

The open dash (i.e., preceded and followed by half-spaces) was presumably meant to stand for the word “shit.” Punctuation is often used in printed texts as a substitute for profanity, but the two-em dash here, with the exclamation point, does not suggest a profane word. The line instead conveys mild exasperation, or perhaps longing.

steadily and rapidly, watching the tall one. The other did not move, jackknifed backward between the two bunks, grave and clean, the cigar burning smoothly and richly in his clean steady hand, the smoke wreathing upward across his face saturnine, humorless, and calm. “Ten more years—”
“Women ——!” the tall convict said.

FIGURE 8. From final page of the first edition, *The Wild Palms*. Random House, 1939.

Further change occurred in subsequent typesettings. In the *Viking Portable Faulkner* (1946), the half-spaces have been removed.

“Women——!” the tall convict said.

The French translator, confused, rendered the line this way in 1952:

— *Ah ! Les femmes ! » dit le grand forçat.*²³

In the New American Library edition of 1954, the long dash becomes a closed one-em dash, with the exclamation point retained:

“Women—!” the tall convict said.

The Vintage paperback of 1962 is a slight improvement, with three hyphens and the letter “t” plus the exclamation point. It reads:

“Women---t!” the tall convict said.

These textual discoveries were noted first by Thomas L. McHaney in his dissertation in 1968.²⁴ Twenty-two years later, McHaney and Noel Polk, with the permission of Faulkner’s literary estate, collaborated on a corrected text of the novel that was published by the Library of America. Here the title of Faulkner’s work is given as *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem [The Wild Palms]*.²⁵ On the last page of this edition the final line has been restored. (“Women, shit,” the tall convict said.) Random House adopted this text, and indeed all of the corrected texts produced

23. *Les Palmiers sauvages* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952).

24. McHaney, “William Faulkner’s *The Wild Palms*: A Textual and Critical Study.” Diss. University of South Carolina, 1968. See especially Appendix I, “The Text,” pp. 252-65.

25. In the volume William Faulkner, *Novels 1936-1940* (1990): 493-726.