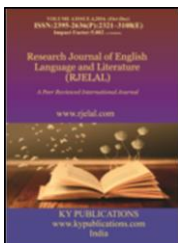




TORSO AND LINDA IN FAULKNER'S FICTION

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ABSTRACT

William Faulkner (1897-1962) has projected a mythical world of his own like Hardy; there he projected Sartoris and Snopes, traditional and modern world; and in that men-women. He projected torso, a sex symbol and likewise drafted many characters. His attitude towards women characters has been considered typically conservative and patriarchal. But his unique creation Linda delineates his real idea of modern world and modern women; she represents a radical change in his fiction.

Key words: Torso, Eula, Linda, Faulkner, Radical Woman

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There are certain women characters in William Faulkner's (1897-1962) fiction those have been shown as the carrier of life in contrast to the 'torso' of woman that he has projected in his very first novel, 'Mosquitoes' (1927), as an object of sex. The torso has been shown the symbol of abstraction and non-fertility. It is projected as headless, armless, legless statue of a woman symbolizing and reducing woman to less than a physical, mental and emotional status i.e., to a figure related to sex only. This sex is insensitive, devoid of love and feelings, only mechanical. This has been projected by Faulkner through various characters those are playing at sex willingly or unwillingly in his fiction. Temple Drake in *Sanctuary* (1931) is most prominent woman character in Faulkner's fiction, a college girl who willingly suffered corn-cob rape by a criminal, bootlegger, Popeye; this was narrated to Horace Benbow in *Sanctuary*, Horace compares the nature of Narcissa Benbow and Little Belle Mitchell, of his sister and step-daughter respectively, to Temple Drake's sexual indulgence as more crafty one. To Horace Temple's sexual act has become a touchstone to judge every woman. Contrary to him, man-woman psychology was best understood by

Reba Reiver in *Sanctuary* and Nancy Mannigoe in *Requiem for a Nun* (1951).

Like Temple, Faulkner has shown different women characters with their psychological traits and aberrations, with great obsession, hatred or sympathy. He has projected mother-daughter pairs; out of those Linda is in extreme contrast to her mother Eula. Eula Varner Snopes is a central character in *The Hamlet* (1940), *The Town* (1957) and *The Mansion* (1959). In *The Hamlet*, Eula appears as a girl of enchanting beauty who attracts each and everyone towards her. Adams says that "in *The Hamlet*, Eula Varner is characterized as the Helen of Frenchman's Bend."¹ She is both beautiful and sexy, and at the same time, innocent. In *The Mansion* itself Mink remarks about her sexual potentiality: "The hurrah and hullabaloo that Varner girl had been causing ever since she (or whoever else it was) found the first hair on her bump."² In *The Hamlet* it is shown that everybody wants to possess her, if not forever, then only for once. At the age of fourteen, she is shown as unaware of Labove's intention to rape her. But at the age of sixteen she submits herself to Hoake McCarron and the ultimate result was her pregnancy before

marriage. Hoake flees from the town, and to cover up her pregnancy, she accepts Flem, a small-statured and money minded commercial person. As in the case of Ellen Coldfield, Eula's marriage with Flem Snopes was a business deal because he appropriated old Frenchman's place along with her. So, it was a loveless marriage.

In this way, it was a marriage of convenience on both sides hence Snopesism started in Faulkner's fiction. Adams rightly says that she "as an embodiment of sexual power and attractiveness, is obviously meant to represent some of the more important and creative energies of life,"³ but "she behaves more like Narcissa Benbow."⁴ Flem was interested more in money than in Eula, and was sexually impotent. But one cannot ignore the fact that Eula was already a pregnant girl at the time of her marriage. If we hold Flem responsible for her extra-marital relationship, we cannot ignore her careless sexual behavior before her marriage. If the man is sexually cold, she cannot be absolved from moral responsibilities. She is shown already a fallen woman. In the three novels, she is shown as wife of Flem, mother of Hoake's child, and beloved of Manfred de Spain. In fact, she is a fallen lady who breaks the social code of conduct knowingly. Above that, she tries to cover up her pregnancy, and conceal her extra marital relationship with Manfred. And ultimately to prevent defame, she commits suicide. Adam says that "her suicide, like the sacrifice of Nancy Manningoe, is totally illogical."⁵

However, as Adams says, Eula "is obviously meant to represent some of the more important and creative energies of life,"⁶ On the one hand, she shows moral weakening, on the other, she performs her duty as mother; and, also, she is a true beloved. She is not frivolous in her love with Manfred. In fact, if we assess the environment she grows in, we find that she has been treated more as an 'item' than a human being. She has been shown as a lazy, innocent, but charming girl, who is oblivious to her own beauty. Labove desires to possess her only once; but he, too, considers her a thing, a shape, and not a human being. Hoake Flee also rejects her existence as human being, and, similarly, Flem is to her:

"no more a physical factor in her life than the owner's name on the fly-leaf of a book....(He will) not possess her but merely own her by the single strength which power gave, the dead power of money, wealth, gewgaws, baubles, as he might own, not a picture, statue: a field say... the fine land rich and fecund and eternal and impervious to him who claimed title to it." (p.118-119)

So, for him, she is not more than a property. But as Broughton says "Eula Varner Snopes manages to retain here humanity,"⁷ in her love with Manfred de Spain. Eula, in fact, rejects what Gawin Stevens calls the "damned female instinct for uxorious and rigid respectability."⁸ She justifies her point as she says, "you just are, and you need, and you must, and so you do" (T.94). Broughton corroborates her ideas when he says, "Eula Varner Snopes seems to have totally emancipated herself from meaningless traditions. Her love for Manfred de Spain is more important to her than her marriage bond to Flem Snopes. She establishes her superiority and her authenticity by just being herself... But the point is that Eula can 'just be,' because she has risen above irrelevant abstractions, not because she has dismissed abstract thinking altogether. She danced with Manfred de Spain 'that way in public, simply because she was alive, and not ashamed of it,' she dances then in 'splendid un-shame' (p.75). Yet being so abundantly alive, does not mean that she disregards loyalty, pity or concern for her child's future. In other words, meaningful abstractions frame even her splendid vitality."⁹ In fact, she lives according to her own drives.

Eula is a complex character; she is more human and natural than any other character in Faulkner's novel. Kinney elaborates in the trilogy that we first think of Eula Varner as a lazy but erotic girl; we do not sense her full stature until sometime later, when she marries Flem, pleads with Gavin, and finally commits suicide."¹⁰ The fact is that, she shows vitality and motion in life while her "splendid un-shame" (p.75) and suicide, cause of shame, are contrary to each other. Eula who used to give an "odor" of a bitch in heat is "buried all right and proper and decorous and respectable (p.348). And the inscription on her monument clears all doubts of

the readers: "A Virtuous Wife Is a Crown to Her Husband" (p.355).

Linda Snopes Kohl in the trilogy--*The Hamlet, The Town, and The Mansion*-- is daughter to Eula Varner and step-daughter to Flem. The story of Linda starts with the defeat of Eula's, the fertility goddess. Linda is the consequence of Eula's rape, and Eula is an abstraction for all male characters, except Manfred De Spain. Linda enters Flem's world with her mother's trade in the shape of marriage. Both women fail to gain Flem's love and concern. As a result, Eula and De Spain's relationship matures. After eighteen years impotent Flem blackmails Eula for Linda's extra-marital relationship, and also for Linda's illegitimacy. Linda receives no love from her step-father, rather, he tries to trade on her love. Both, Linda and Eula, realize evil nature of Flem. In fact, Flem wants to acquire position, power and money by blackmailing Eula, and trading on Linda's need for a father. In order to end Flem's evil intension Eula commits suicide. Consequently, Linda plans to avenge her mother's death upon Flem.

Being projected a radical, Linda embodies American dream and stands against patriarchal dynasty. She is an American in the true sense as she starts living freely on her own terms. She is fatherless, motherless and, master less girl. So, as is free from all restrictions, and at the same time nostalgic about these relationships, she fights against insecurity and injustice. Her resolution to take revenge bears testimony to it. But, Eula and Linda have their different ways of reacting to evil and injustice. Faulkner was proud of these "two women characters"¹¹ because they showed genuine reaction to social injustice. Keith Louise Fulton also asserts "Faulkner was justly proud; in these characters he has embodied an intuition about women and history and problems in the American South."¹²

Linda is unaware, intelligent, and resolute daughter who even rejects her mother's proposal that she should marry Gavin Stevens. Of course, the proposal shows Eula's concern for her daughter, but Linda's refusal, too, is based on her principles. She felt victimized when she finally understood that Gavin lied about Flem that he is her father. She realizes the falseness of kinship and love. Being

alone, she started living with a sculptor, Barton Kohl; together they fight for loyalists in Spain. After a year, she returns to Jefferson as widowed and defeated woman. In this way, she remains distanced from all sorts of relationships which society and nature can offer to an individual.

Now she emerges as a truly radical woman. She is a defender of black people. Minter asserts that Faulkner is a "nigger lover,"¹³ and so is Linda. Like Faulkner she favors Negroes. She commits herself to the cause of Negroes. Besides, while educating the Negroes, she starts tracing culture in black children. She tries to remove the feeling of inferiority and insecurity from the Negro race. She tries to teach them a new culture of equality, and totally rejects Biblical idea of inferiority of blacks.

Linda's love for her mother becomes obvious in her efforts to set women free. She fights for their existential problems. She rejects man's superiority over woman. She is against patriarchy. In fact, she rejects the idea of slavery of man as well as that of race. Supporting women's higher education she establishes herself as civilized radical woman. So, Linda is one such woman whose existence as daughter, wife and mother is a question to herself, but she emerges as a strong woman to serve society, and work for the emancipation and uplift of the women. She rejects ideological theory imposed on blacks and women and demands freedom and equality for them. During her work for the uplift of women she remembers her mother. By accomplishing revenge she rejects patriarchy, and becomes a completely free woman.

All along Faulkner has emphasized the significance of characters in relation to the community they live in. Individual's conflict with community and the resultant dilemma of the individual, and actions and reactions make the character highly psychological."¹⁴

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