CONCLUSION

In this study my aim has been to study the narrative style(s) and language of four novels of William Faulkner namely; *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* using mainly Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of polyphony and dialogism along with Tzvetan Todorov’s contribution to the role of the reader in constructing the meaning of the text. This concluding chapter re-asserts the position of the four novels discussed as polyphonic novels and emphasizes the polyphonic nature of Faulkner’s fiction in general, the degree in which one work varies from the other works depending upon the use of double-voiced discourse and unique narrative experiment in each novel. The primary trait of a polyphonic novel is the presence of highly independent characters and the specially non-interfering position of the author. As a polyphonic author, William Faulkner radically created his novels with the coexistence of multiple voices and interactivity between characters, and between characters and the reader in dialogue.

Faulkner has been the target of critics for not following what they call a unified point of view in his fiction. His novels seem to flourish with the multiplicity of voices and perspectives. In work after work, starting with *Soldiers’ Pay* and ending with *A Fable*, Faulkner has created characters and narrators who represent every walk of life. Some critics believe that characters like Popeye, Joe Christmas and Nancy are hard to reconcile with Faulkner's Nobel Prize speech. Others have mistakenly believed that Faulkner's outspoken characters, such as Gavin Stevens, Mr. Compson, Quentin Compson, V. K. Ratliff, Ike McCaslin and the external narrator of *Light in August* are his spokesmen. The result was that those critics failed to differentiate between Faulkner's point of view and the viewpoints of his characters. While Faulkner emphasizes the independence of his characters, some critics like Slatoff, Hunter and Lockyer among others insist on viewing the characters as reflections of the author's personality. No wonder, Faulkner is referred to as a racist and a misogynist by some of his critics.

The critics who ignore the multiple voices in Faulkner's fiction certainly misread his novels. Their insistence on the unity of the novel is contrived and simplistic. Walter Slatoff represents an extreme case in this respect.
Faulkner's aversion to manipulating his characters and his readers is responsible for the multiplicity of voices in his fiction. Rather than a weakness, this multiplicity of voices should be considered a source of strength as it reflects the diversity of the society it has flourished in. Bakhtin praises Dostoevsky for his ability to hear the great dialogue of his age. We should appreciate Faulkner for the same reason. Bakhtin says the novel, more than any other form of art, has its roots in society, and therefore cannot escape being influenced by the diverse ways of thinking which are reflected in the languages of its people. Faulkner, again, like Dostoevsky and Dickens before him, lets the multiple voices of his time speak as he represents them in his polyphonic novels. It is this ability to represent these various voices that makes Faulkner’s work so rich in meaning and open to all kinds of interpretation, or as Bakhtin would say re-accentuation. On the other hand, Faulkner's use of various narrative levels is responsible for some of the confusion. On this level the theory of narrative that Todorov presents in his essay "Reading as Construction," can help the reader identify the authority of the narrators and test their reliability. Todorov shows us that the reader learns to read the narrative from the narrator. Todorov and Bakhtin's ideas on the narrative voices and their relationship to the author, work hand in hand to clarify Faulkner's multi-leveled narrative.

Instead of recounting the events himself in the traditional sense, Faulkner employs some narrators within the tale, who reveal the plot—situated most often in the past—based on her or his own experience or what the others have told her or him. He uses several character-narrators to provide different insights into specific events.

Added to these narrative complications are his stylistic puzzles, which are often objected to as complicated, obscure and challenging. He frequently coins new words by combining some words together. Now and then, his long sentences, containing parentheses within parentheses, run on for pages without punctuation. At the same time, he drops some of capital letters to increase the obscurity of the thoughts and to reveal confusion in the character’s mind.

One prominent feature of Faulkner’s fiction is to bring into juxtaposition multiple points of view within the same tale. He makes frequent use of several character-narrators who tell the story from their particular standpoints, according to their own interests and biases. Faulkner confronts the reader with a series of changing viewpoints as the narrators, in reporting and sometimes evaluating the same set of
events, show widely differing reactions. In this respect, the reader witnesses the same incidents several times from divergent points of view. Most often, the narrators’ own experiences and obsessions affect the narrations that are, consequently, mixed with a great deal of imaginative recreations or the memories of their own past extracting hidden meanings. Spectators are present in almost all of Faulkner’s polyphonic works; they may appear as detached observers, involved witnesses, as the heroes of the plot, as the represent of a community or as the ones engaged in the act of discovery, trying to reveal the whole or part of the story’s meaning. Whatever the role of these spectators is, they are engaged with the others in a dialogic discourse.

Being no more a passive bystander who listens patiently to what the narrators allow him to know, Faulkner’s reader is given the opportunity to take an active role in the course of the story that is revealed by a compilation of sensitive voices who are directly or indirectly involved in its circumstances. Time and again, refusing to surrender his meaning too easily to the reader, Faulkner presents the story solely through the minds of its characters and attempts to make his reader the author of what s/he reads by making her or him to participate in the ongoing dialogic discourses. In Faulkner’s fiction, the ambiguity undermines the undeniable demonstration of the traditional omniscient narrator, between the reader and the events described; there are some polyphonically engaged points of view, which prohibit him from believing the narrative immediately. On the whole Faulkner’s fiction, rather than imposing on us something as true, submits itself to our judgment as a conjectural representation which invites the readers to participate in recreating the meaning of the text. The relationship between texts and readers is fluid. Bakhtin reminds readers they cannot read in isolation. They cannot read texts apart from other material in the canon or in isolation from other communities of readers. Dialogue appears not only between readers, narrators, and writers but also between literary texts and social contexts. The new zone of the novel draws the present and the past together and predicts the future.

Novelization provides readers with ample scope to re-think and re-evaluate the past and the present texts/contexts. That is to say, the reader gives shape to the complicated plot sequences that are relayed by shifting points of view, at the same time that s/he understands the interrelation of the “character-narrators” - the intermediaries whose function in the novel is that of participants and observer-commentators - who desperately try to make sense of the events they are reporting.

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Faulkner, in one way or another, confronts the readers with the problem of dovetailing the fragmented pieces of the plots of his stories. At the same time he avoids offering an explicit resolution and insists on keeping his readers in ambiguity and suspense, by letting his polyphonic novels remain open-ended. Faulkner does not give any finalizing verdict about the characters or about the storyline at the end. In his “dialogic” texts Faulkner creates fiction that offers a variety of positions and counter-positions for the reader to negotiate. He refuses to give in to abstract statements, clearly defined moral messages, or absolute truths; instead he emphasizes the primacy of human acts by exploring actively the full, undiminished nature of the individual human subject in dialogue with other dialogized subjects.

The four examined novels demonstrate Faulkner's genius in writing the polyphonic novel. They underline Faulkner's unsurpassed mastery in using polyphony to reflect the varied human ways of thinking and understanding at almost every level.

The chapter on *The Sound and the Fury* studies the responses of the members of one family to its decline and moral decadence. It shows how Faulkner succeeds in portraying different personal, social and historical implications of the decline of a society through the eyes of the three Compson brothers, who differ at every level; intellectually, morally and psychologically. Faulkner succeeds in conveying these differences through the language of each of these three character-narrators.

The chapter on *As I Lay Dying*, looks into another method of narration that Faulkner uses to test language as a point of view. The book is divided into 59 chapters, in which each of the fifteen narrator-characters views the same events. However each interprets them differently in accordance with her/his personal and social background. The multiple voices which stand for various views on life illustrate and assert the richness and variety of the human life as well the human need for response. Reading a polyphonic work, like *As I Lay Dying* however, requires that we the reader let go of that need to discern meaning from a single plane of perception, but rather, enter into a world of multi-voiced consciousnesses.

*Light in August*, reveals Faulkner's mastery over his medium. His use of a biased external narrator as a filter for the multi-leveled narrative attests to his skill of representing heteroglossia in his fiction. Joe Christmas, Lena Grove, Gail Hightower, Byron Bunch, Joanna Burden and the furniture dealer may not have much in common.
However, each one of them participates in a social and ethical dialogue as they speak, listen, and respond to one another.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner employs polyphony to test the past through the present. The four major character-narrators of the Sutpen tragedy, Miss. Rosa, Mr. Compson, Quentin and Shreve, employ all their skills and knowledge of history and human nature to understand it. Each of them responds to it differently and imposes on it her/his own truth. This effort results in a revision of history that meets the needs of each of the narrators. In the process of their recreating the Sutpen story, the narrators recreate themselves and discover their own truth. In a similar fashion the reader too finds her/his own truth. Faulkner has demonstrated his mastery in *Absalom, Absalom!* by constructing a multiplicity of narrative voices that amplifies the differences between the versions of a single story due to their individual personalities, varied backgrounds, different access to information, and prejudices. The juxtaposition of narrative voices both helps to construct a thirteen way of looking at a blackbird, and starts a process of questioning the accounts enabled by the detection of contradictions, lacks of evidence, constricting judgment, and literal invention. The erosion of narrative authority reaches its signaling peak in Faulkner through other narrative voices. But for most, with an external narrator that, in lending some credence to what the narrators say, nevertheless keeps an ironic distance by scattering concessive remarks throughout a telling that he just about manages to concede is “probably true enough.” Once again, as in *Light in August*, telling and listening play major roles, as each of the character narrator responds to the point of view of his interlocutor.

Taking into consideration all the discussed characteristics, one should suppose that Faulkner held a different view about his novels and characters and that the studied novels had all the ingredients of a polyphonic and accordingly dialogic novel that Bakhtin talks about. Realizing that each voice in the polyphony of voices that comprise the novel, rather than carrying a piece of the novel’s meaning or “truth,” co-creates, with the other voices, a dialogue. The dialogue, rather than moving towards the meaning of the text, is the “truth” of the text. As the reader of the Faulknerian texts, our voice too, is added to the dialogue. Our participation in the Faulknerian texts is the texts’ truth for us at this time. It seems Faulknerian texts are open-ended and unfinalized for ever.