

## 390 QUOTATIONS



### William Faulkner

(1897-1962)

William Faulkner is the greatest American novelist, though Melville wrote the greatest novel in *Moby-Dick*, because Faulkner (1) wrote more masterpieces than any other novelist except Henry James—at least six; (2) created more original structures with significant thematic implications than any other novelist; (3) is the most prolific allegorist since Hawthorne; (4) conveyed a profoundly important historical vision; (5) invented a fictional world of his own more comprehensive, humane and evocative than that of any rival; and (6) with the exception of Hemingway developed the most influential prose style of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—Expressionistic and moving. Awarded a Nobel Prize in 1949, Faulkner also wrote one of the three best novellas in American literature in *The Bear* and a dozen world class short stories. And no one has spoken with more literary authority on race until the emergence of Toni Morrison.

ORDER OF TOPICS: youth, family, relationship with blacks, war, Oxford Miss., uneducated poet, gentleman farmer, family responsibilities, neighbors, reclusive, autobiography, Sherwood Anderson, motivation, aspiration, Paris, the North, the South, Mississippi, Yoknapatawpha County, time, Virginia, decadent southern traditions, curse of slavery, black civil rights, equality, political fear, economic fear, compulsory integration, race, morality, God, religion, Christ, Christianity, heaven, pantheism, nature, Caddy, Lena Grove, Mrs. Compson, Dilsey, Drusilla, Judith Sutpen, gender equality, women, courtship, love, marriage, sex, illicit sex, rape, determinism, Existentialism, human nature, endurance, immortality of mankind, art, fiction, books, Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, Henry James, Theodore Dreiser, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Robert Penn Warren, Tennessee Williams, Richard Wright, Thomas Mann, European influences, Freud, ranking American novelists, Hemingway, Review of *The Old Man and the Sea* (1953), writing, speed, sentences, paragraphs, compressing the world, style, words, symbols, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), lifting hearts, characters, Realism, the writer, the American writer, critics, rereading, Hollywood, Clark Gable, Communism, America, money, government, Postmodernism, Political Correctness, censorship, Postmodern fiction, popular atheism, the younger generation, alcohol, stature, amazement, wisdom, advice, death, immortality, on his works.

## YOUTH

I didn't like school and I quit about sixth grade.

## FAMILY

My family has lived for generations in one same small section of north Mississippi. My great-grandfather held slaves and went to Virginia in command of a Mississippi infantry regiment in 1861.

The name is "Falkner." My great-grandfather, whose name I bear, was a considerable figure in his time and provincial milieu. He was prototype of John Sartoris: raised, organized, paid the expenses of and commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mississippi Infantry, 1861-2, etc. Was part of Stonewall Jackson's left at 1<sup>st</sup> Manassas that afternoon; we have a citation in James Longstreet's longhand as his corps commander after 2<sup>nd</sup> Manassas. He built the first railroad in our county, wrote a few books...died in a duel... The place of our origin shows on larger maps: a hamlet named Falkner just below Tennessee line on his railroad.... Maybe when I began to write, even though I thought then I was writing for fun, I secretly was ambitious and did not want to ride on grandfather's coat-tails, and so accepted the "u," [in Faulkner] was glad of such an easy way to strike out for myself.

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH BLACKS

I grew up with Negro children, my foster mother was a Negro woman, I slept in her bed and the Negro children and I slept in the same bed together. To me they were no different than anyone else. I noticed that with my own children.

If the race problems were just left to the children, they'd be solved soon enough. It's the grown-ups and especially the women who keep the prejudice alive.

To MAMMY CAROLINE BARR. Mississippi (1840-1940) who was born in slavery and who gave to my family a fidelity without stint or calculation of recompense and to my childhood an immeasurable devotion and love. [Dedication to *Go Down, Moses* in 1942; Caroline Barr was the model for Dilsey.]

Caroline has known me all her life. It was my privilege to see her out of hers. After my father's death, to Mammy I came to represent the head of that family to which she had given a half century of fidelity and devotion. But the relationship between us never became that of master and servant. She still remained...a fount of authority over my conduct and of security for my physical welfare, and of active and constant affection and love. She was an active and constant precept for decent behavior. From her I learned to tell the truth, to refrain from waste, to be considerate of the weak and respectful of age.

[Asked why he did not charge his black tenant farmers any rent]: The Negroes don't always get a square deal in Mississippi.

## WAR

War is an episode, a crisis, a fever the purpose of which is to rid the body of fever. So the purpose of a war is to end the war.

I believe I have discovered the reason inherent in human nature why warfare will never be abolished. It's the only condition under which the man who is not a scoundrel can escape for a while from his female kin.

Men have been pacifists for every reason under the sun except to avoid danger and fighting.

War and drink are the two things man is never too poor to buy.

The war [World War I] quit on us before we could do anything about it. The same day they [R.A.F.] lined up the whole class, thanked us warmly for whatever it was they figured we had done to deserve it, and announced that we would be discharged the next day, which meant that we had the afternoon to celebrate the Armistice and some planes to use in doing it. I took up a rotary-motored spad with a crock of bourbon

in the cockpit, gave diligent attention to both, and executed some reasonably adroit chandelles, an Immelman or two, and part of what could easily have turned out to be a nearly perfect loop...a hangar got in the way and I flew through the roof and ended up hanging in the rafters.

I'm inclined to think that a military background wouldn't hurt anyone.

#### OXFORD, MISSISSIPPI

Now he was home again and not at home, or at least not able to accept the postwar world.

[Upon being charged with dereliction of duties as postmaster at the University of Mississippi post office]: As long as I live under the capitalistic system I expect to have my life influenced by the demands of moneyed people. But I will be damned if I propose to be at the beck and call of every itinerant scoundrel who has two cents to invest in a postage stamp. This, sir, is my resignation.

#### UNEDUCATED POET

I don't have enough education. I don't know anything about ideas, to write an essay. All I know about are people in the seethe and fury of the human condition, in motion. Like all uneducated people, I have a certain distrust of ideas. I think that, if I had to depend on something, I would depend on what my heart tells me, not on what my mind tells me, because I have no confidence in my brain.

A poet without education, only instinct and a fierce conviction and belief in the worth and truth of what he was doing.

#### GENTLEMAN FARMER

I ain't a literary man.

I think of myself as a farmer, not a writer.

I like horses—I breed and train horses. That is what I like to do more than writing.

[Asked by a naïve fan which character he was in *Sanctuary* (1930), in which Temple Drake is raped with a corncob by the criminal Popeye] Madame, I was the corncob.

A gentleman can live through anything.

#### FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

You have to fight your family for every inch of art you gain—at the very time when the whole tribe of them are hanging like so many buzzards over every penny you earn by it.

The writer's only responsibility is to his art. He will be completely ruthless if he is a good one. Everything goes by the board: honor, pride, decency, security, happiness, all to get the book written. If a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate; the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is worth any number of old ladies.

Beginning at the age of thirty I...began to become the sole, principal and partial support—food, shelter, heat, clothes, medicine, kotex, school fees, toilet paper and picture shows—of my mother...[a] brother's widow and child, a wife of my own and two step children, my own child; I inherited my father's debts and his dependents, white and black without inheriting yet from anyone one inch of land or one stick of furniture or one cent of money

I own a larger parcel of it than anybody else in town and nobody gave me any of it or loaned me a nickel to buy any of it with and all my relations and fellow townsmen, including the borrowers and frank sponges, all prophesied I'd never be more than a bum.

I have been trying for about ten years to carry a load that no artist has any business attempting: oldest son to widowed mothers and inept brothers and nephews and wives and other female connections and their children, most of whom I don't like and with none of whom I have anything in common, even to make conversation about. I am either not brave enough or not scoundrel enough to take my hat and walk out. I don't know which.

#### NEIGHBORS

A lot of them don't know I write books, and they think I don't do anything at all. The bookstore in Oxford only sells school-books. The drug store down there has some of my books—some times.

#### RECLUSIVE

I have deliberately buried myself in this little lost almost illiterate town.

The most comfortable place to sit I've ever found is a hickory chair and a post.

Maybe the only thing worse than having to give gratitude constantly is having to accept it.

This is a free country. Folks have a right to send me letters, and I have a right not to read them.

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.

[Declining to attend a dinner honoring him with the prestigious Howells Medal]: I am a farmer this time of year; up until he sells crops, no Mississippi farmer has the time or money either to travel anywhere on. Also, I doubt if I know anything worth talking two minutes about.

[Declining an invitation from President John F. Kennedy to a dinner for artists at the White House in 1962]: I'm too old at my age to travel that far to eat with strangers.

You have seen a country wagon come into town, with a hound dog under the wagon. It stops on the Square and the folks get out, but that hound never gets far from that wagon. He might be cajoled or scared out for a short distance, but first thing you know he has scuttled back under the wagon; maybe he growls at you a little. Well, that's me.

#### AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I graduated from grammar school, went two years to highschool, but only during fall to play on the football team, my parents finally caught on, worked about a year as a book-keeper in grandfather's bank, went to RAF, returned home, attended 1 year at University of Mississippi by special dispensation for returned troops, studying European languages, still didn't like school and quit that. Rest of education undirected reading....

What I have written is of course in the public domain and the public is welcome; what I ate and did and when and where, is my own business. I more or less grew up in my father's livery stable. Being the eldest of four boys, I escaped my mother's influence pretty easy, since my father thought it was fine for me to apprentice to the business. I imagine I would have been in the livery stable yet if it hadn't been for motor car. When I came back from RAF, my father's health was beginning to fail and he had a political job: business manager of the state University, given to him by a countryman whom my grandfather had made a lawyer of, who became governor of Mississippi. I didn't want to go to work; it was by my father's request that I entered the University, which I didn't want to do either. That was in 1920.

Since then I have: Painted houses. Served as a 4<sup>th</sup> class postmaster. Worked for a New Orleans bootlegger. Deck hand in freighters (Atlantic). Hand in a Gulf of Mexico shrimp trawler. Stationary boiler fireman. Barnstormed an aeroplane out of cow pastures. Operated a farm, cotton and feed, breeding and raising

mules and cattle. Wrote (or tried) for moving pictures. Oh yes, was a scout master for two years, was fired for moral reasons.

#### SHERWOOD ANDERSON

One day during the months [1922-23] while we walked and talked in New Orleans—or Anderson talked and I listened—I found him sitting on a bench in Jackson Square.... Then in the evening we would meet again, with a bottle now, and now he would really talk... So I began a novel, *Soldier's Pay*. I had known Mrs. Anderson before I knew him.... She said, "Sherwood says he'll make a swap with you. He says that if he doesn't have to read it, he'll tell Liveright (Horace Liveright: his own publisher) to take it." "Done," I said, and that was all.

#### MOTIVATION

A man works for a fairly simple—limited—range of things: money, women, glory; all nice to have, but glory's best, and the best of glory is from his peers, like the soldier who has the good opinion not of man but of other soldiers, themselves experts in it, who are themselves brave too.

#### ASPIRATION

The work never matches the dream of perfection the artist had to start with.

I think that the writer must want primarily perfection, that that is his one chance while he has breath, to attain perfection.

Always dream and shoot higher than you know you can do. Don't bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself.

Really the writer doesn't want success.... He knows he has a short span of life, that the day will come when he must pass through the wall of oblivion, and he wants to leave a scratch on that wall—Kilroy was here—that somebody a hundred, or a thousand years later will see.

Teach yourself by your own mistakes; people learn only by error. The good artist believes that nobody is good enough to give him advice. He has supreme vanity. No matter how much he admires the old writer, he wants to beat him.

#### PARIS

By temperament I'm a vagabond and a tramp.

At that time I didn't think of myself as a writer, I was a tramp then, and I didn't—I wasn't interested in literature nor literary people. They were—I was—there at the same time, I knew Joyce, I knew of Joyce, and I would go to some effort to go to the café that he inhabited to look at him. But that was the only literary man that I remember seeing in Europe in those days.

I read *Ulysses* in the middle 20's and I had been scribbling for several years.... You know, sometimes I think there must be a sort of pollen of ideas floating in the air, which fertilizes similarly minds here and there which have not had direct contact. I had heard of Joyce, of course. Some one told me about what he was doing, and it is possible that I was influenced by what I heard. When I started to write *The Sound and the Fury* [1929], however, I had no idea of writing the book it finally became.

And I don't believe that Hemingway, or Fitzgerald, either, ever really considered themselves as belonging to a lost generation.

#### THE NORTH

It's not enough to say that perhaps the machine which defeated his enemy was a Frankenstein which, once the Southern armies were consumed, turned on him [the Northern agrarian] and enslaved him, removing him from a middle class fixed upon the land, translated him into a baronage based upon a slavery not of human beings but of machines.

## THE SOUTH

Everyone in the South has no time for reading because they are all too busy writing.

A hundred years ago there were two cultures, two economies in my country, the United States, and ninety-five years ago we fought a war over it and my side were whipped. We were invaded, we went through something of your own experience [in Japan], only our invaders made no effort to help us.

To produce cotton we have to have a system of peonage....a planter who has a thousand acres wants to keep the Negro in a position of debt peonage and in order to do it he is going to tell the poor class of white folks that the Negro is going to violate his daughter. But all he wants at the back of it is a system of peonage to produce his cotton at the highest rate of profit.

It's the only really authentic region in the United States because a deep indestructible bond still exists between man and his environment. In the South, above all, there is still a common acceptance of the world, a common view of life, and a common morality.

It's my country, my native land and I love it.... I love it, and it has its faults and I will try to correct them, but I will not try to correct them when I am writing a story, because I'm talking about people then.

Well, I love it and hate it. Some of the things there I don't like at all, but I was born there, and that's my home, and I will still defend it even if I hate it.

## MISSISSIPPI

To understand the world, you must first understand a place like Mississippi.

Mississippi is still the frontier. In Mississippi an officer of the law can't go around without a gun where he can reach it fast because he never knows when he's going to need it.

## YOKNAPATAWPHA COUNTY

It's a Chickasaw Indian word meaning water runs slow through flat land.

Beginning with *Sartoris* I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it, and that by sublimating the actual into the apocryphal I would have complete liberty to use whatever talent I might have to its absolute top. It opened up a gold mine of other people, so I created a cosmos of my own. I can move these people around like God, not only in space but in time too.

## TIME

The past is never dead. It's not even past.

Memory believes before knowing remembers.

A mule will labor ten years willingly and patiently for you, for the privilege of kicking you once.

It's all about now you see: tomorrow began yesterday and yesterday won't be over until tomorrow.

A man is the sum of his misfortunes. One day you'd think misfortune would get tired but then time is your misfortune.

I give it to you [his grandfather's watch] not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it.

Time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life.

There isn't any time...only the present moment, in which I include both the past and the future, and that is eternity. In my opinion time can be shaped quite a bit by the artist; after all, man is never time's slave.

The fact that I have moved my characters around in time successfully, at least in my own estimation, proves to me my own theory that time is a fluid condition which has no existence except in the momentary avatars of individual people. There is no such thing as *was*—only *is*. If *was* existed, there would be no grief or sorrow.

#### VIRGINIA

I love Virginians because Virginians are all snobs and I like snobs. A snob has to spend so much time being a snob that he has little time left to meddle with you.

#### DECADENT SOUTHERN TRADITIONS

That's the one trouble with this country: everything, weather, all, hangs on too long. Like our rivers, our land: opaque, slow, violent; shaping and creating the life of man in its implacable and brooding image.

A fellow is more afraid of the trouble he might have than he ever is of the trouble he's already got. He'll cling to trouble he's used to before he'll risk a change. Yes. A man will talk about how he'd like to escape from living folks. But it's the dead folks that do him the damage. It's the dead ones that lay quiet in one place and dot try to hold him, that he cant escape from.

Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition [Victorian gentility], a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town... We had long thought of them as a tableau; Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back-flung front door.... Thus she passed from generation to generation—dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse.... Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. ["A Rose for Emily"]

No man can cause more grief than the one clinging blindly to the vices of his ancestors.

#### CURSE OF SLAVERY

The curse is slavery, which is an intolerable condition—no man shall be enslaved—and the South has got to work that curse out and it will, if it's let alone.... I'm a States' Rights man.

There isn't a Southerner alive who doesn't curse the day the first Northern ship captain landed a Negro slave in this country.

And no tyrant is more ruthless than he who was only yesterday the oppressed, the slave.

#### BLACK CIVIL RIGHTS

There are many people in Mississippi who will go to any length, even violence, to prevent [desegregation of schools and voting rights for blacks], I am afraid. I am doing what I can. I can see the possible time when I shall have to leave my native state, something as the Jew had to flee from Germany during Hitler.

I get a lot of insulting and threatening letters and telephone calls since I established my position. The tragic thing is that some of them come from Negroes. At least they say they're Negroes. It isn't just a solidarity of race—you get doctors and lawyers and preachers and newspaper editors and some Negroes too, all grouped against a few liberals like me. People phone me up to threaten my life at three or four in the morning—they're usually drunk by then.... My friends say I ought to carry a pistol. But I don't think

anyone will shoot me, it would cause too much of a stink. But the other liberals in my part of the country carry guns all the time.

#### EQUALITY

I think equality for the Negro will come.

To live anywhere in the world today and be against equality because of race or color is like living in Alaska and being against snow.

If a Negro can get a Congressional Medal for saving your son, why can't he sit in the same class-room as your son's children?

[People] have to be taught the responsibility of equality. That the Constitution never said everybody is to have happiness. They only have the right to gain happiness if they could, and happiness or freedom is something that you have got to work for.

Ninety per cent of the Negroes are on one side with the whites against a handful like me who believe that equality is important.

#### POLITICAL FEAR

Most segregationists are afraid of something.

I think that basically what the people in the South are afraid of is the Negro vote. That if enough of him can vote, he will elect his own people or his own kind to office until some blackguard white man comes along and uses him again through his, the Negro's, ignorance.

#### ECONOMIC FEAR

The whole trouble between the black and the white is not in anything racial or [ethnic]. It's an economic fear that if the white man allows the Negro any sort of advancement whatever, the Negro will take his economy away from him.

There's a class of white man that hates the Negro simply because he's afraid that the Negro will beat him at his own job, his own economic level, and he would feel the same toward anything that he believed would beat him at his economic level. It could be a piece of machinery. He would hate that too.

#### COMPULSORY INTEGRATION

Now I must go on record as opposing the forces outside the South which would use legal or police compulsion to eradicate that evil overnight. I was against compulsory segregation. I am just as strongly against compulsory integration. Firstly from principle. Secondly because I don't believe it will work.... We have had many violent inexcusable personal crimes of race against race in the South, but since 1919 the major examples of communal race tension have been more prevalent in the North.

#### RACE

It is a terrible burden that the Negro has to carry in my country.

Just when do men that have different blood in them stop hating one another?

A nigger is not a person so much as a form of behavior; a sort of obverse reflection of the white people he lives among.

But after that I seemed to see them for the first time not as people, but as a thing, a shadow in which I lived, we lived, all white people, all other people. I thought of all the children coming forever and ever into the world, white with the black shadow, already falling upon them before they drew breath. And I seemed to



see the black shadow in the shape of a cross. And it seemed like the white babies were struggling, even before they drew breath, to escape from the shadow that was not only upon them but beneath them too, flung out like their arms were flung out, as if they were nailed to the cross. I saw all the little babies that would ever be in the world, the ones not yet even born—a long line of them with their arms spread, on the black crosses.

They [the blacks] will endure. They are better than we are. Stronger than we are. Their vices are vices aped from white men or that white men and bondage have taught them: improvidence and intemperance and evasion--not laziness: evasion: of what white men had set them to, not for their aggrandizement or even comfort but his own.... And their virtues... Endurance...and pity and tolerance and forbearance and fidelity and love of children...whether their own or not or black or not.

Maybe the Negro is the best. He does more with less than anybody else.

#### MORALITY

Unless you're ashamed of yourself now and then, you're not honest.

A gentleman accepts the responsibility of his actions and bears the burden of their consequences.

A man's moral conscience is the curse he had to accept from the gods in order to gain from them the right to dream.

Some things you must always be unable to bear. Some things you must never stop refusing to bear. Injustice and outrage and dishonor and shame. No matter how young you are or how old you have got. Not for kudos and not for cash. Your picture in the paper nor money in the bank, neither. Just refuse to bear them.

So never be afraid, never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion; against injustice, lying and greed. If you, not just you in this room tonight, but in all the other thousands of classrooms like this one today and tomorrow and next week will do this, not as a class or classes, but as individuals, men and women, you will change the earth. [address to his daughter's high school graduation class]

#### GOD

To me, a proof of God is in the firmament, the stars.

I have believed that God is not only a gentleman and a sport; he is a Kentuckian too.

Well, I believe in God. Sometimes Christianity gets pretty debased, but I do believe in God, yes. I believe that man has a soul that aspires towards what we call God, what we mean by God.

To me, a proof of man's immortality...that the idea of a God is valuable, is in the fact that he writes the books and composes the music and paints the pictures. They are the firmament of mankind. They are the proof that if there is a God and he wants us to see something that proves to him that mankind exists, that would be proof.

#### RELIGION

[Asked whether he would favor individual rather than organized religion]: I do, always. [Asked whether he thought man must work out his own salvation from within]: I do, yes.

#### CHRIST

"I've seed de first en de last," Dilsey said.

If Jesus returned today we would have to crucify him quick in our own defense, to justify and preserve the civilization we have worked and suffered and died shrieking and cursing in rage and impotence and terror for two thousand years to create and perfect in man's own image; if Venus returned she would be a soiled man in a subway lavatory with a palm full of French post-cards.

#### CHRISTIANITY

I think that the trouble with Christianity is that we've never tried it yet.

People to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too.

Remember, the writer must write out of his background. He must write out of what he knows and the Christian legend is part of any Christian's background, especially the background of a country boy, a Southern country boy.... It has nothing to do with how much of it I might believe or disbelieve—it's just there.

In *A Fable* [1954] the Christian allegory was the right allegory to use in that particular story, like an oblong square corner is the right corner with which to build an oblong rectangular house. The carpenter we are speaking of never lacks that hammer.

Writers have always drawn, and always will draw, upon the allegories of moral consciousness, for the reason that the allegories are matchless—the three men in *Moby-Dick*, who represent the trinity of conscience: knowing nothing, knowing but not caring, knowing and caring.

No one is without Christianity, if we agree on what we mean by the word. It is every individual's individual code of behavior by means of which he makes himself a better human being than his nature wants him to be, if he followed his nature only. Whatever its symbol—cross or crescent or whatever—that symbol is man's reminder of his duty inside the human race.

#### HEAVEN

Surely heaven must have something of the color and shape of whatever village or hill or cottage of which the believer says, This is my own.

#### PANTHEISM

Then he relinquished completely to it. It was the watch and the compass. He was still tainted...and hung them on a bush... When he realized he was lost, he did as Sam had coached and drilled him...the wilderness coalesced. It rushed, soundless, and solidified—the tree, the bush, the compass and the watch glinting where a ray of sunlight touched them. Then he saw the bear. It did not emerge, appear: it was just there, immobile, fixed in the green and windless noon's hot dappling, not as big as he had dreamed it but as big as he had expected, bigger, dimensionless against the dappled obscurity, looking at him. Then it moved. It crossed the glade without haste, walking for an instant into the sun's full glare and out of it, and stopped again and looked back at him across one shoulder. Then it was gone. It didn't walk into the woods. It faded, sank back into the wilderness without motion as he had watched a fish, a huge old bass, sink back into the depths of its pool and vanish without even any movement of its fins.

#### NATURE

The last bear disappeared from the Delta after the big flood in 1927.

There used to be a bear like Big Ben in our country when I was a boy. He'd gotten one paw caught in a trap. [*The Bear*]

The wilderness to me was the past... The bear was a symbol of the old forces, not evil forces, but the old forces which in man's youth were not evil, but that they were in man's blood, his inheritance, his impulses came from that old or ruthless malevolence, which was nature.

In an even wilder part of the river's jungle of cane and gum and pin oak, there is an Indian mound. Aboriginal, it rises profoundly and darkly enigmatic, the only elevation of any kind in the wild, flat jungle of river bottom...it possessed inferences of secret and violent blood, of savage and sudden destruction, as though the yells and hatchets we associated with Indians through the hidden and secret dime novels which we passed among ourselves were but trivial and momentary manifestations of what dark power still dwelled or lurked there...like a dark and nameless beast lightly and lazily slumbering with bloody jaws.

Because this is my land. I can feel it, tremendous, still primeval, looming, musing downward upon the tent, the camp—this whole puny evanescent clutter of human sojourn which after our two weeks will vanish, and in another week will be completely healed, traceless in this unmarked solitude.... This land, said the old hunter. No wonder the ruined woods I used to know don't cry for retribution. The very people who destroyed them will accomplish their revenge.

Well, the New South has got too many people in it and it is changing the country too much. It's—has—it gets rid of the part of Mississippi that I liked when I was young, which was the forest. Though it's foolish to be against progress because everyone is a part of progress...

#### CADDY COMPSON

Caddy smells like trees.

I loved her so much I couldn't decide to give her life just for the duration of a short story. She [Caddy] deserved more than that. So my novel was created [*The Sound and the Fury*]... I did not realize then that I was trying to manufacture the sister which I did not have and the daughter which I was to lose, though the former might have been apparent from the fact that Caddy had three brothers...

#### LENA GROVE

I knew that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn't care whether there was a word for it or not.

[*Light in August*] began with Lena Grove, the idea of the young girl with nothing, pregnant, determined to find her sweetheart. It was—that was out of my admiration for women, for the courage and the endurance of women.

#### MRS. CAROLINE COMPSON

"I am not one of those women who can stand things."

#### DILSEY

Dilsey is one of my own favorite characters, because she is brave, courageous, generous, gentle, and honest. She's much more brave and honest and generous than me.

#### DRUSILLA SARTORIS

She loved, had capacity to love, for love, to give and accept love. Only she tried twice and failed twice to find somebody not just strong enough to deserve it, earn it, match it, but even brave enough to accept it.

(Drusilla would no more have bothered with flowers than Father himself would have...while she had ridden in man's clothes and with her hair cut short like any other member of Father's troop, across Georgia and both Carolinas in front of Sherman's army)... ["An Odor of Verbena"]

#### JUDITH SUTPEN

It was not Judith who was the object of Bon's love or of Henry's solicitude. She was just the blank shape, the empty vessel in which each of them strove to preserve, not the illusion of himself nor his illusion of the

other but what each conceived the other to believe him to be—the man and the youth, seducer and seduced, victimized in turn each by the other, conqueror vanquished by his own strength...

#### GENDER EQUALITY

Women will have more freedom in this country than they had once.

They are much more sensible than men, they have to be. They have held families together and it's because of families that a race is continued, and I would be sorry to think that my work had given anyone the impression that I held women in morally a lower position than men, which I do not.

#### WOMEN

Every young girl ought to have a right to see Paris. [in reference to his first daughter]

You can't beat woman anyhow and...if you are wise or dislike trouble and uproar you don't even try to.

Maybe times are never strange to women: it is just one continuous monotonous thing full of the repeated follies of their menfolk.

Menfolks listens to somebody because of what he says. Women don't. They don't care what he said. They listens because of what he is.

One of the nicest conveniences a woman can have is someone she can pick up when she needs or wants him; then when she doesn't, she can drop him and know that he will still be right there when she does need or want him again. Only she should remember this. Sometimes when she drops him, he might break.

Some men are improved by women...some of the best people are women, and I'm inclined to think that every young man should know one old woman, that they can talk more sense—they'd be good for any young man—well, an old aunt, or an old school teacher, just to listen to.

There was the old woman in stories of our Civil War in the middle of the last century who held a family together, did the best she could to keep the Negroes fed and clothed, to look after the mothers a little more while the menfolks were off galloping around the country waving their swords after glory.

It's much more fun to try to write about women because I think women are marvelous, they're wonderful, and I know very little about them, and so I just—it's much more fun to try to write about women than about men—more difficult, yes.

#### COURTSHIP

You never have but one chance with a woman, you know. If you fail her then, she's done with you—the next man that comes along gets her without a struggle. It ain't the man a woman cares for that reaps the harvest of passion, you know: it's the next man that comes along after she's lost the other one.

#### LOVE

You don't love because: you love despite; not for the virtues, but despite the faults.

#### MARRIAGE

I'll write to Hemingway. Poor bloke, to have to marry three times to find out that marriage is a failure, and the only way to get any peace out of it is (if you are fool enough to marry at all) keep the first one and stay as far away from her as much as you can, with the hope of some day outliving her. At least you will be safe then from any other one marrying you—which is bound to happen if you ever divorce her. Apparently man can be cured of drugs, drink, gambling, biting his nails and picking his nose, but not of marrying.

## SEX

I see now that I have a quite decided strain of puritanism (in its proper sense, of course, not our American one) regarding sex. I was not aware of it. But now, in casting back and rereading now and then or here and there of my own work, I can see it plainly. I have found it quite interesting.

So she would meet him in the afternoons, on pretense of hunting hen-nests, in a thicket beside the creek near her house, in which sylvan Pan-hallowed retreat, the fourteen-year-old boy whose habit it was to spy on them told, Varner would not even remove his hat.

By merely walking down the aisle between them she would transform the very wooden desks and benches themselves into a grove of Venus and fetch every male in the room, from the children just entering puberty to the grown men of nineteen and twenty, one of whom was already a husband and father, who could turn ten acres of land between sunup and sundown, springing into embattled rivalry, importunate each for precedence in immolation...a pagan triumphal prostration before the supreme primal uterus.

He had a vision of himself transporting not only across the village's horizon but across the embracing proscenium of the entire inhabited world like the sun itself, a kaleidoscopic convolution of mammalian ellipses....

He held her loosely, still smiling, whispering his jumble of fragmentary Greek and Latin verse and American Mississippi obscenity, when suddenly she managed to free one of her arms, the elbow coming up hard under his chin. It caught him off-balance; before he regained it her other hand struck him a full-armed blow in the face.... "Stop pawing me," she said. "You old headless horseman Ichabod Crane."

In the South you are ashamed of being a virgin. Boys. Men. They lie about it. Because it means less to women, Father said. He said it was men invented virginity not women.

The next time you try to seduce anyone, don't do it with talk, with words. Women know more about words than men ever will. And they know how little they can ever possibly mean.

He was looking at her from behind the smiling that wasn't smiling but was something you were not supposed to see beyond.

## ILLICIT SEX

It's not the romance of illicit love which draws them, not the passionate idea of two damned and doomed and isolated forever against the world and God and the irrevocable which draws men; it's because the idea of illicit love is a challenge to them, because they have an irresistible desire to (and an unshakable belief that they can, as they all believe they can successfully conduct a boarding house) take the illicit love and make it respectable...

## RAPE

"*Shhhhhhhhh! Shhhhhhhhhhh!*" they said, freshening the icepack, smoothing her hair, examining it for gray; "poor girl!" Then to one another: "Do you suppose anything really happened?" their eyes darkly aglitter, secret and passionate. "Shhhhhhhhhhh! Poor girl! Poor Minnie!" ["Dry September"]

## DETERMINISM

You get born and you try this and you don't 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 don't 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 can't 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 a sudden it's all over.

## EXISTENTIALISM

Father taught us that all men are just accumulations dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps where all previous dolls had been thrown away the sawdust flowing from what wound in what side that not for me died not.

How do our lives ravel out into the no-wind, no-sound, the weary gestures wearily recapitulant: echoes of old compulsions with no-hand on no-string: in sunset we fall into furious attitudes, dead gestures of dolls.

Since *man is mortal*, the only immortality possible for him is to leave something behind him that is immortal since it will always move. This is the artist's way of scribbling "Kilroy was here" on the wall of the final and irrevocable oblivion through which he must someday pass. [emphasis added]

## HUMAN NATURE

Man is important because he possesses a moral sense.

Man is noble. I believe in man in spite of everything.

Most men are a little better than their circumstances give them a chance to be.

Man knows so little about his fellows. In his eyes all men or women act upon what he believes would motivate him if he were mad enough to do what that other man or woman is doing.

My idea is that no person is wholly good or wholly bad, that all people in my belief try to be better than they are and probably will be.

I think that you really can't say that any man is good or bad. I grant you there are some exceptions, but man is the victim of himself, or his fellows, or his own nature, or his environment, but no man is good or bad... He tries to do the best he can within his lights.

Sometimes I aint so sho who's got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and when he aint.... It's like it ain't so much what a fellow does, but it's the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it.

They all talked at once, their voices insistent and contradictory and impatient, making of unreality a possibility, then a probability, then an incontrovertible fact, as people will when their desires become words.

The last sound on the worthless earth will be two human beings trying to launch a homemade spaceship and already quarreling about where they are going next.

## HUMAN ENDURANCE

I decline to accept the end of man.

The salvation of the world is in man's suffering.

I think that a certain amount of disaster and trouble is good for people.

Man performs, engenders, so much more than he can or should have to bear. That's how he finds that he can bear anything.... That's what's so terrible.

I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion

and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past. The poet's voice need not be merely the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail.

Contentment and happiness come only to vegetables when they sit still, never to man himself because he is the victim of his own thinking and his own sweat.

#### IMMORTALITY OF MANKIND

The immortality is the fact that frail, fragile man, a web of bone and nerves, mostly water, in a ramshackle universe has outlasted most other forms of mammalian life. He has outlasted his own disasters, and I think that he will continue—that...the species which has created the fine pictures, the music, the statues, the books, is too valuable for omnipotence, God whoever he is, to let perish.... That is the immortality of the race, not of the individual.

#### ART

Art is not only man's most supreme expression; it is also the salvation of mankind.

Art is simpler than people think because there is so little to write about. All the moving things are eternal in man's history and have been written before, and if a man writes hard enough, sincerely enough, humbly enough, and with the unalterable determination never never never to be quite satisfied with it, he will repeat them, because art like poverty takes care of its own, shares its bread.

Art is not concerned with environment either...the best job that was ever offered to me was to become landlord in a brothel. In my opinion it's the perfect milieu for an artist to work in. It gives him perfect economic freedom; he's free of fear and hunger; he has a roof over his head and nothing whatever to do except keep a few simple accounts and to go once every month and pay off the local police. The place is quiet during the evening hours, which is the best time of the day to work. There's enough social life in the evening, if he wishes to participate, to keep him from being bored; it gives him a certain standing in his society...all the inmates of the house are females and would defer to him and call him "sir." All the bootleggers in the neighborhood would call him "sir." And he could call the police by their first names.

#### FICTION

The best fiction is far more true than any journalism.

#### BOOKS

The Old Testament is some of the finest, most robust and most amusing folklore I know. The New Testament is philosophy and ideas, and something of the quality of poetry. I read that too, but I read the Old Testament for the pleasure of watching what these amazing people did.

I read *Don Quixote* every year.

I read *Moby-Dick* every four or five years.

It's one of the best books ever written. [*Moby-Dick*]

[Asked what is the greatest book in American literature]: Probably *Moby-Dick*. There are others—*Huckleberry Finn*.

The two books I like best are *Moby-Dick* and *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, but I wouldn't say Melville or Conrad was "my favorite author." I'd just like to have written those two books more than any others I can think of.

*Moby-Dick*, *Don Quixote*, *Huck Finn*, *Madame Bovary*, *Brothers Karamazov*, they're old friends of mine... Keats, Shelley, Byron, the Elizabethans, Marlowe, Thomas Campion; the French poets, Verlaine and Laforgue. I think that every novelist is a failed poet.

*Leaves of Grass* is one of the good books, and I remember when I read more poetry I read Elinor Wylie, Conrad Aiken, E.A. Robinson, Frost.

MARK TWAIN

[Mark Twain was] the first truly American writer, and all of us since are his heirs.

WALT WHITMAN

It was only with Twain, Walt Whitman, there became a true indigenous American culture.

HENRY JAMES

Henry James was one of the nicest old ladies I ever met.

Henry James to me was a prig, except *The Turn of the Screw*, which was very fine *tour de force*.

Like Henry James, he attained verisimilitude by means of tediousness.

THEODORE DREISER

Dreiser used the best material he had, the best method, the best skill he had, which wasn't very much. He was a bad writer.

T.S. ELIOT

[T.S. Eliot] I'm perfectly willing for him to have his opinion, but to me I ain't interested in it.

JOYCE

When I read Joyce and Proust it is possible that my career as a writer was already fixed, so that there was no chance for it to be influenced other than in the tricks of the trade.

You should approach Joyce's *Ulysses* as the illiterate Baptist preacher approaches the Old Testament: with faith.

I have read *Ulysses* once. It is interesting, but I probably did not like it, for I never went back to it. One goes back to the books one likes.

James Joyce was one of the great men of my time. He was electrocuted by the divine fire. He, Thomas Mann, were the great writers of my time. He was probably—might have been the greatest.

ROBERT PENN WARREN

I never read but one book of Mr. [Robert Penn] Warren's. It was called *All the King's Men*, and the only good thing in that book, and that was very good, was a story which he put into the middle of it.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

A play called *Camino Real* I think is the best. The others were not quite that good. I saw *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and that was about the wrong people—the problems of children are not worth three acts. The story was the old man, I thought, the father. That's all I know of [Tennessee] Williams. *Camino Real* was—it touched a very fine high moment of poetry, I think.



## RICHARD WRIGHT

You [Richard Wright] said it well, as well as it could have been said in this form. Because I think you said it much better in *Native Son*. I hope you will keep on saying it, but I hope you will say it as an artist, as in *Native Son*. I think you will agree that the good lasting stuff comes out of one's individual imagination and sensitivity to and comprehension of the suffering of Everyman, Anyman, not out of the memory of his own grief.

[Richard Wright] had a great deal of talent.... He wrote one good book and then he went astray, he got too concerned in the difference between the Negro man and the white man and he stopped being a writer and became a Negro.... Ellison has talent and so far he has managed to stay away from being first a Negro, he is still first a writer.

## THOMAS MANN

[Asked what is the greatest novel of the century?]: *Buddenbrooks* by Thomas Mann.

## EUROPEAN INFLUENCES

I was influenced by Flaubert and by Balzac, whose way of writing everything bluntly with the stub of his pen I admire very much. And by Bergson, obviously. And I feel very close to Proust. After I read *A la Recherche du Temps perdu* I said "This is it"—and I wished I had written it myself. I know Malraux because I have read his latest books on the psychology of art. On the other hand, I know neither Sartre nor Camus.

The people that I know and love are Don Quixote, and Sarah Gamp and some of Conrad's people, a lot of Dickens' people, Balzac's people, but not Balzac especially, because I think some of Balzac's writing is bad writing. Some of Conrad's writing is bad writing, but some of Conrad's people that he created are marvelous and endured.

## FREUD

Everybody talked about Freud when I lived in New Orleans, but I have never read him. Neither did Shakespeare. I doubt if Melville did either, and I'm sure Moby Dick didn't.

## RANKING AMERICAN NOVELISTS

All of us failed to match our dream of perfection. So I rate us on the basis of our splendid failure to do the impossible.

Wolfe took the most chances, although he didn't always know what he was doing. I come next and then Dos Passos. Hemingway doesn't take chances enough.

[Asked who he considers his most important contemporaries]: 1. Thomas Wolfe; 2. Dos Passos; 3. Hemingway; 4. Cather; 5. Steinbeck.

[John Steinbeck is] a newspaperman, not really a writer.

## HEMINGWAY

I think he's the best we've got.

He has never used a word where the reader might check his usage by a dictionary.

Set, ye armourous sons, in a sea of hemingwaves. [pun in Faulkner's *The Wild Palms*]

Hemingway was taught to know his limitations, and he had enough sense to stay within them, instead of trying to put all the world on the head of a pin.

His style is a perfect style in the sense that it suits exactly what he wants to do with it. He can control it, it never falters. So, if a style can be perfect it seems to me it must be the style that the man can use exactly and never fail or falter with, which I think Hemingway does.

[Asked about whether to enlist Hemingway to write an introduction to *The Sound and the Fury*]: It's like asking one race horse in the middle of a race to broadcast a blurb on another horse in the same running field.

A few years ago...Hemingway said that writers should stick together, just as doctors and lawyers and wolves do. I think there is more wit in that than truth or necessity either, at least in Hemingway's case, since the sort of writers who need to band together willy-nilly, or perish, resemble the wolves who are wolves only in pack, and, singly are just another dog....

When I talked about Hemingway being a coward, I had in mind this dream of perfection and how the best contemporary writers failed to match it. I was asked the question...who were the best contemporary writers and how did I rate them. And I said Wolfe, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Caldwell, and myself. I rated Wolfe first, myself second. I put Hemingway last. I said we were all failures. All of us had failed to match the dream of perfection and I rated the authors on the basis of their splendid failure to do the impossible.... I rated Hemingway last because he stayed with what he knew. He did it fine, but he didn't try for the impossible.

[In response to Truman Capote's snide deriding of *Across the River and into the Trees* while he rode in a taxi with Faulkner]: "Young man, I haven't read this new one. And though it may not be the best thing Hemingway ever wrote, I know it will be carefully done, and it will have quality."

[In 1961 after they had insulted each other and Hemingway had killed himself]: I don't like a man that takes the short way home.

#### REVIEW OF *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952)

Time may show it to be the best single piece of any of us. I mean his and my contemporaries. This time, he discovered God, a Creator. Until now, his men and women had made themselves, shaped themselves out of their own clay; their victories and defeats were at the hands of each other, just to prove to themselves or one another how tough they could be. But this time, he wrote about pity: about something somewhere that made them all: the old man who had to catch the fish and then lost it, the fish that had to be caught and then lost, the sharks which had to rob the old man of his fish; made them all and loved them all and pitied them all. It's all right, Praise God that whatever made and loves and pities Hemingway and me kept him from touching it any further.

#### WRITING

Ah write when the spirit moves me, and the spirit moves me every day.

The tools I need for my work are paper, tobacco, food, and a little whiskey.

I've got to feel the pencil and see the words at the end of the pencil.

I never know what I think about anything until I read what I've written on it.

I usually get to work pretty early in the morning, and by 10:30 or 11 I'm through. But I can sit down and write almost any time.

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.

I figure what must have happened before to lead people to that particular moment, and I work away from it, finding out how people act after that moment. That's how all my books and stories come. I don't believe in inspiration.

The aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that a hundred years later, when a stranger looks at it, it moves again since it is life.

#### SPEED

There are some kinds of writing that you have to do very fast, like riding a bicycle on a tightrope.

I have written too fast, too much.

I wrote *As I Lay Dying* in six weeks, *The Sound and the Fury* in six months, *Absalom, Absalom!* in three years.

#### SENTENCES

My ambition is to put everything into one sentence—not only the present but the whole past on which it depends and which keeps overtaking the present, second by second.

And so a man, a character in a story at any moment of action is not just himself as he is then, he is all that made him, and the long sentence is an attempt to get his past and possibly his future into the instant in which he does something.

It's the compulsion to say everything in one sentence because you may not live long enough to have two sentences.

I'm still trying to put all mankind's history in one sentence.

#### PARAGRAPHS

[Wolfe] and myself... We tried to crowd and cram everything, all experience, into each paragraph, to get the whole complete nuance of the moment's experience. Of all the recaptured light rays, into each paragraph. That's why it's clumsy and hard to read. It's not that we deliberately tried to make it clumsy, we just couldn't help it.

#### COMPRESSING THE WORLD

As regards any specific book, I'm trying primarily to tell a story, in the most effective way I can think of, the most moving, the most exhaustive. But I think even that is incidental to what I am trying to do, taking my output (the course of it) as a whole. I am telling the same story over and over, which is myself and the world. Tom Wolfe was trying to say everything, the world plus "I" or filtered through "I" or the effort of "I" to embrace the world in which he was born and walked a little while and then lay down again, into one volume. I am trying to go a step further.

This I think accounts for what people call the obscurity, the involved formless "style," endless sentences. I'm trying to say it all in one sentence, between one Cap and one period. I'm still trying to put it all, if possible, on one pinhead. I don't know how to do it. All I know to do is to keep on trying in a new way. I'm inclined to think that my material, the South, is not very important to me. I just happen to know it, and don't have time in one life to learn another one and write at the same time. Though the one I know is probably as good as another, life is a phenomenon but not a novelty, the same frantic steeplechase toward nothing everywhere and man stinks the same stink no matter where in time.

#### STYLE

My prose is really poetry.

And I don't think that style is very important.

I think if one spends too much time bothering too much about his style, he'll finish with having nothing left but style.

The style...is a result of the solitude, and granted a bad one. It was further complicated by an inherited regional or geographical (Hawthorne would say, racial) curse. You might say, studbook style: "by Southern Rhetoric out of Solitude" or "Oratory out of Solitude."

### WORDS

That was when I learned that words are no good; that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at.

I would say that music is the easiest means in which to express, but since words are my talent, I must try to express clumsily in words what the pure music would have done better.

### SYMBOLS

The deliberate use of symbols is a dangerous literary device, since the author may let himself be distracted from the primary reality of his characters and situations in his effort to give them secondary or symbolic meanings.

I write about people. Maybe all sorts of symbols and images get in—I don't know. When a good carpenter builds something, he puts the nails where they belong. Maybe they make a fancy pattern when he's through, but that's not why he put them in that way.

#### *The Sound and the Fury* (1929)

It began with a mental picture. I didn't realize at the time it was symbolical. The picture was of the muddy seat of a little girl's drawers in a pear tree, where she could see through a window where her grandmother's funeral was taking place and report what was happening to her brothers on the ground below... And then I realized the symbolism of the soiled pants, and that image was replaced by the one of the fatherless and motherless girl climbing down the rainpipe to escape from the only house she had, where she had never been offered love or affection or understanding.

### LIFTING HEARTS

It is the writer's privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart.

There isn't any theme in my work, or maybe if there is, you can call it a certain faith in man and his ability to always prevail and endure over circumstances and over his own destiny.

The uplifting of men's hearts...I believe is the one worthwhile purpose of any book and so even to a collection of short stories, form, integration, is as important to a novel—an entity of its own, single, set for one pitch, contrapuntal in integration, toward one end, one finale.

### CHARACTERS

With me there is always a point in the book where the characters themselves rise up and take charge and finish the job—say somewhere about page 275.

I cannot talk about my books. I don't remember them. I remember people, I write about people. They are alive. I don't remember the books. Once I have written them they no longer belong to me. I never go back to them. I don't read them.

[Asked who are his favorites among his characters]: Dilsey and Ratliff, the sewing machine agent.

## REALISM

A writer is trying to create believable people in credible moving situations in the most moving way he can.

## THE WRITER

An artist is a creature driven by demons.

It is the writer's duty to show that man has an immortal soul.

A writer needs three things: experience, observation, and imagination, and two of which, at times any one of which, can supply the lack of the others.

The quality an artist must have is objectivity in judging his work, plus the honesty and courage not to kid himself about it.

One who becomes a writer, if he is going to be a good writer, must have absolute integrity...he must believe in man, he must believe that man is worth knowing, worth dealing with; and he must believe that man will continue to endure and prevail.

At one time I thought the most important thing was talent. I think now that the young man or the young woman must possess or teach himself, training himself, in infinite patience, which it to try and try until it comes out right. He must train himself in ruthless intolerance—that is to throw away anything that is false no matter how much he might love that page or that paragraph. The most important thing is insight, that is to be—curiosity—to wonder, to mull, and to muse why it is—that man does what he does, and if you have that, then I don't think the talent makes much difference.

He [the writer] must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid; and teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed—love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice.

Read, read, read. Read everything—trash, classics, good and bad, and see how they do it. Just like a carpenter who works as an apprentice and studies the master. Read! You'll absorb it. Then write. It is good, you'll find out. If it's not, throw it out the window.

A dream is not a very safe thing to be near... I know; I had one once. It's like a loaded pistol with a hair trigger: if it stays alive long enough, somebody is going to be hurt. But if it's a good dream, it's worth it.

## THE AMERICAN WRITER

The writer in America isn't part of the culture of this country.

In my country, an artist is nothing. Nobody pays attention to him. He has no part in our ideology and our politics, but in an old culture, an artist is a wise man, is important and looked up to with respect... I wish it were true in my country.

## CRITICS

The English review criticizes the book, the American the author.

The artist doesn't have time to listen to the critics. The ones who want to be writers read the reviews, the ones who want to write don't have the time to read reviews.

I don't read the critics. I don't know any literary people. The people I know are farmers and horse people and hunters, and we talk about horses and dogs and guns and what to do about this hay crop or this cotton crop, not about literature.

[To a critic]: You found implications which I had missed. I wish that I had consciously intended them. I will certainly believe that I did it subconsciously and not by accident.

#### REREADING

[Asked what he would advise readers who say they cannot understand his writing even after they have read it two or three times] Read it four times.

#### HOLLYWOOD

Hollywood is a place where a man can get stabbed in the back while climbing a ladder.

Boy meets girl. [written 500 times on note paper left behind in his desk at Warner Brothers.

Men and women without age, beautiful as gods and goddesses, and with the minds of infants.

Everything in Los Angeles is too large, too loud and usually banal in concept--the plastic asshole of the world.

My general impression of Hollywood is that of a very wealthy, over-grown country town. In fact, it reminds me very much of a town that has sprung up as the result of an oil boom.

I don't like the climate, the people, their way of life. Nothing ever happens and one morning you wake up and find yourself sixty years old. I like Florida better.

Nothing can injure a man's writing, if he's a first rate writer.... The problem does not apply if he is not first rate, because he has already sold his soul for a swimming pool.

I'm a motion picture doctor. When they run into a section they don't like, I rework it and continue to rework it until they do like it.... I don't write scripts.

I can work at Hollywood 6 months, stay at home 6, am used to it now and have movie work locked off into another room.

It took me about a week to get Hollywood out of my lungs, but I am still writing all right, I believe.... Maybe I am just happy that that damned west coast place has not cheapened my soul as much as I probably believed it was going to do.

#### CLARK GABLE

[Director Howard Hawks was driving Clark Gable and Faulkner on a hunting expedition when Gable asked Faulkner to name some good writers]: Thomas Mann, Willa Cather, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, and myself. ["Oh, do you write, Mr. Faulkner?"] Gable asked.] Yeah. And what do *you* do, Mr. Gable?

#### COMMUNISM

I'm against belonging to anything.

It takes complete freedom of spirit to be [a] writer.

And I don't believe that man can be free under a monolithic form of government.

And I am convinced that Tolstoy and Dostoevskys in Russia right now are writing but they can't print it.

Only an individualist can be a first-rate artist. He can't belong to a group or a school and be a first-rate writer.

I don't like any form of totalitarian government.... It seems to me that the totalitarian people use people just...for their own power. And I agree that democracy as we talk about it in my country is a very clumsy, inefficient way for people to govern themselves, but so far I don't know a better one.

My experience is that it is impossible to speak to a Communist man to man. He is a Communist first and you don't know whether to believe him or not and the safe thing is to—not to spend too much time believing him... I doubt if there is any way that one can touch him with human spirit to human spirit. I know I can't.

[Asked for points of how to combat Communism] Well, I think the first one would be to believe in “me,” in “I,” rather than “we,” to be oneself, to resist the pressure to relinquish individuality. That's the first thing and maybe that's all anyone has to do to combat Communism. That is, I think that it can be combated, must be combated, and conquered, if it is to be conquered, not by people forming mass meetings in groups but by individuals....

If I, who have had freedom all my life in which to write truth exactly as I saw it, visited Russia now, the fact of even the outward appearance of condoning the condition which the present Russian government has established, would be a betrayal, not of the giants, nothing can harm them, but of their spiritual heirs who risk their lives with every page they write; and a lie in that it would condone the shame of them who might have been their heirs who have lost more than life; who have had their souls destroyed for the privilege of writing in public.

#### AMERICA

The American really loves nothing but his automobile.

The only people with time to read are women and rich people. More Europeans read than Americans.

Nowhere today, saving in parts of Ireland, is the English language spoken with the same earthy strength as it is in the United States; though we are, as a nation, still inarticulate.

It's not that we don't have the taste and don't appreciate it, it's simply that our culture tells us that we are too busy to waste the time looking through books to find which one we should read. We let somebody else tell us which one would be best.

#### MONEY

In my country, instead of asking the artist what makes children commit suicide, they go to the Chairman of General Motors and ask him.... If you make a million dollars, you know all the answers.

No wonder the rest of the world don't like us, since we seem to have neither taste nor courtesy, and know and believe in nothing but money and it doesn't much matter how you get it.

#### GOVERNMENT

Government was founded on the working premise of being primarily an asylum for ineptitude and indigence.

How much longer we will have to go before we finally admit that America is a great country but we just can't afford to run it like we do and people like [Adlai] Stevenson can be elected, nobody can say. [Faulkner himself voted for Eisenhower rather than Stevenson.]

#### POSTMODERNISM

The young writer would be a fool to follow a theory.

I think that nobody should turn his back on his own tradition.

I think that the worst perversion of all is to retire to the ivory tower.

My belief is that nobody can be taught anything, that one must learn.

The fellows who are going places are too busy working to sit around and talk about it.

The good writer never applies to a foundation. He's too busy writing something. If he isn't first rate he fools himself by saying he hasn't got time or economic freedom.

#### POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

I think that's propaganda.

The writer should be controlled by good taste, but he shouldn't be inhibited by any fear of censorship.

A country with a government in which one cannot say what one believes to be true is a bad government and for that very reason, it will not last very long.

When vast monied organizations such as the press or religion or political groups begin to federate under moral catchwords like democracy and freedom, in the structure of which the individual members or practitioners are absolved of all individual moral restraint, God help us all.

#### CENSORSHIP

Well, there should be no such thing as censorship. If the mind has got to be protected by the law from what will harm it, then it can't be very much of a mind to begin with.

And don't make any more additions to the script, bud. I know you mean well, but so do I.

#### POSTMODERN FICTION

The young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself, which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat.

Soon the fine galloping language, the gutless swooning full of sapless trees and dehydrated lusts begins to swim smooth and swift and peaceful. It is better than praying without having to bother to think aloud. It is like listening in a cathedral to a eunuch changing in a language which he does not even need to not understand.

Their characters do not function live, breathe, struggle, in that moil and seethe of simple humanity as did those of our predecessors who were the masters from whom we learned our craft. Dickens, Fielding, Thackeray, Conrad, Twain, Smollett, Hawthorne, Melville, James.

What has happened to writing, anyway? Hemingway and Dos Passos and I are veterans now; we should be fighting tooth and toenail to hold our places against young writers. But there are no young writers worth a damn that I know of.

Let the writer take up surgery or bricklaying if he is interested in technique.

A book that fails to create enjoyment is not a good one.

No story takes 1,000 pages to tell.



## POPULAR ATHEISM

I have noticed in young people in America...there's a certain feeling of shame about admitting the idea of immortality, that it's a little archaic, the idea. That one should be up with the times, with the modern age, and to think of immortality as not only old fashioned but it implies a certain amount of ignorance.

Probably you are wrong in doing away with God in that fashion. God is. It is He who created man. If you don't reckon with God, you won't wind up anywhere...God fades away by the very act of your doubting him.... Listen, neither God nor morality can be destroyed.

## YOUNGER GENERATION

I think the American younger generation is badly confused, maybe more confused than any other national younger generation. I think that they are not too afraid that when the moment, the crisis, comes that they will live up to the demands to made on them, but they like to think that by taking a nihilistic attitude toward it, it looks well. Of course they don't want to face it.

The world's anguish is caused by people between twenty and forty.

## ALCOHOL

[Drinking is] A normal and healthy instinct.

When I have one martini, I feel bigger, wiser, taller. When I have a second, I feel superlative. When I have more, there's no holding me.

There is no such thing as bad whiskey.

Pouring out liquor is like burning books.

## STATURE

None of my work has met my own standards.

Even Sinclair Lewis and Dreiser make engagements to see me, and Mencken is coming all the way up from Baltimore to see me on Wednesday.

In France I am the father of a literary movement. In Europe, I am considered the best modern American and among the first of all writers. In America, I eke out a hack's motion picture wages by winning second prize in a manufactured mystery story contest.

The man crouching in a Mississippi hole trying to shape into some form of art his summation and conception of the human heart and spirit in terms of the cerebral, the simple imagination is as out of place and in the way as a man trying to make the Egyptian water wheel in the middle of the Bessemer Foundry would be.

## AMAZEMENT

And now I realize for the first time what an amazing gift I had: uneducated in every formal sense, without even very literate, let alone literary, companions, yet to have made the things I made. I don't know where it came from. I don't know why God or gods or whoever it was, selected me to be the vessel. Believe me, this is not humility, false modesty: it is simply amazement.

Damn it, I did have genius, Saxe. It just took me 55 years to find it out.

## WISDOM

The man who removes a mountain begins by carrying away small stones.

The end of wisdom is to dream high enough to lose the dream in the seeking of it.

I suppose that people, using themselves and each other so much by words, are at least consistent in attributing wisdom to a still tongue.

I don't care much for facts, am not much interested in them; you can't stand a fact up, you've got to prop it up, and when you move to one side a little and look at it from that angle, it's not thick enough to cast a shadow in that direction.

Facts and truth really don't have much to do with each other.

#### ADVICE

Get it down. Take chances. It may be bad, but it's the only way you can do anything good.

You cannot swim for new horizons until you have courage to lose sight of the shore.

Dreams have only one owner at a time. That's why dreamers are lonely.

#### DEATH

My father used to say that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time.

If I were reincarnated, I'd want to come back as a buzzard. Nothing hates him or envies him or wants him or needs him. He is never bothered or in danger, and he can eat anything.

#### IMMORTALITY

Since man is mortal, the only immortality possible for him is to leave something behind him that is immortal since it will always move.

It is my ambition to be, as a private individual, abolished and voided from history, leaving it markless, no refuse save the printed books; I wish I had had enough sense to see ahead thirty years ago and, like some of the Elizabethans, not signed them. It is my aim, and every effort bent, that the sum and history of my life, which in the same sentence is my obit and epitaph too, shall be: He made the books and he died.

Some of these quotations are excerpted from  
"William Faulkner, *The Art of Fiction*" (1956)  
*The Paris Review Interviews II*  
(Picador 2007)

#### HIS WORKS

##### *Soldier's Pay* (1926)

With *Soldier's Pay* I found out writing was fun. But I found out after that not only each book had to have a design but the whole output or sum of an artist's work had to have a design. With *Soldier's Pay* and *Mosquitoes* I wrote for the sake of writing because it was fun. Beginning with *Sartoris* I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it...

##### *The Sound and the Fury* (1929)

Since none of my work has met my own standards, I must judge it on the basis of that one which caused me the most grief and anguish, as the mother loves the child who became the thief or murderer more than the one who became the priest.

I did not believe that anyone would publish it. I had no definite plan to submit it to anyone.

I loved her [Caddy] so much I couldn't decide to give her life just for the duration of a short story. She deserved more than that. So my novel was created, almost in spite of myself.

I wrote it five separate times, trying to tell the story, to rid myself of the drama which would continue to anguish me until I did. It's a tragedy of two lost women: Caddy and her daughter [the second Quentin].

[The Compsons] are still living in the attitudes of 1859 or '60.

I had already begun to tell the story through the eyes of the idiot child, since I felt that it would be more effective as told by someone capable only of knowing what happened, but not why. I saw that I had not told the story that time. I tried to tell it again, the same story through the eyes of another brother. That still was not it. I told it for the third time through the eyes of the third brother. That was still not it. I tried to gather the pieces together and fill in the gaps by making myself the spokesman. It was still not complete, not until fifteen years after the book was published, when I wrote as an appendix to another book the final effort to get the story told and off my mind, so that I myself could have some peace from it. It's the book I feel tenderest towards. I couldn't leave it alone, and I never could tell it right, though I tried hard and would like to try again, though I'd probably fail again.

I did not realize then that I was trying to manufacture the sister which I did not have and the daughter which I was to lose, though the former might have been apparent from the fact that Caddy had three brothers almost before I wrote her name on paper. I just began to write about a brother and a sister splashing one another in the brook and the sister fell and wet her clothing and the smallest brother cried, thinking that the sister was conquered or perhaps hurt. Or perhaps he knew that he was the baby and that she would quit whatever water battles to comfort him. When she did so, when she quit the water fight and stooped in her wet garments above him, the entire story, which is all told by that same little brother in the first section, seemed to explode on the paper before me.

Caddy was still to me too beautiful and too moving to reduce her to telling what was going on, that it would be more passionate to see her through somebody else's eyes, I thought...she was my heart's darling.

I saw that they [the children] had been sent to the pasture to spend the afternoon to get them away from the house during the grandmother's funeral in order that the three brothers and the nigger children could look up at the muddy seat of Caddy's drawers as she climbed the tree to look in the window at the funeral, without then realizing the symbology of the soiled drawers, for here again hers was the courage which was to face later with honor the shame which she was to engender, which Quentin and Jason could not face: the one taking refuge in suicide, the other in vindictive rage which drove him to rob his bastard niece of the meager sums which Caddy could send her. For I had already gone on to night and the bedroom and Dilsey with the mudstained drawers scrubbing the naked backside of the doomed little girl—trying to cleanse with the sorry byblow of its soiling that body, flesh, whose shame they symbolized and prophesied, as though she already saw the dark future part she was to play in it trying to hold that crumbling household together.

It began as a mental picture. I didn't realize at the time it was symbolical. The picture was of the muddy seat of a little girl's drawers in a pear tree, where she could see through a window where her grandmother's funeral was taking place and report what was happening to her brothers on the ground below. By the time I explained who they were and what they were doing and how her pants got muddy, I realized it would be impossible to get all of it into a short story and that it would have to be a book.

And then I realized the symbolism of the soiled pants, and that image was replaced by the one of the fatherless and motherless girl climbing down the rainpipe to escape the only home she had, where she had never been offered love or affection or understanding.

There was Dilsey to be the future, to stand above the fallen ruins of the family like a ruined chimney, gaunt, patient and indomitable, and Benjy to be the past. He had to be an idiot so that, like Dilsey, he could be impervious to the future, though unlike her by refusing to accept it all....she held that family together for not the hope of reward but just because it was the decent and proper thing to do.

Benjy wasn't rational enough even to be selfish. He was an animal. He recognized tenderness and love though he could not have named them, and it was the threat to tenderness and love that caused him to bellow when he felt the change in Caddy. He no longer had Caddy; being an idiot he was not even aware that Caddy was missing. He knew only that something was wrong, which left a vacuum in which he grieved. He tried to fill that vacuum. The only thing he had was one of Caddy's discarded slippers. The slipper was his tenderness and love which he could not have named, but he knew only that it was missing. He was dirty because he couldn't coordinate and because dirt meant nothing to him. He could no more distinguish between dirt and cleanliness than between good and evil. The slipper gave him comfort even though he no longer remembered the person to whom it had once belonged, any more than he could remember why he grieved. If Caddy had reappeared he probably would not have known her.

Yes, there are too many Jasons in the South who can be successful, just as there are too many Quentins in the South who are too sensitive to face its reality.

A break indicates an objective change in tempo, while the objective picture here should be a continuous whole, since the thought transference is subjective, i.e., in Ben's mind and not in the reader's eye.... I purposely used italics for both actual scenes and remembered scenes for the reason, not to indicate the different dates of happenings, but merely to permit the reader to anticipate a thought-transference, letting the recollection postulate its own date.

About 10 years ago we had notion to reprint, using different color inks to clarify chronology, etc. I underlined my copy in different color crayons, sent it to Bennett [Cerf], never got it back.

The writing of it as it now stands taught me both how to write and how to read, and even more, what I had already read...

I would say that that shadow that stayed on his mind so much was foreknowledge of his own death. [Quentin]...when he wants the old fish to live, it may represent his unconscious desire for endurance, both for himself and for his people.

The inconsistencies in the appendix prove that to me the book is still alive after 15 years, and being still alive is growing, changing; the appendix was done at the same heat as the book, even though 15 years later, and so it is the book itself which is inconsistent: not the appendix. That is, at the age of 30 I did not know these people as at 45 I now do; that I was even wrong now and then in the very conclusions I drew from watching them, and the information in which I once believed.

By God, I didn't know myself what I had tried to do, and how much I had succeeded.

*As I Lay Dying* (1930)

Before I began I said, I am going to write a book by which, at a pinch, I can stand or fall if I never touch ink again.

That was the summer of 1929. I got a job in the power plant [in Oxford], on the night shift, from 6 pm to 6 am, as a coal passer. I shoveled the coal from the bunker into a wheelbarrow and wheeled it in and dumped it where the fireman could put it into the boiler. About 11 o'clock the people would be going to bed, and so it did not take so much steam. Then we could rest, the fireman and I. He would sit in a chair and doze. I had invented a table out of a wheelbarrow in the coal bunker, just beyond a wall from where a dynamo ran. It made a deep, constant humming noise. There was no more work to do until about 4 am, when we would have to clean the fires and get up steam again. On these nights, between 12 and 4, I wrote *As I Lay Dying* in six weeks, without changing a word. I sent it to Smith [his publisher] and wrote him that by it I would stand or fall.

The simplest thing would have been to bury her where she was in any pleasant place. If they wanted to be sentimental about it they could have buried her in some place that she would like to go and sit by herself for awhile. Or if they wanted to be practical they could have taken her out to the back yard and burned her. So

if there was a villain it was the convention which gave them no out except to carry her through fire and flood twenty miles in order to follow the dying wish, which by that time to her meant nothing.

Darl was mad from the first. He got progressively madder because he didn't have the capacity—not so much of sanity but of inertness to resist all the catastrophes that happened to the family. Jewel resisted because he was sane and he was the toughest. The others resisted through probably simple inertia, but Darl couldn't resist it and so he went completely off his rocker....he did the only thing his mad brain could conceive to rid the earth of something which should have been under ground days ago.

Who can say how much of the good poetry in the world has come out of madness, and who can say just how much of super-perceptivity the...mad person might not have? It may not be so, but it's nice to think that there is some compensation for madness.... [Darl] is more perceptive. He has something of clairvoyance, maybe, a capacity for telepathy. Anyway, nobody can dispute it and that was a very good way, I thought, a very effective way to tell what was happening back there at home—well, call it a change of pace. A trick, but since the whole book was a *tour de force*, I think that is a permissible trick.

#### “That Evening Sun” (1930)

This Negro woman who had given devotion to the white family knew that when the crisis of her need came, the white family wouldn't be there....

#### “Red Leaves” (1930)

The red leaves referred to the Indian. It was the deciduation of Nature which no one could stop that had suffocated, smothered, destroyed the Negro.... They had nothing against him, they probably liked him.

The snake episode was to show that man when he knows he's going to die thinks that he can accept death, but he doesn't—he doesn't, really. The Negro at the time, he said, I'm already dead, it doesn't matter, the snake can bite me because I'm already dead...

#### “A Rose for Emily” (1930)

That came from a picture of the strand of hair on the pillow. It was a ghost story.

That was an allegorical title; the meaning was, here was a woman who had had a tragedy, an irrevocable tragedy and nothing could be done about it, and I pitied her and this was a salute, just as if you were to make a gesture, a salute, to anyone; to a woman you would hand a rose.

There was the young girl with a young girl's normal aspirations to find love and then a husband and a family, who was brow-beaten and kept down by her father, a selfish man who didn't want her to leave home because he wanted a housekeeper.

Her father had kept her more or less locked up and then she had a lover who was about to quit her, she had to murder him.

The conflict was in Miss Emily, that she knew that you do not murder people. She had been trained that you do not take a lover. You marry, you don't take a lover. She had broken all the laws of her tradition, her background, and she had finally broken the law of God too... Instead of murdering one lover, and then to go on and take another and when she used him up to murder him, she was expiating her crime.

#### *Sanctuary* (1931)

I took a little time out, and speculated what a person in Mississippi would believe to be current trends, chose what I thought was the right answer and invented the most horrific tale I could imagine and wrote it in about three weeks.

[Popeye] was merely symbolical of evil.... It was all allegory. That wasn't a very good book.

I wrote *Sanctuary* to sell. After I sent it off, the publisher told me, "Good God! We can't print this. We would both be put in jail!"... I then completely re-wrote the book.

*Light in August* (1932)

The story began with Lena Grove, the idea of the young girl with nothing, pregnant, determined to find her sweetheart. It was—that was out of my admiration for women, for the courage and the endurance of women. As I told that story I had to get more and more into it, but that was mainly the story of Lena Grove.

[Asked if the title referred to completion of a pregnancy]: No, used it because in my country in August there's a peculiar quality to light, and that's what that title means.... I had never heard that business of after the cow drops the calf she's light in August.

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 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...from Greece, from Olympia in it somewhere. It lasts just a day or two, then it's gone, but every year in August that occurs in my country, and that's all that title meant; it was just to me a pleasant evocative title because it reminded me of that time, of a luminosity older than our Christian civilization. Maybe the connection was with Lena Grove, who had something of that pagan quality of being able to assume everything...she was never ashamed of that child whether it had any father or not; she was simply going to follow the conventional laws of the time in which she was and find its father. But as far as she was concerned, she didn't especially need any father for it... It was enough to have had the child. And that was all that meant, just that luminous lambent quality of an older light than ours.

[Asked if he intended any Christ symbolism in Joe Christmas]: No... That Christ story is one of the best stories that man has every invented, assuming he did invent that story, and of course it will recur.... There was no deliberate intent to repeat it...the people to me come first. The symbolism comes second.... Now with Christmas...he didn't know what he was, and his only salvation in order to live with himself was to repudiate mankind, to live outside the human race. And he tried to do that but nobody would let him, the human race itself wouldn't let him. And I don't think he was bad, I think he was tragic. And his tragedy was that he didn't know what he was and would never know, and that to me is the most tragic condition that an individual can have—to not know who he is.

If I recall him aright, [Percy Grimm] was the Fascist galahad who saved the white race by murdering Christmas. I invented him in 1931. I didn't realize until after Hitler got into the newspapers that I had created a Nazi before he did...he's everywhere. I wouldn't say that there are more of him in the South, but I would say that there are more of him in the White Citizens Council than anywhere else in the South, but I think you find him everywhere, in all countries, in all people.

Hightower was a man who wanted to be better than he was afraid he would [be]. He had failed his wife. Here was another chance he had, and he failed his Christian oath as a man of God, and he escaped into his past where some member of his family was brave enough to match the moment. He had failed himself, but there was one thing that he still had—which was the brave grandfather that galloped into the town to burn the Yankee stores, and at least he had that. Everything else was gone, but since he had been a man of God he still tried to be a man of God and he could not destroy himself. But he had destroyed himself but he still couldn't take his own life.

*Absalom Absalom!* (1936)

The story is of a man who wanted a son through pride, and got too many of them and they destroyed him.

What he was trying to do—when he was a boy, he had gone to the front door a big house and somebody, a servant, said, Go around to the back door. He said, I'm going to be the one that lives in the big house, I'm

going to establish a dynasty, I don't care how, and he violated all the rules of decency and honor and pity and compassion, and the fates took revenge on him.... He didn't say, I'm going to be braver or more compassionate or more honest than he—he just said, I'm going to be as rich as he was, as big as he was on the outside.

I think Quentin, not Faulkner, is the correct yardstick here. I was writing the story, but he not I was brooding over the situation. I mean, I was creating him as a character, as well as Sutpen et al. He [Quentin] grieved and regretted the passing of an order the dispossessor of which he was not tough enough to withstand. But more he grieved the fact (because he hated and feared the portentous symptom) that a man like Sutpen, who to Quentin was trash, originless, could not only have dreamed so high but have had the force and strength to have failed so grandly.

I use him [Quentin] because it is just before he is to commit suicide because of his sister, and I use his bitterness which he has projected on the South in the form hatred of it and its people to get more out of the story itself than a historical novel would be.

Shreve was the commentator that held the thing to something of reality. If Quentin had been let alone to tell it, it would have become completely unreal. It had to have a solvent to keep it real, keep it believable, creditable, otherwise it would have vanished into smoke and fury.

#### “An Odor of Verbena” (1938)

The verbena was associated with Drusilla, with that woman, and she had wanted him to take a pistol and avenge his father's death. He went to the man who had shot his father, unarmed, and instead of killing the man, by that gesture he drove the man out of town, and although that had violated Drusilla's traditions of an eye for an eye she—the sprig of verbena meant that she realized that that took courage too and maybe more moral courage than to have drawn blood, or to have taken another step in an endless feud of an eye for an eye.

[Aunt Jenny] loves these people, and they have constantly, all of her life, they have given her anguish and trouble. That she can't help but love them and she believes in them, not in what they do, and they do these reckless, completely self-centered things that have caused nothing but anguish and grief to all their womenfolk....she's proud of this boy but he too has done something unexpected, that when she expects them to act like human beings they act like Sartoris...

#### *The Wild Palms* (1939)

When I reached the end of what is now the first section of *The Wild Palms*, I realized suddenly that something was missing, it needed emphasis, something to lift it like counterpoint in music. So I wrote the “Old Man” story until “The Wild Palms” story rose back to pitch. Then I stopped the “Old Man” story at what is now its first section, and took up “The Wild Palms” story until it began again to sing. Then I raised it to pitch again with another section of its antithesis, which is the story of a man who got his love and spent the rest of the book fleeing from it, even to the extent of voluntarily going back to jail where he would be safe. They are only two stories by chance. The story is that of Charlotte and Wilbourne.

I used that technique simply as a mechanical device to bring out the story I was telling which was the contrast between two types of love. One man gave up everything for love of a woman, the other gave everything up to get away from love.

The river dominates not only the economy of that country but it dominates its spiritual life. That the river is Master, and any time the Old Man wants to he can break the levee and can ruin the cotton crop. That in a way you're—the planter is at armistice with him, and the superstitious planter believes that he has got to make libations, make sacrifices to him, that every so often he's got to let the Old Man come in and take that cotton crop to keep the Old Man in a contented frame of mind like the ancients with the dragon, the Minotaur, the symbols of destructiveness which they had to placate, sacrifice.

The isolation, the solitude of the boat in that raging torrent was the solitude which Harry and Charlotte had tried so long to find, where they could be lovers—to escape from the world. They went to infinite labor and risk and sacrifice to escape from the world where this convict had been hurled out of the world against his will whether he wanted to or not. That he and the woman he saved had what Charlotte and Wilbourne had sacrificed everything to get. That's what I mean by counterpoint to the theme of the other book. That these two people had what Charlotte and Harry had given up everything—respectability, future, everything, for.

I would say that the insecurity came to him [the tall convict] with a shock when that woman betrayed him, and he was frightened and he wanted to be where no other woman could catch him off balance and take him over the jumps again. And the place where he was safe from that was in that penitentiary, which wasn't so different from the life he would have led if he'd been home. He would have had to work very hard all day at home, he would have had very little for it, which was just what he got there, but at least behind that barbed wire he was safe from another woman that would get him into the highwayman business.... Remember he's mentally only about fifteen or sixteen years old...

That additional ten years was simply another quantity in fate just like the flood that he ran into. Once he was in it he had to accept the extra ten years just as he accepted the flood and worked through it and survived it. There was no more injustice than there was to the flood.

I was as surprised as anybody else to find where it was going. The story that I was trying to tell was the story of Charlotte and Harry.

*The Hamlet (1940)*

The Snopeses are a family who, by petty chicanery and unscrupulous politics, take possession of the county town of Jefferson, Miss. They creep over it like mold over cheese and destroy its traditions and whatever liveliness there was in the place. It's a humorous book-- Ah mean it's a tribe of rascals who live by skulduggery and practice it twenty-four hours a day.

*The Bear (1942)*

The hunt was simply a symbol of pursuit.

That little dog in that story to me symbolizes the thought of loyalty, the thought of courage.

[The fyce is] the antithesis of the bear. The bear represented the obsolete primitive. The fyce [little dog] represents the creature who has coped with environment and is still on top of it, you might say.

[The bear is] symbolic of nature in an age when nature in a way is being destroyed. That is, the forests are going, being replaced by the machine, and that bear represented the old tradition of nature.

I think a man ought to more than just repudiate. He [Isaac McCaslin] should have been more affirmative instead of shunning people.

I took Hogganbeck from a fella that worked for my father.... Boon, with the mentality of a child, a boy of sixteen or seventeen, couldn't cope not only with the mechanical age but he couldn't cope with any time. He [Sam Fathers] knew that he was finished, he was tired of his life, and he—if he had been strong he could have done the deed himself. He couldn't. He asked Boon to, and I think Boon murdered him, because Sam told him to. It was the Greek gesture which Sam himself was too weak to do. He was done, finished. He told Boon to do it.

*Intruder in the Dust (1948)*

The story I was trying to tell in *Intruder in the Dust* was this Negro, who because of his black blood was already doomed, could be saved by a little child and an old lady. Anyone can save anyone from injustice if he just will, if he just tries, just raises his voice.



*A Fable* (1954)

It is about Christ in the French army, a corporal with a squad of twelve men—and a general who is Antichrist and takes him upon a hill and offers him the world. Symbolic and unreal... It continues on, through the Three Temptations, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection...

Some of these quotations are excerpted from  
*Faulkner in the University*  
eds. Frederick L. Gwynn & Joseph L. Blotner  
(Random House/Vintage 1965)

