CHAPTER THREE

CULTURE CONFLICTS

The Southern writers sought to revitalize for the modern world a view of man that the South had held since Thomas Jefferson. This view saw man as best in his relation to the soil, particularly as that relationship existed in the pre-Civil War South. This myth of good order in the past, Southern writers generally used as a weapon to attack against the bad order of industrialism.

They tended to see in the past a pattern to evolve a meaning out of large sweeps of history, converting the pattern of event into myth, and uniting the sense of tragic dignity with the irony of comedy. Some, like T.S. Stribling and Hamilton Basso, have tried to construct great connected records of social change; others like Erskine Caldwell in his early novels have fashioned laughter into a social weapon; others, like Catherine Anne Porter and Eudora Welty have used highly refined and almost poetic, brief art forms to state their visions of experience. But out of the welter of fictional accomplishment that came in the 1930s, when the Southern renascence was at its height,
emerge most impressively the names of Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren. . . .

The Present Chapter examines the Southern culture and its conflicts that the writers were conscious of. William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Robert Penn Warren are outstanding spokesmen of Southern culture. With great artistic skill and extraordinary talents they have created a kind of fiction out of the rich materials of their region and its past glory. They are Southern regionalists steeped in a Southern culture which was unique in many aspects. William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Robert Penn Warren present the Southern past and the Southern present with a lofty purpose. Their attachment to the region accounts for the accent they lay on the Southern culture. The Southern writers were in constant touch with their people and their place and they were never tired of presenting the same in their fiction and poetry. They took a keen interest in the Southerners' belief in the past qualified by innocence, purity and faith. The Southern culture comprised three essential phases, the past, the present and the future. In the past the South knew an order and a tradition based on honour and personal integrity. It was also guilty of the exploitation of the fellow human beings,

... the enslavement and then the segregation of the Negro; and the sense of frustration, which comes from the consistent inadequacy of the means at hand to wrestle with the problems to be faced, whether they be poverty.

---

Finally the great guilt led to the outburst of the Civil War and ended the glorious past.

The early settlers who flooded the South were mostly aristocrats. They were people of high ambitions who mercilessly usurped the land from the Indians, in order to secure a permanent society for their children. They had no other choice but to accept slavery, an element of sin, guilt and curse on the life and land itself. The Agrarian base was shattered with the advent of Industrialism. The Civil War totally demolished the old order. The new exploiting class that came up to power failed to reintroduce the old traditional manner and the new society was raised on the base of enmity, greed, hatred and guilt. The Negroes and the Indians were grieved to give up their culture and embrace the Western culture thrust on them by the Whiteman. It was a mental conflict for them. They had divine feelings for their native soil -- its beautiful rivers, mountains and deserts. They were helplessly torn between their own culture and the Whiteman's culture. They hated the English but not their religion. In spite of all these culture conflicts they were very firm in their belief that America was their own. This possessive nature instilled courage in them to face boldly the problems of poverty, racial intolerance, or the preservation of historical past with its rich tradition. The Southern writers also responded to these same impulses, for they were bound by the past. Most of the Southern writers were bent on reforming and preserving the rich heritage of their South.

William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Robert Penn Warren are intensely devoted to the soil and life of the South. They find it easy to project the Southern culture, the race and its varied conflicts confronted by the people of their Southern region. The fictions of William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren reflect the decadent phase of the Southern culture. All the three writers come from the conservative South and create a Southern myth in all their works. They also emphasise the fact that human relationship is built upon a feeling of brotherhood and a spirit of endurance. The word endurance becomes an indispensable term in the portrayal of Southern culture by William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Robert Penn Warren.

William Faulkner's writing examines the Southern culture in the beginning and the threat of its extinction. He speaks with great affection for the land of his birth. William Faulkner celebrates the glorious past and bemoans its present state of condition, one of decadence and depravity. He feels miserable and helpless to see his dear South advancing towards its doom. He is unhappy over the loss of the beauteous forms of nature, the fresh and sparkling streams bubbling with life, the sweet and crystal springs and above all the rich fertile soil. With imaginative boldness William Faulkner unravels the social decay that preyed upon the land and its people. His own experiences provided him with close details of the entire Southern community and its culture.

William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha series mirror the decadent phase of a cherished Southern culture. It also reflects modern world as one of moral chaos and confusion. Cowley points out:
Faulkner has been elaborating a tremendous myth of the South, a double labor; "First to invent a Mississippi county that was like a mythical kingdom, but was complete and was living in all details, second to make history of Yoknapatawpha county stand as a parable or legend of the Deep South. . . "

William Faulkner delves into the past and reveals that the past has got to offer a singular perspective which acts upon the present. The people of the South strictly adhered to the moral code of love, faith, honour, courage, honesty, purity and loyalty. All the virtuous qualities vanished due to lack of discipline, and absence of community values. These are true signs of decay. The South became the favourite haunt of horrors, violence and misdeeds, girls were not normal in their behaviour. They indulged in unwanted sexuality and the natives of the South faced only disappointments. Men were vulnerable and desperate. They were mentally, morally and spiritually deranged. William Faulkner gives the notion that the tragedy that befell the Whiteman was purely due to his sin of miscegenation. No other writer has given us so many elaborate and concrete instances of vices like murder, suicide, rape, incest, miscegenation and idiocy.

William Faulkner is rooted in the Southern past. Faulkner's fictions can be viewed as a novelist's bewailing of the decadence in the culture of the Southerners. Unable to conceal his feelings he feels sad that pure and innocent love is nowhere to be seen in his South. To his horror he perceives only sexual perversities, illicit love and loss of family attachment. There is no proper

---

relationship between husband and wife, children and parents, brother and sister, brother and brother and servants and masters. William Faulkner's world is similar to T.S. Eliot's world that degenerates and degrades. He recommends the people to return to past to imbibe its lost values. He advocates that redemption lies in return to the past where there is a blend of innocence and purity. The only possible path to redemption is to practice endurance.

William Faulkner is the leading figure among the Southern writers. His great literary achievement The Sound and the Fury is subject to varied critical interpretations. Paul Satre declared, it is a novel in which time is important. Irving Howe estimates this novel as a social one depicting the fall of a family and of the much loved South. Edmond Volpe remarks that:

The scope of the book is so broad that, like a Shakespearean play, it can sustain a number of specialized interpretations...\(^{103}\)

William Faulkner is a genuine traditional novelist of the modern world who insists on the evidences of the past activity. As he is associated with history and myth there is a conflict between the traditional and the antitraditional modern man. He speaks of two different worlds in his fictions -- the Sartoris and the Snopes world. The Sartoris world stands for morality and humanism and the Snopes world represents immorality which is antitraditional. They are selfish, self-centred and self-interested people. Quentin Compson is the ideal example for the Sartoris tradition and Jason Compson no doubt belongs to the Snopes world. There are of course other characters who follow their own ways and

means. Mr. Compson survives on his philosophy, uncle Maury is just a parasite thriving on liquor. Mrs. Compson covers herself in her religion and headache and Benjy his idiocy. In *As I Lay Dying* there is a wonderful combination of the Sartoris and the Snopes theme. The characters are mostly poor White hill folks who lack decency. Despite the multiple troubles posed by man and nature Anse Bundren successfully carries out his ethical duty towards his wife with endurance.

It is quite easy for a creative artist like William Faulkner to specialize in the Southern culture and the conflicts faced by every Southerner. He gives the reader a photographic view of what the South was in the past, and how it is in the present and how bleak the future is. William Faulkner painfully notices the absence of innocence, purity, harmony, perfection, readiness and endurance, and instead he finds only decay, violence and death. His heart throbs for the past and its precious culture.

In *The Sound and the Fury* William Faulkner traces how the modern society is tainted by ugliness such as sin, fury, sound, lust, hatred and money mindedess. Human relationship built upon a feeling of brotherhood and a spirit of endurance has become tales of the past. The members of the Compson family fall under the spell of lust, incest, suicide and other corrupt nature of the modern society. Faulkner introduces the theme of disorder and disintegration which is the root of modern society. The decline of the Compson family is the fall of a Southern society and the futility of life, Quentin's suicide suggests lack of faith and loss of the old moral code. Jason's life, on the other hand, is characterized by the standards of the New South. William Faulkner noted with great dismay the breakdown of parental relationship in the Southern home,
... the social context of twentieth century Southern life, still strongly flavoured with antebellum principles of Southern chivalry - it is the failure of appropriate care on the part of the gentleman of the family that is to a considerable degree at fault ... 

Parents have no love or consideration for their children. There is no proper understanding between the members of the family. The children are exposed to fight their problems alone. Mrs. Compson proves to be a wretched mother who denies her children love and affection. She seems to be quite contented with her own petty problems. She has nothing to do with the present, for she is caught in glory of the eminent past, which is on the verge of extinct. Mrs. Compson finds it extremely difficult to face reality. Quentin's emotional problems are mainly due to his parents' neglect. His mother has no soft feelings for him and his father's advice misleads and confuses him. Above all he tries to link himself forever to the past world of innocence with Caddy as his support. When Quentin is baffled to arrest the present, he ends his life. Benjy is treated as an unwanted creature sent to punish her,

I thought Benjamin was punishment enough for any sins I have committed, I thought he was my punishment for putting aside my pride and marrying a man who held himself above me ... 

Mrs. Compson refuses the family name given to Benjy. She detests the sight of Benjy wailing and howling. Benjy naturally seeks love from Caddy.

---

104 Lyall H. Powers, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha Comedy, p.25.
105 William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury, p.78
The principal members of the family are responsible for the fate of their children, owing to their indifferent attitude and lack of interest in their ethical behaviour of their children. Benjy and Quentin being obsessed with their sister long to share a warm bed with Caddy and wants to possess her sexually, to commit incest. There is an unhealthy relationship between the brothers and the sister. Mrs. Compson can love only Jason who is of her nature,

... he has never given me one moment's sorrow since I first held him in my arms. I knew then that he was to be my joy and my salvation...  

Throughout her life she needs the support of Jason.

Mr. Compson is portrayed as the inactive, destructive male parent, who fails to tutor his children in the right path. He is the cause for the deep emotional sufferings of Quentin and his suicide,

... a major cause of Quentin's tragedy is that just as his mother has failed him as a source of love so his father fails him utterly in all his roles of progenitory confessor, and counselor. He has become indeed, Quentin's principal enemy, his cold and even cynical logic persistently undermining the very basis of all these idealistic concepts to which Quentin so passionately holds...

There is no love, security and strength for the Compson children.

With great artistic brilliance William Faulkner explicates the character of Caddy. Caddy is the coordinator who attempts to sustain the unity of the family. She is attached to Quentin and Benjy who depend on her for love. Quentin prefers a state of simplicity and innocence of their childhood so that they can be together. Benjy associates her with the things he likes best -- the pasture, the fire and the sleep. Caddy unable to bear the burden of family repression indulges in sexual activity which is a sign of social disruption and decline of society. It is a pity to observe Caddy who plays the role of a mother for her brothers but leaves her child to a surrogate father Jason.

William Faulkner defines the modern man Jason as engulfed by anger, greed, ambition, selfishness and destructiveness. He is alienated from the members of his family. He is indifferent to Caddy and rude to his brothers. William Faulkner points out that a man like Jason can thrive in the modern world.

While his brothers cannot because the vision of life that he brings out of his childhood approximates the reality of the world. With his complete lack of human feeling Jason fits readily into the modern society. 

Jason proves to be the most detestable villain. He can emit only hatred and bitterness. The Southern culture of the past or the family tradition is of no value to him. His instincts are commercial and materialistic. William Faulkner in Jason's section gives a vivid picture of the modern man whose life is a mere life of sound and fury signifying nothing.

---

Edmond L. Volpe, *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner*, p.120.
The South is inconceivable without Black folks. William Faulkner has great admiration for the Negroes. He assigns the last section of the novel solely to Dilsey. The Compsons have several Negroes to look after their domestic activities, even after their decline. They serve the Compsons loyally and faithfully in their ups and downs. The whole Compson family is under the charitable care of Dilsey.

Dilsey has served the Compsons through several generations. She has witnessed their fall from a position of importance, but she has continued to serve them loyally.  

Dilsey maintains a balanced relationship and response to human beings. She is compassionate and sympathetic to every member of the Compson family. She offers comfort and solace to the groaning Benjy. William Faulkner illustrates in the final analysis that it will be the Negroes who will offer relief to the Whites. They suffer and endure patiently like Jesus Christ. William Faulkner closes the last section with a religious touch of Dilsey and Benjy listening to the Easter sermon. Though Faulkner laments for the loss of a Southern culture, he is optimistic that the Southern culture, can survive if the people cherish the virtues of the past.

William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* is totally different from other Yoknapatawpha fictions. The novel has nothing to do with the Southern pseudo aristocratic families. The characters introduced are mainly poor Whites of the South who

---

109 Edmond L. Volpe, *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner*, p.120.
are the decaying humans of an ancient culture. William Faulkner loves these lowly creatures and is attracted by noble qualities of endurance and redemption,

Faulkner clearly sympathizes with them though he by no means overlooks their folly. His treatment of them is complex and just and his comment thus on human condition generally is profound and profoundly moving. . . .

William Faulkner writes of a close knit family moving round a single figure -- Addie. The Bundrens are busy with Addie's death and her funeral procession. It is a hectic preparation for the horrifying and painful journey to Jefferson to gratify the wish of Addie. It is a laborious and tedious work for the Bundrens but at the same time it is a gesture of heroic traditional morality. Her death reunites her with her family.

The members of the Bundren family are under the spell of the mistaken judgments. Addie gives undue value to emotion and Bundren to words. There is no integration in the relationship between Addie and Anse. Addie turns out to be a mother disinterested in her children. Addie willingly accepts Cash as a sign of her own passionate involvement but not Darl,

she refuses to accept the child as hers, and tries to burst her isolation through an affair with Whitfield, who can both speak and act. . . .

---

110 Lyall H. Powers, Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha Comedy, p.52.
Adultery is a sin justified as a moral act. Addie does not seem to discover the reality of sin,

I would think of sin as I would think of the clothes we both wore in the world's face. . . . 112

Olga Vickery says that Addie and Anse Bundren represent two polar opposites of action and words. Literally of course, Anse acts, Addie talks, but effectively Anse is emotionally impotent and Addie mute. From her experience with her husband she realises that Anse has tricked her with more words. Words are his powerful instruments. Though Anse is not a man of action he does succeed in taking the coffin to Jefferson. When Addie learns of her pregnancy she understands that she has been tricked by the words of Anse:

But then I realised that I had been tricked by words older than Anse or love and that the same word had tricked Anse too and that my revenge would be that he would never know I was taking revenge . . . 113

Faulkner laments for the loss of the virtues of the past and culture conflict that arises in the present.

The Bundrens, like the Compsons, failed in their duty towards their children in every possible way. Anse is the self centred and self-interested head of the family. He deprives Dewey Dell of her ten dollars. He is the only Bundren who profits in the end of the funeral journey. He gains a new wife and a new-tooth. Addie is a partial and inadequate parent. Darl becomes,

113 Ibid., p. 137.
the most vocal, the most strangely upset, and eventually the destructive member of the family. His acts and his words are both desperate stratagems to assert himself as a member of a human race and of a family. . . . 114

Darl is endowed with a peculiar gift to see beyond space and time. It is therefore no wonder that Darl is demented and sent off to Jackson.

Jewel stands aloof from the rest of the family because of his illegitimacy. Jewel as his name suggests is precious only to Addie. Jewel becomes to her the only son not associated with Anse. She is very confident that Jewel will be her redeemer and will save her from the water and fire and he does save her. Dewey Dell's inability to communicate makes her problem more complicated. She is a fallen woman more worried about her pregnancy than about her mother's death. The youngest son Vardaman is too small to communicate. Cash is the only redemptive figure present in the novel. He is like Dilsey who has a strong capacity for suffering and self-sacrifice. Kinney says that Cash is the best adjusted, because he is the only child born in wedlock.

William Faulkner in As I Lay Dying traces the disintegration of the family owing to the tensions created by the family members. The Bundren's life is one of wretchedness and misery, yet they have the courage and will to sustain and prevail. Faulkner realised that the real hope for the future of the fallen South and for mankind was to be found in the simple folks like the Bundrens.

Closely following William Faulkner is Eudora Welty. Like William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren she is confined to her region, Jackson, Mississippi. She knew that one's native place is essential to one's good and honest writing. Eudora Welty confesses that the "sense of place going with us still that is the ball of golden thread to carry us there and back and in every sense of the word".\textsuperscript{115} She proudly accepts that her place is the base of her fictions. It is this sense of place that heightens the charm of her fictions. Her fictions rouse varied feelings in the mind of the readers. Her novels give delight and wisdom, understanding and insight, feelings of compassion and love. There is rich variety in her fictions, she deals with the historical South, the contemporary, Southern aristocracy and the common people.

Eudora Welty identified herself with the Southern race, tradition and culture. Her achievement as a novelist is singularly marked by the creation and marvellous peopling of the South. Eudora Welty did not show much interest in history or social themes, but she gave priority to the ordinary people who go about the business of loving and hating and talking about their neighbours. They are talented talkative people. Like Jane Austen, Eudora Welty does not interfere with the social and political problems of her time. She never talks about the South's defeat in the Civil war or about slavery. She did not permit the Great Depression and the War to play upon her emotions. She was very cautious that great events should not dominate in her fiction. She wanted her people of the South to be in the forefront.

Eudora Welty's world is a simple and small rural area filled with charming rustic characters mostly White people. She devotes special attention to the names of characters she chooses. They are characteristically Southern:

Miss Welty has certainly embraced the Southern temper -- a sense of the concrete, the elemental and the ornamental, a fascination with the folk tale or story told and retold, filled out by hazard and by guess in the long afternoons and evenings of the Southern home, store or public square. . . .

Eudora Welty indicts that human life is fictions' only essential theme, and writes only about human beings of her own South. She has written stories about human injustice but not about racial problems. Her Black characters never intrude into the White world to make a cultural transition. They do not interface in the Whites society or business. They remain Black, and their relationship with nature is clearly depicted. With great enthusiasm Eudora Welty writes of their devotion to their family and their manner of living. Her treatment of the Negroes shows her clear understanding of the characters.

Eudora Welty's Delta Wedding has been commended by Paul Engle as a powerful and remarkable novel with a fine texture of human experience. Her attention is on the human heart -- the seat of feelings, and its relationship with others. The theme of innocence is finely presented in the character of a motherless, sensitive nine year old Laura. Laura who is ignorant of the real world is fascinated by her Delta Cousins.

boys and men, girls and ladies all, the old and the young of the Delta kin -- even the dead and the being, for Aunt Shannon -- were also no gap opened between them. Laura sat among them with her eyes wide . . . .

Laura knew from her earliest memory that the Fairchilds never changed at all. Laura is reminded of a great bowerlike cage full of tropical birds her father had shown her in a zoo in a city -- the sparkle of motion was like a rainbow, while it was the very thing that broke your heart, for the birds that flew were caged all the time and could not fly out . . . .

This beautiful image of rare birds symbolize captivity and extinction. This also represents the theme of the novel. The Fairchilds are selfish people, charging one particular member with the responsibilities. They expect their hero to be perfect and idealistic. George Fairchild becomes their scapegoat. He stands for excellence, kindness, love and above all for heroism. The Fairchilds "sometimes seemed to carry him aloft, like a whole roast pig on a platter. They worshipped him so and anticipated his wonders so, dared him not to be faultless". They do not see the man for what he is:

---

118 Ibid., p.15.
119 Carol S.Manning, "With Ears Opeing like Morning Glories". Contribution in Women's Studies, No.58, Conn.: Greenwhich Press, 1985), p.131
They try to force him to fit a mold which they have created that of his older brother Denis. They expect him to be the proponent of cherished family virtues, a typical handsome, self-sacrificing family devoted hero . . . .

George Fairchild is the central focus, round whom the women characters revolve. Eudora Welty proves the fact that the outside world will win over the clan and the plantation. George with the help of an outsider Troy Flavin can certainly make changes.

Eudora Welty successfully handles "the complex technique of under weaving several human perspectives on the same issues -- clan or self, love and exclusion, innocence and experience -- mirrors the meaning itself. The human plight is not static, it constantly rearranges the balance of these issues. Only in moments of susceptibility, when the protections of self are put down, does the order of these contrary perspectives become knowable". The clan and the individual are well explored. Laura the motherless girl is first to appear in the fiction. She is an outsider to the family. She is new to the noise and talk of the Fairchilds. Laura is bewildered and mesmerized as she is not used to the Fairchild living. She is amazed at the ceaseless talk and bustle of her cousins. Laura who was living with her father was a secret and private one. Laura has high hopes that the Fairchild clan would provide her with love, shelter and protection. She longs to be recognised by them. It's a pity that no one told her that they loved her. Laura understands that the Fairchilds are closely knit clan

internally but not by mutual recognition of individuals. There is no individual notice but only common love and affection.

all were dear, all were unfathomable, all were constantly speaking, as the stars would ever twinkle, imploringly or not — so far, so far away . . . .

Laura who is used to exclusive attention is shocked and disappointed to observe the indifference of the clan. Private identity being strong in Laura, she is unable to sacrifice her self and her freedom. Laura's character is beautifully represented in her approach to George with her gift. Her innocent selfishness is poignant, she is going to give her uncle a gift that should be unique. Again in the end, Laura is permitted to remain with the Fairchild clan. She decides otherwise; she cannot lose her self and freedom.

The characters in the Delta Wedding undergo disorder, hunger and loneliness, which are true signs of a decline in Southern culture. Another example is Robbie Reid, who is an outsider but married to a Fairchild. She is a rebellious outsider who cannot allow her husband to be a legendary hero for the Fairchild clan. Robbie is selfish and possessive, and the love she seeks from George is intimate. The love she has for her husband is not meant to be divided or shared. She has the courage to attack the clan savagely,

You're all a spoilt, stuck up family that thinks nobody else is really in the world. But they are! you're just one

122 Eudora Welty, Delta Wedding, p.63.
plantation with a crazy girl in the family, and listen at Miss Shannon you've not even rich! you're just medium . . .  

Robbie is completely neglected by the Fairchilds. Ellen is the most admirable character of Eudora Welty. Though she is an outsider to the Delta she stands dignified and superior to the other women folks. She is exceptional, 

Her life is a widening susceptibility. She knows Laura, Dabney, Shelley and Robbie better than they know themselves. And she meets George with no selfish ulterior motive . . .  

Ellen is encircled by a clan of people whose ways are always noisy and boisterous. With patient and serene calmness and tenderness she successfully performs her role. 

The Fairchilds are a set of people who vehemently disapprove of their members going outside and detest those who take its members away. The door of Shellmound is not open for an outsider. Aunt Tempe's daughter loses her favour from the clan for marrying a Northerner -- an outsider. Aunt Primrose repeatedly worries over Dabney's coming marriage that she will have to go outside the Delta. Dabney, who is young and passionate prefers to embrace life beyond the closed circles of the Fairchilds. Dabney, loves Shellmound and her people, but her love for Troy overrules. Her aunts preserve the legend of the past -- the story of honour, death, the archetypal myth of the old South.

123 Eudora Welty, Delta Wedding, p. 163.
124 Michael Kreyling, Eudora Welty's Achievement of Order, p. 71
The old Southerners, whose presence is constantly felt in Welty's portrayal of their descendants, made their kingdom in a raw frontier world. In the midst of the Mississippi Wilderness they willed the recovery of mythic and traditionalist qualities and values.  

Dabney disregards the lesson of the myth and was willingly ready to face disorder that surrounds her world. The world of sex and childbirth is important to Dabney, but to her aunts, her wedding is a perilous walk near the Shellmound boundary. Dabney's sister Shelley has the habit of writing in a diary when the clan's medium of communication is oral. She observes:

We never wanted to be smart, one by one but all together we have a wall, we are self sufficient against people that come up knocking, we are solid to the out side.

Shelley will also escape from Shellmound to Europe.

**Delta Wedding** triumphantly explores love, identity and the complexity and mystery of human condition. There is a repeated conflict between the need for individual autonomy and the equally powerful need for community and family. The novel forebodes the doom of the community:

living in a world which has ceased to represent the reality of the past in the present, the Fairechilds preserve the art of community.

---

126 Eudora Welty, *Delta Wedding*, p.84.
The older generation of the Fairchild - Aunt Shannon keeps talking to the dead. They feel that the family should preserve social order and chivalric ideals of the past era. They shudder to think of change and disruption. They are troubled to realize that Dabney has broken the family code. Their discomfiture is evident when Troy displays a wedding gift of quilts from his mother. Dabney declares that they will soon have a baby after getting married. All these appear vulgar and silly to the aunts. Past is a treasure that ought to be preserved and passed on from generation to generation. George is their only hope for the continuation of the past. The present does not frighten him. He paves the way for the outside world.

George is the flame that gives new life and destroys old life, the heart of the Fairchild house, the centre of its world, container and houser of its spirit. . . .

It is certain that the Shellmound world cannot withstand modernity and change. Dan Fabricant states that the real world will overwhelm the family and there will be disorder and change. Eudora Welty is confident in the solidity of the family. The clan will survive the test of time because of the love they have for each other. With sheer love they can overcome any disorder and change. In her fiction the Southern folk culture and Southern oral tradition are vibrant and alive.

Eudora Welty is a gifted professional writer who knows how to utilise the rich materials from her Jackson. Her respect and affection is explicit in her comic fiction The Ponder Heart. This fiction comes as one long monologue from the lips of Edna Earle. The region she specifies in The Ponder Heart is a small

South China Grove, Victory, Morgana or Clay, Mississippi. These folks eye progress with scepticism. The people of Clay have inherited a uniform tradition and live in a closed society of intimate relationship. There is an integrity between the blood family and the regional family. The people of the South are shaped by long cultural involvement and enduring human relationship. The people of Clay are quite contented with their old fashioned culture. Miss Glenn aptly points out that Eudora Welty wrote of individuals pitted against modern society -- a diseased society, which finds its reflection in disordered minds and lives. Eudora Welty definitely says that life has a meaning and treats the Southerners with tenderness and compassion.

Edna Earle's life is a struggle for the orderliness of life. She fights to preserve the order while Uncle Ponder tries to prevent it. She appears to be a pathetic figure in her struggle for orderliness,

Edna Earle and Uncle Daniel are Apollonian and Dionysiac ways of living locked in a loving struggle for supremacy. Edna's idea is orderliness, knowledge and experience... 129

Uncle Daniel has no such ambitions, his urge is to follow the spontaneous impulse of his heart. He has a merry time with the chorus girls and loves to flirt with Intrepid Elise Flemming. To quote the words of Edna Earle,

Uncle Daniel is in his fifties, and still the sweetest, most unspoiled thing in the world... 130

129 Michael Kreyling, Eudora Welty's Achievement of Order, p.108.
It is quite evident that he is innocent and has not attained social maturity. He is innocent as preserved by the community of Clay. He is a mythic figure beyond any motive. It is love that keeps him confined within the world. Eudora Welty gives a realistic picture of Uncle Daniel,

He should be an integrity of innocence, for example he should be as innocent about money as about sex- and breaking his father's will would never occur to him or the use of those legal terms, etc. He can’t be offering reasons of logic or argument or art. . .

Edna Earle closely follows uncle Ponder and saves him from landing in disaster at the right time. Bonnie is the non domestic intruder who enters Clay to shatter the ordered, steady and close curtained society. She is a threat to the Southern culture and tradition who mars the family name. The danger is that Bonnie Dee Peacock might corrupt the Ponder order. Edna Earle fails to save Uncle Ponder from the clutches of delicate Bonnie Dee.

Edna Earle is absorbed with the past. She recollects that the place used to be busy in the past and now it is quiet like a grave. Time becomes her adversary. She often worries about her spinsterhood. She is reminded of the previous manageress of the Beulah Hotel, who died an old maid. The possibility of facing a similar end haunts her. She is conscious that she is the last Ponder, the last pillar of the Clay society. She sees her destroyers in various forms of life -- the Peacocks, speeding motorist and chorus girls. The plight of Edna Earle is the plight of several women in a modern society. It is quite natural for Edna Earle to

---

consider her future as dismal. She is caught in the tangled web of social and personal situation.

Her personal suffering is let out when she describes the horde of Peacocks in the court room "they're not dying out". This fiction is a short saga of the declining South. We can hear the voice of Eudora Welty recording and lamenting the passing of a way of life and of family values represented by the Ponders. Edna Earle is just a representative of Welty.

Robert Penn Warren like William Faulkner and Eudora Welty is wedded to his region, South Kentucky. He argues that the strength of America lies in the strength of South,

Warren’s Kentucky had about it a beauty and violence and sadness remarkable even for the South and it forever shaped his imagination, his style, his vision of man. . . .

He proudly reveals that he is a regionist and displays his close affinity with his region in almost all his poems and fictions. His literary works are suffused with regionalism. Hailing from the conservative South Robert Penn Warren makes elaborate use of Southern culture and the conflicts that loomed before his people. To the Southerners of 1850, slavery was a heritage for which they were no more responsible than for their representative institutions, their ideas and their customs.

132 Eudora Welty, The Ponder Heart, p.87.
Most views of the South, expressed both by the Southerners and outsiders have accepted the hypothesis that the area was a separate and distinct part of the United States, differing markedly from the rest of the country in background, economy, culture and social attitude. . . .

The Southerners were not prepared to give up their cherished virtues. It is not surprising to note that the Southerner advances hesitantly carrying the past with him. As a typical Southerner Robert Penn Warren clings on to lost innocence, purity and faith of the past. The Southern qualities of Southern culture are present in his fictions.

Robert Penn Warren made maximum use of the Southern materials especially the local history. Novels like All the King's Men, World Enough and Time, The Cave and his poems, "Brother to Dragons : A tale in Verse Voices", "The Ballad of Billie Potts" and "Audobon : A Vision", speak for Warren's love for history. All the King's Men reflects the decadent phase of the Southern culture.

The Southern culture was a glorious culture having a strong base in agriculture. Robert Penn Warren's characters reflect the Southern society and its culture. They are proud of their family, their region and their gallant past. His regional characters help him to project varied themes. They are mostly drawn from regional folk-lore and from men belonging to Kentucky and its environs.

---

Robert Penn Warren acknowledges that the Southern culture is composed of the past, the present and the future. He bewails the present decadence and admires the glorious past. As a staunch Southerner, he makes the Southern heritage a myth. Like William Faulkner and Eudora Welty, Robert Penn Warren is greatly attached to myth, for it is the only way open to escape the rude shock of the Civil War and the havoc done by industrialization. He considered myth to be the very foundation of culture and social life of people starting from the primitive land. The Southerners are tradition loving people who depend on folk-tales. "The Ballad of Billie Potts" is Kentucky folk tale, and his long narrative "Brother to Dragons" richly abounds in myths,

Myths that support the notion of a distinctive Southern culture tend to be Janus-faced presenting both an attractive and unattractive countenance. . . the reverse side of chivalry is arrogance and the other side of paternalism is Racism. The plantation myth is similarly coupled with the poor white myth, the myth of honor with that of violence. . .

Robert Penn Warren's All the King's Men is widely appreciated for its realism. The author brings out the universal conflicts and tensions in the modern world headed by science and political power. He employs a variety of themes which includes birth, growth, decay, death, rebirth, redemption, the search for self-identity, the quest for the ideal father figure and the return to the past to find a proper remedy for the ills of the present. The Southerners are in constant quest

for identity. The present day American suffers from commercialism, Civil War and industrialism and redemption lies in returning to the much loved past and absorbing the values of the past. The quest for self-hood is a common factor in many of his novels.

In *All the King's Men*, Robert Penn Warren closely examines political corruption, disloyalty in personal as well as in public relations, utter lack of faith in the enduring human spirit and the moral code. Cut throat competition, blackmailing and money matter more than anything. Innocence and purity are bygone virtues. Morality is no longer a cherished virtue. Anna Stanton shamelessly throws herself into the arms of Governor Willie Stark.

The theme of identity crisis and the search for the ideal father figure have a bearing on the glorious past. "The Ballad of Billie Potts" has for its theme the identity crisis. Little Billie Potts goes to the West searching for his identity:

There is always another country and always another place

There is always another name and another face...

The protagonist flees to the West hoping that it would be a land of refuge and promise, but to their dismay they find it a land of violence and sex and death. The Southerner's strong belief in the father image is best seen in his "Billie Potts", "Brother to Dragon" and *All the King's Men*. To quote the words of Jack Burden:

There is no use trying to probe my feelings about them,

for I had lost both of them. Most people lose one father,

---

but I was peculiarly situated, I had lost two at the same instant. I had dug up the truth and truth always kills the father, the good and the weak one or the bad and strong one, and you are left alone with yourself and truth. . . .

Another favourite theme of any Southern writer is the lost innocence. This is the worst damage that is cost to the Society. This great loss can be compensated if man is made to retreat to the past. Returning to the past requires a lot of strain and labour. In *All the King's Men*, Robert Penn Warren decries the corrupt Southern Governor like Huey Long. We are able to say that Warren's works are based on the twin problems of man finding identity and expiating guilt. In search of identity man moves from non-time to time, from innocence to guilt, for guilt is an inevitable property of identity.

Jack Burden, the speculative narrator in *All the King's Men* becomes the chief explicator of the universal problems which he finds embedded in the career of a political Demagogue, Willie stark. Ultimately the novel turns out to Jack Burden's self discovery through Willie Stark, the famous political figure. Robert Penn Warren himself admitted that there is relationship between Huey Long and Willie, though not a literal biography. Huey Long was an obscure farm boy who became the Governor of the South. He acquired dictatorial powers and was assassinated at the height of his political career. Willie Stark is also a farm boy who rose to power and misused his power. Robert Penn Warren indicates that Willie is the product of what happened in the South after the Civil War. The novel poses several problems faced by the South,

137 Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men*, p.486.
Warren's writing combines existentialist themes and vaguely psychoanalytic motifs, prominent among them are the search for identity and self, the problem of human problem, the complex relationship of past and present, with no saving power of the deus ex machine love thrown in for good measure . . .

Robert Penn Warren's chief motive is knowledge of human condition, and it is this knowledge that is expressed in poetry and fiction. It is this that reconciles man to his fate and presses him to a union with nature and others.

In All the King's Men the author goes in quest for a medium between the two extremes of idealism and materialism. To Stark,

Man is conceived in sin and born is corruption and he passeth from the stink of the didie to the stench of the shroud.

Opposing Stark are the idealistic brother and sister, Adam and Ann Stantion defending an old order of courtesy and good breeding. The two are destined to destroy each other.

As a student of history, Jack Burden could see that Adam Stanton whom he came to call the man of idea, and Willie Stark, whom he came to call the man of fact, were doomed to destroy each other, just as each was doomed


139 Robert Penn Warren, All the King's Men, p.70.
to try to use the other and yearn toward and try to become
the other, because each was incomplete with the terrible
division of their age . . . . 140

Jack is unhappy over the terrible division of the age and is unable to cope with
the new world with Judge Irwin as his father. He strives to cure the modern man
of the sickness of his age,

Jack himself, as the Boss's private detective has tried to
change other men's pictures of the world. . . . 141

He discovers that man cannot escape guilt and he has also learnt that through
an acceptance of evil man can achieve good.

Robert Penn Warren gives the idea that there can be no future for any man
unless he accepts his past. Without a past man can have no home. Like his
other twentieth century writers Robert Penn Warren has "portrayed the
wasteland wanderings of a modern Telemachus. But he has also done ararer
thing: he has brought his Telemachus home." 142

Past is a burden for Jack, as his name indicates he must bear the burden of the
age. The split between Adam and Willie is one between the past and present.
Jack fails to link the past and the present:

Jack's burden becomes synonymous with that of the
modern South in which descendants of Governor Stanton

140 Robert Penn Warren, All the King's Men, p.599.
141 Robert Chambers, ed., Robert Penn Warren: Twentieth Century Interpretation of All the
142 Ibid, p.56.
and men like Judge Irwin seem infinitely separated from Willie Stark and the people who support him. . . .

Jack is uneasy over the past and present, he condemns the past as a sublunary dung heap. There are also characters who are obsessed with the past. Jack's mother conceals her affair with Judge Irwin, for the politicians past gives a hold over them and for Jack, Cass Mastern Journals. Jack realises the fact the importance of the past and how it is tied to the future.

William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Robert Penn Warren are full of admiration for the Southern tradition, race and culture. A detailed study reveals that William Faulkner greatly influenced Eudora Welty and Penn Warren. All the three writers have something in common and it is the love for their region and culture. They believed that their region is unique with its powerful history, traditions, manners, customs and culture. Past culture with its myth and folklore are a treasure for the fictionalists. William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren recommend a return to the past by which they can seek redemption from their vices. They never hesitate to speak and pay homage to the values of the past culture,

In expressing their revolt against the modern world they have looked backward to a tradition and an order wherein meaning is sought and found, man has dignity, and history is a record of a purpose. Out of these materials they have formed a fiction of great integrity beauty and worth. . . .
