

## The men and the women

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The roles that the men and women play in the novel are very interesting, particularly when we consider the two narrative time-frames. It is important to think about the number of men and women Faulks writes about in each time-frame and also whether they are major or minor characters. Think about why Faulks has written about them in the way he has and what he is showing us about the times in which the novel is set. For example, Stephen is the protagonist of part one of the novel and is the single man carrying on the affair with Isabelle, a married woman tied to her family. In the third part of the novel, however, it is a woman, Elizabeth, who is the single person carrying on the affair with a married man who puts off leaving his wife and daughter. Isabelle suffers because of her affair whereas Elizabeth's friends only worry about her welfare and future.

Stephen is portrayed as a man without a family, Elizabeth only has her mother. Jack Firebrace loses his son to illness before dying himself in the war. We only know about Jack Firebrace's wife through her letters and Weir's mother is introduced as a rather weak and irrelevant figure.

We see Gray and Brennan both in the First World War as young men and then again in the 1970s: in the first parts of the novel they are both strong soldiers but when we meet them again they are presented as old and rather infirm men whom Elizabeth becomes almost exasperated with and finds it difficult to talk to.

**Firstly, divide up a page in your book and record all the characters that we find in each part, like this:**

First World War	1970s
Stephen Wraysford	Elizabeth Benson
Isabelle Azaire	Robert

**Now** think about the role that each of the characters plays, their importance, their relationship with others and what we learn about the people and the time in which they lived. Always consider your ideas in light of authorial intention; that is think about what Sebastian Faulks intended by his portraying his characters in a particular way. Do you, for example, think they are representative of an era; are some of them anomalies or rebels; are any stereotypes or one dimensional? For all your ideas provide evidence and be prepared to argue your point of view.