

50 CRITICS DISCUSS

William Faulkner

(1897-1962)

“[Hemingway’s] opinions on Faulkner’s later work were mixed. He told Owen Wister that he liked *As I Lay Dying*. *Sanctuary* struck him as ‘pretty phoney.’ But he sent Faulkner his best wishes...adding that he seemed to be going well as a writer and that he sounded like ‘a good skate’....[1932] Ernest immediately took [novelist James T. Farrell] into his inmost confidence, or so Farrell thought, and even asserted during a wine-drinking session one evening that Faulkner was a far better writer than either himself or Farrell.... [1936] Sartre was curious about his opinion of William Faulkner. Ernest magnanimously admitted that Faulkner was a better writer than he....[1944, but then in 1947 Faulkner provoked Hemingway by saying he lacked courage as a writer.] Even the news that Faulkner had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature could not dampen Ernest’s holiday enthusiasm. ‘Cabled him as soon as I heard,’ he told Harvey Breit in a New Year’s Day letter, adding that Faulkner was a nice guy and deserved the prize.... [1950]

[Hemingway had published his first major work 4 years before Faulkner published his first major work and became influential worldwide a decade before him; he should have been in line for the Prize ahead of Faulkner] His first ungrudging reaction to Faulkner’s Nobel Prize was spoiled by his assertion that he was proud of not writing like the author of the latest installment of the ‘Otonawhoopoo’ story in the *Partisan Review*....[1951] Old Faulkner could have his ‘Anomatopoeio County.’ As for Ernest, he felt cramped in a county—any county. His domain was the Gulf Stream, and his fish was the fighting marlin. All that Faulkner knew about was the lowly catfish....[1952] Ernest’s sharpest shooting was reserved for Faulkner—‘Old Corndrinking Mellifluous,’ as he named him....Ernest sent Faulkner a message that the stories [in Faulkner’s just published *Big Woods*] were very well written and delicately perceived, but that Mr. Hemingway would have been more moved if Mr. Faulkner had ever hunted animals that ran both ways....[1955] His most readable books, in Ernest’s judgment, were *Sanctuary* and *Pylon*. *The Bear* was worth attention, and some of the Negro ‘stuff’ was good. But *A Fable*, he said, was not even worthy of a place at Ichang, where they shipped the night soil from Chungking.” [1956]

Ernest Hemingway (1932-56)

quoted by Carlos Baker, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story*
(Scribner’s 1969) 227, 297, 439, 489, 495, 503, 532, 534

“Faulkner seems to me to be melodramatic, distinctly. All the skies are inky black. He deals in horror as in a cherished material. Coincidence, what he would call ‘fate,’ does not stand on ceremony, or seek to cover itself in any fussy ‘realistic’ plausibility, with him....A man like William Faulkner discovers fatalism, or whatever you like to call it: it at once gives his characters something to live for—namely a great deal of undeserved tribulation culminating in a *violent death*. That simplifies the plot enormously—it is, in fact, the great ‘classical’ simplification, banishing expectation.”

Wyndham Lewis
Men Without Art
(Cassell 1934) 54-55

“Not since Swift’s conclusion to *Gulliver’s Travels* (with the possible exception of some of the pages of Aldous Huxley) has humanity in all walks of life been pictured as such contemptible vermin. Nor has anyone probed with greater power into the volcanic fury, the corruption, the depravity in the black hearts of men who are only incidentally dwellers in the South, or written of such matters in more brilliant prose, or with finer control of mood and suggestion and careful spacing of atrocities....It is the natural and ultimate extension of the materials and the moods clearly to be discerned in the literature of the contemporary period.”

Harlan Hatcher
Creating the Modern American Novel
(Farrar and Rinehart 1935) 240

“William Faulkner...in *As I Lay Dying* (1930) and *Sanctuary* (1931) showed [the poor] to be, in Mississippi, degenerate or debauched. Here was no earth-bound peasantry, always in want and yet kept somehow in order by the customs of the immense class to which they belonged. Faulkner’s poor were more likely to be resentful failures living among, or below, the more fortunate. If they were not sluggish they were ferocious. Faulkner knew from their ways of life the sub-human stories he had a knack at telling in his intense, winding prose. Anything could happen, he implied, in the backwoods and backwaters of Mississippi or wherever in America men had fallen out of stride, and been forgotten, and reverted to desperate animalisms....Angry readers who called Faulkner, Caldwell, Farrell merely obscene and sordid did not perceive that they were making valuable if disagreeable discoveries about American life, and that they were doing what American novelists had been doing ever since *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* forced millions of Americans to imagine what it might be like to be a slave.”

Carl Van Doren
The American Novel 1789-1939, 23rd edition
(Macmillan 1921-40, 1968) 354, 356

“In Mr. Faulkner’s mythology there are two kinds of characters; they are Sartoris or Snopeses, whatever the family names may be. And in the spiritual geography of Mr. Faulkner’s work there are two worlds: the Sartoris world and the Snopes world. In all of his successful books, he is exploring the two worlds in detail, dramatizing the inevitable conflict between them. It is a universal conflict. The Sartoris act traditionally; that is to say, they act always with an ethically responsible will. They represent vital morality, humanism. Being antitraditional, the Snopes do not recognize this point of view; acting only for self-interest, they acknowledge no ethical duty. Really, then, they are amoral; they represent naturalism or animalism. And the Sartoris-Snopes conflict is fundamentally a struggle between humanism and naturalism....He has worked to project in fiction the conflict between his inherent traditional values and the modern world; and the conflict has affected his fictional projection, so that all of his work is really a *striving toward* the condition of tragedy. He is the Quentin Compson or the Bayard Sartoris of modern fiction. The significance of the work as myth depends, then, upon the willingness of the reader to recover the meaning of the tradition—even historically.”

George Marion O’Donnell
“Faulkner’s Mythology”
The Kenyon Review 1.3 (1939)

“What immoderately delights him, alike in *Sanctuary*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, *Pylon*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and now and again *The Wild Palms*, and what sets him above—shall we say it firmly—all his American contemporaries, is his continuous preoccupation with the novel *as form*, his passionate concern with it, and a degree of success with it which would clearly have commanded the interest and respect of Henry James himself. The novel as revelation, the novel as slice-of-life, the novel as mere story, do not interest him: these he would say, like James again, ‘are the circumstances of the interest,’ but which are not the interest itself. The interest itself will be the use to which these circumstances are put, the degree to which they can be organized....Of Mr. Faulkner’s devices....aimed at the achievement of complex ‘form,’ the two most constant are the manipulation of viewpoint and the use of the flashback, or sudden shift of time-scene, forward or backward....

In the best of the novels, however—and it is difficult to choose between *The Sound and the Fury* and *The Wild Palms*—with *Absalom, Absalom!* a very close third—this tendency to hypertrophy of form has been sufficiently curbed; and it is interesting, too, to notice that in all these three (and in that remarkable *tour de force*, *As I Lay Dying*, as well), while there is still a considerable reliance on time-shift, the effect of richness and complexity is chiefly obtained by a very skillful fugue-like alternation of viewpoint. Fugue-like in *The Wild Palms*—and fugue-like especially, of course, in *As I Lay Dying*, where the shift is kaleidoscopically rapid, and where, despite an astonishing violence to plausibility (in the reflections, and *language* of reflection, of the characters), an effect of the utmost reality and immediateness is nevertheless produced.

Fugue-like again, in *Absalom, Absalom!*, where indeed one may say the form is really circular—there is no beginning and no ending properly speaking, and therefore no logical point of entrance: we must just submit, and follow the circling of the author’s interest, which turns a light inward toward the center, but

every moment from a new angle, a new point of view. The story unfolds, therefore, now in one color of light, now in another, with references backward and forward: those that refer forward being necessarily, for the moment, blind. What is complete in Mr. Faulkner's pattern, a priori, must nevertheless remain incomplete for us until the very last stone is in place; what is 'real,' therefore, at one stage of the unfolding, or from one point of view, turns out to be 'unreal' from another; and we find that one among other things with which we are engaged is the fascinating sport of trying to separate truth from legend, watching the growth of legend from truth, and finally reaching the conclusion that the distinction is itself false.

Something of the same is true also of *The Sound and the Fury*—and this, with its massive four-part symphonic structure, is perhaps the most beautifully wrought of the whole series, and an indubitable masterpiece of what James loved to call the 'fictive art.' The joinery is flawless in its intricacy; it is a novelist's novel—a whole textbook on the craft of fiction in itself, comparable in its way to *What Maisie Knew* or *The Golden Bowl*."

Conrad Aiken
"William Faulkner: The Novel as Form"
The Atlantic Monthly
(November 1939) 650-54

"With the publication of *Sartoris* (1929) he found his own themes and setting, for it is the first novel in his long, loosely constructed Yoknapatwpha saga, whose themes include the decline of the Compson, Sartoris, Benbow, and McCaslin families, representatives of the Old South, and the rise of the unscrupulous Snopes family, which displaces them. The life of the region is treated from the days of the Indian possession, through the pre-Civil War era, down to modern times. The saga of macabre violence and antic comedy is written in a sensitive but often baroque style and depicts its region as a microcosm in which its subjects often achieve mythic proportions.

The Sound and the Fury (1929) introduces the significant but decadent Compson family in a remarkably structured story. *As I Lay Dying* (1930) reveals the psychological relationships of a subnormal poor-white family on a pilgrimage to bury their mother. *Sanctuary* (1931) is a sadistic horror story, ostensibly written to make money but carefully reworked before publication as a serious novel. *Light in August* (1932), although also filled with horrors, is a more balanced contrast of positive and negative forces of life in its presentation of violent adventures involved in the relations between men and women, black and white. *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), set in early 19th-century Jefferson, shows the tragic downfall of the dynastic desires of the planter Colonel Sutpen. *The Unvanquished* (1938) uses earlier short stories to create a novel about the Sartoris family in the Civil War. *The Wild Palms* (1939) shows the effects of a Mississippi flood on the lives of a hillbilly convict and a New Orleans doctor and his mistress.

The Hamlet (1940), the first volume of a trilogy, shows the rise to power of the depraved Snopes family. *Intruder in the Dust* (1948) is a more compassionate tale of a black man on trial and the concomitant growing moral awareness of a white boy. *Requiem for a Nun* (1951), a sequel to *Sanctuary*, combines the forms of play and novel to treat the tortured redemption of Temple Drake. *A Fable* (1954, Pulitzer Prize) is a lengthy parable of the Passion of Christ set in a framework of false armistice and actual mutiny in World War I. *The Town* (1957) carries on the story of the white trash Flem Snopes and his coming to Jefferson, while *The Mansion* (1960) concludes the Snopes story by treating the family in the first half of the 20th century. *The Reivers* (1962, Pulitzer Prize), published just before the author's death, is an amusing fictive 'reminiscence' of a boy's various misadventures in 1905."

James D. Hart
The Oxford Companion to American Literature, 5th edition
(Oxford 1941-83) 242-43

"As a thinker, as a participant in the communal myth of the South's tradition and decline, Faulkner was curiously dull, furiously commonplace, and often meaningless, suggesting some ambiguous irresponsibility and exasperated sullenness of mind, some distant atrophy of indifference. Technically he soon proved himself almost inordinately subtle and ambitious, the one modern American novelist whose devotion to form has earned him a place among the great experimentalists in modern poetry. Yet this remarkable imaginative energy, so vividly and almost painfully impressed upon all his work, did not spring from a

conscious and procreative criticism of society or conduct or tradition, from some absolute knowledge; it was the expression of that psychic tension in Faulkner...which, as his almost monstrous overwriting prove, was a psychological tic, a need to invest everything he wrote with a wild, exhilarated, and disproportionate intensity—an intensity that was brilliant and devastatingly inconclusive in its energy, but seemed to come from nowhere.”

Alfred Kazin
On Native Grounds
(Reynal 1942) 456-57

“Faulkner built his work on an even grander scale than Dos Passos. He related even his minor personages with one another, he elaborated their genealogy from generation to generation, he gave them a countryside: a deep land of Baptists, of brothels, of attic secrets, of swamps and shadows. ‘Jefferson,’ Mississippi, is the capital of this world which reaches backward in time to the origins of Southern culture and forward to the horrid prophecies of its extinction, and which ranges down in social strata from dying landed aristocracy, the Sartoris and Compson families, to the new commercial oligarchy of the Snopeses; down to the poor-white Bundrens of *As I Lay Dying*, to the pervert Popeye of *Sanctuary*, and to the Negro [sic] Christmas of *Light in August*, turned brute again by the society which had raised him from the animal.

It is typical of Faulkner’s meteoric talent that the three years between 1929 and 1932 contain two of his major works, *The Sound and the Fury* and *Light in August*. Both novels are highly experimental in form. As a matter of fact, all of Faulkner’s big novels are marked by a technical experimentation which adds to an already formidable ambiguity of content. *Light in August* (1932), probably the most easily comprehensible to the average reader, seems to be written as an objective narrative; but it holds the tale within tale and its meaning becomes clear only if you follow the story of Lena, the poor-white mountain girl—and a Faulknerian symbol of a rather appalling, blind, lower-class sexual fertility—to the story of Hightower, isolated, sterile, living in his memories of the Old South. Underneath, is the story of the New South: the murder in Jefferson, Mississippi, and the love affair of the northern spinster, Miss Joanna Burden, with the mulatto Christmas. Here finally Faulkner gives expression not only to the most bitter and profound cultural problem of the South, but to its dominant cultural phobia; and the nightmarish quality is matched only, perhaps, by one’s sense of its reality in the haunted minds of the central figures.

The Faulknerian dialectic, which became reasonably clear in *Light in August*, had already been suggested in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). The earlier novel is even more complex in its technique. It is an outstanding example of the interior monologue in our letters; and the skill of its architecture—the style moves from almost complete obscurity to the statement of prosaic fact—is evident in the use of the unifying symbols: the circus ticket, the river, the broken watch, the tolling clock, and, indeed, all the manifestations of dissolving time that pervade the novel. It is very different from *Light in August* in tone.

In the Compson children, Faulkner caught the torment of childhood at the moment it reaches maturity—at the moment, that is, of the realization of sin and evil, the moment of the ‘Fall.’ Thus the ‘incestuous’ love of Quentin Compson for his sister Caddy, which forms the central theme and provides the most eloquent passages of the novel, and which Faulkner handles with a peculiarly touching naivete, is incestuous merely because these legitimate feelings of childhood—in a sense, the only true feelings of childhood—are judged from outside, from an adult framework of values. Indeed, filled as the tale is with all the pathetic devices and drives and tensions of infancy and the intimations of those other lawless and poignant affections which color the better—or the worse—part of our lives, *The Sound and the Fury* is matched by few novels in its evocations of infantile origins. In spite of being specialized in form, rather self-consciously limited in appeal, it was a landmark of the new literature.

But the childhood here revealed is in a sense a double one. The drama of innocence and corruption takes place within a larger framework: there is the conflict, again, of a decaying landed aristocracy with the rising commercial classes. Avaricious and bigoted, the Jason Compson of *The Sound and the Fury* is the protagonist of the new economic order which, in effect, closes the novel. And, by contrast with Jason’s ‘practicality,’ even the idiot Benjy Compson, whose obscure moaning and slobbering opens the novel, is an intelligible hero.

At least that is what Faulkner seemed to suggest, as he compared the youth of his culture with its misbegotten maturity. In the series of grotesque legends which followed, *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *These 13* (1931), *Sanctuary* (1931), and his later novels and tales, Faulkner dealt with the New South—with this modern stage. On which strut only those modern personages whose milieu is a cold and calculating corruption, whose single instinct is a lust for power...the Faulknerian 'Snopeses.' It was only in *Absalom, Absalom!* in 1936, that Faulkner seemed to regain something of the tone of *The Sound and the Fury*; but there again he was treating the rise and decay of a landed aristocracy—and there, too, Quentin Compson proclaimed that he did not hate the South. "I don't hate it," he said. *I don't hate it* he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark; *I don't. I don't! I don't hate it! I don't hate it!*"

With William Faulkner, the cultural pattern of isolation, of revolt, and of denial, the heritage of the American twenties lasting over and fully forming the American novelist of the 1930's reached an extreme. Here the two main elements of the pattern—the solitary and desperate individual of Hemingway's work, the acrid and despairing critique of contemporary society in Dos Passos' work—are given fullest expression, while even the shimmering flappers of Fitzgerald become a type of Faulknerian incubus. Indeed, the 'misty tragedy' played far behind the veil becomes rather more explicit, and the sense of latent horror in the earlier evocation of the Jazz Age becomes acute.

There is no denying Faulkner's real achievement. In the scope of his scene and the dimensions of his portraiture, in the complexity and subtlety of his emotions, as well as in the vivid and complex prose style, he is perhaps, as Gide remarked, 'the most important of the stars in this new constellation.' Nor is this Mississippi symbolist quite so esoteric as he may seem at first; for his picture of the Mississippi Valley and its people is the work of a realist even when...the Snopeses go to Washington. Those who praise Faulkner indiscriminately, *Sanctuary* as well as *The Sound and the Fury*, are in a sense unaware of how good Faulkner can be and to what degree the history of this remarkable talent is also the history of its dissipation. The increasing stress on technical virtuosity, the sacrifice of content for effect, and of effect for shock—these, too, show the destructive element at work."

Maxwell Geismar
Literary History of the United States, 3rd edition
(Macmillan 1946-63) 1304-06

"Consciousness...is mostly memory....Since, however, memory cannot possibly be anything but the sense of the past, we must conclude—and this lies at the core of Faulkner—that it is the past which is real...since time is nothing outside someone's consciousness of time. So when we say that present means past, that the past recaptures the present, we are speaking of the hero himself who feels bound to a past he cannot dismiss. This is when fate appears....The past, therefore, not only was but is and will be; it is the unfolding of destiny....Does not Proust, on an intellectual level, resemble Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury*, this being who can live only in the past?"

Faulkner's people are real only in their pasts. They do not rethink their pasts, they simply live them, because if the past is to be rethought, as by Proust, it has to be distinct from a perfectly real present. Christmas lives his memories, whereas Proust relives them. Since chronological time exists for Proust, he must account for it and explain the irregular moments of memory which tend to disintegrate it, whereas for Faulkner, chronology is nothing and the past is constantly present. Proust lives in two times, in chronological time and in recaptured time. His analysis is born in the confrontation of the two, when subjective reality interferes with objective reality. But since Faulkner refuses chronological time, he has nothing to analyze. Subjective reality absorbs everything and becomes fate, intensified by the annihilation of all opposition....

Without warning the reader, he places one moment into another and shuffles all habitual order because, according to him, lives are not lived chronologically. This is what the interior monologues try to make us understand....Whereas the present is fragmented, dispersed, and not really experienced, the past forms an undecomposable whole. The entire novel is but an attempt to make this known, but not, however, through some sort of administrative report. We reach this past through a succession of plunges....All this goes to confirm [that] destiny in Faulkner is the opposite of a geometrical relationship between chronologically situated moments....

The second obvious consequence of his concept of time is his use of the past tense throughout the narration. Sometimes, however, we hear the actors and observers converse, we see them move. But these are, so to speak, only the preliminaries. As soon as the essential part of the scene approaches, the part which will be absorbed into the character's omnipresent past—as the rape with a corn cob in *Sanctuary*—rather than the unimportant remainder which will dissolve and be forever forgotten—at this point, then, there is a kind of jump ahead of the crucial moment, because this moment is never known except as past. Chapter XIII of *Sanctuary* offers a typical example of this procedure...After all, everything that takes place has passed as soon as it happens, and can therefore only be told as a recollection, even in direct narration....

The feeling of inner fatality is expressed very clearly in the account of Christmas' attempt to escape in *Light in August*: 'But rather there was too much running with him, stride for stride with him. Not pursuers: but himself: years, acts, deeds omitted and committed, keeping pace with him stride for stride'...Since they have a dim but constant awareness of the destiny they bear, it is quite normal that Faulkner should reveal this consciousness by using interior monologues and by placing himself 'with' his characters....The example of Proust proves [that] understanding destiny is its undoing."

Jean Pouillon

"Time and Destiny in Faulkner," *Temps et Roman*
trans. Jacqueline Merriam
(Paris: Gallimard 1946) 238-60

"Certain features of Faulkner's work suggested that it originated in a profound need to account, to himself, for the retarded condition of culture and civilization in the South. To some extent, therefore, his books recorded an exploration, a sustained and consistent effort to arrive at a coherent explanation of the nature of his environment in his own time. His exploration was imaginative rather than purely historical. His purpose was to understand events in terms of the human experiences which had produced them; the ambitions, the needs, the attitudes of mind and heart that had shaped destiny. The result was a series of volumes which, collectively, formed a single saga."

Lloyd Morris

Postscripts to Yesterday
(Random 1947) 160-61

"Inside this amazing, convolute and inimitable saga is everything that Poe was able to suggest in his macabre tales, much that Brown and Melville and Hawthorne foreshadowed, plus not only Faulkner's own incredibly fecund conjurations of the terrible and phantasmal, but also a very definite and real world of social significances and broad slapstick humor, which is outside the domain of any apocalyptic writer, any Gothic novelist of any time or place."

George Snell

The Shapers of American Fiction
(Dutton 1947) 88

"In addition to being a fatalist, Faulkner is also an idealist, more strongly so than any other American writer of our time. The idealist disguises itself as its own opposite, but that is because he is deeply impressed by and tends to exaggerate the contrast between the life around him and the ideal picture in his mind...of how the land and the people should be—a picture of painted, many-windowed houses, fenced fields, overflowing barns, eyes lighting up with recognition....And both pictures are not only physical but moral; for always in the backgrounds of his novels is a sense of moral standards and a feeling of outrage at their being violated or simply brushed aside. Seeing little hope in the future, he turns to the past, where he hopes to discover a legendary and recurrent pattern that will illuminate and lend dignity to the world about him."

Malcolm Cowley

A Southern Vanguard
ed. Allen Tate
(Prentice 1947) 26-27

"Among modern American novelists, Faulkner...may be compared to Balzac. He cares just as little for the reader's opinion or approbation. Even more than Balzac, he is deliberately obscure, at times seems not

to care if he wears his victim, and is never more original or more inexorably true to himself than when he makes the fewest concessions and dares to be obscure or wearisome unashamedly...The apparent narrative perverseness of Faulkner's stories seems justified and indeed inevitable as soon as the secret reasons for it are understood. The most conspicuous peculiarities of Faulkner's art are: First, that he appears incapable of telling a story otherwise than by beginning at the end, tracing the course of time backward, as in the short story 'Wash' or *Wild Palms* and especially in *Absalom*, where we have to work our way back through a hundred years and three generations.

Secondly, that he needs to have two stories to tell at the same time, the stories being either juxtaposed as in *The Wild Palms*...or subtly interwoven...as in *Pylon*....And finally, that Faulkner has an almost childish taste for riddles—as, for example, when he gives the same name, Quentin, to both uncle and niece in *The Sound and the Fury*, or when he conceals to the very end the name of the reporter in *Pylon*.... Besides this, he often willfully avoids either naming a crucial event (such as the murder of Sutpen or the granddaughters of Wash Jones in 'Wash') or informing us at all about decisive facts (the rape in *Sanctuary* or the Negro blood of Joe Christmas). The common reader is liable to get a headache and charge the novelist with coquetry and games....

The story is continuously delayed by parentheses and interpolations. It unfolds backward, against the grain, instead of proceeding toward the future as one would normally expect. Each episode, wrapped in obscurity, sends the reader back to another one, equally obscure, which occurred twenty or thirty years before. Thus, in *Absalom, Absalom!*, one must eventually hear about events which took place years before in Haiti, in order to understand Sutpen's opposition to his daughter's marriage to his son's best friend. In *Light in August* we are abruptly taken back to a little boy's adventures in a children's home some thirty years previously, which explain the subsequent behavior of Christmas. Faulkner very often dismisses official chronology altogether....Sartre explained, in reference to *Sartoris*, that in his narrative Faulkner allows only events that have already taken place....The characters look obstinately at their past, are fascinated by it to the point of letting it devour them...They wallow in the tale of their ancestors' glories, spellbound with a strange hope in the midst of their despair, as they wait for the unpredictable and necessary catastrophe which is to seize them....

As in Balzac, one story fits into another, characters reappear, and multiple relationships are established between the different family dynasties...until finally we have before us a total work, a total world, which must have pre-existed in the mind of the author, but which remains obscured for the reader as long as he knows only one or two of its parts. We understand why, concentrating as he does on the universe which he carries within himself, the author forgets to realize that all is not as clear to the reader as it is to himself.... If Faulkner, like Balzac, so often seems to disregard us, it is more from distraction than from scorn, so busy are they managing, in their creative solitude, the complex network which binds their creatures.... Faulkner's shorter novels, like Balzac's short stories, are microcosms; each of them...reflects the whole of the work, as the Leibnizian monad reflected the entire universe....Each one is a piece of the same vast puzzle and cannot assume its full meaning until it is replaced in the whole."

Claude-Edmonde Magny
"Faulkner or Theological Inversion"
L'Age du Roman américain
trans. Jacqueline Merriam
(Paris: Editions du Seuil 1948) 196-243

"There are probably very few novelists in America who have not in some depressed, sterile hour wished for Faulkner's madness. He is authentically, romantically possessed by his genius; he can lose himself not only in the act of writing but in the world his imagination has created and populated. He believes all of it, concretely, amazingly: the map of Yoknapatawpha is not a joke....And he is so beautifully our young writers' image of the artist: He has done it by himself, in solitude, far from New York, in spite of critics, little magazines, fads, and professors—our natural genius, isolated, sure of himself, magnificently hallucinated as we feel the artist ought to be...His six or seven superb novels insinuate themselves...and someone is always discovering that Faulkner is our greatest living novelist and saying it with a chip on his shoulder, belligerently, as though he expected to be booted out of the room."

Elizabeth Hardwick

“Faulkner and the South Today”
Partisan Review XV
(October 1948) 1130-34

“In the United States at the present time there is no writer who seems more American to us Frenchmen than William Faulkner. He is the only one who impresses us as being deeply rooted in his native soil....In France, he is admired by a large, fervent following, not merely by intellectual snobs who cry their admiration for an anguished style such as that of *The Sound and the Fury*....Whether it be reading *The Sound and the Fury*, *Sanctuary*, or *Light in August*...it seems that we get caught in a nightmare which is now and then penetrated by a furtive and sinister glimmer of God, reflected in the murky waters of a deserted swamp. There is so much gloom, incurable misery, horror and distress in this divine reflection, that the first reaction of any sane-minded person should be to cry, ‘Let us hope with all our strength that God doesn’t exist, that the novelist has been mocking us, for otherwise, this is too ghastly’....

In Faulkner’s novels...the more brutal, cruel, bloodthirsty, lusty and wrathful the characters are, the more tangible is the presence of God. His universe is peopled mostly with crude, sometimes monstrous, beings; describing them, we hesitate between degenerate and primitive; and yet, although plunged in the human substance of fate, Benjy and Popeye, the idiot and the puny, are possessed by a superhuman force which we would say is that of God. It is strange that a man, in this case a novelist, should believe himself obliged to seek God on the lowest level, starting from the basest instincts, the most sordid dramas and unhealthy embraces, as if he were trying to concoct a visceral emulsion. Nevertheless, it is this God, who seems so at ease in struggles and fights, in drunken orgies, in blood, filth and corn cobs, who is the veritable God of the Bible, both wrathful and vindictive. As for a jealous God—violent and inexorable, storing up hate—Who is every-present in the work of William Faulkner....

We are not capable, if we ever were, of understanding the sort of fury which animates William Faulkner against sin, for we accept ourselves, somewhat restlessly, for what we are. Whilst on the one hand, Faulkner’s puritanism has retained a savage religiousness, French Christianity on the other hand has become merely social, thus confusing itself pathetically with one of its incidental objectives. (These deliberations are all, of course, in the line of attempting to evaluate the distance which separates a Frenchman from *The Sound and the Fury*....

Generally speaking, we owe all that is particularly moving, fine and worthwhile in Faulkner’s work to his creative genius, his power of evocation. It is precisely his gift for raising up a tragic world with an atmosphere of such singular poetry, which has gained for him in France (as, I suppose, in America) faithful and numerous admirers, in spite of the many factors separating them....I had almost forgotten that in the eyes of Frenchmen another charm is added to William Faulkner’s quality as a writer: Faulkner belongs to a Southern family and his characters are Southerners. It is odd that the French, brought up to admire the past revolutionary heroes of French history, besides having all read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in their childhood, should be prejudiced by nature in favor of the Southerners against the Northerners.

It may be, too, that they see in the War of Secession and the crushing of the South the prefiguration of an imminent war and another northern invasion, against which they must stand alone, despite the treaties. [World War II] One thing is certain: William Faulkner’s attachment to his province and his pride as a Southerner do not leave the French untouched. Perhaps the most important element in shaping his genius (which a Frenchman can understand better than an American from Boston) is his love for the misfortunes of his own part of the country.”

Marcel Ayme
“What French Readers Find in William Faulkner’s Fiction”
Highlights of Modern Literature: essays from The New York Times Book Review
(1949; New American Library/Mentor 1954) 103-06

“It was *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), a powerful novel of the decay of a southern family, that lifted Faulkner into the ranks of the major contemporary American fiction writers. There followed the repellently fascinating *As I Lay Dying* (1930), the story of a degenerate family transporting the corpse of their mother across the state to her home for burial. *Sanctuary* (1931), a grisly tale of the violation of a southern college

girl by a group of reprobate moonshiners, whom she had intruder upon for the sake of a drink, won for Faulkner perhaps the greatest fame of any of his works....His work throughout this period had been extreme in subject matter, violent, harshly staccato, and experimental in form and technique—in short, he represented an advanced state of the disease of the Waste Lander....

Where Faulkner will ultimately arrive, none can say. It is clear, however, that he has outgrown in part the sophomoric desire merely to shock; and his world of characters, choked as it may often be by the mephitic mists of abnormality, contributes nevertheless something hard, definite, and vital to the social scene. That Faulkner is tending more and more to the revolutionary in thought and technique can scarcely be denied; but he is still groping. For the general reader he remains a startling phenomenon; there are times when he appears to write as he does out of sheer perversity. But he cannot be ignored or flouted as a libeler of southern civilization; he would probably have written in the same manner about the same kind of people no matter where he had lived—and it may be conceded that he would have found similar material in any given locality of these United States. He is a sore trial to the southern agrarians, no doubt, and in any case he has thus far tended to exaggerate in a suspiciously self-conscious way; but no amount of personal bias can deny him his rightful place as one of the most striking writers of fiction in contemporary America.”

George K. Anderson & Eda Lou Walton, eds.
This Generation: A Selection of British and American Literature from 1914 to the Present
(Scott, Foresman 1949) 697

“He [Faulkner] is, in my opinion, your greatest writer; the only one, it seems to me, whose place is in your great literary tradition of the nineteenth century, and one of the rare creators of the West....*Sanctuary* and *Pylon* are masterpieces.”

Albert Camus
Letter, *Harvard Advocate* (c.1950)

“I would stand on the three early books which I have named as sufficient evidence of the narrative power and the detailed poetry of his creations. And since they are fictions, I suppose some of his analogues in this field need to be named. I think of Dostoevsky, and Melville, and D. H. Lawrence....His power of language is brilliant and fitful like Lawrence’s, but he is never negative (it is not in him to labor at hateful small prose); and his positive is simple and passionate (or Elizabethan), not complicated with modern theory....He is not quite like any other writer whom I can think of. Perhaps they will serve to remark at least the quality of those great writers with whom, if anybody, he seems to keep company best....If he were deliberately a ‘perfectionist,’ as are some highly prepared and articulate artists, his great gift might have been paralyzed, or to some extent inhibited. To regard him is to contemplate the common human behaviors under the aspect of magnificence.”

John Crowe Ransom
“William Faulkner: An Impression”
Harvard Advocate (c.1950)

“The powerful obscurity of genius, which is the privilege of a few great creators—no matter how lucid they may be—has been granted to Faulkner, and when I first read him, I was literally overwhelmed with a feeling of primitive evidence that made my lack of immediate understanding quite unimportant and perhaps more promising than a clear perception of the book. Faulkner’s profundity does not reveal itself at the first glimpse: it has many depths of silence, unconscious energies, long-forgotten events. It contrasts with the two-dimensional space of modern psychology, even helped by the so-called discoveries of psychoanalysis; it is indeed a religious relation of Faulkner’s characters with a past going far beyond their past, with a particular setting of universal myths reshaped in a family mold...

Fate as it appears in Faulkner is not a blind force but an organic reality: our different levels of responsibility in our destiny and other people’s are linked together...Faulkner is one of the rare novelists in our time for which sin is a basic and not only casual reality...original sin, human condition itself...The process of time as we conceive it, from past to future through present, is a mere appearance, a delusion. Real time has nothing to do with those categories: it is a simultaneous though unconscious present.

Something like God's eyes, and Faulkner's God is a terrible one, all the more because He is imminent and takes the figure of fate."

Pierre Emmanuel
"Faulkner and the Sense of Sin"
Harvard Advocate (c.1950)

"The quality of Faulkner's vision, his fundamental way of seeing people, seems to me to approach the Euripidean....If we read him as though he were a tragic poet, many difficulties disappear. It becomes natural now that he should withhold much that the reader wants immediately to know, in order to prepare the recognition scene; that he should abandon the traditional time manipulation of the novel for one which turns the fullest, whitest light possible upon the moment of crisis...that personal relations among the characters should be determined by their sense of the inevitability of the evil yet to come upon them; and that Faulkner's effort should go into showing how the world looks to his characters rather than how it should look to them."

W. H. Frohock
The Novel of Violence in America
(Harvard 1950) 123-24

"His field of vision is concentrated on a society that is too often vicious, depraved, decadent, corrupt. Americans must fervently hope that the award [Nobel Prize] by a Swedish jury and the enormous vogue of Faulkner's works in Latin America and on the European Continent, especially in France, does not mean that foreigners admire him because he gives them the picture of American life they believe to be typical and true. There has been too much of that feeling lately, again especially in France. Incest and rape may be common pastimes in Faulkner's 'Jefferson, Miss.' But they are not elsewhere in the United States."

Editorial
New York Times (1950)

"When, in 1929, William Faulkner came to the writing of that group of novels for which he is best known, he had already published three books as a farewell to his adolescence: two novels, *Soldier's Pay* (1926), and *Mosquitoes* (1927), and a volume of poems, *The Marble Faun* (1924). In each of these he proved himself no more than a second-rate imitator of current or passing literary trends. There was nothing in this product of the 1920's that suggested he would be more than the postwar romantic and sophisticate that his plots and his neo-Paterian style indicated. *Soldier's Pay* is full of echoes, from Pater, Wilde, and late Victorian poetry; *Mosquitoes* bears pathetic evidence of the pervasive influence in the American twenties of Aldous Huxley. Faulkner was, in short, the New Orleans bohemian that Sherwood Anderson had described him as being. He had his war record, as did his contemporaries; it was expected that the war experience would take its literary toll, as it actually had in *Soldier's Pay*.

One important fact, however, did serve to divert his interest in the postwar mode: the South itself, and his own inheritance from its tradition. He turned neither to the habit of Southern pseudo-romanticism nor to the practice of using the Southern economy for leftist tractarian novels. Faulkner's life and his ancestral past led, rather, to another kind of fictional treatment. It was significant that he did not rush to New York to view the South from there or stay long in the Paris cafes where perspectives upon American culture were cheaply purchased, but chose rather to remain in the Mississippi region of his fathers."

Frederick J. Hoffman
The Modern Novel in America
(Regnery Gateway 1951-63) 168-69

"Faulkner believes that individual responsibility is the most important goal for man. Here is his positive answer to his own negative despair....Thoreau based his personal individualism upon his tremendous love of Nature. In Faulkner the love of Nature is replaced by the love of the land. How much one would want to distinguish between land and Nature I don't know. Basically the only difference is...the transcendental ideas in Thoreau's concept of Nature....Instead of having Thoreau's leaven of Transcendentalism, he has Hawthorne's leaven of the brotherhood of man. Man must love the land that God has supplied to him for

his well-being. Through the intimate association with the land, man acquires a sense of loyalty to his family, his immediate social environment, and the all-encompassing land itself. Loyalties, as with so much of man's activities, are governed by what is inherited from the past. By accepting these loyalties and the force of the past, man develops his individuality—the end for which all the other things of man's existence are means.”

Ward L. Miner
The World of William Faulkner
(Duke 1952) 153-54

“Faulkner gives us no systematic classification of physical appearances, but instead offers quite separate insights into individuals. He is interested, not in anything specifically physical, but in something like a *language of the body*, suggested in traits, gestures, manners....Faulkner's search for the most expressive way of representing his characters leads him to try all kinds of literary technique. Sometimes he finds models in the work of his contemporaries...interior monologues which are halfway individual and halfway collective (as in *Soldier's Pay*); a succession of personal angles of vision (as in *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury*); impressionist and expressionist techniques inspired by the cinema or Dos Passos, as in *Pylon*. In all of these manners he pursues his own proper object, the direct communication of a complex and sorrowful human reality....

There are many examples of the character as sensitive and sorrowful witness in Faulkner's books, the man who desperately tries to understand and to make sense of the situations he observes: Judge Benbow, impotent and inadequate, a bondsman to two bitches, his wife and his stepdaughter (*Sanctuary*); the good Byron Bunch, son of a long line of timid and puny beings, which both life and the novel have in abundance (*Light in August*); the reporter of *Pylon*, who chooses to aggravate his illness by drinking, so that he can more quickly abolish despair, yet retains his curiosity like a ravenous hunger, at the same time as he is a prey to an absurd passion for a pilot's moll....

Miss Reba [*Sanctuary*], Faulkner's greatest comedy success, is in a tradition which derives at once from Dickens and from Maupassant....Because the characters, the places, the acts are caught and held together in an affective fusion, we have the impression of a poet's quest of an obscure wholeness. In all of the mature works of this writer (I might say, of this poet), whether we accept it or not, he offers us what appears to be an entirely unified vision....

The past is the unconscious mind of the present; it is a question not of invention but of a resurgence forcefully stimulated by an emotional need, not logical nor tied to chronology. The Faulkner drama is not in the past, it is a *psychodrama* of the present. Quentin, with Shreve as his partner, attempts to reconstruct the drama of Sutpen and of the Civil War, with the aid of the memories of his grandfather, of his father and of Rosa. But he does not need to assume it; he is *inside* it: 'His very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth.' [allegory]

The power of Faulkner comes from his being a man for whom finally nothing exists beyond the interior world. In art, but in philosophy as well (for this uncouth artist is a philosopher, though perhaps without his knowing it), he is an idealist, for whom as for Berkeley...all takes place in consciousness and between consciousnesses....Like Keats, like Mallarmé, like Proust, like Joyce, this idealist belongs to the Platonic tradition; he does not see any matter other than materializations, signs, symbols, of forces which are transformed into existences. Reality is thus presented in a double aspect. It is powerfully significant in that it reflects the play of forces...It is very illusory, since our consciousness seizes nothing but manifestations. Thus on the one hand we have this so vigorous representation of a world charged with meaning...On the other hand, we have all those hints that remind us that it is also a kind of dream, more often even a nightmare. Faulkner is as American as Kafka is Judeo-German. Thus their symbolic and dreamlike reality is as different as it can be...In Faulkner we are before the dream of a reality, and in Kafka, before the reality of a dream.”

Jean-Jacques Mayoux
“The Creation of the Real in William Faulkner”
Études Anglaises
trans. Frederick J. Hoffman

“Faulkner’s reputation has never been so high as it is today. Whatever may be legitimately urged against him, few competent critics doubt that he is the most powerful imagination among contemporary American novelists....Yet Faulkner’s report upon the land of his heart is not that of a Realist. In his most characteristic work, he has chosen instead to function upon the level of legend and myth. He has created an imaginary Yoknapatawpha County in northern Mississippi. Here are the Compsons and the Sartorises, the McCaslins and the degenerate Snopes; the aristocrats, the poor whites, and the postwar commercial exploiters of the South; Negroes, Indians, poor farmers, and once-wealthy plantation owners. Faulkner has not got all of his work into the Yoknapatawpha saga....The first two novels, for example, are out. *Soldier’s Pay* (1926) is one of our bitterest fictions about the wrecked soldier’s return after World War I; *Mosquitoes* (1927) is a sophisticated conversation piece in the manner of the early Aldous Huxley. *Pylon* (1935) is built around a flying meet in New Orleans....

The novels and short stories are elaborately interrelated. Both persons and events may be treated supplementarily or sequentially in works written years apart. There are inconsistencies and contradictions also, for no writer was ever less interested than Faulkner in a mere mechanical or schematic unity....Every kind of offense, legal and moral, that can be committed appears somewhere in Faulkner’s pages, every variety of physical horror, every type of degeneracy, every phase of abnormal behavior....Encountered as Faulkner presents them, the horrors are in general less nauseating than the summary would be, partly because of his indirect and involuted methods of presentation, partly because classical literature has trained us to accept as myth many horrors over which we would gag in the newspapers, and partly because the discerning reader generally feels that he can be sure of the author’s own scale of values....

Moreover, Faulkner has his decent characters: Lena Grove and Byron Bunch of *Light in August*, the sewing machine man of *The Hamlet*, Dilsey of *The Sound and the Fury*, the convict Parchman [sic], who aids the pregnant woman during the Mississippi flood in *The Wild Palms*, Gavin Stevens and his nephew and their friend, old Miss Habersham, of *Intruder in the Dust*, who do not stop even at exhuming dead bodies to save the Negro Lucas Beauchamp from the lynchers....

It is very unfortunate that a writer who thus reads the human drama should have been so often misunderstood in an age which has such desperate need of just such a reading. But it is largely Faulkner’s own fault, for he has been extremely eccentric in method and style—and often, too, in his choice of materials....The point is that when it comes to human degradation, he often uses ore than he needs, thus betraying a morbid imagination or an overbearing tendency toward sensationalism or both, and thus inevitably alienating many readers who ought to be on his side....

Faulkner has given form in fiction as serious consideration as Joyce himself. At the same time, it would be difficult to deny that he has often indulged in such willful caprice as to make his books virtually unreadable except by those who, as Joyce once expressed it with reference to himself, are prepared to devote their whole lives to the task. Here, again, one does not deny the author’s ‘right’ to use any method he needs to get his story told in the most effective possible way. The trouble is that many of Faulkner’s devices seem only to prevent the story from getting itself told. I know it is the thesis of some of his more fanatical admirers that a bad sentence is not a bad sentence when he writes it, but I cannot believe that such indulgence will really serve Faulkner’s needs in the long run or that he himself could be content to survive as the darling of a coterie.

The truth is that when he is at his worst Faulkner’s style is barbarous—barbarous in its abundance of solecisms, barbarous in its intolerable purple passages, and barbarous most of all, in its unending, anaconda-like involutions. That it is at the same time the style of a man of genius I freely grant, but this does not cancel out the barbarisms. Faulkner once declared that he writes out of an inner compulsion and that it is a mistake for the reader to try too hard to understand him....It is impossible not to regret that Mr. Faulkner seems disposed to surrender the problem of communication quite so easily. One can only hope that, under the stimulus and encouragement of the Nobel Prize, his best work lies yet before him.”

*The Cavalcade of the American Novel:
From the Birth of the Nation to the Middle of the Twentieth Century*
(Holt 1952) 417-19, 420, 422-25

“Faulkner’s style and content have been the subject of endless scholarly analysis. The best as well as the shortest analysis may well be that contained in an interchange between him and his cousin Sallie Murray Williams. She asked, ‘Bill, when you write those things, are you drinkin’?’ and he answered, ‘Not always’.”

Robert Coughlan
The Private World of William Faulkner
(Harper 1954) 125

“It would be a mistake to regard these irregularities as gratuitous exercises in virtuosity. A fictional technique always relates back to the novelist’s metaphysics....Now, it is immediately obvious that Faulkner’s metaphysics is a metaphysics of time. Man’s misfortune is his being time-bound....The present is nothing but a chaotic din, a future that is past. Faulkner’s vision of the world can be compared to that of a man sitting in an open car and looking backward. At every moment, formless shadows, flickerings, faint tremblings and patches of light rise up on either side of him, and only afterward, when he has a little perspective, do they become trees and men and cars....For Proust salvation lies in time itself, in the full reappearance of the past. For Faulkner, on the contrary, the past is never lost, unfortunately; it is always there, it is an obsession. One escapes from the temporal world only through mystic ecstasies....As to Faulkner’s heroes, they never look ahead. They face backward as the car carries them along.”

Jean-Paul Sartre
Literary and Philosophical Essays
trans. Annette Michelson
(London: Rider 1955) 79-87

“His mixed but intense feeling for the region in which his forebears had long been prominent also sensitized Faulkner to various characters, who range from the aristocratic Sartoris clan, akin to his own ancestors, through the damned and degraded Sutpens, to the Snopes family, representative of the shrewd, unscrupulous newly created masters of the South. Out of their tragic relationships Faulkner created an intricate saga on the disintegration of the Old South....

Paradoxically, though he has unified a lengthy cycle of fiction, Faulkner is generally criticized for the lack of unity in his work; brilliant as his technique is in brief compass, his works tend to break down into fragments and therefore to have an organization more akin to short stories than to novels. But Faulkner achieves his own kind of order, even though the tortuous rhetoric of his lengthy sentences may be obscure, as his words thread through unrealistic dialogue and the stream of consciousness in a character’s mind. Faulkner has been sometimes condemned for having an exaggerated vision of decadence and cruelty in the South, and it is surely true that his fiction has an unremitting intensity, now that of a modern Gothic horror, now that of fantastic and antic comedy. But Faulkner’s South is for him simply a microcosm of modern society. Looking at it, he assesses with melancholy the great weight of evil in life, but he still keeps a moral point of view and a faith in humanity.”

James D. Hart & Clarence Gohdes, eds.
America’s Literature
(Holt 1955) 897-98

“Faulkner on home ground has a wonderfully quizzical and impassive sense of pathos. Episodes like Cash Bundren’s construction of the coffin in *As I Lay Dying*, or the failure of Theophilus McCaslin in *The Bear* to make anything at all out of young Percival Brownlee, the slave, evoke a common-sense world with great verve and economy. The seething climate of Yoknapatawpha is sweetened and set in perspective.”

R. W. Flint
“What Price Glory?”
Hudson Review

“Many critics...have tried to explain his entire writings by tracing in them a pair of anti-theses: traditionalism against anti-traditionalism, the Sartoris world against the Snopes world, sickness against primitivism, humanism against animalism....His sorrow about the vanishing of the wilderness is as acute and more articulate than Cooper’s, and he comes to a conclusion which to my knowledge no European has ever drawn with such severity: At the root and beginning of civilization and all its achievements is rapacity, and civilized man has to bear the burden of this guilt always and everywhere....

And the rejection of civilization, whether in *A Fable*, or in *Go Down, Moses*, is not linked to savagery or paganism. It means a closer communion with the wilderness, and at the same time leads both the Corporal and Isaac McCaslin to an *imitatio Christi*. His shadow had already been invoked in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Light in August*. He now becomes more and more dominant; not the son of God or the founder of Christianity, but Christ the archetype of man suffering, and of those who expiate the guilt of civilization by renunciation of the power and the privilege: Quentin Compson, Isaac McCaslin, and the Corporal....

His attachment to the South, like Quentin Compson’s in *Absalom, Absalom!*, is one of tormented love but not of admiration. Although he frequently went far enough back into history, he never chose to concentrate on Southern society in its happier ante-bellum days; or to hold it up as a model for preservation. He always shows a tradition in the process of going to pieces, and probes into the past for the causes. In the casual complexity there is always at bottom the same thing: a guilt of rapacity and greediness which has corrupted the tradition right at its starting point, an inevitable sin in man’s civilizing efforts. In other words: tradition itself is part of the curse, it is its continuance through time; and history for Faulkner is really nothing but a working out of the guilt, either by atonement, as in the case of Isaac McCaslin, or by disasters administered as punishment.”

Ursula Brumm

“Wilderness and Civilization: A Note on William Faulkner”

Partisan Review (Summer 1955) 340-50

“Faulkner said in his Stockholm speech accepting the Nobel Prize (1949) that the subject of the literary artist is ‘the human heart in conflict with itself.’ In his work, now stretching to more than 20 volumes, he has shown this conflict and how it yields violence and guilt and bigotry, causing men and women to erupt into emotional earthquakes that leave their mark on an entire community. In recent years there has been a growing awareness among Faulkner’s critics that he is creating not a mere series of novels of varying quality (some of them acknowledged masterpieces and others of puzzling mediocrity), but that he has been writing an integrated work, on a large scale, in the tradition of Balzac and Zola and James, weaving it out of his native South.

A French critic has likened this world of William Faulkner to the world of the Old Testament where murder, incest, rape, tribal violence, guilt, and penitence are chronicled in the period before the coming of Christ. Faulkner writes almost as if he awaits a second coming for his guilt-ridden, religion-haunted world in the South. Saturated with southern legend and ancestral stories of the Civil War and the whole local mythology of his native Oxford and Lafayette County in Mississippi, Faulkner had his subject ready at hand. In modern literary experimentation he found the technical devices that have enabled him to render that world. His stream-of-consciousness novel *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) puts us into the minds of three brothers to give us a whole family history. It is sometimes regarded as his masterpiece. Critics also single out *As I Lay Dying* (1930), and *Light in August* (1932), and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) as his major works. *Sanctuary*, which Faulkner says he deliberately wrote as a ‘shocker,’ first attracted wide attention to him in [1931]. He has had a profound influence on the Continent, particularly in France, where his work was translated and studied long before it attracted serious attention in America.

Faulkner’s methods of narration include a tendency to envelop rather than develop his story; often he will begin a story at the end and then tell it against chronological time—that is, he will move from present to past. Some critics have seen in these devices the influence of the cinema. He often tells two or more stories seemingly unconnected and going back many years, at the same time. In his stream-of-consciousness portions he will utilize italics to convey different phases of thought. He often prefers to let

the reader deduce certain events rather than to relate them. And, as in the cinema, Faulkner likes to 'shoot' certain of his scenes from unfamiliar angles. This wedding of a formidable technique to the rich elemental material upon which he draws for his subjects constitutes the great power of Faulkner. It has won him a place as perhaps America's most serious and most highly integrated artist of the first half of the 20th century."

Lillian Herlands Hornstein, ed.
The Reader's Companion to World Literature
(New American Library/Mentor 1956) 162-63

"In creative genius, in the ability to construct a world of the imagination in which reality is more accessible than it is in the everyday actualities of life, William Faulkner has few peers in modern literature. This fact was tardily recognized. His writing is difficult, obscure, and so often seemed disagreeable that many of his works were not widely read, and the recognition of his highest powers was attained only in perspective....Faulkner's full stature cannot be measured in any single work; however good in itself, the novel or story is usually integrated in a larger pattern with characters and events from other writings.

Faulkner regarded his major works as a 'saga,' a reconstruction of the life of Yoknapatawpha County, his fictional name for Lafayette County in northern Mississippi, where he lived at Oxford (the 'Jefferson' of his novels). The documentary sources of his stories are family papers and county records extending, as in *The Bear*, back to the first settlements among the Indians....The novels of the cycle move on several planes of southern society. There are the old clans of Sartoris, Compson, Sutpen, McCaslin, de Spain, and others, some of them now in a condition of decadence, and others just as significantly readjusted to new social conditions. There are the older townspeople, generally substantial in character, in contrast to the Snopes clan...

Three novels chronicle Flem Snopes, leader of rapacious kindred who emerge from backwoods burrows like rodents, to gnaw the props from under the old order. Flem grabs political and financial control; he uses a pretty wife to disgrace and depose the highborn Major de Spain. He acquires the de Spain mansion, only to be destroyed, ironically by a Snopes whom he had betrayed. The early serial stories were reconstructed as *The Hamlet* (1940); *The Town* (1957) and *The Mansion* (1959) complete this very great comic epic. The older families hold in recollection the pioneers who first conquered the land, the 'old people,' as a heritage that they share with such woodsmen, part Indian, as Sam Fathers and Boon Hogganbeck in the stories of *Go Down, Moses* (1942), among them *The Bear*.

Curiously too, the Negroes have withstood better than the white people the shifting ordeals of history. There are scamps among them, but Faulkner emphasizes the strength of such Negroes as Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury* and Lucas Beauchamp, last seen in *Intruder in the Dust* (1948). In the Yoknapatawpha group, *Light in August* (1932), *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), and *The Unvanquished* (1938) are significant works. *As I Lay Dying* (1930) utilizes a folk tale concerning a delayed burial in a psychological study of the degenerated 'poor whites.' *Sanctuary* (1931) is a classic of horror and degradation representing the corruption of small-town youth and the power of criminality in the age of jazz and prohibition. Its recent sequel is *Requiem for a Nun* (1951). *The Wild Palms* (1939) and its twin, the popular *Old Man*, counterpoint a theme: in one, two lovers are destroyed by passionate violence; in the latter, a derelict convict and a lost woman, in the violence of an 'Old Man' Mississippi flood, experience love and birth. *A Fable* (1954) is a retelling of the events of Holy Week, with the time and place shifted to World War I in France."

Sculley Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty & E. Hudson Long, eds.
The American Tradition in Literature 2
(Norton 1956-67) 1361-63

"No American novelist in decades, perhaps none ever, has been so highly esteemed abroad—has, in fact, been so often accommodated to and naturalized within the different cultures of very different countries. In the developing Old World view, Faulkner was seen as providing images of a world a good deal older yet: a world with the very mark and feature of oldness upon it, a world like that of the Old Testament, seen in a certain exterior perspective....What Europeans have been saying to each other about Faulkner is an important element in their more general conversation about art and experience. It is as

though a sort of pax Faulkneriana permitted them to cross national frontiers and discuss those larger issues...If this is true anywhere, it is especially true in France, where the popularity of Faulkner, which began in the middle 1930s (long before it did in America), reached phenomenal proportions both of sales and of admiration by the late '40s.

French readers saw in Faulkner's work ingredients that Americans were temperamentally slow to recognize or to honor. For there is a certain impressive arrogance about French criticism and French taste; they are profoundly functional...Faulkner became thus a figure in the central debate of the aging population in France—the debate between the Catholic writers on the one hand (Mauriac, Claudel, Jammes, and Bernanos), and their 'demoralizing' adversaries on the other (Gide, and then Sartre and Camus). The debate concerned the questions of existence and salvation, of the degree of rationality in the universe and the degree of man's dependence upon it. This was the context in which Faulkner rose to eminence....He was first embraced by the devil's advocates, for Faulkner's earlier fiction gave a picture of human experience so seemingly nihilistic that the non-religious or even anti-religious writers found it extraordinarily authentic. The Christ imagery of his later work is more likely to attract the followers of *le bon dieu*....

The role assigned to Faulkner in Europe was large and momentous: the very type of the modern artist, combining violence and metaphysics, according to Andre Malraux; a writer whose accomplishment was 'the resurrection of myths and the renewal of tragedy'; a novelist who had found the means to convey in narrative as Jean-Jacques Mayoux said in 1948, the unbearable pressure of time as a 'quality of existence.' These were the grand and terrible themes exposed in Faulkner by French observers, at a moment when he was still looked upon at home (with several distinguished exceptions) as an artless and unnerving primitive, a writer of preposterous melodrama who was devoid of a single recognizable idea....

Faulkner ranked high among the prophets, Mme. Magny implied, for he had uncovered in his local South and its legends the outlines of a nearly worldwide myth of enormous tragic impact....We discover, in short, in different countries and in the views of different critics (and a more complete survey would only confirm the fact), a developed impression of Faulkner in the '30s and '40s as the supreme contemporary artist of defeat, betrayal, and death; and impression greatly honored by a Western world that felt itself defeated and dead, that was yet fighting its own past in order to get out of it and beyond, and back to the shores of life....

It was precisely Faulkner's language—his use of the English language, that is—that prevented Faulkner from winning much acceptance in England. The English regarded Faulkner's verbal eccentricities in somewhat the way Italians of a traditionalist temper regarded the unconventional irregularities of Silone's prose. The irregularities of James Joyce, for the English, remained conventional ones; recognizable deviations from the known center; but Faulkner's idiom, which came from no center known to them, seemed simply unforgivably bad writing. His hot Southern American Protestant rhetoric fell on deaf Anglican ears, his 'ideas' seemed extravagant and intrusive, and his recurrent expression of outrage appeared dubious to a country which was to wait another decade or so before producing its own race of angry young men.

If, then, as several European critics suggested, Faulkner's novels and stories through say, *The Hamlet* (1940) possess an atmosphere not unlike the Old Testament in its most tragic and baffled moments, we can perhaps take *Go Down, Moses* (1942)—and especially its longest and richest component, *The Bear*—as Faulkner's first venture into a world of light like that following the Incarnation....No other American writer engages his readers as mercilessly as Faulkner; and except for those who fear and resent him on quite other grounds, readers of Faulkner can and do get an immense satisfaction from that participation with him that verges on the creative. But the aim of Faulkner's deliberate deformations is not finally aesthetic; he wants the reader to participate not in a creative act but in a moral act. He wants to define a moral experience of mythological proportions and of ambiguous reality: an aim that of necessity makes heavy demands on the reader."

R. W. B. Lewis
"William Faulkner: The Hero in the New World"
The Picaresque Saint
(Lippincott 1956, 1958)

“It is this kind of infinitely extended suggestivity, the waking of universal echoes, that the better work of Faulkner so conspicuously has and the work of so many modern writers—for instance, Arthur Miller—so conspicuously lacks.”

John L. Longley, Jr.
“Joe Christmas: The Hero in the Modern World”
Virginia Quarterly Review (Spring 1957)

“Faulkner’s post of observation usually lies with some individual who, out of his need for self-knowledge, even salvation from those complications of the human scene which ‘outrage,’ tells the story and, in telling it, resolves it, not solves it which only God can do. But in the resolution there is usually a fuller knowledge which rescues the protagonist from the accidents of his own situation, or allows him to see it in a larger context of meaning, by means of which he can ‘endure’; or his plight in the end illuminates by its shock some disaster of epical proportions implicit in the enveloping action. Or else the point of view roves from individual to individual, each of whom discloses differing insights and revelations of the complication. But whatever, the point of view is essentially bardic, with the difference that the bard himself is crucially involved.”

Andrew Lytle
Sewanee Review
(Summer 1957) 475

“Although Faulkner has written fine things in the last twenty years, his best period was that between 1929 and 1932, when he wrote *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Sanctuary*, and *Light in August*. These are among the best novels of the twentieth century....He is an authentic genius, and after James one of the two or three greatest of American novelists....

[*Sanctuary*] is a brilliant *tour de force*, combining the abstract intellectual swiftness of melodrama, the mechanically emblematic moralism of allegory, and the realistic detail and evocation of fate one associates with naturalism. The combination of elements lends plausibility to Malraux’s comparison of *Sanctuary* with the Greek drama. Faulkner’s novel offers, also, passages of humor that give it a place among the modern novels of grotesque comedy as practiced in their various ways by Conrad, Kafka, Nathanael West, and others who have brought to the older comic tradition of Dickens and Dostoevsky a modern or ‘existentialist’ tone. But for all its brilliance, there is a certain amount of fakery in *Sanctuary*, as in all *tour de force*, which is happily not present in Faulkner’s best work.

The Sound and the Fury (1929) is Faulkner’s masterpiece. *As I Lay Dying* (1930) is the simplest and most unified of his longer fictions and has certain fine successes of language. *Light in August* (1932) contains in larger profusion than do any of his other books the essential elements, good and bad, of the author’s genius.... *Light in August* is more ambitious and is a classic example of what is meant by speaking of an American novel as distinguished from a European one. *The Sound and the Fury* is one of the few American novels that rise to a truly tragic art, bringing the possibilities of the novel form to their fulfillment.”

Richard Chase
The American Novel and Its Tradition
(Doubleday/Anchor 1957) 205-06

“It has been generally recognized that the purpose of some of Faulkner’s structural complexities is to keep his material in a state of flux or suspension....To a large extent his shifts in tone and point of view, his avoidance of resolution, and his various obstacles to rational understanding, may be viewed as an effort to present life experience in such a way as to make facile interpretation impossible. The meaning of the stories of Sutpen and Joe Christmas and others, Faulkner is saying, is largely ambiguous. Whether or not they are free agents or pawns, heroes or villains, is ambiguous, just as it is uncertain whether the tall convict is a hero or a fool, whether Darl Bundren is a seer or madman, and whether the desperate struggles of the convict, the Bundrens and others are tragic or comic, significant or futile. They are presented as both and neither...just as Quentin’s reaction to the Sutpen story and to the South, in general, is a both and neither combination of love and hate....

It is his temperamental responses rather than any theories or ideas of particular torments, which [Faulkner] undoubtedly trusts to produce and to order his art. One fundamental quality of that temperament is its response to tension and opposition. Another is perhaps best described as a tendency toward profusion. It is this which no doubt helps to account for the remarkable scope of his fictional creation, but also for what surely must be criticized as an overabundance of effects and suggestions.”

Walter J. Slatoff
“The Edge of Order: The Pattern of Faulkner’s Rhetoric”
Twentieth Century Literature III (1957) 107-27

“The awarding of the Nobel Prize to Faulkner in 1950 has brought home to the American public the fact that in Europe he is considered the foremost living American author; today many American critics are inclined to agree with this judgment...He is more meaningful and profound, as well as more artistically original, than any of the American Naturalists with the possible exception of Hemingway....His great subject is the decline of the South: its economic sterility, its moral disintegration, and its struggle to resist the progressive and materialistic civilization of the North.

The protagonists of his novels are the decayed aristocrats of the ‘Sartoris’ type...yet still finer than the ‘Snopes’ clan—the efficient, materialistic, carpet-baggers, merchants, and entrepreneurs—who are gradually superseding them. In each of Faulkner’s novels the Sartoris characters struggle futilely against the encroachment of the Snopes. In *The Sound and the Fury* the Compson family struggles against a Snopes in their own midst: their brother Jason. In *Sartoris* the Sartoris and Compson clans are confronted by the Snopes themselves; and these latter are seen at the height of their triumph in *The Hamlet*. Even in *Sanctuary*, the least profound and the most sensational of Faulkner’s novels, the ‘Sartoris’ Temple Drake is defeated physically and symbolically by the perverted ‘Snopes’ Popeye. Faulkner’s mission is to preside over the spiritual death of the old South and to study the forces which are preparing its new awakening....

The interest of the author is not so much in the incidents themselves as in the complicated mental reactions of the characters to the incidents—reactions so thoroughly non-verbal that new narrative techniques must be devised to communicate them. Here Faulkner resembles Proust and Joyce more than he does the American naturalists....Faulkner’s characters, although diverse, tend to fall into a set of clearly defined groups. There are rebellious and nymphomaniacal young girls of aristocratic families (Caddy Compson, Temple Drake); there are half-witted country girls, easily exploited by town slickers (Dewey Dell, Lena Grove); there are moody younger sons, reckless and rebellious but proud of their family backgrounds (Quentin Compson, Bayard Sartoris)....One of the most frequently recurring characters in his work is the strong-willed, courageous, and loyal Negro woman whose character is superior to that of the whites around her (Dilsey...Nancy)....But although Faulkner creates the same characters over and over, he seldom repeats his stories; he finds a new situation, plot, or structure for each novel.”

Donald Heiney
Recent American Literature 4
(Barron’s Educational Series 1958) 208-11

“Faulkner had already written some verse and several novels, but with *The Sound and the Fury* he begins to become a concern of the century. Here, establishing his concept of mythical time and employing his strange experience of it for the first time, he outstrips both Proust and Joyce. He does not laboriously reconstruct lost time in order to capture and preserve it as Proust does, trying to outwit it in a rational manner so typically French. Nor does he recreate time through an intense act of will as does Joyce, who enlarges intellectual consciousness and stretches it to its limit. Faulkner destroys time and throws it out of working order. We witness this in a symbolic act when Quentin Compson rips off the hands from his watch and so wrecks the tyranny of its dial. To be sure, the ticking of the clockwork continues and time passes as before, but at least man’s consciousness is no longer subjected to the arbitrary action of a mechanical hand. The consciousness cannot be completely free until the sweet ticking of those little wheels that man devised for his own bondage stops too. Only then can we enter authentic time....

He imposes himself through force, virility, and the natural fury of his vision. He is the truly male talent of modern literature. Against Proust’s painfully relished artistic exercise, Joyce’s burrowing intellectuality, Pound’s constructive mimicry of forms, Faulkner opposes the uncultivated as creative power. He does not

need to penetrate the realm of myth through an effort of culture; he is at home in it....If Faulkner really had only written the tragic tale of the southern states, the trembling saga of the South's curse, would he have caused such vast vibrations? His 'provincialism,' like Tolstoy's, is universal. In a geographically limited section of reality he has borne the full intensity of existence. While he appears to be telling the story of his home town, he is telling the story of the world."

Gunter Blocker
"William Faulkner," *Die Neuen Wirklichkeiten*
trans. Jacqueline Merriam
(Argon Verlag 1958) 112-23

"The critics who first attended to Faulkner's work were largely of two persuasions: they were either in the 'humanist' or in the 'leftist' tradition. In either case, they sought a virtue of statement in literature and were much distressed when they failed to see it. It was not possible to ignore the call to responsibility, as Faulkner seemed to be doing, and remain unpunished. From the beginning of the 1930's, therefore, he was classified as a writer who ignored the largest demands upon social taste and moral discretion. His work ...exploited obscenity and horror for their own sake or as a 'cheap idea'; he did not wish for a 'better world' but hated the present and brooded over the collapse of the past; he was abnormally fond of morons, idiots, perverts, and nymphomaniacs....

[Communist critic Granville] Hicks's discussion of Faulkner's whimsical 'game' continued...to afford reviewers an opportunity to complain about and mock the style, as well as to excuse their own bewilderment. Reviews of the fiction throughout the decade emphasized the 'unusual' complication of plot ...the needless involution and redundancy of style...[and the] wicked preoccupation with irrational and subnormal forms of behavior....Leftist criticism, when it did not ignore Faulkner, severely chastised him for writing in ignorance or defiance of the brave new world in the making. For all that, they sought in the fiction for hopeful signs of social consciousness...To speak of 'the class struggle'...would have been to point up something that scarcely existed [in the South]....

Faulkner's first collection of short stories, *These Thirteen*, provoked a number of interesting reviews, perhaps really a tribute to the succession of important novels produced in the years 1929-1932. The book proved an occasion for several 'total' estimates. Granville Vernon (*The Commonwealth*, January 20, 1932) rather definitively underscored the 'regret' often seen in the reviews: that a man of so much talent should be so entirely concerned with 'the malevolent and disgusting.' A perverse genius, a Baudelairian romanticist, his appearance in literature is a sad indication of what is possible in an age deprived of faith. Lionel Trilling (*Nation*, November 4, 1931) objected to Faulkner's lack of 'largeness of reference.' 'A Rose for Emily,' for example, is 'pure event without implication.' [obtuse] 'Dry September' and 'Victory' escape the impeachment 'because they are aerated by the writer's acceptance of the common, an acceptance which by no means limits the originality, even idiosyncrasy of their vision and style. Beside them the rest of the stories, for all their success in their own terms, have a subtle kind of stuffiness, shut off as they are in their interesting but hermetically sealed universe.' [Like this academic critic himself in New York]

Robert Penn Warren, however, in one of his first statements (*Virginia Quarterly Review*, January, 1932) found the opposite values in Faulkner's work. The narrow identification of theme and locale gives the stories their strength; the 'feeling for place' strengthens the sense of reality which is always profound in Faulkner's characters. Far from being 'trivial' or isolated and strange, 'A Rose for Emily' is his best achievement. The publication of *These Thirteen* served, in these and other reviews, to mark off clearly as at no time hitherto the lines of critical reaction. The wide disparity between Trilling's and Warren's views was indicative of the sharpness of division: Trilling temperately stating a need for 'social reference,' Warren recognizing the strength that is given by a preoccupation with place and limitation....

Only occasionally was there recognition either of the sources of Faulkner's preoccupation or of his genuine talent as an artist, his genius for formal and rhetorical expression. Faulkner could himself have learned nothing from these warnings and expressions of distress; they could only fortify him in his determination to write as he needed, and to remain aloof from all criticism but his own. Favorable criticism of Faulkner...began in 1939. Except for isolated observations (such as Robert Penn Warren's...), studies of his work were largely devoted to expressions of disgust, horror and distress over what Faulkner was doing

or failing to do. An important element of criticism was lacking—a sympathetic effort to understand Faulkner on his own terms, a willing suspension of distress....

Perhaps no novelist of our century has suffered so persistent an attack in his lifetime of writing, as no author has been more valiantly defended. The reviews demonstrate a progress from obscurity to a falsely motivated popularity (in connection with the notoriety of *Sanctuary*) to what was almost a unanimous bewilderment (over the complexities of *Absalom, Absalom!*), and finally to a *succes de'estime*, originally the result of [Malcolm] Cowley's work and then immensely enhanced by the Nobel Prize Awards in 1950. Faulkner was subjected to the abuse now conventionally expected in the case of most modern writers; but he suffered additional abuse, on the grounds of his own 'regional' peculiarities and his apparent 'lack of interest' in the 'larger implications and responsibilities' of his work....

Without necessarily insisting upon the critics' invariable sensitivity to the pressure of public acclaim, I should note that much criticism published after the award [Nobel Prize, 1949-50] hesitated and qualified where earlier it might have condemned with little or no equivocation....Perhaps most surprising was the fact that a man who had in a majority of cases at the beginning been called an 'immoral' or an 'irresponsible' writer should now be soberly—even profoundly—proclaimed as a man of 'moral vision.' This was a result in part of a natural development away from the triviality of spot reviews toward substantial appraisals of a novelist who had obviously survived and transcended the uncertainties of his early career....It is the separate studies of individual Faulkner novels that remain the most satisfactory."

Frederick J. Hoffman
Introduction (1960)

William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism
eds. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery

(Harcourt/Harbinger 1963) 2-3, 5, 7-8, 18-19, 22-23, 27, 49-50

"In 1929 also appeared Faulkner's first great novel, *The Sound and the Fury*, a work still regarded by many critics as his finest....It was not until 1931 that any of Faulkner's books achieved wide sales and financial success. In that year he published *Sanctuary*. Faulkner once wrote that he decided, after his first two novels had failed to sell, to invent 'the most horrific tale I could imagine' and that he wrote it in about three weeks....The critics of Faulkner's early work had considerable difficulty in deciding what to make of it....Malcolm Cowley's introduction to *The Portable Faulkner* in 1946 has exercised a powerful influence upon subsequent criticism. His essay stressed the continuity and consistency of Faulkner's work and pointed up Faulkner's concern with "the tragic fable of Southern history. Indeed, Cowley set a whole generation of reviewers and critics talking about Faulkner's work as a 'myth of legend of the South'....

The excesses of much...later criticism come from oversimplifications of the thesis set forth briefly in Cowley's useful essay. Later writers, knowing little of the rich diversity of the southern social structure, tend to turn all poor southerners into Snopeses and all of Faulkner's gentleness into decadent aristocrats. Or, because of the intensity of current interest in the race problem and in civil rights, critics bear down upon certain moral issues almost independently of the fictional context: Faulkner is exposing the cruelty of the South and showing that southern society was rotten to the core (or perhaps he is scolded because he is not severe enough in so exposing it)....

Like every other great artist, Faulkner used symbols. His best work is rooted in the experience of southern history, but the significance of his use of the southern heritage must be understood. As a novelist, Faulkner dealt not only with the problems of 20th-century man, but with the universal problems of mankind. In order to write about human beings, he naturally made use of the human beings he knew best in the setting that he knew best. The setting provided him with a very important resource, for the background of a traditional society allowed the novelist to give to modern problems a special focus. Man's loss of community, his alienation and his loneliness, are common themes in 20th-century fiction, but the loneliness of Hightower and the alienation of Joe Christmas and the general break with the community made by half a dozen other characters in *Light in August* take on a special urgency and significance when seen against the background of Yoknapatawpha County, in which a living community exists—whether it be regarded as baleful in its paralyzing inertia or nourishing in its vitality.

Again, because in the South moral problems tend to be concrete, with good and bad polarized and not often shading off into a neutral gray penumbra, the whole problem of values can be put with dramatic force and conviction....Faulkner is clearly one of the greatest American novelists. The award of the Nobel Prize in 1949 was merely a special recognition of what most serious critics of fiction had already come to agree upon....He was still capable of magnificent writing in the latter part of his life: witness portions of *A Fable* and *The Mansion*.”

Max J. Herzberg & staff
The Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature
(Crowell 1962) 326-29

“*Sartoris* initiates a period of astonishing productivity and richness, in which Faulkner turned from subjects in fashion to his own great subject, the real life of the small towns of the South, present and past, white and Negro, much as Willa Cather had done earlier for life on the prairies. With *The Sound and the Fury* (October, 1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Sanctuary* (1931), the short stories of *These Thirteen* (1931) and *Light in August* (1932), Faulkner published five important books in four years...every one of Faulkner's four novels had been cast in a different form....

In spite of the great flowering of his talent from the early imitative work to the scarcely predictable accomplishment of *Sartoris*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *As I Lay Dying*, few critics perceived it, and the novels had no popular success. *Sanctuary* fulfilled its purpose and, particularly after the publication of a Modern Library edition made Faulkner better known, if scarcely prosperous. Even *Light in August* seemed to many critics further documentation of Faulkner's belonging to a 'cult of cruelty' and obscurity, and it was during the 1930's that Faulkner found it necessary, presumably, to make occasional trips to Hollywood to write scripts, notably the superior film version of Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*.

But Maurice Coindreau's excellent translations of the major early novels into French introduced Faulkner to French readers and critics in the 1930's, including Jean-Paul Sartre. Malcolm Cowley's *Portable Faulkner* (1946) and Robert Penn Warren's review of the Portable mark the point where Faulkner began to gain critical acclaim and an audience of critical readers. The novels began to come back into print again. *Intruder in the Dust* was made into a film, and Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for 1949. With the prize and an eloquent speech, his reputation was established. The most notable feature of Faulkner's success, aside from the pleasure it has given his readers—he himself takes it very quietly—is that it was very slow in coming. Like many of his predecessors in the United States, he persisted unwaveringly for twenty years without a real audience: according to Malcolm Cowley, none of his books was in print in 1946.”

William M. Gibson & George Arms, eds.
Twelve American Writers
(Macmillan 1962) 726, 729

“No twentieth-century American novelist, with the possible exception of Hemingway, has been so greatly admired, discussed, and emulated as William Faulkner. During the thirties, when he was publishing one remarkable book after another, he suffered shameful neglect from the literary public; as late as 1945 all of his books were out of print; then, in the years since the Second World War, there occurred a major shift of critical opinion, and Faulkner has become the most celebrated living American novelist. We have learned to see that his series of novels centered on Yoknapatawpha County—his imaginary locale in northern Mississippi—not only provides a brilliant portrait of life in the deep South but also dramatizes some of the most insistent problems of human consciousness in our time.

Faulkner's work can be difficult: it abounds in jumbled time sequences, involuted narrative structures, mangled syntax, and torturous diction. It demands from the reader that he take psychic and intellectual risks. One must bring to his novels a capacity for concentration, a readiness to abandon set notions about life and literature, and above all, a willingness to expose oneself to a gamut of feelings. At a time when men in a mass society often believe that their possibilities for significant experience are shrinking, Faulkner insists upon the largeness of human possibility. He returns to traditional dramatic gestures, he reasserts the claims of uncompromising tragedy, extreme melodrama, wild comedy. The force of human desire breaks

through in his novels with a grandeur and terror that are almost unequaled in our time. Indeed, it is this readiness for confronting the largest ranges of experience which helps explain the hold Faulkner has won upon modern readers, both those who admire his work and even some who do not.

Faulkner is a prodigious talent, sweeping and erratic, inventive and wasteful, utterly caught up in the demands of his imaginative vision. He follows in the American tradition of the 'natural genius'—the untutored or self-tutored writer whose impulse is to strive for relaxed and open forms rather than for tidiness of presentation, the writer who appropriates myths and legends from the collective memory of his homeland rather than inventing neatly compressed plots, the writer who offers encompassing statements and images of the human condition rather than resting content with self-sufficient dramatization....

Malcolm Cowley has described Faulkner's social view as that of an 'anti-slavery Southern nationalist,' while George Marion O'Donnell finds him a 'traditional moralist' defending the "Southern socio-economic-ethical tradition'...Actually his work contains a wide range of attitudes toward the South, from sentimentality to denunciation, from identification to rejection....The Southern myth appears in its simplest version in Faulkner's collection of Civil War stories called *The Unvanquished*, a few of which are barely distinguishable from the romancing of popular fiction. The Southern myth appears in its most torturous version in *Absalom, Absalom!*, a novel written out of sheer pain, in which Faulkner has forced himself to see how the will to domination had corrupted the white community. Between these two extremes lies the bulk of his major fiction....

The novels written between 1929 and 1932 form a profound criticism of Southern society—but far more important, a profound criticism of modern life. Many of the dominant and recurrent themes of contemporary literature—the disintegration of moral values under the pressures of commercialism, the loss of the capacity for making close human connections, the costs and terrors of isolation in an impersonal world, the bewilderment of sensitive men and the powerlessness of good ones before the onslaughts of rapacity and vulgarity—all these are dramatized in Faulkner's earlier novels with a marvelous concreteness of detail and pictorial imagery. It is hard to think of another twentieth-century novelist who has given us so many living characters: the idiot Benjy Compson and his money-making brother Jason in *The Sound and the Fury*; the whole Bundren clan in *As I Lay Dying*; the criminal Popeye and the flapper Temple Drake in *Sanctuary*; the crucified mulatto Joe Christmas and the bovine madonna Lena Grove in *Light in August*; and many more, companions of our imagination who survive in memory long after one has put away the books in which they appear."

Irving Howe
Major Writers of America II
(Harcourt 1962) 825, 831

"However great a writer may be, the public gets increasingly tired of him; his death seems to remove the obligation to read him. But if I had read *The Reivers*, I should be willing to say something about the work as a whole, and an essay would make some of the points that I can only suggest in this 'obituary' of a man I did not like, but of a writer who since the early thirties I have thought was the greatest American novelist after Henry James: a novelist of an originality and power not equaled by his contemporaries, Hemingway and Fitzgerald....I should say that he wrote at least five masterpieces (what other American novelist wrote so many except James?): they are *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Sanctuary*, *Light in August*, and *The Hamlet*. I know people of good judgment who would add to this list *The Wild Palms* and *Absalom, Absalom!*...

I believe that as his personality fades from view he will be recognized as one of the last great craftsmen of the art of fiction which Ford Madox Ford called the Impressionist Novel. From Stendhal through Flaubert and Joyce there is a direct line to Faulkner, and it is not a mere question of influence. Faulkner's great subject, as it was Flaubert's and Proust's, is passive suffering, the victim being destroyed either by society or by dark forces within himself. Faulkner is one of the great exemplars of the international school of fiction which for more than a century has reversed the Aristotelian doctrine that tragedy is an action, not a quality....The Greco-Trojan myth (Northerners as the upstart Greeks, Southerners as the older, more civilized Trojans) presented Faulkner...with a large semi-historical background...Two secondary themes in Faulkner have obscured the critics' awareness of the great theme. These are: the white man's legacy of

guilt for slavery and the rape of the land. These themes are almost obsessive, but they are not the main theme....I will repeat it...The destruction of the Old South released native forces of disorder and corruption which were accelerated by the brutal exploitation of the carpetbaggers and an army of occupation; thus the old order of dignity and principle was replaced by upstarts and cynical materialists.”

Allen Tate
The Sewanee Review (c.1963)

“Most people who care about literature agree that William Faulkner has taken a place beside Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Henry James as one of the rare artists in fiction produced in the United States. Yet, perhaps more than any of these others, he has become also an international novelist, admired, honored, and imitated in many lands. His reputation, large in his own country, grows even larger abroad, where his books are found in translation in most of the major literary centers of the world. Throughout much of Europe, especially in France, he has been named among the first of novelists, with Dostoevski, Tolstoi, Proust, or Sartre, nor is he less admired in Tokyo or New Delhi, Cairo or Rio de Janeiro, where readers have long responded to his way of regarding people and his way of using words, which seem extraordinarily his own, yet catch and hold the imagination of readers everywhere....

As much as Emerson’s, Faulkner’s age...is retrospective, dwelling within sepulchers of its fathers, giving lip-service to creeds which stultify and misdirect....[His writings] underline and rephrase distinctions on which Emerson insisted, between Understanding, which is man-devised and very likely to be wrong, and Reason, which is intuitive and which can be divine. They explain again what Melville had Plotinus Plinlimmon explain in *Pierre* about differences between chronometrical and horological time—the one, man-made and useful, but incorrect; the others, eternal, often inconvenient, but everlastingly true. They say again, with less economy of words, almost exactly what Hawthorne often said about the superiority of heart over head, or what Whittier said, or even Longfellow...They represent an adaptation and extension of what Coleridge said in England, and Goethe in Germany, about man’s allegiance beyond all knowledge to what he recognized without thought as good. They have been found to echo Jonathan Edwards earlier certainty that people are better when they place love, which is intuitive understanding and compassion and admiration of those things which are by divine right true, above the presumption of creeds invented by men....

More than most writers of his time, Faulkner tempts readers toward discovering something like allegorical meanings in his fiction....Faulkner is discovered to be within a familiar American literary tradition, which insists that particulars rightly seen become universals, so that any man is a microcosm of all men. In this view, which Emerson and Thoreau and many of their nineteenth-century compatriots inherited from and shared with other men in other lands, nature is recognized as a symbol of spirit....He shared immensely with Thoreau in recognition of the awful loveliness of nature and its inscrutable demands. With Emerson and Henry James, he shared a brooding sense of history—how past infiltrates present until time becomes at once eternal and contemporary, so that man’s contentment where he is depends on knowledge of where he has been....[Also] he is in the line of frontier humorists, as extravagant as Sut Lovingood or Mark Twain, as extravagant as Thoreau. No section other than the American South could have produced him....

His apocalyptic vision...the paradise lost in the American South—placed him beside Brockden Brown and Poe and...Melville...He has become known as a kind of redeemer, who borrows religious imagery and symbolic suggestions of the continuing efficacy of the Christian mythos, set forth through phrases reminiscent of the Sermon on the Mount, to suggest that man may become better than he has been. Sometimes salvation is explained as willingness humbly to submit one’s self as an innocent companion to other creatures who inhabit and no not mutilate the good land which has been given as gift to all.... Faulkner has not yet been seen in his complex entirety by any single commentator. Olga Vickery may come closest, for she puts aside more successfully than most the temptation to make Faulkner an apologist for some favorite view.”

Lewis Leary
Introduction
Crowell’s Handbook to Faulkner
Dorothy Tuck

(Crowell 1964) vii-x, xii-xiii, xv, xvii-xviii

“William Faulkner has mainly devoted himself to a passionate, if not volcanic interpretation of the complexities, both normal and subnormal, of the human mind. The human mind in the American South one might add, for one of the difficulties of appreciating Faulkner is his unusually involved way of blending different aims and different ways of expressing himself. In fact, one does not always know whether he is making it intentionally difficult for the reader to follow his narrative, or whether he is too much preoccupied with his own unsolved problems to extricate himself from them.

To Faulkner, human nature and the human mind are something terrible, a bottomless pit which holds anything imagination can produce, especially any crime and perversion. But, like any other abyss it also exercises a strange fascination over those who look into it. On the other hand, there is his complicated relationship to the South, a sort of love-hate attachment, embracing a powerful tradition and yet kicking against it. For this very reason, it is not easy to choose from Faulkner's work those novels that represent him best. Some of his novels have a definite period touch, such as *Sartoris* (1929), *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), and the collection *The Unvanquished* (1938), and thus may be linked with the American quest for tradition. But the theme of the decline and fall of old Southern families connected not only with all the proings into human desires, passions, and frustrations, but also with the technique of the stream of consciousness, thus changes the period element at times into a tool for something else.

What that is, may perhaps best be seen in his novel *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), which deals with the degenerate members of an old southern family...This takes us to the most unexpected result of Faulkner's work: the moral effect. In all the incredible horrors and apparently cold-blooded misdeeds narrated by the author, and in spite of the absence of justice, pity and compassion, the reader's attention, involuntarily perhaps, is drawn towards the phenomenon of evil as an essential part of human existence: and the moment one begins to reflect about evil as such, one has entered the field of ethics. This, by the way, is evidently one of the reasons that won him the Nobel Prize.

Faulkner is one of the few who expect salvation neither from return of Man to nature, nor to a life of the spirit only, because he is aware that the element of evil is an integral part of Man's worldly existence. The fact that Faulkner frequently makes his characters incapable of understanding fully the meaning of the events in which they are taking part, may be considered a further proof of his idea of the helplessness of man in his attitude towards evil. This is the case of the idiot in *The Sound and the Fury*, of the victimized girl in *Sanctuary*, of the pregnant woman in *Light in August*, of the boy listening to the tale in 'A Justice,' to mention only a few, and it justifies to a large extent, though not fully, Faulkner's oblique methods of narration....The solution to a good many problems in Faulkner's work may be found in *A Fable* (1954), because here the picture of the author's view of the world appears much more explicit than elsewhere.... To the non-American reader *A Fable* may well prove to be the most important American novel since the Second World War.”

Heinrich Straumann
University of Zurich
American Literature in the Twentieth Century
(Harper Torchbook 1965) 86-88, 91-93

“The fiction of William Faulkner has as many different planes of interest as that of any contemporary American writer. On one level much of it is sheer horror, a twentieth-century throwback to the Gothic romance. On another it is Hawthornesque in its exploration of the methods and effects of symbolism and allegory. On still another it is a vast and intricate legend of the disintegration of the Old South, epiclike in conception and not unworthy of comparison with James Joyce's portrayal of Dublin in *Ulysses*. To the student of technique it is notable for its bold experimentation with narrative point of view, while the reader with an eye for style finds it full of some of the lushest rhetoric of our time. All in all, Faulkner's stories are almost incredibly subtle. They make such great demands of their readers that the surprising thing is that they have been as popular as they have....

Readers vary widely in their reaction of Faulkner's fiction, but few fail to appreciate the ingenuity and freshness of its construction and its sincere attempt to accurately depict experience in a region desperately

proud and desperately impoverished. Life in Jefferson, county seat and market town of a sharecropping region overwhelmingly Negro, is seldom pleasant to contemplate. In the best of the Yoknapatawpha County series the Sartorises, representative of the old order in the South, are set off against the Snopes, poor-white opportunists without the vestiges of moral responsibility which the Sartorises retain. It is hard in such a milieu to see what is honest and what is decent, and it is not Faulkner's intent to expound his position. Yet there is a sense in which, for all his worrying of sexual relationships and inexplicable cruelty, he is a moralist. Life, he seems to imply, ought to be better than it is."

Theodore Hornberger
The Literature of the United States 2, 3rd edition
(Scott, Foresman 1953-66) 1232-34

"What happened to me was what happened to almost all the book-reading Southerners I knew. They found dramatized in Faulkner's work some truth about the South and their own Southernness that had been lying speechless in their experience. Even landscapes and objects took on a new depth of meaning, and the human face, stance, and gesture took on a new dignity. If you, in spite of your own sometimes self-conscious and willed Southernness, had been alienated by the official Southern pieties, alibis, and daydreams, the novels of Faulkner told you that there was, if you looked a second time, an intense, tormented and brutal, but dignified and sometimes noble, reality beyond whatever façade certain people tried to hypnotize you into seeing. With this fiction there was the thrill of seeing how a life that you yourself observed and were part of might move into the dimension of art. There was, most personally, the thrill of discovering your own relation to time and place...I am offering this local and personal testimony, because I want to indicate that the first, powerful impact of Faulkner's work was by an immediate intuition, not by the exegesis of critics....

In a profound way Faulkner resembles Robert Frost, and his relation to the South resembles that of Robert Frost to New England. Both men seem so deeply demanded by their moment in history, at the very end of their respective cultures...Both Faulkner and Frost were firmly and intransigently rooted in Old America, the America which was liquidated by the First World War, and both were even more firmly and intransigently rooted in a particular locality and in the history of that locality....Both...could, therefore, take the particular locality as a vantage point from which to criticize modernity for its defective view of man-in-nature and man-in-community...The South which Faulkner had grown up in—particularly the rural South—was cut off, inward-turning, backward-looking. It was a culture frozen in its virtues and vices, and even for the generation that grew up after World War I, that South offered an image of massive immobility in all ways, an image, if one was romantic, of the unchangeableness of the human condition...

The great period of Faulkner's achievement—from *The Sound and the Fury* to *The Hamlet*—overlaps, too, with the Depression and the time of the premonitory shadows of World War II, with another time, that is, of deep cultural shock....We may see this polarity as related to another which he was so fond of—and so indefinite in the formulation of—the polarity of fact and truth. We may see it, too, in the drama of his outraged Platonism—outraged by the world and the flesh....

Even as late as 1940, in reviewing *The Hamlet*, [Malcolm] Cowley says that 'one admires the author while feeling that most of his books are Gothic ruins, impressive only by moonlight.' By 1942, however, in reviewing *Go Down, Moses*, he can say that 'there is no other American writer who has been so consistently misrepresented by his critics, including myself.' Then after an attack on the views of Maxwell Geismar and Granville Hicks [Communist], he says Faulkner is 'after Hemingway and perhaps Dos Passos, the most considerable novelist of this generation'....

This is not to say that Faulkner was the victim of a conspiracy among card-carrying, or even fellow-traveling, book reviewers. A climate can be more lethal than a conspiracy, and the climate was that of para-Marxist neo-Naturalism, with the doctrine of art-as-illustration—debates concerning which we can find embalmed, for example, in the proceedings of the American Writers' Congress. Since such 'leftism' had become intellectually chic, the new attitudes were assimilated with no pain and little reflection by college professors, ladies' clubs, news-minded literary editors, and book reviewers who a few short years before might have attacked Faulkner merely because he was dirty and not very optimistic. In the new context, the combination of tragic intensity, ribald and rambunctious comedy, violence and pathology, Negro field

hands and Mississippi aristocrats, old-fashioned rhetoric and new-fangled time shifts, symbolism and obscurity, amounted to outrage—and probably to fascism....

This clearly was not a literature in tune with the New Deal, the new post office art, the new social conscience, the new Moscow trials, or the new anything. It was, simply, new: that is, created. And in some circles, at all times, for a thing to be truly created, is to be outrageous...Faulkner was a-political... Faulkner's trouble with the patriots was compounded by two other factors. First, he had no truck with any obvious programs for social salvation. Steinbeck and Caldwell, though they both showed abuses and degradation in American life, showed them with a diagnosis and the hint of a quick cure that was fashionable in the reviewing trade. Second, Faulkner was Southern. Of course, Wolfe was Southern too; but nobody ever took him for a fascist...Faulkner, who in those days was often rejected as the most irrelevant of all, was passionately read in places as different as Tokyo and Paris for the simple reason that he was taken to have something to say to the modern soul....

The great watershed for Faulkner's reputation in the United States is usually, and quite correctly, taken to be the publication of *The Portable Faulkner* in 1946. Several factors contributed to the effect of the *Portable*. First, Cowley's Introduction, developing but substantially modifying a line of interpretation originally suggested, in 1939, by George Marion O'Donnell, persuasively insisted on the significant coherence of Faulkner's work taken as a whole. Second, the selection itself was made with taste and cunning to support the thesis....It can, perhaps, be plausibly argued that Faulkner is one of the few contemporary fiction writers—perhaps the only American—whose work is to any considerable degree concerned with the central issues of our time, who really picks at the scab of our time, in the way that, in varying degrees of intensity and scale, Melville, Dostoevsky, Kafka, Conrad, Proust, Eliot, Yeats, and Camus, also do....The long period of exegesis in Faulkner criticism has contributed to the atmosphere of a cult....The very classrooms—sometimes the very same professors—which once granted a grudging half hour to document Faulkner's social irrelevance or perhaps his fascism, have now set about the canonization.”

Robert Penn Warren, ed.
“Introduction: Faulkner: Past and Future”
Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays
(Prentice-Hall 1966) 1-12, 16-20

“During the 1940s, Faulkner's reputation declined, and it was only with the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950 [1949] that interest in his work revived. His stock has remained high since. His importance as innovator has been generally recognized. His experiments with narrative chronology, and his use of ‘stream of consciousness’ and ‘multiple perspective’ techniques beg comparison with the work of contemporaries like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. *Ulysses* was an important influence on Faulkner. But from *The Sound and the Fury* to *The Wild Palms* experimental devices serve singular ends, and Faulkner's complex, involuted prose style is likewise peculiar to him. Perhaps his most original achievement is his use of style and technique to unsettle habits of thought and perception. His vision offered by the best novels is often unfamiliar, primeval—a disturbing refutation of the cozily humanized world of civilized man.

Faulkner's significance is partly that of a successful regional novelist. He is conspicuous as the most prominent figure in the ‘Southern renaissance’ during the century. Most of his novels are set in the fictional Southern county of Yoknapatawpha, and, from *Sartoris* onwards, Faulkner's chief concern was with the South. It was a South impotent and backward, defeated in war, but inheriting a set of impossibly romantic ideals. Faulkner's attitudes to it are complicated and ambivalent, those both of critic and apologist. He attacked its intolerance and bigotry, yet his work is often colored with the very puritanism he satirized. He cherished its legends of heroic endeavor, but he was able soberly to disengage himself from them and to demonstrate their futility. *Absalom, Absalom!*, for instance—itsself a myth—is also a careful analysis of the process by which myths are born and nourished. Faulkner censured the parochialism of the post-bellum South, whilst finding in it the basis for a critique of the urban and commercial culture dominant in America. Hostile to views on the racial question espoused by the conservative white South, his own attitudes to the Negro, and to Negro culture, were commonly less reformist than romantic—to the point, some have complained, of evasiveness.

In his Nobel Prize address, Faulkner spoke of ‘the old universal truths—love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice.’ Commentators hopeful of finding consoling faiths in Faulkner’s work have affirmed his allegiance to such truths. Others have suspected that it is only endurance that he can recommend with conviction. But the novels cannot be reduced to a single ethic. Possibly more fundamental to Faulkner is a deep-seated and pessimistic distrust of human unruliness. For Faulkner, it is at best precariously subject to the limits of law and the constraints of civilization.

It was in France that Faulkner’s novels first met with a reception that was appreciative and intelligent, and they exerted an acknowledged influence on developments in French fiction after 1930, from Andre Malraux to Claude Simon. His impact on American fiction came somewhat later....No writer of importance, however, has followed him in blending modernist experiment with the evocation of a circumscribed but densely imagined provincial world, and a disabused and penetrating quality of insight.”

Andrew Gibson
Makers of Modern Culture
ed. Justin Wintle
(Facts on File 1981) 163-64

“Eudora Welty said that to be a writer in Mississippi after Faulkner was like living next door to a mountain. Brilliant and erratic (even after he won the Nobel Prize in 1949, he was still capable of producing work his editors hesitated to publish), Faulkner is today generally regarded as the greatest twentieth-century American writer of fiction, and his work is routinely ranked with the literary achievements of Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, and James. Although Faulkner’s novels and tales have been frequently described as difficult and obscure, his explanation of them was simple: He wrote, he said in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, of ‘the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat’....

In 1927 Faulkner brought out his second novel, *Mosquitoes*, a story about a sophisticated New Orleans literary crowd on a yachting expedition that is written in the ‘conversational’ mode Aldous Huxley had made fashionable in the 1920s....In the best of the Yoknapatawpha fiction, Faulkner created works unequalled in America in this century....Because of his complex narrative methods and his morally oriented subject matter, Faulkner did not greatly interest sociologically minded critics during the Depression years; by the mid-1940s, of all his books, only *Sanctuary* remained in print. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, a reappraisal of Faulkner’s achievement began, spurred in part by the publication in 1948 of *Intruder in the Dust*, a ‘detective’ story about an elderly black man who refuses to ‘act like a nigger’ and whose surprising innocence in a murder case leaves him a ‘tyrant over the whole county’s white conscience.... No American writer of his time has exerted wider influence.”

David Minter
The Harper American Literature 2
(Harper & Row 1987) 1340-43

“Today, Faulkner is universally acclaimed as the greatest American writer of the twentieth century, and as one of the greatest writers of all time. His work, constantly evolving, was a product of his eclectic but intense reading of the Bible and classic and contemporary masterworks, but was always infused by an equally close reading of southern, American, and western cultures and contemporary events. His dogged, often heroic commitment to a dissection of racism indicates an agreement with W. E. B. DuBois’s assertion that the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.’ Faulkner’s profound sense of history and tradition was in no way a curb on his appetite for modernist solutions—both symbolic and philosophical—to literary, social, and spiritual problems.”

John Lowe
The Heath Anthology of American Literature 2
(D. C. Heath 1990) 1409

“A first stage of the greening [of the South in literature] came in the 1930s with all but the first of the books that [Thomas] Wolfe was to write in the course of his short life, several of Faulkner’s best novels, novels and short stories by K. A. Porter, Caroline Gordon, Allen Tate, Stark Young, Erskine Caldwell,

Andrew Lytle, and a score of others...These were the years in which R. P. Warren published his first book of poems and his first novel...Black writers also began to be conspicuous during this period....Jean Toomer had published his memorable *Cane*...Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston, and Arna Bontemps.... As World War II approached, activity began to slacken.

Wolfe died, and public interest in Faulkner's work all but came to an end....Then in 1946 the New York critic Malcolm Cowley brought out *The Portable Faulkner* with a brilliant introductory essay and a superb selection from the works. Among the eastern literati this kind of recognition by one of their most respected critics was tantamount to a nomination for canonization, and almost immediately the reading public began demanding Faulkner's works, practically all of which had gone out of print. The result of this shift in popularity was a tremendous success for his next novel, *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), which was subsequently made into a movie. In 1950 he received the Nobel Prize for Literature, the first—and only—southerner to be so honored.

In a very real sense, Faulkner's good fortune, however, became the good fortune of all southern writers. With Cowley's recognition of one of their number and the conferring of the Nobel Prize, attention suddenly turned to their part of the world, and readers everywhere began their discovery of a new field of American literature. The term 'Southern Renaissance,' which a few southerners had been using cautiously...began to be heard among critics and reviewers elsewhere...For the first time in literary history, being southern and a writer was beginning to have its advantages....

Few saw that in probing the roots of the southern experience [Faulkner] had provided a definition of the South that would enable a new generation of writers to avoid the path of stultifying romanticism and exploitations of local color and begin to create a literature fully representative of the region's diversity and complexity. All that was needed was a credible public recognition of his achievement that might prompt a speedy reevaluation....At the time of his death [1962] Faulkner was unquestionably the ranking man of letters in the United States."

J. A. Bryant, Jr.
Twentieth-Century Southern Literature
(U Kentucky 1997) 5-6, 78, 86, 112, 114

Michael Hollister (2015)