Chapter IV

William Faulkner: Racial Strife in Prominent Works
The completely changing nature of American life and the vigorous versatility with all encompassing spread of a written record are the marks of American Literature. It is an accepted fact that social forces do make a distinct imprint on literature, especially in America where the democratic processes bring the people into immediate familiarity with cultural forces and American literature has responded admirably to such pressures.

The immensity of the American geography has meant that American literature has a largely developed a regional pattern such as the Southern Writers, New England writers, western and Mid western writers. The hybrid nature of American racial heritage has been a prominent factor in America’s cultural life and literature. A continuous critical assessment of factors in American culture has given American literature a self conscious criticism.

The settlement of James town by Europeans in 1607 heralded the beginning of American history in the modern era. However American literature in the real sense came into existence only by the close of the 18th century. Still the early colonists initiated the birth of American writing and their literary efforts in American literature laid the solid foundation on which to build the literary edifice.

Among the early colonists, captain john Smith, William Bradford, Mrs. Bradstreet, Edward taylor all came from England and wrote in imitation of British authors. The works of these early writers try to capture the distinguishing features of American life such as bravery, hardships, optimism, natural calamities, problem of social amalgamation and so on.

The colonial era in American literature lasted from 1607 to 1765 during which hardly any noteworthy book was published and most of the published works were either average or below average.

During the colonial period most of the literary works dealt with exploration and adventure such as Francis Higginson’s _New England Plantation_ and Motari’s –New England Canon_ and William Hubbard’s _Narrative of the Troubles_. Jonathan Edward’s
_Personal Narratives_, Benjamin Franklin’s _Autobiography_ and John Woolnman’s Journals are some of the noteworthy literary works of the 17th and 18th century.

In the 18th century, the prose of British writers like Jonathan Swift and Daniel Defoe had their effect on American writing.

The period between the beginning of the 19th century to the outbreak of American Civil War in 1865 is referred to as the era of _New England Renaissance_ which gave writers like Hawthorne, Emerson, Thoreau, Melville and Whitman besides other major names such as Washington Irving, William Cullen, Bryant and James Fenimore Cooper.

Washington Irving’s _The legend of Sleeping Hollow_ gained instant popularity and started the use of local dialect and ambience in literary works. James Fenimore Cooper gave American readers the uniquely American Fictional character Leather Stocking.

The most important phenomenon of New England Renaissance was Transcendentalism which was romantic, idealistic and mystical movement and emerged as a reaction against Calvinism. An undercurrent of urgency, almost anguish distinguishes this literature which is nearly always of symbolic content.

In the words of Sculley Bradly:

–American writers and thinkers attempting to express the shifting tensions and complexities of these strenuous decades, moved steadily from romanticism towards increasingly realistic objectives and literary forms, and towards pragmatic, instrumental or naturalistic interpretation of man and his destiny.[1]

The Civil War provided a break from the earlier literary percepts and traditions. In the words of mark twain:

–The eight years in America from 1860 to 1868 uprooted institutions that were centuries od changed the politics of people, transformed the social life of half the century and brought changes so profoundly upon the entire national character that the influence can not be measured.[2]
During 1867 to 1872, the voice of the New West emerged in such stories as _The Luck of Roaring Camp_’, Mark Twain’s _The innocence abroad_’ and _Roughing It_’. Thomas Bailey Aldrich’s _The story of a bad boy_’ etc. The realistic movement in American literature started in 1870 with the publication of Henry James’ _A passionate pilgrim_.

However, Romantic authors, like Irving, Cooper, Hawthorne, Emerson and Holmes continued being popular. Many young writers like Harte, Cable and Harris realistically depicted the daily and common actualities, and dialects of their localities. Bret Harte made notable contribution in the development of realistic fiction with its depiction of outcasts and fallen women.

The earliest gigantic figure among the regionalists, Mark Twain, was indebted like Harte and Cable to the humbler comic journalists.

From the age of Jackson onwards, they had inundated the popular press with anecdotes and fiction drawn from sources deep in the common life of America. In this literature, most of its regional character in the humorous anecdote mingled with white and negro folklore, the frontiers tales, hunting stories and folk songs.

The work of later American realists ws both substantiated and strengthened by the new vogue of European realists who had been disparaged by earlier readers on moral grounds- such as the Russian writers Dostoyevsky, Turgenev and Tolstoy and French naturalists like Emile Zola, Flaubert and Maupassant.

The first and the second decade of the 20th century, the American Novel showed signs of new vitality although the real resurgence came in the second decade of the century.

Theodore Dreiser, burst on to the American fictional scene with _Sister Carrie_’ (1912), _The Financier_’ (1912), and _The Titan_’ (1914). Stephen Crane made a memorable contribution to the development of American novel with _Maggie_’ and _The Red Badge of Courage_.


Sherwood Anderson carried on this tradition with his sensitive delineation of modern man’s inner turmoil caught up in the tentacles of the machine age in novels like Windy Mcpherson’s Son (1916), Marching Man (1917) and Poor White (1920). In the 1920s, Sinclair Lewis wrote path breaking novels like Main Street (1920), followed by Babbit’, Aerosmith’ and Dodsworth’, and deservedly became the first American writer to get the Nobel prize for Literature.

The American writers after the first World War were classified as the post-war novelists. These post-war novelists had either personally participated in the first World War, or had seen the devastation and bloodshed of war from close quarters and as such, they made it their motto to denounce war and express their disillusionment with war in their fictional works.

These writers included Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, E.E. Cummings, Earnest Hemingway, f. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, William Faulkner, Gould Cozzens, and they were collectively given the literary name —Writers of the Lost Generation— by Gertrude Stein.

The novels of writers of Lost Generation portray the brutality, violence, death, terror, inhumanity and the horrifying acts associated with war. This is amply evident in novels like Dos Passos’s Three Soldiers (1921), Cumming’s The Enormous Room (1922), Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises (1926), A Farewell to Arms (1928), For Whom The Bell Tolls (1940) and Faulkner’s Soldier’s Pay (1926).

The prominent features of the Lost Generation novels include a graphic description of physical and psychological conflict, inner turmoil, cynicism, bohemianism and a sense of rebellion against outdated social customs and traditions, besides a sense of futility and meaninglessness bordering on nihilism.

The American novelists have been primarily concerned with attitudes and beliefs of the individual that results in success or failure in his attempt at integration. They have tried to explore those volitional and evaluative elements in human life that direct his volcanic energies and drives into channels of activity when faced with the elemental forces of life or irresistible pressure of society.
The American novel is predominantly a record of how man has tried to respond to the challenges of life in his onward march towards self-discovery. They have tried to explore those moments of passionate intensity in man’s life when his very existence and entity as a human being are threatened with annihilation.

As a part of these Naturalistic writings, novel of a different type that is Negro Novel had started, though many of the advocates of the naïve brotherhood object the notion of the ‘Negro Novel’. Is there any ‘American Novel’ in America?, they ask. Then why single out the Negro? To this line of argument, the classic rebuttal has been advanced by J. Saunders Reeding:

--season it as you will, the thought that the negro American is different from other American is still unpalatable to most Negroes, nevertheless, the Nigger is different. An iron ring of historical circumstances has made him so.‖

The Negro novel like negro life in America is at once alike and different from the novels of White Americans. This is the novel that springs from the soil of a distinctive minority culture.

As Ralph Ellison has remarked:

--Negro life is a by-product of western civilization and in it of only one possesses the humanity and humility to see or to be discovered all those impulses, tendencies, life and cultural forms to be found elsewhere in western society.‖

When the African slave is torn from his homeland and brought to the New World, he was quickly denied his native culture. Tribal organization, languages, family structure, religion - all were systematically extirpated. In rebuilding his sheltered life, he was compelled to appropriate his materials from a new culture.

But his master permitted him access to western culture on a very restricted basis. Christianity had its uses but slaves were forbidden by law to learn to read or write.
The process of assimilation was deliberately obstructed by the Whites. The other side of this coin is an unconscious self hatred likewise appropriated from the dominant culture. Hated by Whites and being an organic part of the culture that hated him, the Black man grew in time to hate in himself what others hated him.

An unconscious desire to be White coupled with feelings of revulsion towards the Negro masses may produce an assimilationist pattern of behavior at the purely personal level. Assimilation is in this sense a means of escape, a form of flight from "The Problem".

For Negroes, ugliness was a matter of personal conviction: "It was as though some mysterious all knowing master had given each one a clock of ugliness to wear to and they had each accepted it without question.

The master had said – you are ugly people`. They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement, saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance`.5

Essentially, the Negro people tried to win equality by their own efforts. They displayed some tendency towards Negro Nationalism and tried to maintain group efficiency, organization and morale. Paradoxically, the struggle for integration involved the creation of race institutions.

Some effort has been made to unravel the conflicting impulse within the early Negro novel during 1890 and 1920, and to illuminate the nationalistic character of the Negro Renaissance during 1920s and 30s. They help to account for the success of the "Party line" among Negro intellect of the 1930s and to explain the recent travel towards "raceless novel in postwar negro fiction.

They provide a fixed point of reference from which to view the charging racial attitudes of the Negro novelists.

Broadly speaking, the cultural history of the American Negro falls into two periods- beginning with folk art before the Emancipation and becoming literary in the full sense about 1890. Literature was never the forte of the Southern aristocracy, and it is
perhaps more than a coincidence that the first flowering of American letters occurred in Abolitionist New England. The year between Emancipation and 1890 constitute the gestation period of Negro Novelist.

The historical origins of the Negro middle class can be traced back to the nocturnal escapades of countless male aristocratic who tried valiantly to wash a whole race Whiter than snow.

When –Massa‖ had an illegitimate child by a Negro slave woman, his attitude towards his offspring was often ambivalent. On the one hand, he desired a better destiny for his child than the cotton patch and the overseer’s lash.

On the other hand, it was often legally impossible, and in any case it constituted too public an acknowledgement. Above all, it created a free colored population whose very existence threatened the institution of slavery.

Eventually a compromise was effected by creating a privileged group of mulatto house servants who were relieved of the more arduous duties of the darker field hands.

A division of labor resulted roughly corresponding to complexion and soon hardened along class lines, but the dilemma for these Negroes with raised status was that in a competitive society success was often accomplished by repressed guilt. In the case of the Negro middle class, this sense of guilt was aggravated by in-group loyalties which resulted from racial oppression.

The form which this guilt assumed in the early novel was a persistent sense of ‘Neblesseoblige’ involving a personal obligation to serve the race.

Emancipation caused an economic and social revolution in the old South. At one stroke it wrecked the plantation economy serves the master-slave relationship between the races and threw the formers bandsmen into the wage market as a legal equal.
By 1876, the Republican party had grown tired of being revolutionary and had abandoned the Negro to the White South.

The result was the post reconstruction repression. It was a period in which the Negro was systematically stripped off his civil rights in order to assure the restoration of White supremacy. The old plantation economy was revived, based now on share-cropping and tenant forming peonage and convict lease. Disfranchisement followed as a means of preventing legal redress.

By 1900, Mississippi, Louisiana and the Carolinas has disfranchised the Negro with "Grand Father Clause", poll tax and terror. Where legal methods failed, the Klu Klux Klan and the lynch mob took over.

When the early novelists took pen in hand to oppose the post reconstruction repression, he wrote not only as a participant in a desperate social struggle, but as a belligerent- in a long series of Literary wars over the status of the Negro in the United States.

The historical sequence of these wars runs roughly as follows: an attack on slavery by the Abolitionists, a counter attack by writers of the so-called plantation tradition, reinforced by other less genteel advocates of White supremacy; then a spirited defense by Negro writers themselves which began on a large scale during the 1890s and has continued to the present day.

Abolitionist Literature and especially "Uncle Tom's cabin" (1852), left a deep impression on early Negro fiction. The post Reconstruction Repression had its literary reflex in the writings of such authors as Thomas Nelson, Page and Thomas Dixon.

In such volumes as "In Ole Virginia", or "Morse Chan and other stories" (1887), "The Old South Essays Social and Political" (1892) and "Red Rock" (1898), Page painted an idyllic picture of Plantation life. Thomas Dixon 's Lurid novels "The Leopard 's Spot" (1902) and "The Clansman" (1905), portrayed the Negro as a primitive savage, capable of any crime or violence, unless kept in his place by the civilizing influence of Ku Klux Klan.
Literary wars aside, the early Nero novelists inherited another stock figure from his White predecessors in the person of the tragic mulatto. Such novels as George W. Cable’s _The Grandissimes_ (1880), William Dean Howell’s _An Imperative Duty_ (1892), and Mark Twain’s _The Tragedy of Pudd’n Head Wilson_ (1894) contain mulatto characters for whom the reader’s sympathies are aroused.

The central artistic problem of the early novelists was the creation of rounded Negro character, in the face of degrading stereotypes inherited from the Whites. The proper solution was Literary Realism, not counter stereotype. One such attempt was made by Dunbar and James Weldon Johnson.

Weldon’s novel _The Autobiography of an Ex Colored Man_ (1912) was the first negro novel to contain a complex fully motivated negro character. The brutality repeatedly inflicted on the unnamed protagonist-narrator in Ralph Ellison’s _Invisible Man_ made it easy for early critics to treat him solely as an innocent victim of racial suppression.

The fact of slavery itself was not a single willed act. It was a natural historical growth. But it was an evil and all its human and humane mitigation and its historical necessity could not quiet the bad conscience it endangered.

The Civil war began the fulfillment of the doom. The war was fought with courage and fortitude and strength but with divided conscience.

After the Civil War the attempt to rebuild according to the old plan and for the old values was defeated by a combination of force. The carpet beggars, the carriers of Yankee exploitation- or better a symbol of it, for the real exploiters never left their offices fifteen hundred miles away and the Snopeses, a new exploiting indigenous class descended from the bush whackers and landless Whites.
No other American writer more than William Faulkner has spent as much energy propagandizing the legend of such a single civilization that thrived on patriarchal relations between magnanimous White masters and their devoted Black slavers.

No other writer has subjected _The Southern Myth_ to such shattering detailed criticism. His works contains an elegiac lament for the good old days- gone with the wind of the civil war of 1861-65 and a decided rejection of bourgeois relation based on clear self interest.

He sees the South hysterically clutching at an illusory farmer’s greatness and the specific racial complex of being dependent on people of a low order. For Faulkner, the delicate adjustments required on both sides between pride and shame, honor and dishonor, define the relations between Whites and Negroes.

But it is appropriate to the heroic ideal which is a part of their Southern inheritance which is the stoic virtue of many of Faulkner’s characters, their will to endure.

The Negro in Faulkner is consistently notable for _his capacity to wait and endure and survive_. In his patience, his desire to endure, because he loved the old few simplest things which no one wanted to take from him.

The Negro has been a better Southerner than the Whites. For it has been the peculiar mission and burden of Yoknapattawa, to preserve itself, bearing its guilt and shame as well as its virtue and honor, despite the Civil War which was intended to destroy it and the glittering rewards which have since seduced many of its citizens into betraying it out of the stubborn refusal to remain vanquished, out of the struggle and travail has survived something of unique value to – a mass of people who no longer have anything in common to save a frantic _greed for money._

The unique contribution of Faulkner in delineation of the Negro problem and the racial question, is that even though he was a White Southerner enjoying the comforts of life, yet he succeeded in literally entering the Negro psyche and portraying the problem of Racism or racial discrimination from the victim’s point of view.
No wonder Faulkner’s depiction of the racial problem is more realistic and more effective compared to other authors dealing with the same theme. In this context Irving Howe remarks:

—all of the tensions in Faulkner’s work reached an extreme in his presentment of Negro life and character. Problems of value which in his novels emerge as problems of perception, become magnified and exacerbated when he writes about Negroes.‖

The racial question is absorbed into Faulkner’s heart and undergoes logical and creative transformation. Complex and ambiguous responses to the Negroes are predictable and almost conventional among sensitive Southern writers; they stamp partly from an inheritance of guilt and uncertainty, and partly from a ripening of heart.

However, in Faulkner’s fiction, beneath his worried surface of attitude and idea, there is also a remarkable steadiness of feeling towards the Negroes and their sad predicament.

During the course of his long fictional career, Faulkner’s attitude and opinion towards the racial question undergoes minor changes, his early assurance melts away his affections and sympathies at large; but always there is a return to one central image, an image of memory and longing.

In the words of Robert Penn Warren:

—In Faulkner’s work we find, over and over again, this theme of the crime, the curse, for it is clear that for him the Civil War merely transferred the crime against the Negro into a new set of terms. Even in the work treating the post bellum period, the Negro remains a central figure- one is even tempted to say the central figure.‖

At the end of the 1920s, attempting to find a place in the American literary firmament in competition with the works of such established authors as Sinclair Lewis and Earnest Hemingway, came the early creative efforts of William Faulkner starting with _Soldier’s Pay_ (1926) and followed by _The Sound and The Fury_ (1929), _Light in
August’ (1932), _Absalom, Absalom_ (1936) and a host of other novels. These novels established a unique record of prolific literary production seldom equaled in the history of American fiction.

The novels of Faulkner broke new grounds in American literature through the apt portrayal of racial discrimination and latent racism in the American social psyche.

Faulkner’s fictional predecessors thinking that the racial question was too controversial and too hot to handle, tried to literally shove it under the carpet, and concentrated on the literary depiction of other less controversial issues.

However, being a realist to the core, Faulkner seized the problem of racism firmly and exposed the hypocritical nature of the so-called civilized American society. Faulkner’s novels highlight the fact that unless American law and society metes out equal treatment to all its citizens irrespective of skin pigmentation, it has no right to hold its head high or boast about its advancement or material achievements.

Anyone seeking to shed light on the vexed subject of the racial convictions expressed by William Faulkner during his life and his fiction must confront the central fact that Faulkner’s racial attitudes, like his explorations of gender and class, were often contradictory, even violently conflicted at any given moment of his career.

Faulkner progressed from giving voice both in his life and work to some of the most pernicious racist beliefs about African-American that he had inherited from his family and society to expressing more insight into and sympathy for the plight of southerner blacks than almost any other southern white male writer of his time.  

Faulkner’s first Yoknapattawa novel, _Flags in the Dust_ (first published in 1929 as _Sartoris_) perpetuate rather than examines Southern racial stereotypes and caricatures.

As prof. Kinney remarks, , African-American in this novel
- are characterized by the Storther family—a father (page 109) who swindles the people of his parish by gambling on their savings (and) a son who lies about his heroism during World War I.

Caspey’s short-lived rebellion in the novel against his white masters only serves to parody the shattering effect that aerial service in World War I has had upon the young Bayard Sartoris.

No longer content to play the faithful family retainer like Simon Strother, Caspey loafa insolently and retails to his credulous family absurdly fabricated stories about the war in dialect. But his revolt is settled with comic violence by old Bayard with a stick of firewood, and thereafter he relapses into the obedient "nigger" he was before he went overseas.

Thereafter he disappears from the novel. Conceivably, this brief rebellion against white authority represents the unsettling effects which the war had on those black veterans who returned to the society for which they had risked their lives only to find that it still refused to grant them equality, but it is treated far too broadly to be taken seriously.

Faulkner’s novels, from _Soldier’s Pay_ (1926) to _As I Lay Dying_ (1930) received critical acclaim almost spontaneously but failed to climb to popularity rating owing the complex subject matter as well as the complexity of style.

But the next novel _Light in August_ (1932) differs from his other early novels in the fact that it does not concentrate on a single family, but involves similar issues of human need, dissatisfaction, crisis, frustration, alienation and finally redemption through endurance.

This novel in the words of Ian Ousby:

--- broadens the social scope of Faulkner’s fiction through the attention it pays to the individual’s sense of place in a racist society.---
Faulkner’s next novel _Pylon_ (1935) focuses on aviation and on the lives of four adults and a child who traveled nomadically from one air show to another.

The next novel _Absalom, Absalom !_ (1936) concerns the frustrated attempts of Thomas Sutpen who founds a Southern dynasty in 19th Century Mississippi; the novel also elaborately portrays the problem of racism, and inter racial relationships embodied in the misfortunes of the Sutpen family.

The year 1938 witnessed the publication of _Unvanquished_ while 1938 saw the publication of _The Wild Palms_. Two prominent works of Faulkner _The Hamlet_ and _Go Down Moses_ came in 1940 and 1942 respectively.

So far the critical attention on Faulkner’s literary works had not been too much, even though he had dealt with the burning problem of racism in many of his novels like _The Sound and The Fury_, _Light in August_ and ‘Absalom, Absalom!’ and _Go Down Moses_.

The year 1949 and 1950 proved to be the years of honour and achievement in Faulkner’s career. He was elected to the _American Academy of Arts and Letters_ 1949 and was awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 1950.

In his novels and short stories, Faulkner made the most ambitious efforts any writer has made to present not only the South, the locale of most of his fiction, but also the human heart in conflict with itself. In the words of Egbert Olivier:

–Faulkner wrote about his own land, his own people, his own culture, probing the evil in the man’s nature and also probed the depth of human soul, probing the dark places, working intensively into the nature of man.

He brings to his fictional insight a fine perception of the corrosive quality of an unrecognized guilt and shame.‖

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Faulkner’s characters are intense creature obsessed with their isolation in the world, abnormally puzzled over the degree of the burdens they must assume and desperate to assert themselves before death closes in upon them. In this respect the complex of past and present assuring both the burdens of history and the struggle of self definition becomes a means of classifying Faulkner’s characters.

In the word of Karl Zink:

—In Faulkner’s novels Negroes, women and children often possesses a spiritual equilibrium which his major heroes often lack. Despite their poverty and depressed status the Negroes have a spiritual equilibrium as people who live on and by the old earth, cherishing their families, protecting the young. ¹¹

In creative genius, in the ability to construct a world of the imagination in which reality is more assessable than it is in the everyday actualities of life, Faulkner has few peers in modern literature.

Faulkner regards his novels as a saga, a reconstruction of the life of Yoknapattawa county, his fictional name for Lafayette county in Northern Mississippi where he had lived for most of his life. His complex style may be regarded as consistent with his difficult objective-to keep continuously in focus the immediate character, —The human heart in conflict, while evoking that past which is always present with us.

In his style, he has created a new prose convention no more strict or unnatural than the conventions of poetry, and similarly intended to engage the imaginative participation of the reader and to provide a language more subjective and flexible than ordinary prose.

This rhetorical convention- the dislocation of logical construction in the free association of images often apparently irrelevant to each other facilitates Faulkner’s psychological approach, the projection of events through the memory of consciousness of the character in the form of interior monologue.
No doubt Faulkner’s style puts a strain on the readers comprehending capability but it nevertheless has the effort of music and poetry and proper matching of the subject matter with the style. According to Malcom Bradbury:

Like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Faulkner saw himself as a romantic egoist, and knew that beautiful was damned; he saw the world of art crossed with the wasteland of modern life. And he too saw the need for redemptive style, in the new decadent fashion.

So, as he moves towards fiction, notions of the failure of history, the decline of the west, the degeneration of modernity, the narcissism of modern existence, the displacement of sexuality, the need to refine sensation and the claims of bohemia were all part of his push towards a modern definition of art and the discovery of a modern style.

This is visible in many of his novels. For example, whatever Faulkner’s intentions may have been when he wrote ‘Light in August’, there is no valid reason to reduce his novel to a clear-cut, univocal moral and social message.

For to do so is not only to miss its teeming complexity, and the ambivalence of Faulkner’s characterization, it is also to bypass the specificity of fictional texts, of their modes, codes, and effects, and to ignore altogether the many questions by the status of the ‘writing subject’ in the text.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, there was a change in Faulkner’s preoccupation- darkening of his themes and increasing concerns with sterile modern evils like loneliness, self centeredness, greed, racial discrimination and the dark outcome of South’s history of Puritanism and miscegenation.

This is amply demonstrated in his novels like ‘The Sound and the Fury’, ‘Light in August’, ‘Absalom, Absalom!’, ‘Go Down Moses’, ‘The Unvanquished’, ‘Intruder in the Dust’ and ‘Sartoris’. ‘Light in August’ presents a classic case where in the central narrative is about the Black wandering orphan, Joe Christmas who, in a fit of anger, kills the woman who protects him but also hurls racial taunts on him.
Finally Joe Christmas has to suffer racial lynching for the crime of murdering a White. In _Absalom, Absalom !_ too, Thomas Sutpen who believes in the concept of racial purity, wishes to establish his new Southern dynasty but finally his racial crimes catch up with him and he has to pay with his own life besides leaving behind the irony of having a Negro boy as his sole surviving descendant.

In _The Sound and the Fury_, the only person who stands amidst the ruins of the Compson family is Negro nurse Dilsey who manages to retain her sanity and fortitude and is a far more affectionate person compared to all the White members of the Compson family put together.

The extra ordinary story of novels like _Go Down Moses_, with the complex exploration of the transformation of the virgin American land through taint, crime and racial exploitation into emptiness and void, presents images of redemptive timelessness.

William Faulkner has mainly devoted himself to a passionate if not volcanic interpretation of the complexities, both normal and subnormal of the human mind. There is his complicated relationship to the South a sort of love-hate attachment, embracing a powerful tradition and yet kicking against it.

For this very reason, it is not easy to choose from Faulkner’s work those novels that represent him best. Some of his novels have a definite period touch, such as _Sartoris_, _Absalom, Absalom !_ and the collection of _The Unvanquished_ and may thus be linked with the American quest for tradition.

But the theme of the decline and fall of Southern families connected not only with all the probing into human desire, passion and frustration, but also with the technique of the stream of consciousness, thus changes the period element at times into a tool for something else.

This has resulted into the most unexpected result of Faulkner’s work: its moral effect. In all the incredible horrors and apparently cold-blooded misdeeds narrated by the author.
In spite of the absence of the justice, pity and compassion, the reader’s attention is drawn towards the phenomenon of evil as an essential part of human existence: and the moment one begins to reflect about evil as such one had entered the field of ethics.

This is evidently one of the reasons that won him the Nobel Prize. Faulkner is one of the few who expect salvation neither from return of man to nature, nor to a life of spirit only, because he is aware that the elements of evil is an integral part of man’s worldly existence.

The map of Yoknapattawa county which appeared in _Absalom, Absalom!_ in 1936, shows that this setting for, most of Faulkner’s fiction beats some geographical resemblance to the Lafayette county where Faulkner had lived since early boyhood.

Yet the legend on the map, “Jefferson, Yoknapatawha Co. Mississippi...William Faulkner, sole owner and proprietor” seems to affirm that any similarities between this imaginary region and an actual region are purely coincidental, although it also suggests that the fictitious town and county are nevertheless situated in Mississippi.

He provides nothing as static as the phrase “a Picture of the South” would imply. He furnished rather a process in self discovery, at once personal and social.

What happens in this fiction is that the South is forced to face itself with a savage honesty, an impassioned detachment.

The aristocratic sartorises, Composons and Benbows; the humbler folk like Wash Jones, Ratliff and the Burdens the Negroes, Simon, Dilsey and Lucas, the swarming parasites, the snopesses and their kind; the criminals like Christmas and Popeys- all the Faulkner characters and the events they enact are the means by which a writer brings the region he is part of painfully but with determination towards self awareness.

The state of mind which Faulkner explores is not simple and it is not worn on sleeves. It means self contradiction and inner conflict, an open seething mixture of pride and bad conscience, of exaltation and shame. One general effect which his work conveys
is that to be a Southerner is something special, something strange and difficult. Typical Faulkner character is mysteriously at war with himself. For example, in _Absalom, Absalom!_, Quentin Compson feels deeply implicated as a Southerner in the terror and the guilt of the Sutpen which he tells his Harvard roommate.

Many of his protagonists would appear incredible in what they do if they were not related to continuity beyond themselves: A family, a town or neighborhood, a region, a race. When brought together on Faulkner’s map of fiction these various histories begin to suggest a single large pattern in which the Civil war is the central fact.

This conflict Faulkner recognizes as both the ruin of the Southern way of life and its apotheosis, the deconstruction of which renders the history of the South in destructible, the vanquished un vanquished.

In brief, the Civil war was the means by which the Old South with all its emotional and moral ambiguities fastened itself upon its descendents for their good and for their ill. This is the heritage that gives to Faulkner’s people their communal character which is more important always than their character as individuals.

The actual role of Negro in Faulkner’s fiction is consistently one of pathos of heroism. There is Dilsey, under whose name in the Compson Geneology, Faulkner writes: _They Endured_ and whose role in _The Sound and the Fury_ is to be the very ethical center of the book, the vessel of virtue and compassion. Then there is the Negro in _Red Leaves_.

The slave held by Indians who is haunted down to be killed at the funeral of the chief. When he is over taken, one of the Indian says to him that he ran well and should not be ashamed and when he walks among the Indian, he is the tallest there, his high close, mud caked head looming above them all.
And ols sam fathers is the fountain of the wisdom which like Mkcaslin, Faulkner’s philosopher, mainly gains, and the repository of the virtues, central for Faulkner – an old man, son of a Negro slave and an Indian King, inheritor on the one hand of the long chronicle of people who had learned humility through suffering and learned pride through the endurance which survived the suffering, and on the other side the chronicle of people even longer in the land than the first, yet now who existed there only in the solitary brotherhood of an old and childless Negro’s alien blood and the wild and invincible spirit of an old bear.

Even Joe Christmas in _Light in August_ is a mixture of pathos and heroism. With his mixed blood, he is the lost suffering enduring creature, and even the murder he commits at the end is a fumbling attempt to define his manhood, an attempt to break out of the iron ring of mechanism, for the woman whom he kills has become a figure of the horror of the human which has surrendered human attributes.

Ralph Ellison said that Faulkner, despite _nigger_ on every other page unlocked his own Southern imagination. Sartre who found in _The Sound and the Fury_ more universal significance than Malraux had guessed at in _Sanctuary_, saw Faulkner’s achievement as the most brilliant solution to the problem of time in the contemporary novel.

The essential thing in all these books was a sense of havoc and conflict, of human storm, blood, madness, and the irrational, of the unconscious possessing the human spirit but using it as Hegel’s world spirit used man, to make history. History always implies meanings.

There is a pattern, a morale even when it is post Christian. Everything in Faulkner came back to man as a conflict which pressed for expression as history, not for solution.

Faulkner’s world was passionate, humane, real, was solidly grounded in human violence and the fierce interminability of the human will. The world as our insufficient home, gives the immediate fiery texture to Faulkner’s novels.
When you grasp in _The Sound and the Fury_, the embattled daily experience of Benjy Quentin and Jason Compson, in _Light in August_ the futile dream of home obsessing Joe Christmas as he runs in a state of sleep ahead of the posses, you feel that fiction has expressed the unconscious strife of air lives not literary personification of the unconscious.

There were a great guilt incurred in the South, a curse was put on the land that was given to all men freely to enjoy. Faulkner does not excuse this guilt, he does not apologize for it, he does not evade it.

He is a Southerner and has a great story to tell. Man’s immortality, he can be said to have one at all, reaches into the past, not into the future, it lies in a candid sense of history, not in a hope offered by orthodox Christianity. The peculiar parallel to Christ that Faulkner finds in this most miserable character, Benjy in _The Sound and the Fury_.

Joe Christmas in _Light in August_ refers to those who have escaped the common guilt by some disability, those who have never lived because they have always been victims of other people.

Those who act, who have power, those who in imagination one can still see siding across the screen of history, can never alter the cause of action. Sarte was right when he said of _The Sound and the Fury_ that Faulkner cuts off the future.

That was necessary to Faulkner, for as sartre’s own erratic development shows to choose the –Future‖ over everything else makes intellect impatient and manipulative takes the heart out of art.

Like contemporaries Hemingway and Doss Passos, Faulkner was not the one to confine himself to natural tradition and actively incorporated European experience. He approached the giants of the past as a contemporary writer.

The founts of his inspiration as is well known were the Old Testament and Shakespeare which he perceived as closely related. Rereading them continuously and he had been familiar with these sources from childhood; the poet retained his ties with the distant past, a past just as real for him as his South and his century.
His novel about the Civil war is named _Absalom, Absalom!_ - a name taken from King David’s bitter lament for his rebellious son. _The Sound and the Fury_, a novel about the breakup of the 20th century, is titled with an excerpt from Macbeth’s speech before his death.

Faulkner liked to read the King James edition of the Bible, linguistically from the epoch of Shakespeare, and it is natural to call all things, no matter how dirty or vulgar, by their names.

The Bible and Shakespeare were models of how a story of generations, rich in perpetual, could become poetic.

When asked about the influence of other sources on his work, Faulkner replied that he was influenced by anything he read. For him, all preceding culture was both a prerequisite and a means of measuring genuine originality in our times.

As for his conception of goal of a writer, demanding _a life’s work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit_, he says in the same Nobel Prize speech: _To create out of the materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before_.

Faulkner’s treatment of the racial problem was the prime necessity of the contemporary era because even though on paper, Negro had got citizenship rights and most of the privileges of the citizens by the end of the First World War, yet the unfortunate fact was that for all practical purposes the Negroes remained less than second class citizens and had to spread widespread discriminations in the fields of education and employment.

Being a socially committed writer, Faulkner took up the noble cause of the assimilation of the Blacks in the main stream American society so that the vertical split in American society on racial lines would be a thing of the past.

After all, a society must have an equitable order and grant equal opportunities to all its members without any discrimination to earn the right to be called a civilized society.
For Faulkner, in the words of Robert Penn Warren:

- The Civil war merely transferred the crime against the Negro into a new set of terms...the Negro remains a key figure in Faulkner’s novels...This centrality appears as early as _The Sound and the Fury_ in the figure of Dilsey, the only character who embodies love, force and fulfilled identity...Dilsey is central in yet another sense...the attitude of each person to her and by extension to Negro in general, can be taken as a gauge of that person’s worth.‖  

Faulkner presents a detailed psychological analysis of latent racism in the heart of White people and their unwillingness to give equal status to the Black. This way Faulkner also manages to highlight the feeling of racial superiority and the vested interests in maintaining the status quo.

The terrible cost of this estrangement recurs again and again in Faulkner’s works, not simply as a theme, but as a cry of loss and bafflement. In the words of Irving Howe:

- Beneath the White man’s racial uneasiness there often beats impatience with the devices by which men keep themselves apart. Ultimately, the whole apparatus of separation must seem too wearisome in its constant call to alertness, too costly in its tax on the emotions, and simply tedious as a brake on spontaneous life.‖  

**Analysis of major Novels:**

_The Sound and the Fury_ (1929) remains the most popular among all the novels written by Faulkner and he too considered it as the best novel. Faulkner himself observed:

-I wrote this book and learnt to read...When I finished _The Sound and the Fury_, I discovered that there is actually something to which the shabby term _Art_ not only can but must be applied.‖  

_The Sound and the Fury_, faulkner’s forth novel, is widely considered his first major novel and offers a gateway into all of his works. It tells the story of the dissolution of the Compson family, moving between different perspectives and back and forth in
time. Many of the elements of the novel point to roots in Faulkner’s own regional and national soil the banter and pranks of the Negro servant Luster are in the South-Western tradition of folk humor that helped produced Mark Twain.

The framework of Southern provincial life offers parallel both to European provincial novels and to American novels by Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis.

Written at the outset of the most productive period of his career, _The Sound and the Fury_ marked the beginning of Faulkner’s confidence in himself as a major professional writer. This novel has some autobiographical sources and it incorporates many of Faulkner’s memories of his own childhood and youth.

In the economic decline of his family from the days of his colorful great grandfather, the sensitive young novelist like Quentin Compson in this respect may have sensed a problematic interruption of fate, history and people that might be examined meditatively by creation of the Compson family.

The first section of the novel focuses on the sense impression of the 33 years old mentally retarded by Benjy, the second section focuses on the sense impression of Quentin, the third section is seen through the eyes of Jason while the forth section is narrated objectively by the author. in the first section, we learn about Benjy’s neglect by all family members except his sister Caddy, the negro nurse Dilsey and the Negro by Luster and in his own way Benjy too reciprocates their love.

In the second section, we learn about the morbid thoughts of Quentin, especially with his excessive concern for Caddy’s loss of virginity. By breaking his watch, Quentin tries to destroy time and to save his family from humiliation. Ultimately inorder to escape from time for ever, Quentin commits suicide.

In the third section of the novel Jason is seen blaming Caddy for ruining his promised career. Jason had actually hoped to become a banker through the influence of Caddy’s first husband – a hope that is shattered when that man divorces Caddy within a year of their marriage, primarily on the issue of Caddy’s illegitimate daughter Quentin.
Since the innocent girl Quentin is the prime cause of the divorce, Jason transfers all his anger towards this poor girl. Quentin is brought up under the care of Compson especially Jason, who treats her very shabbily.

Quentin grows up under Jason’s strict discipline, yet ultimately, as a grown up girl, she too adopts the vices of her mother. Jason accepts money from Caddy every month for Quentin’s maintenance but the maximum amount is kept for him.

When Caddy comes in disguise to attend her father’s funeral, Jason forces her to pay him one hundred dollars just to have a glimpse of her daughter. The evil Jason also has a mistress named Lorriane in Memphis, with whom he has a purely physical relationship without any emotion or feeling.

The forth and the final section of the novel narrated by the author in the third person highlights the noble qualities of the Negro nurse Dilsey who has all alone been the sole symbol of love, sympathy and humanity in the inhuman atmosphere of the Whites of the Compson family.

It is Dilsey, who in fact has shown genuine affection for the idiotic Benjy and the wayward Caddy, and thus fulfilled the motherly duties which their White mother Mrs. Compson should have performed.

The novelist thus tries to break the stereotyped image of the negro as sub-human and devoid of human and civilized values. Only Dilsey with her inner serenity, her faith and understanding can perceive and respond to the need of other. To Dilsey the world is filled not with Sound and Fury, but with compassion and love.

The materialistic Jason may survive temporarily in a materialistic world, but the universal qualities possessed by Dilsey will endure long after people like Jason have gone. Although, in the final chapter, Jason has virtually taken over the entire Compson family property, yet we know that this control is only temporary because evil has a very short life span.
The novel beautifully underlines the fact that ultimately the qualities of a person are determined not by his color or creed but by his goodness, love and understanding for others, as symbolized by Dilsey.

As Edmond L. Volpe observes,

“despair and nihilism is the dominant mood of Faulkner’s novel, offset only by the muted, antithetical mood created through the role of Dilsey in the final section.”\(^\text{15}\)

The novel which underlines the tragic consequences of the poison of racism in society presents several moving scenes of racial exploitation as well as the sad plight of Negroes in the White American society.

The facts the Whites have no faith whatsoever in the honesty and the integrity of Blacks is highlighted by the incident where the poor Negro servant boy Luster loses his quarter which he had painfully saved to buy the ticket for a show.

On seeing some White man moving around the place where he had lost the quarter, Luster asks them whether they have seen it and instead of helping the poor Negro boy, the two White men cast aspersions on Luster’s honesty saying that Negroes can get money only by stealing it from the pocket of Whites:

“Is you all seen anything of a quarter down here! Luster said. –What Quarter‖. The one I had here this morning‖, Luster said, –I lost it somewhere. It fall through this here hole in my pocket. If I don’t find it, I can’t go to show tonight‖. –Where you get a quarter boy? Find it in White folk’s pocket while they aren’t looking.‖\(^\text{16}\)

Without knowing anything about the background of Luster, the two White men express doubt about Luster’s honesty because in their eyes, there is a stereotyped image of the Negroes as wild, dishonest and uncivilized people.

However, Luster too gives an intelligent reply highlighting the fact that as human being, the Negro too has the capacity for earning money through honest work and the money earned by the Negro is of the same color and quality as that by the Whites:
-Nigger's Money good as White Folks, I reckon.

-White folks gives Nigger money because know first White man comes along with a band going to get it all back, so Nigger can go to work for some more.\textsuperscript{17}

The Whites gradually became so much steeped in racist propaganda and racist feeling that even White children, though immature had some very illogical notions about the contrasting lives of Whites and Negroes. When a Negro dies and the Compson children and the Negro servant boys hear of it, they express their contrasting views according to their racial thoughts:

-Oh, caddy said, —that Niggers, White folks don’t have funerals.\textsuperscript{17}

-Mammy said us not to tell them, Frony Versh said.

-Tell them what\textsuperscript{17} Caddy said.

-I like to know why not\textsuperscript{17} Frony said.

-White folks dies too. Your grand mammy dead as any Nigger can get, I reckon.\textsuperscript{18}

The Negro men and women had become identified in the eyes of Whites with all types of vices, so when Jason scold Caddy’s young daughter Quentin and asks her not to go on the path of vice and sexuality, he equates prostitutes with Negro women:-

-She turned back at that\textsuperscript{18}

-I don’t sleep around\textsuperscript{18} she says, -I dare anybody to everything I do\textsuperscript{18},

-And they all know it too\textsuperscript{18}, I says

Everybody in this town knows what you are. But I won’t have it any more, you hear? I don’t care what you do, myself\textsuperscript{18}, I says, -But I’ve got a position in this town, and I am not going to have any member of my family going on like a Nigger Wench. You hear me.\textsuperscript{18}
At no time does Dilsey judge any of the Compsons, not even Jason, though she does object at one point those who frown on Benjy’s presence in a Negro church. However her presence enables the reader to judge, not systems but actions and attitudes, and hence to grasp the truth instinctively.

- They [the negroes] come into White people’s lives like that in sudden sharp Black Trickles that isolate White facts for an instant in unarguable truth like under microscope.  

In _the Sound and the Fury_, Faulkner has presented his Negro character in a sympathetic light compared to the White characters belonging to the Compson family. In the final chapter we are told about the total disintegration of the aristocrat Compson family but the poor Negro servant Luster and Dilsey endure because they represent the universal and eternal human values of love and compassion-

- Luster – A man, aged 14, who was not only capable of the complete care and security of an idiot twice his age and three times his size, but could keep him entertained.

Dilsey- They Endured.  

Only Dilsey among all characters in the novel has inner faith, serenity and an undistorted view of reality, and she can perceive and respond to the needs of others. Dilsey can accept the whole and as such she can respond to Benjy, Caddy and Caddy’s daughter Quentin’s need for affection. Since Dilsey is emotionally whole, she can minister to the weakness of the rest of the family. Evelyn Scott rightly remarks:

- But there is Dilsey, without so much as a theory to controvert theory, stoic as some immemorial carving of heroism, going on doing the best she can, guided by instinct and affection and the self respect she will not relinquish – the ideal of herself to which she confirms irrationally, which makes of her life something whole, while her White folks accepts their fragmentary state, disintegrate. 

The old Negro woman Dilsey provides the beauty of coherence against the background of struggling choice. She acts as the only voice of sanity in an otherwise irrational scenario. Here also we have a good observation by Evelyn Scott:
Dilsey isn’t searching for a soul. She is the soul. She is the conscious human accepting the limitations of herself, the iron boundaries of circumstances and still, the best of her ability, achieving a holy compromise for aspiration.\(^\text{23}\)

The Sound and the Fury has occasioned wide critical interest. Interpretations have ranged from Jean Paul Sartre’s declaration that it is a metaphysical novel concerned with time to Irving Howe’s conclusion that it is a social novel depicting the deterioration of a family and of the American South. One basic fact that most of these interpretations touch upon is that the novel dramatizes a deterioration for the past to the present. In the words of Edmond L. Volpe:

- tragic sense of loss is so predominant and pervasive in each section and in almost every sense that it can be considered the basic theme of novel—a theme similar to that of Eliot’s _The Wasteland_.\(^\text{24}\)

Both T. S. Eliot and Faulkner present modern man as a self-centered being, in a society where commercial values have replaced universal human value. Both writers use the past to reveal, by contrast, the sterility of the present. In the sterile Negro Waste land of the modern world maid servant Dilsey is the symbol of resurrection and life. Regarding the key role of Dilsey in the novel, William Faulkner himself wrote in an article:

- There was Dilsey to be the future, to stand above the fallen ruins of the family like a ruined chimney, gaunt, and indomitable; and Benjy to be the past. He had to be an idiot so that, like Dilsey, he could be impervious to the future, though unlike her by refusing to accept it at all.\(^\text{25}\)

In the immensely positive figure of Dilsey in the final chapter of the novel, we see a certain overall reassurance and even serenity and therefore the novel closes on a note of affirmation. Dilsey endures and her endurance signifies the abiding value of all those whether Black or White, who hold on to the universal human values.
The novel highlights Faulkner’s equal treatment of Negroes as human beings. According to Michael Millgate:

- It is clear, however, that Faulkner does not intend any simple moral division between the Negroes and their White employers.\(^2^6\)

Throughout _The Sound and the Fury_, a recurrent motif, suggested by the title itself, is the traditional convention of conflict between order producing and chaos producing force in human experience, here represented in part by the gradual drift of the Compston family from remembered dignity and order towards disgrace and chaos. Robert Penn Warren observes:

- If the Flems and Jeson drive hard to define a dehumanized future, there are the Dilsey and Ratliffs who see the future as part of the vital human continuity. If _The Sound and the Fury_ is Faulkner’s Wasteland, it is a wasteland that unlike Eliot’s, ends in Easter.\(^2^7\)

The title of this Faulkner’s novel is taken from the following speech in _Macbeth_, by William Shakespeare:

- Life but a walking shadow: a poor player

  That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

  And then is heard no more: it is a tale

  Told by our idiot, full of sound and fury,

  Signifying nothing \(^\quad\) \(\text{(Act V, Scene V)}\)

Macbeth makes this speech after hearing about the death of his wife, and some of its general feelings about loss, decay and death are present in _The Sound and the Fury_. Of course, the most obvious point of comparison between Macbeth’s speech and Faulkner’s novel lies in the idea of life being a tale told by an idiot: not only is Benjy, an
idiot, but Quentin is mentally disturbed (although highly intelligent) and sometimes even Jason does not seem entirely sane.

In a famous essay, the French novelist and philosopher Jean Paul Sartre (1905-80) nearly summed up these problems with the novel:

- The first reading that strikes one in reading ‘The Sound and the Fury’ is its technical oddity. Why has Faulkner broken up the time of his story and scrambled the pieces.‖

**Light in August**

Faulkner’s searching treatments of his obsessive themes are a by-product of his literary experimentation. In Faulkner, the work of formal construction involves for more than finding how to express what the author already knows; it is itself the mean by which he find and grasps his subjects, especially his favorite subject of racism and racial segregation.

The drama at the centre of the novel concerns the forging and the enactment of the doom that flows from Joe Christmas’s problematic origins, especially with regards to his doubtful racial origin and the taint of Black blood.

According to Richard H. Brodhead:

—in embellishing a history for Joe Christmas, then also for Joanna Burden, in his later draft, Faulkner is composing into being the past itself as Light knows it…In the remaining Christmas, Faulkner also for the first time moves race to the centre of a novel and discovers how action draws its deeper energies from the opposition of Black and White.

Race itself gets crucially reconceived in this process. In the early draft of Light, race is given, something you are, by birth. (Joe is a Negro).
In the revision, Faulkner transforms it from a genetic attribute to a structure of consciousness, a violently charged field of psychic conflict that is yours regardless of genetic facts.

Then in another brilliant new reimagining, Faulkner further redefines race as a taking within of the whole fabric of a culture. In the telling the new Christmas story, Faulkner plots how racial terms as they enter Joe's mind, become fatally aligned with the other fierce polarities of Southern Protestant culture: Black / White, Female / Male, Nature / Transcendence, Mercy / Justice and so on.\textsuperscript{29}

The encumbering of the present with a long drawn out past, a past lost to memory, but still so potent that it dooms the present to repeat it; the establishment, then transgression of racial boundaries in the past in such a way that personal history is tangled in the invisible coils of racial strife- these become the essential realities in \textit{Light in August}'.

The novel \textit{Light in August} concerns the dehumanizing and tragic results of racism. The novel begins with a country girl Lena Grove setting out from her home, Alabama, in search of her lover Lucas Burch, who has left her pregnant some months back with the promise to return soon. Lena arrives in Jefferson where she meets a man named Byron Bunch who tells her that her lover Lucas Burch is using a false name Joe Brown and is working in a factory in Jefferson.

Byron leaves Lena safe at his boarding house and then goes to another gentleman Hightower whom he informs about Lena's tragic plight, besides the killing of a White woman named Joanna Burden. The suspect of Joanna's murder, Brown is arrested and reveals that Joanna Burden was carrying on an affair with Joe Christmas who had Negro blood and might have killed her.

The next few chapters tell us about the childhood and youth of Joe Christmas. Raised in an orphanage, he was told by many about his Negro blood and developed an inferiority complex. From the orphanage Joe is adopted by a harsh disciplinarian and a rigid Calvinist Mr. McEachern and his wife.
However, the love and affection showered upon Joe by Mr. and Mrs. McEachern fail to fill the void in his life and his sense of deprivation owing to the suspicion about the Negro taint in blood. His sense of deprivation and racial comments lead to a sense of frustration in Joe and ultimately it leads to the adaptation of a wayward lifestyle.

After turning seventeen Joe begins to carry on an illicit relationship with Bobbie Allen, a waitress and a prostitute.

One day when Mr. McEachen finds out about this, he reprimands Bobbie, at which Joe hits him with a chair and runs away from home. After fifteen years of aimless drifting, Joe comes to Jefferson and meets Joanna Burden, a forty years old White spinster and descedent of New Hampshire abolitionist.

Joe now starts an affair with Joanna and lives with her. Joanna tries to send Joe to college to become a lawyer, but Joe resents her dictatorial attitude and in a fit of anger, one day he kills her, and flees. Joe is finally caught and sent for legal trial. In the White crowd which bays for Joe’s blood is Doc Hines, a religious fanatic and a racist who is in reality Joe’s grand-father.

It transpires that Doc Hines had caught his daughter running away with a part Negro circus worker. However, his daughter had already become pregnant and gives birth to Joe before dying in child birth. Doc Hines himself admitted Joe to the Memphis orphanage.

Within a few days, Lena’s child is born, delivered by a gentleman named Hightower, and on learning about Lena and her child, her lover Lucas Burch flees from Jefferson. Meanwhile, before being punished by the court of law, Joe Christmas is lynched by a White mob. The novel closes with Lena Grove setting off again with her baby in search of her lover Lucas Burch.
Light in August is thus circular in concept beginning and ending with the journey of Lena Grove in search of her lover and symbolically focusing on the circular route traveled for thirty years by Joe Christmas in search of his identity, which he fails to find and ultimately meets his nemesis at the hands of a White mob. In the words of Edmond Volpe:

- The supreme example of the light negating force of mental abstractions, taboos and conventions in the novel is racial prejudice...by it, individuals are transformed into a robot like lynching.  

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The story of Joe Christmas has a parallel in real life. On September 8, 1908, a Negro named Nelson Petton went to deliver a letter to a White woman named Mrs. McMillan and after some altercation, he killed her.

William Faulkner has presented many Negro characters. The most important characteristic of them all was their endurance. Here the ultimate word which means so much to Faulkner is endurance. This endurance or -outlasting- is not the mark simply of his favorite Negroes like Dilsey in _The Sound and the Fury._

The Negroes are his greatest social example for they, like Jews, have the curious bitter advantage and how often they have wished they could lose it- of having suffered a historic injustice so long that the noblest individual among them can finally take in the whole of their situation precisely because they know it is the human situation, and so in some sense, can not be remedied.

Faulkner feels pain and anguish at the degradation of humanism at the alter of rampant materialism in the so called progressive modern age which preaches civilized ideas but hides diabolical crimes like racial exploitation and denial of human right on the basis of color or birth.

Yet as we see in _The Sound and the Fury_, Faulkner remains the eternal optimist and hopes for a golden future when noble human beings like Luster and Dilsey would not be exploited or humiliated but given equal right and a unique pedestal in society.
"The Sound and the Fury' has been considered a unique milestone in the path of American fictional development, especially with regard to the portrayal of the varied forms of inherent racism. The novel has successfully exposed the scar of racial exploitation beneath the outward gloss of American society.

In "Light in August", although Joe is adopted and brought up as a white child by Mr. and Mrs. McEachern, yet he fails to shrug off the racial stigma. The novel thus indicates the fact that racism was so pervasive and over-whelming a force in the society that even the slightest doubt about a person’s racial origin can leave him permanently scarred in the racial society.

"Light in August" throws lot of light upon the glaring aspects of the racial problem which most of the other novelists had tried to literally shover under the carpet. The white novelists especially hesitated to deal with real life characters like Joe Christmas because such characters expose the hypocritical nature and latent racism of the predominantly white society.
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