Chapter 2

William Faulkner: Interrupted Catalysts

I

William Faulkner’s has been one of the defining presences in the American fiction. His immense productivity, both in terms of its breadth and innovation, has placed him on a pedestal not equalled by many in the world of fiction. Recording the ebb and flow of the emergent America through the fictional county of Yoknapatawpha, his imaginative recreations of the race-infested Mississippi present the life of a man divided within the twin pulls of artistic inclinations and ideological/social compulsions. The oeuvre of Faulkner, hence, is consistently engaged in investigations of form and content, of identity and ideology, of ontology and epistemology, of life and art. Though predominantly portrayed as a spokesperson for the modernist American fiction, Faulkner essentially embodies the American obsession with concerns of selfhood and articulation. This chapter therefore makes a prefatory study of the major fiction of William Faulkner with special emphasis on the self-narrative-society-consciousness continuum in it.

The purely individual strains and complexities of one’s art and the taxing struggle to make it reside amidst the social compulsions, the self-implied defeats inherent in such efforts and the final destination of all such struggles—these amount to travails of a coagulant consciousness in the
writers studied here. For Faulkner, as Andrei Bleikasten states, "the urge to write sprang from a passionate desire for self affirmation and self realisation. Boldly asserting his authority, insisting on his demiurgic powers with almost Balzacian self confidence, Faulkner was determined to create a ‘cosmos of his own’, existing for and by itself, of which he would be the sole owner and proprietor" (viii). This intention permeates and is shared by the major figures of his fiction. His fiction represents, "a consciousness, deeply self-aware and even self-beset" (Beck 6). Faulkner tries to take both poles of perception into account at once, the subjective and objective worlds, as functions of each other and his fiction reflects this struggle of a consciousness to evolve itself into being.

As in the case of Barth and Doctorow, what precipitates the creative impasse in Faulkner is the contradictory pulls of a consciousness powered by schisms of life and art, societal responsibility and artistic compulsion, the felt promise of narrative vent and the inner certainty of its futility. The protagonists of Faulkner are seekers of integrity of being. Bemused by the guiles of existence, they are frantically on the look out for means of deciphering themselves. Society/family beguiles them at one level and they turn to narrative as part of the quest for relief. But the plurality of meaning only aids further entrapment of their already warped psyche. The intense anguish of the question of existence throws the debate concerning the
genuine roots of the dilemma open: is it the angst inherited, one generation serving as the hapless, helpless receptacle of the deeds of a previous one? Is it a feeling attendant on the sickly perceptions of a troubled mind? Or can the cause be attributed to the tragic inability of the medium to deliver? Rather than help establish the locus of the dilemma, these texts only traverse the network of potential causes/sources regressus ad infinitum. In strikingly similar statements Doctorow, Barth and Faulkner have dwelt on the dangers of thrusting ideological function on the shoulders of creative art. Yet, such protestations notwithstanding, the thickly marked political contours of Faulkner's fictional writing speaks loudly on the conflicts in which his career is caught, a major one being the question of race in the slavery-ridden American South. These were the "demons" the demon-driven writer in Faulkner fought with to affirm himself, to successfully quantify himself, to also find what it means to be an American. This is further rendered complex by the strong influx of existential flavour in his works, the sceptical faith in the power of language and mind to capture reality, in spite of his professed faith in endurance and prevailment. The life and philosophy of fiction as envisaged by Faulkner, at times though hazy, point to the same concerns possessed by Barth and Doctorow regarding questions of selfhood and creativity. This is why Belikasten calls the novels of Faulkner "monuments to a self ever to be" (2).
Faulkner's genius flourished at a time when there was new, exacting and important work in the understanding of human perception and human consciousness and in the growing awareness that art originates in the human response to events rather than in the external world of discontinuous act. With his age, Faulkner recognized that the world was continually being reconstructed by the perceptions and conceptions of people interacting with it. It is this awareness that allows him to place something so mysterious and mischievous as the human consciousness within what is, after all, the art of a man who maintains an architectonic sense of his craft (Kinney xv).

As a writer Faulkner always took his fiction-making efforts as efforts progressively towards an ultimately unrealisable state of perfection, much similar to the view embraced by Doctorow. This explains his feeling that the great works, as far as far as he is concerned, whether it be from him or the writers he admires, are “splendid failures” (Meriwether 180), like his *The Sound and the Fury*. This argument is akin to the theory of identity as revealed in the fiction of Barth and Doctorow too, not to mention many such instances in the fiction of Faulkner itself. If it is socio-economic, philosophic elements which contribute immensely to the concerns of personhood in Barth and Doctorow, it is the racial-linguistic
plight that receives marginal edge in the unachievable flight towards a stable sense of identity among Faulkner's creations. This is not to deny the existential dilemma, which many of the major characters of Faulkner embody. It becomes all the more problematic in a writer who seems to feel quite strongly the need for correcting the social imbalance caused by racial and economic segregation. The situation bred by this curious ideology-art mix is peculiar and it reappears in similar guises in the writers to follow. These currents of self, narrative and society flow into each other, defying a clear demarcation of the constituents of the consciousness.

Though extremely complex and stunningly innovative the creative career of Faulkner had been, it still carries certain stock features. Social uprootedness, spiritual orphanage, existential dilemma which springs out of these, acute sense of isolation, feeling of being hounded by the tragic past, varied queries as to the value of the real, the quest for truth, the themes of racial purity and the agony and inevitability of articulation--all these make their repeated appearances in various guises in his fiction. The present study investigates the narrative consciousness in Faulkner's selected fiction through the concerns of self embodied by the major characters, the quest for integrity by his narrative and the social hurdles in the achievement of the same.
William Faulkner's initial foray into the realm of fiction is with *Soldier's Pay*. It is a typical introductory work, indicative of a writer who is yet to find his voice. But it is valuable as it drops tentative indications as to the direction Faulkner's fiction is to take in the future. The intense forms of alienation, feeling disoriented or displaced in whatever location the characters find themselves, is certainly strong in early works like *Soldier's Pay*. Galligan has no apparent destination during the train trip with which *The Soldier's Pay* opens. Donald Mahon who returns from the war is equally unsure of the place he is retiring to. The sense of loss of identity in Mahon is understandable in his lack of verbal response and in his inability to recognise figures from the past. The returned soldiers in the novel, as Garry Harrington has stated, "suffer from deracination and dislocation... moving like disembodied shades engaged in a futile attempt to reestablish some sense of personal identity" (15).

Instances of confusing identity abound, pointing to a pervasive sense of loss of perceptions of individuation. Joe Galligan and Januarious Jones, the two figures with artist orientations, signal the core art concerns Faulkner will persist with in the novels to come. Faulkner's second novel *Mosquitoes* lays heavy emphasis on what is to emerge as the pivotal concern of the writer: "the extent to which language reflects, distorts, subsumes or creates life" (Harrington 24). Like Barth's *Tidewater Tales*, it
dwell[s] on an outing on a yacht by a group of art-lovers. Though fairly grounded on discussions of art, the work simply shifts the backdrop without essentially altering the stage or the theme of his first novel. The fluidity of existence and the well-nigh impossible task of placing one's sense of belongingness to a sticking place are very much what the crisis of the text is all about. They drift about, vapid figures, spiritually dispossessed and vaguely self-defined. Talliaferro and Gordon, espousing and denouncing the significance of the word respectively, jointly tell the story of the sense of sterility the entire group of characters suffers from.

As I Lay Dying, Faulkner's tour de force, is a curious little work, with its style masking its stunning power, both in terms of what it says and how it is said. With its strange title, the novel, composed of sixty monologues involving fifteen characters, centers on death as well as life, on the process of meaning in a multi-voiced pursuit of /by language. The story involves the Bundren family and the fierce interpersonal relationships presented against the backdrop of the death of Addie Bundren, the mother. Though it hinges on the steadfastness of a family to honour the final wish of their dead mother, Addie, to be buried in Mississippi, to be united with her forefathers in the final rest, it has placed heavy emphasis on the issues of perception and meaning in/by language. If for the dead it is the ultimate journey of reunification, for the living, it is a journey of self-discovery, of
being born as the coffin is borne. When stripped of its innovative narrative scheme and intricate fictional pattern, the simplicity of the plot masks its innate depth. The tragic-comic journey, often horrifyingly stupid and at times scarily tragic, provides the staple of the narrative. It restates and reaffirms the core concerns of Faulkner's fiction, constituting the polyphony of voices, the multiple perspectives of varying vision, varied intelligence and perception. These are often biased, eclipsed and informed by the personal intelligence, peculiarities and prejudices. Each monologue defines the nature of the character as well as his/her relationship with Addie. The journey, which they undertake to realize the wish of Addie, is a journey, which exposes their real nature. The differing hidden motives of the trip or the different ultimate gains from the trip (for Dewey, it is abortion; for Darl, a train ride; for Anse, a new wife, etc) attest to this. With the burial of Addie, all the members of the family are free to realize themselves in ordinary, unheroic fashion.

"Addie is the center of As I Lay Dying. It is she who motivates the funeral procession to Jefferson. The Bundrens' goal is to find themselves, and somehow their relationship to Addie is the key to their identity. They must explore themselves in terms of Addie" (Garzilli 60). Addie, a woman of passionate individuality, is denied of "herself" when she is married to Anse, a man who shelters himself in wordy speculation, rather than
worldly action. Interwoven with the predominant issue of the ability and efficacy of communication is the question of meaning—meaning not merely of language/novels that we use to communicate with, but the meaning of actions, of life in totality, of making sense of ourselves, of existence and reality. All these are made open to scrutiny through the conventional tools with which we subject the whole lot of life’s processes to analysis and articulation. It is the word of the dead Addie, one who doubted the capacity of words to carry deeds on its back, that leads to the series of deeds that make up the novel. Hence it is a novel which sets the exploration of self in a background of death, a narrative on an attempt to bound being.

The Sound and the Fury is Faulkner’s classic which marks the end of his apprenticeship and heralds the greater pieces like Light in August and Absalom, Absalom!--a long period of creative outburst. Like many other novels to follow, it contains a strong dose of violence, family feud, of people caught in the grip of evil heredity. An intense tale of family feud and brooding melancholy, it brings to fusion the thematic burden of Faulkner with innovations in narrative techniques. Divided into four sections titled after the particular dates, the novel spreads the action from the childhood of Quentin, Caddy, Benjy and Jason to the Easter Sunday 1928, the day on which Caddy, Quentin’s daughter, runs away with a man from a circus show. With a twisted chronology, the novel challenges easy
comprehension. Still, at the heart, the text is intensely involved with the angst of a consciousness caught in the act of meaning--world as well as word.

The major bearer of the entangled, unextricated personhood, compulsively seeking a sense of self is Quentin Compson: “an alien body, a wandering mind, a dizzying sense of dissolved doings, feelings and sufferings” (Weinstein 173). The depiction of the last day of his life shows the man caught in the convolutions of tortuous thoughts as he struggles to free himself from the ambiguous relationship with his sister and the Compson family honor. Incest, miscegenation, honor, sex--the common ingredients which cause the imbalance in many a protagonist of Faulkner war in the character of Quentin Compson.

Identity necessitates a tenuous balancing of attachment and detachment in terms of a person’s relationship with the people around him, with the community of which he is a part. Personhood can’t be achieved through total isolation as it is bound to engender war in the subjectivity. This is because identity is as much a product of self-evaluation as it is a quantity formed in response to the evaluation of the community. Quentin’s obsession with Caddy’s virginity is linked to his personal/family honour. His attempt to convince his father of his supposed incest is part of his effort to put an end to the ambiguity and to withdraw from the world marked with
the taint of sin. As it happens in the case of all compulsive self-seekers, this will only lead him to isolation, triggering further violent cogitation. It never helps a man with Quentin’s speculative bend of mind to be in the shadow of a father who feels that “a man is the sum of his misfortunes...one day you think misfortune would get tired, but then time is your misfortune” (TSTF 103). His father only fosters these sceptic/existential elements, a running thread in the fiction of Faulkner.

The pivotal preoccupation of Quentin, which reveals his anxiety of a fleeting sense of self, is his terror of the passage of time. Apart from honour and virginity, time is ironically the catalyst, component and deterrent of his monologues. As Gail L. Mortimer states: “the world itself undermines his efforts to keep things stable as it fragments, flows and charges through time despite Quentin’s vigilance” (63). From the very beginning of his monologue, he expresses his struggle with time as he quests for the timeless and stable. The inexorable passage of time terrorizes him as it aggravates his feeling of futility and the fear of prolonging his existence, which he has already judged a failure. But the urgency of his desire to communicate and the fear regarding the uncertainty as to what is to be communicated keep him trapped in a hazy psyche. Hence the more potent portrayal of the struggle of Quentin is evident in the narrative anguish and anxiety he experiences.
Joe Christmas’ plight in Light in August is the same but ingrained with a different orientation: “[H]is blood wouldn’t be quiet, wouldn’t let him save it. It would not be either one or the other and let his body save itself” (LIA 449). What rocks Joe’s frail sense of sanity is not only the supposed mixing of blood, but it is the defining ingredient of his troubled subjectivity and the source of all his inner vacillation. Because, the basic problem of Joe in Light in August is not a matter of blood. His tragedy is, as Faulkner himself puts it: “not to know what he is and to know that he will never know” (qtd. in Gwynn 72). Joe’s precarious sense of self makes it hard for him to find acceptance among others and this defines his behaviour towards himself as well as others.

The prime block on his road to self-discovery is the ambiguity surrounding his ancestry/blood. As Mortimer suggests, “in his search for a stable identity, Joe doesn’t find it possible to live with both possibilities, that he is black and that he is white, because society possesses clearly delineated and irreconcilable expectations about how, in either case, he must behave” (16). The early years of his childhood he spent at white children’s orphanage has clearly planted feelings of black inferiority and self-hatred in him. As is common in Faulkner’s fiction, the emotionally turbulent childhood convincingly contributes to his disorganized sense of self and in turn accentuates the disturbing need to delineate a coherent
feeling of identity. The ensuing chaotic perceptions render him incapable of opting for either of the possibilities, the black or the white.

Joe illustrates the duality resident in every such protagonist from Faulkner—stasis versus motion, black versus white and self versus the other. Echoing the travails of the Doctorowian figures, he is severely lonely, every crisis forcing him to be on the move, sexually problematic, irate, carrying the hell of Lord Jim with him. The Southern American society he belongs to never delineates possibilities of existence other than as either wholly white or purely black. A mixed blood entity, where allegiance is fluid, is beyond the perceptive capacity of such a society. "Not knowing who he is in such circumstances leads inevitably to ambivalence about the very things he comes to recognize as 'self'" (Mortimer 16). This affects, in return, his perceptions of the world. This is how the tragi-circularity of the search for personhood takes its shape. Society has already incapacitated him from presuming a sense of wholeness and this has handicapped his perception of the people and objects around him. The eternal sense of becoming which the subjectivity is assured to experience has its origins here. Hence Joe feels that, "all the past was a flat pattern... all that had ever been was the same as all that was to be. since tomorrow, to be and had been would be the same" (LIA 206) and he "never got outside of that circle" (LIA 321).
Externalisation of inner motives, self-objectification, self-division—all these exemplify in various ways the war within Joe. Like Doctorow’s Daniel, again, it often happens in the novel that Joe repeatedly experiences his motives and passions as something foreign to his self. Time and again he refers to his body as “it” and watches things happening to “it,” as when “he watches his hands fumbling at the door” (LIA 210). Similar is his comment when he tries to get out: “if I can just get it outside, into the air, the cool air, the cool dark…” (LIA 210). As a descendant of Quentin who is directly influenced by his nihilist father, it is inherent in Joe Christmas that aspects of his personhood act towards disorientation. This massive disruption at the core of the self and the resultant flight and terror are pronounced in another significant character in Light in August, Gail Hightower.

Quite a number of characters in Faulkner’s fiction embody what Gail Mortimer calls his “one-is-two” formula, which manifests as dual nature of the characters (98). A novel like Light in August rests on the inner polyphony of the central characters. Gail Hightower and Joana Burden supplement Joe in the novel. They both lead isolated lonely lives, caged in the past, simultaneously excited and exacerbated by nostalgia. Hightower who seems to have “two faces” (LIA 89) and Joanna “a dual personality” (LIA 235) are caught between a need to hold on to the past
despite their faith in the futility of doing so in the present. In almost each respect, she constitutes a challenge in her ability to do a Joe. The currents which rock her inner calm are similar to those of Joe’s and are suggestive of the disestablished self. This preoccupation with duality is not confined to the major characters in the novel. It seeps down to the very bottom of the narrative and finds its echo even in figures like Hightower’s father or in Lucas Birch’s two names. The narrative ingenuity and the experimentation in word formation reflect the stated rut of personhood quest into which the consciousness of these characters has fallen.

Apparently the story of the rise and fall of Thomas Sutpen, Absalom, Absalom! is a powerful novel that actually restates Faulkner’s fictional pursuit of ontological and epistemological concerns against the context of personhood. Thomas Sutpen, a settler in the Old South, is a ruthless mixture of daring and shrewdness. As narrator after narrator attempts to explicate the motives of the design of Sutpen’s existence, the mosaic of dilemmas and conflict that people the collective psyche of the community is brought to relief. The author has infused his routine ingredients of fiction like race, incest, miscegeny and violence in his exploration of the elusive concept of reality and truth, which could often be alternative terms for selfhood. Yet the remix throws up an enlightening and enigmatic revelation on the flux of personhood. On writing, on polity and
the cultural entity called life/man, it posits observations of awakening. Quentin, Shreve, Rosa, Sutpen. Born--all are characters who play and revere this game of meaning and being. Recall of the past to reconceive the present and to realign oneself continues.

_Absalom, Absalom!_ unravels the issues of interracial complexity and identity in its entirety. Thomas Sutpen who selects Jefferson to seat his grand design of hundred acres of land and a mansion does so by trampling on the social conventions of the place and individual liberties. Born in the mountains of Virginia, it is the taunts of his early childhood that inscribe a design in him, a design with personally drawn racial boundaries and materialistic, predatory instincts. Hence Sutpen’s personhood comes to be delineated in terms of the self-imposed “grand design” and recurrent jolts to it thwart his self-realization. There is something of Coalhouse Walker of Doctorow’s _Ragtime_ in the man as he approximates the fruition of the project at hand. Pushing sentiments to the margins, he moves forth with single-minded devotion. He is taciturn and his voice is buried under layers of narrative reconstruction. Quentin and Shreve think about him in retrospective. It is Sutpen--his arrival, his doings, his relationships, briefly his design--that has upset the lives of the rest in the novel. Rosa Coldfield, the prime sufferer, has her troubles started, she says, after being insulted by
Sutpen, offering a marriage only if their union results in a male offspring. It intensifies, if not inaugurates, her self-alienation.

Identity implies invisible boundaries. Invisible because the demarcation that delineates the realm of subjectivity is fragile, mutable and subject to imminent collapse. Moreover it is as imaginary as it is psychic. Characters who undergo scrutiny on account of their threatened center in this study do have difficulty in keeping in position this separation. Either the past or the figures of the past inhabit them, rendering them defenceless. Thomas Sutpen holds residence in the lives of Rosa, Quentin, Shreve and the like, colonizing them and their times to the exclusion of everything. Rosa Coldfield fits the Faulknerian world in many ways. She is the unwanted child, born “at the price of her mother’s life and never to be permitted to forget it...a living and walking reproach to her father” (AA 46). As in the case of many a character in Faulkner, she lives with a father she hates and it hence causes a precarious sense of self in her from quite an early age. It is into such a life that Sutpen barges in her childhood.

Daniel Isaacson, Doctorow’s hero in The Book of Daniel comments on the unsettling multiplicity of people around him, causing feelings of self-dissipation. An echo of this could be found in Quentin too. Quentin’s “childhood was full of them, his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity. he was a
commonwealth... a barrack filled with stubborn, backlooking ghosts” (AA 7). Possessing an impotent freedom, he is as much baffled as troubled by the legacy he compulsively inhabits. Though he is keen to follow the legend to its end, Quentin is equally uncertain of its expected outcome. The feeling of being marked in life and the sense of repetitiveness permeate his life. “May be nothing happens ever happens once and is finished” (LIA 210), he muses dwelling on the all-encompassing, ever-pervading sense of inseparableness, futility: “Yes, we are both father. Or may be father and I are both Shreve, may be it took father and me both to make Shreve, or Shreve and me both to make father or may be Thomas Sutpen to make all of us” (LIA 210). Like Daniel again, Quentin simply can’t keep the world barred, preferentially. As is the case of Light in August and The Sound and the Fury the problems of indeterminacy, self-delineation, repetition and meaningfulness are pervasive in Absalom, Absalom!. The ones like Judith, Henry, and Shreve--they are all under the influence of the same kind of logic. Judith feels caught in the strings of a giant puppetry which is humanity and Shreve is tormented by queries of multiple irreconcilable possibilities.

Faulknerian involvement with the constitution of subjectivity is not to be entirely linked with his Yoknapatawpha milieu or being part of a world lit by racial taint. Even in works like The Wild Palms or Pylon, set in
entirely different terrain, theme-wise and narration-wise, they reemphasise the same explorative intent. The Wild Palms is composed of intertwining narratives, alternatively arranged, titled “The Wild Palms” and “Old Man”. Harry Wilbourne and an old unnamed convict are the protagonists who, except for the lack of concern as to their origin, subscribe to the conventional Faulknerian features. If the former is speculative, the latter is noted for being taciturn. But the opposition, the pairing, only throws further light on the author’s relentless juxtapositions and parallelisms in his effort to explore personhood. Wilbourne, a medical student who left incomplete his internship, lives with Charlotte Rittenmayer, wife of Francis Rittenmayer. His unsuccessful effort to abort her pregnancy leads to her death and his incarceration. Later, he chooses to die in the prison. The old man, in prison for his attempt to rob a train, actually goes through the whirl of a flood, officially sent to save a man. He gets lost, is carried away by the flood. The man saves a pregnant woman, sees her through her delivery and returns to the prison, much to the confusion and chagrin of the jail authorities.

This fine counterplacing of loves/lives helps to shed light on the complex issue of self and subjectivity. Harry, the lover, is often racked by moments of severe uncertainty—and the feeling that future holds in store for him only disasters manifold, “the immemorial blind receptive matrix, the
hot fluid blind formation” (WP 138). The nihilistic vein surfaces in him as the novel progresses. He states: “you remember. The precipice, the dark precipice; all mankind before you went over it and lived and all after you will but that means nothing to you because they can’t tell you, forewarn you, what to do in order to survive” (138). This is clear reflection of the inability of deciphering life’s equations, the failure to orient oneself and the conclusion that the past, even if mastered, offers no solace to the living. He is aware of the ability of life to tear him asunder and to perpetuate the war within. The old man perfectly balances the picture by offering the other half of the argument and hence the ceaseless tilt possible in the achievement /non-achievement of a tangible sense of belongingness. For the old man, to exist is to be in the prison. After thwarting every opportunity he had, he labours his way back to the prison and is rewarded with a long period of punishment. The tall convict muses: “Now there was a peculiar quality of repetitiveness about his present fate, how not only the most serious crises recurred with certain monotony, but, the very physical circumstances followed a stupidly unimaginative pattern” (WP 271). If Harry and Charlotte wreck the conventions of society in their attempt to assert themselves, the convict tries to be authoritarian in submitting himself to discipline and attempts to impose a pattern even on natural disasters like a flood.
Pylon, set entirely in town, is involved with the art of flying and reporting. In the final reckoning, though, it is as much about the reporter’s struggle to articulate an event /life, as it is concerned with the travails and tragedy of fliers. The agonising inability to fathom life and render it coherent is powerful in the reporter. He is insufficient in comprehending the dimensions of the drama which unfolds before him, in distinguishing between journalism and fiction, fact and truth. The schism of consciousness evident in every Faulknerian text is seen in the ambivalent tone that the author embraces in the narrative. He is, “unable to reconcile his admiration for the fliers with his presentation of them as examples of dehumanising effects of the machine age” (Harrington 55). As it is, the reporter’s attitude to life echoes those of the major protagonists of Faulkner. Life for him is “thinking about the day after tomorrow and the day after that and the day after and after that and... smelling the same burnt coffee and dead shrimp and oyster and waiting for the same light to change...” (PLN 176). He is impressed by the fliers’ ability to evade the monotony of life circumscribed by the regimentation of time, whereas the novel presents a picture of the life of fliers with essentially little difference from that of the rest—equally monochromatic and boring. Monotony, sameness, the failure to salvage a perception of difference, of relevance in things and events or the lack of it, fuel the reporter’s anxiety. Pylon, with
its aura of doom transplanted to a technologised backdrop, only puts the pet themes of Faulkner into another wary trial.

The ceaseless exploration of a conjectural pivotal to anchor ones life, hence, pervades the fiction of Faulkner. A novel like The Town or Go Down. Moses may not foreground the fissures of being alive like As I Lay Dying or The Sound and the Fury. But in such works, what Faulkner attempts in a subdued manner is not essentially different from the feverish approach of the issues in, for instance, Absalom, Absalom!. Doing away with the acute turbulence of the individual's inner life, it points to the public realm and the contrast only highlights his theory of "splendid failure" (Meriwether 180) applied to the concept of self. The difference is hence in degree, not in kind. They interrogate themselves to plumb into the past, attempting to access a decipherable past. The search splinters/deviates into a frantic hunt into the medium, sometimes as a consequence of the hazy nature of the goal sought and often because of the sceptic core the questors' possess. The private as well as public realms/functions of language are hotly contested in the polyphony of the narrative. Meaning and perception evoke queries of personhood as self quests for definition by narrative.
The word and the story are parts of a larger domain in which self is often sought. The art-centered, creativity-oriented nature of the works of Faulkner is a strong indication of the self-explorative quality of his novel writing. Faulkner's significance as a great novelist is perhaps eclipsed by his panache for experimentation with plot and narration. The novels which tell the tales of the men and women who seek the meaning of one's self, always ride on a narrative which attempts to perfect itself, which explores the possibility of reaching the perfect mode of communication. Quoting the terms of Garry Harrington, not just the non-yolknapatawpha novels, but every fictional piece from the writer has been "Fables of Creativity" (8). They are ruminations on meaning in life as well as art. Since they are the musings of a novelist stuck with the queries of personhood, the nature of communication and the fluent, unboundable realm of consciousness, these cohabit in mutual tension. The books become perfect fields where their mutual indebtedness and violations are captured.

Faulkner acknowledges the unbridgeable divide between life and writing as words can simultaneously represent and make us agonizingly aware that it can only "re-present". The struggle of man burdened with this consciousness is evident in his writing. "The problematic relationship of
language to outer and inner reality, its claim to referentiality and expressiveness, informs much of Faulkner's fiction" (Bleikasten 25). Because, as Bleikasten adds, "for Faulkner, the contradiction between language and life, if never finally resolved, could be coped with through the creation of another idiom: the idiom of art. What art is, how it relates to the world and to the artist's self" (25).

But what is to be asserted while agreeing with Bleikasten is that Faulkner is aware of the limitless nature of the search for the artistic communion as is he of the quest for personhood which drives him and his characters into a search for a poetics of art. Faulkner states during an interview that "Man is free and responsible, terribly responsible. His tragedy is the impossibility--or at least the tremendous difficulty, of communication. But man keeps on trying endlessly to express himself and to make contact with other human beings" (Meriwether 70-71). This is why Faulkner's "ruling concern was one of self definition in terms of life and art, not articulation of a theatrical creed of universal validity" (Bleikasten 28). Digging into the labyrinthine nexus that characterises the relationship between life and art, self and creativity, Faulkner seems to acknowledge Bleikasten's contention that "selves are fictions anyhow--more or less random, and more or less ingenious combinations of images and
identifications. Selves are texts: motley tissues woven from reminiscences and borrowings: the patterns may be new and original, the material never is” (3).

Faulkner is fascinated by the mutual empowerment, entrapment and emancipation of life and art. All his protagonists agonisingly approximate the reality via language, only to know the always known that the significance is more in the ritual of pursuit than in the capture of truth. But irresistible is the need and passion for the exercise as it defines their sense of belongingness. Erection of identity defini(n)es the capacity to narratively unravel the haunting past through their articulations. But the self called fiction never reifies into a sedimented entity at the bottom of the narrative. The liquidity persists. This explains John. T. Mathews’ argument that “language--both as characters manipulated it and as they are constituted by it in the novels-- simultaneously erodes the autonomy and discreetness of selfhood even as it creates them” (16).

The tendency on the part of Faulkner to probe into the intricacies of the creative/artistic functions of language is pronounced right from the beginning of his career. In Soldier’s Pay, Joe Gilligan and Januarious Jones are two muted artist figures, acting as complementaries. They represent opposed attitudes to reading and hence, language. If Gilligan is inarticulate, Januarious has a Janus-like facility with words. It clearly is the seed which sprouts in to full-blown language consciousness and narrative complexity
in the works to come. The attempt to bunch disparate material together during the narration is certainly the spade work for the modernist fractured structures of As I Lay Dying and The Sound and the Fury. Mosquitoes, the very next novel easily accommodates the linguistic emphasis aspired to by the writer in Soldier's Pay. The cost of art in the creation of life and the price of life in the erection of art—a theme that holds all the three novelists under study here—raise its vigorous head here. It lays at the heart of the novel the extent of the ability of language to reflect life/reality. It debates the question of the binary function of language, as a signifier of everything and nothing. "It is a kind of sterility—words", Fairchild admits "you begin to substitute words for things and deeds... and pretty soon the thing or the deed becomes just a kind of shadow of a certain sound you make by shaping your mouth a certain way... but you have confusion too" (MOS 210). Talliaferro and Gordon symbolise the conflicting artistic pair in Mosquitoes. The use Talliaferro find in language is its ability to "balance desire and fear of satisfaction" (Mathews 46), reflecting what Gail Mortimer calls "the dilemma of desire" (127) in Faulkner. As John. T. Mathews expresses it, "Talliaferro repeatedly sustains and suspends his desire by representing it, to create intimacy out of intimation" (47). Other characters in Mosquitoes also contribute alternate views on art and creativity. Mrs. Maurier, Fairchild, Patricia, all of them involve in this discussion of art and life. It is the only novel from Faulkner which projects art as the prime theme whereas in the later fiction,
he masterfully weds the artistic experimentation and debates in the investigations of self-realisations.

*Sartoris*, later retitled *Flags in the Dust*, is a continuation of Faulkner’s fictional musings on the language-experience conundrum. The novel, which brings the Yoknapatawpha into existence, confronts themes of representation and loss, articulation and accessibility, stitched to the Southern theme unlike in the novel of ideas like *Mosquitoes*. As in the case of Compson and Caddy in *The Sound and the Fury*, Horace and Narcissa Benbow are the sibling pair who uses language to present and prevent their incestuous urges. Judith Lockyer, writing on the connection between being and becoming in the novels of Faulkner, states:

Horace Benbow shares more than a troubled sentimentalism with Quentin, Darl, Ike and Gavin. All five characters are bound by an intense, complex relation to words that often intersect with that of writers. Each one is tormented by his desire to do the impossible--to create, order and preserve the essence of experience in words. And each lives with the sense that he, too, is a kind of failed poet. To discover the genesis of that failure, Faulkner begins to challenge the limitations of language that make any meaning possible (3).
Horace Benbow, who makes repeated appearances in Faulkner's fiction, is a significant name in his career-long exploration into the limits and potentialities of language. "Born aloft on his flowing verbal wings" (FID 180). Horace preserves the dream of glass blowing the perfect vase, akin to the chaste Faulknerian dream of seamless articulation. He states: "I have always been ordered by words, but it seems that I can even restore assurance to my own cowardice by cozening it a little" (FID 98). The passage is emblematic of the ambivalent attitude Horace/Faulkner embraces in their approach to language. His characters are "ordered by words" (FID 98) as Judith Lockyer points out--both composed of and compelled by them. It is this obsession which renders his outlook romantic and partly makes him a failure. Turned by his immense faith in language to a self-commentator-cum-observer, his communication time and again becomes self-communication. As Lockyer puts it, "Horace Benbow is, of course, dogged by the fear that language is mutable and not only representational throughout Flags in the Dust especially. But the struggle between doubt and faith in the power of words invigorate Faulkner's writing" (25).

Composed of competing narratives that vie for authority, The Sound and the Fury is a milestone in Faulkner's fictional journey in the rather elusive terrain of articulation. The sense of hollowness felt by Quentin
Compson and the vacuity that he attempts to fling are generated by and in turn fed by the fear of articulation. Quentin is a Horace Benbow powered with added scepticism and linguistic urgency. His is also Faulkner's dilemma of resolving the dialogue of the self and the world, and of retrieving roots from a troubled legacy and disturbing past. The mutually conflicting views he holds regarding the dual capacity of language to solve and dissolve the self make his quest perilous. Chronically withdrawn and severely upset, Quentin is pushed into suicide as he essays to decipher a circle of the consciousness circumscribed by the self-elusive ideas of language. This is why Lockyer calls Quentin, "the dark extreme of his author's continuing debate about language" (36).

A telling manifestation of Quentin Compson's linguistic dilemma is embedded in the incest story involving his sister with which he is in dalliance in his imagination. His desire is to have the story with which he grapples articulated and established. Like Horace in *Flags in the Dust* and Joe in Doctorow's *Loon Lake*, Quentin subscribes to the view that lying can aid survival. But, interestingly, Quentin wants to expose himself by exposing the verbal image that is stuck in him or in which he is stuck. Ironically he is bent on doing it while suspecting the outcome and success of it. In his fervent speculations, his monologues evolve both sides of the incest story and argue within himself. This constant friction, devoid of
ultimate fruition, contributes to the chequered identity. To confess having committed an act he is uncertain about, he thinks, will release him. But it as well releases him into the aftermath of having to chase the cause of the supposed act and the effects of the illicit imagination. Because, “for Quentin narrating is the art of asserting a self that is fitted with unarticulated, warring fears and desires” (Lockyer 42). This explains why language is held as a double-edged maker and unmaker of personhood by him. The incest story, the gap between the telling and the experiencing of it, its existence and legitimacy, keeps Quentin’s selfhood in a life-denying flux. Expression is enactment and enactment is, ironically, bereavement. Quentin’s nihilistic father only helps to confound the crisis as he advocates the fragility of language, further destabilizing the man’s ideal faith in personhood revealed through language.

Every section of the novel is actually an analysis of varied aspects of a different approach to the mind-language duality. Each section emphasizes as well as explores the relation of consciousness and language. It only fits Faulkner’s scheme of things that he opens his study with Benjy, the idiot. He, in the words of Faulkner, “is capable of only knowing what happened, not why” (qtd. in Merriwether 245). His is a consciousness that uses the medium of language without comprehending it. The reader/listener has to massively supplement the articulation of Benjy to derive his sense of
reality out of it. Through Benjy, Faulkner points to the isolation that lack of communication can cause. But simultaneously he also serves to contrast the limits of success of those who are not mentally impaired, like Jason or Quentin. Just as Benjy needs Caddy to formulate his thoughts and render them meaningful, they all rely on the interpretation and imposition of the ones around. The difference is in degree, not in kind. If Jason is plain and clear, his linguistic clarity often gives him away exposing the irony of his words. He knows the power of language and makes it a rule not to write anything down. He is a liar inveterate caught ironically in a need to decipher the letters of others.

Quentin Compson appears with less intense and urgent desire for life defining/denying communication in *Absalom, Absalom!* This anxiety is only subservient to that of Rosa Coldfield, who is inextricably caged in her own suffocating tale, seeking immediate narrative release. It obviously mars his peace but not as it did in *The Sound and Fury*. He speaks little and is a listener for almost three-fourths of the book. But in terms of intensity the novel belongs to Rosa Coldfield. Rosa, the compatriot of Quentin, ends in a coma if Quentin commits suicide. Rosa’s hysterical narrative opens the war of perspectives in *Absalom, Absalom!*. She tells her story in a “grim, haggard, amazed voice” (AA 7). She is, like Quentin, obsessed with the Sutpen story, committed to telling and retelling her part and she replays
memory to substitute the present. Her "impotent, yet indomitable frustration" makes a captive of Quentin. As Quentin puts it, "because she wants it told" (AA 5). Nothing else explains her choice of Quentin or her passionate rendition except the fact that she wants it told. It is an obsessive-compulsive need. So contrary to her claim, she does hold a brief for herself.

Absalom, Absalom! is a novel in which subject matter is meaning-making, the experiential nature of language. If The Sound and the Fury confronts the question of communication and the evolution of reality through attempted depiction of varying and varied states of consciousness trapped in language, Absalom, Absalom! does the same through a handful of characters whose insecurity resides in their inability to get the past straight. It is the story of intrusion and violation of another kind. The Faulknerian kaleidoscope, filled with recurrent queries of self and the world, is twisted to reveal a new pattern, equally intriguing and powerfully intimidating. Quentin, Rosa, Shreve, Sutpen—they all struggle to get the tale of Sutpen straight to illuminate the teller and the told. Meaning unfolds and grows richer as words accumulate. As sentences long to be instances of encapsulated eternity in their entirety, the feeling is one of being immersed in language.
From the perspective of the current analysis, *Light in August* might sound as an odd choice since it is singularly lacking in the stock narrative twists and experimentation in plots so characteristic of Faulkner. Presented through an omniscient narrator, the novel is narrated smoothly, except for an odd twist or two towards the end. In many ways *Light in August* reminds one of E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*—from the apparent straight relation of the tale to the subject of race on which it is built. But the heart of the novel actually involves the fictional debate Faulkner has been concerned with throughout: the relationship of life and language. Yet the angle through which the writer has chosen to effect the exploration offers a total change in comparison with the novels which have come earlier. Instead of placing for scrutiny the way language envelops consciousness by defying and restricting it, Faulkner approaches the public-private arms of the linguistic question. Language as cultural component and culture as linguistically determined rise to supremacy in the novel. To a great extent, this is a consequence of the central place racism enjoys in it. Certainly no text of Faulkner is without involving the issue of racism. But in *Light in August*, the novelist accords it the highest degree of prominence.

The leading characters of *Light in August* are aware of the hostility and necessity of words to them, even though in a less pronounced manner when compared to those like Quentin or Addie in *As I Lay Dying*. The
public perception of concepts like Negro, woman, Bible is subjected to curious and stringent analysis here. All the major players like Joe, Joanna, Doc Hines, McEachen are stuck in the social distinction of these words. Hightower dwells in an old story of his grand father’s wartime deeds. Books claim much of his waking hours. If he reads Tennyson, it is in the full knowledge that it is as effete as “listening in a cathedral to a eunuch chanting in a language which he does not even need to not to understand” (LIA 350). Light in August represents an array of characters who deny the relational and contextual nature of language--Doc Hines, McEachern, Calvin Burden, Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden, the first two being the foster fathers of Joe. Byron Bunch, another loner in Light in August, is beset with questions of delineating the complex relationship of the self and the polyphonic world around him. His effort is to make his word good. But he realise how ephemeral language could be. Hence Light in August is about the difficulties of perceiving relationships, of the impossibility of knowing people correctly.

Like Barth and Doctorow, William Faulkner too has targeted the formal versions of history as his fiction basically chronicles fictionally the South-Jefferson and Mississippi. As in Barth and Doctorow he blurs the distinction between fiction and history, which is another way of problematising the conception of the South, and that of language by
extension. The mingling of the imagined and the supposedly real informs the major bulk of his “invented historical novels” (Rollyson 7). In a passage reminiscent of Doctorow’s views on history, Rollyson comments on the methodology of Faulkner’s writing: “it appears that the central question in Faulkner’s historical novels is what the character thinks happened in the past. What actually happened may never be entirely resolved” (11). Faulkner too refuses to subscribe to the finality/formality of conventional history. He takes on the sanitised regional history of the South and pushes his apocryphal version forward. In Light in August, all the major characters are besieged by what they think happened in the past. Their knowledge is more often than not at loggerheads with their past truths. Either the falsity of their knowledge or the limits of it anguishes them. The omniscient narrator, like that of Doctorow’s Ragtime, as he attempts a recreation of the past through memory, acknowledges the public other of the private wor(l)d(s). The word problematises life for Joe and the word “woman” does the same for Joanna. Joe’s life is composed of “voices evocative of names and times and places” (LIA 115). As in Ragtime, the narration is repeatedly extremely ironical, which is one way of making explicit the dormant duplicity of language. The social restriction of lives through language is given thrust here. As Lockyer suggests, “the impulse to trust language absolutely irritates every one” (93). But language being the only tool, its inevitability has to be confronted too. This is why the
narrator repeatedly coins newer compounds to express himself. The novel hence alternates between linguistic fatality and necessity.

*As I Lay Dying* is described by Harold Bloom as “Faulkner’s strongest protest against the facticity of literary conventions” (*Urgo* 6). Death, the presence of an absence in the life of the bereaved in *As I Lay Dying* is as much the absence of legitimate presence brought forth by language and communication. In the midst of jumbled chronology, multiple, fragmented narration and the varied consciousness through which the locale and the events clip along, the novel centers itself on the elusive trail that meaning leaves on human attempt at articulation. Because whatever else *As I Lay Dying* is also about, it forcefully foregrounds the question of being and meaning. From the chronically sceptic Addie, who dismisses the expressive, referential power of language, through the Verdamanesque realm beyond language to Cash’s attempt to legitimate his talk, the novel takes a sound, deep look at the spectrum of human articulation. The novel, following the clear-cut division of the cast of Mosquitoes on the basis of their attitude to language, in fact, contains a whole variety of characters verifiable in terms of their passion for/prejudices against language. Anse, Cora, and Whitefield are those who find language reliable. Darl seems to be so perplexed as well as perturbed by their struggles to verbalize his experience. Vardaman is stuck at a
primitive level of mental experience with the language available. Cash is as precise as his carpentry is.

It is Addie who is pivotal vis-à-vis the question of communication in the novel. For Addie "words don’t ever fit" (AILD 157). Cowered down by years of unpluggable gap between words and deeds, she spurns the authority of language. Addie’s is the most outspoken denial of language but the stance she adopts is redundant. The polyphony of the cast, the shades of perception and the problems of articulation presented through them makes *As I Lay Dying* Faulkner's supreme exploration of the travails and tragedy of attempted communication. Darl, on the other hand, champions the cause of verbal communication. He is a man with intuitive power who first declares the death of Addie far away from home. Though mad, Darl’s efforts to make himself understood, primarily to the world and then to the rest, to make himself linguistically rational, rationally articulated, make him embody the Faulknerian travails of articulation. His extra perception of the insane is juxtaposed with the precariousness of Vardaman. Darl puts such a high premium on the linguistic assertion of his self because “for him, the self and its relation to others exist when he can put them into words” (Lockyer 77). There are moments in the novel when he seems to be trapped by the words in which he seeks refuge to deliver himself. Expression and entrapment circle the contorted psyche of his. His
seeing of the barn on fire is an instance. His description of the fire indeed serves to point to the bizarre alchemy of the real and irreal, the sane and insane, in the imaginative realisation of creative act. It also comments on the hazards of truthful expression as it invariably slips into realms beyond and things unsaid in the fear of risking incoherence. Narration is an isolationist endeavour, an attempt to cut oneself off, to detach the viewer from the viewed, with the intention of possessing the optional distance for legitimising the viewed as truth. Darl’s heightened efforts to narrate himself leads him into a lunatic asylum: “Darl has struggled throughout to intercept events by making them a coherent story but ultimately his language will not allow him to control events because he is also living the story he is telling. Once he removes himself, he can be objective, but that means the dissolution of himself” (Lockyer 81).

In Darl and Vardman, Faulkner has created a unique fictional study of the concerns of perception and articulation. Vardman is mentally deranged and Darl furiously sliding away from the shores of sanity. The difference seems to be one of quantity than of quality. But, as if subscribing to the Doctorowian flux to come, Faulkner leaves ambiguous the relationship regarding the cause-effect sequence. Is Darl mad because he is the receptacle of severe perceptions of an extra-sensitive psyche? Or is the psyche rendered thus because of a deranged mind? what is certain is
that the author has employed the couple of them to traverse the shifty equation connecting self and articulation, being and meaning.

Hence, the experiential nature of language is an explicit subject of his novels as Faulkner explores the link between consumer and language in the context of so much failed communicators/communication. The human instinct is to articulate the self, but again and again, we see that articulation is fumbled or choked off from an audience within the novel. For reasons as different as they are, none of the Compson brothers can communicate effectively. Language remains an interior tool for them and the effort is to articulate consciousness, not to seek solutions or to establish connections with the (people of the) world. Of the three writers discussed in the thesis, no one looks into the relationship between language and consciousness more thoroughly than William Faulkner. If Barth and Doctorow wrestle with the problems of narrative voice and articulation of reality, Faulkner places himself at even prior levels of consciousness in exploring the relationship of knowing and meaning. For Faulkner’s characters, it is the language and its articulation which constitute this consciousness. “[T]hey create identities that cohere in the texts of their lives” (Mathews 31). They do not merely recall the past, they exist in them. Hence, “the problem of identity is confluent with the problem of the narrative presentation of perceptions” (Mortimer 7).
Thus in Faulkner the persistence of the writerly dilemma of constituting a narrated self while relying on an ever elusive medium of language, is cogent. All his major characters rely on and emphasise "a sense of the interplay of perception and identity" (Mortimer 4). All the texts of Faulkner are, in one way or another, linked to the agony and efficacy of transcribing oneself, one's life into a text, and thereby, in the words of Walter J. Ong, "spatialising" it (110). Because, "a spatial orientation implicitly assumes that the location and definition of something (the conceptual drawing of a line around it) fixes it somehow" (Ong 110).

"This illusion of control is implicit in the act of writing, which by virtue of its finitude--the words on a page, seems to help us to represent tangibly the entities we are trying to think about" (Mortimer 37). All his protagonists are involved, as Faulkner himself, in an extended struggle to fix their fleeting sense of being with narrated lives, spatialised, realised beings. The texts in which these characters erect their "splendid failures" (Meriwether 180) of self-construction, hence, are manifestations of a consciousness in play. The pulls and counter pulls of self and language, men and text, to mean and to be, reveal the shifting fissures of consciousness. The issues of race and colour only heighten the schisms of consciousness and aid the play to further persist.
III

There are many obstacles in the pursuit of a narrated personhood in Faulkner apart from those presented by the inexorable entity called language. The goal of the major characters of Faulkner is to decipher the past and to compose coherence by bridging it with the present. The roots of their troubled legacy lie buried in the past and often are of social origin. It is the clash between the individual ethos and the coercive machinery of the society/state which triggers the crisis. As Faulkner is given to iterate, there may be "no such thing as was" (Meriwether 255), but if it is embedded with the present, that presence itself thwarts the characters' desire to unentangle themselves. To further mystify the liberation struggle, they all have pasts immersed in the racial conflicts of the past. The Southern cultural backdrop that defines Faulkner’s oeuvre provides yet another crucial determinant/deterrent in the constitution of their personhoods.

It is not at all surprising that together with Barth and Doctorow, Faulkner has dismissed blankly the idea of his fiction carrying any political affiliation or manifesto as such. Yet, an author who succeeds in problematising the Southern way of life in his novels could hardly keep off the signs of the times and he actually does not. At the very hub of Southern American culture and the fiction which feeds on it, is the racial question.
Among other things, violence, incest and misogyny creep always into his world of fiction as offshoots of the feelings of race and place. In his *Faulkner's Apocrypha*, Joseph R. Urgo takes an insightful look at the apocalyptic vision of Faulkner and its ideological implications. Faulkner, for him, is a twentieth-century writer of apocrypha writing against place and time, denying the universal/perpetual authority of any single established truth or knowing (Urgo 48). Faulkner admittedly is interested in portraying the scenario of “man in conflict with himself, with his fellow man, and with his time and place, his environment” (Gwynn 19). As Urgo modifies: “man is in conflict with himself, with the perceptions and values he has inherited and carries with him, preconceptions that can blind him to reality and prevent independent or genuine reaction” (59).

In every work of Faulkner—Joe in *Light in August*, Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury*—the major sufferers are recipients of a cultural scenario, a past they are compelled to accept, a history they are destined to live through. Their personal quandary is as much an outcome of the philosophic scepticism they possess as it is a derivative of being held captive by the deterministic cultural parameters of a shifting community. The role of community in the construction of a sense of identity is quite significant. There is a delicate dovetailing of give and take involved in it. In the way we feel our separateness and experience this knowledge
subjectively, there are questions of our perceptions and expectations about the world involved. "All of the choices that we make about how to live our lives are based on perceptions of the world and our felt role in it; even the most diverse behaviours will be variations on a basic identity theme that may be seen as a sort of core metaphor for our existence" (Mortimer 4). In a revealing study, Mortimer highlights the connection:

The identity themes for Faulkner's narrators and male characters, were we able to discover them entirely, would tend to be troubled ones, for the perceptions revealed in his descriptive passages show us that their world is experienced as unlikely to offer what they need. Instead, the central consciousness that guides us through Faulkner's fictive world assures that precious things in the world will tend to leave it and that the only way to prevent loss is to hold on, to create containers and to emphasise boundaries, to see things in ways that control the dissolution that is the normal state of things (Mortimer 4).

Faulkner's characters dwell in a very inimical environment, stumbling their way through, more often than not, with the implicit awareness of the cul-de-sac they stalk.
This is all the more relevant when it comes from a writer who has expressed serious reservations about the way the blacks were treated in America. As Cleanth Brooks has stated, "withholding from the black people of their full civil rights and socially forcing them in to segregated schools, Faulkner saw a flagrant denial of the opening sentence of the declaration of independence" (139). Faulkner’s planned essay, titled “The American Dream; What Happened to It?” was meant to be a critique of the American way of life. “On Fear” and “On Privacy,” the only two to be really accomplished, are a scathing attack on the American cultural ethos of the period. The concept of the freedom of the individual is at the heart of both essays. “We seem to be losing all confidence not only in our national character but in man’s integrity too,” Faulkner states (qtd. in Brooks 141). The release from mere subjecthood, which the American Dream promised through opportunities to become persons in their entirety, has turned out to be a mirage in terms of reality. In “On Privacy,” Faulkner describes America as having promised “a sanctuary on earth for individual man,” one in which he would be safe from “the old, established, closed-corporation hierarchies of arbitrary power...of church and state” (qtd. in Brooks 144). The individualism that Faulkner advocates here is what Doctorow asserts in his writings, citing Plato’s view of Justice: “the liberty to realise ones full being” (Brooks 145), not the corrupted version
permitted by American culture, where existence is transformed into a synonym for corporationalised lust and individual greed.

This anger and frustration of Faulkner against the American grain marks its appearance primarily in the form of the race-infested class divide in the South. In *Light in August*, Joe Christmas is ignorant of the manner and degree of recognition required for his acceptance in Jefferson's racial society. The presumed black blood in Joe unsettles his life forever. It renders him an exile for life from life. It pushes him out of the confines of both the black and white communities alike. He remains a culturally undefined entity in a society in which the parameters of existence and acceptance are fixed only in terms of the racial scales. He doesn't receive any models to follow or aspirations to realise. It is this secular void that coerces him to denounce the moral codes of both races. In the white-dominated Jefferson society of the time, a mulatto was considered more of an inferior black. The norms of colour-based identification and segregation has made the acceptance of a racially ambiguous one impossible. This leads to the uncertainty regarding the reception of Joe in the society.

In every sense, at every crucial encounter in the life of Joe, the black/white query has haunted him: his childhood as a white boy in an orphanage, aborted sexual initiation by a black girl and so on. Ralph Watkins argues convincingly that the danger that Christmas represents to
society in Jefferson exists because Joe has done two things: first, he has crossed the threshold between white and black and his existence brings together what should, in a racist society, be wholly separate (13). The Jefferson community's fear of Joe seems to stem from the ambiguous status he has in society because of his presumed mixed identity. They feel him capable of upsetting the rhythm of their lives as he can't be definitely labelled.

"Because society has treated him as a white man, although he is not part of it, he must conform to white society's morality codes. Joe's anger comes in part, not only from his uncertainty about his identity, but from society projecting on to him its anger at what it interprets as wilful deception" (Sugarmann 100). During the fifteen years period he is left away from Jefferson, Joe has wandered between his possible dual identities. "He had once tricked or teased white men into calling him a Negro in order to fight them or be beaten; now he fought the Negro who called him white...at night he would lie...with each suspiration trying to expel from himself the white blood and white thinking and being" (LIA 212). When he kills his white mistress, the white code catches up, asserting its whiteness and Joe's blackness, castrating and killing him. When Faulkner's depiction of the racist South and the blacks in his fiction are analysed--from Dilsey, through Joe to Lucas Beauchamp, the three landmark blacks
in his fiction-- the significance attached to the mulatto stands out. Being people of mixed blood, they are capable of manifesting the confusion and puzzlement, leading to ambiguities and ambivalences.

In the spectrum of varying contours of the self-society network, *The Sound and the Fury* claims a different kind of space. In it Faulkner explores the struggle of an individual, Quentin Compson, a Doctorowian Daniel minus the burden of a politically destroyed family legacy, whose hypersensitivity combined with cacophonous family relationships render him extremely susceptible to the concerns of shrinking selfhood. If in Joe’s case the external pressure far outweighs or at least equals the turbulence within, in the case of Quentin it is the inner hell that wrecks albeit it could be the consequences of his dealings with the immediate family surrounding and the cultural, sexual equations it embodies.

Instead of a single maternal figure guiding a child to a sense of separateness and identity, the Southern child was often raised alongside a Negro (and white) siblings by a black, as well as a white mother. In this context, the complicated sorting out of one’s self as a being with a coherent and clear identity of one’s own might well be made more difficult by the presence of two maternal figures and two races... in a meaningful emotional state. If a white child is nursed and
raised by a black woman, the white mother may be felt to be absent (Mortimer 13).

This greatly explains the feeling of a sense of inner vacuity in the central figures of The Sound and the Fury as well as Light in August. In the later stages of the Southern male child, this leads to fixing woman as a polarity and to erection of boundaries. This feeling of Joe reappears in another guise in the identity crises of Quentin too:

Woman are like that they don't acquire knowledge of people we are for that they are just born with a practical fertility of suspicion that makes a crop every so often and usually right they have an affinity for evil for supplying whatever the evil lacks itself for drawing it about them instinctively as you do bed clothing in slumber fertilising the mind for it until the evil has served its purpose whether it ever exited or not (TSTF 119).

This stereotyped conception of the female which is a Southern cultural derivation has exerted its pressure in demolishing the bounds of entity for the emotionally unstable Quentin. If finally Quentin has failed in maintaining the requisite distance and is compelled to submerge in the "waters of Caddy", a union which implies destruction, a togetherness, a to-get-her-ness, which denies the bounds of self he has sought, it is to a great
extent a result of the said fixation. Hence the vacillation of Quentin regarding his attitude to women and Caddy in particular roughly parallels the same of Joe, the black-white duality, the involvement-detachment pattern. It is loss of love that has disestablished the moorings of Quentin's psyche and it is a direct consequence of the colour politics in which the South indulged. The story of Quentin is, therefore, as much about the loss of self through loss of love and the discomfort of Faulkner's heroes with women is closely related to the disease of a culture of the turn of the century South America.

It is the remix of the same Southern ingredients of race, family and cultural moves which wreak havoc with the lives of Rosa and Sutpen in Absalom, Absalom!. In any dispassionate analysis of the Sutpen design, the genesis of the grand design is related to his boyish encounter with racist superiority and the concept of ownership of land. Till then, "he didn't even know that there was a country all divided and fixed and neat because of what colour their skins happened to be and what they happened to own" (AA 179). The initiation of Sutpen, born in the mountains of Virginia, into the colour-conscious rites of ownership cements his resolve to conceive a racially pure dynasty. Thomas Sutpen glues himself to the image which has rebuked his nascent psyche. The South and its racial politics are writ sharply into the backdrop of the character as well as of the novel. The saga
of Sutpen is that of the race-ridden South. If Joc in _Light in August_ undergoes the trauma of turbulent inner contradiction as to the colour of his self, in Sutpen it is the external, material trappings of the same prejudices that surface. His passion to fix his identity abidingly with the Southern symbols of land, mansion and male offspring is society induced. He deserts his first wife at Haiti, a rich planter's daughter, finding that she has Negro blood in her and she couldn't be adjunctive to the forwarding of the design. Rosa, too, is wrought by curious influences of the familial and personal nature, but of which, the least significant one is that of the Southern cultural mores. She is left to fend for herself, in her isolation, at Sutpen's hundred. Though at his mercy, she rejects his offer of a conditional marriage. Hence to a very good extent what turns Rosa into a psychic wreck is the existence of Sutpen and her father in a racial patriarchy.

Though the study restricts itself to selected works of William Faulkner, the aspects of his fiction subjected to analysis here runs through his whole oeuvre. Isaac McCaslin and Gavin Stevens exemplify the same in _Go Down, Moses_ as they attempt self-recognition through articulation. Gavin is especially significant as his voice spreads through as many as five of his works. The capacity of language to reveal as well as conceal, to tell truth as well as falsehood, confines him. _The Reivers_, a story of the growing up of Luscious Priest, too is involved with the question of self-
discovery at the stage of initiation. Moreover, it too voices the feeling of being overwhelmed in a world of plenty, where choosing and bounding becomes impossible. Hence even works as different from the exterior as *Pylon* or *The Reivers* at the heart embody the same urge to ease selves into emotional consolidation through therapeutic narration.

In the matrix of interpenetrating layers that make up the consciousness of Faulkner's characters, a clear-cut delineation of the purely individual and social is always a futile venture. In someone like Thomas Sutpen the pursuance of a socially rooted design is made a religion of and he is on the trail of experiences that cause/coerce him to catalyse the inner compulsion. The same goes true in the case of many characters studied here. As the evils of the South stretch to accommodate the evils of the land, the evils of humanity, the cursed South becomes a microcosm of the doomed mankind. Faulkner lets the blur called consciousness with its shifty bounds of self and society record itself. When expression precedes and equals existence, and existence denies and defies essence, the cycle of ceaseless attempt at expression and thus existence persist. The narrative houses this play in the consciousness as the self is both the object and the source of the consciousness. Each of the components of the narrative consciousness catalyses the other as well as serving itself as catalysts. The urge for self-definition pushes for linguistic path and language attempts to
gather the life around. As a socially determined culture and language exert the pressure back on the individual psyche, the turmoil is total. The catalytic activity of each is thus interrupted by the other component, leading to the ever evolving, ever emerging sense of self in the flux of consciousness—what Urgo calls, “the continuously created meaning” (24). Consequently, it drags along the material, spiritual and social irritants, repeatedly confronting and doing away with the search for absolutes, the signature of John Barth’s funhouses of fiction. The being and the knowing dissolve into each other, as does the key and the treasure in John Barth.