

THE NEW CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO



WILLIAM
FAULKNER

Edited by John T. Matthews

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Boston University



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THE NEW CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
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The New Cambridge Companion to William Faulkner offers contemporary readers a sample of innovative approaches to interpreting and appreciating William Faulkner, who continues to inspire passionate readership worldwide. The essays here address a variety of topics in Faulkner's fiction, such as its reflection of the concurrent emergence of cinema, social inequality and rights movements, modern ways of imagining sexual identity and behavior, the South's history as a plantation economy and society, and the persistent effects of traumatic cultural and personal experience. This new *Companion* provides an introduction to the fresh ways Faulkner is being read in the twenty-first century and bears witness to his continued importance as an American and world writer.

John T. Matthews is Professor of English at Boston University. His previous books include *The Play of Faulkner's Language*; *"The Sound and the Fury": Faulkner and the Lost Cause*; and *William Faulkner: Seeing Through the South*. Matthews's articles on Faulkner and Southern literature have appeared in such journals as *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, *American Literature*, *American Literary History*, and *Philological Quarterly*.

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A collaborative volume such as this depends on the expertise and generosity of many scholars: those whose work appears here, others whose scholarship informs it, as well as many experts who have contributed much to new knowledge about Faulkner and ways of studying his writing today that, had space allowed, would have been represented here. Our list of works cited provides a partial list of the extensive scholarship on Faulkner, but readers are encouraged to consult more comprehensive bibliographies.

Ray Ryan at Cambridge University Press had faith in my vision for this new version of the *Companion*, and Caitlin Gallagher at the Press was an exemplary guide through its production; my thanks to both. I've drawn on the counsel and counted on the liberality of many in the field of Faulkner studies, including the anonymous readers of my proposal, who improved the plan of the book. I do wish to mention the invaluable contributions over many years of two colleagues with a shared interest in Faulkner: Richard Godden, whose attention to the substance of Faulkner's texts brilliantly and unfailingly instructs and whose standard inspires; and Philip Weinstein, whose writing exceptionally illuminates Faulkner's literary imagination and who, as the editor of the original *Companion*, generously advised about this successor. I am grateful to Boston University, particularly Dean Virginia Sapiro of the College of Arts and Sciences, and my chairs in English, William Carroll, Gene Jarrett, and Maurice Lee, for continued research support during the preparation of this book. I wish to thank Mayor George Patterson of Oxford, Mississippi, not only for granting permission on behalf of the City of Oxford for the use of John McCrady's painting *Oxford on the Hill* as the cover illustration but also for personally seeing to its transit to the University of Mississippi studio. I thank as well the University's Director of Communications Photography

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CHRONOLOGY OF WILLIAM FAULKNER'S LIFE AND WORKS

- 1897 William Cuthbert Falkner, first of four sons of Murry C. Falkner and Maud Butler Falkner, is born on September 25 in New Albany, Mississippi. Murry Falkner is an administrator for the railroad built by his legendary grandfather, William C. Falkner – a man known as the “Old Colonel” and widely remembered for his achievements as a soldier, landowner, lawyer, businessman, politician, and writer. (The family name was spelled “Falkner” until WF added the “u” in 1918.)
- 1902 The Falkner family moves to Oxford, Mississippi.
- 1914 After an indifferent secondary education (which ceased after the tenth grade), WF accepts a mentor relationship with Phil Stone (four years older), reading widely in classics and contemporary literature. Stone will serve for many years as a sometimes unwanted adviser, helping WF get his early works published.
- 1916–17 WF begins to write verse and to submit graphic and literary work for the University of Mississippi yearbook.
- 1918 WF and Estelle Oldham, childhood sweethearts, consider eloping, but WF seeks her father’s permission, unsuccessfully. She marries Cornell Franklin. WF attempts to enlist in the U.S. Air Corps to fight in World War I, is rejected because he is too short, goes to Toronto, and (masquerading as an Englishman) joins the Royal Air Force training program. He returns to Oxford after the war, feigning war wounds and military exploits (his flight training was actually completed in December, a month after the armistice).

- 1919-20 WF enrolls as a special student at the University of Mississippi; studies French, Spanish, and Shakespeare; writes a play entitled *Marionettes*; completes his first volume of verse – *The Marble Faun* – which (with Phil Stone's help) will eventually be accepted for publication.
- 1921-23 WF works in a New York bookstore managed by Elizabeth Prall, Sherwood Anderson's future wife. He returns to Oxford to serve as university postmaster, a job he notoriously mishandles; in 1923 he is fired from it.
- 1924 *The Marble Faun* is published in December.
- 1925 WF travels to New Orleans and is introduced through Elizabeth Prall to Sherwood Anderson and his literary circle, a group associated with the avant-garde literary magazine *The Double Dealer*. WF spends six months with this group, developing a serious interest in writing fiction and completing his first novel, *Soldiers' Pay*, a "lost generation" story centering on the betrayals of a war-wounded aviator. Anderson's publisher, Horace Liveright, accepts it for publication. WF spends the second half of 1925 traveling in Europe, living in Paris, reading contemporary literature, and writing reviews; he returns to Oxford by Christmas.
- 1926 *Soldiers' Pay* is published in February. WF starts two new novels: *Father Abraham*, about the Snopeses, a clan of aspiring poor farmers; and *Flags in the Dust*, about the prestigious Sartoris planter family.
- 1927 WF's second novel, *Mosquitoes*, set in New Orleans and reflective of its avant-garde arts scene, is published in April by Liveright.
- 1928 Liveright rejects WF's third (and most ambitious to date) novel, *Flags in the Dust*. This novel inaugurates WF's fictional history of his own region and is accepted eventually by Harcourt, Brace, on condition that it be shortened. Throughout the 1920s, WF continues to see Estelle Oldham Franklin and her two sons during her visits to Oxford. He begins writing *The Sound and the Fury* in the spring and finishes it by early fall.
- 1929 Shortened and retitled, *Flags in the Dust* is published as *Sartoris* in January. WF begins writing *Sanctuary*. *The Sound*

and the Fury, WF's first indisputable modernist masterpiece, is rejected by Harcourt, Brace but accepted by Cape and Smith. Estelle Oldham Franklin's divorce is finalized in April; WF marries her in June. *The Sound and the Fury* is published in October. During the fall, WF works nights at a power plant, completing a first draft of *As I Lay Dying* in less than seven weeks.

- 1930 WF buys Rowan Oak, an elegant but rundown antebellum mansion in Oxford. In need of funds (a need that will continue for the next twenty years), WF begins aggressively to market his short stories along with his novels, the former often paying better. "A Rose for Emily" is published in April. *As I Lay Dying* is published in October by Cape and Smith, giving WF's fictional county its name of Yoknapatawpha.
- 1931 Daughter Alabama born in January; she dies after nine days. *Sanctuary*, begun before publication of the two previously completed masterpieces and first conceived according to WF as a "potboiler," is heavily revised before being published in February. Its sexual violence attracts the attention of Hollywood, and WF will soon begin an off-and-on twenty-year career as a scriptwriter for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and Warner Brothers studios. (The two best-known films for which Faulkner earned writing credit were adaptations directed by Howard Hawks of Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not* [1944] and Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* [1946].) *These Thirteen*, a collection of WF's stories, is published in September.
- 1932 *Light in August*, WF's first major treatment of the problem of race, is published in February by Smith and Haas. WF's father dies, causing family financial difficulties. WF accepts his first contract, from MGM, to work in Hollywood as a film scriptwriter.
- 1933 WF's second volume of poems, *A Green Bough*, is published in April. Daughter Jill is born in June. *The Story of Temple Drake*, a film version of *Sanctuary*, is released. The film *Today We Live*, based on WF's short story "Turn About," premieres in Oxford.
- 1934-35 *Doctor Martino and Other Stories*, a collection of detective stories, is published in April. WF works on *Absalom*,

Absalom!, his most ambitious novel about the South so far, as well as his most deliberately modernist work, both in Hollywood and in Oxford. He interrupts *Absalom* for a few months to complete *Pylon*, a brief novel about daredevil stunt pilots, and then returns to *Absalom* after the death of his youngest brother, Dean, in an air crash. (WF, himself an amateur aviator, had encouraged Dean to learn to fly.) *Pylon* is published in March 1935.

- 1936 *Absalom, Absalom!* is published in October by Random House, thereafter WF's permanent publisher.
- 1938 *The Unvanquished*, a collection of Civil War stories, is published in February. WF writes *The Wild Palms* (renamed by the publisher against WF's preferred title, *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*), a hybrid novel composed of two intertwined stories. He buys a farm outside of Oxford.
- 1939 *The Wild Palms* is published in January. WF is elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters. Despite previous attention from French critics, such as Malraux and Sartre, WF only now begins to receive searching commentary from American critics. WF's short story "Barn Burning" wins the O. Henry Award.
- 1940 *The Hamlet*, the first novel of the Snopes trilogy, is published in April.
- 1942 *Go Down, Moses and Other Stories*, WF's broadest and most sustained scrutiny of black-white relations, is published in May.
- 1946 Dire financial pressures lead WF to a final Hollywood contract with Warner Brothers. Malcolm Cowley's edition of *The Portable Faulkner* is published in May by the Viking Press. Except for *Sanctuary*, WF's novels in their publishers' regular hardcover editions are all out of print; Cowley's volume makes a representative selection of WF's work available to a large reading public.
- 1948 *Intruder in the Dust*, a sequel to the Lucas Beauchamp materials of *Go Down, Moses*, is published in September. The novel's direct representation of Southern racial conflict secures large sales and signals WF's willingness to speak out

- on social issues. WF is elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters.
- 1949 Film version of *Intruder in the Dust* is released in October. *Knight's Gambit*, a collection of detective stories, is published in November.
- 1950 *Collected Stories* is published in August. WF wins the Nobel Prize for Literature, travels with his daughter to Stockholm, and delivers his famous Nobel Prize acceptance speech.
- 1951 *Collected Stories* wins the National Book Award. *Requiem for a Nun*, a reprise of the Temple Drake materials in *Sanctuary*, written in a hybrid form that alternates between prose sections and stage drama, is published in September. France awards WF the Legion of Honor. From this point on, WF's work receives critical (indeed "canonical") attention and brings him financial security. Increasingly, he writes and speaks out on political (especially racial) issues, his position costing him support from many fellow Southerners because of his attack on racism, while disappointing liberals because of his gradualist approach to desegregation. WF travels extensively during the 1950s and early 1960s as a cultural ambassador for the State Department, making trips to Japan, Venezuela, and Greece.
- 1954 *A Fable*, a story of World War I cast as a version of the Passion Week of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, is published in August, after more than a decade of intermittent work on it by WF. He describes it as "an indictment of war perhaps." It wins the Pulitzer Prize.
- 1955 *Big Woods*, a collection of stories, is published.
- 1957 *The Town*, the second novel of the Snopes trilogy, is published in May. WF teaches as writer-in-residence at the University of Virginia. He will alternate residence between Charlottesville and Oxford until his death.
- 1959 *The Mansion*, the final volume of the Snopes trilogy, is published in November.
- 1962 *The Reivers*, Faulkner's last novel, is published in June. A month later, on July 6, WF dies unexpectedly (probably of a

heart attack) in a clinic at Byhalia, Mississippi, where he had been recurrently hospitalized for alcoholism and more recently for treatment following the last of many horseback-riding accidents. His funeral takes place the next day in Oxford.

1963

The Reivers wins the Pulitzer Prize