



WOMEN'S REVOLT AGAINST MALE DOMINATED SOCIETY IN WILLIAM FAULKNER'S NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the women characters in revolt in the novels of William Faulkner in the light of their actions which are in contrasts to the set norms of behaviour associated with the woman or female gender in general. This treatment of intersection of the conventions prevalent in the society of western countries reference to the American society is the concern of this critical study of fictional world of William Faulkner, one of the leading novelists of American literature in English.

INTRODUCTION

William Faulkner is one of the most successful novelists of this century because of the wealth of powerful imaginative literature in English. He has to his credit nineteen novels, seventy five short stories, and a few poems. His fictional consists of the families like the Chickas of Habersham, Holston, Grenier, Benbow, Stevens, Sartoris, Compsons, Me Casliin Edmonds, Priest, Sutpen, Me Callum, and Snopes. There are families of the Negroes also like that of Srtoris figured in his most talked about novels like *The Sound and The Fury*, *Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalomi* and *Go Down, Moses*.

Treatment of women character

An intensives study of his novels reveals the fact that Faulkner depicts a wide range of female characters in his novels. Patricia E. Sweeney's has dealt in detail in his "William Faulkner's Women Characters : An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism (1930-1983). This is a

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comprehensive work which enlightens us with rich and profuse explication of Faulkner's women characters. It is found that hardly any American novelist has brought to literature such an abundance and variety of women characters. Faulkner himself has acknowledged his primary concern of his writings was human being. He states: I am interested in people, I'm interested primarily in people, in man in conflict with himself, with his fellowman, or with his time and place, his environment. (Class Conferences at the University of Virginia)

This throws light on the purpose and function of human relation in most of Faulkner's fiction. From gender point of view his fictional women are treated with equality. They are as rich as his men. In the debate about his women character, his remark that follows is often cited. It's much more fun to try to write about women because I think women are marvelous, they're wonderful, and I know very little about them, and so I just - it's much more fun to try to write about women than about men - more difficult, yes. The remark of Faulkner is an evidence, amply supported by the books themselves, that his fictional women are as richly portrayed as his men.

He has presented women characters across the class conflict. In his novels the male characters like Dawson Fairchild, the Semitic man, and Gordon seek out their respective prostitutes. In *Sartoris*, the main plot deals with the married life of Bayard and Narcissa; the two subplots grapple with Horace Benbow and Belle Mitchell, Narcissa and Byron Snopes. It is Miss Jenny who represents all that is most genuinely valuable. Strong, sensible, and eminently capable, she is able to reflect the best qualities of bygone days without living in the past or letting the past dominate the present.

His famous novel *The Sound and the Fury* is about the tragedy of two lost women- Caddy, Candace and her daughter Miss Quentin. To sensitize the difference, he presents Dilsey Gibson who represents a moral norms and her actions set a standard of human behaviour. While Mrs. Compson seems quite contrary to Dilsey Gibson. In other novel like *As I Lay Dying*, we find Addie Bundren, one of Faulkner's most fully rounded female figures. Dewey Dell is like Addie with regards to her intense response to the physical sensations. In *Sanctuary*, we find many women characters such as Temple Drake who represents a complex character. Likewise there are many minor women working in the brothel of Miss Reba. In *Light in August* there are number of women like Lena Grove, Joanna Burden, Miss Atkins, Allen Bobbie, Mrs. Me Eachem, Mrs. Hines, the wife of Hightower who are prostitutes by profession. They carry a special significance in the social context. Lena Grove symbolizes the possibility for fertility, creativity, serenity, and abundance which human life offers to mankind. Helen and Diana symbolizes goddesses of vegetation. In *Joanna Burden*, Faulkner bent on social convention to indicate a woman as susceptible to the destructive forces.



Nonetheless, though the woman warped by these forces of social attributes, can attain tragic stature through the courage and tenacity of her will to struggle against the dark forces that threaten her identity. Apart from these conventionalities associated with the existence of woman in the society, he has presented many minor women characters like Mrs. Armstid, Mrs. Beard, Milly Hines, Laverne Shumann, Lena Grove etc as if a kind of earth-goddess, a personification of fertility in a sterile and death-imbued world.

Rebellious women characters

Besides glorification and codification of the woman through social conventions, we find a new line of treatment in those women characters in Faulkner who rebel against society or fall from certain moral norms and repudiate the code. By doing this they ultimately remain either what they are or mend their ways which show some human consideration and redeem themselves. To probe into the nature of theme of rebel, it is necessary to know the term 'rebel' here. It has been used in relation to those women characters whose behaviour is taken as a deviation or an aberration from social or moral code pertaining to the matter of sex relationship that indicates a violation of common duties. It is true that by the term 'rebel' we do not mean a criminal or a wicked person nor the term connotes such meaning. Rather it also does not mean that it connotes an absence of vice in a person. It is likely that one can associate aberration in women characters in Faulkner's novels with evil in nature. However, here in the present criticism the term 'rebellion' or 'evil' in a character corresponds to depiction of deviation in Faulkner's women against set norms of action and behaviour.

The rebel woman character in Faulkner novels denotes generally a woman of extreme views. She ignores all norms or sanctions of the society. She is such type of character which seems to be highly self-centered and more interested in gratifying her desire without any fear of dire consequences. In doing so, either she shows no respect for existing norms and codes of conduct. She consciously reacts against them. She is not afraid of the consequences of her behaviour and is likely to cut off herself away from the vital family bond. To have broader clearance of the rebel in Faulkner, it is apt to resort to what Frederick R. Carl explain a rebel in some other context.

To Frederick, the 'rebel is "a person who functions by virtue of what he is, rather than by what is expected of him. The rebel is not a criminal and not a force for evil, although he may commit anti-social acts. He is fundamentally, a person for whom society does not offer a testing ground: he seeks his philosophy in himself, not in God or his environment. He is, at best, true to himself no matter what the consequences, and often they are unfavourable. This definition, certainly to a great extent, applies to Faulkner's rebel women.

Faulkner's has treated the rebellious women characters by placing them in religious and secular context. The values held dear by the society. To some orthodox thinkers, having



religious view means belief in the perception that God has created the universe around the innocent folly or evil of Adam and Eve. Satan is taken to be the source of all evil. It is, thus, believed that evil is innate in man; and the journey that was started by Adam and Eve in Heaven by their original sin, still continues. Faulkner's women characters are treated as the voyagers, and their voyage can be described, in Blakean sense, a journey from 'innocence to experience. As Cleanth Brooks holds that Faulkner was not versed in theology, but he believed in God but had some problems with accepting Christianity. At the same time, Faulkner believed that humanity could find its stay in Christian virtues.

Faulkner nowhere treats evil in the abstract. Like Conrad, he presents men or women in a crisis in which they are tested. He never shows evil as an end in itself. He proceeds like a psychologist, and probes into the inner recesses of the mind of his characters. This is why, unlike Dicken's treatment of evil Faulkner's world is not a pessimistic world. He has accepted his rebel women as they are. Similarly unlike Conrad and Melville, Faulkner is neither nihilistic nor optimistic in his approach. He has revealed the black spots in humanity and revealed the the heart of the matter.

However, the rebel woman in Faulkner is not altogether a sadist nor go ahead with motiveless malignity. The evil is convey through her as every human being is prone to do it. Nevertheless, Faulkner's sociological point of view is a filtered view that places women equal with men. Established that the same type of evil, if a man commits has to be tolerated by society and if committed by the woman why she is not to be branded. In a broader view, it seems that the rebel women in Faulkner are not the outcast of the society. Rather they are an important segment of the social unit, family unit. Although we do not find women placed in the neat groups in the case of mothers and wives, or in the case of daughters, sisters and maids, an obvious pattern emerges in the treatment of rebel women in Faulkner. First, there is a category of women characters who violate the social or family code because of their strange sexual behaviour.

As an instance, Cecily Saunders in *Soldiers Pay*, Caddy Compson and Miss Quentin Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*, Temple Drake in *Sanctuary*, Milly in *Light in August fall* etc all fall in this category. Cecily Saunders is an iconoclast. She stands opposite to all that is traditional and settled. She is called as flapper of the period. Faulkner presents her as a test case. In critical parlance it is observed that: for superficiality and shallowness that he sees in society. She is a specimen of sexual manic. She is flirtatious, and to a great extent promiscuous. Although she lacks sensuality, she plays at sex; she represents a generation of hollow men whose, ideal female is an epicine creature asexual, superficial, selfish and silly. Faulkner has already projected the image of sexless love in *Mosquitoes* through the description of 'torso the virginal breast less torso of a girl, headless, armless, legless in marble.



Faulkner takes Cecily as a woman representing profane love. For her, life is a game of flirtation, and seriousness bores her, and even agitates her. The return of wounded Donald is a situation which tests Cecily. The idea of being engaged to a wounded war hero fascinates her, but she cannot tolerate the presence of a sick soldier with disfigured face. She is an affront to the sanctity of conjugal commitments. On her father's insistence that she should help Donald to recover by sparing some time and being with him, she surrenders to George Farr sexually. Even she does not mind when Januarius Jones calls her a "little bitch" (p.131) for her surrender to George. In fact, George is the boy her father had forbidden her to see. But she persists. This act of defiance shows her as a doll, a pliant woman playing at sex, and one who uses free sex as a means of expressing her rebellion.

Her rebellion is explicit at the peak of a climax when her parents do not allow her marriage to Donald. She breaks her commitment with George. Conjugal commitments hold no significance for her. She treats her marriage to George as lightly as she treats sex. She is detached from femaleness. She thinks about herself as she is not a good woman any more. "Oh well, it had to be sometime, I guess" (p.149) She is, in fact, not "for maternity, not even for love: a thing for eye and the mind" (p.156). She detests the idea of bearing a child "blurring her slim epicenity, blurring her body with pain" (p.139). Faulkner portrays her as an ugly specimen of womanhood, because she only wants loveless sex which is sterile and uncreative.

CONCLUSION:

Faulkner emphasizes the human aspect of his characters. Although Caddy is Faulkner's favorite, the reader from the masses have shown mixed responses towards her. To put in the words of Volpe, Caddy is by no means a paragon of virtue. In other words, the critic notes the human side of that character. Faulkner introduces two types of women characters. One that reconcile with the social norms and other who deviates from the social codes and conventions. The women in *The Sound and the Fury* to great extent fall under this category of women characters. They are Caddy and her daughter. Although great writers have no favourites Faulkner had great admiration for characters like Caddy. Thus Faulkner has death with the womanhood in its entirety.



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