

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction

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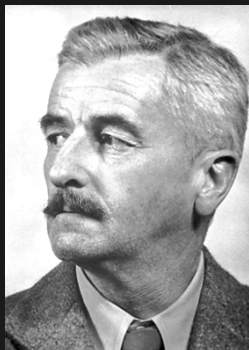
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October 29, 2025. Faulkner (3).

William Cuthbert Falkner

- 1897 b. Mississippi
 - 1918 joins RAF as “Faulkner” in Toronto
 - 1919 briefly at U. of Mississippi as student
 - 1924 *The Marble Faun* (Boston: Four Seas):
long poem
 - 1925 travels in Europe
 - 1926 invents Yoknapatawpha in early work
 - 1929 *The Sound and the Fury* (New York:
Cape & Smith)
 - 1929 works nights at Ole Miss power plant
 - 1929 composes *As I Lay Dying* rapidly
 - 1930 *As I Lay Dying* (New York: Cape &
Smith): good notices
 - 1931 *Sanctuary* (scandalous hit)
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Nobel Foundation Archive, nobelprize.org.

Falkner to Faulkner

1931	Maurice Coindreau, "William Faulkner," <i>Nouvelle Revue Française</i> (June)
1933	<i>Tandis que j'agonise</i> , trans. Coindreau (Paris: Gallimard)
1934–35	<i>Autour d'une mère</i> , French theatrical version
1932–51	Hollywood screenwriting, e.g. <i>The Big Sleep</i> , dir. Howard Hawks (1946)
1936	<i>Absalom, Absalom!</i> (New York: Random House)
1938–39	<i>Le bruit et la fureur</i> (Paris: Gallimard); acclaimed by Sartre
1946	<i>The Portable Faulkner</i> , ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: Viking) "An Error in Chemistry," <i>Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine</i> (June): 2nd prize in story contest
1948	Film deal for <i>Intruder in the Dust</i> (\$50,000)
1950	Nobel prize
1962	d.

Faulkner, the world

Faulkner thus helped a primitive and rural world that until then had seemed to demand a codified and descriptive realism to achieve novelistic modernity: in his hands, a violent, tribal civilization, impressed with the mark of biblical mythologies, opposed in every respect to urban modernity...became the privileged object of one of the most daring exercises in style of the century.

Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004), 337.

Sometimes technique charges in and takes command of the dream before the writer himself can get his hands on it. That is *tour de force* and the finished work is simply a matter of fitting bricks neatly together, since the writer knows probably every single word right to the end before he puts the first one down. This happened with *As I Lay Dying*....

I simply imagined a group of people and subjected them to the simple universal natural catastrophes which are flood and fire with a simple natural motive to give direction to their progress.

Faulkner, interviewed by Jean Stein, *Paris Review* 12 (Spring 1956).

the river...talks

It **talks** up to us in a murmur become ceaseless and myriad, the yellow surface dimpled monstrously into fading swirls travelling along the surface for an instant, silent, **impermanant and profoundly significant** (141)

their [the mules'] gaze sweeps across us with in their eyes a wild, sad, profound and despairing quality as though they had already seen in the thick water the shape of the disaster **which they could not speak and we could not see** (147)

bad explanations

[Darl:] *I saw the log. It surged up out of the water and stood for an instant upright upon that surging and heaving desolation like Christ.* (148)

[Tull:] “Log, fiddlesticks,” Cora said. “It was the hand of God.” (153)

[Whitfield:] It was His hand that bore me safely above the flood, that fended from me the dangers of the waters. (178)

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I have sinned, O Lord. Thou knowest the extent of my remorse and the will of my spirit. But He is merciful; He will accept the will for the deed, Who knew that when I framed the words of my confession it was to Anse I spoke them, even though he was not there. It was He in His infinite wisdom that restrained the tale from her dying lips as she lay surrounded by those who loved and trusted her (179)

“restrained the tale from her dying lips”

“Addie” (169–76)

“restrained the tale from her dying lips”

“Addie” (169–76)

He had a word, too. Love, he called it. But I had been used to words for a long time. I knew that that word was like the others: just a shape to fill a lack (172)

I would think: The shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a and I couldn't think *Anse*, couldn't remember *Anse*. (173)

I would think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it....and that sin and love and fear are just sounds that people who never sinned nor loved nor feared have for what they never had and cannot have until they forget the words. (174)

“blood”

I believed that the reason was the duty to the alive, to the terrible blood,
the red bitter flood boiling through the land. (174)

With Jewel...the wild blood boiled away and the sound of it ceased.
(176)

“Vardaman”

In his inaugural address, [Mississippi governor] James K. Vardaman declared that the growing tendency of the negro to commit criminal assault on white women is nothing more or less than the manifestation of the racial desire for social equality....Vardaman said: “As a race he is deteriorating morally every day. Time has demonstrated that he is more criminal as a free man than as a slave.”... The governor also declares that the people of the nation should rise up and demand the repeal of the Fifteenth amendment.

Washington Post, January 20, 1904: 1, [ProQuest Historical Newspapers](#).

An effort to rid the Constitution of the United States of the Fifteenth Amendment will be made within the next few days by Senator James K. Vardaman of Mississippi. For twenty years Mr. Vardaman has been working to this end....In his propaganda for the disfranchisement of the negro he has lectured in nearly every part of the United States.

New York Times, December 20, 1914: 10, [ProQuest](#).

Faulkner's modernity

[Darl:] A car comes over the hill....It runs along the roadside in low gear, the outside wheels in the ditch, and passes us and goes on. (228)

[Darl:] Against the sky ahead the massed telephone lines run (229)

[Cash:] The music was playing in the house. It was one of them graphophones. It was natural as a music-band. (235)

[Darl:] Darl had a little spy-glass he got in France at the war. (254)

disenchanted or enchanted?

[Cora:] “He is my cross and he will be my salvation. He will save me from the water and from the fire. Even though I have laid down my life, he will save me.”.... Then I realised that she did not mean God. (168)

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Then it topples forward, gaining momentum, revealing Jewel and the sparks raining on him too in engendering gusts, so that he appears to be enclosed in a thin nimbus of fire. (222)

the ending x3

- ▶ Compare how the last three chapters (Darl, Dewey Dell, Cash) close the narrative. What problems are solved? What do the final perspectives add up to?

traps of class

Later he told me, “I aint got no people. So that wont be no worry to you. I dont reckon you can say the same.”

“No. I have people. In Jefferson.”

His face fell a little. “Well, I got a little property. I’m forehanded; I got a good honest name. I know how town folks are, but maybe when they talk to me.” (171)

Lester's historicist reading

As I Lay Dying offers a condensed allegory of the hazards of an upheaval that moved people to unfamiliar social terrains. (Lester, 35)

The river crossing, with all its hyperbolic challenges, demarcates the symbolic boundary that separates country from town. (Ibid., 39)

It is the Bundrens who are in the process of being severed from the earth and from the security of a familiar and viable way of life by social, political, and economic transformations typically figured in Faulkner, as here, in terms of natural forces. (Ibid., 41)

how it feels

[Moseley:] He said the wagon was stopped in front of Grummet's hardware store, with the ladies all scattering up and down the street with handkerchiefs to their noses, and a crowd of hard-nosed men and boys standing around the wagon, listening to the marshal arguing with the man. (203)

Pa said flour and sugar and coffee costs so much. Because I am a country boy because boys in town. Bicycles.... "Why aint I a town boy, pa?" I said. (66)

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It takes them that runs the stores in the towns, doing no sweating, living off of them that sweats. It aint the hardworking man, the farmer. Sometimes I wonder why we keep at it. (110)

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town and country

[Moseley:] Then I looked at her. But it's a hard life they have; sometimes a man. . . .if there can ever be any excuse for sin, which it cant be. And then, life wasn't made to be easy on folks: they wouldn't ever have any reason to be good and die. (202-3)

[MacGowan:] Them country people. (243)

[MacGowan:] "You aint the doctor," she says. (245)

[Vardaman:] "It wont work," Dewey Dell says. "I just know it wont."
(252)

next

▶ midterm