

## Faulkner: *The Man And The Masks*\*

The documentation of Faulkner is very rich indeed. Most of his mss. and typescripts are now in university libraries, his replies to interviewers and his seminars in Japan and at the University of Virginia are on tape or in print, many of his letters have been preserved and some (e.g. to Malcolm Cowley) published, and there is a flood of reminiscence and allusion.

Yet he was a "private" person, like his Addie Bundren, even in his later, discursive phase (as Mr. Gold explains it), and perhaps the most valuable thing about *William Faulkner of Oxford*,\* a collection of recollections by his friends, acquaintances, and fellow citizens of Oxford, Miss., is that it tells us just that. They all saw him in different lights—mainly, of course, as a non-literary Southern gentleman, a horse-and-dog man (which was the persona he liked best to assume)—but I can't see that any of them *knew* him, with the exception of two Negro men, one a blacksmith, Earl Wortham, and the other Clifton Webb, who worked in the cafeteria at Ole Miss, and whose account of the funeral of Caroline Barr (see the dedication of *Go Down Moses*) gets us closer to the way Faulkner lived there than anything else that I have read. Certainly Phil Stone's remarks, in this book as elsewhere, are to be taken with some caution. He was Faulkner's Maecenas, all right, but I think he enjoyed the role too much, enjoyed being in the know, when those people at the publishing houses, and the critics and professors, did not. It is a question whether he was in the know as much as he thought. "Memory believes before knowing remembers."

These were Faulkner's neighbours—though in another sense we are all his neighbours. His critics have seen him in different lights, too, but there is a kind of development, because critics learn from each other, and neighbours never do, in my experience—at least they never learn when one of them is a celebrity. Robert Penn Warren's collection of Faulkner studies in the series "Twentieth Century Views" is a valuable addition to anyone's Faulkner shelf, and I should think it will be particularly useful to younger stu-

---

\**William Faulkner of Oxford*. Edited by James W. Webb and A. Wigfall Green, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965. Pp. 229. \$4.95.

*Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Edited by Robert Penn Warren. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.; Prentice-Hall [Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada], 1966. Pp. 311. \$4.95 (cloth), \$2.45 (paper).

*William Faulkner: A Study in Humanism from Metaphor to Discourse*. By Joseph Gold. Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966. Pp. 205. \$4.95 (cloth), \$2.45 (paper).

dents of the Master, who need to see how the critics' shop was re-tooled, so to speak, with George Marion O'Donnell's "Faulkner's Mythology" (1939) and Malcolm Cowley's introduction to his *Portable Faulkner* (1946), how the French took him as seriously as they took Poe (see the essays by Magny, Pouillon, and Sartre), and how his fellow-Americans responded with an industry, as they always do after an author (or an electronic device, an aircraft, or a fashion) is discovered.

As Warren's rather self-consciously benign introduction makes clear, the Faulkner revival was just getting well under way when the Negro problem began once more to engage the attention of the liberal intellectuals. After the award of the Nobel Prize in 1950, Faulkner became—and more and more behaved like—a public figure, and readers of this collection will notice an increasing preoccupation among the critics with his ideas, and with the significance of his fiction for the interpretation of the American predicament. (It should be said here that the two best studies of Faulkner, by Olga Vickery and Michael Millgate, are not speculative or polemic in this way.)

This consideration brings us to Mr. Gold, and his carefully argued thesis about Faulkner's writing career. The argument has the initial virtue of simplicity: Mr. Gold says, in effect, that Faulkner has written two testaments; his O.T. was a series of "giant images", myths, "echoing" symbols; his N.T., when he was forced "by the pressure of renown to make his own faith clearer" (140), is discursive, "directive" in its imagery, allegory rather than myth, contrived to support ideas, public rather than private, rhetoric rather than poetry (in Yeats's sense). A conspicuous turning point, from Malachi to Matthew, is the Nobel Prize speech. The essential humanist doctrine of man's powers and his doom of limitations, for which the Christian myth is a useful but sometimes embarrassing illustration is, Mr. Gold thinks, implicit and powerful in the early novels, explicit and exposed in the later ones, but beginning with the notorious added section to "The Bear", and continuing with the lucubrations of Gavin Stevens. The last novel, *The Reivers*, doesn't quite fit, though there are some reflections in it of the late lecturing pose: it is an allegory of the Fall, but Huck Finn is there too, and with that swan-song we return to the early Faulkner, who is not trying to impose anything on anybody.

Such is a very hurried précis of a careful analysis of a major achievement, and it should be qualified and enlarged by a sympathetic reading of Mr. Gold's good book. I remain in an unwilling suspension of belief, not because I disapprove of value judgments, or believe that Faulkner could do no wrong, but, for one thing, because I distrust semi-conscious repetition which supports

a thesis. Mr. Gold gives a short chapter to the productions of Faulkner's great years, and then (properly enough for his purpose) works over the later novels. *Light in August*, he says, is a "great failure"; *The Bear* in its final form "fails from its contrived nature"; *The Fable* fails too (of that more later); *Requiem for a Nun* is a "failure"; *Intruder in the Dust* is a "failure"; *The Mansion* is a "failure": too bad. Poor old Bill has become the prisoner of his own rhetoric, since he got that prize, was an envoy of the State Department, was invited to Japan, to Virginia, etc. He preaches. The "adulation" which Mr. Gold professes is deeply reserved. And of course he's right to feel like that, because for him "the great novel is a giant image" (p. 108). I have some reservations about that. Just as a sixteenth-century epic poet felt the obligation of allegory and sometimes (e.g. Tasso) just put it in, so the novelist of our time, carrying a similar burden, and it is a burden, feels obligated to assume the responsibility of the humanist, which includes the power and even the obligation to be (apparently) wrong about things in general. And novels have been pamphlets too, before now, especially in the nineteenth century; it is in that century that we find Faulkner's masters, notably Balzac, who was as full of sociological stuff as of coffee.

Mr. Gold's thesis does not depend on but is heavily supported by his consideration of *A Fable*. "*A Fable*," says Robert Penn Warren (p. 17), "is abstractly conceived; it is an idea deductively worked out—and at critical moments, blurred out. By the very absoluteness of the failure, however, *A Fable* indicates, not so much the limit of, as the nature of, Faulkner's success. Faulkner, like Antaeus, could fight only with his feet on the ground—on home ground; he had to work toward meaning through the complexity and specificity of a literal world in which he knew his way about. . . ." This seems to me a fair comment: Mr. Gold hardly conveys the *kind* (as a sixteenth-century rhetorician would call it) of the novel, nor does he have sympathy for the necessity which Faulkner apparently felt to exorcise the spectre of what for his generation was a planetary misery, a convulsion of the human order, and not just some hideous historical evidence for the corruption and decline of Europe. The novel is an aberration, was an obsession; consider the time-scheme written around the wall of the room where he wrote it (reproduced in *William Faulkner of Oxford*). We turn with relief to the limited diabolism of the Snopes family because that does not have to be written up on a wall; it is intuited; it is a "giant image". Great writers make mistakes, and good critics find them.

The index to Mr. Gold's book is a disaster, or at least an unconscious

parody of what an index should be; e.g., "Gabriel (the angel): 98; Helen of Troy: 173; 'Valhalla': 117." As a denizen of another polysyllabic American country would say, "Oog!"

*Victoria College, University of Toronto*

MILLAR MACLURE

## ROW OF DOMINOES

*David Cornel De Jong*

There is nothing on the pinewood  
table except a row of dominoes,  
nothing moves the tablets—white  
dotted on black—but my hand  
with gardening fingers—symbolic  
green thumbs and genuine joints.  
It is mid-morning, and around me  
insects ramble through the leaves  
and grass, while inside the remote  
house a quartet of women talks about  
recipes and patterns, and may say  
indulgently: "You'd think he'd  
realize how wasteful it is for  
a man to give his wits to dominoes  
when the day is so exacting."

It does not rain, nor is it warm;  
I sit divested of both time  
and haste, asking no one to  
join me solving or unravelling  
anything, or to undermine my  
surrender to serenity and peace  
and my confidence in both. Only  
my fingers do little more than  
set up and then allow to clatter  
down repeated regiments of dominoes,  
while my ears catch the familiar  
rumbling of the train through  
companionable hills and my eyes  
embrace green enclaves of everything.