CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the concepts of past and memory and how they are moulded by and in turn reflected in history and literature are discussed. In the process the relationship between past and memory and different types of memory have been examined. Literature is seen to have the ability to preserve memories of the past, which is illustrated with reference to American literature. The South as a region possesses a uniquely clear and responsible memory of its past as evident from several critiques of Southern literature. The next section therefore focuses on Southern literature in particular, and some of its recurrent themes like past and memory, race and family, time and place. From this the discussion proceeds to the contribution of Southern women writers who are closely bound together by regional qualities of setting, character and time.

History, Past and Memory

The focus on memory reflects a rising interest in a kind of past that historians seldom address explicitly, even though history is mainly grounded in memory. Scrutiny of the ways in which recollection and recall shape images of past and present, could help historians to bring their own concerns more visibly in line with those of the public at large. The collective past is apprehended as a personal and deeply felt extension of the present, and the events and viewpoints of bygone times are seen and judged in today’s perspectives.
Most often it is through conscious effort that a person summons ideas and words, and with them the disturbing emotions that can accompany memories – pleasurable floods of happiness or perhaps rushes of anger that come unbidden with the recollection of events. Humans share a common understanding about their memory: it is the remembrance of the past, its aroma and gatherings, its happy times and moments of bleak despair.

Archival material has a powerful influence on public memories of events in the recent past and, more generally, on the public’s perceptions of history in general. Barbara L. Craig says that “new generations, with no personal recollection of events can only experience the past indirectly. Their understanding of it will be shaped by community traditions and memories, nourished largely, it seems, by a growing buffet of popular historical books, films, and television programs” (2002: 279). The passing of a generation that experienced the traumas of both World Wars and lived to bear witness to the horrors it experienced in concentration and death camps emphasizes one finality – that our personal memory, with all its subtlety nurtured by recollection of direct experience, will pass irrevocably with death.

The various discourses of the self — sexual, racial, historical, regional, ethnical, cultural, national and familial — intersect in us to create our individuality and form a net of language that we share with the community. This “collective memory,” like individual memory, is a function, not an entity. We negotiate within this net of language, which traverses the body and the mind, for discourses intersect in both the body and the mind of the individual. Memory is
one of the ways our consciousness connects items and experiences in the net of language, for as scholars such as Maurice Halbwachs (*On Collective Memory*, 1950) have shown, we remember not only things that have actually happened to us personally, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, we remember events, language, actions, attitudes, and values that are aspects of our membership in groups. What we study are the traces of memory in language and narrative and the ways individual writers challenge it: opposing to memory its dark shadow, forgetting: reconsidering its relation to history and oral tradition: erasing and revising it: preserving or recovering it. In the process, each writer reorients our sense of both cultural identity and literary form.

Related to memory, Freud reminds us that “social, cultural and political life cannot be understood except in relationship to the formations of the unconscious life” (quoted in Amritjit Singh 1994:17). Novelists, however, have often employed their story telling to redefine history and culture and to legitimize personal and collective memory. Memory interrupts linear, conventional narratives in order to make room for multiple voices and perspectives, as, for example, in the “post-modern” effects achieved in the fiction of Gerald Vizenor. This use of multiple voices, although not entirely unknown elsewhere in literature, becomes in American ethnic writing a means of creating community as part of the dialectic between the past and the present in moving toward the future. It allows for a narrative exploration of the past that rejects or circumvents positivistic assumptions about truth and history. This interest in the past is integral to the ways in which alternative cultures oppose and subvert the dominant culture that has historically both repressed and assimilated them.
According to Aristotle, “Memory is an intellectually seductive concept, capable of drawing on a diverse literature, from the cognitive concerns of speculative philosophy on the one hand to experimental psychological probes of the processing-storage-retrieval function of mind” (Collection of Aristotle’s essays edited by R. McKeon 1941:18). Most of the philosophical thinking of memory lapses almost inadvertently into the idiom of the static picture by conceiving memory as a particular content of the mind, as an image, a presentation, an impression, and so on. As Ben Xu comments, “however, it is not just that we have images, pictures, and views of ourselves in memory, but that we also have stories and narratives to tell about the past that both shape and convey our sense of self. Our sense of what has happened to us is entailed not in actual happenings but in meaningful happenings, and the meanings of our past experience” (1994:262).

But memories are not one-way tracks, as early philosophers would like to suggest. If the past casts a shadow on the present through memory, the present also pre-imposes on the past by means of memory. It is worth noting that John Perry, a philosopher who has written widely on the relationship between memory and the personal identity, believes and quotes from Amy Tan that “A sufficient and necessary condition of my having participated in a past event is that I am able to remember it” (1989: 69). The one-way track memory is what Nietzsche calls the “inability to forget,” a symptom of a sick person who has given in to past failures and discomforts, making the present unbearable and the future hopeless. Memory is not just a narrative, even though it does have to take a narrative form; it is more importantly an experiential relation between the past and the present, projecting a future as well.
The notion of memory is not private and simple, but rather extraordinarily complex. Barbara L. Craig raises the following questions in an attempt to understand the complexity of memory. “What is memory? Is it recollection or is it remembrance? Is it the wellspring of reflection and imagination? Is it the ground we contest in struggles for dominance – of peoples, politics, and ideas? Is it natural to us as beings or is it better seen as an artifice, constructed much like we would build any other social structure?” (2002:280).

The conceptual differences highlight the complexity of memory, which is not a unitary thing. There are personal memories, group memories, memories of tribes and localities. In fact, memory has multiple and conflicting manifestations that jostle for accommodation and recognition.

Barbara L. Craig says that “memory begins in human psychology, that which defines our personhood, perhaps even our sense of being a separate and distinct person. Memory has a social role as well, shaping our sense of the group through its shared experiences. Because of memory’s importance to our humanity, thinkers of many hues seek to understand it. Personal memory, the nature of its existence in the mind and in the body, and the process of formation and recollection, are interconnected problems that engaged ancient thinkers as much as they intrigue contemporary ones” (2002:281).

In the writing of their fictional works, novelists often have to reflect on the functioning of memory, for memory lies at the heart, both of inner life and of human experience in general. Jill Terry says that, “any fiction rooted in tradition necessarily speaks of tradition, memory, and therefore identity rooted in the past”
(2004:523). It is indeed in the works of writers such as Marcel Proust or Jorge Luis Borges that the best exemplifications of the subjective experience of memory are to be found. However, from a strictly mnemonic point of view, according to François-Xavier Lavenne, Virginie Renard, and François Tollet, “literature provides more than a means of reflecting on memory: it is also the site of the rebirth and construction of individual and collective memories, which can then serve as a foundation for the writing of fictional works” (2005:1). Creative writing has a meiotic function and is as such a powerful tool capable of rescuing memories from oblivion and bringing them back to life, thus reconciling the past with the present.

There are fundamentally two types of memory which attract lot of discussion — collective memory and individual memory. Collective memory is not a static individual idea, but a dynamic and everchanging, social process. While often ascribed to institutions, collective memory can be found in smaller foci such as individual families. The term is coined by Maurice Halbwachs, separating the notion from the individual memory.

A single person’s memories of her life and experiences give her a sense of where she has come from and who she is, and can guide her decisions about the future. Collective memories work much the same way – they foster and define group activities, telling a group of people where they have come from, who they are and how they should act in the present and the future. In other words, “collective memory is shared, passed on and also constructed by the group or modern society” (Maurice Halbwachs). There are several perspectives on the
relationship between a novelist’s personal memories, collective memory, and the fictional narratives partially inspired by these two types of memory.

In view of the apparent similarity of the terms ‘Collective unconscious’ and ‘Collective memory,’ mention has to be made here of Jung’s theory in order to avoid a loose association of both the terms. Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist, considered the process of individuation necessary for a person to become whole. This is a psychological process of integrating the conscious with the unconscious while still maintaining conscious autonomy. Individuation was the central concept of analytical psychology.

There is a difference between collective memory and Jung’s collective unconscious memory. Jung’s collective unconscious memory is a deeper and more significant layer of the unconscious and consisting of archetypes, which he believed were innate, unconscious and generally universal whereas collective memory is a dynamic and ever changing, social process and is also sustained through a continuous production of representational forms.

A fundamental question lies at the heart of the phenomenon of memory: “To whom should memory be attributed? To the individual or to the group?” To disentangle this complex and delicate relationship, the terms “individual memory” and “collective memory” are defined and then an attempt is made to reconcile these two sides of the mnemonic phenomenon. Leading scholars have taken clear-cut and conflicting positions on this matter. On the one hand, the school that Paul Ricoeur calls “the tradition of inwardness” (2004: 96), has argued that memory is an individual phenomenon. This tradition is based on the conviction, already
enunciated by Aristotle, that it is in the very depths of his soul that an individual expresses what he has heard, felt or thought in the past. According to this 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. Augustine in the journal *The New Arcadia Review* pointed out that “the notion of reflexivity lies at the root of memory” (1999: 18). The development of this conception of the mnemonic phenomenon is linked to the emergence of the emphasis on subjectivity, giving rise to the concept of consciousness turning back upon itself, even to the point of solipsism.

Radically opposed to the concept of the subjective nature of memory is a school that Joel Candau has come to call “holistic rhetorics” (1998:21), which argues for the existence of a collective consciousness and thus asserts the primacy of the collective aspect of memory. This school, which Ricoeur calls that of ‘the external gaze’, casts into doubt the very notion of individual memory.

Several writers have attempted to reconcile these conflicting ideas on individual memory and collective memory. For example, Paul Ricoeur argues that “memory does belong to the realm of interiority, as every individual is the true possessor of his own memories” (2004: 126). However, memory also involves “the other” and fully bears its mark. From its declarative phase, memory enters the public sphere because a testimony is always presented to, and received by, another. Moreover, Ricoeur asserts that peers can assist an individual in the work of
remembering. He therefore draws the conclusion that memory processes involve both the individual and the group.

Joël Candau claims that “collective memory can only emerge when individual memories interact, and that this process inevitably leads to the partial homogenization of the representations of the past” (1998: 25). From this point of view collective memory can be seen as a regulative structure of individual memories. In addition, A.J. Mayer and N. Rousseau have pointed out that 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” (1993: 45).

This intermediary level is of primary importance for the field of literary research. A fictional narrative is inextricably bound to the social, historical and cultural context in which it is created. A writer belongs to a social group, shares a collective memory with it, and often deals in his fictional works with a past pregnant with meaning and that still impinges on the present. Moreover, a literary work is, in essence, an exchange between persons because it is meant to be read. According to François-Xavier Lavenne, “the narrative act and the work of reading therefore help to constitute this intermediary level that connects the realm of the inner life with that of collective memory” (2005: vol.3). Literature thus plays an important role in the dynamic processes that are basic to the creation and the handling of a collective memory. Literary scholars will often deal with novels in
which the characters, the narrator, even the writer himself, recount their personal experiences, but in which these personal narratives transcend the individuals and concern a much larger group of people, sometimes mankind in its totality. Literature is thus often an inevitable blend of individual and collective memories.

Another important distinction usually made is between involuntary memory and voluntary memory. Involuntary Memory is a conception of human memory in which cues encountered in everyday life evoke recollections of the past without conscious effort. Its binary opposite, Voluntary memory is deliberate effort to recall the past. The term was coined by French author Marcel Proust. From this philosophical root involuntary memory has become a part of modern psychology.

Proust contrasts involuntary memory with voluntary memory. The latter designates memories retrieved by “intelligence,” that is, memories produced by putting conscious effort into remembering events, people and places. Proust’s narrator laments that such memories are inevitably partial, and do not bear the essence of the past. The most famous instance of involuntary memory by Proust is known as the ‘episode of the Madeleine’, yet there are at least half a dozen other examples, as in “In Search of Lost Time…” (Marcel Proust).

Scholars are in general agreement that the entry of living memory into the sphere of writing alters both its materiality and its transmission. Maurice Halbwachs believes that “writing is the enemy of memory and causes its death. As long as a memory does not fade away, he claims, there is no need to fix it in written form; this only becomes necessary when there is no witness of that past event left, i.e. when a past event has no memory of a group for support and no one
any longer takes interest in it. That event then turns into History, which begins precisely where tradition ends” (1950: 68). Halbwachs here agrees with Plato, who in *Phaedrus* opposes living memory to text, which he considers the dead deposit of the past, even if he does admit that the writing down of recollections can preserve the past against the oblivion caused by old age – however, this is, in his view, only *memory on crutches*. Ricoeur, on this basis, asserts that “we cannot decide whether writing is remedy or poison for memory, because it freezes the always changing work of memory” (2004: 141).

This negative assessment of writing, synonymous with the death of memory, cannot serve the interests of literary research: literary critics usually highlight the positive role of writing for memory and emphasize the usefulness of novels and other literary works that represent and reconstruct past events. Candau argues that “a human being needs more than his brain to remember and thus resorts to ‘memory extensions’, such as written recollections, which allows some socialization and a better transmission of memories” (1998: 99). The analysis of numerous literary works has indeed shown that it is through the writing process that memory is constructed and that seemingly lost memories can re-emerge. For instance, Marcel Proust considered the “search for lost time,” or the “remembrance of things past,” as inextricably linked to fiction writing.

Even if writing can sometimes support and foster the work of memory, memory still seems opposed to fiction writing. As Ricoeur points out, “memory and fiction pursue different aims: memory, like history, pursues the past, whereas fiction need not do so, and when it does, it is in a way only as an addition” (2004:
Moreover, fiction is bound to the realm of imagination, while memory appears to reject imagination in order to focus exclusively on the real, for first and foremost it seeks to be faithful to the past. But memory is not as faithful to the past as has often been assumed and that imagination does play a major role in the formation of memories for they are always the products of a reconstruction of the past according to present concerns. Eudora Welty used this doubleness of memory in her two novels *The Robber Bridegroom* and *The Optimist’s Daughter* and which is illustrated in chapter IV. The relationship between memory and imagination is at the heart of a relatively complex philosophical debate. Ricoeur argues that these two mental processes have in common the ability to represent absent things. However, he highlights the fact that memory is directed toward the real, i.e. toward the faithful representation, here and now, of a prior reality, whereas imagination is directed toward the unreal. He therefore concludes with Henri Bergson that, even if a memory presents itself as an image, it is not the “de-realizing” function of imagination which is involved in its appearance, but its visualizing function. Ricoeur therefore asserts that it is usually possible to distinguish memory from fiction. Nevertheless, both Bergson and Ricoeur seek to guard against one of the pitfalls of the imaginary for memory, i.e. the intrusion of ‘hallucination’ into the realm of memory, which would lead to a loss of the reliability of memory and would tend to discredit its claims to be faithful to the past. According to Ricoeur, “it therefore emerges from a purely phenomenological analysis of memory that fiction and imagination constitute an obstacle or at least a potential trap for memory” (2004:145). Those who insist on a rigid memory of genocide are totally opposed to the recourse to fiction: they only allow literal testimonies and reject all
the additions and transformations that fiction necessarily implies. They seek to “denarrativize” the event and reject the idea that literature can be of service to the work of memory. Nevertheless, numerous writers have shown that memories have a certain plasticity and that, in this sense, imagination and fiction do not just set up obstacles for memory, but are also the prerequisite conditions of its very existence.

Human memory has been compared to computer memory, with a hard disk on which the past is printed and stored. Memories can thus be kept intact, as faithful images of past experiences, and can also be automatically retrieved. Saint Augustine uses in his *Confessions* the well-known metaphor of the “spacious palace” to describe memory and its processes:

> When I use my memory, I ask it to produce whatever it is that I wish to remember. Some things it produces immediately; some are forthcoming only after a long delay, as though they were being brought out from some inner hiding place; others come spilling from the memory, thrusting themselves upon us when what we want is something quite different, as much as to say ‘Perhaps we are what you want to remember?’ These I brush aside from the picture which my memory presents to me, allowing my mind to pick what it chooses, until finally that which I wish to see stands out clearly and emerges into sight from its hiding place. Some memories present themselves easily and in the correct order just as I require them (1993: 34).

Other writers, such as Marcel Proust who was directly influenced by Bergson, believe in the existence of ‘pure memory’. “They consider that memory is always faithful to the past and can thus be reconstructed in its entirety, as long as one holds the key to that past” (1968: 364). In general, contemporary philosophers, psychologists, sociologists and historians do not agree with this conception. For them, there is no pure memory totally faithful to the past; memory is instead always a reconstruction of the past based on present concerns and purposes.
Research in neuroscience has shown that memory does not retain and does not reconstruct the original impression. D.L. Schacter explains that “memory only stores fragments, bits and pieces of the past, that later serve as a foundation for the reconstruction of those past experiences” (1999:116).

Maurice Halbwachs also emphasizes on how the present concerns enter the framework of, and modify, the memories of past events. The image of a person or event continually evolves in memory, as it comprehends the past in the light of the present. New ideas and memories that originate from other persons can also fit in and modify our already existing memories. This constant readjustment of our memories (functioning on both the individual and collective levels) according to our present concerns and to the concerns of other members of our social group, is an unconscious phenomenon: the image of the past that stems from this modification therefore seems real. Memory is thus a dynamic and evolving phenomenon. For Candau, “memory is more of a constantly updated reconstruction of the past than its faithful reconstitution” (1998: 25). Forgetting also plays a major role in this reconstruction process, as forgetting is an integral part of memory, for the latter is selective in its reading of the past. This notion of the plasticity of memory is essential for literary research, for it introduces the ideas of fiction, creativity and reinvention of history into the very material of literature, i.e. personal and collective history.
Literature and Memory of the Past

A better understanding of the relation between fiction and reality helps us in reflecting on the powers of fiction in its treatment of memories and of the past, i.e. on its ability to convey something about past events and experiences that could not be expressed otherwise. First, it is clear that literature is a powerful means of preserving memories of the past. A.J. Mayer has shown that “memory, and especially collective memory, needs material supports to endure, such as monuments, movies, music, but also books and especially novels that allude to or recount historical events” (1993:50). Literature is thus one of the numerous possible supports for memory and helps to expand it in time and space. Because of its written form, a novel can last longer and circulate on a relatively large scale. Moreover, a historical novel will always appeal to a larger audience than a history book, thanks to the fictional techniques that make the narration more attractive than mere facts. Literature thus seems to be an almost eternal site of memory that preserves the memory of the past, passed down from generation to generation to readers who have not themselves experienced the events. As J. de Romilly puts it, “some have learnt more about Napoleonic wars from Stendhal’s novels than from history textbooks. Even the most convincing documents could not have made the memories of the Holocaust as vivid as Primo Levi’s books” (1995: 54).

Memory serves as a foundation for the writing of fictional works. There is a lot of scope in literature especially novels to recount personal experiences of the characters, the narrator, or sometimes the novelist himself. As literature is a powerful means of preserving memories of the past, the Southern writers used memory as one of the narrative devices in literature for the narration and
development of the plot. Katherine Anne Porter used stream of consciousness and flashback (recollection of past) as narrative devices in order to recollect the past in her novels *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* and *Old Mortality*.

Vincent Engel adds that, apart from its ability to preserve memories of the past, literature can also help overcome the three major obstacles potentially obstructing the recollection of a traumatic event. According to Engel, a traumatic event can seem “unimaginable, incommunicable, and unspeakable” (2000: 255). However, it is essential, when confronted with these three impediments, to imagine, communicate and speak, which can be achieved. Engel strongly believes in the powers of fiction in this domain and asserts against those who argue that the memories of genocides like the Holocaust are sacred and should not be tainted by History or fiction, that one needs to write to be able to live with traumatic memories. In Ricoeur’s view, when confronted with events ‘at the limits’ that seem impossible to imagine and represent through the detached discourse of history, one needs to explore other modes of representation capable of depicting the horror and preserving its memory. Unlike history, fiction does not have the obligation to be factual and can thus express things that would remain unsaid otherwise. Paradoxically, fiction is able to say essential things about reality precisely because it does not have to tell the truth about this reality: after all, one can always add that “it is only fiction.” Through the creation of fictional characters, plots, and narrators responsible for the telling of the story, and the transposition to another temporal and spatial frame, fiction can help overcome the obstacles that prevent the recounting and transmitting of a traumatic past. Moreover, since fiction does not
have to keep to the historical and factual truth, it can imagine what will otherwise never be known or said and explore the uncertainties of the past.

It should also be noted that literary art provides one of the few ways in which the past can be resurrected. Imagination, and thus literature, is indeed structured by a desire to fight against our finitude. Literature can create enduring worlds over which time has no hold. This ability to resurrect the past seems peculiar to fiction. Paul Ricoeur has shown that “if history recreates the past, it also separates it from the present in creating a sepulcher for the past, and thus effectively silences the voices of the deceased. Unlike history, literature can, thanks to fictional conventions, resurrect the dead and revive the voices from the past. Therefore, some fictional works do not only function as the sepulcher of the past, they also defeat death and make the past present” (2004: 141).

Literature is also the site of sharing and communication, for a literary work is always meant to be read. The reader identifies with the narrated event, takes part in it and makes it exist in his memory. As Vincent Jouve has argued, “literature, like cinema, is a privileged place where one has total vicarious knowledge of the other and experiences all the situations that would otherwise be impossible to experience. Literature has the ability to give the reader access to the inner world of characters, to their conscience and feelings” (2004: 63). Through the narrative category of “voice” (Gerard Genette), literature thus gives flesh and blood to History. Fictional characters lend their eyes to the reader and help him to put a face and a name to historical events and characters.
From this discussion, it is clear that “memory cannot be unilaterally attributed either to a single individual or to a group, but that there is always an exchange between the personal memories of an individual and the collective memory of the social group to which he or she belongs” (François-Xavier Lavenne and Virginie Renard 2005: 5). The act of writing which has long been considered the mortal enemy of memory, efficiently supports memory's work. Moreover, memory is not as faithful to the past as has often been assumed; imagination does play a major role in the formation of memories, for memories are always the products of a reconstruction of the past according to present concerns. Fiction, which belongs first and foremost to the realm of fantasy and imagination, is also in constant relation to reality, if only because telling something means telling it as if it had actually happened. Fiction is a site of memory characterized by its ability to preserve individual and collective memories on a larger scale in time and space. Moreover, fiction is a powerful device in the treatment of a traumatic past such as genocides, because it can transpose reality – an approach that appears profane to the champions of a rigid memory of the past.

So, fiction is one of the best means to recollect the past through imagination. Either individual or collective memory which is (re)presented in literature makes us to know what happened in the past. Therefore the American writers in their works highlighted what happened in the history of the nation.

David Lowenthal says, “equating history with fragments of popular culture familiar from memory and media replay likewise endears the American past” (1990:138). Famous film representations of historic features and events are more
recognizable and convincing than the authentic, original lineaments. Many Americans thus conflate past with present only for particular cultures, notably their own.

The representation of memory through narrative and other cultural forms — encompassing oral, textual, visual, material, and digital media — is understood in the context of particular lived cultures and modes of subjectivity, historical as well as contemporary. Analysis therefore involves the relationship not only between past and present, but also between different forms of memory, from the shared, public sites of memory, such as memorials, museums and days of remembrance, which are often designed with the aim of bringing together a group of people around a hegemonically constructed memory, to the private, personal memories of individuals which may become part of public memory but equally, may remain unspoken and, eventually forgotten.

Many of the Americans seemed acutely aware that history was both burden and inspiration, something to be cherished and overcome. They also understood that winning battles over policy or justice in the present often required an effective use of the past. They came to a realization that in late nineteenth-century America, blacks had a special need for a ‘usable past.’ The modern idea of a usable past reflects a desire to make sense of national experiences in ways that unify rather than separate us. The search for a usable past aims at creating a better world by incorporating achievements as well as regrets, pride as well as disappointment into historical accounts. “It is not well to forget the past,” warned, nineteenth century’s most prominent Afro-American intellectual, Frederick Douglass in his 1884
speech, and goes on to say, “Memory was given to man for some wise purpose. The past is the mirror in which we may discern the dim outlines of the future and by which we may make them more symmetrical” (1884: Speeches of Douglass, Reel 16). No amount of nationalism, individualism, or compassion could ever change Douglass’s conception of the memory and meaning of the Civil War.

Originally intended by cultural critics like Van Wyck Brooks and Randolph Bourne to trigger an “awakening” of the arts and intellect for a revolutionary overthrow of the guardians of genteel culture, the idea of a “usable past” came to have a more conservative thrust in the “Puzzled America” of the Thirties (1918: 339). Critics who were troubled about what the Depression fall from grace indicated about the American character and purpose looked to the “usable past” for indication of how to recover old truths. History and biography came back in vogue, and figures from the American past, like Mark Twain, Benjamin Franklin, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, who had been written off during the skeptical Twenties as shills for materialism and Puritan moralism, were rehabilitated as national heroes. To place such heroes in full perspective, a flood of works explaining critical periods and issues of history gave Americans their best means ever to judge where they stood in relation to the past and other cultures — we find that John Dos Passos’s historical study *The Ground We Stand On* (1941) marked his change from cynic to celebrant of American values.

Questions of color and race have been at the center of some of the most important events in American Experience. The Americans, including many historians, tend to accord race a trans-historical, almost metaphysical, status that
removes it from all possibility of analysis and understanding. Barbara J. Fields feels that “beliefs about race are a biological product rather than the creation of men and women in society” (1982:156). Historians ask us to believe that great planters, small land and slaveholding farmers, non-slaveholding yeomen, poor whites, town merchants and artisans, and urban factors — all shared a belief in “white supremacy,” which thus constitutes the central theme of Southern history (Barbara J. Fields 1982:156). She further says, “White supremacy is a slogan, not a belief” (1982: 156). And it is a slogan that cannot have meant the same to all white people. Those who invoke it, as a way of minimizing the importance of class diversity in the South, overlook this simple but basic point. In fact, the unity of Southerners’ belief in white supremacy is more often taken for granted than argued in its own right, because it cannot withstand serious analysis.

“White supremacy” says Barbara, “once disentangled from metaphysical and transhistorical trappings, cannot be the central theme of Southern history. It never was a single theme, and it never led to consensus on a single program. If white supremacy is not the central theme of Southern, let alone American, history, there remains the task of accounting for the prominence of questions of race and color in so many of the most important events in the American history” (1982:159). The question becomes simpler and less susceptible to mystification once the ideological essence of the notion of race is clear. Ideologies are the eyes through which people see social reality, the form in which they experience it in their own consciousness. The rise of slavery, its growth and dispersal, and its eventual destruction were central events in American history. The various
ideologies in which race was embodied became the form in which this central reality found distorted reflection in people’s consciousness.

The other form of memory i.e., Historical memory represents a community history, to consider the complexities that accompany commemoration and the history of commemoration of a country.

In the years following the horrors of World Wars I and II, historians began to explore the ways in which historical events were publicly remembered. They came up with the concept of communicative memory, which refers to the daily modes of communication in which the past is discussed, debated and given meaning. These forms of remembrance are generally oral and very much determined by those individuals who lied through or during the event in question. The illustration for historical memory has been discussed in Katherine Anne Porter’s *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* in chapter II.

There is another form of memory i.e., cultural memory used in fiction to show the cultural heritage. The term Cultural memory was first introduced by the German Egyptologist Jan Assmenn in his book *Das Kulturelle Gedächtnis* (1992), who drew further upon Maurice Halbwach’s theory on collective memory.

Memory is not just an individual, private experience but is also part of the collective domain, and cultural memory has become a topic in both historiography and cultural studies. These emphasize cultural memory’s process and its implications and objects respectively. Memory is a phenomenon that is directly
related to the present; our perception of the past is always influenced by the present, which means that it is always changing.

Cultural memory as a phenomenon is the distinction between memory and history. This distinction was put forward by Pierra Nora, who pinpointed a niche in - between history and memory. Simply put, memories are the events that actually happened, while histories are subjective representations of what historians believe is crucial to remember.

As people realized that history was only one version of the past, they became more and more concerned with their own cultural heritage which helped them shape a collective and national identity. The construction of an American identity accompanying the territorial expansion of the United States involved the rejection or negation of Old World and Native American cultures. However, with the rise of ethnic or minority literatures, several U.S. writers returned to this “forgotten” past, as fiction can also resurrect the past, owing to its generic conventions. These alternative sites of memory may have no more valid claims to representing objective reality than the federating concepts that formed an earlier national literature. “But in contrast to that work of homogenization, the new literatures of the United States are characterized by plurality, interactivity and synergy. They announce a multi-cultural United States whose features are not yet defined. Contemporary acts of memory are not simply nostalgic returns to the past; rather, in the most accomplished works, they are transfigurations of the present” (Construction of Memory in Contemporary American Literature).
Scholars of contemporary literature have been reflecting on the rediscovery and transformation of the past, following a number of possible directions:

(i) The representation of ways of life that were abandoned during the great waves of immigration.
(ii) The return to continents left behind—Africa, Asia, Europe.
(iii) The return to key moments in the history of the U.S.

Emphasis is given to the new artistic forms employed in these acts of memory and to the redefinition of American modes of expression that they entail.

As Holman says, “the question of the relationship between literature and the culture in which it is produced has been raised in many ways since Taine (Hippolyte Adolphe Taine) advanced his theory of literature as the product of race, epoch and era; but the development of a sizeable body of distinguished literature in the South in the last forty years has seemed to many to pose the issue in fresh terms” (1972:187). Holman comments that, “the Agrarian way, which the Fugitive Americans adapted, was, in a sense, a myth of the good order of the past used as a weapon of attack against what they believed to be the bad order of the present” (1972:192).

The issues discussed so far are clearly handled in a significant manner in American literature of the South and so the next section gives an account of the predominant themes in this body of literature.

**Southern Themes**

Southern literature is defined as American literature about the Southern United States or by writers from this region. Characteristics of Southern literature
include a focus on a common Southern history, the significance of family, a sense of community and one’s role within it, the region’s dominant religion (Christianity: Protestantism) and the burdens or rewards religion often brings, issues of racial tension, land and the promise it brings, a sense of social class, and the use of the Southern dialect. In its simplest form, Southern literature consists of writing about the American South. In the opinion of Chester E. Eisinger:

No region of the country is so hospitable to a conservative view of life as the South. And perhaps no region has been as deliberately self-conscious about its identity and so quick and persistent in asserting its unique quality. For these reasons, the South offers the best available argument for a regional discussion of American culture. It is an argument that must be respected at least to this extent: one must recognize at once the broad homogeneity of the literature coming from the South, seeing as a whole all that comprises the Southern literary renaissance (1965: 177).

In addition to the geographical component of Southern literature, certain themes have appeared because of the similar histories of the Southern states in regard to slavery, the American Civil War, and Reconstruction. The conservative culture in the South has also produced a strong focus within Southern literature on the significance of family, religion, and community in one’s personal and social life. The South’s troubled history in terms of its racial issues also continually appears in its literature.

Those who have sought the meaning of the Southern temper or of Southern identity have been in general agreement about Southern literature. In the South the past lives in the present, and it is this intense awareness of its history that gives the South the continuity of its heritage. According to Eisinger, “what the South must live with, wants to live with, from the past is the bone-deep knowledge of defeat,
from which it has never recovered; is the experience of poverty and stagnation in a
country that was otherwise rich and progressing; is the sense of guilt over slavery,
which gave it a profound and universal knowledge of evil; is the sense of social,
economic, and political frustration that the rest of the Union forced upon it”
(1965:178).

It cherishes from the past what it knew then, clinging to anachronisms like
the patriarchal family or a code of honor, and resisting change in every area of life.
So it accepts a given social order, a dedication to place, for this fixes a man in time
and in geography. Speaking about the relatedness of the individual on all the
levels of his being – to a family, to a social group, to a geographical location —
Eisinger comments that, “totality or wholeness is a recognition of the organic order
that encompasses all life, a providential order which includes man in society and
man in nature. Firmly fixed in time and space, the Southerner has at hand all the
stable virtues that tradition and continuity can offer” (1965: 178). The Southerner
is conscious that the tradition includes poverty, defeat, guilt, and frustration, which
he embraces as his own the tragedy of life. Out of the shattered promise, out of the
collapsed dream that was the Southern legend, the Southern writers have made,
says Allen Tate, “a universal myth of the human condition” (quoted in Eisinger
1965:178).

In 1852, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was published, possibly the most famous novel
ever written about the South. Authored by Connecticut-native Harriet Beecher
Stowe, this abolitionist novel focused on the evils of slavery and became the best-
selling novel of the century. The book was inspired by the passage of the Fugitive
Slave Act two years before, which punished those who aided runaway slaves. The book was highly controversial and fanned the debate over slavery in the country. When Abraham Lincoln met Stowe after the beginning of the Civil War, he reportedly said to her, “So you’re the little lady whose book started this Great War” (<Anti-Tom_Literature>).

In response to Stowe’s novel, Southern writers produced a number of pro-slavery books, including the so-called plantation or anti-Tom novels by John Pendleton Kennedy, William Gilmore Simms, Caroline Lee Hentz, and others. Anti-Tom novels tended to feature a benign white patriarchal master and a pure wife, both of whom presided over child-like slaves in a benevolent extended-family-style plantation. To counter this type of fiction, former slaves such as Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass wrote slave narratives, which painted a much harsher version of plantation life.

In the second half of the 19th century, the South lost the Civil War and suffered through what many Southerners considered a harsh occupation (called Reconstruction). Reconstruction era of the US, was the period after the Civil War, when economy and social structures were built. In the history of the US, the Reconstruction era has two definitions: the first deals with the changes sweeping over the entire nation in the period 1865-1877 following the Civil War, and the second the process of transforming the Southern United States starting during 1863 to 1877, with the reconstruction of state and society in the former confederacy.
Reconstruction, one of the most turbulent and controversial eras in American history, began during the Civil War and ended in 1877. It witnessed America’s first experiment in interracial democracy. In place of the Anti-Tom literature came poetry and novels about the “Lost Cause” of the South’s Civil War fight. The rising conflict between the North and the South i.e., the Civil War was reflected in regional literature. After the Civil War, literature gradually regained a national identity amid expanding popularity, as writings of regional origin began to find a mass audience.

As the US grew rapidly after the Civil War, the increasing rate of democracy and literacy, the rapid growth in industrialization and urbanization an expanding population base due to immigration, and a relative rise in middle-class affluence provide a fertile literary environment for readers interest in understanding these rapid shifts in culture.

In 1884, Samuel Langhorne Clemens, better known by his pen name Mark Twain, published what is generally considered the most influential Southern novel of the 19th century, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Ernest Hemingway says of the novel that, “All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*” (Southern Literature). This statement applies even more to Southern literature because of the novel’s frank dealings with issues such as race and violence.

Mark Twain defined the characteristics that many people associate with Southern writing in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. He even referred to himself as a “Southern writer.” *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is the story of
a boy who will not accept the kinds of freedom the world is able to offer, and so flees from them, one after another, to become to many readers a symbol of man’s inevitable, restless flight. Mark Twain created an indelible mark that is not only a prime example of regionalism, but as well as a classic in American frontier history. The impression he made with his fiction is so heavily felt that the line between fact and fiction becomes unclear. Fiction rarely captivates the imagination of an entire society, and to Twain’s advantage, many of his novels have become classics in less than a century.

History builds itself upon the backbone of past experiences and voices. Some of those voices are never heard and are lost in the ages. Others impact history so greatly that their influence cannot help but be discussed. Historically, many of the negatives in history become repressed. In fact, history builds itself upon the backbone of past experiences and voices, and only those voices who have been preserved either orally or in writing will be remembered.

Mark Twain aided in giving America another united voice that is capable of standing against the ages and of giving at least a faint impression of what life was like in the new frontier. It was rough, wild and of course full of opportunity. Most Americans regard Mark Twain with special affection. Lewis Leary is of the opinion that “Twain’s escape to adventure, to the past, to humor which moves through and beyond reality, is not unlike Hemingway’s escape from thinking through the simpler pleasures of wine, women, and manly exercise” (1960:5). The Mississippi River appeared triumphantly in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876). Mark Twain designed it “to pleasantly remind adults of what they once were
themselves” (quoted in Lewis Leary 1960:22). But the artistry in it is beyond the artistry of the raconteur who engraved minor realisms about provincial society for all time.

In the 1920s and ’30s, a renaissance in Southern literature began with the appearance of writers such as William Faulkner, Caroline Gordon, Tennessee Williams, Katherine Anne Porter, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren. Because of the distance the Southern Renaissance authors had from the American Civil War and slavery, they were more objective in their writings about the South. Writers like Faulkner also brought new techniques such as stream of consciousness and complex narrative techniques to their writings (such as in his novel *As I Lay Dying*). *As I Lay Dying* is told by changing narrators ranging from the dead Addie, to her young son. The late 1930s also saw the publication of one of the most well known Southern novels, *Gone with the Wind*, by Margaret Mitchell.

From the 1940s onward, Southern literature grew thematically as it embraced the social and cultural changes in the South resulting from the American Civil Rights Movement. In addition, more female and African-American writers began to be accepted as part of Southern literature, including African-Americans such as Zora Neale Hurston, Sterling Allen Brown, and Dori Sanders, along with women such as Eudora Welty, Flannery O’Connor, and Carson McCullers. Other well-known Southern writers of this period include Reynolds Price, James Dickey, and Walker Percy. One of the most highly praised Southern novels of the 20th century, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, won the Pulitzer Prize when it was published in 1960. Another famous novel of the 1960s is *A Confederacy of*
Dunces, written by New Orleans native John Kennedy Toole in the 1960s but not published until 1980 — it won the Pulitzer Prize in 1981 and has since become a cult classic.

The writers of the Southern Renaissance changed the belief in the South that the “Lost Cause” was a driving force in Southern literature until World War I by addressing three major themes in their works. The first was the burden of history in a place where many people still remembered slavery, reconstruction, and a devastating military defeat. The second theme was focus on the South’s conservative culture, specifically on how an individual could exist without losing a sense of identity in a region where family, religion, and community were more highly valued than one’s personal and social life. The final theme that the renaissance writers approached was the South’s troubled history of war, crime, corruption and dictatorship in regard to racial issues. Though there are the sociologists of the South who choose to write only about white Southerners in isolation from matters of race by referring to them as an “ethnic” group or entity, that tendency implies a fresh attempt to define the region and its culture without one of the major components. The matter of race is undermined, dismissed as somehow applicable only to blacks and inapplicable to new considerations of the region. The tendency toward exclusion has not remained applicable only to individuals, but has become one of the primary ways of defining the region and its culture, not only for cultural insiders but for outsiders as well. The words of Hugh C. Holman give us an insight into the Southern attitude:

The heart of the Southern riddle is a union of opposites, a condition of instability, a paradox. Calm grace and raw hatred. Polished manners
and violence. An intense individualism and intense group pressures toward conformity. A reverence to the point of idolatry of self-determining action and a caste and class structure presupposing an aristocratic hierarchy. A passion for political action and a willingness to surrender to the enslavement of demagogues. A love of the nation intense enough to make the South’s fighting men notorious in our wars and the advocacy of interposition and of the public defiance of national law. A region breeding both Thomas Jefferson and John C. Calhoun. If these contradictions are to be resolved, it must be through the ‘reconciliation of opposites.’ And the reconciliation of opposites, as Coleridge has told us, is the function of the poet. It is little wonder, then, that the paradoxes at the core of Southern life, although they have produced misery and catastrophe on many levels, have formed the materials for a literary expression uniquely powerful in our time, and have found in that expression their only effective reconciliation (1972: 1).

C.Vann Woodward views Southern history not as stories in dusty old library, but as the “Collective experience of the Southern people” (2004:96). It is in this collective experience that Southerners find their distinctiveness. This history includes Southern poverty in the face of American Abundance. It involves the experience of military defeat at the hands of a people who had (at the time of Woodward’s writing) never lost a war. But the South’s experience of “frustration, failure, and defeat encompasses not only an overwhelming military defeat but long decades of defeat in the provinces of economic, social and political life” (2004:96).

The South, however defeated it may feel itself in other areas, has triumphantly taken possession of the American literary world. Holman quotes the London Times Literary Supplement’s assertion that, “the literature (of the South)… has solidly established itself as the most important, the most talented, interesting, and valuable in the United States” (1954: xvi). As a group these writers are not only able to live at ease with a paradox; but also able to value paradox as a primary element of art.
Much of Faulkner’s writing was drawn from the history of the South and of his family. His writings often deal with the search for meaning, racism, the connection between past and present, and with social and moral burdens. He was born and raised in Mississippi, so the stories of the South were ingrained into him, and he used this material in his greatest novels. Unlike earlier American writers, like Melville and Whitman, Faulkner was not writing about an established American myth. He was writing about the “decayed fragments of myth,” with the Civil War, slavery and so many other events hanging in the background. Irving explains that this dramatically different backdrop “is one reason his language is so often tortured, forced and even incoherent” (Irving Howe). Faulkner was searching for a way to make sense of it all.

Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* became a famous novel. Howe writes that, “the extraordinary growth of the books to come will arise from his discovery of his native insight: the Southern memory, the Southern myth, the Southern reality” (Irving Howe). Faulkner was, after all, unique. There has been no other quite like him. He seemed to forever see the world in a new way, as Howe points out. Never satisfied with “the familiar and well-worn,” Howe writes that Faulkner did something that no other writer except James Joyce has been able to do when he “exploited the stream-of-consciousness technique” (Irving Howe). In *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), he combined a Yoknapatawpha setting with radical technical experimentation. It is the most systematically multi-voiced of Faulkner’s novels and marks the culmination of his early post-Joycean experimentalism. “Faulkner’s view of the history of Yoknapatawpha as a sort of cosmic dream of history is to be taken seriously” (<Britannica.com>). Faulkner’s materials are the native materials
of his world, his own “postage stamp on earth” as it is expressed through the Southern myth, the Southern dream of its past, and the Southern memory.

“The writers of the twentieth century used many different literary forms. They have, however, all sought in differing ways for some outside, some external control by which they can judge the value of the society which they discuss” (<Britannica.com>). This society is in many ways more nearly American and less distinctively Southern, except for its grotesquerie, than the societies of the Deep South or of the Tidewater and the Low Country; and the standard by which it is judged, whether it be that of social justice, of religious order, or of moral indignation, has always been an outer and different standard from that embraced by the local inhabitants. Ellen Glasgow and William Faulkner, on the other hand, have found the standards by which to judge their societies in the ideals of their citizens, however little these ideals found firm expression in either of the cultures.

Where Ellen Glasgow used the novel of manners and William Faulkner the symbolic romance to give their fictional representations of their South, Thomas Wolfe turned to a kind of fiction which was lyric rather than dramatic, which was characterized by autobiographical plots rather than by tight structures, and which dealt with the problem of the definition of the self in relation first to a middle-class Piedmont South and later to the great world outside the region. The South which Wolfe lived in as a boy and young man he saw as an entangling web to be broken through in the effort toward self-realization.

Faulkner and Wolfe, being “Southern”, shared many things — verbal power, intensity, probing introspection — but they differed in significant ways. Faulkner
was the novelist of the rural South and its traditions of social order, and Wolfe was
the spokesman of the New South, the South which was embracing the future of
industrialism and capitalism and whose sons dream of great cities and the vast
nation. Thus, where Faulkner used a real country and the material around it to
write a cosmic tragedy, Wolfe sought in his pages to show through the experience
of one man what it meant to be American. Faulkner’s characters are embedded in
history; Wolfe’s are dramatizations of attitudes that are national and epic rather
than sectional mythic.

Southern writing, from its beginnings, has been consistently centered on the
concrete, the particular, the actual, and, with varying degrees of excellence, has
busied itself with the representation of reality as seen through Southern eyes. So
the Southern writer has functioned as an American with a difference, and that
difference has been his unique contribution to the character of American art and
life. Holman comments that “it has expressed itself in three major ways: in his
conception of nationalism, in his artistic method, and in the picture of archetypal
man which his art has portrayed for Americans” (1972: 2).

In the period after the Civil War, when the local color school captured
American fiction, the average critic and reader arrived at a view of sectionalism11
much like that of Simms, (W.G. Simms cited in The Roots of Southern Writing by
C. Hugh Holman) the representative man of letters of Old South. The Middle West
became the focus of sectional talent, and the modern Southern writer, finding
“regionalism” everywhere noised abroad as a virtue of incomparable stature,
moved on from Simms’s position to a new one. In 1945 Allen Tate, writing on the
occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, defined *regionalism* as opposed to the provincialism of local color: “I mean the writer who takes the South as he knows it today or can find out about it in the past, and who sees it as a region with some special characteristics, but otherwise offering as an imaginative subject the plight of human beings as it has been and will doubtless continue to be, here and in other parts of the world” (1945:7). The national impulse in the Southern writer reached perhaps its most intense expression in the works of Thomas Wolfe, who, like his character Eugene Gant, sought to find and to express the meaning of his nation.

In the closing years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, American writers were generally arriving at a similar disillusionment with the concepts of progress and perfectibility and, bowing to the new voices of science — to Darwin, to Spencer, to Comte, to Marx — were formulating a literature of despair and calling into being an American equivalent of the French naturalistic novel in which man is seen as hopelessly trapped. In the Southern writer, by and large, the sense of defeat and of imperfection resulted in a picture rather of tragic strength than of pathetic weakness. Holman is of the opinion that “indeed the extensive use of Southern history by serious Southern novelists has been as a tragic fable of man’s lot in a hostile world: From Poe’s damnation to Faulkner’s myth of the reduplicating tragic history of Yoknapatawpha Country, to Wolfe’s half-lugubrious *Lost O Lost* and *by the wind grieved*; to the ambiguous calamity of Robert Penn Warren’s Willie Stark in *All the King’s Men*” (1972:11).
In the thoroughness and the consistency with which the Southern writer has dramatized the tragic aspect of his experience he has differed most radically from his fellow American writers. And, although they are Southern and have undergone, at least vicariously, the tragic experience, these writers are also Americans and democratic; they weave the tragedies around common people, sometimes contemptible people, characters lacking in the social or economic status that would give them significance. Holman says, “out of the cauldron of the South’s experience the Southern writer has fashioned tragic grandeur and given it as a gift to his fellow Americans. It is possible that no other Southern accomplishment will equal it in enduring importance” (1972: 15).

The South is more distinctively a region than any other section of the United States is. Far more important than its geographical boundaries — the Mason and Dixon’s line\textsuperscript{12} and the Mississippi River — are the boundaries of experience and tradition which have given it a unique identity in the nation. These experiences have taught it attitudes sharply at variance with some of the standard American beliefs. Among these attitudes are the sense of the failure, which comes from being the only group of Americans who have known military defeat, military occupation, and seemingly unconquerable poverty; the sense of guilt, which comes from having been a part of America’s classic symbol of injustice — the enslavement and then the segregation of the Negro; and the sense of frustration, which comes from the consistent inadequacy of the means at hand to wrestle with the problems to be faced, whether they be poverty, racial intolerance, or the preservation of a historical past rich in tradition.
The southerners define their very southernness by a unique and popular preoccupation with their religion’s past. Historians frequently quote William Faulkner’s supposed truism that in the south “the past is never dead. It is not even past” (1951:52). The historical literature on the South’s regional distinctiveness is permeated by the claim that white Southerners are distinctive because they are steeped in their own past and that the Southern past in its uniqueness produced a separate regional and cultural identity.

If history is to have any function in a region so seemingly dominated by heritage — that deep-seated if often incorrect understanding of the South’s past that infiltrates its literature, its public landscape and its politics — then historians must continue to work out the knotty relationship between the past, regional identity, history and tradition, according to Bethany L. Johnson (2010:657).

Presumption of racial affinity, commonality in the dominant view of the South as a region has meant that difference, not diversity, is at issue. One result has been curious: Thadious M. Davis says that “whites in the south became simply “Southerners” without a racial designation, but blacks in the South became simply “blacks” without a regional designation” (1988:4).

Any discussion of the past and the history of a region would include the role played by time. Time, in the form of chronology, knits the fabric of shared experiences into a common memory or history. Aristotle claimed, “it is impossible to remember the future, which is an object of conjecture or expectation … (and that) all memory… a lapse of time. Aristotle draws distinctions between memory
and recollection and further located both as dependent upon our innate sense of time” (Of Memory and Recollection).

Time too becomes a frightful entity for many Southern writers, whose concern with time reminds us of European rather than American authors. Time is Thomas Wolfe’s great enemy. Ellen Glasgow said that “Within time, and within time alone, there was life” (1943: 188), and thus the relentless passage of time is the decay of death. In his search for what Wolfe called “a stone, a leaf, an unfound door,” time and the past played a strange and treacherous role, a threefold controlling function in human life, the adequate representation of which became for Wolfe the great structural problem of his novels.

In Wolfe’s fiction the first and most obvious element of Time was the simple present that he called “clock time” — the consecutive flow of clock ticks, seconds, events. The second element was past time — that he called “the accumulated impact of man’s experience” (quoted in Holman 1972:91), which makes the present and determines the moment’s actions conditioning every instance of our existence, sometimes making the unpremeditated action of an insignificant person two hundred years ago more important to our actions than the immediate sights and sounds that surround them. History and memory by whose action history can be made real to the individual become for Wolfe, therefore, not casual by-products of experience as they have tended to be for many American writers, but essential elements of life.

In William Faulkner that controlling narrative is, at first glance, the most obvious element. For him, as it had been for Ellen Glasgow, Southern history was
the frame, a tragic fable of the human lot. In twenty-four volumes of short stories, short novels, and full-length novels, Faulkner has recorded the events of that history as he sees them impinging upon the denizens of imaginary Yoknapatawpha Country in Mississippi. That country represents in its complex history and its varied citizens one of the great imaginative creations of the American mind. The past exists so compellingly in the present for the characters that it sometimes seems that only the past really exists for them.

William Faulkner in *Light in August* addresses the burden of human guilt and the painful need for expiation. The Southern writer has been uniquely equipped by his history to draw the symbol of guilt and to serve, himself, as an example. For there have been few times in Southern history, early or late, when the fact of Negro slavery, the inequity of the freedman’s case, or the taint of second-class citizenship for the black citizen has not darkened the world of thoughtful Southerners. Faulkner says: “the South once knew an order and a tradition based on honor and personal integrity, but it was guilty of the exploitation of fellow human beings, the Indians and the Negroes. Because of this great guilt, the Civil War came like a flaming sword and ended the paradise of the noble but guilty past” (quoted in Holman 1972: 92). Faulkner also shares with Wolfe the quality of intensity. Everything in Wolfe’s world is vast, every emotion is cosmic, every action gigantic. But for Robert Penn Warren the problems of man are the twin problems of finding identity and expiating guilt. In finding identity, Warren believes, man moves from non-time to time, from innocence to guilt; for guilt is an inevitable property of identity. Warren repeatedly tells the story of that guilt and that search
in poetry, short stories, and novels, frequently laid in the historical past or involving legendary folk characters.

According to Holman, “in dramatizing this tragic view of man caught in his nature and the trap of time, Southern novelists have returned to a vision of human experience that is sharply at variance with that of much of America, to a vision that is essentially romantic and idealistic” (1972: 95). The Southern novelist sees man as a tragic figure rather than a mechanical victim and relates his meaning to a large structure of event and history. The Southern writer has created a kind of fiction out of the materials of his region and its past which can and does counterpoise the despairing view of man that naturalism and realism have taken in our time. In expressing their revolt against the modern world they have looked backward to a tradition and an order wherein meaning is to be sought and found, man has dignity, and history is a record of a purpose. Out of these materials they have formed a fictive world of great intensity, beauty, and worth.

Place plays a significant role in Southern literature. Discussion of place includes its history so that both time and place may conceivably play a role in identifying the literature. For John M. Bradbury the South is chiefly a matter of geography and culture, whereas for Hoffman, “a Southern author is one who was born and has lived his formative years within this area” (1967: 3). Thus as a recognizable historical and cultural space the South was unified by a somewhat or moderately similar economic and historical growth. Robert B. Heilman, speaking of the “temper” of the South defines that temper with a good sense of the scope and the particularity of Southern writing. In the words of Louis D. Rubin, Jr., “the
Southern temper is marked by the coincidence of a sense of the concrete, a sense of the elemental, a sense of the ornamental, a sense of the representative, and a sense of totality” (1961:48). While these qualities are shared by groups and areas other than in the South, their occurring together in one place and in one history is their distinguishing feature.

According to Hoffman “Southern writing is a particularized vocation, preoccupied with images and words. There is less of the abstracting sense, generally, than exists in other literatures” (1967:4). This statement may not appear to be applicable to such major writers as Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, and Thomas Wolfe. For Hoffman, “the sense of the elemental, the sense of ornamental and a sense of the incantatory powers of language, as well as a sense of its gifts of the grotesque and of the richness are the writer’s powers” (1967: 4). As for the “representative,” it is a compromise between the abstract type and the welter of particulars from which it is difficult to draw lines of personal and group identity. Finally, the sense of totality suggests perhaps the richest yield of time and place: an awareness of the qualities residing within a whole.

Southern Literature made a remarkable impression in the country during the 20th century. If one were to look only superficially at the scene and its history, one would think of many reasons, especially the crushing defeat in the Civil War; its lands and industries were depressed for several decades, its people impoverished; educational facilities were the lowest in the country; tradition survived in a few places, but was shattered elsewhere. But the opposing inference was also possible, and has often been made. Since the mid-1920’s Southern literature has grown rich
in its abundance of gifted writers, and it had more and more compelled attention to its virtues.

The normal literary reaction to industrial progress is a literature of protest. In the more traditional line of the ‘social novel,’ the South has had writers like T.S. Stribling, Erskine Caldwell, and Lillian Smith. It is true that the Southerner began in a way of life different from that of the North. Even so, one must distinguish between forms of legend and forms of the actual. According to Hoffman, “John Stewart has offered an interesting analysis of the alternative merging and separating of the two elements of the Southern past” (1967: 9). It is this act of considering, staring at, brooding over the past-as-legend, that dominates many of the scenes in Southern fiction. It is, as Stewart says, “extremely difficult to distinguish between legend and actuality, and the gesture of trying to do so is in itself a major preoccupation in Southern fiction” (quoted in Hoffman 1967:9). The South was also — and more self-consciously so than the North — a land, more easily identifiable as such than New England, for example, which was in essence an idea or a battleground of ideas. According to Frederick J.Hoffman “two important changes have occurred in more recent examples of Southern literature: the shifting of scene from the land to the city, and the intellectual and moral change, from the Southern past to the contemporary universal. It may be that the writers who develop these two themes still possess a sense, however undeveloped, of the South as a place, a point of reference” (1967:10).

He further “likes to explore fiction in terms of place and time, and to risk certain elaborations upon both terms in the course of identifying them with its
history” (1967:12). There is some justice in the suggestion that much modern literature is a literature without place, one that does not identify itself with a specific source. Partly this is a result of much exploration of universals, or of the fragments of universals. Human tensions are not necessarily associated with points on the map; in fact, they are often a consequence of the deprivation of place.

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. Its specific Southern quality may be simply an eccentricity of genre; it may be and frequently is a detail of idiom or manner which used to be labeled “local color.” Place builds out from it; it is made up of a cluster, or a mosaic, or an integrated succession, of images. The significance of place argues some accepted history or coordinated memory which is attacked, defended, or maligned (it is never ignored, or merely set aside). History within an established set of spatial circumstances moves easily into local culture, or tradition. Relationships of class or race or peoples have their own ways of modifying memory or adjusting to historical change.

If a group of writers have produced a collection of works within a certain span of time, these works should bear certain marks of similarity. 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. Surely a climactic event like the Civil War, which had both significant cause and basic effects, is bound to influence the literature of the region which suffered defeat in it. Robert Penn Warren, writing at the beginning of the centennial observances of 1961-65, speaks of the Civil War as “our only
‘felt history – history lived in the national imagination. It is an overwhelming image of human and national experience.” He goes on, by way of differentiating the Southern from the Northern reaction, to say that “In defeat the Solid South was born – not only the witless automatism of fidelity to the Democratic Party but the mystique of prideful ‘difference,’ identity, and defensiveness” (The Legacy of the Civil War: Meditations on the Centennial).

Along with past and memory, region, place and time, the writers also used myth as one of the narrative devices in their fiction. The concept of myth interests not only the literary critic but also the anthropologist, the sociologist, the psychologist, the philosopher and the student of comparative religion. Hence the term is used in a variety of meanings, each field of study investing it with different connotations.

Poets and writers have always been drawn towards myths and legends. One reason may be their quality of timelessness. Myths, in spite of their distance from contemporary reality, do have, for that particular group of men to whom they were culturally relevant, a kind of fundamental significance. In American literature Hemingway, Faulkner and Melville were known for their prominent use of myth. Porter, Welty and McCullers used myth in their novels. The universal myth finds its fullest expression in Faulkner, whose work is rooted in the history and more so of the South and written in the conservative spirit dominant there.

The southern themes outlined thus far have a concentrated treatment in the fiction of Southern women writers. So the next section deals with their contribution to the fiction of region, history and tradition.
Southern Women’s Writing

Nowhere else in American literature is there a group of accomplished women writers like Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, Katherine Anne Porter and Caroline Gordon who are so closely bound together by regional qualities of setting, character, and time. Because Ellen Moers and Elaine Showalter have revealed how much literary women rely on each other and on their own developing traditions, we now recognize the accuracy of Virginia Woolf’s claim in *A Room of One’s Own* that women need their own distinct heritage to nourish their art. We can therefore assume that the Southern women writers share a definite historical tradition, and it is not surprising to find much closer alliances among them.

It is characteristic of Southern writers to defend and represent a way of life at the point of its becoming scarcely operative. The literary record of the South’s history since the Civil War is largely the history of a legend, the legend of a community and a way of life. Taking two of Heilman’s phrases, ‘the sense of totality’ and ‘the sense of the concrete’, the great value of modern Southern literature is derived from these two virtues. The rhetoric is also the style of the folktale, the story told and retold, filled out by hazard and by guess, in the long afternoons and evenings of the Southern home, store, or Public Square. The tradition of the folk tale is almost as old as the South itself. It has become sophisticated, or at least been made more complex, through generations into literary form. In the great folk-inspired literature of the modern South (Faulkner’s *The Hamlet*, Carson McCullers’ *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, for example), the permanent truths of the human condition are given in a rich context of folk
superstition, folk humor, and folk pathos. The best writers transcend folk materials without too obviously showing their transcendence; the writings of Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, Caroline Gordon, Elizabeth Spencer, and others transmute the folk narrative into an examination of a universal moral circumstance.

Faulkner correctly understood the importance of stories to Southern culture. More important, he understood the crucial role women played as disseminators of Southern stories of the Civil War. The Southern Women narratives, including their distinct interpretive contributions, easily wove themselves into the fabric of the white South’s attempt to come to terms with the meaning of defeat. Women born in the decades following the war could take this emerging account of the Southern experience for granted as an integral collective memory. They, in turn, could contribute to its development through imaginative stories. By the 1930s, readers curious about the Civil War faced a mountain of literature written by Southern white women.

Margaret Mitchell’s novel, Gone with the Wind, “enjoyed more attention from scholars and the general public” (2006:3). Literatures by other Southern women — novels, diaries, biographies, histories, and reminiscences — all reveal the ways in which they conceptualized the war. Moreover, these narratives demonstrate the manner in which they carved new public roles for themselves and fashioned a new cultural identity for the postbellum South. From the start, Southern white women demonstrated a firm grasp of the war’s decisive importance to American and Southern history. In doing so these women writers constantly
referred to other works, built on accounts that were already a part of the public discourse, and thereby continually altered the narratives of war and defeat.

“Southern women participated directly and influentially in this conscious effort to fashion a distinctly Southern story of the war. They, along with the more familiar heroes of the Confederacy and men of the New South, actively combated Northern accounts of the war” (2006:3). For many Americans, the Civil War has been the crucible of U.S. history, challenging each new generation to come to terms with its meaning. As Gary Gallagher notes, “few episodes in American history match the Civil War in its power to make the people who lived through it think seriously about a suitable public memory” (2006:4). Southern white women were as susceptible as their men to the grandeur, pathos, sentiment, emotion, curiosity, tragedy, and romance of the war. Beginning with the years of Reconstruction, these women produced a steady flow of celebratory accounts, in both fiction and prose, to consecrate a “proper” Southern understanding of antebellum society and the tragedy that had felled it. Southern white women did not question the standard Southern interpretation of the war’s causes.

In the Southern fiction the writers identify themselves with its history. The values of place in literature come from its being fixed but also associated with neighboring spaces that share a history, some communicable tradition and idiom, according to which a personality can be identified. The interrelationship of personal and cultural history provides for a balance in human events that enhances meaning and locates it. Place is indispensable to scene in any literature that is more than merely abstract. Hoffman comments that, “Eudora Welty has shrewdly
defined the role of place in literature; its function is primarily to attach precise local values of feeling (1967:13). Eudora Welty herself comments that,

Place in fiction is the named, identified, concrete, exact and exacting, and therefore credible, gathering-spot of all that has been felt, is about to be experienced, in the novel’s progress. Location pertains to feeling; feeling profoundly pertains to place; place in history partakes of feeling; a feeling about history partakes of place (1956: 62).

The quality of a place inevitably derives from its existence in time; and as persons inhabit a place, they provide meaningful elaborations upon its intrinsic nature. Place may be called the present condition of a location that is modified through its having been inhabited in time. The peculiarities of a scene are given it by such habitation; they are also the particulars of a scene, and when they suggest a shared experience, they move into patterns of history.

According to Hoffman, “the South as a region has these important distinguishing features; it is rich in natural detail; its pace is slow and close to the rhythms of natural sequences; it tends to develop historically in a slow accession of patterns which accommodate to the atmospheric and biological qualities of setting; it generates loyalties to place that are much more highly emotionally charged than is any dedication to ideas; finally, its rhythm of social motion is passive rather than active”(1967:15). Southern tradition tends therefore to remain static, to be self-protective, and to encourage fierce loyalties to its conditioning of being. This is perhaps the major reason why history plays so large a role in Southern literature. Even when there is no explicit reference to its history, the Southern character is assumed in terms of a regional history. Far more important than any of these is the literary analysis of the South’s psychological and symbolic inheritance. Hoffman
describes this as the “burden of the past” (1967: 16). In large part, the errors and enormities of Reconstruction years are responsible for the overemphasis upon the Southerner’s unique, independent, special fate and responsibility.

The themes of Caroline Gordon’s fiction are as varied, and as conventional, as her concern with the region and with her family. Some of them are the result of a sweeping look at the South’s history, the civil war’s challenge to loyalties, its economic pressures upon families and estates, family divisions and declines, the post war struggle to restore the land, the North’s pressure upon the South.

Welty’s belief in the viability and continuity of place, of both objects and persons, gives her a philosophical sense of place. Certain places are known for being inhabited by “celebrities,” who have left their marks upon them, the imagination, stirred by their extraordinary qualities, brings them back out of the past and reinstates them, thus repeating their lines, freshening them, and even in a sense bestowing immortality upon them. The South emphasized memory and the process of remembering as crucial to understand the region.

The history of the Southern place is essentially one of human agreements made with nature. Miss Nora Roberts’ heroines are often too easily moved by backwoods idealism, though she atones for these excesses by her careful and precise portrayal of folk identities. Throughout the Southern literary evocations of the Southern past, this metaphor of a place inhabited, worked, and loved, dominates. Its opposite is the place destroyed, ignored, or laid waste. The evil of man’s acts is most frequently described in terms of the destruction of place images.
– or, as in Faulkner’s *Intruder in the Dust*, the construction of places not worthy of their setting.

In the words of Hoffman, “when the images of place convincingly group to suggest ideas and moral substance, when they exist both on the level of independent objects and in terms of a history or a tradition or even a memory of men related to a quality of place in generations of time, they contribute to a literature of place” (1967:26). The intensity of the moral vision that informs them, in terms of a succession of significant human disasters, makes them valuable. Above all, the sense of place, which is associated with a reading of human destiny, defines precisely the meaning, at both the beginning and the conclusion of moral reflection.

The ‘lesson’ Katherine Anne Porter’s Miranda learns in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* points up the readjustments to place necessary from generation to generation. Time fixations are an influential aspect of both Northern and Southern literature; one need only remember the several frightening objects of the past which destroy the present in O’Neill’s *Mourning Becomes Electra* to realize that this is so. Other such devastating Southern counterparts can be seen in Faulkner’s *A Rose for Emily* and Warren’s *The Circus in the Attic*.

Ellen Glasgow, who published her “social histories” of Virginia during this period, seems to contrast with UDC’s (United Daughters of the Confederacy) rhetoric. While the UDC and like-minded women writers such as Constance Cary Harrison, Mary Seibert, and Louisa Whitney waxed rhapsodic on the virtues of the Old South and the Confederacy, Glasgow presented a grimmer view. Her novels
— *Voice of the People* (1900), *The Battle-Ground* (1902), and *Deliverance* (1904) — as well as her private writings suggest that she believed that the South’s future rested neither with the old wartime generation nor with the leaders of the New South. Instead, the future depended on the common people.

The previous generation of Southern women novelists had begun to experiment with technical and stylistic innovation, but not even Mary Johnston, perhaps the most successful of the group, had fully transformed the sentimentalized, romanticized, and idealized artifact that the Civil War novel had become.

The Southern local-color writers concentrated on the quaint, the eccentric, and the remote; and the creators of the ‘plantation tradition’ idealized the past. As Holman says, “Thus a region obsessed with the past, as no other portion of America has been, so sentimentalized that past that it became the materials of empty romance, a kind of antiseptic Disneyland, filled with idealized figures” (1972: 87).

Against this sentimental view the first two voices that were strongly raised were those of Ellen Glasgow and James Branch Cabell, Virginians who, in their differing ways, defined the patterns which twentieth century Southern fiction was to take when it became serious and fell into the hands of that group of writers of talent who have practiced it in the 20th century. History was, for Glasgow, a tragic fable of man’s lot in a hostile world, in which defeat was inevitable, but “‘tragedy lies, not in defeat, but in surrender’” (quoted in Holman 1972: 88). She devoted much of her career to a series of novels which collectively present a panoramic
history of Virginia from the Civil War to the 1940s. Using the realistic method of Howells and Henry James, she sketched with irony and anger the social history of a doomed race of aristocrats and a democratized state wherein a sense of duty — her famed *Vein of Iron* — could give dignity to lives rendered unhappy by the exigencies of destiny. Glasgow saw her region in terms of its history; saw that history as a tragic fable, and imprisoned her vision in a vast and ambitiously planned group of books.

When a group of talented young writers like Shirley Ann Grau, (explores issues of race & gender) and others in the early 20th century addressed themselves to the representation of the world through the image of their region, they followed — sometimes afar off — the paths blazed by Glasgow and Cabell. These writers not only were Southern but they were also the products of the same social and cultural forces that were shaping the work of other American writers. One of the most obvious characteristics of the period is that it was an age of protest against certain aspects of the American present which seemed to many to violate the American ideal. In other movements than realism the revolt against the present and past went forward, notably in Gertrude Stein’s experiments with language and in the expatriates’ espousal of continental art forms. All these writers measured the present against the American dream and found it lacking, and they relentlessly pointed out to their fellow citizens the flaws they found.

The problems the women writers have articulated are not limited to the South, but because of the Southern tradition of the lady, the difficulties of defining a positive feminine self can be felt more intensely there. The southern themes such
as the ghosts, the myths, and the prejudices which are articulated by Ellen Glasgow, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty and Carson McCullers may speak with a southern accent, but they are closely akin to those which all women must confront.

The Southern writers sought to revitalize for the modern world a view of man that the South had held since Thomas Jefferson. This view saw man as best in his relation to the soil, particularly as that relationship existed in the pre-Civil War South. According to Holman, “this myth of a good order in the past, Southern writers generally used as a weapon of attack against the bad order of modern industrialism” (1972: 90).

They tended to seek in the past a pattern, to evolve a meaning out of large sweeps of history, converting the pattern of event into myth, and uniting the sense of tragic dignity with the irony of comedy. Some, like T.S. Stribling and Hamilton Basso, have tried to construct great connected records of social change; others, like Erskine Caldwell in his early novels, have fashioned laughter into a social weapon; still others, like Katherine Anne Porter and Eudora Welty, have used highly refined and almost poetic, brief art forms to state their visions of experience.

In the opinion of Louis Westling “the Southern belles enjoyed an enviable reputation from the middle of the nineteenth century through the early decades of 20th century; their traditional position has come under increasingly critical scrutiny in recent years. More and more, the Southern white women carried a distinctive burden as the darlings of their world” (1989:8). Their case is in many ways an especially long-lived version of the Victorian situation of women, with all its
attendant ironies. Special difficulties arose, however, from the South’s peculiar racial institution. The Southern lady was supposed to embody the ideals of her culture, but that culture was torn by profound contradictions and forced into a defensive position by wider national pressures. Thus the white female representative of Christian virtues was lauded in public to divert attention from problems of slavery and racism, but the scope of her activities was severely limited. The Southern lady had to represent a racial purity which was required by her men for the maintenance of their caste but which many of them regularly transgressed in their own sexual behavior.

The immigrant or racial memory filters through the expanding net of language and consciousness. The Southern American women writers have rewritten a past full of pain and suffering into regenerative texts of bonding and nurturing. For example Barbara Offutt Mathieson’s “Memory and Mother Love: Toni Morrison’s Dyad” explores the intricacies of mother–infant love, with its simultaneous nurture and obsession, as well as communal relations, including the entrapment of Blacks in American Slave society. Maternal love, argues Mathieson, serves as a metaphor for memory of the past and can range from the extremes of resistance and total preoccupation to a middle position of “reciprocal adult relations.”

Despite frequent scholarly acknowledgment of broad connections, the specific details of Southern women writers’ contributions to America’s literary and cultural traditions remain largely unexplored. Carolyn Perry and Mary Louise Weaks understandably aim at highlighting and unpacking the network of Southern
women writers’ cultural relationships as evidenced by their aesthetic politics. They speak about issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality, typically associated with Southern mythic discourses of womanhood, machismo, and geography. But what is refreshing about Southern women’s literature is the range of perspectives they bring to bear on the seasoned themes. These themes show Southern women writers’ great inventiveness and interventionism.

Southern women writers have historically contributed to the shaping of the modern American literary tradition; they have also largely set the tone for the subversive energies characterizing the tradition and its criticism in a postmodern context. In her analysis, Mary D. Robertson observes antebellum Southern women writers’ intense engagement with social and historical reality in their letters and journals. However Carolyn Perry and Mary Louise Weaks think that her analysis “pivotally moves away from the characteristic biographical readings of these works, placing them in context and underscoring their value as cultural artifacts” (2002: 342). The Southern women writers have remarkably engaged, complicated, and revised conventional modes of regional and gender representation.

According to biographer Susan Goodman, Ellen Glasgow helped institutionalize many of the stock concerns that would characterize “Southern Literature” as an emerging field of study after her death: a sense of the tragic, of evil, of history, and of place. In many ways, Goodman’s book can be viewed as an attempt — a mostly successful one — to bring to Southern studies the “blood and irony” for which Glasgow herself once had given a call. Goodman “shatters the prevailing idea that modern and contemporary women writers have served
primarily as lightweight chroniclers of domesticity and social manners, focusing instead on the disturbing yet potentially liberating ways they have represented the violence done to Southern bodies, especially those of African-American women” (quoted in Patricia Yaeger 2000: 300). She further speaks about the central irony of Southern culture. Such violence and the grotesque mode of writing that it has practically forced into being, starkly defines life even in the late twentieth century.

In defamiliarizing the South, Yaeger does Southern studies a great service, by casting it as a zone where the grotesque, the surreal, and the uncanny reign, rather than as a bastion of (white) family romance. “If Southern literature is to avoid being marginalized or ghettoized in the academy” (2000:252), it must raze some of the boundaries it has erected within itself and between itself and other regional literatures. Yaeger’s guiding premise holds that “Southern literature, at its best, is not about community but about moments of crisis and acts of contestation” (2000: 38).

After the war, women increasingly inherited real property and served as executors of men’s estates. Given the wrenching changes in rural society, women increasingly sought fulfillment outside traditional domestic occupations. Teaching offered both social respectability and an opportunity to earn a living. Young women often began as governesses before opening schools in their homes. Toward the end of the 19th century they moved into public schools. Church and benevolent work, including participation in various Lost Cause organizations, expanded women’s public roles.
The question of women writers in the post-War South is a case in point. Young women with literary ambitions sometimes turned to writing to make a living. Some desperately needed whatever limited income they could earn with their pens, and others responded to an insistent inner muse or looked to make a reputation in the world. Most labored in deserved obscurity (as did their male counterparts), although their literary treatments of both Northern and Southern characters, and especially of African-Americans, are sometimes revealing. It is significant to note that this literature aids in understanding Southern lives and particularly women’s lives in the post-war period.

The stories we tell ourselves about the past merge with a sense of public history in “memory novels” in which an individual meditates on life. The memories of elderly women are a structuring principle for a number of Southern novels, from Elizabeth Hardwick’s haunting *Sleepless Nights* to Gibbon’s *On the Occasion of My Last Afternoon* and Mary Lee Settle’s *Choices*. The narrator unites her past and present in the desire for story. Events are sifted and scrutinized until it becomes apparent, little by little, that the family history she repressed is her testimony.

In their fictional works the women novelists have highlighted the functioning of memory. There are different ideas on the relationship between a novelist’s memories both — personal and collective — and how they partially inspired the fictional narratives of a novelist. While there are diverse opinions regarding the basic question whether memory belongs to the individual or the group, several writers attempted to reconcile these conflicting ideas on individual
memory and collective memory. For them that collective memory functions as a framework within which individual memory is built and structured.

It is clear from the preceding discussion that Southern women writers were preoccupied with certain recurrent themes which they all seem to share. Yet the rich variety of their treatment is also obvious. The identification with the history of their region, myth, legend, the interrelationship of personal and cultural history, sense of place and time, sense of family and tradition, the preoccupation with the past, the use of memory as a technique, the network of personal memory and collective memory — all these demand an in depth study to understand their significance in human life. For this purpose I have chosen four representative Southern women novelists — Ellen Glasgow, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty and Carson McCullers. Their works reveal some of the common Southern themes like family, region, race, gender, past, memory, time and place, myth and setting. Two novels by each of these writers have been selected to analyse and interpret the fictional representation of the above issues with particular attention on past and memory. They are: Ellen Glasgow’s *Barren Ground* (1925) and *Vein of Iron* (1935), Katherine Anne Porter’s *Pale Horse and Pale Rider* (1939) and *Old Mortality* (1939), Eudora Welty’s *The Robber Bridegroom* (1963) and *The Optimist’s Daughter* (1972), Carson McCullers’s *The Member of the Wedding* (1946) and *Clock without Hands* (1961).

Nevertheless there is some variation in the use of these elements in their fiction depending on the historical background, social conditions and the place they dwell in. Thus in this study, no assumption is being made that the elements of
past, memory and region are used in a similar manner or to the same degree in their narratives. For instance, Carson McCullers’ *The Member of the Wedding* depicts a slightly different attitude towards the past since its central concern is with the growing up of a girl. Yet, in Southern American literature, these four writers form a group closely bound together by regional qualities of setting, character, and time. These four Southern women writers have historically engaged themselves and revised conventional modes of region and gender representation. Through the varied narrative devices they created fiction out of the materials of their region and its past and contributed to American fiction.

The succeeding chapters will be devoted to a discussion of each of these four writers in order to observe to what extent their works are informed by a sense of past and memory, time and place, family and myth, history and tradition, race and gender, which in turn become central to an understanding of the craft of these writers.

**Notes**

1. Jung’s theory divides the psyche into three parts. The first is the ego, which Jung identifies with the conscious mind. Closely related is the personal unconscious, which includes anything which is not personally conscious, but can be. The personal unconscious is like most people’s understanding of the unconscious in that it includes both memories that are easily brought to mind and those that have been suppressed for some reason. But then Jung adds the part of the psyche that makes his theory stand out from all others: the collective unconscious. Jung calls it ‘psychic inheritance.’ It is the reservoir of our experiences as a species, a kind of knowledge we are all born with. And yet we can never be directly conscious of it according to Jung. It influences all of our experiences and behaviors most especially the emotional ones, but we only know about it indirectly, by looking at those influences.

Pourquoi se Souvenir? Paris: Grasset, 1999, p. 18). Augustine claims that “memory is private because the memories of an individual are not those of others and that when one remembers; one always remembers oneself, which leads to the notion of reflexivity. This claim is the foundation of many contemporary cognitive-psychological studies, such as that of D.L. Schacter who defines memory as a subjective experience and asserts that memories only belong to the individual and characterizes his personal life.”

3. Solipsism refers to the philosophical theory that the self is all that you know to exist.


6. François-Xavier Lavenne and Virginie Renard’s article “Memory and the Inner Life”, refers to the translation of T. Todorov, “La Mémoire et ses Abus,” in Esprit, 7, July 1993, pp. 34-44. Here they say that Memory is selective; it cannot store all the elements of one’s life, or it would be totally overloaded. “If one can always choose between memory and forgetting, it is certainly because not all that can be remembered is memorable […]. It is the construction of identity based on memoranda, i.e. things ‘worthy of being remembered’, that is responsible for this selection of meaningful events, this ordering of mnemonic points of reference”.

7. This phenomenon is especially visible in the literature of the inner life, i.e. autobiographies and diaries. The way a person perceives and gives meaning to his or her past can evolve and sometimes change radically with time. George Sand’s numerous autobiographical works provide many examples of this phenomenon. On the collective level, a group’s perception of its past can also alter following a present event that leads to the revaluation of the past. For instance, the myth of the Edwardian age as an era of perfect bliss emerged after and in contrast to the Great War.

distancing it imposes, enable one to deal with one’s traumatic past and put a plaster of words on one’s wound.

9. Vincent Jouve. “Le Héros, Effet de Texte ou de Contexte,” in Cahiers Electroniques de l’Imaginaire1, 2004, p. 63 and Jouve Vincent, L’Effet-Personnage dans le Roman, Paris: PUF, 1992. This identification does not depend on the reader, Jouve argues, but on the text and its shaping through narrative techniques such as focalisation. Because the identification depends more on the textual organisation than on the reader’s values, it is possible to identify with negative characters or with characters whose views the reader does not share, such as Madame de Merteuil in Dangerous Liaisons or Raskolnikov in Crime and Punishment. We would argue that this is at the root of the “decentring experience” that is brought about by the reading act.


11. Sectionalism is one word for the material of the legends. It is local sectional - and to be national in literature, one needs be sectional. No one mind can fully or fairly illustrate the characteristics of any great country: and he who shall depict one section faithfully, has made his proper and sufficient contribution to the great work of national literature.

12. The border between the states of Maryland and Pennsylvania in the US, traditionally considered to mark the division between the North and South of US.