CHAPTER I
CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION

Any work of art cannot make a claim to universal greatness unless it subtly and unobtrusively encodes a moral principle that shall ennable mankind and make the world a better place to live in. The message of a writer of universal acclaim, even without any explicit intention on his part, will be to make the world nobler than what it is at any given time; this he achieves not in a direct and didactic manner, but by presenting the society both in its beautiful and ugly dimensions in such a way that his work becomes more aesthetic and humanistic than dogmatic and pontificating.

“Great Literature is a timeless thing” (10), observes Hans Bertans. Literature being an embodiment of the best thoughts of the best minds reveals the most direct and lasting communication of experience by man-to-man, presents the most profound insights into human nature and the conditions that prevail in this world. As Raymond Williams observes, novel as a “whole literature in itself... offers a valuing of a whole way of life” (584). The function of literature is not to provide an escape from unpleasant facts, but to help the reader to face reality and cope with it successfully.

Novel as a literary genre can be regarded as a “perfect medium for revealing to us the changing rainbow of our living relationships” (D.H. Lawrence, 131). It judges the “quality of life... in terms of the qualities of persons... and... some of the best novels of our times... describe, carefully and subtly, selected personal relationships” (Raymond
William Styron, a twentieth century American Novelist of great repute and significance, believed that literature could change the attitude of the people to a great extent. Almost all his novels reveal his pre-occupation with humanity. Styron's novels evolve around his concern for human values, its decline in the modern society, the pervasive violence in man's nature, the growing alienation among human beings and the domination of human beings over another. They suggest ways and means of living a better way of life. Since Styron is an American writer, it would be beneficial to trace the origin and development of the American novel.

The colonial expansion in England led the Puritans to settle down at Jamestown in 1607. During the colonial period, the literary output in America was scanty. The reading public confined themselves to a few books such as the Bible and the Prayer book. Only three things made the colonial men to write. Firstly, the desire to record important events and to provide one's family and friends with an account of personal experiences, secondly, the stories of exploration, and thirdly, the adventures and efforts of the communities to form colonies for settling down. The Puritan's appetite for religious writing made them to write treatise. Prominent among these writers were William Bradford, Captain John Smith, Francis Higginson, Richard Mather and John Cotton. The treatises that were written by Jonathan Edwards dealt with issues like original sin and freedom of will. They also portrayed the contemporary American social life in a vivid manner.
After the strain of colonization was over, most of the states had reached a provincial status. America’s first newspaper *The Boston News* was published in 1704, and soon a number of periodicals sprang up. In 1767, *The American Company*, a dramatic troupe presented the first native tragedy, *The Prince of Parthia* by Thomas Godfrey. Leisure and improved standards of living were conducive to the production of literature. The writings of Jonathan Swift and Daniel Defoe in England influenced the American writing. The colonials who had emigrated from different parts of Europe to these colonies, were now beginning to consider themselves as one group - “We, the people of United States”. They became aware of the fact that poetry, fiction and drama were ambassadors of political, social and economic disposition and hence they did not want to lag behind any other country in possession of these. Benjamin Franklin’s *Rules by which a Great Empire May Be Reduced to a Small One* and *An Edict of the King of Prussia* and Thomas Painn’s *Common Sense* and *The American Crisis* were among the prominent specimens of prose literature of this period. *The Declaration of Independence* written by Jefferson remains a classic of colonial period. Colonial literature was altogether wanting in fiction. The puritanical hostility to anything that was entertaining made it to neglect fiction writing. Drama suffered worse than that of the novel form, since the puritans regarded theatres as the ‘houses of the devil’. The decline and waning of Puritanism created a conducive atmosphere wherein plays and novels thrived. By about the eighteenth century, circulating libraries were
providing journals and newspapers to the reading public. Political, economic and social conditions were undergoing tremendous changes and hence journalism flourished. Among the leading newspapers, mention may be made of *The New York Evening Post* (1801), *The North American Review* (1815), *The Sun* (1833), *The Herald* (1835), and *The Times*.

Another interesting literary vehicle emerged during this period in the form of Gift Books. Most important of the Gift Books was Samuel Goodrich’s annual Gift Book - *The Token*. The fact that Nathaniel Hawthorne’s poems and tales appeared first in the Gift Books reveals the important role played by them. Influenced by the literary trends and movements in England, American writers started writing novels. The sentimental views of Richardson, Jane Austen and Fanny Burney influenced the American writers to a considerable extent. W.Hill Brown’s *The Power of Sympathy* was the first American novel. Susanna Rowson published *Charlotte Temple* in 1791 and Hannah Foster published *The Coquette* in 1797. These three novels are in the general stream of ‘Richardsonian Fiction’, for they picture the heroines in distress. Hugh Henry Brackenridge’s *Modern Chivalry* and Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wieland* reached a higher level of fame than any of the plays that appeared during that period. Yet, for a long time, the harvest was meager both in the field of novel and drama.

The novel *Charlotte Temple* retained its fascination among the readers for a long time. The early novelists made good use of their brief
American history. Prominent among them were Mrs. Rowson and Jeremy Belknap. They portrayed the adventures of the Englishmen in the new world in their novels. James Fennimore Cooper's first book *Precaution* appeared in 1820. His novels cover a wide variety of writing such as romances, adventures, historical stories, satires and novels of manners. The greatest contribution of Cooper was that it was he who brought American life and the element of romanticism into American novel.

The contemporaries of Cooper — William Gilmore Simms, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Lonthrop Motley, Charles Fenno Hoffman and Nathaniel Parker Willis tried their hands at fiction. Legends, superstitions and rural customs of New England were discussed by John Green Leaf Whitier in his *Margaret Smith’s Journal* (1849).

Among the minor writers of this period, mention may be made of Richard Henry Dana Jr and Daniel Pierce Thompson. *The Cavaliers of Virginia* by William Alexander Caruthers is a historical romance. In 1836, Richard Hildreth published *The Slave*, an anti slavery novel, credited with having influenced *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. William Gilmore Simms, one of the most prolific writers of America, introduced the element of crime psychology in his domestic tragedies. *The North American Review* highlighted the rich materials, America offered for historical fiction and encouraged the writers to write in a historical mode. The historical romances of Walter Scott and Fennimore Cooper captivated the reading public.
completely. With the advent of Scott’s writing, regionalism played an important role.

A great change occurred in the literary history of America with the writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Three of his four major novels, The Scarlet Letter (1850), The House of Seven Gables (1851), The Blithedale Romance (1852), and A Wonder Book (1852) appeared in successive years. Though Hawthorne has contributed much to fiction, today he is best remembered for The Scarlet Letter. Hawthorne’s stories bear testimonies to the idea that the unpardonable sin is pride and he heralds the idea that one must embrace life in spite of all its disappointments. Theme of alienation occupies an important role in his works. His portrayal of sin is psychological. For him the heart of man is desperately wicked.

Melville was not hailed much when he was living. The unfailing enthusiasm of readers like William Morris, James Thomson, R.L Stevenson and John Masefield has revived his works. As a consequence of this revival, Melville has become one of the most outstanding writers of American literature. His Typee (1846), Omoo (1847), Red Burn (1848), and White Jacket are considered as autobiographical fictions. His other books such as Mardi (1849), Moby Dick (1851), The Pizza Tales and Billy Budd (1856) describe life at sea. His descriptions of the sea are powerful and awe inspiring. Like Hawthorne, he portrays a gloomy view of man. Though a writer of short stories and poems, Melville is today best remembered for his novels especially Moby Dick.
During the years 1850 - 1860, domestic sentimental women writers adorned the literary sky. Some of them were Elizabeth Wetherell, Maria Cummins, Fanny Fern, Mary J. Holmes, Mrs. Southworth and Augusta Evans Wilson. These women writers did not deal exclusively with domestic sentimentalism alone. Their writings included romantic and religious elements also. The most famous American woman novelist, Elizabeth Harriet Beecher Stowe belongs to this era. She has written nearly ten novels. *Old Town Folks, The Pearl of Orr's Island, The Minister's Wooing* and *Agnes of Sorrento* are some of her eminent works. Her outstanding book *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is not a mere antislavery book. It skillfully portrays the racial segregation, the struggle of a mother for her child, along with the cruelty of the strong and the helplessness of the weak.

Another prolific writer, Samuel L. Clemens, better known as Mark Twain began his career by writing *The Celebrated Frog of Calaveras Country and other Sketches* in 1867. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, two classical novels brought fame to him. Hailed as a genius, the novels of Mark Twain have universal appeal. Though Clemens was a Southern writer, he has contributed much to American Literature without any reference to regional provenance.

The intimate friend of Mark Twain, William Dean Howell wrote many novels. *The Lady of Aroostock, A Modern Instance, The Rise of Silas Lapham, Indian summer* and *A Hazard of New Fortune* are the most admired of his works. His *Criticism and Fiction* (1891) defines realism.
Howells attitude to realism, as Edward Wagenknecht observes: “caused him to take up the treatment of the romantic love in the novel and his attack upon that aspect of the Puritan morality, which glorifies self-sacrifice as necessarily virtuous” (137-138). The contribution of Howell to literature is immense. His deep insight into the characters, his subtlety, grace, and charm of style has brought permanent aesthetic value to his works.

The first novel of Henry James was published in 1876. Within a short span of time, he published numerous books. The American (1877) is a book of great charm. The European and The Confidence are novels of lesser importance. The Ambassadors and The Golden Bowl are considered as the best works of Henry James.

The writings of James reveal the influence of the French novelist Turgenev, the English novelist George Eliot and the American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne. In his works, importance is given to characters than to that of plot. The observer’s point of view is highlighted. His characters are well-bred men and women. Love and fidelity were the virtues admired by him most and much emphasis is laid on these two aspects in his writings. Among the critical essays that set forth the views of Henry James, mention must be made of Criticism and The Art of Fiction. The greatest contribution of James to American fiction is that, it was he who formulated the theories of novel writing.

Marian Craw Ford, Sarah Orne Jewett, Constance Fennimore Woolson, and Henry Adams were the minor writers of this age. In the
difficult years following the Civil war, literature produced in the South, continued to be mainly fiction. Most of the writers followed the pattern that was established by John Pendleton Kennedy, who, according to J. A. Bryant had portrayed his hero as a “Virginia planter, who took pride in family and land, love of honor, respect for bravery and courtesy to women.” (11)

Another writer who established the writings of this era was an Atlanta journalist, Joel Chandler Harris. His views about the disparity between the races were represented in a series of folk tales told by an elderly black narrator to the child of his widowed mistress. His first book, Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings (1880), won immense popularity and it led him to produce three more collections of Uncle Remus stories. The greatest contribution of Harris is that he made a black man as a narrator in his works.

Thomas Nelson Page followed Harris. His novels portray gallant young men, beautiful young women and their slaves contented in their service to their masters. His first short story Marse Chan (1884) was an immense success and it became his most popular book. In Ole Virginia appeared in 1887. His essays and novels portray an idyllic south before the war.

The novels of Kate Chopin portray the delicate and tender feelings of women. Her first novel At Fault contains a vivid picture of plantation life. Her second novel, A Night in Arcadia, portrays her women characters ill at ease with the established conventions of the society. Her next work The Awakening, created a scandal since it portrayed the heroine as one breaking
the barriers of the society. A furor created by her works eclipsed her popularity. Her fame is re-established now and the very same aspect that once condemned her to obscurity brought reputation back to her.

By 1900, several writers - either born in Richmond or closely associated with it were beginning to attract national attention. Prominent among these were three women - Amelie Louise Rives, Mary Johnston and Ellen Glasgow. Amelie Louise Rives began her career by writing romantic tales in 1845 and she has written twenty-three novels. She introduced the element of psychological realism in American fiction. Mary Johnston and Ellen Glasgow were the other significant writers of this era.

Ellen Glasgow's works are considered as the most significant fiction produced in the South before the advent of Thomas Wolfe and William Faulkner. She was deeply influenced by the theory of Charles Darwin and by the philosophical works of Herbert Spencer and J.S. Mill. Her first novel, *The Descendant* was an instant success. As a novelist, her contribution to American literature attains significance because of her realistic portrayal of human nature. Writer of many novels and short stories, Ellen Glasgow was awarded Pulitzer Prize for *In this Our Life*.

In South Carolina, the emerging writers endowed human status to black people. Julia Peterkin wrote stories for H.L. Mencken's *Smart Set* and *The Reviewer*. Her novel *Black April* was published in 1927, with a foreman of a plantation as its protagonist. Evelyn Scott in 1919 published *Precipitation - A Trilogy*. Her second trilogy, *Migrations* (1927), dealt with
The expansions of the country in the West. Traditional notions about sex and marriage were emphasized in her works.

The earliest works of Elizabeth Maddox Roberts were poetical works. Her first novel, *The Time of Man* (1926), established her as an important writer on the literary scene. Her style and subject matter coincided with the waves of fashion. *The Green Meadow* and *The Time of Man* were considered as the best among her novels.

Since William Styron was born a Southerner, it would be beneficial to review the Southern Renaissance, which took place during the mid 1920s. In 1917, H. L. Mencken wrote an essay entitled, “The Sahara of the Bozard”, in which he drafted an obituary of the South. As cited by Vann Woodward, Mencken regarded that, “...in all these [criticism, music, painting, sculpture, architecture] fields, the South is an awe inspiring blank...a vast plain of mediocrity, stupidity, lethargy, almost of dead silence.”(225)

As John Bradbury comments, this remark of Mencken was, “close enough to truth” (7) and within five years, there was an explosion of literary production. The first response to the criticism of Mencken came from New Orleans. A journal, *The Double Dealer* was published in 1921 by John Mcclure, Julius Weis and Basil Thompson, and it was credited with fame for it has sponsored dozens of young writers including Hamilton Basso, Donald Davidson, J.C.Ransom, Allen Tate and R.P.Warren. The issue, which appeared in June 1921, invited clear-visioned writers from the South.
From Richmond, another magazine, *The Reviewer* was published in 1921. The first issue of *The Reviewer* had an article by Hunter Stagg, in which the writer had admitted the truth of Mencken's saying. Mencken and a group of writers - James Branch Cabell, Carl Van Vechten, Joseph Hergesheimer, and Alfred A Knopf made *The Reviewer* as the best magazine of the United States. The literature of the South had by this time, solidly established itself as the most important, the most talented, interesting and a valuable one. Many contributory factors could be associated with the flowering of the Southern Renaissance. The most important of them are the impact of the literary school led by John Crowe Ransom and that of the Civil War.

John Crowe Ransom influenced the three developments, which shaped the literature of the South. The first step was to have informal discussions among a group of faculty students and outsiders and to publish a journal. The second development was the result of 'Agrarian Movement' and the third was 'New Criticism'. It is remarkable that John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren were involved in all the three developments. David Donaldson took a leading role in the first two developments. Merrill Moore and Andrew Lytle took part in the Agrarian movement. Cleanth Brooks was a champion of the New Criticism.

The faculty students called themselves as 'The Fugitives' and this group consisted of Allen Tate, Lytle, R.P.Warren, Donald Davidson, Merrill Moore, Sidney Hirsch and William Faulkner. On the suggestion of Hirsch,
the group published its first magazine in April 1922. They named it as *The Fugitive*, after one of Hirsch's poems. John Crowe Ransom wrote a brief foreword and to the first edition the members alone contributed articles. The primary aim of these writers was to write good poetry and it encouraged the artistic talents of youngsters who were to develop as great literary figures. They believed that fiction could aspire to the artistic unity and effect, which were usually associated with poetry. But the edition that appeared in December 1922 contained contributions from outsiders. Davidson and Ransom wrote reviews of books. These writers had no intention to make their work distinctly Southern, but they wanted to prove that the Southerners were skilled and that they could produce poems of logical coherence. They had to struggle hard to fight against the sentimental image of the old South, propagated by Thomas Nelson Page and other writers, who gave importance to the regional context. The change in economic and social conditions which ushered the industrial development, found its expression in their writing. These southerners held the idea that the land is sacred and believed that the moral life is one that is lived in close accordance with nature. M.K. Naik opines that the Southerners regarded nature as "the measure and standard of human conduct" (184), and that it should not be exploited. They lamented the fact that the noble aristocrats were possessed by greed and that the agrarian life and its values were displaced by the growth of industrial society.
Harriet Monroe, in a review of a poetic work by Dubose Heyward and Harvey Allen, urged the new poets of the South, to comment upon the limitations in the commonly accepted images of the south. A quick response for this review was written by Donald Davidson in which he advocated industrial and agrarian development. The result was a book entitled, I'll take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition by twelve Southerners, published by Harper and Brothers in 1930.

Along with an "Introduction", in this book John Crowe Ransom contributed the famous essay "Reconstructed but Unregenerate". Donald Davidson's "A Mirror for Artists" declared his firm conviction that a harmonious Agrarian society was essential for the production of great art. Allan Tate argued that the deficiencies of the South in the arts were due to an inadequate religious base. R.P. Warren expressed his views of the social situation in an essay, with an emphasis that Negroes should be given equal opportunities, rights and privileges as those enjoyed by the Whites.

The other members of 'Agrarian brethren' were Frank Owsley, John Donald Wade, Lyle Lanier, Henry Blure Kline, H.C. Nickson, Andrew Lytle, John Gould Fletcher and Stark Young. Though they have named themselves as 'Agrarian brethren' they were in no way connected with agriculture. These contributors, though varied in quality, yet subscribed themselves to the principles set forth by John Crowe Ransom in his introductory essay.
To John Crowe Ransom, Agrarianism provided an important occasion for changing directions. When the ‘Fugitives’ disbanded, Ransom was already acknowledged as a poet. He began to write essays in critical theory, describing and defending poetry as a means to present reality, more comprehensively and to present the experience in a whole and undiminished way.

Ezra Pound, T.S.Eliot, I.A.Richards, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, R.P.Warren and Cleanth Brooks were the propellants of New Criticism. The New Critics were mainly concerned with language, especially that of poetry. As J.A.Bryant observes, these ‘New Critics’ believed that:

Any literature, worthy of the name of poetry exhibits a use of language in which the tangible and the intangible, the sensible and the abstract modes of perception ... were presented as one, undivided and indivisible. Preservation of language with all its communicative and creative functions was insisted by these new critics. (60)

Of the three movements that developed at Vanderbilt, the new criticism lasted longer than the other two movements. It is remarkable that though these movements developed at Vanderbilt, none of them had its fountain source at Vanderbilt. The Fugitive movement was the result of the literary currents flowing in England; the Agrarian Movement and the New Criticism were the influence of American transcendentalists and other social
critics in the nineteenth century England. These literary activities in Mencken's 'Sahara' led the critics to comment on the results. "The Literary Awakening in the South" by Herchal Brickell in 1927, was the first article to focus on the freshness and variety of the new fiction. Labor shortage during the war led a large number of blacks to settle in New York's Harlem, where they formed an intellectual community. These black writers wrote many short stories, poems and fiction. As a consequence of Harlem Renaissance, black writers emerged in the literary scenario. Many of them were either Southerners or had strong ties with the South. Prominent among them were James Weldon Johnson and Langston Huges. Minor novelists of "Harlem Renaissance" were Jean Toomer, Zola Hurtson and Arna Bontemps. Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1922) is commonly acknowledged as a book that represents the awakening of the blacks.

The great difficulty faced by black writers was the scarcity of outlet for their works. At times, journals like *Smart Set*, *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harpers* published articles by black writers, but there were no exclusive magazines for them. But only around the 1920s, three magazines, exclusively for blacks appeared - *Crisis*, *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* and *Messenger*. The black writers grabbed every opportunity that came in their way to expose their literary talents. Another important movement in the American literary history is the rise of Naturalism in the American novel, during the early 1900-1920s. The naturalists were highly influenced by Emile Zola, the French novelist. Enthralled by the scientific impact of the
They believed firmly that a change in the environment may change the man himself. Zola insisted that a novelist must be an analyst as well as an anatomist and his work must have the certainty and the practical application of a work of Science.

The Red Badge of Courage marked the beginning of Stephen Crane’s career as a writer. Maggie, The Third Violet and The Monster were the significant works of Stephen Crane. His novels centre on poverty and the cruelties of war, and deal with death. As commented by Robert E.Spiller: “His vivid impressions of life and circumstances had provided a pattern for the writing of the next generation” (1026). Jack London, author of forty-nine volumes of fiction, many dramas and essays started his career as a storyteller. “An Odyssey of the North” appeared in the Atlantic in 1900.


Considered as the pioneer of Naturalism in America, Theodore Dreiser was profoundly influenced by Emile Zola. Sister Carrie was a
banned book, which had to wait for twenty years for its publication. Jennie Gerhardt was published in 1911. His trilogy of novel, The Financier (1912), The Titan (1914), and The Stoic (1947), is a character study of the hero Cowperwood, a business magnate. The best of Dreiser’s work, An American Tragedy, was published in 1925 and it became an instantaneous success.

In their writings Stephen Crane, Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser portray the view that man is limited, shaped and conditioned by powerful destiny. One can deduce the influence of Zola in their writings. These writers depicted contemporary life of the lower and middle class society, and like the Classicists, they believed that man is limited by the violent nature in him and disciplined by order and tradition.

John Steinbeck, a great novelist between the two world wars has written thirteen books of which the best are The Grapes of Wrath, East of Eden, and The Long Valley. He portrays an interesting and honest view of life and all his works embody an optimistic theory that everything works for the best.

Other important writers of this era were William Faulkner, Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, Sinclair Lewis, Erskine Caldwell, Hamilton Basso, Margaret Mitchell, and Stark Young. This “lost generation” group of writers reveals the horror, fear and futility caused by the First World War. A living legend, Ernest Hemmingway, is hailed as the representative of the ‘lost generation’ writers. Though Hemmingway has written short stories also, his fame rests on novels such as A Farewell to Arms (1928), The Old
Man and the Sea (1952), and For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940). The greatness of Hemmingway rests on the fact that through the effective use of language, he has portrayed life-like characters.

Margaret Mitchell’s Gone with the Wind is more a popular romance than a historical novel. The novel emphatically stresses the success of a determined woman to rebuild the family estate that has been destroyed by the civil war. Though the novel portrays the bitter realities of civil war, the underlying theme is romantic.

Two writers who began their literary career in the twenties - Thomas Wolfe and William Faulkner, dominated the high tide of Southern literature in 1930s. Thomas Wolfe’s first novel Look Homeward Angel was published in 1929 and it became the outstanding novel of the year. His next work was Of Time and the River (1935) and The Web and the Rock, posthumously published in 1939, followed it.

One of the outstanding twentieth century American novelists, William Faulkner’s first novel Soldier’s Pay appeared in 1926 and it describes the homecoming of a wounded soldier. Mosquitoes followed it in 1927. His Sartories implied that the writer might become a Southern novelist. The Sound and the Fury (1929) established Faulkner as an eminent writer of the South. As I Lay Dying (1930), Sanctuary (1931), Light in August (1932), Absolam, Absolam (1936), and The Wild Palms (1939) are some of the significant works of Faulkner. He wove the theme of violence and horror in his novels. He won both the Nobel and Pulitzer prizes.
The first generation of Southern writers consists of Allen Tate, Andrew Lytle, R.P.Warren, Donald Davidson, William Faulkner and others. It is remarkable that from the writings of these novelists, one can deduce the impact of the Southern myth. The elements of the South, as Van Woodward observes, are “the belief that human nature is mysterious and relatively intractable and that it is not a kind of social putty which can be shaped as the politician or the social scientist may be tempted to shape it.” (238)

The Southern myth, as Jane Flanders opines: “presents the white ruling class ...to be pitied and condemned ... The blacks, especially the slaves - oppressed, denied all hope or self-respect are paradoxically most capable of emerging from despair, to find a basis for faith” (108). The First generation writers were concerned with the problems of guilt, innocence, the image of culture and inherited sin. As Van Woodward fittingly remarks, “It is in the present or the recent past...that the major Southern fiction writers have most often sought their subject matter” (236). In their writing, “the past is always a part of the present, shaping, haunting, duplicating or reflecting it.” (236)

By 1930s there was a general awareness that Southern fiction constituted a remarkable portion of American literature. Southern books often dominated the best selling lists and so Southern literature became the centre of critical attention. Most of these writers were extensive readers and hence their criticisms were naturally excellent, informative and brilliant. Journals such as The Southern Review, The Kenyan Review and The
Virginia Review became most influential because of the criticism of the eminent writers like John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Donald Davidson, R.P. Warren, Merrill Moore, Cleanth Brooks and Andrew Lytle. They traced the basic outlines of the Southern fiction - the individual in relation to himself, and with others, and the individual as a free agent. The Southern writers were aware that values such as the sense of family, social and religious integrity were disappearing and this feeling created a sense of personal loss in them.

With the passage of time, disintegration of society was no longer considered noteworthy by Southern novelists. Instead, the disintegration of the self was highlighted. In their writings, man was viewed as a limited creature. The recurrent theme in their works included murder, suicide, rape, castration and self-mutilations. The characters were portrayed as insane, idiotic, obsessed and perverted. These writers emphasize the view that life without principles is unworthy of being lived and they portrayed an individual as responsible for his actions.

The first generation writers were followed by the second-generation writers, which consisted of Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, William Styron, Elizabeth Spencer, Madison James and others. These writers have inherited the techniques and style of their predecessors.

William Clark Styron, born in 1925 at New Port News is a significant literary figure in American literary scenario of the twentieth century. His first novel Lie Down in Darkness was published in 1951 and Styron at the
age of twenty-six was instantaneously hailed as the heir of Faulkner. A novella, *The Long March*, was published in 1953. His second novel *Set This House On Fire*, published in 1960, probes the nature of evil and the possibility of redemption from it. Commenting on the responses of the critics, immediately after the publication of this novel, Louis D. Rubin observes: "... the Most Promising Younger Novelist of his generation had fallen flat on his face" (92), and Styron was thoroughly denounced for having written a book of this kind. As a consequence of this kind of bitter criticism, some of the critics felt that *Lie Down in Darkness*, like that of *Set This House On Fire*, was not really so good.


*Sophie’s Choice*, published in 1979 remained on the New York Times Best Seller list for forty-seven weeks and the book won the ‘First American Award’ in 1980. This novel heralds the significance of love and
implies that endurance is the greatest wisdom and that inhumanity to fellow human beings is the greatest evil in this world. His non-fictional work - *A Memoir of Madness* (1990) portrays the depression experienced by him. An honorary Doctorate degree was awarded to him in 1993.

Modern literature portrays society as one that has lost traditional values. Loneliness, guilt, anxiety, anguish and disintegration have become the theme of the twentieth century literature. The major concern of the writer is the inner man and he is depicted as if in a vacuum and in a painful condition, unable to reconcile with the society, traditional values and with his own self. The underlying theme of contemporary American fiction is the tragic incompleteness of life; for they make an individual to realize how insignificant he/she is or how little he/she knows, despite his/her capacity to be and his/her desire to know.

Walter Allen opines: “The classic American novels have dealt with the life of solitary man - man alone, wrestling with himself” (XIV). Needless to say, Styron as a modern writer deals with the above-mentioned themes. His novels portray man as limited. His characters search for identity and they are trapped by their own follies. They are prisoners of their own memories and they find it difficult to live in the present. In his writings, Styron portrays the world as a prison, devoid of God, and man has to struggle hard to extricate himself from sorrows, sufferings and despair. His novels bear testimony to disharmony - disharmony between man and his inner self, between man and his environment. They also teach a valuable
lesson that the meaningless existence of his life can be transformed by love, humanity and compassion to fellow human beings.

T.E. Hulme in his essay "Romanticism and Classicism" makes a distinction between the concepts of man as the Romanticists and the Classicists held it. The Romanticists believed that man is noble if only he is freed from the influence of society, while the Classicist believed that man "is intrinsically limited, but disciplined by order and tradition to something fairly decent" (94). The Classicists view of the inherited limitation and evil in man's nature influenced the literature of the twentieth century. As examples, we can cite William Goldings' *Lord of the Flies* (1954) and Richard Huges' *A High Wind in Jamaica* (1972). *Huckleberry Finn*, a classic of American literature by Mark Twain expresses the view that "Human beings can be awful, cruel to one another.”(194)

Styron's novels involve human institutions and humanly contrived situations, which cause people to live in wretchedness. His novels exemplify the view that with all our capacity to do good, to love, to maintain goodness and friendship, we allow ourselves to be mechanized or twisted through society and politics, and through a thousand different ways into causing evil, pain and suffering in our and in other's lives. He is of the opinion that man's greatest enemy is his own self and the evil in man destroys him and others.

Styron makes use of Southern characters, settings and themes. Each work embodies the traditional Southern themes- the curse of racism, the
influence of the past, the power of social environment over an individual’s will, rebellion, despair and search for order. Though his novels reveal the influence of Faulkner, R.P.Warren, and Fitzgerald, his characters do not suffer from Faulknerian sense of communal loss.

One can find obvious similarities between Styron’s *Lie Down in Darkness* and two of the novels of William Faulkner. The technique of beginning the novel with the funeral procession brings to our mind the scene of *As I Lay Dying*. The characters and the technique of revealing the story is similar to that of *The Sound and the Fury*. Peyton is a combination of Quentin and Caddy. Like Caddy, she is a nymphomaniac and like Quentin wanders around the town of New York with a clock. Like Mrs. Compson, Helen feels that all that is bad had surrounded her. The crippled Maudie reminds us of Benjy. Both the families have faithful Negro servants. And the ending of Styron’s novel echoes that of Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*.

Louis D. Rubin comments: “Faulkner envisions the disintegration of leading southern family as something dynastic whereas Styron portrays it as being psychological, the results of personal weaknesses and sins of father and mother” (86). Besides Faulkner, the influence of R.P.Warren could be deduced in Styron’s works. The richness of language, the life like characters and the narrative technique of Warren fascinated him. Styron in *This Quiet Dust and Other Writings* comments on the influence of R.P.Warren’s *All the King’s Men* as follows: “it was a book which thrilled me, challenged me and
filled me with hope for my own possibilities as a writer” (329). After reading this book, he decided to write about the young girl who had committed suicide. He also admired Flaubert. Commenting on the literary influence of William Faulkner, Styron in the *New York Times Review* remarked that “Faulkner was the hardest to shake off” (27). With all these influences, Styron’s writing is not a mere imitation of Faulkner. As Nathan in *Sophie’s Choice* says, “Of course, you’ve read these writers, you wouldn’t be able to write a book if you hadn’t. But you’ve absorbed them…and made them your own.” (251)

Styron believed that literature could change the attitude of the people to a great extent. As a Southern writer, his forceful writings place him on par with other Southern writers like William Faulkner, R.P. Warren, and Donald Davidson. In spite of such greatness, the researchers and reviewers have left some gap in the study of Styron’s works. Though much research work has been carried out on various aspects of William Styron’s fictional work, like his preoccupations with the decadence of the South, the inhumanity of man to man, the evils in his novels, the thematic unity, and his achievement as an artist, no full-length study concerning his conceptualization of sin and expiation has been made so far. The present researcher strongly believes that a study of his novels from this point of view will be helpful to mitigate, if not solve, the ills of today’s society.

The worries, the fret and fever of the modern world enforce us to live in an existential vacuum and in a self centered way. The novels of William
Styron teach us to understand the essential qualities, which provide identity to us as human beings. The spiritual vacuum of our age and the desperate measures adopted by human beings to fill up the void are also portrayed in his novels. Hence the researcher is of the view that a study of sin and expiation in the select novels of Styron would be much useful to humanity at the present context.

The novels of William Styron focus on the qualities, which contribute to the well-being and survival of humanity. On the basis of this thematic unity and considering the limited scope of a study of this kind, the researcher has restricted her focus mainly to three of his novels - Lie Down in Darkness, Set this House On Fire and Sophie's Choice. An in-depth analysis of William Styron's novels reveals the fact that the writer is preoccupied with the problems of sin, remorse and expiation and hence the researcher has made an attempt to analyze the sins that are committed by the characters of these selected novels. This study hopes to enhance our knowledge of human beings, their behavior and attitude to life.

For an interpretation of the works of Styron, the present researcher adopts an eclectic approach. The study is divided into five chapters including this introductory chapter. Chapter II is entitled, "Concept of Sin", Chapter III - "Concept of Remorse", Chapter IV- "Concept of Expiation" and Chapter V - "Conclusion". At the beginning of each of the three main chapters that follow this introductory chapter, the chosen concept is explained in general followed by a thorough investigation of the author's
selected works to exemplify his conceptualization of the same. Wherever necessary, cross-references are made to the works of other writers drawing parallels in situations, events and characters. At the end of each chapter, a brief sum up of the arguments of the concerned chapter is given. In the final and concluding chapter, the arguments of all the preceding chapters are neatly tied up in a dovetail manner and suggestions for further research are given.