



William Faulkner: The Making of a Modernist (Fred W. Morrison Series in Southern Studies)

By Daniel Joseph Singal

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Amid all that has been published about William Faulkner, one subject--the nature of his thought--remains largely unexplored. But, as Daniel Singal's new intellectual biography reveals, we can learn much about Faulkner's art by relating it to the cultural and intellectual discourse of his era, and much about that era by coming to terms with his art. Through detailed analyses of individual texts, from the earliest poetry through *Go Down, Moses*, Singal traces Faulkner's attempt to liberate himself from the repressive Victorian culture in which he was raised by embracing the Modernist culture of the artistic avant-garde. To accommodate the conflicting demands of these two cultures, Singal shows, Faulkner created a complex and fluid structure of selfhood based on a set of dual identities--one, that of a Modernist author writing on the most daring and subversive issues of his day, and the other, that of a southern country gentleman loyal to the conservative mores of his community. Indeed, it is in the clash between these two selves, Singal argues, that one finds the key to making sense of Faulkner.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Published on the centennial of its subject's birth (September 25, 1897), this wide-ranging but concisely written and easy-to-follow study by Singal (history, Hobart and William Smith Coll.) argues convincingly that Faulkner's artistic greatness lay in his ability gradually to liberate himself from the repressive and outmoded 19th-century Victorian culture into which he had been born and to accommodate his art to the modernism that was replacing it. Taking the reader from *Soldier's Pay* (1925) to *The Mansion* (1958), Singal shows the trajectory of Faulkner's conversion, from a rage for unity, stability, and the possibility of personal innocence to an acceptance of diversity, change, and immersion in the imperfect human condition. Interestingly, Singal also argues that Faulkner's increasingly debilitating alcoholism drove him (in such late work as *The Reivers*) back toward the safe Victorian culture from which he had so arduously freed himself. A thoughtful and thoroughgoing work; strongly recommended for all libraries. —Charles Nash, Cottey Coll., Nevada, Mo.

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From Kirkus Reviews

In this persuasive intellectual biography, Singal makes sense of Faulkner's thought by viewing him as caught between the cultures of the Victorian and Modernist eras. In the centennial year of Faulkner's birth, Singal (History/Hobart and William Smith Colleges), opens with a subject he calls largely unexplored--"the structure and nature" of Faulkner's thought. Singal believes the key to understanding lies in the ongoing "conflict of cultures" in which Faulkner lived-- the morally absolutist Victorianism of his rural gentry youth and the more fluid concepts of the Modernism of his adulthood. After examining the persuasive influence of Faulkner's proper Victorian mother and Civil War hero great-grandfather, Col. William C. Falkner, he turns to the novelist's early encounters with Modernism, beginning with *Mosquitoes*, with which the writer entered "the darkened rooms and houses of southern history." Analyses of other novels follow, including *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Light in August*, and *The Sound and the Fury*, the latter representing Faulkner's "Modernist authorial self" taking hold (though, Singal believes, he never felt entirely at ease with Modernism), notably in the character of Benjy Compson, who repudiates the entire Victorian value system. While the book centers on textual analysis, Singal's forays into Faulkner's life ground the book and reveal the biographer's humanism and restraint. On the fact that Faulkner did not divorce wife Estelle to wed lover Meta Carpenter, Singal indicates an understanding of human connections, observing that "despite mental and sometimes physical warfare, genuine bonds of loyalty and even affection still united the Faulknors, who after all had been tight childhood friends." Singal also chronicles Faulkner's lifelong excessive drinking with a refreshing mix of largesse and scientific fact, admitting the possibility of alcohol's early benefits in liberating Faulkner's artistic inhibitions but detailing the effects of alcohol misuse, giving credence to his claim that alcohol eventually diminished his talents. Written with calm authority and offering a plausible new thesis, this is a worthwhile introduction to the next century of Faulkner. -- Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Review

"A work of literary criticism that is so compact, sensible, and reassuring.

"American Literature""

(SingalUs) work is a significant step forward in Faulkner criticism because of its clarity and good sense.

"Georgia Historical Quarterly"

""SingalUs understanding of the cultural forces that competed within Faulkner help to unlock the novels.

"MagillUs Literary Annual""

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