

Faulkner's Racism: A Response to Arthur F. Kinney*

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Given the sheer volume of material on Faulkner, Race and Racism, Professor Kinney has shown a refreshing courage in offering an overview of the topic within the confines of a single article, and in taking the decision to ground his account firmly in humanist terms, based on his own personal encounters with Faulkner's writing and Faulkner's region. His article revisits familiar scenes, but encourages us to look at them again, to take a broad view. Over the last fifteen years or so, in contrast, critical discussion of this topic has become ever more specialized: Faulkner's writings have been scrutinised for their fissures and fractures, rhetorical tropes and narrative strategies, their ideological manoeuvres, their gaps, their voices, their silences. Every new theory seems to have romped over the Faulknerian landscape like kudzu over Mississippi, making it hard, even impossible, to discern any original contours. Many critics would argue, indeed, that there are no "original" contours to see: the texts and the re-readings of texts are all we can ever have. However, while Professor Kinney has himself made a distinguished contribution to these re-readings in his discussions of Faulkner's narrative poetics, the fact that texts are also "works" with writers behind them has remained important to him and he clearly believes it should continue to matter to a reader. His scholarly investigations have traced in detail some of the bye-ways which have brought Faulkner and his writings before the public,¹ and here, returning to the best known books, he seems to distance himself from the more theoretical, speculative, studies of Faulkner to suggest an approach to the man, to his problems and

*Reference: Arthur F. Kinney, "Faulkner and Racism," *Connotations* 3.3 (1993/94): 265-78.

to the fiction, which is based more directly on his personality and heritage.

From the opening sentence, Kinney emphasises that, despite the subsequent theoretical overgrowth, there are, after all, firm, inerasable, things to say: Faulkner's "persistent concentration on observing and recording the culture in which he was born" is an "indelible fact"; so too is "the enormous courage and cost of that task" (265). Here, the central energies of the fiction arise out of empirical responses to empirical questions; writing is a form of praxis, not a self-reflexive, self-regarding enterprise, obsessed by its own problematics. While biographers and critics have continued to produce more and more complex figurations of the man and the writer, Kinney's account as a whole reclaims Faulkner as a controlling consciousness, placing a coherent (through troubled) self at the centre of the inquiry. He offers us a heroic narrative, of a struggle, a series of battles and a kind of peace, which implicitly counters some of the alternative constructions of Faulkner in recent years: the misogynist, the man of masks, the victim in a family romance, the irredeemably divided subject and so on. Given the restrictions of space and the necessary simplifications, it is hardly surprising that in outlining an entire writing career, Kinney tends to give the impression that one can refer, without too much difficulty, to Faulkner's intentions, wishes and fears. His article is a clearly-stated reminder that the texts were rooted in time and place; and it successfully brings attention back to author and region in an era of postmodern dissolutions of these anchors. I have no wish here, then, to respond to this survey by reimporting wider theoretical challenges to the category of the subject, or raising yet again the problems of regarding the texts as directly expressive forms; but, while recognising these complexities, I should prefer to think about Kinney's account in its own terms, and take up its invitation to reflect upon some of the questions it raises.

Kinney rightly sees racism as a contagion throughout Faulkner's fiction. Although in this article he concentrates largely upon its symptoms at a thematic level, his argument could be extended to include the ideology implicit in other aspects of the texts: the radical distortions of form or

the strains of syntax that witness to the pressures of so "debilitating" (265) a force. Here, in uncovering the theme, he puts before us a sequence of powerful images, within the texts and beyond: the stories, the sermons, the confrontations (Granny and Loosh, Henry and Bon, Gavin and Aunt Mollie) which give voice to what seem ineradicable differences. In Faulkner's culture, all sources bear the marks of this infection. The hideous memory of the murder of Nelse Patton, with its terrifying evasions—"Someone (I don't know who) cut his ears off. . ." (271)—surfaces out of the blandly, even cosily, entitled *Old Times in the Faulkner Country*; in the 1990s, the traces of an erased slave balcony, a missing newspaper or a ban on a movie still speak of a suppressed history. Kinney reads these signs, in relation to Faulkner's career, as part of a narrative of increasing recognition, of a private consciousness struggling with its own heritage to make this history public, to suggest, even, that white culture might begin to dismantle its own structures.

As he rereads Faulkner and tracks his texts back to the culture they sprang from, Kinney's own journeys and experiences bring to mind others' stories: among them, Robert Penn Warren's *Segregation* (1956), Paul Binding's *Separate Country* (1979), and V. S. Naipaul's *A Turn in the South* (1989). Written from a variety of perspectives, all, no matter what else they talk about, return again and again to the questions Kinney raises here. How do we read the South? How do we read its writers? How much can the South change, and how can writing affect that process? And in their interviews, voices speak in all the different tones that Kinney identifies in Faulkner's texts: from the unthinking racist, to the concerned liberal, from the radical to the Citizens' Council. For Robert Penn Warren, an exiled Southerner, a girl in Mississippi summed up his own feelings in the stir of 1956: "I feel it's all happening inside of me, every bit of it. It's all there."² In Faulkner, as Kinney makes clear, these voices, echoing through one man's head, or through a life-time's texts, set up tensions that never resolve themselves, even as they generate some of the most exciting and challenging narratives. For many white Southerners, those narratives contributed too vocally to the upheaval. Penn Warren in 1956 records, like Kinney, the controversy caused by a movie made in Mississippi, where then, too, people's silences spoke more loudly than their words:

"Didn't they make another movie over at Oxford?" I ask.

The man nods, the woman says yes. I ask what that one had been about. Nobody had seen it, not the woman, neither of the men. "It was by that fellow Faulkner," the woman says. "But I never read anything he wrote."

"I never did either," the man behind the desk says, "but I know what it's like."³

Yet, for some visitors to the South, Faulkner presents a less radical voice. Paul Binding warns of the danger that for many throughout the educated world, "Faulkner is the South—in literature and life" and that his myths determine the way we see its history.⁴ Some commentators, then, re-emphasise Faulkner's privileged position in that culture and record how, for them, his work has become part of what keeps its sign-systems in place; and these readings, too, need some acknowledgement.

One of the most powerful remains, for me, Alice Walker's reflective account of her own journey back to the South in 1974 to visit two writers' houses in Georgia: her own and Flannery O'Connor's. Alice Walker, too, offers us images of southern history, written on the surface of the region: the "large circular print" of the electric chair which had once stood on the floor of the state prison that became her segregated school, or the daffodils her mother planted in the family yard, outlasting the rotting sharefarmer shack.⁵ For Walker, visiting white antebellum homes dramatises the difficult and divided passage travelled by the African-American writer: "I stand in the backyard gazing up at the windows, then stand at the windows inside looking down into the backyard, and between the me that is on the ground and the me that is at the windows, History is caught."⁶ Her essay brings home the degree to which, in the twentieth century, too, the part played by the white writer, no matter how individual and inspiring, further complicates this history, one that the white outsider could all too easily overlook. Contemporary guide-books in all countries, after all, tactfully present the visitor with the "front yard" view.⁷ For Walker, however, O'Connor's house becomes in an instant the symbol of her own disinheritance, just as the shadow of the caretaker of Faulkner's house falls over her writing and her reading: "For years, this image of the quiet man in the backyard shack stretched itself across the page. . . . For a long time I will feel Faulkner's house,

O'Connor's house, crushing me. To fight back will require a certain amount of energy, energy better used doing something else."⁸

Walker's trope is many-layered. For the southern writer it suggests, highly specifically, an image of the House Divided: a reminder of all the complexities of negotiating one's own position with respect to that past and, in a further turn of the image, of the writer's own internal rifts and repressions as subjectivity divides against itself in the process. For Faulkner, as many critics have remarked, the "Dark House" was the working title for both *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!*,⁹ and in his texts, the plantation house with its shadows and ghosts, holds deep internal contractions that the narratives can never either resolve or contain: the topoi of the blocked threshold and the sudden destruction of the house in flames repeatedly frustrate the reader from seeing into its depths and produce the endless retellings, which can never arrive at single meanings.

For general readers, Walker's image may evoke Bloomian battles for literary dominance: Faulkner's own relation, perhaps, to the great European cultural narratives, as he rewrote the stories of Oedipus, Faust, the House of Atreus or of King David within Yoknapatawpha history; or the difficulty for younger writers, black or white, of extricating themselves from Faulkner's own mythic constructions of Southern history.¹⁰ The image suggests, too, the further problems for women writers and for African-American writers of entering the House of Fiction. Here, the discourses of patriarchy, additionally weighted by the history of slavery and the paternalistic rhetoric of the plantation masters, are enmeshed with the discourses of racial difference, and to establish a voice within their terms is both impossible and undesirable. Within that house, women (and black men) have been written as the muted Other. Caddy, Miss Quentin, Dilsey, Clytie, Eulalia, do not narrate their stories.¹¹ Dilsey and Clytie, indeed, guard the houses of the Fathers, which hold the secrets of the white families. As Arthur Kinney says, this is a "profoundly subtle and profoundly deep" form of racism (266), and even if "wholly unintended" these tragic revisions perpetuate the hierarchies and the exclusions. (It is as hard for the reader as it is for Quentin to get beyond the legacy of the fathers' word, enacted in the "Father said" that punctuates these narratives.)

Kinney suggests that Faulkner's career represents a life-long attempt to look into his own racism and dismantle the house from within. No matter how broadly we endorse this view, however, from the perspective of the 1990s (unless we adopt extreme formalist positions) others' histories must perhaps inevitably impinge on our readings.¹² For white non-Southern readers, then, like myself, Walker's image may not devalue Faulkner's own struggle, but it may shed yet another cross-light over a re-reading, making it a little harder to type his work unequivocally as the record of a hero. It brings uneasily to mind the more ambiguous documents of that career: not simply the literary texts, but all the shifting constructions of the self that biographers have brought to light and which, whether rightly or not, have become part of the public meaning of "Faulkner," making it ever more difficult to conduct purely "textual" readings. In Ishmael Reed's memorable formula, "words built the world and words can destroy the world";¹³ writing under that shadow and out of those silences, African-American writers bring into the foreground Faulkner's contribution to the house as well as his efforts to escape it. We may not want to read the agonies of *Absalom, Absalom!* or *Go Down, Moses* alongside Faulkner's own pleasure in playing the gentleman farmer, with a particular delight in chalking up his share tenants' trades in the commissary ledger; but they cast their own shadow.¹⁴ And how quickly can we turn away from those notorious interviews, gradualist admonitions, and talk of the Negro having to "earn" his privileges, which as Kinney reminds us emerged in the 1950s, even as Faulkner "spoke up" for black people? How do we relate the image of Faulkner in retreat from public initiatives to our vision of the writer who antagonised his home town by his progressive stance?¹⁵ Do we sweep aside non-literary, but public, texts, like the letter in which Faulkner refused to help Paul Pollard with his subscription to the NAACP?¹⁶ Or do such documents take us back into the uncomfortable occlusions of the fiction? To what extent can authors overcome the wider cultural texts through which, as some would argue, they themselves are "written"; and what should we expect of them?

As Kinney makes clear, there are no easy resolutions. Walker's essay, too, has itself now become a historical document, a landmark in African-American women's writing. Like early texts in many movements,

it draws its much of its own energy out of opposition, offering a meditation on difference, on the experience of being silenced, before moving on. A few years later, in *The Color Purple* (1982), Walker takes her own stand in the territory, struggling to rework language and find a form, and, as Eric Sundquist has suggested, "recast[ing] the classic tradition represented by *The Sound and the Fury*" to give the black Southern family a narrative voice.¹⁷ Even in this essay, by the end, Walker has chosen other, more oblique and equivocal images, to register the complexities: the wry jokes she shares with her mother about O'Connor's peacocks, who, in a series of puns, stand in for the white writer. They "lift their splendid tails for our edification"; one in the "presentation of his masterpiece . . . does not allow us to move the car until he finishes with his show"; peacocks are "inspiring" but "they sure don't stop to consider they might be standing in your way."¹⁸

A decade after Walker's essay, at the annual "Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference" in Oxford, Mississippi in 1985, Toni Morrison in the acknowledged position of a distinguished speaker, could emphasise the impact rather than the obstruction. Looking back to her own readings of Faulkner in 1956, as she worked on him for her Cornell thesis, she recalled his meaning for her then in terms that closely anticipate those of Professor Kinney, speaking of Faulkner's "power and . . . special kind of courage," of his help to her in finding out about her country and "that artistic articulation of its past that was not available in history": "And there was something else about Faulkner which I can only call 'gaze.' He had a gaze that was different. It appeared, at that time, to be similar to a look, even a sort of staring, a refusal-to-look-away approach in his writing that I found admirable."¹⁹

Morrison did not say how she would read Faulkner thirty years later, but gave the audience instead a reading from her own manuscript then in progress. She could not have made a more powerful response. As Alice Walker suggests, "Each writer writes the missing parts to the other writer's story."²⁰ In a form still more intense than *The Color Purple*, *Beloved* speaks out of the silences in white stories, making readers look again at Stowe, at Cather, at Faulkner. What swept Morrison's readers away might be almost exactly described in the terms of her own tribute to Faulkner: the courage to reclaim an unwritten history and the

"refusal-to-look-away approach" to what *Beloved* represents as "unspeakable thoughts, unspoken."²¹ In Morrison's Harvard lectures in 1990, she made it even clearer that we should re-read classic American writing with a version of this "gaze." Within the larger attempt to free language from its "racially informed and determined chains," readers and writers need to look hard at the processes of signification that construct "blackness" within white fiction. It is all too easy to naturalise the reader of American fiction as white, to accept a black presence produced according to white psychic or social needs, and to step from there to assuming that "American means white".²²

How easy is it to do this when reading Faulkner? Perhaps because race is so much at the centre of his fiction, criticism for a long time has seemed in little danger of falling into the mode Morrison laments: "too polite or too fearful to notice a disrupting darkness before its eyes."²³ (She recommends, indeed, as a template for reading, a set of categories adapted from one of the most notable books on Faulkner and Race: James Snead's influential *Figures of Division*.) When we turn back to Faulkner's texts themselves, the questions persist. How are black characters coded? to which spaces are they assigned? There seems little doubt that, as Morrison argues so forcibly, Faulkner's major fiction subordinates the African-American presence to the driven narratives of white figures, and that appearances of black figures frequently signal white lack, or an impasse in the white imagination. Arthur Kinney's account of Dilsey supplies a telling example: in the final movement of his novel, Faulkner produces a "traditional mammy" (266), an image of reassurance and consolation for the broken and debilitated white family, and perhaps for the white reader, after the disturbances of the previous sections. Though the reader overhears fragments of the Gibson women's conversation and is present in the black church for Shogog's sermon, the narratorial focus remains largely outside the black community, entering it largely where the white world touches it: "In the midst of the voices and the hands Ben sat, rapt in his sweet blue gaze."²⁴ Kept at a distance from this community, and altogether outside the black consciousness, a white reader might indeed find it possible to read *The Sound and the Fury* with a gaze equally unperturbed by its tacit racial codes. In Philip Weinstein's phrase, the blacks are a "tranquilizing

counterpoint . . . a calm black lens" to the disease of the "sound and the fury" of the white Compsons.²⁵

Versions of this charge lie behind many of the accounts that view Faulkner, at least in the 1920s, as being unthinkingly and unknowingly racist. However, for a white writer, to stay out of an African-American consciousness may not necessarily imply the assumption that there is no life there to characterise. Alice Walker praises O'Connor's restraint in this: by limiting her treatment of black characters to observation, she avoids the dangers inherent in colonising the inner beings of people whom she did not and could never know.²⁶ Richard Gray and others have argued, similarly, that, as his career proceeded, Faulkner's "external" approach comes to demonstrate his increasing awareness of his own ignorance and the structure of his own inherited beliefs.²⁷ As he becomes more self-conscious about his own cultural assumptions, he increasingly articulates the processes of signification which have produced them. They are dramatised, as Kinney reminds us, in the desperate attempts of the white characters to stabilise those most ambiguous figures of Charles Bon or Joe Christmas, and in the readers' dissociation from the most strident acts of definition. Whether in Gavin Stevens' variant or Granny's, these and other passages Kinney puts before us are among the most graphic in enacting the ways white voices construe racial differences, and impede the processes of change.

Although I am in broad agreement with this model, I am a little wary of its neatness.²⁸ If we pursued this logic of an ever-increasing clarity of vision, we should expect the most luminously aware novels to arrive at the end of Faulkner's career, tidily in place just in time for the new Civil Rights movement. Instead, we find *The Reivers*, Faulkner's final novel, setting stereotypes back in place through a narrative of comic nostalgia, anchored, in its opening words, firmly in the authority of what "GRANDFATHER SAID."²⁹ "Written at the end of one South, published on the threshold of another," as one critic has remarked, this "mellow reminiscence beams the very loud political message that Jim Crow was not so bad."³⁰ It is hard while reading this novel to see Faulkner's "coming to terms" with his culture as anything but an escape into a set of reassurances that at the heart, life was still very much as it always had been.³¹ Kinney's account, wisely, stops in 1942 with *Go Down*,

Moses, avoiding the problems presented by the late career. Many readers have felt uncomfortable both when Faulkner directly represents racial issues in this phase (in *Intruder in the Dust*, for instance), and when he does not. The model of Faulkner's development, then, is perhaps altogether more uneven.

Philip Weinstein theorises the difficulties succinctly, suggesting that, during his last twenty years, "Faulkner exhausts his (Modernism-inspired) capacity to invent new fictional voices, to see and vocalize the Other within the Self, the Self within the Other. . . ." ³² Weinstein's interesting formula is applicable even to some of Faulkner's very earliest writings. In some of his verse and in *The Marionettes*, Faulkner already shows a sense of the interdependencies that contribute so forcefully to his presentation of the dynamics of black-white relations. Here, through *fin-de-siècle*, rather than Modernist modes, he begins to construct some of the central images of his later fiction: the garden, the virgin, the male dreamer, the divided voices that offer competing versions of what they see. While he did not represent these within racial terms (although there are moments when he glimpses the division), the patterns he sketches out persist into the major fiction: there is always a sense that a "pure" lyric is an arrested moment in a complex narrative, and that "pure" subjectivity is always complicated by the sense of the Other. Later, Faulkner learns to open up some of the historical processes within these white cultural myths, tracing the complex networks of dependency. But even in the most deliberately aesthetic exercises of Faulkner's apprenticeship, nothing is ever simply itself; the poetic tragedy at the heart is often qualified by the sense of darker figures at the margins, and it is only a short step to the realisation that these figures may have a cultural identity.

In the later novels of the 1920s, African-American figures frequently serve Faulkner conventionally as friezes in the background of the white dramas. Yet the part played by some of the black characters points to more active sub-plots which carry less stereotypical histories. For Kinney, *Flags in the Dust*, for example, reveals a writer still trapped in the culture that formed him. Yet, much of the interest (and the difficulty) of this novel could be said to lie in the way it is not homogenous: alongside the kind of racist assumptions like the infamous "mule analogy" Kinney

quotes, certain strands of the narrative allow considerable space to some of the more marginal characters. The Strother family, whom Kinney reads as a patronisingly drawn set of black ne'er-do-wells, exhibit some of the text's internal contradictions. The casually embedded racist rhetoric, in Simon's case, coexists with a different kind of discourse that types him not merely as a dishonest swindler, but, for a while, as a more contemporary and sociologically acute figure: a black banker within a text more generally fascinated by economic and social changes, and their meaning for the southern white landowner.³³ Caspey's tall-tales about his war-service (mild, one might submit, next to some of Faulkner's own) deflect back into racist comedy a potentially more significant figure representing the black American who has escaped the bounds of white paternalism. Like Kinney, many commentators have highlighted what is racially deplorable in the characterisation, sharing the view, for example, that Caspey is "a vicious parody of the black American's wartime heroism and postwar aspirations."³⁴ However, alongside, even within, this rhetoric, the text voices through Caspey some far more serious bids for attention, which for some readers may remain just as long in the memory.³⁵ Caspey's claim that "War unloosed de black man's mouf. . . . Give him de right to talk"³⁶ presents readers with a more sharply historical plea than the merely generalised protests of the plantation stereotype of the "uppity nigger." Caspey's presentation emerges from this stereotype (a structurally consequential one in the white Southern imagination); but here, focused as the black turned soldier, turned talker, the figure admits into the text some of the threats to the Sartorises' world, in ways that anticipate, say, the ironic confrontations Kinney analyses in *The Unvanquished*. Faulkner places him in a family whose men are honed by wars, and tried by their conduct in the aftermath, as preservers of domestic and class interests. However, it is old Bayard—the one Sartoris who has had no war to fight—who with a stick of stove wood parries Caspey's compressed campaign.

The episode is a powerful one, easily as strong as the meeting of Granny with Loosh and Philadelphly; and the signs of a system under pressure are as insistent as in the later novel. In Caspey's resistance, Faulkner brings to the surface all the white plantation's old fears—of

the black insurrectionary, or the freedman—and shows the planter facing the threat of his own extinction in the changes of the postwar world. In Old Bayard's violent response, Faulkner acknowledges the force lying beneath the more sentimental discourses of family and community which underpinned much of the self-interested white racist rhetoric. Although *Flags in the Dust*, finally, returns Caspey to his ordered place in the white household, the novel gives some form to the historical forces that were offering a different role to black Southerners in the 1920s, and, in so doing, it allows readers, even if briefly, a critical glance into the processes of power in that culture. Caspey is a strategic figure who, like Loosh, exemplifies, if only in part, knowledge that the Sartoris myths may be subject to revision. Critics have seen other characters, in similar terms, unravelling their sub-textual histories.³⁷ Encountering such figures suggests that Faulkner was attuned to workings of the racist imagination and the social forms it might take, long before the issue surfaces as an explicit theme in the foreground of the texts.

In the final works, Faulkner seems to collude with the definitions of white culture; his fictional narratives follow his biography, in the attempt to extricate himself from the entangled world of Mississippi, to build his house elsewhere: in an idealised past, or in the self-constructed aristocracies of Virginia.³⁸ However, as Kinney makes only too plain, even if a writer resists flight, there are wider problems. These questions might be framed as the more general problems of writing across a social divide. They have been asked too, again and again, in other theories—feminist, gender, post-colonial—that take on the discourses of difference. In a racist culture, what stories is it possible for a white writer to tell? How does a writer engage with what is repressed in his or her culture? Can we expect any text, even an oppositional one, ever to extricate itself entirely from the legacy of a discourse? Can any text ever address itself to both sides of the hierarchy? How does one unwrite the divisions of Self and Other?

Even after the Civil Rights movement, equipped with new knowledge and linguistic awareness, white authorship in the South remains a problematic enterprise. To take a more recent instance, Ellen Douglas's *Can't Quit You, Baby* (1988) might seem an exemplary instance of what a highly literary, theoretically and politically sensitive, white Southern

woman might write when she's read the rest.³⁹ The novel acknowledges political events (King's murder, Vietnam); it shares its textual space between the white employer and her black servant, giving the latter an extended chance to tell her own story; it parades its own narrative assumptions through metafictional breaks which draw attention to the partiality of all fictions, the provisionality of all selves, the cultural colouring of all metaphors. It is actively self-conscious about its silences, its ignorance, its pretensions to liberalism, and attuned to the way it positions its readers. At the same time, it fails to get itself free; in the "tangle of snakes,"⁴⁰ the urgent and desperate racial question, there is always another false motive lying at the base of the most transparent confession. The novel provokes many accusations—some it invites of itself, some it does not: it cannot shed words of their historical memories; it can neither ignore the political nor take it on without the context of specific people in specific places; it colonises the black woman's voice, but cannot enter the black world when a white person is not present. It imprisons its white and black figures in different, stereotypical, worlds, in segregated genres: the white mistress exists in the realm of canonical written texts, mediated through realism, her consciousness explored with Jamesian attentiveness and metaphoric elaboration; the black servant is heard in a narrative of cunning and resistance, checks and reversals, in an oral tale, a piece of dialect fiction out of the tradition of Joel Chandler Harris. In a reprise of older myths, the African-American woman's wise voice, in touch with other forces, heals the damaged white consciousness, but cures its own distresses through rhythms beyond speech. In this intelligent, self-divided narrative, then, the narrator's twists and turns demonstrate that a writer can't just take up the old Modernist injunction to "make it new"; there are deeper cultural pressures that prevent the total freedom to rewrite and purify the text. The text fractures itself to face itself, but any new position for the author always remains elusive; outside the discourse, it seems, there is no obviously stable point for fresh kinds of representation.

The end of Ellen Douglas's novel reaches a kind of resolution in the tentative space of a song, Willie Dixon's "Can't Quit You, Baby," in lines that echo the passage of Faulkner with which Arthur Kinney closed his essay. In Douglas, it is the black woman who sings, "Oh, I love you,

baby, but I sure do hate your ways."⁴¹ In Faulkner it is the white writer who records "Loving all of it even while he had to hate some of it . . ."⁴² Where does this inter-racial cross-fire (or accommodation?) leave the reader? No one, looking at Faulkner or his South, can hope to remain outside the context of a specific history. It is a history that refuses abstract readings, one that does not lend itself to simple moral positions. In Kinney's journey back to Mississippi, he saw a society still closed, still hiding the texts which indict it. He felt, very pessimistically, that there had been no change. Alice Walker, in 1975, taking her mother to a Holiday Inn in Georgia felt differently.⁴³ So, too, did the participants—white and, though thinner on the ground, African-American—in the "Faulkner and Race" conference in Oxford, Mississippi, in 1986, celebrating a chance to discuss this writer and this topic across old divisions. The conference, after all, was taking place on the very site of the battles over James Meredith's university registration in 1962. Visiting Mississippi myself for that conference, I recall feeling moved by the testimonies to social change; remember the pleasure of hearing young African-American students talk optimistically of their academic ambitions. Yet, as I write now, re-reading Mississippi, or Yoknapatawpha, from England, with its own peculiarly enduring legacies of racism, it is difficult to ignore the signs that white power structures are more difficult to dislodge.⁴⁴ Perhaps, in these circumstances, it is time to reaffirm above all the spectrum of literature: to make sure that we read Faulkner alongside others' fictions, other cultural documents, that we hear of struggles from both sides of the racial divide. This seems particularly important when introducing new readers to literature. University curricula, course anthologies, critical editions, publications of African-American auto-biography, poetry, children's fiction, are, of course, increasingly emphasising the multiple voices of a culture, allowing readers to track the difficult journeys for themselves. There is a danger, however, that laying texts side by side may just become an academic exercise in turn, just as in the minutiae of scholarly debate, exploring one man's canonical words may take the eye off wider questions. But to place these words, as Kinney does, within the texts of the times may help, in the end, to keep understanding out in the open,

and destroy for ever any sense that writers, or groups of people, each have their ordered place.

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NOTES

¹See, for example, his useful articles: "Ben Wasson and the Republication of Faulkner's *Marionettes*," and "Count No 'Count: Ben Wasson's Long Homage to Faulkner," *Faulkner Journal* 5.1 (Fall 1989; published Spring 1992): 67-80.

²Robert Penn Warren, *Segregation: The Inner Conflict in the South* (New York: Random House, 1956) 4.

³Penn Warren 21.

⁴Paul Binding, *Separate Country: A Literary Journey through the American South* (New York: Paddington Press, 1979) 146.

⁵Alice Walker, "Beyond the Peacock: The Reconstruction of Flannery O'Connor" (1975), *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (London: The Woman's Press, 1984) 44. See, too, Craig Werner's comments on this essay: "Minstrel Nightmares: Black Dreams of Faulkner's Dreams of Blacks," *Faulkner and Race*, ed. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1987) 41.

⁶Walker 47.

⁷In a description I have before me, Faulkner's Rowan Oak, for example, is characterized primarily in terms of rhetoric of "sanctuary"—"a place of refuge, privacy, and peace." The cook's house and kitchen in the grounds are mentioned in an aside late on: Bob Vila, *Bob Vila's Guide to Historic Homes of the South* (New York: Lintel Press, 1993) 176.

⁸Walker 57-59.

⁹On this, see especially Eric J. Sundquist, "Faulkner, Race, and the Forms of American Fiction," *Faulkner and Race*, ed. Fowler and Abadie 26-27. Sundquist has brilliantly canvassed the image of the house in his *Faulkner: The House Divided* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1983), and in my own thinking on the matter I am considerably in his debt.

¹⁰Before Alice Walker, Flannery O'Connor, in turn, found her own image for being "crushed" by Faulkner: "Nobody wants his mule and wagon stalled on the same track the Dixie Limited is roaring down." See "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction," *Collected Works* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1988) 818.

¹¹For more extended commentaries, see for example, Ikuko Fujihera, "The Black Mask: A Double Consciousness in Faulkner's Novels," *The Artist and His Masks: William Faulkner's Metafiction*, ed. Agostino Lombardo (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1991) 245-54; Philip Weinstein, *Faulkner's Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992); John T. Matthews, *The Sound and the Fury: Faulkner's Lost Cause* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991) 89-93.

¹²See, for example, Alice Walker on reading the Brontës, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* 8. Weinstein comments that he has "rarely known a black student to enter uncritically into [*The Sound and the Fury*]'s morass of white male subjectivity" (*Faulkner's Subject* 120n14).

¹³I am indebted to Sundquist's essay for drawing this to my attention: *Faulkner and Race* 30.

¹⁴See Joel Williamson, *William Faulkner and Southern History* (New York: OUP, 1993) 272. For interesting accounts of Faulkner's manoeuvres with his "private" identity see also Michael Grimwood, *Heart in Conflict: Faulkner's Struggles with Vocation* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1987), and Richard Gray, *The Life of William Faulkner* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

¹⁵Even in 1982, visiting Oxford, Mississippi, I met an older resident, who after warm recollection of Faulkner's brother, John, closed in tight-mouthed disapproval of William: "That other one. The writer. He didn't have anything to say."

¹⁶William Faulkner "To Paul Pollard," 24 Feb. 1960, *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, ed. Joseph Blotner (London: The Scolar Press, 1977) 443-44.

¹⁷Sundquist, *Faulkner and Race* 31.

¹⁸Walker 59.

¹⁹Toni Morrison, "Faulkner and Women," *Faulkner and Women*, ed. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1986) 296-97.

²⁰Walker 49.

²¹Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Picador Pan Books, 1987) 199.

²²Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* [1992] (London: Pan Macmillan, 1993) xiii, 47.

²³Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* 91.

²⁴William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (New York: Norton, 1987) 177.

²⁵Weinstein 48. Weinstein witnesses here to having been such a reader himself. The issue is taken up, too, but with an eye to the way the smoothness may be disrupted in Matthews 86-6.

²⁶Walker 52-54.

²⁷Gray 33.

²⁸As Lothar Hönnighausen warns, it is too easy to slip into the "simplistic generalization that Faulkner's drawing of black characters develops from antiblack stereotype to more individual, lifelike and therefore problack characterization": *Faulkner and Race*, ed. Fowler and Abadie 207n5.

²⁹William Faulkner, *The Reivers: A Reminiscence* (New York: Random House, 1962) [3].

³⁰Walter Taylor, "Faulkner's *Reivers*: How to Change the Joke without Slipping the Yoke," *Faulkner and Race*, ed. Fowler and Abadie 128.

³¹See Richard Gray's excellent discussion of the disappointments of this novel: Gray 358-71.

³²Weinstein 150.

³³I have argued this at fuller length elsewhere. See, Pamela E. Rhodes, "Who Killed Simon Strother, and Why? Race and Counterplot in *Flags in the Dust*," *Faulkner and Race*, ed. Fowler and Abadie 93-110.

³⁴Walter Taylor, *Faulkner's Search for a South* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1983) 33. See also Thadious M. Davis, *Faulkner's "Negro": Art and the Southern Context* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1983) 67; Esther Alexander Terry, "For 'blood and kin and home': Black Characterization in William Faulkner's Sartoris Saga," *Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The Sartoris Family*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1985) 312-13; and Grimwood 244-45.

³⁵Lothar Hönnighausen, too, believes Caspey to be "authentic" in literary and sociological terms: *Faulkner and Race* 207n5.

³⁶William Faulkner, *Flags in the Dust*, ed. Douglas Day (New York: Random House, 1973) 53.

³⁷In *The Sound and the Fury*, they are present in all the white Compson imaginations. Luster, for example, searching for his quarter has been re-read, by John T. Matthews, as a "disquietingly enigmatic" reminder to the white brothers of financial, even sexual, challenges to their "very sources of their authority" (101), directing readers to a strong economic strand within the poetic text. Deacon, Richard Godden argues, faces Quentin with the shadow of black politicization and labour relations very different from those of the faithful retainers complacently pictured by Southern white masters: "Quentin Compson: Tyrrhenian Vase or Crucible of Race?" *New Essays on The Sound and the Fury*, ed. Noel Polk (Cambridge: CUP, 1993) 113-19.

³⁸On this, see for example, Gray 364-65; and Williamson 315-50.

³⁹Douglas, a Mississippi author, published her first novel, *A Family's Affairs* in 1962, the year Faulkner died. (A collection of stories, *Black Cloud, White Cloud*, had appeared in 1961.)

⁴⁰Ellen Douglas, *Can't Quit You, Baby* [1988] (London: Virago, 1991) 240.

⁴¹Willie Dixon, "Can't Quit You, Baby" [1965], cited in Douglas 256. Born in Mississippi in 1915, Willie Dixon composed blues notable for their impassioned political awareness. For a brief overview, see obituary tributes in *Living Blues* (May/June 1992): 46-49.

⁴²William Faulkner, essay for *Holiday* magazine, 1954, cited by Kinney 278.

⁴³Walker 45.

⁴⁴See, for example, Stephen Bates, "Ghosts of Old South Rattle Chains," *Guardian* (20 May 1995): 23, on the restoration of chain gangs (largely black); and Doris Y. Wilkinson, "Gender and Social Inequality: The Prevailing Significance of Race," *Daedalus* 124.1 (Winter 1995): 167-78.