

Faulkner's Fetishized Words

2ème colloque international Faulkner organisé à Amiens par Frédérique Spill, Solveig Dunkel et Astrid Maes, les 19 et 20 novembre 2020, site de la Citadelle, 10 rue des Français Libres

Call for papers:

William Faulkner's writing is known, revered and shunned for its meandering syntax that draws its readers into a forest of words as dense as the last first growth woods described in "Delta Autumn," in which one is likely to get lost in search of the mythical great bear. Likewise, it is certainly not always easy to find one's way through Faulkner's convoluted prose and to grasp where it is taking us. More often than not, whatever plotline Faulkner's novels contain is entangled in the dense accumulation of words. Among these words, some recur with a striking frequency: either simple words designating simple things or elaborate words (mostly of Latin origin) of a conspicuous unfamiliarity, these words are endowed with a singular power that betrays Faulkner's relish in using them and, of course, grants them a special status in the writer's lexicon.

In his analysis of the author's early works, Michel Gresset has singled out two words, "epicene" and "compulsion," that he sees as essential in the construction of Faulknerian psychosexuality and his vision of contingency: as a result, in *Soldiers' Pay*, sexuality already appears as an obstacle to freedom. From a feminist perspective, Deborah Clarke has analyzed Faulkner's near-obsession with the term "urn," which reappears relentlessly in his work. Indeed, in the shadow of Faulkner's urns hide a reference to John Keats and the haunting presence of the mother. Using Faulkner's remark in *Lion in the Garden* in which the author stated that "if a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate; the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' is worth any number of old ladies," Clarke has explored Faulkner's artistic and linguistic vision through the influence of the figure of the mother. Yet another example is to be found in the symbolic power of the word "ink," which surfaces throughout Faulkner's fiction. *Sanctuary* features a notorious description of Popeye smelling "like that black stuff that ran out of Bovary's mouth when they raised her head." In *The Ink of Melancholy*, André Bleikasten has revelled in the reference to Flaubert's novel: the "black stuff" of Emma Bovary's vomit could also be the blackness of ink, "terror and nausea exorcised in the very act of writing" (Bleikasten 265).

In the tradition of close readings that has often been privileged by French Faulkner Studies and certainly contributed to their singular identity, this second international Faulkner conference in Amiens, France, proposes to examine some of the smallest units making up Faulkner's dense and unmistakable writing style—his words. We will focus our attention on words that end up being so laden with meanings, whose plurality is fostered by their reappearances in the sometimes most surprising contexts, that it is tempting to consider them not only as Faulkner's favorite words, but as his fetishized words.

John T. Matthews (Boston University) and Jay Watson (University of Mississippi) will be our two keynote speakers.

Papers, panels or roundtables proposals are invited to explore some of the following aspects:

- specific fetishized words in one or several texts or novels; their scope, their values, their contribution to Faulkner's "signature."
- Faulkner's coinages, his compound words and adjectives; their role; their functions; their impact.
- the recurrence of the subject/object pronoun "it." Can "it" be regarded as yet another of Faulkner's fetishized word? Previous works on this subject include Richard Godden's interpretation of the pronoun "as an extending register of an economic practice (peasant production) in transition" in *As I Lay Dying*, in the article "'It' and 'Olé' in 1930" (103).
- the spatiality of fetishized words, on and outside the page, in relation to the surrounding words, etc.
- the workings of repetition in Faulkner's writing.
- our own fetishization of Faulkner's words.

Contributions stemming from new approaches including new materialism, eco-criticism or the anthropocene, the post-human, post-critique as well as queer studies are encouraged. Examples of such approaches include reflections on “flooding,” from Minrose Gwin’s feminist approach to Susan Scott Parish’s eco-critical perspective, or on the reification of labor in Richard Godden’s work on the word “bit.” Critical attention could also be directed to subjects such as the relation between fetishization and ideology or the intersections between style and material or ecological urgencies, to mention but a few.

Abstract proposals of c. 300 words, along with a short biographical sketch, should be sent to the organizers, Frédérique Spill (frederique.spill@gmail.com), Solveig Dunkel (dunkel.solveig@gmail.com) and Astrid Maes (astrid.maes@ens-lyon.fr) by **May 30, 2020**. Presenters will be notified of acceptance of their papers by **June 15, 2020**.