CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation an attempt has been made to show how Southern American women writers employed past and memory along with Southern themes like region, time, place, setting, family, myth and history in their fiction. In the course of the analysis the influence of the Civil War on Southern literature was explained. Before discussing Southern women writers at length, suitable references were made to the Southern Renaissance and the Southerner as American writer. In my study I have concentrated on select novels of four Southern women writers Ellen Glasgow, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty and Carson McCullers. These writers used different kinds of memories as narrative devices in their fiction. Their focus on memory shows a rising interest in a past that historians seldom address explicitly, even though history is mainly grounded in memory.

The Southern American women writers have rewritten a past full of pain and suffering into regenerative texts of bonding and nurturing. If the past casts a shadow on the present through memory, the present also pre-imposes on the past by means of memory. All writers are concerned with memory, since all writing is a remembrance of things of past; all writers draw on the past. As Maxine Hong Kingston suggests, “the reason we remember the past moment at all is that our present – day life is still a working – out of similar situation ; understanding the past changes the present. And the ever – evolving present changes the significance of the past” (1987:179).
Memory revises, reorders, refigures, resignifies; it includes or omits, embellishes or represses, decorates or drops, according to imperatives of its own. Scholars are in general agreement that the use of memory in the fiction changes both its materiality and its transmission.

The traces of memory in language and narrative can be seen in the ways individual writers challenge it; opposing memory is its dark shadow, forgetting; reconsidering memory’s relation to history and oral tradition by erasing and revising it or preserving and recovering it. As memory is nothing but reconstruction of past forgetting also plays a major role in this reconstruction process, as forgetting is an integral part of memory. In the process, each writer reorients the sense of both cultural identity and literary form. The novelists selected in this study have often employed their story telling to redefine history and culture and to legitimize personal and collective memory.

The discussion of these novelists reveals that there is an integral relationship between a novelist’s personal memory and the collective memory, and the fictional narratives partially inspired by these two types of memory. The complex and delicate relationship between the two terms “individual memory” and “collective memory” has been explored citing different critics and then an attempt was made to reconcile these two sides of the mnemonic phenomenon. As outlined in Chapter I, leading scholars have taken clear-cut and conflicting positions on this matter. In the longstanding tradition, supported by numerous philosophers and psychologists, memory is a subjective experience and memories belong to the individual, helping to build identity by differentiating this individual from others.
It is clear that the individuals adopt the memory of the groups in which they live: an individual’s personal memories will always interweave with the impersonal memories of the group, for memory is inherently shared and thus social in character. Collective memory thus functions as a framework within which individual memory is built and structured. So, collective memory is not a static individual idea, but a dynamic and ever-changing, social process. While often ascribed to institutions, collective memory can be found in smaller foci such as individual families.

From the discussion in Chapter I, related to memory different kinds of memories can be identified. In the novels that I have selected for study the four writers used different forms of memories in their fiction. For example, the memories of Dorinda are collective in Ellen Glasgow’s novel *Barren Ground*. In *Vein of Iron* some of the memories of Ada Fincastle are individual and some others are related to the social group (i.e.,) collective. In Porter’s *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* the memories of Miranda are voluntary, as for instance, when she was in delirium. In *Old Mortality* the memories of Miranda are collective.

The discussion of place includes its history so that both time and place play a role in identifying the literature. The Southern writers identify themselves with its history and place. Eudora Welty has astutely defined the role of place in literature in her essay “Place in Fiction.” The South as a region is clearly responsible for the memories of its past. The endless struggle of a place against its threats is made absolutely static by an obsessive memory and this is a significant part of the dynamics of place literature.
The importance of place in Southern literature begins with the image, the particular of the Southern scene, a quality of atmosphere or a simple human detail. Hoffman thinks that “the significance of place argues some accepted history or coordinated memory which is attacked, defended, or maligned, but is never ignored, or merely set aside” (1967:20).

A vivid, pervasive sense of place and local color ties the work of all four writers Ellen Glasgow, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty and Carson McCullers to its regional source in the Deep South. These women grew up and drew their inspiration from towns not much more distant from each other than a day’s travel. The social history of Virginia is pictured by Glasgow in her novels. Porter describes Texas, the most marked achievements of it and the general period i.e., during World War I. Welty writes of the historical South as well as the Southern aristocracy and the common people in her fiction. It resembles all those who have written accurately about Mississippi. Georgia looms large in the background of McCullers’ fiction. Chronology and geography might be trivial if it were not for the profound function of place in the fiction of all four writers and, even more important, if it were not for interrelationships of theme, character, and symbol which give immense value to their collective work – a kind of richness and power which is far less apparent or affecting when they are taken separately.

The myth of the Southern lady – the dominant myth of Southern womanhood – parceled out specific qualities and talents by categories of class and race, but each category then had its own corollary myth. Eudora Welty in The Robber Bridegroom used myth and doubleness and in the process reveals the
memories of the past, which are individual and historical. In *The Optimist’s Daughter* the memories of Laurel McKelva are a spontaneous juxtaposition of past and present. McCullers, though she sticks on to particulars of experience, presented individual and historic memory in *Clock without Hands*. It could be said that Southern women writers led the way toward a successful articulation of the Southern past with its future, its old myths of gender with the new. The Southern women writers’ response to modernity sought (or feared) change in less tangible arenas: structures of identity, constructions of gender, dichotomies of race.

The Southern women writers shared a definite historical tradition and they carried a distinctive burden as the darlings of their world. Their contribution to America’s literary and cultural traditions have been explored again and again. They have historically contributed to the shaping of the modern American literary tradition and revised the conventional methods of regional and gender representation. Functioning of memory is clearly reflected in their fictional works. A study of the relationship between memory and imagination implies the need to reflect on fiction and reality. Literature is one of the numerous possible supports for memory to expand it in time and space and fiction has the ability to revive the past. Unlike history, literature can and does bring back to life the dead; it breathes life into the voices from the past and makes it exist in the memories of the reader.

The American literary fiction of the post Civil War period traced, in an effective and compelling manner, the changing nature of American life and its greatness. The fiction of women writers is no exception to the common vigor that encompassed American fiction during this period. Among the several themes
which abound in Southern literature, those generally discussed include a widespread reference to Southern history. There are also references to the importance of family, a sense of community and one’s role within it. The region’s dominant religion is Christianity and the burdens and rewards religion often brings also find a place in Southern fiction. The concerns of racial tension, land and the promise it brings, a sense of social class and the use of the Southern dialect and the strong consciousness of its history also give the literature of the South the continuity of its tradition. So it is clear that the narrative of any fiction writer is very close to the social, historical and cultural contexts of the period.

All these themes are indeed recurrent in the novels under discussion. The four Southern women writers chosen for study, Ellen Glasgow, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty and Carson McCullers, used the elements of past and memory as part of their narrative technique; and their novels touch upon the issues relating to racism, slavery, identity, tradition and the individual, history, place, time and family. Glasgow is a transitional figure in the development of American literature. The creation of a believable universe from out of the Virginia past in her best novels, their undeniable insight into the human heart and their pervasive spiritual light and grace, gives Glasgow a permanent place in American literature.

Kennedy, Simms, Cooke, and Caruthers — all wrote of earlier times in the South: but their viewpoint differs from the new one in that regionalism contains an awareness of “presentness” of the past. It is this new regional quality in Glasgow’s works that puts her in the mainstream of the Southern tradition.
In her two novels *Barren Ground* and *Vein of Iron* Ellen Glasgow effectively presented the memories of the past through the protagonists Dorinda and Ada Fincastle. She wanted to believe that the anguish of the Civil War and Reconstruction had given the South a deeper spiritual awareness, a kind of socially informed collective memory. *Barren Ground* may be regarded logically as one of the scenes from country life in a social history of Virginia since the Civil War. This novel stands squarely in the doorway through which the tradition of Southern writing passes from the often barren past into its fruitful modern period. Under the lights and shadows there is the brooding spirit of place, but, deeper still, under the spirit of place, there is the whole movement of life. On one level Glasgow grounds the iron of fortitude in the tenets of Presbyterianism; but the basis of the “vein of iron” in Dorinda transcends this strict religious limitation. The validity of the complete separateness which is, paradoxically, the universal is established as Dorinda, solitary and strong, weaves her personal history. The novel even ventures to explore empiricist concepts of memory and personal identity as rooted in physiology. The impact of the novel, in large part, depends upon Glasgow’s skillful handling of the passage of time, so that the years go by naturally and inevitably.

Ellen Glasgow’s *Vein of Iron* centers on the love and marriage of Ada Fincastle, daughter of a resilient Scotch-Irish family. *Vein of Iron* has excellent descriptions of life in rural Virginia and of the growth of the urban South in a larger fictitious city called Queenborough. For all the descriptions of place and the intensity of the love story the main focus of the novel is spiritual. True to Glasgow’s assertion in *The Woman Within*, the lives of Dorinda Oakley and Ada
Fincastle conform to a theory of history which insists that individual history is an endless, repetitive pattern of human endeavor. Glasgow discusses many levels of history in the novels: universal, social, familial, and individual, with the last serving as the main symbol for articulation and definition of the rest. She defines collective, universal history in terms of the other three. Social history is determined by a series of calamities which produce existence-defining symbols operating within a basic, repetitive framework. The Civil War produced the system of tenant farming and hence the particular land which serves as a symbol in *Barren Ground*. The World War I foreshadows the dying of the previous culture and the onslaught of a mechanistic society and in *Vein of Iron* Glasgow shows how Ada struggles, as does Dorinda.

Similarly, familial history is emphasized as following the same general pattern of cataclysm and struggle in social history. A great emphasis is placed on the power of ancestral heritage in the two novels. Both Dorinda and Ada had, in their ancestral past, figures that stood against social upheaval and change. These were the figures who had the “vein of iron,” and who not only survived but also triumphed over the circumstances of their lives. These ancestors were responsible for founding a family line and for establishing the houses in which Dorinda and Ada are born and to which they inevitably return. Dorinda and Ada had pioneer ancestors who weathered the shock of settling in a new land and facing the Indian Wars and Civil War. These ancestors managed, in their survival, to pass along the basic pioneer spirit. Individual history, which receives Glasgow’s most avid attention, is actually an acute, personalized representation of the basic model of social and familial history.
The flow of the individual histories of Dorinda and Ada controls the structure of the novel as a whole. In both novels the strong, reserved community and the prevalent Presbyterian heritage are a brilliant backdrop for the elemental conflict between will and desire. The imaginative world Glasgow creates in the two novels is defined by this struggle and the social world parallels the particular symbols of the individual struggle: the land and broomsedge in *Barren Ground* and the mechanization in *Vein of Iron*.

Glasgow’s novels occupy a unique place in the development of Southern fiction, for in them can be seen the significant changes which the tradition has undergone. Her early revolt illuminates the characteristics and the inadequacies of the romance conventions, which served Southern novelists throughout the nineteenth century. In her work some stock characters such as the Byronic aristocrat were discarded; others were given new status. She continued the traditional rhetorical style, yet she introduced a theory of realism and a radically new attitude toward her cultural heritage. From an historical perspective these and other changes modify the tradition. Glasgow’s later novels, moreover, in their new outlook on industrialism, in their regionalism, and in their use of the family as a symbol, display the central concerns and viewpoints in the fiction of the Southern revival. While her novels bear the distinctive stamp of her own personality, they are an index to the achievements in Southern literature during the last thirty years of her literary career.

The great organizing ideas of Glasgow’s fiction are the conflicts between tradition and change, matter and spirit, the individual and society. The natural bent
of her mind taught her that realism and irony were the best roots with which to fashion a new Southern fiction to take the place of the sentimental stories of glorified aristocratic past that dominated the regional fiction of her day.

In her works, Katherine Anne Porter is concerned with the burden of the past, the proper perspective upon it, and the necessity to move from it into the present. Though she is not in any way a regionalist or an historical novelist, she has a narrow sense of it and is preoccupied with the transformation of all life into art. In the words of Frederick J. Hoffman, “she is a dedicated artist, and the experience of her and her family, back into several generations, comprises what she calls a ‘usable past’, in the sense that memory, legend, personal experience, and required knowledge ‘combine in a constant process of re-creation’”(1967: 40). As Porter notes in many of her essays and interviews, memory informs her fiction to such an extent that it becomes a controlling metaphor. Although numerous critics point to Porter’s use of memory as a creative strategy, not a rhetorical strategy, in the Miranda stories, she consistently shows Miranda’s functioning in a Bergsonian realm of time, as past, present, and future converge through the vehicle of memory.

Porter’s Old Mortality, The Old Order, and Pale Horse, Pale Rider, all sections of the unfinished novel, constitute the so-called “Miranda Cycle” within her oeuvre. She used the elements of past and memory in her fiction while discussing family relations and myth. The two novels Pale Horse, Pale Rider and Old Mortality are full of memories of the past as they evoke many incidents that happened in the life of Porter herself. The story of Pale Horse, Pale Rider deals with the surreal world of Miranda’s dream-ridden, feverish consciousness. In a
series of flashbacks and additional dreams and nightmares, Miranda’s story unfurls as a structured stream of consciousness, full of symbols, distortions, and fragments of time. The novelist has created a structure out of these symbols from which it may be impossible to establish chronological time in this story. The rendering and utilization of myth in Porter’s stories is both subject matter and method. Porter’s subject matter is Southern attitudes as expressed through family history, and where the theme is concerned with the nature of reality – particularly with self-definition. Porter’s Southern history, whether legendary or actual, provides the concrete experience through which “historic memory” may function.

The novel *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* faithfully depicts the condition of the United States of America during World War I, illustrating Porter’s ability to absorb and reflect the past. Miranda, who looks at every man on his own merit, has war propaganda penetrate her subconscious. The novel presents the flow of thoughts, sensations, associations, fears, reflections, and memories of Miranda from full conscious to semi-conscious to unconscious delirium. Elements of Porter’s artistic style in moulding Miranda’s personality is clearly seen in the distortions of the conventional time sequence in the interweaving of past, present and future time and the blending of fantasy with reality in order to render the sub–surface complexity. In this novel many artistic elements have been meticulously woven together to express a powerful and enlightening statement of Porter’s vision of the human condition during the war. This novel bridges the separation between memory and history as the events in it act both as a personal recollection of the event and as a document recording the event.
Old Mortality is apparently Amy’s story, told from a number of points of view, but all is sifted through Miranda’s perception. In actuality, the chronology of the story belongs to Miranda, and the tale depends primarily on what she will do with the legend of Amy and the bitter reality of Cousin Eva. The novel centers around the family myth, the legend of Amy, and it is a mixture of legend and memory. Of all her stories, Old Mortality is the most typically Southern. It has two prominent themes, which are in themselves Southern favorites; the family, and the legend the family creates. The mythopoeic ability of Miranda’s family is also typically Southern. The story is told from the point of view of Miranda between the ages of eight and eighteen, and its details agree with all the other Miranda stories insofar as they relate events in a family that had moved from Kentucky to Louisiana and from there to Texas.

In Old Mortality, Porter directs the reader to recognize the narrative construct written by the elder members of Miranda’s family. It is significant that Porter in this novel never writes from the perspective of the past, from the time that Amy actually lives and dies. Because others reconstruct her life, Amy never really has a chance to speak for herself, to Miranda or to Maria or to the reader. She is, essentially, a silent figure. Aunt Amy is “only a ghost in a frame, and a sad, pretty story from old times” (OM, 4). Miranda eventually rejects “the legend of the past, other people’s memory of the past” (OM, 88) and acknowledges that she will never know the truth about Amy. Ultimately, the story of Amy and the truth regarding her identity become parabolic, reflecting Porter’s concerns about the way history and identity are constructed.
In Porter’s world, there is no absolute, objective truth. *Old Mortality* then emerges as a story putting forth a dialectic of history and the slipperiness of truth. It is clearly about Miranda, a Southerner, and a child from the South, who is caught up in its history. In another sense, Miranda is not merely a Southern child, in Southern history, reflected through the sensibility of a Southern author, even though she is, partly at least, all these things. In her work Porter deals not merely with a memory of something that occurred, but with what happened within the long history of personal, family, and regional events; finally, within an even longer history.

In *Old Mortality* we come across the image of a dead aunt preserved in a family photograph. As the family memory contrasts it with the living present, the memory of illness and death during the influenza epidemic, the memories of Mexican revolutionaries, of moving picture companies on location, of Mexican women and West Texas farmers stirred to violence by passion flash through the narrative. As Ray B. West, Jr. says:

Partly these memories are controlled by a Catholic sensibility that seeks out the ceremony and order in the events, partly by a Southern habit of thought that metamorphoses reality into “romance”, not the romance of inferior Southern authors, who see the events as picturesque and quaint manifestations of a peculiar social order, and something nearer the “romance” that Nathaniel Hawthorne sought in his new England novels, a romance that links man of the present with his ideals, the long legendary concepts of man in a continued and continuing past (1977: 131).

The two Southern autobiographical novels *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* and *Old Mortality* are important as they bring out vividly Porter’s use of Southern life in fiction that is best described as personal and family history and to demonstrate that
Porter’s fiction has the power to stimulate profound feelings and an intellectual understanding of life and death.

Eudora Welty, held as the master of the craft of fiction, used the elements of past and memory, myth and legend, as narrative devices to enrich her fiction. The characters in her novels testify to the myth – making impulse in Welty. And they reinforce her attachment to the past. The past is also history, and history is used in Welty’s work as an imaginative record of those who have lived in the past. Historical characters thus take shape under her hand as an embodiment of various value structures. Memory, a powerful element in her technique, is a means of recapturing the past and is employed by most of the characters in Welty’s fiction. Through her protagonists Clement Musgrove in *The Robber Bridegroom* and Laurel in *The Optimist’s Daughter* she presents a dialogue on family, doubleness, history and time and in the process reveals the memories of the past. *The Robber Bridegroom* is one of her richest and most complex of works in terms of the variety of themes it explores. These include the general history of a region, the effects of the steady passage of time, the question of personal identity, the inability to distinguish between reality and fantasy, and the dual nature of both man and the world he confronts. Past and present become a continuum in Welty’s tale; they form a cycle symbolic of eternal return.

*The Robber Bridegroom* is backward-looking and myth-making, a relevant demonstration of the fascination that the past holds for Welty. Much of the charm of the novel lies in its fairy tale elements as Welty has domesticated them in early nineteenth-century Natchez Trace country. Its folklore and local history coupled
with Welty’s perspective on American history yield its own doublings. In the novel there are the mistaken identities, transformations, misperceptions, deceptions and historical comment as the other side of burlesque. The novel’s inclusive ebullience is a rare contrast to the realistic method of *The Optimist’s Daughter*.

Welty outlined her purposes concerning the doubleness of the story. It was her firm intention to bind together “local history and the legend and the fairy tale into working equivalents,” and though it is not a “historical novel,” the figures born of fairy tale and legend incorporate the spirit of time and place. As illustrated in Chapter IV, past as legend dominates many of the scenes in *The Robber Bridegroom* and it is also extremely difficult to separate legend and actuality. The line between history and fairy tale is not always clear, as *The Robber Bridegroom* points out. The place Welty chose for the novel *The Robber Bridegroom* is both real and imaginary. It is the timeless land of fairy tale, and the changing world of historical and geographical events. Though the Indians Clement are in fact, relics of the past, they are also overtaken by change and have to come to terms with it.

For Welty art becomes the medium by which man can apprehend the reality of human life within the eternity of the ‘here and now.’ Art, especially music, endows man with an ability to accept knowledge of time and the real world. Clement’s reflection about time and place sounds what is perhaps the most persistent theme in the novel – the relationship between the past, the present, and the future.

But the time of cunning has come, said Clement, and my time is over, for cunning is a world I will have no part in. Two long ripples are following down the Mississippi behind the approaching somnolent eyes of the alligator.
And like the tenderest deer, a band of copying Indians poses along the bluff to draw us near them. Men are following men down the Mississippi, hoarse and arrogant by day, wakeful and dreamless by night at the unknown landings. A trail leads like a tunnel under the roof of this wilderness. Everywhere the traps are set. Why? And what kind of time is this, when all is first given, then stolen away? (TRB, 143).

Man’s identity is tied inextricably to his attitudes both towards the past and towards the future. For Clement his old life before the death of his first wife, Amalie, at the hands of the Indians is infinitely more desirable than his present life with his second wife, Salome. But the past is forever closed to him except in dreams.

The past in her fiction is possessed, not as episode, but as ethical alternative. The past is possessed, also, as alternative way of seeing, of grasping experience. In these ways, Welty makes history meaningful in her fiction. Perhaps more desirable is her other emphasis that absorbs history into her fiction and thus she makes her stories more meaningful and as a result they are richer in texture and resources.

Welty talks about memory as an “inward journey, that leads us — through time forward or back, seldom in a straight line, most often spiraling” (1984: 102); she reminds us that memory, like her fiction, violates the chronological sequence, disguising cause and effect. It is only in The Optimist’s Daughter that Welty treats specifically of the nature of memory and its relationship to the past. For Laurel McKelva Hand in this novel, “the past is impervious, and can never be awakened.” Memory, however, is the somnambulist. “It will come back in its wounds from across the world, like Phil, calling us by our names and demanding its rightful tears. It will never be impervious.” (TOD, 179). Memory is a flower that blooms
on the dead wood of the past experience and renders the past “vulnerable to the living moment” (TOD, 179). Voluntary memory permits a spontaneous juxtaposition of past and present, which Allen Tate suggests, renders history ahistorical. Moreover, every moment of the past has been impinged upon by all that has come before and by all (including the present) that has happened since. Thus, the apposition of closely spaced images of the past allows an apprehension of time that must be perceived in sensibility rather than in the intellect. The future is of only minor significance in Welty’s fiction; it is her manipulation of past and present that elevates her story to the region of the timeless.

Certain memories become so much a part of the individual’s inner world that they lie dormant within, impervious to all time. A sensory perception accomplishes an evocation of the past, within the present moment that cannot be accomplished by the conscious intelligence of or voluntary memory. The opening phrase of Fur Elise in The Golden Apples reawakens in Cassie Morrison a memory of ‘June Recital’, and “like a wave, the gathering past came right up to her”(1949: 37). Ellen Fairchild in Delta Wedding hears the “whistle of flight” of the bird that has entered Shellmound, and “dimly there seemed to be again in her life a bell clanging trouble, starting at the Grove, then at their place the dogs beginning to clamor, the Negroes storming the back door crying, and the great rush out of this room, like the time there was a fire at the gin” (1946: 222).

In one of her autobiographical works One Writer’s Beginnings, Welty shows how the past joins seamlessly with the present in a masterful evocation of grief, memory, loss and love. In The Optimist’s Daughter Laurel struggles to
come to terms with her father’s death and with the life of the small Mississippi town he was so intimately involved with. Laurel recollects how the things are when her father, mother and husband were alive. Laurel’s resolution of the past is a product of listening to the silent voices of memory. These voices of memory are primarily visual rather than verbal.

In a night alone in the house she grew up in, she confronts elements of the past and comes to a better understanding of it and of herself and her parents. The novel ends with Laurel reflecting on her family’s history and with one final, not entirely conclusive, fight with Fay. Its moral tells us that we cannot change the past, but we can hurt memories and that is what makes memories live. So, the past is static invulnerable, but memory is fluid. In the words of Marilyn Arnold, “Laurel abandons her efforts to protect the dead from the living and to preserve the past intact only after a long night of wrestling with her own version of the past, confronting it, examining it, reinterpreting it, and finally freeing it from the chains of her sheltering need” (1982:30).

Assessing McCullers’s stature in American arts and letters, biographer Virginia Spencer Carr writes that “Critics continue to compare and contrast McCullers with Eudora Welty, Flannery O’Connor, and Katherine Anne Porter, whom they generally consider to be better stylists in the short form than McCullers. Yet they tend to rank McCullers above her female contemporaries as a novelist” (1975:81). Like her contemporaries McCullers explored the lives of isolated grotesques in twilight corners of the American South and produced a body of fiction marked by eccentric originality, artistic finish and a bleak poetic effect.
Her characters are, by and large, abnormal, egocentric, bizarre and lonely. Her aesthetic demands a poetic prose and a style which she skillfully uses to good effect. In Chester Eisinger’s words,

This aesthetic dictates an intense concentration on man’s most urgent emotional needs: a communion of dialogue and love. For her, further, the truth of the fable is the truth of the heart. It is not concerned with abstractions about the structure of society or with ideological conflicts in the contemporary world. She has banished these sociological and intellectual matters from her fiction, narrowing its range, perhaps to its detriment, in favor of memory and moods, and above all feeling (1965: 243).

As a Southern novelist McCullers shared some of Southern themes like place, history, time, race, gender and setting. The study shows that use of the elements of past and memory is comparatively less when compared with the other three writers Ellen Glasgow, Katherine Anne Porter and Eudora Welty.

_The Member of the Wedding_ has a strong undercurrent of the unrelenting autobiographical element. The story is primarily that of Frankie Addams, a motherless, twelve-year-old-girl who has some vague feelings of discontent and monotony that she experiences in the past. The only memories that she was able to recollect were the events and discussions that took place among the three members (Frankie, Berenice and John Henry) in the kitchen. She felt that her life was tedious without any change from the routine. As she has faith in the future she expresses her wish to become a member of wedding /member of her brother’s family.

As Margaret McDowell says, McCullers treats the characters “as a composite of the many un-reconciled identities within her individual psyche”
(1980: 81), leading to the complexity of the dramatic action in this seemingly simple novel. Frankie Addams, the adolescent girl, is thus given the dual personality of a child and an adolescent in every scene. Berenice, though appearing vital and domineering, is several selves struggling in a psyche at war within itself. Because of Berenice’s legendary history, Frankie’s response to her is properly double.

Though the cook Berenice is not the protagonist of the novel she is central to the significance of the novel as she embodies the past. She not only reminisces about her past married life but also speaks of racial discrimination and social state in South America. Berenice, like a mother figure, brought up Frankie. She corrects and cautions Frankie regarding her adolescent longings based on the wisdom that she had gained from her past experiences. McCullers showed her artistry in moulding these two characters Frankie and Berenice who are quite opposite to each other. The memories of Frankie in the novel are individual, while the memories of Berenice as she speaks about racial discrimination and social state are collective.

As a Southern writer McCullers has the ability to go beyond the particulars of an experience. The theme in The Member of the Wedding is adolescence. In the characterization of Frankie and development of the plot she goes beyond the particulars of an experience, without losing her concrete tradition/values and uses them in a suggestion of the past’s residing in and influencing the present. McCullers’ landscapes are much more confined than those of either Welty or O’Connor, for action is almost always limited to one or at the most a few interiors
- kitchen, or café and the streets and sidewalks of the Southern town where the story occurs. Interiors are the scenes for community, and sidewalks are paths of exploration for adolescent heroines.

*Clock without Hands* is set in the town of Milan, Georgia, and provides the novel with its time scheme and organisational frame. The novel is an exploration of the American South on the brink of desegregation — a novel about the difficult and lonely ways that the Old South comes to deal with its ghosts. Running parallel to Malone’s story is the history of the town’s leading family, the Clanes. These characters make this novel a forceful allegory of the South during the Civil Rights Movement. It is a novel which McCullers tried to situate in history intentionally, which indicates her maturing powers. Though McCullers focuses on the internal conflict of her characters in this novel, she attempts to give to the dramatization of this conflict a sociological base and a historical perspective. As in her earlier novels, McCullers continues to handle man’s loneliness in this novel too, but here it is more scathing. People in this novel are no existentialists nor do they live in history, in time and their life is like a clock without hands. McCullers thus universalizes the fate of man who is born with a clock without hands, merely measuring out the time of his life.

Judge Fox Clane and Malone share their feelings with each other and console themselves for what happened in the past. The individual memories of the judge are those of the suicide of his son. Malone recollects how he missed the chance of becoming a physician. It was the dream of the Judge to correct the South and work for its development to bring changes in the history of South.
Both the novelists Porter and McCullers explored racial issues in their fiction. In referring to a friendship between Miranda’s grandmother and a negro maid in *Old Mortality* Porter writes: “The friendship between the two old women had begun in early childhood, and based on what seemed even to them almost mythical events (1977:130). In *Clock without Hands* racial discrimination was shown very clearly when Shermen Pew, found it difficult to work in the Judge’s house as the judge had negative feelings towards the black people.

Memories are not always pleasant, sometimes they edit unpleasant details — anxiety, irritation, fatigue, boredom, impatience and pain of daily existence — in favour of the big picture, which is always done over with a flattering brush. For example in Porter’s novel *Old Mortality* Aunt Amy’s picture does not look pleasant for Miranda but the family maintain that she was known for her beauty.

Memory is described as the ability to retain information or to recover information about previous experiences. When we remember something, a process takes place in which our brains recover and reconstruct information about things we have done or learned. Sometimes the past events come back to haunt us and at other times happy remembrances help to brighten our days. The complete understanding of a person does not lie merely in evaluation of his outer actions and speech but penetrates into past experiences, memory and psychological makeup. In the fiction of the writers selected, as the story line weaves in and out of time, memories play an important role in character development and the progression of the plot.
The discussion of these novels proves that women have more incentives than men to be nostalgic – deprived of outlets in the present, they live more in the past, which is why they are the keepers of diaries, journals, family records, and photograph albums. The protagonists in the novels taken for discussion were able to grapple with the past from the family, diaries and photograph albums, as seen in the case of Miranda in *Old Mortality* and Laurel in *The Optimist’s Daughter*. Elaine Showalter notes that “each generation of women writers has found itself … without a history forced to rediscover the past anew, forging again and again the consciousness of their sex” (1978:11).

In the hands of Ellen Glasgow, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty and Carson McCullers, literature has become a powerful means of preserving memories of the past. Their literature is one of the numerous possible supports for memory and helps to expand it in time and space. According to François-Xavier Lavenne and Virginie Renard, “the act of writing, which is long considered the mortal enemy of memory, efficiently supports memory’s work” (2005: 5). The fiction of these writers has become a place of memory characterized by its ability to preserve individual and collective memories on a larger scale in time and space.

As a group Glasgow, Porter, Welty and McCullers have produced works within a certain span of time and hence these works bear certain marks of similarity. What has been discussed under place is one of these: and with it is the special disposition to the past, to tradition, and to a special set of events in history. A historical event like Civil War had significant effect on the literature of its region which suffered in it. As a set these writers have taken the pressures of both
present and past and made of them not only a new fiction but also a new method of writing as well, a complex set of literary interchanges which resulted in a new literary style and structure. While Southern themes like history, past, region, place, family, race, myth and memory are found to be recurrent in the novels under discussion of Glasgow, Porter and Welty, certain motifs like memory and family are less explicit in the selected novels by McCullers. Likewise mythic parallels and legends are used to a lesser degree by McCullers compared to the other three writers. Particularly, Glasgow and McCullers represent a break with tradition in some respects as seen from their novels taken up for study.

The attempt in this dissertation has been to indicate how the features of history, place, family, time, past and memory in literature establish and preserve an identity, a dominant tradition of a certain culture or society, influences its changes, its monolithic or pluralistic features, and “external political” relations with other communities and cultures. Literary art is historical not only as one of the phenomena that changes with time; it is also the ground of the historicity of an individual’s existence and his expression. As we have seen in the writings of the novelists taken up for discussion, narration has been used as a medium to reflect the elements of the past and memory; recalls personal experience through social frames containing personal or autobiographical experiences, social themes, novel ideas, and traditional values which have their origin in the American South. All these four writers add important fictional experiences to Southern literature, and they do so by investigating the identity and the experience of women in their unique Southern world.