

# Faulkner's Writing Style

## Foreword Comments

Since this paper is concerned with William Faulkner's writing and his style, I thought it fitting to make a few opening remarks about writing as a general proposition. William Zinsser in his book, *On Writing Well* has given writers permission and encouragement to begin sentences with the first-person singular nominative pronoun "I" or the occasional "And" or "But" as preposition, adverb or conjunction where emphasis is justified. This makes writing in the active voice more convenient and natural. The conventions for college term papers coerce us to avoid this practice and fairly force us to write in the more contrived passive voice, or at least with perfect conventional grammar, while we are simultaneously encouraged to always write in the more interesting active voice. This writer will make his best attempt to avoid speaking of himself in the third person with the passive voice as was just constructed in this sentence.

Note also that William Faulkner wasn't concerned about run-on sentences and didn't bother to use commas with care to demark clauses - independent or dependent - since it didn't matter to him. William Strunk in his monumental work on grammar and style, *The Elements of Style* took great pains to explain to us in excruciating detail our proper use of commas. I don't think that Faulkner disliked commas, sometimes he used a lot of them and sometimes few; it just seemed he was unconcerned with them. He didn't want them to get in the way of his attention or expression.

And if you care much about the appearance of your words on paper - like a writer would - just how the line spacing, tab depth and type font looks and feels, how the first word of a paragraph is positioned at the beginning of a page and the last word of the last sentence of the last paragraph sits on the bottom of the page unbroken from the rest, how the thought ends perfectly before you turn the page, then you might not abide apostrophes on word contractions like dont, cant, wont and the rest.

For the great writers, too much obsessive attention to grammatical purity - not artistic appearance - would be a distraction from their creativity. Further, grammatical purity that dictates avoiding writing that uses split infinitives - "To boldly go where no man has ..." or "To quickly eat", "To deeply sleep .... " or "To vividly dream ... " - diminishes the breadth of opportunity for beautiful phrasing. I won't make a case for the use of dangling participles and would agree their use muddles writing. If I were (the correct hypothetical) William Faulkner, I would likely not see merit in the dangling participle either. These are just opinions based on observations. I am wrong 50 percent of the time. And finally, I can never know what I do not know.

For the rest of us pedestrian writers, and depending on our audience, there is a danger here. Closer adherence to conventional grammatical structure is likely the safer approach.

However, I will take some personal risk here and depart from my experiences writing non-fiction history papers in the acceptable manner for college history class purposes. As this is an American literature class, in contrast to history or economics or even English composition, and with adult students, I trust that a more creative, loose and open form of writing will be acceptable. I will attempt it.

I have read the notes and handouts provided for class discussion and understanding. They were invaluable, working with my diminutive intellect, to understand what the hell Faulkner was talking about. Some appeared as written by the literary critics of the newspapers, magazines, best seller list publishers, fellow writers and the like of Faulkner's day and later. Some were postured in the highest tone of passive voice, with an impressive plethora of comparative literary reference, and some far-fetched propositions for his motivations. Like Benjy's character in *The Sound and the Fury*, I could fairly smell the writers grasping for their publication and graduate degrees. Perhaps that was dismissive. In fairness, each has tried to understand him in their own way, as their own ideas have come to them. As an aside, I hold the view, along with others, than man is a sentient being above the beasts and below the angels. Sentience is awareness to the degree that a creature can feel pain, joy, frustration and love. I'm confident that since my dog is sentient, so is Benjy.

I have included several quotations in this paper at near full length since I felt them valuable in support of my assertions, enjoyable as literature, sometimes quixodical and confounding to the reader, and with value for a collector of such things as a keepsake. The page length of the paper will be adjusted above ten pages to compensate for this practice and comply with the assignment requirement.

Finally, I have asked my old friend Joan Austin - my contributing writer, muse and purely honest editor who lives in rural Athens, Alabama as a transplant Yankee forty years ago from New York - to visit Mr. Faulkner's grave if she passes by Oxford, Mississippi. She is instructed to greet him with a smile and with good cheer he would appreciate, "Thanks a lot you Son of a Bitch for writing books to confound us. No, really thank you Bill. Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders."

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## **Introduction**

What we refer to as literature is a high form of art expressed as fiction. It is not bounded by many of the grammatical rules and conventions that must be abided in non-fiction. It allows expression with imagination, intelligence and creative use of language. It leaves much also to the imagination and intelligence of the reader to resolve for himself. In some instances, a complete understanding of the author's meaning cannot be understood by the reader. The author does this purposefully for his own reasons and motivations.

As much as can be learned from Faulkner's writing, can be learned about Faulkner as the man he was and what he wrote about himself. His personal family background, incomplete formal education, the abject poverty and bigotry of his post-bellum rural southern culture prior to and during the Great Depression, his influences (or lack of influences) from his contemporary writers, his self-view - all contribute to our understanding of him and his writing. His greatness might be attributed to what he accomplished with the body of his work in spite of his circumstance.

## **Background**

Born in 1897 in rural New Albany, Mississippi, Faulkner grew up just 21 years after the abandonment of failed reconstruction in the South. With scant education, he lived near there in Oxford most of his life, struggling to earn a decent living as a writer, caring and providing for an emergent dependent family, as a keen observer of the devastated South and its people.

Jim Crow laws were firmly in place from the southern governments and blacks were segregated from whites in public institutions. Many white families had fallen from former affluence but kept up the pretense of their past glories. This group, the chronically poor whites and the struggling poor blacks all living in the rural areas and small towns, dominated the scenes and characterizations of his fictional writings.

The relationships between whites and blacks were complex and conflictive. There was a carryover view of superiority, blatant and thoughtless racism, paternalism and affection from whites toward blacks and a self-effacing, while steadfast assertion of worth, from blacks toward whites. Faulkner exploited all of this cultural behavior, racism and hypocritical Christianity in his books and characters.

His writing accomplished in the 1930's, just prior to the cusp of the depression and thereafter, came to critical acclaim, but did not sell well or provide him good income. The hard- scrabble lives he wrote about were similar to his own.

## **His Acclaim and Self-view**

In the literary world, much has been written about William Faulkner as a major member of its canon. Some have claimed that nearly as much has been written about him as has been for James Joyce and the Bible. The critics consider him the best southern writer in the American lexicon for the 20th century and place 4 of his books in the top 100 for that century. For his readers, he is an acquired taste. His books did not sell well for most of his life.

I would speculate that the reasons for his acclaim are varied but would include his powerful style of explosive writing filled with enigma. Perhaps equally important would be his unique and interesting self-view.

If you listen to William Faulkner give his Nobel Prize acceptance speech (You Tube video) and read some of his work, you will see that he wrote for lofty purpose, with profundity, without fear, without apology and without reservation. He wrote with dark cynicism and not with a warm heart. He didn't leave us much hope.

His works convey a mood - dark, pessimistic, devoid of warmth, love, hope for mankind, cynical of Christian faith, full of condemnation of racism, empty of much goodness found in his beloved Deep South. Yet he chose to live there most of his life. In his time, the interwar period of the early 20th century, he expressed concern of his fear that the world would blow itself up. However, he did not chronicle much good in the world and one would wonder why he would be concerned.

He was self-assured and held himself in high regard, or so he presented himself in public interviews and in writing about himself. On the back flap of *As I Lay Dying*, he claimed:

*I set out deliberately to write a tour-de-force. Before I ever put pen to paper and set down the first word I knew what the last word would be and almost where the last period would fall.*

He claimed to have written this work in one pass from 12:00am to 4:00am each night over six weeks. He implied there was no need for editing, but this is likely a fabrication on his part. The acclaimed novel is short, approximately 75,000 words and 260 pages on a 5 1/4" x 8" paperback format with single-spaced 10-12 pt. type. Faulkner wrote this short novel in the first person voice. This is challenging with multiple characters. He resolved this by selecting a different character for each chapter, with their name as the title. The story moves along with each character taking turns. His 15 characters present 15 points of view. There are 59 short chapters. With this complex writing task, I estimate he would have had to maintain a writing rate of 75,000 words / 168 hours, or nearly 450 words per hour - an exhausting marathon pace. Even if he knew exactly what the book was to be, as he had claimed, and didn't require spending time thinking or imagining what to write, his claim stretches credulity. And no editing was required as the result of this. It might have taken longer than he claimed.

Had he known about them, the corrections provided by Noel Polk for Faulkner's ribbon cutting copy made in 1985 would have been a great hardship for him to bear. Fortunately, he passed away in 1962.

## **His Style**

His works have been categorized as southern Gothic, presumably because they were dark and cynical. They differ from his predecessor, Edgar Allan Poe however, in that they did not delve into the macabre or detective fictional aspects of the American-Gothic modern movement.

His writing followed three approaches to linguistic modalities of expression as suited to his plot circumstance:

- First person narration spoken by his characters in the thick southern idiom of the black and white poor, with their unique sensibility, religious beliefs and world view.
- Third person omniscient narrator describing the scene and action characterized by extremely long sentences using elegant descriptive language, with impressive vocabulary, often archaic today but appropriate to his time, and without concern for grammatical conventions of punctuation or run-on sentences.
- Stream of consciousness flow of thought without organization, linear progression or grammatical concern. In this mode, the readers can glean a feel for what is written but cannot hope to fully understand it.

### His Influences

Sherwood Anderson, author of *Winesburg, Ohio*, is remembered as influencing Faulkner, Steinbeck and Wolfe. Faulkner took a job as an assistant in a New York City bookstore managed by Elizabeth Prall who later married Anderson. Anderson met him and advised that he write about his native region. Generally though, Faulkner claims he was influenced by reading the books of Flauberts, Dostoievsky and Conrad. To confirm his claims, in his introduction to *The Sound and the Fury* (Southern Review Version), he wrote:

*I wrote this book and learned to read. I learned a little about writing from Soldier's Pay - how to approach language, words: not with seriousness so much, as an essayist does, but with a kind of alert respect, as you approach dynamite; even with joy, as you approach women: perhaps with the same unscrupulous intentions. But when I finished The Sound and the Fury I discovered that there is actually something to which the shabby term Art not only can, but must be applied. I discovered then that I had gone through all I had ever read, from Henry James through Henty to newspaper murders, without making any distinction or digesting any of it, as a moth or a goat might. After The Sound and the Fury and without heeding to open another book and in a series of delayed repercussions like summer thunder, I discovered Flauberts and Dostoievskys and Conrads whose books I had read ten years ago. With The Sound and the Fury I learned to read and quit reading, since I have read nothing since. (705-710).*

With reference to his writing of *Light in August*, he referred to his angst in comparing himself to other writers:

*..... since now I was deliberately choosing among possibilities and probabilities of behavior and weighing and measuring each choice by the scale of the Jameses and Conrads and Balzacs. I knew that I had read too much, ..... (705-710).*

Faulkner, like many of the highly regarded authors of the literary canon, did not use stock characters - Jungian archetypes. His characters do not all remain static. Some evolve, while some devolve. He does not present the reader with a protagonist to love that is simply all pure good. Nor can his reader hate an antagonist since there are none that are simply pure evil. It is often difficult to identify the protagonist and antagonist characters in his novels. Caddy, in *The Sound and the Fury*, changes from the self-sacrificing child-mother to the self-serving adult. Jason remains self-sacrificing throughout his life but never gains our love due to his bitter nature. We tend to sympathize with him while he begrudges all the good he does for others. He has no good heart associated with his care for his family. We dislike him while simultaneously understanding him.

Additionally, Faulkner joined with Joyce, Hemingway and Fitzgerald in the literary canon. And certainly Sigmund Freud's theories of psychology, popular in Faulkner's time, influenced him and the other "Stream of Consciousness" method writers.

In terms of writing style and literary impression in the eyes of their readers, I will pursue parallels I have observed between Joyce and Faulkner, not on a high or deep intellectual plane, but more at a sensory level - what the language sounds, looks and feels like. In my view, to be able to read or write literature, it is necessary to be able to feel first in order to see meaning after.

While in France, Faulkner would sometimes go to the cafe that James Joyce would frequent, but the interminably shy Faulkner never mustered the nerve to speak to him. (William Faulkner: *The Mississippi Writers' Page*). Faulkner must have revered Joyce for many reasons. There are similar strains and aspects in their works and persons and, of course, notable differences:

- While Joyce built complex allegories of great mythic figures to reveal human characters, Faulkner told stories with enigmatically disclosed plots and revealed seemingly plain characters as complex, nuanced and human.
- Both had a strong writers tool box of vocabulary and poetic prose, and wrote passionately for their own edification.
- Both men made up words - often concatenations of individual real words - and treated the English language as their personal property.
- Like Joyce, Faulkner's narratives placed seemingly incongruous vocabulary and scholarly word choices out of character with their characters.
- Both were skilled at subtle humor - both dark and light.
- Both had elevated the craft in their time with believable voices spoken by their characters.
- Both often employed a stream of consciousness technique to give their characters voice.

- Like Joyce, Faulkner cherished enigma. The mysteries of understanding and meaning are left to the reader.
- Like Joyce, Faulkner's blended narrative-dialogue in the first person is styled age-specific. As an aside narrative-dialogue is where the writer speaks in the first-person voice. The narrative becomes the dialogue as well. It is an easier way to boost the desirable dialogue content in a fictional work. Only when the narrator requires another speaking, is he required to identify the character and use quote marks (ie, Frank looked over at the barn and said, "I'm going over there to check on the horse."). Using the more common third-person omniscient narrator voice is easier, but requires more effort to increase dialogue content.
- Both men relished forcing intellectual intercourse on their readers for their gratification, the smartest-guy-in-the-room syndrome.
- Both took a harsh view of Christianity's hypocrisy and criticized it unabashedly.
- Both men enjoyed imbibing in alcohol.
- While Faulkner engaged in extramarital affairs, he was more of a gentleman than the truly perverse Joyce (his love letters to Nora Barnacle - not for the feint of heart or morally upright).

To approach a substantive comparison between Joyce and Faulkner, it might be helpful to compare their literary characters and their approaches to writing their stories - their language.

Some of their iconic characters are children or mentally impaired adults who are presented as child-equivalent. For Faulkner, consider Vardaman in *As I Lay Dying* and Benjy in *The Sound and the Fury*. For Joyce, consider Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*.

Vardaman says, "My mother is a fish." (*As I Lay*, 84) - perhaps the shortest chapter in American literature. As a young boy, Vardaman views the world in a child-like sensory way. His mother is dead, slimy and smelling bad. His narrative language is age-specific.

Similarly, throughout the book (*The Sound and the Fury*), Benjy does not speak, perhaps cannot speak, moans and thinks his sister Caddie, and others, smell like a tree. In *The Sound and the Fury*, section 1, Benjy is the narrator and an idiot. He views the world in a very direct way, based on his senses - sight (light and shadows), sound, feel (texture) and simplistic observations. That is all. We are told, he cannot grasp meanings and may have been autistic. That would mean that he could not articulate or relate in a conventional way, not proof that he was incapable of understanding.

Stephan Dedalus (*A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*) recounts a childish story of his father's hairy face, and the smell of the oilskin on his wet bed and does speak as a wee lad.

Joyce wrote:

*Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo...*

*His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face.*

*He was baby tuckoo. The moocow came down the road where Betty Byrne lived: she sold lemon platt.*

*O, the wild rose blossoms*

*On the little green place.*

*He sang that song. That was his song.*

*O, the green wothe botheth.*

*When you wet the bed, first it is warm then it gets cold. His mother put on the oilsheet. That had the queer smell.*

*His mother had a nicer smell than his father. She played on the piano the sailor's hornpipe for him to dance. ... (A Portrait, 195)*

And from *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce referred to the old nursery rhyme of Humpty Dumpty:

*The great fall of the offwall entailed at such short notice the pftjschute of Finnegan, erse solid man, that the humptyhillhead of humself promptly sends an unquiring one well to the west in quest of his tumpytumtoes." (Finnegans, 3).*

Stephen was not an idiot, like Benjy, but a young boy who thought and spoke from that perspective. Benjy did not speak but may have had thoughts about observations of visual scenes, textures, sounds, wetness in this manner. We don't know. Certainly both characters were attuned to smell.

Take note of the esoteric vocabulary that both authors were fond of using. In these examples, Joyce's writing is humorous. He, as well as Faulkner, took liberties with the use of language.

Regarding their approaches, both Faulkner and Joyce brought imaginative innovation and their own unique elegance to the writing of the English language. It is debatable which writer strived harder to make his work less understandable for his ordinary readers or relished the joy of experimenting with language more.

Consider Faulkner's words in *Light in August* here:

*Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders. Knows remembers believes a corridor in a big long garbled cold*

*echoing building of dark red brick sootbleakened by more chimneys than its own, set in a grassless cinderstrewnpacked compound surrounded by smoking factory purlieus and enclosed by a ten foot steel-and-wire fence like a penitentiary or a zoo, where in random erratic surges, with sparrowlike childtrebling, orphans in identical and uniform blue denim in and out of remembering but in knowing constant as the bleak walls, the bleak windows where in rain soot from the yearly adjacenting chimneys streaked like black tears. (Light, 119)*

Or Faulkner's words in *Absalom, Absalom!* here:

*He seems to hover, shadowy, almost substanceless, a little behind and above all the other straightforward and logical even though (to him) incomprehensible ultimatums and affirmations and defiances and challenges and repudiations, with an air of sardonic and indolent detachment like that of a youthful Roman consul making the Grand Tour of his day among the barbarian hordes which his grandfather conquered, benighted in a brawling and childish and quite deadly mud-castle household in a miasmatic and spirit-ridden forest. (Absalom, 74).*

This refers to the dramatic character, Sutpen and the concern viewed about him from his community.

And Joyce's imaginative and elegant approach in *Finnegans Wake* here:

The book ends with "A way a lone a last a loved a long the" (628), and begins with "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs." (3)

Joyce meant to portray both the meandering river and his love of Viconian (Roman historian Vico) cyclical history with this passage.

And Faulkner again in *As I Lay Dying*:

Yet still she could watch his mind darting and darting as without pity, without anything at all, she watched him with her grave, unwinking, unbearable gaze, watched him fumble and flee and tack until at last all that remained in him of pride, of what sorry pride the desire for justification was, fled from him and left him naked. (*As I Lay*, 429)

And:

*She just didn't hope. Didn't know how to begin to hope. I imagine after thirty years the machinery for hoping requires more than twentyfour hours to get started, to get into motion again. (As I Lay, 445)*

And in Hugh Ruppersburg's book, *Reading Faulkner: Light in August*, he references William Faulkner's clarification of his title choice for *Light in August*. Faulkner's states that his choice came from the scene where Gail Hightower looks out his study window awaiting a recurring vision of

his grandfather's last raid. The descriptive portrayal of light is vividly conveyed there where Faulkner's words convert written language to a visual picture for the reader:

*. . .in August in Mississippi there's a few days somewhere about the middle of the month when suddenly there's a foretaste of fall, it's cool, there's a lambence, a soft, a luminous quality to the light, as though it came not from just today but from back in the old classic times. It might have fauns and satyrs and the gods and---from Greece, from Olympus in it somewhere. It lasts just for a day or two, then it's gone. . .the title reminded me of that time, of a luminosity older than our Christian civilization.(Ruppersburg, 3)*

Faulkner's writing is elegant, lush and gorgeous. This is some of the most beautiful writing - descriptive imagery of light and ancient myth - I can imagine.

And in Joyce's *Araby*, an example of descriptive sensory elegance:

*The career of our play brought us through the dark muddy lanes behind the houses where we ran the gauntlet of the rough tribes from the cottages, to the backdoors of the dark dripping gardens where odours arose from the ashpits, to the dark odorous stables where a coachman smoothed and combed the horse or shook music from the buckled harness. When we returned to the street light from the kitchen windows had filled the areas. (Dubliners and, 24).*

And also from *Araby*:

The light from the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck, lit up her hair that rested there and, falling, lit up the hand upon the railing. It fell over one side of her dress and caught the white border of a petticoat, just visible as she stood at ease. (Dubliners and, 25).

And from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as a young man:

*Such moments passed and the wasting fires of lust sprang up again. The verses passed from his lips and the inarticulate cries and the unspoken brutal words rushed forth from his brain to force a passage. His blood was in revolt. He wandered up and down the dark slimy streets peering into the gloom of lanes and doorways, listening eagerly for any sound. He moaned to himself like some baffled prowling beast. He wanted to sin with another of his kind, to force another being to sin with him and to exult with her in sin. He felt some dark presence moving irresistibly upon him from the darkness, a presence subtle and murmurous as a flood filling him wholly with itself. Its murmur besieged his ears like the murmur of some multitude in sleep; its subtle streams penetrated his being. His hands clenched compulsively and his teeth set together as he suffered the agony of its penetration. He stretched out his arms in the street to hold fast the frail swooning form that eluded him and incited him: and the cry that he had strangled for so long in his throat issued from his lips. It broke from him like a wail of*

*despair from a hell of sufferers and died in a wail of furious entreaty, a cry for an iniquitous abandonment, a cry which was but the echo of an obscene scrawl which he had read on the oozing wall of a urinal. (Dubliners and, 276-277)*

And finally from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as a young man:

*... The yellow gas flames arose before his troubled vision against the vapoury sky, burning as if before an altar. Before the doors and in the lighted halls groups were gathered arrayed as for some rite. He was in another world: he had awakened from a slumber of centuries. (Dubliners and, 277).*

## Conclusion

Trying to grasp a sense of Faulkner's writing style and his meanings, not even a full sense, is like trying to climb a greased pole. But even the student with limited faculty and inadequate literary experience, can sense and feel his expression, at least at that level. He writes, as he speaks, imbued with a smooth southern charm, never to be misconstrued as anything less than brilliance. His high skill in the craft is beyond doubt at the genius level. His versatility to accomplish this is demonstrated by his agility to change voice and convey such a great range of characters. He re-invents himself with each writing enterprise.

Everything he writes appears on the surface to be all the same, when it really is new and original with his each re-invention. The plain folk, narrating so believably in their first person voice in *As I Lay Dying*, are not the archetypal caricatures they appear. Faulkner understands humanity. There are no Jungian archetypes. Nothing is either all good or all evil. Only thinking makes it so. (William Shakespeare, approximate paraphrase).

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the characters and families depicted with his third-person omniscient voice are complex and nuanced. He confounds us with his 200 word sentences that defy the rule we have been so carefully taught: to not express more than one idea in a sentence. There is a 1,288 word sentence in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Chapter 6 the Guinness Book of World Records claims to be the longest sentence in literature. His sentences present and juggle four or more ideas at once. He juxtaposes and cross-fires them at each other, while arguing with himself with increasing intensity as they proceed. We see that there is a volume aspect as well as a tempo beat - a cadence.

Faulkner is deceptive. The smooth southern charm appears to flow along at the slow southern pace, but intensifies to a rate as voiced from a much colder climate. His arguments with himself are like a nested loop in a software program, so difficult to exit.

Perhaps the simplest aspect to grasp is his cadence like the ratta-tat-tat and the clippity- clop of the dialogue in *As I Lay Dying* - "So I say Dewey Dell - Dewey Dell I say". That wasn't a direct quote - just a fabrication of style. Note the interesting word symmetry.

And lastly, to attempt understanding Faulkner, or at least appreciate the beauty and skill he communicates in his use of descriptive language, cadence, temporal sense, voice and other aspects, I was reading *Absalom, Absalom!* - the fourth and last book assigned to us. I will explain my search for this understanding experientially.

I got to thinking that this was like the layers of an onion - a commonly used metaphor. This book read more like a normal book. At least, like in that idiot Benjy's reality, it smelled that way. It still had excruciatingly long sentences. The experience begins at first with your head spinning. Then you are shaking it, confounded; your mind fights to wander. Finally, you are smiling, laying down, taking it as he gives it to you, letting the words flow over you. To surrender to him is to enjoy. Maybe that was an allegory, maybe not. It doesn't matter. It expresses the solution I have found for enjoying William Faulkner's writing for the time being.

And so, truly finally, here are Faulkner's words as the narrator, waxing philosophical as he speaks of Bon and the New Orleans whorehouse:

*But we save that one. God may mark every sparrow, but we do not pretend to be God, you see. Perhaps we do not even want to be God, since no man would want but one of these sparrows. And perhaps when God looks into one of these establishments like you saw tonight, He would not choose one of us to be God either, now that He is old. Though He must have been young once, surely He was young once, and surely someone who has existed as long as He has, who has looked at as much crude and promiscuous sinning without grace or restraint or decorum as He has had to, to contemplate at last, even though the instances are not one in a thousand thousand, the principles of honor, decorum and gentleness applied to perfectly normal human instinct which you Anglo-Saxons insist upon calling lust and in whose service you revert in sabbaticals to the primordial caverns, the fall from what you call grace fogged and clouded by Heaven-defying words of extenuation and explanation, the return to grace heralded by Heaven-placating cries of satiated abasement and flagellation, in neither of which - the defiance or the placation - can Heaven find interest or even, after the first two or three times, diversion. So perhaps, now that God is an old man, He is not interested in the way we serve what you call lust either. Perhaps He does not even require of us that we save this one sparrow, anymore than we save the one sparrow which we do save for any commendation from Him. (Absalom, Absalom!, 91-92)*

It matters little whether Bon is speaking, or Henry speaking of Bon, or Judith speaking of Sutpen, or Faulkner is narrating. It is all Faulkner writing with profundity, philosophically, poetically, and vividly - using the old South and its people as a living laboratory to study the human condition - for himself but giving us the chance to see it, to understand it. I believe that this is why he stands at the pinnacle of the American writers.

I have enjoyed and appreciated most all that I have read of Faulkner's writing so far. Some of it has struck me much deeper than some other of it. I think he is at his best when he is writing as himself in third-person omniscient voice. There his most profound thoughts and the beauty and elegance of his skill with the English language comes through and touches the reader the most.

Thank you Mr. Faulkner. Even if you were alive today and could hear my gratitude, you could not know how much you have helped me in a very short time. I hope to learn and appreciate your work more.

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