

## REVIEW ESSAY

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### What Is “New” in Faulkner Criticism?

**Taylor Hagood. *Following Faulkner: The Critical Response to Yoknapatawpha’s Architect*. Rochester: Camden House, 2017. 153 pages.**

When in 1954 in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech Hemingway claimed that “[f]or a true writer each book should be a new beginning, where he tries again for something that is beyond attainment” and that “[h]e should always try for something that has never been done or that others have tried and failed” (805-806), he was following, unknowingly as it seems and with no sense of anxiety, the statement Faulkner had made on the same occasion in Stockholm four years earlier when he spoke of the writer “creating out of the materials of the human spirit something that did not exist before” (qtd. in Hagood 3) and the belief Faulkner expressed in interviews and class conferences that the book’s worth is to be judged by the splendor of its failure, a demonic mark of literary excellence and of literary heritage behind continuing efforts to attempt the impossible. Imaginative returns to the beginnings of the writers’ work once its position within the world literary canon has been confirmed significantly and securely, these declarations owe much to the modernist spirit. “Something” in them reminds one of “it” in Pound’s “make it new.” The call for the pursuit of the elusive, timeless phantom of perfection which is also the pursuit of the aesthetic means capable of meeting the needs of the changing times remains part of the definition of literature. From the era of the “great” modernists the call may have lost some of its enthusiasm and openness. Yet, even if toned down, moderated, ironically self-conscious, it never fails to be attractive. In *Watermark* (1989), for example, Joseph Brodsky remembers his early appreciation of Pound’s work—its youthful insolence, diversity, range of cultural references and its “make it new” formula—during his walks along Fondamenta Nuove and Fondamenta degli Incurabili in Venice. They are very nostalgic walks of an experienced man of letters and they allow his critical “I”/“eye” to see through the *nebia* of falsehood in judgments and declarations which remain stagnant, resist any views that might challenge their inertia (see Brodsky’s

darkly anecdotal account of his and Susan Sontag's visit to the house of Olga Rudge, Pound's wife).

It is not possible to estimate the importance of the interest writers, critics, literary historians, academics and all the mutant forms of these have taken in both Faulkner's claim for originality and in Faulkner's indebtedness to others. The awareness of the magnitude of critical commentaries his work has received may prove to be something of a burden in the attempts to approach it with new energy. Yet, their number is growing and Faulkner's reputation as a master of American literature one could support one's own reputation with stands high, though perhaps not as high as it once did. "The eye of William Faulkner is a defining eye," Noel Polk wrote in the "Afterword" to *Eudora Welty on William Faulkner* and by the eye he meant the ways the works of southern writers "since Faulkner" tend to be perceived through the lens of Faulkner's influence, the patterns of evading it and of denying it, the latter providing "the most compelling evidence of how completely inescapable he [Faulkner] and his work are." It is critics rather than writers, Polk observes, who have been "overwhelmed" by Faulkner, who "have felt that Faulkner alone has defined the terms by which we can talk about the South" (75-76). Taylor Hagood's *Following Faulkner: The Critical Response to Yoknapatawpha's Architect* follows Polk's and other critics' concern with the question of Faulkner's legacy by elevating it to the position of a presence defining, because never satisfactorily defined by, the developments of critical thought. In the "Introduction" to the book, Hagood writes: "Often when new modes of criticism arise critics look to test them on Faulkner's writing, which in turn bolsters his critical *caché*. It is partly because scholars so often test their theories on his work that it continues to be so prominent, while at the same time theories gain prominence by engaging Faulkner" (1). Neither "often" nor "partly" detracts from the book's merits as a tribute to the expanding body of Faulkner scholarship, although or because some of its formulations, including the one quoted above, remain disputable.

To introduce the text on various practices of "following" by emphasizing and contextualizing the importance and the relevance of its subject matter, the one being followed, is of course as conventional as it is justifiable, especially when so many predecessors have felt compelled to do the same in their own ways. Equally compelling it is to approach the phenomenon of Faulkner and the phenomenon of its recognition with the stylistic method Faulkner himself is said to have put to masterly use: antithetical complementation. The opening sentence in Hunter Cole's "Forward" to *Eudora Welty on William Faulkner* is: "William Faulkner, a man of small physical stature but large literary worth, cast a long shadow in every direction" (9). (The metaphor, possibly indebted to Faulkner's way of defining the credibility of fictional characters, must have caught Hagood's eye, as he writes that Flannery O'Connor's comments on Faulkner's "overpowering" status "forecast the long shadow he would cast on other writers"; 24.) An intensely private man and a public figure known for his practices of posing and role playing; a man from a backwater place of economic poverty and high level of illiteracy who became the Nobel Prize winning author

of commanding vision, raising the provincial to universal, mythical dimensions; a writer whose imaginary world and the techniques he experimented with to create this world were immersed deeply in the history and culture of the American South but who himself claimed proudly and light-heartedly that when writing about his native environment he was “like a carpenter” who “uses the nearest hammer;” a writer whose work combines and reconciles the abstract and the concrete, the nuanced and the stereotypical, the disruptive and the traditional, the original and the borrowed, the insightful and the excessive—Faulkner provokes critical responses which recognize their roots in the pleasure of juxtaposition. In *Following Faulkner*, Hagood documents the principle and adheres to it in the titles he gives to his book’s main chapters: “Genius in the Hinterland,” “From New Critical Heights to Structural and Archival Groundings,” “The Grip of Theory,” “Global Faulkner.”

The play of opposites, paradoxes and ambiguities, which can help pattern the complexity of his work, both major individual texts and their holistic organization into an expanding design, made Faulkner, in Hagood’s words, “a convenient darling for the dominant movements of the 1960s and 1970s, New Criticism and structuralism” (25). It can indeed be argued that major commentaries on Faulkner dating from that period retain their strong position because, exhaustive and convincing in their own right in their own times, they provide a solid background for the flow of diverse, often contrasting perspectives they initiated. Olga W. Vickory’s *The Novels of William Faulkner* (1959, revised in 1964); Michel Millgate’s *The Achievement of William Faulkner* (1963, revised in 1966), Edmund L. Volpe’s *A Reader’s Guide to William Faulkner: The Novels* (1964) were among such groundbreaking books which helped, possibly continue to help, readers find their way into the complexity of Faulkner’s texts and understand their role within larger contexts of world literature. Joseph Blotner’s two-volume *Faulkner: A Biography*, first published in 1974, occupies a privileged position on the shelves of Faulkner scholars not so much for nostalgic reasons as because it is still used as an invaluable source of information about the author. Hagood’s strategy is to demonstrate that these early texts on Faulkner’s art and life remain helpful and informative also by raising reservations, letting us see question marks following their affirmative statements. Vickory’s decisions about which summaries of Faulkner’s texts to include in and which to leave out of her book might seem biased and no longer valid; Millgate’s assumptions about the grounds for judging Faulkner’s achievement might appear “masculinist and absolutist” (17); Volpe’s claim that Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha did not evolve but was “discovered,” complete with its family ghosts and intent on logic and unity, is debatable or “patently untrue” (19); Blotner’s biography has “a lovingly personal touch” to its factual richness which might also account for the biographer’s tendency to suppress “some unsavory details” in the writer’s family life (22).

Walter J. Slatoff’s *Quest for Failure: A Study of William Faulkner* (1960), which opens a series of presentations of books on Faulkner in the chapter “From New Critical Heights to Structural And Archival Groundings,” is exemplary of the

New Critical approaches to the writer's work. Statoff's concern is with Faulkner's "polar imagination," the dependence of his world upon the tensions resulting from the play of "antithetic terms" (with stasis and mobility, silence and sound receiving the critic's special attention) remains primarily of aesthetic nature. The aesthetic vein highlighting the role of binaries dominates also in Richard P. Adams's *Faulkner: Myth and Motion* (1968), an examination of the significance of the concept of arrested motion in Faulkner's vision, and in Panthea R. Broughton's *William Faulkner: The Abstract and the Actual* (1974), which recognizes the distinguishing feature of that vision in Faulkner's avoidance of the falsehoods of abstraction by identifying it, in apparent contrast to the views held by Hemingway and Faulkner's other contemporaries, with the "elusiveness of truth," the destabilizing rather than insulating truth of the actual human experience. James Gray Watson's *The Snopes Dilemma: Faulkner's Trilogy* (1968), Walter Brylowski's *Faulkner's Olympian Laugh: Myth in the Novels* (1968), Elizabeth M. Kerr's *Yoknapatawpha: Faulkner's "Little Postage Stamp of Native Soil"* (1969), Sally R. Page's *Faulkner's Women: Characterization and Meaning* (1972), and Arthur F. Kinney's *Faulkner's Narrative Poetics: Style and Vision* (1978) are among the other books whose contents Hagood chooses to encapsulate in his brief, one or two-paragraph long, discussions of the important contributions to Faulkner studies in the 1960s and 1970s, important for their ability to expand the range of critical perspectives and often to come into tension with each other. These two decades, Hagood writes, saw the field of Faulkner scholarship already becoming "crowded," the new individual voices finding it difficult to be "heard above the overwhelming scholarly clamor" (47). The chapter ends with the accounts of two books which attempted to accomplish the goal. In *William Faulkner: Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond* (1978), Cleanth Brooks demonstrates (for the first time on such a grand scale and with such great emphasis) how significant for the understanding of Faulkner's art is the reading of his early works, despite their imitative, Romantic leaning, and of his novels set "beyond" Yoknapatawpha (*Pylon*, *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*, and *A Fable*), despite their artistic deficiencies. Gary Lee Stonum's *Faulkner's Career: An Internal Literary History* (1979) (with which Hagood seems to have more patience than with Brooks's book) remains indebted to the ways New Criticism and structuralism were prepared to interpret Faulkner's vision, but it also opens up some original, unexplored theoretical territory in discussing various aspects of the concept of the writer's career, the one of particular relevance to Faulkner's being the relation between "the texts a writer has already written and the writing of new texts," the career "projected" and the career "achieved" (48).

In the third and the most substantial chapter of *Following Faulkner*, the "new" in the development of Faulkner studies is theoretical. As Hagood, in an intentionally provocative and hopefully refreshing way, introduces the subject of that section of his work, Faulkner's critics of the 1980s "needed something new to discuss if they were going to be able to carve up space for themselves" (50). The new in Faulkner criticism of the time embraced the emerging approaches to innovative linguistic and

psychological studies. It both followed and helped articulate the need to address hitherto largely neglected or repressed areas in literary scholarship, including language's, literature's and criticism's own dependence on ideological, social, political forces defined by the notions of race, ethnicity and gender. The theoretical "grip" on Faulkner, at its strongest representational level associated with the names of Barthes, Derrida, Lacan and Kristeva, commanded discursive modes which meant to "decenter" the writer's work on the one hand, but tended to enclose it within a hermetic, often jargon-ridden and mostly "European-based" perspectives on the other. Having acknowledged the above in anticipation of and in contrast to some critical texts on Faulkner which were to appear at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries, Hagood proceeds with his task of providing, in chronological order, synthetic descriptions of the interpretative efforts which seem to have lost little of their power of influence. The chapter's main focus allows him to return briefly to a number of books on Faulkner's work dating from the 1970s but having their lines of argumentation rooted firmly in the theoretical ground. He claims John T. Irwin's *Doubling and Incest / Repetition and Revenge* (1975) to be "a tour-de-force of theory-based criticism" (56), an early attempt to investigate the mechanism of "following," voluntary or involuntary, in the textual patterns. Irwin's approach is psychoanalytical. It reads connections between Quentin Compson's own story as he tells it in *The Sound and the Fury* and as he tells it by telling the story of Thomas Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!* in terms of the novels' correspondences with Freud's work, itself in dialogical relationship of influence with Nietzsche's thought. Though it fails to capture the complexity of the Southern social setting, Myra Jehlen's *Class and Character in Faulkner's South* (1976) is given credit for effectively breaking away with the New Critical tendency to disregard a "sense of history," shaping rather than providing a background to Faulkner's major texts. Donald M. Kartinger's interest in the "protean," the "unstable," the "deferred" (with *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* productively illuminated by it) places his *The Fragile Thread: The Meaning of Form in Faulkner's Novels* (1979) in the vicinity of admittedly the most thorough and insightful discussion of Faulkner to be attempted from Derrida's viewpoint: John Matthews's *The Play of Faulkner's Language* (1982). Matthews's "play" with the two posits the fluid substance of "partnership" between Faulkner's Southern practice of storytelling and Derrida's poststructuralist practice of decentering, for both the text never attaining, nor truly wishing to attain, any satisfactory level of permanence in the meaning beyond its own self-regenerative drive. Such is also the critical angle adopted by the French critic André Bleikasten whose early work on Faulkner dates from the 1970s but whose greatest contribution to the field (which Hagood recognizes by having it open the list of those in "the grip of theory") is *The Ink of Melancholy: Faulkner's Novels from "The Sound and the Fury" to "Light in August,"* published in 1990. The center which Bleikasten finds and celebrates in Faulkner's novels is that of loss, an emptiness never to be filled by expanding layers of textual sedimentation and repeated efforts to construct a self, for a writer a source of creative freedom, for the

text a source of its openness to interpretation.

The deconstruction of the patriarchal structures in the Southern culture became the subject matter of several important books on Faulkner in the 1990s. Hagood quotes a fragment from Minrose C. Gwin's *The Feminine and Faulkner: Reading (Beyond) Sexual Difference* (1990): "To question Faulkner about those gaps, those ruptures in his text, is simply to follow where he leads; for he has taught us to listen as much to what language does not say as to what it does" (84). The gaps, the raptures, the silenced, as well as the exceeding, the overflowing, the flooded speak of the feminine in Faulkner's (and are read as elements of the feminist theoretical discourse) underlying and undermining the masculinist order. Drawing on feminist criticism, most notably Kristeva's, Deborah Clarke's *Robbing the Mother: Women in Faulkner* (1994) proposes that central to a new understanding of the role of Faulkner's women characters is "the transformative power of the mother," Faulkner's ability to disrupt stereotypical, cultural constructs by "dissolving boundaries between self and other, semiotic and symbolic" (qtd. in Hagood 92-93). Thus, Faulkner's somewhat off-hand remark "if a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate" acquires in itself a strongly symbolic status, but one that expresses his desire (repressed/ criminal?) to take over the "literal creative power" of the mother as a physical body rather than an object of idealization. The feminist approach encounters the tenets of Lacan's theory in Doreen Fowler's *Faulkner: The Return of the Repressed* (1997). Acknowledging her indebtedness to Irwin's strategy, Fowler attempts another intertextual reading: in hers, Lacan's key concepts (the mirror stage, the imaginary, the symbolic, the Name-of-the-Father) become exemplified and explained by giving insights into and finding their relevance to Faulkner's life and Faulkner's writings. In Hagood's final commentary, while some will see in Fowler's method acts of "tortur[ing] a text to the point it will admit to anything," he is ready to recognize the importance of the effort it makes to reveal what he calls the text's "deep psychology" (95).

Eric Sundquist's *Faulkner: The House Divided* from 1983 was one of the first critical texts to deal predominantly with the issue of race in Faulkner's writings. For the purpose of discussing Faulkner's preoccupation with the effect of slavery, the book favors *Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses* over Faulkner's earlier works, their achievement measured by the gravity of the writer's confrontation with the experience of the South. The year 1983 also saw the publication of Thadious M. Davis's *Faulkner's "Negro": Art and the Southern Context*, the significance of the word "Negro" organizing the book's critical argument in the function of the basic signifier, a cultural, white man's concept antedating the use of the word "black," belonging properly to the historical and social context at the time Faulkner wrote his fictions and of the time Faulkner wrote about. In Davis's commentary, Hagood notices, "the Negro" "represents both division in society and paradoxically also wholeness—a connection and a disconnect between the two races" (63).

The deconstructive and decentering tendencies in following Faulkner criticism over the two decades in "the grip of theory" relate also to the revision of

attitudes towards the very concept of the Faulkner canon. Hans H. Skei, James B. Carothers and James Ferguson brought to attention Faulkner’s short stories, their autonomy and their interconnectedness in relation to each other and to Faulkner’s novels (sometimes revised and incorporated into them), generally, rightly or wrongly, believed to be of superior artistic value. A strong contribution to the broadening scope of Faulkner criticism was made by Judith L. Sensibar’s *The Origins of Faulkner’s Art* (1984). The originality of Sensibar’s study consists in demonstrating how enlightening for following his literary career is an in-depth examination of Faulkner’s early poetry (*The Lilacs, Visions of Spring*) and of the play he himself illustrated (*The Marionettes*), the two sharing the Pierrot figure which, although discarded together with the writer’s poetic and dramatic experiments, continues to wear various masks and give multiple voices to Faulkner’s characters in his mature fictions. In a fragment from the book quoted in *Following Faulkner*, it is interesting to notice again how its critical argument benefits from the perception of antithetical drives informing Faulkner’s aesthetic vision (a possible claim for its greatness as much an indicator of its “rambling” quality): one to “distill” and the other to “tell a tale.”

The chapter “Global Faulkner” opens with a proposition that much of what has been written on Faulkner at the beginning of the twenty-first century remains under the sign of “Faulkner and \_\_\_\_\_,” the new being the name or the concept following \_\_\_\_\_. It is, like so much else in the domain of the critical, academic commentary, a political sign, and in the sense of the “global contextualization of Faulkner,” it answers the need to turn away from traditional, often “nationalistic” ways of seeing in Faulkner a representative American Southern writer, including those which privilege the European prism. The new terms which appear in Hagood’s book to account for the change in the development of Faulkner studies are New Southernists and the Global South, the first referring to commentators seeking more nuanced and diversified approaches, the second to the perspective they endorse. The terms place Faulkner in a somewhat defensive position. As Hagood eloquently puts it: “in a time when interest in white male writers paled before that in non-English-descended, nonwhite, nonmale writers of a variety of ethnicities and races, tweedy, silver-haired Faulkner looked dull at best and representative of smug empowerment itself, an apotheosis of oppressive, conservative, dominant culture” (102). Interestingly, one of the early voices which came to the rescue is that of the black Martinique writer, Édouard Glissant, whose *Faulkner, Mississippi* (originally published in French in 1996, translated into English in 1999) discovers connections between the experience of the United States South and the experience of the Caribbean. In the presentations of books which in the chapter begins with Glissant’s, Faulkner may actually seem to take a second place in relation to the field his name is associated with and his work helps to define in a yet unexplored, or from today’s viewpoint not properly explored context. The elusiveness of Faulkner’s meaning becomes its inclusiveness.

According to Richard Godden’s *Fictions of Labor: William Faulkner and the South’s Long Revolution* (1997), Faulkner’s work is “best understood” through

an analysis of a historically and racially determined “labor trauma,” a change in the patterns of interdependency between the white landowner and the black slave and sharecropper, a change defined by Godden as “a primal scene of recognition during which white passes into black and black passes into white along perpetual tracks necessitated by a singular and pervasively coercive system of production” (qtd. in Hagood 104). In *Faulkner and the Discourses of Culture* (2005), Hagood writes, Charles Hannon “contextualizes Faulkner’s polyvocal fictional texts with the extratextual discourses of their moment” (in the praised “uncanonical” discussion of *The Unvanquished* opposing that of the Agrarians with W. E. B. Du Bois’s) as well as with the current discourses on race, class and labor applying to Faulkner’s texts “a cultural materialist lens” (112-113). Hosam Aboul-Ela’s *Other South: Faulkner, Coloniality and the Mariátegui Tradition* (2007) equates the Global South approach to Faulkner with the postcolonial reading of the economic factor as understood by the Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui and his followers. Recent revisits to and revisions of Faulkner’s biography include Judith L. Sensibar’s *Faulkner and Love: The Women Who Shaped His Art* (2009) and Philip Weinstein’s *Becoming Faulkner: The Art and Life of William Faulkner* (2010). Sensibar re-writes the stories of Faulkner’s mother, Maud Butler Faulkner, his wife, Estelle and the African American woman, Caroline Barr, known as “Mammy.” The stories may not have been re-written had it not been for the presence of the name of the writer in the title’s initial position, yet the critic’s focus is invariably, and especially with reference to what has been said or not said about Estelle, on the women’s lives. Weinstein’s speculation on “becoming” as “the uncertainty of the present moment” invites the potential reader to join him on an imaginative and factual journey into Faulkner’s life in which Weinstein’s own voice takes the risk of becoming one with his subject’s own experience (“All he [Faulkner] knew for sure was that he could not move, though he could not remember why. Where was he anyway?” (qtd. in Hagood 124)). In a sense, the reader’s interest in Faulkner’s life (is it not taken for granted?) must “become” her interest in the way Weinstein is telling it. Published in 2017, Hagood’s account of studies devoted to Faulkner’s biography could not include André Bleikasten’s *William Faulkner: A Life Through Novels*, translated into English in the same year (in France published in 2007). Among other books “Global Faulkner” devotes more space to are: James Watson’s *William Faulkner: Self-Presentation and Performance* (2000), Karl Zender’s *Faulkner and the Politics of Reading* (2002), Ted Atkinson’s *Faulkner and the Great Depression: Aesthetics, Ideology and Cultural Politics* (2006), Hagood’s own *Faulkner’s Imperialism: Space, Place, and the Materiality of Myth* (2008), and Cadace Waid’s *The Signifying Eye: Seeing Faulkner’s Art* (2013). The last one deserves special attention for its insightful, innovative perceptions of the meaning of Faulkner’s drawings (the clock and a male figure by the pond in a 1910 drawing for his mother; Pierrot, Marietta and the shape of the black space between them in a drawing for *The Marionettes*), anticipating the writer’s later fictional patterns.

In the introduction to his book, Hagood insists that it be read as a “*narrative*,”



chronologically unfolding for organizational and informative clarity, past-oriented (the annual *American Literary Scholarship* will keep us updated) and selective by necessity. The narrative demonstrates that, branching out and gaining in depth, the field of Faulkner criticism is becoming increasingly more dense. It is that density, reflected by the proliferation of influential names and influential titles in the main parts of the book, that makes the narrative tension fall in its last chapter titled, some might say too ambitiously, “Forecast: Future Trends in Faulkner’s Scholarship.” This does not surprise, as what these trends might be is simply impossible to know now. The “forecast” (not an “epilogue”) is actually the assumption, well-grounded in the past and returning to the primary idea behind Hagood’s whole project, that Faulkner scholarship will not cease to productively intersect with other disciplines in responding to intellectual challenges of our time. In a sequence of paragraphs the “forecast” lists and briefly explains exemplary areas of current interest: disability studies, studies of whiteness, so called “nonhuman” and “thing” studies, queer studies, film and popular culture studies (the last, understandably, seeking some energizing support from the “undead” in Faulkner). Finally, Hagood acknowledges the role of digital platforms in giving unprecedented access to Faulkner’s texts and texts on Faulkner, allowing the internet users to catalogue and order as well as to see unexpected patterns and hidden connections.

Hagood wrote an engaging, at times compelling narrative. Packed with information, it is relatively fast-paced. His is a “telescoping” rather than “defining” eye. It particularizes in its attention to telling details in individual perspectives and it generalizes in its perception of the benefits of periodization, chronology, ideological and theoretical background. Its undoubted merit is the ability to provide brilliantly concise, scholarly rigorous but also clear, highly approachable framework to the parts and to the whole. Knowing that the processes through which components build up a picture often communicate a sense of conflict and contradiction, his authorial eye tries to offer balanced views and avoid strongly polemical approach without resigning entirely from the pleasure of expressing personal appreciation or the lack of it. In any case, to be chosen for the commentary (and some texts are not), the critical material must seem important for the author. It is because *Following Faulkner* succeeds in achieving what it aims at that it occasionally tends to be repetitive. The responsibility of doing justice to every new text under analysis is naturally helped by such words as “but,” “although,” and their variants to control the argumentative construct. Readers may find a little puzzling the frequent use, sometimes more than twice on a page, of the word “moment,” as in: “Faulkner’s moment,” “the historical moment of Thomas Sutpen,” “Faulknerian scholarly climate of the moment,” “Brook’s moment,” “the shift of its [the book’s] moment,” “Faulkner plugged into a forward-moving modern moment,” “conservative societal ideals of its moment,” “our moment” etc. There are simply too many “moments” here, however deliberately the word is used to denote a specific social, political and cultural context and even though it is from the accumulation of such key moments of critical focus that Hogood’s book gathers

its momentum.

Hagood's *Following Faulkner* belongs to the series *Studies in American Literature and Culture: Literary Criticism in Perspective*, published by Camden House. As in the case of Laurence W. Mazzeno's *The Critics and Hemingway, 1924-2014: Shaping an American Literary Icon* (reviewed in these pages in vol. 10, 2016), the question one may want to ask oneself concerns the book's "target audience." A note from the Editor explains that studies appearing in the series are intended: "to address a readership consisting of scholars, students of literature at the graduate and undergraduate level, and a general reader." This particular contribution to the series may have a better chance with the middle group than with the other two. If a scholar shows his or her ignorance about the proper context in which to put an argument or a quotation, Hagood writes in the introduction, the scholar's "credibility could be compromised" (1) (they will see their colleagues' eyebrows raised? be less likely to be invited to conferences and get their articles published? have their academic status threatened?). Surely, not many of them would be willing to admit their need to give *Following Faulkner* a close reading for such reasons. It is the students who, by definition, as it were, would/should welcome the opportunity of having their "awareness of what to say and how to say it" significantly deepened by what the book has to say. *Following Faulkner* will be their helpful, although at times demanding, guide to Faulkner studies. The first pages of each chapter provide rather student-friendly introductions to critical theory, should the students still find that territory unfamiliar and threatening. As for "a general reader," who is she that one immediately gets to like her? The feeling one sometimes has when reading *Following Faulkner* is that for all its scholarly seriousness and for all the sublimated level of satisfaction its discourse may give, somehow it misses "a general reader." There are signs of it in fragments of Hagood's text where it loosens its logical and balanced grip and lets in some fresh air. When, for example, he writes about Sally Wolff's discovery of Francis Terry Leak's diary and the old plantation ledgers which Faulkner read before writing *Go Down, Moses* (*Ledgers of History: William Faulkner, an Almost Forgotten Friendship, and an Antebellum Diary*, 2010), Hagood takes notice of the "unparalleled excitement" of "follow[ing] an author so closely" and Wolff's "wonderful job of conveying that thrill" (126). He seems enthusiastic about Weinstein's attempts to "experience" Faulkner, come into his mind, live "within Faulkner's life," and about Glissant's narrative which "does not participate deeply in the academic conversation" but has "an impressionistic way" of "relating experience" (103). Or, he includes a lengthy quote from the opening pages of *Fiction's Inexhaustible Voice: Speech and Writing in Faulkner* (1989), where Stephen M. Ross recalls his "epiphany:" sitting on a campus bench and thinking about Quentin Compson, he lets his thoughts be filled with the students' many voices around him and then becomes ready to embrace what is "new to [him]," "a greater comprehension of the effect Faulkner had on [him]." In Hagood's commentary: "Ross's anecdote, I think, shows how a deep listening to one's own self, which may take some time, can eventually bring forth the answer,

and this quickens scholarship beyond its theoretical findings, giving it life. A scholar does well to borrow Faulkner’s great energy, to follow him as Ross does here” (79). In such “moments,” writing about the critic but also writing about himself, Hogood, well-versed in reader-response theory, talks to “a general reader,” that is a new reader, and not so much of Faulkner criticism as of Faulkner himself. He speaks of a longing for some “primary,” deeply personal, both emotional and intellectual experience of reading Faulkner, which is not necessarily the first or the unaided reading of Faulkner. In fact, such an experience can no longer be “innocent” (see Karl Zender’s *Faulkner and the Politics of Reading*, 2002), but it is a kind of response which regains the power of immediacy.

I finish by looking again at the cover of Hogood’s book with the figure of William Faulkner against the brick wall in the background. I believe I can read the photograph’s symbolic relevance. I like the sound of and the idea behind *Following Faulkner*. I am not sure about the subtitle: *The Critical Response to Yoknapatawpha’s Architect*. “Yoknapatawpha” would favor the “canonized” version of the critical response, leaving out what is “beyond” much against what I think is Hogood’s preferred way of thinking in his book; the word “architect” suggests someone in control of the structure he is deliberately, consciously designing, possibly only one of the ways of looking at Faulkner, while Hogood’s interest in the polyphonous author and his sensitivity to the flow of words and the flow of ideas always calls for others.

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