

LOUIS DANIEL BRODSKY

## *Faulkner's Life Masks*

"Beginning with *Sartoris* I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it, and by sublimating the actual into apocryphal I would have complete liberty to use whatever talent I might have to its absolute top."

—William Faulkner, Interview with  
Jean Stein, 1956

"Bud, you're an animal, but I'm just a vegetable!"

—William Faulkner to A. I. Bezzerides, ca. 1944

ESSENTIALLY, WILLIAM FAULKNER was a passive person who not only privately condemned himself for his passivity but at times disparaged his own character publicly. In fact, not only as a youth but as an adult, he repeatedly adopted, as personae, figures who represented the life of courage and action. Furthermore, he would spend the better part of his adulthood attempting to sublimate the myriad actual elements he considered as constituting his "vegetable" life into the apocryphal matter of his fantasies. If reality, Faulkner's "own little postage stamp of native soil" would be "worth writing about," provide the stuff of fiction, fiction itself would engender, in him, the stuff of living. His existence would be that of a double agent's disguised conspiracy against reality itself.

A graphic illustration of Faulkner's dissatisfaction with himself as a physically inactive individual and with his role as writer appears, through implication, at the outset of *Absalom, Absalom!*, in which Miss Rosa Coldfield makes Quentin Compson a willing conspirator in the fall of the house of Sutpen:

So I dont imagine you will ever come back here and settle down as a country lawyer in a little town like Jefferson, since Northern people have already seen to it that there is little left in the South for a young man. So maybe you will enter the literary profession as so many Southern gentlemen and gentlewomen too are doing now and maybe some day you will remember this and write about it. You will be married then I expect and perhaps your wife will want a new gown or a new chair for the house and you can write this and submit it to the magazines. Perhaps you will even remember kindly then the old woman who made you spend a whole afternoon sitting indoors and listening while she talked about people and events you were fortunate enough to escape yourself when you wanted to be out among friends of your own age.

This passage is intricately charged with Faulkner's personal sentiments. Although Miss Rosa places law in the highest echelon of respectable vocations, the profession suggests, to her, effeteness and ineffectuality. Innocuous, utterly domestic in its scope, writing, she further suggests, is a less active, more demeaning vocation than the law.

Miss Rosa concludes her prefatory remarks to the lengthy tale about Sutpen and his family, by observing that she has "made" Quentin spend the whole afternoon inside when he might have been out playing with his young friends.

Actually Quentin has no choice. Miss Rosa tells him that he has been "fortunate enough to escape" the people and events she is poised to evoke and dramatize for him, but ironically, her very telling will still further implicate Quentin in events and lives for which he already feels a compulsive responsibility. During the course of the novel, Quentin will learn that his greatest misfortune may be that he has to remain a passive rather than active participant in the events; no matter that he has entered the events, through his imagination's will, he will experience a growing awareness of ambivalent guilt and hatred and shame.

Of course, Quentin Compson is not William Faulkner. Somewhere in that no-man's land between protagonist and author flourished the dynamic mediating forces that permitted Faulkner, the artist, to fuse Quentin's angst with his own and to transcend himself, through the imagination. Nonetheless, although the published novel stood, ineluctably, as a testament to the power of his imagination as an artist, Faulkner, the citizen of Oxford, Mississippi, had to go on living with the old, unchangeable daily frustrations, ambivalences, and trivial responsibilities after the eruptive creative juices had cooled and hardened in *Absalom, Absalom!*.

Almost as though a dozen years had not intervened, and as if, like Quentin Compson, he were again listening to Miss Rosa expound her low estimation of the legal and writing professions, Faulkner described Gavin Stevens, in *Knight's Gambit*, as "a split personality: the one, the lawyer, the county attorney who walked and breathed and displaced air; the other, the garrulous facile voice so garrulous and facile that it seemed to have no connection with reality at all and presently hearing it was like listening not even to fiction but to literature."

In fact, Faulkner had relentlessly pressed this kind of negative expression into service, in novels which followed *Absalom, Absalom!*. In *The Unvanquished*, appearing in 1938, Bayard Sartoris remarks of his infatuation with Drusilla: "I thought then of the woman of thirty, the symbol of the ancient and eternal Snake and of the men who have written of her, and I realised then the immitigable chasm between all life and all print—that those who can, do, those who cannot and suffer enough because they can't, write about it." Two years later, in *The Hamlet*, the collective community of Frenchman's Bend concludes of its new teacher, Labove, ironically a former football star at the state university, that "although his designation of professor was a distinction, it was still a woman's distinction, functioning actually in a woman's world like the title of reverend." For Faulkner, regarding writing or teaching literature, a profound and seemingly unavoidable domesticity or womanish quality would persist in plaguing both callings and practitioners, plague him, personally, with self-doubts about his own "distinction."

On February 7, 1949, just slightly more than four months after the late-September publication of *Intruder in the Dust*, Faulkner wrote a two-page letter he intended to mail to Robert Haas, one of Random House's principals, imploring him to interpolate into the very next printing of the book a new passage, the conclusion of which reads:

. . . so that in five hundred years or perhaps even less than that, all America can paraphrase the tag line of a book a novel of about twenty years ago by another Mississippian, a mild retiring little man over yonder at Oxford, in which a fictitious Canadian said to a fictitious self-lacerated Southerner in a dormitory room in a not too authentic Harvard: "I who regard you will have also sprung from the loins of African kings."

Two countervailing dynamics are in tension, within this passage. On the one hand, Faulkner regarded his accomplishment in *Absalom, Absalom!* proudly enough to presume that "all America can paraphrase the tag line" to remind itself of a former truth. On the other hand, Faulkner still viewed himself with considerable self-deprecation, alluding to the novel's author as a "mild retiring little man over yonder at Oxford." In addition, by juxtaposed inference, Faulkner equated himself with Quentin, the "fictitious self-lacerated Southerner." Contemplating what he had written, Faulkner evidently decided he had been too harsh on himself. Before actually posting the letter, he discarded both ribbon and carbon copies of page "2" and retyped it, with one quite major recasting of a phrase: for "a mild retiring little man," he substituted "the successfully mild little bloke." Thus, he asserted an identity with the valiant English, as he had been doing, sporadically, in dress, speech patterns, and physical mannerisms, since his days in the RAF, in 1918.

In a different kind of letter, to Saxe Commins, his Random House editor and beloved confidant, postmarked Oxford, October 25, 1952, Faulkner confided his urgent need to get away from his home and family. But, he told Commins, he would be unsuccessful in convincing Estelle that his reason for wanting to leave home was to save his talent from total disintegration, "since she (E.) has never had any regard or respect for my work, has always looked on it as a hobby, like collecting stamps." To what degree Faulkner was projecting, onto his wife, his own uncertainties and disillusionments is not clear. But he seems to have felt that what he took to be her attitude toward his vocation represented the general attitude toward it: his life's work was seen, by others, to represent little more than a "hobby."

Paradoxically, Faulkner's preoccupation with the apparent uselessness of the writer in society increased with his growing reputation. Three years later, Faulkner elaborated the image of his career he had first described, privately, to Saxe Commins, in two sardonic public statements. In his speech on receiving the National Book Award for Fiction on January 25, 1955, he claimed that "the pursuit of art is a peaceful hobby like breeding dalmatians." Five days later, in an interview he gave to Harvey Breit, his friend and associate-to-be on the People-To-People Program, initiated by President Eisenhower, he added to the notion of the writer's uselessness the idea of his inherent dislocation in society: "The writer in America isn't part of the culture of this country. He's like a fine dog. People like him around, but he's of no use."

These foregoing citations, culled from myriad references to the ineffectuality of the writer Faulkner made, in print and in public statements, over his forty-year career, indicate an abiding preoccupation with failure—not with the failure to become a productive artist but a failure to fulfill his own conception of himself as an active human being. He never succeeded at squaring his self-image as a writer with his image of those he admired as contributing individuals in society. The fact that writing required isolation, contemplation, introspection, minimized its value in a world that revered "doers" and "things." He was not a "doer"; at best, he was someone to be indulged or merely tolerated.

Faulkner's ideal of the active, heroic person was the soldier, an ideal he conceived to have been embodied in the career of his great-grandfather, the "Old Colonel," William Clark Falkner. In this leader of soldiers, railroad builder, hard drinker, and duelist, Faulkner discovered the romantic apotheosis of the man of action and great deeds. That the Old Colonel also found time to be a lawyer, politician, and writer added to his luster, but Faulkner saw his great-grandfather first as a soldier. So he portrayed him in fiction, although he suggests doubts about the Old Colonel's ethical and moral behavior, in *The Unvanquished*.

Rejected by the American armed forces, for service in the First World War, because of his small stature, he was

accepted, in 1918, as a flight-training cadet, by the RAF in Toronto. His stint lasted only from July to December 1918, when he returned home, to Oxford. He received an "honorary 2nd Lieutenant rank" in 1920. His disappointment in having failed to go abroad and participate in battle is a commonly accepted biographical fact. We know, too, that he concocted tales about dogfights over Europe, crackups, and near-misses. The twenty-one-year-old Billy Falkner imagined himself, or at least one of his selves, as a heroic flier returned from the Great War, sporting a "steel plate" beneath his skull, who, with the aid of a cane, was managing to master a limp.

Faulkner himself is embodied in one, if not in all three, of the wounded pilots he dramatized sitting out the war, in an English hospital, in "The Lilacs," a poem possibly composed while he was stationed in Toronto. An early, subsequently revised draft of this poem mentions, by name and distinction, the three fliers: "John, the poet," "James, the motorcar salesman," and "myself," the latter being the narrator, who had been shot down over Mannheim, in his "little pointed eared machine." In Faulkner's first novel, *Soldiers' Pay*, published in 1926, a Faulkner incarnation surfaces, in the persona of Donald Mahon; another appears as the central protagonist of "Turn About," a short story published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, on March 5, 1932. As late as the mid-forties, Faulkner was still alluding to himself as a pilot who had seen action over Germany. In fact, it was "in Germany" that he had lost his dogtag, he reminisced to his nephew, Jimmy Faulkner, in a patriotic, confidence-boosting letter mailed from Hollywood.

As sensitive as Faulkner was to the fact that he had "missed the war," he was equally aware of those writers who had not missed it: the English poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owens, whose verse he admired greatly; the American novelists John Dos Passos and Ernest Hemingway, who had seen action in the front lines and whose fiction not only palpably recreated scenes of war but reflected postwar disillusionment in a more poignant and authentic manner than anything Faulkner had approximated in *Soldiers' Pay* or in his "war" poetry and short stories. No matter how flexible it was becoming, his embryonic imagination was no match for their actual experience. Faulkner was highly conscious of his lack of experience. His first novel, *Soldiers' Pay*, and Hemingway's first, *The Sun Also Rises*, both appeared in 1926. Faulkner could have had no doubt about the superior sophistication of Hemingway's novel.

However, by 1929, Faulkner had reached a literary maturity equal to that of Hemingway. The year that saw the publication of *A Farewell To Arms* also marked the appearance of *The Sound and the Fury*. One of his greatest novels, *The Sound and the Fury* demonstrated that Faulkner had taught himself to set aside all his romantic notions of heroic figures poised on the tips of their shining sword points. In this novel, Faulkner focused on Yoknapatawpha County, a minute integer of it anyway; and in subsequent novels and short fictions, he was to select shifting aspects of this region, a physical locale as well as his own heart's geography. Here he isolated Compson and Bundren children, Snopeses and Tulls, and Peabodys, Bookwrights, Armstids, Ratliffs, and McCaslins, lawyers, politicians, senators, judges, deputies, tenant farmers, poor whites and blacks, landed gentry, Indians and a few northern abolitionists, merchants, and criminals: misbegotten, all!

The Yoknapatawphans Faulkner most admired were the ones who exemplified courage and fortitude in maintaining the struggle of living — the "doers," not those who were constantly on the lookout, to take advantage of others, survive at another's expense, by dint of superior education, inside information or chicanery, whom Faulkner equated with the idle poor as well as the idle rich. The latter category, like the de Spains and Compsons and Sartorises, should have been stewards, as their forebears had been, of their respective clans and communities but, instead, through complacency, laziness, alcoholism, and greed, had allowed themselves to deteriorate into ineffectual Southern gentlemen. Some of them lacked

moral principles; others had scruples but lacked moral energy.

After soldiering, the occupations or avocations which commanded Faulkner's greatest respect were flying, hunting, farming, athletics, horseback riding, and sailing. Each of these activities provided opportunities for displaying courage, fearlessness, physical prowess, a touch of foolhardiness—all the attributes Faulkner equated with men of action and with manhood. During the last fifteen years of his life, Faulkner owned a sailboat, the *Ring Dove*. He kept horses at Rowan Oak, for riding and jumping. He also engaged, to a limited extent, in fox hunting. He enjoyed athletics, as a spectator of football, basketball, and baseball games on the Ole Miss campus, which was within walking distance of his home. As for flying, hunting, and farming, it seems fair to say that as serious vocations, these had more reality in Faulkner's thoughts and dreams than in actuality.

Faulkner was, in reality, a writer, a fully dedicated, highly skilled, totally committed and engaged man of letters, whose trophies, racks and wattles, blue ribbons, bumper-crop harvests, were his published short stories and novels. These, alone, were the tangible manifestations of his victory over odds, the proof of his endurance and fortitude and skill. Yet his vocation to literature did not provide Faulkner with what he most wanted to project about himself: an uncompromising sense of manliness. Surely it was not any real doubt that he could hold his own, intellectually, with academics and critics, that made him avoid engaging in literary discussions; rather his idiosyncratic taciturnity saved him from that nagging sense of inadequacy which his profession never ceased to engender in him. The same feeling may account for his unwillingness to reread his own novels and stories or even keep many of them on the premises. Reminders of pain they must have been! More so, at times, they might have appeared, to him, as paltry little to show for his life's work. After all, what were a few stacks of books, and perhaps five large cardboard cartons filled with manuscripts, as the earthly estate of forty years? Doubtless, his sense that the writing profession was not really "part of the culture of this country," rather "a peaceful hobby like breeding dalmatians," motivated him to deflect conversations directed toward his writing, into discussions on farming, horses, flying, sailing.

If, in Faulkner's perception, writing, as a profession, projected a somewhat less than active, manly image, it had also failed to provide him with the outward, tangible rewards for hard work by which he might have been able to consider the pursuit at least economically worthwhile. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Miss Rosa suggests to Quentin that becoming a self-supporting writer would be one viable alternative to languishing in the South. But his profession had been excluded from the list of occupations approved by the American gospel of wealth, the sturdy Puritan ethic. His novel *Sanctuary* had made money for him only indirectly, not from publisher's royalties but from the proceeds of Hollywood's movie version, *The Story of Temple Drake*. Also, he had made considerably more income from his first association with William and Howard Hawks, in scripting *Today We Live* from his short story "Turn About," than he had earned from its original sale, to the *Saturday Evening Post*. Paradoxically, it was his scriptwriting assignments for MGM, in 1932 and 1933, Universal Studios, briefly, in 1934, mainly for Twentieth Century-Fox, from 1935 through 1937, and his sale, in 1938, of the movie rights to *The Unvanquished* that had sustained him, financially, during the decade of his most impressive fiction writing. Although adapted into screenplay form, *The Unvanquished* was never made into a Hollywood extravaganza like *Gone With The Wind*. Yet, ironically, its sale had given Faulkner the financial leverage he required to purchase Greenfield Farm and, by extension, become a "farmer."

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As a result of the failure of his literary career to support him either materially or psychically, by the end of 1941, Faulkner was nearing financial bankruptcy and spiritual exhaustion. During November and December 1941, he attempted, unsuccessfully, to gain employment at Warner Bros., by writing and submitting perhaps half a dozen story outlines and treatments. One of these was an original treatment of a previously rejected screenplay called "The Damned Don't Cry." With the unfelicitous assistance of William Herndon, a West Coast agent who had arranged a seven-year contract for him, with Warner Bros., Faulkner excitedly prepared to make the first trip of what would be an off-and-on, four-year sojourn in Hollywood, to work as a wartime screenwriter. On July 18, 1942, Faulkner wrote James J. Geller, then head of the Warner Bros. Story Department, of his decision to report for work later that month:

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 I hope and trust I can do it justice.

Officially Faulkner went on the Warner Bros. payroll on July 27, 1942, at a rate of three hundred dollars per week. Although this sum was considerably more than he himself had suggested as acceptable, he would later complain that the starting salary had been far below his expectations. The project to which he referred in the excerpted letter to Geller was *The De Gaulle Story*, a project that had been sanctioned not only by Washington but by representatives of De Gaulle, then based in England. The motion picture was to be top priority and would provide the most up-to-date information regarding the combined efforts of the Fighting French and British forces, allied against Hitler's regime.

For quite a while, Faulkner believed that the work he was doing for the studio had delivered him from the abyss. It allowed him to earn a steady weekly income, albeit one below his level of pay for the Hollywood work he had done in the thirties; moreover, it seemed to satisfy his need for pride in vocation. He was, after all, participating actively in the war effort, and not as a bystander or commander of "observation posts for air raids" or even as a uniformed officer sitting at a desk in Washington. Indeed, at first, anyway, he 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, if we can deduce from the massive output of material he produced for *The De Gaulle Story*, Faulkner actually found he could be proud of himself, in his role as writer.

But by December 1942, Faulkner was both frustrated with the lack of success in his first major writing assignment for Warner Bros. and homesick. Worse, he had convinced himself that the arrangement into which he had entered with Warner Bros. was a bad one. His pay was paltry rather than generous, as he had first perceived it to be. He felt his contractual term of seven renewable yearly options with Warner Bros. was too confining. 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 cynically expressed his belief that only soldiers and those working directly on the construction of war materiel were essential. In the group of people 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." With eloquent bravado, Faulkner implored his stepson to enlist, asserting his own desire to participate actively in the war. 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.

Faulkner had missed the First World War, and it was apparent to him that he must miss the Second, and, thus, lose a final chance to put his manhood to the test. Furthermore, it was obvious to Faulkner that writing propaganda for the Fighting French was not going to satisfy his need to contribute to winning the war. Perhaps he thought he could participate vicariously, through his stepson Malcolm, and his brother John's eldest son, Jimmy Faulkner, who was training to be a Marine pilot. But Faulkner had another strategy, also. Concluding his letter to his stepson, he said:

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.

The rest of Faulkner's life pivoted on this eloquently expressed *raison d'être*. Availing himself of the rights and privileges accorded older men, he could prove his manhood. His soldiering would be "vocal"; he would become "articulate in the national voice" and be "listened to." Being "listened to," in fact, became one of Faulkner's highest priorities. Although his portrait had appeared on the January 23, 1939, cover of *Time* magazine, signaling the epitome of critical acclaim, the public had not given him its ear at any time during the twenty years since he had first published *The Marble Faun*, in 1924. Now Faulkner seems to have realized that if his voice was to be heard, he would have to broadcast on a frequency to which the public was tuned—one that carried neatly packaged moralizing.

Returning to Hollywood in January 1943, Faulkner resumed writing war-effort scripts. The first was a treatment for a property entitled "The Life and Death of a Bomber." The brief story outline was shallow, sentimental, and cliché-ridden, and the project was aborted. On April 7, 1943, Faulkner commenced writing a very ambitious project for Howard Hawks, entitled *Battle Cry*. Meant to celebrate the bravery and courage of the American, French, English, Chinese, Greek, Dutch, and Russian forces, *Battle Cry* was remarkable for its experimental form, but it was no less so for its rhetorical war slogans and blatant heroics, its sentimentality and actual bathos. Having exhausted most of his creative energies on this project, for five straight months, only to have the studio finally shut it down permanently, a dejected Faulkner returned home to Oxford, in August 1943.

Earlier, in a letter to Jimmy Faulkner, dated April 3, 1943, Faulkner had spoken in the moralizing voice of public convention. His message was marked by considerable fantasizing, in which, at one point, he even reminded a myth about the World War I flying experience he had originally propagated twenty-five years earlier:

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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.

Having established his credentials as a combat pilot, Faulkner moved on, in his letter, to the virtues of becoming intimate with fear, so that true courage could emerge, and then concluded with a prediction about his future course:

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.

For one thing, Faulkner saw the need to become a "preacher" if he were to reach the public, with his writing, and make money from the recognition of his efforts. For another thing, he recognized that to be effective in his role of provider for his family, he must officially assume the primogenitive position as family patriarch. Within the next five years, Faulkner became both "preacher" and patriarch. He did so, however, at the expense of his art.

On returning to Oxford in mid-August 1943, Faulkner had, in hand, a check for one thousand dollars — a loan from producer William Bacher, to be applied against future movie royalties for an as-yet-unwritten screenplay. He was to write the script on the basis of some partially developed ideas about "a fable" of the First World War. He wrote Robert K. Haas:

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.

Sadly, Faulkner failed, consciously, to recognize that, in fact, he was substituting the role of the preacher for that of the dramatist.

Back in Hollywood in February 1944, Faulkner worked on the only two scripts for which he received credits from Warners Bros. during the forties: *The Big Sleep* and *To Have and Have Not*. The following year, he tried, unsuccessfully, to adapt Stephen Longstreet's *Stallion Road* for film. By mid-September 1945, Faulkner had left the Warner Bros. studio for good, although his Warner Bros. "Off Payroll Notice," dated September 19, 1945, simply stated: "Suspended for not to exceed 6 months." On October 15, 1945, Faulkner wrote a restrained and deferential apologia to Colonel J. L. Warner, almost begging him to give 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 mis-spent time which as a 47 year old novelist I could not afford to spend. And I dont dare mis-spend any more of it.

Faulkner's exodus from Egypt / Hollywood had not been motivated by a salutary financial alternative, nor was he returning to marital stability and domestic comforts, 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. The effect of his recent lengthy separations from her had been compounded by the renewal of his relationship with Meta Carpenter Rebner. In truth, had he not had Meta's

companionship, for the duration of his stay in Hollywood, and the hospitality of A. I. Bezzerides, during its last two years, Faulkner's proneness to alcohol might have destroyed him. Surely he would have been fired from his job.

From September 1945 through mid-1947, Faulkner languished in Oxford. His publications during that time could hardly have seemed of much consequence to him, since all three represented virtual recyclings of material previously published and previously publicly ignored. His friend, Random House editor Saxe Commins, compiled and issued a diminutive paperback, printed on cheap pulp paper, entitled *A Rose for Emily and Other Stories*, which was distributed in April 1945, through the Editions for the Armed Forces. A year later, the Viking Press brought out *The Portable Faulkner*. This book, edited by Malcolm Cowley, the noted critic, contained a chronological ordering of much of Faulkner's best fiction and was accompanied by what was to become a seminal introduction consisting of an illuminating overview of Faulkner's all-encompassing thematic design. The third book, *The Sound and the Fury & As I Lay Dying*, issued in 1946, by the Modern Library, brought together, in one volume, two of Faulkner's favorite novels, both of which had been published more than fifteen years earlier and now were out of print, seemingly unavailable even in secondhand bookstores.

But with these publications, something outside began to occur, and four years from the publication of the Modern Library edition, in December 1946, Faulkner traveled to Stockholm, to receive the 1949 Nobel Prize for Literature. If Cowley's *The Portable Faulkner* had served to reintroduce Faulkner's fiction to America, Saxe Commins' little collection of Faulkner's finest short stories may have helped to introduce Faulkner to European scholars and students as well as to returning American soldiers. In any event, the Modern Library edition put, before the American public, two of Faulkner's very best novels, together with the newly conceived, highly significant "appendix" for *The Sound and the Fury*. For its author, this edition was both a novelistic and an autobiographical exercise, a way, in middle age, for him to reconnect with the great fiction of his mature youth.

One interesting exchange developed between Faulkner and Malcolm Cowley, during the period, in which the latter was completing his *Portable* introduction. Both men realized the importance of making the piece not only insightful but accurate, and Faulkner trusted Cowley, perhaps more than he had or ever would again trust any critic. But at one point, he expressed hesitancy. Mistrusting not Cowley, however, but himself, he thrice insisted on the deletion of certain facts he realized might shadow his credibility. Having read the first draft of Cowley's introduction, Faulkner wrote:

If you mention military experience at all (which is not necessary, as I could have invented a few failed RAF airmen as easily as I did Confeds) say "belonged to RAF in 1918." Then continue: Has lived in same section of Miss. since, worked at various odd jobs until he got a job writing movies and was able to make a living at writing.

Two important attitudes toward his career surface in this letter: Faulkner openly expresses his indebtedness to Hollywood, for having allowed him to earn money as a writer, no matter (in this letter, at least) the cost to his art and his spirit; second, he no longer seems willing to perpetuate the myth of his flying career in the First World War. On the same subject, in a follow-up letter to Cowley's response, Faulkner sounds almost desperate:

Yours at hand. You're going to bugger up a fine dignified distinguished book with that war business. The only point a war reference or anecdote could serve would be to reveal me a hero, or . . . I'll pay for any resetting of type, plates, alteration, etc.

In a third and final reference to this matter, Faulkner reaffirms the fact that he did not want to be made to appear heroic, especially when "compared with men I knew, friends I had and lost . . ." In this letter, he does not completely repudiate the self-created myth of having been wounded but, rather, evasively suggests he may have been in some kind of foolish mishap on a "practice flight." Does he not even intimate that he had been the victim of his own imagination's desperate seeking for recognition and sympathy? It is clear that, in middle age, he did not want to perpetuate the apocryphal tale about his combat service, fabricated in youth. After all, he was almost fifty years old. It was time to begin creating a new image, and Faulkner's disavowal, especially when compared to the obvious fabrication in his April 3, 1943, letter to his nephew, Jimmy Faulkner, three years earlier, suggests that he was, at last, looking at himself realistically.

But Faulkner's image as a public spokesman tended to be as false as his warrior image. *Intruder in the Dust* (1948) is a highly-calculated, blatantly contrived tract on the growing national problem: civil rights. Only secondarily is it about individuals with personal problems. With its civil rhetoric, flamboyant bombast intermingled with propagandistic sentimentality, it qualified as prime Hollywood fodder. Its sale to MGM, for fifty thousand dollars outright, ironically gave Faulkner relief from penury, for the first time. The receipt of the 1949 Nobel Prize in 1950, with its stipend of slightly more than \$30,000, betokened ultimate public acceptance and success—success Faulkner could equate with a measure of fulfillment of his manhood, because it embodied two fundamental prerequisites: making money and being heard. What he had mentioned to his stepson, Malcolm, 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* [emphasis added]," he reiterated 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* . . . [emphasis added]

Soon, public statement became a way of life. Viewing Faulkner's behavior in the 1950s, from the sidelines, but with a surprisingly perspicacious eye, Phil Stone remarked, in the following excerpted letters to Carvel Collins:

For some time now Bill has not been getting publicity. My prediction is that between now and October 1 he will do or say something startling that will again attract public attention. Watch for it. I have no idea what it is because I have not talked with Bill since he got back from Virginia . . . .

Please refer to the second paragraph of my letter to you under date of July 19 and read the enclosed clipping. My guess came true with sixteen days to spare.

The last twelve years of Faulkner's life were marked by public appearances and addresses, letters to editors, interviews, readings, question-and-answer sessions for teachers, students, and critics, press conferences, semiautobiographical essays, moralistic tracts, acceptance speeches, and keynote addresses. With some exception, moreover, the considerable body of fiction he wrote in his last years tended to moralize and preach. *A Fable*, which he brought to fruition after ten years and which represented the political, religious, and philosophical poetics he had initiated during his Warner Bros. years, when he had hit financial and spiritual bottom, was for the "public ear." *Requiem for a Nun*, *The Town*, *The Mansion*, even much of *The Reivers*, to varying degrees, show a similar sensibility to public reception.

The Nobel Prize afforded the public recognition of Faulkner's work that had eluded him, so many dispiriting years. At least evanescently, that pinnacled moment in Stockholm reversed a lifetime of consistent disappointment and losing; he was pronounced winner. Yet there seems little doubt that Faulkner felt, increasingly, that he had alloyed and compromised his talent, at first for the money Hollywood had paid him for diluted "Faulkner," then, in exchange, for continuing public adulation—a sweet emollient to his vanity, despite his vociferous protestations to the contrary. For Faulkner, the fifties would be marred by despondency, complicated by acute alcoholism.

The fiction of Faulkner's final period, 1948-1962, is virtually all residual, if not derivative. One need merely study certain letters in *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, written mainly during the thirties, when Faulkner's imagination was aflame, to document the foreshadowing of *Intruder in the Dust*, *Requiem for a Nun*, and *The Reivers*. *The Town* and *The Mansion*, of course, had been planned as early as the late twenties; there had never been any doubt that these novels would be written. Sadly, their postponement, most likely precipitated by Faulkner's sojourn at Warner Bros., during the early to mid-forties, allowed the "new," publicly articulate Faulkner to work over that wonderfully fresh "old" material he and Phil Stone had shared in concocting, during their youth. Both *The Town* and *The Mansion* seem warmed over. They contain a good deal of moralizing and rhetorical posturing. They may even be said to be sentimental.

Faulkner never forgot the legacy of the artist he had inherited from his own youthful ego: to complete what he had initiated. Indeed, he had an obligation not only to himself and to his material but to the "living" fictive characters into whom he had breathed life; he had to permit them to conclude their own literary destinies. But the Faulkner of the 1950s was different from the Faulkner of the twenties and thirties. Lawrance Thompson described the bulk of Faulkner's creative effort in the fifties, in a prepublication critique of *A Fable*, for Saxe Commins:

Perhaps stylistic weaknesses should be listed, here, as the underlying and all-important weaknesses, because they may be seen as causing and determining those other weaknesses of characterization, action, structure. For example, in characterization, Faulkner permits character after character to talk like Faulkner, to rant like Faulkner, and to rant Faulknerian clichés. So the separate characters frequently blur into each other, and into Faulkner. Take another example, which involves both action and structure, as controlled by style: Faulkner has always seemed only one remove from a dramatist, because he has so frequently presented his narratives through episodes which give us characters pushed out on the stage, so to speak, or into actions where they characterize themselves. This is, essentially, a dramatic principle of characterization. But in *A Fable*, the principle of narration tends toward mere description, and as a result the reader gets the sense he is watching the action through the wrong end of a telescope.

In essence, Thompson said the creative artist had been transformed into a world-class rhetorician and polemicist. As a world traveler, lecturer, and keynote speaker; as a speculator on the future of race relations, nuclear holocaust, and the state of literature; as a cultural ambassador for the American State Department and chairman of President Eisenhower's People-To-People Program committee, Faulkner had donned the fabled coat of many colors he had dreamed, in youth, of possessing. He appeared to wear it with dignity and distinction. He projected a certain austerity, suggesting, always, that he was the moody and idiosyncratic genius of grass-roots Jefferson, Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, the South, U.S.A.

But Faulkner's actual state of mind and health were not reflected in the outward manifestations of his having "made

it." Faulkner's onetime dearest friend, poetry mentor, and resident collaborator in many of the early Snopes tales, Phil Stone, discerned Faulkner's radical artistic and social deterioration. Writing to Ward Miner, on September 29, 1952, Stone, in alluding to and thanking the former, for his book *The World of William Faulkner*, stated, as an aside:

Another thing is that such critiques make me a little sad because they seem to be in the nature of literary obituaries. After all, the Nobel Prize was for work he did between 1928 and 1940 and he has done very little since then of the same stature as the work of that period. I think now that he never will and I think that his great success and the adulation that has followed it has really been a misfortune.

On the following day, Stone wrote Robert Coughlan in attempting to correct misinformation the latter was planning to use in a *Life* magazine article on Faulkner:

There are two things in general in which I think you give an incorrect impression. The first thing is that you emphasize too much the fact that Bill occasionally, very occasionally, throws a drunk. I think you should re-work this part and avoid so much reference to his drinking. On the whole he drinks very little.

If Stone, isolated from Faulkner by a chilling of their friendship in the fifties, failed to gauge the intensity of Faulkner's alcoholism, his editor, Saxe Commins, did not. Publicly, the image of Faulkner as a drinker carried with it an almost manly distinction; it was discounted, condoned as being, proverbially, the writer's occupational hazard. Coughlan, misperceiving Faulkner's condition, credited him with being a manly drinker, one whose overindulgence, although risky business, had neither gotten the better of his talent nor led to his physical debilitation. Saxe Commins, on the basis of firsthand knowledge, knew better. On October 8, 1952, he wrote a report to Robert K. Haas and Bennett Cerf, covering the details of his abruptly made trip to Oxford, at Estelle Faulkner's behest, for the purpose of ministering to a very ill Faulkner:

The fact is that Bill has deteriorated shockingly both in body and mind. He can neither take care of himself in the most elementary way or think with any coherence at all. This may be only evidence of his condition in a state of acute alcoholism. But I believe it goes much deeper and is real disintegration.

Not a month later, Faulkner himself would sound a refrain that became a chant during the remainder of the decade. His keening would take on many variations, but, essentially, it would revolve around his despair of losing his artistic integrity. On "Saturday," probably November 1, 1952, Faulkner wrote Saxe Commins, regarding *A Fable*:

I must have peace again; I have almost got to teach myself again to believe in it. I seem to have reached a point I never believed I ever would: where I need to have someone read it and tell me, Yes, it's all right. You must go ahead with it.

The last time Faulkner had experienced such uncertainty was during his apprenticeship, thirty years before, when, as a matter of habit, he asked Phil Stone to read and correctly parse his new poems or to listen to him read aloud his first novels and advise him on matters of structure and stylistics. But more than technical help, Faulkner needed "peace again." The constant magazine and newspaper play he was getting, which would increase as the civil rights issue intensified, deprived him of the solitude necessary for his work. Without fully realizing it, Faulkner was caving in under the pressures arising from his celebrity.

Shortly, he was to become an eminent cultural emissary. In 1950, he traveled to Stockholm. In 1951, Faulkner

went to France and England, for three weeks. In 1952 he returned to both countries before traveling on to Norway. Ostensibly, he made these trips to refresh himself and to imbibe the atmosphere in which he was setting what he thought would be his opus magnus, *A Fable*. In truth, the trips allowed him to see a young lady, Else Jonsson, whom he had met while in Stockholm to receive the Nobel award.

Ironically, just three weeks before leaving for Europe in 1951, Faulkner had visited in Los Angeles, where, while helping script the Howard Hawks production of *The Left Hand of God*, he had spent time with his enamorata of the thirties and forties, Meta Carpenter Rebner, and had lovingly given her an inscribed copy of *Notes on a Horse thief*, as a token of what appeared not only to be a memento of their past relationship but a sign of its future. Even more ironic, in July 1951, just three months after returning from his tryst with Else Jonsson, Faulkner flew to New York, to work with Ruth Ford, on a stage adaptation of his recently completed play, *Requiem for a Nun*. Ruth, like Meta Rebner, was an attractive reminder of his otherwise distasteful sojourn in Hollywood, during the mid-forties. "Ruth" and "Bill" had been under contract to Warner Bros., and on parting, Faulkner kept alive what obviously had been more than just a casual friendship, through a series of amorous letters dating from 1947 through 1952. In October 1951, Faulkner returned East, this time traveling to Cambridge, to work with Ruth, Lemuel Ayers, and Albert Marre, on further revisions of the stage version of *Requiem*. Faulkner's professed commitment was to make good on an earlier "promise" to deliver to Ruth a vehicle in which she could star.

Although more elaborate, this literary gift resembled those Faulkner had handmade and presented to ladies of his affection, in the twenties: *The Marionettes*, *Vision in Spring*, *Helen: A Courtship*, *Mayday*. Indeed, in 1927, he had given a handbound, typed copy of *The Wishing-Tree* to his eight-year-old stepdaughter-to-be, Victoria Franklin. Similarly, in 1948, he typed out and presented an inscribed copy of *The Wishing Tree* to Ruth Ford's daughter, Shelley, as a Christmas gift. Actually, both gestures and both copies had been intended, by Faulkner, as tender persuasions to love calculated less to appeal to the children than to their divorced mothers.

Unfortunately, like so many other relationships, this one with Ruth Ford would be interrupted by a formal occasion: marriage. Faulkner's typed response to Ruth's personal announcement and invitation to her wedding to Zachary Scott in 1952 would be a mixture of congratulation and mild remorse. But Ruth was not the only woman who might assuage his needs. In 1949, almost on his own home turf, Faulkner also had allowed himself to be smitten by and fall in love with a nineteen-year-old Memphis girl named Joan Williams and was, at this same time, frequently plotting clandestine, intensely passionate trysts with her, having convinced himself that the relationship was justified by his responsibility to be her writing mentor.

In approximately 1952, Faulkner typed out the following fragment, to help Joan Williams develop the central character in a novel entitled *The Wintering* (not published until 1971). Describing a celebrated older writer, this story fragment exposes William Faulkner himself, in a telling moment:

The writer had received all awards there were, a fact he gave little thought to being still too busy being an artist. But now thinking of himself as this person, he could not help but smile at the incident of himself having lied to drive forty miles on a hot morning to meet a bus bringing a twenty-two year old girl forty miles to met him secretly [*sic*] too. Perhaps, he admitted, it was not even so much the incident as it was his own satisfaction at finding himself a white-haired bloke and still capable not only of love, but of a fool-young fearfulness at the thought that his love might not keep a rendezvous [*sic*].

Or perhaps it was just the happiness who [*sic*] brought to a white-haired bloke to find he was still capable not only of love, but of a fool . . .

Doubtless, the integuments of the incident described had a basis in fact, and without doubt, the situation had sparked memories of repeated female rejection in Faulkner's youth. Just the memory of this seemed sufficient to reconnect Faulkner with his past, somehow make him feel young again, no matter that his youth had been painful in this regard. Faulkner had again referred to himself as a "bloke"—twice, in fact, just as he had done in his letter to Robert Haas, requesting an insertion of material for *Intruder in the Dust*, in 1949, the implication being that, after all, he was just an ordinary guy with ordinary feelings and responses: manly, libidinal urges and compulsions.

In truth, Faulkner was meeting with sexual success in his later years, when, in youth, he had failed. He had failed to win his childhood sweetheart, Estelle Oldham, who had married Cornell Franklin, a man with more social position, wealth, and savoir faire; subsequently, he had also lacked success in his courtship of Helen Baird. And he experienced even more short-lived relationships with Shirley Kirkwood, Gertrude Stegbauer, Elise Huntington, and Mary Victoria Mills — young ladies he more than desired yet likely failed to entice with his somewhat less than masculine physique, his high-pitched voice, and decidedly ascetic mannerisms.

When he finally did win Estelle's heart, his passion had diminished. Quite probably, the humiliation of having to accept his formerly pedestaled lady, a divorcée now twice a mother, tainted whatever passion and exuberance he might have had for a presumably virginal Estelle Oldham. In a perverse, though doubtless unconscious, way, marrying Estelle may have been a way of publicly displaying himself as a cuckold. Now, to the contrary, thanks to his celebrity, Faulkner seemed to be filling and maintaining a role which he had not, since youth, imagined himself capable of playing: that of "ladies' man." In 1951, there were four women on his string: Meta, Ruth, Else, and Joan. And in 1953, Faulkner would meet another teenager like Joan, Jean Stein, with whom he would take up where he had left off when Joan Williams became Mrs. Ezra Bowen.

Like his drinking, Faulkner's extramarital affairs were symptoms of extreme distress. Faulkner was not a "womanizer." His affairs simply provided him with a definite assurance of his manhood. To be past fifty years of age and still capable of not only attracting but nurturing and maintaining lusty relationships with at least four young women was reassuring, at least superficially. And even if Faulkner might not have consciously rehearsed this awareness, his wife, Estelle, certainly did, in the following excerpts from two letters she wrote to Saxe Commins, in 1954:

As for me—I'm hurt, but not despairing—*Nothing* can alter my love and devotion—nor upset my faith in Bill's actual love for me—although right now, he swears he doesn't care . . . All I want is Billy's good—and to prove it, I'll do anything that is best. . . .

I am much too old and poised (I hope) to give vent to personal animosity—In fact, am not sure that I feel any—Certainly I do not blame Joan—In all probability, had I been an aspiring young writer and an elderly celebrity had fallen in love with me—I would have accepted him as avidly as Joan did Bill—

Who am I, to judge her anyway? I don't . . .

And in a way, I feel sorry for Bill—He *is* in a mess, and I daresay is going to have a bad time of it . . .

Bill's article, "Mississippi," in next month's *Holiday* explains the two Bills—He is so definitely dual I think—Perhaps artists must needs be—

Faulkner was not as adept at verbalizing the psychological dynamics of the problem as was his wife. She recognized her husband's affairs for what they were:

I know, as you must, that Bill feels some sort of compulsion to be attached to some young woman at all times—it's Bill—At long last I am sensible enough to concede him the right to do as he pleases, and without recrimination—It is not that I don't care—I wish it were not so—but all of a sudden [I] feel sorry for him—wish he could know without words between us, that it's not very important after all . . .

Estelle knew that it was the physical presence of these women rather than their ultimate personal attachment to her husband that was most significant to him. In fact, when Commins wrote Faulkner (on location in Cairo, where he was scriptwriting Howard Hawks' movie *Land of the Pharaohs*), to inform him of Joan Williams' recent marriage, Faulkner responded with shocking callousness:

Thank you for your letter. I knew about it. . . . Incidentally, a queer thing has happened to me, almost a repetition; this one is even named Jean. . . . She is charming, delightful, completely transparent, completely trustful. I will not hurt her for any price. She doesn't want anything of me—only to love me, be in love. You will probably meet her next fall when we are home again. The other affair would have hurt of course, except for this.

Although it made almost nothing out of what vague rumors it may have received regarding his love affairs, the press got great mileage out of Faulkner's drinking reputation, this, at times, indicating that he was less than sober during his trips abroad in the fifties. These were frequent. In 1954, he went to Lima and São Paulo, for the International Writers' Conference. In 1955, he was sent, by the American State Department, to Japan and Manila; he returned via Italy, France, and Iceland. In 1957, he was in Athens, for two weeks, and in 1961, in Caracas, Venezuela, for two weeks. In the final decade of his life, Faulkner seemed something like the traveler he had dreamed of being when, in his twenties, he had worshiped a romantic image of himself as a tramp.

Before finally making his youth's grand gesture, his 1925 walking tour through Europe, he had nurtured his wanderlust and restlessness by vagabonding between Oxford and Memphis, Greenville, Helena, Pascagoula, Clarksdale, New Orleans, and back; he even got to Los Angeles and New York. In the 1950s, he was able to travel on the grandest scale of all—continent-hopping, and he indulged in this with relative abandon and considerable bravado. He continued to regard flying a highly masculine endeavor. At this time, oceanic crossings by plane were still in their pioneering stage as a means of public transportation, and although others were piloting him, flight remained almost as exotic and daring as it had seemed to him during his teens and twenties.

One result of Faulkner's increased financial stability was freedom to pursue his interest in sailing. He became an avid, if maladroit, sailor. He not only maintained his own sailboat, the *Ring Dove*, but was cobuilder and, for a brief time, self-proclaimed captain of the houseboat *Minmagary*. He was Master of the Sardis Reservoir. During this period, when he seemed to fancy he was articulating in the national voice, Faulkner also showed an enthusiasm for other sports as well as sailing. In January 1955, *Sports Illustrated* carried "An Innocent at Rinkside," Faulkner's description of a hockey match, at Madison Square Garden, between the New York Rangers and the Montreal Canadiens. In May 1955, the same publication presented "Kentucky: May: Saturday: Three Days to the Afternoon," a more poetic than factual account of the running of the Kentucky Derby. These pieces, it would appear, informed the public that Mr. Faulkner was not only a fictionist of the highest order, not only a crusader for civil rights and freedom of speech (if not "freedom" of the press), but a well-rounded man who actively enjoyed active sports.

Actually he did indulge in one sport, being more involved than ever in riding and jumping horses. In a sense, this activity represented a refinement of his interest in hunting. In the past, he had accompanied roughhewn, hard-drinking, tobacco-chewing good old boys, on deer and bear hunts into the Delta, and had written extensively about them, by extrapolating, metaphorically, from his own limited personal experience. In the fifties, Faulkner's idea of the hunt would assume more sophisticated proportions. Riding to the hounds either in Albemarle County, Virginia, or just outside Germantown, a community near Memphis, Tennessee, he associated with a socially elite class of people. This reinforced his sense of "having arrived." In the past, Faulkner had cast himself as a "farmer," a man of the soil. Although he may not have struck an exact likeness of Cincinnatus at the plow, at least he could boast of trying to earn a livelihood from his livestock and crops. But by the mid-fifties, Faulkner had decided to let his nephew, Jimmy Faulkner, acquire Greenfield Farm. He could still stable his horses at Rowan Oak, jump them in the paddock and field, and occasionally ride in Bailey's Woods (Martin Dain and Ed Meek photographed Faulkner handling his ungroomed horses during the late fifties and early sixties).

But Dain and Meek also arrested a very shabbily dressed Faulkner, a virtual tatterdemalion, completely at ease among his unkempt horses, in the shadow of ramshackle outbuildings. A portrait Faulkner commissioned "Colonel" Cofield, an Oxford photographer, to make of him, in December 1960, captures and highlights the disparity between the public image Faulkner meant to project and the private one of a physically deteriorated man. The formal portrait depicts Faulkner stiffly seated on a bench, dressed "to kill," in his full fox-hunting regalia: jodphurs, hightop black boots with spurs, crop, whip, formal black top-hat, white silk scarf with stickpin, riding jacket. Faulkner had requested that Cofield hand-tint many, possibly all, of the nineteen copies of this portrait he ordered, so that the coat might appear in its vibrant scarlet hue, with Belgium blue lapels and gold-accented brass buttons, with additional touches of black on the stickpin and a stroke of gold, to offset the vest peeking out from the scarlet jacket. To complete the impressive rendering of this man of leisure, Cofield carefully retouched the white moustache, with light black flecks of oil paint, though he left Faulkner's imposingly white hair untouched. The overall effect must have seemed utterly sensational to Faulkner, who, with enormous pride, in early 1961, gave a copy of this portrait to virtually every member of the Faulkner family and to various close associates. To Bennett Cerf, Faulkner sent a different pose from the same sitting, one that captures him standing nearly full length, hands resting on his thighs, clasping the coiled whip. The inscription on its mat reads, "To Random House./ Love and Kisses. Tally-ho./ William Faulkner." This pose, together with the inscription, epitomized the Anglophile in Faulkner; to be "British," whether bloke or squire, was to attain the ultimate sophistication.

If we find it difficult to square the contrast between Cofield's portraits of Faulkner the Virginia huntsman with those taken by Dain and Meek, in the same period, we have no difficulty making a comparison between 1961 depictions of Faulkner, in riding habit, with a picture made right after the First World War that shows Faulkner, standing stiffly against his cane, in an RAF uniform which he had brought back with him, from flight school in Toronto, and had embellished with store-bought metal regalia. These portraits, forty years apart, represent costumed incarnations of the same man attempting to project an image at once ideal and "real." As a "wounded," "decorated" flier and as a fully-garbed aristocrat accustomed to riding to the hounds, with the most elite Virginians, Faulkner could accept himself as a success, a man's man who had succeeded in pursuits requiring courage and skill, a man of action, arrested, in perpetuity, by the camera's all-discerning eye.

During the 1950s, at least two bemusing ironies must have dawned on Faulkner. The first centered on Hollywood; the second on his literary coeval, Ernest Hemingway. Faulkner had left Hollywood, in frustrated disgust, in 1945, as penniless as he had been when he first journeyed to Warner Bros., in 1942. Yet in 1948, MGM's purchase of rights to *Intruder in the Dust* set him free from financial worry. No doubt because of his increasing celebrity, Universal Pictures, then Twentieth Century-Fox, purchased the rights to and adapted movies from five of his novels: *Pylon* (*The Tarnished Angels*), *The Hamlet* (*The Long, Hot Summer*), *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Sanctuary* and *Requiem for a Nun* (*Sanctuary*). Faulkner had no hand in scripting these fictions for the movies, and with the exception of *Intruder in the Dust*, which he viewed and found vaguely satisfying, he consciously avoided seeing them in the theater.

Prior to the 1948 publication of *Intruder in the Dust*, *The Wild Palms*, published in 1939, had been Faulkner's last novel conceived wholly as a novel rather than as a literary collage mainly of previously published short stories, as had been the case with *The Hamlet*, in 1940, and *Go Down, Moses and Other Stories*, in 1942. Faulkner had experienced a virtual nine-year lapse in the writing of new fiction, between *The Wild Palms* and *Intruder in the Dust*. Ernest Hemingway had suffered a similar silence in the output of his fiction. Ten years after *For Whom the Bell Tolls* appeared, in 1940, *Across the River and into the Trees* was published, followed, in 1952, by *The Old Man and the Sea*, which received a Pulitzer Prize. Faulkner's *A Fable* would garner a similar award two years later. While both books made considerable noise at the outset, giving the illusion of matching the greatness of their respective author's earlier fiction, neither was to prove to be as significant as earlier books by Hemingway and Faulkner. Nevertheless, in 1954, Hemingway received the Nobel Prize, as Faulkner had, four years before.

Faulkner had, many times before and would many times after 1952, decline to pass judgment, publicly, on Hemingway and on his work. As an exception, Faulkner did contribute a review of *The Old Man and the Sea*, for the Autumn 1952 issue of *Shenandoah*. In its qualified praise, it read almost like an epitaph not just for Hemingway but, in many respects, for Faulkner himself. With a kind of prescience, Faulkner seemed aware that not only Hemingway's work from 1940 on, but all his own work—from the assumption of his duties at Warner Bros., in 1942, to the present moment—had smacked of too much tampering, conscious artifice, and self-imposed moralizing. Faulkner concluded his seemingly complimentary review with an equivocal understatement: "It's all right. Praise God that whatever made and loves and pities Hemingway and me kept him from touching it any further."

Although Hemingway got considerable "press" from his Pulitzer Prize-winning book and from his elevation to Nobel Prize status, it was Faulkner's decade. As a social presence, Faulkner was, in the fifties, what Fitzgerald had been in the twenties and Hemingway in the thirties and forties. His much-photographed likeness—that solemn, grave, mustachioed visage, with its deeply-set eyes and aquiline nose, a ubiquitous pipe forever poised—became imprinted on the public mind. His sarcastic, sardonic, controversial comments frequently flashed across newspapers worldwide. He was quoted and discussed on the cocktail circuits and in academia's austere colloquia and seminars. He had outgrown even his own conception of what his youthful dreams had fantasied and wildly, though not wildly enough, might have envisioned for himself.

The only problem was that the acclaim had taken so long to catch up with his dreams that by the time it did, he no longer felt a burning urgency to preserve the privacy needed for writing. The momentum of his activities literally pulled him

up by his roots. He was homogenized and processed, for public consumption, in high schools and colleges and lecture halls and reading sodalities across the country and in every nation devoted to studying American society and its literary heritage. As the decade wore on, Faulkner must have come, increasingly, to realize that the image he projected no longer had any relevancy. Whether or not he appeared, to the public, as a manly, well-rounded, successful writer, a personage who had overtaken and assimilated the American Dream, made very little difference.

A. I. Bezzerides, a screenwriter and, at one time, a close friend of Faulkner, has said:

To me, Bill seemed to have become a victim of his own legend, and was living a part that seemed totally false: the esteemed writer, the Nobel winner, the man who had written these great things bore no relationship to the young man who had written these wonderful things he had written when he was a struggling writer trying to make a scratch, trying to earn a living, writing things he was impelled to write, not written deliberately, but impelled to write because they came out of his subconscious. Now, here he was very conscious of the greatness he had achieved without the memory of the consciousness that had actually done the achieving; he was living a role that seemed fraudulent to me. It seemed sad to me.

For all his "success," there seems little reason to believe William Faulkner ever completely succeeded in squaring with his role as writer his own personal dissatisfaction over sensing himself to be a physically inactive individual, a "vegetable." His perceived inadequacies would remain ambivalent, if chronic, irritants to be temporarily, repeatedly assuaged. However, at least once, he would actually document, explicitly, what amounted to a justification for and resolution of all his activities, literary and physical. In his confessional "Foreword" to *The Faulkner Reader*, dated November 1953, Faulkner isolates the underlying "anguish" which had "driven" him to write: to "uplift man's heart." And although he would like to "hope" his efforts might lead to change, improvement in the human condition, admittedly, he states, his prime motivation was "completely selfish, completely personal." Referring to himself in the collective voice of all serious writers, Faulkner focuses on the "selfish" results his writing could effect:

He would lift up man's heart for his own benefit because in that way he can say No to death. He is saying No to death for himself by means of the hearts which he has hoped to uplift, or even by means of the mere base glands which he has disturbed to that extent where they can say No to death on their own account by knowing, realizing, having been told and believing it: *At least we are not vegetables because the hearts and glands capable of partaking in this excitement are not those of vegetables, and will, must, endure.*

So he who, from the isolation of cold impersonal print, can engender this excitement, himself partakes of the immortality which he has engendered . . .

Ultimately, we may conclude, the handcrafted life masks William Faulkner designed, to give the illusion that he was one of life's active, productive, virile men, were assimilated to his death mask. We can only conjecture about the ambivalent dynamics of this process. It is, in any event, inconsequential. What is significant is how we regard the living corpus of Faulkner's writing. This *exists* to remind us that living productively may be the human spirit's most profound justification for not staying dead in the first place — likely, its only way of saying no to death.

*A Note on Sources*

The sources employed in the preparation of this essay and/or cited in its course are as follows: James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, eds., *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962* (New York: Random House, 1968); Louis Daniel Brodsky, "Reflections on William Faulkner: An Interview with Albert I. Bezzerides." *Southern Review*, 21, no. 2 (1985); William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: The Modern Library, 1951); William Faulkner, *Knight's Gambit* (New York: Random House, 1949); William Faulkner, *The Unvanquished* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966); William Faulkner, *The Hamlet* (New York: Random House, 1964); Patrick H. Samway, S.J., *Faulkner's Intruder in the Dust: A Critical Study of the Typescripts* (Troy, New York: The Whitson Publishing Company, 1980); Louis Daniel Brodsky and Robert W. Hamblin, eds., *Faulkner: A Comprehensive Guide to the Brodsky Collection, Volume II: The Letters* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984); James B. Meriwether, ed., *Essays, Speeches & Public Letters by William Faulkner* (New York: Random House, 1965); Louis Daniel Brodsky, "The Autograph Manuscripts of Faulkner's 'The Lilacs,'" *Studies in Bibliography*, 36 (1983); Joseph Blotner, ed., *Selected Letters of William Faulkner* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978); Louis Daniel Brodsky and Robert W. Hamblin, *Faulkner and Hollywood: A Retrospective from the Brodsky Collection* (Cape Girardeau: Southeast Missouri State University Printing & Duplicating, 1984); Louis Daniel Brodsky and Robert W. Hamblin, eds., *Faulkner: A Comprehensive Guide to the Brodsky Collection, Volume III: The De Gaulle Story* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984); Louis Daniel Brodsky and Robert W. Hamblin, eds., *Faulkner: A Comprehensive Guide to the Brodsky Collection, Volume V: Manuscripts & Documents* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987); Martin J. Dain, *Faulkner's County: Yoknapatawpha* (New York: Random House, 1964); Ed Meek, "Spring Workout," *Mississippi Magazine*, (Spring, 1962); Bennett Cerf, *At Random: The Reminiscences of Bennett Cerf* (New York: Random House, 1977); Carvel Collins, ed., *William Faulkner: Early Prose and Poetry* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, October 30, 1962). In addition, I would like to make grateful acknowledgment to Jill Faulkner Summers, who has continued to support my scholarship by permitting me to use and publish material in or relating to my Faulkner collection that currently exists in or subsequently will appear in the *Comprehensive Guide* series; to Victoria F. Johnson, who has heightened and sharpened myriad details, with her special "personal knowledge" of the Faulkner family, her keen insight, and her demanding requirement for accuracy; and to Robert W. Hamblin, whose penetrating reading of this essay as it evolved provided substantial enhancement.