

PODCAST 31_WORDS OF THE SOUTH_SOUTHERN LITERATURE

EDITOR AND NARRATOR RICHARD GAY: Welcome to 30 Brave Minutes, a podcast of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. In 30 Brave Minutes we'll give you something interesting to think about. Joining Jeff Frederick, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, is noted poet Julie Kane. With them are faculty from the Department of English, Theatre, and Foreign Languages: Peter Grimes, Aaron Cole, and Richard Vela. Now get ready for 30 Brave Minutes!

CHANCELLOR ROBIN CUMMINGS: This is Chancellor Robin Cummings and I want to thank you for listening to 30 Brave Minutes. Our faculty and students provide expertise, energy, and passion, driving our region forward. Our commitment to southeastern North Carolina has never been stronger through our teaching, our research, and our community outreach. I want to encourage you to consider making a tax-deductible contribution to the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. With your help we will continue our impact for generations to come. You can donate online at uncp.edu/give. Thanks again for listening. Now, back to more 30 Brave Minutes.

JEFF FREDERICK: Start reading through any of the giants of southern literature: Twain, Faulkner, O'Connor, Harper Lee, and you soon realize that there are a lot more giants than you remember. Barry Hannah's prose is unbelievable. Larry Brown might be my favorite. Don't leave Eudora Welty off the list. Tom Franklin will make you think and Cormack McCarthy can take you someplace you didn't think you wanted to be. Could you leave Erskine Caldwell, or Willie Morris, or Alice Walker, or James Dickey, or Pat Conroy off any list? For all the historical reality of deprivation and doing without that southerners have experienced for the better part of four centuries, we suffer from an abundance of good writers, meaningful poems, and soulful stories. Humorist Roy Blunt Jr. said it this way: "I studied French in high school and German in college, and I once took a 24-hour crash course in Italian. English has by far the most words entered of any language. Our money might not be worth anything anymore, but the language is." I think that is true for southerners who love language and the way words come together in deeply personal ways. The themes of the words that southerners write and read cover many bases: family, sense of place, race, religion, poverty, fatalism, the context of change, and the soul-crushing burden of conformity. Sometimes it takes 300 pages to wrap our minds around these topics. We are often convinced that you have to have been born, raised, bled, and baptized in these parts to understand it. Sometimes a non-southerner like Jack Gilbert can take us there with a poem of just a few lines. Here's his poem *South*.

In the small towns along the river
nothing happens day after long day.

Summer weeks stalled forever,
and long marriages always the same.
Lives with only emergencies, births,
and fishing for excitement. Then a ship
comes out of the mist or comes around
the bend carefully one morning
in the rain, past the pines and shrubs.
Arrives on a hot fragrant night,
Grandly, all lit up. Gone two days
Later, leaving fury in its wake.

In the end, southerners stand foursquare in support of the premise that nobody does barbecue, debutante balls, college football, Sunday dinner-on-the-grounds, or literature quite like folks who hail from or live permanently in the south. Southerners enjoy a freedom that they do not always bequeath to non-southerners, namely the ability to express the inconsistencies, hypocrisies, conundrums, and riddles of the South without receiving the glare, stare, or punch-in-the-mouth that a Yankee might elicit, and often the words we value most carry us to a place called home that for all its imperfections is unmatched in meaning. Consider these words from Harry Crews:

I went down the hallway and out the back porch and finally into the kitchen that was built at the very end of the house. The entire room was dominated by a huge black cast iron stove with six eyes on its cooking surface. Directly across the room from the stove was the safe. A tall, square cabinet with wide doors covered with screen wire that was used to keep biscuits and fried meat, and rice, or almost any kind of food that had been recently cooked. I opened the safe, took a biscuit off a plate and I punched a hole in it with my finger. Then with a jar of cane syrup I poured the hole full, waited for it to soak in good, and then poured again.

Those words that Crews wrote carry us into a grandmother's or a mother's kitchen where other words were spilled, year after year, in between the family and the fried food, and cast across the context of lives lived in Dixie. Joining me today to talk about the words and poetry and literature of the South is Julie Kane, poet, editor, Poet Laureate of Louisiana and a professor emeritus at Northwestern Louisiana University. Julie has also been a Fulbright lecturer and was twice New Orleans' Writer-In-Residence at Tulane University. Also joining me are the accomplished writers and scholars Peter Grimes, Aaron Cole, and Richard Vela. Welcome.

KANE, VELA, GRIMES, AND COLE: Thank you.

FREDERICK: So, what are the critical hallmarks of southern poetry and literature, both in terms of themes and style?

KANE: I think you hit on many of the key themes in your intro. Certainly family, but, you know, not nuclear family. Family through the generations is a powerful theme. History, a sense of the past being present, in the present, is essential.

FREDERICK: It's not past, it's not dead...as Faulkner put it.

KANE: Exactly. Exactly. You mentioned a sense of place, of lives being rooted to places. Race, and race relations is important. Religion is a key theme. In terms of style, I think the oral tradition of literature has had a tremendous influence on written literature. Both the storytelling, narrative tradition, and certainly the African-American church. The beauty of spoken language resonates in the written language, and I know I'm leaving out many things that my colleagues can add.

FREDERICK: What about the rest of y'all?

VELA: I would underscore that sense of place. For example, as I was thinking about this and thinking about Jeff's really good questions, I thought about, for example, someone like Robert Frost. And if you go to a poem like Mending Wall or After Apple Picking, or any of a number of poems like that, or Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening, it could happen almost any place, but with a lot of southern poetry, you know exactly what the geography is. Many of Julie's poems are about things in Louisiana, things in New Orleans and all that. Robert Frost, though they may be sort of generally New England, it doesn't feel as much like if I went there I could see the things he's writing about in the way that I do feel that about her poems.

FREDERICK: Peter and Aaron, you guys both grew up in North Carolina. What do you think are the themes that hit you about southern lit?

COLE: I would have to say the sense of place would be the biggest one for me as well. Mainly just because I've studied a little bit of creative writing with Ron Rash. Ron Rash really emphasizes that sense of place and growing up in Appalachia and what it means to be an Appalachian. All of those things. Everything from all the things we talked about, from the food itself, the way that the food is prepared, the language itself. Everything down to the way that Appalachia is pronounced is such a big thing for that, and the dialect itself. But also the literal kind of natural sense of place. I know my family grew up growing tobacco, and that was one of

their biggest sources of income for years. I think that there's something to say about southern literature that is some of the best southern literature, I think, is embedded in that sense of the natural earth and the natural place itself, or at least some of the southern literature that I think is the best, that I enjoy the most. I think it's hard to get away from that whenever you live in this area, in particular.

KANE: Right, and rural life, as opposed to urban. Absolutely. Yes. Yes. Yes.

GRIMES: When I think of southern literature, I often think of the grotesque. (Everyone laughs) The way it kind of represents some of the inequalities in southern life. I think of Flannery O'Connor. I think of images that mix contradictions or images that would make society uncomfortable as they point out some of those inequalities. But the grotesque is something that maybe hasn't been part of my life so much but is definitely something I think of when I think of southern literature.

FREDERICK: But there's that family story that we all have lurking back there somewhere that we're not sure if we want to... if we're proud of it or we're not proud of it, but it's lurking back there that sort of wraps around something that seems out of character. I'm very interested in the lives of ordinary southerners and the way in which they cope with all of the positive and negative connotations of what you guys have mentioned. What draws you to these specific pieces of literature about the south?

GRIMES: I think it is for me very much the language. Often the language is rich or, you know, descriptive. Whether it's about place, or about food, or about just capturing that oral style, like the long sentences, the retelling of stories in different ways. That is something that I associate with it and really enjoy.

VELA: Southern literature is something that you can enjoy read aloud, I think, and it's not just the poetry, though we had good examples of that at the poetry readings yesterday, but generally speaking southern poets have a kind of an impact when read and I think you can do the same thing with a lot of the prose. You can read it in Faulkner, you can read it in any number of the stories out loud and get caught up in, as you were suggesting, you know, the rhythm and sounds as much as anything else.

KANE: I'm always drawn to intensity in literature, too. Especially poetry, emotional intensity. And that's so present in much southern literature.

FREDERICK: And that certainly brings us back to those family concepts, and religious concepts that provide so much emotion and so much passion into decisions we make.

KANE: Yes. Yes. Passion. Yes.

COLE: I was going to say I think, also, to kind of go along with that I think that oral tradition kind of brings us back to those, just like you're saying, those ideas of family and that sense of that family structure, and also the amount of emotion that people have about the history itself. We were talking about kind of the way that the history intertwines the good side and the bad side of that history and the way that history is told and who tells that history and the way in which that history is told. I keep thinking about the Appalachian poets, in particular, and I think about Frank X Walker and some of the work that he has done with talking about, kind of the intense kind of divide between the sort of southern hospitality and also the kind of darker side of the repercussions of the Civil War, in particular, for Walker. I think those are some of the things that draw me to it as well, thinking about those stories.

FREDERICK: And there's this middle ground between history and literature, or between history and poetry in the south, filled with memory. And so it becomes both the way we choose to remember it or the way we want to remember it or the way we pass down a story. So that the fish, you know, every week gets a little bit bigger. (Everyone laughs.) And the catching of it just a little bit harder. Talk about the authors and the poets that shaped you, particularly to do more of what you have done.

KANE: That's hard to say. There are writers that I was drawn to that I recognize some sensibility in. I don't know if they influenced me so much as I said, oh, that feels the way I feel inside, reading Carson McCullers *Member of the Wedding* when I was young, or Tennessee Williams *Streetcar Named Desire*. I think as far as influencing my own poetry. I've had a strong influence from blues lyrics, especially from women blues singers like, Bessie's Fish, they didn't necessarily write all of them, but just that sense of female agency, the wit, the little vulgar streak in there. I love the play with language, metaphors, Kitchen Man and those. So yeah, I guess it's a combination of kind of recognition and influence there.

GRIMES: You know, a lot of my favorite writers aren't necessarily southern writers. I was really influenced by Kafka and by Joseph Heller and writers of the absurd, but I certainly, when I was young, paid a lot of attention to Thomas Wolfe, writing about Asheville, and me growing up in Asheville, thinking, oh, you can write about where you live. I do love his language in *Look Homeward Angel*. That was a big influence on me.

COLE: So, to tag along with that, I think going back to Ron Rash, also David Joy, those two writers in particular. That was the first time that I realized that someone could write about western North Carolina in a way that was not a negative stereotype all the way around. It was the balance between the negative aspects of the area and also that communal aspect of family

that we were talking about and the good deeds that come out of the area along with the more violent tendencies and more grotesque like we were talking about and I think their work in particular has led me towards southern literature more fully than anyone else I would say. Especially because they write in a more modern setting but they always show that they understand the past and the past is always influencing the present and the way that our culture is formed and kind of dispersed throughout the area.

VELA: My experience with it was actually in college. I went to school at the University of Dallas. There was a heavy emphasis there. They saw themselves as descendants of the Fugitive poets. So all of that, Allen Tate, all of those people, John Crowe Ransom, and there was actually a gathering of them about the time I hit graduate school, that they came there and I actually saw and heard Robert Penn Warren and a bunch of these guys there. So it was sort of fascinating that way. There was that sense of we belong to something even though I geographically and in other ways was from a different background, but I found it fascinating to be caught up in that. And then later on, in the late nineties, I went to Sewanee, the writing conference there and was caught up some with Donald Justice and a bunch of other folks there in terms of the new formalism. And so both of those movements, while they emphasized certain things in terms of subject matter, both of them suggest a way of shaping things. I remember Justice talking, particularly about 'you need to have a philosophy of language - you need to understand what you are trying to do', and invaluable kinds of experiences, I think with those. And just hearing them, because again, they had a lot of those poets and writers there.

FREDERICK: And certainly those agrarians had this mission sense of 'let's hold onto what the past was and forestall all this change.' Really interesting times.

KANE: It's funny in terms of mentors. I hadn't thought of that but I went off. I'm from the northeast. I went off to Cornell in upstate New York and who did I study with? AR Ammons from North Carolina, Bob Morgan from North Carolina, and Bill Matthews whose MFA was from Chapel Hill, were my three mentors who really guided me as a young poet. So yeah.

VELA: We're everywhere, we're everywhere.

GRIMES: I'll throw in my mentor, Padgett Powell, down at University of Florida. He's one of my literary heroes. He is very playful and very fun.

FREDERICK: So, how do you guys write, you know, when you're surrounded by all of this inspiration? What's your creative process like?

KANE: Oh, I don't want any young poets to hear this because when I write prose I'm much disciplined. I have a schedule, set times of day and keep at it even when the drafts are bad and know I can go back and revise them. But poetry, I kind of have to be inspired or that draft is never going to be any good. So sometimes I go for long stretches without writing at all and sometimes I write in streaks, but basically in long hand, still, on lined paper, and revising as I go and then set it aside for a couple of weeks. Go back and then you can chip away at it, you can polish and make little tweaks to it, but you can't really change the framework of it once you have it down.

VELA: I was talking to my classes today about the fact that a lot of writing is just rewriting and all that. I completed a long article recently and I said I probably did 30 drafts of it and it is not at all unusual for me to do that and the same thing with the creative writing. I used to write quite a bit more when I first came here and up through the end of the nineties. I was writing and publishing a fair amount and my experience was a little bit like we're talking about. You know, it's like something moves in effect and you put something down on paper and you don't always know where it came from but I couldn't start off with, okay, I want to write a poem about... or I want to write a story about... That never seemed to work. It always had to be something that just sort of stirred inside and I don't mean to sound mystical about it, but that's just the way it worked.

KANE: It is mystical.

GRIMES: It's always a good question. I remember hearing one writer _____ talk about his process and how he would write with a cap or a toboggan pulled down over his eyes so he couldn't see the computer screen and be thrown off by the white space. Richard ____ talks about how you need to learn to write at anywhere at any time, you know. In the middle of a crowded living room, with a squalling child. I think that is good advice because making time to write is definitely part of the challenge. But I prefer to write first thing in the morning when I'm half asleep and not thinking about the day. I need energy. I can't do that writing in the middle of the night thing that some people do. Yeah, before I have any thoughts about other things I need to be doing; that helps me.

VELA: I tried working a schedule like that once and it worked for a while. I just, for other reasons, couldn't keep it up. But I'd heard about that thing, that if you write the first couple hours, I think Hemingway did that. The first four hours of the morning he'd write and then he'd stop and didn't write anymore the rest of the day.

FREDERICK: I like to write in the morning, too, and I like to be alone when I write and sometimes that means certain kinds of music depending on what I'm trying to write or what

mood I need to be in or just something ambient that frames me and what I'm trying to accomplish. One guy told me one time that, every time he wrote something and he was confident in it, he celebrated with a glass of cognac. (Everyone laughs) I said I can't do that, and, too, how many bottles must you have? Every time you write a chapter that you like? We all kind of have our own little rituals that seem to work for us.

VELA: In that case, if he is sober he is failing.

FREDERICK: So how do you read? If that is how you write, how do you read? Do you read in these frenetic bunches where you can't stop? Do you only read one thing at a time? Are you someone who's got dog-eared copies of six books going on all at the same time and has that process changed over time for you?

COLE: I actually do my reading and writing in the same place in most cases. My wife has set up this amazing study in the home that we're at right now and that's where I have surrounded myself with the books, the posters, the cds, all the artwork and things like that, that really give me that kind of inspiration and put my mind at ease. I close the door. I usually sit in my rolling chair and read or write. I tend to just read vigorously one book at a time, unless it's something that I need for teaching or something like that. My pleasure reading is one book at a time. I don't like to divert my attention or scatter my consciousness across multiple narratives. I like to invest as much as I can in one text at a time and then I do my writing in the exact same place and sometimes they overlap with one another. I'll read a couple of chapters and then I'll start writing afterwards. It's whenever it strikes me in that exact same space all the time.

VELA: You're lucky. (Everyone laughs)

GRIMES: Since starting this job I have discovered the beauty of books on cd during my commute, so most of my reading lately has been listening. And I will also bring the book home and read a little at night, so I've got this fast-paced listening, not being able to stop, and then a little bit more careful during the evening. But it's taken me several years since grad school to stop reading with a pencil, and just agonizing over not missing any techniques. That's been an accomplishment in the last few years.

KANE: Right. I guess I read differently, depending on the genre. If it is a poetry book I like to read it in one sitting and since poetry collections are usually no more than about 80 pages, some are more but usually you can do it in a couple hours. They tend to be unified, so if you break it up over days or weeks you're kind of missing that sense of how it all holds together. But fiction, I really like to treat fiction as a sort of reward for getting everything done that I should have gotten done during the day. Yeah and like the last hour when I'm in bed, with the covers

up, then that last hour I get to read and when I have a good book going I kind of hate when I'm getting close to the end and I know I'm going to finish it. When I was young and reading Little Women, I didn't read the last page for weeks. I didn't want it to end and I kept saying to myself no, no, and then finally I gave in and read it. With nonfiction usually I have several books going and read part of one and hop to the next one and stick in a bookmark and it's totally different.

FREDERICK: If I'm reading southern history, I'm reading it with a pen and I'm reading it with a highlighter and I'm making notes on it and maybe even on the front page list some pages that I think are particularly meaningful or important to me. If I get out of the history and I read some southern literature I read it with nothing and I just try to race through it to enjoy it and to pull out the themes that matter to me as opposed to thinking about the nuance and, oh my gosh, you know, I better go check that footnote. Now where is that person getting that source? Literature is sort of ice cream for me, as well. So, how do you like people to read what you write?

VELA: You're looking at me? A lot of what I've been doing the last few years has been critical works of one kind or another. As I mentioned I just finished a really long article and it's going to be in an anthology and so a lot of the things that I've written have to do with specific kinds of topics and I want them to be able to connect what I'm saying and what I'm trying to get them to understand about it with whatever it is that it is. So the last thing I did was on a couple of movies and about the Latin American cartels and things like that. Two years ago I wrote an article, for example, about John Huston's movies that take place in Mexico because that's an interest of mine as well. In my own poetry and that sort of thing for the most part, to be honest, if it didn't appear in the magazine, it didn't appear anywhere because I've not put together a book. Shelby asked me about that just last night. So much of the time when people have heard my poetry they actually physically have heard it. In other words I did a reading someplace. I used to do quite a few of them.

KANE: As long as it gets read, I don't care how they get it. (Everyone laughs.) If they read a whole book or you know, google and find something on the Internet or find it in an anthology or textbook or something.

VELA: I sent out links to all sorts of things of yours when we were preparing for your coming here and reading. Everybody has at least maybe a half dozen links to your website, readings that you have done on YouTube and you in all kinds of places and things like that. So there's a lot of stuff out there.

KANE: One way I did love to get to I guess "hearers" not "readers" was a couple of times Garrison Keillor read poems on The Writers' Almanac and then you always get emails from all

around the country from people. Little old ladies who heard it or people who heard it on their commute and are like, oh that happened to me, too. You know that was really fun. I guess he's not doing any new readings now.

FREDERICK: Have you ever read somebody who read something you wrote and they got hold of you by e-mail or something and they wanted to tell you about what they got out of what you wrote? And you are like, I'm not sure that's what I was aiming for...

KANE: Right.

VELA: No, my readers are always remarkably accurate. (Everyone laughs).

GRIMES: If my readers laugh that's my goal or whatever and really the easiest way to tell they're enjoying it. You know you can't really tell if they're being silently moved, but I really, that's just a great complement to just burst out in laughter for me.

VELA: There really is something about reading and having a reaction from the audience, you know, something that happens and all that. Whether there's a little light that shines in their eyes or actual laughter or something, but that's an important ingredient.

KANE: Yeah, and the internet can almost replicate that, too, when someone finds something and then tracks you down and emails you. You know, it's a little delayed but...

FREDERICK: So, let's talk about favorite authors. Aaron, you've mentioned several that were influential to you and who you really like but who else really would be on your must-have list?

COLE: I would say, obviously, Ron Rash and David Joy are a couple of the big ones. I would say Daniel Woodrell is another one. He writes about the Ozarks and he writes a very kind of gritty, down-to-earth sort of style that he has. Toni Morrison; and Morrison has drawn me in like no other author has, I would say. *Beloved* is one of my absolute favorite tales. I go to it at least once a year just because I get so much out of that. From a craft standpoint, I would say Flannery O'Connor. There's something about the craft of anything that O'Connor does that is just, it's pretty breathtaking, because it's extremely concise. Everything seems thought out and everything seems meticulous. There's no wasted space. Yeah, anything O'Connor does. I would say those would be some of the big ones for me. Frank X Walker, like I mentioned, and Tasha Trethewey. Those are some of the big ones for me.

GRIMES: I would say some of my favorite authors are people like Dostoyevsky and *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller, and O'Conner. In terms of the southern literature I enjoy, I really loved *The Conjurer Woman* by Charles Waddell Chesnutt, a really fascinating work, kind of taking the

Uncle Remus tales and turning them on their head and the trickster characters. That's something that I would recommend to any person looking into southern literature. I think also Richard Ford is someone who doesn't often write about the south, he writes about New Jersey, but he is a southerner and I just love his style, a sort of a philosophical daily meanderings of a real estate agent or whatever.

KANE: I'd have to kind of separate writers into two camps. The ones that I read when I was very young who really influenced me the most strongly and even if later in life, I encountered writers who were better, you know, maybe they didn't, maybe it was too late to be an influence. But when I was young Robert Frost. We had two poetry books in the house. We had *Collected Poems* by Frost and we had Edna St. Vincent Millay *Lyrics* and I read those two books a hundred times each and practically had them memorized. Yeats, too, I encountered when I was young. The beauty of the language, the sense that your friends, were somehow caught up in history, that you were living in history and could document it in your work, you know that was essential. And of course, later in life, certainly, Baudelaire has been important to me. You mentioned Natasha Trethewey, a magnificent poet. Larkin is another one I encountered later in life. There are just so many. Oh, I didn't say Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton when I was in college. When I hit them, you know, I had no idea that you could write about women's experience. I had no idea that that was okay in poetry really until... Well I had read Millay but you know not quite the same.

VELA: One of the things that occurs to me. I was looking through an anthology and it's sad to see how older writers like Faulkner seem to be disappearing from these things. He's got I think two stories in this particular anthology and the same thing with a lot of other writers. I think it's sad to see them disappearing, in effect, I mean, because it used to be you had to read a novel or two, of course to say you've been through a lit course. In my own specific case because my background is actually Mexican-American, I've gravitated toward a lot of Latin American writers and therefore connected with them in terms of the language for some of them that write in English, for example, in terms of the experience in terms of others. But I carried on a correspondence for a while with Julie Alvarez and there are others that I've had contact with and that I read their works on specific schedule almost and I teach them pretty much every fall, for example, in one of my courses. So I think that they have been, I read through some of my things that I published a long time ago and a lot of them take place in South Texas or Mexico or someplace like that in a way that I hadn't really thought about till I looked at Jeff's questions and began to think, oh yeah, that's right.

FREDERICK: So let's turn the question on its ear a little bit. So who is an example of a writer that you know you're supposed to enjoy or your supposed to have read and it just never worked for you? I'll confess first, and Richard, you may be upset based on what you just said about that

anthology. I've never enjoyed Faulkner. The sentences or paragraphs in that can be fine, but it's a repetition of a sort in my mind and I never have really climbed into that writing and just said it feels really good around here and it's taken me to a wonderful place. And so I have read half a dozen Faulkner and I've never really loved it and I've always resisted trying to keep learning to love it. So what about y'all?

GRIMES: Ralph Waldo Emerson perhaps. I don't know. I remember having a love-hate relationship with some books like *Moby Dick* but in the end, I love *Moby Dick*. Yeah, I remember struggling through *A Hundred Years of Solitude* in Spanish but loved it in the end. I am trying to think of ones that leave me cold and I come up with Ralph Waldo Emerson for some reason.

KANE: Yeah, I would say we touched on this yesterday but Ezra Pound, the Cantos. I've never been able to penetrate or never had the real desire to, well the Pisan Cantos, maybe, but yeah, you know, he was always held up as great-great-great in my college education. I just didn't get it and my fellow new formalists would probably kill me for saying this but I've never really appreciated Richard Wilbur who's just a god to new formalists, you know. His vision of life is just too prettified for me, not real, you know a little bit artificial.

VELA: That's a good point.

COLE: For me, I didn't have much appreciation for Faulkner either, until *A Light in August* was the one that kind of turned me around and then after that I started kind of appreciating more of his work, but I would say probably Cormack McCarthy, honestly, for me. And the main reason is because whenever I read especially if I'm reading a novel I need good, kind of strong, dynamic characters, and a lot of his male characters are extremely dynamic and strong, but I fail to think of a single female character that he has written in a way that seemed to rounded and seemed real. I know that's a criticism that some people I've talked to have had of McCarthy in the past and I think that, for me, that holds true. I've never been able to really dig into his work and enjoy it on that level because of that. It felt like a very kind of one-sided story every time I've read anything he's written.

VELA: Somebody who is not from the south that really had a strong influence on me was Thoreau. To the extent that, at one point, I went ahead and grew a garden in the vacant lot next to us, sort of an homage to... There was just something about the way that he approached life that I kind of liked, even when I found out things, that his life wasn't really the way it was written up to be and all that. I still thought that's an interesting way to construct a life and so I kind of like that about him. But a lot of the writers I approached more from an intellectual and emotional way. So Ralph Waldo Emerson and folks like that, it's more like okay I'm interested in

that idea. It may take forever to get through it, but I'm interested in that idea and so there's a split like that that I feel sometimes.

KANE: Yeah.

FREDERICK: Well, what a fascinating conversation! Thank you all for being a part of this: to Aaron, to Peter, to Julie, and to Richard. Join us next time on 30 Brave Minutes.

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Good job, everybody!