

cess. It can be some hurt or sudden joy." "Helen, I Love You" offers none of the satisfactions of a love story or well-turned tale. Its conclusion leaves Dan alone with his "strange feelings" in the growing darkness, afraid of the wind. He is poised on the precipice between childhood and adulthood, needing love and understanding, needing to prove himself, and struggling to create an identity with confusing mass-media models.

A number of Farrell's stories connect the inner turmoil of youth to the problems of urban culture. "The Scarecrow" (1930) achieves an objectivity Farrell strove for in contrast to the autobiographical introspection of "Helen, I Love You." He considered the story "a leap into originality." Scarecrow is the only name, other than Nickel Nose, of an abused fourteen-year-old girl who gives herself willingly to any boy who will have her. She lives with her mother, who beats her regularly with a rubber hose. The Scarecrow's life contrasts to her daydreams—in a long passage the adjective *beautiful* precedes every item on her list of material desires, indicating her limited imagination. She has sex with a boy who takes her to a Halloween party, where he abandons her among his friends as they get drunk. The Scarecrow is ridiculed, and before the party breaks up, she strips to reveal her welts and bruises. One girl shows compassion and wants to take her home with her but is told, "I tried that once. You'll never get her out." The story ends with the Scarecrow, having forgotten her dress, wearing only her underclothes and a coat, alone and shivering.

The story's depiction of squalor was shocking at the time, but understated and

tame compared to its progeny. It is a significant link in the development of American fiction, connecting the 1890s to the 1930s, claiming as an ancestor Stephen Crane's *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets*. "The Scarecrow" is also a progenitor of stories by Hubert Selby, Jr., in *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1964) and Buddy Giovinazzo in *Life Is Hot in Cracktown* (1993). Selby's Tralala, like the Scarecrow, does not have an ordinary name, suggesting that she too is less than human. Tralala is fifteen when the story opens, living among friends with whom she "puts out" and rolls drunk sailors. Her downward slide is inevitable. The story crescendos with a gangrape, where Tralala is left naked and bleeding, as good as dead in an empty lot. *Life Is Hot in Cracktown* opens with fourteen-year-old Londa, a direct descendent of Tralala and the Scarecrow. Londa has survived for seven years by performing oral sex to obtain crack; by "firing the bazooka" (smoking crack) she is able to withstand her father's physical and sexual abuse. Her inevitable death is mentioned in a later, related story.

The criticism that such fiction is not art but documentary journalism or sociology has impugned Farrell's reputation since his first novel, *Young Lonigan*, was published in 1932. Farrell's fiction, and that of the dire realists who followed him, overturn self-satisfied notions about the quality of life in America. Their work causes the reader to empathize with society's outcasts such as Farrell's Scarecrow, Selby's Tralala, and Giovinazzo's Londa—all sexually abused young women. Farrell, his predecessor Stephen Crane, and his successors presaged a social problem widely discussed today. As Blanche Gelfant has noted, much of Far-

rell's work criticizes society for its "reprehensible indifference to the waste of human life."

Farrell's stark, often shocking approach to the street life of Chicago's South Side had an immediate influence on Depression-era novelists and successive generations, including fellow Chicagoans Richard Wright and Nelson Algren. Farrell's stories express the empathy he believed necessary to the writing of fiction, giving voice to the voiceless, primarily the working-class Catholic Irish. Farrell's stories do not allow complacency, they provoke troubling questions. Though the early pieces take place in the 1920s, they are relevant today, reflecting as they do an urban way of life dominated by consumerism and dehumanizing images from a mass-market entertainment industry. James T. Farrell empathized with ordinary people who could not live up to the glamorous images of beautiful people surrounded by "beautiful things." His stories include a wide range of protagonists: working men, abused and abusing women, priests, nuns, the patriarch of a prosperous middle-class family, a homeless man. Such diverse voices enable the reader to connect with all of humanity.

Robert Fox

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#### WILLIAM FAULKNER

(1897–1962)

No other writer in this century has been at once so provincial in his sub-

ject matter and so sophisticated in his narrative technique as William Faulkner. Nor has anyone been so influential or so widely imitated. Born in Mississippi in 1897, Faulkner came of age understanding that his family's reduced circumstances corresponded to the South's decline; his own father was the mediocre successor to a legendary grandfather of Civil War heroics. Faulkner himself was undistinguished as a student at Ole Miss, though fortunate in having a friend who inspired him to read Melville, Henry Adams, Lawrence, Cather, Huxley, and Fitzgerald. By the 1920s, a series of odd jobs as house painter, carpenter, and postmaster freed him to write—first poetry, then fiction. Three conventional novels appeared before the breakthrough innovations of *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), which was followed by a decade of extraordinary literary experiments that would transform the twentieth-century novel: *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Light in August* (1932), *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), and *Go Down, Moses* (1942).

Royalties from novels, however, were slim during the Great Depression, which was, ironically, an era when mass-market magazines could offer top dollar for short stories. In 1930, newly married, Faulkner began publishing short fiction as a means of paying bills while working on novels (he would also write screenplays in Hollywood for similar mercenary motives). A decade later, most of his books were no longer in print, and his reputation revived only with Malcolm Cowley's *The Portable Faulkner* (1946), which reprinted a handful of major stories as well as excerpts from novels. Renewed recognition led to the award of the Nobel Prize in 1949, and

Faulkner spent the 1950s in relative retirement, giving long interviews as writer-in-residence in Virginia, Japan, and West Point.

Faulkner always had a conflicted response to the idea of short fiction, partly because his expansive imagination made it hard for him to keep his stories story-length. Yet he could not ignore the market, having earned less from his first four novels than from the sale of four stories to the *Saturday Evening Post*. He may have carped that such writing interfered with his more serious longer work, but he felt that way even as he created his greatest short stories. These stories demarcate familiar Faulknerian terrain, a terrain so characteristic that his name is one of the few to have become a writerly adjective. Part of the reason for this is his thematic obsession with the tragedy of southern racial relations, a product of the "peculiar institution" of slavery, which forced blacks and whites to live together yet apart. All his later novels and most of the stories occur in an imagined Yoknapatawpha County, the "little postage stamp of native soil" that allowed Faulkner to reconsider the tormented history of his region. The saga he created, which stretches from early Native American possession to World War II, mires ghostly heroes together with embittered survivors, privileged planters with stalwart sharecroppers, ambitious renegades with overly principled ascetics in a community always required to define itself as essentially black and white.

Another more obvious "Faulknerian" quality—the tropical lushness of his style, the wrenched syntax, the stark repetitions—tends to be less characteristic of

the stories, perhaps because they were intended for a more clearly commercial market. But Faulkner's concern with meanings delayed and constructed by the reader is as apparent in "A Rose for Emily" and "The Bear" as in *The Sound and the Fury*; his concern with the violent legacy of racism as obvious in "Dry September" and "That Evening Sun" as in *Light in August*. And his realization that narratives are never complete or finished but always open to further revision is apparent in the recasting of stories in new guises, retold in such later novels as *The Unvanquished* and *Absalom, Absalom!* (though an economic incentive was always at work in this process of recycling). Indeed, so committed was Faulkner to the expansive possibilities of the short story form that in *Go Down, Moses* he created what he always insisted was a novel composed entirely of interrelated stories previously published separately.

"Barn Burning" (1939) is among Faulkner's finest stories and the best introduction to issues that recur in his fiction, including most importantly the conflict between family ties and community abstractions. More poignantly than almost any other figure Faulkner created, ten-year-old Sarty Snopes is tormented by "the old fierce pull of blood," caught in the tension between preadolescent loyalty to his father Abner and a growing awareness of Abner's moral savagery in defying community standards. Present and preterite tenses shift abruptly in the story, with Sarty's immediate anxieties conveyed by exclamatory italics that interrupt a straightforward chronicle of his developing moral integrity. The theme of a child's anxiously coming to terms with

the need for social mores has fascinated the best of American authors (James, Crane, and Hemingway, among others), and was masterfully explored in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which succeeds through Mark Twain's ironic trick of not allowing Huck to understand his own moral heroism, keeping his narrative always in the first person.

By contrast, Faulkner dramatizes the problem of having a hero too young to grasp a larger moral order by deliberately shifting the narrative perspective outside Sarty's consciousness at a number of important junctures. Once, when Abner realizes Sarty would have told the truth if given a chance, an authorial voice intrudes with an insight well beyond the boy's capabilities: "Later, twenty years later, he was to tell himself, 'If I had said they wanted only truth, justice, he would have hit me again.'" This foreshadowing of a calmly retrospective view registers Sarty's own gradual recognition of his developing independence, his growing need to stand up for something larger than sheer family solidarity. The difficulty of this evolution is conveyed in the fabric of the narrative, in an ambiguous dependence on the pronoun "he" that occasionally confuses Sarty with his father, mirroring the process by which people are entangled in the history of their families and dramatizing the inherent difficulties in any attempt to escape paternal authority.

The story begins with a fiercely loyal boy immersed in his father's perspective but already conflicted at the prospect of testifying on Abner's behalf in court. Sarty both endorses his father's irrational perspective against the judge ("*Enemy! Enemy!* he thought") and reveals deep reservations

("He aims for me to lie, he thought, again with that frantic grief and despair, *And I will have to do hit.*") Later, when the family is forced to move, the image of Major de Spain's mansion triggers in Sarty a silent acknowledgement of the value of self-respect, honesty, honor, human integrity—in short, the "peace and dignity" he has never associated with his father. Still, filial loyalty prompts him to fierce defense of a man whose sly viciousness he cannot fathom until the moment kerosene is poured in preparation for torching de Spain's barn. At that point, Sarty races unself-consciously to warn of the danger, troubled by only the most fleeting pang of regret ("*Father. My father.*").

The fact that even now the meaning of his father's actions escapes Sarty is clarified wonderfully in the ironic distance between Sarty's final testament—"He was brave"—and the deflating account provided by an authorial voice detailing Abner's mercenary Civil War ventures. That distance in perspectives enhances our appreciation of Sarty's development, dramatizing through narrative voice itself the story's thematic conflicts in levels of knowledge. That Sarty, unaware of these facts or their meaning, departs at the story's conclusion reinforces the weight of the dramatic transformation that has ensued since the story began only weeks before. Its final words, "He did not look back," register a sense of closure for both the story and the boy.

Though "Barn Burning" is most importantly about a boy's coming of age, it raises other related issues, one of them economic: uneducated sharecroppers are kept impoverished by a system that allows rich landowners to indulge their taste in

carpets imported from France. Abner's acts of retaliation, motivated by resentment of that system, are craven, even sociopathic (scarring rugs, burning barns), and hardly gestures of heroic defiance. But an implicit part of postbellum life in the rural South is the exploitative economics that offers less and less to such as the Snopes, and Abner's brutal behavior is in some measure the result of his brutalized condition. As the narrator says, "fire spoke to some deep mainspring of his father's being . . . as the one weapon for the preservation of integrity, else breath were not worth the breathing." However misshapen Abner's sense of "integrity," Sarty achieves his own principled independence by an ability to emulate his father, transforming a destructive urge into something more socially responsible and sustaining.

Along with class, gender is highlighted in the story, in the distinct set of relations between Abner, Sarty, and his brothers on the one hand, and the women of the family on the other. The unnamed mother's "hopeless despair" is matched by the ineffectiveness of his aunt and "big, bovine" sisters, whose collective helplessness against Abner's destructiveness becomes a source of mild contempt. Yet Sarty's final awareness that his father is deeply wrong derives in part from his mother's moralizing example. And if his departure at the end is wholly commendable, the redemptive possibilities of his transformation are partially undercut by the cyclical reminders in the story's concluding paragraph ("The slow constellations wheeled on"), which imply a repetition of the patriarchal conditions represented in the story.

"Barn Burning" relies on a fairly

straightforward narrative voice that actively assists the reader in understanding the consciousness of a ten-year-old boy as he comes to grips with his father's inadequacies. A decade earlier, Faulkner had created a more elusive and tantalizing narrative voice in "A Rose for Emily" (1930). The story works retrospectively, circling back from its opening sentence—"When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral"—through a biography of Emily Grierson, to the moment immediately following the funeral when the town and narrator discover the corpse of her poisoned lover in her bed. The final revelation of murderous necrophilia comes as a shock, especially given the unidentified narrator's dispassionate tone. At no point does he or she reveal emotional involvement in the events recounted, as if to forestall the excess emotional engagements that structure the circular narrative—engagements between Emily and her father, between Emily and her lover Homer Barron, between Emily and the taxpaying town. Faulkner's story evokes Henry James's novella, *Washington Square*, in which a young woman is caught between a domineeringly suspicious father and a fortune-hunting suitor. But the closer literary legacy may be Charles Dickens's *Miss Havisham*, whose disappointed bridal hopes in *Great Expectations* lead to her self-immuring in an imminent pre-wedding moment, with clocks symbolically stopped at twenty to nine, wedding cake left on the table, and a bridal gown worn unchanged until her fiery death years later.

Emily Grierson's desire to arrest time is reflected in the narrative itself, which circles back from its opening sentence as

the last event in a chronology yet to be determined. The entire story seems intended to bring the reader more thoroughly to an understanding of the opening line, and thus to participating fully in the initiating moment of death. Frequent adverbial clauses beginning with "when" contribute to a repeated breaking of narrative motion that, even as it moves time along, marks it as past. Emily's strongest motive, to refuse any acknowledgment of time and its consequences, is established in scenes of her resistance to burying her father's corpse, paying taxes, and accepting free postal delivery. That motive, however, is made more immediate through the hesitations and backward shiftings of the narrative itself. And the attempt on the part of the unidentified townspeople (invoked sometimes as "we," sometimes "they") to make sense of her life matches our readerly efforts.

While the reader partakes in Emily's obsession through a circuitous chronology that accentuates time by forestalling it, the narrative also enhances her mysteriousness by delaying knowledge of the facts. We may have become jaded by post-structuralist claims that fictional texts are always about their own interpretative quandaries, but there is no avoiding that classic critique in this case: "A Rose for Emily" engages the problem of reading itself in the distinction between Emily's actual biography and the accounts of the townspeople. The tension between these two possibilities is defined as a conflict in the narrative modes of gothic tale and detective story, which structure the story even as they introduce narrative unreliability. Only as readers carefully detect the relevant clues can they anticipate

the gothic revelation of the closing sentence.

If the conflict between Emily's secret and the town's complacency produces a certain ironic tone, it also disguises the remarkable similarity between the deranged spinster who imposes her murderous marriage plot and the town that likewise imposes an indulgently misplaced homage on its proud senior citizen. The town's satisfied self-assurance about the eccentric spinster, moreover, is paralleled in the reader's confidence over the self-contained narrative voice. This helps explain the frequent effort among critics to devise a chronology of Emily's life based on a series of temporal markers and only one stated date (1894, the year her taxes are remitted), as a means of gaining control over a narrative that seems incapable of controlling itself (interestingly, no two of these critical accounts quite agree on dates). Clearly, Faulkner intended this response, since early draft versions are much more explicit about the story's events.

Again, however, Faulkner is interested in more than mere narrative-making, and the story can be read in a number of thematic ways, perhaps especially as a perverse monument to the southern heritage. Emily is admired by the town, considered "a tradition, a duty, and a care," and only her death fosters a reconsideration of her life. The townspeople have applauded not a madwoman and a murderess but a heroic figure to whom they have a "hereditary obligation," deserving its noblesse oblige. Like the South itself, she has earned respect for the dignity with which she has faced adversity. To them, her fostering of traditional cultural talents (teaching

painting to young girls) as well as her antagonism to industrial modernization (refusing free postal delivery) have transformed her into a model of Confederate persistence. As the narrator intones, "Thus she passed from generation to generation—dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse." That her intrepid eccentricity covers for necrophilia and murder—albeit of a Yankee suitor lacking in honor—complicates any interpretation of Faulkner's meaning in the story. But the description of her "iron-gray" fortitude suggests a certain wry admiration for Emily, who achieves through death the status of an honorable icon; the color may even quietly refer to her association with Confederate values. She wins from fellow townspeople, at least before the story's conclusion, the respect they hold for the best of southern tradition. And ironically, her death achieves for both town and reader precisely the suspension of time that she had striven to achieve through Homer Barron's murder.

Various readers have pointed to the formal symmetry of "A Rose for Emily." The opening invasion by the Board of Aldermen is matched by the final breaking into Emily's bedroom that discloses the corpse; only in the third, middle section is her isolation left fully intact. This thematic alteration between isolation and intrusion plays out the contest between Emily and the town to reveal, or conceal, the facts of her life. The more vivid tension, however, occurs in the story's suppression of action, as details of the past fall into place to form a portrait monstrously different from any we had assumed. The narrative creates an overall rhythm of slow-

motion revelation, with each aspect of personality laid bare before the surprising jolt of the story's final sentence.

A startling aspect of Faulkner's achievement in the short story form is that his most brilliant successes succeed with quite different materials in narratively various ways. "Red Leaves" (1930), for example, is often acknowledged as his most extraordinary story, not least because of the nuanced use of a selectively omniscient point of view in describing the bizarre Indian ritual of burying his slave with a leader. Other authors might have played up the exotic features of these materials, but Faulkner quickly moves beyond such concern by manipulating the narrative perspective (sometimes in the slave's consciousness, at others with the pursuers, at still others quietly omniscient) to enforce the reader's conflicting sympathies both with and against tradition. The narrative develops just the opposite of "A Rose for Emily" and achieves a different effect, at once gut-wrenchingly suspenseful and hilarious, culturally alien and yet movingly familiar on the subjects of death and tradition.

The purely comic strain in Faulkner is revealed nowhere better than in "Spotted Horses" (1931), which introduces the Snopeses, the clan whose ratlike persistence and witless endeavors animate Faulkner's late novelistic trilogy, *The Hamlet* (1940), *The Town* (1957), and *The Mansion* (1960). The story is told by Ratliff, a sewing-machine agent, who recounts in humorous dialect the wily, inscrutable Flem Snopes's rise in life: "That Flem Snopes. I be dog if he ain't a case, now." A month after wedding the local merchant's daugh-

ter, Flem takes his wife to Texas to conceal a premature pregnancy, returning a year later with twenty wild horses to sell. In fact, Flem never admits to owning the horses, much less profiting from their sale, and in the equine havoc wreaked on the town, he avoids any blame. Once sold, the horses cannot be caught, racing through houses, roaming the countryside, leaving broken wagons and legs behind. The rare mix of satiric comedy and pathos that Faulkner achieves in the story is represented best in the character of Mrs. Armstid, who had resisted her foolish husband's purchase of a horse, had even won the Texas salesman's promise of a refund, and yet can only passively accept Flem Snopes's patent lie that he had nothing to do with the trade. After all, the Texas salesman has left town and therefore Flem cannot help her, save for a nickel candy for her young "chaps." The story ends with Ratliff's admiring view of Flem Snopes's brazen sales triumph: "If I had brung a herd of wild cattymounts into town and sold them to my neighbors and kinfolks, they would have lynched me. Yes, sir."

Among short story practitioners, William Faulkner is nearly unique in his fascination with action-laced narratives, coupled with a commitment to literary experimentation. Perhaps the author he most resembles is Stephen Crane, whose preoccupation with bizarre experiences seemed only to reinforce his skepticism about the potential of any supposedly straightforward account. Just as narrative for Faulkner nearly always begins with peculiar events—of barn-burning fathers, necrophilic old maids, and hysterical Indian slaves, among others—his fiction

also makes us acutely aware of the form in which those events are represented, the narrative voice and temporal succession that makes them "peculiar" to begin with. Few other authors invite such self-consciousness in the process of reading, or display in the course of a story how firmly readerly judgments emerge from the reader's own predilections. This open-ended, revisable quality of Faulkner's aesthetic may help us understand why so many of his novels began as stories and why so many of his stories appear again in novels. But it does not explain the peculiar and continuing power the best of William Faulkner's stories have in transforming sharply observed episodes of human behavior, however fantastic, into triumphant fictional explorations of universal experiences.

Lee Mitchell

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## F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

(1896–1940)

Although F. Scott Fitzgerald's fame rests primarily on his two major novels, *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *Tender Is the Night* (1934), he wrote more than 160 short stories during his lifetime. At least six of his stories are considered classics, among the best American short stories published in the twentieth century, and are widely anthologized. Although Fitzgerald thought of himself primarily as a novelist, the stories represent a literary legacy that equals his novels. The connection between the two forms was clear to Fitzgerald, for whom short stories not only provided the income that supported his family over the years—and allowed him to write his novels—but also served as a kind of fictional laboratory. In his stories Fitzgerald developed his style and the themes that he would develop in the novels; in many cases, after a story had been published in a mass-circulation magazine, he would copy passages that seemed to him particularly felicitous into a notebook for possible use later in a novel. From the time he was a young boy in school until his death in Hollywood in 1940, Fitzgerald never ceased writing the short stories that gave him financial and literary sustenance.

F. Scott Fitzgerald was born September 24, 1896, in St. Paul, Minnesota, to Edward and Mollie McQuillan Fitzgerald. He was always proud that he was named for his second cousin, three times removed, Francis Scott Key, composer of "The Star-Spangled Banner." When he was two, the family moved to Buffalo, New

York; two years later to Syracuse; then back to Buffalo in 1901. In 1908, after his father lost his job, the family returned to St. Paul, where he attended St. Paul Academy and began to write short stories. The family moved several times in St. Paul, always living in rented houses; indeed, throughout his lifetime, Fitzgerald never owned a place of residence. The years of his childhood and early youth were indelibly etched in his memory. He would always feel like the outsider, the poor relation, dependent on his mother's family, admitted to but never really a member of St. Paul's social world. This sense of estrangement is characteristic of his fiction, from the short stories of his school years to those he wrote shortly before his death in Hollywood.

In September 1911 he enrolled in the Newman School in New Jersey, where he wrote and published his stories in the *Newman News*. In 1913, he entered Princeton University, where he established friendships with writers Edmund Wilson and John Peale Bishop. At Princeton he joined the major literary and dramatic clubs, and his work appeared in the *Nassau Literary Magazine* and *Princeton Tiger*. In 1914, while home for a school break, he met and fell in love with Ginevra King, who became the model for the unattainable girl who appears frequently in his early short stories. Fitzgerald left Princeton and joined the army in 1917. While stationed in Montgomery, Alabama, he fell in love with Zelda Sayre, whom he married in 1920, the same year that his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, was published. The success of that novel and the personal celebrity Fitzgerald and his beautiful wife achieved made them icons of the "Jazz

Age," the term Fitzgerald popularized to describe the 1920s. In the same year, his first short story collection, *Flappers and Philosophers*, was published. The Fitzgeralds' daughter, Frances Scott (Scottie) was born in 1921. During the next four years the Fitzgeralds moved to Great Neck, New York, and twice to the French Riviera. His second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned*, was published in 1922, as well as a second collection of short stories, *Tales of the Jazz Age*. In 1926 his third collection of stories, *All the Sad Young Men*, appeared. Fitzgerald completed his next novel, *The Great Gatsby*, in France, where the couple settled until 1927, when he made his first trip to Hollywood to try his hand at screenwriting. Later that year, the family moved to Eilerslie, a rented home in Delaware, and Zelda Fitzgerald started to take ballet lessons. Returning to France, with an interval at Eilerslie and a trip to North Africa in 1930, they took an apartment in Paris, where Zelda suffered her first nervous breakdown and entered a nearby clinic. Later, she was moved to clinics in Switzerland until she was deemed able to return to the United States, to Montgomery. In the next few years, Zelda would experience several breakdowns, and Fitzgerald made a second trip to Hollywood (1931), all the while publishing the short stories that made it possible for him to meet the enormous cost of his wife's illness. In 1934 his novel *Tender Is the Night* was published, and the following year saw publication of his fourth collection of short stories, *Taps at Reveille*. During the years 1935–1937, living in North Carolina close to Zelda's hospital, he was deeply in debt, drinking heavily, and despondent about his wife's condition and