



## Professorial Tourism: Reflections on Examples

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### Abstract

*“Professorial Tourism: Reflections on Examples” examines conferences that combine scholarly presentations with tourist activities that are organized by the conference itself. These are distinct from conferences where tourist activities are simply an aspect of the city or country where the conference is held. Particular attention is paid to the annual Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference (F&Y) and to the triennial meetings of the International Association of University Professors of English (IAUPE), with comments as well on the Willa Cather Conference (WCC) and the Dickens Project (DP). Discussion centers 1) on the reasons cities and institutions (colleges and universities) choose to host these conferences and 2) on the divergent needs of the three groups of attendees: scholars, general readers, and accompanying persons (usually spouses/partners). The discussion also draws on my personal experiences as a frequent attendee at F&Y and IAUPE. The article concludes with a speculation about what the future holds for these conferences and similar conferences, as the authors on which they focus cease to be contemporaries of the attendees.*

**Keywords:** Tourism, Professorial, Activities, Universities, Conference

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I begin this article with a comment regarding my relation to its topic and with further comments regarding the extent of its coverage. An English professor and literary critic who specializes in studies of the plays of William Shakespeare and the novels of William Faulkner, my encounters with the burgeoning field of tourism studies are oblique, a reflex of personal travel rather than of scholarly emphasis. The main title of the article, “professorial tourism,” is intended to distinguish its topic from the broader terms, “educational tourism,” “academic tourism,” and “study tourism,” that can encompass not only the experiences of professors but those of college students, who can spend a quarter or semester or more studying outside their native country. Similarly, the article’s subtitle, “reflections on examples,” with its anecdotal overtone, is intended to limit the area within professorial activities that the article addresses to a subset within a wider array of possibilities. The focus here will be on a particular type of professorial activity: conferences that combine scholarly presentations with tourist activities that are organized by the conference itself.<sup>1</sup>

There are, of course, many other opportunities for scholars, both those residing in the United States and those living elsewhere, to combine scholarly activity with tourism. Professors at American universities can spend a quarter, a semester, or longer abroad as a Fulbright scholar, or a visiting professor may accompany and supervise students participating in Education Abroad Programs. Professors can also attend conferences within their disciplines, as, for example, in my own discipline, the annual meetings of the Modern Language Association, which convene annually in early January, can attract 20,000 or more attendees, and, when meeting in New York City, often receive satiric gibes in popular media over some of the more *recherché* topics of presentations. But these gatherings differ from this article’s area of focus in that the tourist activities are merely an aspect of the city or country being visited, not opportunities arranged by the sponsoring organization.

The meetings that are of concern here are conferences that convene for as long as a week and that are designed to attract both scholars, accompanying persons, and general readers. These are usually, but not always, devoted to the study (and often celebration) of the life and works of a single individual—(e.g.) an author, a musician, or an historical figure. Examples from within my own field of study include

- The annual Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference (F&Y), held in late July in William Faulkner’s hometown, Oxford, Mississippi.
- The annual Willa Cather Conference (WCC), held in early June in Cather’s hometown, Red Cloud, Nebraska
- The tours of areas of England associated with Jane Austen’s life and fiction, sponsored by the Jane Austen Society of North America, and coordinated with activities of the Jane Austen Society (UK);
- The biennial F. Scott Fitzgerald Conference, held in various locations, both national and international;
- The annual Dickens Project (DP), held in late July at the University of California at Santa Cruz; and

- The triennial meetings, alternating between English-speaking and non-English speaking countries, of the International Association of University Professors of English (IAUPE).<sup>2</sup>

Because of the pandemic, a number of these gatherings were suspended for 2020 and again for 2021 or were held remotely, via internet links. My direct experience, all from prior years, extends to the first and last of these gatherings, F&Y and IAUPE, but I have visited both Lyme Regis, a seaside resort that Jane Austen visited and that figures prominently in her novel *Persuasion*, and the city of Bath, where Austen lived from 1801 to 1806 and which is the home of the Jane Austen Centre and of several Austen-related tourist activities. Also, academic acquaintances of mine have attended the Dickens Project, and my affection for Willa Cather's fiction has led me to be in touch with the sponsoring organization, the Willa Cather Foundation, and to consider attending the conference devoted to Cather's life and work.

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My attendance at F&Y, at which I made three or four scholarly presentations, began in the mid-1980's and continued intermittently for some twenty years thereafter. My attendance at the IAUPE gatherings began in 1998, at a conference in Durham, England, and continued, with interruptions, at meetings in Bamberg, Germany (2001); Vallerta, Malta (2010); London, England (2016); and Posnan, Poland (2019). At the Durham, London, and Posnan meetings I made scholarly presentations. Both F&Y and IAUPE, especially F&Y, offered me insight into both the advantages and the hazards of these sorts of mixed assemblages. The advantages accrue differently depending on the constituencies to which attention is directed: 1) the host communities and sponsoring institutions; or 2) the disparate attendees—scholars, general readers, and accompanying individuals (usually spouses/partners)—whose needs and expectations do not always align with one another. I will discuss these constituencies in order. Why, considering the first, do towns and cities encourage and support such gatherings? Why do host institutions, usually local colleges or universities, take on the burden, sometimes onerous, of sponsorship? The answers to these two questions, as far as F&Y is concerned, are markedly dissimilar.

Oxford, Mississippi, the site of the main campus of the University of Mississippi, has a population of a little more than 25,000 people. The university is the city's main employer, with nearly 3000 employees, or more than the second and third largest employers, an ammunition manufacturer and a residential hospital, combined. This circumstance, when combined with William Faulkner's status as a Nobel Prize-winning author, much of whose fiction has a strongly regional flavor, has made tourism a focus of the city's efforts at economic development. The F&Y Conference, five days in length, is always held in late July, a time when, as a male attendee of my acquaintance often joked, the heat and humidity is such that the week features two-shirt weather and three-shirt weather but never only one-shirt weather. Despite the challenge posed by that weather, attendance at the conference is strong, and the economic benefit for the city is considerable, directly in the form of a tourism tax, and indirectly through monies spent for hotel accommodations and meals in restaurants and for various other matters, such as purchases at local stores and fees for parking.<sup>3</sup>

In July 2019, for example, attendees, 150 in number, occupied 103 hotel rooms, at an average room rate of \$105 per day, with 112 total room nights at the university's hotel, the Inn at Ole Miss, of which 43 nights were reserved for conference speakers. How much was spent on meals by attendees is not information available to me, but the per diem rate for federal employees at that time was \$63 per day, and a study by a professor in the Department of Economics of the university, commissioned some ten years earlier, assessed the average expenditure per attendee for the five days of the conference at \$1000. The city also benefits from grants obtained from the Mississippi Arts Commission and other governmental agencies. For nearly the past thirty years, it has derived similar economic benefit from the Oxford Conference for the Book (OCB), held for three days in March, under the co-sponsorship of the university's Center for the Study of Southern Culture (CSSC), and Square Books, a large bookstore on the city's central square. This conference, which also includes a Children's Book Festival, features authors of various sorts—poets, novelists, journalists, historians, sociologists, and others—who read from and discuss their work and, as an attraction to attendees, are available to sign their books for purchasers.<sup>4</sup>

The financial benefits to the city of these conferences, and of other, non-university-related gatherings, such as the Oxford Blues Festival and the Oxford Film Festival, can be seen to be considerable. For the university, by contrast, primarily the English Department for F&Y and the CSSC for the OCB, the benefits are not monetary but intangible. The conference generates no revenue for the university beyond its registration fees, which in some years do not even cover the sponsoring department's costs. The intangible benefits, however, accrue in a variety of ways. Living in Oxford all of his adult life, Faulkner gave several of his novels settings identifiably based on locations within the city and its environs, while also exploring regionally specific themes, such as relations between the races, local customs and mores, and attitudes toward the Civil War and Reconstruction and their aftermath.

This circumstance gives the department a considerable advantage in recruiting faculty members and graduate students interested in studying Faulkner's life and fiction, those of other Southern writers, and, more largely, Southern history and culture. The F&Y conference offers these faculty members and students an additional enhancement, giving them the opportunity to network with conference presenters, most of whom are prominent

scholars from other universities, and to learn of current directions in the field. And this enhancement is available to others as well, because the department waives the conference registration fee for all its faculty members and graduate students, whether Faulkner's oeuvre is the focus of their work or not.<sup>5</sup>

When attention shifts from the city and the university to the other constituencies, of scholars, general readers, and accompanying individuals, the advantages of this type of mixed gathering come to be somewhat counter-balanced by the hazards.<sup>6</sup> The advantages for the scholars who attend are evident—the networking and the knowledge gained, mentioned above, and, for the speakers, the enhancement of their scholarly profile through the publication of their presentations in the conference proceedings, in the form of a book from the University Press of Mississippi. For the general readers, the advantages also seem evident. Because of its stylistic difficulty, William Faulkner's fiction is an acquired taste that can prove to be, in Hamlet's phrase, caviar for the general, a fact that became evident in 2006, when Oprah Winfrey's choice of three of Faulkner's novels, *As I Lay Dying*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Light in August*, for her book club met with initial journalistic and scholarly skepticism, less readerly enthusiasm than had greeted earlier, more accessible selections, and declining interest among online chat group members as their reading progressed from the first to the second and third of the novels.<sup>7</sup>

For those readers who *have* acquired the taste, however, Faulkner's fiction can be addictive, capable of rewarding his readers, whether scholars or others, with fresh insights and renewed pleasure, even after multiple re-readings. At the same time, the nature of these insights and of this pleasure may differ markedly for the two audiences, and this difference can lead to tension between the two groups during the conference, and even to occasional hostility. René Magritte's painting, "The Treachery of Images," combines a realistic depiction of a tobacco pipe with the statement, inscribed within the painting, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe." By calling attention to the illusory nature of his painting, Magritte continues a long tradition of similar works, stretching back to Diego Velázquez's magnificent "Las Meninas" and beyond. And a similar interest in self-referentiality can be seen throughout the history of literature, as in Shakespeare's plays, where the behavior of Iago, the malignant "plot maker" of *Othello*, invites meta-dramatic reflections on the parallel between his activities and those of the playwright himself.

Many scholars are comfortable with having their attention drawn to this aspect of the arts of representation and may find it a compelling subject for study. But while this can also be true for general readers, it is not always so. The tourist activities associated with the conference are varied, ranging from a full day trip to a cotton plantation and a blues museum in the Mississippi Delta to a reception and buffet dinner at Rowan Oak, Faulkner's colonnaded home near the university campus. Always included as an option is a bus trip through the town and its environs, with the tour guide identifying locations, such as a ditch located between the university and the town square that resembles a similar declivity down which the doomed character Joe Christmas flees in *Light in August*. At the end of one of these trips, a German scholar seated beside me on the bus questioned the value of the tour, saying that the identification of these locations held little interest for him. What he found interesting was how Faulkner transformed them in his fiction. How, he wondered, could Faulkner have made great art out of such banal, unpromising material?

My impression, however, is that many of the general readers who took this and similar tours, and some of the scholars as well, responded not by increasing the distance between the fiction and the settings but by diminishing it. An attraction of the fiction for these individuals was less its metaphoricity than its literalness, so that tracing the route around the town square followed by the horse-drawn carriage at the end of the novel *The Sound and the Fury* or leaving a bottle of whiskey beside the headstone of Faulkner's grave became a sort of secular pilgrimage and a form of personal engagement. There are other authors, of course, whose works arouse such passionate identification—one thinks, for example, of those members of the various Sherlock Holmes societies who treat, with differing degrees of self-irony, Arthur Conan Doyle's creation as if he were real, and who engage in speculations about activities on Holmes' part that are nowhere depicted in the stories and novels. And there are undoubtedly scholars of Doyle's career who view such speculations as misguided, even risible. But the length of the F&Y conference, the social interactions it fosters, and its format, where both groups attend the scholars' presentations, can highlight to an unusual degree this difference in readerly approaches and expectations.

Furthermore, directions taken by literary study over the last forty or so years—the rise of feminist studies, critical race studies, new historicism and cultural studies, poststructuralism and posthumanism, and the augmenting (or displacement) of close textual analysis with an emphasis on literary theory—have exacerbated the difference, as two examples can illustrate. The F&Y conferences began in 1974, with the proceedings first published following the 1976 meeting, and for several years the themes (e.g., "The Maker and the Myth" [1977], "Faulkner and the Southern Renaissance" [1981]) were, by later standards, anodyne and the presentations mainly celebratory of Faulkner's artistic mastery. But the themes for the 1985 and 1986 conferences were, respectively, "Faulkner and Women" and "Faulkner and Race," and many of the presentations reflected a sort of tectonic shift in both method and focus, toward theory-dominated analyses and toward emphasis, at the one conference, on the corrosive negativity of several of Faulkner's depictions of women and, at the other, on the limitations, hitherto largely unexamined, of his depictions of blacks.

The first of my examples took the form of the varying audience reactions to two presentations at the 1986 conference, presentations that in retrospect seem almost like salvos fired in a war between literary criticism's future and past. In "Marginalia: Faulkner's Black Lives," Philip Weinstein, a Professor at Swarthmore College, drew on knowledge of advanced theory he had gained while attending seminars led (in Paris) by the philosopher Jacques Derrida and the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan to develop the view implicit in his title. "Largely deprived by the narrative of voice, of point of view, of their own past and future," Weinstein says, "blacks as represented by Faulkner are truncated figures. . . . [T]heir importance is for *others* alone," where the "others" are both the white characters in the works of fiction and Faulkner himself, who uses blacks, as "the medium through which he imagines—with both longing and repugnance—how it might feel to be not-white." Despite "some remarkable portraits of black beauty, courage, pathos, and cunning," Weinstein says, "the power of [Faulkner's] racial imagination lies elsewhere. . . . in the depiction of the turmoil and hatred that the notion of black can unleash in the white male mind," and for this reason Faulkner cannot "inhabit" the interiority of marginalized black characters like Jim Bond in *Absalom, Absalom!* and Samuel Worsham Beauchamp in *Go Down, Moses* in the way that he can that of so seemingly inaccessible a white character as the mentally damaged Benjy Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*.<sup>8</sup>

The second presentation, "Man in the Middle: Faulkner and the Southern White Moderate," by the late Noel Polk, a prominent Faulkner critic and a professor at the University of Southern Mississippi, was written, I assume, without prior knowledge of Weinstein's talk. But Polk mounts what is essentially a rearguard action designed to rescue Faulkner first, as an individual, from criticisms directed at his at times provocative public pronouncements concerning racial issues and second, as an artist, from the critiques now emerging in the field and evident in Weinstein's presentation, as well as in those of some of the conference's other speakers. For Polk, black lives in Faulkner's fiction ultimately do not signify in and of themselves any more than they do for Weinstein, but for an opposite reason. In an impassioned and rhetorically insistent peroration near the conclusion of his talk, Polk says that we do Faulkner's "Negro characters an injustice if we do not at least try to see them as human first, and black only second." Nancy in the short story "That Evening Sun" is a part-time prostitute and her husband, Jesus, potentially her future murderer. But Faulkner's treatment of the two, Polk says, if examined closely, "forces us to the astonishing knowledge that [their] feelings are, well, *white*: what we are really astonished at, even if we do not know it, is that those feelings are *human*."

It is fair to say that Polk's argument has aged less well than Weinstein's. However much Polk seeks to engage imaginatively with the interiority of Nancy and Jesus, abstracting them from their blackness into a generalized (and, seemingly, dominantly white) humanity will strike most current readers as less convincing than Weinstein's emphasis on similar characters' inaccessibility. But at the conference, the reaction was opposite. Weinstein's talk was given either midway through the conference or earlier on the same day as Polk's, which was given last, as a sort of capstone, a position most likely accorded him in consequence of his prominence in the field, his regional academic affiliation, and his prior involvement with the conference. Weinstein's presentation was greeted courteously, with applause, whereas Polk's met with an extended ovation and, as I myself noticed, an audible sigh of relief throughout the auditorium. It would be presumptuous on my part to claim that these reactions originated only from the general readers in attendance. But I do believe that many of those audience members did so participate. Whatever might have been his intention, what Polk offered was *comfort* and, more largely, scholarly support for a familiar way of reading and enjoying Faulkner's fiction.

My second example, more vivid, can be briefly treated. It came to me at second hand, my not having attended the conference the year in which it is said to have occurred. F&Y is an attractive venue in which to make presentations, in part because of the amount of time allotted to the speakers for their presentations—almost always an hour and a quarter, with the final fifteen minutes reserved for questions from the audience. After a presentation that challenged past interpretations of Faulkner's fiction and that was reliant on advanced terms and concepts of literary theory, questions from the audience were evidently few in number and then ceased entirely to be voiced. The presenter attempted to encourage further questions by using a familiar classroom technique, telling the audience that, as he would say to his students, there is no such thing as a dumb question. At a conference I did attend, a scholar responded to a talk similar in method and intention to this speaker's by saying that he would at least still possess the story "Mule in the Yard," as if the pleasure he took in reading and teaching Faulkner's fiction was threatened by the estranging tendencies of current directions in criticism. So I do not know whether the response to the speaker's attempt to encourage further questions came from a scholar or a general reader. But in either case, the speaker may well have found the response disconcerting, because someone in the back of the auditorium said, loudly, "We're not the dumb ones here."

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The tensions and differences that occasionally arise at the F&Y conferences are accompanied, and largely outweighed, by the many congruences—friendships formed, opportunities to appreciate anew southern cooking, on- and off-site musical performances and receptions, talks by townspeople and by Faulkner's relatives and their

descendants—that make returning, either year after year or intermittently, a practice common to many people. Whether other single-author conferences show a similar mixture of tensions and attractions is a question I cannot address on the basis of personal experience. But I believe that the Willa Cather conference, for one, may do so, and for reasons resembling those that I have just described. Cather commands no less intense a devotion among her readers than does Faulkner among his, in part through a similar regionalism—the compelling descriptions of the prairie landscapes and small-town mores found in several of her novels and short stories. As at F&Y, the literalistic style of reading that this devotion encourages is supported in various ways at the conference, not least through tours of Red Cloud (Cather’s youthful hometown) and the surrounding area, for the purpose of identifying sites resembling those depicted in the fiction.

In the late 1990s, however, again as with Faulkner, changes in the literary-critical climate challenged this readerly orientation, primarily in Cather’s instance through scholarly attention to her lesbianism, an aspect of her identity that Cather herself sought to conceal from public attention. Led by Sharon O’Brien, in her *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice*, critics began calling into question Cather’s emphasis on male characters, such as Jim Burden in *My Ántonia* and Godfrey St. Peter and Tom Outland in *The Professor’s House*, and claimed to find an underlying, occluded, feminism in her fiction. In *Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism*, Joan Acocella, best known for her work as the dance critic for the *New Yorker* magazine, argued strenuously against this development. While not herself supporting literal-minded readings, Acocella claimed that in attempting to read *through* the surface of the texts, these critics overlooked, indeed often even seemed indifferent to, their aesthetic richness. She advanced instead a view of Cather as a tragedian, someone who can transform the ordinary disasters of life into a “principle” and thereby make them “heartbreaking.”

In her final chapter, Acocella describes her own visit (in 1994) to the conference and provides anecdotal evidence of the varying effects on attendees of the critical changes she describes. On the one hand, while a paper on homoeroticism in one of Cather’s novels occasioned “some mumbling in the back of the hall,” “[y]ou can now use the word ‘lesbian,’” said a graduate student in attendance, “without getting booed out of the room.” On the other hand, in a view more literal-minded than Acocella’s, a visitor complained about “all these people [who] come in and symbolize about Cather,” saying that her “books are about real life, the way life was.” And a few years earlier, Acocella was told, a busload of “Cather fans got out and spat on [the] grave” of the railroad worker who impregnated and then abandoned a young woman named Annie Sadelak, thereby serving as the model for Larry Donovan, the character who does the same to Ántonia Shimerda, the eponymous heroine, based on Sadelak, of *My Ántonia*.<sup>9</sup>

By comparison, yet another single-author conference, the Dickens Project (DP), held annually on the campus of the University of California at Santa Cruz, operates on a model that seems better suited to fostering collegiality than the ones relied on by F&Y and WCC. Unlike those conferences, which usually concern themselves with a variety of their author’s works, and which require no prior preparation on the part of attendees, DP focuses on a single novel by Dickens, announced well in advance of the gathering. In an anecdote-laden account of her attendance, Jill Lepore, a historian at Harvard University and frequent *New Yorker* contributor, describes how the opportunity to read or reread the novel—in her instance, *Great Expectations*—combines with a variegated structure of activities to encourage interaction among “students and readers, scholars, and teachers.” In addition to “lectures . . . delivered in the morning, afternoon, and evening,” the conference includes “late-night screenings of film adaptations of the week’s novel, . . . faculty seminars, graduate writing colloquiums, and teaching workshops, not to mention [a] Victorian tea [and] a Victorian dance.” And while this structure can lead, as Lepore confesses, to “Dickens Fatigue,” and to occasional complaints of the sort voiced at F&F and WCC, it also leads to a general reader enjoying attending because “the experts are actually experts, and they don’t talk down to you.”<sup>10</sup>

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IAUPE, the other conference combining scholarship and tourism with which I am personally familiar, offers a combination of contrast and comparability relative to single-author gatherings, both those discussed above and others. It differs in structure, purpose, finances, and attendance from F&Y and WCC and DP and does not include general readers as attendees. Yet it does organize tourist activities as part of its meetings, and the registrants always include a number of accompanying persons, a group whose needs usually differ from those of the scholars in attendance. By exploring these continuities and this difference, it will be possible to illumine further the challenges that scholarly gatherings of this sort present to their organizers and participants.

IAUPE had its inception in 1951, as an outgrowth of two earlier conferences, one held in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1949, the other in Oxford, England in 1950. According to its website, IAUPE “was formed . . . with the idea of getting senior representatives of English as an academic subject together irrespective of the ravages of war.” Implicit in this statement is the idea that the organization would reestablish lines of communication between scholars residing in the formerly warring nations of World War II, and this effort to bond across distances and ideologies led to the practice (still ongoing) of alternating the triennial conferences between English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries. Also noteworthy in the statement is its emphasis on “senior representatives.”

Membership in IAUPE is restricted to “university professors of English Language and/or Literature and [to] other scholars of distinction in these and related fields.” It is conferred, not chosen, with current members periodically asked to nominate potential new members, with potential members not allowed to self-nominate, and with admission to membership determined by a majority vote of the International Committee, one part of an organizational structure that includes a president, a secretary-general, and, as a subcommittee of the International Committee, an Executive Committee.<sup>11</sup>

Despite its high degree of internal organization, until 2020 IAUPE was not formally incorporated, something that happened only as result of Canadian requirements, where the current secretary-general resides, and its financial statements are accordingly internal documents, intended only for the use of the Executive Committee. Available evidence indicates, however, that both IAUPE itself and its conferences are well funded. With a membership of around 440 individuals, a membership fee for three years for active professors of ca. \$120.00 (US) and for emeriti of ca. \$60.00, IAUPE has sufficient income to cover office expenses, travel of the executive committee members to a conference site a year in advance of the conference to oversee preparations, a subsidy fund for indigent scholars, and subvention of the publication of the proceedings of the triennial conferences. Similarly, the registration fees for the conferences are sufficient—180 pounds sterling for the 2016 London gathering—to ensure, in the instance of London, that “the conference did not incur a loss.”<sup>12</sup>

In these regards, as in others, IAUPE’s internal organization and conference funding stand in marked contrast to the less centrally organized and less amply funded F&Y, although perhaps less so than to WCC. The Cather conference, shorter in length, at three days duration, than either IAUPE’s or F&Y’s, is hosted by the Willa Cather Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit “that owns and operates the National Willa Cather Center.” In addition to registration fees, for both those who attend in person and those who link up remotely through an app “that allows conference-goers to interact with all participants,” the 2021 conference invitation contained a robust array of ways in which attendees (and others) can donate to the foundation, in some instances with gifts in the \$1000 to \$5000 range. By contrast, F&Y, as I have already noted, generates no revenue for the university, nor does it “enjoy any consistent financial support. . . . Registration revenue . . . in some years fails to cover costs,” and “the losses are absorbed for the most part by the Division of Outreach and Continuing Education.” Also, the reason for having “defaulted to [a solely] remote [conference] for 2021 was financial, not, as one might expect, logistical: the COVID precautions . . . would just have run the costs up higher than in-person registration could have covered.”<sup>13</sup>

In the organization’s early days IAUPE’s officers and committee members were all faculty members at British and Western European universities, as were all or most of the attendees. Perhaps by reason of their long familiarity with the organization of literary studies by historical periods, the officers and committee members chose to use that traditional structure for IAUPE’s conferences. “[B]ased primarily on chronological blocks,” from the beginning of English literature to the present day, each period is “represented by a ‘Section,’” and each Section will typically include several ‘Sessions.’” This structure, while seemingly comprehensive, lacks flexibility, so that emerging areas of interest, such as, in recent years, “digital humanities” and “posthumanism,” and areas that move across several chronological periods, such as literary theory, must either be wedged into a chronological block or be proposed as a special session. In the last two conferences, in 2016 and 2019, however, organizers have shown a lively awareness of, and have fully included, presentations on these and other emerging and cross-period trends. Also, the conference structure is well suited to IAUPE’s aim of “prov[ing] that disciplinary specialization is fully compatible with successful transmission of specialist knowledge to an audience of non-specialists.”<sup>14</sup>

In this statement, however, the non-specialists are not general readers, as they would be at F&W or WCC, but specialists in a different chronological period, author, or topic, and, should they wish to attend presentations, accompanying persons. By its nature as an international conference, attracting participants from long distances, the activities of accompanying persons are less variegated than at single-author conferences held within a single country. At F&Y, there can be some overlap between the categories of attendees, with some accompanying persons also general readers, with some attending their spouse or partner’s presentation or other presentations, with some choosing to spend their time reading or swimming and sunbathing, and with some staying for only a day or so. And this variety can be true as well for the presenters. The German scholar mentioned earlier prevailed upon me and another American participant, an acquaintance of mine, to play hooky one evening and go to Memphis to attend a game played by the Memphis Chicks, a minor league (AAA) baseball team, on the ground that a good aid to understanding a culture is observing its amusements. (The experience, it turned out, was educational not just for our visitor but for myself and my acquaintance: for our visitor, in having the opportunity to see the magnificent athlete Bo Jackson in action; for us, in learning how difficult the game is to explain—a ball is both an object and a judgment regarding its location when pitched—and how little information even an intelligent and willing student will retain upon first exposure.)

At IAUPE, the variables affecting the activities, and even the presence, of accompanying persons consist less of on-site individual choices and more of the location of the conference and of the opportunities the location offers for pleasurable and informative outings. Poznan, Poland, a city with a population of around 500,000 and the site of the 2019 conference, attracted 144 registrants of which number only 14 were listed as accompanying individuals. The tourist activities offered by the conference were accordingly limited and not especially oriented

toward the non-scholars in attendance. A tour of the towns of Rogalin and Kónik, originally scheduled for a full day when scholarly presentations were occurring, and hence only available to accompanying individuals, was rescheduled as a late afternoon tour when everyone, including presenters, could attend. The IAUPE tradition of scheduling a full day of tourist activities on Wednesday, with no sessions scheduled, consisted of a bus trip to Warsaw. And this, while very interesting, not least for the insight it offered into the tragic fate of the city's ghetto, was lightly attended, with the chartered bus only about half-full. Similarly, the 2013 conference in Peking, China, the first ever held in Asia, was also relatively lightly attended, by just "over one hundred professors from seventy universities in twenty countries," and by an indeterminate number of accompanying persons—even though the week included among its tourist activities such enticing options as a trip to the Great Wall and a tour of the Forbidden City.<sup>15</sup>

The 2016 conference, by comparison, held in London, a city less remote, familiar in language to all attendees, and possessing numerous tourist attractions, had 208 scholars in attendance. As with the Peking conference, with whose organizers I have not been in communication, I have not been able to determine the number of accompanying persons; but that the number was large was apparent both from my personal observation and from the fact that the Wednesday full day outing to Windsor Castle and the city of Bath required two buses, both fully occupied, with a total of between 60 and 70 individuals. Similarly, the conference included a "taster session" visit to the Senate House Library, to "view and enjoy a selection of some of the . . . special items held in the library." And the organizers anticipated an interest among attendees in unscheduled tourist opportunities within London itself by providing a conference website link to a "London Attractions" guidebook, along with information on the locations of the underground stations to use and the routes to follow when visiting those attractions.<sup>16</sup>

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IAUPE thus offers a different model for the organization and financing of opportunities for professorial tourism than WCC, and one perhaps more enduring than the one used by F&Y. For both WCC and F&Y, and even for DP, however, other considerations may ultimately have a more profound impact on their ability to remain in existence than either structure or financing. Willa Cather died in 1947 and William Faulkner in 1962. For an increasing number of conference attendees, therefore, each author is not a contemporary but an ancestor. With this shift there arises the question of how long WCC and F&Y will command an audience. Will Cather and Faulkner continue to exhibit cultural prominence similar to that accorded to William Shakespeare and Jane Austen and Charles Dickens? Or will various influences, not least the recently emergent "cancel culture" tendency to challenge the hegemony of past cultural icons, undermine their attractiveness as subjects of study and discussion?

A more encompassing term than "cancel culture" is "iconoclasm," a designation that situates the recent spate of renaming buildings and removing statues from their pedestals in a context reaching back to the Byzantine Empire and beyond. Although primarily associated with a suspicion of graven images, the term extends as well to other forms of representation, including works of fiction, as the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and book burnings in (e.g.) Boston and Nazi Germany can serve to remind us. As we have seen, as early as the 1987 F&Y conference, challenges to Faulkner's depictions of blacks, and a need to defend those depictions, had emerged, and the same had begun to happen around the same time regarding his depictions of women. (In the late 1980s or early 1990s, an instructor at the University of California at Berkeley offered her students, in a graduate seminar, the option of writing a paper on why they could no longer read Faulkner's fiction.)<sup>17</sup> And similar challenges (and defenses) can be found in Cather scholarship, relative to her occasional depictions of, and, as some have contended, her not infrequent erasure of, Native Americans from the landscape of her stories and novels.

Looming behind these considerations is the larger issue of the relation of the behavior of the artist to the value of the work of art. The tendency among some readers to conflate the settings of Cather's and Faulkner's fiction with their representations has a corollary in the impulse to collapse together the author's life and his or her work, as an example from my own experience can illustrate. Several years ago, I brought along to a friend's house two DVDs to choose between for viewing, one of *Chinatown*, the other of a film whose identity is now lost to memory. An attendee, a relative of our host, refused to consider watching *Chinatown* on the grounds that the director, Roman Polanski, was a wanted criminal, having drugged and raped a thirteen-year-old girl.

To this day, I regret having silently acceded to that demand, wishing I had instead opened to discussion the question of how (and whether) Polanski's repulsive behavior, or Edgar Degas's notorious anti-Semitism, or Flannery O'Connor's evident racism impugned the value of the movie, the paintings, the works of fiction. For that matter, we might raise the same question about Charles Dickens, who could be viewed as having become a milder, somewhat less socially unacceptable, Polanski *avant la lettre*, when at the age of forty-five he left his wife to begin an affair with a seventeen-year-old actress.

I do not believe that to understand all is to forgive all. Polanski's behavior was criminal and deserving of prosecution. But I doubt that American culture has been improved by the fact that to date no American distributor has been willing to release Polanski's 2019 film, *J'Accuse* (also known as *An Officer and a Spy*), winner of numerous awards at the Venice Film Festival and elsewhere, and judged by many commentators to be the best

movie ever made about the Dreyfus Affair. I note also that the movie's topic, of a Jewish officer unjustly accused and punished, was one for which Polanski, a Jew of Polish ancestry, may have felt a double affinity: inappropriately, if he views himself as a Dreyfus-like victim in his forced exile to avoid a court trial; appropriately, if it reminds him of his mother, who lost her life in the Auschwitz death camp, or of his wife, Sharon Tate, who was murdered, while eight months pregnant, by Charles Manson and his gang of followers.<sup>18</sup>

1. For a wide-ranging coverage of tourism, see Jafar Jafari and Hangen Xiao, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Tourism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, (New York: Springer, 2016). For the student activities that I describe, see the entry "Study Tours."
2. Jafari and Xiao, op. cit., discuss conferences of the sort listed here under the heading "Literary Tourism."
3. As to "two-shirt" and "three-shirt" weather, a joke explained seldom retains its status as a joke. But I myself at times found that the five-hundred-yard walk from the conference auditorium to my motel necessitated a shower and a change of clothing.
4. Information in this paragraph was obtained from the Oxford, Mississippi Economic Development website; phone conversations and email exchanges with Jessica Lynch, a staff member at the "Visit Oxford" office of the City of Oxford between April 7 and May 7, 2021; an e-mail on April 6, 2021, from the conference director, Jay Watson, Professor, Department of English, University of Mississippi; and the Oxford Conference for the Book website.
5. Watson, op. cit. Through a scholarship funded by the William Faulkner Society and a waiver of the registration fee, the conference supports attendance by a graduate student from another university. In 2000, a former student of mine attended under these auspices. He subsequently earned his Ph.D. with a dissertation on Faulkner's fiction and has gone on to a successful career as a Professor of English.
6. To avoid repetition, I delay discussion of the third constituency, of accompanying persons, until the section on IAUPE below.
7. For a commentary by a Faulkner scholar who served as an online discussion leader, see Robert W. Hamblin, "Oprah's 'Summer of Faulkner,'" *Faulknerjapan.com/journal/No 8/Hamblin 2006.htm*.
8. Philip Weinstein, "Marginalia: Faulkner's Black Lives," in Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie, *Faulkner and Race*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha 1986 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987), 170-91. Noel Polk, "Man in the Middle: Faulkner and the Southern White Moderate," in Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie, *Faulkner and Race*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha 1986 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987), 130-51. Weinstein's presentation appears in expanded form as Chapter Two in his *Faulkner's Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). The book's subtitle deliberately reverses a statement, "a cosmos of my own," that Faulkner used in an interview in reference to his Yoknapatawpha fiction. In its original form the phrase was used as the title for the 1980 F&Y conference.
9. Sharon O'Brien, *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Joan Acocella, *Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), p. 89 and (in the previous paragraph) pp. 92-93.
10. Jill Lepore, "Dickens in Eden: Summer Vacation with *Great Expectations*," *New Yorker*, (August 22, 2011), 52-65. As Lepore observes, *Great Expectations* was a selection of the Oprah Winfrey Book Club. The selection was made in 2010, five years after her "Summer of Faulkner."
11. [www.iaupe.net](http://www.iaupe.net), "History and Officers," and "Membership."
12. Email from Jane Roberts, IAUPE president, 2016, and member of the London conference organizing committee, May 11, 2021.
13. Announcement of the 66<sup>th</sup> Annual Willa Cather Spring Conference, [https://whova.com/portal/registration/awcsc\\_202106](https://whova.com/portal/registration/awcsc_202106); Watson, op. cit. At the end of her article, Jill Lepore, op. cit., notes that the University of California "had stopped funding the Dickens Project. . . [as had] three affiliate universities" and that while the "camp is still growing" it is "increasingly dependent on donations."
14. Thomas Austenfeld, "Foreword," *English Without Boundaries: Reading English from China to Canada*. Selected Papers from the IAUPE London Conference in 2016 (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2017), p. vi.
15. "English Professors Gather at Tsinghua for IAUPE Triennial Conference 2013," <https://www.tsinghua.edu.cn/en/info/1245/4693.htm>.
16. "Conference Schedule," IAUPE Triennial Conference, July 25-29, 2016, Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, pp. 4, 6.

17. See Karl F. Zender, *Faulkner and the Politics of Reading* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), p. xi.
18. For Flannery O'Connor, see Paul Elie, "Everything that Rises: How Racist was Flannery O'Connor?" *New Yorker*, (June 15, 2020), pp. 82-85.

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