FAULKNER AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION
TED ATKINSON

Faulkner and the Great Depression

Aesthetics, Ideology, and Cultural Politics

The University of Georgia Press | Athens and London
Contents

Acknowledgments vii
List of Abbreviations xi

Introduction
Placement and Perspective: Faulkner and the Great Depression 1

Chapter One
History and Culture: Faulkner in Political Context 16

Chapter Two
Decadence and Dispossession: Faulkner and the “Literary Class War” 55
vi Contents

CHAPTER THREE
   Power by Design: Faulkner and the Specter of Fascism 115

CHAPTER FOUR
   Revolution and Restraint: Faulkner’s Ambivalent Agrarianism 173

CONCLUSION
   Destruction and Reconstruction: Faulkner’s Civil War and the Politics of Recovery 221

Notes 237

Bibliography 247

Index 261
Acknowledgments

As I have come to realize in my study of literature, the production of a book involves much more than the solitary experience of writing. A wide range of influences acts on an author before and during the writing process to make the work possible. Bearing that in mind, I want to acknowledge those who have helped in myriad ways to bring this book to light.

First of all, I owe a debt of gratitude to the dedicated teachers who fostered my love of language, literature, and history over the years. Betty Simmons, Joan King, Ted Ownby, and Jack Barbera immediately come to mind when I think of influential teachers. Doreen Fowler gave me my first tour of Yoknapatawpha while I was enrolled in her undergraduate course on Faulkner at Ole Miss. It was nothing short of an epiphany.
to discover Mississippi’s eighty-third county. Jay Watson continued the tour, demonstrating an enthusiasm for Faulkner and for teaching that still serves as a model to me in my research and pedagogy.

I have benefited greatly from the advice of readers at various stages in the writing process. Without the initial guidance and the continued support of Panthea Reid, this book simply would not have been possible. I also wish to thank Richard C. Moreland and Patrick McGee for their careful reading and thoughtful responses in the early going. Susan Donaldson’s insightful comments and suggestions helped me to define the scope of this project more clearly and thus to improve its consistency. I appreciate as well her collegiality and kind words of support during my search for stable ground in academia. I also wish to thank Philip Cohen for his careful reading and constructive criticism during the review and revision phase. His advice helped me to sharpen the interdisciplinary focus of this study. Hugh Ruppersburg stepped in as a reader late in the game, and I am grateful for his time and effort at a crucial stage. Jeanée Ledoux is an extraordinary copyeditor. Her attention to detail and diagnosis of my “not only . . . but also” disease enabled my manuscript to become more reader friendly.

The scholarly community in Faulkner studies has been a valuable resource. Along the way, Faulkner scholars have offered intellectual stimulation, inspiration, and encouragement—sometimes knowingly, sometimes not. I want to thank the *Faulkner Journal* for publishing an essay that I revised and incorporated into chapter 1. The William Faulkner Society and the Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference gave me opportunities to present material associated with this project and to receive useful feedback from other Faulknerians. I am grateful to Anne Goodwyn Jones and Kevin Railey for their genuine expressions of interest and encouragement. The scholarly contributions of John Matthews, Eric Sundquist, and Richard Godden to the field of Faulkner studies have been so influential that I consider them ex officio advisers.

Working with the staff at the University of Georgia Press has been a delight. I appreciate Nancy Grayson’s enthusiastic response to this project
from the outset and her always prompt, thorough, and straightforward manner of keeping me posted and responding to questions. I also wish to thank Jon Davies, an exceptional project editor, Sandra Hudson, Patrick Allen, John McLeod, Andrew Berzanskis, and Jane Kobres for their courtesy, creativity, and professionalism in dealing with a first-timer.

Over the years I have been fortunate to work with many wonderful people. When I reflect on the process of writing this book, I realize just how instrumental they have been. The LSU crew—Andrea Adolph, Meg Watson Barrett, Anne-Marie Thomas, Christine Cleveland, and Judi Kemerait Livingston—has provided much support, first as graduate school cohorts and now as longtime friends. Lillie Johnson, chair of the Department of Languages, Literature, and Communications at Augusta State University, gave me a port in the storm so that I could finish this project. For that I am more grateful than words can express. Mary McCormack, Grace Heck, and Betty House are kind and wise mentors to the junior faculty, and I appreciate their always taking the time to ask, “How’s the book coming?” Christina Heckman and Christie Launius are ideal colleagues and the best of friends.

I must acknowledge the support of family and my “family.” My parents both work with numbers, and so I am all the more grateful to them for accepting my love of words and for not making too much of a fuss when I acted on it by shifting professional gears dramatically. Caroline Langston Jarboe has been a constant source of wisdom, grace, and humor in my life. She is, in the immortal words of E. B. White, that rarest of combinations: “a true friend and a good writer.” To the “ka-tet” in Augusta and to Peter Conroy, thanks for asking about the book and then helping to take my mind off of it. I offer my heartfelt appreciation to Douglas Joubert for the many votes of confidence and recognitions of achievement during an uncertain but ultimately transformative journey. Finally, I am grateful to Grant Williams for helping me to reach the end of this book and to imagine a new beginning.
This page intentionally left blank
Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Absalom, Absalom!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AILD</td>
<td>As I Lay Dying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>Collected Stories of William Faulkner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAB</td>
<td>Faulkner: A Biography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FABOV</td>
<td>Faulkner: A Biography, One Volume Edition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>The Hamlet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Light in August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mosquitoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Sanctuary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO</td>
<td>Sanctuary: The Original Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SF</td>
<td>The Sound and the Fury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>The Unvanquished</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FAULKNER AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION