INTRODUCTION
Faulkner's major novels are about a county in the South. They deal with the life style of a proud people very much different from their countrymen in the North. These people built a social order which was 'flawed' from the beginning because it was not based on justice, equality, and human dignity. The designers of this order established the institution of slavery which brought in its wake, first a curse on the land, then a crushing defeat. This defeat changed the entire social structure of the region. It gave the racial tension a new direction. Conscious of the altered situation and armed with political powers the negroes set out to undermine the white supremacy of the South. Very few remained loyal to the land and its 'racial code'. Consequently, the plantation economy of the region received a severe set back. Once 'the Eden' of the planters, the region appeared no better than a 'land of collapsed dreams' and 'blighted promise'. In novel after novel Faulkner records the impact of this
catastrophe on the inward-looking descendants of the planters and on the institutions of the region.

After a shaky beginning as a novelist, Faulkner wrote in 1929 his first important novel *Sartoris*. In *Sartoris* he found himself. This is his first novel about the South and anticipates all the major themes: the curse on the land, racial tension, decline of an order, conflict between two systems of values, impact of industrialism, contemporary chaos and nihilism. Since the study is concerned with the problems of the South, only a few novels have been taken up for a detailed analysis. These are *Sartoris*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Night in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Go Down, Moses*, *Intruder in the Dust* and the *Snopes Trilogy*. They fully reveal these themes and all the strains and stresses of the South and the moral vision of Faulkner. If one reads these novels in a chronological order, one finds it difficult to discover the basic historical pattern which gives a kind of imperceptible unity to his major fiction. In order to make this pattern explicit it is desirable to begin with *The Bear* which deals with the primal curse of the South.
The grand phase of Faulkner's creative career begins with *Sartoris*, after which follow seven major novels in quick succession. What is remarkable about these novels is that they belong to the Yoknapatawpha county, Mississippi, and reveal the socio-economic structure and moral imperatives of the region. They reveal Faulkner's interest in local problems of topical as well as of permanent significance. But essentially, Faulkner is neither a realist nor a naturalist. To be sure, though his interest in the immediate problem of the region is apparently all-absorbing, it is of a more fundamental nature. He views his subject in a wider perspective and like a Greek tragedian discovers in the happenings of a family, recurrence of an eternal pattern. This makes his characters real and representative at the same time and gives to his simple story of the village folk, a scriptural dimension, and to his novels a Joycean magnitude. Faulkner, not only sees his subject in a wider perspective but intensifies and deepens its meaning and thus transforms an authentic native subject into an awe-inspiring drama of the human condition.

It is presumed that Faulkner's major fiction reveals his nascent vision of history and of human destiny. This vision slowly emerged with the passage of time,
though it was latent from the very beginning in the
depths of his mind. With Sartoris, he began to work
with the enduring preoccupations of his people, their
tragic fate, the fall of the home-land and its cultural
crisis. But he postulated the real cause of these
tragic developments in the saga of Sutpen: Absalom,
Absalom!, which is an authentic chronicle of the South,
in the form of a powerful legend, to a very great
extent, unravels those moral failures which weakened
the foundation of the heroic order in the South. But
only in The Bear, does Faulkner successfully state
the root cause of his region’s schism. In this
novelette he enshrines his basic insight into men’s
moral degradation and its impact on a people whose
preoccupation with a stupendous design made them
insensitive to the basic human concerns.

If the creation of man in the image of God, his
life in the Garden of Eden, his disobedience and fall,
and later Christ’s crucifixion and redemption all
embodied in the doctrine of the original sin, reveal
the basic insight of Christianity the private myth
which Faulkner creates is an attempt to reveal the
causes of the tragic fall and destitution of his home-land. The myth accounts for the coming of the white men to the promised-land in the South, their establishment of a social order and complete devotion to all its moral sanctions. Only later, motivated by 'wolverine greed' and 'dead animal lust', did they begin to own the big chunks of the virgin land to buttress their economic position. This compelled them to introduce 'Chattel slavery' and 'the peonage system' on the land. This was a mistake which the Southern man committed in all his innocence but which involved him in a perennial conflict with the higher scheme of things, which led to a loss of moral rectitude and bred apathy to the basic concerns of humanity. Consequently, as Granville Hicks says:

The world echoes with the hideous trampling march of lust and disease, brutality and death.¹

The essence of this myth which one finds in Faulkner's work is that in the beginning there was the

¹ Granville Hicks cit. by Hoffman and Vickery in Three Decades of Criticism, (New York and Burlington, 1960), (eds.) Hoffman and Olga Vickery, p. 3.
virgin land and was open to mankind's free use. But the white man in the South possessed it, and violated the original 'covenant' which existed between man and God. This violation became the sole cause of the South's defeat, degradation, cultural crisis and the present plight.

In the light of this myth Faulkner attempts a prognosis of his region's fall and the fall of man from grace. This we clearly see in his treatment of the family legends. Here, he tries to recognize those psychic compulsions which destroyed not only the families of the noble planters, but the region itself; the subject on which Faulkner writes with 'blood' is the failure of man to see man as a sanctified being with all his deeds both noble and ignoble. Because of this moral failure of man in the South, unnatural tension developed in the region which caused the armed conflict between the North and the South. The war ruined the plantation aristocracy and the Cavalier order of the region and created an ugly, unprecedented situation which the post-civil-war generation could not face. With the collapse of the old order a new tribe of rank
opportunists emerged in the region to exploit its meagre natural and human resources, which paved the way for the region's economic crisis and cultural chaos. The Sartorises tried to defeat the votaries of this amoral inhuman order but could not match their strength.

This study is solely about Faulkner's pseudo-polis and its adjoining area where people conditioned by its geography, history, social customs and religion are engaged in a bitter struggle for survival. It is a world where the down-trodden wage a ceaseless war against the malevolent forces of nature and the privileged fight for honour and dignity. In this world an 'isolato' like Joe Christmas desperately strives to achieve a human status and young Quentin Compson discovers an alarming vacuity at the centre of things. Here, untaught Faustuses make pacts with the devil to establish a white dynasty and the industrial plutocracy, and finally succumb to brute necessity, and the grandson of a big planter repudiates his patrimony to absolve his people from a primal curse, and a sadist involves a coed in barnyard sex.
This land, opaque and slow, shapes the destiny of a people whose tragic heritage reminds them of the basic paradoxes which lie at the foundation of the enormous scheme. If Faulkner creates his characters with shadows trailing behind them, longer than usual, it is natural because he belongs to a family which played a heroic role in the tragic drama of the region and shaped its cultural ethos and conscience. But the thing which always moves a critical reader is his clear recognition of those human values, which serve as the main prop of a culture. The tragic destiny of his home-land always prompted him to probe deeper into the psyche of his people, and like Joyce, he forges a new conscience for his people in the 'Smithy of the heart'.

Strictly confined to a well-defined geographical locality and to a typical cultural context created by a people fated to know defeat, poverty, and me-sulpism, Faulkner does not write only to justify or condemn the ante-bellum South's moral order, or the modern South's commercial ethos. He also does not write in an outlandish language and style merely to codify the obsessions of a nihilist. But, he creates human documents
of the century and reveals the moral issues not of a region but of all mankind. Faulkner is a novelist of a region and uses a limited human context to explore the workings of those primary psychic eruptions which cripple human initiative and shape the tragic destiny of man.

This unique insight of Faulkner had been ignored by many critics. They viewed his novels in the Southern context and either praised him for their dramatic intensity or condemned them for their cynical exploitation of violence for the sake of violence. Their hostility to Faulkner was so complete that they were almost blind to his great merit. Even the Nobel Award did not pacify his countrymen. Major Frederick Sullens, for example, wrote: 'He (Faulkner) is a propagandist of degradation and, properly belongs to the privy school of literature.' Earlier, Kazin described him 'as a tortured talent negated by his obsession with rhetoric and agony'. Even today Faulkner has his detractors. Hoffman sums up their position:

His work did not have "spiritual resonance";
it exploited obscenity and horror for their
own sake or as a "cheap idea": he did not wish for a "better world", but hated the present and brooded over the collapse of the past; he was abnormally fond of morons, idiots, perverts and nymphomaniacs. He was, in short, the leading member of a "cult of cruelty" school of modern writing.2

Only Cowley's influential introduction to the Portable Faulkner (1947) changed the trend of Faulkner criticism. Faulkner himself after the Nobel Award broke his mysterious silence and made many revealing statements about his intentions as a writer. These statements clearly indicate that from the start he was conscious of his role as a writer and was quite alive to the basic maladies of the modern world. His preoccupation with the sordid local drama of man was a ruse to reveal the 'old verities and truths of the heart', 'the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed - love and honour and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice'.

Although much has been written about Faulkner, he

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will continue to appeal to different people in different ways. Words like 'obtuse' 'irrelevant' 'soulless', 'nihilist', have often been used to describe his genius. A discovery of the essential Faulkner demands patience and sympathy. Yet the sober Faulkner who broods over the mystery of life, its sordid drama, its glory, its paradox, its irony eludes the discerning eye of quite many critics. Those who condemn him as 'the bard of degradation' do not recognize the profound significance of his creative work. Deeply committed to the human condition Faulkner is a seeker of human values which Christianity teaches, such as love, pity, charity and brotherhood. The last section of The Sound and the Fury amply justifies his search. Dilsey is seated with Denjy in a negro church listening to the moving words of the preacher:

Den, lo ! Breddren ! Yes, breddren !
What I see? What I see, O sinner?
I sees de resurrection en de light;
sees de meek Jesus sayin Dey liit
Me dat ye shall live again; I died
dat dem what sees en believes shall
never die. Breddren, O breddren !
I sees de doom crack en hears de
golden horns shouting down de glory,
en de arisen dead what got de blood
en de ricklickshun of de Lamb !

If the title *The Sound and the Fury* suggests that the book expresses a complete blank despair about human life, the tragic waste involved in the meticulous mundane planning, the last section of the novel ends on a note of religious affirmation. Dillsy with Benjy in the negro church epitomises man's undying capacity for love and compassion. Those who lack these virtues come to grief in Faulkner's world. And those who endure, endure because they hold tenaciously to the noble ideals of humanity in a world where the 'mind-forged manacles' threaten to silence 'the voice of feeling'. The South which Faulkner depicts in his novels is the South where 'racial' categories are rejected in favour of a human order based on love, compassion and magnanimity. This is a testimony to Faulkner's vision of the South and of man's destiny in the world.