

Hans H. Skei, *William Faulkner: The Short Story Career*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1981. 164 pp.

Despite the enormous output of Faulkner criticism, the subject of William Faulkner's short stories is much neglected. Volume after volume is produced about his novels, and in recent years a lot of scholarly work has been presented which pays attention to biographical matters. In the field of Faulkner's more than one hundred short stories there remains much to be done, however. Hans H. Skei's study of Faulkner's short story career is a step towards redressing the balance.

Also Skei proceeds from the assumption that William Faulkner really should be regarded primarily as a novelist, but that this fact in no way diminishes the need for critical treatment of his short stories. The present volume is a revised section of Skei's doctoral dissertation from 1980, entitled *The Novelist as Short Story Writer*. Within the dissertation, the section which forms the basis for *The Short Story Career* served to give an outline of Faulkner's short story writing, dating the individual stories and tracing the author's work of revision as a background for the critical analysis of the stories in the main part of the dissertation. An enormous amount of detective-work must have gone into this chapter, the reading of manuscript fragments and typescripts, examinations of paper and ink etc., and in publishing *The Short Story Career* Skei attempts to share the benefits of this toil with a broader public of scholars.

Skei divides Faulkner's short story career into four periods. The dividing-lines in some cases seem rather arbitrarily chosen, but the subject is of course not one that presents clear-cut division. The first of these periods, the »Apprenticeship Years,« spans from 1919 — the year of Faulkner's first published item »Landing in Luck« — to 1927. The material of this period includes early sketches as »The Hill« and »Nympholepsy,« but also the stories Faulkner wrote, and published, in New Orleans in 1925. Skei here presents a chronology that differs substantially from the one Carvel Collins used in his edition of *New Orleans Sketches*. It is in cases such as this that Skei's work may be especially valuable. By ordering the stories according to dates of composition rather than of printing, he throws new light on the subject.

What Skei calls »The Major Period« lasts from 1928 to 1932. During this period Faulkner made his most persistent effort to earn a living from short stories. Especially the time between the completion of *As I Lay Dying* in January 1930 and the start on *Light in August* in August 1931 saw an outburst of productivity in the short story field. Many of what are generally considered to be Faulkner's best contributions to the genre belong to this period, »A Rose for Emily,« »Dry September« and »Mountain Victory« to mention just a few. Also here Skei's book is helpful in clarifying the chronology of the stories, but also in disentangling the different extant versions of some stories, notably the complicated cases of »Pennsylvania Station« and »That Evening Sun.« He furthermore argues convincingly for the identification of the previously unexplained titles »Aria Con Amore« and »the Peasants,« listed in Faulkner's short story sending schedule, as earlier titles for »Spotted Horses.«

The third period in Skei's division falls between 1933 and 1941 and is really, as the chapter heading »Cycles of Stories and Stories for Novels« indicates, concerned also with some of Faulkner's novels. This is inevitable as the stories of this period to a very large extent were either later reworked into novels, as »Wash« became a part of *Absalom, Absalom!* and »This Kind of Courage« was expanded into *Pylon*, or were brought together to form larger units as *The Unvanquished* and *Go Down, Moses*. The subject of the relationship between the original *The Unvanquished* stories and the final novel/short story cycle bearing this title has been treated before by other critics, but Skei nevertheless manages to present interesting and clarifying comments on Faulkner's revisions.

»Late Stories,« finally, is the heading for the years 1942 to 1962, which saw

only very sporadic short story-writing from Faulkner. The first seven months of 1942 were a period of sudden activity in the field. Obviously story writing was something of a last resort to bring in badly needed money at this point in Faulkner's career. Among these stories are found such contrasting specimens as the overtly patriotic »Shall Not Perish« and the purely comical »Shingles for the Lord.« Skei pays these stories only summary attention together with some pieces that can hardly be considered short stories at all, for example »Appendix: Compson 1699-1945« written for Malcolm Cowley's *The Portable Faulkner*, the chapter from *A Fable* published separately as a novelle under the title »Notes on a Horsethief«<sup>9</sup> and the semi-autobiographical essay »Mississippi.« (As Hans Skei points out, the main event of this period was really the publication of the *Collected Stories* in 1950. This volume at once made the bulk of Faulkner's best stories available to a broad public and undisputably established his reputation as a competent writer of stories.

Hans Skei has taken on a very ambitious task in *The Short Story Career*. As he states in the preface, he aims »to clarify Faulkner's short story career, with emphasis on genesis, composition, revision, publication, re-use, inclusion in collections, and textual variants.« This may seem no small feat to perform in 160 pages, but by and large one must say that he accomplishes what he sets out to do. One might ask for a more comprehensive treatment of some of the stories of the last period, however. The fact that a story belongs to a rather unproductive part of the author's life does not of course diminish the value of the story to a scholar interested in some specific aspect of the author's writings. There has certainly been a need for a work of this kind, since James B. Meriwether's classic *The Literary Career of William Faulkner* is gradually becoming outdated. Joseph Blotner's monumental biography can hardly be called a handy source of reference concerning the genesis of the short stories, nor is it, as Skei points out now and then, completely reliable. Hans Skei's book should thus clearly fill a function for all scholars dealing with the complex material of William Faulkner's short stories, and hopefully also serve as an incitement for further research in this field.