

faithful to his originals for that reason. Dadié felt free to develop his stories in his own way, and even to invent some new ones. He dispensed with the opening and closing formulas which are almost invariably found in the storytelling of particular cultures. He also eliminated many of the choral responses which would be contributed by the audience in a live session, but he did keep many of the songs, in their original Nzima language, and the onomatopoeic effects, such as Tortoise walking: *Clouk! clak!* or Kakou Ananzè sharpening his matchet before the terrified squirrel: *Kochio! kochio!*.

That redoubtable trickster ("when they thought they had him by the arm they had hold of only one leg") figures in most of the stories, overreaching himself as usual and actually being outwitted by Iguana-son in one episode. Karen Hatch's welcome translation preserves most of the felicities of Dadié's descriptive style. Here is the opening of "The Yam Field": "The field stretched as far as the eye could see. And it belonged to Kakou Ananzè. The yam shoots gracefully twined round their supporting stakes and sprawled lazily over the ground like fat women in a king's harem. . ."; and here is a passage from the story of the stepchild who is sent to replace the broken pitcher—the *Mother Holle* motif found also in the Grimm brothers' stories: "Tufts of grass, like travellers looking for asylum in a village at evening, latched onto some reeds whose heads were in the water . . . A kingfisher, on the watch, scarcely beat his wings. The small fry navigated in squadrons; shellfish dragged along their thick, spiny bodies and staggered about as though they were burdened with a cross. A spider sat poised on a leaf and floated with the current. . ."

In the thirty years since this collection first appeared, great strides have been made in the faithful recording, filming, transcription, and comparative analysis of traditional tales, in Africa and elsewhere. But that process is primarily academic in aim and impact, though the results may occasionally inspire the work of a poet, as Kofi Awoonor was inspired by some lines from *The Myth of the Bagre* and J.P. Clark by *The Ozidi Saga*. But the task set themselves by Birago Diop and Bernard Dadié, or by Daniel Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola for that matter, was very different. It was the search for a new channel of literary art, adapted to the times, through which the great riches of the African narrative imagination could continue to flow.

James G. Watson

WILLIAM FAULKNER: LETTERS AND FICTIONS

Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987. Pp. 214, \$22.50

Reviewed by Sally Wolff

With William Faulkner's own admonition firmly in mind that "people who will open and read another's private and personal letters . . . deserve exactly what they get," James G. Watson undertakes in *William Faulkner: Letters and Fictions* a profitable comparison of Faulkner's own personal and public correspondence with the fictional letters that occur in his stories and novels. Faulkner's letters are not a promising resource for those who seek a clear por-

trait of Faulkner, the man. Always an intensely private individual, William Faulkner carefully guarded, crafted, and controlled the image of himself in his letters as much as he did in person. Thus the correspondence conveys contradictory impressions of him. In some letters he tends to view himself as the undereducated "old 8th grade man," the writer begging favors, and the country innocent negotiating from afar with the big-city publishers. Yet in other letters he blasts his literary editors with sharp independence and stubbornness; in his love letters he is often witty, playful, and erotic.

Despite the protean image created in this body of work, Faulkner's letters are now an important source, as Watson claims them to be, of "much that we know of his personal and creative life" (xii). In this book, Watson's aim is to analyze the similar rhetorical strategies that Faulkner uses in his canon of poems, letters, stories, and novels. The book begins with attention to the real letters, which represent, the author argues, an act of self-composition for Faulkner, an essential statement of self necessary for the creation of the "seamless, self-referential whole or 'cosmos'" (10) of Yoknapatawpha. He views these letters as autobiographical fragments among which Faulkner chose to establish his various masks—a process of "self-conscious selection, involving exclusion as well as inclusion and the construction of conscious and unconscious masks and personae that conceal as well as reveal" (128).

The section of Watson's book that offers the freshest interpretations and deserves compliment is the examination of the fictional letters and their relationship to the real correspondence and to Faulkner's major themes. *The Sound and the Fury*, for instance, contains twenty-one letters and telegrams, and many suggest the novel's theme of "failed communication and broken identity" (78). Uncle Maury's surreptitious letters to Mrs. Patterson; Caddy's letters to Miss Quentin; Quentin's undelivered letter to his father; and Jason's three letters and seven telegrams all forward the theme of "failure of selfhood." Letters serve as important narrative devices in other novels, too. Watson notes the heavy correspondence of Joanna Burden; the letter-like dialogue of Buck and Buddy McCaslin (through whose words, as Mr. Compson says, the past and the people "who once lived and breathed" there come before us); Charles's son's letter to Judith; Narcissa's letters from Horace and Snopes. Faulkner's characters, it seems, are always writing letters, and Watson juxtaposes them with relevant letters from Faulkner's own to demonstrate the proximity of the two "imaginatively charged bodies of writing" (xiii). The "epistolary personae" of the real letters become for Faulkner a source for fictional creation—"notes toward a future fiction." The personal correspondence can finally be said to "shape and be shaped by his fiction." Of these "crossings" between the real and fictional letters and letter writers, perhaps Temple Drake is representative: "all that matters is that I wrote the letters."