

Mrs. bland is anything  
but



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

As difficult to read as William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* proves to be, there are still characteristics to the story that are obvious or obviously out of place. Arguably, just such a characteristic or character would be Mrs. Bland, mother of Gerald and present in Quentin's narrative. Though comic in some lights, she seems to be symbolic of a much bigger persona than she could ever physically encompass. Out of place, perhaps, because this mythic legend of which she is a symbol has proven itself, by the time the narrative is taking place, out of date, out of place. She is phony and, if nothing else, the main characters in this novel are all too real in the sense that what they feel and think dictates how they live and who they are. Faulkner even uses the word "bland" to make pointed the fact that indeed she is not of complex worthy material, but plain and insignificant, lifeless. Mrs. Bland is a haughty, shallow, social being who represents a grandiose way of Southern living now dying out, if not dead.

The scene in which Mrs. Bland is first introduced provides perhaps the most intricate insight into her personality. Quentin observes Gerald about to go rowing, dressed in an outlandish outfit: "He or his mother had read somewhere that Oxford students pulled in flannels and stiff hats, so early one March they bought Gerald a one pair shell and in his flannels and stiff hat he went on the river" (90). Right away, the reader is able to form a picture of this overbearing maternal figure and her oh-so-submissive male child. She is a woman excruciatingly planted in the will of social whim, someone who demands "the finest," that others may observe her, or rather, observe her son and then, in turn, observe her and consciously acknowledge her affluence. Whether this is necessarily a positive or negative character

trait is certainly dependent upon the experience of the reader, but in most literary compositions, such society-obsessed matriarchs prove to be shallow.

Along with material credibility, Mrs. Bland obviously puts much stock into out-and-out appearance, bundling up in a “ fur suit” and seeing Gerald off from a hired car despite “ a twenty five mile wind and a steady drove of ice floes” (91). Driving along the shore as her son moves down the river, she displays no affectionate valedictions, no ‘ good luck’s or ‘ I love you’s, but rather, rides along side as if “ they’d [never] seen one another before, like a King and Queen, not even looking at one another” (91).

Mrs. Bland seems not to care about her relationship with her son, or even her son for that matter, but how the appearance of their togetherness is received. She gives him a motorized escort, despite the fact that she “ tried to make him give up rowing and do something else the rest of his class couldn’t or wouldn’t do” (91). Pride in all things she believes must be displayed and haughty composure maintained. She must believe she and her actions are on the tip of the tongue of social will and she pushes Gerald and her intentions to accomplish such a belief. The fact that Mrs. Bland really wanted Gerald to take up an activity unlike any other fellow’s shows that she is not simply a victim of social tendencies to push for conformity, but rather, she is of a complicated mentality that strives for uniqueness, not for its own sake, but for prestige. She speaks openly to her son’s friends of all the finer things he possesses or has possessed. She keeps rooms in town for both he and herself and she approves of the other college boys according to whether their “ Geography [meets] the requirements (minimum)” (91).

Mrs. Bland is not respectable, but strives to be respected. Flaunting the exploits of her son while he sits in “ princely boredom” (91) only deems she and her state of mind pathetic as it acknowledges her superficial claims to importance and their relevance to people’s opinion of her. Her judgment of others according to where they live is simply a stereotypical portrayal of her superficiality. It is ironic that though she presumes to have Southern superiority and accepts Quentin as acceptable because he originates from the proper side of the Mason-Dixon Line, she has ensconced she and her son in Massachusetts, a pinnacle of New England, northern living. She dresses her son in clothes from New York, a place of origin for many an “ ignorant lowclass Yankee,” (146) as she calls them. Faulkner’s depiction of this Mrs. Bland character is intended to mock the pretensions of the old South as people cling for dear life to its myth as it slips away. If Jason represents the new South, a redeemed , aggressive, business-oriented society, then the Blands have sprung from the group being pushed away by the Jasons, the representatives of the Old South unraveling, run-a-muck, and absurd. Faulkner scoffs at chivalric tendencies such as when Quentin approaches the Bland auto after having been arrested. ““ Gerald . . . send these people away. You get in this car Quentin,” (141) Mrs. Bland commands. Here is a stranger to this town, sitting in a car watching municipal matters which involve her not at all, dictating left and right what will be and can not be done. She believes her son, the epitome of Southern character can remedy the situation these Northern imbeciles have created. Yet everyone seems to realize she can not do anything by sitting giving orders; her son can not do anything stepping down and giving orders. Faulkner know the reader is

laughing at them and their ostentatiously remedial ideology and are therefore laughing at the mythic legend of the South.

It does seem a bit odd that amidst a novel of three brothers, each obsessed with their sister, such a character as Mrs. Bland would appear. However, Faulkner is utilizing a tool of contrast here. Not only is her view of life as a resident of the South different from those like Jason, the basis of their conflicting personas being social perspective, she also is used as a contrast to the aura of the novel and its over-riding themes. *The Sound and the Fury* is fraught with emotional strain and misappropriation and confusion:

Benjamin's inability to deal with loss (the exit of Caddie from his life), Quentin's neurotic, guilt-ridden inability to handle loss (the unrequited need to appeal to Caddie's physical desire), Jason's bitter, hateful inability to deal with loss (the missed opportunity of a decent bank job). In the midst of all this regret and anxiety, especially that of Quentin, we have a character of seemingly no emotion; someone who does not go to the beach to "see" her son off, but goes to the beach to be seen with her son going off. Mrs. Bland is so wrapped up in social wants, she seems not to be a feeling human, but a reflective mirror of ancient values and mythical tenets. "' She don't object to the fighting, it is the blood that annoys her'" (165). She does not care about emotional impetus or desire. She is not worried about personal conflict or derision, only with the physical appearances of things and how they will affect others' perception of her.

Faulkner uses Mrs. Bland's disregard for emotion or inability to feel as a tool with which to make her look pathetic. However, those who do feel deeply in the novel, who thrive on emotion and/or wallow in the treacherous sorrows of

love do not exactly come out looking like heroes. Had he not included Mrs. Bland, *The Sound and the Fury* may have carried a message involving human feelings and destruction. By including her, the reader is shown two paths by which to arrive at the same end. Should one feel and concentrate on emotion or should one ignore it and allow himself to be bitten by the social serpent? One thing one learns from reading Faulkner is that he is not one for answers, only for providing a launching pad for reflection and investigation. Perhaps moderation is the key; one just has to decide on one's own.