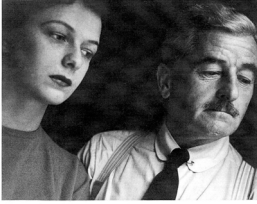


ME TOO, MR. FAULKNER
A LITERARY LOVE STORY



A PLAY PREMIERING AT
GRAVITY LOUNGE
SATURDAY EVENING AND SUNDAY MATINEE
JULY 30 & 31

New play about Faulkner explores lasting inspiration

By JANE DUNLAP NORRIS
Daily Progress staff writer

When Jane Williams met her literary idol for the first time, she couldn't even make eye contact with the diminutive Nobel laureate who'd supposed pulling wires out of your nose just to shake her head.

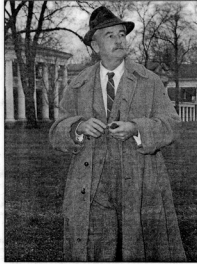
While Williams, then a 19-year-old college student, read "The Sound and the Fury" on her front porch over the summer, she felt "there was someone who understood exactly how she felt," said Matthew Bowen, Williams' son.

But in 1948, proper introductions were important, as when her cousin became engaged to a young man from Oxford, Miss., where William Faulkner lived, the shy young woman asked her new family member to introduce her to the writer.

"My mother was a heady college student, riding away the summer," Bowen said. "He had just won his Nobel Prize that winter." Faulkner at that time was 52, and because many of his works had gone out of print, he may have felt his best writing years may have been behind him, Bowen said.

Williams' group had caught Faulkner in the middle of yard work, and the brief, awkward meeting hadn't gone the way Williams had hoped. So she wrote a letter to Faulkner, telling him that she wanted to be a writer herself, and that she thought he'd suffered everything she ever had, Bowen said.

In her delight, he wrote back.



"Mr. Tee, Mr. Faulkner" takes a look at William Faulkner's influence on a shy young woman who wanted to be a writer.

In the letter, Bowen said, Williams found her own voice as a writer and began to publish her own novels. They remained friends until his death in 1962.

Bowen has adapted one of her books, "The Witness," into a play that will premiere at Grady Lounsbury this weekend. "Mr. Tee, Mr. Faulkner" can be seen 8 p.m. Sunday and 3 p.m. Sunday. "The

details

Mr. Tee, Mr. Faulkner
Grady Lounsbury
8 p.m., Saturday and 3 p.m. Sunday
\$8 on Saturday, \$5 on Sunday
www.gradylounsbury.com
977-5005

"Witnessing," which Williams wrote in 1970, was released in 1997.

"My mother is the only person Faulkner ever mentioned, either formally or informally," Bowen said. Williams, who died April 11, 2004, she spent most of her final years living in the Charlottesville area, as well as in a small apartment near Oxford, near her mother's home.

"Mr. Tee, Mr. Faulkner" is the first play by Bowen, a neurotypologist who also is writing as director and producer. But with a close Charlottesville tie — his mother's first novel, collection of short stories and correspondence with Faulkner are at the University of Virginia, and he was writer in residence in 1948 during their association — the idea was a natural, especially with its focus on a writer and began to publish her own novels. They remained friends until his death in 1962.

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story are Jennifer Sobel as Williams, Ken Thompson as Faulkner, Sheila Oppenheimer as Lucille Faulkner, the writer's wife, and Drew Williams as Jesse, Faulkner's cousin.

"It has all the potential in the world to reach the highest level," Bowen said of the project. "It with a legendary literary story."

The premiere also tells another story, one that Bowen calls "a grassroots community effort."

The play will be the first drama to premiere at Grady Lounsbury, and Bowen is grateful for over 500 hours of support. He also said David Small, head of drama at Charlottesville High School, has been a great help, and had told about Tim Lingo, a film major at the University of Texas, will film this weekend's production for a DVD project. Brian Lamerata of CBS will handle the lighting, Bowen also has a dramatic agent lined up in New York.

"It's wonderful to be getting so much support," Bowen said. Bowen suggests that parents keep in mind that teens might get more out of the play than children would. "This is not a young child's play," he said, adding that it should suit "sophisticated 12-year-olds on up."

And watching the play might encourage some readers to pick up Faulkner's and Williams' books. Oprah Winfrey is backing her book group on "The Sound and the Fury" this summer. For details, check out www.oprah.com.