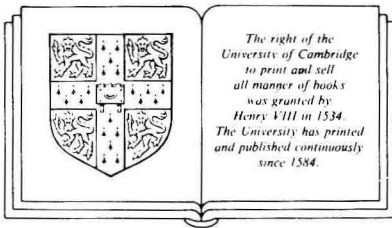


William Faulkner:
The Art of Stylization in
his Early Graphic and
Literary Work

LOTHAR HÖNNIGHAUSEN

University of Bonn



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For my American Friends

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Preface

THIS BOOK takes Faulkner's artwork as a starting-point to approach his early poetry and prose, and derives its focal point from Faulkner's fascination with "the art of stylization." His Arts and Crafts affinities, his drawings in the Beardsley style, and his cartoons for the student yearbook *Ole Miss* have a certain interest in themselves; but the reason why they are studied here in detail (for the first time) is that they help us to achieve a more balanced appraisal of how his imitative early poetry and prose prepares the ground for the style of his great novels. When we relate the binding and lettering of the *Lilacs* volume in the Brodsky Collection to the text of the poems, or examine how in *The Marionettes* the meaning of the words and the form of their presentation work together to achieve the total aesthetic effect, we may come to see the poetic arrangement of the narrative in *Absalom, Absalom!* or the "wordy mannerism" of the Ike Snopes episode in *The Hamlet* in a different light. It is not then from the traditional perspective of source and influence studies that I shall look closely at Faulkner's "debts" to Swinburne and Wilde, to Verlaine, Aiken and Eliot. Rather, I propose to study Faulkner's assimilation of the highly stylized poetry and prose that went before him to observe how his own stylizing power formed itself. The assessment of this process of formation may lead us to a more intimate acquaintance with that element of Faulkner's imagination which added a Symbolist dimension to the realism of his novels.

In writing the book, I became aware how strongly influenced I was by a European academic tradition. This seemed natural, however, and indeed more appropriate than imitating what the native American Faulkner scholar can do better. Throughout the work I have enjoyed the friendship and unstinted support of American friends to whom I dedicate the book. I am particularly grateful to Thomas L. McHaney whose expert help and kind interest were invaluable from the conception of the book to its final draft. James B. Meriwether gave encouragement and expert advice in extensive discussion in Bonn and Columbia SC. I am greatly indebted to Noel Polk not only for his introduction to and edition of *The Marionettes*, which opened up the field, but also for his valuable suggestions and kind interest in my book. Louis Daniel Brodsky generously shared information with me and provided photographic material from his collection. Joseph Blotner, André Bleikasten, Ursula Brumm, Hans Bungert, Harold Kolb, Ilse Lind,

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My sincere thanks go to Mrs Jill Faulkner Summers for graciously granting permission to use copyright material, and to Mr Edward Berkeley, Ms Joan St C. Crane, and the staff of the University of Virginia Library for giving expert assistance and for making my work there so pleasant. Mr Thomas M. Verich of the John Davis Williams Library, the University of Mississippi, was most helpful in allowing me to use material from *Ole Miss* and *The Scream*. I should like to express my thanks to Mr John Muirhead and the library of the John F. Kennedy Institute for American Studies (Free University, Berlin) for their efficient help. Thanks are due to Dr Judith L. Sensibar, who sent me a copy of her dissertation before the publication of her book, *The Origins of Faulkner's Art*, to which specific reference is made in the appropriate sections of this book. I am grateful to Robert W. Hamblin for providing photographic material from the Brodsky Collection, and I should like to thank the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and Dr Briegel for a travel grant enabling me to work in American Faulkner Collections.

Throughout the various stages of the manuscript, Chr. Brost, E. Denton, R. Glasgow, S. Gülicher, B. Honrath, Chr. Irmscher, T. Langston, S. Taubeneck, and Jo van Vliet acted as dedicated research assistants. C. Daufenbach did valuable work on the index. Great thanks are due to Albert Gelpi, the editor of the series, for his close and very helpful reading of the typescript. I should also like to express my deep gratitude to Andrew Brown and copy editor Penny Wheeler of Cambridge University Press who gave excellent editorial guidance. My most profound thanks go to my wife Gisela for her expert advice, her good humor, and her suggestion for the design of the dust jacket.

Abbreviations

References in the text to works by William Faulkner are to these editions, and are abbreviated as follows:

- AA *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Random House, 1936.
- CS *Collected Stories*. New York: Random House, 1950.
- ELM *Elmer*. Edited by James B. Meriwether and Dianne L. Cox. *Mississippi Quarterly*, 36 (1983), 337–460.
- EPP *Early Prose and Poetry*. Edited with an introduction by Carvel Collins. London: Jonathan Cape, 1962.
- FAB *A Fable*. New York: Random House, 1950.
- FD *Flags in the Dust*. Edited with an introduction by Douglas Day. New York: Random House, 1973.
- HAM *The Hamlet*. New York: Random House, 1940.
- HO “Hong Li.” Quoted in Noel Polk, “William Faulkner’s ‘Hong Li’ on Royal Street.” *The Library Chronicle of the University of Texas at Austin*, 13 (1980), p. 29.
- LA *Light in August*. New York: Smith and Haas, 1932; reissued Vintage, 1972.
- MF & GB *The Marble Faun and A Green Bough*. New York: Random House, 1965.
- MAR *The Marionettes*. Edited with an introduction and textual apparatus by Noel Polk. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977.
- MAY *Mayday*. Introduction by Carvel Collins. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976.
- MOS *Mosquitoes*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1964.
- NOS *New Orleans Sketches*. Edited with an introduction by Carvel Collins. New York: Random House, 1968.
- REQ *Requiem for a Nun*. New York: Random House, 1951.
- SANC *Sanctuary. The Original Text*. Edited with an afterword and notes by Noel Polk. New York: Random House, 1981.
- SAR *Sartoris*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1954.
- SF *The Sound and the Fury*. New, corrected edition. Edited by Noel Polk. New York: Random House, 1984.

xvi List of abbreviations

- SL* *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*. Edited by Joseph Blotner. London: The Scolar Press, 1977.
- SP* *Soldiers' Pay*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1954.
- TWN* *The Town*. New York: Random House, 1957.
- US* *Uncollected Stories of William Faulkner*. Edited by Joseph Blotner. New York: Random House, 1979.
- VS* *Vision in Spring*. Edited with an introduction by Judith Sensibar. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984.
- WP* *The Wild Palms*. New York: Random House, 1939.

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Introduction

Faulkner and the Art of Stylization

FROM HIS FIRST NOVEL *Soldiers' Pay*, in which the mythic pattern of satyr and nymph informs realistic characters, to that litany of mythical *femmes fatales* surrounding the country girl from Frenchman's Bend, Faulkner's work is characterized by stylizing features. His specific artistic genius lies in the productive tension between the concreteness of realistic description and various means of stylization: mythic method, momentary freeze, silhouette effect, intervention in the flow of time and plot, manneristic image and sound clusters, unnatural sentences, and esoteric vocabulary. Stylization is, of course, a characteristic feature of all art, but in certain epochs like the Middle Ages or in certain genres such as the Elizabethan sonnet it proves to be a more influential or intense force. It becomes a useful category in literary criticism only when its historical modes and specific forms are considered and its degrees differentiated. Faulkner's early literary and graphic works, for example, display more intense features of stylization than his novel trilogy *The Hamlet*, *The Town*, and *The Mansion*, and his parody of Malory's medieval style in *Mayday* produces a more homogeneous, if less subtle, system of stylization than that used in *Absalom, Absalom!* The awareness of the power of stylization of major twentieth-century authors like Joyce and Faulkner is related to their ambition of restoring to the epic genre the poetic dimension it had lost in the Naturalistic novel. The new insights of the times of Freud, Frazer, and Bergson demanded a more flexible lyrical imagination of the fiction writer and so it is probably no coincidence that the two greatest English language novelists of the early twentieth century began with experiments in lyric poetry. Joyce's *Chamber Music* and Faulkner's *The Marble Faun* or *Vision in Spring* do not constitute great poetry. Yet they are of significance because they reveal the later novelists' search for more intense forms of expression, a prerequisite for the genesis of the modern novel.

Faulkner's integration of modes of expression from the modern novel and the lyric tradition of late English Romanticism has been recognized by Edmund Wilson:

. . . he belongs . . . to the full-dress post-Flaubert group of Conrad, Joyce, and Proust. . . . To their kind of highly complex fiction he has brought the rich and lively resources, appearing with amazing freshness, of English lyric verse and romantic prose . . .¹

2 Introduction

The young Faulkner's affinities not only with Eliot but also with Swinburne's poetry and Beardsley's art become more apparent when we recall that he rejected Carl Sandburg's and Vachel Lindsay's poems as unpoetic and accepted only the more lyrical Conrad Aiken from among his countrymen. Faulkner's partiality for Aiken is consistent with his predilection for Swinburne, Verlaine, and the Keats imitators of the *fin de siècle*. Aiken's distortions of the modern world are so guarded that the stylized beauty of his Impressionistic imagery and his late Romantic sonority are never seriously threatened. Faulkner's admiration of Aiken's moderate Modernism raises the question of his escape from the American present of 1920 to the outmoded forms and tropes of the European late Romantic tradition.

Before attempting to explain what the young Faulkner believed he could find in English literature and what he thought lacking in his American surroundings, it should perhaps be mentioned that Swinburne and the English *fin de siècle* were not so out of the way for an American of that time as would seem today. Besides the general American interest in English literature of the nineteenth century, there was, understandably, in the South of the post-Reconstruction era a particular receptiveness for the retrospective, melancholic idealism of late English Romanticism.

In this respect William A. Percy's volume of poetry *In April Once*, reviewed by Faulkner in *The Mississippian* of November 10, 1920, proves to be a revealing document. It is interesting to note that what Faulkner considers problematic in Percy's work are the same tendencies visible in his own lyric production of the time:

Mr. Percy – like alas! how many of us – suffered the misfortune of having been born out of his time. He should have lived in Victorian England and gone to Italy with Swinburne, for like Swinburne, he is a mixture of passionate adoration of beauty and as passionate a despair and disgust with its manifestations and accessories in the human race . . . The influence of the frank pagan beauty worship of the past is upon him, he is like a little boy closing his eyes against the dark modernity which threatens the bright simplicity and the colorful romantic pageantry of the middle ages with which his eyes are full. (*EPP*, 71-2)

The need for a stylized world of sensual beauty characterizes both Faulkner's appraisal of Percy and the early phases of his own work of around 1920. In the gray reality of the economically and culturally undeveloped South, a utilitarian and rigidly religious world distrustful of the sensuous richness of art – Mencken's "Sahara of the Bozart" – Faulkner chooses to emphasize the "influence of the frank pagan beauty worship of the past" in Percy's poetry. He himself was obviously drawn toward the colorful world of William Morris's romanticized Middle Ages, and the sensuousness of the Pre-Raphaelite Keats, of Swinburne and Oscar Wilde, which in Percy's work are set against a present-day atmosphere perceived as threatening and antagonistic toward beauty: "the dark of modernity." The pain of existence felt by sensitive artistic temperaments in such an uncongenial atmosphere is further intensified by the feeling of "malaise" of the "lost generation." Faulkner notes that Percy had seen action in the First World