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Chapter 4

AN INTERVIEW WITH DIANA SHEETS: WILLIAM FAULKNER AND ERNEST HEMINGWAY: MYTHIC STORYTELLER AND WRITER ENGAGED WITH THE WORLD

Keywords: *Absalom, Absalom!*, doubling, Faulkner, Hemingway, “The Snows of Kilimanjaro”, *The Sound and the Fury*, *The Sun Also Rises*

MFS: Diana, in this interview we are going to juxtapose two of the greatest American writers who are Nobel laureates—William Faulkner, a mythic storyteller, and Ernest Hemingway, a writer engaged with the world. How do you see these two individuals?

DS: In many respects Faulkner and Hemingway personify the concept of “doubling”, which is to say that they were opposites in terms of personality, in writing styles, and in their approach to understanding the world. Yet as contemporaries they were both impacted by World War I, by some of the same writers, and both were committed to transforming 20th century American literature.

To appreciate Faulkner’s significance, it is important to understand that, as his biographer Frederic R. Karl suggested, “he was, except for Dos Passos, the first of the American moderns in fiction, and the sole American novelist who, in this respect, can be discussed along with James Joyce, Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust, and Thomas Mann” (Karl, 1989, p. 5). Or as Harold Bloom noted, “Faulkner now is recognized as the strongest American novelist of the twentieth century, clearly surpassing Hemingway and Fitzgerald, and standing as an equal in the sequence that includes Hawthorne, Melville, Mark Twain, and Henry James” (Bloom, 2008, pp. 1-2), an assessment echoed in his more recent analysis *The Daemon Knows: Literary Greatness and the American Sublime* (Bloom, 2015).

In evaluating the importance and significance of William Faulkner (1897-1962), it’s necessary to understand how the history of the South shaped his formation as a writer. The

Civil War resulted in profound wounds to the nation and, particularly, the South. A new estimate, based on digitized census dating back to that war, place the country's death toll at a staggering 750,000, an increase of greater than 20% from the previous 1902 estimate, which had been the reliable benchmark. Eric Foner, one of our notable American historians, suggested that the revised figure "further elevates the significance of the Civil War and makes a dramatic statement about how the war is a central moment in American history" (Gugliotta, 2012).

The South at that time was an agrarian society with far fewer people than the North, so its losses were felt disproportionately. But it was much more than that. The antebellum South—so associated with slavery—was no more. Most white Southerners during Reconstruction and its aftermath were not prepared to come to terms with what transpired. The result caused profound psychological trauma to the South, which continues even to some degree today. For many white Southerners this meant literally and figuratively turning their backs against the forward march of time. This gaping wound would have profound social and moral consequences in the South.

It is in this context that Faulkner's fiction was created. Many of his novels and story cycles—17 in all beginning with *Sartoris* (1929)—were situated in a mythical Yoknapatawpha County, which closely resembled Lafayette County and its county seat of Oxford, Mississippi where Faulkner lived. Three of these novels were selected by the Modern Library in 1998 as among the list of 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century. They included *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), ranked 5th; *As I Lay Dying* (1930), ranked 35th; and *Light in August* (1932), ranked 54th. *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), which many critics see as Faulkner's greatest work of fiction, arguably should have been included on that list, but was probably omitted because of the particular challenge this novel posed for readers trying to comprehend its difficult baroque style.

As Frederick R. Karl has noted, "the South's passion for politics and rhetoric was rooted in violence; language stood as a vehicle for force, as an incitement to action" (*William Faulkner*, 1989, p. 5). For this reason, "language often took the form of building a wall behind which the South's romanticism and fantasies were held hostage against Northern science and modernism, against a very different kind of rhetoric" (Karl, 1989, p. 5). Faulkner's genius was to penetrate this wall by means of baroque literary modernism and make it available to his readers.

By contrast, Hemingway (1899-1961) grew up in Oak Park, Illinois, an affluent suburban community of Chicago, known, as he characterized it, as "a place of wide lawns and narrow minds" (Hemingway cited in Carter, 1999). He became an avid sportsman and outdoorsman who throughout his lifetime demonstrated tremendous physical courage. After graduating from high school, Hemingway began working as a reporter—as did several American writers who grew up in the Midwest including Mark Twain, Theodore Dreiser, and Sinclair Lewis. His initial job was with the *Kansas City Star* where he began developing his distinctive literary style based on journalistic premises advocated by the newspaper that called for "short sentences, short paragraphs, positive, vigorous English; emphasized authenticity, selectivity, compression, precision, clarity, immediacy" (Meyers, 1985, p. 24).

Hemingway volunteered to serve as a Red Cross ambulance driver during World War I. Shortly after arriving in Europe, while stationed near the Austrian front in northeast Italy, a mortar composed of explosives and scrap metal detonated a few feet from him, killing one soldier and seriously injuring two others. Hemingway was also badly wounded by some 200

shell fragments. Shortly after the explosion, after recovering consciousness, he rescued one of the wounded soldiers for which he later received Italy's Silver Medal for Valor. After World War I, he worked for the *Toronto Star Weekly* initially in Toronto before moving to Chicago and later serving as their European correspondent. His journalistic and daredevil exploits frequently placed Hemingway in dangerous circumstances during World War I, the Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922), the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), and World War II. While on safari during his first trip to Africa, he had to be airlifted out—an experience upon which his short story “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” draws—because of amoebic dysentery. On a subsequent trip to Africa, he survived two plane crashes and while recovering read obituaries recounting his demise. These experiences, and many others, shaped his short stories and his novels.

MFS: How did Hemingway's journalism influence his style and approach to writing?

DS: As Meyers noted, the Hemingway aesthetic, adapted from his newspaper experience, can be distilled down to the following: Write what you experience directly, basing the fiction on genuine emotions and intellectual perceptions. However these experiences and perceptions, while representative of what happened, must be intensified so that they seem more real, more vivid, more true to life than the actual events. Or as Carlos Baker suggested, Hemingway knew “how to get the most from the least, how to prune language . . ., how to multiply intensities, and how to tell nothing but the truth in a way that allowed for telling more than the truth” (Baker, 1990, p. 117).

The best illustrations of what I shall refer to as this “journalistic bleed” are evident in Hemingway's short stories. Consider, for example, the opening lines of “After the Storm”, which was published in his third and final collection of short stories *Winner Take Nothing* (1933).

It wasn't about anything, something about making punch, and then we started fighting and I slipped and he had me down kneeling on my chest and choking me with both hands like he was trying to kill me and all the time I was trying to get the knife out of my pocket to cut him loose. Everybody was too drunk to pull him off me. He was choking me and hammering my head on the floor and I got the knife out and opened it up; and I cut the muscle right across his arm and he let go of me. He couldn't have held on if he wanted to. Then he rolled and hung onto that arm and started to cry and I said:

“What the hell you want to choke me for?”

I'd have killed him. I couldn't swallow for a week. He hurt my throat bad.
(Hemingway, 1987, p. 283)

What should be apparent from this passage and, indeed, most of Hemingway's fiction, as Meyers notes, are “the short words, limited vocabulary, declarative sentences and direct representation of the visible world” (Meyers, 1985, p. 139). Hemingway's style is simple, clear, and forceful. Each word is precisely chosen. Sentences generally don't have subordinate clauses. Similes are rarely used. Adjectives are shunned. Adverbs are discarded. Dialogue typically replaces narration. The emphasis, unlike that of Faulkner, is on action rather than interior monologues—our interior thoughts or interior speech that when extended over time constitutes a verbal stream of consciousness—except, perhaps most notably, in one of Hemingway's celebrated short stories “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” (1936) and his novella

The Old Man and the Sea (1952). Thus, the focus of Hemingway's fiction is typically on deeds, not the subconscious motivation that drives them. His violent themes, as Meyers indicates, are expressed "in limpid, focused, perfectly controlled prose. He concentrated on sensations—the 'exaltation of the instant'—and found physical details that produced the aesthetic effect" (Meyers, 1985, p. 140). The result is a style that is exacting, evocative, and minimalist while conveying a poetic intensity.

"What seems unique is that Hemingway", suggests Harold Bloom, "is the only American writer of prose fiction in this [20th] century who, as a stylist, rivals the principal poets: Stevens, Eliot, Frost, Hart Crane, aspects of Pound, W. C. Williams, Robert Penn Warren, and Elizabeth Bishop" (Bloom, 1987, p. 2). Thus, Robert Penn Warren has argued that Hemingway "is essentially a lyric rather than a dramatic writer" (citing Warren, Bloom, 1987, p. 2).

The reasons for this are not surprising. Hemingway began his creative writing composing poetry (as did Faulkner). His most influential mentor—and the only one other than Joyce that he never later quarreled with—was the poet Ezra Pound. From him, Hemingway learned how to master the stylistic techniques of Imagism, poetry that emphasized precise images and compressed language. As Pound stressed in writing about Imagism, "Don't be descriptive. . . . Go in fear of abstractions" (Wagner, 1987, p. 104). Hemingway credited Pound with having taught him "how to write and how not to write" (Meyers, 1985, p. 74). That approach was masterfully adapted to the craftsmanship of his short stories, which have the clarity of what Hemingway referred to as "the *mot juste*—the one and only correct word to use", noting that Pound "taught me to distrust adjectives" (Meyers, 1985, p. 75). Hemingway summarized his functional utility theory of literature: "Prose is architecture, not interior decoration, and the Baroque is over" (Meyers, 1985, p. 75). However, as I'll illustrate, Faulkner imposed a baroque style on his fiction, thereby reimagining Southern literature with his own distinctive brand of modernism.

But back to Hemingway. If today his novels—even the celebrated ones such as *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940)—seem dated, that's because, as Bloom points out, "Hemingway is the best short-story writer in the English language, from Joyce's *Dubliners* until the present" (Bloom, 1987, p. 3). As Bloom emphasized, "Hemingway wrote *The Sun Also Rises* and not *Ulysses*, which is only to say that his true genius was for very short stories, and hardly at all for extended narrative" (Bloom, 1987, pp. 3-4). Thus, according to Bloom, "*The Sun Also Rises* reads now as a series of epiphanies, of brilliant and memorable vignettes" (Bloom, 1987, p. 4), rather than that vast, sweeping novel that captures through action and thought what we seek in the "Great American Novel". Far better, then, to read Hemingway's first 49 stories, which still have that pulsing meter of poetry, as well as the breathtaking power of affect.

Nevertheless, Hemingway understood that novels, not short stories, determined one's stature as the Great American Novelist. Indeed, it would be hard to overestimate Hemingway's influence today. On the Modern Libraries list of top 100 English-language novels of the 20th century, *The Sun Also Rises* ranks 45th and *A Farewell to Arms* 74th. But it's more than that. *A Farewell to Arms* was in its time the Great American Novel about World War I and remains the single best war novel about the American experience in the First World War today. When Norman Mailer wanted to declare his arrival as the Great American Novelist, he implicitly understood that his breakthrough work would have to be about World War II, which he had directly experienced, and that it would have to respond to the challenge

posed by *A Farewell to Arms*. This he did with *The Naked and the Dead* (ranked 51st on the Modern Library list). Were we to designate the Great American Novel that best describes the American experience during the Vietnam War, it would have to be Tim O'Brien's anti-heroic story collection *The Things They Carried* (1990), which was one of only 22 novels or novel series that made *The New York Times* relatively recent list of best American fiction published in the last quarter century ("What Is the Best Work of American Fiction of the Last 25 Years?", 2006; Scott, 2006). It was felt throughout much of the 20th century, although perhaps less so today, that the war experiences defined generations and transcended the merely personal to say something definitive about who we were and what we had become.

But the importance of Hemingway extends much further than that. The Hemingway style has become almost synonymous since post-World War II with the pared down simplicity we associate with American fiction, which has been honed and developed by MFA schools—beginning, most notably, with the Iowa Writers' Workshop and later extending to similar programs throughout the country. Thus, if as readers we embrace Raymond Carver or Joy Williams—as I do—then, we must acknowledge that their style, despite their unique approaches, is enormously indebted to Hemingway, significantly more so than to Faulkner. In the war of story narratives, Faulkner may be celebrated as the literary giant, but Hemingway dominates the style of writing that most readers have come to expect from accessible modernist and contemporary fiction.

The influence of Hemingway can be summed up by a cartoon featured some 65 years ago that showed an editor rejecting a manuscript with the fateful words to the devastated author, "But you have a wonderful style; Hemingway's, isn't it?" (Ronan, 1985).

MFS: How did Faulkner's Southern heritage shape his stories?

DS: Faulkner had a tremendous challenge in creating innovative fiction since, at the time of his birth, as Karl noted, "the South lacked a large aesthetic or cultural tradition. Its 'culture' was the history and tradition of the South, but in literature, music, and art, it was deficient" (Karl, 1989, p. 6). The reasons for this were complex, but can be distilled down to the South's "insistence on conformity, a narrow-mindedness that was necessary to present a united front against the North" (Karl, 1989, p. 6). The essentially agrarian, almost frontier society that defined the South, particularly in Faulkner's formative years, made it challenging to create a modernist fiction in a society that was rural and anachronistic, that is, determined to embrace the past, rather than the future, which was perceived as "Northern".

Thus, in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), as Jean-Paul Sartre noted in an essay published in 1939, events are situated in the past. The present is held in "suspension" and the future absent. "Faulkner", Sartre suggested, "always shows us events when they are already completed. . . . Everything occurs in the wings; nothing happens, everything has happened. . . . Faulkner's vision of the world can be compared to that of a man sitting in a convertible looking back" (Sartre, 1963, pp. 227-228). Or to quote William Faulkner directly, "The past is never dead. It's not even past" (Faulkner, 2011, p. 73).

Faulkner began, starting with *Sartoris* (1929), to create a cycle of interconnected novels and stories set in the imaginary Yoknapatawpha County. This enabled him to present the tragic Southern story in its fullest dimension. Today, it is easy to be critical of Faulkner's portrayal of race in his fiction while failing to account for just how much society has changed

since he wrote these stories. As Karl noted, Faulkner's literary innovation was extraordinary, even if his views and actions on racial matters were found wanting.

Faulkner's courage, even heroism, in swimming upstream against the current of opinion must be stressed. His tepid and often unsatisfactory views on race, many of them based on condescension and patronization, should be perceived in the larger sense—that *any* criticism was a betrayal of Southern unity. What was necessary for the region and for the South as a whole was to retain an iron clasp on the status quo. Nothing must be allowed to slip through, for any break in harmonious accord would open up the South to Northern penetration. (Karl, 1989, p. 7)

Faulkner's fiction examines the nature of race relations in the South. However, his early efforts were fraught with stereotyping without penetrating into the deeper underlying issues. Only in some of his later novels situated in Yoknapatawpha County, notably with *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *Light in August* (1932), and, especially, *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) did he address racial relations with increasing complexity. How did Faulkner accomplish this? The solution was to create a Southern baroque literary style that is a modern reinterpretation of the baroque art, architectural, and musical styles of the 17th and 18th centuries that utilized excessive ornamentation to create "extravagantly ornate, florid, and convoluted" forms often to great "dramatic effect" ("Define Baroque", n.d.).

To accomplish this, suggests Karl, he developed a very complex literary style and narrative that seemingly worked in accordance with and simultaneously in opposition to Southern language and culture.

Faulkner was a dangerous commodity, a loose cannon in the mansion of tradition. Even while he honored history, he helped destroy historical process, and in this he was American, not Southern. The greatness of his fiction is predicated on Faulkner's uncanny ability to present the South sympathetically and yet suggest its death knell. . . . Faulkner did not so much deny tradition as present it in its self-destructive phases. . . . The South used its incredible energies and strength of will to subvert everything which it wished to preserve; Faulkner is the cultural historian of this process. (Karl, 1989, p. 6)

Arnold Weinstein characterizes Faulkner as "the creator of the most poignant stream-of-consciousness narrative in our tradition [*The Sound and the Fury*], and as the architect of the most extravagant and baroque novel [*Absalom, Absalom!*] we possess" (Weinstein, 2006, p. 295).

I contend that Faulkner's writing style, with its density and ornateness coupled with the modern literary technique we refer to as stream-of-consciousness, allows readers to immerse themselves in Southern culture without necessarily understanding the author's subtle and obscure style laden with a complex web of meanings that implicitly challenged the status quo. It's important to understand that during the era in which Faulkner wrote the theme of race relations was regarded as an explosive issue. Consequently, Faulkner approached the subject obliquely. This allows readers to infer the implications of the narrative to their satisfaction.

Permit me to give an example of that Southern baroque complexity evident in the opening sentence of *Absalom, Absalom!*, the novel generally acknowledged to be the most innovative, as well as the most difficult to read and to understand.

From a little after two o'clock until almost sundown of the long still hot weary dead September afternoon they sat in what Miss Coldfield still called the office because her father had called it that—a dim hot airless room with the blinds all closed and fastened for forty-three summers because when she was a girl someone had believed that light and moving air carried heat and that dark was always cooler, and which (as the sun shone fuller and fuller on that side of the house) became latticed with yellow slashes full of dust motes which Quentin thought of as being flecks of the dead old dried paint itself blown inward from the scaling blinds as wind might have blown them". (Faulkner, 1993, p. 1)

MFS: Hemingway had many mentors—or so it seemed. Who were they and how did they influence his writing? What was Hemingway's connection with the "Lost Generation" and how did it impact his work?

DS: Hemingway returned to America after his war injury in 1919 and spent time recuperating before taking a reporting job with the *Toronto Star Weekly*. He then moved to Chicago where he worked as an editor for *Co-operative Commonwealth*, a monthly mutual health magazine. He was introduced to Sherwood Anderson, whose interconnected story cycle *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) had been published and well received. Ranked 24th on the Modern Library list, it depicted the lives of individuals in a small Ohio community. It embodied elements of American naturalism, exemplified by the fiction of Theodor Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis, as well as some of the modernist techniques generally associated with the Lost Generation.

In the aftermath of the First World War, Paris was the epicenter for the American expatriate writers and artists. Anderson encouraged Hemingway in 1921 to move there and provided him with a letter of introduction to Gertrude Stein. Hemingway married Hadley Richardson and made arrangements to serve as a foreign correspondent for the *Toronto Star Weekly*. Once in Paris he met Gertrude Stein and her wide network of friends. The result was that Hemingway gained access to many writers and artists—including James Joyce, Ezra Pound, John Dos Passos, Scott Fitzgerald, Allen Tate, Archibald MacLeish, as well as Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Juan Gris, and Luis Quintanilla. Though these relationships Hemingway became closely associated with the American expatriate community living in Paris that Stein referred to as the Lost Generation. At this critical stage in his literary life, Hemingway nurtured friendships, literary contacts, and writerly advice. Stein, Fitzgerald, Joyce, and Pound all read and edited some of his early work, but ultimately it was Joyce and especially Pound who exerted the greatest influence. Initially Hemingway wrote poetry and short stories, but by 1926 he published *The Torrents of Spring*, a novella that mercilessly parodied Sherwood Anderson's novel *Dark Laughter* (1925), suggesting that Hemingway's aspirations for literary greatness bore no empathy for lesser talents.

The coming-of-age writers, artists, and expatriates that Hemingway associated with in Paris became the subject of his novel *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). Hemingway never identified with the decadence of the Jazz Age personified by Fitzgerald in *This Side of Paradise* (1920), nor did he view himself or his generation as lost souls devastated by the impact of the Great War. As Hemingway emphasized to his editor Max Perkins, *The Sun Also Rises* had two epigraphs, Stein's quotation regarding the Lost Generation, which he rejected, and a passage from *Ecclesiastes*, which stressed the continuance, sustenance, and renewal of life, rather than the dissipation of a generation scarred and ruined by the Great War. Hemingway later elaborated, "I thought [he said in 1951] beat-up, maybe, [deleted] in many ways. But damned

if we were lost except for deads, *gueules cassées*, and certified crazies” (citing Hemingway, Baker, 1987, p. 13).

What was Hemingway like during that formative period in his life? “Ernest was noble, a good friend”, said Quintanilla, adding that he was “generous, passionate in his ideas and feelings, sentimental at times, extremely reflective and cautious; but, above all, very, very complicated” (citing Quintanilla, Meyers, 1985, p. 70). Archibald MacLeish emphasized that Hemingway “could exhaust the oxygen in a room just by coming into it” while Allen Tate suggested “even his malice had a certain charm” (citing MacLeish & Tate, Meyers, 1985, p. 71). When Pound suggested Hemingway work with Ford Madox Ford to edit the *Transatlantic Review* in 1924, he described Hemingway to Ford in glowing terms: “He’s an experienced journalist. He writes very good verse and he’s the finest prose stylist in the world” (citing Pound, Meyers, 1985, p. 127). Ford took exception to this, pointing out that Pound had referred to him as the finest stylist to which Pound replied: “You! You’re like all the English swine” (citing Pound, Meyers, 1985, p. 127).

But after 1937, when Hemingway argued with Dos Passos, Meyers suggested he had no close friends (Meyers, 1985, p. 73). This was not necessarily surprising. Many prominent writers striving for greatness jettison social contact in an effort to nurture their writing in hopes of prominence, continued success, and a measure of literary immortality. A writer’s life, as Hemingway noted in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1954, is often lonely and isolating.

Writing, at its best, is a lonely life. Organizations for writers palliate the writer’s loneliness but I doubt if they improve his writing. He grows in public stature as he sheds his loneliness and often his work deteriorates. For he does his work alone and if he is a good enough writer he must face eternity, or the lack of it, every day. (Hemingway, 1954)

MFS: Faulkner, on the other hand, seems to have had relatively few mentors. It sometimes appears as if his work was created out of “whole cloth”. Why do you think that is the case?

DS: Faulkner—the “u” was added in his early 20s—lost interest in primary school, began writing poetry in adolescence, and never completed high school. He was rejected by the U.S. army for enlistment in World War I because of his small stature, but joined the Royal Air Force through its Toronto, Canada training site, although he never actually saw active duty. His first mentor, Philip Stone, was from a prominent Oxford family and had attended the University of Mississippi (in Oxford), as well as Yale University. Stone introduced Faulkner to the writing of James Joyce and other modernists. He supported Faulkner’s early efforts in poetry and sponsored the private publication of Faulkner’s poetry collection *The Marble Faun* (1924). While residing in New Orleans, Faulkner met Sherwood Anderson. His support was important because he encouraged Faulkner to write his first novel *Soldiers’ Pay* (1926). Furthermore, Anderson’s success demonstrated to Faulkner that a writer publishing regional stories could, nevertheless, achieve national stature. After completing *Soldiers’ Pay*, Faulkner headed to Europe in 1925 armed with letters of introduction written by Philip Stone intended for Joyce, Pound, and Eliot. However, rather than making contact with these men, he preferred to absorb their influences by means of cities, streets, and cultural byways. Just as

Hemingway satirized Sherwood Anderson, Faulkner's second novel *Mosquitoes* (1927) pilloried him.

Why? It's important to remember that fiction in the 1920s was a manly enterprise and building one's reputation often involved jousting and jockeying for position. As important as Anderson was to Hemingway's and Faulkner's early development, he was jettisoned by them as their literary talents and ambitions surpassed his. Or, as Faulkner later noted in his interview with Jean Stein in *The Paris Review*, "The good artist believes that nobody is good enough to give him advice. He has supreme vanity. No matter how much he admires the old writer, he wants to beat him" (Faulkner, 1956).

If Hemingway spent years in Europe absorbing literary and artistic influences, Faulkner's trip to Europe in 1925 was a more solitary journey. After returning to Mississippi in late December of 1925, Faulkner increasingly focused on developing his own distinctive stories drawn from formative family and cultural influences in the South. By 1927 he began working on *Flags in the Dust*, eventually renamed *Sartoris* (1929). It was the first of 17 novels or story cycles featured in mythical Yoknapatawpha County, which bore a remarkable resemblance to Lafayette County, Mississippi in which Oxford is the county seat. Faulkner's baroque and convoluted writing, his focus on the Southern Gothic that emphasized the grotesque, his increasing interest in exploring the historical undercurrent of racial relations—all framed in high modernism—placed him first of all 20th century American literary modernists.

It's important to remember that Faulkner was born in 1897, only 32 years after the end of the Civil War. The wounds of slavery, war, and reconstruction were all very wrapped up in the present to him and everyone he knew. Faulkner grew up listening to stories about the war by family members, the older men living in and around Oxford, as well as Caroline Barr, the nanny, whom the boys referred to as "Mammy Callie". She was born into slavery and subsequently looked after him and his brothers when they were young. Years later she also took care of Faulkner's daughter, Jill. Mammy Callie's stories about slavery, the Civil War, and the Ku Klux Klan had a great influence on him. She remained the dedicated family servant until her death in 1940, living in a small cottage on the property adjacent to Faulkner's Rowan Oak home. He dedicated *Go Down, Moses* to her. She became the basis for the character Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury*. She was buried in the family plot in Oxford. All of which suggests that Faulkner's material was the South, specifically Oxford and the surrounding region. While he might study other writers for style and technique, his sources were immediately at hand.

MFS: Hemingway's short story "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" is an internal meditation about the fading hopes and aspirations of a dying writer in Africa as he waits in vain to be rescued. It's arguably Hemingway at his very best. Why is this story so effective?

DS: Perhaps my favorite Hemingway short story is "The Snows of Kilimanjaro", first published by *Esquire* magazine in 1936. It is about Harry, a writer, and Helen, his wife. They are on safari in Africa. Through mishap or carelessness Harry gets infected and lies dying of gangrene, waiting for a rescue plane he is convinced will never arrive. Faced with death the writer contemplates his life by means of five sustained reflections presented as interior monologues and indicated by italics. As a writer he has regrets: a dissipated lifestyle that has squandered his talents and limited his writing opportunities, marriage to a wealthy woman

whose affluence diminished his ambition, and the agonizing acknowledgment of all those stories that he should have written that will now be lost. These flashbacks provide a painful assessment that is relentlessly honest, if sometimes brutal, appraisal of his life and its lost opportunities. With each reflection leading up to the final climatic scene, Harry comes closer to death. The sixth and final interior monologue, not indicated in italics, seamlessly integrates Harry's interior thoughts and dreams as he dies and his spirit ascends to Kilimanjaro. The immediacy of this short story is heightened because of how closely the thoughts and deeds parallel Hemingway's own life.

The story opens with an epigraph about Kilimanjaro, the tallest mountain in Africa, referred to by the Masai as the "House of God". Near the western summit lies a carcass of a leopard seemingly frozen for eternity. Harry, the protagonist, is immobile on a cot situated on the African plains—far from the majestic white summit of Kilimanjaro. Nearby are vultures and a hyena, wildlife known to pray on carrion—the dead and diseased flesh of the departed. Helen tries to comfort him and care for him, to little avail. The dialogue is classic Hemingway. Rapid fire, real-to-life, precious little of those "he said"/"she said" superfluous indicators that clutter and destroy spoken language written by so many writers.

"You're not going to die".

"Don't be silly. I'm dying now. Ask those bastards". He looked over to where the huge, filthy birds sat, their naked heads sunk in the hunched feathers. A fourth planed down, to run quick-legged and then waddle slowly toward the others.

"They are around every camp. You never notice them. You can't die if you don't give up".

"Where did you read that? You're such a bloody fool".

"You might think about some one else".

"For Christ's sake", he said, "That's been my trade". (Hemingway, 1995, p. 8)

Then, he confronts his impending mortality.

So now it was all over, he thought. . . . So this was the way it ended in a bickering over a drink. Since the gangrene started in his right leg he had no pain and with the pain the horror had gone and all he felt now was a great tiredness and anger that this was the end of it. For this, that now was coming, he had very little curiosity. For years it had obsessed him; but now it meant nothing in itself. . . .

Now he would never write the things that he had saved to write until he knew enough to write them well. Well, he would not have to fail at trying to write them either. Maybe you could never write them, and that was why you put them off and delayed the starting. Well, he would never know, now. (Hemingway, 1995, p. 9)

The internal monologues provide the reader with Harry's assessment of his life, the pains and losses, the joys and sorrows, these fleeting moments of satisfaction or success or sex. With these reflections come the acknowledgment that he never loved his wife, that her wealth made things too easy, that the struggle associated with writing was, in fact, the essential quest.

Harry's relentless death-journey is met with anger, rage, resignation, insight, boredom, and moments of grace. Thus, he recalls his humane decision to provide a dying soldier with his personal stash of morphine pills during World War I. He acknowledges to himself the necessity, if not the dignity, of refusing to hurt his wife grievously during these final moments by telling her that he never loved her. He imagines that he's productively writing again. With these noble and implied gestures, the story draws to a close. The hyena presses on him, a

fabulist hallucination that suggests to readers that Harry's life is passing. The final internal monologue, unlike the others, is presented without italics. Hemingway imagines the rescue plane arrives, that he's evacuated, that the plane diverts toward Kilimanjaro where symbolically Harry's spirit departs, gaining entrance to the "House of God", granting him a measure of immortality implied by the legend of the leopard. The story then segues back to Helen and that dreadful moment when she is forced to acknowledge that Harry has died.

Ahead, all he could see, as wide as all the world, great, high, and unbelievably white in the sun, was the square top of Kilimanjaro. And then he knew that there was where he was going.

Just then the hyena stopped whimpering in the night and started to make a strange, human, almost crying sound. The woman heard it and stirred uneasily. She did not wake. . . . Then the noise the hyena made was so loud she woke and for a moment she did not know where she was and she was very afraid. . . .

Then she said, "Harry, Harry!" Then her voice rising, "Harry! Please, Oh Harry!"

There was no answer and she could not hear him breathing.

Outside the tent the hyena made the same strange noise that had awakened her. But she did not hear him for the beating of her heart. (Hemingway, 1995, p. 28)

In my assessment, this story trumps the novels, the short stories written after "The First Forty-Nine", as well as Hemingway's novella *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952).

MFS: Faulkner's novels—the ones that continue to resonate most strongly today—are about cultural and familial ruin that ensues in the aftermath of the South's loss of the Civil War. What impact did the legacy of slavery have on his fiction?

DS: Let's briefly consider two of his most famous novels, *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* Arnold Weinstein makes a compelling argument that they should be read as companion stories. Together, they present the social, familial, and historic wreckage of the South with its legacy of racism, violence, and catastrophic ruin. *The Sound and the Fury*, he suggests, is the "story of a doomed family, doomed by loss of love" that is presented by means of a "hallucinatory inner world . . . where all boundaries between private and public are erased" (Weinstein, 2006, p. 294).

For Weinstein, *The Sound and the Fury* is "the most *immediate* book written in the English language, the book that places us at ground zero in the affairs of the human animal, by immersing us nonstop in the inner tempests and collapses of its people". On the other hand, *Absalom, Absalom!*, he suggests, has as its backdrop the Civil War carnage "where black and white, brother and brother, father and children, all destroy one another". It represents, Weinstein argues, "the richest and most profound effort ever undertaken by an American writer to write war, make us see why it happened, and to show how we are always formed and deformed by our pasts and collective history". "Faulkner's signature event", he emphasizes, "is *trauma*" (citations Weinstein, 2006, p. 294).

If in *The Sound and the Fury* Harold Bloom hears "the stylistic traces of James Joyce", then in *Absalom, Absalom!* he hears "only Faulkner's voice at its richest, in the most comprehensive and ambitious of all his superb prose romances" (Bloom, 2015, pp. 405-406).

The Sound and the Fury has four principal narrators—the three brothers and an omniscient narrator. These stories contradict one another and are presented by means of

different timelines that compel the reader to piece together the story. Three Compson brothers mourn the loss of their sister Caddy whose love sustained the family. Benjy is cognitively challenged. Quentin, who is attending Harvard and has incestuous longings for his sister, later commits suicide. He is a symbolic representation of the dissipated South. Jason, bitter and enraged, is left to oversee the family's diminished fortunes following his father's death. This family calamity has as its backdrop the historical tragedy of the South with its ruinous legacy of the Civil War and internecine race relations that provide a social context for the familial ruin. With Caddy dead, only the black servant Dilsey exhibits love and compassion toward Benjy.

Absalom, Absalom! chronicles Thomas Sutpen's ascent from poverty to riches and the family tragedy that ensues. The "inciting incident"—that event that sets in motion all the others actions in the story—is when Thomas Sutpen, a poor, mountain boy of thirteen, is denied entrance to a manor home by the black servant and directed around to the back where slaves and tradesmen are received. The insult compels Sutpen's drive to create and sustain a dynastic family estate. The story re-envision the biblical trials of Absalom whose sister is raped by his half-brother and Absalom must avenge the family honor by arranging to have his brother murdered. Faulkner's creative genius is to establish in the opening chapter the essential story narrative. What follows are the various retellings of the mythic past by different unreliable narrators over the course of generations. Thus, the reader is indoctrinated into the Southern heritage and feels and anticipates the biblical tragedy of the South where brother kills brother and social wreckage and ruin are the consequence.

In terms of the plot of *Absalom, Absalom!*, Henry, son to Thomas and presumptive dynastic heir, befriends a student at the university, Charles Bon, with whom he develops strong emotional ties, an attraction that appears to have homosexual implications. Henry learns that Charles is romantically linked with his sister, Judith. Henry comes to accept their relationship, despite his own incestuous longings for her. However, the prospect of Charles and Judith marrying prompts his father to inform Henry that Charles is his son by his first marriage and, therefore, Henry's half-brother. Rejecting these implications, Henry abruptly leaves and visits Charles. Both young men join the Confederate Army to fight on behalf of the South during the Civil War. Gradually Henry comes to accept the incestuous prospect of his step-brother's marriage to his sister until, that is, his father informs him that Charles is not only his son, but part black. Henry then fulfills the murderous consequence of the Confederate legacy—and thereby reenacts the biblical prophecy—killing his half-brother, Charles, to preserve the family "honor".

The narrative is complicated by the realization we have as readers that Henry longed for his sister and was prepared to accept the incestuous marriage between Charles and Judith until he learned of his step-brother's mixed-race heritage. Another layer of meaning is embedded into the story when we realize that one of the primary narrators is Quentin Compson, who in *The Sound and the Fury* also has incestuous feelings for his sister and is later driven to commit suicide. *Absalom, Absalom!* is Faulkner's most difficult novel to read. Its implications, deliberately obscured by the baroque density of Faulkner's prose, is that all "white" Southern families, if one investigates far enough, are likely to have black family members and that the killing of blacks is, by extension, equated with the killing of family and more generally associated with the tragic historical destiny of the South.

In terms of Faulkner's style, permit me to quote from the opening passage from *The Sound and the Fury*, which I find particularly moving. It's narrated by Benjy, who is

cognitively challenged. He watches golfers in what was once the family property that was sold to allow Quentin to go to Harvard. He longs for his dead sister, Caddy, and confuses the golfers call to the caddie as a call to his sister. However, this is all difficult to comprehend at first because Faulkner insists that the reader assemble the story. Benjy's thought processes, although obviously impaired, are presented by Faulkner in a poetic style that is far more complex than seems plausible for a cognitively impaired "man-child", as should be implicitly clear by Luster's comments.

Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. They were coming toward where the flag was and I went along the fence. Luster was hunting in the grass by the flower tree. They took the flag out, and they were hitting. . . .

"Here caddie." He hit. They went away across the pasture. I held to the fence and watched them going away.

"Listen at you, now." Luster said. "Aint you something, thirty three years old, going on that way. After I done went all the way to town to buy you that cake. Hush up that moaning. Aint you going to help me find that quarter so I can go to the show tonight." (Faulkner, 1990, p. 3)

If Hemingway's literary style seemed action-driven, heroic, austere, and to the point, Faulkner's style, as Alfred Kazin emphasized, was "perhaps the most elaborate, intermittently incoherent and ungrammatical, thunderous, polyphonic rhetoric in all American writing" (citing Kazin, Volpe, 2003, pp. 37, 405). Indeed, as Faulkner himself noted, he sought "to crowd and cram everything, all experience, into each paragraph, to get the whole complete nuance of the moment's experience, of all the recaptured light rays, into each paragraph" (citing Faulkner, Volpe, 2003, p. 45).

Nowhere is Faulkner's convoluted style more evident in *Absalom, Absalom!* Thus, in one particularly trying passage—and I'll cite only one sentence of a very densely laden paragraph contained within an extended interior monologue rendered in italics—Rosa Coldfield runs up to the room where Charles Bon lies dead, and this is her initial reaction.

That's what I found. Perhaps it's what I expected, knew (even at nineteen knew, I would say if it were not for my nineteen, my own particular kind of nineteen years) that I should find. Perhaps I couldn't even have wanted more than that, couldn't have accepted less, who even at nineteen must have known that living is one constant and perpetual instant when the arras-veil before what-is-to-be hangs docile and even glad to the lightest naked thrust if we had dared, were brave enough (not wise enough: no wisdom needed here) to make the rending gash. (Faulkner, 1993, p. 147)

Hemingway, in a letter describing Faulkner's fiction to Malcolm Cowley who served as editor to both Faulkner and Hemingway, commented, "Faulkner has the most talent of anybody but hard to depend on because he goes on writing after he is tired and seems as though he never threw away the worthless. I would have been happy just to have managed him" (Cowley to Faulkner quoting Hemingway, Karl, 1989, p. 729). Hemingway's praise is somewhat disingenuous because his implication is that Faulkner's fiction, while ambitious, falters because it is sorely in need of editing.

MFS: Both men appear to personify the stereotypical view of male writers of that era: hard-drinking, extramarital-affair-driven men who may have been depressed and dysfunctional in their lives while, nevertheless, remaining painstakingly committed to their craft. What is it about writers and drinking and affairs (then and now)? Why are so many driven to excess? Or did their behavior reflect their personalities and their era?

DS: Faulkner and Hemingway matured in an era when it was generally perceived that all great fiction was or should be written by men and that great fiction depicted men's engagement with the world. Women were generally perceived as mothers, daughters, virgins or "whores"—or femme fatales or "bitches" or "dykes". The societal expectation was that women were supposed to support and sustain the manly enterprise of men engaged in writing the Great American Novel. This mindset fostered the belief by men who wrote then—and persists, in some cases, even today—that one of the benefits of literary success was greater sexual access to women.

None of this titillation interests me. I'm looking at the writing, the story, and how it enriches or enlarges my view of the world. Through years of reading I've gradually come to believe that, on balance, the fiction written by men who engage with the world is far preferable to today's feminized, politically correct, and "domesticated" stories written by most women and increasingly by "literary" men. That's been the gist of my essays posted on my Literary Gulag site, <http://www.literarygulag.com>, many of which are also hosted on the University of Illinois open-access website, IDEALS, <https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/handle/2142/3459>.

But back to your question. Men of Faulkner and Hemingway's generation generally saw women as supplicants who nurtured and assuaged men, bolstering their confidence and, often, their vanity. Perhaps, writers who work largely in isolation are more prone to drink and depression. Perhaps, *Eros* (today we degrade it by referring to it merely as sex) is a release from the relentless specter of *Thanatos* (death). For men and women, sex or romance or passion—whatever we might call it—can be liberating: It nurtures innovation, gets the creative juices flowing, and puts "the noonday demon" (depression) at bay. If a writer's life is largely lived in isolation, it could even be argued that the drive for emotional contact is life affirming. Today, as people read less and less, it's hard to draw them into the solitary act of reading challenging fiction potentially alone in a room for hours at a time. The biography of scandal has become yet another means of enticing increasingly reluctant readers to engage in an author's life and, perhaps, motivating them to read the fiction written by the writer.

Hemingway married four times. The end of the first three marriages roughly coincided with a time in which Hemingway sought a new relationship with a woman, as well as a different life adventure that might nurture the next stage of his creative talent. The end of the fourth marriage was, of course, Hemingway's suicide.

In 1929 Faulkner ultimately married his childhood infatuation, Estelle Oldham, a match, as it turned out, that was tragically unhappy for both. Eleven years earlier she had married another young man, a well-to-do lawyer, which devastated Faulkner. She had two children during that unhappy marriage. During her honeymoon with Faulkner, reputedly after having been told that his writing came first, she, possibly in anticipation of what lay in store, waded out into the ocean intent on suicide. Faulkner, calling for assistance from his balcony room, had Estelle rescued. Nevertheless, the marriage was doomed from the outset, except,

arguably, for their love of their daughter, Jill. Their relationship became a marriage of convenience, mostly celibate, as husband and wife drank—she frequently, he in life-threatening binges between writing projects. Nevertheless, the marriage to Estelle and the creation of Rowan Oak gave Faulkner the coveted stature of “country squire” both at home and in the larger community. Husband and wife lived on a quasi-baronial estate, itself a projection of a world of Southern gentility that was fading away, more fictive than real. Faulkner worked in Hollywood as a scriptwriter for a number of years to maintain the stately home. He also turned to other women—there and elsewhere—for love and support, but was careful to keep them at arm’s length from Oxford and his writing at Rowan Oak. In one particularly painful letter to his editor Malcom Crowley, Faulkner agreed to write Hemingway, although his response revealed both malice and pathos, if not a fair amount of insight into his own life choices.

I’ll write to Hemingway. Poor bloke, to have to marry three times to find out that marriage is a failure [Hemingway later married a 4th wife], and the only way to get any peace out of it is (if you are fool enough to marry at all) keep the first one and stay as far away from her as much as you can, with the hope of some day outliving her. At least you will be safe then from any other one marrying you—which is bound to happen if you divorce her. Apparently man can be cured of drugs, drink, gambling, biting his nails and picking his nose, but not of marrying”. (Karl, 1989, p. 729)

Faulkner’s worst public dustup with Hemingway came in 1947 when he was giving some lectures at “Ole Miss” (the University of Mississippi situated at Oxford) and was asked to rank the five best contemporary American writers. Initially the list included Thomas Wolfe, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, and either Willa Cather or perhaps Erskine Caldwell—the records from that lecture were unclear about the fourth author, and John Steinbeck. When asked to forgo modesty, his desire for acclaim led him to revise the list. In so doing, he diminished Hemingway, his erstwhile competitor for the Nobel Prize.

1. Thomas Wolfe—he had much courage, wrote as if he didn’t have long to live. 2. William Faulkner. 3. Dos Passos. 4. Hemingway—he had no courage, has never climbed out on a limb. He has never used a word where the reader might check his usage by a dictionary. 5. Steinbeck—I had great hopes for him at one time. Now I don’t know”. (citing Faulkner, Karl, 1989, p. 758)

Faulkner’s list quickly became national news when the university highlighted his comments as part of a public relations release. Hemingway, hurt and publically humiliated, had General Lanham counter with a glowing account of his personal bravery in wartime conditions. But the insult retained “staying power” primarily because Faulkner’s accusation levied against Hemingway was literary, rather than strictly personal.

MFS: Let me go to the end of our narrative so to speak—Hemingway committed suicide and Faulkner sustained horseback riding injuries before dying of a heart attack. Did their styles of life do them in?

DS: I have a great deal of empathy for Hemingway’s decision to take his life. How he could have survived all the bodily harm inflicted upon him over the years is anyone’s guess: his

extensive war injuries, his many physical mishaps that included at least two severe head injuries and two near-fatal plane crashes, the increasing use of alcohol, in part, to ward off the pain, the depression that ensued (possibly related to the head trauma or drinking or even a genetic disorder of hemochromatosis that may have run in his family), and, finally, the electroshock treatments he endured at Mayo Clinic at the end of his life to combat his depression. His father committed suicide as did Hemingway's sister Ursula and his brother, Leicester. Hemingway knew at the time of his death that his life as a writer was finished. Shooting himself with his double-barreled shotgun may have been his only release.

When Faulkner learned of Hemingway's death, he knew immediately, despite reports of an accident, that it was suicide. He felt Hemingway's suicide demonstrated a lack of courage, but it seems likely that he, too, had contemplated it many times. Certainly his biographer Karl felt that Faulkner's binge drinking and his reckless horseback riding represented suicidal gestures.

Writers who make it to the top—and many who don't—often lead lonely, difficult lives. They don't generally make good companions; they are often driven by demons or impulses that make their lives painfully difficult, if not torturous. They have my greatest sympathy, even if it seems their pain is self-inflicted.

MFS: Both writers works are still enjoyed today and are required reading in many colleges and universities. What is it about these writers—or their stories or their styles or their motifs—that continue to entrance readers?

DS: Let me answer your question indirectly.

When I was working on my story-cycle novel, *The Cusp of Dreams*, I had a chapter that took place in the South. It wasn't working: It didn't read as if I had been in the South, as if I knew the South or my Southern character. I went back down for a visit to try to "get it right". Thanks to suggestions from friends in Memphis, most of my time was spent in Oxford, Mississippi, because in their words, "You just don't get the South unless you've experienced the Mississippi Delta". I did research at Oxford at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture. I traveled along the Mississippi Delta. I made my way down to New Orleans and wended my way home, eventually, via significant detours to Oxford and Memphis.

During that trip I visited Faulkner's house. I was permitted into his writing room by a friendly curator from my hometown, which is Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. The austerity of the rooms in Rowan Oak surprised me, leading me to conclude that Rowan Oak wasn't really a country estate. Rather, it aspired to be a country estate. I saw Faulkner's grave and "Mammy Callie" Barr's too. I attended a homecoming football game at Ole Miss and tailgated at The Gove, which the Sporting News refers to as "the Holy Grail of tailgating sites". When I talked to older adults, it seemed they all possessed an active, living memory of Faulkner. One friend in Memphis actually attended Ole Miss and was friendly with Faulkner's stepson, Malcolm Franklin. He drank with Bill and Malcolm at Rowan Oak. He was intimately associated with Faulkner's world. He remains one of the most well-read men I've ever had the pleasure to meet. Every year he rereads *Absalom, Absalom!* It's a literary pilgrimage of faith, a homage to a great writer, and an acknowledgment of a culture that was and is. As a Northerner in the South, I had this constant sense of vertigo. The wrong word, the wrong look, and KAZAM! I was instantly transported into a time warp traveling back some hundred or two hundred years. When I was there the present seemed fleeting, the past vitally

alive. The visit gave me an insight into the world of Faulkner and a hunger to read more of his fiction.

I read Hemingway, on the other hand, because all modern, pared-down prose today descends from his fiction. When I started writing stories, I began stripping my sentences bare. Death to adjectives. Adíós to adverbs. Yay, to simple sentences. Nay, to subordinate clauses. It's a different approach to language that, nevertheless, is capable of retaining literary character, something that, generally, cannot be said for the Internet lexicon and—horrors!—text messaging.

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