CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The importance of the small town in Southern life, the pride in family and region and the sense of a rich and gallant past have combined to give the texture of life in the South, a special density and coherence. . . .

William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Robert Penn Warren get bunched together by their American ingenuity, deep seated regionalism, unique and singularly life-situations of the Southerners, their keen sense of the past and by their meaningful and brilliant wit. And it is an acknowledged fact that their contribution to the growth and strength of American literature is remarkable. All the three are admirable American creationists. In fact, they are rightly termed literary achievers.

The oeuvres of William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Robert Penn Warren lend themselves to a close examination, interpretation and evaluation. Moreover the fictions of these three greats conform to the Gestalten theory precisely of their right kind of form, tight structure and perfect organisation. These three American achievers project their mind art, in which could be gleaned their understanding approach to the elements of fiction. In short, the literary products of these outstanding Southern fictionalists bear the stamp of class and their American fictions are structurally superb, technically admirable and contextually relevant.

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Though all the three American creationists are arresting fictionalists each is unique and individualistic and differs from the other two. In their capacities to employ techniques with functional valuations and variations, in their structuring of the plot, in their narrative techniques, in their use of fiction and dialogue writing, scene setting and characterization, and moreover, in their voices and visions they are dissimilar. But then one detects running parallels as far as thematics are concerned in all the three representative Southern writers. And as regionalists all the three belong to the South, and from them one learns of the different phases of the Southern culture. The senior among them is William Faulkner. Robert Penn Warren and Eudora Welty are rightly recognised as Faulkner's disciples in art.

A study of these three eminent fictionalists offers in the first place, the male and female perspectives concerning human problems and life situations. The view points of William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren are those of the male artist, while Eudora Welty's attitude towards vicissitudes of life are essentially feminist in character. Therefore, the levels of human relationships, conflicts caused by internal forces and external agents, psychological realism and neurosis become quite an interesting study because of their gender and biological heritage.

The three fictionalists William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Robert Penn Warren are committed artists, and this gets projected in their works. Their main object is to establish the right fusion of matter and manner in their fiction. Moreover, they make it a point to consider the "whys " and "whats" of writing. Yet again in them the art of writing is of deep interest. Thus, they get identified as admirably equipped and richly talented artists marked by American ingenuity and revisionary zeal.
Faulkner, the typical Southern fictionalist belonged to Oxford, Mississippi. His novels and stories are about people from a small region in northern Mississippi, imaginatively reconstructed as Yoknapatawpha County of which he is the sole owner and proprietor. His works are therefore set in a fictitious town called Jefferson.

As an American achiever Faulkner is true to his local roots.

He has a brooding love for the land where he was born and reared and where, unlike other writers of his generation, he has chosen to spend his life . . .

Faulkner exhibits an abiding and a passionate love for his region in his fiction. Because of his strong attachment he is able to present a representative picture of the land and the people. Faulkner's fiction is "as Southern as bourbon whiskey, Southern history, climate, geography, natural life, society, customs, traditions, speech patterns -- everything that particularizes the American South and its inhabitants." Faulkner believed in the eminence of the South and felt that it was his duty to explore and uphold the values of the Southern past.

Faulkner's university education was incomplete but the knowledge he possessed was astounding. He was well versed in ancient and modern poetry. He had a sound knowledge of British and American literatures. He had the exposure to the old conservative British culture and the Neo American culture. He was a witness to the depression days the, global conflicts and local wars in

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Europe. Faulkner primarily a literary historian of Southern culture had seen the transformation in social structure of America. He was intelligent enough to think sharply and actually and write power-packed novels and short stories. His main concern is to lay bare,

the conflict between the idea of the old South and the progressive actuality of the new South . . .

Faulkner's work of art illustrates that he is the most absorbing writer. He minutely traces the decadence in society for he is conscious of the social confusion and sterility of his land and people. T.S.Eliot brings to light the wasteland condition in poetic form while Faulkner projects dehumanisation, degeneration and spiritual depravity in the form of prose poems in his fictions.

The man who has adapted to modern society is a kind of human cash register. He has lost his natural "feeling" response to life; his religion is an empty formalism; he is incapable of love. Throughout Faulkner's fiction, twentieth-century society is seen as the enemy, encroaching upon the individuals integrity and strangling humanistic values . . .

The fiction in context is The Sound and the Fury, which traces the deterioration in the present, from what was glorious in the past. Therefore, the basic theme of the novel The Sound and the Fury can justly be compared to that of Eliot's The Waste Land. Eliot and Faulkner picture the modern man as a self-centred being in society, in whom commercial values alone predominate. Eliot and Faulkner

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use the past to reveal the barrenness of the present, but there is a vast
difference in the handling of the past. The novel *The Sound and the Fury*
depicts not only the decline of a family but also of American South. It is of
pertinent value to record the following observation:

Faulkner reflects and expresses the anguish of a
disintegrating class and society of various
representatives of that society and of a class thrown by
the waves of history beyond reality (as a fish might be
thrown out of water), and wandering its mind in a lost
world. . . . 6

As a diagnostician and social scientist Faulkner directs his writer's mind to the
problems raised by Southerners. The first world war brought about a shocking
cultural collision not only with Europe but also with the North and the new order.
The changes brought about were radical and dramatic. The Southerners had to
confront the following:

. . . profound tensions, deep inner divisions of loyalties
new ambitions set against old pictures, new opportunities,
new despairs, new moral problems or rather old problems
which had never been articulated and confronted, all the
things that stir a man or a society, to utterance. The
South, then, offered the classic situation of a world stung

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6 Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery eds., *William Faulkner: Three Decades of
Criticism*, p.173.
and stirred by cultural shock, to create, in order to objectify and grasp the nature of its own inner drama. . . .

Apart from the first global war, the Civil War and Industrialisation played havoc on the races of the South. It altered the life-style of the Whites and the Blacks. The White aristocrats who depended on the Blacks were helpless and inexperienced to cultivate their lands. Therefore they passed through stages of a gradual diminution of wealth. The emancipated Blacks who fled to the North fared no better for they were exploited by the Northern White industrialists. The establishment of industries in the South completely changed the complexion of the Southern society. They introduced mean rivalry and cutthroat competition and awoke the merchant in man, and everyone began to adopt a commercial attitude towards life. As a result Southern society experienced moral confusion and social decay. No other writer so acutely bemoans the dark complications of Southern life as Faulkner does:

His [Faulkner's] field of vision is concentrated on a society that is too often vicious, depraved, decadent, corrupt. . . .

The present South marked a shift from agricultural setup to an industrially oriented kind of life. This brought forth loss of individualism. Many of his novels point to the innumerable threats to individualism posed by modern society. Faulkner gives a graphic picture of the complete extinction of Southern tradition and culture. He makes frequent references to the loss of human values, the neurosis of individual characters and the collapse of the South.

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One happily records that Faulkner's six novels, *Sartoris*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Sanctuary*, *Light in August*, *Absalom Absalom!* Are rooted to his legendary Yoknapatawpha County.

These six novels are the core of Faulkner's major achievement. They introduce the special world of Yoknapatawpha county; they offer an already elaborate description of its topography and its people; they are a brilliant beginning of Faulkner's profound analysis of the human moral condition, for which he is now justly known and admired. . . .

The *Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* are companion novels which project signs of decay and argue that redemption can be achieved by returning to the past. In other words, he recommends that the past values should be imbibed. The *Sound and the Fury* is a social document that portrays the deterioration of a family and by extension the degeneration of the American South. It is a decline from the past to the present. With great capacities for fictional writing Faulkner develops the theme of deterioration and loss in the Compson family.

The *Sound and the Fury* is essentially a Southern fiction focusing on the fall and expulsion of Caddy. The novel can be read as a general "failure of love and an absence of self - respect and of mutual respect". It is a single story narrated by four different characters, thereby offering multiplicity of perspectives. One

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makes a note of Faulkner's observation concerning experience of writing the novel. I wrote it five separate times trying to tell the story, to rid myself of the dream which would continue to anguish me until I did... It began with a mental picture. I didn't realize at that time it was symbolic. The picture was of the muddy seat of a little girl's drawers in a pear tree, where she could see through a window where her grand mother's funeral was taking place... I had already begun to tell the story through the eyes of the idiot child, since I felt that it would be more effective as told by someone capable only of knowing what happened, but not why, I saw that I had not told the story that time. I tried to tell it again, the same story through the eyes of another brother. That was still not it. I tried to gather the pieces together and fill in the gaps by making myself the spokesman. It was still not complete, not until fifteen years after the book was published, when I wrote as an appendix to another book the final effort to get the story told and off my mind, so that I myself could have some peace from it...  

Faulkner owned that this novel began as a short story with Caddy at the centre, and finally ended in the story of the entire Compson family.

11 Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery eds., William Faulkner : Three Decades of Criticism, p.73-74.
Caddy is the only member in the family who" has the capacity to love, generously and unselfishly. Her problem, indeed, is her superabundance of love. Her fall is the result of that superabundance." The relationship with her brothers is treated in the first three sections and the fourth section is given to Dilsey, a humble servant. The author uses Dilsey as a symbol of hope.

The first section of the novel is about Benjy, a thirty three year old idiot boy. He fails to get sympathy and love from his hypochondriac mother. Benjy cannot talk, but he can express his feelings only by howling or moaning. He makes no distinction between the past and the present. It is Caddy who gives Benjy the motherly love and tenderness. Benjy's life without Caddy is empty.

Quentin is emotionally unstable. The love he had for his sister is more than for anyone else in the family. He views the illicit affair of Caddy as a blot in the family and as a sign of the decadence of the South. Caddy's fall and her loss of virginity out of wedlock clearly represents to Quentin the loss not only of the family honor but of the whole way of life -- that of the pseudo aristocratic, antebellum South -- which he has raised to espouse. ... Unable to face the loss of Caddy, Quentin commits suicide.

The third section belongs to Jason, the most villainous character. He is "one of the most despicable characters Faulkner ever created." The loss of his sister means loss of money for he has been deprived of a good job at the bank. He

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13 Ibid., p. 26
filches the money sent by Caddy for the support of her daughter Miss Quentin. Money is the only valuable thing in his world. When he learns of the robbery he undertakes a vain pursuit of his niece. Faulkner dramatizes the failure of self interest, the failure of love and compassion that characterise a modern man. The theme of loss and disintegration reaches its climax in Section Three.

In the final section of the novel, Dilsey is at its centre representing the norm ethical. She is the redemptive figure. She attends the Easter service with Benjy. In the wasteland of the modern world, "Dilsey is the symbol of resurrection and life"\(^\text{15}\). Faulkner's talent is quite obvious in this exquisite novel.

As I lay Dying was written soon after The Sound and the Fury. Both the novels have many points in common, technically and thematically but As I lay Dying is a more complex work than The Sound and the Fury. Faulkner repeatedly referred to the novel " as a tour de force, something he had dashed off in six weeks and revised less than any other of his novels."\(^\text{16}\) Yet again As I lay Dying is rated as one of the three monumental works of the twentieth century, the other two being Eliot's The Waste Land and James Joyce's Ulysses.

As I Lay Dying seems too short and simple. It is a struggle between humanism and naturalism. The characters introduced in the novel are poor hill folks, who are ignorant. Anse Bundren promises his dying wife that he will bury her in Jefferson alongside her own kin. The Bundren family undertakes a journey form Jefferson some forty miles away. They had to battle with flood, fire, losses and disasters. Finally in a decomposed state Addie is buried. The bereaved husband appears with the second Mrs. Bundren, a funny duck shaped woman

\(^\text{16}\) Lyall H.Powers, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha Comedy. p.50
who has brought a gramaphone as dowry. The action of the story is built up through the monologues of fifteen characters of whom seven are members of the Bundren family and eight are outsiders. "We are, thus, given a panorama of human psychology and motivation."\textsuperscript{17}

The novel As I Lay Dying presents human existence as an absurd joke. This novel is no doubt a great work of Faulkner. He thus gives a profound picture of the South in its total state of decay and argues that redemption can be gained only by returning to the past, which is to recognise the value of the past. Only then one can escape from mental conflicts and neurotic states. The solution to the problem of life lies in leading a virtuous life, practising brotherhood, leading a life of innocence and purity and rising from a state of indecision. What is required is the will to endure and prevail. All these were enshrined in the glorious past of the South. Powers pointedly argues:

\begin{quote}
I believe that man will endure: he will prevail. He is immortal not merely because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. . . .\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

Eudora Welty hails from an affluent family. She has enjoyed rich education both at school and college. She is a native genius. With great American ingenuity she engages the minds of the readers by her American approach to problems of life and death in the twentieth century context. As is common among the

\textsuperscript{17} S.B.Mathur American Fiction : The Technique of Point of View (Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, Publication, 1975), p.64
\textsuperscript{18} Lyall H.Powers Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha Comedy, p.1
American literary figures she has voraciously and with avidity read the classics of the past. With streamlined scholarship gained from her intensive and extensive reading, with the keen power of observation and assimilation, and with desire to equip herself with second hand information also, Eudora Welty has created artistically satisfying, emotionally gratifying, and intellectually absorbing fictions and short fictions. Moreover, her created works are technically superb and contextually relevant.

Eudora Welty has spent most of her life in Jackson, Mississippi:

She has remained modest and unassuming living almost at home in Mississippi...¹⁹

Almost all her fictions are set in Jackson, Mississippi which serves as the milieu for her short stories and fictions. Her South is the treasure house of rich traditions and folklore. Jackson, Mississippi provides her with fictional gist. Her region strengthens her to evolve into a natural artist.

Eudora Welty writes of the historical as well as the contemporary South, the Southern aristocracy and the common people. She can never forget her South and that makes her claim that all her feelings are bound up in one particular place. She has the capacity to delight her readers with her original talents. She is a distinguished artist where artefact offers an extraordinary range of mood, pace tone and variety of matter. She never moves beyond her region to pick and choose a character or a landscape. It is her own South that offers her the necessary details for creating fictions of lasting value.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Evans, Eudora Welty (Frederick: Ungar Publishing Co., 1981.), p.1
Welty's novels are greatly admired for they focus on family life, community ceremonies and rituals such as weddings, reunions and funerals. Apart from all these, there is scope for delight and wisdom, understanding and insight and feelings of compassion and love.

Eudora Welty is a child of her place and time like William Faulkner. Furthermore, like Faulkner she lives in the midst of the life she writes about. As a creationist given to originality and spontaneity she follows her own way and her own bent of mind and therefore she cannot be brought under any category. Her stories are filled wholly with Southerners -- particularly Mississippi Southerners. She gives a fine account of their gestures and their moods, feelings, thoughts and experiences.

Eudora Welty has a high regard for Faulkner and Jane Austen. Like Austen she stands aloof from social and political events of her time, but concentrates on the ordinary people of her country who go about the business of loving and hating and talking about their neighbours but at the same time she fails not to scrutinise the plight of the individual who pursues his dream. She is a very private person whose keen interest lies in writing on private experience, however much she participates in community life. She is a natural observer, always just, honest and vastly entertaining. Maureen Howard argues to the point.

With vigilance she watches the world around her. She has transferred that early obsession into the vision of a magnificent American artist...  

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Yet again one connects with the statement of Elizabeth Bowen that Welty is a genius rather than an interesting woman. Glorious tributes have been paid to her by her South and her nation. She has been bestowed with honorary degrees by several universities and has won numerous literary awards.

Eudora Welty's first novel *The Robber Bridegroom* explores a variety of themes. She is also extremely conscious of the traditions of the Southern humor and effectively utilizes the concept of the duality of all things -- man, the wilderness, time, history and reality. *Delta Wedding* appeared in 1946. The action of the novel centres round family events. The novel can be called a comedy of love for it deals with the problems of human relationship and the themes of love. "*Delta Wedding* is Welty's representation -- a dream perhaps, but a dream in close conformity to the life of her region of what it is like to live a civilised order." 21

The novel is a study of family life about the clan of the Fairchilds which begins on September 10, 1923, an uneventful year.

I had to pick a year and this was quite hard to do in which all men could be home and uninvolved. It couldn't be a war year. It couldn't be a year when there was a flood in the Delta because those were the times before the flood

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control. It had to be a year that would leave my character all free to have a family story. ... 22

The novelist has specially chosen this year so that she can stress on the family without any other outside influence. The size of the family she chooses is quite formidable. Battle Fairchild reigns at Shellmound with his wife Ellen Dabney and their eight children. Added to this number are their great aunts, Shannon and Mac who were left to raise eight children. Aunt Shannon's mind steps in and out of the past as she converses with the Fairchilds. The number fills a large stage. The Fairchilds are ego-centric and snobbish. They reveal some of the family's customs, morals and taboos. Like her Southern colleagues Welty repeatedly brings forth in her writings the nature of the family, its origins, structures, growth, influences, enmities, affections and complexities. She is also aware of the family growth for several generations. The key-note of the novel lies in the wedding of Dabney Fairchild, the second oldest daughter in the family, to the plantation overseer Troy Flavin. They consider him to be an unknown intruder and distinctly unworthy of such intimate admission into the family. Thus there is in the family a tendency" to squelch individuality to ostracize outsiders and to resist improvement."23

The Ponder Heart has been chosen by many as Welty's best comedy. The murder trial of Daniel Ponder offers splendid comedy and a jolt to the entire judicial system. The novel proves the fact that comedy is a sure foundation of

her fiction. Daniel Ponder's experiences as suitor, husband, widower and murder - suspect sparkles with humour.

The Ponder Heart is technically a tour de force. Welty charms her readers with colourful patterns of Southern speech and Southern life, Welty's treatment of the folk culture of the South is found in The Ponder Heart.

Delta Wedding and Ponder Heart are warmly received as outstanding Southern fictions. The former novel is thematically superb and the latter technically splendid. In this respect the two novels deserve comparison with The Sound and the Fury.

The next to succeed as an American creationst is Robert Penn Warren. He like William Faulkner is essentially a regionalist. He hailed from Kentucky, a Southern region of America. He was highly influenced by Theodore Dreiser, William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway. His ardent love for his region is explicit in his novels. He proudly maintained the superiority of the South. Robert Penn Warren believed that a Southerner would always be a Southerner even if he was away from his native soil. He took great pleasure in his region and its rich folk-lore. He could never forget the South, and the South is everything for him.

The characters that Robert Penn Warren introduces are typical products of his own region. He himself affirms that all his novels have Southern settings. As a Southerner Robert Penn Warren attaches great importance to his region. He can be likened to Thomas Hardy and W.B. Yeats in this respect. Robert Penn Warren did not hesitate to accept the influence of Hardy and Yeats. Thomas Hardy had always been his favourite novelist. Just as Wessex had been to
Hardy and Ireland to Yeats, Kentucky had been to Robert Penn Warren. This admiration for the South makes him proclaim the patterns of the South to the rest of the world. Warren exultingly celebrates the glories of the Southerner. The South always carries the past with him, for the past stands for innocence, purity and faith.

Robert Penn Warren is commonly grouped with three celebrated schools, the Fugitives, the Agrarians and the New Critics. His association with these schools is best reflected in his fictional practice.

Robert Penn Warren is identified as a Christian writer well versed in the historical and doctrinal problems of Christianity. As in Faulkner, there is in Warren,

the basic promise of original sin conceived as a metaphor of the human condition, of radically imperfect man. There is everywhere emphasis upon the conflict between the flesh and the spirit, the necessity of discipline, man's disposition to evil, and the possibly redemptive nature of suffering. Yet the condition of man, imperfect and predestined though it may be is a condition of responsibility. . . .

Robert Penn Warren was a man of letters who has gained rich mastery over all the generic forms. He was an established Southern fictionalist, a New Critic, a

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fine modern poet, excellent short story writer and a great committed teacher. Hilton Kramer observes:

... everything he writes is stamped with the passion and embattled intelligence of a man for whom the art of literature is inseparable from the most fundamental imperatives of life . . .  

One can argue with pride that Robert Penn Warren had a successful career as an artist. Reading his poetry proves the fact that he was a gifted poet. His contribution to the critical renaissance of the Twentieth century was tremendous. No other American writer has laboured so well with such proficiency in different branches of the literary profession. It must be said to the credit of Robert Penn Warren that he received a number of awards and prizes. His volume of poems Promises won the Pulitzer prize in 1957. His Selected Poems received the Bollingen award for 1966. He had already got the Pulitzer prize for his fiction All the King's Men in 1946.

Robert Penn Warren's All the Kings Men is a great work. It is his magnum opus. His novel is a true representation of Southern literature. Hilton Kramer's observation concerning Robert Penn Warren's use of language is worth recording here.

The language with its flow of regional southern speech tempered to the economies and elisions of the verse medium is alive with narrative continuities and the atmosphere of fictional episode. . .  

26 Ibid, p.111.
The fiction "All the Kings Men" provides a striking insight into the nature of his work. The foundation of the novel is laid on the public life in America:

It occurs in an American world that is shown in beautifully precise detail, a world of country farm houses and county court houses and small town hotels, of pool halls and slum apartments and the foul ox smelling lairs of cheap rooming houses, of places at Burden's landing and governors mansion and the state capital, of country fair grounds and city football stadium and endless highways. . . .

Robert Penn Warren's fictional strength lies in his creative ability to create naturalistic realism in his classic work All the King's Men.

The novel stems from a political struggle in which the ordinary country boy, Willie Stark rises to power. It also studies how the protagonist exercises that power. The other important dramatis personae include Jack Burdern, the trained historian and newspaper reporter and Irwin, the judge.

All the King's Men is not only the story of Willie Stark but also of Jack Burden, who is the narrator of the story. Through his keen observation and experience, the meaning and significance of Willie Stark's life and career are conveyed. Jack Burden becomes "observer, participant and commentator in the significant events of Willie Stark's life." He participates in the events and at the same time he is able to view objectively in a detached manner. Through the events

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28 S.B.Mathur, American Fiction: The Technique of Point of View, p.36.
centre around Willie Stark, it is Jack Burden who is the chief instrument of the plot.

Willie Stark is known to Jack Burden as cousin Willie from the countryside. His job being a newspaper reporter, he is brought close to the events of Willie Stark's life. He becomes aware of the real character of Willie Stark, the governor. The novel starts as Willie Stark's story but ends with Jack Burden's story. The success of the novel depends on the juxtaposition of Willie Stark's and Jack Burden's attitudes and responses. Therefore one realises that Robert Penn Warren's main aim is "to explore and portray man's split sensibility in modern times, the conflicts and tensions that hinder the achievement of an integrated selfhood."²⁹ The novel is generally accepted as a parable of fact and truth. Allen Shepherd makes a pointed observation: Robert Penn Warren is an accomplished story teller and a sophisticated critical intelligence. Even as one is caught up in the fast paced action, violence, broad humor sex and suspense of his novels, one responds to the philosophical novelist making the same old struggle for his truth ... ³⁰

Moreover Robert Penn Warren with his deft artistic skill introduces Freudian psychoanalytic approach and that is why his characters are studied on the level of human consciousness, where id, ego and super ego operate. Yet again one detects the fact that his characters, situations and events are traceable to

²⁹ S.B.Mathur American Friction, The Technique of Point of View. p.35.
archetypes. In these several aspects Robert Penn Warren proves to be an outstanding fictionalist.

Thus the three writers lend themselves to a detailed comparative study thematically and structurally.