

attention to the pure grandeur of the heroic." The "crystalline lucidity which France loves above all else" naturally has deep appeal for Edith Hamilton, since it is her love too. The intellect, she says in one of these essays, should always serve to "clarify and simplify." Hers did so, supremely well, though there are instances which could be called over-simplification.

To Edith Hamilton's admirers, and they are many, the intimacy of these selections will have a special appeal. Whatever the subject, more so because they are so varied, the personality of the author permeates: her scorn of pretense and ostentation; her devotion to sincerity and beauty; her innate but always nicely balanced conservatism. A curious result is that the theme not infrequently seems less significant than the personality that is developing it.

In this small chaplet of well-cut gems it is not easy to have a preference. But certainly one of the most thought-provoking is the recent (1960) and heretofore unpublished address on *The Way of the Church*. "The Way," to Miss Hamilton, is always the Latin *via*. She is by no means sure that it was for the best when the young Christian Church turned from the *Via Dolorosa* of fallen Greece to the *Via Gloriosa* of then ascendant Rome. In the long perspective, to which she seeks to attune American thinking, Edith would exchange the adjectives.

Reviewed by FELIX MORLEY

---

## *The World as Yoknapatawpha*

**William Faulkner: *The Yoknapatawpha Country***, by Cleanth Brooks. *New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963. xiv & 500 pp. \$8.50*

IN FREDERICK J. HOFFMAN'S *Two Decades of Faulkner Criticism* (1954) there is recorded a startling critical judgment that has with time become peculiarly instructive in its perversity. In 1936 a well-known critic ventured to declare Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* greatly superior to any of Faulkner's novels up to that time because Caldwell's novel showed how the economic condition of Southern "agricultural morons" could be improved by "large-scale collective

farming." We need not pause over this statement as a variant theory of land reform. What strikes us now, after almost thirty years, is the extraordinary misdirection of this way of reading and judging the work of Faulkner. Critics with leftist leanings have naturally expected a serious novelist of the South to produce problem novels; the general theme of the degeneracy of the South since the Civil War—with deep causes even antedating that catastrophe—could be expected to offer the novelist a rich opportunity to present the sociologist and psychologist with material on a vast range of problems—racial, moral, political, economic, agricultural, and what not. The South is a maze of problems demanding solution. What help do Faulkner's novels give us in this situation?

In 1941 Joseph Warren Beach, who combined sympathy with Faulkner with a subtle and hardly conscious Northern condescension, remarked in an essay on Faulkner that "there is so much in the life of his beloved South that is cruel and ugly, obscene and graveyard-smelling—so much that is lost and hopeless and perverse, for which it is impossible to make excuse before the bar of European and Northern civilization, that he finds his heart filled with distress and loathing. He cannot hate the South; . . . he may have done something to prepare the Southern mind to meet the dark and intricate problems of its inheriting." And thus perhaps one could find use for Faulkner's novels in an Area Rehabilitation Program, aiming at a moral, economic, social, and spiritual restoration of the South.

It is because so much of our current criticism of Faulkner is off-key that the new study by Cleanth Brooks is particularly welcome. It is a meticulous examination of the text of Faulkner, such as Brooks and other "New" critics of recent times have bestowed on the great English and American classics of the past. Among the by-products of this close scrutiny Brooks provides us with genealogical charts, time-schemes, elaborate notes, and a helpful index to all the characters in the whole body of Faulkner's fiction. But the important aspect of this careful reading and checking is the humanistic spirit of the critic. Brooks analyzes the fiction of Faulkner in the same manner and with the same purpose as he might a tragedy by Shakespeare or a novel by Hawthorne. He dismisses the notion that Faulkner's novels "represent only slightly distorted pictures of Southern rural and small-town life." He is interested in other things than sociological realism. "Faulkner critics," he says,

"are prone to confuse matters by saying that since the fiction is good, the 'facts' must be correct, or that since the facts are incorrect, the fiction is bound to be poor." Brooks explores the world of Faulkner in another spirit, which he defines in his opening chapter: "Faulkner, to be sure, has much to tell us about life in Mississippi and in the South generally. He is indeed concerned with human beings and human values. But his novels are neither case studies nor moral treatises. They are works of art and have to be read as such." Brooks is consistent throughout his volume in reading them as works of art. And therefore one feels, as one reads this critical examination of the stories about The Yoknapatawpha Country, that their greatness is not in their strange and fascinating local color, but in their universality.

The conclusions reached by Brooks, after his scrupulous tracing of the histories of Faulkner's characters, are consistently bold and challenging. He does not find that the violence and abnormality of these characters indicate cynicism or nihilism in the author. The world of Faulkner's fiction "embodies its own principles of order" and serves as "an excellent mirror of the perennial triumphs and defeats of the human spirit." Brooks not only defends the normality and universality of Faulkner's vision, but unhesitatingly claims that he is a great religious writer and that his characters can be understood only on Christian premises. "Faulkner's work speaks ultimately of the possibilities and capacities of the human spirit for finding and embodying meaning." It will probably take some time for students and readers of Faulkner to adjust themselves to this masterly and provocative study. But controversialists who disagree with Brooks will not find it easy to invalidate his lucid and conscientious interpretation.

Reviewed by LOUIS I. BREDVOLD