**Faulkner, William (1897-1962)**

William Faulkner was one of the best-known American authors of the twentieth century. Experimenting with form, chronology, and language, Faulkner developed a strikingly personal style while exploring the complexities of life in the American South. He was especially interested in crafting stories that explored the effects of the Civil War’s destruction and the ways in which it revealed the breakdown of plantation-based aristocracy, the effects of the exaggerated chivalric code of the Old South, and the complex racism of a society once based on slavery. He is most famous for novels such as *Absalom, Absalom!, Light in August, The Sound and the Fury, Sanctuary,* and *As I Lay Dying.* Many of his novels are set in fictional YOKNAPATAHPHA COUNTY, a county of his own design that resembled his own birthplace, Lafayette County. A native of Oxford, Mississippi, Faulkner lived most of his life there; he also joined the Canadian Air Force during World War I and spent time in Hollywood later in his career writing screenplays. He struggled with alcoholism throughout his life, but eventually died from a heart attack following a fall from his horse.



**Timeline of Life**

1897 1918 1929 1935 1950 1962

Born Joins Canadian Marries Works for Wins Dies

Royal Air Force Estelle Fox Studios, meets Nobel

Oldham Meta Carpenter Prize

Begins 15 yr affair

**Timeline of Key Works Published During Lifetime**

1926 1929 1930 1931 1932 1935 1936

*Soldier’s Pay The Sound and As I Lay Sanctuary Light in August Pylon Absalom,*

*the Fury, Sartoris Dying Absalom!*

1938 1939 1940 1942 1948 1949

*The Unvanquished The Wild Palm The Hamlet Go Down, Moses Intruders in Knight’s Gambit*

*The Dust*

1950 1951 1954 1955 1957 1959 1961

*Collected Requiem for A Fable Big Woods The Town The Mansion The Reivers*

*Stories**a Nun*

Born William Falkner to Maud Butler and Murry Falkner in New Albany, Mississippi, Faulkner became a resident of Oxford, Mississippi in 1902. An exceptional student, Faulkner aspired to be a writer like his grandfather, skipped a grade, and read the poetry of Pound, Yeats, and Eliot as a young man. His early years were shaped by a meeting with Estelle Oldham, who would later go on to marry a friend of his and leave him brokenhearted. In 1918, he joined the Canadian Royal Air Force in hopes of making his way into World War I. Despite the fact that he never saw active duty, Faulkner, who had added the “U” to his name to sound more British, often walked with a limp and told war stories upon returning home. He worked as a postmaster, a Boy Scouts scoutmaster, and a bank bookkeeper after dropping out of the University of Mississippi in 1920. After traveling in Europe and eventually marrying the divorced Estelle, he returned to Mississippi to buy the estate Rowan Oak.

While he did publish some poems earlier in his career, Faulkner’s first novel, *Soldier’s Pay,* did not appear until 1926. During the 1930’s, Faulkner struggled with alcohol abuse and suffered the death of a daughter, Alabama, his father, Murry, and his younger brother, Dylan. During that time, he also published *As I Lay Dying, Light in August, Pylon, Absalom, Absalom!, The Unvanquished,* and *The Wild Palms.* From the 1930’s to the 1950’s, Faulkner worked intermittently for MGM, Fox, and Warner Brothers as a screenwriter, spending time in Hollywood and meeting Meta Carpenter, with whom he would have a fifteen-year affair.

*The Sound and the Fury* (1929) developed the distinctive voice and uniquely personal style that makes Faulkner a major contributor to the history of modernism. The novel, which resists traditional plot summary, tells the stories of the Compson brothers’ relationship to their sister Caddy. *As I Lay Dying* (1930)furthered Faulkner’s intensely personal, fragmented narrative style, narrativizing the different perspectives of the members of the poor, uneducated, white Bundren family. *Sanctuary* (1931) continued Faulkner’s interest in telling the tales of ignoble characters, chronicling the criminal activities of a group of men and the rape of Temple Drake.

Faulkner is also notable for his creation of an interconnected web that is often set in the fictional YOKNAPATAWPHA COUNTY, a place of his own design, which served as the setting for many of this works. Many of his works included at least some reference to a group of characters that are part of the interconnected Faulknerian narrative—the Sutpens, Coldfields, Compsons, Sartorises dominated the landscape of his works. As characters and stories were connected between works, Faulkner clearly entered the realm of metafiction, challenging narrative’s capacity for consistency and self-reference.

Faulkner’s works reflected many quintessentially American themes, while often illustrating a uniquely Southern perspective. His writing often engages with issues of race, incest, class, family, all mediated by the effects of the Civil War. While *Light in August* (1932) also dealt with the plight of the poor inhabitants of the South, it suggested that this racially charged environment was especially hostile to those of mixed race, like the novel’s Joe Christmas, who meets a violent end at the hands of an angry mob. *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) developed the unique, stream-of-consciousness style narration for which Faulkner is famous. Following the disastrous consequences of Thomas Sutpen’s attempt to build a dynasty, the novel focused on the ill-fated relationships between Sutpen’s legitimate son and daughter and his son from an extramarital affair with a woman of mixed race. It also complicated the issue of narration by having characters retell the same stories from different perspectives, illustrating the importance of collective history. Set in the days before and after the Civil War, the novel challenged the reader to confront the repercussions of incestuous and interracial relationships as well as the class issues that followed breakdown of the Old South’s aristocracy after the Civil War eradicated the slave labor that empowered it.

Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (1950) the National Book Award for Fiction (1951), and the Gold Medal for Fiction from the national Institute of Arts and Letters (1962).

**KEY BIOGRAPHIES OF WILLIAM FAULKNER**

Blotner, Joseph. *Faulkner: A Biography.*

Oates, Stephen P. *William Faulkner, the Man and the Artist: A Biography*

Parini, Jay. *One Matchless Time: A Life of William Faulkner.*

**CHRONOLOGY OF ALL WORKS**

1919 – “L’Apres-Midi d’un Faune” (poem)

1920 – *The Marionettes* (play)

1921 – *Vision in Spring* (poems, gift to Estelle)

1924 – *The Marble Faun*

1926 – *Soldiers’ Pay*

1927 – *Mosquitoes*

1929 – *Sartoris*

*The Sound and the Fury*

1930 – *As I Lay Dying*

1931 – *Sanctuary*

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1932 – *Light in August*

1934 – *Doctor Martino and Other Stories*

1935 – *Pylon*

1936 – *Absalom, Absalom!*

1938 – *The Unvanquished*

1939 – *The Wild Palms*

1940 – *The Hamlet*

1942 – *Go Down, Moses*

1948 – *Intruder in the Dust*

1949 – *Knight’s Gambit*

1950 – *Collected Stories*

1951 – *Requiem for a Nun*

1954 – *A Fable*

1955 – *Big Woods*

1957 – *The Town*

1959 – *The Mansion*

1962 – *The Reivers*