“Poor Faulkner. Does he really think big emotions come from big words? He thinks I don’t know the ten-dollar words. I know them all right. I know them all right. But there are older and simpler and better words, and those are the ones I use.”

-- Ernest Hemingway

Dear Hemingway,

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 I was just making $250.00 I thought informally, not for publication, or I would have insisted on looking at the stuff before it was released.....I hope it won’t matter a damn to you. But if or when or whever [sic] it does, please accept another squirm from yours truly.

-- William Faulkner

Much before Faulkner and Hemingway butted heads in 1947 when Faulkner in a question and answer session with students had made a candid statement that Papa “has no courage” and Hemingway had a friend inform Faulkner of his heroism as a war correspondent, the contrast of styles in the men and the vulnerabilities, as in their writing, had become well known. In *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway tells the old lady that his “operatives tell [him] that through the fine work of Mr. William Faulkner publishers will now publish anything rather than try to get you to delete the better portion of your works.” There are several other passages in the book in which Hemingway’s bitterness descends into petulance, as in his gibe at William Faulkner (who had done him no harm save to come under his influence). Faulkner later apologised, but it did not cut much ice into his contemporary writer’s world-view.
In trying to evaluate the interrelationship between these two great contemporary American novelists, both Nobel Laureates, who exchanged letters but never met, I will use Hollywood and the making of the movie *To Have and Have Not* to show how both these writers shared certain common dislikes for the movie capital and the filmic medium but could not avoid it for the lure of the lucre. And of course, due recognition has to be given to Howard Hawks’ endeavour of bringing these two geniuses together. So, for a project which involved Hemingway’s weakest novel (he admitted that he had written it when he needed money), a “book-writing man, not a scenarist,” as Faulkner claimed himself to be (whose actual contribution to the entire screenplay cannot be clearly assessed as he collaborated with Jules Furthman), and a director who wanted to make a film in the mould of the whole *Casablanca* ethos and the “American-in-exotic-locale” genre, *To Have and Have Not* serves a good exploring such relationships.

Before discussing the novel or its filmed version made in 1944, it would be worthwhile if we recapitulated on the love-hate relationship that both Faulkner and Hemingway had with Hollywood and the motion-picture industry. Like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Faulkner had several of his works committed to celluloid and preferred writing fiction to composing screenplays, though he was willing to serve time in Hollywood in order to subsidize his career as a novelist. Referred to by Jack Warner as “schmucks with Underwoods,” Faulkner took offence at the tawdriness of Hollywood and felt himself artistically compromised. Between 1932 and 1954, he had worked on more than forty-four film properties owned by five of America’s major studios. Also, from time to time in the 40’s and 50’s, he also developed more than a dozen ideas for the cinema and television. Most critics refer to the innumerable stories that have been told about Faulkner in Hollywood and how in 1942, when he owned a big bill at the grocer’s, Faulkner had written to Warner Brothers and said that he would work for whatever they gave him, if they paid his way to Hollywood. It is true that Jack Warner liked to boast how he’d got “America’s best writer for $300 a week,” but the screen credits that Faulkner got for *The Big Sleep* and *To Have and Have Not*, do not confirm his declaration that he “doesn’t really know the trade.” In an interview in *The Paris Review* in 1956, he had unequivocally stated:
The moving picture work of my own which seemed best to me was done by actors and the writer throwing the script away and inventing the scene in actual rehearsal just before the camera turned. If I didn’t take, or felt, I was capable of taking, motion picture work seriously, out of simple honesty to motion pictures and myself too, I would not have tried. But I know that I will never be a good motion picture writer; so that work will never have the urgency for me which my own medium has. (Meriwether, 241)

Faulkner’s abiding dislike of “Tinsel Town” has led some commentators on his life and work to surmise that he carried out his studio assignments rather hastily and carelessly. Yet, there is a great deal of evidence that Faulkner did conscientiously try to give the studios that hired him an honest week’s work in return for his weekly wages. Samuel Marx, chief of the story department at M-G-M while Faulkner worked there, vouched for his seriousness in more than one interview in later years. It is interesting to note how Faulkner had also expressed his belief a year before his 1945 departure from Warner Brothers that he could keep “Hollywood” and Yoknapatawpha separate, mutually exclusive. Critics have offered conflicting evaluations of Faulkner’s screenwriting abilities. Jerry Wald for example, remarks that he “had a particularly excellent sense of story construction, but his actual writing was rather indifferent.” Howard Hawks, on the other hand, once reflected: [Faulkner] has inventiveness, taste, and great ability to characterize and the visual imagination to translate those qualities into the medium of the screen. He is intelligent and obliging – a master of his work who does it without fuss” (Coughlan, 87). Shortly before his death in 1962, the writer’s own point of view as expressed to a group of students at the University of Virginia that “you can compromise without selling your individuality completely to it. You’ve got to compromise because it makes things easier” proves the point that Faulkner never deceived himself about his screenwriting work.

In Ernest Hemingway’s case, the situation was totally different. Unlike his contemporaries, from nearly the very beginning of his literary career, Hemingway refused to write screenplays of his novels because he believed that whenever a writer went to Hollywood, he had to write as though he were “looking through a camera lens. All you think about in pictures, when you ought to be thinking about people.” (Beja, 27) In spite of this, his work proved to be the “grist for the mill” of Hollywood filmmakers. His oft-quoted statement that the best way for a writer to deal with Hollywood was to arrange a rendezvous
with the movie man at the California state line: “You throw them your book, they throw you
the money, then you jump into your car and drive like hell back the way you came.” This
was his laconic way of saying that to a novelist the film versions of his work offered a source
of revenue but little else. Though there are innumerable stories about Hemingway’s distaste
for Hollywood, ironically enough he remained “filmdom’s favourite story source.” Unlike
Faulkner, the symbiosis in Hemingway’s case also included the author. That is, the writer
himself had an unusually high esteem and popularity among filmgoers; thus the publicity
based on his work highlighted his name – a man who was a cultural hero to millions of his
countrymen, not all of them intellectuals or even readers of books. Because Hemingway was
at least “bankable”, Warner Brothers decided to cash in by a very loose, jaded translation of
To Have and Have Not in 1944. Howard Hawks recalled the genesis of the film version this
way:

I tried to get Ernest Hemingway to write for pictures as Bill Faulkner had
done for me on several occasions, but Hemingway said that he was going
to stick to the kind of writing that he knew best. Once, on a hunting trip,
I told him that if he give me the worst story that he had ever written, we
would make a good movie out of it. He asked me what I thought was his
worst novel and I said To Have and Have Not, which I thought was a
bunch of junk. He said that he had written it when he needed money and
that he didn’t want me to make a movie out of it. But he finally gave in.
(Phillips 50)

Written during a period when Ernest Hemingway himself was slightly shaky about
his integrity as a writer, the novel To Have and Have Not (1937) originally began as a short
story entitled “One Trip Across” about a smuggling expedition of rumrunner Harry Morgan
(named for the famous buccaneer) off the coast of Key West. This story was followed by a
companion piece called “The Tradesman’s Return”, and Hemingway then decided to lump
the two stories together as the first two sections of a novel about Morgan, to which he added
a third, longer segment designed to round off the account of Harry’s life. In this last, longest
section, Hemingway introduced several minor characters who represented the affluent “have”
that were meant to serve as a contrast to the struggling “have nots”, embodied by Harry and
his wife and two daughters. Their function was to provide social comment on the inequities
of a social system under which Harry was forced to employ his fishing launch for smuggling
contraband cargo in order to support his family during the Depression, while the idle rich
lounged on their yachts in leisure and luxury. In the latter half of the novel, Hemingway also writes about Richard Gordon, a burned-out hack author who makes his living by writing about the Harry Morgans of the world but cannot feel or understand about them.

Considered one of Hemingway’s weakest books, through the cheapened and coarsened texture of the novel, an all-consuming nihilism seemed to strike at last at the source of its own projection. Here, if only temporarily, Hemingway relinquished what had been his special gift among the American moderns: the gift of compassion which had modulated and given a kind of final harmony to the continuous play of the wounded psyche. Since social comment was never Hemingway’s strong suit, the real theme that emerges from the book is a much broader one, articulated by Harry as he lies near death in the wake of a shoot out with some Cuban revolutionaries, namely, that “a man alone ain’t got no bloody chance”(165). Though Hemingway had written to Maxwell Perkins that it was shaping up as a hell of a fine book, full of poor people, rich people, reactionaries and revolutionaries, critical response after the actual publication of the novel in late 1937, was far from satisfactory. Most of the reviewers on both sides of the Atlantic displayed mixed feelings. As always under adverse judgement, Hemingway simmered, boiled, blew up, and subsided. Whenever any of his books failed to earn universal praise, he said that there had been a “critical gang-up” obviously designed to put him “out of business.” (Baker 320) This time too, it was the same reaction.

Since the conversion from one medium to another appears to impinge on the autonomy of the novel, it is interesting to note the journey of *To Have and Have Not* (1937) from page to screen. In the novel, there had been a gun fight on the boat with the Cuban revolutionaries. Morgan won it with a sub-machine gun, but one of the Cubans had got in a point-blank shot at Morgan’s stomach. He is barely alive when the Coast Guard tows his boat back to Key West, and he dies in the operating room. Hollywood filmed *To Have and Have Not* four times and in all the versions, Harry Morgan survives. Of course it was not only Hemingway’s endings that were subjected to the Hollywood “treatment” and not only matters of death. We are all aware how the Hollywood background of a film reveals an intricate web in which genre, studio, stars and past successes interact with topical ( if not
exactly advanced) thematic and narrative material. Howard Hawks was known for making films that did not get bogged down in “significant” dialogue but told their stories in a straightforward fashion that nonetheless implied subtle thematic implications beneath the surface of their basically action-oriented films. Both Hawks and Hemingway had in common a certain taste in material and a similar approach to character and story; a predisposition to strong, confident men (with discreetly revealed vulnerable streaks) engaged in dangerous work; a high regard for physical capability and mental professionalism; a preference for conveying meaning through their characters’ actions, gestures, and looks; an exceeding intelligence and aversion to the pretentious; a sometimes adolescent view of human endeavour that could often be abruptly offset by stunning expressions of insight and maturity; an unusually developed sense of the moment, of the fleeting nature of relationships, love, and life; a cool, pared-down style ideal for describing the physical nature of things, as well as for eliminating from concern anything not immediately germane to what interested them on a scene; a wry humour; and a poet’s way of refining and transforming the commonplace into the rarefied and deeply meaningful. (McCarthy 288). Moreover the film suddenly became a “go” project when Humphrey Bogart agreed to star in it. If Howard Hawks’ version is to be believed, he said that the one thing he liked about the novel was that “the two leading characters were marvelous in their relationship with each other” and claimed that he and Hemingway spent several days knocking around ideas about how Harry Morgan and his wife Marie, had met, which is what he wanted to make the film about.

But the similarity ends there and apart from the first ten minutes, the extent to which Hemingway actually helped Hawks envision the sort of film To Have and Have Not eventually became is highly questionable, given that it had so little to do with the source novel. Whatever it was represented the only direct input Hawks ever got from the writer of one of his films. So far removed from Hemingway are the picture’s character and viewpoints that James Agee commented at the time: “It has so little to with Ernest Hemingway’s novel that I see no point in discussing its faithfulness!”). The only positive indebtedness that Hawks had towards Hemingway was not in connection with the script, but in engaging his help in smoothing over any problems with the local Cuban politicians. There was already some concern that a major Hollywood film depicting crime, revolutionary students, and
general licentiousness in Cuba would not foster goodwill between these allies during wartime, and Hemingway made an initial gesture to mend matters by talking to State Department representatives in Havana and by offering to intercede with top Cuban officials, including Batista himself. Again, with shooting due to begin in two weeks, Warner Bros. was obliged to send the script to moral watchdog Joseph Breen, and the studio was not pleased by his response. In a long rebuke of Furthman’s screenplay, Breen wrote:

The general unacceptability of this story is emphasized by its overall low tone and by the suggestion that your sympathetic lead, Morgan, is a murderer, who is permitted to go off unpunished. (McCarthy,370)

Insisting that all the characters be “softened”, that all the women characters be changed “to get away from any possible suggestion that they are prostitutes,” that the studio “remove from the script the business of the men sleeping in the women’s rooms,” and that Morgan’s killings of Kato and the three Cubans be clearly made acts of self-defense, Breen then enumerated three dozen instances in which the script wilfully violated the Production Code, making it impossible to approve unless many changes were made.

It was at this time that another problem suddenly sprang up. This, for some time at least, seriously threatened the picture’s proceeding. The Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs decide that the nature of the story ran directly counter to the interests of the United States’ Good Neighbor Policy with Central and South America and intimidated that the film would therefore not be granted an export licence, thereby placing all overseas markets off limits. Jack Warner wanted to cancel the production, but Hawks obtained permission from Inter-American Affairs to set the action in Martinique, a French-controlled territory that lay outside its domain. It was here that Hawks called on his most resourceful script doctor, William Faulkner, to perform some emergency surgery. This was the same Faulkner who, according to his contract with Warners, received a mere 5000 dollars, whereas Jules Furthman earned 47,450 dollars for his work. But Hawks engaged Faulkner, increasingly unhappy with his Warner Bros. enslavement, a writer he knew would at least be able to break down the novel in a constructive way. Several published accounts have stated that Furthman left the picture after Faulkner was engaged, but in fact he was always on call to help punch up dialogue or find a new angle on a scene.
Faulkner solved numerous problems on the script. Having recently written an unproduced epic screenplay for the studio on Charles de Gaulle and the Free French, the writer was familiar with issues regarding the anti-Vichy movement and saw at once how the conflicts in *To Have and Have Not* could be updated and altered to reflect war intrigue in the Western hemisphere. The film would now begin politically, with some local blacks appreciating the large “V” torn into a Petain poster. The Cuban revolutionaries cum criminal terrorists would become members of the Gaullist underground, the local authorities became personified by Captain Renard, both smuggling missions were eliminated, Helen and her husband were “Casablancanised” into resistance fighters in need of Morgan’s help, Marie became his sole romantic interest, and Eddie was not only beefed up as a character but spared from dying as well. Faulkner solved the problem of sleeping arrangements by simply having everyone stay in the same hotel, and he facilitated the Morgan-Marie encounters by placing their rooms directly opposite each other. He also cut down the quantity of Marie’s drinking and, by jettisoning the smuggling, effectively did away with what appeared to be Morgan’s murderous side. To suit Hawks’s taste for compressed storytelling, Faulkner also boiled the time frame down to a very eventful three days, a far cry from the three seasons of the novel.

Faulkner had about a week to make these major conceptual adjustments; the rest was done as shooting progressed. He started working just one to three days ahead of the shooting, sometimes in Hawks’s bungalow, sometimes in Hawks’s portable office and sometimes on the sets itself. Dan Seymour recalled that Faulkner would sometimes sit in a chair next to Hawks, who would ask, “How did that sound, Bill?” Faulkner would nod, go off for a shot of Scotch and come back with a new line that was always better. In this process, practically nothing of the original Hemingway text remained. Though these instances do not confirm Faulkner’s own declaration that he “doesn’t really know the trade,” there are also stories of how Faulkner would often forget where he was and would compose monologues that ran page after page, more suitable for *The Sound and the Fury* than for a Hollywood feature. “I’m supposed to say all that?” a confused Humphrey Bogart had asked on the set one day after Faulkner handed him a speech that lasted six pages. Howard Hawks, whose support for
the author is by now well-documented, is said to have saved the situation by saying, “Bill, that’s fine,” and he and Bogart then revised the speech themselves.

The way in which To Have and Have Not moved from page to screen has been analyzed by numerous scholars and from various points of view, with special attention to how the finished film does, and does not, reflect the contributions of Hemingway and Faulkner and Hawks and secondarily, Jules Furthman and the whole Casablanca ethos. The various drafts of the screenplay have been combed over by several academics, notably by the Hemingway scholars. As Bruce Kawin has pointed out, aside from specific plot and character points, the overriding difference between Hemingway’s and the Hawks-Faulkner-Furthman version is that the Harry Morgan of the novel is progressively beaten down by events until he is destroyed, whereas the film’s Morgan, specifically written with Bogart in mind, manages to prevail and come out on top after his assorted setbacks (the only irreversible tragedy, the Rummy’s killing, is eliminated in later drafts). Hawks always detested stories about “losers”, which is probably the main reason he disliked Hemingway’s novel in the first place, so it was elemental for him to turn Harry Morgan into a winner. It is also clear that Hawks and Furthman originally intended to create two women characters of equal weight who kept outdoing each other in insolence and toughness. No matter how much he conceded to the demands of Hollywood escapism, the film is, beyond doubt, exactly the work its director intended it to be.

Strictly from his own perspective, Hawks accomplished many things with To Have and Have Not: he finally worked from a story by his favourite modern author and stood it on its head, collaborated with his two preferred screen-writers [William Faulkner and Jules Furthman], added some of the screen’s most famous dialogue to the Hollywood anthology, [of special mention is the Rummy’s line, “Was you ever bit by a dead bee?” and the dialogue in the famous “whistle” scene when Marie gives Morgan a parting kiss and says, “I’ve been wondering whether I’d like it ..What’s more, you don’t have to do anything. Not a thing. Oh, maybe just whistle. You know how to whistle, don’t you, Steve? You just put your lips together and blow.”]
Howard Hawks tried many times to arrange a meeting between Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner. The two great, proud authors always resisted the idea, however, so the closest Hawks, or anyone, ever came to getting them close together was on the credits of To Have and Have Not. Hawks often claimed that when Hemingway turned down his offer to work on the adaptation and doubted that the director would ever be able to make a film from that novel, he taunted the author by saying, “I’ll get Faulkner to do it; he can write better than you can anyway.” (McCarthy, 358). This may well have been typical after-the-fact bravado on Hawks’s part, but there is no doubt that he took some perverse pleasure in having his genuinely good friend Faulkner rewrite Hemingway to his own specifications. However, it was a long time coming to that, and Faulkner was far from Hawks’s mind when he initially got around to figuring out how he would make the film.

A critic, Robin Wood, has provided us with a well defined theory as to why the film version of To Have and Have Not differed so much from the original Hemingway novel. According to him, Howard Hawks had merely conformed to the studio and star vehicle format and the contemporary “American-in-exotic-locale” genre, in the tradition of Across the Pacific, Casablanca, and Morocco. He also finds close interconnections between three films scripted or co-scripted by Furthman, namely, Only Angels Have Wings, To Have and Have Not, and Rio Bravo. Thus To Have and Have Not is both a Hawks film and a Hollywood film: not intermittently, in some kind of dislocated alternation in which the director’s personality can be seen struggling to express itself against the odds, but both at the same time, indissolubly, every aspect on the film traceable to some outside source or background influence, yet every aspect pervaded and transmuted by the director’s presence. It is totally Hollywood and totally Hawks. (Wood 305) But what makes it rather ironical is the fact that it could bring together two literary rivals under one umbrella – Ernest Hemingway, the original writer of the novel contributing little to the finished product, and William Faulkner, whose dialogues still echo in the movie halls through the lips of Humphrey Bogart (and when ignorant viewers praise Hemingway’s macho style, making a ‘star’ of him).
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