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KNEE-SLAPPER SOUTHERN NOVELS
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Roy Blount lists his top five in the Southern humor category: (1) As I Lay Dying, by William Faulkner; (2) Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, by Mark Twain; (3) Satchmo by Louis Armstrong; (4) Flannery O’Connor: Collected Works; (5) Norwood by Charles Portis.

Yes, numbers (1) and (4) gave you a double-take. But Blount says “[t]he best of Southern humor is inextricable from the blues, desperation, alligators, lust, irrational politics, whiskey and all the other basics of life.”


NORDIC SLEUTHS
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

PBS “Masterpiece Mystery” is carrying the Kurt Wallander series about a detective of angst, ills and total alienation from society. He is the creation of Swedish author Henning Mankell and keeps company on the bookshelves with Hakan Nesser’s Swedish Inspector Van Veeteren, Arnaldur Indridason’s Icelandic Inspector Erlunder Sveinsson, and Jo Nesbo’s Norse Detective Harry Hole.

And all these are descendants of the married Swedish authors Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö’s ten titles with Inspector Martin Beck. They created the model for a Swedish police procedural replete with social criticism of society.

“Sweden is so small that they made little money until translated into German and other languages. The Laughing Policeman was made into an American movie but resituated in San Francisco. The Wall Street Journal


RIDING OUT THE RECESSION IN COLLEGE
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Administrators have long fretted about the mass retirements of boomer business professors. They worry no longer as a rotten economy has students rushing into Ph.D. programs. Applications at Wharton are up 34%. Five of the applicants are refugees from the Lehman Brothers disaster.

See — Alison Damast and Ben Levisohn, “The Doctorate Is In,” Business Week, June 1, 2009, p.015.

DONALD DUCK DOES GOETHE
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

The French groove on Jerry Lewis, but the Germans are ga-ga over Donald Duck. While the drawings are the familiar Carl Bark’s creation, the richness and complexity of the German Donald is derived from the German translations which include grammatically complex sentences, philosophical musings, and quotes from Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin and even a cat singing Wagner.

And of course, Uncle Scrooge (or Dagobert Duck) is irresistible to leftists who see him as the “prototype of the monopolist” with Donald as a prole and nephews Tick Trick and Track as “socialist youth” well on their way to being “proper Communists.”

Donald is published in Germany by Ehapa and Egmont Horizont, subsidiaries of the Danish-based media group Egmont, a Disney licensee. The improved dialogue is the handiwork of Erika Fuchs, a Ph.D. in art history.

Egmont Horizont has published a lavish 8,000-page German Donald Duck collector’s edition with a price tag of $1,900. Its 3,333 copies are sold out.


AH FRANCE, THE LAND OF INTELLECTUAL VANITY
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Louis XIII wanted to put the literary set under state supervision so he created the Academy Druon and told them to create a dictionary, gave them a Louvre apartment and 40 goose quills. In no hurry, they produced the first edition for Louis XIV after 60 years of labor.

The eighth edition came out in 1935. The ninth is now up to the letter M after a mere 75 years. Meanwhile, the latest 20-volume OED came out in seven years.

And so the French Academy goes on, replete with tailored tailcoats designed by Napoleon and ceremonial épées each marked with symbols from the bearer’s life and accomplishments.

No academic degrees are required and everyone — ecclesiastics, farmers, secretaries of the Communist Party cells, streets cleaners — desperately wishes to belong.

And what a great quote: “The French love nothing so much as the superfluous. No wonder the Academy is their only institution to survive nearly 375 years of monarchy, revolution, empire, humiliating military defeats, and five constitutions.”