CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMATION

It may well be said that all work springing out of such vital impulse from its native soil has certain things in common. But what signifies is that these are not the little things that it takes a fine tooth critic to search out, but the great things that could not be missed or mistaken, for they are beacon lights of literature. . . .

The final chapter is one of summation and documentation to prove the inherent worth and modern relevance of the five powerful fictions presented by William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Robert Penn Warren. First and foremost the fictionalists are acknowledged as regionalists. Their regional predilections and fondness for their native soil create in them nationalistic and universalistic feelings. This fact becomes apparent from their love of God and humanity.

William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Robert Penn Warren believed that their South is inimitable and took remarkable pleasure in projecting their region, its characters and its rich folk-lore. On close examination all the three novelists were prodigious in glorifying their own region.

Their commitment to their locality made them feel that it was not necessary to leave their region in quest of themes, for their region provides them with resources in abundance. Their regional outlook enabled them to choose several

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279 Eudora Welty, The Eye of the Story, p.32.
themes that largely go in with Southern setting. It is therefore quite obvious that
the three artists profess that their region has a vital role to play in their novels.
They are ardent Southerners whose works are suffused with regionalism with
great warmth and tenderness. They disclose their attachment and personal
memories of their county.

Eudora Welty and Robert Penn Warren were highly influenced by William
Faulkner. They both share the Southern heritage like William Faulkner. They
assert that the South serves as the right milieu for their fictions. They are
triumphant examples in America today of the mastery of place and time in their
novels.

William Faulkner's best works are based on his native deep South, Mississippi.
He has much to tell about life in the South. His savoir-faire lies in transforming
his South into a town of Jefferson in Yoknapatawpha, which he calls his mythical
kingdom. His remarkable fictions like Spotted Horse, The Sound and the Fury
and As I Lay Dying are the outcome of his passionate feelings for his region.

Robert Penn Warren in his statement on William Faulkner says.

The narrow identification of theme and locality gives the
stories their strength, the "feeling for place" strengthens
the sense of reality which is always profound in Faulkner's
characters. . . .

280 Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery, eds., William Faulkner: Three Decades of
Criticism, p. 19.
To quote William Faulkner’s words,

... I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it. ...\(^{281}\)

It is therefore apparent that his favour for the South is of two sides. There is the admiring love on one side and the obsessive dread that his land should be devastated by native serfs, greedy traders and land lords on the other.

He adores everything in his land especially the weather which is of great delight to him.

He speaks in various novels of “the hot still pine-winey silence of the August afternoon”, of the moonless September dust, the trees along the road not rising soaring as trees should but squatting like huge fowl”, of “the tranquil sunset of October many with windless woodsmoke”, of “the slow drizzle of November rain just above the ice point”, of those windless Mississippi December days which are a sort of Indian summer’s Indian summer”. ...\(^{282}\)

A review of Eudora Welty’s fictions reveals that her major works correspond with that of William Faulkner’s. Like her senior artist she lives in the midst of the life she writes about. Her stories are furnished with Mississippi Southerners and the

\(^{281}\) Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery, eds., *William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism*, p.32.

characters she creates are in the image of the land. Eudora Welty is aware that place is absolutely necessary for a superior and honest writing. She upholds her conception that place "bestows on us original awareness, and our critical powers spring up from the study of it and growth of experience inside it. It preserves in bringing us back to earth when we fly too high. It never really stops informing us, for it is forever astir, alive changing reflecting like the mind of man itself."283

Place is the very foundation of her works. She argues that place has a lot to do with the making of characters. It is therefore clear that for Eudora Welty home gives setting and theme for her fictions like Delta Wedding and The Ponder Heart.

Robert Penn Warren akin to William Faulkner and Eudora Welty preserves his Southern identity. He claims he is a refugee from the South. His longing desire to live in his native soil makes him a regionalist. As a regional spokesman he asserts that place induces poetry full of regional glimpses. Hyatt H. Waggoner remarks that Warren speaks of his childhood memories in a series of poems called "Kentucky Mountain Farm". The land holds great fascination for him. He minutely gives a photographic description of his place in his verses and fictions.

Robert Penn Warren accepts the influence of Yeats and Thomas Hardy. They are his favourite writers. There are also other writers like Theodore Dreiser, William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway. Like most of the Southern writers regionalistic feeling is too strong in Robert Penn Warren.

Regionalism self-consciously strives to portray the all inclusive reality of a region; it strives to show the lay of the land, the flow of the rivers, the drift of the clouds and the winds; but above all, it labors to reveal the human beings who work and sweat and die on the land, and to reveal how these human beings have built their social institutions, especially their particular colloquial language. . .

William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Robert Penn Warren confirm the truth that Southern milieu has perceptibly influenced them. They are essentially regionalists. It is their region that has shaped their mind and art. Their pronounced regionalism enables them to evolve into a universalist and their fictions have definitely universal application.

All the three fictionalists were conscious of their region, its past and present. For William Faulkner the past was a glorious one ravaged by slavery and Civil War. His lamentation over the loss of the virtues of the past is explicit in his fictions.

In Faulkner's stories it is everywhere evident that he is concerned with the way the past lives on into the present. . .

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The best examples can be seen in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury*. He makes the reader apprehend the present in terms of the past. There is always a conflict between the past and the present. The Southern society had a rich and gallant past ruled by innocence, purity and selfless love. William Faulkner, therefore paints the modern society as a twilight world deprived of all the noble virtues of the past.

In the present there is social disorder and moral degradation, men are spiritually sterile indulging in miscegenation and incest. Sexual perversities were common among men and woman. This resulted in the absence of pure love and family attachments. Dilsey is the only character of the old order who can exercise her true love for the Compsons. She alone stands for love, faith, honour, courage, honesty and endurance. William Faulkner portrays Jason as the modern man - mean and selfish. One can safely say that his writing

\[\ldots\text{ is both ancestral and prophetic haunted alike by the beginnings, of Southern culture and the threat of its extinction.}\] ^286

A deep study of Eudora Welty's major fictions like *Delta Wedding* and *The Ponder Heart* reveal the fact that she was aware of the past like William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren. Her characters talk about the past and its glorious traditions. In *Delta Wedding* the Fairchilds are proud of their family history and family values. The two fascinating old ladies, Aunt Shannon and Mac talk about the past, and their mind slips in and out of the past. They are

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^286 Dayton Hohler, "Faulkner and The Social Conscience," *College English* (Dec 1949), Vol. 11 No. 3., p. 120
fond of repeating the tales of their great grandfather. In *The Ponder Heart*
Edna Earle proclaims the superiority of the Ponder family over the Peacocks.

Though Eudora Welty has great admiration for William Faulkner and Robert
Penn Warren, she is a different Southern fictionalist in certain aspects. For
them "the old myth of honor still colors the sky, still provides a contrast to the
dislocation and disorder of life in the present." Eudora Welty’s main focus is
not on the social problems of her age but on the family relationships. She is
unique for her interest lies only in family and community. She is not to be
tempted by the disturbing seasons of her time. She has no intention of being a
political crusader.

Eudora Welty takes delight in entertaining her readers. Her fictions are homely
ones dealing with ordinary people. Her heroines find happiness in marriages
and are content to live a small circle of life isolated from the outside world. They
fail to realise that the family world is liable to change. This naturally makes
them look into the future in dreadful awe.

Eudora Welty’s feminine qualities add glamour to her fictions. Her stories are
the outcome of affection, love and sympathy for the human race. The world she
depicts is full of warmth and charity. There is a touch of tenderness in her
portrayal of characters. She is not preoccupied with horror and violence as seen
in the fictions of William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren.

Robert Penn Warren in his attitude towards the past is similar to William
Faulkner. They are both sensitive to the past. Past is precious and impeccable.
Robert Penn Warren, like William Faulkner was conscious of the glorious past

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287 Daniel Hoffman, ed., *Harward Giude to Contemporary Writing*, p. 355
and its present decay. He, too bemoans the loss of innocence, faith and purity due to the invasion of the Civil War and Industrialism. Both highlight the fact that the modern man is corrupt and mercenary. They anticipated an extinction of all the noble virtues. They therefore, recommend a return to the past to assimilate its values and seek redemption.

One can therefore assert that Southern culture forms the crux of their works. Allen Tate has referred to the historical consciousness of the Southern novelists William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren treat history and myth as modes of human existence,

Faulkner’s treatment of the drama of myth and history is oriented toward the deprivation of the past in the present and is always inclined toward history as the controlling force of existence. His vivid images of the futility of the struggle against history are unforgettable. . . .

The artist, Eudora Welty can see only the richness of life in Mississippi and elaborate the richness in terms of myth and fantasy.

Robert Penn Warren’s attachment to history and myth makes him choose historical themes. He is a historian, whose works are based on history. His famous fictions are Band of Angels, World Enough Time, Wilderness and All the King’s Men are history oriented. He portrays a corrupt Southern Governor, Huey Long. Historical facts are accurately collected and related in his fictions. He becomes an efficient historian because of his patriotic love for his region. All

the three fictionalists hailing from the South celebrate the Southern culture and its history by introducing myth, folklores, folk tales and fairy tales.

Assessing the characters introduced by the three fictionalists, they expose the fact that they are all products of their region. The characters selected are realistic and life-like characters as one would see in the South. The characters they create enable them to impart the close connection between fiction and the real world.

William Faulkner stands matchless in his picture of identical characters. As his fictions are interconnected, the same characters move from one story to the other. The world of characters created by William Faulkner is rather small, but they display a rich variety of their feelings.

William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* are fairly small and simple stories. The thoughts and feelings of every character is minutely traced. His delineated characters suffer from diurnal urges. William Faulkner says that he spent a lot of time on his characters. Benjy, the idiot has the mind of a child. Brian Lee comments that “Benjy’s section is a brilliant but bewildering tour de force”\(^{289}\). He shows deep sympathy for Benjy by exhibiting his powerful feelings. He portrays Jason as a cynical materialist. Caddy is made to suffer because of her parents and her brothers whose lives are devastated by their violent and neurotic reactions. In *As I Lay Dying* he meticulously expresses the motives and feelings of Cash, Jewel, Dewey Dell, Darl and even Vardaman through their monologues. He helps the readers to recognise the individual identities of his characters.

\(^{289}\) Brian Lee, *American Fiction 1865-1940*, p.232
Another important characteristic feature in his works is the importance given to Negro characters. There are Negro characters in Requiem for a nun, Sanctuary, Go Down Moses and The Sound and the Fury. He is aware of the injustice meted to the Black race by the Whites. He therefore treats them with tender feelings. He commends them for their long suffering patience and perseverance.

Eudora Welty mostly concentrates on White characters. Her characters are types as one would come across in Jackson, Mississippi. They never speak for author as seen in William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren. As there is no horror and violence there are no villainous characters like Jason. Eudora Welty, unlike William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren, writes with detachment. Her characters are conceived in kindness, justice and compassion and permits them to maintain their human dignity. There are also interesting and lovely characters in her fictions.

Robert Penn Warren's art of characterization is superb. His characters representing the South belong to his Kentucky. Like William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren speaks through his characters. He loves historical characters and prefers autobiographical characters belonging to his own clan. William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren create perfect protagonists who are in constant search for their identity. As region is of great value all the three novelists present regionalistic characters.

The theme of selfhood is adeptly handled by the Southern fictionalists especially William Faulkner. He makes it clear that the plight of the young protagonist is the result of the problem of self. Past alone exists and they are unable to face
the reality of the modern world. He becomes furious and violent, he rejects all family traditions and goes about in quest of self and existence. Quentin for example struggles against his heritage and self. He is bounded by the past and his family honour. It is therefore worth mentioning that they endlessly suffer on account of their guilt. His existential characters undergo mental torment and they try their best to expiate the guilt. Through this theme of self William Faulkner brings out the egotistical self and the spiritual self of his characters. The quest for selfhood and identity becomes a key problem in his novels. Eudora Welty specifically talks of clan and individual self as major aspects of her stories. She is different from William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren when she links self and community. The individual thrives because of the family. Her novels are a conflict between the self and the group. This clash between the self and community makes her characters lonely, selfish and egocentric.

The theme of selfhood reaches its zenith in the hands of Robert Penn Warren. This theme is dominant in his poems and fictions. The search for identity and the struggle for identity are common factors that govern his characters. In All the King's Men Robert Penn Warren defines life and the quest for selfhood. Jack Burden attains victory only after a painful struggle for self knowledge. He stresses that man has to overcome two main problems successfully, finding his identity and expiating guilt. Identity depends upon the relationship between the past and future events. The burden of guilt is to be uplifted only by turning to God.

The three fictionalists get identified as technical virtuosi. In their own way they have introduced novations. They are prolific writers of the South whose success
depends on the techniques and style adopted by them. In all their works there is a perfect harmony between form and content. They did not hesitate to welcome the modern technical innovations. Their technical virtuosity is displayed in a variety of ways. All the three are clubbed as painters and inventors of techniques. William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Robert Penn Warren have great admiration for the simple colloquial dialect. Their characters are made to speak in the dialect of their region. Compared to Eudora Welty and Robert Penn Warren, William Faulkner's sentences are long and complicated. He has complete supremacy over symbols and images. These symbols and images are necessary for the progress of the story. Blood is a common symbol which signifies the growth the boy to man. His novels are strewn with mythological and Biblical allusions. As a Southern writer he draws fine images and symbols from nature. His descriptive passages are poetic and lyrical. William Faulkner shows great interest in the interior monologue technique and stream-of-consciousness. He is of opinion, these technical devices help the reader to get involved in the struggles of the characters and share their inner thoughts and feelings. The multiple points of view is the modern technique adopted by all Southern fictionalists.

Eudora Welty like William Faulkner is a gifted artist. She has the art of bringing Southern colloquial speech alive. She is fond of figures of speech, images and symbols. Unlike William Faulkner Eudora Welty loves a mythical world of romance. There is beauty and charm in her description of nature. She has no aptitude for the stream-of-consciousness technique, but she likes the first person narrative to analyse the nature of her characters.
Robert Penn Warren proudly says that the Southern dialect is appropriate for his regional fictions. Charm and realism are superadded to his characters. Like William Faulkner's fictions, his fictions are also crowded with images, symbols, myths and Biblical allusions. *All the King's Men* is in the form of first person narrative. He uses the flash back technique for the reader to have a clear idea of the past and the present. He has mastery over the technique point of view, by this technique the reader is led to have a clear understanding of his characters.

William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Robert Penn Warren are powerful story tellers. They are creative and realistic artists. All the three have contributed richly to the growth of American literature. Their fictions help to appreciate Southern culture. The message they impart is not for the South alone but for the whole universe. This evolves them into universalists. William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren turn out as moralists. The lesson one learns is that man can never escape from sin and guilt. They follow him like shadows, but still there is hope for redemption in complete surrender and return to the past:

> It is [the writer's] privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past. The poet's voice need not merely be record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail.

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290 Manning Hawthorne, ed., *American Literary Scene*, p. 20