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Introduction

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[William Faulkner] spoke of a recent trip to New York. My strong impression is that he did not care for the place; in fact, he disliked it. It appears that he had attended some rather fatuous literary parties and that he did not like them; that he had never been so tired of literary people in his life, and cared not at all for a city "where everybody talks about what they are going to write, and no one writes anything."

—Louis Cochran, 1931¹

You know that state I seem to get into when people come to see me and I begin to visualize a kind of jail corridor of literary talk. I don't know what in hell it is, except I seem to lose all perspective and do things, like a coon in a tree. As long as they don't bother the hand full of leaves in front of his face, they can cut the whole tree down and haul it off.

—William Faulkner, 1932²

Strange and contrary impressions come to mind with the conference title Faulkner and His Contemporaries. Surely, he must have had some, thought he did. Some writer's names come to mind immediately. Ernest Hemingway, considered by many, then and now, to have been a rival, with whom Faulkner exchanged words in print. But only in print: the two writers never met, never seemed even to want to meet. Willa Cather is another, with whom Faulkner had a career-long intertextual dialogue, again, in print; they may have met in 1931 at a Knopf party, but there is no evidence except testimony that he was there, and that he and his companion, Dashiell Hammett, were too drunk to engage in even the most rudimentary of polite formalities. Of Hammett and Faulkner, Joseph Blotner writes, "The men continued to enjoy each other's company at the same time that they presented difficulties to others."³ Contemporary writers and intellectuals with whom Faulkner had what may be called a social relationship (not counting working relations with editors and agents and filmmakers) were more often drinking friends, people with whom he was comfortable to go carousing in New York or Hollywood, or hunting in Mississippi, or the handful of women with whom he had love affairs—and even these were successive, secretive, and relatively speaking, monogamous. There was no charmed circle in Faulkner's world, no cohort of

literary men and women whom we may identify as Faulkner's crowd, his contacts, no regular correspondents or interlocutors.

"Faulkner was shy. Faulkner was arrogant. Faulkner went barefoot on the streets of Oxford. Faulkner tore up his driveway to discourage visitors." Such is the introduction given by James Webb and A. Wigfall Green, in *William Faulkner of Oxford*, a collection of forty reminiscences by local contemporaries, "those who knew him on his home ground." What emerges there are forty distinct perspectives on a civic enigma who had become world famous. "Even to the people of Oxford, Faulkner was a kind of legend in his own lifetime."⁴ While he did not accomplish his self-proclaimed "ambition to be, as a private individual, abolished and voided from history, leaving it markless, no refuse save the printed books,"⁵ his reticence and his remarkable success at maintaining an exclusive existence have resulted in the scholarly need to think deeply about Faulkner's relationship to human beings who were alive at the same time he was alive, particularly with others who may have failed at leaving the world markless when they left.

It may be that one of the most important things to know about Faulkner and his contemporaries is that he did not believe himself to have any. One of his most perceptive observers—at least, one whose perceptions continue to ring true as years pass, consistent with new scholarship—was Robert Coughlan, the *Life* magazine reporter who enraged Faulkner for his success at prying personal information out of friends and acquaintances during a nine-day stay in Oxford in the early 1950s. Coughlan subsequently published the first book-length study of Faulkner, with a title that surely irritated the author, *The Private World of William Faulkner*, released as a \$.50 Avon Book. Coughlan offers this portrait:

Confident of his own genius, determined to write for himself ("I don't give a damn whether anybody reads my books," he has said) and more perceptive generations to come without reference to current taste, nurturing his private nightmare for purposes which perhaps eluded his own understanding, he had begun to regard critics and the literary world in general with indifference and contempt. . . . With his withdrawal he became increasingly anti-intellectual, drawing over himself the mantle of the simple, rough "farmer" who "happened to write sometimes."⁶

The portrait is perceptive on a number of levels. Faulkner did have contemporaries in the 1920s—people he sought out, like Sherwood Anderson and William Spratling in New Orleans. Almost as soon as his writing career was under way, as early as 1930, he began to retreat from his contemporaries, a retreat made emblematic by the purchase of Rowan Oak, and from then on came the enforced isolation, and the comments

about the "jail corridor of literary talk" he felt whenever anyone wanted to talk about books and the contemporary literary scene. In the 1950s, when Faulkner emerged as a public figure, he became a kind of spokesperson for privacy, and attracted the descriptive terms Coughlan uses: the private nightmare, the anti-intellectual, the indifference and the contempt for anyone who tried to treat him as a literary peer.

Faulkner's sense of himself as being without contemporaries, the aloofness produced by a combination of shyness and arrogance, should not be understood and dismissed as egocentrism, even if Faulkner was well aware of his gifts, as Coughlan suggests. Faulkner spent a good deal of public time in the 1950s reflecting on and speculating about what he had accomplished—or what, to be more precise, he happened upon accomplishing. In 1956 Faulkner told Jean Stein, "If I had not existed, someone else would have written me," and offers as proof evidence for the existence of "about three candidates for the authorship of Shakespeare's plays." It is not important who wrote the plays, he continues, only that the plays exist. When Stein asks whether the individuality of the writer matters at all, Faulkner responded: "Very important to himself. Everybody else should be too busy with the work to care about the individuality." Inexplicably, Stein does not pursue Faulkner's dodge, but rather ingeniously asks, "And your contemporaries?" to which Faulkner replies, equally ingeniously and equally evasive, "All of us failed to match our dream of perfection." He then moves on to his familiar theory that "failure to do the impossible . . . is the healthiest condition for an artist. That's why he keeps on working, trying again."⁷

Particularly provocative is the idea that the individuality of the writer should be of interest only to the writer, and not anyone else. Faulkner does not want to be asked personal questions, he says at the very start of the interview; he prefers questions about his work only. "When they are about me," he explains, "I may answer or I may not, but even if I do, if the same question is asked tomorrow, the answer may be different." Stein does not follow up on the remark (or perhaps Faulkner does not allow it, as scholars assume that he had a hand in crafting the interview), which is itself a revealing statement about Faulkner's sense of his individuality. He may well have doubted his own existence as a cohesive being, or at least one that could be adequately captured in print or by his own self-reflective speculation. Or, Faulkner, in Coughlan's words, may have eluded his own understanding. He may well have remained a mystery to himself in his lifetime, a state of mind which would account for the peculiar combination of arrogance and humility associated with his character. A person's being, the essential self, was something Faulkner had identified elsewhere as foreign, repeating the idea that in essence man is "in conflict with himself," as well

as with his time and place and circumstance. The idea of the heart in conflict with itself, which Faulkner admitted was a personal credo,⁸ postulates a sense of individuality which is transient and ephemeral but at the same time interlocked with something eternal, something unknowable, toward which the individual strives and with which it is often at odds.

Faulkner often referred to beings—created characters or actual people—who attempted to be better than their circumstances allowed, who strove to overcome or, in a much preferred term, to endure. “Don’t bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors,” he told Stein. “Try to be better than yourself.” These remarks can too easily be dismissed as homilies if they are not linked to similar formulations made by Faulkner when asked about his relationship to his own time and place, or when he was asked personal questions designed to elicit self-definition. The most famous response was to the Nobel Prize committee, in the opening sentence of his acceptance speech, where Faulkner claims that “this award was not made to me as a man, but to my work.”⁹ His work is the closest approximation he was able to create in order to give form to what Coughlan called his private nightmare, the vision of perfection which drove him to create. He could answer questions about his work because, along with anyone else, he could read it and comment on it. His personal struggle, the struggle between Faulkner and his own heart, like that between him and his family, him and his contemporaries, and the circumstances of his existence—these were matters over which he claimed no expertise and, by the evidence of the comments he did make, matters over which he had much less desire to achieve mastery. Those who were interested in such personal phenomena were intolerable to Faulkner; he simply did not recognize a correlative or significant relationship between the physical existence of the writer and the work he produced. It is a view at odds with current critical assumptions about the identity of writers and their creativity, and the association of writers with particular interests, ethnicities, or subject groups, and therefore may strike today’s up-to-date critics as disingenuous. Nonetheless, when Faulkner described the Nobel Prize as something which could be “only mine in trust,” the statement reflected a lifelong detachment from his work, a sense of self which possesses enormously challenging implications for his view of who or what may be considered his contemporaries.

At the end of the interview with Jean Stein, Faulkner claims as “my own theory” the idea that “time is a fluid condition which has no existence except in the momentary avatars of individual people.” The theory is emblematic of a Faulknerian ontology. He subscribed to the idea of the contemporaneity of all literature, understood as a form of writing which pursued perfection and always failed because, like time, it relied upon

“the momentary avatars of individual people” to experience it and to attempt to write it down. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin recalls his father telling him that “clocks slay time.”¹⁰ Clocks destroy the phenomenon they are meant to measure. So too, in Faulkner’s formulation, does literature, once written down, slay the writer’s vision. In the same way that the individual is drawn toward something unattainable which it knows only as its self, a desire defined variously as happiness, fulfillment, or perfection, the artist is drawn, in his writing, toward what, if he could only get it right, is his imagination of perfection. The artist inevitably fails, as one always will when employing physical reality to embody transcendent vision. The view is Platonic, and it assumes the existence of eternal forms toward which physicality strives. Time, Literature, Individuality, the verities he was fond of referencing—in Faulkner’s mind these were eternities without material existence, forms of absence in the physical world, but which possessed an immense pull on the physical world to approximate. The writer tries again and again to create on the page the “dream of perfection” pursued by his mind. The very definition of life is embodied in that pursuit because, as Faulkner explained to Jean Stein, if the writer should succeed in matching the work to the image, “nothing would remain but to cut his throat, jump off the other side of that pinnacle of perfection into suicide.” Failure is the keystone in Faulknerian ontology, from his sense of a novel as a splendid failure, to his sense of himself as a failed poet, and to his tendency to judge other writers by what they in turn failed to accomplish. There was nothing which we might consider “personal” in these formulations; they were, rather, Faulkner’s ontological speculations on the origins and existence of something which was, in his mind, worthy of being called art.

Faulkner understood that the writer, like anyone else, bears a relationship to himself which we call personal, or private. However, he understood his engagement with his own individuality as an interest that could not be shared or even appreciated by someone else. Possessing a sense of himself as the avatar of William Faulkner, Faulkner could say “If I had not existed, someone else would have written me,” which is to say, if I were not me, someone else would be me—someone else would do the work demanded by the time and place and circumstance. The “I” in the statement, “if I were not me,” refers to the physical man, the man who lived in Oxford; the “me” in the statement refers to the necessity, or the eternal form, of the person we know as Faulkner but who, had William Fa(u)lkner not existed, would be someone else—maybe someone in Alabama or Arizona, Mexico City or Madrid. Faulkner’s sense was that he *participated* in himself; he was Faulkner only by the random chance of universal caprice, and he devoted his life to an attempt to articulate what that

meant—the voices he told Malcolm Cowley that he heard, the stories in his mind which demanded aesthetic shape and form and to which he bowed his will. “I listen to the voices . . . and when I put down what the voices say, it’s right. Sometimes I don’t like what they say, but I don’t change it.”¹¹ The sense of himself as medium, as the temporary and ephemeral location of a set of energies and ideas we call Faulkner, was at once archaic, for its Platonism, and prescient in its anticipation of postmodern critiques of identity. Once again, however, these notions of self and art set Faulkner apart not only from his own contemporaries, but from ours in the twenty-first century. One can already hear the term “schizophrenia” as a response to the voices, missing entirely Faulkner’s account of himself as a fleshy creature associated with the authorship of those books.

For the purposes of the volume at hand, we begin with a sense of the complexity in Faulkner’s thinking about contemporaneity and his contemporaries. After all, the magnitude of his accomplishments results in the existence of contemporaries in numerous categories. There were his local Oxford contemporaries, friends, companions, mentors; there were literary contemporaries, those in whom he was expected to have an interest because he was a writer; there were his contemporaries in Hollywood and New York and places he frequented; and there were his contemporaries who lived at the same time as he, and whose own accomplishments place their lives in inevitable juxtaposition—names like Henry Ford, Albert Einstein, anyone whose mind affected the century. Who is it we need to have Faulkner talking to? Whom do we need to know as his contemporary? Faulkner seemed not to understand why the work he did compelled him to be “a literary man.” He repeatedly denied the affiliation, claiming to be a farmer, or a Mississippian, or a private citizen—anything to distance himself from others who might possess a systematic conception of literature or who might assert a claim on him by virtue of what they did for a living. The books he felt closest to, by his own claim, the works of Shakespeare, the Old Testament, Cervantes, implied that the contemporaneity he felt as a writer had little to do with the time in which he happened to live. At West Point in 1962, he was asked, “And you’re simply not interested in contemporary literature, is that it?,” to which he answered, “Not enough to keep up with it.”¹² The response was not materially different from comments made in 1931. “Asked about the most significant literature being produced in the world today, Mr. Faulkner said very decidedly that there is none being produced.”¹³ Faulkner is not telling the truth; we know he read his contemporaries, and when pressed, would offer opinions about them—albeit usually in the form of canned or stock responses. Nonetheless, in his comments about contemporary writing we detect the same detachment from the associations we take for

granted, aligning and entangling people by their identities, identifying people by what they do. It seems fairly clear that Faulkner fled such entanglements, struggled throughout his life to come to terms with who he was and who he had become, and struggled most heroically with the voices and the vision that possessed and drove him, the only evidence for which we have now are the books.

2

You get born and you try this and you dont know why only you keep on trying it and you are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs and the others all trying and they dont know why either except that the strings are all in one another’s way like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug; and it cant matter, you know that, or the Ones that set up the loom would have arranged things a little better, and yet it must matter because you keep on trying or having to keep on trying and then all of the sudden it’s over.

—William Faulkner, 1936¹⁴

While Faulkner may have raised questions about the very idea of contemporaneity, he had no doubts about the ways in which minds influenced and struggled with one another, and about the compulsion felt by human beings to connect to others. Judith Sutpen, whose voice is quoted above, continues to assert the importance of going “to someone, the stranger the better, and give them something” that would impress them, something to “be remembered even if only from passing from one hand to another, one mind to another.” *Absalom, Absalom!* is Faulkner’s great study of contemporaneity. The novel expands the idea of the contemporary to encompass much more than the coincidental living generation, to include the desire of the living to be contemporaneous with the dead as well as with the alive, to blur the distinction, moreover, and to leave some evidence of having made the attempt. At key points in the novel characters in the present become contemporaries with characters and events from the past; in their imaginations, the living may inhabit the past intellectually and emotionally; as well, in their intellects and emotions, characters in the present may be visited by ghosts, alternately called heroes, demons, or saints, the *dramatis personae* of contemporary memory and desire.

Each of the ten essays in the volume at hand wrestles with the idea that Faulkner was contemporaneous to a specific time and a locatable space, even if our sense of who his contemporaries are differs from his. Houston Baker, Jr., in “Traveling with Faulkner: A Tale of Myth, Contemporaneity,

and Southern Letters," begins by discussing Faulkner's own sense of his contemporaries—Eliot, Housman, Anderson—and speculates on Faulkner's failure to recognize, or his silence regarding, his more local contemporaries, including Wright, Hurston, and Hughes. Houston asks, "Who, then, are his contemporaries?" The question leads Baker to "The Bear," the central portion of *Go Down, Moses*, where through the McCaslin-Beauchamp plantation economy Faulkner asks the same questions about who is included in notions of community, family, and identity. "There is, then, a sense in which I think of Faulkner less as an author than as a journey, a mythic and always contemporary encounter waiting, like an interpretive stone, to mark our modernity. And mark our modernity especially with respect to what we have made of an American South and its outrageous economies of race."

Baker's journey includes an encounter with *The Sound and the Fury* during a racially charged summer in Louisville in 1957, when "the Compsons were going crazy." The experience is not clarified for years, when Baker acknowledges his need for "a myth of my own through which to engage the parallel time of the South" and to counter the linguistically encompassing myths created by Faulkner. The journey continued at Howard University, where Baker relates a remarkable classroom moment more significant now than imaginable at the time, and then to Paris, where a professionally savvy Professor Baker finds himself lecturing on Wash Jones's relation to Thomas Sutpen in a make-shift café classroom outside the Sorbonne, closed by student riots and guarded by Algerian marshals, vaguely reminiscent of the Senegalese soldiers in *A Fable*. And on into the 1980s, when seasoned Ivy League Professor Baker tried to convince suspicious students that Colonel Sutpen mattered to them. Finally, though a brutal replay of Faulkner's tortured racial prose in *Light in August*, Baker locates what anguishes so many of Faulkner readers, his seeming complicity in so many "prurient, disastrous myths of black blood and odor, Negro razors and bovine stupidity, white nymphomania and black-male lasciviousness, militaristic white desire sublimated into grim and unlikely castration." At the end of the journey, in a kind of cold-war moment between Baker and Faulkner, between American Black Studies and the great fact of Faulkner in American literature, emerges a strikingly adept confession, as genuine and yet as suspect as the diplomatic moment it mimics.

We do not think of Faulkner as a city boy, but in his youth he did come to know one city very well. We do not think of New Orleans as a city in Mississippi, either, but in its early history, it almost was. W. Kenneth Holditch, in "William Faulkner and Other Famous Creoles," reminds us that "when the Louisiana Purchase was divided up into states, the original plan would have used the Mississippi River as the dividing line, and

New Orleans would have been part of Mississippi." This fact accounts or documents for the affinity most Mississippians have always felt for the Louisiana city, a place too big mythically and too diverse culturally to be held by any one state, or nation. Indeed, writers have referred to the region of southern Louisiana as the northern tip of Costa Rica, a Mediterranean city, an Arab state. Cosmopolitan visitors describe it as America's only European city, sensing that in the French Quarter one is brought in spirit to Paris, Madrid, or Athens.

Faulkner was no different from many Southern (and non-Southern) writers drawn to the city's exotic charms and, perhaps most significantly, its disdain for Prohibition and other restraints and interdictions. Holditch provides accounts of numerous literary associations and stations in New Orleans. "All through the 1920s, artists and writers flocked to the city, for a variety of reasons," Holditch explains, "not the least of which involved the presence of Sherwood Anderson." John Dos Passos and Faulkner each encountered Anderson at this time; both careers may be traced to Anderson's influence. Dos Passos and Faulkner were contemporaries, and throughout Faulkner's life they "remained friends and admirers of each other's work, although they rarely met." Holditch charts Faulkner's various associations in the city, drawing on interviews with "all the Famous Creoles who were still living in New Orleans," in 1974 and 1976. An important image of Faulkner as a young man, with characteristic confidence (which, before fame, was surely read as arrogance), starting a career in the arts in one of the few American cities where an artist's vocation was considered, among Faulkner's contemporaries in the Vieux Carré, as important as it was irrelevant, maybe even more so.

It may well be that the contemporaries Faulkner never met were more important to him than those with whom he spent time in New Orleans, New York, or California. "Cather's War and Faulkner's Peace: A Comparison of Two Novels, and More" is the latest in a series of essays by Merrill Skaggs suggesting a career-long dialogue between Faulkner and Willa Cather, one which includes a portrait of Faulkner in *One of Ours* and features a string of sometimes cryptic and sometimes astounding references to one another. The Faulkner portrait is one that will arrest any Faulkner reader. In *One of Ours* appears a man with a "humming-bird moustache," possessing "an air of special personal importance," wearing a Royal Flying Corp uniform, carrying a cane, reeking of alcohol, and telling stories about flying in France. While there is no smoking gun to establish a physical connection, Cather and Faulkner were both in Greenwich Village in the summer of 1921, when this RFC-weary character is more or less what Faulkner personified. There is also a good bit of borrowing from *One of Ours* in *Soldiers' Pay*, including similarly (and uncommonly)

wounded soldiers, parallel motifs and images, and a shared projection of misogyny which provides some impetus to male war volunteerism. "That's the surprise," Skaggs claims; "how much Cather's Claude loves war, and how much William Faulkner chooses to believe other soldiers do, too."

The influence Skaggs charts between these two rough contemporaries is private. It is not the shared-state neighborliness of the Welty-Faulkner connection, nor the machismo rivalry of the Hemingway-Faulkner tug of war. It is, rather, a silent, unpublic, and easily missed series of nods and exchanges never intended for critical consumption. Anyone who knows both authors as well as Skaggs does can hear the echoes, however, and suspects that these two writers read each other very carefully. "For his major work," Skaggs demonstrates, "William Faulkner mined five central Cather novels, including *One of Ours*, thoroughly." He then acknowledged and repaid the favor, by writing a Cather-bodied woman into his own fiction as one of his more memorable female characters, one with "the strength and fortitude of a man" whose name plays on Cather's own male persona, Jim Burden, emerging as Joanna Burden. Skaggs's sleuthing, and her adept intertextual eye, proves that when probing the influence of contemporary writers, we are in fact probing the workings of minds interlocked in myriad ways.

The contemporary relationship that was not private but often embarrassingly public was that between Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway. Donald M. Kartiganer, in "Getting Good at Doing Nothing": Faulkner, Hemingway, and the Fiction of Gesture," offers the first of a pair of essays in this volume to explore the connections between two men who were contemporaries, rivals, public interlocutors—but who also never met, a nonmeeting which is, as Donald Kartiganer says, "just as well, because as writers and personalities they seemed to be completely opposite in every respect." And more, the opposition they embody seems emblematic to American literature: Hemingway's sparse and linguistically exclusive style matched by Faulkner's "art of inclusion," the accumulation of words that never quite get to be exclusively representational. Kartiganer identifies the opposition as "one of the recurring phenomena of American literature," echoing previous embodiments in Hawthorne and Melville, Dickinson and Whitman, Crane and Dreiser, Frost and Williams. In the case of Hemingway and Faulkner, the opposition is seen most clearly in the way it revolves around a shared, career-long fascination with what Kartiganer calls "gesture," defined as "an action that signals intention, a purpose, but is never completed"; or, in intellectual terms, gesture occurs "when realization appears to be impossible at the very outset." The phenomenon is known also as "failed gesture" or "empty gesture"; but such phrases are redundancies in Hemingway and Faulkner because in the fiction of both

writers "gesture always fails," according to Kartiganer, and "proves in the end to be empty."

Arising from carefully selected examples is a sense of the thematic centrality of failure, a "persistent defeat of purpose" which both informs and gives rise to "the gestural mode." However, each writer gets to this thematic concern by vastly different paths, paths which would seem never to converge. "Faulknerian gesture is often ambitious to the point of arrogance," while it also "remains almost blithely indifferent to its actual outcome." In Hemingway, by comparison, gesture is "rooted in disciplined patience," where virtue is measured not in Faulknerian "flamboyant motion" but in Hemingway's signature emphasis on the "art of not saying too much." The difference may be between the gesture that surrounds failure, circling it like birds of prey, and gesture that lies at the heart of failure, the calm eye of the storm which is, in effect, no storm at all but something else. Kartiganer charts divergent aesthetics important to our understanding of these contemporaries. Faulkner once explained that to his idea of art, it is "best to take the gesture, the shadow of the branch, and let the mind create the tree"—to surround the thing, in other words, and let the reader infer its presence. Hemingway, on the other hand, sought to "make something through . . . invention that is not a representation but a whole new thing," so that the reader senses the presence of something new. The characteristic Hemingway gesture is thus "clean, straightforward," with "no tricks," and marked by simple action, according to Kartiganer, whereas the signature gesture in Faulkner is "not a program for action but a script for a posture, a stance, an attitude." Both writers, however, ended in a similar place, where art, essentially gestural, accomplishes nothing, "admits—no, boasts of—its irrelevance," in Kartiganer's words.

George Monteiro, in "The Faulkner-Hemingway Rivalry," charts the numerous public and private gestures made by each writer toward one another throughout their lives. In a thoroughly researched essay, Monteiro contributes the definitive account of "the incidents and episodes" that constitute the relationship between the two writers. These "flash points," as Monteiro accurately calls them, amount to strong evidence that the two men thought about each other often, perhaps to the point of imagining the other reading over his shoulder. Faulkner called Hemingway "the best we've got" in the 1920s, starting a series of compliments which always seemed to contain something disturbing to Hemingway—"the best we've got," for example, being quite something else besides "the best there is." Hemingway's view of Faulkner was also consistent; on the one hand, he would assess Faulkner as "damned good when good" and on the other, find him "often unnecessary."

Among the most intriguing of these interlocutions is evidence that Faulkner may have retained a 1940 essay about Hemingway by Archibald MacLeish (where Hemingway is brought to task for devaluing the "old verities") and then incorporated the sentiment into his Nobel Prize Address in 1950 where he argues that "the old verities and truths of the heart" are all that's worth writing about. The speech also contains echoes of an apology Faulkner had offered Hemingway in the past. For his part, when Hemingway had opportunity to give his own Nobel Prize Address four years after Faulkner, he used the occasion to criticize writers who turned themselves into public spokesmen—coincidentally, Faulkner was at the time on the payroll of the State Department, speaking the old verities to foreign nations deemed receptive to American cultural initiatives. The rivalry continues postmortem, and now decades after the last ding-dong clocking either man's voice has stopped, each writer's critics and biographers explore the rivalry and the pairing—Faulkner/Hemingway has emerged as among the century's major aesthetic dialectics, as evidenced by Kartiganer's essay in this volume. The match, at present, seems, to Monteiro, to be tilted in Faulkner's favor. Hemingway's champions still defend him, still explain Faulkner's error in listing Hemingway where he did on his list of the best writers, or counter Faulkner's claim that as a writer, Hemingway lacked courage. Almost no one seeks to defend Faulkner in terms of his writerly courage, but this may also be because Faulkner "discovered the exact terms by which his rivalry with Hemingway might serve him." Moreover, Monteiro establishes that the gestures made toward one another throughout their careers accomplished a great deal, and continue to influence the way critics imagine Faulkner and Hemingway and their relative positions of influence in twentieth-century American literature.

The simple fact of being contemporaneous may arrest; placing two seemingly unrelated contemporary minds in juxtaposition expands and refines what it is we mean by contemporary. Deborah Clarke's "William Faulkner and Henry Ford: Cars, Men, Bodies, and History as Bunk" is an exploration and meditation on this fact: Henry Ford and William Faulkner were contemporaries. One devoted his life to the manufacture of automobiles; the other devoted important aspects of his art to exploring what the automobile meant. Henry Ford, while revolutionizing automobile production, remarked in 1926, "we have not yet found out what the automobile means." At the same time, Faulkner was projecting realms of car-significance, including the creation of Jason Compson's emblematic (and illicitly bought) automobile, pointedly *not* a Ford, the means of both his liberation from and his entrapment within circumstances. Clarke provocatively juxtaposes Ford's various visions of the future with Faulkner's aesthetics, centering, for example, on Ford's efforts to transform the types of

men who would become workers and Faulkner's interrogations into the effects of industrialization on the quality of life in northern Mississippi.

Henry Ford wanted to make the automobile within the purchase of every American, thus transforming the car from luxury to necessity. Faulkner saw the process accomplished in his lifetime, even in the poorest region of the nation, to the extent that Gavin Stevens would conclude (in *Intruder in the Dust*) that "The American really loves nothing but his automobile: not his wife his child nor country no even his bank account . . . but his motorcar." Both men were also deeply interested in continuity, especially the relationship to the past which defined community. Ford created Greenfield Village, "a recreation of his idyllic vision of the past," as Clarke describes it, a kind of reification of the communities Faulkner envisioned at stake in a novel like *Go Down, Moses*. Throughout the various juxtapositions of Ford and Faulkner, the automobile serves as the chief vehicle. Clarke explores the relationship between the car and nostalgia, gender definitions (and auto-sexual metaphors), criminality, and the myriad intersections among cars and speed, mechanization, and masculine identity. Ultimately, Clarke suggests we consider the relationship (and the tension) between art and industry as twin forces affecting and defining contemporary identity.

Bringing us back to Mississippi, Danièle Pitavy-Souques, in "'Blacks and Other Very Dark Colors': William Faulkner and Eudora Welty," describes the two writers as equally engaged in the socially compelling events of the late 1940s in Mississippi, though in vastly different ways. For example, while both "use the strategy of exposing the Southern infatuation with language," they do so by employing distinct methods. Faulkner's language "exposes the bombastic rhetoric of political discourse" which works to endlessly delay action, while "Welty exposes the drama and vacuity of humorous chitchat." However, as Pitavy-Souques argues, "whether staged for large audiences or restricted to the intimacy of a front porch, Southern discourse can prove a terrible weapon." Her essay then meticulously examines the emotional content of Southern discourse, its reliance on cliché and other vacuous tropes, to produce a sense of each writer's attempt to both expose and counter the language of the contemporary scene. Her texts are Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust* (1948) and Welty's *The Ponder Heart* (1953), novels which, from the vantage point of fifty years, are contemporary texts.

One particularly engaging point of intersection between the two novels lies in their parallel employment of transgression. Drawing on the work of Georges Bataille (particularly *Literature and Evil*), Pitavy-Souques places Faulkner's Lucas Beauchamp alongside Welty's Daniel Ponder in a study of comparative transgression. Beauchamp's offense is revealed when he "refuses to act like a nigger" and acts as if his right to exist emanates from

within his self, rather than from his alleged betters. Daniel Ponder, resembling "a child obstinately immersed in the present," transgresses by "subverting the establishment with his disregard for riches and social conventions." In Faulkner's novel, the transgressive acts of Beauchamp lead to "a new awareness of racial issues" in the community. Acknowledging that Welty's novel "seems to be lighter," Pitavy-Souques argues that while its plot is less consequential than Faulkner's, its ultimate significance is not easily dismissed. In *The Ponder Heart*, "the true manipulator of the plot is the uniform and deadly power of language." By probing into the abuses of language in the cold war/civil rights era, Welty's novel is as politically charged as Faulkner's, examining as it does "the contemporary fallacy" of the American response to Communism. Faulkner, in *Intruder in the Dust*, overtly invokes the cold war by naming "a fascist background against which the present situation in the South" may be evaluated. Welty, at virtually the same moment, "offers a comic version of a totalitarian regime headed by a half-wit . . . whom all will reject in the end." What Pitavy-Souques reveals is two very different Mississippi writers, close contemporaries, never rivals but responding, according to discordant aesthetics, to the same social and cultural crises.

Opening with a fact we sometimes forget, Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, in "Surveying the Postage-Stamp Territory: Eudora Welty, Elizabeth Spencer, and Ellen Douglas," reminds us that there is nothing especially significant, historically or otherwise, about the area Faulkner identified as his "postage stamp of native soil" in northern Mississippi. Prenshaw is astute to point this out. Other areas of the state of Mississippi, before Faulkner, would be certain to come to mind as containing a richer historical significance, such as Vicksburg or Natchez, or more social and cultural importance, such as the Delta area around Clarksdale. Nonetheless, the northern hill country in and around Lafayette County has tremendous significance now, of course, because of what Faulkner did with it. What happened in this area is Faulkner: Faulkner happened, and forever after, the event of Faulkner is one that subsequent writers, writing about Mississippi and the South, must confront. Prenshaw looks carefully at three writers, Welty, Spencer, and Douglas, who responded specifically to Faulkner and who, in their responses, "imagined an alternate mapping of the region, one originating in their different experience of it."

Faulkner loomed large in the imaginations of all three of his female contemporaries, all of whom were publishing in his lifetime and into the wake of his reputation. Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha "came to be not only a part of the general textual universe, but part and parcel of the imaginative universe" of these three women. At the same time they departed significantly, in part because they were women, with access to and no access to certain

modes of experience. Welty, for example, "a white girl growing up in a deeply gendered and racialized society, was segregated from Faulkner's Mississippi, as from Richard Wright's Mississippi, in profound ways," the profundity of which resulted in the projection of a very different kind of Mississippi fiction, one which nonetheless cannot but know of Faulkner. Spencer's experience in Mississippi in the 1950s, after writing three Mississippi novels (with traces of Yoknapatawpha), was to sense "that the homeland she knew was disappearing" and, as a result, she left the state, eventually settling in Chapel Hill and writing novels "not anywhere near Yoknapatawpha." Ellen Douglas, finally, in her writing "demonstrates no assured sense of entitlement to appropriate the larger world of country or state or region" but, writing "the female world" which was inaccessible to Faulkner, narrates a more "modestly scaled" world, "more ephemeral in memory, more contingent upon a daily shifting reality." In all three cases, writing as women, after Faulkner, results (or perhaps compels) a reconciliation to "mortal limits," Prenshaw argues, a view that admits to "the elusiveness of originality and the constraints upon truth."

Faulkner's shadow looms very large in Grace Elizabeth Hale, "Invisible Man: William Faulkner, His Contemporaries, and the Politics of Loving and Hating the South in the Civil Rights Era; or, How Does a Rebel Rebel?" Hale juxtaposes the Southern Renaissance in literature of the 1930s and '40s with the Southern rock phenomenon in popular music of the 1970s, comparative moments of Southern ascendancy in the national imagination, both of which tended to obscure their debt to African American cultural forms. Hale centers on the figure of the "rebel," that vestige of Confederate dissent which recurs whenever white Southerners find themselves at odds with or in defiance of national policies, trends, or entertainment modes, either by active rebellion or in transcendental reverie. "The civil rights movement made it impossible to be both a Rebel in the Confederate sense, someone who defied his nation to defend his region, and a rebel in the romantic sense, a seer who defies his society to defend a greater truth." The greater truth, if recognizable, was regressive at best and unjust to most outside observers, if that truth was, as Faulkner suggested, to "go slow" toward civil rights for black citizens.

Hale attempts a line of continuity from Southern Agrarians to Southern rock musicians, with Faulkner (and, also, Shelby Foote and James Dickey) providing the bridge of a conflicted white Southern consciousness. Typical of white Southern intellectuals, these men "could no longer be romanticized outsiders within the larger American culture." What we find them doing, in response to an impossible situation, was adopting "the most traditional of American male images," rooted in a sense of exclusion, and with an uneasy relationship to violence, both ecological and domestic.

The dilemma, according to Hale, found its way into the music scene a generation later. "Southern rock provided a safe place outside of politics for white Southern men to express and romanticize their experience of loss," according to Hale, while also, we might add, turning loss into celebratory ritual in a deeper sense, a sense that tapped into the national consciousness. Like the writers of the Southern Renaissance, Southern rock musicians were heavily indebted to black cultural forms, in this case blues music. Ironically, the sense of loss emerging from the civil rights era (if not loss of personal privilege, then certainly loss of regional prestige in international terms) provided an experience approximating the blues, so that black music became an important resource for the expression of white angst. In this sense, Southern rock music is cultural integration, a hybrid form for what only appeared to be "white" music. "In Southern rock," Hale concludes, "the Rebel and the rebel," Confederate and transcendental alike, "merged, creating an image specific enough to be appealing and yet vague enough to symbolize whatever kind of rebel a man wanted to be." This marked the popular manifestation, one generation removed, of the conflicted white intellectual made emblematic by Faulkner's efforts, in the 1950s, to be both outsider and moral force.

From Yoknapatawpha to beyond Mississippi and beyond the borders of the United States, M. Thomas Inge and Donária Romeiro Carvalho Inge, in "William Faulkner and Guimarães Rosa: A Brazilian Connection," explore Faulkner's Latin American contemporaries. Noting the well-established links between Faulkner and Latin American writers writing in Spanish, particularly those associated with the South American "boom" era, the Inges trace an important set of parallels between Faulkner and the Brazilian author Guimarães Rosa (1908–1967). While there is no direct evidence that Rosa read Faulkner, the Inges provide convincing intertextual evidence that Faulkner's influence on Rosa, writing in Portuguese, was equal to his established influence on other South American writers of the era. Guimarães Rosa was an adventurous author who experimented with prose methods. His short stories, according to the Inges, "sometimes read more like essays or character sketches" and often lack the "basic plot structure and conflict of the traditional literary story." Rosa's subject matter is taken from "his own beloved *sertão*, or backlands," an area used much like Yoknapatawpha, "a cosmos of his own which serves at the same time as a microcosm of the larger world and society." The Inges conclude that Rosa, like writers of the Latin American boom, "probably felt liberated by the possibility of turning to his own regional world of Minas Gerais as an appropriate fictional matter for fiction."

The essays in this volume make a start on a project which will occupy Faulkner scholars in the twenty-first century: the relationship of William

Faulkner to his self, his time, and his circumstances, and the idea of Faulknerian contemporaneity. Where the lines of influence begin and where they go is as much an ontological matter as it is a biographical, critical, and intertextual issue. "Yes. *Maybe we are both Father. Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished.*"¹⁵ Quentin Compson came to know his contemporaries to be an ever-widening circle of lives, some lived, some speculated to have lived, some never to have existed anywhere save for his personal compulsions and desires. In considering Faulkner and his contemporaries, we begin with his personal sense that he had none, to an equally outrageous suspicion that all within and without the grasp of his intellect was, in some way, contemporaneous with Faulkner. To paraphrase, contemporary is not *was*, but *is*.

NOTES

1. James W. Webb and A. Wigfall Green, eds., *William Faulkner of Oxford* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 106.
2. Joseph Blotner, ed., *Selected Letters of William Faulkner* (New York: Random House, 1977), 56.
3. Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography*, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, 1974), 1: 741.
4. *Ibid.*, vi, v.
5. *Selected Letters*, 285.
6. Robert Couglan, *The Private World of William Faulkner* (New York: Avon Books, 1954), 103–4.
7. A number of quotations in the next paragraphs are taken from "Interview with Jean Stein Vanden Heuval," *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner*, ed. James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1968), 236–57.
8. See *Faulkner at West Point*, ed. Joseph L. Fant and Robert Ashley (New York: Vintage, 1969), 64.
9. The "Address upon Receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature" is available in many volumes. See *Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters by William Faulkner*, ed. James B. Meriwether (New York: Random House, 1965), 119.
10. William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929; New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 85.
11. Malcolm Cowley, *The Faulkner-Cowley File: Letters and Memories, 1944–1962* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 114.
12. *Faulkner at West Point*, 66.
13. Interview in University of Virginia College Topics, in *Lion in the Garden*, 17.
14. *Absalom, Absalom!*, in *Faulkner: Novels, 1936–1940*, ed. Joseph Blotner and Noel Polk (New York: Library of America, 1990), 105.
15. *Ibid.*, 216.