

# William faulkner biography

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William Faulkner is an American writer from the state of Mississippi, Oxford who lived between 1897 and 1962. He is regarded as one of most important Southern Literature writers of the United States. During his lifetime, he was credited for writing and publishing a great volume of poetry, novels, short stories, essays and screenplays. His collection of short stories and novel is the most popular. He also won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1949 for his contribution to the field of American Literature (O'Connor 1). This paper focuses on the most important works of William Faulkner, his literary influences, writing style, themes, what makes him so important in the field of literature and why his works are worth reading.

## **The most important works of Faulkner**

During his lifetime, Faulkner wrote very many literary works such as poetry, novels, short stories, essays and screenplays. His novels and short stories were the best in the collection. His collection of first edition novels contained over 20 novels. Some of the works of William Faulkner that stood out from

the collection and made the list of the most of the celebrated of Faulkner's novels include;

**The Sound and the Fury:** This novel was set in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County in Mississippi State which was his home and also the setting of most of his novels. The novel featured the Compson family and their slow agonizing decay and twisting of the social order. Themes such as incest, honor and mental instability formed the book. The book ended with an interesting twist that said that they endured. This book was instrumental in the winning of the 1949 Nobel Literature Prize. It showed a very superior construction technique with ability to recreate the human mind thought pattern and it advanced the stream of consciousness narrative pattern (Minter 104).

**As I Lay Dying:** This is the fifth book that was written by Faulkner and it is considered by most people as the best. The story was developed by fifteen narrators narrating the burial of the matriarch of the Bundren family. The vulnerability of the lovers, children and friends was shown in a very moving way. The book represents development of the stream of consciousness technique in a more intimate way than in 'The Sound and the Fury'. The story in this book played a role in founding the Southern Renaissance (Minter 106).

**Light in August:** This novel featured a story of Lena Grove, Reverend Gail Hightower and Joe Christmas all seeking to find an identity. The story was emotional and often, the characters viewed themselves differently from the way other people viewed them. This novel had a lot of significance in the

Southern way of life and especially racism which was very obviously attacked by the author (Minter 129).

Absalom, Absalom: This was a story done by two narrators Quentin and his roommate Shreve at Harvard. It featured the life of Thomas Sutpen who came to Mississippi in the 1830s to build a plantation as well as a dynasty. The narrators were very disconnected from the story they were telling. The story had its inspiration in the biblical story of Absalom, King Minter's son. It was very instrumental in helping Faulkner win the Nobel Prize and in 2009; it was declared the best Southern novel of all time by a panel of judges (Minter 168).

### **Major influences on Faulkner's works**

As with every other writer, Faulkner had his own share of experiences and people who influenced his works. One of the major influences of Faulkner was his Southern upbringing and environment. Themes that had to do with the southern environment at the time of his life kept recurring in his novels. These included racism, classism and misogyny and he was strongly opposed to these ideologies. His families as well as their values also influence his writing to some extent as is expressed by his reference to 'Damuddy' his grandmother's nickname in the Novel, 'The Sound and the Fury' and the modeling of Colonel Sartoris in the novel 'Sartoris' after his great grandfather who was a colonel. The post master job held by Faulkner at some point is also referred to in some of his writing for instance 'A Rose of Emily'. When it comes to literary influences on Faulkner's works, Faulkner took after James Joyce and Virginia Woolf in their stream of consciousness

writing technique. Mark Twain's influence is also evident in the characteristic laid back adventure Faulkner uses that was also used by Mark (Cruz 1-5).

## **Faulkner's writing style**

The writing style of Faulkner is very distinct and as such has many proponents and equally many opponents. He uses a distinct highly symbolic style that is full of contrast. For instance, his characters are full of corruption and violence which is his way of criticizing the morals of the society. One particularly unique characteristic of Faulkner's writing style is the use of extremely long sentences. The different phrases of the sentence are connected by commas, semicolons and parenthesis. They also portray different ideas so that a single sentence presents all the possibilities of the issue being highlighted. Another characteristic of Faulkner's writing style is the use of the 'stream of consciousness' technique (Lowe 1).

## **Why is Faulkner important?**

Faulkner was a very important figure in the literature as well as the larger world. In Literature, he developed his own distinct style that was marked by symbolism, contrast and the stream of consciousness technique. He was also a very important interpreter of history through his work. He wrote at a time when modernism was emerging and he managed to portray most of the issues that were facing not just the South and America but the world at large as modernism was kicking in. Literary critics have called him a "master of a high rhetoric and folk rhetoric" style (O'Connor 151) and an "important interpreter of history" (Lowe 1).

## **Why is Faulkner's work worth reading?**

Most critics claim that Faulkner's literary works is complex and not easy to understand. Long sentences with contrasting ideas are used confusing the reader. However, those who have taken the trouble say it is worth reading. This is because of Faulkner's portrayal of Southern culture is very clear and important. He also has vast literary influence due to his unique writing style. His work is also very original and interesting.

## **Faulkner's ideas and themes**

Faulkner's themes and idea recur many times in his works. Southern history is one of the themes he writes about frequently perhaps because he grew up there. He also addresses other themes such as social structure, class, modernism, racism and gender. In most of his works, Faulkner uses corruption and violence in his characters to indicate the moral decadence in the society. It seems that his Southern influence was so strong because every theme he tackled, whether it was class, racism or equality was related to the South (Lowe 1).