could just feel it, it would be different, because I would not be alone. But if I were not alone, everybody would know it."32 Dewey Dell must face her problem by herself; "she cannot turn to a mother, since one does not truly exist."33

Dewey Dell can neither solve nor resolve her problem, around which her thoughts revolve and repeat themselves. She is unable to discuss her situation with anyone; she is also afraid to talk it over with herself. Darl says to her: "The reason you will not say it is, when you say it, even to yourself, you will know it is true . . . . But you know it is true now."34

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29Ibid., p. 380.

30Ibid., p. 422.

31Ibid., pp. 355-356.

32Ibid., p. 379.

33Hefner, op. cit., p. 72.

34Faulkner, op. cit., p. 365.

Darl, who had seen his sister with Lefe, has knowledge of her problem, though he does nothing about it. Dewey Dell and Darl actually need no verbal communication. She remembers his response: ". . . I said 'Are you going to tell pa are you going to kill him?' without the words I said it and he said 'Why?' without the words."<sup>35</sup>

Darl continues to taunt Dewey Dell silently. Her growing hostility toward him is shown when she betrays him to the owner of the burning barn; her hatred of him explodes into a clawing physical attack after her mother's burial.

When they first reach Jefferson, Dewey Dell, who has been given ten dollars by her seducer for an abortion, approaches two druggists for help. One turns her down in righteous indignation; the other takes advantage of her ignorance and her urgency and seduces her. To add to her disappointments, her father discovers she has some money, although he does not know for what it is intended, and takes it from her.

Finally, Dewey Dell "returns to the wagon sullen with the knowledge that the [druggist's] treatment has failed, empty of enmity towards either Darl or Anse."<sup>36</sup> "Characteristically she brushes everything concrete from her consciousness and sits nibbling a banana."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 356.

<sup>36</sup>Hefner, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>37</sup>Vickery, op. cit., p. 203.

One doubts that she will resolve her problem.

Dewey Dell and Addie show little resemblance. There is a slight parallel between the two women in that Dewey Dell's pregnancy corresponds somewhat to Addie's affair with Whitfield; they also are both withdrawn, silent, hostile and alone, yet they differ in more essential qualities.

Addie is the stronger woman - proud, stoical, lonely. She courageously carries out her convictions, her concept of life, truth, right and (or) wrong. Dewey Dell, on the other hand, has no convictions, no beliefs (except perhaps as an automaton: "I believe in God, God. God, I believe in God."<sup>38</sup>). She is much less intelligent than Addie. And Addie puts her thought into action. All of Dewey Dell's movements, in thought and deed, are circular. Her reasons are compulsive; her actions are automatic. She never really acts - she only moves, and reacts.

Mother and daughter are women basically unlike; their only similarity is one of sex, their only kinship one of blood. They differ in thought and behavior, need and motivation. They seem to move in different directions, divergent and apart. Perhaps it is their modes of life, never merging, which are unlike. Faulkner places these two personalities in linked, yet separate worlds - he lets their lonely lives evolve on two different levels of reality.

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<sup>38</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 424.

Although Addie exhibits a certain strength or fortitude, she lacks the truer courage of Aunt Jenny, the real stoicism of Dilsey. Addie actually escapes from life, and adheres quite rigidly to her ideas; less realistic, more withdrawn, she lacks the flexibility and wisdom of the other women. She is not really responsible in her role as parent, resembling Mrs. Compson in her inability to be a true mother to all her children. And her influence, like that of the neurasthenic woman, is far-reaching, adversely affecting several of her children.

In certain respects Dewey Dell resembles flapper Jenny of Mosquitoes, whose stolidity, lack of will, and potential fecundity are repeated in the country girl. Dewey Dell also possesses a physicality like that of Caddy and her daughter, Quentin; she follows the almost helpless, compulsive pattern of behavior they both shared. Pregnant and unwed like Caddy, Dewey Dell is ignorant and completely unsophisticated, much more simple than the other woman; she has an innocence, a naivete, as well as an association with nature which Caddy lacked. Her name is symbolic of a fertility, a fecundity; she herself feels "like a wet seed wild in the hot blind earth."<sup>39</sup> Yet Dewey Dell rebels against these attributes; she does not want the responsibility connected with her natural function. Obsessed with her pregnancy, and intent upon its destruction, Dewey Dell, like Narcissa Benbow, is ego-centered, weak, and fearful; she lacks the strength required to cope with her problems, which remain unresolved.

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 334.

## CHAPTER VI

In Faulkner's Light in August the story of Lena Grove begins and ends the novel, looked upon by many critics as his finest work. This young woman, associated, like Dewey Dell, with fecundity, has a combination of qualities which Faulkner's other youthful females lack. Her circumstances are similar to those of Dewey Dell and Caddy, but her motivation and goal differ distinctly from those of the other women. Lena embodies all the characteristics of womanhood which Faulkner apparently deems feminine, qualities he finds valuable in that sex. She is honest, trusting, simple, faithful, and courageous; she is also fertile, flexible, and life-giving. And Lena not only endures - she prevails.

Her story is one which is also full of rural humor. Some critics refer to it as a pastoral idyl, or as an idyllic subplot contrasting the tragedies of Joe Christmas and Reverend Hightower. Seduced by a young ne'er-do-well, Lena, a young and ignorant country girl, leaves her home in Alabama to find the father of her unborn child. She does not deviate from her purpose, and seemingly never doubts it may be accomplished. Serene in her conviction that she will find her lover, she starts upon the "apparently senseless journey, [which] is first of all heroic and finally comic."<sup>1</sup>

Lena's consistent proximity to nature gives added emphasis to the earth-mother characteristics which she exemplifies in abundance.

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<sup>1</sup>John Arthos, "Ritual and Humor in the Writing of William Faulkner," William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism, ed. Frederick Hoffman and Olga Vickery, p. 112.



The critic Irving Malin says that Lena shows the "too easily forgotten fecundity of nature."<sup>2</sup> Unlike some of Faulkner's other women characters, she is "faithful to one of the natural laws of the universe - childbirth . . . ."<sup>3</sup> He feels that she is almost an "archetype of the earth-mother . . . [and is the] embodiment of fecundity."<sup>4</sup> The connection with nature is evidenced also by her last name which is apparently symbolic of the association.

All of Lena's virtues are simple ones; her life has been (and continues to be) one close to the natural world. It is not associated with the chaotic, civilized world she journeys serenely into.

The journey she makes is not a linear one; Lena's movements are all cyclical. There are many "curve" images in Light in August with which Lena is associated and about which Richard Chase has this to say: "The curve image stands for holistic consciousness, a containing culture and tradition, the cyclical life and death of all the creatures of earth. Throughout the novel, Lena retains her holistic consciousness and she is strong, enduring, hopeful."<sup>5</sup> Of these images Malin says that the "female is the curve because of her cyclical movement demonstrated by menstruation . . . , an indication of her closeness to the actual workings of the universe."<sup>6</sup> Within

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<sup>2</sup>Irving Malin, William Faulkner: An Interpretation, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 44-45.

<sup>5</sup>Richard Chase, "The Stone and The Crucifixion: Faulkner's Light in August," ed. Frederick Hoffman and Olga Vickery, op. cit. p. 207.

<sup>6</sup>Malin, op. cit., p. 63.

this movement, this motion, Lena has a sort of stillness. She is always presented as serene, calm, still, placid. She has an inner quiet, an unhaste, a peacefulness. Her actions are always spontaneous ones. Her concern is with the immediate event; and her "faith allows her to act spontaneously toward events while they are occurring . . . ."7 Her conception of time is a realistic one. The cause of her journey is in the past - and her goal of marriage is in the future, but the present, which "holds concrete reality for her . . . [is the] necessary link between past events (which can be used to interpret it) and future events (which it can help predict)."<sup>8</sup> Lena goes along her way, "slow, deliberate, unhurried and tireless as augmenting afternoon itself . . . ."9 Here is a continuous movement, a flow of time, gradual, cyclical.

She seems the embodiment of peace. The turbulence surrounding her leaves her basically unaffected; and she has no inner conflict. She accepts her pregnancy, her femininity, and, sure of her destination (marriage), she is a "distinct presence in the community of violence."<sup>10</sup> Her inner certitude seems to emphasize the "superiority of rural primitive virtues."<sup>11</sup> According to Campbell and

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<sup>7</sup>Chase, op. cit., p. 207.

<sup>8</sup>Malin, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>9</sup>William Faulkner, Light in August, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup>Malin, op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>11</sup>Harry Modcan Campbell and Ruel E. Foster, William Faulkner: A Critical Appraisal, p. 110.

Foster, she becomes an "actual tower of strength about whom the persevering forces of the strong gather."<sup>12</sup>

Byron Burch attests to her worthiness when he falls in love with her. Theirs is an attachment which grows, and the union is a significant one. Byron, protecting Lena, sees the importance of motherhood, and his "hitherto meaningless life finds its repose in Lena."<sup>13</sup> It is his involvement with her which gives him an "insight . . . and the opportunity to choose between right and wrong, justice and injustice."<sup>14</sup>

Lena is more than individually good - she "is responsible for the goodness of other people . . . who try to help her reach her destination."<sup>15</sup> Lena's simplicity is outstanding. One critic finds an ironic implication in the fact that "her actual stupidity about as much as her simple innocence is responsible."<sup>16</sup> The word "stupidity" seems a little strong. Lena is unlettered, and indeed evidences little rational cerebration, but perhaps is ignorant and ingenuous rather than completely imperceptive.

Lena is truly free. She "does not need to flee from involvement in human life . . . ."<sup>17</sup> She accepts her situation, her

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Chase, op. cit., p. 203.

<sup>14</sup>Malin, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>16</sup>Campbell and Foster, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>17</sup>Chase, op. cit., p. 211.

pregnancy, as a natural thing. And rather than becoming embittered, she "works through to a simple, happy life with Byron . . .,"<sup>18</sup> who is rewarded for his devotion. Through Lena, Byron "now knows the meaning of love . . . and she knows he is to be a 'real' father to her child. Man and woman seem to be at one with nature."<sup>19</sup>

Their last scene is a calm one. She "just sits there, riding, looking out like she hadn't ever seen country roads and trees and fields and telephone poles . . . before in her life."<sup>20</sup> Lena intends to keep on just traveling while she still has the chance. She is satisfied. Her destination has been reached - but she is still moving. Hers is a completion within movement, a cycle which is changing yet constant. A great contrast to all the calamity and disaster around her, she moves through the violence as a center of peace, and, seeking justice, she finds safety - and pleasure.

Lena might be called a "natural" heroine. She is not sick, not abnormal. Though extremely simple, she combines both spiritual and physical characteristics - and, strong, serene, "feminine", she not only perseveres - she prevails.

The simplicity of Lena Grove is emphasized when compared with the complexity of Joanna Burden.

Contrasting with earth-motherly Lena, Joanna, a forty-year-old spinster, is an incomplete woman. She is barren, masculine,

<sup>18</sup>Campbell and Foster, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>19</sup>Malin, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>20</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 443.

rigid and repressed. Considered an eccentric by the people in Jefferson, she secludes herself in her house, seeing no one but the few Negroes who make a path to her door, until she meets Joe Christmas, part-Negro "hero" of the novel, who is first her seducer, last her murderer. Theirs is a sordid affair; Joanna can release her long pent-up repressions only in violent, devious ways, and disintegrating spiritually, appalls even Joe. Their relationship ends when she reaches her menopause, withers physically, and reverts to her former state of rigidity, of semi-masculinity.

Joanna's heritage is responsible for her eccentricities and her lack of womanhood. The Burden family had figured in a dispute over Negro voting in Reconstruction days; Joanna, known to the community as a lover of Negroes, still fights for their rights, and corresponds with several Negro schools and colleges. Her last name is symbolic; she carries the burden of the black race, a "curse" her father told her belonged to the white race, to those who have enslaved the Negroes. Her relationship with her father, her acceptance of his severe doctrines, influences all her life. Remembering a scene from childhood, she tells Christmas how he had taken her to the graves of her ancestor: "I don't know why I didn't want to [go] . . . . I think it was something about father, something that came from the cedar grove to me, through him . . . . I would never be able to forget it."<sup>21</sup> It is there her father had told her of the "curse". The

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 221.

pattern she follows in her adult life is an attempt "to placate this curse through humanitarianism - it demonstrates her superstitions and her brooding consciousness . . . ."22 Her heritage (her rigidity, her pattern or design) is all-pervading. She is "separated from the community because . . . [of her] inflexibility . . . ."23 Joanna's desire to develop an authoritarian pattern of behavior like her father's springs from a need for certainty in life and results in the rigidity of her existence.<sup>24</sup> Her affair with Christmas is a significant one, for he symbolizes the unforgotten curse behind it all. (During their love-making, she breathes wildly to him "Negro! Negro! Negro!")<sup>25</sup> Hers is not a healthy, normal sexual gratification. Faulkner, says Malin, is attempting "to stress the nature of her sexual ambivalence in the relationship because he believes that she is too concerned with the personal design of her ancestors to care about her natural function as a woman."<sup>26</sup>

Faulkner uses several striking metaphors to exhibit Joanna's duality; her inner conflict is seen by Joe Christmas as he watches her struggle with herself:

Anyway, he stayed, watching the two creatures that struggled in the one body . . . , [one] who, even though lost and damned,

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<sup>22</sup>Malin, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>25</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 227.

<sup>26</sup>Malin, op. cit., p. 36.

remained somehow impervious and impregnable; then . . . the other . . . , who in furious denial of that impregnability strove to drown in the black abyss of its own creating that physical purity which had been preserved too long now even to be lost. Then she would stare at him with the wild, despairing face of a stranger . . . .<sup>27</sup>

Her duality, her continued conflict, is constantly evidenced in the relationship between Joe and Joanna; the violence of the passion she shows indicates the extent of her repressions. Her spiritual disintegration is a corrupting of herself by herself. She expresses herself sexually, but "her means of expression are only corrupt and perverse."<sup>28</sup> Christmas himself feels as though he has fallen into a sewer. The corruption, Faulkner says, "came from a source even more inexplicable to him than to her."<sup>29</sup> Joanna does not live "in sin but in filth."<sup>30</sup>

The distraught spinster is a puritanic nymphomaniac whose sex status is one outside of womanhood. She is more manly than womanly, and is rigid and inflexible. Her disintegration, her lack of fertility and vitality are illustrated in her withering and becoming physically barren.

Her repressions result in her downfall - and in her murder. After her menopause, she begins praying over Joe; these futile

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<sup>27</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 228

<sup>28</sup>Malin, op. cit.

<sup>29</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 227.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

attempts to save his soul result in the loss of her life. John Arthos says that Christmas "murders his benefactress because his pride cannot endure her pity."<sup>31</sup> Warren claims the murder is committed because the "woman he kills has become a figure of the horror of the human which has surrendered the human attributes."<sup>32</sup> She is a pathetic creature, neither man nor woman.

Joanna is never free. Her behavior with Christmas is an attempt to flee, to deny the past and her wasted years; her behavior takes a drastic turn, but Joanna really does not change. The past has a definite - and disastrous - effect on Joanna's destiny. One critic says that she harms herself only because she is not herself at all but her ancestors.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps the realization that she is barren "is the motive which compels her at last to yield to the personal design which she . . . [had] never really abandoned."<sup>34</sup> This design, which had restrained and inhibited her before Joe Christmas' "seduction", she returns to easily. Its pattern is one from which she cannot part.

Perhaps because Joanna tends to be "masculine", Faulkner portrays her as more complex than Lena. It has been said that Faulkner equates "feminine" woman ("those he knows least about") with nature.<sup>35</sup> Lena fits well into that category; Joanna, on the

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<sup>31</sup>Arthos, op. cit.

<sup>32</sup>Robert Penn Warren, "William Faulkner," ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga Vickery, op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>33</sup>Malin, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 46.



other hand, is an older epicene type, one corrupt and withered.

Directly contrasting with Lena, Joanna lacks the younger woman's "holism" as well as her wholesomeness; Joanna is non-holistic - she has a split, a lack. Lena can look clearly at her past experiences, while Joanna demonstrates an "instinctive denial of . . . wasted years . . ., hopeless, reproachful . . . and despairing . . . ." <sup>36</sup> Although Lena has "sinned", too, she has done so in innocence - which she personifies. This is her saving grace, her redemption. She is completely disassociated from evil, while Joanna is the tragic victim of her own corruption.

✓ Lena might be, in Faulkner's eyes, a goddess of fertility. As an earth mother, her "'nature' is like the flow of the moon and the seasons." <sup>37</sup> She makes no attempt to enter the masculine world; spontaneous and reflexive, she recognizes her status as woman, and accepts it, continuing her slow and cyclical movement. The road she moves along is one of life - and love - and, curving, continuous, still stretches out before her.

Unlike Faulkner's other heroines, Lena embodies both spiritual and physical characteristics; she is morally good, physical and fecund as well. One may recognize in her the honesty and kindness of Margaret Powers, the placidity (and mindlessness!) of the flapper Jenny, the fertility and rustic simplicity of Dewey Dell. She has

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<sup>36</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 230.

<sup>37</sup>Malin, op. cit., p. 43.

the "good" qualities of all the earlier women, and lacks their weak or corrupt tendencies. Like Margaret Powers, she is searching, but she is serene, for her search has meaning; like other young, physical women, she is fertile and pregnant - but accepts her fecundity as a natural law. Lena, however, is quite complacent, slightly dense, and almost too good to be true. Although she is, like Dilsey, a repository of virtues, she is an idealized type, rather than a compelling, convincing character, and the two cannot really compare. Yet Faulkner keeps her from chaos, strife and care, and is happy with his ideal - one knows the fate in store for her will be a pleasant one.

## CHAPTER VII

The flapper Temple Drake, a character who is presented first in Sanctuary as almost a stereotype, is a complete contrast to feminine, earth-motherly Lena. Outwardly she strongly resembles the young girl in Mosquitoes, Patricia; however, as the narrative progresses one recognizes in Temple certain potentialities which keep her from being categorized with others of her basic type. Although these potentialities seem at first uniquely evil ones, they also appear to be one-way directed because of a barrier, the erection of which Temple is not completely responsible for. She has had more than a fair share of help. Reappearing in Requiem for a Nun, Temple there develops into a character who for the first time recognizes not just her own complexity, but her hitherto unsuspected possibilities as well.

Most critics see Temple in Sanctuary as a symbol of corruption. At first a quite young, most typical flapper, she undergoes a series of horrible experiences which finally make her apparently as corrupt as the circumstances in which she finds herself.

Temple has always sought pleasure; it has been her only goal. The motherless, seventeen-year-old daughter of Judge Drake of Jackson, she is supposedly safely enrolled in college at Oxford, but manages to slip out during the week against the rules in order to cuddle with the town boys - who have cars. She protects her reputation with the careless university men by attending their social functions on alternate Saturday nights. There she dances "in a swirling glitter . . . with her high delicate head and her bold

painted mouth and soft chin, her eyes blankly right and left looking, cool, predatory and discreet."<sup>1</sup>

Temple is potentially rather dangerous, even though the danger is mingled with much innocence. She apparently has dangled her virginity before a number of young men. Her father has already shot one young man because of her, and her four brothers are also as determined to preserve her virtue and reputation. Temple at this stage has never committed evil, but she has played at it for some time.

She is concerned only with her own needs, using anything about her for that purpose, even her status as daughter of a judge. She has advertised such prestige to the town boys, who mimic her "My father's a judge" in falsetto.<sup>2</sup> Physically she resembles earlier Faulknerian flappers: she is "long-legged, thin armed, with high small buttocks - a small childish figure no longer quite a child, not yet quite a woman."<sup>3</sup> Temple is a mixture of simple sex and simple innocence and little else. She has no inner values; unthinking, wilful, and extremely weak willed, she seems oblivious of ideals, expressing little awareness of and no respect for them. She is always "intent upon enjoyment . . . [and finally] she becomes utterly corrupt."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 33

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>4</sup>Irving Malin, William Faulkner: An Interpretation, p. 33.

Temple, on a college train en route to a ball game, hops off to ride with her date, Gowan Stevens, in his car. Gowan, who had learned to drink at Virginia, is already half drunk. In this state he decides to get more whiskey, going to a moonshiner's hide-out - the Goodwin place - to do so, despite Temple's pleas. He manages to wreck his car as they approach the ruined house, and he and Temple are forced to remain overnight at the place which abounds in the characters who will loom large, directly and indirectly, in Temple's life.

Temple, who is frightened, is actually not aware of the very real danger she is in. She darts from room to room and runs frantically about the place to avoid the men. Yet while cringing from any contact with them, Temple, ever vain, at first takes a flapperish delight in the awareness that she has provoked their interest. She gradually becomes more apprehensive. Her fear is so great during the night that she has a number of fantasies and also attempts to protect herself by sealing herself in an old raincoat. One by one the men go to her room: the depraved Popeye, a young hoodlum, Tommy, and the moonshiner, Goodwin. She is guarded, unknowingly, by the one woman on the place, the mistress of Goodwin.

Gowan leaves the next morning, ostensibly to get a car and return for Temple. He does not return, however, leaving Temple prey to the "crimps and spungs and feebs"<sup>5</sup> to whom he had taken her.

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<sup>5</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 8.

He shows complete irresponsibility by first placing Temple in such an atmosphere and then by leaving her there. He might have been able to prevent the traumatic events she becomes involved in: she is raped by the depraved, impotent Popeye, who first coolly shoots the young man guarding the door of the barn where she has run to hide. Paralyzed with terror, Temple is powerless to resist Popeye's brutal, perverted attack. "She could hear silence in a thick rustling as he moved toward her . . . and she began to say 'Something is going to happen to me . . . . 'Something is happening to me!' She screamed . . . I told you it was! I told you all the time!"<sup>6</sup>

One critic, Irving Malin, states that

Faulkner believes that . . . [it is Temple's] vanity and will to power [which] expose her to the malicious advances of a man who can't be swayed - Popeye. In the rape scene she is powerless because circumstances oppose and terrify her . . . . Her potentialities to fight evil have never been tested before.<sup>7</sup>

She remains partially paralyzed; and in this condition she is abducted by Popeye who speeds away to Memphis. As they pass Goodwin's woman in the road, Temple's "face did not turn, her eyes did not wake; . . . it was a small, dead-colored mask . . ."<sup>8</sup> that the woman glimpsed.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>7</sup>Malin, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>8</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 123.

Temple remains in this apparent state of semi-shock while Popeye takes her to a brothel, where he imprisons her and engages another man as proxy for further sexual exploitation.

Temple's losing her virginity does more than shock her sensibilities; it seems also to baptize her into evil, which, perhaps, she never before had been truly able to recognize. This inability plus her weakness of will helps her succumb easily to the authority imposed upon her. The progression she makes is a downward one. She quickly slides to lower levels, accepting amorality without a conscious qualm.

The entire incident has another effect as well: Temple unconsciously stamps herself as soulless. She has no self; there is a void, an emptiness, where any soul might be. One critic believes that the novel "presents, in progressive steps, the death of Temple's soul. Each act she performs contributes increasingly to the abandonment of any feelings of humility, compassion or love . . . . [Her] will is so deadened that the human emotions . . ."9 mean nothing to her.

This lack is never clearer than after the Memphis ordeal is over. She is traced to the brothel (where she stays for six weeks) by Horace Benbow, defense lawyer for Goodwin, who has been accused of the murder committed by Popeye. Popeye also murders Red, his sexual proxy whom Temple has "fallen in love" with. When Horace, whose

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<sup>9</sup>Lonnie Dean Hefner, "The Concept of Love in Novels of William Faulkner," (unpublished Master's Thesis, The University of Texas, 1955), p. 112.

plans to use Temple for the defense fail completely, first finds Temple, he listens to her version of the experience and "realized that she was recounting . . . [it] with actual pride, a sort of naive and impersonal vanity, as though she were making it up . . . ."10 Temple, used to operating always on a level of instinct and passion, is completely unable to comprehend the horror of the situation; she shows no moral sensitivity, and, at the trial, she appears finally corrupt as she convicts an innocent man with false testimony.

Her behavior at the trial is that of a person lethargic, stupefied, stunned. Her inner state is indicated by the flat, dull monotone in which she speaks, and all of her actions are automatic and mechanical. Her false testimony, "ironically, makes the community, including her father, think of her as a 'ruined, defenseless child.'"11

Retrieved or rescued by her father, Temple is taken to Paris, which is a drastic change in environment only. Sitting in the Luxembourg Gardens, she seems almost lifeless. Faulkner shows her little pity. Her face is "sullen and discontented and sad."12 She has survived the ordeal, yet she is an empty shell of a girl not yet woman, female yet unfeminine.

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10Faulkner, op. cit., p. 259.

11Malin, op. cit., p. 34.

12Faulkner, op. cit., p. 379.



Faulkner apparently felt that Temple was sorely in need of redemption and (twenty years later) in Requiem for a Nun, he starts her on her way. One critic feels that in Requiem "there is about . . . [Temple] a living breathing immediacy not felt in Sanctuary. At times she approaches the requirements for a true tragic heroine."<sup>13</sup> Another feels that it is

. . . a quintessential Temple . . . [who speaks here], a Temple reduced to a certain odor of sanctity or damnation, a "verbalized soul." These [characters in Requiem] are preconscious and postconscious selves speaking aloud. Requiem for a Nun is . . . an ancient morality play.<sup>14</sup>

In Sanctuary, Temple seemingly symbolizes corruption; in Requiem she becomes a modern "Magdalene . . ., seeking redemption of her soul in the . . . [present] world."<sup>15</sup>

Temple in Requiem is presented as the same character, but is now Mrs. Gowan Stevens. Six years have passed since the original incident which is ever present in her life. She comments upon her younger self before the rape as a "foolish virgin . . . seventeen, and more of a fool than simply being a virgin or even being seventeen could excuse . . ., capable of a height of folly . . . scarcely . . . matched."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Hefner, op. cit., p. 119.

<sup>14</sup>Albert Guerard, "Requiem for a Nun: An Examination," The Harvard Advocate, November, 1951, pp. 19, 41-42.

<sup>15</sup>Hefner, op. cit., p. 141.

<sup>16</sup>William Faulkner, Requiem for a Nun, p. 130.

Temple again is caught up in circumstances which this time she may hold herself more accountable for than before. The younger of the couple's two children, a six-months-old baby girl, has been strangled by the Negro nurse whom they had hired to care for the infant and their four-year-old son. By Temple's own admittance she had brought the Negress, a former prostitute and dope-fiend, into her home so that she might have a confidante. What she does not admit - at first - is that she is the party more guilty than the factual murderess - she is essentially responsible for the crime.

At the beginning of Requiem, Temple is a smartly garbed, streamlined New Woman. The socially popular couple are members of the younger, ultra-smart country club set. The trial at which Nancy has been pronounced guilty is over, and Nancy is awaiting her execution. Temple at first "seems to be playing a part, that of the righteously bereaved mother."<sup>17</sup> Gowan, as well as Temple, is hiding something. He pretends a concern and solicitude for his wife, but actually he hides "a morbid preoccupation with his part in Temple's past experiences."<sup>18</sup> Gowan has failed Temple drastically in Sanctuary and, in marriage, he has failed her again.

Gowan married Temple because he was partly responsible for what happened to her. Actually he feels he has made a sacrifice because he believes she enjoyed her stay in the Memphis brothel.

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<sup>17</sup>Hefner, op. cit., p. 122.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

Gowan's marrying Temple has a noble ring, but it was an action essentially selfish. For through marrying her, Gowan "is able to amend his own guilt, but he also asks that Temple be grateful to him."<sup>19</sup> Gowan actually cannot forgive or forget, and even begins to doubt the paternity of their son. The past is everpresent in both their memories.

Temple has herself convinced that her true nature is one corrupt and worthless. Her past experiences "have remained dormant in her mind"; and she is "distorted by the hold that . . . [her] past life has on her."<sup>20</sup>

This past confronts her in a concrete form when the brother (Pete) of her former lover (Red) appears with letters she had written to Red while she was in Memphis. Pete, whose intentions were at first blackmail, represents to Temple not just his brother, but a form of escape from Gowan. Pete's amorality is so hard, ruthless, and impeccable that to her he seems to have a kind of integrity and purity which will never need or intend to forgive anything.<sup>21</sup>

Temple makes plans to flee with Pete and her baby, and when Nancy discovers this, as a last resort she murders the child to prevent the more disastrous action. It is this act which not only jerks open Temple's eyes to what she was about to do, but forces her to take

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>21</sup>Faulkner, Requiem for a Nun, p. 171.

another, clearer look at herself and her past, and finally, another evaluation of both.

Temple, basically responsible for the child's death, had not been a conscientious parent. It is "the vision which she has of her own loss of femininity [which] points the way toward this later 'unnaturalness.'"<sup>22</sup> She has not been able to "come to terms with the present because she clings to an inflexible pattern of behavior."<sup>23</sup>

After the trial, Temple goes to California to await Nancy's hanging, but returns, realizing that she cannot really run away from guilt. It is Gavin Stevens, Nancy's lawyer, whose logic (and ethical beliefs) brings Temple back to face her own guilt - and to admit it publicly.

Temple "still thinks of herself as an abandoned soul,"<sup>24</sup> yet Gavin wants her "to perform a 'good' act out of virtue, which she refuses to believe has existed in her since she first became aware of the seductiveness of spiritual immorality."<sup>25</sup> It is Temple's choice to make. Gavin only insists that she face the issue, knowing that "if the hope for redemption can be planted the first step will have been taken."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Malin, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Refner, op. cit., p. 126.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

Gavin takes Temple to the governor, in whose office, unknown to Temple, Gowan sits also. Temple there repeats the story of Sanctuary for the Governor. She holds nothing back, at last telling the truth about herself. She makes her confession of present guilt as well as reliving her past sins, while Gavin "draws the philosophical implications and conclusions which . . . [Temple] is unable to recognize."<sup>27</sup>

Temple, who has almost instinctively loved evil, says "You've got to be already prepared to resist it . . . ; you must have already said no to it long before you even know what it is."<sup>28</sup> Echoing Gavin, she feels there must be "a corruption even in just looking at evil, even by accident . . . ." <sup>29</sup> One recognizes in Temple possibilities other than for evil, as she realizes that perhaps she has a soul after all, and if so, one which might be saved. Other visions of life are now possible for her.

In beginning to look more clearly at her past experiences - and herself - she begins a process which will help her to a truer individuality, another life. Temple is at least aware that there might be something else, although she is numbed, drained by the emotional experience of confession. She is "only half awake to the full meaning of what has happened to her . . . . [She had] lived by

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>28</sup>Faulkner, Requiem for a Nun, p. 134.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

instinct . . . . The suddenness of release leaves her stumbling in confusion."<sup>30</sup>

Temple then goes to ask forgiveness of Nancy. Nancy herself is not really a character in Requiem; "she is just a voice, a moral wraith."<sup>31</sup> It is her "cry of 'Believe!'" [which] appears to be the distillation of Faulkner's central ethical viewpoint."<sup>32</sup> Listening to Nancy, who is willing to sacrifice herself for her beliefs, Temple prepares to attempt a transcendence of her former self. Temple, "a bride of Satan . . . [had been dedicated] to evil."<sup>33</sup> She begins a spiritual striving at the end of the novel; "her requiem is that of a farewell to evil and an assumption of her place as a child of grace."<sup>34</sup> Although Temple does not know what may lie ahead, she is ready - and willing - to try.

Temple has appeared in a variety of perspectives. In Sanctuary, she is fertile for the seed of degeneration; in Requiem, she begins a spiritual growth. Faulkner shows little sympathy for Temple as a flapper. He only suggests pertinent incidents which might have influenced her behavior; her father and brothers - and society - apparently gave her rigid laws to follow without the truer guidance of understanding. Faulkner at first "hates Temple . . . [as] a creature of the modernism which equates sex with evil . . . . [He knows] that she and her youthful counterparts like what they are

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<sup>30</sup>Hefner, op. cit., p. 135.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

doing but don't want to admit it."<sup>35</sup> In a less harsh comment the same critic says she is "a complex person who is unsure of growing up, who [both] desires and fears men . . . ."<sup>36</sup>

Temple moves from flapper to corrupt automaton in Sanctuary, from New Woman to potential heroine in Requiem. She is given possibilities for change not seen in Faulkner's other women, for she has a chance to become another person; she is started on her way toward redemption, toward individuation, toward transcendence. Temple, once doomed, is given an opportunity to free herself from her past, from the pattern which Faulkner had first placed her within. He breathes a vitality into this type-become-character - and rescues his creation from her first predestined doom.

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<sup>35</sup>Malin, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER VIII

Miss Rosa Coldfield of Absalom, Absalom!, while similar in type to Miss Jenny, is more complicated, affected by the past like Temple and Joanna. One of Faulkner's more complex women, she is an individualistic old maid of sixty-four who has nursed a hatred, an outrage, an insult for forty-three years. The incident behind her rage had occurred at the end of the civil-war, the period in which Rosa spent her isolated, never-blooming girlhood. Rosa, ever a dreamer, is, at sixty-four, completely and extremely self-absorbed. Except for her obsession, her neurotically narrowed viewpoint, Rosa has qualities which are quite admirable. She demonstrates a strength of will and shows a certain bravery. And although harrassed and frustrated at almost every turn, suffering undue hardship, she endures with a fortitude worthy of any heroine.

Faulkner has ambiguous attitudes toward her. He deems her "cold, implacable, and even ruthless";<sup>1</sup> yet he indicates a certain sympathy at least in giving some reasons for her personality by acquainting the reader with her early life, her childhood and girlhood.

The spinster is partial narrator of Absalom, Absalom!. Rosa, "the most consciously incantatory of all . . . [Faulkner's] narrators . . .,"<sup>2</sup> reconstructs for Quentin Compson (who re-narrates) the family history of the Sutpens, the ramifications of whose lives comprise the tragic tale. She supplies him most of the material with

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<sup>1</sup>William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>William R. Poirier, "'Strange Gods' in Jefferson, Mississippi: Analysis of Absalom, Absalom!," William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism, ed. Frederick Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery, p. 219.



which he organizes the story. What she tells him must be reinterpreted, reorientated, for Rosa "acknowledge[s] the past only through the retroactive distortions of her own rage and frustration."<sup>3</sup>

When Rosa summons Quentin to her home, he is at first puzzled by the reasons for using him as listener. When she tells him he might be able to use the story as literary material, he thinks that, rather, it is just "because she wants it told . . .,"<sup>4</sup> or perhaps, "so that people . . . will . . . know at last why God let us lose the War."<sup>5</sup> Rosa has yet another reason, a plan which requires some practical help from Quentin.

In sooth-saying, portentous fashion Rosa recounts her tale, evoking shadowy, wraith-like figures who gradually assume a solidity, returning to haunt, to taunt Quentin as urgently as does Miss Rosa, herself an "outraged, baffled ghost . . . ."<sup>6</sup>

As Miss Rosa speaks to Quentin in her "grim haggard amazed voice,"<sup>7</sup> he is aware of the "rank smell of female old flesh long embattled in virginity while the wan haggard face watched him above the faint triangle of lace at wrists and throat from the too tall chair in which she resembles a crucified child . . . ."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>4</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

The object of Miss Rosa's frustration is long dead Thomas Sutpen. According to her, he was a man who had valor and strength, yet possessed neither pity nor honor. The story she tells to Quentin is a complex one which he must first disentangle, then reconstruct, and finally find a meaning for.

Rosa relates part of the Sutpens' story - how Thomas Sutpen suddenly appeared in Jefferson, acquired land and built a mansion, married her sister, Ellen (through some secret business dealing with her father) by whom he begot two children, Henry and Judith. Quentin hears also of Ellen's death, of the promise extracted from Rosa to protect Judith, of the shooting of Charles Bon (Judith's sweetheart) by Henry, and of Rosa's stay at the Sutpens with Judith and Clytie, Sutpen's mulatto daughter. He learns finally of the personal consequence of that sojourn for Rosa - of the return of Thomas Sutpen from the war and of the two proposals made to her, the first for marriage, the second for siring.

Rosa's recapitulation is one which embraces her childhood, one spent in solitude, in a strange, silent world of her own. She had been reared by an aunt in a home ruled by a Puritanic, moralistic father. Born into her parents' middle age, Rosa's birth cost her mother's life. Her sister, Ellen, had married Sutpen seven years before she was born, and her niece, Judith, was four years older than she. She claims that she really had no childhood. For Rosa, "born too late . . . was doomed to contemplate all human behavior through the complex and needless follies of adults - [and even as a child she

possessed<sup>7</sup> an air Cassandralike and humorless and profoundly and sternly prophetic . . . ."<sup>9</sup>

Quentin already knows from Mr. Compson part of Rosa's background: how Rosa's aunt (a woman "strong vindictive consistent"<sup>10</sup> who finally climbed out the window one night and vanished) was both mother and father to her, how Rosa ("without knowing it"<sup>11</sup>) hated her father whom she learned to keep house for and whom she fed surreptitiously during the war when he nailed himself up in the attic where, hiding from Confederate provost marshals for three years, he finally starved to death.

Miss Rosa had grown up looking upon Sutpen as an "ogre", a "demon", although she had seen him only on infrequent visits to Sutpen's Hundred. After her aunt left, Rosa and Mr. Coldfield made once-a-year visits; after a while these visits ceased, and she saw Sutpen not at all for years. Ellen and Judith she saw more often, for they would stop by on bi-weekly shopping trips to town.

It was upon Judith that Rosa projected "all the abortive dreams and delusions of her own doomed and frustrated youth . . . ."<sup>12</sup> Rosa, small, plain, listened solemnly as Ellen chattered about Henry's New Orleans friend, Charles Bon, soon to become Judith's beau. Rosa had begun to live vicariously Judith's life, and in her dreaming, her imaginings, romanticized both suitor and situation.

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 21-22.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

She once offered Judith "the only gift . . . in her power . . . , [which was] how to keep house and plan meals and count laundry,"<sup>13</sup> to be met with shrieks of amusement by Ellen, and a "blank fatherless," "impenetrable dreaming"<sup>14</sup> stare by Judith. Rosa, "a spinster doomed for life at sixteen,"<sup>15</sup> felt not at all jealous of Judith. She never saw Charles Bon, although through her vision of him she felt that she knew what love was. Hearing about their engagement from Ellen, Rosa felt "probably just peaceful despair and relief at final and complete abnegation, now that Judith was about to immolate the frustration's vicarious recompense into the living fairy tale."<sup>16</sup> Rosa began secretly making trousseau garments for Judith, apparently stealing the material from her father's store to do so, working on them while he was asleep, readying them for what was "her own vicarious bridal."<sup>17</sup>

Sensitive and perceptive, Rosa's sensibility is a poetic one, although perhaps it did function "in the soul of a pathetic ante-bellum 'bobby-sover'."<sup>18</sup> Rosa's long soliloquy (which is placed in Quentin's stream-of-consciousness) is rather "overindulgent . . . , [a] romantic self-dramatization . . . ."<sup>19</sup> As such it is quite in keeping with Rosa's personality. All the events touching upon her life are of personal consequence to her, and her "romantic verbalization is [also] consistent with her avocation as poet . . . ."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77

<sup>18</sup> Poirier, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 236-237.

(Rosa is the county's "poetess laureate", submitting poems, epilogues, and eulogies to the county newspaper. She had begun writing odes to Southern soldiers as soon as her father locked himself up.)<sup>21</sup> Rosa, full of romantic illusions, lived in her own world, partially a dream state, one always of isolation.

When Ellen died Rosa was seventeen; she had asked Rosa to protect Judith, yet even after Mr. Coldfield died, Rosa, an orphan and a pauper, did not go immediately to Sutpen's Hundred. She did not go until summoned by Wash Jones, a poor white who helped care for the place. Jones informed her of Bon's death by yelling it out in front of her house.

Rosa traveled the twelve miles to the big house in a frantic state of mind, one she remained in while running into the house where she was stopped by a rocklike, sphinxlike Clytie, who held her, preventing her from dashing immediately upstairs. She then was confronted by a calm, cold, tranquil Judith. This attitude had a stunning effect upon Rosa; such a reaction was incomprehensible to her. Rosa had been dwelling in a dream, in a self-mesmerized state. And in her identification with Judith she had attributed her own needs and attitudes, aspirations and yearnings to the other woman. Rosa woke

not from what was, what used to be, but from what had not, could not have ever, been; . . . [she woke] from the hoping, who did believe there is a keenness to bereavement even

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<sup>21</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 11.

though grief be absent; believed there would be need . . . to save not love perhaps . . . but what was left behind by widowing - and found that there was nothing there to save; who hoped to save her as . . . [she] promised Ellen . . . , and came too late . . . , who came twelve miles and nineteen years to save what did not need the saving, and lost instead . . .<sup>22</sup>

herself.

Rosa gives Quentin a questionable account of the reason for Judith's marriage being forbidden. Of course, she does not know the actual situation and, as one critic points out, this partially explains Rosa's hatred of Sutpen,<sup>23</sup> since she has lived vicariously Judith's life. Although Rosa's romantic longings have become somewhat objectified in her vision of Charles Bon, she does not seem, as the critic claims, to have actually "fallen deeply in love . . . ."<sup>24</sup> Rosa herself says she had loved Bon "but not as women love. Because I asked nothing of him . . . . And more than that: I gave him nothing, which is the sum of loving."<sup>25</sup> Rosa had never known love, not even parents' love, yet, she says she had become "not mistress, not beloved, but more than even love; I became all polymath love's androgynous advocate."<sup>26</sup>

Rosa stayed on at Sutpen's Hundred; and, with Judith and Clytie, waited for Sutpen to come back.

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 147

<sup>23</sup>Poirier, op. cit., p. 229.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>25</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 147.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

When Sutpen returned he had to be told by Judith who Rosa was. He apparently had never looked at her - nor had any man looked upon her as female. She herself compares herself (as she was in her teen years) to a forgotten root or a warped chrysalis which may still bloom - and bloom the more for having slept forgot. "Root and urge I do insist and claim, for had I not heired too from all the unsistered Eves since the Snake?"<sup>27</sup>

Apparently this root, this urge, though dormant, was a vital one, for when Sutpen suddenly looked upon her and as suddenly proposed (his courtship was a "minute's exchanged look")<sup>28</sup> she accepted. He spoke no word directly to her nor did he pause to hear an answer of acceptance. "That ogre . . . held out its hand and said 'Come' as you might say it to a dog, and I came."<sup>29</sup>

Was it simply because Sutpen was a man that she accepted his marriage proposal? Rosa's father had not fulfilled Rosa's needs for a strong man figure in her life; theirs was a negative relationship. Rosa's imagination, soaring again, turned Sutpen suddenly into a heroic figure instead of a demon, an ogre, which he quickly became again after his second proposal - to breed first and marry if it were a boy. Rosa's dreams completely collapsed, her illusions sharply shattered as she again abruptly recognized "unbearable reality."<sup>30</sup> It was for her "the death of hope and love, the death of pride and

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

principle, and then the death of everything save the old outraged and aghast unbelieving which . . . lasted for forty-three years . . . ."31

Rosa tells Quentin there are a number of specious reasons she could give him - none of which are hers - which would justify her having accepted a proposal from Sutpen. She says she holds no brief for herself - and that the thing she actually cannot forgive Sutpen for is his dying before he could admit that he had been wrong.

One wonders if there were not "more of maiden hope and virgin expectation than she ever told Quentin about . . . ."32

Rosa's actual association with Sutpen had been a vicarious one. He had never noticed her until just before his proposal. Perhaps "Rosa is unfair to Sutpen . . . . Her reasons for calling him . . . [demon] are . . . ambiguous and questionable . . . ."33 She does give some contradictory testimony, much of which conflicts with the version Quentin's grandfather had given. Rosa's outrage definitely has a "primarily personal and [perhaps] an ambiguously sexual content."34 Perhaps she uses him, as she did Charles Bon, as an objectification of certain personal views of life. As a scapegoat, Sutpen may "objectify [to her] an exclusively egocentric and romantic view of life which has been wrenched apart by forces and events for which she holds . . . [Sutpen] responsible."35

31Ibid., p. 168.

32Ibid., p. 190

33Poirier, op. cit., p. 229.

34Ibid., p. 237.

35Ibid., p. 234.



Rosa has never seen "in the very nature of her illusions . . . the source of their destruction."<sup>36</sup> William Poirier claims that Rosa had tried "desperately to disown the past. [She] . . . had her own design . . ., obsessed with a future even more impossible than Sutpen's."<sup>37</sup> If this is so, then "Rosa and Sutpen were made for each other. That is the ironic appropriateness of Sutpen's proposal."<sup>38</sup>

Rosa's difficulty in acknowledging the world outside herself results in a narrowed viewpoint. It is one which, "non-social . . ., dangerously individualistic,"<sup>39</sup> is actually similar to Sutpen's, though it is expressed differently. Rosa's own needs and compulsions blinded her to much else. And they are conflicting ones; perhaps she is "a woman who, confronting a world as furiously antagonistic as Sutpen's, feels that she can come to life only as a man . . . ."<sup>40</sup> She is concerned with some of their problems; but she lacks their weapons, their armor - and their sex.

Rosa's summoning of Quentin has a purpose other than that of pouring out her outrage, giving vent to her feelings; she insists that he accompany her to the rotting Sutpen mansion to see what Clytie, now seventy-four, is hiding there. Quentin finds that it is not just Rosa's imagination compelling her: they find a dying Henry Sutpen, hidden, protected by the ancient Clytie, still sphinxlike, who is to Rosa Sutpen's "own image [ ] the cold Cerberus of his

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

private hell."<sup>41</sup> It is interesting that this time Rosa knocks Clytie down, for Clytie blocks her from the stairway again, as she had long ago at another crucial moment for Rosa; she and Clytie are, Rosa knows, "not . . . two faces [glaring at each other] but . . . two abstract contradictions . . ."<sup>42</sup> Clytie's grip on her arm had been "the disabling grip of a damaging past as . . . [Rosa had tried] to realize her dream of the future."<sup>43</sup>

Rosa, always a dreamer, lived too much of her early life in her "shadow realm of make believe."<sup>44</sup> The rest of her life she consequently spends in "aghast unbelieving",<sup>45</sup> obsessed with her outrage. It is too late now for her "to reassess her whole experience in relation to her fatal excursion into the 'factual scheme' of things."<sup>46</sup>

When Quentin receives a letter, several months later, telling of Aunt Rosa's death, he tells his room mate of her: "Miss Rosa Coldfield, an old lady that died young of outrage in 1866 one summer . . ."<sup>47</sup>

Miss Rosa perhaps should have been a man. It is not easy to call her woman. Although at one time she might have blossomed into femininity, bloomed into the more natural role, such possibilities,

<sup>41</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 136.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>43</sup>Poirier, op. cit., p. 232.

<sup>44</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 147.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>46</sup>Poirier, op. cit., p. 233.

<sup>47</sup>Faulkner, op. cit., p. 174.

ever remote for her, were forever stifled. Faulkner seems to admire in her what he admires in Aunt Jenny, whom she resembles but for her self-absorption and her consequently distorted view of life; for Rosa has a strong will, determination, and much fortitude. Although she is not so masculine as Joanna, she retains unfeminine traits and is considered an eccentric by the community. Like Mrs. Maurier of Mosquitoes, her possibilities were long ago stifled, and she cannot forget the past, involved in it as are Temple, Joanna and Addie. She has a Cassandra-like strain similar to Dilsey's, and a certain bravery. Her creator looks warily at her rather androgynous nature, yet shows in some detail how the pathetic pattern of her later life was wrought. Perhaps most telling of all, he has Rosa accept a fate which she herself acknowledges, permitting her to see it as "that doom which we call female victory which is: endure and then endure, without rhyme or reason or hope of reward - and then endure . . . ."43

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

## CONCLUSION

Faulkner looks askance at most of his feminine creations, deploring certain types, admiring others, feeling ambiguously toward some. His women are, as a rule, not full-flowering, living, "whole" personalities. They are incomplete in one fashion or another - fragmented, restricted, cut off or blocked. Faulkner either limits his portrayals of the "second sex" or presents females who are incomplete as women, who lack qualities which mark them as well-rounded feminine individuals. Those few who possess virtues he deems valuable move toward fulfillment; those who have attributes he abhors head toward an unkind fate.

Although Faulkner is "concerned with the 'individuation process,' the psychological process that makes an individual of a human being,"<sup>1</sup> his women seldom receive such opportunity. Temple is permitted to begin to develop, but the others (excluding Lena and Dilsey) are psychologically determined by Faulkner. Caddy, Quentin, and Dewey Dell move only compulsively; Narcissa and Mrs. Compson are too weak to change, and Addie, Rosa, and Joanna are so neurotically diverted they cannot. The women in Mosquitoes are undeveloped, and his first heroine, Margaret Powers, though a "good" woman, is stifled, so wounded that life has little meaning left. Lena is too idealized, and is almost comic in her complacency; Aunt Jenny is romanticized and quite conventional in type. Only Dilsey is compelling as a

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<sup>1</sup>Irving Malin, William Faulkner: An Interpretation, p. 84.

character; she alone achieves self-realization, an individuation all her own.

That his women are in some way psychologically twisted or beset by problems is a characteristic tendency of Faulkner's portrayals. Those who have the inner strength to work through their troubles merit his praise; those unable to cope with crisis face tragedy or defeat. The degree of their weakness or of their neuroses determines their destiny or their fate; and the consequences Faulkner suggests are frightening for his more erratic females.

The qualities he most admires are found in simple women who are connected in some way with nature, with the life giving process and the protection of the young and helpless; he also admires the older women who have courageously withstood travail. It is difficult for him to show both physical and spiritual characteristics in a woman. His affection and respect for the older women, the spinster- or auntie-type, coincides with the fact that they are past the age of child-bearing; they cannot, like younger females, use feminine or sexual wiles to disturb or destroy men, for they have "lost their active association with Eros."<sup>2</sup> Those who have not are potentially dangerous women.

Females who are weak, willful or repressed come under the baleful blast of Faulkner's disapproval. Women who want to rebel against or deny the basic female life-giving function, who wish to

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

escape from its responsibilities, meet Faulkner's displeasure or disgust, which he expresses in showing the corruption they bring upon themselves. Self-centeredness or selfishness is condemned as well. ". . . He cannot tolerate the needless destruction which narcissism and the desire for escape can bring both to the woman and to the people involved with her."<sup>3</sup>

The sketchiness or superficiality of most of his woman characters may indicate his relative unconcern with them. The many-sided problems of women do not attract Faulkner's full attention "because he is more interested in the conflict between father and son, design and quest for identity. He inspects [only] man's world . . . ."<sup>4</sup> Faulkner, more interested in his men, characterizes those women with masculine characteristics more adequately; women like Joanna and Rosa are more complex, more individualistic than their more feminine sisters.

Faulkner's flappers are usually yet-to-be-corrupted. They are only headed in the direction of disaster, while the older, repressed woman, like Joanna, is definitely on her way. Such a woman is

completely willful and unthinking . . . . [She] is more violent than . . . [the flapper] - and more malevolent. [Her] . . . downfall . . . is expressed in vicious ways . . . . It is associated with the spiritual degradation of the New Woman . . . [who forgets] about the family . . . .<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

It is the woman who holds the family together, who represents nature and the continuity of life who commands Faulkner's highest regard. Women like Lena, who are potential sources for such renewal or development, represent fertility, fecundity - a continuum. Faulkner has Horace Benbow say, "We know Nature is a she; . . . [there is] a conspiracy between female flesh and female season."<sup>6</sup> The cyclical movements of a woman like Lena correspond with natural rhythms. Yet one "cannot identify himself completely with Lena . . . , [and Faulkner] is too involved . . . to more than glance at her . . . , offering only a fleeting vision . . . ,"<sup>7</sup>

Dilsey, with her spiritual equilibrium, can be considered an organic part of the old earth, possessing its abiding rhythms, its innate serenity. She embodies all of Faulkner's ideals and virtues, and bears with children, loving and protecting the young, the helpless, promoting the continuity of life.

One may predict the patterns of movement Faulkner's women follow, may foresee their destiny and doom. Those who move within a tightening circle of self-concern, compulsion or design do not escape. For those who move in natural cycles fulfillment lies ahead.

A hierarchy of heroines may be discerned: Lena - fecund, feminine, virtuous - is at its head; Joanna - barren, masculine,

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<sup>6</sup>William Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup>Malin, op. cit., p. 64.

corrupt, fits in its lowest niche. In between are the flappers and the weak women; Miss Rosa's nook is uncertain, while Temple steadily moves upward. Dilsey alone transcends the span. She cannot be classified; she is unique.

Faulkner's sense of values concerning women may be so scaled. Those who do not come up to standard get little sympathy and much censure, predestined to a waiting doom. Yet Faulkner gives them little chance to bloom, to flower into femininity - which may well be the unkindest fate of all.



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