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The Women of Yoknapatawpha

by Elizabeth M. Kerr

In discussing Faulkner's women characters I shall not attach labels to Faulkner's attitudes toward women nor to the women he created: simple classifications are inadequate for either the author's attitudes or for the characters he created, men or women alike. All his characters must be viewed in relation to the society in which they lived. Faulkner created that society as a world in which men and women shared the eternal verities, the human conflict and struggle, and the moral imperatives, a world in which both men and women were capable of good and evil and were to be judged, as Faulkner judged them, by their deeds, the consequences of their choices. Faulkner's characters dramatize, negatively or positively, the verities which he affirmed. In *The Sound and the Fury*, he said, Dilsey exemplified his belief "that man will prevail, will endure because he is capable of compassion and honor and pride and endurance."¹ These verities, plus courage and pity, Faulkner asserted to be the "edifice on which the whole history of man has been founded. . . . Man has endured despite his frailty because he accepts and believes in these verities" (p. 133). Faulkner believed that man chooses these values from the heritage of the past, but that human experience is a never-ceasing conflict of man "with himself, with his fellow man or with his time and place, his environment" (p. 19), because "man is trying to do the best he can with his desires and impulses against his own moral conscience, and . . . the social conscience of his time and his place" (p. 59). In this human conflict, Faulkner saw man as having "free will to choose," but functioning "against a Greek background of fate" (p. 38), those circumstances and accidents beyond his control which restricted his choice. No doubt Faulkner would have agreed with Paul Tillich's statement that "Man becomes really

¹ William Faulkner, *Faulkner in the University*, Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, eds. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959), p. 5. Further references to this source will be given by page numbers in parentheses in the text.

human at the time of decision.”² Faulkner believed that man was “compelled to make choices between good and evil sooner or later, because moral conscience demands that from him in order that he can live with himself tomorrow. His moral conscience is the curse he had to accept from the gods in order to gain from them the right to dream.”³ The choices that determine the course of one’s life are equally crucial to men and women, but the circumstances of Yoknapatawpha society offered women fewer choices than men enjoyed. And of course only men had the prerogative to choose and court a mate as long as they lived. Incumbent upon both men and women in Faulkner’s view is the necessity to work out their own salvation (p. 73) and “to take a responsible part in the human family” (p. 81). For, he said, the acceptance of responsibility increases all of us and the refusal of it diminishes all of us (p. 238). Faulkner repeatedly classifies people by their way of facing and coping with problems and choosing an attitude and acting accordingly: “The first says, This is rotten, I’ll have no part of it, I will take death first. The second says, This is rotten, I don’t like it, I can’t do anything about it, but at least I will not participate in it myself, I will go off into a cave or climb a pillar to sit on. The third says, This stinks and I’m going to do something about it. . . . What we need are people who will say, This is bad and I’m going to do something about it, I’m going to change it” (p. 246). It is fitting, therefore, to consider Faulkner’s characters, men or women, in terms of their choices, motives, and consequent actions, the aspects of behavior with which Faulkner was concerned in life and literature alike.

Within the social framework of Yoknapatawpha, a male-dominated society offered limited choices of activity and life-patterns to girls and women, and generally failed to provide them with education and experience, under wise tutelage, to prepare them for adult roles and for coping with personal and social problems. By a single major difference between Lafayette and Yoknapatawpha counties, Faulkner limited the opportunities of Yoknapatawpha girls for education, independence, and self-realization. The University is forty miles from Jefferson, outside the county; therefore in the Yoknapatawpha chronicles no girl could live at home and

²Quoted by René Dubos, “A Symposium on Morality,” *The American Scholar*, XXXIV (Summer, 1965), 369.

³Jean Stein, “William Faulkner,” *Writers at Work*, Malcolm Cowley, ed. (New York: Viking Press, 1958), pp. 138–39.

attend the University. None of Faulkner's fictional parents were able and willing to send daughters to the University, though some could and did send sons there or to Harvard. None of Faulkner's Yoknapatawphan girls had the example of women who had chosen well and had succeeded in their life roles. Thus Faulkner's women characters were born into a world much more limited than that of young men, with whose initiatory experiences Faulkner was deeply concerned, and who could choose an occupation, be educated for it, and marry or remain single. The male McCaslin and MacCallum households have no female parallels. And the girls could not even get them to a nunnery in Yoknapatawpha! They might well have said, with Alma Winemiller of Tennessee Williams' *Summer and Smoke*: "Most of us have no choice but to lead useless lives."

Though Faulkner thought women were "marvelous," he confessed to knowing "very little about them" (p. 45). This lack of knowledge is revealed in his assumption that female intuitive wisdom renders initiatory experience unnecessary for girls. But neither his girls nor most of his women show much evidence of that wisdom and often came to grief for lack of it. The few wise old women, such as Aunt Jenny and Miss Habersham, imparted their wisdom to boys, not girls. Maternal wisdom is most notable in Granny Millard, whom Faulkner conceived after he discarded the two Sartoris girls of *Sartoris* and created the two boys, Bayard and Ringo, whom Granny mothered in *The Unvanquished*.

The Southern concept of women, the socio-historical context in which Faulkner's women must be viewed, is dealt with in my article in the *Mississippi Quarterly* (Winter 1961-62). The life of an upper- or middle-class white girl was expected to follow a prescribed pattern. She was not expected to get a college education or earn her own living. With a little bit of luck, she might fall romantically in love with a boy of her own class, marry him if his and her parents approved, and have a family. Or she might marry without being in love. That was it! Variations from this norm range from real or counterfeit approximation to it to violation or denial of it. Upon this choice, or the lack of it, all other choices of a woman's life depended, but a whole sequence of choices must often be considered. Therefore, I shall outline the chief variations on the norm before discussing individual women characters. I shall dispense with the tedium of naming titles with each reference to a character.

The ideal marriage, in which the girl's choice is approved by all the

parents and in which the marriage is generally successful, is rare. Margaret Mallison and Lucius Priest's parents are apparently examples. The marriage which superficially seems to conform to the pattern may deviate from it, in reality, before and/or after the wedding, as in the marriage of Caddy Compson and Herbert Head or of Temple Drake and Gowan Stevens. Open or secret choice of an unacceptable husband or mate may violate the accepted pattern. Miss Quentin, Caddy's daughter, ran away with a carnival man. Parents may deny a girl choice, either by refusing the man the girl chooses or by coercing her to marry the man of their choice. Sutpen forbade the marriage of Judith to Charles Bon; Mrs. Compson forced Caddy to marry Herbert. Or choice may be denied by external circumstances: Judith Sutpen was isolated on the plantation and the war removed all eligible men in the county. That a girl might choose single blessedness was, of course, unthinkable, unless she was independently wealthy, in which case she was unlikely to remain single anyhow. The state of widowhood was the most commendable way of escaping both the tyranny of a husband and the stigma of being an old maid.

Outside of respectable society, white girls were less subject to restrictive influences. Such a girl might choose to conform to the patterns of respectable white society as a means to social and economic advantage. Lena Grove, despite her lapse from proper behavior, wished to behave like a lady and was willing to marry without love for the sake of her child. A choice of a respectable way of life outside of marriage, such as Essie Meadowfill's position at the bank, probably was no advantage to her socially. And of course a girl's choice or acceptance of prostitution put her beyond the pale of respectable white society; Miss Reba could only imitate tea-table gentility, no matter how many of the leading male citizens might patronize her establishment for other amusements.

The choices of black women were usually determined by white society. Black women could marry and have their own families if they accepted their menial status and performed their duties in the white world. Dilsey Gibson and Molly Beauchamp are shining examples of those who bore their responsibilities to both white and black families. But whereas a notorious black prostitute like Nancy Mannigoe could be employed in a white household, a white free-lance prostitute, like Ruby Lamar, would be denied a roof over her

head. The roles expected by whites of black women limited or denied a black girl's choice of a respectable life; she could earn a living only in a menial job, and she could not protect herself against a white man and might be victimized by both black and white men. Faulkner said that Nancy was "just doomed and damned by circumstances to that life" (p. 196). For the black women who rejected the submissive roles expected by whites, there might be only one alternative within Yoknapatawpha, suicide. Nancy attempted it; Eunice, mother of Tomey, succeeded, rather than live with the knowledge that Tomey's child was the son of Carothers McCaslin, Tomey's father. Time does not permit discussion of Faulkner's black women characters, but it is significant that his portrayal of them is always sympathetic, and that none of them deliberately chose evil.

In discussing individual characters in light of their choices and their conformity to or deviation from the accepted patterns in Yoknapatawpha society, consideration will be given to time of action, the factual information available to the reader, the method of narration, and the sympathetic or unsympathetic impression received by the reader. Since this select audience is familiar with Faulkner's works, I need not dwell upon the fact that characters reappear and that the entire story of a character may have to be pieced together from several works. The various crucial choices made by a man or woman follow a sequence from an initial choice of a mate, with or without marriage, or from an initial lack of choice. The order in which characters will be introduced will follow roughly that of the options or lack of options as outlined above, with necessary overlapping to accommodate changes in time or circumstances and grouping based on relationship between characters.

A remarkable fact about Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha chronicles is that there is no account of romantic courtship and marriage followed by commendable family life. Logically and chronologically we can begin with the Sartoris, the most admirable of whom we meet after she became a childless widow. Married and widowed by 1862, Jenny Sartoris Du Pre first appears in *Sartoris*, in 1919. Her "piercing eyes which saw so much and so truly"⁴ seem to share the author's vision concerning the Sartoris men. Born in 1839, married at twenty-one, widowed at twenty-three, Jenny Sartoris presumably

⁴*Sartoris* (New York: Random House, 1929, 1956), p. 308.

married Du Pre for love, within the aristocratic Carolina pattern. Bayard Sartoris said that she spent a few nights with her husband before he was killed in battle.⁵ In 1869 she brought to her brother's household in Mississippi a hamper full of colored glass, a few flower cuttings, and two bottles of port (*Sartoris*, 8–9; "There Was a Queen").⁶ As a war-widow, she chose family responsibility, giving the Sartoris men her unsentimental devotion without self-pity. She is an admirable character despite her inability to cope with old Bayard's inertia or young Bayard's frantic activity; she is benevolently bossy but ineffectual. Faulkner regarded her as "fine and gallant," one of the unvanquished women who never surrendered and who deplored the defeatism of death-seeking men like the Sartorises (p. 254). Honesty, rectitude, and unsentimental loyalty governed her relationships with others. In *Sartoris* she gave Narcissa good advice, unheeded, about Sartoris men and anonymous admirers; in *Sanctuary* she gave Horace moral support in his efforts to aid Lee and Ruby, and in "There Was a Queen" she died of shock, in her nineties, when Narcissa sold her body to save her reputation. With the confidence of assured social status, she lacked the prim conventionality of respectable but unaristocratic society. In the novels and stories in which she appears, her advanced age gave her freedoms in speech and attitudes which were denied to younger women who were still capable of the capital sin, illicit sex.

Akin to Aunt Jenny in character but a later creation, Granny Millard of *The Unvanquished* also appears only in old age, as seen during the Civil War by her young grandson, Bayard Sartoris. Of her marriage we are told nothing; her daughter married John Sartoris. Left in charge of the Sartoris plantation, the servants, and young Bayard and Ringo, his Negro companion, Granny Millard was involved in a series of moral choices in which she strove to retain her integrity but yielded to benevolent impulses. From lying to save the lives of Bayard and Ringo, she stooped lower in accepting, as restitution, property to which she had no claim, and then descended to deliberate trading with forged orders to get livestock from the Union troops in order to aid the poor and to rebuild Sartoris after the war. Asserting the worthiness of her motives, she recognized the

⁵*The Unvanquished* (New York: Random House, 1938), p. 263.

⁶"There Was a Queen," in *Collected Stories of William Faulkner* (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 728.

baseness of the means and publicly confessed, prayed for forgiveness, and took upon herself the burden of the sins into which she had led Bayard. She paid with her life for her wrong choices. Her influence and the lesson of her downfall aided Bayard in the one positive choice he made, not to murder the man who killed his father, in "An Odor of Verbena." By encouraging Bayard in this choice Aunt Jenny reinforced the influence of Granny. Here Bayard's point of view confirms the impression given of Aunt Jenny in *Sartoris* and links her with Granny Millard as an effective influence upon the young. Both are women of strong character and firm convictions, with whom Faulkner was in sympathy even when he dramatized Granny Millard's serious errors and their consequences and Aunt Jenny's ultimate failure to provide a backbone for the Sartoris men. She died too soon to complete her final endeavor, with young Benbow Sartoris.

The story of Drusilla Hawk, cousin of young Bayard's mother, presents a direct contrast with that of Aunt Jenny, though they were nearly the same age. When her fiancé was killed at Shiloh, Drusilla found war an exciting alternative to the stupid life of a Southern wife and mother (pp. 114–15). A scandalous figure, with short-cropped hair and wearing pants, Drusilla rode her horse, Bobolink, with the troops of Colonel John Sartoris. At the end of the war, she accompanied Colonel John to Sartoris and helped to rebuild the house the Yankees had burned. Her first choice of a conventional life she had rejected completely after her fiance was killed, but eventually that life was forced upon her, in "Skirmish at Sartoris," by her mother and the concerted force of her mother's peers in Jefferson. In the verbal equivalent of a shotgun wedding, Mrs. Hawk forced Colonel John to marry Drusilla to wipe out the stain of Drusilla's having lived with him at Sartoris. Neither of them wanted to be married, but Colonel John, as a gentleman, could not refuse to marry a lady and Drusilla apparently feared gossip more than war. Independence from men seemed not to occur to her as a possibility. In "An Odor of Verbena," Drusilla made amorous overtures to her stepson, Bayard—an episode which Faulkner curiously forgot (p. 256). Later she tried to make him act in accordance with the code she did accept, the masculine code of blood revenge. In the contrast between Drusilla and Aunt Jenny in this episode, Faulkner endorses the choices of Bayard and rejects those of Drusilla, though with

some sympathetic understanding of her nature which could find no acceptable expression in her world and time.

With Drusilla's mother who forced Drusilla into a loveless marriage, Faulkner had no sympathy. The letter she wrote is a parody of the Southern myth of chivalric gyneolatry: it said in part: "my husband . . . laid down his life to protect a heritage of courageous men and spotless women" (p. 231). When she saw Drusilla in brogans and overalls, having been working in the sawmill, Mrs. Hawk exclaimed, "'Lost, lost. Thank God in His mercy that Dennison Hawk was taken before he lived to see what I see'" (p. 231). Mrs. Hawk assumed the worst and fully expected Drusilla to be pregnant, and on the familiar basic principle in Yoknapatawpha that any marriage is better than no marriage, arranged the marriage that gave Drusilla a stepson almost her age. The marriage was saved from disaster and scandal only by the murder of Drusilla's husband, not by her choice of virtuous conduct as a wife.

In the twentieth century, there seemed to be few marriages that approximated the ideal. That of Margaret Stevens, sister of Gavin, to Charles Mallison, is one of the few. We are told nothing about Mallison prior to the marriage. Margaret, as presented from the point of view of her son, Chick, and her brother, Gavin, seemed a satisfactory wife to the rather colorless Mallison and a good mother to Chick. The presence in the Mallison household of Margaret's father, Judge Stevens, until his death and Gavin until his belated marriage contributed much to Margaret's domestic happiness. Faulkner's final decision to make Margaret and Gavin twins intensified the close brother-sister and uncle-nephew relationship in *The Town* and *The Mansion*. Margaret's choices seem to have resulted in a better than average marriage, thanks to Charles Mallison's tolerance for in-laws.

Gavin's marriage to Melisandre Backus Harriss in 1942 is related in "Knight's Gambit" (1949). Faulkner inserted the romance of Gavin and Melisandre into *The Town*, to prepare for their marriage in *The Mansion*. There is no hint in "Knight's Gambit" of Gavin's devotion to Eula from 1908 to 1929, and to Linda thereafter. The belated marriage of Gavin and Melisandre consummated the romance between them before World War I which, had it then culminated in marriage, might possibly have resembled the Southern ideal—save for Melisandre's extreme youth and Gavin's incorrigible

adolescence. Melisandre's socially undesirable first marriage occurred only because of Gavin's mysterious failure to pursue his courtship.

Late in the Yoknapatawpha chronicles occur two examples of wives who actively aided their husbands in worthy efforts. Mrs. Wall Snopes encouraged and helped Wall to live down his Snopes background and to establish a grocery business which benefited the whole community (*The Town*). Essie Meadowfill in *The Mansion* first worked at the bank and discharged her duty to her tyrannical father and "his gray drudge of a wife"—a typical Yoknapatawpha pair—before she married the Marine corporal, McKinley Smith, whom she had met secretly, and helped him to establish a home and become a farmer.

Ironic contrast between appearance and reality characterizes the stories of Yoknapatawpha women in all periods, antebellum to post World War II. In 1859, Sophonsiba Beauchamp, in "Was," adopted the role of a Scott heroine, granting her favor to a chivalric knight, in order to mask her predatory designs and unremitting determination to capture the girl-shy, elderly Buck McCaslin. No circumstances are told of the marriage which took place after the war and produced Isaac McCaslin in 1867. The McCaslin twins were apparently the only eligible males, if they could so be regarded, within a reasonable distance of Warwick, so perhaps Sophonsiba's desperation is forgivable: better marriage to Buck than old-maidhood with her brother Hubert. The story of Thomas Sutpen and Ellen Coldfield perfectly exemplifies the marriage based solely upon social convention, with no pretense of romantic love or any other kind on the part of man or woman. Sutpen married Ellen for respectable status in Jefferson; Ellen married Sutpen to obey her father, who derived some mysterious profit from the deal, and to realize her own social ambition. She wept at the splendid wedding, which had only two guests, but thereafter, Mr. Compson said, "She seemed not only to acquiesce, to be reconciled to her life and marriage, but to be actually proud of it."⁷ As chatelaine of the largest plantation in Yoknapatawpha Ellen dramatized not only the world of pure illusion but also the appalling reality when, after "the absolute halcyon of her butterfly's summer" (p. 74), she retreated to a darkened room

⁷*Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: The Modern Library, 1964), p. 68.

to die a slow death. To Ellen, love had no relation to marriage, if she thought of love at all. When she was planning the wedding of Judith and Charles Bon as a social triumph for her, Bon was to her a mere object, and love between the woman and man was no more necessary or desirable than it was to Mrs. Hawk when she engineered the wedding of Drusilla and Colonel Sartoris. Ellen reaped what her choice or acceptance of a loveless marriage had sowed.

After World War I, the conventional image of the ideal Southern woman as sweetheart, wife, and mother served to mask the desires of Narcissa Benbow and Temple Drake. In *Sartoris*, Narcissa's aggressive tactics were concealed from young Bayard and Aunt Jenny by her role-playing as the white-clad virgin; this role and the self-image it represented were Narcissa's response to her brother Horace's idealization of her and to the Southern myth it reflected. Narcissa wavered between attraction to and repulsion from Bayard while he tried to kill himself in his reckless exploits. Her failure to destroy the mash notes from Byron Snopes, as Aunt Jenny advised, and her persistent visits to Sartoris indicate that her attraction to sexuality was stronger than her culture-conditioned aversion to it. Her marriage to Bayard lasted not much longer than necessary to insure a Sartoris heir: Bayard fled after his grandfather's death before Christmas, and his son was born at the time of his suicidal airplane crash in June. Widowhood suited Narcissa: she could live at Sartoris and receive the attentions of Gowan Stevens without gratifying his desires. When Horace disregarded her wishes, she acted in secret to betray him. Her visit to the District Attorney destroyed Horace psychologically and Lee Goodwin physically, but that fact caused no ripple in her serene stupidity. Her choices were designed to maintain in her and the public eye the image of herself as the Southern ideal woman, pure as the lily. The shamefulness of her last choice, a weekend in Memphis with the Jew from the FBI to prevent him from making public the letters from Byron Snopes, she atoned for by baptismal immersion, white clothes and all, in the pasture creek at Sartoris. Before she died, Aunt Jenny recalled facts about Narcissa which readers of *Sartoris* and *Sanctuary* would not know: Narcissa was already secretly engaged to Bayard when she began her visits to Aunt Jenny, before John was killed. Aunt Jenny could not live with the knowledge of Narcissa's final dishonorable conduct. The justification of Aunt Jenny and the condemnation of

Narcissa are voiced by Elnora, who saw it all and who, we learn, was the daughter of Colonel John Sartoris.

Narcissa in *Sanctuary* is comparable in some respects to Temple Drake, who, despite her flapper costumes and manners, also chose to subvert the Southern ideal of white womanhood to her own selfish purposes. But unlike Narcissa, Temple deliberately chose to do what she knew was evil and irresponsibly fled from the consequences, the murder of Tommy and the arrest of Lee Goodwin. Narcissa's treachery toward Horace and Temple's perjury in court led to the lynching of Lee Goodwin, an effect more extreme and horrible than Faulkner at first envisioned.⁸ Temple went beyond Narcissa in her appeal to the Southern myth when she took refuge behind her father and brothers and the whole of conventional society to save her "honor," whereas Narcissa pulled wires in secret to preserve the family name unblemished. In reality, as Temple confessed in *Requiem for a Nun*, she had sought her encounter with evil and had been gratified by the consequences. Having posed as the injured innocent, Temple could then continue the masquerade by marrying Gowan Stevens and playing the role of the country-club-set wife and mother. Her affair with Red's brother recalls that with Red in *Sanctuary*, with new elements: a touch of blackmail and the facts that she is a wife and a mother. The death of her baby resulted from this last choice of evil. It is uncertain whether that desperate act which Nancy paid for with her life effected in Temple the change of heart which Nancy hoped for.

Unlike Narcissa and Temple, Belle Mitchell, in *Sartoris*, is almost refreshingly simple, though not harmless, in her deceptive role-playing. Wife of Harry Mitchell, mother of Little Belle, mistress of a fine house in Jefferson in which she could draw victims into her toils, Belle played the role of temptress to Horace. He was not deceived but yielded nevertheless. She ruined the life of the simple, loving, and generous Harry, and destroyed Horace's self-respect and peace; at the end of *Sanctuary* Little Belle was imitating her mother as a heartless coquette, using her sexuality as a lure for the unwary male. With horror, Horace had realized that Little Belle was like Temple and that the guise of innocence masked evil.

⁸In the unpublished galleys, Lee Goodwin was not lynched. Gerald Langford, *Faulkner's Revision of Sanctuary: A Collation of the Unrevised Galleys and the Published Book* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1972), pp. 38, 119.

The motives of Mrs. Compson and of Belle Mitchell in their marriages are complementary: of an earlier generation, Mrs. Compson chose to marry Jason for the social status of a prestigious name and an ancestral mansion; Belle chose to marry for money to buy a mansion and shine in Jefferson society. Mrs. Compson most resembles Mrs. Hawk in her concern for appearances, manifested in her insistence on marrying Caddy—pregnant as Drusilla was not—to Herbert Head, a marriage more clearly doomed to disaster than was Drusilla's. Both brides, of course, wore white, complete with veil. (Drusilla's veil was a bit of a nuisance when she acted as voting commissioner after Colonel John shot the two Burden men.) To Mrs. Compson, and no doubt equally to Mrs. Hawk, sin was sex and sex was sin and ignorance was bliss. The unloved children of Mrs. Compson were, as Caddy said, cursed and doomed. And Caddy's daughter, Miss Quentin, was doomed for the same reason: she was at the mercy of this same unloving Mrs. Compson and of the sadistic Jason who resembled his selfish mother.

Another daughter of a loveless marriage is Eula Varner. As a prospective husband, Flem Snopes, paid to marry Eula to give her child a name, is even worse than Herbert Head. The Varners at least did not deceive Flem, as Mrs. Compson deceived Herbert. Caddy and Eula allowed themselves to be married without their own wishes being considered. Each girl yielded to parental pressure in order to provide for the coming child. The impossibility of the girl's family or the child's father assuming responsibility is obvious to the girls and to the reader. Equally obvious, on reflection, are the facts that neither girl was equipped to provide a living for herself and the child, except by prostitution, and that to neither would the idea of being self-sufficient and self-supporting have ever occurred. Caddy, Faulkner said, was his "heart's darling" (p. 6), and Eula was presented sympathetically by the admiring Ratliff, and the myth-making omniscient author.

A girl might make an unacceptable choice, in open or secret violation of the conventional pattern, by her marriage or outside of marriage. Miss Emily's father drove off any suitors. When he died, Miss Emily made an unacceptable choice of a Yankee, socially her inferior, and killed him to prevent the humiliation of being jilted by the man she had stooped to accept. Both Temple and Caddy, as already noted, chose promiscuity before marriage, in rebellion

against family pressures. Temple's choice to run away with Red's brother, in *Requiem for a Nun*, caused Nancy to kill the baby to bring Temple to her senses. Caddy's return to promiscuity after Herbert cast her out is recounted in the Appendix to *The Sound and the Fury*. Her own experience in the Compson household should have prepared Caddy for Miss Quentin's flight from a family which lacked even the love Caddy had received from Benjy, Mr. Compson, and Quentin. By Faulkner's use of Jason's self-revelation in III and the omniscient author method in IV, Faulkner made the pressures to which Miss Quentin succumbed more vivid than those Caddy experienced. When Melisandre Backus's unidentified fiance disappeared after World War I, she married the wealthy Mr. Harriss to save the family plantation; her improvident father and her delinquent suitor thus were responsible for her choice. Mr. Harriss proved to be a bootlegger whose wealth attracted only sychophants and a bullet. For social contacts Melisandre had to depend on a few friends from her schooldays or live abroad. By the time she married Gavin Stevens her children were grown. Melisandre is presented from the point of view of the sympathetic Chick Mallison, relying more on the tales of his elders of Melisandre as a girl than on his own observation of her as the mother of grown children.

Eula Varner Snopes is the chief violator of marriage vows with whom Faulkner and the narrators are in sympathy. Her love affair with Manfred de Spain represented eighteen years of faithful adultery, during which Eula preserved her marriage with Flem to provide Linda with the semblance of a conventional home and parents. Eula's choice was not necessarily the only one possible nor the best, but the story is told by the admiring Ratliff, the adoring Gavin, and the fascinated boy, Chick, who are all too much aware of Eula's charms to exercise dispassionate reason. Why couldn't Eula divorce Flem and marry her wealthy lover and, if necessary, go elsewhere to live? This is a realistic, not a literary, question. The literary answer is that the characters had to stay in Yoknapatawpha. Faulkner explained Eula's suicide as her way of defending and protecting Linda, for whom it would be better "to have a mother who committed suicide than a mother who ran off with a lover" (116, 195). Eula's earlier choices or failure to choose led to this fatal last choice. Her daughter Linda, sent off by Gavin to Greenwich Village, by her choices responded to the example of the mother she had loved, to

the influence of Gavin, and to bohemian life of the Village: she lived with Barton Kohl, a communist Jewish sculptor for several years before marrying him and going to Spain. Faulkner seems to have invented the most unacceptable white lover–husband possible, in terms of Yoknapatawpha conventions. Her choice of such a man was a predictable consequence of Gavin's influence and of his sending a young and inexperienced girl to that environment in 1929; therefore one must hold him responsible. And the delay in the marriage may well have been Linda's attempt to make Gavin marry her himself. The marriage was ended by Barton's death in the Spanish civil war. One must hold Gavin responsible also for Linda's making him an accessory to Mink's murder of her stepfather, Flem. As the courtly lover who virtuously had been refusing to marry Linda since she was in her teens, Gavin compounded the injustices imposed upon women in Yoknapatawpha and did not offer her the choice of a marriage which would allow her, like Galatea, to come down off her pedestal and be a real woman. (Of course, when Faulkner wrote *The Town* and *The Mansion*, Melisandre was waiting in the wings for her entrance in 1941.) We learn of Linda's grievances only through the narrators, who obviously were not fully aware of her feelings; she could not even talk normally after she was deafened in Spain. Those grievances do not, however, seem to justify Linda's retaliation for the errors Gavin made in his years of devoted service to her. Linda's well-meant efforts to aid the Negroes in Jefferson were ineffective because she lacked understanding and skill and was an object of suspicion in Jefferson as a communist: her New York experiences gave birth to and defeated impulses not demonstrated by any other Yoknapatawpha woman.

Women who were denied marriage by their parents or by adverse circumstances might never have an opportunity to marry. The Civil War created such circumstances for Judith Sutpen, taking from her not only the man her father forbade her to marry but all the other eligible youths and burdening her with responsibility for the plantation. Judith is one of Faulkner's most interesting and admirable women, as she is revealed through others and through local legend. Having had no choice, she accepted and endured; she told Quentin's grandmother that she had considered and rejected suicide as an escape (p. 128). Although she saw human beings as puppets, trying to weave their own patterns on the loom of life and tangling with the

threads of others (p. 127), she persisted in doing her duty with no hope of material or heavenly reward. After her father's death she provided a home for Charles Etienne, the son of Charles Bon by the octoroon woman, and then for Charles Etienne's brutish black wife. Judith died of yellow fever, contracted in nursing Charles Etienne, who died after she did. Judith was the victim of Sutpen's megalomania and of Henry's infatuation, so Mr. Compson theorized, with Charles Bon and desire to have him as a brother-in-law and vicariously to enjoy both Bon's love and Judith's (p. 96). The one suitor Judith knew was the one man in all the world whom she should not marry, her half-brother.

Miss Rosa Coldfield, Judith's young aunt, was even more deprived of choice: her father, her circumstances, and her appearance and nature all doomed Rosa to remain single. But Judith's romance and the picture of Charles Bon induced in Rosa dreams of love. After the war she responded eagerly to her one offer of marriage, from her brother-in-law, Thomas Sutpen, transformed from the ogre or demon of her childhood to a war hero. The offer, however, proved to be contingent on her producing a son to Sutpen before marriage, and she fled in outrage which lasted for forty years. So she died a victim of heredity and circumstances, instead of a victim of Sutpen's megalomania, as her sister Ellen had been.

While Miss Rosa was living alone and scrounging food from the neighbors' gardens, Miss Habersham, descended from one of the three founders of Jefferson, and her two Negro servants were raising chickens and vegetables and peddling them about town. In expensive gloves and shoes but cheap dresses and an ancient hat, she never lost her dignity and gentility, and the townspeople respected her. Her courage, wisdom, and integrity and her loyalty to her Negro foster-sister and brother, Molly and Hamp, whose grief she shared in "Go Down, Moses," enabled her, in *Intruder in the Dust*, to save the life of Lucas Beauchamp and, by so doing, to make a man of Chick Mallison. She surpassed Aunt Jenny and Granny Millard in choosing action which did not compromise her ideals and in aiding youths, Chick and Aleck Sander, to accomplish worthy deeds. Although Miss Habersham is the incarnation of one of Faulkner's favorite principles, *Noblesse oblige*, she is unique in Yoknapatawpha, an independent, self-reliant woman, who used her strength to help others without dominating them. The true aristocrat did not fear

losing status through unconventional behavior, like Miss Habersham's, that was in no way disgraceful, but an older woman could do what a young woman could not, however innocent her intentions and actions.

A lower-class white girl had less to lose than a young lady and more to gain by her choices. Those who chose marriage, often without love, within the conventional pattern of respectable society usually were pursuing a romantic ideal or some material goal. A man did not need to offer marriage to a girl of a lower class: Sutpen found that a few trinkets sufficed to buy Millie Jones. But Sutpen's lack of a sense of honor in dealing with Millie caused Wash to kill him. Girls who held out for marriage were more ambitious and less vulnerable than Millie, whom Wash had failed to guard. Ike McCaslin's wife, a carpenter's daughter, married Ike in the belief that she could make him claim his McCaslin inheritance. Through ambition she made the wrong choice: Ike would not yield, so she denied him children. She gained only a life of frustration and enjoyed only her revenge. Addie Bundren gave up teaching to marry Anse. Faulkner conjectured that "probably she married Anse because of pressure from her people, . . . She was ambitious probably, and she married against her inclination and she saw nothing ahead of her but a dull and dreary life as a slave . . . no pay, no compensation" (p. 114). Marriage to Anse as a choice motivated by ambition is a thought-provoking concept. Addie found some satisfaction in motherhood but dealt unfairly with her children, rejecting Darl and favoring Jewel, son of Whitfield, the minister. Reputation was important to both Addie and Whitfield, so Jewel's parentage was kept secret. Addie's concealment of her adultery and Dewey Dell's desire for an abortion showed that appearance was all-important even in rural life on a low economic level. Addie's last bid for conventional respect and dignity was her wish to be buried in the Jefferson cemetery. Addie's neighbor, Cora Tull, is one of the few women represented as escaping from male domination: no doubt her family of daughters, rare in Yoknapatawpha, helped Cora to subjugate Vernon. Cora enjoyed unshaken confidence in her own righteousness and sound judgment; from her point of view, at least, she had chosen well. Cora arouses no sympathy in the reader, and Addie evokes mixed feelings; they are among the few women in Yoknapatawpha who are allowed to speak for themselves.

Lena Grove is unique in Yoknapatawpha. An orphan, living in poverty with a brother, she had no opportunity to meet eligible men; Lucas Burch, definitely ineligible, she met by stealth. But Lena had an ideal which she strove to attain by her own actions: even when she was engaged in the unladylike ordeal of walking from Alabama to Mississippi to find the father of her unborn child, she showed courage and endurance and behaved like a lady. She clung to the simple ideal that a child should have both mother and father, at least by the time it was born. Her belief "in the possibility for happiness and goodness" (p. 97) she communicated to Byron Bunch, thus redeeming him from his voluntary exile from the community of man and his abdication of responsibility. She released Lucas from his responsibility, and at the end Byron is about to assume that responsibility as a privilege. Despite her decorous behavior and her ideal of family life, Lena was indifferent to conventional judgment on her innocent and instinctive conduct. Because she did not regard herself as a fallen woman, no one else so regarded her. Her instinctive wisdom is that of an unreasoning nature which chooses according to the unsentimental dictates of the heart.

Even more underprivileged than Lena was Faulkner's last heroine, Everbe Corinthia, who shared Lena's instinctive attraction to gentility. Everbe, however, was more intelligent and complex than Lena. A naive, friendless orphan, without resources, Everbe was initiated by Aunt Fittie into the profession she practiced at Miss Reba's in Memphis. Between Aunt Fittie, the procuress, and Otis, the peep-show operator, Everbe originally had no chance to experience the gentility for which she yearned. When she met young Lucius Priest, she was so attracted by his chivalric conduct that she chose to give up her profitable and not unpleasant life at Miss Reba's. After this act of moral choice, she unselfishly chose to relapse for once into the old ways, in order to "buy loose" the horse Lightning from Butch in time for the race. Even young Lucius came to understand and forgive her sin. After the drudgery of keeping house for the constable and his invalid wife, Everbe Corinthia married Boon Hogganbeck. Their child, Lucius Priest Hogganbeck, was better off than Boon or Everbe in having parents of respectable status in Jefferson.

When women like Miss Reba and Ruby Lamar became prostitutes, they knew what they were doing. Their choices made them social

outcasts. The fact that Ruby's father shot Frank, her suitor, may explain Ruby's failure to marry. Both Ruby and Miss Reba are sympathetically portrayed by Faulkner as omniscient author; he depicts them as having more humanity and compassion than Narcissa or Temple. Reba and her husband, Mr. Binford, and Ruby and her common-law husband, Lee Goodwin, were better examples of marital loyalty than many Jefferson couples.

The county Faulkner created resembles Lafayette County but does not encompass it. Women in Oxford led lives with no parallels in Yoknapatawpha, but until recent years the basic shaping influences in the two societies were similar. In this male-dominated society woman was put on a pedestal from which she fell to her own ruin, regardless of who or what caused her fall. Men made the rules of the sex-marriage game, umpired it, and called fouls on women but not on men. Men, with their greater freedom of choice, were usually the aggressors; even the temptress did not pursue men but enticed them. The tyranny of men over women in marriage had disastrous effects on children, but boys could more easily escape. Men exercised power to perpetuate power in every social relationship and social institution. Within the restricted spheres in which women functioned, Faulkner portrayed them as seldom either achieving self-fulfillment or effectively exercising their responsibility. Those women who succeeded in these respects he admired. The only women he condemned were hypocrites who lacked love and compassion and who warped or destroyed the lives of others. Like Dante, Faulkner considered the sins of the flesh less serious than the sins of the intellect, in which warmth and mutuality were lost. Faulkner's prevailing attitude toward the women of Yoknapatawpha showed understanding of the restrictions which limited their options, sympathy for them in their struggles acceptably to fill their place in society, and pity for those who were defeated. Faulkner even found in his heart "A Rose for Emily."