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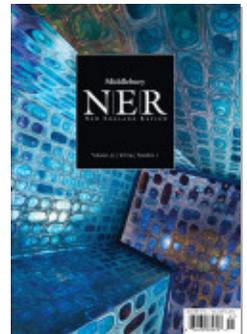
## Hemingway, Faulkner and the Clash of Reputations

Joseph Fruscione

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## Joseph Fruscione

# Hemingway, Faulkner and the Clash of Reputations

IT COULD HAVE BEEN A RIPOSTE IN AN ONGOING DUEL, OR MERELY AN objective appraisal of a few well-known American writers. There was probably something of both in the list of names he came up with, when, while answering questions in a University of Mississippi Creative Writing class in April 1947, William Faulkner was asked to rank his contemporaries. His answer initiated the definitive episode in his ongoing exchange with Ernest Hemingway:

Q: Whom do you consider the five most important contemporary writers?

A: 1. Thomas Wolfe. 2. Dos Passos. 3. Ernest Hemingway. 4. Willa Cather. 5. John Steinbeck.

Q: If you don't think it too personal, how do you rank yourself with contemporary writers?

A: 1. Thomas Wolfe: he had much courage and wrote as if he didn't have long to live; 2. William Faulkner; 3. Dos Passos; 4. Ernest Hemingway: he has no courage, has never crawled out on a limb. He has never been known to use a word that might cause the reader to check with a dictionary to see if it is properly used; 5. John Steinbeck: at one time I had great hopes for him—now I don't know.

Faulkner could have meant this ranking as a detached, even off-the-cuff, observation. More likely, he wanted his rating to have a competitive tinge, in that, as George Monteiro has pointed out, he “chose to annotate his choices as he went along, developing reasons for his rankings” and disparaging two seemingly lesser coevals. Faulkner places himself first among living writers, since Wolfe had been dead almost nine years at the time of the ranking. Although Faulkner's pantheon of writers includes Hemingway, his placement and commentary prompted, in Richard Walser's words, “a mild farrago of statements which kept him busy off and on for a decade.” Regardless of whether Faulkner—ostensibly a private, noncombative writer—meant to be provocative, Hemingway saw this as a shot across his bow. His placement of Hemingway below both himself and Dos Passos proved central to the Faulkner–Hemingway rivalry, because it led to

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This essay appears, in somewhat different form and with full citations, in *Faulkner and Hemingway: Biography of a Literary Rivalry*, published by Ohio State University Press, 2012. Used by permission. The book version contains direct quotations from some Hemingway letters that are paraphrased here. The author retains all idiosyncrasies of grammar and spelling from Faulkner's and Hemingway's letters.

the only known direct communication between the two men—four letters in all, in which they added to their mutual repository of evidence of rivalry and shared influence. Faulkner’s ranking was pivotal because it gnawed at Hemingway for years to come; he could not, or would not, let it go. As always, Hemingway was particularly attuned to criticisms that Faulkner made of him. He was even more angered by these particular remarks because they called some aspects of his courage into serious question.



The three-plus decade relationship between William Faulkner (1897–1962) and Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961) was complicated, rich, and often vexed. It embodied various attitudes: one-upmanship, respect, criticism, and praise. This exchange of American modernists was manifested in writing through their fiction, nonfiction, correspondence, and Nobel Prize addresses, ranging from Hemingway’s *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) to his late “The Art of the Short Story” (1959) and Faulkner’s class sessions at West Point (April 1962). Faulkner and Hemingway used these and many other texts to debate—and spar over—the forms, experiments, and styles of modernism in America. Their intertextual relationship was unique for both men: it was unusual for the reserved Faulkner to engage so directly and so often with a contemporary, and for the hypercompetitive Hemingway to admit his respect for—and the concomitant possibility of his inferiority to—a rival writer. Commonly, Hemingway’s literary relationships were monochromatic, as in, for instance, his declared respect for Ezra Pound, or his disdain for John Dos Passos after their friendship disintegrated in the mid-1930s. Likewise, when Hemingway was described as inferior to or derivative of other writers (such as Sherwood Anderson or Gertrude Stein), he distanced himself from and disparaged them because of their influence. His dynamic with Faulkner was different: he simultaneously respected and scorned Faulkner, who responded similarly, if a little less harshly. They helped shape each other’s work and aesthetic, manifesting a literary version of what jazz musicians call “trading twelves”—riffing on others’ versions of twelve bars of music in a back-and-forth exchange—as Faulkner and Hemingway often did, with a sharp competitive edge, in their own writing.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that Faulkner and Hemingway were dominant *artistic* influences in each other’s lives, nor am I arguing that each was the other’s sole creative inspiration or literary model. Their close reading of each other’s works, in tandem with their mixed mutual feelings, spawned an influential, resonant, and contending body of literature in which each had a psychocompetitive hold on the other. Their many allusive works, when read together, form a kind of modernist intertext that traces a narrative of intense rivalry, joint psychological influence, riffing, and complementary authorial-masculine performance.

Since it seems that Faulkner and Hemingway may have met only once,

it was their writing that created their relationship. Judging by the located correspondence, each talked of meeting the other very infrequently: Hemingway mentioned meeting Faulkner in a July 4, 1952, letter to Harvey Breit; at West Point in April 1962, Faulkner referred to seeing an ill, mentally exhausted Hemingway, but without specifying when and where. It is unlikely that Faulkner would have visited Hemingway at the Mayo Clinic in late 1960 or early 1961, given the serious condition of both men's health at the time and matters of privacy. Their actual face-to-face meeting could be a literary moment waiting to be uncovered, seemingly one that occurred after 1931 but before 1952: a piece on Faulkner in the New York *Herald Tribune* for November 14, 1931, notes that he had never met Hemingway, and Hemingway's July 4, 1952, letter refers to a lone meeting of the authors. No published biographies of either man mention a meeting, which seems at most to have occurred in passing. Nevertheless, a great many of their letters and texts joust, creating a symbolic textual relationship in place of a sustained social one. The authors' shared motivation and the desire of each to be America's definitive modernist engendered a mutual psychological influence. Oftentimes, each wanted to outshine his rival; accordingly, bringing their mutually referential texts and comments under review reveals how they were locked in a competition throughout their writing lives, a competition in which—in their minds, and possibly in the academy's—Faulkner seems to have prevailed. Hence his implication that he himself should be judged as the best living American writer in April 1947.



In the mid- to late-1940s, the authors' correspondence contained an especially biting intertextuality, as well as a joint psychological and professional awareness. In this decade, their careers overlapped through a few publications. Hemingway included Faulkner's story "Turn About" in the anthology he edited for Crown, *Men at War* (1942); he also included his own (superior) material, such as excerpts from *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). In 1944, while again working in Hollywood, Faulkner co-adapted Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not* (1937) with Howard Hawks, becoming involved in a project that deviated from Hemingway's source novel in terms of setting, mood, and ending. These works, though, were somewhat subdued in comparison to other expressions of the authors' competitive language.

As their relationship escalated in rivalry in the late 1940s, letters became a clear, if largely indirect, line of debate between Faulkner and Hemingway, embodying various tones—admiration, mutual respect, occasionally harsh judgment, one-upmanship, and personal-professional anxiety. Both authors indirectly traded commentary through other writers and critics, primarily Malcolm Cowley and Harvey Breit, while revealing some psychocompetitive recognition. In letters from the 1940s and 1950s specifically, as Faulkner won numerous awards and published more books, Hemingway recognized his

significance, felt a level of anxiety, and made numerous (some quite humorous) criticisms to downplay his rival's impact. They often lauded and belittled one another in their correspondence, sometimes in the same letter. This is consistent with their tendency to praise one another guardedly, as well as to praise themselves implicitly in the process.

In *The Faulkner–Cowley File* (1966), Cowley describes “the argument at a distance between Faulkner and Hemingway,” noting that it “sometimes became embittered on Hemingway’s part.” Cowley’s regular correspondence with them and close reading of their work showed him several intersections: their “sharp eyes for landscape,” being “hunters by devoted avocation,” and examining “the primitive mind, the mystical union of hunter and hunted, the obsessions of wounded men, and the praise of alcohol” in their fiction. Cowley was aware that Faulkner and Hemingway, as they rivaled each other, were also attuned; he suggested to both men more than once that they exchange letters. Although they essentially ignored his advice, Cowley was an important presence, due to his admiration for both men as artists and to his role as a kind of conduit between them. Because the two men framed one another as competitors, their rivalry seemingly trumped their respect for Cowley, and the authors seemed content to have no social relationship, only a tense intertextual one that increasingly played out in correspondence with others.

Between 1945 and 1949, Hemingway mentioned Faulkner in at least three letters to Cowley, who had edited *The Portable Hemingway* in 1944. Writing from Cuba on September 3, 1945, he discussed the state of writing somewhat pessimistically. He seemed to feel, to borrow from *To Have and Have Not*, a man alone, since F. Scott Fitzgerald and other coevals had died. For Hemingway, this was a transitional moment in the writing profession: he and other established authors had endured some professional struggles, and younger writers now seemed poised for success. Faulkner, Hemingway observes in this letter, was highly skilled but undependable, a good writer in need of a good editorial eye to clear out the chaff in his work. That is to say, a writer whose style should be more Hemingway-esque.

On October 17, Hemingway again wrote to Cowley and elaborated on his views regarding Faulkner’s professional struggles and, as he saw it, uncontrolled abilities. As usual, he evaluated Faulkner through his own stylistic lens:

I’d no idea Faulkner was in that bad shape and very happy you are putting together the Portable of him. He has the most talent of anybody and he just needs a sort of conscience that isn’t there. Certainly if no nation can exist half free and half slave no man can write half whore and half straight. But he will write absolutely perfectly straight and then go on and on and not be able to end it. I wish the christ I owned him like you’d own a horse and train him like a horse and race him like a horse—only in writing. How beautifully he can write and as simple and as complicated as autumn or as spring.

Despite his reservations about Faulkner’s lack of artistic discipline, an uneasy mix of jealousy, admiration, and disappointment, reveals itself here. Faulkner

may have “the most talent” and write “beautifully,” but Hemingway feels that he could “train” him to write even better than he already does. Playing the part of literary critic as he did in *Men at War* and numerous other venues, Hemingway acknowledges Faulkner’s talent but then suggests that he could guide him to improve his writing—there was always a “but” in their positive comments about each other. This treatment of Faulkner may recall Hemingway’s patronizing criticism of Fitzgerald in *A Moveable Feast*. Although he respected Fitzgerald as an author and friend, Hemingway criticized him for wasting his talent by his lack of discipline, by “whoring” in Hollywood and publishing in popular magazines, and by being too committed to his troubled wife, Zelda. Hemingway leaves Faulkner’s wife, Estelle, out of his critical-complimentary portrait of the author, but his mixed, even hesitant praise squares with his treatment of Fitzgerald and other authors *qua* competitors.

In a *New York Post Week-End Magazine* article, “They Call Him Papa” (December 28, 1946), interviewer Mary Harrington talked to Hemingway about his fellow writers: “And he disagrees with the critics who call him the greatest living American writer. History will probably prove him wrong, but he’ll take Faulkner any day, he says. ‘William Faulkner is the best living,’ he says. ‘And Nelson Algren.’” A year before Faulkner would offer a different ordering of “the greatest living” writers, Hemingway elevates him above their milieu, but more than a little disingenuously given the harsh statements he had made and would make in other forums. And, in an October 1949 letter to Cowley, Hemingway again linked Faulkner to Algren: “He has everything that the fading Faulkner ever had except the talent for magic.” His past criticisms aside, Hemingway seemed to appreciate Faulkner’s “magic,” just as he ostensibly admired Fitzgerald while criticizing him.

However, most of Hemingway’s positive comments about Faulkner were given with some proviso. He is magical yet “fading,” he has much “talent” but no “conscience” and is “hard to depend on” and, as such, presumably needs Hemingway’s help. This conditional praise is rooted in Hemingway’s strong competitive ego, one increasingly concerned with Faulkner since the early 1930s. In the letters and comments quoted above, Hemingway does not specify Faulkner texts that seem to him endless and undisciplined, but he has clearly read his work. (He owned several Faulkner works, as records of his libraries in Key West and Cuba reveal.) In writing to one of the era’s preeminent critics, Hemingway tried to establish himself as an authority on American fiction, just as his inclusion of a comparatively pedestrian Faulkner story in *Men at War* made his own work look better by comparison. During the 1940s, Cowley became a sounding board for Hemingway’s ideas about old and new writers and their changing, often solitary profession. Hemingway knew that Cowley respected Faulkner. Yet he worried that Faulkner was a more creative artist, despite his own stronger publicity.

Faulkner also corresponded with Cowley, who first wrote to him in 1944 to ask for information he could use in an essay he was planning to write. This essay

eventually turned into his introduction to *The Portable Faulkner*, which Cowley edited and which helped recapture Faulkner's broader critical acclaim. Their correspondence lasted sporadically into the 1950s; Hemingway's name surfaced in their letters, often in conjunction with the same reserved praise that Faulkner's name evoked in Hemingway's letters to Cowley. On September 17, 1945, Cowley noted how Hemingway had praised him, referencing the September 3 letter above:

Did I tell you the story I heard from Sartre, about Hemingway drunk in Paris insisting that Faulkner was better than he was? Hemingway wrote me a long, rambling, lonely letter complaining that writing was a lonely trade and there was no one to talk to about it. He said about you, "Faulkner has the most talent of anybody but hard to depend on because he goes on writing after he is tired and seems as though he never threw away the worthless. I would have been happy just to have managed him." Hemingway would be a good manager, too—he knows how to say exactly what he feels and set a high price on it. But just now he seems to be very lonely and unhappy [. . .] and if you're not corresponding with him already, it would be nice if you sat down some time and wrote him.

Faulkner replied on September 20:

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

Having marital problems of his own—namely, his alcoholism and a continuing affair with Meta Carpenter—Faulkner ostensibly empathized with Hemingway's domestic problems. Apparently, he did not think that Hemingway would be a good "manager," because he never acknowledges the statement, nor mentions Hemingway's writing. Such an omission manifests his competitiveness and points toward some of Hemingway's psychological influence. This episode is one of several showing how, in the words of biographer Jay Parini, "Faulkner swung wildly between the poles of overconfidence and a feeling of failure" and also manifesting wariness, as Hemingway had, too. Faulkner seems confident enough artistically that he saw no need to be managed by Hemingway, yet his desire to eclipse him indicates a related desire to avoid social contact with such a worthy, equally canonized writer whose fame and wealth were markedly greater than his own.

*The Portable Faulkner* created a potential connection between the authors, because it had been suggested at Random House that Hemingway write its introduction. Both Cowley and Faulkner objected. Cowley wrote to Robert Linscott, then Senior Editor, on February 12, 1946, suggesting Conrad Aiken, Kay Boyle, and Jean-Paul Sartre as better candidates: "an introduction by [Hemingway]

might be in dubious taste—but he has a lot to say about Faulkner, mostly on the credit side.” Faulkner himself wrote to Linscott on March 22:

I am opposed to asking Hemingway to write the preface. It seems to me in bad taste to ask him to write a preface to my stuff. It's like asking one race horse in the middle of a race to broadcast a blurb on another horse in the same running field. A preface should be done by a preface writer, not a fictioneer; certainly not by one man on another in his own limited field. This sort of mutual back-scratching reduces novelists and poets to the status of a kind of eunuch-capon pampered creatures in some spiritual Vanderbilt stables, mindless, possessing nothing save the ability and willingness to run their hearts out at the drop of Vanderbilt's hat.

The woods are full of people who like to make a nickel expressing opinions on the work of novelists. Can[']t you get one of them?

Faulkner respected Hemingway but seemed to like the social distance keeping them at arm's—or text's—length. As Hemingway would do more astringently in the 1950s, Faulkner links writing and gender, noting that the positive public commentary associated with an introduction would be analogous to making a (male) writer into an ineffectual, eunuch-like figure, one slavishly faithful to someone else. He also continues the use of equine metaphors but makes no mention of Hemingway's letter to Cowley from the previous October. Their race horse metaphors connote that Faulkner and Hemingway saw themselves to be in an artistic match—one on one, winner take all, but without “expressing [positive] opinions.”

In the earlier letter to Cowley, Hemingway temporarily displaced his competitiveness and saw Faulkner as a horse in need of management and training, whereas in his letter to Linscott, Faulkner saw Hemingway as a horse against which he was racing. Although Hemingway generally took their mano a mano contest more seriously than Faulkner did, their roles equalize with this common horseracing metaphor. Random House soon dropped the idea of Hemingway's writing the introduction; Cowley eventually wrote it, creating a key document in early Faulkner criticism. The collection, as we know, helped revive Faulkner's reputation, brought many of his books back into print in hardcover, and strengthened his creative drive. Faulkner doubtless did not want to share the recaptured spotlight with Hemingway. Both before and after the *Portable*, he had significant financial and personal problems, and bringing Hemingway into the equation would possibly have split the critics' focus.

After *The Portable Faulkner*, Cowley kept up his correspondence with both authors. In the spring of 1948, *Life* commissioned him to write a short biographical essay on Hemingway. He and his family flew to Havana on March 7; Cowley talked with Hemingway about his past, his work, and his family. Eagerly embracing his role as an intermediary between two such major figures, Cowley provided Faulkner with a brief report on July 20, 1948:

Hemingway loves being a great man, it's something he needs and demands, and nobody begrudges it to him because he keeps paying for it at every moment

in terms of kindness and attention and thoughtfulness to anyone around him. [. . .] It's a curious life for a writer [. . .] and Hemingway is a curious and very likeable person and drinks enough to put almost anyone else in the alcoholic ward—then spends much of the night reading because he can't sleep and goes to work in the morning on the big novel he's had around for seven or eight years and doesn't know when he'll finish; [. . .] You would stifle and go crazy in the mob that surrounds him.

This letter borders on literary gossip about Hemingway's drinking and writing troubles but shows Cowley trying to give Faulkner a window into his life and shape the image of the author as his own critical work did. Though he does not tell Faulkner to write to Hemingway, he still attempts to put them in communication. According to Cowley, Faulkner never responded to this letter, so we may not know for sure what he thought about Hemingway's alcoholism, writer's block, and finances—perhaps a modicum of empathy, given his similar creative troubles; perhaps gratitude, given that he had no such regular “mob” in Oxford.

After Cowley's *Life* profile of Hemingway was published in January 1949, he wanted to write a similar one of Faulkner—who felt differently, as a February 11 letter indicates:

I saw the LIFE with your Hemingway piece. I didn't read it but I know it's all right or you wouldn't have put your name on it; for which reason I know Hemingway thinks it's all right and I hope it will profit him—if there is any profit or increase or increment that a brave man and an artist can lack or need or want.

But I am more convinced and determined than ever that this is not for me. I will protest to the last: no photographs, no recorded documents. It is my ambition to be, as a private individual, abolished and voided from history, leaving it markless, no refuse save the printed books; I wish I had had enough sense to see ahead thirty years ago and, like some of the Elizabethans, not signed them. It is my aim, and every effort bent, that the sum and history of my life, which in the same sentence is my obit and epitaph too, shall be them both: He made the books and he died.

Unwilling to sacrifice his privacy to *Life*—or any periodical—Faulkner preferred directing his artistic energy toward his fiction, advocating an almost anti-*author* image here. He, of course, “made” a few more books and won a few more major awards before “he died,” but with some public exposure. He is hopeful, even happy, for his “brave” coeval, whose presence was ubiquitous in the public sphere, often due to Hemingway's own efforts. Still, Faulkner demarcates them, as he claims not to have read the *Life* piece. Whether he had or not, these authors typically read anything they could by or about each other. By not (admitting to?) reading the *Life* profile, Faulkner may have been trying to veil some unease concerning Hemingway's greater fame, wealth, and cultural attention. This implicitly financial self-doubt counterbalanced his own vast artistic accomplishments, which can be said to have eclipsed Hemingway's. Always a

more private figure, he tried separating himself from Hemingway's psychological impact: he implies here that he focused almost solely on his own writing, while Hemingway focused on writing and publicity. At this point, Faulkner seems to have thought it better for himself as an author to be known for his work, not for publicity, photographs, and profiles in popular magazines. This was, in the view of Parini, "an admirable wish, and one unfamiliar in most literary circles, where self-promotion has tended (in the modern era) to run rampant—in part *because* of Hemingway's egregious example . . . Faulkner may also have rejected the idea of another profile because he hated the inevitable comparison to Hemingway." He may have "hated" being linked to a writer whose style so differed from his own, but he was often eager to compare himself to Hemingway favorably and rank himself above his peers, at least privately. Or so he thought.



Two years before his comments about a possible *Life* profile, Faulkner's perception of his own stronger writing informed the ranking he offered at the University of Mississippi in April 1947 about Hemingway (fourth) being inferior to Wolfe (first), himself (second), and Dos Passos (third). After these remarks were publicized, the fourth-best writer reacted to the perceived doubt about his masculine courage. In a marked role reversal, Faulkner was the aggressor, Hemingway the target. His ostensibly impromptu comments about Hemingway, their guarded responses, Faulkner's later comments, and his subtly disparaging Hemingway are the summa of their sustained struggle. Never before had they communicated directly, nor would they ever do so, judging by the known correspondence. Faulkner's ranking reverberated: he and Hemingway wrote to each other afterwards; he tried to clarify his standards while insisting on the accuracy of his ordering and implying his own superiority; and his ranking continued to resound loudly in Hemingway's mind.

Between April 14 and 17, Faulkner conducted six question-and-answer sessions with upper-level students at the University of Mississippi, an early version of the writer-as-academic role he would embody more fully at the University of Virginia a decade later. As Oxford's most famous native son, Faulkner returned to the university—where he was briefly a student after the First World War—to share his knowledge and experiences. In debt, and consequently in Hollywood, for much of the decade, Faulkner agreed to these class conferences partly for economic reasons. Ole Miss paid him \$250 for the six sessions, and his involvement with the university was likely a way of promoting Ole Miss. He was assured that students would not be allowed to take notes and that professors would not be present; he used these meetings to discuss writing, past and present authors (e.g., Joyce and Sherwood Anderson), his own work, and his personal war fictions (still thought to be true). It all seemed innocent enough; he just wanted to make some money and help out the English Department of the adopted alma mater that he attended sporadically in the 1920s. Despite the agreement,

students took notes, faculty were present, and Faulkner's comments eventually reached an audience much larger than a handful of English majors and professors. Marvin Black, then Ole Miss's public relations director, wrote a press release summarizing Faulkner's various comments, including his list and his claim that Hemingway "has no courage, has never crawled out on a limb." Black's release ran in the May 11 New York *Herald Tribune*, which Hemingway eventually received in Cuba. This occurrence—perhaps an oversight, or an indication of Black's inability to resist such promising gossip between literary heavyweights—propelled the direct, tense communication between Faulkner and Hemingway.

While the ranking was not the kind of *ad hominem* attack Hemingway would eagerly direct his way in the 1950s, it demonstrated Faulkner's competitiveness and felt influence. Having dueled with Hemingway since the 1930s, Faulkner must have known that Hemingway would answer his remarks harshly and combatively, no matter how unintentionally provocative they seemed to him. Whereas Faulkner was never as stridently competitive as Hemingway, he was rather strong-willed and confident. His persona did not have the cultural reach or appearance of masculine bravado of Hemingway's; Faulkner's was of a more provincial, genteel tenor, revealing him to be more of a creative than an overtly active writer. Nevertheless, he wanted exemplary professional acclaim and masculinity, which in this case may have been at the expense of Hemingway, Dos Passos, and Steinbeck. As several Faulkner scholars and biographers note, he never withdrew his suggestion of his superiority, or of Hemingway's inadequate risk-taking. He would only apologize for his comments being publicized and misunderstood. Perhaps he thought them true, his more toned-down persona to the contrary. Such feelings of eminence bespoke his renewed professional confidence.

Hemingway was incensed when he discovered that Faulkner had placed him fourth in a field of five writers. Initially, he took great umbrage at the ranking, because he—predictably—misconstrued what Faulkner meant by "courage." Whereas Faulkner was referring to his artistic courage, he read the comments as questioning his masculine courage. This distinction between artistic and physical courage speaks to how they saw their professional identities. Faulkner distinguished between Hemingway as *man* and as *author*, while Hemingway nearly always coupled Faulkner the *man* and *author*, or *man* and *alcoholic author*, as several Hemingway letters from the 1950s demonstrate. Hemingway—arguably the most competitive American writer of their era, or any other—routinely equated *man* and *author*, which may be seen in his frequent attacks against other writers. Faulkner's comments had given Hemingway the impression that he saw himself as both a better author and as a better man. This, of course, did not sit well with Hemingway, who retaliated against what he perceived as a two-front attack on both his literary and masculine worth.

Hemingway was so heated that he asked General Buck Lanham to attest to his battlefield (read masculine) courage; Lanham did so in an early June (1947) letter to Faulkner. News of his fourth-place ranking had come at a bad time for

Hemingway, who was in a particularly troubled mood—his middle son Patrick was recovering from a concussion, his wife Mary had a bad case of the flu, and his longtime editor Max Perkins had died on June 17. Hemingway was feeling vulnerable and on edge, and Faulkner's comments reached him at an emotionally tense time, hence his being so cross initially. Rarely needing added impetus to lash out at Faulkner, Hemingway promptly vented to his wife and Lanham. His “black ass,” as he often called it, momentarily in check, he told Mary on June 26 about the situation. After relating domestic matters—Patrick's health, his own sleeping difficulties—he discussed the Faulkner episode and Lanham's four-page letter defending his heroism. Lanham's recounting of his battlefield courage in the European theater, Hemingway tells his wife, was true but somewhat exaggerated. His initial ire somewhat checked, he offers the kind of backhanded commentary that colored most of the authors' dynamic: Faulkner, though likeable and talented, focused too narrowly on the Civil War, whereas Hemingway's own war experience was stronger. Perhaps, he felt, this episode would provide a creative spark for Faulkner, who should write more and rank others less.

Regardless of Hemingway's assertion that he admires Faulkner and wants to avoid lashing out, he misconstrues Faulkner's comments somewhat condescendingly, implying much more than he says. Responding to the charge of his artistic limitations, Hemingway counters with his own charge, effectively downplaying his professional worth, distinguishing the authors from one another, and advocating his own literary and experiential superiority. Because Faulkner was not in Europe, Hemingway's logic goes, he lacked the real-world experience necessary for the modern writer and was somewhat sheltered in Civil War-obsessed Oxford. As well, his suggestion that the ranking seems meaningless to him is disingenuous; Faulkner's comments rankled Hemingway, hence his dispatching Lanham to defend him and his sharply criticizing Faulkner. Hemingway's tendency toward gendered misprision is also apparent. Faulkner made no overt claim about his physical courage, but he interpreted the “courage” remark as suggesting such, while perhaps implying his own greater manhood because he was in Europe during both world wars and the Spanish Civil War, among others.

This letter embodies Hemingway's mixed feelings about Faulkner: worthy of respect but thematically limited. Hemingway rebutted Faulkner's apparent accusation of his cowardice by referencing his own action in Europe. Conversely, Hemingway's emphasis on Faulkner's absence from the Second World War is linked with the implication that his artistic presence was still strong, and that Hemingway would welcome a renewed commitment to writing on Faulkner's part. His remarks about Faulkner often followed this pattern: he recognized Faulkner's talent, was unsettled by it, and then lashed out. Although he experienced similar “black ass” depression throughout his life and became increasingly self-pitying, Hemingway's emotional state had righted itself by the time he wrote to his wife, which later enabled him to think about and respond to Faulkner somewhat rationally and civilly.

Before such civility, though, came bitterness, anxiety, and belligerence.

Faulkner's remarks about Hemingway's suspect artistic courage had stung particularly hard because they had come from his Ur-adversary. Although Faulkner did not attack Hemingway's manhood, he painted his art as limited, sometimes formulaic, and inferior, effectively setting the stage for his later quasi-apologies. Hemingway felt that Lanham could best defend and attest to his courage. Lanham, who was with Hemingway during the fighting in the Hürtgen Forest among other places and vouched for his battlefield composure, wrote to Faulkner on June 24, noting that Hemingway was "without exception the most courageous man I have ever known, both in war and in peace. He has physical courage, and he has that far rarer commodity, moral courage." Lanham also seems to have sent Faulkner a copy of Hemingway's Bronze Medal Citation, which Hemingway had received in mid-June and presumably forwarded to Lanham; the award reads, in part, "[Hemingway] displayed a broad familiarity with modern military science, interpreting and evaluating the campaigns and operations of friendly and enemy forces, circulating freely under fire in combat areas in order to obtain an accurate picture of conditions." Hand in hand with the Bronze Medal Citation, Lanham's recounting of these various battles doubtless struck Faulkner as proof of his coeval's courage. Although both men exaggerated their war experiences, Hemingway was in fact seriously wounded in the First World War and very much in harm's way during the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War. Faulkner may have thought himself a better artist, but he knew that, of the two, only Hemingway had proven himself in battle.

Sounding a bit humbled and conciliatory, Faulkner responded to Lanham's letter on June 28. He admitted knowing of Hemingway's military résumé, stressed that his ranking was not a personal attack, and then apologized. If he had intended his ranking only to be insulting, any such vitriol is absent in this letter: "it had no reference whatever to Hemingway as a man: only to his craftsmanship as a writer. I know of his record in two wars and in Spain, too." Further,

In one of [the class sessions] I was asked to rate the greatest American writers. I answered, I wouldn't attempt it since I believed no man could, but (after further insistence) I would give my own personal rating of my own coevals: the men whose names were most often connected with mine since we began to write.

"I think we all failed (in that none of us had yet the stature of Dickens, Dostoevsky, Balzac, Thackeray, etc.). [ . . . ] That Hemingway was next since he did not have the courage to get out on a limb as the others did, to risk bad taste, over-writing, dullness, etc."

This was elaborated of course. I spoke extemporaneously, without notes, as I believed at the time, informally, not for publication. Your letter was my first intimation that it had been released, and from what you re-quoted, garbled and incomplete.

I'm sorry of it. A copy of this goes to Hemingway, with a covering note. Whatever other chances I have to correct it, I shall certainly take.

On the same day, Faulkner dashed off a contrite note: "Dear Hemingway," he began,

I'm sorry of this damn stupid thing. I was just making \$250.00, I thought informally, not for publication, or I would have insisted on looking at the stuff before it was released. I have believed for years that the human voice has caused all human ills and I thought I had broken myself of talking. Maybe this will be my valedictory lesson.

I hope it wont matter a damn to you. But if or when or whe[ne]ver it does, please accept another squirm from yours truly.

By Faulkner's explanation, Lanham and Hemingway should think that his remarks were unplanned, unknowingly printed, and, more importantly, not meant to be in the hands of the antagonistic man whom he thought was the fourth-best contemporary writer. He emphasizes that he was appraising Hemingway as an artist, upholding the *man-author* distinction and admiring him for his firsthand combat experience. Faulkner likely wanted to avoid exacerbating an already tense situation, or else this letter might have been confrontational, or never even written. In part, he also probably feared angering the ever-sensitive and pugnacious Hemingway, lest they engage in a protracted public war of words that would adversely affect his guarded privacy and regenerating creativity. Relatedly, their respective performances of gender are at odds here: Faulkner's reserved masculine demeanor often sought mitigation or gentility, while Hemingway's hyper-macho attitude typically sought conflict, be it real or imagined. In this connection, Judith Butler, a theorist of gender issues, observes: "[A]n enacted fantasy or incorporation" of their era's socialized masculinities, Faulkner's and Hemingway's acting out their masculine constructs "constitute[s] the identity they are said to reveal," namely, a more self-confident pose and more aggressive affect, respectively. Despite some differences in tone and degree, both men's codes of manhood were culturally rooted and performed with some eagerness, as is evident here in their association of war, authorial competition, and the male writer's life and work.

Whatever their differing modes of masculine performance might be, Faulkner's friendly tone affected Hemingway, who responded amicably ("Dear Bill") on July 16, apologizing for his reactions, Lanham's letter, and Faulkner's having to write to them both. They might be best served by forgetting, Hemingway suggests, as well as by arranging to meet, drink, and talk. Yet, this seemingly civil letter also has a subtext of competition. Hemingway suggests his openness to more of Faulkner's artistic-personal commentary, though in the end he might dispute it. Perhaps, Hemingway somewhat jokingly suggests, a duel would be appropriate, one in which he would merely try to maim his opponent and preserve Faulkner as a writer. (Or, perhaps, it was less a joke than a key aspect of Hemingway's masculine code.) Hemingway's valediction and handwritten signature end this letter optimistically, their past, present, and future animosity notwithstanding.

That he regrets Lanham's writing to Faulkner is clearly insincere, because Hemingway himself mobilized Lanham to do so. As well, Hemingway suggests an openness to Faulkner's criticisms yet implies his own competing artistic

vision. His imagined duel thinly veils his hostility and shows his willingness to engage in such a contest, in which Hemingway would probably fire inaccurately. That he did not write something to the effect of “I would shoot to miss you” reveals the figurative violence of his persona. He could have retyped or otherwise clarified the wording here, but the letter shows no emendations, crossings-out, or marginal corrections. To a mostly symbolic degree, Hemingway may have wanted his words to have connotations of violence. In his mind, if Faulkner could imagine Hemingway shooting at him, then that would dissuade him from questioning Hemingway’s unassailable courage and masculinity.

As in many other Hemingway letters, there is a volatile fusion of admiration and conflict here. Faulkner ranked Wolfe first; Hemingway rethinks this ranking, implying that Faulkner should have ranked himself first instead of second, or perhaps that Faulkner is not good at ranking their contemporaries. Wolfe, Hemingway notes, was greatly helped by Max Perkins, who pared down Wolfe’s verbose prose and enhanced his worth. Feeling a certain affinity with Faulkner as a fellow modernist, he ostensibly continued Faulkner’s attempts at mollification by twice suggesting that they meet and drink together, though it seems that they never did meet, to judge by biographical evidence. As he also did in his June 26 letter to Mary, Hemingway understates his military résumé by admitting that Lanham may have exaggerated and that Faulkner should not believe everything Lanham said about him. This letter’s amicable salutation and closing seem aberrational, given that Hemingway had spoken—and would speak—ill of Faulkner in other letters and that he was antagonistic toward other authors. His past reservations about Faulkner aside—for one, that he did not know how to end a sentence—Hemingway seems to value him as an important American writer, which is also why he suggests their imagined duel over literary prominence. Hemingway seems to have sent Lanham a copy of his letter, most likely to vent his ire in preparation for remaining relatively civil while writing to Faulkner. Hemingway may no longer have been overtly angry, but Lanham was, thinking that Faulkner “must be a bastard underneath” for admiring a war he had not seen firsthand.

On July 19, Faulkner responded to the amicable tenor of Hemingway’s letter and their mutual attempt to allay the new tension between them. “Dear Brother H,”

Thank you for your letter. I feel much better, not completely all right; I owed Lanham an apology and I hope he accepted it but the bloke I’m still eating shit to is Faulkner. I cringe a little at my own name in printed gossip; I hate like hell to have flung any other man’s into it. Damn stupid business, one of those trivial things you throw off just talking, a nebulous idea of no value anyway, that you test by saying it.

[. . .] Take a thing like *Madame Bovary* (not the woman: the book) or your *Alpine Idyll* or that one of Joyce’s about the woman playing the piano [“*The Dead*”]. [. . .] It’s finished, complete, all the trash hacked off and thrown away, 3 dimensions and solid like a block of ice or marble; nothing more than even God could do to it; it’s hard, durable, the same anywhere in fluid time; you can

write another as hard and as durable if you are good enough but you can't beat it. That's on the one hand.

On the other is this: say you capture the light rays that contained London in 1830–1840; if you keep on turning corners long enough you will meet face to face Mrs Gamp carrying the same umbrella and the cloth bag with the same bottle of gin in it, or a hundred years further back and you will see Tom Jones come charging out of the bushes scrabbling at his fly with one hand and snatching Thwackum's cudgel away from him with the other. That's what I meant about Wolfe and (second to him) Dos Passos—some truth now and then out of the junk, and Dos P. second (since there are no degrees of truth) because with him the gross bulk and mass is smaller.

I wish I'd said it that way. But even then it would have been misquoted probably, as most things not worth saying in the [first] place usually are. But what [I] wish most is I'd never said it at all, or that I could forget having done so, which perhaps I could and would if it had not been about a first rate man.

In this letter, which he signs “Bill F.,” Faulkner again praises Hemingway's talents, calls him a “first rate man” (though apparently still fourth-place writer), downgrades his own statement to “a nebulous idea of no value anyway,” and suggests his respect. He probably would not have taken such pains to clarify his statements if he had only minimal respect for—or had not been wary of—Hemingway. That Faulkner equates him with Flaubert, Joyce, and others suggests that “An Alpine Idyll” is as sound as *Madame Bovary*, “The Dead,” *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and *Tom Jones*. This separates Hemingway from Wolfe and Dos Passos, who only express “some truth” in their work. The salutation of each letter is also suggestive: Faulkner wrote to “Hemingway” on June 28 but to “Brother H” on July 19. The two men could speak directly with some mutual admiration, despite Hemingway's imagined duel. Faulkner's competitiveness and masculinity did not entail (symbolic) violence as Hemingway's did, and he may have been anxious about more “printed gossip.” Still, he likely wanted to keep the upper hand: moral courage, as George Monteiro has observed, defined “the exact terms by which his rivalry with Hemingway might serve him in the shaping of his own lasting reputation”; this seems emblematic of how each defined himself with and against the other, and of how Faulkner never retracted his statement and often reiterated his own superiority.

Hemingway reciprocated Faulkner's praise in his July 23 response, a very encouraging letter of several pages, the longest that either had written to the other. Here, “Brother H” called himself Faulkner's “brother” twice, striking a note likely to alleviate the ill will that the ranking and his reaction to it had produced. “Dear Bill,” this lengthy letter begins:

Awfully glad to hear from you and glad to have made contact. Your letter came tonight and please throw all the other stuff away, the misunderstanding. [. . .] There isn't any at all. I was sore and Buck was sore and we were instantly unsore the minute we knew the score.

I know what you mean about T. Wolfe and Dos and still can't agree. I never felt the link-up in Wolfe except with the N.C. stuff. Dos I always liked and respected and thought was a 2nd rate writer on acct. no ear. 2nd rate boxer

has no left hand, same as ear to writer, and so gets his brains knocked out and this happened to Dos with every book. Also terrible snob (on acct. of being a bastard) [. . .]

You picked a very cold one of mine ["An Alpine Idyll"] to make the comparison on about the great thing we would all like to do. To make it really how it was any really good morning—but I tried to get way past that [in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*]. [. . .] Probably bore the shit out of you to re-read but as brother would like to know what you think. Anyway is as good as I can write and was taking all chances (for a pitcher who, when has control, can throw fairly close) could take. (Probably failed.)

Difference with us guys is I always lived out of country (as mercenary or patriot) since kid. My own country gone. Trees cut down. Nothing left but gas stations, sub-divisions where we hunted snipe on the prairie, etc. [. . .] Been chickenshit dis-placed person since can remember but fought each time before we lost (and this last time we fought with most stuff and it was the easiest and we lost the worst). Things never been worse than now.

You are a better writer than Fielding or any of those guys and you should know it and keep on writing. You have things written that come back to me better than any of them and I am not dopy, really. You shouldn't read the shit about living writers. You should always write your best against dead writers that we know what stature (not stature: evocative power) that they have and beat them one by one. Why do you want to fight Dostoevsky in your first fight? Beat Turgenieff—which we both did soundly. [. . .] Then nail yourself DeMaupassant (tough boy until he got the old rale. Still dangerous for three rounds.) Then try to take Stendhal. (Take him and we're all happy.) But don't fight with the poor pathological characters of our time (we won't name). You and I can both beat Flaubert who is our most respected, honored master. [. . .] Anyway I am your Bro. if you want one that writes and I'd like us to keep in touch. My middle kid (Pat) very sick now 4 months. Had to feed rectally 45 days. [. . .] Please excuse if write stupidly. This most talented boy. Oldest very . . . nice. Capt Paratroops 3 times wounded etc. Prisoner 6 months. We mounted attack to get him out of hock when first taken P.O.W. and accessible (drop) but was cancelled. This boy [Gregory] (sick) good painter, head smashed in auto accident his kid bro. driving. Excuse chickenshit letter. Have much regard for you. Would like to keep on writing.

As usual, Hemingway sees writing competitively, as if he were boxing with Flaubert or Turgeniev. However, he suggests that he and Faulkner symbolically join forces against the canon of Western literature, implying that Faulkner's artistic talents are comparable to his own. Continuing the rhetorical strategy of Faulkner's July 19 letter, Hemingway employs brotherly language to suggest a modernist siblinghood, insofar as they both felt a professional connection and artistic sibling rivalry. In a symbolic sense, Hemingway inadvertently recognizes Sherwood Anderson's role as his and Faulkner's literary progenitor who begat psychological influence-anxiety in both of his mentees, a dynamic that they would repeat in their own vexed relationship. Envisioning the two of them as fraternal though competitive, Hemingway praises Faulkner's writing and mildly belittles his own by suggesting *For Whom the Bell Tolls* was a creative disappointment. Faulkner may have considered this "failure" a good thing, considering that his ranking was based on how much Wolfe and others failed in their attempts at

experimentation. Hemingway, though, seems concerned that “An Alpine Idyll” is dated and that Faulkner does not judge him on the basis of his less “cold,” more progressive works. Hemingway’s admission of his chance-taking in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* indicates a shared psychocompetitive influence. He invokes Faulkner’s criticism of his “never crawl[ing] out on a limb” and taking artistic risks, essentially arguing for his ability to innovate and be equally avant garde.

Hemingway could easily have omitted the emotional commentary on how he has been geographically uprooted (in sharp contrast to the more rooted Faulkner) or on the lives of his sons, but he may have wanted to communicate more personally. Surprisingly, he expressed friendly, apologetic remarks, even though he was becoming increasingly prone to fits of paranoia and anger against Mary, his sons, and friends during and after the late 1940s. Hemingway’s writing a long, cordial letter rather than a short, indifferent one implies a feeling of intellectual camaraderie. This “friendly response,” though, the biographer Michael Reynolds points out, “was on a good day. Time and again, when the paranoia, lurking beneath the surface of his reason, became full blown, he would come back to Faulkner’s inadvertent insult, reopening the old wound.” His friendliness shows that, at least in this letter, he saw more in Faulkner than the verbose, alcohol-inspired writing and seemingly endless sentences he often maligned. He would abandon such friendliness in later letters and revisit his ideas about Faulkner’s apparent “failures”—such as *A Fable* (1954) and *Requiem for a Nun* (1951)—quite harshly. One such letter, in fact, recasts the Hail Mary prayer to express disparagement of Faulkner’s alcoholism and apparent piety in *A Fable*.

Faulkner’s ranking initially came across as disparaging of Dos Passos, Hemingway, and Steinbeck, but his clarification and apologies suggest that what he intended was not a personal insult to Hemingway. Had he intended such an attack, he could have let Lanham’s response go unanswered, or he could have come back with further criticisms. His ranking became public, however, and thus harder to rein in, when an account of it ran in the New York *Herald Tribune*. Faulkner learned of the release of this apparent gossip, and he seemed anxious to clarify what he had said, meant to say, or wanted to appear to have said about Hemingway—he had to contend again with this episode in New York, Japan, Virginia, and elsewhere over the next decade. Faulkner’s divergent attitudes, however, indicate a split in his persona: his reserved side wanted to avoid open confrontation with another writer, particularly one so truculent as Hemingway; his private, daemonic side may have wanted to disparage Hemingway’s literary reputation and elevate his own. His public guise was measurably different—he probably would not have responded to Wallace Stevens’s criticisms with fisticuffs as Hemingway did in 1936—yet he wanted to have the edge in their increasingly heated competition. Suggesting that he was the best living writer and pointing out Hemingway’s artistic limitations enabled Faulkner to gain professional advantage while not appearing overtly aggressive.

While they had felt, and would continue to feel, competitive, there is no clear-cut acrimony in the letters they exchanged. Yet their sustained psychological

influence on one another is implicit. Faulkner and Hemingway suggest an awareness of each other's talents, abilities, and worth through their positive, respectful remarks—Hemingway's imagined, perhaps hoped-for, duel excepted. While they eschewed outright personal attacks and antipathy in their direct correspondence, recognizing each other's merit may have made each of them even more anxious to look better. Such added motivation effected more psychocompetitive influence and more literary commentary and allusion. They followed this pattern from 1947 until the mid-1950s, and their intertextual sparring peaked in the wake of Faulkner's ranking, his Nobel Prize (1950), Hemingway's Nobel Prize (1954), and numerous comments until 1955. Faulkner's ranking had primed them for this last, most tense period of their rivalry.

In the summer of 1947, these modernist "brothers" got as close as they ever would to a social relationship. While they did not continue corresponding, Faulkner and Hemingway produced a short-lived connection that embodied the complex attitudes of their dynamic: influence-anxiety, admiration, disdain, and competitiveness. They may have traded compliments, but they would continue to criticize, challenge, and begrudgingly respect each other. Faulkner's pivotal ranking and its aftermath effected his and Hemingway's only direct communication, in which they saw each other as dueling artistic siblings, painted each other as worthy competitors, and revitalized their rivalry and guarded mutual esteem.