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Faulkner and Love: The Women Who Shaped His Art, A Biography. By Judith L. Sensibar. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

616 pp. \$40.00 cloth.

Ledgers of History: William Faulkner, an Almost Forgotten Friendship, and an Antebellum Plantation Diary. By Sally Wolff. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010. 225 pp. \$35.00 cloth.

Two new books have entered the already crowded field of Faulkner biography, each using previously unavailable sources to develop fresh insight into William Faulkner's life and the origins of his art. Judith Sensibar's *Faulkner and Love* offers portraits of three underappreciated women in Faulkner's life--his nanny Caroline Barr, his mother Maud, and his wife Estelle--and examines the writer's relationships with them. Sally Wolff's *Ledgers of History* uncovers Faulkner's friendship with Edgar Francisco, Jr., the great-grandson of Mississippi plantation owner Francis Terry Leak. The details of this friendship in turn provide an unconventional image of Faulkner as a scholar deeply engaged with the history of Holly Springs, MS, the location of the Francisco homestead, through his exploration of Leak's plantation diary and Francisco family stories. Wolff compellingly suggests that both the friendship and the historical investigations were important sources of the settings, characters, and historical drama in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels. In early biographies, Faulkner seems a spontaneously generating genius: the dropout who dallies with poetry, produces two amateurish novels, and then suddenly and inexplicably emerges as perhaps the most important fiction writer of his generation. Sensibar and Wolff depict Faulkner's art as emerging instead from an anxiety of literary, historical, cultural, and personal influences. Readers of *The Space Between* will find them engaging as interdisciplinary approaches to biography which draw insights from gender and sexuality, family and regional history, individual psychology and interpersonal relationships.

Faulkner and Love is an impressive and important work of scholarship. Attending to such diverse texts as photographic poses, sketches, essays, stories, and major novels, Sensibar depicts Faulkner's nanny, mother, and wife as women who defied social expectations for their gender and race. Despite Faulkner's deployment of traditional mammy figures--in *The Sound and the Fury*, in *Go Down, Moses*, in his funeral oration for Barr, and even on her gravestone (which reads, in part, "Her white children bless her")--Sensibar reveals that Barr's life belied the traditional representation of "mammy" as an asexual caregiver, linked by love only to the white family she served. Sensibar then shows how Maud Faulkner's artistic sensibility, intelligence, and education set her apart from other women of her social class. Her experience fostered an almost heretical resistance against southern patriarchy, especially the traditions of alcoholism and miscegenous infidelity in her family history. From Maud and her mother, Lelia Swift,

Faulkner inherited what Sensibar calls a “visual aesthetic,” his attention to graphical images in self-portraiture, photography, and in drawing, but also in depictions of these art forms in his fiction.

More than half of Sensibar’s book concerns Estelle Oldham. She, too, was a cultural outsider: an educated and artistic woman who resisted her culture’s objectification and her family’s commodification of women; a cultural critic who, in traveling outside of her natal geography, made critical connections between the colonialist cultures of the South, the South Pacific, and Asia. Representations of Estelle in previous Faulkner biographies emphasize negative characteristics while ignoring the lifelong affection between Faulkner and Estelle. In Sensibar’s careful examination of their relationship, it becomes clear that they saw in each other allies against the demands of their social class. Sensibar suggests that, while neither was interested in marriage per se, each saw a union with a lifelong friend as a means of avoiding censure and achieving a measure of freedom in society. The Faulkner who emerges from Sensibar’s book is a man whose gender and sexual identity are decidedly queer, though he remains powerfully resistant to identification as homosexual. According to Sensibar, Estelle and alcohol served as beards for Faulkner’s anxiety about his sexual identity and its effect on his standing in society and his family (367).

Shared identity as artists and cultural outsiders, cemented by a love that began in childhood friendship and deepened through the years, kept Faulkner and Estelle together. Sensibar shows that Estelle’s influence on Faulkner’s art—her role as muse for his poetry, plays, and drawings, and in the example of her own fiction—best explains their relationship. Through careful analysis of Estelle’s fiction, Sensibar convincingly argues that Faulkner’s conversion from poet to fiction writer, his turn toward local geography and culture, family history, and personal experience as the subjects of his fiction, and thematic choices including an emphasis on identity trouble and disciplinary violence all derive from Estelle’s example. Sensibar’s book ends with an examination of texts in which he acknowledges this debt, including his unpublished introduction to *The Sound and the Fury* and a set of photographs in which Faulkner recreated the imaginative scene at the heart of that novel with his daughter Jill in the place of Caddy Compson.

Sally Wolff’s *Ledgers of History* makes a more modest contribution to Faulkner biography, but her book is equally intriguing because she largely leaves the application of her discoveries to other critics. Wolff’s book received attention in the national press because of the discovery of the connection between the Leak diary (which was already known to historians of the antebellum South) and Faulkner, who appears in the interviews with Dr. Edgar Francisco, III, as a serious historian who spent long hours poring over primary sources and taking compendious notes. Wolff notes several examples of direct borrowing from the diary, notably including an argument

between Francis Terry and W. F. Leak which clearly served as the model for an exchange between Buck and Buddy McCaslin in *Go Down, Moses*. She also points out a wealth of names in the Leak diary that appear throughout Faulkner's fictional world, though she leaves unanswered the implications of Faulkner's application of slave names to white characters. Not all of Wolff's connections between the diary and Faulkner's fiction are as significant or as clear, however, especially when she argues for the diary's influence on Faulkner's vocabulary.

The most interesting material is the interviews and their evidence of what in her subtitle Wolff calls "an almost forgotten friendship." Dr. Francisco explains that Faulkner and his father knew each other from childhood and spent many boyhood hours playing together. In adulthood Faulkner made weekly trips to Holly Springs to hunt squirrel, drink beer, listen to repetitions of local and family stories, and then read the Leak diary. The relationship between Edgar Francisco, Jr. and Faulkner seems to have been a very conventional southern male friendship, one that provided Dr. Francisco with a "portal to manhood" (80). "I knew these were men, and I had better pay close attention to what they were saying and doing. I thought to myself that this is the only way I will get to be a man" (68). Their hunting and cooking was an exclusively masculine activity: Dr. Francisco's mother, Ruth Bitzer Francisco, "wouldn't touch [squirrel meat]; she wouldn't eat it; she wouldn't participate in the cooking; she wouldn't come in and be jolly. She would get furious. Quite agitated. She was anxious over it all" (69). Ruth's anxiety, along with Francisco's repetition that the friends "acted like the last two surviving members of a secret order," creates a sense of mystery around the relationship (176, see also 96).

The relationship between Faulkner and Edgar Francisco, Jr. ended, or fundamentally altered, because of Ruth's disapproval of it. To the minister's daughter Faulkner represented "the abandonment of discipline," and she "refused to allow herself to look at [Faulkner's] writing" (114, 93). Her disapproval seems to have stemmed from two sources. First, a drunk Faulkner welcomed his newlywed friend home with a handful of dead squirrels, a bucket of beers, and a tasteless joke referring to Ruth as "a fine mare, 'a cute little filly, a spirited little filly, a live one. You're gonna have to break her in'" (85). A similarly insulting statement comparing a young woman to a horse gets Thomas Sutpen killed in *Absalom, Absalom!*. The second point of contention was the Holly Springs Pilgrimage, a pageant into which Ruth put a lot of effort, but which Faulkner saw as sentimental and historically inaccurate. In 1939 or 1940, Edgar Francisco, Jr. ended the weekly visits, though Faulkner would occasionally visit his friend's workplace and the two would take up their conversation as if it never ended (91). This alteration in their relationship coincides with Faulkner's use of the Leak diaries in *Go Down, Moses*. The latter book, full of themes of grief and guilt, references

a masculine world of hunting, male friendship, homosexuality, and queer homosociality. It is likely that Faulkner was mourning the loss of a deep and enduring friendship, the exact nature of which remains a mystery.

We thought we knew William Faulkner. Despite the passage of time and the diligent work of previous biographers, Sensibar and Wolff have accessed previously unavailable sources and drawn on critical frames from gender and sexuality studies to produce refreshingly relevant images of the man and his work.

—Peter Alan Froehlich, Pennsylvania State University, Hazleton