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On William Faulkner : An Interview with Robert W. Hamblin

Li Mengyu

Abstract: Robert W. Hamblin is Professor of English and Director of the Center for Faulkner Studies, Southeast Missouri State University. His Faulkner publications include *Faulkner: A Comprehensive Guide to the Brodsky Collection*, 5 vols. (with Louis Daniel Brodsky, 1982 – 1988); *A William Faulkner Encyclopedia and A Companion to Faulkner Studies* (with Charles A. Peek, 1999, 2004); *Teaching Faulkner: Approaches and Methods* (with Stephen Hahn, 2000); *Faulkner in the Twenty-First Century* (with Ann J. Abadie, 2003); *A Critical Companion to William Faulkner: A Literary Reference to his Life and Work* (with A. Nicholas Fargnoli and Michael Golay, Facts on File, 2008); and *Faulkner and Twain* (with Melanie Speight, 2009). In this interview, Professor Hamblin first introduces the general status of Faulkner study in the United States, the Center for Faulkner Studies at Southeast Missouri State University and its contribution to Faulkner study, then discusses the major themes in Faulkner's mythological Yoknapatawpha, Faulkner's treatment of such topics as the time, race, male and female characters, and Faulkner's short stories and poems. The interview concludes with some comments on Faulkner's overall literary achievement and the state of Faulkner study in China.

Key words: Faulkner study in the United States themes of Faulkner's works Faulkner's short stories and poems Faulkner's contribution

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标题:关于威廉·福克纳:罗伯特·W·哈姆布林教授访谈

内容摘要:罗伯特·W·哈姆布林是美国东南密苏里州立大学英语系教授、福克纳研究中心主任。其福克纳研究著作有:《福克纳:布罗茨基收藏本理解指南》(五卷本,与布罗德茨基合著,1982 – 1988)、《威廉·福克纳百科全书和福克纳研究指南》(与查里斯·P·皮克合著,1999,2004)、《福克纳教学:途径与方法》(与斯蒂芬·汉恩合著,2000)、《21 世纪中的福克纳》(与安·J·阿贝迪合著,2003)、《威廉·福克纳批评指南:福克纳生平及著作文学参考文献》(与 A. 尼古拉斯和迈克尔·高雷合著,2008 年)、《福克纳和台湾》(与梅勒尼·斯贝特合著,2009)。在访谈中哈姆布林教授首先介绍了美国福克纳研究状况,继而概述了东

南密苏里州立大学福克纳研究中心及其对福克纳研究的贡献，阐释了约克纳帕塌法神话体系的重要主题，福克纳作品中的时间观、种族观、男女主人公以及其短篇小说和诗歌的价值等。在访谈中，哈姆布林教授还评析了中国的福克纳研究。

关键词：美国福克纳研究 福克纳作品中的主题 福克纳的短篇小说、诗歌 福克纳的贡献

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Li Mengyu（Li for short hereafter）: This afternoon, I'd like to have an interview with you on Faulkner. First of all, would you please describe the status of Faulkner study in America?

Robert W. Hamblin（Hamblin for short hereafter）: Thank you. Sustained scholarly study of Faulkner in the United States began in the 1950s, shortly after he won the Nobel Prize for Literature, and Faulkner study still remains very strong in this country. I think one reason for that is Faulkner's novels are so open-ended, lending themselves to a wide variety of critical approaches. The early study of Faulkner, influenced largely by New Critical theory, focuses on a close reading of the text, analyzing the form and structure of the work and the use of language. Numerous early studies also examine Faulkner as a "Southern" writer, specifically one who explores the tragic legacy of the Civil War and Reconstruction. More recent study of Faulkner focuses on race, class, gender, post-colonial, and even environmental issues. One might have thought that there would be a decline in Faulkner study after so many years, but that is not the case. Even today, six decades after Faulkner won the Nobel Prize, there are on average more than one hundred books and articles per year on Faulkner, so he continues to be considered one of the great American writers, and contemporary American scholars continue to study his works diligently.

Li: To be more specific, could you introduce some famous American scholars who have done quite well in Faulkner study and their representative books?

Hamblin: An early highly influential treatment of Faulkner was Malcolm Cowley's introduction to *The Portable Faulkner*, published in 1946. The first full-length book on Faulkner, *William Faulkner: A Critical Appraisal by Harry Campbell and Ruel Foster*, appeared in 1951. Perhaps the best of the early overviews of Faulkner's work is *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country by Cleanth Brooks* (1963). Other good early books on Faulkner are those written by Richard P. Adams, Michael Millgate, Melvin Backman, Olga Vickery, Walter Slatoff, Hyatt H. Waggoner, and Irving Howe. The most prolific of the current group of Faulkner scholars is Noel Polk, who has done textual, psychoanalytic, and thematic treatments of almost all of Faulkner's books. Another outstanding contemporary critic is Philip Weinstein, who deals with Faulkner's treatment of race. Thadious Davis has also written extensively on Faulkner and race. John T. Irwin's *Doubling and Incest / Repetition and Revenge* is the best-known psychoanalytic treatment of Faulkner, but Doreen Fowler has also published Freudian and Lacanian interpretations of Faulkner. Two historians, Joel Williamson and Don Doyle, have produced detailed analyses of the historical contexts of Faulkner's fiction. Minrose Gwin, Deborah Clarke, Sally Page, and David Williams have studied Faulkner's treatment of women. Lewis Dabney has written about Faulkner's treatment of Native Americans. James Carothers and Theresa Towner have defended the quality of Faulkner's post-1942 work, which was frequently disparaged by the earlier critics. Post-colonial critics such as Deborah Cohn and Mark Frisch have examined Faulkner's influence upon Caribbean and Latin

American authors. My colleague at the Faulkner Center, Christopher Rieger, has related Faulkner's works to ecological and environmental concerns. Judith Sensibar, the foremost critic of Faulkner's poetry, in *The Origins of Faulkner's Art*, examines the influence of that poetry upon the fiction. Bruce Kawin, Gene Phillips, Louis Daniel Brodsky, and I have written about Faulkner's movie work. The first detailed biography of Faulkner, written by Joseph Blotner, was published in 1974. Later biographies have been written by Frederick Karl, David Minter, Stephen Oates, Richard Gray (who is British), and Jay Parini. I recommend Blotner's biography for the facts of Faulkner's life and Parini's for the commentaries on the works.

Li: I know your center has played a very important role in Faulkner study. As director of the Center for Faulkner Studies at Southeast Missouri State University, could you please make a brief introduction to your center and its contribution to Faulkner study?

Hamblin: We have a Center for Faulkner Studies here because of the Brodsky Collection. Beginning in 1978, Louis Daniel Brodsky and I have worked for ten years or so, throughout the 1980s, in publishing books and articles, mounting exhibits, and giving lectures based on his private collection of William Faulkner materials. Then in 1988, he made his decision to place his Faulkner collection at this institution, and now our center has become one of four major Faulkner collections in the world, the others at the University of the Virginia, University of Mississippi, and University of Texas. When Mr. Brodsky placed his Faulkner collection here, we opened it up for any scholar doing research on Faulkner. We have been very pleased to host scholars coming not only from the United States but also from China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Canada, England, France, Germany, and Romania to use the materials in their research for their articles and books. So you cannot really separate our Faulkner Center from the Brodsky Collection. It has been my privilege to work with Mr. Brodsky, and with his collection, now for some thirty years. And because of him and his collection, I now have the opportunity to work with scholars like you. And that is a great honor and privilege.

We also have a website to assist the scholars who cannot come personally. We are happy to provide them materials through the internet: photographs, copies of letters and scanned documents, answers to their questions.

Li: Actually I also got to know your center through the internet. Now, let's focus on Faulkner's works. As we know, Yoknapatawpha created by Faulkner is often regarded as the myth of the Old South as well as the myth of the modern world. What do you think of Faulkner's mythology of Yoknapatawpha?

Hamblin: Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha fiction is grounded in the South, in Oxford, so it is modeled on the real world. Faulkner grew up and lived in that experience, so it is understandable that his fiction reflects that place. But Yoknapatawpha is about more than Oxford, or Mississippi, or the South, or America. It is a mythic rendering of the human condition. It is an expression of Faulkner's view of human nature, human social structures, religion, race, all these things. It is a tremendous achievement, a great creation of the imagination. There is really nothing like it in American literature.

Li: Yes, it is quite unique. Then what do you think of the themes revealed in the mythology of Yoknapatawpha?

Hamblin: Hundreds of scholars study Faulkner's themes, and they find a lot. One of the most prominent ones is the influence of the past upon the present. As one of his characters, Gavin Stevens, says, "The past is never dead, it is not even past." In the American South, in addition to the legacy of slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction, and the struggle of poor people for justice and equality, there are a lot of past influences upon the present, and one of Faulkner's grand

themes is how his characters negotiate the past and present. As with any cultural history, there are a lot of things from the past that you cherish, you admire, you preserve. But there are also parts of the past we need to get rid of, things we have to change or transcend in order to move on. I think it is this need to escape from the past and move on to the present and future that engages many of Faulkner's characters. Sometimes the past can be treated as a positive heritage, because there are a lot of traditions we do need to preserve and cherish. But much of the past has been a burden, a curse, like slavery, so the tension between past and present is one of Faulkner's major themes.

In his fiction Faulkner also expresses his views toward the federal government, the North, gender issues, the roles of women, race, social classes, religion, war, and the conflicts between the rich and the poor. Marxists find his books quite interesting, because he often shows the plight of the poor, both white and black, and their struggles against an economic system that has left them behind and shut off opportunity. So there is a conflict between the social classes, and you often find that in Faulkner's novels. But I would say the struggle between the past and present is the dominant theme.

Li: The relationship of the individual to society is a major theme in American literature and politics. Does Faulkner treat this subject as well?

Hamblin: Faulkner holds traditional views concerning a sense of human responsibility to other people, to community. Extreme individualists in Faulkner, living isolated and alone—Joe Christmas would be a good example—are typically tragic figures. When it comes to personal responsibility, we need to remember that Faulkner is part of a Southern literary tradition that is not bound to a deterministic view of human behavior. Southern writers generally think we need to make responsible choices; we cannot excuse our failures by blaming them on hereditary or environmental influences. Naturalistic and deterministic philosophies became very dominant in American literature at the end of the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth century, with writers like Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser. Faulkner was influenced by such writers, especially early in his career, but he, like most writers of the Southern Renaissance, was never willing to give over the notion that human destiny was the matter of one's choice and free will. We make choices. If we make good choices, we can be happy and productive, and we can live happily and successfully in a community; if we make bad choices, we suffer and we pay the consequences. Faulkner's characters are Shakespearean, not Greek, governed by choice, not fate. They are responsible for their own destinies through the choices they have made. That belief makes Southern writers, especially Faulkner, much different from many other writers in the twentieth century, who place more emphasis on a deterministic philosophy. In Faulkner's works, choice, free will, personal responsibility play dominant roles. Faulkner's characters can be satanic, like Flem Snopes or Popeye Vitelli, or saintly and good, like Dilsey and, one of my favorites, Byron Bunch in *Light in August*. In Faulkner there is always a struggle between good and evil, since the human heart is conflicted and divided. There is the pull of the old, ugly past and also the pull into the bad side of human nature. You have to resist, you have to choose what is good and acceptable, and it is always difficult. Faulkner's theme in this regard is very consistent with Christian philosophy. Faulkner was raised in a Christian background; thus he was heavily influenced by *The Bible's* view of the world. You know that in the Christian philosophy, if you make good choices, you go to heaven; if you make bad choices, you go to hell; it is the choices you have made that determine your destiny. Faulkner believes it. His native South made some bad choices: slavery was a choice, civil war was a choice, destroying the big woods was a choice; but you have to remedy the bad choices you have made previously and you have to make better

choices in the present. But you don't make these choices in isolation; you are a part of the human community.

Li: Is existentialism related to Faulkner's view?

Hamblin: Existentialism emphasizes free will and choice ("You are condemned to freedom," the existentialists say), and may be understood in part as a resistance to determinism. But Faulkner's view is existential only to a degree. Faulkner holds some views in common with existentialism, but he does not share the nihilistic and pessimistic view of the world that existentialism embraces. He would not call the cosmos and our existence "absurd": he is more positive. But yes, there are a lot of common points between existentialism and Faulkner's views of human behavior and history, particularly in relation to human freedom and responsibility.

Li: As Faulkner reveals in his works, the American South has undergone a process of change under the invasion of Northern commercialization. What is Faulkner's interpretation of change and commercialism?

Hamblin: He loves nature, and he loves the land; thus he is very suspicious of industrialization and commercialization. At the same time he realizes, it is not an either/or situation; these are things that have to be negotiated. Benjy lives in the world of nature as an eternal innocent: he is three years old, mentally, and will always be three years old. But Faulkner does not represent Benjy's world as a perfect state; rather, it is sad, pathetic, to be trapped at any one point of history, to be unable to grow and advance. That is a tragedy. The challenge is taking what is best out of the old world and taking it with you as you go into the contemporary world. The past is not always better than the present, and vice versa. Some things in the past may be better than the present, some things in the present may be better than the past; you have to choose wisely, and you have to judge between them. And so it is with nature versus industrialization. Faulkner was always in favor of preserving the land, respecting the wilderness and old landmarks and buildings. For example, he made quite an effort to preserve the old court house in Oxford, when many of his fellow citizens wanted to tear it down and build a new one in the name of progress. And when you go to visit Oxford and see the magnificent old court house, you know Faulkner was right. Faulkner has a great respect for the good things in tradition; he believes you should honor what is good in the past, bring it forward, but there are many things in the past we need to throw away and leave behind, since they are not good for us.

Noel Polk, an outstanding Faulkner scholar, calls Faulkner a "man in the middle." His characters, too, are often caught in the middle; they have to negotiate the opposites of past and present. And Faulkner wants his readers to do the same. That's why Faulkner's novels are open-ended. He does not tell the reader what to think; rather, he dramatizes the problems, the situations, and then he leaves readers to make up their own minds about what the stories mean and what is the theme and meaning of the story. He does not try to force the meanings upon readers because he knows we always have to negotiate meaning for ourselves, and we each do that in a different way. Faulkner does not favor a return to the past. Benjy shows the tragedy of being trapped in the past, as Quentin and Gail Hightower and Thomas Sutpen do. Faulkner's characters who cannot move forward into the present are tragic characters. At the same time, his characters who live in the present without any ethical grounding or tradition, like the Snopes clan, are tragic too. The Snopeses survive into the present and future, but they have no humanistic foundation—no value system, no ethnics. They are amoral; they have power, money, greed, but they are animalistic, lacking in the human qualities they need to negotiate change positively. The secret is not to go back to the past or leave all the past behind, it is to find a proper balance between the two, and the best of Faulkner's characters, like Dilsey, or Byron Bunch, or V. K.

Ratliff, are successful in negotiating these oppositions.

Li: Race is a very important factor in Faulkner's novels. What is Faulkner's attitude towards it?

Hamblin: Almost all Southern writers deal with race, so it is no surprise that Faulkner's novels also deal with race. Faulkner's great-grandfather owned slaves, and he may have fathered children by one of them. Thus, in the story of L. Q. C. McCaslin in *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner may be writing about his own family history. Faulkner had great sympathy for the little people of the world, whatever their color. In the American South, historically, black people have been discriminated against as second-class citizens; they've had to ride in the back of the bus. Faulkner appeals for justice, fairness, and *Go Down, Moses* is his best testament that regardless of the color of a person's skin, they are equal, they should be fairly treated under the law, and they should have equal opportunities in economics, business, and politics. I don't think Faulkner is a liberal on race; I would call him a moderate. He is a white Southerner who did not live to see the Civil Rights Movement and the changes it brought to the American society. He lived in a different time, in a more conservative era. He believed that blacks should have equal schools and equal opportunity, but I don't believe he would approve of social integration; I think he would have been very upset if his daughter Jill had brought a black boyfriend home with her. Once again, we see Faulkner as a man caught in the middle. Concerning race, Faulkner is very much a product of his time and place. I'm sure he would be amazed (and I think pleased) to see that we have an African-American president now, only fifty years after the Civil Rights Movement. Faulkner thought it would take at least a hundred years for American racial attitudes to change significantly. So I am convinced that Faulkner would be amazed at the enormous change in race relations in the American South.

Some of his best books such as *Go Down, Moses* and *Light in August* center on race, particularly on biracial characters. Faulkner understands that most blacks in the United States are not black, that is, only black; they also have white ancestors. Dr. Martin Luther King, for example, was called a Negro, but he actually was part black, part white, and part Native American. Faulkner's Joe Christmas is biracial; in truth, he does not know what he is. Maybe his father was Mexican; maybe he was a black; Joe doesn't actually know. But our history, our culture even today still clings to that outdated, outworn notion that if you have the smallest trace of black ancestry (the "one drop rule"), we are going to call you black. As the post-colonial critics remind us, it's interesting that farther south, in the Caribbean and throughout Latin America, this is not an issue. There you are allowed to take pride in your mixed ancestry; but in the American South, historically, blackness, even partial blackness, has been treated as a curse. And while that attitude is changing, it is still present to a degree. No matter how many times Barack Obama reminds us that he is not only black, that he has a white mother, white grandparents, there are still people (both white and black) who will insist that he is black and only black. This is why scholars today point out that race is in part a "social construct," that is, black is whatever society decides to call black. Obama honors both sides of his heritage. He is proud of his black ancestors; he is also proud of his white ancestors. We should not force him to choose between the two. Most Americans, in fact, are a mixture of racial and ethnic identities; that is the result of our egalitarian history. Thus it is not accurate to call a biracial person black, because that is only part of his identity. Faulkner understood all of this long before the rest of our society, so he depicts his biracial characters as being caught in a culture that will not allow them to be biracial, that forces them into the box of being black. That is the situation with Joe Christmas and Charles Bon. If they lived somewhere other than Mississippi—maybe California or New York, or Europe, certainly in the

Carribean, maybe even in today's Mississippi—their color would not matter. But in the South that Faulkner knew, because race was still such a crucial issue, they were regarded as black, no matter how light their skin was.

I believe that Faulkner personally is bigger than his characters. His characters are locked into a provincial way of looking at the world, and Faulkner can show the shortcomings of that, because he has seen a larger world. And one of the best places you see that paradox in his works is in his treatment of race. Faulkner's characters view race in the old way, but Faulkner himself is moving to a larger view of that subject. That is the history of America. We have painfully, slowly, but progressively moved away from the old ways of looking at race and are trying a new way of looking at it. Race should not be used to define characteristics of any person's identity or value, but some people still hold the old-fashioned view, and it is hard for them to let go of that view.

Li: Could you make a brief comment on Faulkner's male characters and female characters? How does Faulkner interpret femininity and masculinity in his works?

Hamblin: Again, as with race, Faulkner's characters reflect the time in which they live. There are some male characters who abuse women (Popeye, for example); there are some who don't (Byron Bunch); there are some female characters who are fixed in the traditional role of female characters; there are others like Caddy Compson who challenge the traditional role of female characters. Faulkner's novels have different types of female and male characters. Sometimes they mirror the gender roles of the time in which they live; at other times (as with Caddy Compson) they are in opposition to those roles. Faulkner presents a large variety of types.

More and more Faulkner studies are dealing with gender issues, not only the female and male issue but also the question of heterosexuality versus homosexuality. Just as we have learned in the field of race, there are emerging new perspectives on gender. These studies reflect the influence of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, especially Jung. Jung thinks that every individual possesses both female and male attributes. Even if we are males, we have female tendencies, and females have some male characteristics. In the development of the psyche typically either the male or female side will come to dominate, but you still need to have a harmonious balance between the two. Males need to keep in touch with their feminine side; females need to maintain touch with their masculine side. Jung argues that suppression of either side of one's personality will lead to neurosis, or worse. Faulkner's successful characters (for example, Dilsey, Lena Grove, Byron Bunch, V. K. Ratliff, Gavin Stevens, Ike McCaslin, Lucas Beauchamp) are not aggressive, violent, or destructive; they develop a harmonious psychology which enables them to live peacefully and productively with themselves, their neighbors, and their community. They seem to be characters who mirror the Jungian ideal: female characters in touch with their male side and male characters in touch with their female side. As with other Faulkner subjects, such as time and individualism and race, there is a negotiation, in this case between the female and male principles. And the solution, I would argue, is not to be found in the conflicts of genders and gender wars, with one side winning and the other losing; it is to be found in the peace and harmony and balance of male and female principles. You can study Faulkner's characters in terms of Jung's theory and see which ones are able to negotiate these opposites in a healthy and productive way. Jason Compson, for example, who hates women, completely denies his female side. He is all masculinity. Ike McCaslin, on the other hand, is a male who seems to be very much in touch with his feminine side.

Some critics find the basis for Faulkner's examination of gender roles within his own biography. If you look at Faulkner's picture as a boy, he is delicate, pretty, almost like a girl. Perhaps the reason why Faulkner grew a mustache is by doing so he would appear to be more mascu-

line. It seems to have bothered him that he did not present more of a masculine image, so he lied about going to the war; he went hunting, even though he did not like killing animals; and of course he drank excessively. In all of these actions Faulkner seems to be trying to create the image that he is more masculine than he appears. In this connection, there may be a good deal of Faulkner's own feelings in his portrayal of Quentin Compson. Quentin is not masculine in the traditional sense, and he worries about his gender and sexuality. He is wrestling with his inner urges and drives, and ultimately he is unable to find a happy and harmonious reconciliation of those conflicts. But Quentin is only one character. Faulkner gives us a large variety of character types.

Li: What do you think of Faulkner as a short story writer?

Hamblin: A large number of critics think Faulkner is a better short story writer than he is a novelist; I think Malcolm Cowley may have been the first one to offer that theory. Cowley, a very influential critic who edited *The Portable Faulkner*, points out that several of Faulkner's novels were basically made out of his previous short stories. Moreover, Faulkner's short stories are relatively easy to understand, while his novels are so difficult and offsetting to read. Among recent critics, James Carothers has done a book on Faulkner's short stories, and he agrees with Cowley that Faulkner is a masterful short story writer and argues that critics should be spending more time studying his short stories. In ranking the degree of difficulty of producing the various genres, Faulkner put poetry at the top, short stories second, and novels third. So he apparently thought of himself as a pretty competent short story writer. I think most scholars agree with him.

Li: Then, how about Faulkner's poems? It seems that they are paid less attention to.

Hamblin: Yes, that is certainly the case. Maybe it is unfortunate, but Faulkner did not stay with poetry long enough to develop his full talent in that area. When he wrote poetry, he was imitating Eliot and Swinburne and Housman. Most beginning writers are imitators; they start imitating the masters and eventually move toward independence. But Faulkner never stayed with poetry; all of his poems were written in his early years (even those that were published later). So Faulkner quit writing poetry when he was still in the imitation stage. I think Faulkner's poems are quite interesting, and I like quite a few of them; but he did not stay with it long enough to really discover how good he could be in poetry. Judith Sensibar has made the most extensive study of Faulkner's poems; her study shows how the themes, use of language, and character types in Faulkner's poems find their way into his fiction. Even though she admires his poetry and studies it closely, she considers Faulkner's poems to be apprentice works, interesting primarily in relation to his later, greater fiction. But there remains a lot to be done on Faulkner's poetry.

Incidentally, another area of Faulkner study that has been neglected is his movie work; very few critics—no more than a half-dozen—have studied Faulkner's Hollywood career. In general, these are the two areas most neglected by scholars: the poetry and the movie scripts. There is a lot of work yet needed in both of those areas.

Li: Finally, could you please tell me what you think of the Faulkner study in China?

Hamblin: I have only come to know about the Chinese study of Faulkner during the past few years, only since Chinese scholars have been visiting our Faulkner Center, so I am just recently aware of the popularity of Faulkner in China. But I would stress that we learn from you too. As I noted earlier, a big tendency in Faulkner study in the United States has been to identify Faulkner as a Southern writer, but when the Chinese scholars come here, they tell me how they read Faulkner, and I learn from them to view Faulkner in a different context. In the United States, we keep putting Faulkner into the box labeled "Southern writer," but the Chinese scholars do not read Faulkner from a Southern historical perspective; they approach his work from a broader humanistic view, looking at the characters, the language, the themes such as the mixture of tragedy and com-

edy and the struggle between good and evil. The Chinese scholars are not as grounded in the Southern context as we American scholars are, and, as a result, they are free to give us a new perspective on Faulkner. We help the Chinese scholars see how Faulkner is a Southern writer, for example, when we show you Oxford, the geography and landscape of his work, the old court house, the house where he lived. But you read Faulkner with Chinese eyes instead of American or Southern eyes, so you are in a position to remind us that Faulkner is bigger than his Southern context because he is more universal.

All great writers, of course, deal in universals. Shakespeare does not belong only to Stratford, and he is universal. Likewise, Faulkner is much bigger than Oxford and the American South. I think that the right way to read any great writer is from the humanistic perspective, whatever region or locale he might represent. Of course, as Faulkner says, you cannot sit down to write a universal novel, and you have to write what you know; but if you are any good, or lucky, what you know will be translated into some universal themes. And somebody from another part of the world reads what you have written and says, I feel the same way. I am not a part of the writer's world, but I feel the same way about my children, my government, my dreams, whatever. So with the Chinese scholars and me, it is a mutual exchange. We benefit each other: I learn something about reading Faulkner from them, and hopefully they learn something from me.

Li: Yes, we need to learn from each other. Thank you very much.

Hamblin: Thank you very much.

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