

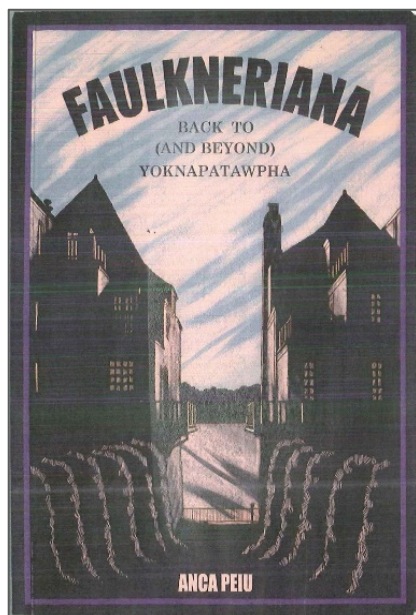
## BOOKS

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### **Anca Peiu, *Faulkneriana. Back to (and Beyond) Yoknapatawpha*, București, C.H. Beck, 2019, 266 p.**

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To discuss William Faulkner in any capacity that could be considered relevant is not an easy task. As one of the most evocative authors of the American South, his novels and short stories have come to be regarded as the quintessential example of what one might call Southern literature. Moreover, his work has been spared no criticism or analysis from literary theorists and fellow authors worldwide, most of whom have made great efforts to untangle the web of themes and motifs Faulkner had become known for exploring. The translation of his work into other languages had been very significant as it had caused the resurgence of various critics and writers' interest in Southern literature. Romania is no exception in this respect. For instance, in 1969 Sorin Alexandrescu published his study *William Faulkner*, Virgil Stanciu's *Orientări în literatura sudului American* (1977) briefly, yet expertly delves into the Faulknerian fiction, and Mircea Mihăieș published *Ce rămâne: William Faulkner și misterele ținuțului Yoknapatawpha* in 2012.



Alexandrescu's study impresses through its meticulous approach to Faulkner's work, as it takes into consideration the writer's initial reception by the critics and the many interpretations his novels have been subjected to. It provides an extensive look into the writer's narrative along with a structuralist analysis of the typological structures Faulkner employs when it comes to his characters. Moreover, Alexandrescu also examines the writer's life as he focuses on several important events whose influence can be observed in many Faulknerian novels.

Mihăieș also focuses on Faulkner's life, as he presents a psychological, moral, and aesthetic portrait of the writer. He investigates the literary mechanisms which Faulkner employs in order to properly understand how a provincial writer managed to attain international renown. Mihăieș forgoes any attempt at a chronological approach, preferring instead to focus on the novels themselves and how they compare to one another.

Stanciu gives considerable attention to the Faulknerian microcosms. According to Stanciu, Faulkner has managed to bring the Southern life and mentality to the attention of the world beyond the American sphere. The pivotal theme of Faulkner's novels is the human being who respects and understands the Southern traditions. Stanciu considers that Faulkner's works have, in fact, managed to recreate and transcend beyond the limits imposed by a certain geographical reality.

To talk about Faulkner in Romania today would be, of course, impossible without mentioning these scholars. But the number of literary critics and American study specialists from Romania who wrote studies about Faulkner is much higher. We must, at least, briefly mention: Ion Biberi's *Microcosmosul lui Faulkner* (1982), Anca Mureșan's *The stylistics of literary translations: William Faulkner* (2019), Ioan Sava's *Narrative techniques in William Faulkner's work* (2004), Gabriela Dumbravă's *The southern short story from Faulkner to Styron* (2004), Teodor Mateoc's *Encounters with blackness: re-reading race and identity in William Faulkner's fiction* (2005), Ana-Karina Schneider's *Critical Perspectives in the late Twentieth Century: William Faulkner* (2006), Iulia Andreea Milică's *Literary representations of the Southern plantation* (2013).

Anca Peiu's interest in Faulkner goes back to her thorough stylistic study *Trecutul timpului perfect: de la Thomas Mann la William Faulkner published in 2001*. Her latest Faulknerian publication is *Faulkneriana: Back to (and Beyond) Yoknapatawpha*, published in 2019, a study which follows suit Alexandrescu, Stanciu, and Mihăieș. Peiu's research is a compelling approach to Faulknerian criticism. She considers not only the work of Faulkner in its context, but also the influence the

writer has had upon the evolution of literary representations of the American South in literature. Though it could be considered similar to other critical studies published before by virtue of approaching the same subject, it nevertheless provides an intriguing perspective upon some of the writer's most well-known novels and short stories, as well as the carefully constructed world of Yoknapatawpha County.

The 23 chapters of Peiu's monograph tackle different aspects of Faulkner's work. It also provides the reader with a chronology of the author's life, interlaced with several events of his contemporaries' lives, as well as two maps of Jefferson, Yoknapatawpha County. Each chapter acts as an individual study, rather than a cohesive unit, which facilitates Peiu's efforts to properly delve into the themes and motifs of the novels, as each chapter will present a new perspective upon a matter which was previously discussed. The reason is that, according to Peiu, Faulkner "defies any didactic effort at categorization" (238).

Nevertheless, Peiu's focus is clearly Yoknapatawpha itself, and its county seat, Jefferson, which she eloquently describes as a "live metaphor" (33). The significance attributed to this particular spot in the Faulknerian literary universe is quite understandable given the author's own fascination with places and their influence. Peiu even explains that with Faulkner spaces are rarely ever just spaces, but rather a 'kaleidoscopic enigma' which symbolizes "more than just the Old South: it is a fine fictive microcosm often representing the entire United States of America" (112).

Peiu acknowledges that Faulkner tends to associate the Old South not necessarily with the idea of a single coherent

and unitary setting, but rather with a set of conventions and traditions. "‘We the People:’ Townsfolk of Jefferson, Yoknapatawpha", "Poor White Trash of Yoknapatawpha: The Bundren Clan (*As I Lay Dying*, 1930)", and the "Out of Yoknapatawpha" sections in Peiu’s work show that, in Faulkner’s fiction, the county of Yoknapatawpha tends to occupy a far greater place than perhaps any of the characters themselves, who are all ultimately formed by its customs and traditions. Peiu remarks upon "the Old Southern social tensions stemming from inter-racial intolerance" (168) and "the permanent loss of an idyllic American wilderness" (186), as they ultimately reinforce the idea that the county might exist without its inhabitants, though they themselves are unable to escape it. In fact, the question that Peiu places much emphasis on is whether there is "actually any way *out* of Yoknapatawpha - for this writer and his readers" (197)? According to Peiu, the answer to this question is uncertain. Most of the novels that she analyses, especially those focusing on the Bundren and the Snopes clan, often reveal that there is no escape from the South, whether physically or psychologically. Exploring the flawed and perverse characters that populate Faulkner’s novels, Peiu comes to the conclusion that Faulkner imbues his characters with certain Southern values, such as chivalry and honour, which are always considered a result of their genealogy. Or at least this seems to be the case of the women he writes about. Females are always in danger of mothering the often weak-willed men that surround them. Annie Bundren, one of Faulkner’s most memorable heroines, is, thus, given considerable attention, especially in the chapter "Addie - The Return of the Letter A."

On the other hand, families and family stories are not neglected either.

Peiu also delves into matters related to Faulkner’s own perception of art. The Southern writer equates art to a form of survival that paradoxically has no inherent merit, but rather "is born from this particular ‘oratory of solitude’" (208) which his narrative often embodies. In chapters such as "Between Traum(a) and (Meta)Fiction: Lost Cause Letters, Hunger and Parties in Modern Prose - William Faulkner’s *Absalom! Absalom!* And Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*", Peiu comments that Faulkner expresses a certain reservation towards the notion of words and their performative function, which could be construed as rather ironic given the oral quality of his novels. "Words are safe no more" (76) is the conclusion Peiu ultimately arrives at. She explains that Faulkner often ascribes a certain inadequacy to words which, in his vision, often transcend life and fail to capture it properly and entirely. It seems that the appeal of Faulkner’s fiction lies in the fact that the readers are often seduced into imagining that it is only they who can understand and become aware of the messages hidden in Faulkner’s fiction.

This is the very point of Peiu’s study as well. Though she remarks that Faulkner might have been concerned merely with ensuring that people are made aware of his prowess as a unique "writer of the world" (66) through his work, this study chooses to focus not so much only on deciphering his novels and short stories, but on bringing awareness about the reception of Faulknerian studies in the Romanian literary scene.

As a translator, Peiu is acutely cognizant of the international impact of Faulkner’s work: "translating Faulkner into any

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other language means so much more than translating from American English ... [I]t means translating from all these languages involved in a Faulknerian idiom of an exquisite metaphorical richness" (195). Indeed, as Peiu states at the end of her study there is a certain difficulty in truly

and exhaustively researching Faulkner and his work. Yet this knowledge is precisely what makes him so compelling as a subject: we are not entirely aware of him still. Though, it could be argued we are perhaps one step closer now as another monograph has been published.

**ADINA DRAGOŞ**  
dr.florina@yahoo.com