... Man's ability to analyze relates him even more subtly to history: to think about life is to become even more intimately enmeshed in it. Reflection proves that we carry the burden for much we are not responsible for that, all the same we have no genuine identity until we assume responsibilities unique to ourselves... \(^{185}\)

The Southern novelists' chief endeavour is to realise a general theme of selfhood and history. William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Robert Penn Warren are no exceptions. As distinguished fictionists of the South they stand unique in their specific goal to discover the connection between self and history. The modern artists are no doubt highly marked by their individuality. They make it clear that selfhood is a modern myth that attracted every Southern writer.

William Faulkner's sense of history and myth as modes of human existence mark him as a creative writer. He defines existentialism as man's intention to seek for an abstract basis beyond the realities of his own troubled history.

... the experience of nothingness animates almost every aspect of existential literature... \(^{186}\)


Endora Welty's novels are a resistance to history. With singularly fictional skill she presents a saga of self and Southern collective memory which is an indispensable aspect of survival. She argues that a novel is time's child.

More than Warren and more consistently than Faulkner, Welty sees modern history not as the passing of days and years (as a calendar chronology reminiscent of cosmological time) but as a clock chronology - at once an irreversible on going measurement of time and its ruthless fragmentation. . . . 187

Robert Penn Warren's aim is to throw light on self and history. His approach is Hebraic and Christian. He was conscious,

that American history has taken the ironic form of a perpetual series of attempts by the free and equal individual to incarnate the truth of the nation in the solitary self, he has made the search of an American for moral and spiritual meaning in unique selfhood the rich substance of his novels. . . . 188

These dedicated writers of the South reveal the universal truth that life is a constant struggle and to discover one's self one has to gain knowledge of moral identity. The theme of selfhood has been dexterously handled by the novelists in their own perspectives.

William Faulkner is superb when he invests his simple genius and high quality of imagination in his theme of selfhood. His treatment of existentialism brings out the struggle of man against fate and identity:

To be something he must learn to face nothing.  

The plight of the young hero is the result of the problem of self. They are fast bound by the past that at times past alone seems to exist. They are unable to cope with the reality of the modern world. This leaves him bewildered and shocked. They turn out as furious men who rebel against family traditions and frantically go in quest of self and existence:

The young boy's involvement with a glamorized past that could or did exist does little to prepare him for maturity, and his difficulties are increased by his moral indoctrination. He is reared in Protestantism, which is Faulkner's South seems to be a mixture of Baptist, Methodist, and Calvinist theologies, adding up a rigid moralism. His moral training is fused of course with the legendary past. His gallant ancestors are the guardian of moratily. 

Like Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner makes a deep analysis of the inner self of his character, particularly in his outstanding novels The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying.

The tragic plight of Quentin is solely because of his heritage and self. His notion of women as pure and innocent is shattered when he learns of his sister's attitude towards sex and is horrified of her loss of virginity. Quentin is highly puritanical towards sex, moreover he can never forget that they are descendants of General Compson. Quentin can think only of his family honour and the old moral standards of his family. Quentin undergoes mental torment because he is a prisoner of the good old past governed by the social and moral taboos of his ancestors.

He is so entrapped that his individuality, what Faulkner calls the central "I am of his being, is practically obliterated"...\(^{191}\)

The Compsons in general are superstitious primitive and self centred indulging in the history of the past. The egotistical self dominates in every character and deprives them of love and affection. Mrs. Compson has no time to spare for her children. She confines herself in her room moaning her illness. She cannot bear to hear the bawling of Benjamin, "With two grown Negroes, you must bring him into the house, bawling". Mother said, "You get him started on purpose, because you know I'm sick".\(^{192}\) Mr. Compson's inability to uphold the family traditions of the past makes him an addict to alcohol. Benjy and Quentin are selfish in their love for Caddy. Benjy expects his sister to smell leaves and Quentin wants her to loathe Dalton Ames and give up her marriage with Herbert Read.


The ego identity governs the character of Jason too. He is condemned as the calculating server of the self and a cruel egoist. Jason's excessive attachment to money makes him a typical heartless, modern man. Although he is pampered by his mother as a Bascomb, he has no feelings for his family and its traditional values. Throughout the novel Jason acts on pure selfishness. He has no regard for humanity and human relationship. His dealings with people show his utter contempt for all humanity, especially the way he treats his employer, his mother and the Negro servants. His perversity is as strong as his self-centred nature. The title of the novel best suits the character of Jason. He is a monster whose life is just a chase of wild goose. It is therefore apt to say that William Faulkner's protagonists,

struggle with the painful incoherence and paradoxes of life, and with the contradictory and often unworthy impulses and feelings in the self in order to achieve meaning; but to struggle, in the awareness that meaning, if achieved, will always rest in perilous balance. . . \(^{193}\)

Yet again his existential characters experience endless suffering on account of their guilt. They strive hard to expiate their guilt and sin. Ike McCaslin of Go Down Moses sacrifices everything including his marriage, to expiate the guilt of his forefathers. Ike becomes a carpenter.

A Christ in the modern world as Christ takes it upon himself to redeem the sins of Adam and Eve. Ike takes it

upon himself to redeem the sins of Carothers Macaslin. ... 194

In Light in August Joe Christmas when he gains knowledge of his Negro blood feels a sense of guilt which must be wiped off, Cash is patient and enduring and full of compassion for his brother. They are Christ like in their suffering.

William Faulkner recognises the spiritual self of his characters through Christ story. His deep love for the old Testament is evident in his fictions. There is a divine spark in the character of Dilsey. Her spiritual self helps her to extend her love voluntarily to the Compsons. She successfully bears the burden of the Compson family with courage and dignity. She imbibes her strength obviously from the fact that she is a regular church going woman. Cash, the carpenter overcomes the natural catastrophes and hardships of life owing to his capacity of forebearance. They are redemptive figures who can suffer, endure and self sacrifice. The Tulls in As I Lay Dying are sympathetic neighbours. They are self righteous people but at the same time they offer a helping hand to the Bundrens. The quest for selfhood becomes a key problem in an individual's life. This is what exactly takes place in the life of Darl. Darl is uncertain of his identity. He does not know what he is. His own existence depends on the existence of others. He speaks of himself in the third person. His search for identity fails due to his lonely and loveless self. As an isolated person he moves against the forces of existence and fails.

The result has tragic consequences for him, for the other members of his family have him committed to an asylum.

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and this rejection of him loosens his tenuous hold on his identity and so tips him into madness. . . .

Cora Till is the only person who knew that Darl was different from others.

I always said he was only one of them that had his mother's nature, had any natural affection . . . .

Despite all this, Darl like Quentin fails in life. Jewel and Vardaman face the same problem of individual self identification. Jewel survives because he had his mother's support. Little Vardaman to establish his identity seeks the aid of Darl who confuses him. He is left to grope for his self identification. In the opinion of Richard Chase, the heroic action undertaken by the Bundrens is really the search for their identity. Addie to uphold her identity, freedom and individuality indulges in adultery. Her selfish act brings eternal damnation on her and her family. There is no hope of salvation or redemption for Addie:

I begged her to kneel and open her heart and cast from it the devil of vanity and cast herself upon the mercy of the Lord. But she wouldn't. She just sat there; lost in her vanity and pride, that in her vanity and pride, that had closed her heart to God and set that selfish mortal boy in His place. . . .

196 William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying, p.20.
197 Ibid., p.133.
Addie, like Mrs. Compson, is purely egotistical. Her self and her contention are more important than her children. Jewel would like to have his mother for his own self.

It would just be me and her on a high hill and me rolling the rocks down the hill at their faces, picking them up and throwing them down the hill. . . .

The motive of the Bundrens carrying the stinking corpse is rather an act of selfishness to satisfy their external motives. Dewey Dell can have her abortion, Vardaman, the toys and Anse a set of teeth and a new wife. Their self centred nature mars the entire unity of the Bundren family.

William Faulkner asserts the fact that everyone is in search for the meaning of life and death. The search for love and affection is a quest for selfhood. When this love is denied they are unable to thrive.

Analysing Eudora Welty’s fictions there is

Neither the tension between myth and history in Faulkner's stories nor that between history and existence in Warren's describes the motivation of Eudora Welty's stories. While the drama of resistance to history is the subject of her major novels. . . .

Her fictions primarily depend on her memory and experience. The society she portrays, essentially speaks of a dimension of self which has a close association

198 William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying, p.15.
in time and place. Clan and the individual self are the prime words of her stories.

The novel faces the insoluble question of belonging in the world as a self and as a member of a larger body. . . .

The close link between the self and the community of the family is enunciated in Eudora Welty's fictions, *Delta Wedding* and *The Ponder Heart*. Eudora Welty's novels are homely novels which centre round family celebrations. They give the notion that the self can be identified by knowing the family history. To have a knowledge of the self one should know one's kin and home. The individual survives because of the family. The feeling of oneness makes them feel safe from the hostile and threatening world. It upholds the truth that without the family there is no individual.

*Delta Wedding* is a fresh and penetrating exploration of love, identity and the complexity and mystery of the human condition . . .

The Fairchilds, especially the older generation feel that they are secure within the circle of the family. Their identity is found within the community and family. The family circle becomes a fortress meant to preserve the chivalric ideals of a bygone era. It also defends them from any external face such as change and disruption.

The novel's central conflict lies in the relationship between the self and the group. The self in Laura craves for individual recognition in a large family. She

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200 Michael Kreylin, Eudora Welty's *Achievement of Order*, p.75.
201 *Southern Literary Journal*, vol.XXII, No.1 (Fall 1989), p.50
longs to be taken into collective identity of the Fairchilds. She is terribly upset when her cousins fail to see her as an individual. Later when she is accepted into the clan she decides not to forfeit her individuality. A similar conflict is seen in Shelley and Dabney. Shelley who takes limitless pride in her community constantly fears a threat for her group. Dabney to assert her self breaks away from the community and feels some remorse.

Dabney, poor sister and bride shed tears this morning (though belatedly) because she had broken the Fairchilds night lamp the aunts had given her, it seems so unavoidable to Dabney, that was why she cried, as if she had felt it was part of her being married that this cherished little bit of other people's lives should be shattered now. . .

Robbie Reid, the outsider strives hard to make George choose between his family and her. He must either be one in the collective identity of the clan or be an individual with her outside the Fairchilds circle. Her possessive and selfish nature fails to bring about a reconciliation between self and collective identity. Ellen enlightens her that George is a complex individual who loves people and everybody in the Delta.

George loves a great many people, just about everybody in the Delta, if you would count them, don't you know that's the mark of a fine man, Robbie? . . .
Ellen's nature of conflict is entirely different from that of Robbie. According to Ellen, the individual in the group ought to be identified. She makes an attempt to identify her children in the dancing crowd. As she was about to give up her quest she catches a glimpse of her little daughter India without a partner. She comprehends that,

...individual identities begin to emerge "each different face bright and burning as sparks of fire to her now, more different and further apart than the start".  

George is the only commendable person who prepares the family to meet the colossal social change. He makes the clan realise that they can have their own private and personal self without impairing their control. "For George, if circles exist at all, then they are interesting circles that make it possible for an individual to be both a part of and separate from the clan".

Eudora Welty finely traces the intricacies of the self and family that go to make her characters lonely and egocentric. Loneliness is experienced by Laura when she is left out by the Fairchilds. Her selfishness bars her from giving up her private identity for the sake of communal identity. She plans to get a gift for Uncle George. She is very particular that her gift, her self, must not come from the within the clan.

Inside the clan the struggle for self is intense. The egotistical self dominates in Dabney, Shelley and Robbie. They are governed by their selfish and self-centred nature Dabney shows keen interest in her own life by marrying an

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204 Eudora Welty, *Delta Wedding*, p. 221
205 *Southern Literary Journal*, vol.XXII, No.1 (Fall 1989), p.55
206 Michael Kreylin, *Eudora Welty's Achievement of Order*, p.64.
outsider. She is so passionately in love with her life that she is unaware of others. Shelley on the other hand prefers privacy to bustle. She realises,

we're all more lonely than private and more lonely than self-sufficient. . . .

Robbie who is a militant outsider, meets George with her selfishness. Her vigorous egotism makes her an enemy of the clan. Eudora Welty in Delta Wedding thoroughly explores the clan and the self. The different aspects of human personality both individual and group are dealt by Eudora Welty with great perfection.

The Ponder Heart which is a blend of comedy and tragedy reflects the internal struggle of isolated individuals. The cheerful narrator Edna Earl's life is one of pain and courage.

The knowledge of her loneliness and incompleteness nags her. . . .

She is constantly reminded of the previous manageress Miss Cora Ewbanks who died an old maid. She is a pathetic character whose private life is stifled. She is the solitary self who muses over the past and worries over her spinsterhood. Her monologue is the confession of a lonely and torn heart.

Her monologue sets out to reveal her nature and the characters who are around her. She hints at her own disappointment in love,

207 Eudora Welty, Delta Wedding, p.84.
Poor Grandpa! suppose I'd even attempted, over the years to step off - I dread to think of the lengths Grandpa would have gone to stop it of course, I'm intended to look after uncle Daniel and everbody knows it, but in plenty of marriages there's - three all your life. Because nearly everybody's got somebody. I used to think if I ever did step off with, say Mr. Springer, uncle Daniel wouldn't mind he always could make Mr. Springer laugh. . .  

One is able to detect that her personal sufferings are not understood by her Grandpa and Uncle Daniel.

Edna Earle takes pride and loyalty when she speaks of herself as a Ponder and a pillar of Clay society. She considers Bonnic Dee as a destroyer of her orderliness of the society of clay. She is a non domestic intruder who has come to shatter the happiness of the Ponder world. There is a note of jealousy when Edna Earle repeatedly emphasises the smallness of Bonnie Dee. Edna Earle practices "a great unmotivated generosity that is also a splendid self centredness". Uncle and niece are the only Ponders left and they will live together.

To Miss. Wetly the easiest thing is to write about the emotions of the inner life of her characters.

Robert Penn Warren, the Southern Renaissance writer with astonishing talent manipulates the theme of selfhood in several of his poems and fictions:

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Warren pores over the nation's history trying to decide how free and how determined the individual is. The war between the states was second, hurried attempt at clarity; and the Southerner, as he points out in segregation, has a unique knowledge of what moral identity means on both the national and personal levels. . . . 211

Robert Penn Warren remarks that history is an essential source to discover oneself and one's own identity. He knew that the literary myth of modern history is the self's experience in American history. He was conscious that

The national self definition originated in an abstract promise -- an idea about the individual human being's capacities for freedom, equity, and happiness that presented itself to the founders of the Republic as an embodiment of truth in history. Ever aware that American history has taken the ironic form of a perpetual series of attempts by the free and equal individual to incarnate the truth of the nation in the solitary self, he has made the search of the American for moral and spiritual meaning in unique selfhood the rich substances of his novels . . . he has deputed this seeking largely through fictive Southerners. . . . 212

Selfhood becomes the keyword of his novels such as Night Rider, At Heaven's Gate, All the King's Men, World Enough and Time. In the Night Rider the main

211 Paul West, "Robert Penn Warren", Seven American Stylists from Poe to Mailor, p.218.
problem is Percy Hunn's search for identity which is a reflection of Southerners' disillusions. It is a question of intellectual and moral implications in the case of *At Heaven's Gate*.

In *World Enough and Time* the egoistic Jeremiah Beaumont struggles to reshape the world to meet the demand of his own shapeless dream. His chief career is a search for the inner wholeness. His *All the King's Men* reveals the narrator's definition of life and the search for selfhood. His poems such as the "Original Sin: A Short Story" and "The Ballad of Billie Potts" examine the theme of identity crisis. It is therefore quite obvious that Robert Penn Warren creates characters who are in constant quest for identity.

*All the King's Men* is the most successful novel of fact and birth. The author makes the reader understand his concept of identity and humanity. The novel is all about Jack Burden's comments on the meaning of life and existentialist views on the search for selfhood. His life is a painful struggle for self knowledge, full of "halting, stumbling movements from ignorance to knowledge". If Jack Burden attains the goal of victory it is because of knowing his self and identity in his search for twin problems of finding identity and expiating guilt. The author's notion is that in finding one's identity, one has to move from non-time to time, from innocence to guilt, for guilt is an inevitable property of identity. This makes Robert Penn Warren emphasises in his *Brother to Dragon* that death of the self is the beginning of selfhood.

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How a self becomes a new self, is really the burden of Burden's story, the major chord of the novel including Willie's search for identity within it.  

Robert Penn Warren is Christian in his outlook when he gives a biblical interpretation of self. He takes the reader back to the sin of Adam which led to the fall of man. Man is born out of the original sin. He can never completely flee from sin, but there is hope for redemption and salvation. By acknowledging his guilt and sin and by a complete surrender and retreat to the past man can escape from sin. The courage to accept their guilt helps Jack Burden, Billie Potts and Aubudon to seek their identity and pass through the threshold of the future:

If you could accept the past you might hope for the future, for only out of the past can you make the future.  

Jack Burden as his name suggests relives the burden of his past life to know his selfhood. Jack's historical thesis poses a trouble for him. He is afraid to put down the facts of Cass Mastern's story. His mind becomes clear only when he gets some idea of the direction of his own life. He comes to realise that identity depends upon the relationship between the past and future events. Jack accepts the past to have a future. His excursion into the past history gives him strength to form new truths. He learns the case of the upright Judge Irwin and the life of Cass Mastern. He overcomes the shock, attains wisdom and gets ready to face the future.

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215 Robert Penn Warren, All the King's Men, p.435.
The discovery of his self and identity comes to him when his mother accuses him of killing his father. He realises that he was responsible for the suicide of Judge Irwin. He feels guilty of having conspired with Tiny Duffy. A big change takes place in the life of Robert Penn Warren's protagonists. Jack comes to love his mother, and his reconciliation with her brings his salvation:

Jack's transformation at the end of the story is a kind of moral second birth in contrast to Adam Stanton's surgical transformation of the schizophrnics personality. . .

The recognition of guilt for Cass is an awesome discovery. The burden of guilt appears too heavy and endless. He learns that it is impossible to undo the sin he has committed. Only by turning his eye to God he can seek redemption. He joins the Southern army, ends his life while refusing to fire a shot in his own defence. Through martyrdom he expiates his sin. Willie Starke accepts Tom's paralysis as a punishment for his sins and attains expiation through constructive good works, but he is denied rebirth.

The curse of man is his identity, which is his separateness and therefore his incompleteness. Man's duty is to rededicate himself to God in whom completeness lies. Because any future is the outcome of its past, man is necessarily more aware of the probability of imperfection than of the possibility of perfection. That humbling state of being warned is required, but so is the will to hope and

work for salvation, whatever the agony. Only in the way Humpty Dumpty be put together again. . .

It is noteworthy that the theme of selfhood has become a common feature in the works of the Southern writers like William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Robert Penn Warren. With keen intelligence they have voiced in the Southern fiction a compelling drama of self and history. The achievement of William Faulkner Eudora Welty and Robert Penn Warren, viewed individually or collectively reveal the fact that the theme of self and the individual's struggle for supremacy is very impressive in their novels.

The treatment of selfhood reveals a biblical view of the history of the South. They bring a close connection between self in time and place. They stress the fact that self cannot be isolated from time and place. They fail not to bring the spiritual identity of the self, self's loneliness and the redemptive nature of their characters. To quote the words of Eudora Welty,

. . . I knew that my wish, indeed my continuing passion, would be to part a curtain, that invisible shadow that falls between people, the veil of indifference of each other's presence, each other's wonder, each other's human plight. . .