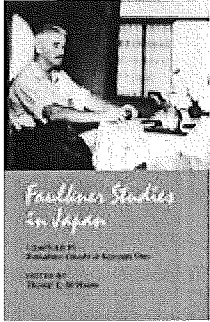


# Faulkner Studies in Japan, edited by Thomas L. McHaney; compiled by Kenzaburo Ohashi and Kiyoyuki Ono

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(available at Amazon.com)

Review by Allen Mendenhall

It was with great interest—and, perhaps, skepticism, for I myself taught English in Japan—that I read *Faulkner Studies in Japan*, an assemblage of critical essays written and translated by Japanese academics and edited by American Thomas L. McHaney, professor of literature at Georgia State University. Whisking eagerly through the pages of this significant, insightful book, I learned, to my surprise, that Faulkner’s reputation in Japan has been, for six decades, mostly favorable, despite that his “works are difficult to read, even in his own country.”

Though my brief stint as *sensei* didn’t lend itself to instruction in unconventional, stream-of-consciousness fiction—just getting my pre-teen students to pronounce “Yoknapatawpha” would’ve been inconceivable—other *sensei* have taught Faulkner with relative if not outright success.

According to McHaney, the Japanese have enjoyed a longstanding admiration for the short, mustachioed Mississippian, who once affectionately remarked, “The Japanese people really and actually wanted to see and to know me—the man, the human being.” Under the auspices of the U.S. State Department, Faulkner visited Japan in 1955, roughly ten years after the American bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and fourteen years after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. Faulkner’s sojourn, particularly his appearance at a summer seminar in Nagano, resulted in probably the most fruitful give-and-take he ever allowed as public speaker. “By virtue of their interest and their sincere questions,” McHaney explains, “Faulkner’s Japanese audiences also seemed to have received a higher percentage of clear and meaningful answers from him than almost anyone who ever asked him to explain himself.”

McHaney divides the book into three sections: General Studies, Studies of Individual Works, and Faulkner and the Japanese Writer. Topics addressed in General Studies include, among others, Faulkner’s style, his echoes of T.S. Eliot, his repetition or self-parody (he enriched and diversified fictional worlds he created in previous works), and his resemblance to—and difference from—Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis and John Barth. Only three novels—*As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, and *Go Down, Moses*—receive individualized treatment in the second section, though one could register little complaint about their exegeses.

The final section, peppered with “several reflections by distinguished Japanese novelists,” reveals, in McHaney’s words, “not only a profound response to Faulkner’s mysteries but also the deliberate intellectual appropriation of his techniques as both a Modernist and post-Modernist writer.”

Readers interested in either Faulkner or Japan, to say nothing of American literature enthusiasts generally, will find much here that's appealing and constructive, but might, I suspect, find the editor's selectivity wanting. The nearly random assortment of topics gives the impression that inclusion in the work depended on Japanese nationality and not, say, thematic coherence. Nevertheless, *Faulkner Studies in Japan* will sustain many re-readings and is essential for any Faulkner aficionado.