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William Faulkner and the Blues

Forthcoming Book Finds Parallels in Mississippi's Literature and Music

Baton Rouge—During the 1920s and 1930s, Mississippi produced two of the most significant influences upon twentieth-century culture: the modernist fiction of William Faulkner and the recorded blues songs of African American musicians like Charley Patton, Geeshie Wiley, and Robert Johnson. In *Yoknapatawpha Blues*, the first book examining both Faulkner and the music of the south, Tim A. Ryan identifies provocative parallels of theme and subject in diverse regional genres and texts.

Placing Faulkner's literary texts and prewar country blues song lyrics on equal footing, Ryan illuminates the meanings of both in new and unexpected ways. He provides close analysis of the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 in Faulkner's "Old Man" and Patton's "High Water Everywhere"; racial violence in the story "That Evening Sun" and Wiley's "Last Kind Words Blues"; and male sexual dysfunction in *Sanctuary* and Johnson's "Dead Shrimp Blues." This interdisciplinary study reveals how the characters of Yoknapatawpha County and the protagonists in blues songs similarly strive to assert themselves in a threatening and oppressive world.

By emphasizing the modernism found in blues music and the echoes of black vernacular culture in Faulkner's writing, *Yoknapatawpha Blues* links elucidates the impact of both Faulkner's fiction and roots music on the culture of the modern South, and of the nation.

Tim A. Ryan is associate professor of English at Northern Illinois University and the author of *Calls and Responses: The American Novel of Slavery Since "Gone with the Wind."*

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Music History / Literary Studies

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