



Press Release

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Media Contact: Charlotte Morford
Director of Communications
434-924-4254
cwm6z@virginia.edu

The University of Virginia Library Showcases the Sound and the Fury of Faulkner's Work

When U.Va. English professor Stephen Railton teaches a course on William Faulkner's work, he said, "It fills up faster and generates more e-mails than any other course I teach. Students know that climbing 'Mount Faulkner,' as we call reading twelve or so of his novels, is often hard work, but that the views are terrific."

The territory of Faulkner's life and literature about the slow demise of the old South, and what "Faulkner in the University" means now are the subject of an upcoming symposium at the University of Virginia on April 4 and an accompanying exhibition at the U.Va. Library, on display until August 2.

Faulkner had a special connection to the University of Virginia. This spring marks 50 years since the great American author served two terms as writer-in-residence at U.Va. He moved to Charlottesville in 1957 to be near his daughter and her family, and divided the remaining few years of his life between Virginia and Oxford, Miss., where he was raised.

Faulkner left most of his papers to U.Va. They are housed in the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library and include the handwritten manuscript of "The Sound and the Fury," as well as holograph and typescript material from 19 published novels and two unpublished novels.

The exhibition, on display on the first floor of the Small Special Collections Library, is free and open to the public. It features letters, manuscripts, the typewriter from his office in Alderman Library and a map of Yoknapatawpha County (the fictional Mississippi county where Faulkner set much of his work).

The exhibition also features an interactive kiosk that enables visitors to listen to audio clips of Faulkner reading his fiction and answering questions at U.Va. in 1957-58 or to view films related to Faulkner.

Faulkner attended the University of Mississippi in Oxford for a few semesters, but never graduated from high school or college. He supported himself with odd jobs early on and later, when he had a family, mostly by publishing short stories and screenplays. His

novels were not popular bestsellers at publication time, and many went out of print until he was awarded the 1949 Nobel Prize for Literature.

The symposium will be held in the Mary and David Harrison Institute for American History, Literature, and Culture, above the Small Special Collections Library. Railton, who organized the symposium with Michael Plunkett, Harrison Institute Fellow and director emeritus of the Small Special Collections Library, will moderate a panel discussion by four noted Faulkner scholars.

Railton said, "The way literature is studied in the university has changed a lot in the half century since Faulkner was here as writer-in-residence." While the writer's stature is as impressive as ever, the way scholars, teachers and critics interpret his significance in literature and history, including the current fields of African-American, women's and cultural studies, has continued to make his work new for each generation. The four scholars are Noel Polk, Thadious Davis, Judith L. Sensibar and Grace Hale, and they will talk about the ways interpretations of Faulkner's work have changed since the late 1950s.

Railton's graduate seminar students are also working on the exhibition, adding materials they select from the Faulkner collection that reveal aspects of the author and his work that are appreciated and explored in the University today. Each student group covers a certain time period and two of his novels.

In the exhibit, graduate student Georgia Chaconas and her group are focusing on the mid '40s and including screenplays in addition to letters and photos. Of the 53 screenplays he wrote, Faulkner worked on seven films directed by Howard Hawks, including "The Big Sleep" and "To Have and Have Not," both starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall.

"I'm not sure he enjoyed it, but it helped him financially," she said, calling his style "cinematic."

Chaconas said reading Faulkner more closely in Railton's seminar has given her a better appreciation of his nostalgia for the old South and the issues about race that he tried to overcome in novels such as "Absalom, Absalom."

"One measure of his achievement is how much his work still has to say to us, no matter what kind of questions we want to ask it," Railton said.

Links:

Information on the Faulkner exhibit and symposium:

<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/press/faulkner/>

Background on the Faulkner collection:

<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/small/collections/faulkner/>

Information on hours and the Small Special Collections Library:

<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/small>