

Syllabus
Carl Rollyson

Course description: Reading Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*

As I Lay Dying portrays a family adrift and disintegrating, but instead of the Compson elite in *The Sound and the Fury*, the Bundrens are poor whites. *The Sound and the Fury*, centers on the Compson household whereas *As I Lay Dying* is a family road novel, with heightened language and interior monologues that deviate from the standards of social realism. Yet the characters are clearly recognizable as the country people that Faulkner associated with. Each Bundren, like each Compson, is distinctive, and yet all are concerned with the same questions: How do you mourn? How do you cope with what you have lost? How do you go on? This biblical story of fire and flood, of a family on a quest to bury their dead mother in her native soil, has a Homeric sweep, but with characters not usually thought of in epic terms. How Faulkner came to write this novel, why he chose a narrative method and style so unlike the work of writers like John Steinbeck and Erskine Caldwell, who created similar characters, will be the focus of this course.

It will be important to read *As I Lay Dying* in the Second Norton Critical edition, edited by Michael Gorra. The entire novel is included as well as articles about the cultural background of Faulkner and his characters, and a selection of criticism. I will be citing specific pages during class discussions, so it will be important for you to have the book with you during class.

Beginning April 20, my comments and class discussion will presume everyone has read the entire novel. Each class will deal with the style of individual sections, and the treatment of characters and themes. Look carefully at the way language defines each character.

The course is structured so that you are encouraged to form your own understanding of the novel and to raise questions and issues. Please resist the temptation to read what Faulkner said about the novel or what other critics say until you have completed reading *As I Lay Dying*. After you've read the novel and read Faulkner's comments and the contemporary reception, read the novel again, before reading the later criticism.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Note: Faulkner uses an innovative version of indirect discourse: "In indirect discourse, the character's thought is incorporated into the narrator's discourse, but it is summarized or reported by the narrator, rather than being reproduced as the character would have articulated it." In Faulkner's version of indirect discourse, he dispenses with the narrator.

April 6: Introduction to William Faulkner, his world, and what he wrote before *As I Lay Dying*

By April 20: Read the novel

By May 4: Read Michael Gorra's introduction and the Cultural Context section

By May 18: Read The Writer and His Work Section

By June 1: Read Contemporary Reception. Reread the novel

By June 15: Read Vickery, Brooks, and Sundquist in Criticism Section