Memorial Resolution

Elizabeth M. Kerr, a member of the Department of English from 1945 to 1970, died on May 7, 1991 at the Fairhaven Retirement Center in Whitewater, Wisconsin, where she had lived for five years. She was eighty-six years old.

With a B.A. from State Teachers College, Superior, and an M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota, Prof. Kerr taught English composition and literature on the college and university levels during her entire professional career. Previous to coming to Milwaukee, she held positions at the University of Minnesota, Tabor College in Kansas, College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, and Rockford College. In addition to courses in composition and general literature, she specialized in fiction and the novel. As a result of her studies with Professor Joseph Warren Beach, she became a leading authority on the sequence novel, and from her work she compiled a Bibliography of the Sequence Novel (1950). She prepared, with Ralph M. Aderman, Aspects of American English (1963, 1970), a composition textbook which used the American language as the source for writing assignments. With a busy teaching schedule Prof. Kerr had limited time for scholarly work. She found time, however, to write several book reviews and critical articles relating to Joyce Carey, Robert Penn Warren, and William Faulkner. One of her early essays on Faulkner's As I Lay Dying, which appeared in Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, has been frequently cited and reprinted over the years and led to her appointment to the editorial board of that distinguished Madison-based journal.

Elizabeth Kerr's most prolific period as a scholar followed her retirement. During a period of less than fifteen years she published three quite remarkable studies of Faulkner's work, Yoknapatawpha: Faulkner's "Little Postage Stamp of Native Soil" (1969), William Faulkner's Gothic Domain (1979), and William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha: "A Kind of Keystone in the Universe" (1983). The first of these books was especially well received by reviewers in the major journals. The following are samples of their responses: "Here in Professor Kerr's book, presented pictorially and verbally, are signposts that will enable Faulkner readers to find their way through Yoknapatawpha County and to gain greater insight into his writing." (South Atlantic Quarterly); "Here is not only a substantial achievement in its own right, but a pioneering study that should stimulate other investigations." (Journals of Modern Literature); "This is a perceptive and readable book, to be savored and then to be used." (Thought); "Miss Kerr is among those wisest of Faulkner critics who see Yoknapatawpha whole." (Southern Review).
After the publication of her third book on Faulkner she came to be regarded as one of the half-dozen most important critics of the Mississippi novelist. During the 1970s and 1980s she regularly participated in the annual Faulkner conferences sponsored by the University of Mississippi; the papers she delivered at these gatherings were published in the transactions of these symposia.

Some five years before her death she was awarded a grant from the American Philosophical Society to begin work on a long study of Faulkner's Mississippi; this was to be more of a cultural than a literary study. Unfortunately, failing health prevented the completion of this manuscript. No less a critic than Malcolm Cowley, who came to admire Elizabeth Kerr's contributions to literary study, actively supported this unfinished project in a variety of ways.

Long after her retirement from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Professor Kerr remained involved in its activities. The English department will long remember her as one of its most distinguished scholars and teachers as well as one of its most generous human beings.

Ralph M. Aderman
Melvin J. Friedman, Chair
Robert K. Stone