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William Boozer

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THE FAULKNER NEWSLETTER

& Yoknapatawpha Review

Vol. X, No. 2

April-June 1990

Bad Faulkner

More Than 650 Entries in First Write-alike Bid

Texas, home of spotted horses and four nameless offspring of Byron Snopes and an Apache squaw, is a hotbed of Faulkner imitators.

Or so it seems, from the number of entries in the first annual Faulkner Write-alike Contest.

Dean Faulkner Wells, copublisher of *The Faulkner Newsletter* and coordinator of the contest that searches for the best of bad Faulkner, reports more than 650 entries in the first contest, the deadline for which was February 1.

A total of 102 of the entries came from Texas. Other states scoring in the top five were California, with 68 entries; Florida and New York, 53 each; and Illinois, 33.

The 650-plus entries came from 46 states and the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, and from Australia, Brazil, Canada, England, and France. The only states not heard from are North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont and Wyoming.

An award ceremony at Faulkner's Rowan Oak home announcing the winner will be the kickoff of the 17th Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference Sunday afternoon, July 29, at the University of Mississippi. Taking part will be George Plimpton, who serves with William Styron and Willie Morris as judge of the contest and who will be a conference speaker later in the week.

American Airlines' *American Way* magazine will host a celebration party at the Beckett Howorth home across Old Taylor Road from Rowan Oak following announcement of the winner.

That evening, Square Books will be the scene of a "Write-alike read-in" at which anyone wanting to read a contest entry may do so, among them some authors of their imitation Faulkner submissions.

American Way is a sponsor of the contest with Yoknapatawpha Press and its *Faulkner Newsletter* and the Ole Miss Department of English and Center for the Study of Southern Culture.

The winner will receive an 11-day vacation for two—five days in Hawaii or choice of other U.S. destination or the Bahamas, plus six days in Oxford and complimentary registration for the Faulkner Conference.

Announcement of the winning entry will come simultaneously in the August issue of *American Way* and the July-September issue of *The Faulkner Newsletter*, which will be delayed for publication on July 29.



SIGNED PHOTO of Faulkner in Paris is a treasured memento given by him to the couple who escorted him on his goodwill visit to Iceland. The fading ink inscription reads "To Nancy & Forrest Shivers/William Faulkner/Reykjavik/17 Oct. 1955."

Faulkner in Iceland

His Escort Recalls Triumphant October 1955 Visit to Reykjavik

By FORREST SHIVERS

William Faulkner's visit to Iceland in October 1955 was the last stop on a tour of several countries that had begun two-and-a-half months before at the request of the U.S. State Department. The tour had started in Japan, and Faulkner—new at the goodwill ambassador game—found himself pushed and pulled by an assortment of bigwigs, artists, students, bureaucrats and ordinary citizens.

The United States Information Service in Tokyo had prepared a long memorandum on precautions to be observed in handling the Nobel laureate that was relayed to all posts he was expected to visit. Iceland was added to the tour after he reached Rome near the end of August, and at that time a copy of the Tokyo alarm was sent to Reykjavik.

Tokyo recommended that Faulkner be assigned an escort officer who was

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F&Y Conference

Short Stories Subject of 17th Faulkner Meet

"Faulkner and the Short Story" is the theme for the 17th Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference July 29-August 3 at the University of Mississippi.

Opening session of the conference this year will bring announcement of the winner of the first annual Faulkner Write-alike Contest. (See accompanying report on the contest.)

Readings and commentaries on Faulkner's short fiction by authors Elizabeth Spencer, Joan Williams and George Plimpton are scheduled during the six-day conference.

Other Conference highlights will include:

- *The Battle of Harrykin Creek*, a musical comedy with book and lyrics by conference director Evans Harrington, offering a new view of the story, "My Grandmother Millard and General Bedford Forrest and the Battle of Harrykin Creek," first published in *Story* magazine (March-April 1943) and reprinted in *Collected Stories* (1950).

- Sessions on "Teaching Faulkner" by Robert W. Hamblin, Southeast Missouri State University, and Charles A. Peek, Kearney State College.

- An exhibit of William Allard photographs of Oxford and Lafayette County at University Museum.

- A Library exhibit prepared by Thomas Verich, university archivist, of Faulkner's short stories, including those discovered among the Rowan Oak Papers.

- Panel discussions by Faulkner family members and townspeople; a slide presentation by Jimmy Faulkner, Faulkner's nephew, and Jo Marshall; tours of Faulkner country; an opening day buffet supper; a picnic at Rowan Oak; an autograph party at Square Books; and a concluding banquet on Friday evening, August 3.

Conference speakers announced at this writing are:

Robert H. Brinkmeyer Jr., associate professor of American Literature and Southern Studies, University of Mississippi; author of *Three Catholic Writers of the Modern South*, *The Art and Vision of Flannery O'Connor*, and numerous essays and book reviews.

James B. Carothers, professor of English, University of Kansas; author of *William Faulkner's Short Stories* and a member of the editorial board of the *Faulkner Journal*.

John T. Irwin, chairman of Writing Seminars, Johns Hopkins University; author of *American Hieroglyphics*,

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Faulkner's Iceland Visit

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a Southerner, even if that meant using a regular embassy or legation officer instead of one of the USIS specialists. It was thus that I, a Georgian assigned to the legation's economic section, was asked to accompany Faulkner during his visit and to be on call at all hours. Both my Alabama-born wife and I had read Faulkner's books, admired them, and were delighted at the opportunity of being at his side during the five days he was expected to be in Iceland. An extra day was added at the end, and he was actually with us for six days.

We met him on Tuesday evening, October 11, at the Reykjavik Airport when his plane arrived from London. It was rather late, perhaps 9 o'clock or after when he arrived, and he had had dinner on the plane. We drove him to the residence of U.S. Minister John Muccio, which occupied a separate wing of the chancery building on the edge of downtown Reykjavik, the capital city of some 60,000 people of a nation whose total population was about 180,000.

Minister and Mrs. Muccio were out of town at the time of his arrival but had made arrangements for him to stay at the residence. On arrival there, in compliance with the recommendation from Tokyo that hard liquor be avoided, we suggested that we all have a glass of beer. He accepted and we all sat down for a session of talk and beer. Faulkner did not volunteer much in the conversation but courteously answered all questions put to him by two obvious admirers. He seemed tired and we left well before midnight with an agreement that I would join him in the morning just after breakfast for a walk around town.

It had not been easy for the USIS staff in Reykjavik to prepare a schedule for Faulkner since the date and time of his arrival were uncertain until shortly before he got there. The day after his arrival had largely to be improvised while Naomi Huber, the cultural affairs officer of the USIS office, put a program together. Tokyo had cautioned against scheduling Faulkner too tightly. So we welcomed a leisurely day in which he could meet most of the Americans with whom he would be involved during his stay, be taken on a sight-seeing tour of Reykjavik and environs, and be briefed on Iceland, the Icelanders and U.S. relations with the island nation.

Lunch and dinner that day were at our apartment and each time wine or beer only was offered. Faulkner went along with the protocol at lunch but that evening, when offered a choice of wine or beer before dinner, he asked plaintively, "Doesn't anybody around here drink whiskey?" I responded appropriately with a whiskey highball. From then on we gave him what he wanted to drink with no untoward results.

That evening after dinner we had a "coffee" with cakes and cookies, and drinks for those who wanted them. The guests were a handful of young Icelandic writers, reporters and scholars known to Naomi and Don Nuechterlein, the USIS press officer. During the evening most of the Icelandic guests talked among themselves or simply watched Faulkner as he conversed with other people or just sat quietly watchful in his chair. One young poet told my wife how much he admired Faulkner's work and what a privilege it was to see him at close hand. She asked if he had spoken to the great man and he replied, "Oh, no," apparently discomfited that he might be thought so pushy. "Come along," she invited, taking him to meet the guest of honor.

By the next day the schedule for the rest of the visit had been worked out. It included visits and receptions with Icelandic writers, individually and in groups. Icelanders are among the most literate people in the world. Free education is universal and they know world literature as well as their own rich heritage of the sagas and eddas. Every year a special session of the Althing, or parliament, was held at which members were permitted to address the house only in the poetic rhyme scheme of their older literature.

A problem which had been foreseen when Faulkner first agreed to extend his tour to include Iceland was what to do about Halldór Kiljan Laxness, Iceland's best known and most influential writer, who resolutely opposed all vestiges of the American presence in his country. He obviously would have to be included in whatever schedule might be devised, and what his reaction and attitude might be was unpredictable. But he did us a favor and was out of the country while Faulkner was there. I have always suspected he wanted to avoid a situation which might adversely affect the attitude of the Nobel committee toward him. If that was his objective, he calculated correctly. Later that year he received the Prize for literature.

In Laxness' absence the place of Iceland's leading writer easily belonged to Gunnar Gunnarsson, the "dean of Icelandic authors," a highly respected novelist, in his 60s, most of whose adult life had been spent in Denmark and whose major works had been written in that language. Gunnarsson proved co-operative and generous and he and Faulkner seemed to like one another from their first meeting at Gunnarsson's home on Thursday afternoon.

[Joseph Blotner, in *William Faulkner's Library: A Catalogue* (1964) records a copy of Gunnarsson's *Ships in the Sky* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1938) in Faulkner's library at Rowan Oak. It was inscribed and autographed to Faulkner on Oct. 13, 1955. Also catalogued by Blotner are Laxness' *Brennunjals Saga*, autographed by 24 Icelandic and Scandinavian poets and writers, and works of Jóhannes Sveinsson and Thor Vilhjálmsson, each of them presented during the October visit.]

The highlight of Faulkner's schedule was to be an after-dinner meeting
(Continued Page 3)

Short Stories Are Theme of Faulkner, Yoknapatawpha Meet

(From Page 1)

Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner, and a forthcoming book on the analytic detective story.

John T. Matthews, associate professor of English, Boston University; author of *The Play of Faulkner's Language*, and editor of the *Faulkner Journal*.

David Minter, vice president for Arts and Sciences and dean of Emory College, Emory University; author of *The Interpreted Design as a Structural Principle in American Prose and William Faulkner: His Life and Work*.

George Plimpton, editor-in-chief of the *Paris Review* since 1953; an associate editor of *Horizon* magazine, 1959-61, and of *Harper's*, 1972-81; editor of seven volumes of *Writers at Work*, four volumes of *The American Literary Anthology*, and other works; and author of more than a dozen books, including *Paper Lion*.

Elizabeth Spencer, author of *Fire in the Morning*, *The Light in the Piazza*, *The Snare*, *The Salt Line*, four other novels, and four collections of short fiction, including *Ship Island and Other Stories* and *Jack of Diamonds*.

Philip M. Weinstein, professor of English Literature, Swarthmore College; author of *Henry James and the Requirements of the Imagination*, *The Semantics of Desire: Changing Models of Identity*, and numerous essays on Faulkner and other writers.

Joan Williams, author of *Pariah and Other Stories* and five novels—*The Morning and the Evening*, *Old Powder Man*, *The Wintering*, *County Woman*, and *Pay the Piper*; recipient of the John P. Marquand First Novel Award from the Book-of-the-Month Club, a grant from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Registration for the conference, sponsored by the Ole Miss Department of English and the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, is \$150 for students, \$175 for Friends of the Center, and \$200 for other participants.

THE FAULKNER NEWSLETTER,
& Yoknapatawpha Review

William Boozer
Editor

Dean Faulkner Wells
and Lawrence Wells
Publishers

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"Faulkner & Popular Culture" Due in June From Mississippi

Scheduled for June publication by the University Press of Mississippi is *Faulkner and Popular Culture*, edited by Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie.

The newest title in UPM's Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Series will feature papers read at the 1988 Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference at the University of Mississippi.

Scholars exploring the influence of popular culture on Faulkner and "his forays into the pop culture world" are Joseph Blotner, M. Thomas Inge, Louis J. Budd, George Garrett, Leslie A. Fiedler, David Madden, Judith L. Sensibar, Anne Goodwyn Jones, Tom Dardis, Susan V. Donaldson, Bruce Kawin, Leon Forrest, William Brevda and Louis D. Rubin Jr.

Faulkner and Popular Culture will be available from UPM at \$35 in cloth and \$15.95 in paperback.

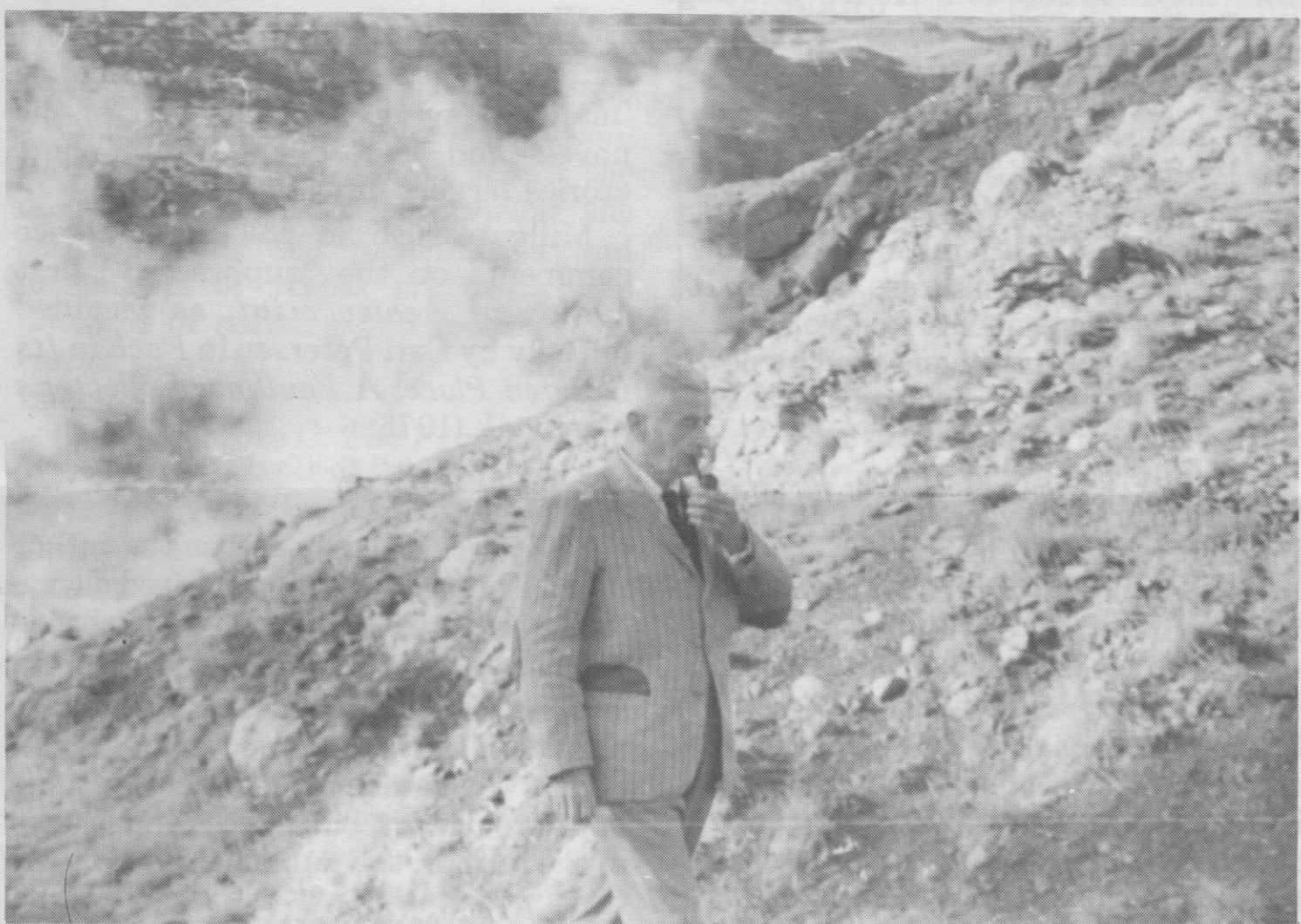
WILLIAM FAULKNER WRITE-ALIKE CONTEST

Win an 11-day vacation for two—five days in the Bahamas or Hawaii or just about anywhere else in the U.S. you want to go, plus six days in Faulkner country.*

All you need do is write the *best bad* Faulkner, 250-to 500-words, drawing on Faulkner's style, themes or plots. Each entry must be typed and double-spaced. Entries in the second annual contest will be received after August 1, with a deadline of Feb. 1, 1991. Entries will be judged by William Styron, Willie Morris and George Plimpton. Contest sponsored by American Airlines' *American Way* magazine, the University of Mississippi's Department of English and Center for the Study of Southern Culture, and Yoknapatawpha Press and its *Faulkner Newsletter*. Contestants grant publication rights to *American Way*, Yoknapatawpha Press and *FN*, and the right to release entries to other media. Send entries to *The Faulkner Newsletter*, P.O. Box 248, Oxford, MS 38655.

*Winner gets two round-trip tickets to any American Airlines destination in the continental U.S., Hawaii or the Bahamas, plus five-days lodging at a Marriott Hotel if present in the destination of choice. Plus attendance at 1991 Faulkner Conference at Ole Miss.

A Stroll at the Solfataras And Time Out for a Picnic



FAULKNER'S ICELAND VISIT included a stop at Krisuvik (top two snapshots), a solfataras area south of Reykjavik, and a picnic at Thingvellir. Forrest Shivers, Faulkner's escort on the six-day Iceland visit in October 1955, writes that the Icelanders drill into the solfataras and channel the steam and hot water into mains in Reykjavik as a source of central heating to homes in the capital city. (Snapshots courtesy of Forrest Shivers.)

Faulkner's Iceland Visit

(From Page 2)

with the Society of Icelandic Authors at a downtown cafe. Faulkner was to read from his work, answer questions, and participate in discussions that might arise.

After the crowd had gathered, the president introduced Faulkner to the group and ordered a round of drinks. Faulkner gave a brief response and ordered another round for everybody. After that the president made a few other remarks and presented his guest with a new, handsome edition of the *Njala*, as the Icelanders call the great saga about Njal. Faulkner then read from *Light in August* and sat down. There were few questions and no discussion. The president thanked Faulkner and me for our presence and we left.

The apparent lack of interest and enthusiasm by the writers at the meeting seemed to me a bad omen. Naomi, Don and their boss, Carl Peterson, the public affairs officer and chief of USIS in Iceland, had worked hard to get Faulkner to Iceland and to arrange for an appropriate response, and now the meeting which was to set the tone for the rest of his stay seemed to have been a flop.

The next morning I was at the legation early seeking out our translator, Al Goodman, an American of Icelandic heritage who had married an Icelander and stayed behind when U.S. troops were withdrawn from the island after World War II. Icelandic is a difficult language and to speed things up every morning Goodman prepared under the original headlines a summary of the most important stories in each of the four or five daily newspapers then being published in the capital. All legation officers got a copy of the summary almost as the first order of business.

"Well, Al," I asked, not wanting to hear his answer, "how did last night go?" He looked at me solemnly. "It was a triumph," he replied. "Look, *Thjodviljin* (the Communist daily), *Timinn* (organ of the Progressive or farmers' cooperative party and opponent of a U.S. military presence in the country), all of them praised him and all his work." He showed me the headlines and it was true; the praise was across the board for both the man and his books and his grave and modest conduct before the writers' group.

What I had failed to foresee was the degree to which the Icelandic authors, many of whom were "farmers who write," would identify with this unassuming gentleman from Mississippi who was able to sit quietly smoking his pipe unless there was something he felt it important to say or he was replying courteously to a questioner. In any event, after the evening meeting with the writers the rest of the visit was easy.

At the University of Iceland the next afternoon he read from *The American Dream*, particularly the part having to do with the economic basis of white supremacy and the suppression of Blacks in the South. In the discussion after the reading one of his listeners asked him about statements made by certain white Southern politicians that they would resist to the bitter end all pressure for change in racial relations in the South. Faulkner's answer was succinct: If they defy federal law they will go to jail, he said; he didn't know any politician who is prepared to go to jail for his beliefs. There was more give and take at the university meeting than there had been at any of the previous sessions, and we considered it a great success.

The remainder of the schedule called for less formal events, except for a call on the President of Iceland on the next to last day when Faulkner was accompanied by Minister Muccio and one or more of the USIS officers. I wasn't asked to go on that visit. Now that the fear of a misstep was behind, USIS asserted its bureaucratic rights.

An event Faulkner seemed to enjoy was a visit to the air base at Keflavik where the Icelandic Defense Force of 5,000 American Army, Navy and Air Force troops provided security for Iceland and the North Atlantic sea lanes. The force was there at the request of the Icelandic government, which had no armed forces; during the worst days of the Korean War, Iceland as a member of NATO had asked for such a protective force. The presence of this foreign element had become a major issue in Icelandic politics and was a constant subject of debate among Icelanders.

The highlight of the visit to Keflavik was a fighter plane scramble which the commander arranged to show to the former pilot what the Air Force could do now. Faulkner was impressed at the speed with which the pilots reacted to the alert. But what gave him special pleasure was the chance, after the display, to talk to one of the pilots, a first lieutenant from Jackson, Miss., who seemed pleased to meet his famous fellow citizen and who could talk authoritatively and easily about the capabilities of his flying machine.

The rest of Faulkner's time was taken up with dinners and receptions with all kinds of people. Minister and Mrs. Muccio, who had returned a day or so after his arrival, arranged lunch, dinner and a reception for the following days and he and they developed an easy and friendly relationship.

It was at the Muccio reception near the end of Faulkner's stay that Gunnarsson asked him which of his books he thought was the best. Faulkner hesitated a moment and then gave what appeared to be a practiced response. None of his books was good, he said, because in none of them had he been able to achieve what he set out to do. But in the case of *The Sound and the Fury* the "quality of the failure was higher."

Faulkner seemed to enjoy the moments of relaxation when he was not on display and showed appreciation of efforts made to provide him with private time. One evening at our apartment with just my wife and me and our two-year-old daughter, who was pulling a string of toy ducks across the polished floor, he listened to my wife's account of how conscientiously Icelandic

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The Picnic and "For Cecily"



For Cecily, Reykjavik, 17 Oct. 1955 11:50 P.M.
from William Faulkner

Pinnocchio, with a butterfly net, chasing a baby dragon
Across the moon.

JOINING FAULKNER on the picnic at Thingvellir were Naomi Huber, cultural affairs officer of the U.S. Information Service at Reykjavik, and Forrest Shivers of the legation's economic section. Shivers in his article here on Faulkner's stopover in Iceland tells of Faulkner having dashed off the Pinnocchio inscription for two-year-old Cecily Shivers on the contents page of the Oct. 17, 1955 USIS news summary in English.

Faulkner in Iceland (From Page 3)

housewives kept their floors clean and polished and how difficult that was since the near-constant winds continually blew lava dust into the house.

As we talked and our daughter played, Faulkner dashed off a line on the cover sheet of the daily news summary issued by USIS: "For Cecily, ... Pinnocchio (sic), with a butterfly net, chasing a baby dragon across the moon." It is still a treasured possession.

Before he left he inscribed books and pictures for members of the staff who asked for them. On the second or third day of his stay he had discarded me as a companion for his morning walk in favor of Naomi Huber, who not only looked better than I did but who would walk much longer than I wanted to.

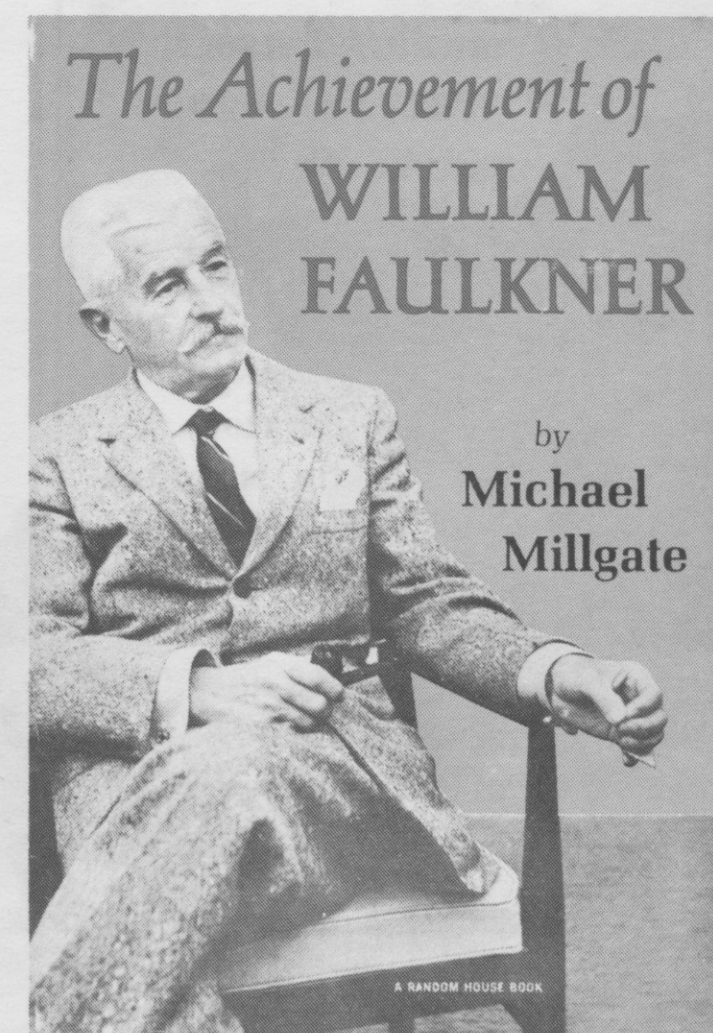
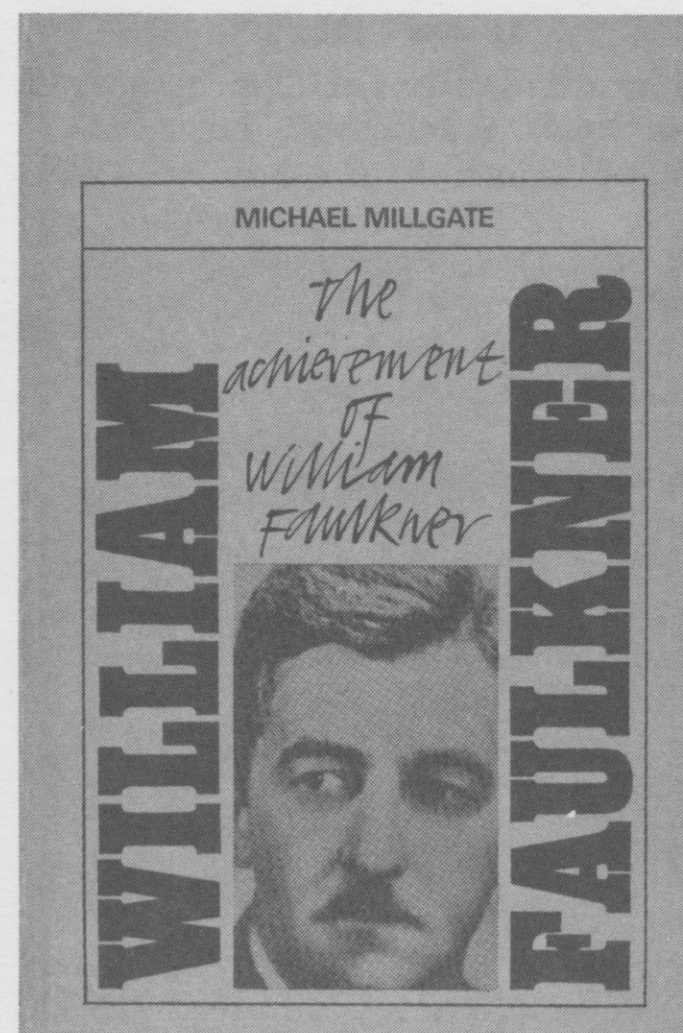
On the photograph he gave her he wrote, "To Miss Naomi who walks well." I am sure Naomi would agree with me that in Iceland Mr. Bill walked, talked and otherwise conducted himself admirably.

(Forrest Shivers lives in Opelika, Ala. He retired in 1977 after 31 years with the Foreign Service. He writes that Joseph Blotner in *Faulkner: A Biography* (2:1,578) states that Lewis Mattison was Faulkner's escort officer on the author's 1955 visit to Iceland. There was no legation or USIS officer by that name in Reykjavik at that time, Shivers reports.)

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Michael Millgate's "Achievement" Is Now in Its 25th Year in Print



DUST JACKETS from the 1965 recalled Constable London printing (left), and from the 1966 Random House printing.

— William Boozer Collection

By WILLIAM BOOZER

In our mailbox recently was a new printing of Michael Millgate's *Achievement of William Faulkner*, published last December 5 by the University of Georgia Press (\$14.95). It remains, 24 years since it first appeared, at the top of our list when asked by newcomers to Faulkner which works about him to take up first.

Actually, Millgate's own achievement appeared 25 years ago, but that's another story told later here.

Readers coming to the critical work for the first time in this new printing will find classic essays on the subject's life and career and the achievement of "a great novelist in the context not merely of the South, or even of the United States, but of the whole western tradition." In between are assessments of the 19 novels and brief treatments of the short stories.

The new Brown Thrasher paperback printing from Georgia includes a new preface by the author to the landmark work in Faulkner studies first published in 1966 by Constable & Co. in London and that same year in this country by Random House.

The author apologizes in the new preface, as he did in a preface to a 1978 University of Nebraska Press Bison paperback printing of *Achievement*, for some errors or misreadings retained from the original printing.

But he remains pleased, rightly so, at how well his book holds up a quarter of a century after his research and writing.

Acknowledging the excellent work on Faulkner in the last decade or so, Millgate goes on to note that "it is not clear that the consensus generally perceived to have developed during the 1960s and 1970s has as yet been greatly affected by the stirring critical events of the 1980s."

Scholars "coming fresh to the [Faulkner] field have been regrettably but understandably reluctant to confront in any extensive fashion the mass of primary and, more especially, secondary material now so loomingly available, and attention has continued to be focused on a relatively small group

of texts universally acknowledged to be 'major,' leaving the remainder of the novels and almost all of the short stories largely unvisited."

Millgate also in the new preface comments on the "suppressed" first edition of *Achievement*, as recorded initially by Carl Petersen in *Each in Its Ordered Place: A Faulkner Collector's Notebook* (1975).

The "correct" first edition, in brown dust jacket, was recalled by Constable at Millgate's insistence when the author found it marred by unauthorized alterations made by someone at Constable after final proofs.

Constable had scheduled the book for publication on June 3, 1965. Amid efforts to retrieve copies that had gone out to reviewers, bookstores and friends of the author, the publisher on May 31, 1965 wrote those who had received early copies that "Owing to serious mistakes which have occurred in the printing of this book we have had to postpone publication...We would be grateful if you could ensure that no review appears until a new publication date is announced."

The corrected first edition appeared the following year, first in London and in May in the Random House printing, both in green dust jackets.

Only a few copies of the 1965 withdrawn edition survive, and most of them, Millgate suspects, "have by now found their way onto the shelves of Faulkner collectors of the more obsessive sort." Millgate has "even consented to write my name in one or two of them," he states in the new preface to the Georgia printing, "but always in invisible ink, and while wearing a mask."

The Achievement of William Faulkner has never been out of print. There were no further printings in England, but Random House brought it out in three hardcover printings. Then there was a 1971 Vintage Books printing, the 1978 Nebraska issue, and now this new Georgia printing. It was also published in 1972 by Barral Editores, S.A., in Barcelona.