

## TWO FAMILY NAMES: FAULKNER AND SARTORIS

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The grave of William Faulkner's brother John is marked by a unique inscription, in which the name is engraved "JOHN FA(U)LKNER." This inscription points to a concern for names that is found in the whole Falkner family. An unsupported story says that the family name was originally spelled "Faulkner" (it descends from a Scottish spelling of "Falconer") but that Col. William Clark Falkner, the novelist's great-grandfather, dropped the "u" so as not to be confused with a "no-'count" family in a neighboring county. Actually, Col. Falkner's name was itself spelled with a "u" in one contemporary report, but since it was by a Yankee officer perhaps we should discount it as resulting from ignorance and animus. And there was a Col. W.W. Faulkner with whom Col. W.C. Falkner became confused in later legend.<sup>1</sup> So perhaps there was some ground for the novelist's ancestor to be concerned with his identity and the spelling of his name.

The name remained Falkner for all members of the family until, in July 1918, William Cuthbert Falkner, the future novelist, registered in Toronto for the Canadian branch of the Royal Air Force. (He was named William C. after his great-grandfather, also a novelist, but the C. stood for Cuthbert since the Colonel had never liked the name Clark). Having

been turned down by the United States Air Corps because of his diminutive 5'5 1/2" stature and eager to enter the war as a glamorous pilot, Faulkner chose the R.A.F. Thinking it would be easier to be accepted if he were identified as an Englishman, Faulkner created a new identity for himself, developing a British accent, claiming British birth, and spelling the family name "Faulkner."<sup>2</sup> He did get into the R.A.F. but never saw combat, the war ending while he was still in ground school. However, he liked the role of dashing pilot so well that he retained the "Faulkner" spelling and invented a number of incidents to go with it, including a drunken flying spree ending in an upside-down crash into a hangar and resulting in wounds necessitating silver plates in his head and hip. The "u" remained in his name for all his professional publications and many of his literary and pictorial contributions to University of Mississippi publications thereafter. In 1940 another member of the family, William's brother John, published his first novel, Men Working. His publisher, Harcourt, Brace, suggested that changing the Falkner spelling, which he still retained, to "Faulkner," in imitation of his more famous brother, would help sales.<sup>3</sup> John agreed, and became "John Faulkner" as a novelist, while retaining the "Falkner" spelling for his many non-literary pursuits, thus leading to the anomalous spelling on his tombstone. The second brother, Murry Charles Jr., kept the "Falkner" spelling, but the youngest brother, Dean, adopted the "Faulkner" spelling, together (alas) with his eldest brother's love of flying, which led to his death in a crash.

The succeeding generation now had a choice. William Faulkner's daughter Jill kept the "u", but John's sons weren't so sure. At first John's older son Jimmy (James Murry) rejected the "u" but later incorporated it into his name, possible because he too was taken to publishing stories and essays. Jimmy's younger brother Chooky (Murry Cuthbert II), choosing to distinguish himself from his elder brother, at first used the "u" spelling, but when his brother changed so did he, and Chooky now spells his name without the "u". What will happen with the next generation, the oldest of whom is a teenager, is yet to be seen, although the "Faulkner" spelling has been incorporated into the middle names of two other family members, William Cuthbert Faulkner Summers (second son of Jill Faulkner and Paul D. Summers, Jr.) and Diane Faulkner Mallard (eldest daughter of Dean Faulkner's daughter, also Dean, and Jon Mallard).<sup>4</sup>

William Faulkner's sensitivity to names extended beyond the spelling of his own name, however. The man who devised names like Flem Snopes, I.O. Snopes, Montgomery Ward Snopes, Wallstreet Panic Snopes, and Lancelot Snopes (nicknamed "Lump"), was certainly aware of the evocative value of names. The names he chose for the fictional family that represented the epitome of Southern aristocracy reveal something of the complex emotions he felt toward the changes taking place in Southern society. The aristocratic Sartoris family, a romanticization of Faulkner's own, was gradually being superceded by the Snopes family, a composite of the

redneck Lee M. Russells, Theodore R. Bilbos, and James K. Vardamans who were taking over Mississippi politics (two of the Snopeses were named Bilbo and Vardaman, in fact) and the T.W. Avents and Joe W. Parkses who were taking over Oxford, Mississippi, and particularly Falkner, businesses.

The Sartoris family, like Faulkner's, descended from Scottish emigres who reputedly fought on the side of the doomed Prince Charles Edward Stuart at Culloden and then sought their fortunes first in the Carolinas and eventually, through Tennessee, in the untamed north of Mississippi. Although earlier ancestors are mentioned in Flags in the Dust, Faulkner's first version of Sartoris, the Mississippi Sartorises begin with two brothers, Bayard and John, Confederate officers in the American Civil War. (Since the names repeat in the family, we'll call these Bayard I and John I to avoid confusion.) Although both are dashing and chivalric, Bayard I is killed when, having led a successful raid to capture Federal supplies, he foolhardily returns to seize a can of anchovies.<sup>5</sup> Despite many brushes with danger, Col. John Sartoris (like Col. William C. Falkner) returned from the war to rebuild his plantation, found a railroad, run for public office, and be murdered by a jealous former business partner. Col. John's one sone, Bayard II, bucked the code of the South by refusing to avenge his father's death (The Unvanquished) and eventually went on to found a bank (like Faulkner's grandfather, John Wesley Thompson Falkner). Bayard II had a son, John II, of whom little is said but who died of "yellow fever and an old

bullet wound" when his twin sons Bayard III and John III were eight years old.<sup>6</sup> In being unimportant, John II resembles Faulkner's father, Murray Cuthbert Falkner, by far the least dashing of the Falkner men. The twins, corresponding in the sequence to Faulkner himself and possibly his brothers, were both pilots during World War I. John III died in a daring aerial duel, not unlike Bayard I, while Bayard III returned from the war full of wild self-destructive tendencies, eventually to find death test-flying an experimental airplane (Sartoris). There was one other Sartoris male, Benbow Sartoris, son of Bayard III and Narcissa Benbow Sartoris, whose mother deliberately called him Benbow in an attempt to break the Sartoris curse.<sup>7</sup> The Sartorises--"There is death in the sound of [the name], and a glamorous fatality"--live "a life peopled by young men like fallen agnels, ... a meteoric violence like that of fallen angels, beyond heaven or hell and partaking of both: doomed immortality and immortal doom."<sup>8</sup> They "had derided Time, but Time was not vindictive, being longer than Sartorises. And probably unaware of them."<sup>9</sup> A less sympathetic speaker says of them, "Rotten luck they have. Funny family. Always going to wars, and always getting killed."<sup>10</sup>

This sketchy history of the Sartorises is intended only to hint at the qualities of these characters, qualities of romantic derring-do and deliberate self-mythopoeticization that are suggested by the names of the characters. But Faulkner's attitude to the Sartorises is mixed: he makes them figures of both chivalric excess and economic solidity, of dashing adventure and conservative reluctance to abandon the past. He

both mocks and reveres them. Bayard II as a boy (The Unvanquished) spends weeks hunting down and finally killing the murderer of his grandmother, even nailing the murderer's hand to his grandmother's gravestone, but as an old man (Sartoris) he spends his days sitting in his bank office and reliving the Civil War, refuses to abandon his horse-drawn carriage for the more modern automobile, prefers the old country doctor to the young specialist, and eventually dies of heart attack while riding in Bayard III's recklessly driven sportscar. The name Sartoris suggests the mixed attitude revealed in Bayard II's career.

Although the name Sartoris is in fact found among Mississippi families and could have been learned by Faulkner from local residents,<sup>11</sup> it more obviously suggests Carlyle's Sartor Resartus (and perhaps also William Faulkner's youthful dandyism, which earned for him the local soubriquet of "The Count"). The connection with Sartor Resartus evokes the deliberate antiquity, romanticism, and sense of distance with which Carlyle invests his spiritual autobiography, together with the intensity he imparts to the life and language of the central character, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh. The Carlyle connection evokes also his well-known support of the hero concept in history, as set forth in On Heroes and Hero-Worship. The Sartorises might well have patterned their lives on Carlyle's anti-democratic emphasis on individualism and the need to revere great leaders. But some of the skepticism expressed by Col. John Sartoris' sister, "Aunt Jenny" (Virginia) DuPre (she calls the

Sartorises "scoundrel[s] and...fools[s]"),<sup>12</sup> may be present in the root meaning of the name, "tailor." Faulkner may not have known that in the Renaissance a tailor was considered an insignificant coward, only one-ninth of a man (although he could have found this idea in several of Shakespear's plays), but he certainly knew that a tailor is as far removed from chivalric adventurousness as it is possible to be. He may also have remembered the boastful tailor from Grimm's fairy tale, "The Gallant Tailor," who celebrated his feat of killing seven flies on his jelly bread by wearing a belt stitched with the words, "Seven at one blow!" Although this tailor eventually became a king, Faulkner knew he wasn't writing fairy tales! Moreover, the ambivalence of which I speak is suggested also in the name of Carlyle's character, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, or "God-born Devil's dung." If the Sartorises are related to the heroes of chivalry on the one hand, on the other they are of the earth and gain whatever stature and peace they possess by acknowledging their tie to the land. This is demonstrated both when Col. John Sartoris, in The Unvanquished, recoups his losses after the Civil War by rebuilding his plantation (himself working hard with his hands) and founding his railroad, and when Bayard III, in Sartoris, gains a respite from his anguished thoughts by working the land and hunting with the simple hill-country men.

The repeated first names of the Sartoris men further underscore this ambivalence. To the extent that "Sartoris" is intended to evoke images of heroism and elegance, the name "Bayard" is especially appropriate.

It is undoubtedly taken from the name of Pierre Terrail, Seigneur de Bayard (c. 1473-1524), "le chevalier sans peur et sans reproche," who fought so nobly for King Charles VIII of France during his Italian campaigns.<sup>13</sup> At the bridge of Garigliano, Bayard is reported to have single-handedly held 200 Spanish soldiers at bay, and on another occasion he led 1000 troops in holding off for six weeks, in an almost indefensible spot, an attacking army of 30,000 soldiers, compelling the attackers to withdraw and saving France from invasion. Surrounded once in a battle against the English, he refused to surrender to anyone bearing arms and at length turned his sword over to an unarmed English soldier; King Henry VIII was so impressed by his courage that he released him without ransom. Bayard met his death like Roland, directing the retreat and defending the rear of the French forces near the Sesia River. We are told that, in addition to his courage (and unlike Bayard Sartoris I and III), Bayard was always shrewd and realistic in battle, maintaining an efficient espionage and reconnaissance system.<sup>14</sup> General Robert E. Lee was given the soubriquet "Bayard of the Confederate Army."<sup>15</sup>

However, while reading in other Renaissance materials, Faulkner must have come upon another Bayard, less complimentary to the Sartoris image. Bayard was the name of the famous horse, incredibly swift and agile, given by Charlemagne (according to medieval French romance) to the four sons of Aymon: Reynaud (or Rinaldo), Guiscard, Alard, and Richard. As revealed in the romance compiled by Huon de Villeneuve, this horse was

expandable: if only one of the sons rode it, the horse was of normal size, but it would elongate to accommodate the remaining sons if needed. Bayard (or Bayardo) can also be found in Boiardo's Orlando Innamorato, Aristo's Orlando Furioso, Tasso's Gerusalemme Liberata, Pulci's Morgante Maggiore, and elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> His fantastic feats are certainly linked to the chivalric adventures of the Sartoris, most of which involve horses or mechanized steeds like automobiles and airplanes, but the linkage is surely comic and meant to undercut the Sartoris attitudinizing. One can imagine what Faulkner, with his love for tall stories and fishing tales, would have thought of this conveniently expandable horse!

It is just possible, also, that Faulkner knew of the New York and Delaware Bayard family, who achieved some fame in United States politics. Nicholas Bayard (1644-1707), mayor of New York in 1685, was charged with sedition, treason, and Jacobitism but cleared and restored to office; John B. Bayard (1738-1807) was commended by George Washington for gallantry during the Revolutionary War and later served in the Continental Congress; James A. Bayard (1767-1815), a noted constitutional lawyer and a leader in the Federalist Party in the House of Representatives, helped to insure Thomas Jefferson's election as President in 1800 and served in Congress from 1796-1813; James A Bayard, Jr. (1799-1880) served in the Senate during the Civil War but resigned his seat in protest over the oath of loyalty to the Constitution required of Federal office-holders;

Richard H. Bayard (1796-1968) served in the Senate and as a chief justice of Delaware; Thomas F. Bayard (1828-1898), businessman, U.S. Senator from Delaware, Secretary of State and Ambassador to Britain under Grover Cleveland, was even considered as Democratic candidate for President in both 1880 and 1884 but never nominated; Thomas F. Bayard, Jr. (1868-1942) graduated from Yale in 1890, practiced law, and served as U.S. Senator from Delaware from 1922- 1929.<sup>17</sup> The Yale connection (Faulkner's good friend Phil Stone, a practicing lawyer, was Yale 1912), the Democratic party politics (Faulkner's grandfather and uncle were both much involved in Democratic party politics in Mississippi), or something else could have called to Faulkner's attention this family of Bayards, some of whom had qualities akin to those of the Sartorises, and some of whom bore identical names. If so, we have here a family with the sense of tradition and even some of the romanticism possessed by the Sartorises, but with a greater devotion to public service and a better record of success. If Faulkner had this family in mind, it must have been primarily by way of contrast. But there is no real evidence that Faulkner based his Bayards on these others. In any event, the name "Bayard," in Faulkner's works, was quite clearly meant to evoke and partially mock romantic chivalry.

More puzzling, though, is "John". William Faulkner knew many men named John, several in his own family. There were his great-uncle John Wesley Thompson, his grandfather John Wesley Thompson Falkner (the "Young Colonel"), his uncle John W.T. Falkner, Jr., his brother John W. T. Falkner III, his great grandfather Dr. John Y. Murry, and his great-

uncle Dr. John Y. Murry, Jr. Faulkner's great-uncle and grandfather had both been involved in frontier violence, his grandfather having been shot in the hand while gunning for the man who had shot his son; Faulkner's father, in the back with a shotgun and in the mouth with a pistol, all as a result of a personal quarrel over a woman.<sup>18</sup> And as earlier indicated, John Wesley Thompson Falkner was, to a large extent, the model for Bayard Sartoris II. But there were other men named John whose personalities could have been partly incorporated into John Sartoris I, II, and III: John Chisholm, John J. Craig, and John D. Martin open a trading post in what became the Courthouse Square of Oxford, Mississippi, and eventually purchased from the Indians the land that became the town of Oxford;<sup>19</sup> John Cullen, older brother of William Faulkner's fifth-grade playmate Hal Cullen, assisted in capturing and lynching a Negro murderer in 1908;<sup>20</sup> John Ralph Markette, another boyhood friend of Faulkner's, often took Faulkner for rides on his father's Illinois Central locomotive;<sup>21</sup> John McClure, an established poet who befriended Faulkner in New Orleans, was a personable though quiet man.<sup>22</sup> Then there are famous Johns like John D. Rockefeller and General John J. Pershing. There are literary Johns, from Little John of Sherwood Forest and John-a-Dreams (whom Hamlet describes as "peaking") to Byron's Don Juan and lusty Friar John of Rabelais' Gargantua and Pantagruel (which Faulkner must have read, since the marvelously comic way in which V.K. Ratliff discourages Clarence Snopes from running for Congress--by arranging for all the male dogs to

urinate on him--repeats Panurge's similar revenge on his coy Countess).<sup>23</sup> There are Johns who are saints, Johns who are kings, and even the conveniently anonymous John Doe, whom Faulkner must have encountered in the law office of his friend Phil Stone.

Actually, this plethora of Johns, far from being an embarrassment, may hint at Faulkner's reason for using the name "John." Just as "Diogenes Teufelsdröckh" conveys the majesty of the spiritual and the degradation of the physical aspects in man, and just as "Sartoris" suggests both the sublimity of heroism and the mediocrity of the tailor, so the ambivalency continues in pairing the chivalric but faintly comic, "Bayard" with the workaday name "John," which still has connections, in Faulkner's family and reading, with romantic violence and past glory. If Bayard is both Seigneur and horse, so John is both nobleman and privy. The chivalric elegances and heroism are mingled with the basic realities, just as Faulkner's regret over past Southern glories is mixed with his realistic perception of the need for change. The Sartorises fail because they doom themselves to repeating gestures that are no longer viable in the real present, whereas they find temporary peace and success when they put aside their romantic dreams and engage the land and the men and women around them in terms of objective fact. If the Sartorises had realized all the possibilities latent in their names, and if the Southern aristocrats could look more objectively at themselves, Faulkner seems to be saying, much of the anguish and dislocation brought by changing times could be avoided.

For Faulkner, a name implies character, but it is neither simple nor fixed. Names and spellings can be changed--in The Town, for instance, Wallstreet Panic Snopes changes his name to Wall Snopes in emulation of a courageous general of that name<sup>24</sup>--any name may contain more than one meaning and project more than one destiny. Insofar as onomastics implies a degree of determinism, Faulkner would have reminded us, it seems to me, that the complexity of names and their meanings leaves open many possibilities. As a humanist, concerned with the ways in which human beings freely create their own destinies, Faulkner might say that the name helps to determine the fate, but so many possibilities reside in the name that the human being remains essentially free and morally responsible.

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## NOTES

- 1 Joseph Blotner, Faulkner: A Biography (New York: Random House, 1974), Vol. I, pp. 28-29.
- 2 Blotner, I, 210-211.
- 3 Blotner, II, 1062-1063.
- 4 Blotner, "Genealogy," II, 222-223 (*italic*).
- 5 William Faulkner, Sartoris (New York: New American Library, 1957), pp. 30-31.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 86.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 302-303.
- 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 303,113.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 143.
- 11 Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 383.
- 12 Faulkner, Sartoris, p. 303.
- 13 Blotner, I, 209.
- 14 Encyclopedia Americana, Vol. 3, 1972, pp. 381-382.
- 15 William Rose Benét, ed., The Reader's Encyclopedia (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1948), p. 84.
- 16 Benét, pp. 61,84.
- 17 Encyclopedia Americana, Vol. 3, 1972, pp. 380-381.
- 18 Blotner, I, 53-54.
- 19 Blotner, I, 137.
- 20 Blotner, I, 113-114.
- 21 Blotner, I, 147-148.

22 Blotner, I, 390-394.

23 William Faulkner, The Mansion (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), pp. 315-320; cf. François Rabelais, Gargantua and Pantagruel, Book II (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1949), pp. 282-285.

24 William Faulkner, The Town (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), pp. 143-144.