

PARODIES OF FAULKNER



William Faulkner

(1897-1962)

“In 1990, 650 contestants battered us into submission with such titles as ‘Inclusion in the Rust,’ ‘As I Lay Dieting,’ ‘Abstinence, Abstinence!’ and ‘The Round and the Furry.’ And 750 faux Faulkners had not had enough, returning to bedevil America in 1991.”

Dean Faulkner Wells, ed.
The Best of Bad Faulkner
(Harcourt/Harvest 1991)

As I Sat Typing

On the table the lean jaw of the typewriter sat in gaping unamaze like a memento mori, a death's head that stared at the writer sitting in undaunted authorial pride, his fingers poised above the keys so that he (the writer) looked not monklike or afraid but like a concert pianist awaiting silence, ignoring completely the omen on the table. A bottle of corn whiskey stood at his feet corked like a genie... The writer regarded the as yet un-novelated page with keen eyes, patient and determined but weary too, the mouth drawn under the gray mustache that had belonged to his grandfather, Colonel Beowolf Falkner, who had ridden savage and furious and completely hairless out of the indomitable hills of Virginia and into an old Chickasaw barber shop where he had pulled it off the face of another man with main force and ridden out again without even paying, and though his beard and sideburns, which he had also stolen, had been shot off at Bull Run, had preserved and passed down the old growth of facial hair as a token and a promise, though of what no one was sure.

Jonathan Rosen

Doomed

If he had been born with a talent for brevity or even the ability to construct a simple cohesive sentence, he might now be turning his attention to a different contest [Hemingway parodies], that would take him, if he won, to a good bar, an honest bar in an Italian city, that even as a boy he dreamed of seeing, where he

could drink for free with other Americans and feel good, but that was not to be so, for like all men who had grown up in this part of the country where time was measured not in hours but in the length of a planting season his words flowed like a tangle of Spanish moss dragged through the swamp grass...

Jeff Sanders

Bill and Ernie Go Fishing

I allowed that I might break my usual code of temperance owing to the dank cold of the Yoknapatawpha river bottom where we had now arrived, the old fish camp sagging in the mud flat, and knowing that Ernie would soon empty the bottle anyway. I put on my boots, remembering the times as boy and man and libelous character I had waded these somnolent waters, whose enduring tides would always sweep these hills, endlessly, ceaselessly, to the delta below.

Suddenly, a large ten-point buck bolted from the brush. Ernie dived for the backseat of the car, erupting from the other side with a loaded shotgun we had brought for emergencies. "Yes!" he snarled. He charged into the woods. "Don't ask for whom we fell does!" Ernie shouted. "It's the bucks I want".... The farmer only charged us five hundred dollars for the cow Ernie shot and said he would dress it out real nice for another fifty dollars. Me, I thought about how nice it might be to take up fox hunting in Virginia.

Ernie just wanted the ears.

Joseph Rogers

A Wal-Mart for Jefferson

First it was the nameless plot of land: doomed to be encompassed in the apotheosis of the white man's trade; transmogrified by the hands of man from its moiling earthface, gully-drawn plow-turned ammoniac mule-ambulated; its immortal destiny to be parking-lotted and Wal-Marted; where the once indomitable trees fell to the ax and the horny-handed (and nameless now too) sons of the earth: they myriad and mired and miscegenated and more—mixed up—who thought that by having they could own when owning wasn't possessing, omitting the apostrophe of doom from their possessive pronouns and even contractions...

Michael A. Crivello

Light in the Mall

If I could only see, he thought, thought turning in on itself amorphous, brooding, opaque, thought-not-thought anymore, ceasing to be thought, ceasing to be the be-ness of being itself, no longer identifiable, but vague—vague and shadowless, like shadows which themselves have fled the shadows of their very being, shamed among the shamed, pitiful among the pitiful, hopeless to the very apogee of hopelessness, the very dingdong of doom in a vast gloom-filled swamp that is swamp-mud-vague-squishing-cold-against-the-feet of his subconscious mind, squishing cold cold wet, timeless, the hidden horror of generations of doomed mud moving, inexorably, toward their final, inevitable twilight....

Don Mangan

He Stared with a Fixed, Unmoving Gaze

He stared with a fixed, unmoving gaze at the charred ruins of the Snopeburger Barn, remembering the sweet, slightly revolting smell of hot fat turning endlessly to vapor on a griddle, the mildly obscene costumes of the carhops, now unemployed, with the sewn patches of red cloth representing flames on their tight shorts and back, another pair of flames over each breast, giving them the look of innocent demons as they roller-skated loads of hot food out to the waiting cars. He remembered, sitting and swinging on his front porch, when the Snopeburger Barn first was built, one of the many commercial ventures of County Commissioner Earl Snope, another way, some said, to hide the kickbacks skimmed from the building of the roads full so soon of potholes, the sewers cracking and disgorging their plagues of rats, the waterworks always in need of expensive repair.

He knew better. Few of the current residents of the recently named Snope County...would know or care about the grim joke lurking in the caricature of a barn decorated with painted flames and selling "Barn Burning Good" burgers, carefully located upwind of the ancestral home of Earl Snope's wife, fouling the air breathed by the brother she never saw. He remembered precisely how she looked, tan in a way her

female forebears never were from hours on foreign beaches, top-heavy from the silicone implants now worn by all the Snope women... He remembered other things as well as he swung on his porch in the sweltering heat, remembered reading the *Iliad* in the original to that fourteen-year-old slut from the Snopeburger, how she would wiggle and squeeze him at the clash of armor, the birth of their idiot son, the towering rage that seized him when she ran off with the rock and roll band, the flames roaring up from the Snopeburer from the incendiary device he placed in the grease trap. There was some talk of a Tastee-Freeze locating on the ruins. Let them try. Just let them try. He was only a Snope by marriage, but just let them try.

W. D. Cruse

Bran Burning

The kitchen in which Phlegm Snopes held family court smelled of rye husks baking on a tray in the oven. The boy raised his skinny rump from the chair to smell the hulls baking...he knew he smelled in the steady wash of warm air and unwashed family another smell, a scent of fear and decay and grief—for he was a full-blooded Snopes, blind to the truth and chained to the past whether he knew it or not—and the rush of blood to his head made him woozy like his brothers Heck and I.O.U., who were anxious to confess their guilt and leave the kitchen (where no good ever originated, not the way their mother cooked) and run to town for Coca-Colas and Ding Dongs and some conversation at Homer Barren's 7-11...

Smoke from the oven escaped; no one noticed but the boy. He had to do something, now. The husks would burn black, ruined and useless.

"Bran!" the boy cried. "Bran!"

His mother and father, his two older brothers, the birds and dogs and the wind in the trees—they all stopped. The world stopped spinning for a full second, until their mother spoke up.

"He talked! The boy can talk!"

"Bah!" the boys' father said, disgusted. "Now we got to name him."

The boys' mother stood to turn off the oven but paused, swollen with maternal triumph, and smiling with all the enduring liquid bovine tenderness of her sex, she told her youngest son: "I always knew maybe you'd talk."

They say Bran Snopes never spoke another word until his dying day, when he asked the preacher, "Is that bran I smell burnin'?" But the preacher...told Bran that he reckoned it was all the souls of all the Snopeses burning in hell that Bran smelled, and wasn't that a shame when it's such a simple thing to confess your sins and be saved from eternal death and damnation, but it was too late: Bran had died about two lines back. It was the syntax that sent Bran Snopes to everlasting perdition, not the sin itself.

John Ruemmler

As I Lay Dieting

Beatrice Rose: My God it was only pork. How was I to know that my two sisters *they are both bitches I will not even use Freudian symbolism to describe them* would go on for eighty years about it, reversing my name in the bargain? Look at Lizzie over yonder, earth-heavy and violet orbed, thinking she has come to Mossrot for my funeral when indeed I am not dead but merely at a diet center which she, deaf as Tiresias was blind, misheard as "died a sinner." And Porah sensationalizing as usual; what I said that day was I am a pork chop survivor, I have joined a support group. We members of the human race have a soul, a spirit capable of sacrifice until the cows come home; I decline pork, I said, I will have tofu! I will! I decline it, I will have it, tofu, I choose tofu!

Sam Staggs

The Reader

Knowing knows before remembering can ever have remembered that knowing was thinking about anything that remembering could have known. The sentences of Yuckhuffapuffa County were deep and he had many to go before he could sleep and know he was literate, know that he had come face-to-face with Old Bill, alone, without Cliff Notes, in the dark, mysterious, mute depth of the looming tome—seen him, known his power, felt the accumulated ages of wisdom and wordiness that he who could not be fathomed... And suddenly, emerged from a clearing of dialogue, there it was, over a page in length, exactly as Spam Feathers and Major Deegan and Christian Brothers and the Composts had said it would be. It was the largest sentence he had ever seen, white with clear traces of black and part French. He was so close to it

now he could see a participial clause as long as a snake hanging from one of its branches. He read in awe as it swung its massive purport directly toward him and then veered, lumbered into a descriptive passage, its absolutes uncoiling darkly seemingly surreptitiously in peristaltic rhythms with plot references myriad proleptically plopping onto the leaves yellow-fringed and immemorial.

He read in a dense fog, trying to get his bearings, listening to the sonorous baying of verb and adjective as he followed the trail over the rough syntax with thorny clauses embedded in it to grate and trip an unwary man, expecting at any time to find a period in the litter of dark, lush prose strewn with semicolons and dashes while all around him the deep, chaptorial abyss yawned, suffocating him and he was reading reading, thinking never to find his way out as participles dangling from huge parentheses slapped him in the face and a dense tangle of verbiage caught at him, spinning him about, disorienting him, spinning him into an ever tighter cocoon of miscomprehension until, stumbling over leaf after leaf, gasping, thinking it would not end, could not end because the words were from the beginning while man was here only to use those words, to nurture and be nurtured by them, he saw a white space in the dark mass of characters and came, wheezing, agonizingly, and finally abruptly to the end and knew he had endured.

Marshall Toman

Him

It was Ratmound telling this. That was what I thought, that was who Uncle Nilly said it was who was doing the telling to Uncle Villy who was doing the telling to Phlegm who was doing the telling to Varnish who did the telling to me who was doing the telling to Chips, but maybe it wasn't, not because Ratmound could not do the telling on his own but because not he, Ratmound, the sewing needle agent, could weave, spin, tell such a tale told to me alone because no one of them knew all they needed to know to tell the tale told, so all of them, he, Ratmound, the sewing needle agent, and Uncle Nilly and Uncle Villy, the twins, and Phlegm and Varnish had all created, added to, modified, and traduced the tale into what it became when I heard it, which is what I think happened, but I could be somehow wrong, mistaken, at fault, in error.

Larry Thompson

I Lost My Place

Far back, before reading became remembering and remembering in its turn understanding, far back in the ever-dwindling stoic implacable yet not hurried or even fleet progression (outspilled from the lush fecund and eternally untamable copiousness of rhapsodic writerly excess)...marching obliviously onward in perpetuity with endless imperious majesty...generation upon generation; before even resentment of moiling syntax became repudiation...in this squandered ruin of a once invitatory text, making expressions long bereft of gentility and pretense of import, the façade of the dilapidated but once pristine edifice of thought, pure in its primal verity but now adulterated yet retaining the trace of its former semblance...whose true issue is itself...falling breath-giving and grammatically sensible appearance of a period...the precursor of all that came before this timeworn heritage of syllables—even before all else had chanced or designed to occur, I lost my place.

Michael Houdeshell

Old Jeb

He realized later that it had begun long before he had been born or was big enough to see and remember and tell afterward so that it would make any sense to anyone except maybe the vice president. It had begun insofar as the boy could discern when that first doomed creature made its first doomed attempt to slink out of the primordial sludge and into the vast indomitable wilderness and, once there, to discover within its heart the audacity, the courage and will to ask to be called a huntsman, a hunter, a courser, a stalker, a pursuer, or simply a good sport. It had already begun, he realized, on that day when the very first woman-weary band of such creatures had at last, in deliberate confederation against their ultimate evolution from men into a race of talking potatoes, slouched out of the town and into the big woods; had slouched into the big woods for a pristine and virginal breath of hushed and unflaggingly silent, pine-laden air, in blighted and desperate search of an opportunity to practice male bonding and to discover some excuse for ordering more than four hundred dollars' worth of stuff from L. L. Bean. The ineradicable truth was that man will

endure, which cannot be said of American-made cars. And man will not merely endure: he will dress nattily when the occasion calls for it.

Robert F. James

The Sound and the Fury: Appendix II

Sojourned in Hollywood and peddlerwise sold detective stories to the *Saturday Evening Post* and sojourned yet again in Hollywood, glittering brightest among that constellation of impecunious novelists who were Howard Hawks's screenwriters, and yet in all this never compromised that studied aloof detached air which found its apogee in true (some) and apocryphal (others) tales of eccentric and sometimes even taciturn seclusion. Who (as he in re-creating his own name had lengthened simple vowel into diphthong) hammered out a syntax and diction and general novelistic style which outstripped capacity of thesaurus or simple dictionary and often even the skill of a well-paid copy editor and which were (the syntax, style, and diction) the outward and visible signs of a fiction which refashioned a history and present until in their apotheosis they were...fictional landmarks... "I'm just a farmer who writes," he said. That sentence was his simplest fiction."

Allen D. Boyer

Lite in August

Lena thinks, 'I have come from Alabama with a banjo on my knee.' She thinks *I could have walked faster if it were in a case and I were carrying it, or if I played the harmonica.* Thinking: *why do I think in italics sometimes and sometimes in single quotation marks?*

Lena is walking to Georgia, to find the man who put her in the family way. She is also pregnant. What she does not realize is that the man has gone to *Soviet* Georgia, and the walk will be longer than she had hoped for. "I am looking for a man named Burch," she tells a man who, in the most unbelievable coincidence ever recorded in southern fiction, is, in fact, Burch. He has had liposuction and let his hair grow out, so she does not recognize him.

"I don't know no one named Burch, he tells her"...

Mark Silber

Abe's Saloon! Abe's Saloon!

From almost ten minutes past three o'clock until dusk of the long hot August afternoon (*as I lay dying in Yoknapatawpha General Hospital*) they sat in what old Miss Coldfurrow called Abe's Saloon because her father Abraham had called it that and because it served bourbon for fifty cents a shot and had a bar and tables and chairs and in the back, a room with a toilet that flushed and a sign on the door that read Men if you could read it. Opposite Quittin Cropson sat Miss Coldfurrow in widow's black eternal as death and black as the human soul in torment, a garment she had worn for forty-five years without thought of dry-cleaning it for what if she did and on that day He descended again and she wearing white or gray or blue or anything but black, what would happen then and who would have to suffer and die because of her woman's vanity?...

"Where am I?" Quittin Junior asked, Goodyear treads across his forehead like some simpleminded grotesque tattoo.

"Abe's Saloon! Abe's Saloon!"

John Ruemmler

Go Down, Goldilocks

She emerged, surfaced—obscurely juxtaposed against the unaxed woods and relinquished herself to it: stood, seventy years before she could or would stand defunctive of the old time, the old trees, the older people: prefecund concupiscent and unfabricated. Emerged: to the semiclearing and the unpainted clapboard house, swamp-sunk and decayed, the door hanging by one corncob, the sagging steps which she negotiated bought and amortized as if by instinct, knowing what it would be like even before she entered: the bear-rank room, the chairs then the porridge: gelatinous cold indomitable and gaseous.... The cold mass touched her lips and tongue, then fell: bounced off the table, along the tilted floor, and out the sagging doorway....

Foreknowing too the beds she would find as she ascended and absolved the dimness of the stairway, of the ravished and virginal oblivion as she relinquished herself to it, and the bears: huge, rank and flatulent, looming over her as she held her nose and felt the first foreshadowing of verbosity and gastric repudiation. “Ha. So you had to do it. In spite of Papa Bear’s and your fourth cousin’s coeval’s descendants’ warnings.... You knew this was bear country and a bear house already, but you had to do it anyway. In the bear’s own bed yet...”

“Yes. Vouchsafed and acknowledged, not against the repudiated porridge, but worthy of bequest by the dispossessed bears, presumptive of gnawing rapacity and grace. Don’t you see? I reckon they foreknew I’d do it in spite of that; finally in atavistic anticipation of all regurgitation...” She was out of the bed, hand to mouth, stumbling headlong down the newly rank stairway to the kitchen.

Ralph Schneider

Abstinence, Abstinence!

Because he knew. Had understood from the beginning, suspected anyway, from the speculative light in the old woman’s eyes, faded watery dead eyes the light squirrel-gray of executioners’ eyes, had guess from the hooded, secret, avid glance and the tentative smile of the pressed lips, not the actual fact of her unthinkable purpose but the possibility at least, even, with sudden startled acknowledgment, the probability of it. And in that same half-knowledge, with that same dark instinct, the uneasy premonition of the dreamer, he had stolen the chicken bone—not because of a certainty, not because he knew, had planned, had organized his mind to what he must do with it, but merely because he sense that it would be the instrument of their temporary safety and perhaps of rescue itself...

“Sister, wake up, she’s coming,” he whispered. “Here, take this chicken bone, and when she asks you to put out your finger, stick this out instead.”

“Oh, Hansel, don’t be silly,” his sister said sleepily, but even as he handed it to her, he saw the awed, sickened comprehension aborning in her eyes.

Michael Kernan

The Well

He sat with his sister at the hill’s base, looking up at the mound of earth relentless, the eminence of land unaccountable, the big pile of dirt; it seemed to grow higher in his eyes with each day, the mouth of the well it held deep in its bowels ever more distant...

“Damn, Jack, are you just goin to stand there lookin up at it?” she said, smashing his ubiquitous veil of nostalgic morbidity and stomping on his foot as well. He reached down to rub his foot and pick up the bucket that lay there, taking it with a hand still callused from gripping the rungs of his mother’s casket and dragging it across the field during the casket races at the big Obieonekenobie County annual picnic last summer. The memory of his fourth-place finish in that event filled him with further dolor.

“I’m coming, Jill,” he said and followed her up the path, the path that every Sartoris before him had scaled, dating back to the very first Sartorises and even further, to the primordial Sartorisaurus and its scaly ill-fated broods of Sartorisauruses. His grandfather, the sartorial Cyrus Sartoris, a Taurus, had followed this very trail...

“Jack, will you stop; having flashbacks and hurry up with the bucket?” She had already made the top of the hill and was drawing water from the well. The bucket, the bucket, he had never wanted the damn bucket, but every Sartoris male had held the weight of it. He took it to her, set it down, watched as she filled it...

Jack faced down the hill. “How about you go first?” he said, but it was too late: the bucket’s weight drew him down the precipitous decline, pulling him back-first down the hill. As he left his feet and felt his body topple end over end, he felt the relief of giving way to a larger force, although this feeling was combined with irritation at hearing Jill’s convulsive laughter as he picked up speed, irritation that gave way to empathy as her spastic mirth caused her to lose her balance and follow him in quick violent descent down the hill. After them both came the bucket, now void of its watery weight, falling at a relaxed pace, banging from rock to rock in a symphony for no man.

Jay Martel

Did You Ever Have a Sister?

Did you ever have a sister? asked Lena as they swished through the Grove. The savage light of the August dusk shimmered against their shynslick neon flesh bicycle shorts as the two girlshewomen abandoned the wisteria womb fertile fragrance to stride down Sorority Row. She the honeyblond perfect innocent the career virgin active i the unspoken dark evilness the corrupted rushee she the pristine Delta lineage the triple legacy sheen i the nouveau Metarie car dealer the status grasping gleam she the new convertible BMW i the shared '83 Cadillac... Oh that's right i know your brother *Yes* He drives that Caddy *Yes A Caddy*...

Elizabeth B. Boyd

The Itty-Bitty Place

Hula: Jiggling attractively to school every morning would have been her idea of hell if she had bothered to have ideas, to let the long recording of mankind's temporal and fleeting struggles with his doom enter her head at all, or even had she bothered to wake up, to open wide those eyes like mammalian monstrosities stained beneath the satyr's trampled hothouse grapes long enough to notice either the jiggling or the attractiveness or even the horse. Instead, she snored.

Will Varnish was an irascibly jolly old man of thirty or eighty with between two and sixteen children, depending on what year the author counted them up in. He held simultaneously every elected and appointed post, Baptist and Democrat, in this part of the county short of pooper-scooper, which with exemplary paternal concern and pure unadulterated foresight he had delegated to his son Jumpy, and ran the only combination general store and sawmill in American literature, whose sign read *Have Lumber Will Varnish*, belying not so much his interest in the business he would one day bequeath his numberless progeny and not even really so much his illimitable and maybe even boundless self-esteem but rather the absolute stranglehold he had on the pursuits, economic spiritual sexual and trivial, of the itty-bitty place.

When Will Varnish needed a husband for the hugely outrageously and somnolently pregnant Hula, Slim Sniflet was chewing, implacable.

"What more do you want?" Varnish said, cried, and otherwise demanded. "She'll never wake up long enough to get in your way, and I've already said I'll pay for a maid and a cook and a French architect to build you that house in town with the columns outside and the special shelf on the mantel for you to rest your boots on the inside. What else on God's earth could you possibly want?"...

Slim spat. "That sure is a jewel of a horse," he said.

Teresa Towner

As We Go Walking

Again that morning he commenced the trek, the peregrination, without illusion but also without hope of personal gain or coffee—though earlier, before the commencing even, he had doubtless rankled at, cursed perhaps, the dread intractable ritual of his dawn.

"Let's go," he said. "It's freezing."

From the stoop the poodle gazed at him in wordless canine paradox, as if in peevish acknowledgment of its own capitulation and servitude, its runny nostrils violating the air with fierce, antic jets of condensation. Suddenly, abruptly, without warning, the dog descended gingerly to the icy sidewalk.... So that was when the poodle walked right around it, the plug, the hydrant rising peremptory, mute, and inviolate from the mottled curb; but not even around it, simply past it, without sniffing even: its, the pet's, tail bolt upright, its shorn head erect and poised like an extravagant appendage or aberrant vegetable upon the furious spindle of its neck, its trunk and belly bound by the pink knit sweater and motionless save for the giddy churning of its repudiant paws.

"What is it, Quentin?" he said....

Quentin, still moving, cocked his ears in rakish and quizzical riposte.... And suddenly he was there, already standing by it, the gnarled leggy wisteria clambering leafless above the browned-out lawn in defunctive apotheosis (a vine which had prevailed not only as a symbol of the block, the street, the neighborhood association...but as an emblem too, a testament, to the endless tedium and exacerbation of yard work). The act, the deed itself—the ancient immemorial effluvium—lasted only for an instant....

“Good boy,” he said. Because the two of them, owner and pet alike, could hurry home now out of the inexorable tyranny of cold—and once again, he realized, doubtless endure.

David Impastato

The Warp and the Weft

He hoisted the ponderous material hermetically enveloping his slumbering frame and obtunded the insistent progeny of resplendent dawn that, like the phantasmagoric images of chimerical sleep, obtruded themselves on his somnolent sensibilities. He rose and gingerly traversed the dust covered floor, stepping slowly, the floor inveighing against his chilled feet, the pressures of consciousness already saddling his weary mind, stabbing relentlessly with their jagged spurs as if to wrest from him the tyrannical resolve which prompted him through his morning ritual....

He groped confusedly among the cornucopia of variegated garments, benefactors of the initiative of their possessor, who, insatiably inventive, had signed his ingenuity on these wan and disconsolate coalitions, adorning them with color borne from the iron rich soil and the blood of hapless verdure, yet, as he'd sat dyeing, he'd discerned the repercussions of his action, that, by advancing heterogeneity, fostered dilemma. The necessity of action became immediate... He wrapped his gaze around the diverse plenitude, inviting distinction from the competing alliances in order to obviate the imminent endorsement of one creation over another, that, by virtue of exclusion, would vitiate existing parity. Each reached violently for his attention, blitzing him with brilliant hue and design, the sound and the fury of the incursion sheathing reason with irrationality, forcing him to disregard loyalties and exalt practicality. Unvanquished, he chose argyle.

Eric A. Schade

Requiem for a Noun, Or Intruder in the Dusk

The cold brussels sprout rolled off the page of the book I was reading and lay inert and defunctive in my lap. Turning my head with a leisure at least three-fourths impotent rage, I saw him standing there holding the toy with which he had catapulted the vegetable, or rather the reverse, the toy first then the fat insolent fist clutching it and then above that the bland defiant face beneath the shock of black hair like tangle gas. It, the toy, was one of those cardboard funnels with a trigger near the point for firing a small celluloid ball. Letting the cold brussels sprout lie there in my lap for him to absorb or anyhow apprehend rebuke from, I took a pull at a Scotch highball I had had in my hand and then set it down on the end table beside me....

Peter DeVries

Michael Hollister (2014)