

FAULKNER'S WOMEN

A THESIS

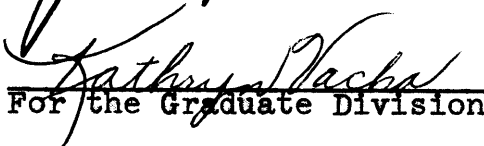
PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
OF WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE COLLEGE

by

Susan Havran Carter

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
MASTER OF ARTS

  
Thesis Advisor

  
For the Graduate Division

May, 1976

### Thesis Abstract

"Faulkner's Women" is an examination of various of the female characters in the early novels of William Faulkner in regard to their basic characteristics, and their significance as representatives of Faulkner's philosophy of woman's role in society at that time in his life.

In general, the women examined can be divided into positive and negative categories. The positive women are those who are constructive, and are able to succeed in life by seeking fulfillment through the outlet of their own womanhood. The concept of the positive aspects of the feminine principle is based upon a general acceptance of life and an ability to endure whatever life has to offer without questioning it or attempting to alter it.

Among the positive female characters explored in this paper are Dilsey, the Negro woman in The Sound and the Fury, and Lena Grove in Light in August. Both these women are constructive forces because they embody the feminine principle to the fullest. Both perpetuate the life cycle and serve as life sustainers.

On the other hand, Faulkner presents the negative, or destructive woman, who does not provide the life-sustaining qualities which are the basis of the feminine principle. This

category is not as clear-cut as the first, and includes such diverse characters as Caroline Compson, her daughter, Caddy, and her granddaughter, Quentin, in The Sound and the Fury. Each of these women has, in her own way, sought fulfillment outside her natural role as mother and life-giver, thus each is doomed in terms of Faulkner's female principle. Furthermore, each woman seeks a goal or ideal outside the reality of her womanhood, and thus fails to provide the strength which will sustain the lives of those around her.

In Addie Bundren, in As I Lay Dying, and Joanna Burden, in Light in August, we see further examples of this destructive woman. Each of them is doomed despite the fact that she possesses admirable ideals. Thus Addie destroys not only herself, but her family as well. In Light in August, Joe Christmas is destroyed when he comes in contact with Joanna, whereas he might have been saved had he met and come under the life-giving influence of the more natural Lena Grove.

Importantly, each of these women is symbolic of some aspect of the Southern culture in which William Faulkner lived, and must be viewed in terms of her symbolic significance in conjunction with the theme of the novel in which she appears. As Faulkner himself pointed out, his characters are "larger than life." They must be considered in light of this statement.