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Booklover-Choice

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Booklover — Choice

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Words. They make sentences, then paragraphs, then chapters and ultimately the books that we read. Their choice can make the sentence quoted, an author successful, a book a page-turner or bring a famous person much unwanted attention.

The use of racial and ethnic slurs are in constant review by society, as well they should be, and ownership of these words move among the populace as a way to indicate their power. Hurtful, mean-spirited, or denigrative words are best left out of conversation and maybe best left in the dictionary or in carefully crafted literature for perspective.

It has been hard to avoid notice of the attention that **Paula Dean** has received after revealing her use of the "n-word." Born and raised in the South in the middle of the 20th century I found this word too present in the conversations of my youth. Now when I hear it or see it, I am admittedly disturbed. Thus when I chose to read **William Faulkner's** short story "That Evening Sun," it was a little bit of a shock to once again encounter the use of this word by both of the racially diverse characters.

But first, how I got to **Faulkner** as my next **Nobel Laureate** to explore. "Great Stories by Nobel Prize Winners," edited by **Leo Hamalian** and **Edmond L. Volpe** of the **City College of New York** is a discarded volume from the

Central Rappahannock Regional Library of Fredericksburg, Virginia. I discovered this little gem in a second-hand bookstore. There are 26 stories by 26 different Laureates with a 5-page preface by the editors. Each story is introduced by a short italicized biography of the author. It will become a great resource for this column. Now, which one to read first? I pondered this and for some reason felt that **Faulkner** should be the first story I approached from this collection. No sooner had I encountered the "n-word" in the story did I find myself surrounded by the news of **Paula Dean** and her less than appropriate choice of word. Letting this subject settle out in the media, I prefer to focus on **Faulkner**.

William Cuthbert Faulkner was born in 1897 in New Albany, Mississippi and died in 1962 in Byhalia, Mississippi. This is not to say that his worldly adventure was limited in his lifetime, but only to emphasis that the South, his home state of Mississippi, and the history of both his family and this region heavily influenced his literary output. "Mississippi marked his sense of humor, his sense of the tragic position of Black and White Americans, his characterization of Southern characters, and his timeless themes, including fiercely intelligent people dwelling behind the façades of good old boys and simpletons," quips one reviewer. What a perfect description. The setting for many of his works

was Yoknapatawpha County, a fictional county modeled after his home county of Lafayette.

His family had settled in Oxford, Lafayette's county seat, in 1902. One biographical description states that: "Yoknapatawpha was **Faulkner's** 'postage stamp,' and the bulk of work that it represents is widely considered by critics to amount to one of the most monumental fictional creations in the history of literature."

The **1949 Nobel Prize for Literature** was awarded to **Faulkner** for "his powerful and artistically unique contribution to the modern American novel." He was no fan of the fame and glory associated with the recognition that came with such a high honor. The story is told that even his 17-year-old daughter had not heard of her father's honor until she was told in the principal's office during the school day.

Faulkner is probably best known for "The Sound and the Fury," and the some of the same characters are in play in "That Evening Sun." Quentin narrates the story of Nancy, the family's washerwoman, who is crippled by fear. She is pregnant with a white man's child and believes her common law husband, Jesus, has all intentions of seeing her dead. The gulf between the

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are changing in collection development. I suspect that the same is true for other areas. For my collection development course, I ask students to read articles on “eBooks,” “publishing,” “print-on-demand,” and “electronic publishing” in *Wikipedia*. I didn’t find any scholarly articles that were current enough and offered broad enough coverage of these topics. I ask students for feedback on using *Wikipedia* for assigned readings. Some are surprised after the negative comments from other professors. While the quality of the articles varies, I tell students that they are more current, offer multiple perspectives, and give links to more scholarly resources. I conclude by saying that they should be savvy enough information seekers to overcome any of the weaknesses traditionally assigned to *Wikipedia*.

To conclude, I would suggest to libraries that they give up on steering students away from *Google*, *Wikipedia*, and similar online resources. Instead, they should show them how to use these resources as entry points into the formal scholarly communication network. One of my students pointed out a few weeks ago that she uses *Wikipedia* to get an overview of legal topics before reading the specialized articles that most often assume this basic understanding. Instead of losing the battle against using these resources, librarians should co-opt them by showing what they do and don’t do well and how they can be exceptionally useful at the start of the information gathering process. 🌿

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them to buy something more profitable. In any case, one of my publishers has been unable to provide me a clear explanation of how the numbers on my royalty statement relate to whatever the actual electronic sales of any of my books, or portions of them, might be. I don’t believe anyone is lying. It seems to be as much of a mystery to them as it is to me. I get the feeling that they just pass on whatever numbers their computers, which may have minds of their own, spit out. Well, so what? Look, it’s the same publisher, just like the others I deal with now, whose employees and contractors manage to produce sci-tech books that are still well made, whether print or electronic.

I’m reminded these days of the time years ago when a boss of mine passed on the criticism from on high that I “loved the books [my division was publishing] *too much*.” The criticism lacked nuance, but I didn’t push back against it. The reason was that I suspect I’m like a lot of other people in sci-tech book publishing. We do love the books too much. We still believe they have a useful place in the world, and maybe that’s why we keeping plugging away at them. 🌿

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two races is perfectly described in this 20-page short story. Nancy’s stream of consciousness (a style **Faulkner** used in his writing), the dialogue between the children, parents, and other laborers in the home, and the simple focus on fear lead us into the emotional and Gothic world of a society that is very reticent (or not) to come to terms with its fate.

“‘When yawl go home, I gone,’ Nancy said. She talked quieter now, and her face looked quiet, like her hands. ‘Anyway, I got my coffin money saved up with Mr. Lovelady.’ Mr. Lovelady was a short, dirty man who collected the Negro insurance, coming around to the cabins or the kitchens every Saturday morning, to collect fifteen cents.... We went up out of the ditch. We could still see Nancy’s house and the open door, but we couldn’t see Nancy now, sitting before the fire with the door open, because she was tired. ‘I just done got tired,’ she said. ‘I just a (n-word). It ain’t no fault of mine.’”

And with that we might understand why **Flannery O’Connor**, stated that “the presence alone of **Faulkner** in our midst makes a great difference in what the writer can and cannot permit himself to do. Nobody wants his mule and wagon stalled on the same track the Dixie Limited is roaring down.” 🌿