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issued 10-3-86
1st rev 5-5-90

AMERICAN LITERATURE WORK
SPRING 1986
MEETING WILLIAM FAULKNER

presented by Alfred Carol

PRELIMINARY

Dear Diane,

I was preparing my work when I found in a book borrowed from the library (Aspects of Recent American Literature, by Robert Graves, was the book) a folded bunch of handwritten papers with what seemed to be a set of notes gathered in order to produce a work on William Faulkner. Since it looked as if the work had not been finished - for what reason I don't know - but was of some interest, I myself took this raw material as a basis for my work. I arranged some missing links, I added some little parts of my own, and I present the whole for your consideration, believing that even though it is not my original, work you will like it as much as I did.

II

While I was there, worried on the green slope, someone started forming in front of my eyes, a dim figure coming out of time.

- "Please, help me!" I called to him, "whatever you are, shadow or true man".

He answered: "not man, I was a man and my parents were from Toscana, born in the city of Firenze both of them. Poet I was and I sang the charmed passage through Hell and Purgatory until Heaven, where I met the wonderful Beatrice in a complete fulfillment of my quest."

- "Thus you are Dante, the main fountain of literature flowing across the centuries, the one who until now has been feeding dozens of writers with an imperishable substance".

- "Oh, you, honor and light of other poets, you are the master from which we can acquire this beautiful style that would make people celebrate us! I wish you to guide me in my modest quest."

III

Down the way, my guide and I, we found all of a sudden plenty of people slowly walking in a sorrowful mood, complaining with their last effort. They wore heavy cloaks and hoods like monks of an old sanctuary; outside the robes were of dazzling beaten gold, but inside all sheathed with lead, doubling them under an extraordinary weight.

In spite of his heavy dress, one of them managed to approach our place, and as I fixed upon the down-turned face that pointed scrutiny with which we challenge the first met stranger in the vanning dusk, I caught the sudden look of some dead master whom I had known, forgotten, half recalled. I frowned, my eyebrows coming together like the old tailor when he tries to thread the needle.

- "This is the master you were looking for, the man who pulverized prose in the middle of this century. Here he is at your disposal. Ask him the questions you want to know; he will be happy to answer you before restarting for ever his unfair damnation", said my guide.

And I to the figure whom I had recognized: - "You are Mister Faulkner, the wonder that I feel is easy, yet ease is cause of wonder. Therefore speak:"

And he: - "Oh, my son, don't be sorry if William Faulkner leaves this pitiful doomed herd in order to speak with you . But I am not eager to rehearse my thought and theory which you have studied, forgotten, then misunderstood. Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age, the rending pain of reenactment of all that you have done, and been; the shame of motives late revealed, and the awareness of things ill done and done to others harm, which once you took for exercise of virtue. The fool's approval stings and honor stains. From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire."

So, the scene set up in this way, I started with the following dialogue:

IV

- "The first thing one notices when reading your works are those long, intricate, sneaking sentences. How did you come to that form?"

And he answered: - "You know that at the moment I started writing my prose the trend was towards short, concise, direct sentences, used in order to express the objectivity of the situations or the superficial feelings of characters. Men that opened up this way were Hemingway and dos Passos, later on this trend converged with the chronicle-like journalistic style cultivated by writers like Truman Capote. "Of course I myself was not interested in these experiments, and when you see where they led you cannot blame me. I

was, to the contrary, concerned with the ambiguity of situations as they are perceived by different people with different concerns in them. You have possibly noticed that I myself had not definite and coherent ideas about crucial issues of my time and country. This long sentences of mine were the adequate tool that allowed my work to lay out the confusion, lack of certitude and whatever contradiction existing in my mind and my country. My force is that I could apprehend the behavior of very different people without, in a way, understanding them, or feeling any kind of solidarity to them".

He stopped, as surprised as I by the clear explanation he had given. The sort of direct response you are not used to when reading him.

Notwithstanding I asked him rapidly:

- "Sometimes part of your descriptions smell of poetry, for example, in Burn Burning:

And even then he held his course,
As if the very urgency of his wild grief
And need
Must in a moment more find him wings,
Waiting until the ultimate instant
To hurl himself aside
And into the weed choked roadside ditch
As the horse thundered past and on,
For an instant in furious silhouette against the stars
The tranquil early summer night
Which, even before the shape of the horse and rider
vanished,
Stained abruptly and violently upward
a long swirling roar
incredible and soundless blotting the stars"

- "I reckon that it's exaggerated to take that for poetry, but in fact it is true that I trained myself with poetry; I translated some of Verlain's poems and wrote many others of my own. The mood of the poetry may fit well with some aspects of my style, despite the fact that I have never clearly succeeded in poetry".

- "You are right, your poems are not currently very much prized. No so much as other aspects, that could have been considered marginal at their time. I would mention your activity as script writer for movie pictures in Hollywood, especially your collaboration with Howard Hawks in films like "To Have and Have Not" or "The Big Sleep". You may or may not know that those detective stories, gathered under the title of "Film Noir" are heaving increasing success of "esteem" besides the popular success they always had had".

He sort of smiled: - "Well it's funny, at that time this cinema business was just considered entertainment, without any artistic value, and I did it for money. Even though, given the attraction I felt for colloquial language, corrupted atmospheres and loosely-tied plots, I found occasional satisfaction in the job, I never thought any of these movies would

be remembered and even appreciated in any artistic aspect. That will learn you, young man, how little we are aware of the meaning of our acts; once they are released we lose control over them and whatever our intent or will was, they follow a way of their own. I know worse examples of that kind".

V

So we were talking and walking but as it was painful for him to follow my steps my Lord advised: "Wait and try to keep stroke with his pace", I stopped and looked again at his face beneath the cowl, now somber as if in his mind dwelled sad thoughts.

He said: - "I did never get to rights with the damned black problem of our southern god dam country. You realize I had ever been obsessed by this matter; it was in one way or another in everyone of my pieces, and however, how difficult it was to assume, to get rid of, to achieve an harmonic position about. I was always describing them blacks - Nigger, I used to say - from every side, but never coming to figure out what they could really think or feel or be, since at last there is a problem of essences laying under the debate. An impossible debate there, in the country, where everybody is mad about the matter, contaminating the air to the point where you can not breath anymore, and suffocated, I started blustering horrible words. - Which I am purifying by this burning fire -, as I said once that I would go down the streets with my gun killing niggers if it was necessary for the defence of the Mississipi against the Union. What a silly mess it was! Because now, after the time and distance and the walking, everything is clearer: Sickness is in our mind of white people, therefore there is nothing they - blacks - can do".

- "But master - I interrupted - at least most of your readers agrees about their high appreciation of your work as means a of knowing the southern society and its weakness".

He nodded and said: - "Really? Even if it was possibly part of my intent, I come to feel uneasy about the results. There is a flavour of partiality, of a restricted view that sticks to my work. If you want to know what I mean read Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn. He also lived in my country in early times, and he did point out aspects that I may have missed. See, then, Huck and Jim, a closed group evolving in a perfect harmony with nature, each one playing a role according to his age, - not to his 'race' - protecting themselves against he attacks of the perverted surrounding. Notice in special chapter 14, the discussion about King Sollermunt (Solomon) - whether he was the wisest man or not - and how Jim plays the rational part...".

- "Years pass, new people inherit old wicked burdens, and they make them not any better. So I like pretty well to walk here under this heavy, almost unbearable, lead-sheathed cloak".

He shut up, and I turned to my guide who, delicately taking my hand, pulled me aside, saying:

- "Let him go now, he is exhausted".