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In Faulkner's Shadow: A Memoir

Lawrence Wells
University Press of Mississippi (Sep 15, 2020)
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In Faulkner's Shadow is a lively literary memoir set in Oxford, Mississippi, the hometown of famed novelist William Faulkner. Oxford has produced more writers than most places. There's competition, Lawrence Wells says, to see who will carry on after "Mr. Bill." With relish and style, Wells introduces unpredictable Faulkner kin and local luminaries, including, when a home catches fire, writer Larry Brown as a firefighter!

Wells's book is also a love note to Dean Faulkner Wells, a devoted and feisty patron of the arts and author in her own right. In his marriage to William Faulkner's beloved niece, and as publisher for the Yoknapatawpha Press, Lawrence Wells hosted many writers and scholars. There were many late nights, especially with writers and professors like Willie Morris and wild man Barry Hannah. Some of Hannah's behavior wouldn't be tolerated on campuses today, but Wells's tellings are always empathetic.

Wells's stories include the founding of hubs of Oxford's creative scene and from the literary community of Southern authors, editors, and storytellers that grew out of the university since the time Wells and Dean met, while both were married and teaching. The couple made a big impression on each other; later, Dean's mother, aunt, and cousin were wont to start trouble or feuds around them.

In Faulkner's Shadow is a rich memoir about a growing arts community, against which Wells's marriage to the firecracker niece of William Faulkner, one of the great authors of the twentieth century, is set. Oxford could have easily rested on its artistic heritage, but thanks to boosters like Dean and Larry Wells, it continues to support a vibrant community of writers like those who light up these stories.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS (September / October 2020)

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