

Lothar Hönnighausen, *Faulkner: Masks and Metaphors*, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 1997, 311 pp., with 15 plates. Reviewed by Rosella Mamoli Zorzi.

Lothar Honnighausen's *Faulkner: Masks and Metaphors* is the *summa* of a lifetime's work and passions. Literary theory, in-depth knowledge of Faulkner's works (and criticism), a vast and articulate acquaintance with the South and its history, but also an often-emerging familiarity with the artists of our century, in America and in Europe, combine to produce a book which opens new critical perspectives on Faulkner.

The book is much more than "a critical study of the ruses and roles with which Faulkner masked himself and his characters", as the back-cover announces, although the beginning of the book is exactly that. Which scholar has not wondered, in various ways, on the interviews of Faulkner, in turns hilarious tall-tale teller ("I was born in 1826 of a negro slave and an alligator- both named Gladys Rock...") or wise man commenting - almost insufferably - on "the old verities and truths of the heart" (Nobel Prize speech)? Honnighausen analyses the various masks, and roles, no longer only from the point of view of psychoanalytical criticism, as had been done before, but with a focus on the sociopolitical context within which the interviews were produced, on the audiences, collective or individual, to whom the interviews or letters were addressed, and also on the interviewer and his/her abilities and aims. Within the vaster analysis of Faulkner's successive roles, and a precise analysis of its "image clusters and leitmotifs", even the famous racist 1956 Russell Howe interview seems slightly less embarrassing: it testifies not only to Faulkner's "personal anxieties", as J. Blotner and F.R. Karl had indicated, and "the social insecurity of the period", but also to the writer "dramatically reenacting patterns of the southern Civil War myth which Faulkner had assimilated in his childhood and had then so successfully rehearsed in writing *Flags in the Dust*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *The Unvanquished*"

(p.44). In addition to the roles Faulkner created in the interviews and the letters, the author analyses the photographs of Faulkner, from the early (gorgeous) Cofield portrait of the young man holding a cigarette, to the dandy R.A.F. lieutenant (with cane, cigarette and insignia) to the "movie star image", to the late photo dedicated to Random House (Faulkner in his elegant hunting coat, but with a fierce gaze) to the "Pastoral portrait", which gives its title to the last chapter of the book. To analyse the different "poses" of Faulkner, Honnighausen also uses the faun-looking early pen self-portrait, and connects this mask to the early writings of Faulkner, linking thus this work to his previous seminal *William Faulkner: The Art of Stylization in his Early Graphics and Literary Work* (1993).

This is basically the fascinating content of Chapter 1, which explains Faulkner's role-playing in texts and images as his "ardent wish for anonymity" (p. 52), in a way typical of the poetics of the twenties (Pound's "persona" and T.S. Eliot's theory of impersonality), but also as Faulkner's very personal reaction to psychological insecurity and suicidal drive, opposed to his "sure sense of his artistic achievement" (p. 52).

In Chapter 2 the author discusses the meaning of "masks and metaphors" within the context of the new critical approach to biography, seen not as the positivistic interest in the author, but as the interest in the author's "narrative voice participating in the discursive practice of his time" (p. 58). The impact of new historicism, feminist and multiculturalist criticism seems to have opened new perspectives also on this issue. In this very central theoretical chapter the conceptual framework is furnished by Nietzsche's perspectivism, which "includes both an emphasis on multiple points of view and a fusion of the intellectual with the emotional"; Nietzsche's passage on truth, "a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphism", coming from his *On Truth and Falsity and their Ultramoral Sense* (1873), and discussed by Derrida and Hayden White, as Hönnighausen underlines, is the basic text working analogically in the approach to Faulkner. We refer the reader to the whole of this central chapter, that cannot really be summarized without trivializing it, and that leads to the structuring principles of the whole book: the study of metaphor no longer as a trope, a traditional rhetorical figure, but as

a concept to be explored as an aesthetic principle. Hönnighausen openly declares how contemporary criticism, Derrida, White, Foucault, have led him to consider the metaphoricity of the text as an aesthetic principle; connecting it with Faulkner's "narrative gift", and keeping in mind the "political and psychological" dimension of metaphoricity that traditional formal analysis had ignored, the author proceeds to examine the processes of mask-making and metaphorizing and also the complex metaphorizing process of the readers experiencing Faulkner's texts in specific stories and novels. Also anthropological and sociological studies contribute to a new aesthetics of role-playing.

It is in this central chapter that one may not agree totally with the connection made between the mask and the work: if there is no doubt that interviews and photos are to be analyzed as texts, or perhaps as "paratexts" enlarging Genette's definition, in the canon of a writer's production, I personally still feel some uncertainty when the parallel is made between the poet as described by Keats (letter of October 27, 1818, to Woodhouse) - the poet lacking identity and nature because he is continually filling some other body - and a *character*, namely Quentin, whose body is "an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names".

In the vast, significant remaining part of the book the author analyzes the figure of the "Artist as Visionary" in less known stories (Chapter 3 is focused on "Black Music", "Carcassonne", "Artist at Home", *Elmer* and *Mosquitoes*, and on the "Artist as Human Failure" (Chapter 4 on *Mosquitoes*, *Flags in the Dust*, *The Town*, *As I Lay Dying*). The study proceeds with the probing of the "new modes of metaphor" in such great novels as *The Sound and the Fury*, *Light in August*, *A Fable* (Chapter 5) and *Absalom, Absalom!* (Chapter 6).

The last part of the book is an exemplary discussion of what "regionalism" was in the 1930s and what it is in Faulkner (Chapter 7), specifically in *The Hamlet* (Chapter 8), where regionalism is no longer seen in the traditional, and limiting way, but where in the light of a close scrutiny of Faulkner's metaphorizing it is related to his modernist experimentalism: Faulkner can well be grounded in the regionalism of the 30s (and the discussion is based on a deep and critical knowledge of background scholarship) but his regionalism is not limited and celebrative; his is a "probing" kind of

regionalism, where every single characteristic is not celebrated but questioned. In these chapters there are several references to artists, for instance to the murals of Orozco and Siqueiros and their monumentalizing of regionalist elements, to Thomas Hart Benton and Grant Wood and their universalizing of regional features, to the De Zayas collections of African art photographed by Sheeler in 1926, conveying the fascination of the black image on the whites. These parallels, together with those with other writers, contribute to placing Faulkner within a rich and varied context.

The Chapter on regionalism in *The Hamlet* is called "Regionalism and Beyond": the "Beyond" is that world of liminality that Faulkner, after the breaking up of traditional values, felt necessary to explore, in such famous characters as Benjy or Ike Snopes: Hönnighausen brings particular poignancy to these famous Faulkner explorations of humanity by reminding the reader that "these literary assessments of humanity took place at about the same time that Hitler had begun to draw his borderline of humankind through his eugenic mass murders" (p.259).

"Prospero's smile" in a late Cofield photo defines in shakespearean terms the visual image of the "Pastoral Portrait" that is the concluding ikon and chapter of the book; Prospero's smile or Rembrandt's final self-portrait indicate the consciousness of a "disturbed" pastorality in Faulkner, suggesting the "distance, tired irony and mournful insight" of this giant of literature, treated, in this book, with the depth and vastity of references, the thorough knowledge of his texts, and the intellectual passion he deserves. The final portrait, one among the many possible ones, the bronze bust created for the Hönnighausen garden also testifies, in addition to every line of this book, this passion.

In the wealth of critical works on Faulkner, this book will stand as a most significant landmark in years to come.