

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

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WILLIAM FAULKNER

(1897 – 1962)

Works

Sartoris (1929)

The Sound and the Fury (1929)

As I Lay Dying (1930)

Sanctuary (1931)

Light in August (1932)

Pylon (1935)

Absalom, Absalom! (1936)

The Wild Palms (1939)

Go Down, Moses (1940)

Intruder in the Dust (1948)

The Reivers (1962)

Biography

William Faulkner was born in 1897 in Oxford, Mississippi, and died in 1962, shortly after publishing his last novel, *The Reivers*. Although an excellent student in elementary school, Faulkner began to have difficulties in school, and never graduated from high school. Despite not having a high school diploma, Faulkner enrolled in the University of Mississippi (“Ole Miss”) in Oxford, where attended courses before dropping out after three semesters. Fascinated by the history of the American South, Faulkner wrote most of his novels and short stories about the South set in the fictitious Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi. In 1932, Faulkner was offered the opportunity to be a screenwriter in Hollywood. There, he worked with Howard Hawks and other directors. Faulkner continued writing novels and short stories, gaining much fame and recognition (the Nobel Prize in 1954) for his sensitive, complex, and deeply humanistic depiction of human beings at every level of society.

Achievements

Although he was a successful screenwriter, Faulkner was most noted as being a stylistically innovative writer, whose techniques of stream-of-consciousness, psychoanalytical layers that often exposed deeply emotional, complex, and even grotesque scenes and personages. Many of his characters are larger than life, and they demonstrate many facets and layers, often contradictory, but always illustrating the human condition.

Stream of Consciousness

Faulkner was a pioneer of the “stream of consciousness” form of writing which immediately had a powerful impact on the literature landscape. His method of creating what seemed to be unfiltered dialogue was utilized by Carlos Fuentes in “La Muerte de Artemio Cruz” and also by other writers.

Fictive Worlds

He deeply influenced Latin American writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Juan Carlos Onetti, both of whom credited Yoknapatawpha County as being a model for the fictive worlds of “Macondo” and “Santa Maria.” In the fictive worlds, Faulkner created a complex society that mirrored the outside world and allowed the examination of complex issues of class, race, history, war, sexual relations, and culture.

Psychoanalytic Novel

Faulkner was not the first to write what came to be known as a psychoanalytic novel, which plumbed the depths of the human psyche to uncover the hidden knowledge, passions, and understanding of the true

(and often incomprehensible) nature of the world. However, his use of characters of all walks of life, and his willingness to give the underprivileged of the world the most elegant and divinely inspired insights were quite revolutionary.

Themes in Faulkner's work

Reality is multi-faceted.

Reality is not a simple, 2-dimensional snapshot. Instead, it is complex, which Faulkner shows through his use of stream of consciousness, flashbacks, and flash-forwards. He also shows different perceptions of the same slice of reality by having different narrators describe the same event.

The complexity of the human being.

Faulkner's protagonists are complex and their ideas of identity, belonging, and heritage are interwoven, with the result that all the inhabitants of the microcosmos interact with each other, even as the vestiges of antebellum South would suggest absolute segregation. There are no such divides or barriers; all are interconnected, and in order to understand the complexity of a situation, it's necessary to enter into the mindset of many.

Social justice.

Faulkner's protagonists often fight racism, elitism, injustice, cruelty, and years of rigid hierarchies. His protagonists are often society's oppressed, ignored, or humiliated, and yet, they have the most profound awareness of the reality of the human condition and of each other. In *The Sound and the Fury*, the cognitively disabled protagonist, Benjy Compson, is the narrator, whose insights are searing and honest.