



Faulkner and Southern Womanhood

By Diane Roberts

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This study examines the vexed and contradictory responses of the South's most celebrated novelist to the traditional representations of women that were bequeathed to him by his culture.

Tracing the ways in which William Faulkner characterized women in his fiction, Diane Roberts posits six familiar representations?the Confederate woman, the mammy, the tragic mulatta, the new belle, the spinster, and the mother?and through close feminist readings shows how the writer reactivated and reimagined them. "As a southerner," Roberts writes, "Faulkner inherited the images, icons, and demons of his culture. They are part of the matter of the region with which he engages, sometimes accepting, sometimes rejecting."

Drawing on extensive research into southern popular culture and the findings and interpretations of historians, Roberts demonstrates how Faulkner's greatest fiction, published during the 1920s and 1930s, grew out of his reactions to the South's extreme and sometimes violent attempts to redefine and solidify its hierarchical conceptions of race, gender, and class. Struggling to understand his region, Roberts says, Faulkner exposed the South's self-conceptions as quite precarious, with women slipping toward masculinity, men slipping toward femininity, and white identity slipping toward black. At their best, according to Roberts, Faulkner's novels reveal the South's failure to reassert the boundaries of race, gender, and class by which it has traditionally sustained itself.

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Editorial Review

Review

Roberts's readings are everywhere interesting, and frequently new. Virtually every page offers, for me at least, a provocative interpretation of even the tiniest detail. Her literary scholarship, too, is exemplary. Clearly she has read the Faulkner criticism as carefully and as widely as she has the numerous texts of southern culture within whose context she carries out her own analyses of Faulkner's work.

(Anne Goodwyn Jones *Mississippi Quarterly*)

From the Back Cover

In *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood*, Diane Roberts examines the vexed and contradictory responses of the South's most celebrated novelist to the traditional representations of women that were bequeathed to him by his culture. The very mention of "the South", Roberts observes, conjures up a crazy quilt of images - from the romantic to the violent, from the gracious and glamorous to the backward and racist. The phrase "southern woman" likewise evokes a whole range of stock characters and stereotypes. Tracing the ways in which William Faulkner characterized women in his fiction, Roberts posits six familiar representations - the Confederate woman, the mammy, the tragic mulatta, the new belle, the spinster, and the mother - and, through close feminist readings, shown how the writer reactivated and reimagined them. In so doing, Roberts sees Faulkner as both a product and a producer of that multi-faceted place - and metaphor - called the South. "As a southerner", she writes, "Faulkner inherited the images, icons, and demons of his culture. They are part of the matter of the region with which he engages, sometimes accepting, sometimes rejecting". Drawing on extensive research into southern popular culture and the findings and interpretations of historians, Roberts demonstrates how Faulkner's greatest fiction, published during the 1920s and 1930s, grew out of his reactions to the South's attempts to redefine and solidify its hierarchical conceptions of race, gender, and class. During the era in which Faulkner's psyche was formed, the South's efforts to maintain its cultural stability included everything from lynching to erecting Confederate monuments and apotheosizing *Gone with the Wind*. Struggling to understand his region, Roberts says, Faulkner exposed the South's self-conceptions as quite precarious, with women slipping toward masculinity, men slipping toward femininity, and white identity slipping toward black. At their best, according to Roberts, Faulkner's novels reveal the South's failure to reassert the boundaries of race, gender, and class by which it traditionally sustained itself. Earlier studies of female characters in Faulkner's novels have charged the writer with unrelenting misogyny or have read these characters as mythic embodiments of "the life force". Offering a richer view befitting the writer's complexities and contradictions, *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood* revises, reimagines, and reinvigorates our understanding of Faulkner the artist and Faulkner the southerner. It reveals, fully and contentiously, the challenge Faulkner poses to the South's most sacred icons.

About the Author

Diane Roberts is an associate professor of English at the University of Alabama. She is the author of "Aunt Jemima: Representations of Race and Region."

Users Review

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Ruth Frye:

Reading can be called head hangout, why? Because if you find yourself reading a book especially book entitled Faulkner and Southern Womanhood your head will drift away through every dimension, wandering in most aspect that maybe unfamiliar for but surely can be your mind friends. Imaging every word written in a reserve then become one application form conclusion and explanation which maybe you never get previous to. The Faulkner and Southern Womanhood giving you one more experience more than blown away your mind but also giving you useful data for your better life in this particular era. So now let us teach you the relaxing pattern is your body and mind are going to be pleased when you are finished reading through it, like winning an activity. Do you want to try this extraordinary investing spare time activity?

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