

REVIEWS

WILLIAM FAULKNER: From Jefferson to the World.
By Hyatt H. Waggoner. Lexington: The University of
Kentucky Press. \$5.00.

Readers familiar with Mr. Waggoner's other books, Hawthorne: A Critical Study and The Heel of Elohim: Science and Values in Modern American Poetry, will find the author's voice more relaxed here. But if the style is less formal, the insights are fully as incisive. This is a valuable book.

Several reviewers have suggested that Faulkner slights the novelist's craft, concentrating rather on message. This does not seem to me true. Indeed, Professor Waggoner's careful treatment of Faulkner's growth in the earlier books, his sensitivity to what "works" for Faulkner and what fails, told this reader a great deal about the way the man operates. The books are judged individually as well as in terms of Faulkner's development; at no time are we far from purely artistic considerations.

The complaint that this study neglects technique for message, while unjust, may result from the fact that Faulkner does contain the best discussion we have been given of Faulkner's use of the Christian myth. Mr. Waggoner makes clear that Joe Christmas' Christlike attributes were given him not merely for contrast, as has frequently been suggested, nor merely to enrich the book, which they certainly do, but also to drive home the central notion that we are to consider even "this man's death as parallel to the crucifixion." And Waggoner's point that Faulkner is farthest from a mature Christian point of view when he is being most consciously Christian, as in A Fable, goes a long way towards explaining what is causing that disturbing loss of power which numerous writers have noted in his more recent work.

A quality of the book which I find most satisfying is this: repeatedly the author arrives through insight into some Faulknerian trait at tentative but richly suggestive conclusions of the sort which could only be verified by Faulkner himself. Mr. Waggoner's procedure at such places is to say in effect, "This could be the result of A or B--probably A." This modesty protects the critic, perhaps, but because A and B--especially A--are invariably sound and reasonable, it serves also to suggest new lines of work both in criticism and biography. Indeed, William Faulkner raises all the important questions which a really definitive biography will some day have to answer.

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