

CHAPTER 3

SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

William Faulkner (Cuthbert), whose original surname was Falkner until 1924, born on 25 September 1897, in New Albany, Mississippi, United States. He was best known for the series known as the Yoknapatawpha cycle, developed as a fable of the real American South in history and, beyond that, of human destinies everywhere. He won the Noble Prize for Literature in 1949.

Faulkner was the oldest of four brothers born in a county seat in northern Mississippi. His parents were Murry C. and Maud Butler Falkner. It was the novelist himself who latter added a "u" to the name. Soon the Falkners moved to Ripley, in the adjoining county, and then 50 miles southwestward to Oxford, where the novelist was to spend most of his life. In Oxford his father owned and lost a livery stable and a hardware store before he became business manager of the state university. The family was proud of its Southern heritage and of the memory of the great grandfather, Col. William C Falkner, who had served with distinction during the Civil War. In 1881 he had written a romantic novel, The White Rose of Memphis, which was popular enough to be reprinted 36 times.

Billy, or "Memie" - as he was called by the family and also by a devoted servant, Caroline Bar, who told him stories remembered from slavery days - was an imaginative boy, always leading his brothers into scrapes. He was not interested in formal studies and dropped out of high school after his second year. At the time, he was in love with a neighbour girl, Estelle Oldham. Dreaming of marriage, he went to work in his grandfather's bank.

Estelle married another man and went to live in the Orient. Faulkner enlisted in the Royal Air Force of Canada and was sent to Toronto as a cadet pilot in 1918, but the war ended before he had finished his basic training. Home again in Oxford, he was admitted to the University of Mississippi - 'by special dispensation for returned troops,' he said in a letter - but stayed there only long enough to join a fraternity and contribute poems to the literary magazine. In 1921, he worked as a New York City bookstore. For the next three years he was postmaster of the university station, just outside of Oxford. Meanwhile another neighbour, named Philip Stone, entered the family law office, put up most of the money for the publication of his first book, a cycle pastoral poems, The Marble Faun (1924).

The first half of 1925 he spent in New Orleans, which was also the time when he wrote his first novel, Soldier's Pay. In July Faulkner sailed for Italy on a slow freighter,

soon he made his way to Paris, partly on foot. He was living there alone, on the Left Bank, when he heard that the novel had been accepted for the publication, under the novelist and short-story Sherwood Anderson's recommendation to his publisher, the following spring. He went back to Oxford before Christmas and continued for some years to support himself by odd jobs: by working as a house painter, carpenter, golf professional, deckhand on a shrimp trawler, and, by his own account, rum smuggler on a speedboat that dodged through the Louisiana bayous. Meanwhile he was writing furiously, mostly at night.

His second novel was Mosquitos (1927), a heavily satirical picture of the New Orleans literary circle. Next, his third novel, Flags in the Dust, finished in the autumn of 1927, was refused by the publisher of the other two. In January 1929, Sartoris was accepted by another publisher, after changes in the manuscript by an unknown hand. In October of the same year appeared The Sound and the Fury still by another publisher.

Estelle Oldham came back from China after the failure of her first marriage, and she and Faulkner were married in June 1929. During the spring of that year he had written a draft of Sanctuary. During the late autumn, Faulkner wrote As I Lay Dying while he worked as a night fireman at the university power station. "A Rose for Emily" was his first short story

to appear in a national magazine (April 1930), and it was soon followed by others.

In the years from 1930 to 1942 he published two collections of stories, a second and last book of poems A Green Bough (1933), and nine novels. The novels are As I Lay Dying (1930), Sanctuary (1931), Light in August (1932), Absalom, Absalom! (1936), The Unvanquished (1938), The Wild Palms (1939), the first volume of trilogy: The Hamlet (1940), and Go Down Moses (1942). Except for Pylon, all these novels contribute to the Yoknapatawpha cycle.

Collected Stories, published in 1950, won the National Book Award. At the end of the same year Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize and accepted in an address famous for his prediction that man would survive in a world on the brink of self-destruction.

Though a private man, Faulkner had become a public figure. He travelled abroad for the State Department: to Peru and Brazil in 1954, to Japan, to the Philippines, and western Europe in 1955, to Greece in 1957; and to Venezuela in 1964. He was a writer in residence at the University of Virginia (1957 and 1958). Faulkner profoundly sympathized with the Negroes, but he had a strong residue of Southern nationality and believed that the South should integrate for itself, without Northern interference. His opinions irritated many blacks and whites and drew fire from both liberals and conservatives.

In 1953, Requiem for a Nun was published. And, one year later, A Fable appeared on which he had been working for ten years. Next, The Town (1957) and The Mansion (1959) concluded the the sequal trilogy. The Rivers was Faulkner's last book had appeared before he died in 6 July 1962 near Oxford Mississippi.

