

# William Faulkner Biographical Sketch

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



American novelist and Nobel Prize recipient, William Faulkner, was born on September 25, 1897 in New Albany, Mississippi. He was the first of four children, where his family was deeply influenced by their home state and the overall culture and lifestyle of the American South. He experienced many different fields of literature through his career in media allowed him to write many essays, poems, novels, and stories. Many of his stories take place in Yoknapatawpha County, based on the Lafayette County that he grew up in. Considered to be one of the most influential writers of all Southern literature and is often compared to Mark Twain or Harper Lee. Upon a mistake one careless typesetter made when printing the title page of Faulkner's first book, the misprint of the author's last name was altered to from his original last name "Falkner" to his current, widely known last name as "Faulkner". Faulkner was indifferent about the way his last name was spelled, so he left it as that and was then known to have his surname spelled the latter way. Faulkner's family made a great impact on his writings, especially his mother and grandmother. His artistic imagination flourished while being around these women, for they were all great readers. Also, they were painters, educating his visual language and use of sensory images in his writing. Faulkner was educated his entire life by Caroline Barr, a black woman who raised him since his infancy. She was also particularly critical to Faulkner's success, for his novels' dealt with the politics of race and sexuality. Also, his birth into a traditional southern family exposed him to fishing, farming, and other orthodox activities around where he lived, while being educated in literature, art, and poetry. These two influences created and shaped the writer he was and became. His philosophy was that he only wanted to

write about things that were worth his time, labor, and agony invested into his novels. He began his early career writing mostly poetry, until 1925 when he wrote his first novel, *Soldier's Pay*. He attended the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi, the place where he grew up at, but soon dropped out after three semesters to go to New York City where he had several odd jobs. After that, he became postmaster at the Mississippi University Station, but was fired for reading on the job. From 1926 to 1930, Faulkner published a series of novels, but none of which were very successful. Soon after though, in 1931, the publication of his more successful book, *Sanctuary*, freed him of financial worries, so he traveled to Hollywood for a year to be a scriptwriter. After the World War II, Faulkner finally received critical acclaim for his writings, posing to be a turning point for Faulkner's reputation. He rapidly earned the praise of many people all over the country, which led him to earn a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1949. Among other influences on Faulkner's writing are the region he resided in and his own family history. His humor, observation of the position of White and Black Americans, characterization and depiction of Southern characters, and themes that will remain throughout all of American literature were all based off of his southern lifestyle and the Mississippi setting he was surrounded by. He includes characters in his novels that represent both sides of the south: the aristocratic, land-owning ways of the Old South, and the commercial New South. Some of his most notable novels are *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* Battling a lifelong drinking issue indicated that Faulkner used alcohol as an escape from the pressures of everyday life, rather than having anything to do with

his writings. He usually never drank while writing, but rather binge drank after he completed a good portion of what he was working on. Contributing to the pressures of his daily life were Faulkner's infidelity to his wife, Estelle Oldham, where he had many affairs with different women such as a secretary, a script girl, another young writer, a widow of a journalist, a reporter, and a daughter of a movie actress, leading to an eventual divorce with his wife. Faulkner was considered to be an arrogant, volatile, unfaithful, and drunken man. As a reticent man, he did not expose much of his private life and rarely invited people for interviews. He died on July 6, 1962, in Byhalia, Mississippi at age 64. Faulkner passed away on account of a heart attack, most likely because of his years of constant abuse of alcohol and his many severe injuries from horse-back riding, something he enjoyed doing in his pastime. Faulkner's meticulous attention to diction and writings which were very emotional and sometimes along the Gothic style, which depicted poor whites, slaves, and the southern working class will always be revered by readers and other writers for years to come.