VISION OF CHANGE

Faulkner has been criticized for ignoring three-dimensional time in his novels. Sartre has charged that he "has decapitated time and deprived it of its future. His vision of the world can be compared to that of a man sitting in an open car and looking backwards." This has created an impression that Faulkner does not consider change an important aspect of life. But a close study of his novels shows that Faulkner considers change an inexorable process of life. Without recognizing the need for change in keeping with times and progress of civilization a society is likely to become stagnant and degenerate, no matter how important it considers its past. If past appears to be so significant in his novels, it is because of the material out of which they have been composed. They reflect the attitude of the Southern society which failed to give recognition to the present let alone the future. The problem of change, therefore, in Faulkner's novels is the problem of change from the past to the present.

The South had pretended to be impervious to the changes brought about by the Civil War, but the first World War shook it up from its somnolence. The new

opportunities gave rise to a new class that wanted to have its share of the national prosperity. Its values clashed with those of the landed aristocracy that clung to its cherished dreams. As a matter of fact, the impact of the war was much more intense on the South, even though it was not so obvious, than on the North. In the North, the change that it brought about was only a matter of degrees; in the South it caused a cultural shock, giving rise to new social, economic and psychological tensions.

Faulkner could not but be aware of changes that were taking place around him not only in the South but also in the North, as well as in Europe. But Faulkner's approach to it was different from that of most of his contemporary writers. His view of change as Heinrich Strauman remarks, "throws light both on his view of the world as an ever changing reality, and on the stress which he lays on man's ability to shape his own destiny." 2

With fascism in the air, accentuation of Depression and increasing socio-economic conflicts, many writers felt obliged to take sides as recordists and prescribers. Faulkner, instead of it, tried to explore

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the forces that compel human beings, inspite of their knowing better, to drift along in the direction of self-destruction.

His exploration was imaginative rather than purely historical. His purpose was to understand events in terms of the human experiences which had produced them: the ambitions, the needs, the attitudes of mind and heart that had shaped destiny. The result was a series of volumes which, collectively formed a single saga.

Undoubtedly, the contemporary life and the sensibilities that he paints, depict the degeneration of his society, but it does not imply repudiation of change. His intention is to shame people into realizing their situation so that they would bring about the necessary change for a better life. To quote him:

I expect to see instances in which he has failed, yes, but they're temporary failures. I think that given time he will solve most of his problems, except the problems which he is doomed for ever to, simply because he is flesh and blood.

Faulkner's profound vision is revealed in his firm belief that we can guard ourselves against corrupt inhuman values - the root cause of our degeneration - and try to bring about a change in our consciousness. So

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he is deeply interested in man, his problems, his feelings and his actions.

The world of Yoknapatawpha created out of the South that he knew provides a context to his studies of the impact of change on human mind and emotions. He has even drawn a map of his imaginative land of Jefferson, specifying its geographical boundaries, physical features and its population. He also prophesies further changes on account of the growing population of the blacks, who may outnumber the whites in due course of time. The Yoknapatawpha county, as Cleanth Brooks and Frederick J. Hoffman have painstakingly worked out has twelve major families of planters: Hebersham, Holston, Crenier, Benbow, Stevens, Sartoris, Compson, McCaslin, Edmonds, Sutpen, McCallum and Snopes. All these families were once renowned for their chivalry. Now they have degenerated because of their refusal to accept change and desire to arrest time. They do not realize that past can only be contemplated not revived.

_Sartoris_ is the first novel of his Yoknapatawpha saga, in which he has shown the decline of Compsons, Sartoris, Benbows and McCaslins --- the representative of the Old South and the rise of unscrupulous Snopes, who displace them. He has traced the life of this region
from the days of Indian possession, through the Pre-
Civil War era, down to the modern times. He has tried to
link the theme of soldier's return from France to the
theme of decay of an old Southern family and of all the
traditions which once supported it. The historical
perspective involves a period comprising two wars: the
American Civil and the Ist World War.

The theme of the novel may be interpreted in many
ways. First, it may be said to be about an excessive
obsession with the past. Secondly, it indicates the
disillusionment and loneliness of the modern man. Thirdly,
it reflects the frustration of the post - World War I
generation. Finally, it also depicts the conflict
between the traditional values of the Sartorises and the
Jazz era values of the Snopes.

Bayard Sartoris, an aviator, returning from the
war is the first character of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha
county saga to have a compulsive drive. He belongs to
the post-World War I disillusioned American society, but
he is obsessed with the memory of his brother's death,
who was lost in an air crash during the War. Bayard believes in the romantic legend of chivalry and
wants to lay down his life like a martyr in the battle
field, unmindful of the fact that the war is over and the situation has changed with time. Being over-whelmed by romantic idealism, he knowingly flies an aeroplane whose engine is defective and heads towards self-destruction in a classical pattern like some great Greek hero.

Old Sartoris, on the other hand, is a person who realizes futility and sterility of that ethical code for which the Sartorises, including young Bayard have been laying down their lives prematurely.

"I am the first of my name to see sixty years that I know of. I reckon Old Master is keeping me for a reliable witness to the extinction."  

Old Sartoris and young Bayard both represent two opposite poles of history. In between the two, the period of sixty years shows the change in the historical perspective and the devastation wrought by the hold of the past. Bayard lacks the sagacity of old Sartoris who has witnessed the gradual extinction of his family on account of rigidity in attitudes. Thus, with the help of these two antithetical characters, the writer indicates the detrimental effects of stagnation in a society.

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By creating the characters of Horace and Belle, the representatives of Jazz era, the author has hinted at the rebellious attitude of a section of society against the hold of the past. Miss Jenny's comments provided an inkling of what the direction of change ought to be. She has nursed the last four generations of Sartorises and knows well about the violence in their nature. She believes in allowing natural instincts to be free of artificial restrictions.

In Sartoris, the writer also depicts the degenerated value of those who make opportunistic adjustment with changing times without change in attitudes. Snopeses are 'poor whites' who inspite of gaining wealth remain morally poor. The short-coming of the traditionalists is their inability to recreate their past in a fast changing world, but they, at least, have the dignity of their past. The opportunists have neither the past dignity nor any sense of responsibility to the present.

In his next novel, The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner artistically shows how the Southern aristocratic families, isolating themselves from the course of history, gradually degenerate. Their inability to adjust to the
changes is the main cause of their decay. The crumbling looks of Compson's house symbolise the crisis which has gripped the family.

The theme of the novel may be interpreted mainly in two ways. First, as the title suggests, it is an indication of futile efforts, vain concerns and inexorable doom. The novel reveals complete disintegration of Compson family on account of the inadequacies of characters. They, at first, isolate themselves from the society and, later on, get isolated from each other. It is almost a Greek tragedy on excessive pride and lack of love. The downfall hints at the possible alternative which could have prevented their doom.

Secondly, it "is a complex treatment of a Southern household's role in the historical process of change, decline and endurance".\(^6\) Unable to cope with the change, in the modern times, the proud family of ante-bellum planters declines and shatters. Mr. Compson tries to seek refuge in whiskey and Latin authors, and dies young. Jason, the businessman of the family, makes an adjustment with the times but it is a sordid adjustment as it is grossly materialistic without any accompanying spiritual change.

Then, there is Quentin's excessive obsession with the past. He has a rage for order and wants to arrest time. Being a puritan, he can not come to terms with his sexuality and wishes for the innocence of childhood. Failing in his attempt to put his obsessions into practice he stops time by committing suicide.

Caddy's promiscuity is an attempt at experiencing love physically in an environment where it is spiritually absent. She is a victim of a social system which denies human feelings and emotions for the sake of rigid outdated abstractions. Finding it impossible to find natural expression, these emotions and feelings lead to chaotic behaviour. Benjy's castration is an indication of the sterility of his environment.

As a matter of fact, the problem of Compson children is their inability to come to terms with their adulthood. Their ineffectual and neurotic parents watch helplessly, one through the fumes of whiskey, the other lost in self-pity. The situation is a symbolic expression of the lack of proper adjustment to change in life.

Dilsey serves her purpose of a touch stone in the novel. Her attitude can be used to assess the validity of the attitudes of the various members of Compson
family. Inspite of belonging to a section of the Southern society which is looked down upon as sub-human by the dominant class, she proves to be better than most of them. She is warm, loving, compassionate, generous and sacrificial. She lives with courage and dignity. She is the only one who challenges Jason's work in the household and defends Caddy, Miss Quentin and Benjy from his anger. Her wholesome attitude exposes the fallacy of the whites claim to superiority and their refusal to allow changes in the social structure.

As I lay Dying through its interior monologues provides a psychological study of several perspectives of truth and truth in this case is the various perspectives of the relationship between the living and the dead. The author has portrayed in it the conscious, unconscious and, sometimes, hallucinatory impressions of the husband, the daughter and the four sons of Addie Bundren, as they carry her dead body through fire and flood to her parental cemetery in Jefferson.

There is a certain apparent dignity in the way the children try to fulfil the last wishes of their mother. But as the journey proceeds, not only does the absurdity of the entire mission is revealed but we discover the
hidden motives of each of the characters in this tragi-comic epic. Addie's character, on the one hand, shows the plight of women in the South, who in the male dominated society thirst for real love and feel betrayed; on the other hand she herself becomes a symbol of past imposing its will on the present. Her loveless existence forces her to extract loyalty from her children and husband even in her death.

Like *The Sound and the Fury, As I lay Dying* is also a story of family fragmentation owing to an obsession and lack of love. Addie's attitude finally destroys the most insightful of her sons. Darl senses his mother's and his sister's secret. He also perceives the selfishness implied in Addie's desire to be buried at Jefferson and considers it wrong. Yet he tries to go along with the plan. The burden is, however, too much for him and the conflict in his mind pushes him into madness.

There is a similarity, though not very obvious, between Mrs. Compson and Addie Bundren. Both of them are complaining figures, and their selfish natures are partially responsible for the destructive obsessions of their children. Both of them instead of taking interest
in their children willingly adopt a pessimistic attitude towards life. They treat children as a kind of burden with no moral responsibility.

In her private life Addie declines to make a social gesture of love and acceptance of family's responsibility; resulting in alienation which is mirrored in the maladjustment of her children. She showers her favour on Jewel, her illegitimate son by Whitefield, which creates jealousy in the mind of Darl. Malin Irving appropriately comments that "Addie is the only representative of design which neglects pity for pride, understanding for domination, life for death".  

The next novel, Sanctuary deals with the miscarriage of justice in a stagnant society. One of the recurrent motifs in the novel is change. Horace Benbow comes back to Jefferson because he wants to change his life and fight against evil and corruption in Jefferson. When he meets with all round resistance he remarks:

"When this is over, I think I'll go to Europe', he said. 'I need a change. Either I, or Mississippi, one'.

But the hold of the prejudices handed down from the past is so great that Benbow is completely

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8Sanctuary, p. 107.
frustrated in his efforts. His own sister, who inspite of her surreptitious attempts at gratifying her sexuality, stands for the sanctity of marriage, thwarts his efforts to get justice for Goodwin. The dilapidated house that provides sanctuary to the moonshiners but fails to provide it to Temple could well be symbolic of the Jefferson society which provides sanctuary to prejudices but fails to support justice. Even religion in Jefferson is used to deprive a mother and child of shelter. The hypocrisy and moral hollowness of the Jefferson establishment becomes obvious when Temple's father, a judge, makes her commit perjury. Temple's violation is symptomatic of the violation of the South's concept of the purity of its ideals by forced mechanical changes. For Popeye stands for the kind of mechanical and sterile change that overtake a stagnant society and corrupts it.

Light in August is a novel that not only presents the conflict between abstraction and concrete experience but also highlights the Southern blight of segregation and injustice to blacks. It is more historically determined than any of the preceding novels. In delineating characters like Hightower, Doc Hines, McEachern and
Percy Grimm, Faulkner appears to provide a study of the psychology of contemporary fascism.

The novel begins quietly with no trace of violence to come. Lena Grove, expecting a child, is on a long voyage to Jefferson, sometimes on foot but most of the times on unidentified wagons, to meet the father of her child. When the wagon approaches Jefferson, the driver points out from the top of hill two fires, one at the mill and the other at Joanna'a house.

The next chapter establishes the source of violence. Joe Christmas enters the tale. He is a victim of the Southern prejudices. He does not know whether he is white or black. His is a life long search for his identity which ends in the murder of Joanna Burden and his own murder. Faulkner invests him with characteristics that make him a Christ figure and highlight the moral and religious deviations and distortions in the Southern outlook.

His story begins in an orphanage, where the dietitian finds him eating toothpaste behind the curtain of her room while she is busy in love-making with her friend Charley. It is his first encounter with hypocrisy. She calls him a "little rat spying on me", but later
on, gives him a dollar to keep him from telling anybody what he, as a matter of fact, does not understand.

Sometimes afterwards he is taken away by a self-righteous presbyterian, Simon McEachern. The dietition had made him consider himself a "Nigger bastard". McEachern adds his doctrine of the elect and the damned, thus mixing the calvinist harshness with the problem of race and blood. Joe's love for a prostitute, 'Bobbie', leads to a clash with McEachern and McEachern's murder.

When Bobbie turns against Christmas, he steps out into the "street" to be on the run for fifteen years. Through his experience he learns that self-definition is a brutal, forcibly derived experience, while love is a softness, a weakness and a deception. He, therefore, wanders around aggressively demanding his identity, and goading and hurting all soft, weak and contradictory creatures.

After fifteen years the road runs back into Jefferson and to the house of Joanna Burden. Both of them are obsessed. Joe, forced from within to assert his identity violently, is now faced with a woman whose being has been forced from without. Each of them is afflicted by a burden -- an assumed martyrdom; each of
them is firm, violent and tortured by an inner fear of corruption. She is obsessed by the burden of negro race; he as an imagined victim, she as an imagined heiress to the guilt complex. Both violently struggle to impose their ideology upon each other. When she tries to force him to kneel and pray to her Calvinist God and he refuses, they both realize that there is just one end to it and unified action takes place: she is murdered and he is lynched. After hiding with Negroes, and sometimes from Negroes, he finally gives himself up in the neighbouring Mottstown.

The novel is full of characters who represent forces of retrogression and fanaticism. Gail Hightower is obsessed with the loftiness of his vision of the past; Doc Hines is a racial fanatic; McEachern is a religious fanatic, and Percy Grimm is a white superma-
cist. Together they reveal tendencies that lead to fascist tendencies and sadistic violence. Hightower is redeemed from his plight when he changes his attitude and helps Lena Grove.

The emphasis in the novel is on the degeneration that takes place in a society which resists change and is not ready to give up its dehumanized values. Joe
Christmas, Hightower, Joanna Burden, McEachern all are in the grip of a self-destructive drive. Bobbie, and the other spectators who watch silently the lynching of Joe Christmas at the hands of Percy Grimm and the white persuers cannot shirk off their responsibility. Their passivity contributes as much to the perpetuation of brutality as the action of the persuers. The entire episode shows what kind of soil is fertile for the rise of fascism.

Opposed to the characters who represent abstractions are the characters of Lena Grove and Byron Bunch. They stand for concrete experiences and continuity of life. Lena Grove could well be the symbol of earth mother. These characters through their active love and human outlook suggest the norms to be adopted by the South.

Absalom, Absalom; invests a drama of inner compulsion with historical and social richness to an even greater extent than Light in August does. It deals with the failure of human design in the face of time and throws light on the actuality of the ante-bellum planter, his post-bellum obsessions and rigidity and the tragic grip of the past on succeeding generations.
The story of Thomas Sutpen, as rescued from the views of several narrators is that of an energetic man who through sheer force of his character rises from a poor boy from the mountains to be one of the most powerful and richest planters. He represents in that the aggressive adventurer who by accumulating wealth laid the foundations of modern America. But his growth is arrested. Once having become a part of the establishment he acquires its prejudices and refuses to acknowledge any change in the established relations and outlook.

The turning point in his life comes when he faces humiliation at a big house, where he goes to deliver a message. Hitherto, he had never thought that possession of a house or land was worthwhile in anyway, but now he is compelled to think that apart from the distinction between the blacks and the whites, there is also a distinction between the rich and the poor; which leads to the exploitation of many poor people like him. The awareness of the distinction between man and man produces in him a violent desire to be a great planter, with a huge mansion and a number of Negroes to rule over.

To fulfil his desire he goes to Haiti. There he
suppresses an uprising, earns money, marries and gets a son. But his childhood obsession of having a mansion and a pure dynasty persists. He discards his wife and son on the pretext that she has 1/8th Negro blood.

He thinks that once he has provided for her and their son, his duty as a husband and a father is over. He forms his relations with others not as I-You-Thou but as I-It. Marriage for him is not a moral obligation but a mere business transaction. However, in discarding his wife and son he unconsciously plants the seeds of his own misfortune.

He returns to Jefferson and marries Ellen Coldfield, who belongs to a very respectable and religious family of Jefferson. He acquires one hundred square miles of land, kidnaps a French architect and with the help of thirty Negroes, brought by him from Haiti, builds a plantation mansion. He gets two children from Ellen: Henry and Judith. But his past catches up with him. Charles Bon, his son born of his discarded wife comes to Jefferson. He pretends to fall in love with Judith in order to force his father to acknowledge him. But Henry kills Charles because of the threat of incest and miscegenation and absconds.
Thomas Sutpen's fortune declines and he is reduced to running a crossroads store. He makes two more attempts to restore the family. First he proposes to Rosa Coldfield that they live together and promises to marry her if she gives him a male heir. When she indignantly rejects him, he tries to gain a son from Milly Jones, the grand daughter of his old retainer. When their child turns out to be a daughter, Sutpen goads Wash Jones to kill him.

*Absalom, Absalom!* has been intricately constructed from the knowledge of different narrators each of whom has a particular individual perspective compounded of a special knowledge and a special ignorance.

In the beginning Rosa Coldfield, outraged by Sutpen, tells her version to Quentin Compson just before he leaves for Harvard. She treats Sutpen as a demon, a source of evil and a cause of South's defeat. Her version is charged with her special hatred and prejudices. Nothing in the account is told quietly or graciously or with charity.

The second version of the tale is shared by Quentin's father and grand father. It provides external details. Quentin's father is an outside observer,
curious, indulgent but not well informed so he is hopelessly at a loss to explain many things. He believes that Sutpen's tragic end is a punishment for his hubris.

Ultimately, Sutpen's story becomes Quentin's own responsibility. With his room-mate Shreve, he tries to reconstruct it from the account he has. Since he is a son, he thinks of the errors committed by Sutpen's children in responding to their father's arbitrary decisions. His zeal to recast and understand Sutpen's story intensifies his obsession with the past and hastens his suicide.

In short, every viewer of the legendary stories has his own perspective, and unfortunately none of these perspectives is totally correct. However, we get a view of the South from different angles. We realize that the past was after all not so idyllic as the legends make it out to be. They merely present a view of the lives of planters when the plantation economy had a validity. Those who built the plantations from the scratch seemed to be more than life size. But their energy became diabolic once they stopped keeping pace with the changing times. The hold of the attitudes of the older
generation on the younger generation resulted in the stultification of the latter.

The only character with an ability to survive is Clytie. Through her character, Faulkner once again suggests that black could well be superior to whites. She, like other blacks in Faulkner's novels, proves to be the survivor and can endure change because of her value system.

The problems posed in the novels discussed above clearly show that Faulkner considers that most of the problems of the South are a result of the incomplete changes since the Civil War. Segregation, miscegenation, incest, suppression of women, hypocritical and pharisaical attitudes, inability to attain emotional stability and adulthood, all are a result of stagnation. A change is needed in the outlook in order to come to terms the reality of historical changes and to make a healthy adjustment. The attitude of the survivors, that is the touchstone characters, who are mostly blacks, points out the shortcomings of the whites outlook. Further these novels also suggest that change does take place within a society even if it resists it. But, in the absence of any accompanying conscious change in the values, it only causes more confusion and conflict.