

## FAULKNER'S *Light in August*

The following papers were presented in a workshop on Faulkner's novel *Light in August* during the Segunda Semana de Estudos Germânicos by four students of our M. A. program in English.

Since the workshop was planned as a complement to the lecture "The sound and the fury of Southern American Literature," an informal introduction, not included here, related Faulkner's text to the main topic in question.

The participants then dealt with specific aspects of the novel: narrative technique and style, characterization as carrier of themes, and imagery.

A.L.A.G.

### FAULKNER'S NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN *Light in August*: STYLE

Sandra G. P. Lima

To read Faulkner is to discover the South with all of its historical burden, its social and moral significance combined with the author's own experience and imagination.

Like most of his novels, *Light in August* was written in a highly personal style aiming at the gradual, sustained, and enriched unfolding of theme and placing a considerable responsibility upon the reader who, instead of receiving the unveiled truth, has to search for it. Thus, Faulkner uses his style as a means to reinforce some important elements in action and characterization, creating a unique type of mood and carrying

specific ideas and themes.

As a skillful stylist whose purpose goes beyond merely entertaining, he masterfully controls his writing by giving his narrative a lyrical and coloring individuality. He combines the methods of modern narration with traditional and poetic resources of language to achieve a harmonious coherence of both techniques. A good example of this is the use of old-fashioned words regarded by some of the critics as a retrogression in technique. However, they represent in fact a progression toward the reproduction of the free flow of consciousness.

The book was written in simple clear prose communicating feeling and attitude in a rather slow and prolonged movement, the pace reproducing that of the wagon wheels which are a leitmotif in the novel. Even in chapter XXII, which is concerned with the complex relations of Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden, the prose is simple.

Faulkner seems often to write as if he were listening to a voice, which may sound as the voice of a stereotyped character whose words might be charged with incredulity, resentment or grief. When this happens Faulkner's prose acquires a broader dimension, a melancholic tone, and a dream-like quality.

In *Light in August*, Faulkner's characters, who can be considered products of a particular moment in history and society, are presented through advance warnings or hints such as in the following quotation in the second page of the novel:

*... Lena did all the housework and took care of the other children. Later she told herself, 'I reckon that's why I got one so quick myself...*

(You know here Lena is going to bear a child).

Also the yellow column of smoke coming from the burning house of Joanna Burden in p. 25 will be very significant later for she is to be one the main characters in the novel. When the author introduces the reader to facts that are to become meaningful he deliberately withholds important information not only to heighten suspense but because he prefers to concentrate in establishing the setting immediately. This device of forecasting events increases dramatic effect and implies a more ultimate meaning for it provides the readers with a first insight into the character's behavior.

Regarding Faulkner's treatment of language, two of his own basic ingredients to improve style are the point of view and the subjective use of syntax. His manipulation of point of view provides him with a great deal of freedom in the development of the story. By using third person narration he creates a framework of objectivity but sometimes he also limits it through the eyes of a specific character to bring the reader close to the reality of consciousness. As an effective piece of narration it leads to a high point, a point toward which one is carried and at which the interest is greatest. If the major interest is the inner world itself (the mind), the external events are not so important but the way they are registered in the mind. Furthermore, Faulkner is fond of using in extended passages, the first person narrator to attain a mixture of perspectives, one of the favorite devices of modern fiction. This confers intimacy and leads toward the achieving of psychological realism. When the author does that he carries into the first person narration the flavor of regionalism making his characters speak with their own individual renderings of language. To engage the reader in the narrator's line of thought Faulkner presents time shifts alternating with shifts in the

point of view. By doing so the "She" becomes "I" to inform us what each character is thinking in order to make the author's task easier and to make the reader feel the story more personally.

The high quality of the style explains to some extent the complexity of the syntax. Faulkner uses rhetorical devices of oratory and builds his sentences with parallel units. For many writers the paragraph, the chapter or even the whole thesis are the chief units of composition but for Faulkner the chief unit is the sentence. Some of his long sentences are difficult to follow, with clauses developing not from the main subject or verb but growing out of precedent clauses. As a result the main thought usually gets lost. On the other hand, short sentences are clear and dominated by concrete nouns and strong verbs. When Faulkner wants to indicate the suspension of meaning in longer sentences he uses semi-colons, dashes, and even parentheses. When he leaves out commas his intention is to add to the text a dream-like quality out of time and space which has a hypnotical effect on the reader.

He makes use of recurrent words that convey not only the image or thought in his mind but also the related feeling or mood. Words such as "doomed," "nameless," "persecuted," besides evoking morality, are also references to past events.

The reference to mythological and biblical allusions which will also be discussed in this workshop, confers depth and universality to his fiction.

The other not less important characteristics and qualities which convey a peculiar flavor to this literary piece are:

- the use of paradoxes and metaphors that regardless of their true meaning give a special effect and shed light and color on

the real subject;

- the use of synonyms or deliberate repetition of words for emphatic purposes;
- a symbolic extension of the meaning of the words, a somewhat poetic meaning brought about by an unexpected expression;
- the piling up of qualifying adjectives which induce the achieving of a dream-like quality to produce that hypnotical effect on the reader.

All of these language devices turn *Light in August* into one of the best creations of American Literature, a microcosm of the world, the world of Faulkner, the world of the South, the world of Man.

#### NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN *Light in August*

Maria Lúcia Barbosa de Vasconcellos

I am going to start with a quotation by Edmond L. Volpe in his studies about Faulkner: "Faulkner's greatness as an artist is due to a great extent, to his ability to deal with the specific and the universal simultaneously. Everything that particularizes the American South and its inhabitants is rendered realistically in his writing. But he is far more than a regional writer, and his achievement is due, in large measure, to his narrative structure, narrative techniques, and his style."<sup>1</sup>

Escaping the limitation of naturalistic prose, Faulkner reveals he is a man of his time, in tune with the devices used in the *new novel* (le nouveau roman), therefore mirroring in his structure the main themes projected by his texts. He violates natural