

# Faulkner's Wounded Art: The Aftermath of Hollywood and World War II

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By the end of 1941, William Faulkner was financially and spiritually bankrupt as a result of his failure to make fiction writing support and satisfy him in a climate of well-being. During late November and into December 1941, he unsuccessfully attempted to gain employment at Warner Bros. by writing and submitting at the studio's request an original story outline of a previously rejected screenplay called "The Damned Don't Cry" (Brodsky and Hamblin, *Country Lawyer*). Additionally, during the next few months, he wrote "5 20-25 page story lines for various studios or individuals, none of which came to anything." (SL 159) In fact, Faulkner spent the first seven months of 1942 working himself up emotionally while his financial condition steadily deteriorated as he progressed toward signing a seven-year contract with Warner Bros. as scriptwriter.

The following five excerpts from letters Faulkner wrote to various associates between January and July 1942 demonstrate the progressive justifications he evolved for not engaging physically in the war, while yet convincing himself he would be participating in it. To Robert Haas, one of the three principals of his publisher, Random House, Faulkner wrote:

The world is bitched proper this time, isn't it? I'd like to be dictator now. I'd take all these congressmen who refused to make military appropriations and I'd send them to the Philippines . . . .  
I have organised observation posts for air raids in this county . . . But that's not enough. I have a chance to teach navigation (air) in the Navy as a civilian. If I can get my affairs here established, I think I'll take it. (SL 148)

A little more than two months later, Faulkner again wrote to Haas:

I am going before a Navy board and Medical for a commission N.R. I will go to the Bureau of Aeronautics, Washington, for a job. I am to get full Lieut. and 3200.00 per year, and I hope a pilot's rating to wear the wings. I don't like this desk job particularly, but I think better to get the commission first then try to get a little nearer the gunfire. (SL 149)

The tone of the second letter struck a familiar, if distant, chord; it suggested almost a repeat of Faulkner's experience in 1918. Having been rejected by the American armed services, then accepted into the Canadian Royal Air Force, he had been honorably discharged, but without seeing action, and was awarded his 2nd Lieutenant's wings post facto. With this hoped-for desk job would come the regalia and outfit, a costume symbolic of an active-duty flier, superficially indistinguishable from that worn by a "real" pilot. Faulkner's Washington desk job would be his Harvard AT-6, his Corsair, his P-38 Lightning. He could wear the outfit with distinction, just as he had dressed up frequently in his RAF uniform during the late teens and early twenties on the Ole Miss campus and in Oxford, affecting the pose of a wounded pilot returned from his tour of duty "over there."

The following letter to Bennett Cerf, another executive of Random House, written in early June 1942, marks the turning point in Faulkner's jockeying for a moral and pragmatic position:

Good for Don. Do you know how he managed to get into the Air Force? They turned me down on application, didn't say why, may have been age, 44. . . .  
I have a definite offer from the Navy, but I want an Air Force job if possible. . . .  
The Navy job is at a desk in the Bureau of Aeronautics in Washington. I want to stay outdoors if possible, want to go to California. Incidentally, has Random House any job in California I could do? (SL 152)

To soothe his conscience, he continued to express his overt intentions of offering himself up to the service. Of course he would prefer the more romantic branch, the Air Corps. Failing to get this commission, he would settle for a Navy desk job. Yet, on closer, more realistic scrutiny, it seemed even this alternative would not suffice to relieve him of his financial

distress. Later in the same month, Faulkner wrote his New York literary agent, Harold Ober:

What chance might I have of getting some specific assignment to write a piece that would pay my fare and keep in Cal. for a month? That is, a drawing acct. of \$1,000.00, so I can leave \$500.00 here with my family? If I can get to Cal. I believe I can get myself a job at least \$100.00 - \$200.00 a week with a movie co. . . . I've got to get away from here and earn more money. I know no place to do it better than Cal. if I can get hold of \$1,000.00 that's what I will do. I would need that much to take up the service commission, buy uniform and transport myself to where I can report for duty and live until I draw pay, even. The comm. (if I pass board) will pay me \$3200.00, but I will have to live in Washington, which will leave little left over for family, and nothing at all to pay the food bills, etc. (SL 153-54)

Previously, Faulkner had written Bennett Cerf about his "definite offer from the Navy," which ten days prior he had already mentioned to Robert Haas as most likely providing him with an opportunity to obtain "a pilot's rating to wear the wings." Now, in truth, he was admitting to Ober he had doubts about even passing the board examination for the Navy desk job. Furthermore, he realized, passing it would not deliver him from his fundamental dilemma. To Cerf, Faulkner reiterated his monetary and emotional destitution, and concluded with what appeared to be a resolute decision:

My best chance to earn money is Cal. Mainly I must get away from here and freshen my mental condition until I can write stuff that will sell. Am I in shape to ask an advance from the firm? if so, how much? I would like to pay the grocer something before I leave, but I have reached the point where I had better go to Cal. with just r.r. fare if I can do no better. (SL 155)

With the dubious and detrimental assistance of William Herndon, a West Coast agent who finally arranged for his employment with Warner Bros., Faulkner excitedly prepared to make the first visit of what would become an off-and-on four-year sojourn in Hollywood working as a wartime screenwriter. Officially, he went on the Warner Bros. payroll on July 27, 1942, at a rate of \$300.00 per week. In the beginning, and for quite a while, Faulkner actually believed that the work he was performing for the studio was finally delivering him from the Abyss: it was providing him with a steady weekly income, albeit one below his level of pay for Hollywood work he had done in the thirties. Not even a month earlier, desperate to secure work, Faulkner had written Harold Ober, outlining remuneration he had received for Hollywood writing performed between 1932 and 1937:

"I believe the agents who have tried since to sell me have talked about \$1000 per week. I dont think I am or have been or will ever be worth that to the movies. It just took them five years to find it out. I will take anything above \$100.00. I must have something somewhere, quick. (SL 155)

At the outset, scriptwriting seemed to satisfy all Faulkner's requisite justifications for feeling that his new role could be a source of significant pride. He expressed this emotion in a letter to James Geller, head of Warner Bros. Story Department, regarding his first assignment, a movie about France's emerging dominant military leader, Charles De Gaulle, which he would commence outlining almost immediately upon his arrival at the studio's Burbank location:

"Your letter of July 15 at hand. I also have Mr. Buckner's letter describing the job he has in mind. It is a good idea and I will be proud to work with it and hope and trust I can do it justice." (SL 157)

Writing for Warner Bros. at the outbreak of World War II was just the opportunity he had hoped for. What he was engaged in was not only pragmatically salutary, but purposive, even necessary to winning the war. After all, he was actively participating in the war effort, and not as a bystander, or commander of "observation posts for air raids" or even as a uniformed officer sitting behind a desk in Washington. Indeed, at first anyway, Faulkner even may have felt a tinge of the heroic in his "service" status. And for much of 1942, (until the end of November at least), deducing from the massive, exuberant outpouring of material he produced for *The De Gaulle Story*, Faulkner actually found gratification from, as well as received recompense for, his work as Hollywood scriptwriter.

But by December 1942, Faulkner was frustrated with the lack of success with which he had met on his first major writing assignment and he was homesick. Worse, by then he had convinced himself that the arrangement into which he had entered with Warner Bros. was catastrophic; his pay was paltry rather than generous as he had first perceived it to be.

In truth, he felt duped on many counts: his salary, his contractual term of seven renewable yearly options with Warner Bros., and his growing suspicion that his "war work" was not as essential as he had thought and hoped it might be.

In an uncharacteristically garrulous letter to his stepson, Malcolm A. Franklin, on December 5, 1942, Faulkner summarized his most elemental concerns: First, he cynically expressed his belief that only soldiers and those working directly on the construction of war materiel were essential. In the group of persons who were engaged in work "not essential. . .to winning a war or anything else," he included "real estate agents, lawyers and merchants and all other parasites who exist only because of motion picture salaries." (SL 165) This list of "parasites" closely resembled a similar list of Yoknapatawpha Snopeses he had been elaborating fictively for years. Disquietingly, Faulkner was already sensing himself party to this specious breed, and this exasperated him.

Secondly, with eloquent bravado, Faulkner implored his stepson to enlist, asserting his own desire to participate directly, actively, physically in the war. More significantly, Faulkner actually spelled out his fundamental reason for insisting Malcolm not allow himself any outs; going to fight was a matter of manhood:

But it is the biggest thing that will happen in your lifetime. All your contemporaries will be in it before it is over, and if you are not one of them, you will always regret it. That's something in the meat and bone and blood from the old cave-time, right enough. But it's there, and it's a strange thing how a man, no matter how intelligent, will cling to the public proof of his masculinity: his courage and endurance, his willingness to sacrifice himself for the land which shaped his ancestors. I don't want to go either. No sane man likes war. But when I can, I am going too, maybe only to prove to myself that I can do (within my physical limitations of age, of course) as much as anyone else can to make secure the manner of living I prefer and that suits my kin and kind. (SL 166)

Faulkner had missed the First World War. It was very apparent to him that he was about to miss World War II also, forfeit any real physical chance to put his manhood to the test. Perhaps he might participate vicariously through the endeavors of his stepson, Malcolm, and those of his brother John's eldest son, Jimmy Faulkner, who, as poetic justice would have it, was training to be a Marine pilot. To Faulkner, it was obvious enough that writing propaganda for the Fighting French was not going to satisfy his own needs of contributing to winning the war. He had tried and failed to give Hollywood a story with which, by focusing on the travail of the heroic "little people of Brittany," American audiences might identify.

Realizing he had already bordered on moralizing, if not actually propagandizing, Faulkner allowed himself one final indulgence in concluding his letter to Malcolm Franklin:

The next step opens out here, of course, and this stops being a letter and becomes a sermon. So I'll take this step in one jump, and quit. We must see that the old Laodicean smell doesn't rise again after this one. But we must preserve what liberty and freedom we already have to do that. We will have to make the liberty sure first, in the field. It will take the young men to do that. Then perhaps the time of the older men will come, the ones like me who are articulate in the national voice, who are too old to be soldiers, but are old enough and have been vocal long enough to be listened to. (SL 166)

For Faulkner, the crux of the entire rest of his life may have pivoted on this eloquently expressed *raison d'être*. If he were to prove his manhood, his soldiering would have to be "vocal"; and if he were going to be "listened to," he would have to "articulate in the national voice."

Apparently, being "listened to" had become one of Faulkner's highest priorities. Although his portrait had appeared on the January 23, 1939 cover of *Time*, signaling the epitome of national acclaim, the public had not given him its ear during the fifteen years since he had first published *The Marble Faun* in 1924. Suddenly, Faulkner must have realized that success, if it were to come at all, would have to be achieved by tuning his voice to the frequency on which the public listened: the "national voice." Also, he must have suspected that the national voice bore Hollywood's jingoistic accent.

After his brief respite home for Christmas in Oxford, Faulkner returned to Hollywood in January 1943 and resumed where he had left off trying to write a war-effort screenplay. This one was entitled "The Life and Death of a Bomber."

On the previous November 14, Faulkner and Joe Berry of the Warner Bros. Location Department had toured the Consolidated Aircraft factory in San Diego to gather information for a proposed script about the civilians involved in building American bombers. According to Faulkner's notes from the tour,<sup>1</sup> the movie was supposed to provide favorable publicity for Consolidated in the way *Wings for the Eagle* (Warner Bros. 1942) had done for Lockheed. On January 21, 1943, Faulkner submitted a twenty-page "Outline for Original Screenplay" (Brodsky and Hamblin, *Country Lawyer*), the theme of which is the need for national unity in support of America's servicemen. In showing how a labor dispute and a love triangle interfere with work at the factory and cause a defective bomber to be sent overseas, Faulkner dramatized the tragic consequences of placing selfish motives ahead of national security interests. However, like *The De Gaulle Story* before it, and far more quickly, "The Life and Death of a Bomber" was canceled.

For the next two months, Faulkner worked on a succession of unfulfilled—and unfulfilling—projects, none related to the war. Possibly as a result of this last fact, Faulkner found himself living "a damned dull life" and vowing, again, "to soldier, if possible." (SL 167-169) On April 3, 1943, he took the liberty to exercise his newly-discovered moralizing voice in a letter to his nephew, Jimmy Faulkner; it was marked by considerable fantasizing in which Faulkner at one point even reminded the worn myth about his WWI flying experiences to which he had originally given currency in the late teens and early twenties:

I would have liked for you to have had my dog-tag, R.A.F., but I lost it in Europe, in Germany. I think the Gestapo has it; I am very likely on their records right now as a dead British flying officer-spy. (SL 170)

Faulkner advanced from fashioning himself as a flier who had done battle to waxing on the virtues of becoming intimate with fear so that true courage could emerge, and concluded with two extremely significant confessions:

This is a long letter, and preachified too, but Uncle Jack and your father are too old to do what you can do, and I must stay in civilian clothes to look after things for us when everybody comes back home again. (SL 171)

Indeed, Faulkner had emerged from his experiences at this juncture in his career with two insights into his most practicable future roles: one was that of needing to become a "preacher" if he were to reach the public with his writing, and by extension, make money from its recognition of his efforts; the other was to satisfy himself with the role of provider for his family, officially assume the primogenitive position as familial patriarch.

Then occurred, suddenly, a development that once more stirred Faulkner's enthusiasm and pride. Howard Hawks wanted him as scriptwriter for his next war movie. Faulkner would be given another major opportunity to prove himself useful both to Warner Bros. and the nation. On April 7, 1943, he commenced writing a very ambitious project entitled *Battle Cry*. Meant to celebrate the bravery and steadfast loyalty of the American, French, English, Chinese, Dutch and Russian forces to the causes of liberty and universal peace, it was remarkable for its experimental form; in its variegated shifting in and out of time sequences and montaging of disparate scenes and locations, it more closely approximated one of his own novels, such as *As I Lay Dying*, than it did movies of the period. A month later, Faulkner described the project in a letter to his daughter Jill:

"I am writing a big picture now, for Mr Howard Hawks, an old friend, a director. It is to be a big one. It will last about 3 hours, and the studio has allowed Mr Hawks 3 and ½ million dollars to make it, with 3 or 4 directors and about all the big stars." (SL 173-74)

<sup>1</sup>Originally part of the William Faulkner/Warner Bros. Story File archive, this document is now included in the Brodsky Faulkner Collection at Southeast Missouri State University.

But abruptly and without any advance warning, almost four months to the day from its inception, the *Battle Cry* project was canceled and Faulkner was temporarily out of a job. Not a week before, in a letter bordering on the euphoric, he had written his wife, Estelle:

I will stick at this picture until Hawks says its finished, my part of it, I mean. He and I had a talk at the fishing camp. He is going to establish his own unit, as an independent: himself, his writer, etc., to write pictures, then sell them to any studio who makes highest bid. I am to be his writer. He says he and I together as a team will always be worth two million dollars at least. That means, we can count on getting at least two million from any studio with which to make any picture we can cook up, we to make the picture with the two million dollars, and divide the profits from it. When I come home, I intend to have Hawks completely satisfied with this job, as well as the studio. If I can do that, I wont have to worry again about going broke temporarily. The main problem I have now is to get myself free from the seven-year contract for a pittance of a salary . . . I have a promise from the studio that, when I have written a successful picture, they will destroy that contract. This is my chance. (SL 177)

Although no one can document with certainty its extenuating and culminating circumstances and reasons, the shut-down of *Battle Cry*, which during its short-lived existence stimulated Faulkner to generate thousands of typescript pages leading to a "Second Temporary Draft" composed or adapted almost exclusively by him, must have come as a bleak and nauseating reality.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, if Faulkner believed he had satisfied his immediate boss, Hawks, he could have had little expectation that his efforts had merited him a more lucrative, less constricting contract with the studio. Doubtless, this seemingly gratuitous denouement to his highly concentrated attempt to prove himself not just competent, but exemplary, as a screenwriter only could have reinforced his cynical judgments about Hollywood; certainly, this would break his spirit! None of the projects on which he would work during 1944 and 1945 would either compel or engross him to this degree or delude him with hopes of becoming a well-paid, respected scriptwriter.

Yet on returning home to Oxford from Hollywood in mid-August 1943, Faulkner did retain one immediately tangible legacy from his work on *Battle Cry*, along with the less visible alterations to his literary psyche: he had a check for \$1,000, a loan from William Bacher, Hawks' chief advisor on the *Battle Cry* project, who, having been impressed with Faulkner's writing abilities on the recently-aborted screenplay, was confident the latter could transform his, Bacher's, bare story outline of "a fable" into a saleable movie property. It had been agreed tacitly that both men would share in all future movie proceeds. Once situated at Rowan Oak, Faulkner wrote Robert Haas about his challenging new concept; no matter that it treated neither vintage nor newly conceived Yoknapatawpha material:

The argument is (in the fable) in the middle of that war, Christ (some movement in mankind which wished to stop war forever) reappeared and was crucified again. We are repeating, we are in the midst of war again. Suppose Christ gives us one more chance, we will crucify him again, perhaps for the last time. That's crudely put; I am not trying to preach at all. But that is the argument. (SL 180)

Sadly, Faulkner failed to recognize consciously that in fact he was trying to convince, persuade Haas by preaching in the abstract. Nor did he, could he, realize then that he had actually arrived at that junction in his career and in his life where the veering had already begun to take effect.

Back in Hollywood in February 1944, Faulkner tried to hold peace of mind together until year's end. Two of the screenplays on which he collaborated that year, *The Big Sleep* and *To Have and Have Not*, netted him his only screen credits for the Warner Bros. studio during the forties. But Faulkner's June-to-September 1945 stint presented no such happy conjunctions, although he did succeed at "novelizing" Stephen Longstreet's book, *Stallion Road*, while failing to create a production-ready screenplay out of it. By mid-September, with a head of resolute, though irresponsible, steam up, Faulkner

<sup>2</sup>For a detailed record of Faulkner's work on this project, see Brodsky and Hamblin, *Faulkner: A Comprehensive Guide to the Brodsky Collection*, Volume IV.

disappeared from the studio for good. For appearance's sake, his Off Payroll Notice, dated September 19, 1945, stated: "Suspended for not to exceed 6 months" (Brodsky Faulkner Collection). On October 15, 1945, Faulkner wrote to Colonel J. L. Warner his most restrained and deferential apologia, almost begging the latter to issue him a formal studio release from his contract:

So I have spent three years doing work (trying to do it) which was not my forte and which I was not equipped to do, and therefore I have misspent time which as a 47 year old novelist I could not afford to spend. And I dont dare misspend any more of it. (SL 204)

The buildup and climaxing of Faulkner's exodus from Egypt/Hollywood had not been motivated by a salutary financial alternative; nor was he returning to marital comforts and domestic stability in Canaan/Oxford. In fact, the situation which greeted Faulkner in September 1945 was not much different from that which he had left in July 1942. In a sense, it was even worse since Rowan Oak had further deteriorated, as had his marriage to Estelle by virtue of the recent lengthy separations, compounded by his renewed amorous relationship with Meta Carpenter Rebner, who, between marriages, remained Faulkner's beloved and devoted mistress during the four years he spent in Hollywood at Warner Bros. In truth, had he not had Meta's companionship and undemanding devotion and the abiding hospitality and friendship of A. I. Bezzerides, especially during his last two years in Hollywood, Faulkner might have succumbed easily to physical despondency; surely he would have been fired from his job for his notorious problem with alcohol.

Ironically, in a letter Faulkner wrote to Malcolm Cowley, the highly esteemed American literary critic, nearly a year before his September 1945 departure from Warner Bros., he expressed his belief that he could keep "Hollywood" and Yoknapatawpha separate, mutually exclusive: "I can work at Hollywood 6 months, stay home 6, am used to it now and have movie work locked off in another room." (SL 186) And almost a year later, referring to the prose set piece which Cowley had requested Faulkner write to be included originally in *The Portable Faulkner* Cowley was heatedly preparing for Viking Press's Fall 1946 publication schedule, Faulkner remarked similarly, "I think this is all right, it took me about a week to get Hollywood out of my lungs, but I am still writing all right, I believe." (SL 205) Even though this recently completed fictional *tour de force* would come to be regarded as one of the finest postwar prose pieces Faulkner would compose, still it looked backwards, not ahead, treating material he had conceived almost two decades earlier. Yet, little could he realize when he wrote the preceding cover letter to Cowley which accompanied the "Appendix" to *The Sound and the Fury*, that never again would he be able to lock Hollywood away "in another room" or get it "out of his lungs."

And in point of fact, the "Appendix" itself would be explanatory or "preachified"; it would bring to the surface through overt, objective clarification that which had remained so beautifully evocative and enchantingly mesmerical in the "longer version" of *The Sound and the Fury* published fifteen years before. In the new piece, among other revelations, Faulkner would tell an audience not altogether certain whether Quentin had or had not actually committed incest with his sister Caddy the "truth" of the matter. Of Quentin III Faulkner would record that he "loved not the idea of the incest which he would not commit, but some presbyterian concept of its eternal punishment." (SF 9) Although at the time Faulkner's shift in literary aesthetic would go unnoticed even by his most ardent and fastidious admirers, it would appear that Faulkner was no longer content to leave his readers guessing, or to allow them to formulate their own determinations; rather, the "Appendix" he had written was the product of his newly-developed compulsion to explain his messages, make sure he was being heard, understood, assimilated, and above all, respected.

In retrospect, one almost might view the composition of the new "Appendix," occurring at the tail end of Faulkner's Warner Bros. years, as having arisen out of the same compulsive urgency which in the early months of 1942 had driven him to

write "5 20-25 page story lines for various studios or individuals," that financial imperative to sustain his vocation as fictionist. This time also, hoping to enhance prospects for sales of Cowley's forthcoming anthology of his own work in *The Portable Faulkner*, Faulkner had supplied the grateful editor with what equally might be considered a kind of story outline, albeit ostensibly prose fiction. And in this respect, Faulkner's "Appendix" might even be seen as a valedictory to his Hollywood career, incorporating, as it does, not only one of Hollywood's compositional formats, that of the story outline, whose technique he had mastered, but even the infusion into its plot of certain tinges of that ambiance indigenous to his recently abandoned residence. In updating Caddy's biography from the point at which he had "suspended" her in 1910, the year she had just married "an extremely eligible young Indianian she and her mother had met while vacationing at French Lick the summer before," Faulkner writes, "Divorced by him 1911. Married 1920 to a minor movingpicture magnate, Hollywood, California. Divorced by mutual agreement, Mexico 1925. Vanished in Paris with the German occupation, 1940." (SF 10-11) Furthermore, by 1945, the time frame in which Faulkner as well as his "suspended" characters are concurrently operating, it appears that Caddy is yet very much alive; she has been recognized by the city's public librarian posing beside a German staff general—the actual year is 1943—somewhere on the French Riviera; the arrested scene has been spotted in a photograph from a "slick magazine." This allusion hardly could have been accidental; it thrust Faulkner directly back into his original working out of *The De Gaulle Story*. And as he wrote the "Appendix," if Faulkner had conjured Caddy as heart-breakingly exiled, anomalous, and tragically doomed, doubtless he must have considered his own isolated dislocation back home at Rowan Oak and his impecunious condition resulting from his books being out of print equally lamentable and humiliating.

The years between 1945 and 1947 were limbo years in which Faulkner virtually languished in Oxford: the war had been favorably concluded by the American forces in Europe: both Faulkner's stepson and his nephew were home safe, although his brother Jack had sustained serious wounds. What cosmopolitan atmosphere Faulkner had appreciated in California was gone, as were his friendships with fellow writers at Warner Bros. He must have known that his relationship with his inamorata Meta was all in the past: on realizing that Faulkner was leaving for good, Meta Rebner had reconciled with her divorced husband Wolfgang and they were remarried before the end of 1945. And if Faulkner's tenuous marriage was strained, so too was he aware of a growing estrangement between himself and his longtime Oxford friend and early literary mentor, Phil Stone. But, by 1948, Faulkner would prove he had not only mastered his Hollywood primer, but had become competent at writing his own version: *Intruder in the Dust*.

This new book would contain enough of the controversial as well as the sentimental to ignite a very dry public tinder. The short novel would be a "front" for a highly calculated and contrived tract on the growing national epidemic, civil rights. Only secondarily would it be about individuals with personal problems, though it would render poignant portraits of an old black man, Lucas Beauchamp, juxtaposed to a young white boy, Chick Mallison. Despite, or perhaps because of an inflammatory, involuted civil rights rhetoric intertwined with a rather straight-forward mystery story, *Intruder in the Dust* would qualify on its own terms as prime Hollywood fodder. And ironically, its subsequent sale to MGM for \$50,000 outright would serve for the first time in Faulkner's adult life as a major stopgap against his most humiliating nemesis, penury. That unimagined windfall and receipt of the 1949 Nobel Prize in December 1950, with its stipend of slightly more than \$30,000, would betoken ultimate public recognition and success Faulkner could equate with a measure of fulfillment of his manhood: all of a sudden, he was being heard and making money!

What privately Faulkner had mentioned to his stepson in his December 5, 1942 letter, about men like himself "who are too old to be soldiers, but are old enough and have been vocal long enough to be *listened to*" (SL 166, *emphasis added*), he would

reiterate and publicly proclaim on December 10, 1950 in his Nobel Prize Address:

So this award is only mine in trust. It will not be difficult to find a dedication for the money part of it commensurate with the purpose and significance of its origin. But I would like to do the same with the acclaim too, by using this moment as a pinnacle from which I might be *listened to*. . . . (ESPL 119, *emphasis added*)

Most shocking and stunning to those who had been familiar with Faulkner's fiction for more than a score of years was not the lofty, eloquent rhetoric embodied in his undeniably moving speech, but his avowed affirmation of man's ability to endure and his will to prevail over oppression and tragedy by virtue of indomitable, seemingly immortal qualities inherent in the collective human spirit. Little might they have intuited that this apparently complete reversal of attitudes was the residual product of Faulkner's mature years in Hollywood. After all, neither *The De Gaulle Story* nor *Battle Cry*, his two major war screenplays from the forties, had been produced, thus depriving them of insight requisite to being prepared for and understanding such an "about-face." And even those movies that had earned him screen credits, which they might have viewed, *The Big Sleep* and *To Have and Have Not*, were so inextricably collaborative as to muffle and distort whatever voice originally he lent to them.

Nonetheless, the hallmark, or stigma, was in place, even if the public would remain at a loss for adequate explanations for his emotional sea change. Less than six months later, on May 28, 1951, Faulkner again would take to the podium. And again he would preach his newly arrived-at stance on mankind; this time to an audience gathered in the University High School auditorium in Oxford, Mississippi, for the Commencement of the Class of '51, the valedictorian of which was his daughter, Jill. The address, which has come to be known as Faulkner's "Never Be Afraid" speech, was laced with two very remarkable echoes. One implicit theme would describe a path directly back through the Nobel Prize Speech to his December 5, 1942 letter to Malcolm A. Franklin in which, due to his age, he had offered, as an alternative to fighting in the field, articulating in the national voice; he was among those "too old to be soldiers, but . . . old enough and have been vocal long enough to be listened to." Faulkner devoted the initial two of only five paragraphs comprising this brief speech to the distinction between youth and age, highlighting with an aphorism the obvious paradoxes in these diametrical conditions. Presuming to have established a position of credibility and moral authority by aligning himself with the older generation, he proposed to offer relevant observations, not absolutes, occasioned by his maturity and experience as a man who had traveled beyond Oxford. However, his prevailing insistence was on being listened to; he hoped what he was about to tell them would be heard, at least by those in attendance young enough to yet effect changes:

So you young men and women in this room tonight, and in thousands of other rooms like this one about the earth today, have the power to change the world, rid it forever of war and injustice and suffering, provided you know how, know what to do. And so, according to the old Frenchman, since you cant know what to do because you are young, then anyone standing here with a head full of white hair, should be able to tell you.

But maybe this one is not as old and white as his white hairs pretend or claim. Because he cant give you a glib answer or pattern either. But he can tell you this, because he believes this. . . . (ESPL 122)

Most striking in this passage is the resonance which in retrospect appears to be a direct corollary to lines Faulkner wrote into the "First Extended Treatment" and retained verbatim in his "Second Temporary Draft" of *Battle Cry*. In his commencement speech, the thrust of Faulkner's argument and crux of what he had to tell his audience with such urgency was:

What threatens us today is fear. Not the atom bomb, nor even fear of it, because if the bomb fell on Oxford tonight, all it could do would be to kill us, which is nothing, since in doing that, it will have robbed itself of its only power over us, which is fear of it, the being afraid of it. (ESPL 122-23)

In both complete drafts of *Battle Cry*, Faulkner has the Italian prisoner relate a tale about a fat German officer humiliated by his captives despite his tyrannical domination over them. When he has finished, Battson, his American guard, says, "Well? Is that all?" The Italian replies, "It will never be all, as long as they can laugh. How can you conquer people who can still laugh at you?" "You can starve them," a soldier interjects, and the Italian responds, "You can only kill them by doing that. You can kill them much simpler. But when you do that, you have failed. The man whom you must destroy, as the only alternative to his obeying you, that man has beat you." (Brodsky and Hamblin, *Comprehensive Guide IV* 110)

Soon propagandizing would become a way of life. On accepting the Nobel Prize, Faulkner likely would not have stopped to ponder that with few exceptions the fiction he would produce henceforth, by no means scanty in quantity, would have a distinct cast to it: virtually all of it would be characterized by ethical preaching, political polemics, and philosophical diatribes. Unintentionally, most of Faulkner's later work would fail to engage his readers by forcing them to participate in the "working out" of the tale being rendered; rather, he would seem to become increasingly preoccupied with imparting information which might "fill in" or "fill out" lacunae within his literary construct, his Yoknapatawpha cosmos.

Even Faulkner's most well-sustained later prose from the fifties, indeed that which sporadically would rise to the qualitative levels achieved between 1929 and 1942, would be marked by more than a striking similarity to filmic story outlines, treatments and screenplays. For instance, the three masterful prose "prologues" Faulkner would compose to buffer his "experimental play-novel," *Requiem for a Nun* (1951), would qualify as background treatment to the play itself, which in format would appear almost identical to *The De Gaulle Story*, *Battle Cry* and the other fully developed screenplays he had written in the forties. So, too, would two semi-autobiographical essays published in 1954, "Mississippi" and "Sepulture South," read like story outlines. And when one considers that the basic purpose of a treatment is to expand surface narrative elements posited in a story outline with additional plot tributaries, some dialogue, as well as include initial scene blocking and stage directions or camera angles, the two essays and, especially *Requiem for a Nun*, become easier to locate derivatively in relation to their prototypic models, if not adapted incarnations.

Also in 1954, Faulkner would coerce into fruition *A Fable*, whose early drafts substantially had been written in the California home of A. I. Bezzerides ten years earlier, and which, if nothing else, would represent the political, religious, and philosophical tenets that had polarized in his psyche during his Warner Bros. tenure. In 1957, *The Town* would be published; in 1959, *The Mansion*. Both would appear almost as elaborate apologiae for earlier work forestalled because of financial difficulties reaching crisis levels after the 1940 publication of *The Hamlet*.

*The Reivers*, Faulkner's final novel, published only months before his death in 1962, would reprise the semi-autobiographical genre he had resorted to in "Mississippi" and "Sepulture South" and in the Foreword to *The Faulkner Reader*. It would project a pervasive surface rendering of narrative content, and despite its opening flashback, would maintain a serial structure parallel in its linear chronology and resolution of plot, albeit predominantly through the use of farce, itself among the most accessible of comic techniques. *The Reivers* would provide Faulkner's loyal reading audience with a novel not only easy to read and follow because of its uncomplicated syntax and diction and superficial plot, but diverting on account of its informing gentle sentimentality, nostalgia, and tall-tale humor. Cinematic in its surface presentation, it would manifest an easy adaptability to the film medium: without stretching, *The Reivers* even might be considered Faulkner's most self-consciously constructed and successfully articulated "screenplay"!

More by coincidence than design, Faulkner made one of his final three public appearances at the United States Military Academy. There, on the evening of April 19, 1962, he read an excerpt from a prepublication copy of *The Reivers* to an audience of 1400, one thousand of whom were cadets, after which he graciously answered questions from those in

attendance. Later, he submitted to additional queries from a select group of press correspondents. Ironically, during these and two classroom sessions held the following morning, Faulkner actually seemed to be fulfilling the pontifical role as purveyor of wisdom he had assigned to Lucius Priest's grandfather in his recently completed novel. In fact, the frame of this novel ("Grandfather said:"), which establishes the whole narrative as an exhortation of age and youth, as well as the homiletic tone of many of the speeches, especially those of Grandfather, Parsham, and Ned, echoes the "national voice" that Faulkner had discovered in World War II Hollywood and developed over the remainder of his life.

Furthermore, had Faulkner pondered his surroundings in light of his old dreams and compulsions, performing this role in the nation's premier military institution might have seemed altogether appropriate. After all, two decades earlier, rationalizing about his own inability to fight in the war, he had said to Malcolm Franklin, "It will take the young men to do that. Then perhaps the time of the older men will come, the ones like me who are. . .too old to be soldiers, but are old enough and have been vocal long enough to be listened to."

Indeed, at West Point, William Faulkner easily might have felt not only that his time had come, but that he was a fellow soldier among the country's elite. In response to the following question posed during the final session at the Academy, "Sir, have you ever desired to be anything besides a writer?", Faulkner replied, "Why sure, I'd like to be a brave, courageous soldier. . . ." (Fant 112)

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