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Faulkner in Oxford, Panel Discussion

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Faulkner in Oxford

Panel Discussion

I

PANELISTS

Howard Duvall
Robert J. Farley
Phil Mullen
James W. Webb

Webb We have some people here this morning that I'll introduce to you. This is Robert J. Farley, Dean Emeritus, School of Law. He was closely associated with Oxford and the community as well as with the University and William Faulkner. I think his chief distinction among us was being the youngest mayor of Oxford for some time. Here's Phil Mullen. During Faulkner's heyday he was with the *Oxford Eagle*. You will see him in the film *William Faulkner of Oxford*. Here is Howard Duvall, a contemporary of Jill and a close friend. Now I'll invite questions.

Questioner I'd like to know how Rowan Oak was acquired by the University.

Webb Well, you might be putting me on the spot. I'll try to be brief but will relate some matters that led up to the acquisition. I first met Mr. Faulkner in 1948, in the fall. Over the years our acquaintance was most casual, even distant. I wanted to talk to him but I thought of him as being a rather private man. I couldn't go whooshing to him with pencil and paper and ask what he meant by so and so. Common ground was not easy to find. In 1960, I was appointed chairman of the English Department. Dr. Bill Strickland was and still is chairman of the Department of Modern Languages. His stepfather, Mr. Goldsborough, had retired from legal practice and was devoting much of his time to being an excellent portrait painter. Bill and I worked ourselves up to the point of approaching Faulkner about an oil painting of him for the Faulkner Collection. He agreed and seemed pleased. I raised the funds by subscription—writing letters

to people on the campus, in town, and to individuals interested in Faulkner over the United States. This venture got us all well acquainted. You can believe that I never got quite "carried away," but I was smitten. Genius that I believed him to be, I found him to be easy and interesting and even humorous when the situation was right. We went to the barn on one occasion to look at his horse Stonewall. I grew up on a Mississippi farm and I found that we could talk about horses, mules, dogs, and even rats. With a twinkle in his eye he could be whimsical and speculative while talking about animals. To him the rat is the most intelligent of animals. "Why?" I asked. Briefly he answered, "The stupid ones don't live long." I didn't ask him about his books or writing.

Later I worked up the courage or recklessness to ask him about his many awards, including the Nobel. At the time they were in the Mary Buie Museum which was owned and operated by the town of Oxford under the curatorship of Mrs. Herron Rowland. I asked him about seeing them placed with the Faulkner Collection in the University library and waited a moment for his reply. He looked at the ceiling by way of reflection and then looked right at me. "Jill and Mrs. Rowland collected these things as they were awarded and put them in the museum. As long as Mrs. Rowland is curator I want them to stay there, but the minute she resigns or retires you may move them." I replied, "Mr. Faulkner, you can't be any fairer than that." They are now in the Faulkner Collection of the Ole Miss library.

Now, I'll try to answer your question. When Mr. Faulkner died on July 2, 1962, he left Mrs. Faulkner at Rowan Oak alone. She was persuaded by her daughter Jill to come and live near her at Charlottesville. After waiting a proper time I went over to the Lyceum building to see Mr. Hugh Clegg, Director of University Development, having retired after many years with the F.B.I. I suggested that it might be possible for the University to acquire Rowan Oak and to perserve it as a kind of memorial. Mr. Clegg, a man of vision, thought well of the idea. He stated that he would approach Jill on the matter and added that he might enlist the assistance of Jack Faulkner, brother of the author, and also retired from the F.B.I. after years of service. He and Mr. Clegg had been long time friends and colleagues. Anyway, Mr. Clegg went to work on the matter. At this time, however, Jill was reluctant to sell the home but stated that she

would agree to lease it to the University for twenty years for ten dollars. Mr. Clegg then asked what I thought of that. I said, "Let's take it." Then he asked if I would assume responsibility of looking after it. Naturally I answered "Yes." Later Mrs. Faulkner came down to discuss and close matters. It was a chilly afternoon and we all sat in the library at Rowan Oak. After negotiations were concluded, Mrs. Faulkner, a tiny and frail and wonderful little person, commented, "If having Rowan Oak proves to be an asset to this university in its time of trouble, I will be pleased." This was late in the year of 1962. Mrs. Faulkner and the immediate members of her family were granted the privilege of staying in the home during visits in the summer—and did. One evening, while sitting on the east lawn, she informed me that no doubt eventually Rowan Oak would become permanent property of the University of Mississippi. I told her that we would be pleased.

Mrs. Faulkner died in 1973. Not long afterwards, Jill called me one morning at 7:30, saying that she was now ready to sell the home to the University. I told her that I would call Chancellor Porter Fortune as soon as our conversation was over. When I called I found that he had gone to the University airport—leaving town. I told Mr. Yerby, his administrative assistant, that it was an emergency. The Chancellor came to the phone and I gave him the message. He was pleased and in turn called Mr. Tommy Ethridge, attorney, and asked him to take it from there. The University purchased the home, along with its 32 acres ajoining the campus, for $170,000.

I will close with one more statement. A few years ago we had among our list of distinguished visitors William O. Douglas, Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Upon leaving the grounds he asked me who owned the home. As modestly as I could I replied the University of Mississippi. He shot back, "No. It belongs to the world." I believe he is right. Anyway, we don't sell admission tickets.

Mullen Jim, I would like to read two things that I think the audience would be interested in. In a special edition which I published in 1966, which reprinted much of what I had written before in the *Eagle* and the Canton, Mississippi, *Herald*, I wrote this:

> William Faulkner wrote some of the most violent, brutal, and shocking passages in literature. At the same time, he has written some of the most beautiful, romantic, sensitive, and nostalgic. Perhaps I misread them but it

seems to me that the critics mainly miss the fact that much of Faulkner's writing was done as if in the thoughts and the observations of an adolescent boy. In that period of life when events are the most poetic, when nobility is the most admired, when the majesty and power and mystery of love and life are at their greatest, and when all humanity is bigger than life.

And, of course, I say if you don't believe it just read *The Bear*, "Barn Burning," or one of the greatest, *The Reivers*.

Now all through their lifetimes Hemingway and Faulkner were natural contenders for the number one writer in the world, or at least in America. In one of his books, Hemingway spoke of William Faulkner as the authority on the bawdy houses in Memphis, and mentioned him by name, and I don't think Bill particularly liked that. When Hemingway published *The Old Man and The Sea* in *Life* magazine, he wrote *Life* and said, "This is a greater honor than the Nobel prize." I clipped it out and mailed it to Bill and said, "Sour grapes, as far as I'm concerned."

I have a brother who is an egghead and was acutally the Faulkner buff more than I was, and he indirectly arranged one of my best Faulkner quotes. He said to me, "Ernest Hemingway must have felt very bad, working as hard as I know he does, to have labored on *Across the River and into the Trees* and to have come up with nothing." So I met Bill coming out of Kroger's one day and I repeated that to him. Bill said, "Hemingway tries too hard. He should be a farmer like me and just write on the side."

I want to tell one more thing and then I'll sit down. You will see the *William Faulkner of Oxford* movie tomorrow night. I was in Paris, Tennessee, in 1952 and I got a thick letter from the Ford Foundation. I thought it was some big publicity and started to throw it away, but I opened it up. It was a letter saying that the Ford Foundation had picked Faulkner to be the writer in America on the Omnibus Series and that Bill had just been through there on his way to Paris, France, and had asked that they employ me to be the coordinator for the making of the movie. They sent along a script, and it was the most outrageous script I had ever read. One line I remember said, "This will be a film about an American writer in an obscure American town that reaches fame." So I sent the script back and said, "I can't help you; forget it." And I said, "Besides, Oxford is not an obscure town." I said, "After all, Grant slept there."

So they called me on the phone and said, "Mr. Mullen, we've got to

have you. We can't make this movie without you." They said, "We're scared of William Faulkner." So I said, "Well, all right. Send somebody down here with some sense and we'll make the movie 'cause I ain't a damn bit scared of him." So they sent a poet named Harry Behn from the University of New Mexico. I suggested that we just write it like it happened: the impact on a small town of somebody who the small town had not particularly admired or looked up to and who knew him so well, and what happened when he got the Nobel Prize. And so that's what we did. It just tells the story. That's the reason I'm in it, because AP called me that morning, when Faulkner's winning the Nobel Prize was announced, a Friday morning, and I had a slight hangover, Bob, and I wasn't feeling like working. And they said they had to have the story. So I called Bill on the phone. I said, "There is one damn newspaper man you're going to see this morning." He said, "Who's that?" I said, "That's me." He said, "Well, come on." So we went it from there.

I would like to tell this one further thing. He said, "Phil, would it be unethical if I read your story before you filed it?" I said, "No, but they're yelling for it. I'm going to phone it in." He said, "Well, call me when you finish and I'll run down to your office and read it." It took me two hours to write that story. The AP, of course, used it around the world. He came in and read it. And he said, "Do you have to mention my mother?" I said, "Well, Bill, she's an artist. I think I should use it." He said, "All right." He came down to a line where I said he had served with the RCAF. He said, "Change that to I was a member of the RCAF." He said, "I saw no service." He said, "Your story is all right," and turned around and walked out.

Questioner I was going to ask Mr. Mullen to tell us about the actual filming of that.

Mullen Oh. Well, as it happened most of the principals were still here. Bill Asger, the man who gave—well now, here goes another one of my favorite stories. Dr. Byron Gathright was in that class, and Bill Asger was the Episcopal rector. He gave a baccalaureate address and spoke for five minutes. So Byron told Bill, "Mr. Bill, if you'll do as well by us, I'll join your church." So Bill spoke for exactly four and a half minutes.

But we came down with a very fine director and camera man, and

Bill was a movie maker himself. That's what he should have been all his life, a movie maker. Now he did tell me to bring him four fifths of whiskey. When he offered to pay me for them, I said, "No, we'll charge these to the Ford Foundation." He liked that. So, he worked absolutely perfectly with the crew; I wasn't with him all the time, but he made suggestions. I think it's probably the unique literary film in the country because I dare someone to come up with one of Shakespeare, or even Hemingway. Well, anyway, we reenacted the graduation address and we had some of the same girls. Jill wasn't there but we had the same rector and the same speech.

Another favorite story about that actual graduation was that I was at a garden party that Jill gave during the week. Bill got up and walked me to the gate and I said, "You gonna write your talk or are you gonna give it off the cuff?" And he looked at me and said, "You want a copy of it?" I said, "Yes, me and AP and UPI and all the ships at sea." And so he talked so softly when he actually delivered the speech that nobody could really hear what he said and the AP man was sitting beside me and he said, "Phil, I didn't get what he said." I said, "Well, come go with me." So I went backstage and he was being very courteous to a very little girl from Grenada who had come up there and he handed the manuscript to me. I still have it. And then the girl called me from the University and said, "Oh, Mr. Mullen, can you help me? A Harvard professor hired me to take down Mr. Faulkner's address and I simply couldn't get it. Can you help me?" I said, "Yes, Ma'am. The *Eagle* will be on the street tomorrow and on the front page will be that speech word for word carefully proofread. It'll cost the total sum of seven cents."

Duvall I think Mr. Phil, Moon, keynoted a part of Mr. Faulkner's personality. In looking back on it, I believe William Faulkner, John, Jack, the whole group, Dean—I don't think any of them ever really wanted to release their childhood. They cherished the memories of their childhood and carried them right on through, and certainly Mr. Faulkner must have in a great many of his writings, particularly in something like *The Unvanquished* or *Sartoris*. Mr. Faulkner loved children. He really loved them, and I think he would reveal himself to children more; you may correct me on this. He would play with us, he would guide us in our games, he would take a great interest. He was a man who was intense in his writings, and deep in his thoughts.

When he was down there at Rowan Oak, when we were young and growing up, we weren't awed at Mr. Faulkner, the writer, at all. We were only curious mainly as to why he didn't go to work at eight o'clock and come back at five like the rest of our daddies. That made him more interesting to us because we could count on Mr. Bill to get involved in the games. When we wanted to learn to make rubber guns Mr. Faulkner taught us how to make rubber guns. And he was pretty good at it.

Mr. Faulkner also had a great sense of humor, a wry sort of humor. One afternoon we were out sailing. He loved to take the children, and most of my sailing was done with him, even after I got back from the Air Force. We got into a tremendous storm out at Sardis one afternoon. Mr. Faulkner had purchased a sailboat from Art Guyton; it was so heavy you could cross the Atlantic in it without any trouble. The only trouble is we put it on Sardis where we don't have very strong winds. Mr. Bill would say, "We're going sailing," and that really meant we were going out and just sit on Sardis Reservoir two or three hours and sweat it out, hoping something would come along and push us back into shore. This particular afternoon, Miss Estelle and Faulkner and Hunter Little and myself went out. It took about an hour and a half to get out of the Cove. Mr. Bill was a very proud man. He had a little one-horsepower motor that someone had given him as a hint. Sometimes he might want to use it to get back in. It had never been put in the water and probably never has because he wasn't going to be towed in. We'd finally tacked out that far, to get out into what we thought might be some wind, and we were becalmed as usual, but it was a pleasant afternoon. We might not have passed three words with Bill, though sometimes he'd talk your head off. Not about writing, of course, but about just things on the reservior, poring over problems of what we call nowadays environmental things.

We noticed this huge storm developing at the upper end of the lake; it was the southwest part of Sardis Dam, which is forty–four miles long: beautiful water, a conservation dam. It looked like we had some hope that we might get back in to shore for the first time on our own power. Well, all these commercial fishermen were just piling off the lake as fast as they could go. Most of the time, while we were becalmed out there, these commercial fishermen, who all knew Mr. Faulkner, would come by and ask him, "Mr. Bill, would you like

for us to tow you in?" He'd say, "No, thank you kindly, I believe I'll just sit it out." And that's what we'd do, sweat rolling down our faces. But this particular day after the squall started, we commented to Mr. Faulkner that this time we thought it might be good to crank up that motor for our safety, to go ashore because these commercial fishermen were piling on in. I'll never forget these two men passed us just lickety-split toward Cole's Camp. They got within ten or fifteen yards offshore and that boat went down. I don't think the water ever touched them. They were just like walking on water. They just kept on going. We passed out the life jackets and Mr. Bill wouldn't take one. He said, "No thank you, don't believe I will." So, Miss Estelle put on one, Hunter put on one, and I put on one. Mr. Bill had some sort of R.C.A.F. cap and I was told, maybe incorrectly, that Queen Elizabeth had given it to him, because he had been in first aid in World War I and never gotten in the R.A.F. overseas. Anyway it was a very prized cap of his and it blew overboard. Well, Hunter being a fantastic swimmer and a very fine sailor—he taught sailing at camp at Maine and North Carolina—he knew all these nautical terms. Mr. Bill started rolling off these nautical terms and it was all I could do to hang on. So, I was hanging in the bottom of the boat. Hunter jumped overboard and got Mr. Bill's cap back. A little dinghy was floating in the back, we had it tied to the sailboat. If it hadn't been for that dinghy, I don't believe Hunter would have made it. The waves were at least six feet high. So Hunter got back in and gave him his cap back and Bill thanked him. About ten minutes later the dinghy broke with us and disappeared. Things really looked bad. That's when Mr. Faulkner said something about, "Howard, I believe I will take that life jacket." So I handed him a life jacket and I said, "Mr. Bill, are you getting scared?" And he said, "Naw, just getting cold." And he never would tell me he was scared, but I felt sure that he was a little bit scared.

Farley I think I'll tell the story about Faulkner and a friend driving into the lake. One of Faulkner's attributes was imperturbability and just as this storm illustrates, he never did get excited.

Duvall Never changed expressions.

Farley This story I got from Hugh Evans, who was a very close friend of Bill's and his neighbor in later years. A few months after

Sardis Lake was built, they had closed the dam and covered what is now called the Old Sardis Road, a gravel road from Oxford to Sardis. It ended at the lake somewhere out near Clear Creek. Hugh Evans and Bill Faulkner were riding out in Hugh's automobile to look at the lake one moonlit night. They drove out the Old Sardis Road and the moonlight was such that you couldn't tell where the water started and the road ended. So, Hugh went dashing out right on into the lake and the water killed his engine. They rolled up their pants and waded back to shore. After they got back up in the road Hugh said, "Bill, you said something just before I hit that water. What did you say?" And Bill said,—he was smoking his pipe— "I said, 'Goddamn, he ain't gonna stop.' " He didn't think enough of it to yell it out again.

Mullen Bob, tell them about the Delta Council people.

Farley That's too long a story. Nobody else'd get to talk any, I'm afraid.

Mullen Well, just the one thing, the one thing he suggested that you do.

Farley Bill was in this period and, in fact, most of the time before he won the Nobel Prize, always cramped for money. Maury Knowlton asked me to invite him to speak at the Delta Council where we have an annual meeting and always have some prominent people, usually a general, admiral, or an author. Anyway, we wanted to have Bill Faulkner on it. That was unusual because he wasn't thought of very highly in the Delta. Anyway, I went to see Bill and I talked to him about it. He said, "Aw, you know I can't make a speech." And I said, "Yeah, you can. All you gotta do is write it out and read it." And I said, "We're gonna pay you four hundred dollars." That's a small amount now, but it was a big amount then. Bill was wanting to buy a jeep and I knew that. Anyway, the four hundred dollars appealed to him a good deal. He requested that I make the speech and he'd take me over there and I told him that they hadn't invited me to make the speech. So he finally agreed to go.

The publicity was put in *The Commercial Appeal* and everywhere that William Faulkner was going to be one of the speakers. About three days before the date, which was in May, Bill telephoned me

and said he was going to Italy. No particular reason, just that he was going to Italy and wouldn't be able to go over there. I told him he just couldn't do that to those people over there. They had all the publicity out and people were there to hear him as well as others and he just couldn't do it. Well, he finally agreed again that he would go.

So, I was to take him over there. Alice, my wife, and I went by his house about eight o'clock in the morning. Actually, he had forgotten all about it and he was lolling around out there on the front lawn, if you could call it a lawn at that time. And he had on an old linen jacket that was dirty and a frayed shirt. To cap it all, he had on a hat that he must have had back in about 1912. It was of that vintage and also of that age, greasy looking in addition to being very much out of style. Well, he got in and we went. He said he was ready. So I assumed that he was doing that—he did fool us sometime—because he was speaking to what he called farmers (they called themselves planters, instead of just farmers) so he was going to look like one of them, and be one. Anyway, he got in the car; we drove over there and when we went to get out I was so bothered about that hat, I said, "Now, Bill, I'm not wearing any hat, why don't you leave yours in the car?" So he said, "Well, I will." So he didn't look as bad as he might have.

We got there and were very cordially received. Photographers and newspeople were there from the time we went to the sidewalk and were conducted in. We had a lunch first, a dinner–on–the–ground with fried chicken and all the things that go with it. I don't remember whether he ate anything much or not. I didn't. But, anyway, we finally got back inside and it came time for Bill's speech. He didn't have a very strong voice and he didn't use it as much as he might have if it had been stronger. As luck would have it, the public address system wasn't on; something went wrong with it. There were a few screeches when he'd say something and that was about all until he got about halfway through his speech and then it suddenly came on and you could hear the rest of it. But nobody, just like this other speech, nobody, including me, that was sitting right up at front, understood the first half of what he said. I learned afterwards that he was telling them that he was glad to be there because he was a farmer, just like they were, and a poor farmer. So he went along with this first and then he finally gave a very nice address. Well, that's about all to it except that we left there and he autographed letters and things and they took his picture some more. He was very cooperative.

We went out and got in the car and Maury Knowlton, the governor of the council, called me out there and he said, "I've got that check for four hundred dollars, but I spoke to Mr. Faulkner earlier and he said, 'Just give me a case of whiskey.' I've got a case of whiskey, too, but I don't want to insult him by giving him that four hundred dollars if he doesn't want it." And I said, "Maury, give me that check. He wants it." Anyway, I took it back and I chastized Bill for getting me in such an embarrassing situation. I had insisted upon the four hundred dollars and then he'd said, "Just give me the whiskey" and I said, "I'm a damned good mind to take the whiskey myself." He said, "Bob, you can have it or you can have half of it—I'll give you half of it and I'll give you ten percent of the four hundred dollars. I'm gonna make you my agent from now on." I took the half a case of whiskey. I didn't get into the four hundred dollars.

Questioner When did you first know William Faulkner? How far back does your friendship go?

Farley 1910. I didn't know him very well when we were little boys. I knew him, but we were not particularly friends.

Questioner You grew up in Oxford?

Farley Yes.

Mullen He forgot one point on that thing. Going over there Bill turned around to Bob and said, "Bob, let's do this thing a little bit differently"; he said, "I'll get up and make my speech and you get up and introduce me."

Duvall Dean Farley alluded to the fact that Faulkner always said he was a farmer. And I've seen it written many times when they asked him what he did for a living, he said "I'm a farmer." It reminds me of what happened last year out at Bill's farm. We had a group out there on a tour, and I got James Avent, the colored man who worked for Mr. Faulkner, to talk to the group. I had some trouble doing it, but I finally got him aboard the bus. I said, "James, you don't have to make a speech. Just take this microphone and I'll introduce you and they'll ask you questions." Well, a few questions went by and he'd answer them yes and no when he could. Some lady in the back raised

her hand and said, "Mr. Avent, I want to ask you one question. I want to know what kind of farmer was Mr. Faulkner?" James immediately took his straw hat off and put it over his heart and looked up there like Mr. Bill might be looking over the top of the trees at him and he said, "Well, I'm gon' tell ya'. I'll tell the truth about it. Mr. Bill, he wadn't much of no farmer, but he sure was nice to us folks." He put his hat back on then. I guess Mr. Bill was probably one of the worst farmers in Lafayette County, but it was a hobby with him and he was going to raise those mules come hell or high water, which he did. He wasn't really much of a farmer, but he liked to tell folks that he was a farmer. When he came back from Sweden, of course he had all kinds of offers for talks. The only one he accepted was from the Lafayette County Farm Bureau.

Questioner Can I get Dean Farley to tell that story, just a very short one, about Colonel Faulkner sitting up in front of the bank after he had been deposed from the First National over to the Bank of Oxford?

Farley I was using by way of illustration the fact that none of the Faulkners were what you'd call democrats. All of them were pretty autocratic, including Bill and his grandfather, who everybody called Colonel Faulkner, J.W.T. I. He wore a white linen suit and carried a hearing aid that looked like a fan; he was deaf. He put it between his teeth and he could hear you. He was sitting out in front of Roland's drugstore with the Courthouse, of course, right in front of him. A country fellow walked up and saw the great big chain across his tummy and asked him what time it was. Colonel Faulkner put his hearing aid up and he said, "What time is it?" And he heard him that time and he shouted, "There's a clock up there for po' folks, look at it!" The clock is famous—it never showed the same time on all four sides.

Webb I know we're running pressed for time, but I'd like to hear Dean Farley tell the Ridley Wills story.

Farley This I told by way of illustration of two things. One was that Bill Faulkner was a very devout Episcopalian. The other was his love for privacy and his averseness to gentle association. There was a man

named Ridley Wills, who wrote the column for *The Commercial Appeal,* called "Rambling with Ridley." He would go around to different towns in the Mid–South and write up the town and a character or two there. I had met him earlier—this was in 1924, I think. And he had written Oxford up in *The Commercial Appeal.*

Anyway, late one afternoon, I had started walking to my T–model Ford to go home, and Ridley Wills was standing there at the corner where Colonel Faulkner was sitting. And he spoke to me and told me he wanted to ask a favor of me. I said, "What's that?" He said, "I want you to take me out and introduce me to Bill Faulkner." He said, "I'm writing a novel, and I think that I can get some good ideas from him about getting it published." And I said, "Well, Ridley I don't mind taking you out there, but I can't guarantee you how you will be received, whether or not Bill will turn around and walk off or whether he would talk to you or not." "Well," he said, "if you take me out there I'll take a chance on it."

So we got in the Ford and went out there. When we got to the road around the campus, we saw Bill walking across from the post office towards his home. This was when he was living with his father in the old Delta Psi house there on the campus. So I drove up to the place where the path intersected the roadway. And he came up and spoke to me, and I introduced him to Ridley Wills. I should mention that Ridley had been to school, I think, at Vanderbilt originally and then had had one year at Oxford, England, and then had come back to Vanderbilt and taught English until he got to drinking so much, and then they fired him, according to his own story. Anyway, he had gotten this job with *The Commercial Appeal* and was doing very well with it.

So, I introduced him to Bill and told him Ridley Wills would like to talk to him. I told him who Ridley was, and he said, "Fine, well, let's ride around some more. Wait for me just a minute." So he went in the house. Mrs. Faulkner was having a bridge club out on the side porch. He went directly in the house and in a few minutes came back out again with something in his shirt front. He got in the car on the back seat and Ridley and I were in the front and we started off, driving out the Batesville road. Bill got out what he had hidden in his shirt—a quart of white lightning. And we all started to drinking out of the bottle just a little bit at the time. Someone had remarked, one of his camping friends, that Bill never really did just drink whiskey,

he just sucked on the bottle. He didn't use big drinks, but he would take little ones often. Anyway, we began to drink and pretty soon it began to take its effect on everyone but me. Anyway, Ridley Wills asked Bill, "If you could be anything you want to to be, what would you be?" And Bill said, "Well, I think I'd be a lay reader in the Episcopal Church." And Ridley said, "You want to go to heaven, don't you." And Bill said, "I certainly do. Don't you want to?" And Ridley said, "Naw, I can't imagine anything more boring than being up there. They would probably put me not just playing the harps but to manicuring the angel's wings. I certainly wouldn't want to do that." Bill reached over and slapped him on the shoulder and said, "My boy, you don't have the true Rotary spirit."

We came back and stopped at the golf course where Bill and a boy named Gerard Dean had a little shopper they called it. They sold golf balls and soft drinks and other golfing equipment. Bill asked me to stop and let him run in there. It was located right at what was the first tee at that time at the University golf course which was right at the corner of where the baseball grandstand is now. This shack was in the corner and the tee was off a little to the left there. Bill went on into the shack, and Ridley and I went on over to the tee and there was Dean Kimbrough. And I might add at that time I had started teaching part time in the law school. I knew that the other dean was Dean Oliver Shaw, who was a comical looking sort of a person.

Mr. Shaw was there about to drive a ball off the tee. Ridley went running around in front of him, took the club out of his hands, and he backed off and Ridley gave it a swat. He dropped the club, and started running down the fairway and retrieved the ball, in a weaving sort of way. He came right back with it and put it up on the tee and picked up the golf club and handed it to Mr. Shaw again who was nonplused. Anyway, Ridley then walked back on up toward the shack. They left me standing there, and Judge Kimbrough, whom I had known for a long time, said, "Robert, who is that fellow?" And I said, "I don't know, Judge, some fellow that came here with Bill Faulkner."

II

PANELISTS

William McNeil Reed
William Roane

William Stone
James W. Webb

Webb This is an informal meeting, so we're just going to chat. On our left is William Stone. We call him "Jack." He was a young man in Faulkner's day. Next to him is Mr. William Reed. We call him "Mr. Mack." This is Aston Holley, local pharmacist who grew up with Faulkner's step–son Malcolm Franklin. On my right is William Roane. We call him "Hoot." First, I'm going to ask Mr. Stone to tell us about when he first came to know Mr. Faulkner.

Stone I was very fortunate in knowing Bill Faulkner in three different areas. One was in Charleston, Mississippi, which is a small town about fifty miles south and west of Oxford. Another place that I knew him was in Pascagoula, Mississippi, where my family spent the summers when I was a child. He would come down and stay three and four weeks with us at a time in between his visits to New Orleans when he was with Sherwood Anderson. In fact, he wrote *Mosquitoes* in the front yard of our house there on the Mississippi coast. And then, of course, when I moved to Oxford I picked up on the friendship. He was always close to the Stone family.

One incident I remember about this writing was sown in Pascagoula when he was writing *Mosquitoes*. As I time it now, I must have been five years old. He was writing. I overheard the grown people say he was writing a book—so as a small, curious child I wandered up to him and asked him what he got for doing that. I thought any honest labor ought to be justly rewarded. He told me he got sometimes a nickel and sometimes a dime. So, when I was five years old I decided I wouldn't be a writer. Another story about his writing and his relating to children when he was writing involves Aston Holley, who is a contemporary of mine and who was a childhood friend of Faulkner's stepson Malcolm. Frequently Aston would go to see Malcolm and play on the grounds of Rowan Oak. One time, on a summer day about like today, Aston came across the hollow and found Bill in the back yard getting some sun and writing. Aston had always been taught to speak to the grown people when he was in their presence, like most Southern boys of that day. So Aston stopped and said, "Hello, Mr. Bill." Bill looked up and said, "Hello, Aston." He said, "Where's Malcolm?" And Bill said, "He's in the house. Go on in." Well, as Aston tells it, he made his mistake then. He said, "What ya doin', Mr. Bill?" And Bill told him. He said, "Well, Aston, I'm writing." So Aston—he was really lost then—he said, "What are you writing, Mr. Bill?" So Bill looked up at him and said,

"Well, stand there a minute, Aston, and I'll read it to you." At that time Aston, being about ten or eleven years old, was anxious to get on with his play with Malcolm, and he had to stand there while Bill read him whatever it was he was writing. Of course, he said he was perfectly miserable after being taught not to leave a grown person's presence until he was dismissed. He stayed there and suffered.

There is one other thing I would like to say. You heard Jimmy this morning talking about the South Street Gang. Would you like to hear what happened to the South Street Gang? Those boys grew up and survived their rubber gun wars and the cannon shooting and turned out one professor of English, two colonels in the military, one biologist, a microbiologist, three doctors of medicine, an oil company executive, a college instructor in pharmacy, an assistant director of athletics at Ole Miss, a journalist, two engineers, one television and radio executive, two insurance executives, an oil geologist, a successful lumberman, and two professors of law. So I think that record was pretty good, and I'm glad the cannon shooting didn't destroy them all.

Reed Over the years the people of Oxford were most patient, hoping that William would come along and write more about children, with whom he found the greatest happiness, I think. So many people have spoken lightly of those patched trousers that he wore, but many of us happen to know that they were not all done by kneeling down checking the shoes on his fine horses' feet or working where mud was and so on. If you could have ever come along on South Street or University Avenue or anywhere else in the town of Oxford where some child spoke to Mr. Bill, you may be assured that he was down on his knees listening to the child. Much could be written about that.

We had a rental library in our drug store for many years. We needed one because we didn't have paperbacks. William was constantly searching for mysteries, and so were Mrs. Faulkner and Malcolm. When we got the rental library going, that solved a great problem. But we were losing our file cards. Students of the University of Mississippi, bless their souls, would steal William's cards and keep his signature for an autograph. So what we had to do—and William was the most cooperative person you nearly ever saw—we had to ask him to stop signing the cards. He would just hold up the

book and we signed it out and kept the card separate so the students wouldn't even see what he was checking out. So that worked out all right. You know, he and his wife and Malcolm never returned a single book that they ever borrowed. We had the understanding that we'd call every third or fourth day and ask the maid or anybody who answered the phone if there were any books that belonged to Gathright–Reed Drug Store and if they'd kindly put them out at a place that was waterproof on the porch. If it did rain while the books were out there, why the books would be safe. So the books would come back the first time our delivery man would stop by. We would charge respectively; that meant a little extra bookkeeping, but it was good business. I don't think Bill ever knew about it. Well, I mentioned he never did return a volume and neither did the others. Paperbacks replaced rental service.

Webb Some of those rental books are still down at the house.

Reed I had hoped, Jim, that I had gotten them all back. That's neither here nor there. William early one morning came in the store and his eyes were blazing black—I wish you could have seen the way his eyes looked when he was mad. After saying "Morning, Mack," Bill said, "Mack, you talk too much." Well, I was stunned. I didn't think I had talked very much and I said—I don't know how I managed to say it—I said, "Well, that's doubtful. I know I read too little." And I did—I read too little. I didn't have time; I was sick and tired every day and night of my life almost, with the long hours in the drugstore and all the bad health that was around. Mrs. Reed did her very best to see that I read William Faulkner's things. He was kind to give me a book and every now and then—inscribed, autographed. So I would say, "Just let me lie down a little bit and you just read to me." So I'd go to sleep. After I got one of his long sentences, I'm sure that's when I started to go to sleep. Anyway, he said, "You talk too much." So I said that I probably read too little, and doubtless was forced sometimes to listen too much. Well, I wasn't putting Bill down and I don't think he meant to put me down, but it was a fact that there were times when anybody could almost be forced to listen too much sometimes to people that would take advantage of you.

I remember one time when Bill went back to sit with Aston Holley in the prescription department; that's one of the few times that I

ever saw him sit down in the store. As he sat there, there was a noise that was disturbing him greatly; it was the radio that was up on the counter close to where Mr. Holley stood. It was blaring away terrifically. When Aston was at leisure for a moment, Bill said, "Aston, does that thing have to keep on making that noise?" He said, "Why, no, Mr. Bill, I wasn't conscious of it at all." Bill said, "It looks as if so many people do everything they possibly can to have noise around to keep them from thinking about what they ought to be doing." Aston said that that had stayed with him throughout all of these years and he could understand how Mr. Bill was so concerned about it.

There's one other thing I want to tell you. Please don't ever worry about William and his indebtedness, his bills. He worried a great deal and I expect the rest of us did too, but don't you, because those things worked out all right. There were times when nobody knew what was going to happen back then. The only time Bill ever paid a bill in the store in my presence was one day when two or three fellows were talking with William. A couple of friends and neighbors were seated in the lounge in our store, and William came in and stood and talked with them and asked them a few questions about the family and others. Finally one of them said that his daughter was going to marry, and he added, "The expense is killing me." Well, Jill was going to be married, too, pretty soon. I think Bill must have been a little bit concerned about it. Later a young lady who worked in the store called me over to see something that Mr. Faulkner had left there. He had stepped up to her after he had turned away from the others and said—now this was in April—he said, "Miss Margaret, will you see what my last September bill is?" And she said, "Why certainly, Mr. Bill." So she just went back and, without anybody hearing, she handed the sheet over to him. About thirty minutes later Margaret raised up a little something that was on the counter that had been covered up and she opened it to look at it and there was a check. She called me and said, "I wish you'd look here." It was not for last September's bill—it was paid up to date and was for a very happy amount. You have no idea how much I enjoyed going to the bank. Thank you very much.

Webb Hoot, will you take over here?

Roane Well, I tell you, we're going to have to turn back the pages of time pretty far back to, let's see, about 1923 when I moved down

there on what we then called Second Street, which is now South Eleventh. So my family got hunkered down, I guess you'd say, down there in our house. Before Mr. Bill moved to Rowan Oak there was a family by the name of Harris who briefly rented the house and lived down there. The house was in really bad shape back in those days. Red Harris and I played out in the front yard under that big magnolia tree that you all saw out at Rowan Oak. We spent a lot of happy hours down there. Then Mr. Bill moved there in 1930 and started restoring the house. Of course, his stepson Malcolm and all of us were good friends. And going back, Jack, to talk about that Second South Street Gang—our playground was all around Rowan Oak in the sand ditches and the woods. Back then, you know, we were little tykes—twelve, thirteen, fourteen years old. Well, we could roll up a blanket, take some biscuits and sweet potatoes and fat back—whatever Mama had in the oven up over the stove in the warmer—and go down there and camp out at night. We did a lot of camping out around Rowan Oak. Mr. Bill would come out and talk to us. Lawrence Hutton and I used to cut through there on our way to school and stop by and Mr. Bill would tell us stories there on the tennis court. Anyway, we had this terrifying gang down there that terrorized the neighborhood, as Mr. Mack Reed knows, fighting with those rubber guns and sling shots and bows and arrows. And we had different gangs. We had a Lake Street Gang over there with Herman Taylor and all that bunch. And we had this Second South Street Gang, which was us. We had the University Creek Gang. And all of us were constantly scrapping with each other, you know, fighting. Well, we organized our pirate gang down there, too. Smokey Joe Hutton, he was our Captain Kid. And I was Buzzard Bill the Bloody Butcher of the Bounding Billows. Lawrence Hutton was Hack'em Hank the Howling Horror of the Heaving Horizon. Red Harris was Wall Eyed Willie the Wicked Weasel of the Waves. And Elton Ramsey was Dusty Dan the Daring Demon of the Deep. And I mean we were tough hombres. We had this big ole platform with a rail around it we used as a ship. We had our flour sack up there with the skull and cross bones, and we had our rubber guns and wooden swords, and we drank root beer out of liquor bottles. We were tough. Anyway, to show you what a quick mind Mr. Bill had, little Mack—Mack Franklin—came dashing across the woods one day and wanted to join our happy throng—our bloodthirsty group. He was down at the foot of the tree, and we were up there with our rope

ladder. He was just beseeching us to let him join. We said, "Well Mack, you can't join." He said, "How come?" We said, "You ain't got a bloodthirsty enough name." So he said, "I'll go to my pappy." He called Mr. Bill Pappy. He said, "I'll go gèt my pappy to get me in there." So he scampered off and about half an hour he came back through the woods yelling, "I got it, I got it." And he leaped over the rails and we said, "Mack, what did Pappy say your name was?" He said, "My pappy said I was Mangling Mack the Man Eating Maniac from Murder Mountain." We said, "Well, come aboard." So, from then on Malcolm was Mangling Mack.

While we were living down there, Mr. Reed lived right next to our house, and right across from us was Mr. Charlie Neilson and Miss Mary Louise Neilson. Mr. Chester McLarty remembers way back in those times. Mr. Charlie Neilson died, and Miss Mary Louise was from a very old family in these parts. She's a cousin of the Neilsons that were in that store business up town. Well, so it came to pass that they started paving our streets. I remember a big old landing out in front of our house where the carriages used to come up and the people would step out of the carriages onto the landing. Of course, that had to be moved for the paving. So, all this machinery was going up and down the street. And Miss Mary Louise Neilson was just a real proper prim spinster. She would come out occasionally and sit on the top of her steps coming down to the street and watch the paving go along. And this old tough hombre, Captain Jack Hume, came barreling in here. He was a roustabout with the old Barnum and Bailey Circus. He had been all over the world. And he was a tough talking fellow. I mean he could let it go when it came to profanity. And he'd been everwhere. He was kinda' the foreman of the paving crew. So he shore 'nuff got to courting Miss Mary Louise, and they got closer and closer. Every once in a while he'd get up and go down there and cuss somebody out and then come back with his hat in his hand and sit down. And then he started paying court in the afternoon after he got through. He'd go brush up and come down there and start dating her. And that was where the idea of "A Rose for Emily" was conceived. It was right there across the street with Miss Mary Louise Neilson and Captain Jack Hume.

Well, I worked up there at Mack's Cafe in the old days. And Mr. Bill he would come in there and I'd always make a beeline when he and Miss Estelle came in, because Mr. Bill would always tip 15¢, and

that was big money back then. He always tipped. And I remember one time when he came in about mid morning and he had his mail under his arm. He said, "Hoot, come back here and help me open my mail." I said, "Ok, Mr. Bill." So we went back in this private dining room. Nobody was back there. And I rolled my apron up and sat down there. And I said, "Well, what do you want me to do, Mr. Bill?" He said, "Just start opening some of that stuff and see what's in there." So I opened it up and he said, "What's that?" I said, "Mr. Bill, somebody's claiming kin with you from way up yonder in the North somewhere wanting you to send them a history." He said, "Aw, put that aside." And he wrote more things, inquiries and things like that. And finally I picked up the *Time* magazine and shore 'nuff it was the first picture he had had of himself on *Time* way back in the thirties. Dr. Webb probably remembers exactly what year it was, way back in the middle thirties I guess, middle to late thirties. And so I said, "Look here, Mr. Bill. They got your picture on the front of *Time*." He said, "Really." And he picked it up and looked at it and took his pen out and wrote, "To my friend, Hoot Roane. William Faulkner." And handed it back to me. He didn't look in it to see what they said about him or anything. And that doggoned Lawrence Hutton borrowed that thing from me to show to somebody, and I haven't seen it since.

Mr. Bill was friendly and had a curious mind and was always interested in what the young folks were doing, what the boys were doing. We'd camp out in his yard down there. He always sidled around there to see just what we were doing, how we were building our lean–tos, and what kind of games we were playing. He was interested in young people and their activities. I think about the only time he ever mentioned anything about me in his work was the time that Arthur Guyton was building the boat in his garage. The Guytons lived next to Mr. Reed and me. Arthur Guyton was just as brilliant as he could be. He could do anything. He had a mathematical mind, chemical mind—he was just brilliant. So, Arthur built this beautiful sloop, sailboat, out there in his garage. He got the sails, and everything done right to precision. Mr. Bill, when he was headed up to Mr. Reed's store or going to get his mail, would poke his head in there to see how Arthur was coming along with the boat. They progressed and they said, "We want you to help us sail her, Mr. Bill, when we get her finished." Bill said, "I sure want to help you put her in the water, you know, launch that thing."

So gradually, after weeks and weeks, we finally got the boat finished and took it out to Sardis reservoir. The morning of the launching, I went up town and got this guy that drove a taxi, Nyles Campbell. He'd been driving a taxi around town for a long time, and was one of the colorful characters of Oxford. He had a good voice—we used to harmonize on Saturday nights in front of Mack's Cafe. And then there was Arthur Guyton, he was with us, and Slug Smallwood and Howard. The four of us got in the car and Nyles Campbell was going to take us out to put that boat in the water. Sure enough, as we went around the Square Mr. Bill was coming out of the post office with his mail. So Arthur said, "Pull in, Nyles, and stop. See if Mr. Bill wants to go out there with us to put that boat in the water." So, we pulled around there and stopped and yelled at him out the window. He came on and got in the car with us, just happy to be there. Well, Slug Smallwood had a pint of liquor stuck down in his belt for the occasion—you know, to get that thing launched the right way down there in Mississippi. Later on we put that boat in the water and had a real happy afternoon.

But, later on after I came out of the war—gosh, that was years later—well, I was down at Mr. Bill's for a little party. Over in the corner he mentioned that thing. It was on his mind. He said, "Hoot, don't you remember when we launched that boat out there at Sardis?" I said, "Sure do, Mr. Bill. That was fun." He said, "Yeah, it was." It just passed over; I didn't realize why he had it on his mind. But later on he wrote this real fine article, "Mississippi," for *Holiday Magazine* back in about 1956. It was voted, I believe, the magazine article of the year that year. He was telling about the history of Mississippi. It just went way back from the Indians up to Mississippi and his relationship and his life in Mississippi. In it he came to this incident about launching a boat when he was getting middle-aged, and he wrote, "When I get her finished, Mr. Bill, I want you to help me sail her." And each time he passed after that the undergraduate would repeat that: "Remember, Mr. Bill, I want you to help me sail her as soon as I get her in the water." To which the middle-aging Mr. Bill would answer as always, "Fine, Arthur, just let me know."

And one day he came out of the post office and a voice called him from a taxicab, which in a small town of Mississippi was any motor car owned by any footloose young man who liked to drive, who decreed himself a cabbie as Napoleon decreed himself emperor. In the car with the driver was the

undergraduate and a young man whose father had vanished recently somewhere in the west out of the ruins of a bank of which he had been president, and a fourth young man whose type is universal, the town clown comedian whose humor is without viciousness and quite often witty and always funny. "She's in the water, Mr. Bill," the undergraduate said. "Are you ready to go now?" And he was, and the sloop was, too. The undergraduate had sewn his own sails on his mother's machine. They worked her out onto the lake and got her on course all tight and drawing when suddenly it seemed to the middle-aging that part of him was no longer in the sloop but about ten feet away looking at what he saw—a Harvard undergraduate, a taxidriver, the son of an absconded banker, and a village clown and a middle-aged novelist sailing a homemade boat on an artificial lake in the depths of the north Mississippi hills. And he thought that was something which did not happen to you more than once in a lifetime.

So we got that thing in the water and, of course, we got rid of the booze, too. He's really outdoorsy and had a very adventurous spirit. (I'd say that booze was for christening purposes.)

I think one of the most delightful afternoons was, a memorable afternoon, a time when, again, Slug Smallwood, myself, Billy Cox, and Tommy Ethridge were detailed to go to Memphis to get a case of liquor for Christmas. This was about 1946. Dr. Jim Silver here at the University needed a couple of fifths; Commander Henry Baggett needed a couple of fifths. So we put it together and decided we'd just go on and get a case. So we tooted off to Memphis in Billy Cox's Terraplane car. We got up there and saw the town and got our booze. I got an extra pint stuck in my belt; everybody carried a pint back then. We wound up at the Hotel Peabody where they had this huge fountain and it was real famous for its ducks swimming around in the fountain, and it was a colorful place. And they say, they've always said that's the place where the Mississippi Delta began. The northern extremity was in the lobby of the Hotel Peabody and it went on down to New Orleans.

So, anyway we were in there and we had one for the road and one for the driveway or something. I left the boys in there and went out to watch the ducks swimming around in the colorful water spraying it around and blowing around in there, you know. And while I was standing there waiting for the boys to finish up in the Creole Room, this firm pat came on the back of my shoulder, and I turned around and Mr. Bill and Miss Estelle were standing there. He took his pipe out of his mouth and said, "Hoot." And I said, "Yeah, Mr. Bill." He

said, "Are ya'll going back to Oxford this afternoon?" I said, "Yeah, yeah, we're fixing to go back in a few minutes." He says, "Have you got room for Estelle and me?" I said, "Well, let's see, there's four of us. Three in the front and three in the back. Sure, sure Mr. Bill, we got room." He said, "Well, Estelle and I rode up on the bus this morning to do some shopping." They would just take off and do what they pleased, so they just rode the bus up there. They probably were going to ride it back until they ran into us.

So we piled in there. By the time I got the other three boys out of there, Slug Smallwood was feeling no pain, just feeling no pain. So, we got in the car and started out and cleared the last traffic light of Memphis and started down 78. Just about dark, about bull bat time we used to call it, milking time, whatever time it was was late in the afternoon. I figured it was about time to have a little toot. Smallwood was kinda taking a little brief nap, kinda nodding in the middle up there. And I was in the back here and Miss Estelle was here and Mr. Bill was over on the right side. Tommy Ethridge was riding shotgun over on the right. Billy Cox was driving. So, after while we got going down the road, and I leaned over and I said, "Miss Estelle, you want a little nip?" She said, "Yes, I believe I will." I said, "Mr. Bill, how 'bout you?" He said, "Believe I will." So I eased that pint out and took the top off. Miss Estelle lit a cigarette for a chaser, you know. So I gave it to her and she took a little dainty sip. And I passed it to Mr. Bill and he took his pipe out of his mouth and took a little sip. And about that time Smallwood's head flew up and he said, "I smell liquor." I said, "Slug, shut up and go back to sleep. You know that liquor is locked up in the trunk of the car." He didn't know I had that pint. He said, "I know I smell liquor." I said, "There ain't no way." He said, "Do you reckon a bottle of it busted in the trunk of the car?" I said, "Naw, don't worry about that. Just hush and go to sleep." So his head fell over again. And we passed it back a couple of times. Slug said, "I know I smell liquor." I said, "Hush, Slug. Just go on and take a little nap." So finally we made the run and got back home safe and sound. And we distributed the bottles to their proper distribution points and everything. But, I never shall forget trying to keep that booze away from Slug Smallwood.

Webb Let me expand just a little bit for the benefit of you who are considering Faulkner from the point of view of material and the way

he uses material. Hoot said something a while ago about Miss Neilson. I'd like to add that Miss Neilson and Captain Jack did marry and they lived happily ever after.

Questioner Mr. Roane, at Rowan Oak I heard you alluding to the horrifying story that Mr. Faulkner told you before the fireplace in the parlor, but you didn't tell us that story.

Roane About five or six of us went down there on a Halloween night. It was just a perfect Halloween night. The wind was blowing, it was raining, and the trees were rocking back and forth. Malcolm and I were small then, so the grownups decided they'd tell some ghost stories for the children's sake. They turned the light out, and we sat by this big cracklin' fire at the fireplace in the living room, there at the right where the piano is. Well, we were ringed around that thing, with everybody telling stories. So finally Mr. Bill told one; he could really tell some stories that could terrorize you. It's been a long time ago, but the gist of the story was this. Way up in the Pacific Northwest there was a little ole whistle stop station in a remote area of the Rocky Mountains. This howling blizzard was blowing. Mr. Bill got the scene all set and said this fellow came in with his trench coat on and sat down by this old pot–bellied stove in just a little old hut thing there to wait on the train. While he was sitting there reading the paper, this other figure came through the door with his hat down over his head and his coat pulled up and his hands in his pockets. He sat down across the little room with the stove between them. This second guy looked at the first, and the first one didn't say anything. He was reading along. They didn't make conversation, waiting for the train. The blizzard was howling outside, snow was pecking on the windows. This second guy said, "You know, it's terrible about this werewolf that they say is loose up here in these mountains." And the first guy grunted and looked up at him and said, "Yeah, you know, I never heard of one of those things before, have you?" He was reading on down and the second guy said, "Folks say the only way you can tell a werewolf is to look at his hands—that third finger is longer than the middle finger—and he's got long eye–teeth hanging down." So he kept reading. After a while Mr. Bill just built this horrifying night and howling blizzard and of course, it was one of those white knuckle stories. We were holding our chairs, and he was

building up to it and finally said, "And in the distance, way off, the faint moan of the whistle of the train rose and fell as it was coming down toward the station. This guy kept reading and all of a sudden he looked up and this guy was coming at him with his fingers out and his fingers were longer than that and the teeth were hanging down"—and that was the end of it. I didn't sleep for a month, the way he told that story.