



Volume: 2, Issue: 8, 727-730
August 2015
www.allsubjectjournal.com
e-ISSN: 2349-4182
p-ISSN: 2349-5979
Impact Factor: 3.762

Rasak Annayat
Teaches at Department of
English, Amar Singh College
Srinagar, Jammu and
Kashmir, India.

William Faulkner as short story writer

Rasak Annayat

Abstract

William Faulkner was born on September 25, 1897, and began to write poetry as a teenager. He was an indifferent student, and dropped out of high school when he was fifteen. A preeminent figure in twentieth-century American literature, Faulkner created a profound and complex body of work in which he often explored exploitation and corruption in the American South. William Faulkner was a prolific writer who became very famous during his lifetime, but who shied away from the spotlight as much as possible. He is remembered as both a gentlemanly Southern eccentric and an arrogant, snobbish alcoholic. William Faulkner is better known as a novelist though he wrote more than seventy short stories and as such his short stories deserve study in themselves. Six volumes of his short stories were published during his lifetime. Even in isolation from his novels, Faulkner's short fiction provides the complete chronological development of Yoknapatawpha from the coming of white men, who introduced the concept of private property, up to the twentieth century, when the automobile became a common fixture in American society. In 1950, Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. This award effectively turned his career around, bringing him the economic success that had so long eluded him. However, most critics find the works he wrote after winning the prize largely disappointing, especially compared to his earlier, mythical works.

Keywords: Short stories, literature, mythological, colonel, eccentric.

1. Introduction

A preeminent figure in twentieth-century American literature, Faulkner created a profound and complex body of work in which he often explored exploitation and corruption in the American South. Many of Faulkner's novels and short stories are set in Yoknapatawpha County, a fictional area reflecting the geographical and cultural background of his native Mississippi. Faulkner's works frequently reflect the tumultuous history of the South while developing perceptive explorations of the human character. In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize for literature in 1949, Faulkner stated that the fundamental theme of his fiction is "the human heart in conflict with itself," and he used a variety of narrative techniques to enrich his exploration of this struggle.

William Faulkner was a prolific writer who became very famous during his lifetime, but who shied away from the spotlight as much as possible. He is remembered as both a gentlemanly Southern eccentric and an arrogant, snobbish alcoholic. But perhaps the best way to describe Faulkner is to describe his heritage, for, like so many of his literary characters, Faulkner was profoundly affected by his family.

William Faulkner was born on September 25, 1897, and began to write poetry as a teenager. He was an indifferent student, and dropped out of high school when he was fifteen. During World War I, he joined the Canadian Royal Flying Corps - he was too short to join the U.S. Air Force - but never fought; the day he graduated from the Flying Corps, the Armistice was signed. The only "war injury" he received was the result of getting drunk and partying too hard on Armistice Day.

After the war, Faulkner came back to Oxford, enrolled as a special student at the University of Mississippi, and began to write for the school papers and magazines, quickly earning a reputation as an eccentric. His strange routines, swanky dressing habits, and inability to hold down a job earned him the nickname "Count Nocount." He became postmaster of the University in 1921, but resigned three years later, after the postal inspector finally noticed how much time Faulkner spent writing (and ignoring customers). In 1924 his first book of poetry, *The Marble Faun*, was published, but it was critically panned and had few buyers.

In early 1925, Faulkner and a friend traveled to New Orleans with the intention of getting Faulkner a berth on a ship to Europe, where he planned to refine his writing skills. Instead, Faulkner ended up staying in New Orleans for a few months and writing. There, he met the

Correspondence

Rasak Annayat
Teaches at Department of
English, Amar Singh College
Srinagar, Jammu and
Kashmir, India.

novelist Sherwood Anderson, whose book *Winesburg, Ohio* was a pillar of American Modernism. His friendship with Anderson inspired him to start writing novels, and in a short time he finished his first novel, *Soldier's Pay*, which was published in 1926 and was critically accepted - although it, too, sold few copies. Faulkner eventually did travel to Europe, but he quickly returned to Oxford to write.

Faulkner and his novels

Faulkner wrote four more novels between 1926 and 1931: *Mosquitoes* (1927), *Sartoris* (1929), *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), and *As I Lay Dying* (1930), but none of them sold well, and he earned little money during this period. *Sartoris*, also known as *Flags in the Dust*, was Faulkner's first book set in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County. The difficulty Faulkner faced getting *Flags in the Dust* published led him to give up on the publishing process in general, and he decided to write only for himself. The result of this was *The Sound and the Fury*, the first of Faulkner's truly classic novels. *The Sound and the Fury* was published to good critical reception, although it still sold very few copies.

In 1929, Faulkner married Estelle Oldham. He lived with her and her two children from a previous marriage, Malcolm and Victoria, in Oxford, Mississippi. He is known to have had a romantic affair with Meta Carpenter, secretary of Howard Hawks, the screenwriter for whom Faulkner worked in Hollywood. From 1949-1953, he had an affair with Joan Williams, who wrote about the relationship in her 1971 novel *The Wintering*.

Faulkner wrote his next novel, *As I Lay Dying*, while working the night shift at a powerhouse. With this novel's publication, Faulkner was finally, if still faltering, a writer on the literary scene. However, Faulkner still did not have any financial success until he published *Sanctuary* in 1931. He wrote *Sanctuary* to sell well, which it did, but it also tarnished his reputation in the eyes of some critics, and that affected his success for the rest of the decade. From then through the 1940s, Faulkner wrote several of his masterpieces, including *Light In August*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Wild Palms*, *The Hamlet*, and *Go Down, Moses*. At the time these books made Faulkner very little money, so he was forced to work in Hollywood as a screenwriter.

In 1950, Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. This award effectively turned his career around, bringing him the economic success that had so long eluded him. However, most critics find the works he wrote after winning the prize largely disappointing, especially compared to his earlier, mythical works.

In his third novel, *Flags in the Dust*, Faulkner created a mythological Mississippi county and named it Yoknapatawpha (Yawknaw-puh-toff-uh), with its county seat in Jefferson. This particular novel, however, was not published during Faulkner's lifetime; it appeared posthumously in 1973. What did appear in 1929 was a heavily edited and much shorter version of *Flags in the Dust*, renamed *Sartoris* to emphasize the importance of one of the county's major families, the Sartorises.

Many of Faulkner's characters appear in his various novels; a character who appears in a minor role in one novel might reappear as a significant character in another. For example, a Snopes appears briefly in the first novel of the Yoknapatawpha series, and Faulkner comments that this Snopes is one of an inexhaustible number of Snopeses who have invaded the county. Later in his career, the Snopes family becomes the subject of three different novels and many

short stories. His other characters appear and reappear in varying roles, and, therefore, in reading more than one of his novels or short stories, we come to know a great deal about the diverse people who inhabit Yoknapatawpha County.

The aristocracy of Yoknapatawpha County is represented by Colonel John Sartoris and his family, the General Jason Compson family, Major de Spain, and the Griersons. Because members of the Sartoris family appear more frequently than do the other members of the aristocracy, Colonel Sartoris best represents this class.

Sartoris appears as a major or minor character in many Faulkner short stories, including "A Rose for Emily," in which he tells Miss Emily that she does not have to pay the taxes on her property; in "Barn Burning," Colonel Sartoris ("Sarty") Snopes, named for the genteel colonel, is the only ethical Snopes in the entire county. Because Colonel John Sartoris epitomizes Southern values — gallantry, generosity, hospitality, valor, pride, honor, and a dedication to the protection of the region's ideals — in "Barn Burning," when young Sarty Snopes is called to testify before the justice of the Peace and gives his name as "Colonel Sartoris Snopes," the justice says, "I reckon anybody named for Colonel Sartoris in this country can't help but tell the truth, can they?"

Although the colonel is the most admired man in Yoknapatawpha County and best represents the values associated with the Old South, he is also one of the most difficult people to get along with. At the beginning of the Civil War, he is the first man to raise a regiment to fight the Yankees. But within a year, he is voted out of his command because of his arrogance and intolerance. He returns to Yoknapatawpha County and organizes his own troop of "irregulars." As the leader of this troop, he becomes somewhat of an instant legend; he seems to be always in the local vicinity or in the neighboring land, protecting the women and children left defenseless while their menfolk are off fighting.

Colonel Sartoris is also admired for his cleverness and ambition. Once, with only a few men, he unexpectedly rides upon an encampment of about sixty Yankees, but his innovative reaction is superb: Pretending to have a large number of troops surrounding the Yankees, he yells commands to make-believe lieutenants, demanding that the Yankees surrender. Afterward, he takes their food and their rifles, and he makes them strip down to their underwear. He then pretends to relax his guard, allowing the prisoners to escape in small groups. This way, they think that they have outwitted him and his regiment, never realizing that the colonel has only a few men with him.

Supremely self-assured and exuding confidence in everything he does, the absolute and undeviating loyalty that Sartoris inspires among the men in his regiment attests to his ability to lead with authority and respect. The fact that his arrogance causes his demotion in his official capacity does not detract from the fact that, as the commander of his own troop, he receives extraordinary loyalty and devotion from his fellow rebels.

The colonel also inspires men's confidences in matters other than wartime tactics. At the end of the war, he is broke and destitute, but he dreams of building a railroad. He is able to communicate that dream to others and convince enough of them to finance the project — not just once, but again and again — so that the railroad, and even the first engine, are built with capital from others. Although Colonel Sartoris himself has no money, he has a vision and a dream. Most important, he is a determined man who refuses to be vanquished — by anything or anyone.

During his writing career, Faulkner wrote numerous short stories featuring members of the Snopes family. He also wrote a trilogy of three novels — *The Hamlet*, *The Town*, and *The Mansion* — that has the Snopes family as the central concern. Throughout the trilogy, he often revised his short stories about the Snopeses and included them in the novels.

As a class of people, the Snopeses are the antithesis of the highbrow society represented by Colonel Sartoris. Whereas Sartoris is refined and carries about himself an Old World gentility, the Snopeses are crass, poor, and ill-mannered. V. K. Ratliff, the narrator of "Spotted Horses," sums up the Snopeses' shady character with the deceptively simple saying, "Them Snopes," an expression that underscores the astonishment and exasperation of Yoknapatawpha County's citizens viewing the Snopeses' behavior.

The Snopeses are best represented by Flem, who in "Spotted Horses" symbolizes the rise of an amoral materialism that will eventually overpower all other moral values. He is the elemental and destructive force of invincible greed opposed to all other forces in Faulkner's fiction, and he accomplishes his ends with a perverse and distorted vitality. The Snopeses' ubiquitous inhumanity infiltrates every aspect of the community life, and their calculating and dehumanizing exploits leave their victims stupefied and in abject rage.

Singularly, the descendants of Abner Snopes, who in "Barn Burning" epitomizes the single-mindedness of his family, are inveterate liars, thieves, murderers, blackmailers, and the personification of every type of treachery. As a clan, they present an insurmountable and insidious example of the horrors of materialistic aggrandizement, and they accomplish their aims with complete, unshakable calm. They are so impersonal that their gruesome inhumanity must be viewed in a comic manner. When we cease to view the Snopeses with ironic and humorous detachment, we lose all perspective. In "Spotted Horses," it is almost impossible to define our reaction to Flem Snopes' audacious gift — "A little sweetening for the chaps" — to Mrs. Armstid, except to agree with Ratliff that if he himself were to do what Flem does, he would be lynched.

Flem and his spotted horses represent the infiltration of unorthodox behavior into a heretofore serene community life. The disorder that he causes forms the basic pattern of his strategy. He does not pit himself against the community in personal combat; rather, he incites diverse elements within the community to battle each other. His last name symbolizes everything unprincipled and amoral in society.

William Faulkner is better known as a novelist though he wrote more than seventy short stories and as such his short stories deserve study in themselves. Six volumes of his short stories were published during his lifetime. Even in isolation from his novels, Faulkner's short fiction provides the complete chronological development of Yoknapatawpha from the coming of white men, who introduced the concept of private property, up to the twentieth century, when the automobile became a common fixture in American society. *Go Down, Moses* is a short story collection that can also be considered a novel, with a thematic unity binding the separate sections of the work. Though Faulkner himself referred to this collection as a novel, yet many critics view "episodes" such as "The Bear" as fully realized short stories that are more concise and complete than many of Faulkner's novels. Faulkner's novel *A Fable* (1954)^[20] won the Pulitzer Prize in fiction and the National Book Award, but received mixed reviews because of its rigidly structured prose. After completing the Snopes trilogy, Faulkner wrote his final novel, *The Reivers* (1962),

which was published shortly before his death. *The Reivers* provides a final glance at Yoknapatawpha County. Although written as a tall tale in the manner of the nineteenth-century Southwestern humorists, this work, like most of Faulkner's fiction, can also be read symbolically as a moral tale.

New Orleans Sketches / edited by Carvel Collins. – New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1958

- *The Mansion*. – New York: Random House, 1959
- *The Reivers*. – New York: Random House, 1962
- *Early Prose and Poetry* / edited by Carvel Collins. – Boston: Little, Brown, 1962
- *Essays, Speeches & Public Letters* / edited by James B. Meriwether. – New York: Random House, 1966
- *The Wishing Tree*. – New York: Random House, 1967
- *The Big Sleep*: screenplay / William Faulkner, Jules Furthman, and Leigh Brackett. – New York: Irvington, 1971
- *The Marionettes: A Play in One Act*. – Charlottesville: Bibliographical Society, University of Virginia, 1975
- *Mayday*. – South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976
- *Mississippi Poems*. – Oxford, Miss.: Yoknapatawpha, 1979

Uncollected Stories of William Faulkner / edited by Joseph Blotner. – New York: Random House, 1979

- *To Have and Have Not*: screenplay / William Faulkner and Jules Furthman. – Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980
- *The Road to Glory*: screenplay / William Faulkner and Joel Sayre. – Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981
- *Helen: A Courtship*. – Oxford, Miss.: Yoknapatawpha, 1981
- *Faulkner's MGM Screenplays* / edited by Bruce F. Kavin. – Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982
- *Elmer* / edited by Dianne Cox. – Northport, Ala.: Seajay, 1983
- *A Sorority Pledge*. – Northport, Ala.: Seajay, 1983
- *Father Abraham* / edited by Meriwether. – New York: Red Ozier Press, 1983
- *The DeGaulle Story*: screenplay / edited by Louis Daniel Brodsky and Robert W. Hamblin. – Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984
- *Vision in spring* / edited by Judith Sensibar. – Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984

Country Lawyer and Other Stories for the Screen / edited by Louis Daniel Brodsky and Robert W. Hamblin. – Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987

- *Stallion Road*: screenplay / edited by Louis Daniel Brodsky and Robert W. Hamblin. – Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989

References

1. Malin, Irving, *William Faulkner. An Interpretation*. – Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1957.
2. Waggoner, Hyatt Howe, *William Faulkner. From Jefferson to the World*. – Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1959.
3. Frohock, Wilbur Merril. *The Novel of Violence in America*. – London: Barker, 1959.
4. Brooks, Cleanth, *William Faulkner. The Yoknapatawpha Country*. – New Haven, Conn. Yale Univ. Press, 1963.

5. *Faulkner. A Collection of Critical Essays* edited by Robert Penn Warren. – Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1966.
6. Reed Joseph W, *Faulkner's Narrative*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1973.
7. Blotner, Joseph Leo. *Faulkner: a Biography*. – New York: Random House, 1974. – 2 vol *William Faulkner: the Critical Heritage* / ed. by John Bassett. – London: Routledge & Kegan, 1975.
8. Brooks, Cleanth. *William Faulkner: the Yoknapatawpha Country*. – New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1976.
9. Nordanberg, Thomas. *Cataclysm as Catalyst: the Theme of War in William Faulkner's Fiction*. – Uppsala: Univ., 1983.
10. Gray Richard J. *The Life of William Faulkner: a Critical Biography*. – Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994.
11. *The Cambridge Companion to William Faulkner* / edited by Philip M. Weinstein. – Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995.
12. Glissant, Edouard. *Faulkner, Mississippi* / translated from the French by Barbara Lewis and Thomas C. Spear. – New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999.
13. Parini, Jay. *One Matchless Time: a Life of William Faulkner*. – New York: HarperCollins Publishers, cop. 2004.
14. *Faulkner and the Ecology of the South: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 2003* / edited by Joseph R. Urgo and Ann J. Abadie. – Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi. 2005.
15. Sensibar Judith L. *Faulkner and Love: the Women who shaped his Art*. – New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.
16. *Collected Stories of William Faulkner* – New York: Random House, 1950.
17. *Notes on a Horsethief* – Greenville, Miss.: Levee, 1950.
18. *Requiem for a Nun* – New York: Random House, 1951.
19. *Mirrors of Chartres Street*. – Minneapolis: Faulkner Studies, 1953.
20. *A Fable*. – New York: Random House, 1954.
21. *Big Woods* – New York: Random House, 1955.
22. *Faulkner's County: Tales of Yoknapatawpha County*. – London: Chatto & Windus, 1955.
23. *Jealousy and Episode: Two Stories* – Minneapolis: Faulkner Studies, 1955.
24. *The Town* – New York: Random House, 1957.