

The Verities

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Not to single out William Faulkner from all the great writers in the American literary canon including Twain, Steinbeck, Hemingway and Fitzgerald, but his life and his writing were instructive, especially when he spoke about his purpose. He was very serious minded, full of vanity and self-assured when he described himself or his books. But I respected his seriousness of purpose.

He said that he wanted to write about the old verities but he did not list them or explain which eternal truths he intended. The truths that mattered to Faulkner did come out in his work. Much has been written about that from critics in their exegesis.

Lawrence Thompson wrote that Faulkner's moral vision, those laws that have to do with the verities of the heart, would include courage, endurance, compassion, aspiration, sacrifice, pride and love.

My observation is that Faulkner drew from mythology or mysticism as a substitute for his personal lack of spirituality. His characters were metaphors for Diana, the earth mother goddess and he wrote often about the fecundity of the earth, the fire wheel of eternity and illumination. He believed in nature, the earth's nature, as it compelled human nature to act in an automatic and pre-ordained pattern. But that is not spiritualism; it is secularism at best or perhaps paganism.

So I believe he lacked spirituality. It needn't had to have been Christianity, but his concerns with Christian hypocrisy kept him from spirituality in even a broader way.

As for his trove of the verities, he therefore had little concern for grace, redemption and salvation, as a religious person might. While I learned some things from him, his work encouraged me to read more widely and deeply. Some of Faulkner's characters achieved a degree of redemption, though he often denied its possibility, and it was thin and not transcendent. He could have moved more of us had he held a belief in God.

So more on my own, without any ideas of the kind from him, I found more of these universal verities of humankind and included them in my writing. I saw that the verities include forgiveness which he seemed to have ignored in his work. It seems to me that forgiveness of one's self and others can lead to a peace and a happiness and joy beyond the mere achievement of endurance and survival. Forgiveness leads to hope and hopefully hope leads to grace and redemption. As a matter of perspective, I suppose Faulkner saw little of that in his time and place so that he did not feel it and could not write about it.