

English 8892: Faulkner

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Spring 2003:715GCB Wed 7:15 p.m.-9:45

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**Office hours Wed. 4-7 p.m. & by appointment Tues. or Thurs**

Important Dates: **Spring Break: March 3-9**

**Last Day to Withdraw with a “W”: April 16**

Required Texts

William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury (Norton or Vintage International)  
As I Lay Dying (Vintage International: "corrected edition")  
Sanctuary (Vintage International: "corrected edition")  
Light in August (Vintage International: "corrected edition")  
Absalom, Absalom! (Vintage International: "corrected edition")  
The Hamlet (Vintage International "corrected edition")  
The Reiver (Vintage International "corrected edition")

Recommended: Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (published at various times by Random House, U of Nebraska Press, and U of Georgia Press—still frequently available inexpensively on the Internet at <abebooks.com> and <alibris.com> and other sites.

PERSPECTIVE: In addition to the standard considerations of Faulkner as both a southern writer and a Modernist, this course will also pay some attention to the following: the textual history of selected Faulkner works; as yet unwritten Faulkner biography; relationships between revisionist southern historiography and Faulkner's works of the imagination; and the validity of various Internet guides to Faulkner's novels and stories. Many aspects of Faulkner's writing have contributed to his still very high international reputation; he is, one can prove by the comments of fictionists from all over the world, a writer's writer. This sometimes makes him seem a daunting writers to students who encounter his works for the first time, and so another of our perspectives is not only to overcome any “fear of Faulkner” among members of this particular class but also to discuss strategies for bringing the challenges and rewards of studying Faulkner to undergraduates and secondary school students.

The powerful positive impact of Faulkner's novels on such writers as Robert Penn Warren, Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Toni Morrison, Ralph Ellison, Kenzaburo Oe, William Styron, Shelby Foote, and others will be the source for yet another small exercise for this class.. Almost until Faulkner won the 1949 Nobel Prize in Literature (awarded in 1950, by which time he had published 14 remarkable and remarkably different novels) his writing was most often attributed by journalistic critics to his Southern regional heritage (miscalled “Gothic”) and his propensity for strong drink. What Warren, Camus, Morrison, Marquez and other serious writers knew was that Faulkner's impact results from the marvels of his style, by

which we must mean both his literary structures and his deployment of language. We will seek to understand this aspect of his work by constantly comparing his structural strategies and by looking closely at his diction and his syntax.

**GENERAL REQUIREMENTS:** Regular attendance and class participation required; anyone missing classes without a valid excuse runs the risk of a grade penalty and habitual failure to meet class and be prepared for class can result in a non-cooperative member of the class being dropped from the course with a failing grade. I know life intervenes, and I know that some classes can be boring, but I believe that well-prepared students bring and receive intellectual surprises in class. And experience of sudden illumination can't be repeated nor can it be found in someone else's notes. I don't want you to miss that possibility and I don't want to miss it myself because someone has come unprepared and has to ask questions already answered by the class. Unprepared students create a vacuum in the room that chokes discussion.

**Reading Assignments (Dates represent when a reading of the assigned text(s) should be completed;** with Faulkner, re-immersion in the text is very important, so make and keep appointments with yourself to read the texts carefully. Do not depend in any case on a previous reading of the texts: read them again; they will be different. Having finished a novel that you are reading for the first time, re-read the first chapter to see how that will be changed for you as well.

**First Class,** January 8, will take up Faulkner's life as it is reflected in his writing; discussions of his texts and his perceived role in what has been called the "Southern Renaissance"; the syllabus and assignments; and the handing out of copies of excerpts from some of Faulkner's apprentice works to read for the following week.

**For January 15:** Read excerpts from *Soldiers' Pay*, *Mosquitoes*, *early prose and poetry*. Also read handouts on "idiot" and on the biblical account of Jesus's life that is the basis for the celebration of the four-day Easter weekend.

**For January 22:** Read *The Sound and the Fury*.

**For January 29:** Re-read the first section of *The Sound and the Fury*

**For February 5:** Read *As I Lay Dying*

**For February 12:** Read *Sanctuary*

**For February 19:** Read chapters 1-9 of *Light in August*

**For February 26:** Read remainder of *Light in August*

----Spring Break, March 3-9---

**For March 12: Read chapters 1-5 of *Absalom, Absalom!***

**For March 19: Read remainder of *Absalom, Absalom!***

**For March 26: Read “Books” One and Two of *The Hamlet***

**For April 2: Read “Books” Three and Four of *The Hamlet***

**For April 9: Read *The Reivers***

**For April 16: Re-read the Quentin section of *The Sound and the Fury* and the first chapter of *Absalom, Absalom!* In the light of reading *The Reivers*.**

**For April 23 [Last Class]: Discussion of Faulkner’s career and influence.**

### **Grading System**

The following is a tentative guide to how aspects of the coursework will be weighted:

- 10% oral report and handout on writer influenced by Faulkner
- 20% biographical paper on small aspect of Faulkner’s career.
- 10% “Focus” essay for stimulating class discussion.
- 10% “abstract” of critical essay on a specific Faulkner work
- 15% book report on recent critical work on Faulkner
- 10% written critique on an internet resource for one of Faulkner’s texts
- 10% reading log and class participation
- 15% final exam

**This syllabus provides a general guide to the course. Adjustments and changes may be necessary to accomplish course goals. Students will be allowed to make up work missed or made late because of illness or accident, but must make arrangements with the instructor as to when this will be due.**

**Being Prepared to Learn and to Remember what you have learned:** In an ideal world, a graduate class in literature should provoke you to learn many things: not just facts, but, yes, also facts. It is not just, as we say, a project of light summer reading. You should use your reading log and your outside reading to develop a sense of the subject (in this case Faulkner, but also the modernist novel, modern literature in general, and even southern literature) as “field” or area of discipline. You should come to some conclusions about the roles of biography, literary history, both practical and philosophical analytical or critical techniques. And you should take the opportunities offered you to raise the level of your ability to organize ideas and to express them in writing.

Here is what I propose to help you accomplish some of these goals:

### Handouts:

At the first class and during subsequent classes you will receive a variety of printed handouts. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to procure the materials from the instructor, who will not keep books for you, or a member of the class. As of now, the projected handouts are as follows:

1. This syllabus.
2. A twopage checklist of Faulkner's major booklength publications, of major secondary sources for the study of his life and work, and instructions about using American Literary Scholarship and Sixteen Modern American Authors.
3. A twopage excerpt from Hillis Miller's Fiction and Repetition.
4. A photocopied gospel harmony to use in understanding the Christological context of The Sound and the Fury.

In addition, you should receive as many handouts as there are students in the class in connection with the inclass reports. These will vary in length according to the purposes of the student giving the report. Additional handouts may be given by the instructor and by students in the class.

### **Terms and important names**

From lectures, discussions, the process of preparing papers, and your own reading in current handbooks, literary guides, dictionaries, etc., you should become aware of the importance (for both Faulkner and modern literature in general) of the names and terms listed just below. I suspect you will know many already, and I'm sure you'll encounter them again, so take some pains to be sure you know the meaning of the terms and their implications for the culture of modernism and the significance of the named writers and thinkers for both modernism and Faulkner in particular:

Sherwood Anderson	Impressionism	Fin de siècle
art nouveau	Gertrude Stein	Expressionism
James Joyce	T. S. Eliot	Symbolism
Symbolist Poets	Surrealism	Sigmund Freud
Carl Jung	Henri Bergson	Friedrich Nietzsche
Imagism	Vorticism	Synaesthesia
Arthur Schopenhauer	Futurism	Albert Einstein
Cubism	Interior monologue	Post-Modernism
leit motif	Marcel Proust	Thomas Mann
Picasso	Cezanne	Mallarmé
Stravinsky	Schoenberg	James G. Frazer

To help you read critically, the following may be helpful: The excerpt from Hillis Miller's Fiction and Repetition included in the syllabus should help you take an unpanicked approach to some of the many ways in which Faulkner's novel-length fictions may be read. Other handouts will contribute, as well, I hope. Below are some recurring elements in Faulkner that you may expect to encounter as theme or subject as you read:

**The Oedipal triangle:** The Incest Theme / Father son problems / The overprotective brother/ The "profligate" sister / Repetitive names and events

**Problematic marriages:** the "second-hand wife" / The impotent or outraged husband

**Rooms and enclosures as psychological spaces:** The hermetic room / doors and windows / the house as character

**The heightened sexuality of the natural world:** Flowers and plants / Sun or moon / water / earth, etc.

**The language of negation and negativity**

**The language of thought and not-thought:** memory, belief, knowledge, intuition

**The problematics of time and history:** repetition, exceptionalism, "the human condition is the failure to understand the true nature of time" (Bergson); "we are memory incarnate" (Proust), eternal return (Nietzsche), the world as will and idea and the endless wheel of the suffering caused by longing and the emptiness caused by boredom (Schopenhauer)

**The indelibility of letters and other documents**

**The constellation and romance of family**

**Biblical stories:**

Jesus

AbrahamIsaac

DavidTamar

**Mythological stories:**

Orpheus

Persephone

PhaetonApollo

**Faulkner and Psychology:** Early in his career, Faulkner certainly saw in what we call the Family Romance (as distinct from the Historical, Sentimental, or Gothic Romance) a device for exploring most of the other things he felt moved to write about. By inventing the town of Jefferson, Mississippi, and then an entire county of interrelated families, or families that repeated patterns of living addressed time and again, Faulkner gave license to his exploitation of the Freudian notion of recurrence.

**Paradigm shifts:** After *Light in August*, and perhaps even as he wrote it and worked on other projects that did not come to fruition until the late 1930s (the pieces about wilderness and plantation and families that, in a racist society, were doomed to see themselves as having "dual" lines and the pieces about the rise of the "redneck" in the form of the Snopes), Faulkner shifted to what we might call an economic paradigm, taking into account the poverty of the rural south. He also may have encountered the writings of Carl Jung and felt sufficient influence, or interest, to shift into a mode where the archetype became more important than the neurosis. The romance of landscape, of the "made" cosmos or order of his fiction) took on increasing importance to him after the critic Malcolm Cowley, editing the *Viking Portable Faulkner* anthology in 1945, told him he was "god" to the young existentialist writers of France and that Yoknapatawpha was his great creation.

**Faulkner's styles** and he does have many, contrary to some old popular notions of his being a kind of outofcontrol drunken natural genius of a writer have hardly been explored, except for a work by Irena Kaluza many years ago. Yet what is now nearly a half century ago Eudora Welty called him "poetically, the most accurate man alive," a phrase picked up and used by the poet and critic Randall Stewart as the title of an essay on Faulkner's style. Robert Penn Warren, a poet of no mean distinction, wrote that the study of Faulkner's works was the single most engaging task before American criticism. And Cleanth Brooks pointed out that those journalistic critics who said of Faulkner that he could not write, yet what

impact his works created, appeared acutely naive: where the hell did they think the impact was coming from but from the style. An outsider, the Latin American novelist Mario VargasLlosa, put it simply: Faulkner is the Picasso of Literature. Let's see if we can find out why and how all this is true.. Be open to the deliberate choice in Faulkner's work of a variety of styles and very bold ways of conceiving the architecture of novellength work. The purpose of the assignment of the inclass report, the critical summary, and the paper in this class is to encourage you to dig more deeply into the textual intricacies of Faulkner's works, to help you acquire a reasonable preliminary knowledge of the cultural environment in which Faulkner's works appeared, and to provide you with a beginning exposure to the critical perspective on Faulkner. This work, in turn, should constitute a paradigm of how to begin study of the work of any single author of any period in whom you become interested.

**What to do:** As you approach these or other topics we may discuss in class, try to imagine a critical perspective or method that you think would work well in investigating the topic. One thing that may happen is that from our familiarity with the critical works used in reports, we may suddenly see ways to apply some new kind of criticism to a scene, passage, skein of imagery, device, set of allusions, etc., that the investigated critic does not tackle. The result may be a new and enriched explication of a specific piece of the work or certain kinds of generalizations about style, structure, or even about Faulkner's presentation of race, of women, of economic matters, of consciousness, of humor, of history's power, of consciousness and unconsciousness, of time and memory, etc.

Here, for example, is a brief guide to many of things we encounter when we read **The Sound and the Fury**

What lies behind it:

Inside: Late romantic & modernist poetry

Decadent & symbolist art

Faulkner's apprentice writing:

*Marionettes*: seduction, pool, dreaming, death

"The Kingdom of God" from *New Orleans Sketches*: idiot, flower

*Elmer*: family, sister (Jo-Addie), obsessions (phallic, colorist)

*Mayday*: chivalry, faithless women, pain & hunger, death

The Wishing Tree: Children, Dulcie, Water, Little Sister Death

[Stories of my townspeople As I Lay Dying? Twilight?] [cf. That

Evening Sun {Go

Down}, A Rose

for Emily, etc.]

Outside:

Joyce, Dubliners

Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio

Hemingway, In Our Time

Freud/Frazer/Bergson/Einstein

Joyce, *Ulysses* / Eliot, *The Waste Land*

Robinson Jeffers, "Tamar" (1925)

What's woven in to provide pattern:

Easter 1928 [1910]: three Christmanque

PersephoneDemeterHecate: triune women

EgoIdSuperego

Three misconceptions of time: None; stop; late plus eternal

Black family/white family: Gibson, Compson [linguistically related]

Folk religion/Corrupt institution

Carnival: cf. As I Lay Dying

Shegog's sermon > Nobel Prize Speech

Dilsey/Candace < Dulcie [Dulce]

Losses and absences

Deaths: horse, pig, Damuddy (begins); Quentin, Mr. Compson, Roskus.

Trips to cemetery

Marriage

Madness and suicide

**Macbeth**

"Keepers": Versh (Virgil?); T.P. (Thomas Peter?); Luster (Lucifer?)

What is peculiarly southern about TSATF?

Family history and relationships

Voice

Traditions?

Styles; repetitions; semiclosures & closure; Story versus What is revealed

Stylistic innovation: "Caddy" & "I was trying to say" "Did you ever have a sister" "Keep your on Mottson" "I see'd de first and I see'd de last"

Quentin's 'i'

Title: Macbeth: idiot, walking shadow, poor player: she should have died hereafter....signifying?

## Demonstrating and Retaining What You've Learned

As you've seen already in the little chart showing how different assignments will be weighted, you have a good many small tasks I've created to help you learn more about Faulkner, about modernist literary culture, about the critical legacy surrounding Faulkner, etc. Below is an explanation of what each of these assignments requires:

1. Reading log: In a notebook of some kind, record your thoughts and questions as you read each of the assignments; reserve some pages of this log, either at the end of the notebook or following entries on each novel, to put down unfamiliar words you will encounter and brief definitions. If you don't read with a dictionary and, preferably, a one-volume literary handbook or "encyclopedia" such as the Columbia-Viking Desk Encyclopedia (which you can still find very cheaply at used book stores), you miss much, including allusions you should look up: look up everything you don't recognize and write it down! The log of your reading clearly records any puzzlement you experience reading Faulkner and then, most likely, later statements about how simply reading on reduced or erased that puzzlement
2. "Focus" essay for stimulating class discussion. During the course of the semester, I will assign focus essays of one-page, double-spaced, for you to write about very minor aspects of what we are reading as a stimulus for class discussion and to make sure each of you can contribute to the class "reading" of our texts
3. "Abstract" of critical essay on a specific Faulkner work I will assign each of you one recent essay on one of the works we are reading; your task will be to read it and make an "abstract"—a summary of the argument and main points of the essay, without comment, for the rest of the class.
4. Written critique of an internet resource for one of Faulkner's texts: the internet abounds with guides of literature of various kinds and of various reliability. I will ask each of you to investigate either a specific site or a section of a specific site devoted to one of the books we are reading and to evaluate that site based on your own reading, and class discussion, of our texts.
5. Using available library media, write a biographical paper on small aspect of Faulkner's career: Using available library media, each of you will write a 5page biographical sketch of some small increment of Faulkner's career.



I will assign each of you a different couple of weeks in Faulkner's life that deserve some attention. Your job will be to see what, in those two weeks, was appearing in good American popular and literary magazines, in movie theaters, in the daily newspapers (Faulkner's regional paper was the Memphis (Tenn.) *Commercial Appeal*, which we have on microfilm in Pullen Library, and Emory University has a microfilm set of the *Oxford (Miss.) Eagle*. Here are the broad dates we will use:

21 December 1906-1 June 1907

Fall 1909

Summer 1914

Fall 1916

Spring 1917

Spring 1918

Aug.-Oct. 1919

Jan.-April 1920

Jan. April 1921

Autumn 1921

Jan.-April 1922

May-Dec. 1922

Jan.-June 1923

July-Dec. 1923

Jan.-June 1924

July-Dec. 1924

Jan.-June 1925

July-Dec. 1925

Jan.-June 1926

July-Dec. 1926

Jan.-June 1927

6. Oral class report on some fiction writer's remarks regarding Faulkner's influence. **(If you use a written version of your report to make your presentation, remember that it should be no more than ten minutes in length and, without exception, that's five double-spaced typewritten pages).** The handout may be no more than one page, and you must bring copies for all **15 members** of the class and two for the instructor. In the handout, you should give useful information that cannot be given easily in an oral presentation. Oral reports should be clearly presented in a strong voice. They will be strictly timed; at the end of ten minutes, you will have to stop.

7. Book report on recent critical work on Faulkner: using the table of contents, introduction, and a skim-read of some of the text, write a 2-page “review” of a major critical work on Faulkner: I will give you a list of works from which to choose. This “review” does not require a detailed reading of the critical text, merely sufficient examination of the text in order to let another reader know what the book is about and how it is organized to accomplish what it is about.
8. Final Exam: The exam will test knowledge of the terms for identification listed in the syllabus above and will include the opportunity to write responses to two questions in the format created for the English Department’s M.A. examination (handouts will be given to you) on three of the novels discussed this semester.