

friends, and of the creative writer as an original genius, and of the public speaker as a representative American voice in the context of his times. Social and cultural history is reinforced by Allen's insights into the poems and the artistic essays, as in the distinctions drawn between self-reliance and God-reliance, mystical and creative experience, transcendentalism and pure Idealism. Also noteworthy are the pages on women's rights (equality of status with men), and chapters 25-27 on his deep involvement with the abolitionist movement from the mid-1850s, including his support for John Brown (though not for the Harper Ferry raid).

The ongoing discovery of the real Emerson is now more definitively pursued with the virtual completion of the *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson* as the latest volumes, XV (1860-1866) and XVI (1866-1882) have arrived from the Harvard University Press, also the publisher of *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, with volumes 1-3 (lectures and essays) now in print. Joel Porte's one-volume edition of selections from the 16-volume *JMN* is handsomely printed and bound. With the omission of the textual apparatus in the *JMN*, the page is wholly clear and readable, a fact that will please the general reader as well as not a few specialists. As a further enhancement, the editor has supplied a general introduction and separate introductions to each of the nine sections, from "Prospects (1820-1824)" to "Taking in Sail (1866-1874)." Also included are an index, a chronology, some twenty illustrations, but no notes. Another invaluable aid to Emerson scholars is *Ralph Waldo Emerson: A New Descriptive Bibliography*, edited by Joel Myerson, in the Pittsburgh Series in Bibliography. Its contents are subdivided as follows: Separate Publications, Collected Editions, Miscellaneous Collections, First Book and Pamphlet Appearances, First-Appearance Contributions to Newspapers and Magazines; Books Edited by Emerson; Reprinted Material in Books and Pamphlets; Material Attributed to Emerson; Compiler's Notes, and an Appendix: Principal Works about Emerson.

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life, art, history, faulkner, method

FAULKNER: *The House Divided*. By Eric J. Sundquist. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1983. \$16.95. WILLIAM FAULKNER: *His Life and Work*. By David Minter. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1980. \$16.95.

American Studies is sometimes less in the method than in the training; the scholar or the reader will see the connections which spell "culture," "society," "interdisciplinary" or whatever if only he knows enough. Of course it helps if his thinking is appropriately broad, as it is in each of the Faulkner studies under consideration. Both books are about relationships between Faulkner's world and his works. Minter's is what used to be called a critical biography; Sundquist's is a "reading." In Minter, the analysis of novels is in the context of the life, while Sundquist moves from Faulkner's work to history.

Faulkner has been carefully studied, and by bright people; there is always the problem, in writing about him, of locating a fresh area in which to stake out a claim. As early reviewers noted, Minter's "biography" makes no special effort to add biographical information to that already available. Minter means rather to show both how the fiction reflects a life and how it also provides a private world which "distances" Faulkner from the life. He uses old-fashioned writer-in-his-art

criticism, but works with wonderful sensitivity. I guess by now I have not a lot of patience with the intolerance of certain colleagues in our field who question the relevance of a study such as this for American Studies. Minter is not especially concerned with theory, but his book has to do exactly with prime American Studies topics. Minter carefully explains the connections between Faulkner's fiction and first, the texture of Faulkner's life; second, popular magazines and Hollywood, for both of which he labored strenuously though not always very realistically; third, racial realities in Mississippi; fourth, Southern attitudes toward race and the range of fears and hatreds associated with them. I have just named, in order, what seem to me to be important applications of material culture, popular culture, media studies, minority history and psychohistory. Minter handles the evidence from such fields skillfully and with great respect; when ties can be firmly established he does so; when there are necessary uncertainties, he labels them frankly and evaluates them. The great variables are not in method—or, God help us, “methodology”—but in intelligence and scholarly integrity. There *are* no problems with method here, and the answer to the reverse-snob question, “How can you connect elite literature with large social issues or movements” turns out to be, “By knowing enough.”

Because Faulkner's life is so well documented and because, as a literary artist, he has left so compelling a record of his range of ideas and associations, studying his life and art *is* studying culture and society. First-rate critical biography helps define those relationships between social and cultural context and the feel of everyday life which we tell ourselves are central to American Studies.

Sundquist's reading of the connections between Faulkner's deep Southern sensibilities and his fiction is also truthful and important. The method is different—close reading rather than critical biography—but the honesty, intelligence and erudition are again present; this work, too, is about socio-cultural connections. I doubt, however, that it will have as large an impact as its argument merits. The reasons are aesthetic: there is nothing very wrong with the writing, yet *Faulker: The House Divided* is a hard read. Although it is brief—159 pages of text as compared with Minter's 250 or so—it is very dense and a little cramped. Here's a sample which suggests both what is good and bad:

Because the hallucinating fear of the Negro as “beast” that characterized many theoretical justifications of American slavery and became particularly fierce in postbellum racial hysteria undeniably grew in part out of repressed guilt over the visible actualities of slaveholding miscegenation, the language in which such fears were expressed, both before and after the war, reveals a psychological instability that makes the analogy between repressed white lust and projected black threat acute by frantically denying it, closer for the paradox.

William Faulkner: His Life and Work, by contrast, is aesthetically satisfying in its own right. Minter sometimes even deliberately repeats evidence in order to make certain important points the way a novelist would make them. The reader responds to pace and rhythm; understanding increases by accretion and by association.

Sundquist's volume has breadth because he has read the scholarship about the complex psychological underside of Southern racial behavior. Thus he can show how American and Southern history, incest, miscegenation and the emerging civil rights movement speak with great power, although not always with much coherence, in Faulkner's fiction. Such historical interpretation Sundquist ties to the texts through well-established New Critical methods of close reading; the

mixture of modes works well because it is used with conscience and discretion. It enables him to reach conclusions of compelling force—though they sound lame, alas, in the isolation of a review: A “key” to *The Sound and the Fury* is that Quentin Compson, in killing himself, is killing the “brother” who wants to commit incest. And that is why the Sutpen story in *Absalom, Absalom!*, told at Harvard, leads to his death. It is also why Quentin encounters the still-surviving Henry Sutpen, Bon’s murderer. Fiction enacts Southern psychological history. (And, I might add, that is the reason for the close ties between *Absalom, Absalom!* and Edgar Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher”—incest, death, catastrophe involving a collapsing building, warped fraternal ties—all the themes are there in Poe’s Southern sensibility as well. The racial tensions, not notably evident in “Usher,” are clear enough in other works by Poe.)

Sundquist’s book seems to me important enough that he really ought to rewrite it. (Scholars rarely get that chance, though.) Too often critically-important passages, such as the one excerpted above, or the paragraph at the end of Chapter 2, just are not clear. These and others will block readers from getting through a good book, one important not only in its major arguments, but also in its bright, glancing side observations, such as this from Chapter 3: “It is not at all fortuitous that naturalism, as style and as doctrine, moves in its greater moments toward an aestheticism of expression, a symbolic consolidation or concentration of immutable forces, for the naturalistic novel relies heavily on a gothic intensification of detail. . . .” That bright and original idea perhaps strikes one as a “purely literary” point, but even it may have potential for social and cultural studies. It would have been worth including even had it not. Intelligence and sensitivity need no apology.

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