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*Faulkner et le cinéma* by Marie Liénard-Yeterian (review)

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The cover of the journal 'Mississippi Quarterly'. The title is in a serif font. Below it, the subtitle 'The Journal of Southern Culture' is in a smaller font. There is a small logo in the center. At the bottom, it says 'Vol. 64, No. 1-2 Winter-Spring 2011'.

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*Faulkner et le cinéma*, by Marie Liénard-Yeterian. Paris: Michel Houdiard Editeur, 2010. 351pp. \$31 [22 €] cloth.

MARIE LIÉNARD-YETERIAN CONTINUES THE FINE TRADITION OF FRANCOPHONE scholarship on William Faulkner with *Faulkner et le cinéma*, her comprehensive study of his Hollywood oeuvre, including those projects for which he did little more than produce a scene's worth of dialogue, those that were never produced (most), and those for which he received no screen credit whatsoever (most). To manage such a vast amount of material (Faulkner worked on nearly 50 properties, after all, and over a period of twenty or so years), Liénard-Yeterian has organized her study into two parts: a summary of Faulkner's life-long and varied interactions with cinema, and then a studio-by-studio account of the properties to which he contributed.

In the book's first section, "Faulkner et le monde de Hollywood" ("Faulkner and the World of Hollywood") Liénard-Yeterian provides an account of pre-Hollywood and pre-sound cinema, that is, the cinema with which the young film-going Faulkner was well acquainted. Implicit then is the expectation that scholars take into account early and transitional cinema—not just studio-era Hollywood—in any consideration of his literary career, something that has not really been pursued beyond Bruce Kawin's compelling arguments about the novels and cinematic montage—in particular, Griffith's and Eisenstein's—and D. M. Murray's excellent 1975 essay, "Faulkner, the Silent Comedies, and the Animated Cartoon" (which Liénard-Yeterian doesn't reference). One only has to reread the opening of *As I Lay Dying* with Buster Keaton's *One Week* in mind to begin to appreciate the pay-off that a critical framework of this kind might engender.

While Faulkner may have been an avid filmgoer, writing for the "moom pitchers" was another matter, comparable to, apparently, working in the salt mines. Liénard-Yeterian approaches Faulkner's ambivalence towards Hollywood with the skepticism it deserves, and suggests that his grievances were a means of channeling the pressures and bitterness concerning his increasing family responsibilities; the guilt associated with his brother Dean's death; seemingly endless financial crises; and rejection by the public. She does well to remind us, then, of the productive professional and personal relations he shared with Meta Carpenter, Howard Hawks and Jean Renoir over the course of his

Hollywood career.

Part Two, “Bill the Screenwriter” (“Bill le scénariste”) begins with an overview of the studio system, and so provides the context for Faulkner’s experiences at MGM, Twentieth Century-Fox, and finally Warner Bros, with stints at Universal and RKO along the way. Here, I found most valuable Liénard-Yeterian’s checklist of those directors, screenwriters, producers and actors with whom Faulkner worked. (If only she’d provided an index, in which these names might also have appeared). One third of the chapter devoted to Faulkner’s MGM projects is given over to his relationship with Howard Hawks. Although I am not aware of any new material here—Kawin covered this relationship quite comprehensively in his 1977 *Faulkner and Film* and elsewhere—the sustained attention Liénard-Yeterian gives this friendship demands, I think, that we consider the place of Hawks in Faulkner’s oeuvre more broadly. She thus prods us to think in greater depth about the nature of artistic collaboration itself; indeed, its complex creative practices must surely affect the way in which we conceive of Faulkner as “sole owner and proprietor” of the great novels.

Liénard-Yeterian then offers a précis of each and every one of the properties Faulkner worked on. She devotes greater attention to some of these—*Today We Live* and *The DeGaulle Story*, for example—to unravel their connections (usually thematic or to do with plot) with the novels and stories. However, these are the very screenplays and treatments that receive scholarly attention time and time again. I wish that Liénard-Yeterian had written at greater length on the many overlooked or neglected screenplays.

This brings me to the two reservations I have regarding Liénard-Yeterian’s otherwise immensely useful study. First, it is impossible to ascertain whether or not she worked from the screenplays and treatments themselves. This textual ambiguity is a direct result of a second problem: the omission of any bibliographic details pertaining to the unpublished materials, which form the bulk of Faulkner’s Hollywood writings. Only the details of the few that have been published, in English and sometimes French, are included in the Selected Bibliography (“Bibliographie sélective”). Related to this, the citation details for the treatments reproduced in George Sidney’s unpublished 1959 dissertation, “Faulkner in Hollywood: A Study of His Career as a Scenarist,” remain buried deep in chapter endnotes rather than

appearing in the bibliography. Odd again is the absence of any reference to Kawin's edition of Faulkner's MGM screenplays and treatments (1982).

What I am still waiting for is a study that collates the titles, dates (not just years), number of pages, credited author/s, and archival location of every draft of each of the properties Faulkner worked on. This is of course no mean feat: most of Faulkner's screen writings are held in various archival collections across the United States. Such a meticulous bibliographic undertaking would shift the focus of Faulkner and film studies from the cinematic Faulkner to, as Liénard-Yeterian puts it, Bill the screenwriter, and would thus open up a whole new set of relations, perhaps as yet unforeseen, between industrial writer and literary artist. *Faulkner et le cinéma* is certainly an important step in this direction.

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*Cotton's Queer Relations: Same-Sex Intimacy and the Literature of the Southern Plantation, 1936-1968*, by Michael P. Bibler. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009. x, 298 pp. \$55 cloth. \$22.50 paper.

THE MYTHOLOGY OF THE PLANTATION IN THE US HAS BEEN A NOT SO SECRET agent of the Lost Cause in a cultural history stretching from the nineteenth-century saccharine apologias of John Pendleton Kennedy to the still lucrative cottage industry of plantation tours led by "hostesses" who cloak themselves in hoopskirts and the history of America's "peculiar institution" in euphemisms. For every image of "moonlight and magnolias," though, there is one that counters its impressionistic strokes with the stark lines of realism or the bold hues of parody. This demystification of the plantation can be traced from the antebellum slave narratives, which expose the violence and brutality underwriting the plantation social order, to postmodern offerings such as the recent storyline in HBO's *True Blood*, featuring the maniacal Vampire King of Mississippi writ as Southern plantation gent. What is rare to find in representations of and responses to the plantation mythos in American culture is nuance—a lack that Michael P. Bibler's compelling study, *Cotton's Queer Relations: Same-Sex Intimacy and the Literature of the*