

19

WILLIAM FAULKNER'S NOVELS

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Abstract:

William Faulkner is one of the best writers in modern times. He is known for his modernist theme and the use of stream of consciousness narrative technique. He wrote novels, poems, essays, short stories and screen plays. However, he is known for his novels. The New Critics also show their interest in Faulkner's novels. The complex human relationship, conflict within the soul, struggle against defeatism are some of the major aspects of his novels. The present research paper analyses major novels of William Faulkner.

Key Words: *Stream of Consciousness, human relationship, conflict within soul.*

Faulkner was born in New Albany, Mississippi, on 25 September 1897, the first child of Maud and Murry Faulkner. Later the parents moved to Ripley and then to Oxford, where he spent the rest of his adult life. Near Oxford, in a sanatorium on a hill outside Byhalia, another small Mississippi town, he died in 1962. He did creative writing for five decades. He had a great ancestry and he was a contemporary of Ernest Hemingway. He too got Nobel Prize for literature. Faulkner's creative began in the 1910s. Sometime around 1910, he began writing poetry. Years later he began writing stories like those he was listening to and occasionally telling. Poetry contributed, he said later, to his 'youthful gesture' of being 'different' a gesture to which he devoted considerable effort for a long time. His first poetry collection is called *The Marble Faun*.

His first novel was *Soldiers' Pay* where he borrowed from what he had written as well as from what he heard, read, and projected. From one of his earlier poems, he began his novel with a contrast between two figures that had long engaged him: one a cadet on whom 'they had stopped the war,' the other a dreadfully scarred R.A.F. pilot who has returned home maimed and moribund. Later Faulkner used the war and its aftermath as the setting of several stories and novels that are superior to *Soldier's Pay*. Drawing on several outings arranged by the Andersons, Faulkner focused *Mosquitoes* on a yachting expedition on Lake Pontchartrain.

In 'Father Abraham,' which contained the seeds of his Snopes saga, Faulkner began engaging the social, economic, and political developments that were transforming the South. In *Flags in the Dust*, which became Sartoris, he began drawing on regional and familial legends and traditions. In *The Sound and the Fury*, which became his first great novel, he returned to the family configuration of his earliest years and to memories out of his own childhood. Soon he was writing stories about some children named Compson. Taking a line from W.C. Handy's 'St Louis Blues,' he called one of the stories 'That Evening Sun Go Down.' Another he called 'A Justice.' Both were based on memories out of his own childhood, and both concern children who face dark, foreboding experiences without adequate support. At the end of 'A Justice' he depicts the children moving through a 'strange, faintly sinister suspension of twilight.' In 'A Justice,' as twilight descends around them and their world begins to fade, loss, consternation, and bafflement become almost all they know. In early spring Faulkner began a third story about the Compsons calling it 'Twilight,' he thought to make it an exploration of the moment 'That Evening Sun' and 'A Justice' had made the Compsons' inclusive moment. By the time he finished it, this third story had become *The Sound and the Fury*, his first great novel. Faulkner was capable, as he once remarked, of saying almost anything in an

interview; on some subjects, he enjoyed contradicting himself. In discussing *The Sound and the Fury*, he displayed remarkable consistency for thirty years. From his statements several facts emerge, all intimating that he wrote *The Sound and the Fury* in the midst of a crisis that was both personal and professional.

Like *Flags in the Dust*, *The Sound and the Fury* is set in Jefferson and recalls family history. The Compson family, like the Sartoris family, mirrors Faulkner's sense of his family's story as a story of declension. But *The Sound and the Fury* is bleaker, more personal, and more compelling. By September 1928 Faulkner had finished the manuscript of *The Sound and the Fury* and had begun a typescript. Believing that he 'would never be published again,' he had no plan for submitting it to a publisher. He wanted something he could bind for himself. Late in September, however, he received in the mail a contract for Sartoris. Harcourt, Brace was going to publish at least part of the novel Liveright had rejected. Almost immediately Faulkner decided to pack his manuscript and partial typescript and go to New York. He had now three hundred dollar advance to live on; he had friends like Lyle Saxon, Bill Spratling, and Ben Wasson to visit; and he could revise and type as well in New York as in Oxford.

As I Lay Dying appeared then. Like *Sanctuary*, his new novel would be deliberate. But this time his intention was to demonstrate his mastery of fiction: 'Before I began I said, I am going to write a book by which, at a pinch, I can stand or fall if I never touch ink again'. Using a title he had first given to a story about Flem Snopes, he called his novel *As I Lay Dying*. He also used a few characters, such as Henry Armstid, from his earliest Snopes stories. But the family whose story he was telling was new. Moving quickly, Hal Smith published *As I Lay Dying* on 6 October 1930, less than a year after Faulkner began it. Like *The Sound and the Fury*, it attracted large notice and small sales, and so disappointed Faulkner.

In June 1930 the Faulkners moved from their comfortable apartment to their new home. In the household he made a place for Mammy Callie. Later, in dedicating *Go Down, Moses* to her, he recalled both the long fidelity she had given his family, 'without stint or calculation of recompense,' and the 'immeasurable devotion and love' she had given him. Seeking an appropriate name for his new home, he decided to call it 'Rowan Oak' from the rowan tree, which Frazer describes in *The Golden Bough* as symbolic of peace and security and as indigenous to Scotland, the land Faulkner thought of as his ancestral home.

As 'Dark House,' (the novel called as *Light in August* later) focused on the Reverend Gail Hightower. Like Dr. Gavin Blount in 'Rose of Lebanon,' a story Scribner's had rejected in early August, Gail Hightower is crippled by his preoccupation with his family's history. Like the Sartorises, he wants to be heroic like the protagonist of 'Carcassonne,' the last of *These 13*, he wants 'to perform something bold and tragical and austere.' As in *Flags in the Dust*, the dream of glory is associated with illustrious ancestors; as in 'Carcassonne,' it is associated with a galloping horse that thunders upward and outward into glorious oblivion. But in *Light in August* both the horse and the glory belong wholly to the past.

'Vendee' completed the series of five stories published in the *Post*, and it also marked the temporary conclusion of Faulkner's last major extension of the story of the Sartoris family. During the next few weeks he added an episode called 'Skirmish at Sartoris'; a few years later he revised the stories and wrote a final chapter called 'An Odor of Verbena'. Renaming the fourth episode 'Riposte in Tertio', he shaped his stories into a novel called *The Unvanquished*. Ostensibly the story of a family and a region caught up in a war and its aftermath, *The Unvanquished* is essentially the story of two boys. In it we observe the growth of Ringo and especially of Bayard. In the last episode they are young men in their mid-twenties, and they have been tested several times. Near the middle of the novel they lose Granny Millard; near its end, Colonel John Sartoris. Deprived of sponsors, they retain memories that enable them to survive with honor. There is great energy and skill in *The Unvanquished*, and there is also genuine delight in some of the exploits of Granny, Ringo, and Bayard. Through his treatment of Ringo and Bayard, Faulkner was able to push farther the concern about race that had found compelling expression in *Light in August*. The stories he called 'a pulp series', he also called 'trash'.

In structure, however, the next minor novel *Pylon* is closer to *Absalom, Absalom!* than to any novel Faulkner had yet written. Its action centers on four barnstormers and a child: a pilot named Roger Shumann; his lover and wife, Laverne; a parachute-jumper named Holmes, who is also Laverne's lover; a mechanic named Jiggs; and a boy named Jack, who is Laverne's son, probably by Roger, though possibly by Holmes. Together these characters epitomize the appeal of flight and rootlessness. Each of the adults has rejected a mundane, ordinary existence in order to become a homeless adventurer. Like *Sanctuary*, *Pylon* is a bleak, uncompromising novel. Its world is as hopelessly mean and evil as to inspire cynicism and even despair.

To salvage their marriage, he and Estelle needed to acknowledge the large role Hollywood was playing in their lives. Perhaps by consolidating households they could cut expenses; and perhaps by being together in a new setting they could recover a sense of order and stability if not of happiness. When Faulkner reported for work at the studios of Twentieth Century Fox on 1 August 1936, he was still looking for a house large enough to accommodate his family and servants, Jack Oliver and Narcissus McEwen. Soon he found a place, just north of Santa Monica, complete with servants' quarters and a view. On a clear day he could see both the San Gabriel Mountains and Catalina Island. The house was too far from the studio and it cost too much, but both he and Estelle liked it; and since they had a car, a chauffeur, and a big salary, they decided to take it. Here the Faulkners quarreled often.

William Faulkner's early novels such as *The Marble Faun* (1924), *Soldier's Pay* (1926), *Mosquitoes* (1927) and *Sartoris* (1927) were quite obscure and morbid in the thematic concerns. These early novels, yet established Faulkner as a celebrity but wrongly established. The 1930s critics, however, praised Faulkner's established of Yoknapatawpa as a country in the American South. Faulkner's masterpiece *The Sound and the Fury* appeared in 1929. The early and important critics Evelyn Scott, Winfield Townley Scott, Abbott Martin, Henry Nash Smith, Dudley Fitts, Edward Crickmy and Frank Winnerton reviewed the books with interest. The novel *The Sound and the Fury* appeared at the same time as Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* and Faulkner's novel was poorly sold and poorly praised. Critics called it a difficult book as it traded in obscurity and morbidity. Gerald Gould who ironically was one of very few critics ever praised by Faulkner, refused even to finish the book, rejecting it as incomprehensible. John Bassett observes,

We should be the last to deny any novelist the right to poke his nose into any human territory, but should mind of such 'a high order' dip so 'close to trash'? Edith H. Walton regretted that Faulkner had lavished his talents on material which is so grotesque and so essentially insignificant. They complained that Faulkner was still concerned only with idiots and degenerates, as if the whole cast of *As I Lay Dying* were literary offspring of Benjy Compson - Almost no one recognized the book's humor or the comic vision behind the most bizarre and catastrophic events in the journey (Bassett 7).

References:

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