

(De)Formation of “Southern Female Habit”—A Case Study of William Faulkner’s *Snopes Trilogy*

Biljana Oklopčić

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Osijek, Croatia
1 Omorika Street, Osijek 31 000, Croatia
E-mail: biljana.oklopacic@os.t-com.hr

Abstract

The aim of this paper is twofold. The first part of the paper discusses the notion of “Southern female habit”—formal and informal women education—as it appeared in the U.S. South in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. Its analysis in the paper relies upon the following factors: the “necessity” of formal education, gender-discriminatory job distribution, prescribed skills and features, the role of reproduction, and the importance of home as woman’s private sphere. The second part of the paper shows how William Faulkner approached this typically Southern phenomenon in his *Snopes* trilogy. Three generations of the Varner-Snopes women characters—Mrs. Varner, Eula Varner Snopes, and Linda Snopes Kohl—foreground three different comprehensions of the idea of the “Southern female habit”: Mrs. Varner lives it; Eula Varner Snopes balances between accepting and subverting it; Linda Snopes Kohl subverts it.

Key Words: William Faulkner, the *Snopes* trilogy, the Southern female habit

In Book Two of *The Hamlet*, the first part of the Snopes trilogy, the omniscient narrator referring to Linda Snopes Kohl says the following: she “had left the South too young too long ago to have formed the Southern female habit” (Faulkner, 1994: 996). With this sentence William Faulkner introduces a possible starting point for an analysis of formal and informal aspects of women’s “education” in the U.S. South in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century—the phenomenon known as the **Southern female habit**. The concept of formal and informal women education in the U.S. South was, during that period, founded on a canonized discourse, resting on gender discrimination—a law, a regulation, a prescription—which authorized the interpretation of superiority and inferiority, power and subordination, masculine and feminine, culture and nature, civilized and primitive. It was perceived, to paraphrase Norbert Elias (1996), as a continuous process of learning submissive behavioral patterns which operated both as the expression of Southern regional awareness and Southern attitudes to gender and sex hierarchy. In other words, the idea of the Southern female habit rested on the idea of masculine domination which was comprehended as “normal,” “natural,” and “self-evident” since it was legitimized by the social order in, as Pierre Bourdieu points out, “the objectified state—in things (in the house, for example, every part of which [was] “sexed”), in the whole social world, and—in the embodied state—in the habitus of the agents, functioning as systems of schemes of perception, thought and action” (2001: 8). The unquestionable reproduction of gender roles in Southern society was supported by social institutions—family, church, and schools. They were “objectively orchestrated and had in common the fact that they acted on unconscious structures” (2001: 85). Family and church, because of their focus on woman’s intimate sphere, represented the secondary sources of institutionalized gender role distribution. In contrast to these, just seemingly, second-best institutions of patriarchal hierarchy, education, encompassing not only the pure process of elementary and advanced learning but also employment

opportunities, job distribution, financial and in the broadest sense civil rights, imposed itself as the primary source of gender role distribution in the U.S. South since its power-generating ability stemmed from a rendering of masculine domination and male culture as the dominant mode of acting, thinking, and behaving.

In what follows, I will examine the phenomenon of the Southern female habit—the role of both formal and informal education in the lives of Southern women at the end of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century—to show that an analysis of mirroring of “the actual into the apocryphal” (Stein, 1963: 82) is important for understanding women characters in Faulkner’s Snopes trilogy. Beginning with description of the main factors that supported formal and informal process of women education in the U.S. South (schooling, distribution of jobs, skills and features, reproduction, and private sphere—home), I will point out their role in the (de)construction of Southern women identity. In the second section, I will discuss how Faulkner applies and/or subverts the concept of the Southern female habit in his Snopes trilogy. The attention will be paid to three women characters that take part in the Snopes trilogy: Mrs. Varner, Eula Varner Snopes, and Linda Snopes Kohl. I will conclude by considering, in the light of possible objections, some consequences of my argument: it shows that Faulkner, even though the product of Southern patriarchal culture, was also capable of revising and subverting it. His Linda Snopes Kohl demonstrates this convincingly.

I. Factors Supporting the Formation of the Southern Female Habit

A. Education

Struggling with the consequences of the lost war and recession that followed it, the U.S. South could not cope with the economic and social changes that were undergoing in the rest of

the country. In the general tendency of falling behind of the national mainstream, the system of formal education in the U.S. South showed the same kind of backwardness. It was underfunded, overcrowded and segregated, staffed by overtly racist teachers and administrators, influenced by the legacy of the plantation system and the Civil War, perceived “as a means of . . . normalizing the gender hierarchy [and] crucial to institute racial segregation [to] maintain the racial hierarchy” (Rushing, 2002: 170). In addition, formal education of any kind indicated class privilege in the U.S. South and higher education for both men and women was restricted to elites.

Southern elementary education curriculum, to begin with, did not differ much from the antebellum’s and consisted of the same basics of reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography. Classes were held in one room where boys and girls were physically separated. The classroom sitting arrangements emphasized gender segregation: girls “would assume their seats on the opposite side of the room from the boys . . . and had to be seated so as not to face each other” (Vinovskis & Bernard, 1978: 865). Evidence also shows that, although teaching was organized in the spirit of coeducation, “boys and girls met in the same classrooms a good deal less than they had earlier” (Rury, 1984: 22). New South educational reformers worked to replace one-room schoolhouses with graded institutions taught by well-trained but poorly paid female teachers and stressed understanding over rote memorization and a sense of duty over fear of authority. For example, Hindman Settlement School and Pine Mountain School in Kentucky were elementary and middle schools that taught discipline, industriousness, and social graces to African Americans and mountain whites to help them adjust to the industrializing and urbanizing New South.

The similar differentiation continued in Southern secondary and higher education: “while young men trained for college or for careers in business, young women were to seek present satisfaction rather than future advancement” (Vinovskis & Bernard, 1978: 865). They learned classics or chose vocational schools. Young

women who were fortunate enough to continue their education at college/university experienced the same kind of gender segregation because their options concerning the choice of curricula, courses, and professions were limited. A few examples can illustrate this: the Lucy Cobb Institute in Athens, Georgia, created the new educational ideal—the “new belle” which “preserved aspects of antebellum elite femininity while also borrowing from the Progressive-Era New Woman” (Case, 2002: 19). Founded in the same town, Spelman Seminary, on the other hand, trained African-American women who would later help in uplifting and educating other newly freed women and men. A helpful insight into the Southern educational reform movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century gives Benjamin D. Burks (2002) who in his dissertation discusses Southern normal schools. Southern normal schools emphasized the importance of the quality of teaching as crucial to the success of the public system of education. The female normal schools in Virginia’s Farmville, Radford, Fredericksburg, and Harrisonburg promoted Christianity, preached proper etiquette and appropriate attire, and policed the relations with boys. All these educational institutions offered adjusted or less difficult academic programs which were usually divided into three academic departments: liberal arts (foreign languages, English, mathematics, science, art, music, pedagogy, history, etc.), business or commercial education (typewriting, bookkeeping, stenography), and domestic science or home economics (cooking, sewing, bacteriology, study of house consumption or household economics, nourishment, family relations based on psychology and sociology, personal hygiene). Each of these curricula had its definite purpose and its special objective. Whereas liberal arts educated women to become teachers, business or domestic science courses, as their name implies, were more concerned with manual activities and thus operated as female counterparts of male curriculum. Quite specifically, courses in domestic science were considered “as another context in which young women could learn manual dexterity and practical lessons

about science” (Rury, 1984: 23) and thus improve the living conditions not only in the micro way—in their family but also in the macro way—in the institutional household and the community. In contrast to domestic science curriculum, business courses responded to changes in the labor market which demanded more qualified and more educated workforce, even if it meant to employ women. Of course, the difference between business classes for men and women was more than obvious. While men were educated to become bankers, managers, or lawyers, women “needed training for relatively short term employment as secretaries and typists” (1984: 33) because “the technical details of office procedure were considered sufficient for women, whose working careers were generally short” (1984: 33).

The analysis set forth in the previous paragraphs is thus helpful in three ways. First, it focuses on the fact that the U.S. South depended heavily on “the traditional division of labour [that] assigns to women familiarity with the things of art and literature” (Bourdieu, 2002: 63) rather than involvement in business, science, and technology. Second, it reveals that the purpose of women’s education in the U.S. South was to instill in a girl

a well-disciplined mind, high moral aims, refined tastes, gentle and graceful manners, practical views of her own duties and those resources of health, thought, conversation and occupation which bless alike the highest and lowest station of life. (Vinovskis & Bernard, 1978: 865)

Third, in being perceived “as the final polish necessary to gentility” (Jabour, 1998: 40), women’s education in the South was also seen as “an asset in the marriage market” (1998: 40). In other words, as a process of character building aimed at perfection of women’s future responsibilities in marriage formal education in the U.S. South during the period of concern here was intended to develop simplicity of disposition and manners, modesty and inclination to self-negation, and, consequently, create a perfect wife.

B. Distribution of Jobs

Crucial for the reading of the phenomenon of the Southern female habit is the investigation of woman’s place in the Southern labor market. The ground from which I will begin is the “popular” patriarchal belief that “women ‘help’ rather than work, that their true ‘place’ is in the home, that when they venture ‘out’ of home they are best suited to doing work that replicates housework” (Kerber, 1988: 28). Accordingly, the Old South, where industrial and commercial activities were kept at minimum, considered women’s labor to be an integral part of the household economy. This had multiple implications for Southern women, not the least of which was the continued integration of home and work into plantation and yeoman household. In the postbellum and New South, women’s domestic labor was even more devaluated due to private and public needs that drew women out of the home. Widespread loss of property and men providers after the Civil War, large numbers of widows and orphans who could not realize their class privileges through men, and an infusion of Northern capital after Reconstruction that stimulated the Southern economy and accelerated industrial capitalism were some of the impetuses for including women in Southern market economy. This, however, produced a backlash, as men who opposed gender equality grew nostalgic for the Old South and resurrected the image and the idea of woman as the household mistress and administrator. As a result, women were mostly offered jobs that implied handling “raw materials”—children, food, and clothes. They were consequently perceived as “‘unskilled’, interruptible, nurturing, and [were] appropriately awarded primarily by love and secondarily by a segregated marketplace that consistently value[ed] women’s work less than men’s” (1988: 28). In addition, these jobs offered little or no opportunity for advancement and confined women near the bottom of the economic ladder.

When confronted with the prevailing public opinion on career women and the reality of low wages and sex-segregated jobs,

an educated woman in the U.S. South could opt for one of these two possibilities. She could either

proclaim . . . herself “a woman, and therefore less an achieving individual, or an achieving individual, and therefore less a woman”. She could not do both, and if she chose to follow the second option, she took the risk of losing forever to be “a loved object, the kind of girl whom men will woo and boast of, toast and marry.” (Chafe, 1988: 260-261)

It is then little wonder that women in the U.S. South, although the statistics showed “the great leap forward in women’s participation in economic life” (McGovern, 1968: 320)—as much as 29.7% from 1890 to 1930, did not want to risk marriage and did not want to fight the patriarchal mainstream which claimed that “women who worked outside their homes did so only under duress or because they were ‘odd’ (for which read ‘ugly,’ ‘frustrated,’ ‘compulsive,’ or ‘single’).” (Cowan, 1976: 148)

C. Skills and Features

Women’s education in the South was embedded in the family and attempts to analyze it apart from the familial context risk overlooking a central assumption of Southerners: that women were to be educated for their “roles” within the home. As a consequence, most of the period of concern here, even though characterized by cultural and social changes that could not be disregarded, clung to the model of Southern womanhood introduced during the antebellum days and known as the Cult of True Womanhood (1820-1860). The notion of Southern “true womanhood” rested on four main, either ornamental or domestic, features or skills—piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Piety, purity, and submissiveness were seen as ornamental features and were thus pursued (1) to find a proper match in the marriage market and (2) to contribute to man’s public image after the marriage was

contracted.

The first feature on the list—piety—was given to women as God’s gift; it belonged to them by divine right and represented the source of their strength. As moral instructresses, women were in charge of the souls of their nucleus family which in turn emphasized the importance of their role within family. It also gave them something else: a source of common identity and an opportunity to take part in charitable work in their community. Of course, it goes without saying that the emphasis on woman’s piety actually tranquilized “the many undefined longings which swept the most pious young girl and about which it was better to pray than to think” (Welter, 1983: 373) and kept her in her “proper sphere”—her home.

The second feature on the list—purity—was seen as woman’s priceless virtue and her most valuable asset in the marriage market since it guaranteed her upward mobility in Southern society. It set forth woman’s superiority as the guardian of her own innocence since women, “weak in themselves and sources of weakness, being the embodiments of the *vulnerability* of honour” (Bourdieu, 2001: 51), symbolized negative honor which could either be defended or lost. Needless to say, this very virtue forbade them to demand sexual gratification and gave Southern patriarchal hierarchy the perfect instrument of control of female sexuality and reproduction.

The last ornamental feature—submissiveness—was brought into being by focusing upon woman’s passivity, helplessness, selflessness, renunciation, and sacrifice. An example of the demands and duties that women were expected to fulfill provides an insight into how this feature operated: a really submissive woman had to spend her life servicing others—her husband, her children, and, occasionally, her parents and relatives—with ambitionless cheer, never-ending strength, and unconditioned love. Tellingly, all this was justified by the premise that women “*choose* to adopt submissive practices, . . . or even that they love their own domination, that they ‘enjoy’ the treatment inflicted on them, in a kind of masochism inherent in their nature” (Bourdieu, 2001:

39-40).

The fourth feature of the Southern “true” woman—domesticity—had its share in the formation of the Southern female habit as well. It provided the basis for multiple oppression of women which manifested itself through women’s rendering to the role of mother, nurse, educator, plantation/yeoman household administrator, and “custodian of culture” (Bartlett & Cambor, 1974: 11). Simply put, women were supposed to be mothers since this was their civil and racial duty; they were expected to dispense with comfort, morality, cheer, and hospitality, to engage in housekeeping, health care, and elementary education of their family and to provide enough refined entertainment both for their family and their guests. All these tasks/duties were presented as uplifting steps in emphasizing woman’s importance and authority and as her contribution to the social capital of her family and her community. But given the fact that the man was by divine, constitutional and legal right the possessor of money, law and voting right, woman’s “elevation” was actually used to mask the reality in which women operated as dependent, voiceless and nameless property.

D. Reproduction

It will help my current argument to consider for a moment the importance of reproduction in the formation of the Southern female habit. For sure, the attitude to reproduction in Southern society, in much the same way as the features and skills discussed in the previous section, stemmed from “the division of the social statuses assigned to men and women” (Bourdieu, 2001: 15). In linking social status with gender, and vice versa, Southern society compelled the belief that the ability to reproduce and give birth was the highest female civil and racial duty and the feature of “truly Christian personality” (Rosenberg, 1973: 137). Southern patriarchy found additional impetus for this argument in psychology and medicine which proclaimed that sexual excess in

women, or restraint from reproduction, could “frequently cause uterine inflammation, and ulceration, leucorrhoea, deranged menstruation, miscarriage, barrenness as well as debility, hysteria, and an endless train of nervous and other diseases” (Rosenberg, 1973: 135-136). In other words, with the help of science, religion, and (popular) culture Southern women were presented as the products and the prisoners of their reproductive organs which, in turn, provided the basis for their “social role and behavioral characteristics” (Smith-Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 1973: 335), their intellectual abilities, and their personality.

E. Private Sphere—Home

The analysis of the Southern female habit in this paper also relies upon the importance of the ideology of separate spheres in its appearance, development, and preservation. A focus on the ideology of separate spheres is here helpful in two ways. First, it points up its instrumental character since this very ideology found support in woman’s physiology and anatomy which “oriented her toward ‘inner’ view of herself and her worldly sphere” (Smith-Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 1973: 337). With the reproductive organs hidden in her body, woman had to seek her fulfillment in the closed space, i.e. in the house, which established a kind of analogy between the body of a woman and the body of a house. In addition, Southern women found the instrumental aspect of the ideology of the separate spheres “useful and emotionally sustaining, a familiar link between the older patriarchal culture and the new bourgeois experience” (Kerber, 1988: 26).

Second, interacting with the instrumental character of the ideology of separate spheres was its prescriptiveness which not only defined the main areas of woman’s interest and action but also determined frequency, quantity and quality of prescribed modes of thinking, acting and behaving. “The word of the father,” who actually did not have a clue about domestic or other female activities, thus transformed housekeeping, and, in particular, such

inspiring chores like cooking, washing and cleaning, into healthy exercise or even art or science. There were suggestions that “chemistry could be utilized in cooking, geometry in dividing cloth, and phrenology in discovering talent in children” (Welter, 1983: 381). Relatedly, the emphasis was put on the emotional impact of duties and obligations performed by women. They were thus transformed into the signs and the signifiers of symbolic value. In this context

laundering . . . was an expression of love. Feeding the family . . . was a way to communicate deep seated emotions. Diapering was . . . a time to build the baby’s sense of security; cleaning the bathroom sink was . . . an exercise for the maternal instincts, protecting the family from disease. (Cowan, 1976: 151)

II. (De)Formation of the Southern Female Habit in Faulkner’s Snopes Trilogy

As a Southerner, William Faulkner could not resist the influence of values, myths, and images of his birth-place. They shaped, or it is tempting to claim tried to shape, his personal and literary attitudes toward women, their status in family and community, and correspondingly the necessity of their formal and informal education. He also tried to redefine them by negotiating them through the subversive potential of Southern women education and the prescriptive rhetoric of Southern cultural codes they assert once they are separated from its institutional binding. Through formal and informal aspects of Southern women education—choice of schools, almost non-existing distribution of jobs, prescribed skills and features, backward attitudes to reproduction and childbirth, and the importance of home as woman’s private sphere, Faulkner appears to depict rises and falls of his South, its (in)capability to survive changes it faced, its struggling with the changed values and new traditions as well as

“the powerlessness of modern man, victim of the shallowness and dissolution of the twentieth century” (Entzminger, 2002: 27).

This issue appears as a recurring motif in much of Faulkner’s fiction. *Sanctuary* (1932)¹, for example, is a story about the rape of Temple Drake, a college girl. In *The Sound and the Fury* (1990) there are brief references to Caddy’s and Miss Quentin’s schooling as well: Uncle Maury insists that Caddy “needs the fresh air [because] she’s been in school all day” (Faulkner, 1990: 7). Unlike her mother, Miss Quentin does not take her schooling seriously for she spends more time “on the streets” (Faulkner, 1990: 180) than in school which results in Professor Junkin’s warning that “she will have to leave school if she’s absent one more time” (Faulkner, 1990: 180). Another example is that of Joanna Burden and Lena Grove in *Light in August* (2005) who embody two different approaches to women’s education in the South. Lena Grove represents the woman skilled in housewifery—after the death of her parents she moved to her brother’s where she “did all the housework and took care of the other children” (Faulkner, 2005: 6)—and in no control of her sexuality and reproduction abilities—she rationalizes this by “I reckon that’s why I got one [child] so quick myself” (Faulkner, 2005: 6). Conversely, Joanna Burden gets enough formal education as a daughter of a Civil Rights activist to run her property like a man and to spend “a certain period of each afternoon . . . writing steadily” (Faulkner, 2005: 175). She “received . . . business and private documents” and “sent . . . replies—advice, business, financial and religious, to the presidents and faculties and trustees, and advice personal and practical to young girl students and even alumnae, of a dozen negro schools and colleges through the South” (Faulkner, 2005: 175). One aspect of this social and cultural complexity employed by Faulkner is his representation of the Southern female habit in

¹ The year 1932 refers to the publication year of the version shown in the reference inquiry. The same rule applies to all Faulkner’s works mentioned or discussed in the paper.

his Snopes trilogy—*Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion* (1994). The trilogy depicts three generations of the Varner-Snopes women who, owing to the socio-economic changes in the U.S. South, embody three different approaches in the attitudes to the necessity of Southern women education. They are:

1. Mrs. Varner, who as the real “true woman” is presented as the perfect product of Southern patriarchal ideology;
2. Eula Varner Snopes, who as a kind of the “new belle” balances between accepting and subverting the Southern female habit, and
3. Linda Snopes Kohl, who as the anti-belle is presented as an outsider.

A. Mrs. Varner

As the first in the successive line of the Varner women, Mrs. Varner opens a discursive space on the formation of the Southern female habit in the Snopes trilogy. Mrs. Varner’s appearance, which occupies a modest share of *The Hamlet*’s narrative space and is thus corresponding to her place in the patriarchal matrix, is tied to Southern patriarchal views on woman’s role in family and community. As the embodiment of ideal Southern woman, and in accord with the demands of Southern phallogocentric economy, Mrs. Varner has a highly practical value because of her ability to reproduce which she proved no less than sixteen times. She did fulfill her racial and civil duty and she did contribute not only to her family and community but also to the image of Dixie Madonna stereotype. Further investigation of Mrs. Varner’s motherhood reveals another striking thing. The mere fact that she has sixteen children, which implies that she had one child every year and, given the fact of undeveloped health care in the U.S. South at the time, probably many miscarriages which were not recorded, demonstrates convincingly that she was not in control of her reproductive ability and that she was denied access to any means of contraception. This fact is additionally confirmed by Will Varner

who admits the following: "[We] already had a mess of children and maybe we ought to quit then. But I wanted some more gals . . . a gal will stay home and work until she does get married" (Faulkner, 1994: 293). In pronouncing the words *children*, *home*, *work*, and *marriage* Will Varner encapsulates in four words a mode of thinking that places woman in the home where she is supposed to do household chores and take care of her family. By the same token, Mrs. Varner "was one of the best housewives in the county and was indefatigable at it. She derived an actual physical pleasure . . . from the laying away of ironed sheets and the sight of packed shelves and potato cellars and festooned smoke-house rafters" (Faulkner, 1994: 95).

The vivid content of this passage sets forth the importance of domesticity as the skill each Southern "true" woman should imbibe. As something that was learned within the family and generationally passed from mother to daughter, the skill of domesticity here also points out woman's acceptance of such knowledge as some kind of learned behavior. The very notion of learned behavior implies the existence of intention on the part of both the learner and the teacher and thus justifies a rendering of woman's bringing up and education in the U.S. South to the idea of the Southern female habit. Given the fact that the skill of domesticity is considered to be part of the Southern female habit, it is then not strange that Mrs. Varner's "conviction was . . . that the housewife who had to wait until she had been to school to know how much money she had left after subtracting from it what she had spent, would never be a housewife" (Faulkner, 1994: 95).

This specific fictional instance gives way to one more idea that pursued the concept of the Southern female habit. Once again there is a specific word—**school**—which draws attention to the role and the importance, or the insignificance, of formal education in Southern woman's life. This very word assumes a somehow pejorative meaning in Mrs. Varner's narrative space since it bears connotations of unnecessary burden and undesired property. As such, the schooling is either neglected:

She did not read herself, though at the time of her marriage she had been able to read a little. She did not practice it much then and during the last forty years she had lost even the habit, preferring now to be face to face with the living breath of event, fiction or news either, and being able to comment and moralise upon it. So she saw no need for literacy in women. (Faulkner, 1994: 95)

Or it is rejected as something unnecessary and quite suspicious: “It was you insisted she had to go to school. It wasn’t me. I raised eight other daughters, I thought they turned out pretty well” (Faulkner, 1994: 97).

One final point. Interacting with the previously mentioned Mrs. Varner’s features is her invisibility on the linguistic level. She appears to be quite nameless as there is no indication of her name or her origin in the novel. She is always just Mrs. Varner or “mammy” (Faulkner, 1994: 293). This, again and again and again, points up the representative blankness of her role of mother and wife in the patriarchal gender matrix and thus presents her as the perfect “straight A” student in the cultivating and civilizing school of Southern patriarchy.

B. Eula Varner Snopes

The next step in my reading of the literary (de)formation of the Southern female habit in the Snopes trilogy is to examine the role of Eula Varner Snopes in it. Unlike Mrs. Varner, her mother, who did not go to school but was “educated” within the family in the art of housewifery, who gave birth to sixteen children because she did not have access to any kind of contraception and who considered her home and her family to be her sanctuary, Eula, whose name “suggests a eulogy” (Crosby, 2000: 118) and thus symbolizes the celebration of the eternal feminine, does not lose her name and consequently her identity in the act of marriage. By adding her name to her husband’s, Eula announces her position of a “half-breed,” a hybrid or “the locus of conflicting ideologies”

(Crosby, 2000: 114) balancing between accepting and subverting the idea of the Southern female habit.

Eula did not, to begin with, "object to attending it [school], to being in school" (Faulkner, 1994: 95). It is interesting to note that "it was the brother, Jody, who . . . had insisted that she go to school" (Faulkner, 1994: 95). An important question arises. If Eula's parents were not interested in their daughter's future since they perceived her "in stereotypic terms, as a housewife and sexual object" (Clarke, 1994: 76), then why did Jody take such great care of his sister's education given the fact that he was not involved in the education of his other eight sisters? At first glance, his intention "mark[s] him as more sympathetic and progressive than his parents" (Clarke, 1994: 76), especially when humiliation and frustration which he endured to send Eula to school are taken into consideration. Underneath Jody's conviction "of the necessity of that" (Faulkner, 1994: 95), lurks, however, something else: the obsessive need to participate in the cult of protection of Southern womanhood which in turn symbolized honor, pride, and morality of Southern manhood. In other words, when Jody sends Eula to school, he actually wants to "educate Eula away from sexuality" (Clarke, 1994: 77) and to desexualize her since he perceives her as the threat to family honor and, in the broadest sense, to himself because, although he is Will's first born, he is not his favorite child and Eula is.

The very process of Eula's schooling seems to cover wider ground since it serves to broaden Eula's objectification in the Southern educational system. This discursive space is opened by Labove, Eula's teacher. Unlike Jody, who is convinced that schooling will civilize and consequently desexualize Eula, Labove completely fails in his teaching, i.e. civilizing, responsibilities since he, as Deborah Clarke asserts, "views her in exclusively sexual terms, as beneath and beyond books" (1994: 78). Aware of his failure as a teacher and a man, Labove ventures to regain his position in educational and gender system by force. In pronouncing the following sentences: "That's it. . . . That's the

trouble. You are not afraid. That's what you have got to learn. That's one thing I am going to teach you, anyway" (Faulkner, 1994: 117), he attempts to assert his superiority as a teacher and a man. The result, however, is doubly devastating for him: first, Eula demonstrates greater physical strength than he and fights back his rape attempt:

He held her loosely, the better to feel the fierce resistance of bones and muscles, holding her just enough to keep her from actually reaching his face. She had made no sound . . . He held her loosely, still smiling, whispering his jumble of fragmentary Greek and Latin verse and American-Mississippi obscenity, when suddenly she managed to free one of her arms, the elbow coming up hard under his chin. It caught him off balance; before he regained it her other hand struck him a full-armed blow in the face. He stumbled backward, struck a bench and went down with it and partly beneath it. She stood over him, breathing deep but not panting and not even dishevelled. (Faulkner, 1994: 117-118)

Second, when Eula compares Labove with "old headless horseman Ichabod Crane" (Faulkner, 1994: 118), she demonstrates that she is, despite the widespread popular disbelief in female ability to learn, actually capable "to imbibe at least some knowledge as she taunts him with deadly literary accuracy" (Clarke, 1994: 78). Furthermore, by naming him in this way Eula "identifies the 'dead' body of Washington Irving's fictional character with the 'living' body of the schoolteacher" (Levitsky, 1993: 494) which is another insult and another blow for his male ego.

The failure to civilize Eula in the institution of formal education made Jody invent other means of restricting and rewriting her identity. One thing is at least worth mentioning here. This is, for sure, a corset. In being made to restrain and reshape the female body to fit the male ideal of femininity, the corset promoted the control of woman's body and justified its existence

as the instrument of patriarchal gender control. Aware of this fact, Jody "had nagged Mrs. Varner into making her [Eula] wear corsets. He would grasp her each time he saw her outside the house, in public or alone, and see for himself if she had them on" (Faulkner, 1994: 126). The corsets however can neither hide the sensual quality of Eula's body nor transform her into something she is not; they, underneath "the dresses of silk" (Faulkner, 1994: 127), reveal the body of "a woman of thirty dressed in the garments of her sixteen-year-old sister" (Faulkner, 1994: 127) and, strangely enough, generate a possibility of "protest against the Cult of True Womanhood" (Blanchard, 1995: 37).

Similarly, in attempting to control the female body, the corset, at least in this fictional instance, operates as the more or less successful instrument of preserving woman's virginity. A single example will suffice: "Jody . . . wait[ed] for her in the hall until she came out, dressed, the buggy waiting, to grasp her arm and exactly as he would have felt the back of a new horse for old saddle sores, grimly explore with his hard heavy hand to see if she had the corset on or not" (Faulkner, 1994: 129). Challenges to Jody's viewpoint on the importance of virginity began to appear before Jody could have grasped them since the very act of physical control he engaged himself so eagerly in could not impose the patriarchal control over Eula's body. For Eula's part, in choosing the circumstances of losing her virginity, i.e. the time, the place, the way, and the man, she demonstrated her unwillingness to take part in the construction of patriarchal honor and consequently refused to be reduced to an object of exchange in the marriage market. In other words, she did not care about wasting her value of untouched and unspoiled goods, called into question the premises upon which the concept of Southern womanhood was constructed, and showed that "her social position and reputation mean nothing to her" (Clarke, 1994: 72) although single and pregnant.

Even though this appears to be a significant shift in the way women were supposed to think and behave, it could not have been justified by the society which valued its members according to

gender, race, and class roles it imposed on them. As one would expect, the Varner family honor had to be restored not by finding a biological father who, by the way, was “halfway to Texas now” (Faulkner, 1994: 138) but by finding a suitable husband who was desperate enough or greedy enough, or probably both, to get married to a ravished belle and to secure in this way “a considerable check, . . . a deed to the Old Frenchman place, . . . [and the paid] marriage license” (Faulkner, 1994: 140). And they found him in Flem Snopes:

a dwarf, a gnome, without glands and desire, who would be no more a physical factor in her life than the owner’s name on the fly-leaf of a book, . . . who would 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. (Faulkner, 1994: 115)

Eula, on the other hand, entered this marriage as “the calm beautiful mask” (Faulkner, 1994: 140). This occurs “because she cares nothing about legality and social convention, a husband, any husband, is simply an extraneous appendage, a different kind of corset which may or may not succeed in confining her body” (Clarke, 1994: 82). Or maybe, as Lorie Watkins Fulton suggests, Eula saw her pregnancy and marriage to Flem as a “ticket to Jefferson” (Fulton, 2005: 457), as an opportunity to leave the rural and backward hamlet that could not have held her.

Eula’s comprehension of femininity and reproduction complicates the issue further since she once again balances between accepting and subverting the prescriptions of the Southern female habit. In being constantly compared with nature, no matter whether with animals (cat, dog, and horse), land, fruit, food or moon, and in doing nothing to fight it, Eula accepts partaking in the patriarchal binary hierarchy which always identifies woman with nature in order to have an excuse to cultivate and civilize her. She thus becomes the metaphor of a virgin land which has to be

penetrated and contaminated in order to be used. Furthermore, Eula is throughout most of the trilogy presented as the embodiment of Eve, Aphrodite, and Venus—“the eternal female” (Bašić, 1996: 196).² The mythological background of Eula’s “divine sensuality” (1996: 196) is additionally emphasized by her “appearance [that] suggested symbology out of the old Dionysic times—honey in sunlight and bursting grapes, the writhen bleeding of the crushed fecundated vine beneath the hard rapacious trampling goat-hoof” (Faulkner, 1994: 93). As the embodiment of another ancient goddess—Juno, the protector of household, motherhood, marriage and moon, Eula also fulfilled the function she was predestined—she was impregnated and gave birth to her daughter Linda. But in being perceived as “mammalian female meat” (Faulkner, 1994: 97), “the supreme primal uterus” (Faulkner, 1994: 110), “the queen, the matrix” (Faulkner, 1994: 112), “miraculous intact milk” (Faulkner, 1994: 117), Eula, on the other hand, seems surprisingly infertile with one child only. This implies that she was probably in control of her reproductive ability and did not depend on man’s will to regulate it which, for sure, represents a subversive nuance in the creation of this woman character.

C. Linda Snopes Kohl

Linda Snopes Kohl, the last link in the succeeding line of the Varner women, marks a crucial turning point in the literary (de)formation of the Southern female habit. When confronted with her “true woman” grandmother and her rebelliously indolent yet “civilized” mother, Linda appears to have been quite removed from the realms accorded and assigned to both her mother and her grandmother. This placelessness that Linda immerses herself in is present as a continuous thread woven into the fabric of the Snopes

² Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Croatian to English in this paper were done by the author of the paper.

trilogy and is tied to her linguistic, public, and private appearance in subversive disclosure of the Southern female habit in the Snopes trilogy. In this way she becomes an outsider and expresses triumphantly “her subversive feminine discourse” (Kang, 2005: 509) in the narrative space of the trilogy.

Linda’s “failure” to cultivate typical feminine features and to take part in the civilizing process imposed on women in the U.S. South is somehow set forth by the circumstances of her conception, birth, and name-giving. Whereas the story of her conception and birth pays homage to the rebelliousness of her mother Eula, the name given to her, intentionally or not, undermines everything the patriarchal U.S. South has ever done to civilize its female population. Linda’s first name, which is derived from a Spanish word meaning “pretty,” appears to be a name for a Southern belle. Yet, Linda is not “pretty” in terms of white Southern womanhood; she is “not reducible to a single trait, an admired appearance but a person of much complexity, unassimilable into the usual categories used to divide and conquer in the southern symbolic order” (Roberts, 1994: 140). Linda’s family names—Snopes Kohl shatter another Southern stereotype—the stereotype of the pure and unquestionable origin guaranteed by the virginity of a woman and the first child conceived in a legitimate marriage upon which the Southern patriarchy based its institutional being. For Linda is a “bastard” (Faulkner, 1994: 544); her biological father is Hoake McCarron which makes Snopes in her family name “a legal fiction” (Roberts, 1994: 141). This is not to say, of course, that Snopes in her family name does not acquire a new and a special meaning: the meaning of being an outsider. In being so, she was able to escape the U.S. South before it civilized her to adjust her to projections of the idealized Southern womanhood. In addition, her second family name—Kohl, which is not pronounced “Cole” (Faulkner, 1994: 820) and thus “don’t sound very American” (1994: 820), brings into focus one more aspect of her subversion of the Southern myth. Linda married a Northern Jew who was a sculptor. On some symbolic level and in the context of the

Southern ideology of whiteness as property, her marriage could appear to hold the connotative value of forbidden mixing of races or miscegenation. As such, it represents Linda's protest against the prescribed modes of thinking and behaving in the U.S. South which required that the subject of marriage, i.e. man/husband, should preferably be a Southerner, white, Christian, and well-off.

Besides Linda's symbolic namelessness, there are at least two other issues that point up her placelessness, i.e. her status of the outsider. First and foremost, she is not the product of Southern culture and she therefore resists any stereotypical classification. This occurred because she "had left the South too young too long ago to have formed the Southern female habit" (Faulkner, 1994: 996). In containing three key words—Southern female habit, this sentence draws attention to features Linda should but did not develop to fit in the context of modern Southern domestic metaphor. She is neither pious nor pure nor submissive nor domestic although many attempts were made to teach her how to adopt skills and features of Southern belle. Specifically, Linda is always depicted as a being-perceived and an object of the male gaze. Her entire (male) community takes part in her construction and deconstruction; her entire being is filtered through them. Secondly, Linda's "only" love, Gavin Stevens, tries to civilize her by treating her as *tabula rasa*, as a blank page or a blank space, that should be marked by male spirit. He engages eagerly in "forming her mind" (Faulkner, 1994: 506) by giving her books to read, talking with her about them and examining her on them; he intends to send her off to a college and eventually plans to marry her to a real Southern gentleman. Given all his "efforts," it is no wonder that he "sees Linda in some ways as *his* creation" (Roberts, 1994: 141). Third, there is Flem Snopes who "was her father even if he did have to be her enemy" (Faulkner, 1994: 629). He tries to civilize Linda by the choice and the content of higher education she will receive. He thus sends her to the Academy:

one of the last of those gentle and stubbornly fading

anachronisms called Miss So-and-So's or The So-and-So Female Academy or institute whose curriculum includes deportment and china-painting, which continue to dot the South though the rest of the United States knows them no more. (Faulkner, 1994: 597)

Although quite different from Gavin's, Flem's intentions show similar adherence to the concept of a woman as *tabula rasa*. In much the same way, he wants to construct Linda to become obedient, dutiful and submissive daughter who should be

homely and frightened from birth and hence doomed to spinsterhood to that extent that her coeval young men would as one have taken one glance at her and then forgot they had ever seen her; and the one who would finally ask for her hand would have one eye, probably both, on her (purported) father's money and so would be malleable to his hand. (Faulkner, 1994: 595)

Lastly, the early twentieth century Southern culture and society justified a rendering of women's education as the part of the Southern female habit by asserting that prescriptive behavior for women "was not in conflict with college attendance" (Graham, 1978: 770). It was thus believed that college education presented "proper youthful behavior for a young woman [and] a pleasant interlude on the way to growing up" (Graham, 1978: 770-771).

Linda, on the other hand, demonstrates the need to take her whole life beyond a focus on the Southern womanhood mythology and far from the reach of patriarchal control. As one would expect, her subversion of the Southern female habit operates as travesty and/or transgression of everything she is expected to do, say or think. Specifically, unlike her grandmother who "was one of the best housewives in the county and was indefatigable at it" (Faulkner, 1994: 95) and her mother who worked "behind the counter in the restaurant in another greasy apron, frying the hamburgers and eggs and ham and the tough pieces of steak on the grease-crusting kerosene griddle" (Faulkner, 1994: 358), Linda did

not develop any inclination for homemaking. For “what would she want in a Ladies’ Auxiliary, raffling off homemade jam and lamp shades. Even if she could make jam, since obviously cooking is the last thing a sculptor would demand of his girl.” (Faulkner, 1994: 850) In much the same way, Linda subverts another facet of the Southern female habit myth: the one concerning the necessity of student performance in belle’s education. She was thus “the year’s number-one student, the class’s valedictorian” (Faulkner, 1994: 521-522). Similarly, she let Gavin Stevens feed her with poetry, John Donne in particular, and sweets, but somehow she appeared equally interested in geometry. Further investigation helps to reveal how Linda, although young and inexperienced, understood the rules of Flem’s world and was ready to compromise to escape the South. She thus issued her will—“it was her idea. She did it herself. . . . she thought of it, wanted to do it, did it herself” (Faulkner, 1994: 626-627) —and gave “her share of whatever she would inherit from . . . [Eula] to her fa—him” (Faulkner, 1994: 626)—Flem. Flem let her go and she fled out of the South to Greenwich Village in New York—“a place with a few unimportant boundaries but no limitations where young people of any age go to seek dreams” (Faulkner, 1994: 652). And Linda found there more than one dream: she became a radical and an activist, married a Jew sculptor Barton Kohl, went to fight in the Spanish Civil War, and eventually escaped the South and its discourses.

Linda’s deconstruction of the Southern female habit does not stop with her linguistic and educational otherness; it is also brought into being by her unwillingness to participate in the Southern phallogocentric economy which commodifies women and values them according to their usefulness to patriarchy (mother has, for instance, very high value because of her ability to reproduce) or their exchangeability in patriarchy (whereas prostitute has exchange value, virgin is the pure gain since she is untouched, unspoiled goods). Unlike all other women characters in Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha novels and short stories, Linda is not presented as the exchange object in the marriage market. By living “with the

guy for years before they married” (Faulkner, 1994: 857) and wasting in this way her pure exchange value of the virgin, she not only refused to operate as goods in Southern phallogentric economy but also demonstrated that she is a free subject fully in control of her body and her sexuality. In other words, “if the contractual concept of law is shown in Faulkner to quantify women’s bodies as a matter of course and custom, then Linda may be seen as breaking that custom” (Lahey, 1993: 521). She is even courageous enough to verbalize her desire:

“I love you,” she said. “Even when I have to tell a lie, you have already invented it for me.” . . .
 I wrote *No*
 “But you can . . . me,” she said. That’s right. She used the explicit word, speaking the hard brutal guttural in the quacking duck’s voice . . .
 “You’re blushing,” she said.
 I wrote *that word*
 “What word?”
that you just said
 “Tell me another one to use. Write it down so I can see it and remember it.” (Faulkner, 1994: 892)

The omitted but nevertheless present F-word in Linda’s discourse strikes at the heart of the idea of the Southern female habit encapsulating in one word not only her distance from the idealized Southern womanhood but also her partaking in the construction of her own sexual desire. In this way she refuses to fall victim to the taboos and codes of behavior that numbed her grandmother and destroyed her mother and imposes herself as the outsider and the female subversive force not only in the Snopes trilogy but also in Faulkner’s entire oeuvre.

III. Conclusion

Whereas patriarchal ideology, literary canon, and popular culture have always identified man as a cultural being, woman’s

existence has usually been connected to nature and natural processes and therefore “required” cultivation and civilization. To do this patriarchal ideology imposed on woman civilizing projects in the form of religion, art, literature, and education. Relatedly, the aim of this paper was to show how the Southern female habit, i.e. formal and informal aspects of women’s education in the U.S. South at the end of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century, was used to “civilize” women and consequently promote the values of dominant male culture. The emphasis was therefore put on the following factors:

1. adjustment of curriculum for those women who decided to pursue their career;
2. restricted choice of schools/colleges and, consequently, jobs for women;
3. cultivation of skills that could help woman to raise her value in the marriage market;
4. woman’s reproductive function rather than her intellect, and
5. prescriptive approach which determined the importance of private sphere in woman’s life.

The second part of the paper brought into focus William Faulkner’s Snopes trilogy (*The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*) which masterfully depicted how all the above-mentioned factors contributed to the formation and, occasionally, deformation of the Southern female habit. Faulkner showed this by using three generations of the Varner-Snopes women: (1) Mrs. Varner, who is presented as the product of Southern patriarchal ideology which emphasized the uselessness of formal education in woman’s life as well as the great necessity of development of domestic skills; (2) Eula Varner Snopes, who balances between accepting and subverting formal and informal aspects of women’s education and is, therefore, approached as a kind of hybrid, and (3) Linda Snopes Kohl, who is depicted as an outsider and a subversive force in the Snopes trilogy.

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南方女性特質的養成：
以威廉·福克納的史諾普斯三部曲為例

芭耶娜·歐克羅普澤克
(張滌之譯)

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Osijek, Croatia
1 Omorika Street, Osijek 31 000, Croatia
E-mail: biljana.oklopac@os.t-com.hr

摘 要

本文分為兩個部分。第一部分探討所謂的「南方女性特質」，此一現象來自十九世紀末期及二十世紀初期，美國南方對女性的正式及非正式養成教育；本文分別從「必備」的正式教育、工作分配中的性別歧視、受侷限的技能與專長、生育角色，以及家庭在女性私領域的重要性等幾個因素加以剖析。第二部分探討威廉·福克納如何在史諾普斯三部曲中，真實呈現這個典型的南方現象；他是透過維爾納·史諾普斯家族裡三個世代的女性角色——具典型南方女性特質的維爾納太太、游走於接受與抗拒之間的尤拉·維爾納·史諾普斯，以及顛覆傳統的琳達·維爾納·柯爾，來呈現對所謂的南方女性特質的不同想像。

關鍵詞：威廉·福克納、史諾普斯三部曲、南方女性特質