THE AMERICAN NOVEL

剑桥美国小说新论·20

（英文影印版）

New Essays on

Light in August

《八月之光》新论

Michael Millgate 编

北京大学出版社
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导 读

北京大学英语系教授　陶洁

近年来，美国文学在我国很受欢迎。大专院校英语系纷纷开设美国文学选读和专题课，学生从中学到的大部分内容是美国小说。不仅如此，在本科毕业论文、硕士论文或博士论文方面，学生所选题材也大多为关于某部美国小说或某个美国小说家。然而，我们的学生往往热衷理论而对作品或作家缺乏深入细致的了解和分析。他们往往先大谈理论规则，然后罗列一些例证，不能很好地把理论和文本融会贯通，恰如其分地结合在一起。在这种情况下，我们需要一些好的参考资料来帮助学生更好地认识和理解他们在阅读或研究的作品和作家。《剑桥美国小说新论》正是这样一套优秀的参考书。

这套丛书的负责人是曾经主编过《哥伦比亚美国文学史》的艾默里·埃利奥特教授，并且由英国剑桥大学出版社在上世纪80年代中期开始陆续出书，至今仍在发行并出版新书，目前已有五十多种，不仅出平装本还有精装本。一套书发行二十多年还有生命力，估计还会继续发行，主要因为它确实从学生的需要出发，深受他们和教师的喜爱。

《剑桥美国小说新论》的编排方式比较统一。根据主编制定的原则，每本书针对一部美国文学历史上有名望的大作家的一本经典小说，论述者都是研究这位作家的知名学者。开篇是一位权威专家的论述，主要论及作品的创作过程、出版历史、当年的评价以及小说发表以来不同时期的主要评论和阅读倾向。随后是四到五篇论述，从不同角度用不同的批评方法对作品进行分析和阐

释。这些文章并非信手拈来，而是专门为这套丛书撰写的，运用的理论都比较新，其中不乏颇有新意的真知灼见。书的最后是为学生进一步学习和研究而提供的参考书目。由此可见，编书的学者们为了帮助学生确实煞费苦心，努力做到尽善尽美。

这五十多种书有早期美国文学家库珀的《最后的莫希干人》，也有当代试验小说大师品钦的《拍卖第49号》和厄普代克那曾被《时代》杂志评为1923年以来100部最佳小说之一的《兔子，跑吧！》；有我们比较熟悉的麦尔维尔的《白鲸》，也有我们还不太了解的他的《漂亮水手》；有中国学生很喜欢的海明威的长篇小说《永别了，武器》，令人想不到的是还有一本论述他所有的短篇小说的集子。有些大作家如亨利·詹姆斯、威廉·福克纳等都有两三本作品入选，但它们都分别有专门的集子。丛书当然涉及已有定论的大作家，包括黑人和白人作家（可惜还没有华裔作家的作品），但也包括20世纪70年代妇女运动中发掘出来的如凯特·肖邦的《觉醒》和佐拉·尼尔·赫斯顿的《他们眼望上苍》，甚至还有我国读者很熟悉的斯托夫人的《汤姆叔叔的小屋》。当年这部小说曾经风靡美国，在全世界都有一定的影响，后来被贬为“政治宣传”作品，从此在美国文学史上销声匿迹。70年代后随着要求扩大文学经典中女性和少数族裔作家的呼声日益高涨，人们才开始重新评价这部作品，分析它对日后妇女作家的影响、对黑人形象的塑造，甚至它在美国文学的哥特式传统中的地位等等。

这样的例子还有很多，例如威廉·迪恩·豪威尔斯和他的《赛拉斯·拉帕姆的发迹》。以前人们只肯定他在发展现实主义文学和理论方面的贡献，对他的作品除了《赛拉斯·拉帕姆的发迹》评价都不太高。但在这本新论文集子里编者对已有定论进行挑战，强调豪威尔斯的小说、他的现实主义跟当时的社会经济文化现状有很大的关系。他的小说既有其文学形式，又是一种社会力量。另外一位19世纪新英格兰作家萨拉·奥尼·裘威特过去一向被看成是乡土作家，现在学者们用女性主义观点强调她的《尖枞树之乡》对美国文学的贡献，分析当年的种族、民族主义和文学市场

对她写作的影响。用封底宣传语言来说，这本集子对美国文学研究、女性主义批评理论和美国研究等方面都会引起很大的兴趣。

还有一本书似乎在我们国家很少有人提起过——亨利·罗思的《就说是睡着了》。此书在20世纪30年代曾经风靡一时，此后长期销声匿迹，60年代又再度受到推崇。现在这部小说则是上面提到的《时代》杂志100部优秀小说中的一部，被认为是上个世纪头50年里最为出色的美国犹太小说、最优秀的现代主义小说之一。评论家认为集子里的文章采用心理分析、社会历史主义等批评方法探讨了有关移民、族裔和文化归属等多方面的问题。

这套集子里还出现了令人信服的新论点。很长时间内海明威一直被认为是讨厌女人的大男子主义者。但在关于他的短篇小说的论述里，作者通过分析《在密执安北部》，令人信服地证明海明威其实对妇女充满同情。不仅如此，这一论断还瓦解了海明威在《太阳照样升起》中充分暴露他的厌女症的定论。

然而，作者们并不侈谈理论或玩弄理论名词，所有的论断都是既以一定的理论为基础，又对文本进行深入的分析；既把理论阐述得深入浅出，又把作品分析得丝丝入扣，让人不由得不信服。他们能够做到这一点完全是因为他们了解学生的水平和需要。

我认为《剑桥美国小说新论》是一套很好的参考书。北京大学出版社购买版权，出版这套书是个有益于外国文学研究教学的决定。

Series Editor's Preface

In literary criticism the last twenty-five years have been particularly fruitful. Since the rise of the New Criticism in the 1950s, which focused attention of critics and readers upon the text itself – apart from history, biography, and society – there has emerged a wide variety of critical methods which have brought to literary works a rich diversity of perspectives: social, historical, political, psychological, economic, ideological, and philosophical. While attention to the text itself, as taught by the New Critics, remains at the core of contemporary interpretation, the widely shared assumption that works of art generate many different kinds of interpretation has opened up possibilities for new readings and new meanings.

Before this critical revolution, many American novels had come to be taken for granted by earlier generations of readers as having an established set of recognized interpretations. There was a sense among many students that the canon was established and that the larger thematic and interpretative issues had been decided. The task of the new reader was to examine the ways in which elements such as structure, style, and imagery contributed to each novel's acknowledged purpose. But recent criticism has brought these old assumptions into question and has thereby generated a wide variety of original, and often quite surprising, interpretations of the classics, as well as of rediscovered novels such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, which has only recently entered the canon of works that scholars and critics study and that teachers assign their students.

The aim of The American Novel Series is to provide students of American literature and culture with introductory critical guides to

American novels now widely read and studied. Each volume is devoted to a single novel and begins with an introduction by the volume editor, a distinguished authority on the text. The introduction presents details of the novel's composition, publication history, and contemporary reception, as well as a survey of the major critical trends and readings from first publication to the present. This overview is followed by four or five original essays, specifically commissioned from senior scholars of established reputation and from outstanding younger critics. Each essay presents a distinct point of view, and together they constitute a forum of interpretative methods and of the best contemporary ideas on each text. It is our hope that these volumes will convey the vitality of current critical work in American literature, generate new insights and excitement for students of the American novel, and inspire new respect for and new perspectives upon these major literary texts.

Emory Elliott
Princeton University

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1

Introduction

MICHAEL MILLGATE

WHEN his seventh novel, *Light in August*, was published in October 1932, William Faulkner was just thirty-five years old and at the peak of his creative powers. This is not to say that his career, so shapely in its outlines, was ever marked by radical shifts in the levels of his achievement: his first novel and his last are both distinguished works, quite different from one another yet alike in displaying the stamp of their author's genius. But there is general agreement among Faulkner's readers and critics that the years between 1928 and 1936 – years that saw the composition and publication of *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Sanctuary*, *Light in August*, *Pylon*, and *Absalom, Absalom!*, as well as of numerous short stories – constituted a period of extraordinarily sustained creative activity, unmatched either in Faulkner's own career or in that of any other American writer of the twentieth century.

I

The exceptional intensity with which Faulkner worked at this time perhaps had something to do with the relative slowness with which he found his way into print – or, at least into public notice. At a time when his near contemporaries F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and John Dos Passos were already established and, indeed, famous writers – Fitzgerald's great success with *This Side of Paradise* came in 1920, when he was only twenty-three years old – Faulkner remained entirely unknown and almost entirely unpublished, hanging around the campus of the University of Mis-

sissippi, the French Quarter of New Orleans, or, more briefly, the fringes of the American expatriate world in Paris.

He had been born – "male and single at early age," as he once humorously declared[1] – in New Albany, in northern Mississippi, on September 25, 1897, but by the time he was five he had moved with his family to Oxford, the county town of Lafayette County, Mississippi, and the place he was later to use as the principal model for his fictional Jefferson, the focal point of Yoknapatawpha County. In Oxford he experienced the characteristic open-air upbringing of a Southern white youth of middle-class parents, and although he never finished high school he read omnivorously in his teens – the extent and depth of Faulkner's reading should never be underestimated – and began to write and draw. In 1918 he joined the British Royal Air Force and spent several months in Canada training to be a pilot, but the armistice of November 1918 came too soon for him even to get into the air, let alone to Europe. Back in Oxford he published a few poems, essays, and illustrations in campus newspapers and acted out a self-conscious, self-dramatizing role as a local poet; in 1924, encouraged and supported by his friend Phil Stone, an Oxford lawyer, he published with a "vanity" press a verse sequence in rhymed octosyllabic couplets entitled *The Marble Faun* – of which the few surviving copies have become extremely valuable collector's items. In the autumn of 1924, however, he met the novelist Sherwood Anderson, then at the height of his popularity, and his own first sustained attempts to write fiction seem to have belonged to the period of the six-month visit to New Orleans that began in January 1925 and ended with his departure in early July for a five-month tour of Europe.

Faulkner's first novel, *Soldiers' Pay*, written while he was in New Orleans and published in 1926, was an impressive achievement, ambitious as a piece of writing and strikingly effective in its treatment of the isolation and incomprehension encountered by soldiers returning from the World War I to a civilian world of which they seem no longer a part. A second novel, *Mosquitoes* (1927), was distinctly less successful, and in the autumn of 1927, after he had returned to Oxford and settled down to make a serious literary career for himself, Faulkner was badly shaken by his failure to find

a publisher for the long and leisurely novel, drawing extensively on local observation and on his own family history, that he had confidently counted upon to make money, establish his reputation, and so provide a secure basis for his future career. *Flags in the Dust*, as it was originally called, did eventually appear in severely truncated form as *Sartoris* in January 1929,[2] establishing for the first time that world of Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County that was to provide Faulkner with the setting for so many subsequent novels and stories. But in the meantime, according to his own account, Faulkner had written his guts into a new book, *The Sound and the Fury*, believing that he was fated to be an unpublished author and need therefore make no concessions to the conventionality and cautious commercialism of the literary marketplace. In a moving, and now famous, passage, written a few years later and never published in his own lifetime, Faulkner recalled:

> One day I seemed to shut a door between me and all publishers' addresses and book lists. I said to myself, Now I can write. Now I can make myself a vase like that which the old Roman kept at his bedside and wore the rim slowly away with kissing it. So I, who had never had a sister and was fated to lose my daughter in infancy, set out to make myself a beautiful and tragic little girl.[3]

The Sound and the Fury did find a publisher, however, despite the difficulties it posed and continues to pose for its readers, and from the moment of its appearance in October 1929 Faulkner never looked backward but moved always confidently forward to the exploration of new areas of experience, the development of new themes, and, above all, the confrontation of new technical challenges. Although his most strikingly obvious and distinctively "modern" experimentation appeared in *The Sound and the Fury* itself and, to a slightly lesser extent, in *As I Lay Dying*, the next of the novels to be published (in October 1930), Faulkner never repeated himself from a technical point of view, and in the long list, the impressively wide shelf, of his nineteen novels there are no two books that demonstrate precisely the same formal characteristics. Even the component volumes of the *Snopes* trilogy are quite different from one another in this respect, and the reader's entire relationship to the text of *The Reivers* (1962), Faulkner's

final novel, is profoundly affected by its being placed within the framework implied by the two opening words: "GRANDFATHER SAID."[4]

Intervening between *As I Lay Dying* and *Light in August* in the sequence of Faulkner's publications was the controversial *Sanctuary*, brought out on February 9, 1931, but actually written and submitted to the publisher ahead of *As I Lay Dying*. Given the violence of the actions, including rape and murder, around which the narrative of *Sanctuary* is organized, it was perhaps hardly surprising that the reception of the novel, although predominantly favorable, should have been marked by expressions of revulsion and by the categorization of Faulkner, in an influential and by no means unappreciative review by Henry Seidel Canby, as a member of "the cruel school" of American fiction, a "prime example of American sadism."[5] Many aspects of the history of the composition of *Sanctuary* remain obscure, as do the reasons for the delay in its publication, but it is at least clear from Noel Polk's edition of *"Sanctuary": The Original Text* (1981) that the extensive revisions Faulkner made to the novel prior to publication were directed not toward diminishing its violence (which was, in fact, noticeably intensified) but rather toward simplifying its structure, cutting out the proliferating flashbacks of the earlier version and ordering the narrative into a more or less chronological sequence. In the process of making these changes, Faulkner abandoned his original opening, in which Horace Benbow, the central character, broods retrospectively upon events that have already occurred, in favor of the brilliantly conceived scene, formerly located in the second chapter, in which Benbow and the gangster, Popeye, stare across a spring at each other in absolute stillness for a period of two hours. It was a revision that not only provided a profoundly violent novel with a richly suggestive opening image of stasis and suspension but also worked with the existing (and essentially retained) ending of the book to constitute an overall ironic framework of such images.

Clearly, Faulkner's experience of restructuring *Sanctuary* was to have considerable implications for his strenuous endeavors to find an appropriate form for his next novel. *Light in August* was to look back to *Sanctuary* in its presentation of a number of parallel but

only loosely connected lives, in its readiness to present violence with experiential directness and to set off episodes of violence against episodes of comedy, and in its adoption of some of the features of the contemporary American detective story – or at least, to adapt a phrase of André Malraux's, of the detective story as intruded upon by Greek tragedy. It might even be speculated that the long case history of Joe Christmas that occupies the center of *Light in August* was in some sense derived from the brief glimpse of Popeye's past life that Faulkner added to *Sanctuary* at the time of his final revision. Or that those suspended actions with which the published *Sanctuary* opens and closes had a significant bearing upon the use of Lena Grove at both the beginning and end of *Light in August*.

Whether or not the reviews of *Sanctuary* had any impact upon Faulkner's conception and execution of his next novel – whether, for example, they made any contribution to his apparent decision, at a fairly late stage, to present Joe Christmas in an altogether more sympathetic light – it is impossible to tell. What is clear, however, is that *Light in August*, like each of Faulkner's major works, needs to be seen both in its own terms, as a wholly autonomous work of art, and in terms of the moment in time and in Faulkner's career at which it was written. It has been suggested[6] that Faulkner in the early 1930s was working to a double agenda, seeking primarily to explore the fullest possible range of stylistic and structural techniques, to push excitedly toward the extreme limits of the novel form, and secondarily to give a denser substance and more complex integration to his fictional world of Yoknapatawpha. If this is true, then the case of *Light in August* takes on a peculiar interest. Although perceived as more conventional in technique than its immediate Faulknerian predecessors and successors, there can be no doubt that it makes heavy demands upon the reader in terms both of its structure and of its moral complexity. Widely regarded as a fable of the modern predicament, it is at the same time intensely of its regional place, profoundly concerned to develop further the sense of Jefferson's specificity and tangibility, to project it as an inescapably imaginable social fact. What is above all clear (as will be argued in my own essay later in this volume) is that Faulkner, always possessed of an imperious sense of his own re-

sponsibilities and capacities as an artist, embarked upon the composition of *Light in August* with an altogether exceptional determination to make it an unmistakably major work.

2

William Faulkner finished writing *Light in August* shortly after he first attained the status of a literary celebrity. He had received some good reviews from the very beginning of his career, *The Sound and the Fury* won him much respect in American literary circles, and in June 1930 the well-known English novelist Arnold Bennett hailed him as "the coming man," possessed of "inexhaustible invention, powerful imagination, a wondrous gift of characterization, a finished skill in dialogue," and capable of writing "like an angel."[7] But it was during a visit to New York in the autumn of 1931 that Faulkner seems first to have realized how greatly his fame had been enhanced by the mingled praise and outrage that had greeted the publication of *Sanctuary* the previous February. "I have created quite a sensation," he wrote home to his wife in Oxford, Mississippi, on November 13, 1931, adding that he had "learned with astonishment that I am now the most important figure in American letters. That is, I have the best future. . . . But I dont think it has gone to my head. Anyway, I am writing. Working on the novel, and on a short story which I think Cosmopolitan will pay me $1500.00 for."[8] Whatever short story this may have been, *Cosmopolitan* did not in fact buy it; but the novel was *Light in August*, and it was published ten months later, on October 6, 1932.

Although Faulkner's newly awakened sense of his literary reputation almost certainly contributed to the ambitiousness of the final scope and structure of *Light in August*, work on the novel had in fact begun some time before. The first page of the surviving manuscript (at the University of Virginia) is dated "Oxford, Mississippi/17 August, 1931," but it seems likely that a good deal of writing and a certain amount of reorganization had already taken place prior to that date. When talking about *Light in August* in later years, Faulkner said that its starting point in his imagination had been "Lena Grove, the idea of the young girl with nothing, pregnant, determined to find her sweetheart."[9] Other evidence sug-

gests, however, that Faulkner may originally have conceived of the novel as beginning with the Reverend Gail Hightower sitting in his study, somewhat as he does at the beginning of chapter 3 of the novel as published: a surviving fragment of an early draft in Faulkner's hand at the University of Texas opens in this manner, and so, apparently, did the Virginia typescript at one stage in its evolution.[10] Faulkner's insistence on the primacy of the Lena Grove material – he said on another occasion that he had begun the book "knowing no more about it than a young woman, pregnant, walking along a strange country road"[11] – is further called into question by the fact that the Texas fragment, opening with Hightower, already carries the title "Light in August," even though Faulkner seems subsequently to have considered using the title "Dark House" that appears, struck through, on the first page of the Virginia manuscript.[12]

It seems entirely possible, however, that the novel in fact took shape from the coalescence of two (or more) narrative strands that were in the first place quite independently conceived. There are certainly elements in the opening chapter, including the introduction of Varner's store and of characters named Armstid and Winterbottom, that link the novel with the world of the Snopeses and their "poor white" sharecropping neighbors, a world that was to be fully explored only in the successive volumes of the *Snopes* trilogy – *The Hamlet* (1940), *The Town* (1957), and *The Mansion* (1959) – but that had already been established in *Sartoris* and in some of the many short stories Faulkner was writing and publishing in the early 1930s. And if the past-haunted figure of Hightower seems to have something in common with that of Dr. Gavin Blount in the unpublished short stories "The Big Shot," "Dull Tale," and "Rose of Lebanon,"[13] it is no less tempting to associate Joe Christmas with "Dry September," the short story about a lynching that Faulkner had published at the beginning of 1931.

Curiously enough, that abandoned title, "Dark House," later reappears as the title for an early draft of *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), but here the link appears to consist of the part played in each novel (as in so many of Faulkner's works) by a decayed mansion, relic of a more prosperous past, that tends to be shunned by members of the local community as a house of ill omen. Given, however, the