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## UNIT I AMERICAN FICTION IN 1920S AND 1930S

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### 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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Before attempting a critical appreciation of the novel, I would like to introduce the period (1920's and 1930's) which saw not only Faulkner's best work but the best work of some famous contemporary writers. Three of them, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck won the Nobel Prize for literature.

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### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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The period also saw a lot of avante-garde writing involving experiments in painting and literature. A background study will help us understand the climate in which Faulkner wrote his novels and put him in a proper perspective. It is also necessary that you should be generally acquainted with the other great writers of the period. The themes and issues which dominated the period gave rise to new forms and techniques. Since this period followed the first World War, which caused unprecedented devastation and mauled a whole generation physically and psychologically, a close look at this period and its concerns will be a rewarding experience.

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### 1.2 THE POST-WORLD WAR I AMERICAN NOVEL

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A group of brilliant writers appeared on the American scene during the decade following the First World War and they dominated not only American fiction but the whole age and set major trends in the art of fiction. They included Hemingway, Faulkner, Scott Fitzgerald and John Dos Passos.

Gertrude Stein's remark to a group of garage mechanics 'you're all a lost generation', which Hemingway used as an epigraph for his first major novel, *The Sun also rises* describes a generation disoriented and confused by the devastating War. This chaotic scenario threw up creative geniuses and explorers of the world of literature who set out to chart new courses and draw new maps in the world of arts and literature. Expressionism and Impressionism which made a deep impact on the creative genius of the first quarter of the 20th century became first manifest in the Impressionist exhibition in London in 1910. It fired the imagination of a whole generation and prompted Virginia Woolf to remark that the world changed in 1910. The new generation of American writers poured scorn on the provincialism of American manners and narrow hypocrisy of American public life. Sinclair Lewis's satiric attack on *Main Street* is a good example of this. Lewis, however, could not present an alternative to the *Main Street*. Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* is filled with dishonest politicians, irresponsible Labor leaders and selfish businessmen. The writers of the *Lost Generation* not only attacked the world they grew up in but also sought to discover what Henry James called 'the great and good place' that surely existed somewhere in the American sensitivity and to learn how to organize their lives so that they may not only survive but live meaningfully. Arthur Mizener says "In an important sense, all good American novels since World War I--from Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* in 1920 to Cozzens' *By Love Possessed* in 1957--are pilgrim's progresses".

The First World War forced Americans to recognise the fact that their country was a responsible part of Western culture. Many Americans were dissatisfied with the narrowness of American civilisation and opted to live elsewhere. In 1921, Harold Stearns edited a symposium called *Civilization in the United States*. At the end of it the participants concluded that there was very little civilization in the U.S.A. Stearns moved to Paris. A large number of writers of the period did the same thing.

As long as America had remained a provincial backwater, it had been difficult for the talented Americans to take it seriously. As a result, the great writers America produced in the 19th century were all alienated from their society, whether they went into exile literally like Henry James or metaphorically like Hawthorne and Melville. But the writers of the 1920s went to Europe to discover the American consciousness of experience.

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### 1.3 WRITING OUT OF AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

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The most important thing about these writers was their shared conviction that it was possible for an American, writing directly out of American experience, to produce major novels. Thus Scott Fitzgerald, an undergraduate at Princeton in 1916, said to his fellow undergraduate, Edmund Wilson, "I want to be one of the greatest writers that ever lived, don't you?" Young men with Fitzgerald's feeling for the possibilities of American experience suddenly appeared in all parts of the U.S.A. in the early 1920s. Whether it was Fitzgerald, an Irish Catholic from St Paul, Minnesota, or John Dos Passos, the son of a Portuguese immigrant or Ernest Hemingway, the son of a doctor from Illinois, or William Faulkner, who came from a backwoods county seat in Mississippi, they were all convinced of the special significance of American experience. They all felt a compulsive need to tell the truth about it.

America was afflicted by a sense of dislocation and one of the reasons for it was the first World War, the first major foreign conflict in which the U.S.A. participated. The United States entered the war in 1917. It had a deep impact on American thought and development. It left six million dead and changed the geo-political map of Europe. It saw the birth of a major revolutionary state in Russia, which was committed to the spread of communism all over the world. Even though the USA was relatively less affected and concentrated on economic and technological development, the sense of

cultural disorder, apparent in Europe, affected America also. Many American writers served as soldiers or members of the ambulance corps in Europe. John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, E.E.Cummings and Edmund Wilson worked in the ambulance corps. Hemingway was wounded on the Italian front and was decorated for bravery. Fitzgerald finished Officer training, and Faulkner trained with the Royal Canadian force. The war was the first subject in their writings. From the small town milieu in which they had grown up they came face to face with the horrors of war and the utter devastation of the European culture about which they had cherished romantic ideas. It was a culture shock, the story of crumbling idols and shattered dreams--a rude exposure to the ruthless forces of history. It involved deep disillusionment and alienation and the abject failure of language. An excellent example of this predicament is Krebs in Hemingway's well-known story, "A Soldier's Home," who returns to his Midwestern home after the war only to find old values, meanings and modes of speech useless. Men seemed to need new perceptions, new styles of living and expression.

The war produced the war novel and images of barrenness and sterility in poetry. The theme of John Dos Passos' *One Man's Initiation*: 1917 (1920) and *Three Soldiers* (1921) was growing disillusion. E. E. Cummings' *The Enormous Room* (1922) was about his confinement in a French prison camp. There are novels about the disillusioned protagonist and his 'separate peace' like Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1930).

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## 1.4 THE AMERICAN NOVEL IN THE TWENTIES

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The post-war novel dominated the American Twenties and became a metaphor for a world, twisted and torn beyond recognition. Hemingway's *The Sun also rises* (1926) is dominated by the emasculating war wound. The theme of impotence or sterility and barrenness pervades the novel. These images haunt not only *The Sun also rises* but T.S.Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), Ezra Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberly* (1920), Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and William Faulkner's *Soldiers Pay* (1926). *Soldiers' Pay* focuses on the central image of the wounded soldier returning to a new world where all the traditional values are dislocated.

The Twenties in America were a conservative decade. It was marked by Wilson's Versailles Treaty, the US senate's failure to ratify his proposals for a League of Nations, the red scare and the prohibition. But this decade led to far reaching changes in America. There was a significant shift from production to consumption and consumerism. The middle class expanded, and new techniques flourished. The machines became central to life and the technical and commercial developments saw the developments of the automobile, the aeroplane, the movie, the radio, the neon lights and the high rises. Lifestyles and sexual mores changed.

In literature, realism and naturalism yielded place to the avant-garde, the experimental and the bohemian which synchronized with the mass exodus of American writers to Paris. The experimental writings of Stein and Pound made significant contributions to the already established tradition of European modernism, and made it possible for many other American writers to make newer and bolder experiments like breaking the conventional forms of fiction like the linear narration, the search for newer and harder modes of expression and the charging of language with fresh life and vigour.

John Dos Passos, in his *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) presents the changed city through expressionist techniques. William Faulkner depicts the historical disorders of modern southern consciousness through the techniques of multiple points of view in the framework of the Gospels and the stream of consciousness.

Gertrude Stein attempts to invest America with a modernist myth in her *The Making of Americans* (1925). The American writers of this period attempted to explore the new consciousness through new techniques.

### 1.4.1 Scott Fitzgerald

The best representative and the chronicler of the Twenties was Scott Fitzgerald, one of the most talented writers of the period. His first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), in which he catches the mood and spirit of his age, was an immediate success. The novel presents Fitzgerald's main theme--the ephemeral nature of wealth and beauty. When it was first published in 1920 this side of paradise, Scott Fitzgerald's first novel, was an immediate success with both the public and the critics. It is not difficult to see why: with his elegantly disillusioned hero and his hints of romantic sadness beneath the polished charm, Fitzgerald had captured the mood of his times perfectly. As Airfred Kazin noted in *On Native Grounds* (1942), 'he was not so much a novelist as a generation speaking'. The Life of Amory Blaine (obviously a romanticized version of the life of Scott Fitzgerald) is typical of the Lost Generation. Amory is born into a privileged world -- the world of the American aristocracy -- with the natural advantages of good looks and intelligence. His mother, the fashionable Beatrice Blaine, encourages him in a pose of aristocratic disdain towards life. His years at Princeton University intensify this secret rebellion against stodgy middle-class propriety. At that time the University was dominated by the concept of the 'Christian Hero' -- a devout clean -- living undergraduate who throws himself impartially into work and sport -- but Amory and his friends take a different course. He abandons his interest in football during his first term and fails his exams at the beginning of his second year, for his energies are devoted to the pursuit of style and social prominence. His friends drive fast cars, drink too much, flirt with girls in a way that would have been unthinkable only a few years earlier, and dabble in literary interest.

The effect of the war is to harden this pose of casual cynicism into a rock-bottom despair. The early parts of the novel convey an atmosphere of gay enchantment, but this vanishes with the hero's departure from Princeton. The New York sections of the book recount a series of reverses in Amory's life: his abortive romance with Rosalind, his loss of his private income and his job, and the death of Monsignor Darly, his adviser for some many years. Amory talks at one point in the story about books that describe quests. If the reader sees this side of Paradise in these terms, it is a quest that destroys rather than establishes certainties about life. Amory's surreal journey back to Princeton at the end of the novel is a final expression of his extreme emotional turbulence.

For all its novelty, *This Side of Paradise* has precedents in earlier literature. Scott Fitzgerald is particularly influenced by the work of Oscar Wilde, the English Decadent. Indeed Wilde is several times mentioned with obvious respect in the literary conversations of Tom and Amory. With his love of bright and cynical epigrams, his fascination with gilded youth, and his occasional surreal touches (like the scene when drunken Amory meets the Devil), Scott Fitzgerald sometimes seems to be a latter-day member of the Decadent movement. But he was also subject to more modern influences, especially that of James Joyce. Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* also described a young man's development of 'quest' and its experimental style obviously impressed Fitzgerald. In the middle section of *This side of Paradise* he temporarily breaks with conventional techniques of narration to present part of the story through letters and stage dialogue.

It is unlikely, however, that readers will today be as impressed by *This side of Paradise* as Scott Fitzgerald's contemporaries were. Edmund Wilson, a lifelong friend for the author, voiced an important criticism when he described the novel as 'a phantasmagoria of incident which has no dominating intention to endow it with unity and force'. At times it seems more like a scrapbook of undergraduate memories than

a planned work of art: a contemporary reviewer facetiously hailed it as 'the collected works of Scott Fitzgerald'. Moreover, the novel's outlook on life is often immature. Fitzgerald's cynicism seems like a shallow pose, while his ceaseless straining after brilliant epigrams quickly becomes irritating. In spite of these very real faults, *This Side of Paradise* remains an important and memorable book. It expressed the mood of a generation and it introduced, in however crude and immature a form, a novelist who was to become one of the major writers of the age.

His book of stories--*Flappers and Philosophers* (1921) and *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922) show him as a sort of oracle - 'the prophet of the jazz age'. His *The Great Gatsby* (1925) is one of the most famous American novels of the 20th century. Though it won much critical acclaim, it did not sell well for more than two decades but it has gained great popularity during the last 40 years.

The novel's command of a larger audience during the last 40 years speaks of a better appreciation of Fitzgerald's achievement. *The Great Gatsby* analyses the failure of the Jazz Age to produce lasting values and exposes the disease corrupting American spirit. Fitzgerald employs a third-person minor character to narrate the story, a technique he seems to have learnt from Henry James and Joseph Conrad. This technique provides us with an objective view of the events and characters and helps in evoking a melancholy mood that pervades the novel. *The Great Gatsby* is the story of a gross, careless society of coarse wealth in a sterile world and of the extraordinary illusion of the protagonist, Jay Gatsby. It represents the dialectic between the old world of romance, love and dream on the one hand, and the dislocated modern world with its rootlessness and corruption on the other.

By 1930, Fitzgerald's wife, Zelda, became a victim of schizophrenia and he became an alcoholic. He started reading Springler, Henry Adams, Freud, and Marx and realised the need for a fresh look at things. This led to his next novel *Tender is the Night* (1934). A novel of psychic disorientation with autobiographical overtones. The focus is on the Diver couple--the wife is insane and the husband a psychiatrist, who seeks to heal the pains of the rich disintegrating psyches in a disintegrating world and all the while the drums of war sound in the background.

Scott Fitzgerald's own description of *Tender is the night* as 'novel of deterioration' is apt in more ways than one. He wrote the book at a time when his own life, once the epitome of the gaiety and glamour of the Jazz Age, was becoming messy and unhappy. His wife Zelda had already suffered several Schizophrenic breakdowns, while he himself was fighting a losing battle against alcoholism: *Tender is the night* stands on the edge of the abyss. After its publication Fitzgerald wrote several good short stories and an interesting unfinished novel, *The Last Tycoon*, but on the whole his talent sadly declined. These are the years so movingly described in the autobiographical essay, *The Crack-up*. After Zelda's permanent confinement in a sanatorium, he lived a life of lonely heavy drinking and financial anxieties. A desperate attempt to establish himself as a Hollywood script writer brought further suffering and no relief to his money worries.

*Tender is the Night* was relentlessly attacked by contemporary reviewers: it was the first major work by Scott Fitzgerald that was not an immediate success. The chief burden of complaint was that the book was messy and formless. This is largely justified, for the structure of *Tender is the Night* (especially after the precision and compartment of *The Great Gatsby*) is a great disappointment probably the most striking fault is the long opening section describing the initiation of Rosemary Hoyt into the Divers' social circle. One can see why Fitzgerald wanted to begin with a glimpse of Dick and Nicole before their troubles set in, but unfortunately the effect is to muddle the reader. It is quite a while before it becomes clear that the novel is about Dick rather than Rosemary herself. Scott Fitzgerald was fully aware of this weakness and in his extensive revisions of the novel after publication he transposed the Rosemary Hoyt section to the middle of the book. Even this major surgery did not

satisfy him and it seems likely that if he had lived longer he would have returned to revise *Tender is the Night* again.

Surrounded by waste and suffering in Fitzgerald's own life, and itself showing signs of a decline in skill, *Tender is the Night* actually takes deterioration as its main theme. It describes the gradual transformation of Dick Diver from a promising and hard-working doctor to a genteel playboy on the French Riviera, and then to a medical hack practising in obscure American provincial towns. Much of the story, of course, draws on his own experience – his alcoholism and his wife's illness – and on his fears about himself. Yet it also expresses a larger disillusion with the gay world of parties, dancing and drinking in which Scott Fitzgerald had spent much of his life. In *this side of Paradise* he had adulated the Jazz Age, in *The Great Gatsby* he had expressed a wistful disenchantment with it; in *Tender is the Night* he is its most visceral critic.

His last novel, *The Last Tycoon* (1941) is set in Hollywood, the great producer of the American illusions. Cecilia is the first person narrator, who has an ironic view of Hollywood but is in love with a producer called Stahr. Fitzgerald uses this surrealist technique here presenting distorted images of a disintegrating world amid which stands the last of the great producers, the last tycoon, trying in vain to retain command and impose an order on the crumbling world around him. The novel was unfinished owing to Fitzgerald's early death. The tragedy of the hero here is not only the tragedy of the author but also the tragedy of his times.

#### 1.4.2 Ernest Hemingway

Ernest Hemingway, Fitzgerald's fellow expatriate in Paris, was his friend and rival in the 1920s. Like Fitzgerald, Hemingway was so deeply involved with his time that he called his first work, *In Our Time* (1925), a collection of short stories which present the violence, pain and death as well as the courage and endurance of our time. The famous Hemingway style, with its verbal economy, control and precision, became manifest in his very first book. His second work, *The Sun also Rises* (1926), a novel about the post-war generation, which was to become the famous 'Lost Generation' later, firmly established him as a major writer. He concentrated on what really happened in action and what evoked the emotion without explicitly stating it. He believed in the power of understatement and suggestion using a clean prose freed from adjective and ornament.

Hemingway was born in Oakpark, Illinois, in 1819. He served on the Italian front as an ambulance man and was wounded in 1918. This wound was to play a significant role in his life as well as in his fictional work as 'a repetitive compulsion' recurring again and again in different forms and ways. The traumatic shock and the resultant fear, which he tried to overcome by seeking danger and death again and again had a profound impact on his life and work.

His style is characterized by staccato rhythms, clipped dialogue, understatements, and hidden metaphors, all working towards a remarkable verbal economy. This style is seen at its best in *The Sun Also Rises*, set in France and Spain, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), a novel about love in the time of war on the Italian Front, and his short stories. His experiments in shifting the point view and in foreshortening time in *To Have and Have Not* (1937) lead to their masterly use in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), which is a novel about guerilla action in Spain during the civil war. In *Across the River and into the Trees* (1950), set in Venice, Italy, and *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), set in Cuba, the narrative focus is kept undeviatingly on a single character and his consciousness.

*The Old Man and the Sea* after the publication of which he won the Pulitzer prize in 1952 and the Nobel Prize in 1954 for his "style-forming mastery of the art of modern narration," is a great achievement in the narrative art. The dynamics of narration in this novel chiefly consist in giving the reader a clear objective view of the drama

taking place on the sea while allowing him to involve himself emotionally with what the protagonist thinks and does. When the old man does not know what he has against him and wonders if it is a Marlin or a broadbill or shark, we already have the superior knowledge that it is a marlin 100 fathoms down in the sea. Later, as Santiago looks at the Marlin and is blissfully ignorant of the approaching Mako shark, we keep track of the movements of the shark deep down in the water. It is this superior point of view that makes us aware of the tragic irony of Santiago's predicament, as he pities the flying fish and the birds.

Hemingway superimposes a paradox over the obvious ironic pattern of the novel in which Santiago's great triumph is reduced to a miserable failure as he brings home only the skeleton of the magnificent fish lashed to his skiff. But this basic irony is transformed into a paradox when we consider how the old man fights the sharks with an indomitable will and brings home his prize transforming his material failure into a moral triumph in the story. The Hemingway hero lives by a code and exemplifies "grace under pressure".

Read literally as an adventure yarn, *The Old Man and the Sea* grips young and old. The prose is simple, the appropriations of Spanish dialogue poetically affecting and appropriate the narrative pattern wild and economical. Santiago's stubborn courage, rugged strength and marvelous skill sustain suspense till the tragic end. As almost every critic has noted, however, the reader who casts for subtler meanings may net a more haul. Hemingway said of the story that the old man, the boy, the sea, the fish, and the sharks were all real, "But if I made them good and true enough," he went on, "they would mean many things."

For some readers the novel has deep, religious implications. Santiagos' scarred palms, the crosslike mast he carries up the hill – these symbols suggests the christian overtones that sound throughout the tale. Although Santiago loves the fish, his pride compels him to destroy it – a human failure for which both man and nature suffer.

Other see the struggle between man and nature as the ancient bond between hunter and prey. Respecting his prey, the hunter must nevertheless assert at any price the power of man. Ironically, the price is often death or defeat for the hunter as well. Santiago becomes an embodiment of all of Hemingway's "code" heroes the first of them, however, as Philip young observes, to have grown old.

*The Old Man and the Sea* is also significant as a study of initiation, for in it the boy Manolin learns what it means to be a man. He has been consummately tutored in the craft of big game fishing. More important, however, he has, like all of Hemingway's initiates, absorbed knowledge about love, death, courage and endurance.

For many readers, *A Farewell to Arms* is Hemingway's most appealing and affecting novel. The courage of Frederic and Catherine and the tragic consequences of their love, the atmosphere of the Italian war front and the powerful scenes of the debacle at Caporetto – these remains etched in memory long after other details have skipped away. Some critics have objected that Catherine is too idealized, too romantically compliant, too sentimentally a "code" heroine. As a result, they believe, Frederic's development proceeds with a slick, movie-script glibness different from the rough edged force of *The Sun Also Rises*. For other critics, the emotional force of the novel as a whole transcends its several weaknesses.

Like most of Hemingway's novels, *A Farewell to Arms* is about love and death and the kind of courage one needs to experience them. In the beginning, Frederic lacks commitment of any kind. He cannot find in love of man, woman, or God any compelling reason for existence. Until he meets Catherine he drifts with the moment. Afterward he moves inevitably towards an understanding of the fullness as well as the emptiness of life. He learns about the hollowness of abstractions'. Medals do not prove valor; a wedding need not signify a true marriage. He learns from Catherine

and from Rinaldi and Greffi as well – the potential force of the individual spirit. And he learns, above all, that those who undertake a “separate peace” win no lasting victory. But deserting the army to be with Catherine, Frederic symbolically bids farewell to military arms. Ironically, when she dies, he must bid yet another farewell – to the arms of his love.

The novel is rich in symbols. For example, the rain that opens and closes the book symbolizes death as well as life. That Frederic learns, then, is that a “Code” hero must accept the truth that all stories end in death. That truth understood, life has moments of beauty and significance well worth the living.

Hemingway’s use of suggestion and symbolism is based on his belief that the dignity of movement of an Iceberg lies in only one-eighth of it being on the surface of the water. In spite of his tough exterior and his formidable reputation for boxing, big-game-hunting, bullfighting and fishing. He was a sensitive artist. This was captured in a New Yorker cartoon in the 1930s, which showed a brawny, hairy arm holding a beautiful rose in hand captioned “the Soul of Ernest Hemingway”.

### 1.4.3 John Dos Passos

The First World War attracted John Dos Passos who went to France and Spain to be nearer to the war and joined the ambulance corps. His first novel, *One Man's Initiation : 1917* was published in England in 1919. The protagonist, Martin Howe, sees the war as a violation of his cultural values. His second war novel, *Three Soldiers* (1921) depicts war as a massive machine crushing individualism. His third novel, *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) is an urban classic, set in the great modern city. Dos Passos sees the city as a fast moving thing, a terrible machine to give and choke life. Manhattan is a dynamo filled with throbbing energy and life. In his famous trilogy *The 42nd parallel* (1930), *Nineteen Nineteen* (1932), and *The Big Money* (1936), later collected together as *the U.S.A* (1937), there is a shift towards Marxist radicalism and a historical approach. This trilogy is a modernist epic, with a wide range of characters and experimentation with the documentary matter used in a novel way, giving us a large vision of America and its corruption. It has four basic structural levels --the life stories of the fictional characters, the “newsreel” Collage of documentary data --headlines, songs, speeches and reports --and the “camera eye” sections where impressions are registered in a stream-of-consciousness flow of the novelist's perception.

To comprehend the full impact of Dos Passos' study of despair, defeat and disillusion. One must read all three volumes of the trilogy *USA*, of which *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel* is the first volume. *1919 and the Big money* (published in 1932 and 1936) round out the portraits begun in the earliest novel and add several others. But even in the initial work, the sustaining purpose is clear, the pervasive technique manifest. All four narrative techniques merge to shape a nightmare vision of human exploitation.

Dos Passos' method, as critics have noted, enables him except in *The Camera Eye* – to stand apart and record events dispassionately. The testimony of history thus indicts the capitalistic system without reducing the novelist to the role of propagandist. Unhappily, the results do not entirely fulfill the promise of Dos Passos' purpose. Too often his carefully selected characters lack flesh to body forth their symbolic intent; they seem clinical specimens rather than full-blooded human beings. Similarly, in choosing subjects for his *Living Biographies*, Dos Passos has ignored many who have survived or prevailed in our society without selling out or being sold out.

Before the trilogy ends, the reader becomes aware that Dos Passos has not intended to indict only capitalism. Act of betrayal and distortion indict communism as well. What Dos Passos seems to argue for most passionately is the dignity of man and his right to freedom from the encroachments of any ideology that diminishes him.



Precisely how to achieve his goal Dos Passos fails to make clear, but his nobility of motive and dramatic force move the reader.

American Fiction in  
1920s and 1930s

#### 1.4.4 William Faulkner

One of the great novelists of America was William Faulkner, a regional writer whose reach embraced the whole of mankind. His novels are firmly rooted in the South but deal with enduring values, honour, endurance, compassion, and sacrifice. We shall discuss this great writer in detail in the next unit which will be devoted to the novel of the South preparatory to a detailed study of his famous novel, *Light in August*.

The American Twenties saw the rise of a generation of great writers who elevated writing to new heights with their sensibility, commitment, innovation and experiment with language and narrative techniques.

#### 1.4.5 The Great Depression

The Great crash of 1929 led to a Depression, which engulfed the whole world and eclipsed the social and cultural mores of the Twenties. Banks and factories closed: farming collapsed; industries became sick; and millions were unemployed and poor. Scott Fitzgerald's 'Jazz Age' ended. The expatriate writers returned from Europe to America as their stay abroad would no longer be funded by an economically distressed home country.

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### 1.5 AMERICAN WRITING IN THE THIRTIES

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American writers who have shown a penchant for experimentation with language and narrative techniques now showed a keen interest in socially and politically relevant subjects. The 'how' of writing yielded place to 'what' as the writers showed leftist sympathies and well known writers like Sherwood Anderson, Upton Sinclair, Theodore Dreiser, John Dos Passos, and Thomas Wolfe wrote about economic, social and political issues.

Michael Gold, editor of *The New Masses*, a communist paper, authored a radical novel titled *Jews without Money* in 1930. Dos Passos' *The 42nd Parallel* also appeared in the same year. In 1928, *The New Masses* had called for a worker-correspondents and radical authors. *The New Masses* sponsored the foundation of the John Reed Club in New York for younger writers. Its slogan was 'Art is a class weapon'. In 1934 the John Reed club sponsored *Partisan Review* a major intellectual magazine of the decade. Initially, it was a magazine with communist sympathies, but by 1937, after the Moscow Trials, it reacted against the totalitarian trend in the Marxist attitude to culture and moved towards a new liberalism. This new realism caught on and coloured the American intellectual life of the Thirties. Historical factors of the time like the debates on the Spanish civil war, the impact of the Moscow trials, and the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939 battered the Marxist image.

#### 1.5.1 James T. Farrell

James T. Farrell, who had a lot of personal experience of the streets of Chicago, wrote in the naturalist vein. His most famous work was the *Studs Lonigan Trilogy* [Young Lonigan (1932), *The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan* (1934), and *Judgment Day* (1925)], written in the objective mode of naturalism. Studs, a typical young American of his time and class, walks out of the school, which has exercised no influence on him. He enters the city, where he becomes a drunkard and dies. There is a cultural degeneration in every phase of his life. Farrell's was a qualified

determinism as opposed to Dreiser's environmental determinism. Character and motivation play an important role in qualified determinism. *Studs Lonigan* is not, as James Farrell has pointed out, a tough or a gangster. Nor is he the product of the slums. In the first novel of the trilogy, at least, Studs displays many of the qualities of an average American boy – dreams of grandeur, a rebellious spirit, an essential decency. And his family, with its faith in church and home, work and duty, represents a characteristically American approach to life. Moreover, the Lonigans have the economic means and security to translate that approach into reality; what, then goes wrong?

According to Farrell, Studs' downfall is caused by "spiritual poverty," the failure of church, family, school, and community to provide a significant direction for the boy and for his friends. Platitudes have taken the place of purpose, allowing social and moral decay to deep into and rot the vital substance of youth. Studs is not a villain, then, but a victim of the world he inhabits, and his story, Farrell has asserted, is the story of an American destiny in our time".

Young Lonigan, like the other books in the trilogy, is compelling and affecting. It records disillusion, degeneration, and despair with an almost photographic accuracy and with meticulous attention to fine detail. Farrell has sought to emulate the compass of Balzac and the scientific detachment of Zola, the thundering power of Dreiser and the stylistic elegance of Joyce. Unfortunately, he achieves less than he aspires to. Farrell's prose style is almost featureless, his accumulation of details often repetitious to the point of ennui, and his sense of life's ceaseless boredom nearly suffocating. The naturalistic novel – of which Farrell has been the outstanding writer since Dreiser – often falls prey to these faults and Farrell's novel sometimes reads more like a case history than novel. Nevertheless, young Lonigan and two novels that follow it belong to the great tradition of American naturalistic writing, a tradition that sharply contracts romantic dream and hideous reality.

### 1.5.2 Erskine Caldwell

Erskine Caldwell, a southern writer from Georgia, wrote tales of poor farmers and their old land and passions and joys and sorrows in novels like *Tobacco Road* (1932) and *God's Little Acre* (1933) and depicted the rough face of the countryside even as Farrell presented the rough face of the city.

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## 1.6 REALISM AND NATURALISM

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Realism and naturalism ruled the world of fiction in the 1930s. While the realist presented life or a slice of life in his fiction, the naturalist's presentation of the same is coloured by scientific observation of characters under laboratory conditions.

The American naturalists like Frank Norris, Jack London and Theodore Dreiser were influenced by European naturalists and Emile Zola's theory set forth in his *Le Roman Experimental* (1879). The novelist's job was to study life and society from the scientific point of view recording facts, living conditions, genetic, environmental and historical factors. Naturalism is scientific and systematized realism.

### 1.6.1 John Steinbeck

A serious naturalistic writer in the tradition of Dreiser, Norris and London, John Steinbeck was interested in a biological explanation of human nature and behaviour. He was greatly influenced by the marine biologist, Edward F. Ricketts, who gave a scientific explanation of human and animal nature. This informed Steinbeck's novels in a significant way. There are sage-like characters, in many of Steinbeck's

John Steinbeck was born in the Salinas valley of California which is the setting of many of his books. His first novel, *Cup of Gold* (1929) is a historical romance about the buccaneer, Sir Henry Morgan. After this novel, he moved to novels about the life around him. His series of powerful novels like *Tortilla Flat* (1935), *Of Mice and Men* (1930s) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) flowed from his pen. *The Grapes of Wrath*, his best-known work, is a classic tale of 'Okie' migration from Oklahoma to California. Steinbeck wrote this book after travelling to California with okie migrants. The work at once expresses social and political despair as well as an optimistic view of life. Steinbeck's political sympathies are with the radicals but he did not like their attempt to impose a system on nature.

In recent years critics have grown increasingly impatient with John Steinbeck. He has been called a "naive mystic" and worse, a "hausfrau sentimentalist." Yet a quarter of a century ago, when *The Grapes of Wrath* appeared, Steinbeck's work stirred intense reactions. Supporters called his novel "The Uncle Tom's Cabin of the Depression". Antagonists joined Lyleboren, an Oklahoma Congressman in attacking the novel as "a lie, a black, infernal creation of twisted, distorted mind."

Today distance enables us to adopt a more judicious attitude. Few view the novel as a mere piece of left wing propaganda despite the warning sounded by its title, a title Steinbeck chosen "because it is in our own revolutionary tradition and because in reference to this book it has a large meaning". The novel does, however urge the development of a communal spirit and affirms a sense of the mystical spirit of the group. Jim Casy possesses this instinctive sense of the surging force of mankind, and Ma Joad expresses it in her insistence upon the unity of the family. Tom Joad moves gradually toward awareness of this higher sanctity and at the end of the novel, assumes the responsibility for pressing forward its ineffaceable truth.

Because of Steinbeck's interest in marine life, some critics have argued that he has reduced life to a series of animalistic patterns like those he had observed in the sea: Survival of the fittest, rejection of alien elements by the established group. Certainly the migrant farmers of *The Grapes of Wrath* represent intruders who upset the balance. And in this, as in other Steinbeck novel, property, ownership, indeed the land itself – all upset the natural balance disastrously. But Steinbeck is a man of compassion, not a clinical precisionist. Like Jim Casy, he seems to say, "All things are holy", and to urge all men and women to love one another, to march forward together. His confidence in man triumphs over despair.

The style and structure of *The Grapes of Wrath* seem at times overwrought the symbols transparent and the episodes – especially the much-debated closing scene of Rosasharn nursing the starving man – often melodramatic. Nevertheless, at its best – which it often is – the novel nears the level of epic in its lyric sweep and agonized others. And in Ma Joad, Jim Casy, and Grampa, among others, Steinbeck has created a gallery of American portraits that body forth our American heritage of courage, compassion and humor.

*East of Eden* (1952) is about the American west as the Garden of Eden, the virgin territory, the promised land, where the dreams and struggles of man are re-experienced. Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962.

### 1.6.2 Thomas Wolfe

Thomas Wolfe was one of the most celebrated writers of the Thirties. His ambition was of epic proportions, and he tried to catch the spirit of the times, places and people. His writing was anchored in his own experience, the story of his own being and becoming as his first novel, *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929) demonstrates. According to him, "all serious work is autobiographical." The protagonist of this novel is Eugene Gant, a surrogate for Wolfe. Gant is the protagonist of Wolfe's next novel, *Of Time and the River* (1935). *The Web and the Rock* (1939) and *You Can't Go Home Again* (1940) are also autobiographical.

different name--George Webber Wolfe's novels are confessional and they present the protagonist actively interacting with his times.

Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* a biographer points out, "fell on critically evil days and they have taken their toll of his reputation, in not of his steadily increasing number of readers." Published in 1929 in the month of the stock-market crash, it was regularly attacked by the critics of the thirties for its lack of social commitment. The attacks have never ceased. Only recently an influential English critic has said that Wolfe is not a novelist at all: "He is an obsessional neurotic with a gift for words who could write only about himself and who could not create other people".

The charges against Wolfe vary, but those most frequently leveled are that he is guilty of "sprawling profusion," that he is "monstrously rhetorical and oratorical," that he constructs formless, bulging pseudo-narratives that he then calls "novels" not all the charges are baseless. Wolfe himself divided writers into two classifications – those who "take out" and those who "put in", and named as the great practitioners of the selective novel, Flaubert and of the inclusive novel Tolstoi.

Wolfe further wrote, to Margaret Roberts (the model of Margaret Leonard) that *Look Homeward, Angel* was the story of powerful creativity "trying to work its way toward an essential isolation; a creative solitude; a secret life – its fierce struggles to wall their part of life away from birth, first against the public and savage glare of an unbalanced nervous, brawling family group, later against school, society, and all the barbarous invasions of the world." And this analysis, may indicate the reason for the novel's continuing appeal. *Look Homeward, Angel* is intense autobiography, the record of the author's struggle for self, for individuality. People, especially but not exclusively young people, identify with that struggle, feel the novel with a force and directness that make negative criticism largely irrelevant. The novel still proves for them a vitalizing, even a liberating experience, and they still find their way to it in undiminished numbers.

Besides, the novel has three qualities that make it rise above its faults; its lyrical soaring prose which forms an effective counterpart to its harsh and bitter realism, its moving, pungent dramatic dialogue, its vivid portraiture, which has etched for us a gallery of real, memorable people. Few American novelists can boast a greater accomplishment.

### 1.6.3 Henry Miller

Henry Miller's novels are generally described as anti-novels of the Thirties. They are also novels of the Thirties Depression reflecting a sense of economic chaos, political anguish and reaction against conventional attitudes and judgment. He wrote in Paris when the expatriates left Paris for home. His books were printed in Paris. They were not published in the USA until the 1960s because of their sexual explicitness.

He was an iconoclast who attacked the values of the decade in his 'Tropics' series like *Tropic of cancer* (1934) *Black Spring* (1936), *Tropic of Capricorn* (1939) and in his later series of novels like *Sexus* (1945), *Plexus* (1949) and *Nexus* (1960). Miller returned to the States after the Second World War broke out, travelled extensively and finally settled at a Big Sur in California. His books were no longer banned and he attacked the USA in *the Air-Conditioned Nightmare*. He became a guru of the beat generation, who represented American romantic anarchism. He found a vehicle of expression in Surrealism, which was used by another well-known writer of the Thirties, Nathanael West in his novels, *the Dream life of Balso Snell* (1931) and *Miss Lonely Hearts* (1933).

The Twenties and the Thirties were a period of restless creativity in American literature.

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## 1.6 LET US SUM UP

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## American Fiction in 1920s and 1930s

The 1920s and the 1930s saw the rise of the Modern American Novel. This period was charged with literary excitement. Some of those who started writing during this period, like Faulkner, Hemingway, and Steinbeck, went on to win the Nobel Prize for Literature later. Most writers selected for their treatment themes and problems from their native American soil. Interesting experiments in prose writing, particularly in the narrative art, were made during this period.

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## 1.7 QUESTIONS

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1. How did the first world war affect American writers?
2. Comment on Hemingway's contribution to the American novel.
3. How did the Great Depression influence the American novel of the 1930s?
4. Write a note on Naturalism in American fiction.

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## 1.8 SUGGESTED READING

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## UNIT 2 THE NOVEL IN THE SOUTH

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### Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The Southern Novel : A Bird's Eye View
- 2.3 William Faulkner
- 2.4 Robert Penn Warren
- 2.5 Women Novelists
- 2.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.7 Questions
- 2.8 Suggested Reading

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### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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In the unit we'll discuss the Southern Novel in general and a few of southern novelists in particular.

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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The south of America is a distinctive region in the United States . Apart from the geographical boundaries, the boundaries of experience and tradition and its predominantly agrarian character mark the South as a distinctive entity . The civil war gave it a taste of defeat and humiliation; enslavement and ill-treatment of the blacks gave it a sense of guilt . The obsession with the past gave it a sense of sentimental and romantic pride in its history and tradition . These attitudes went into the making of the literature of the South which is, more often than not , a tragic literature in that it deals, for the most part , with the tragedy of human experience .

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### 2.2 THE SOUTHERN NOVEL : A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

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The first two voices to rise out of the South were of Ellen Glasgow and James Branch Cabell. Ellen Glasgow presented the social history of a decadent aristocracy. Her best novels, *Barren Ground* (1925), and *Vein of Iron* (1935) put us in mind of Thomas Hardy in their tragic sense. Incidentally she was an admirer of Hardy.

Like Ellen Glasgow , James Branch Cabell was a Virginian who loved the history and tradition of Virginia . Unlike Ellen Glasgow who dealt with facts and traced a tragic pattern in the history of Virginia, Cabell involved himself with the imaginative and romantic manifestation of chivalry, gallantry, and poetry in his novels. He demonstrated that truth is found in imagination rather than in dry facts.

The 1920s and 30s were an age of protest for some writers who promoted the realistic movement. These novelists were social critics. Some of them attacked the small towns and villages like Sinclair Lewis , while others attacked the American cities like James.T. Farrell . Both the groups raised the banner of revolt against the present and the past. Southern voices found a form in *The Fugitive* , a magazine published from Nashville, Tennessee , in 1922-25. *The Double Dealer*, published from New Orleans, was interested in the new writers like Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein and

Sherwood Anderson. While the Midwestern writers called for social reform, the Southern writers who were in love with the past looked back for inspiration and creativity. In the process they rediscovered man's relationship to the soil. Esrline Caldwell wrote passionate tales of people who identified themselves with the land

## The Novel in the South

The Southern writer always knew himself as part of history and a larger meaning. He felt burdened by the accumulation of ancestry, history and a guilty conscience related to race, superstition and the sin of slavery. His pen was pushed by a force larger and more powerful than himself. This gave a remarkable depth to his writing.

Thus the South became a fertile ground for the emergence of good literature and literary criticism in the post-war years. The South provided the right landscape and the right intellectual milieu for its creative writers and literary critics. The result was the rise of a large number of creative writers and critics whose names read like a 'hall of fame'. Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, Randall Jarrell and Cleanth Brooks, to name a few, and famous women novelists like Katherine Anne Porter, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty and Caroline Gordon.

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### 2.3 WILLIAM FAULKNER

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In the 1920s when some of the most distinguished American writers of the North either migrated to Europe or drew their inspiration from there, the Southern writers stayed back in America and wrote of the anguish of the south. The greatest of them was William Faulkner who was born in 1897 and rarely left his home town, Oxford, Mississippi, except for brief periods when he trained with the Royal Canadian Air Force. He went to New Orleans to become a writer and found Sherwood Anderson, already an established writer, who was to influence and help him, and a literary ambience. Other strong formative influences on him were the Romantics, Keats in particular, and the new modern texts like T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Like most of his contemporaries he found modern life a wasteland and he fashioned a style for himself to help him go through this wasteland.

In his first novel, *Soldier's Pay* (1927), the protagonist, Donald Mahon, comes home to find the people around him suffering from a post-war sterility.

In *Sartoris* (1929), he discovered that his literary range extended beyond his contemporary life to embrace an extended historical and social dimension. It is a novel that reveals a deep social commitment exploring his community at various levels.

Faulkner's famous Yoknapatawpha county in which most of his fictional work was set, was born in this novel. With Jefferson as its county seat, the fictitious Yoknapatawpha becomes a functional community like Thomas Hardy's Wessex or R.K. Narayan's Malgudi. Here Faulkner presents the play of classes and races and processes of historical changes and the passions, agonies, sins and penances of a variety of men and women. *Sartoris* presents the Yoknapatawpha county against the post-World War One background. Bayard Sartoris, who inherits the reckless courage of his aristocratic ancestors, returns home and this sets off the dichotomy between the past and the present -- the virile, chivalric world of the Sartorises and the delicate, intellectual world of the Benbows, the families who have a historical and social sense like the Sartorises, Compsons and De Spains and those who were driven by commercial self-interest like the Snopeses.

Faulkner was no exception to the great experimental writing of the 1920s and 1930s. *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *As I Lay Dying* (1930) employed a multiple point of view technique of narration and the stream of consciousness technique to the best

advantage . This and *Light in August* (1932) and *Absalom , Absalom!* (1936 ) present the Yoknapatawpha experience from the point of settlement in the new country to the contemporary moment of decadence and disjunction . History is interwoven with personal perception and psychic time interacts with historic time. There is a great intensity in Faulkner's work. This arises from the concentrated projection of the southern experience as felt in the enslavement of the Blacks and the civil war , military, political , and cultural defeat , and the process of industrialisation resulting in the ascendancy of machines which subjugated an agrarian culture.

Faulkner's characters are unique in that they have a reality outside the stories in which they are portrayed. They recur again and again in different situations in different novels.

In the long story , 'The Bear ' , in *Go Down Moses* (1942) , we're given glimpses into the evolution of the central character, like McCaslin who is presented at the age of 16, 18 and so on .

In *The Sound and the Fury*, we see part of the story through the consciousness of Benjy, a cretin with the mental age of five and in another part, the whole complicated levels of consciousness as the reasons for Quentin's suicide are unfolded. The structure of this novel is based on the gospels of the New Testament, which is the story of Jesus according to four of his disciples. *The Sound and the Fury* also gives four versions of the story of the Compson family. The technique of stream of consciousness is used to the best advantage in the novel.

The novel begins with the image of Caddy's dirty drawers. Benjy's tale told by an idiot in the continuous present reveals timeless memory : in Quentin's memory, the image is transformed into a sense of guilt and sin, the past impinges tragically on the present ; Jason's point of view is practical , mean and selfish .only Dilsey's account offers an enduring continuity and stability .

*As I Lay Dying* describes the six day funeral journey of the Bundren family from different points of view and through several interior monologues. The journey generates profound reflections on life and death.

In *Light in August*, three stories are intertwined. The central figure in the main story is the light- complexioned black orphan called Joe Christmas. This mean, selfish, amoral , unscrupulous and perverse man kills the woman who protects him , and finally pays dearly for his bad life at the hands of a lynching mob . The story of Rev. Gail Hightower is equally dark . The story of Lena Grove , who is the archetypal female representing fecundity, endurance, and stability, serves as the framework for all the three stories which make up the novel. Her untiring search for the father of the child in her womb gives deep meaning to the novel.

We shall examine this novel in depth from different angles in the ensuing units.

Faulkner fashions a style for his depiction of Southern life and history mirrored through the microcosm of Yoknapatawpha County. His regional art retains universal dimensions on the lines of the microcosm reflecting the microcosm. He was a pioneer in Southern fiction, a master craftsman who paved the way for writers like Robert Penn Warren , Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor. His was a major contribution to the art of fiction in the 20th century in general and to the Southern novel in particular.

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## 2.4 ROBERT PENN WARREN

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Robert Penn Warren wrote the novel of ideas dramatising the southern view of man through southern characters. His novels demonstrate technical excellence involving the special use of witty and sometimes metaphysical language. Jack Burden, the



narrator in *All The King's Men*, becomes the commentator on the universal problems which Warren finds in the carrier of a political demagogue called Willie Stark. The novel turns out to be a story of burdens self-discovery through Billy Stark and not about Stark as a politician as we are led to anticipate in the beginning.

When *All the King's Men* appeared in 1946, the obvious parallel between Willie Stark and the late Huey Long, Governor of Louisiana, aroused greater attention than the more significant merits of the novel. To those who insist that the novel is an apology for Long's life, Warren's own answer serves best. "There is really nothing to reply to this kind of innocent bone headedness or gosput-bit hyseria."

Most critics since those first days of stormy dissension have recognized the novel for its more relevant qualities. They have seen that Willie Stark and Jack Burden are alike in their quest for self knowledge and for the identity that enable a man to shape his destiny in a chaotic world. Willie's moral neutrality leads him at last to destruction, but so too does Adam's moral absolutism. Jack Burden alone comes to maturity that permits survival. He experiences the extremes of idealism and despair but settles at last for a kind of pragmatic realism that opens the way to meaningful life.

The novel has tremendous narrative impact, even though its episodes occasionally border on the melodramatic. The prose style has energy and sweep, except when the contract between Jack Burden's rhetorical asides to the reader and his hard-boiled, laconic dialogue tan the reader's credulity. Warren draws upon a rich fund of imagery and certain basic mythic patterns - the motifs of journey and return, birth and death, sin and repentance - to deepen the implications of his narrative. The abiding strength of *All the King's Men* remains in its characterization, not only the masterly handling of Willie Stark, but also the shrewdly and vividly portrayed minor figures who cluster about him.

His *World Enough and Time* is a novel of philosophical speculation about the meaning of justice, death, and the end of man arising out of the authors reflections on an early 19th century murder case. *Band of Angels* is a slave narrative about a supposedly a white girl with negro blood in her. The novel explores the nature of freedom.

In *The Cave*, Warren describes the events happening around a man trapped in a cave and the attempts to rescue him. In the process he explores the characters' search for identity.

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## 2.5 WOMEN NOVELISTS

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Eudora Welty and Catherine Anne Porter were famous for their 'perfect' or 'almost perfect' stories. Ms. Porters 'faultless' stories fascinated a whole generation of Americans are with their beautiful prose and laconic irony. It is difficult to achieve this sort of perfection in a long narrative like the novel and Ms Porter strove long and hard to achieve it in her *Ship of Fools*. The novel depicts the world as a ship load of fools bound on a voyage into the dissolution of Western society. She regards Nazism as the centre of a world sickness. *Ship of Fools* was planned as an epic but, in fact, it is a harsh personal statement of a point of view.

In contrast, the fictions of Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor are so artfully constructed that they do not strike as statements of a single point of view.

Carson McCullers writes about man's spiritual isolation and his desperate but futile bid to break out of it. Her first novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* is a story of five

lonely people, each of them isolated yet tragically incapable of the kind of love and understanding they need from one another.

The central figures are Singer, a deaf mute, and Antonapoulos, a cretin. The other three lonely people pour out their hearts to Singer as if he were God for, like God, he neither hears nor responds. Singer, in his turn, pours out his heart to Antonapoulos who can neither think nor hear nor respond, and on whom Singer's emotional dependence is total. These are grotesques like Amelia, Lymon and Marvin Macy in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*.

The action of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, which Carson McCullers wrote when she was twenty-three, is contained within the winter of one year and the summer of the next. It is a tightly constructed and intensely concentrated novel. Yet remarkably, it presents a panorama of the "Strangled Smith." As Ihab Hassan notes, "the novel finds a way of acknowledging the social realities of its time."

Its central theme is the inevitable isolation of each man. Each reaches out, lonely and longing, for communion with another human being. And each finds it is only an illusion – an illusion that must be ultimately shattered, nevertheless, the illusion is what makes life livable.

The characters in the novel are realistically sometimes ironically drawn – but always the quality of mercy mitigates the irony. Mick Kelly, who loves music and strives dimly for a kind of beauty, perhaps touches readers most poignantly. But the unexpressed tenderness of Biff Brannon, the futile rage of Jake Blount, the unfulfilled purpose of Dr. Copeland – those, too, evoke compassion. Richard Wright, an important Negro novelist, especially praises Mrs. McCullers for "the astonishing humanity that enables a white writer, the first time in southern fiction, to handle Negro characters with as much ease and justice as those of her own race."

Singer, a deaf mute, is the centripetal force of the novel. Toward him all the character gravitate to speak their deepest wants and to hear the saving words – and he can neither hear nor speak. Though *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* is set in the deep South during the early thirties, it is more than reportage, even spiritual reportage, dealing with a particular place and time. It is a parable on the human condition, men's fragile visions, their frustrated aims, their shut-in agonies, their necessary self-deceptions and, not least, their valorous endurance.

In spite of the preponderance of grotesque and symbolic overtones, or may be because of them, McCullers would always be remembered as one of the greatest practitioners of the aesthetic of pain and loneliness in American fiction.

She has a theory of the nature of love, which she states in clear terms in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* and all her novels read like illustrations of a theory. According to her, love is a one-way traffic and generates hostility in the beloved. Hence everyone wants to love only and not to be loved.

In dramatising the tragic view of man, trapped in his own nature, suffering loneliness and loss of identity or reduced to a grotesque trying to reach out and communicate, and starved of sympathy, the southern novelists present a vision of human experience which is at variance with that of much of America. In their revolt against the modern world they look backward to a tradition of human dignity.

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## 2.6 LET US SUM UP

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The American South got its distinctive character not only from its predominantly agrarian character but from its treatment to the Blacks and its defeat in the Civil War.

The mainsprings of literary creativity in the South were its history and guilty conscience related to race, superstition, and the sin of slavery. It gave rise to several well known writers, including women writers, and influential literary critics. The greatest writer from the South was William Faulkner.

## The Novel in the South

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### 2.7 QUESTIONS

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1. What are the main attitudes that went into the making of the literature of the South?
2. What is the Yoknapatawpha County?
3. Compare it with Thomas Hardy's Wessex and R.K.Narayan's Malgudi.
4. Give an estimate of Faulkner as a novelist.
5. Write a brief note on some women novelists of the South.

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### 2.8 SUGGESTED READING

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Bradbury John M. *Renaissance in the South : A Critical History of The Literature After 1920-1960* (Chapel Hill, N. C .1963 )

Gary Richard . *The Literature of Memory : Modern Writers of the Americans South* (London/Baltimore , 1977 )

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Hubbell J B. *Southern Life in Fiction* (Athens, Ga 1960 )

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## UNIT 3 *LIGHT IN AUGUST* : STRUCTURE AND NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

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### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 What happens in *Light in August*?
- 3.3 The sad saga of Joe Christmas
- 3.4 The Three Plots
- 3.5 A Sampling of the Original Reviews
- 3.6 Private Selves and Public Roles
- 3.7 Narrative Strategies
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Questions

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this Unit, William Faulkner and *Light in August* will be introduced. I propose to discuss what happens in the novel giving an outline of the story with an analysis of the relationships and interactions and calling attention to the themes and issues involved like the racial problems, psychological problems, human foibles, and alienation, against which the simple and the good are presented.

Also in this Unit I propose to acquaint you with some early responses to the novel and with the view of eminent critics on the dialectic between the private self and the public social role of some of the *characters* in *Light in August*. I shall also discuss the polyphonic nature of the narration and the narrative strategies adopted to unfold the events and their meanings in the novel.

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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William Faulkner was born in a distinguished family in the southern state of Mississippi and became the most distinguished Southern novelist. It was one of the ironies of literary history that Faulkner, like many other great writers in literary history, never had a formal education. He never graduated from a high school and failed in the only English course that he took. But he worked hard at the craft of writing, and won Pulitzer Prize and the Nobel Prize for Literature. Faulkner started as a poet, but after his meeting with Sherwood Anderson, who was already an established writer, he began working on his first novel, *Soldiers' Pay* (1926), which he later published with Sherwood Anderson's help. Three years later, he published his most famous novel, *The Sound and the Fury*, and became a major writer. He married in the same year and had to earn a living by doing odd jobs. In 1931 he published *Sanctuary*, mainly with a view to making money. The novel brought him a fortune and he was tempted to write for Hollywood where he made more money.

Faulkner lived and worked in his home town of Oxford, Mississippi. Out of this town and its environs, he created the fictional Yoknapatawpha county, a miniature representation of the southern American society. It presents a cross section of different classes of the society like the aristocratic but decadent Sartoris and Compson families, and Snopes family, the *neuvo riche* usurpers, and the enduring

Blacks, the stable and stabilizing factor in a society suffering from moral decadence, insecurity and a guilty conscience.

*Light In August:*  
Structure and  
Narrative Strategies

Faulkner was a very private person, who avoided publicity. When he won the Nobel Prize, he delivered a memorable acceptance speech in the course of which he emphasized the verities of life and expressed his conviction that man will not endure but will prevail.

Acknowledged as one of Faulkner's finest and most readable novels, *Light In August* is nevertheless a difficult work. The sources of its difficulty are many: complex structure, diversity of points of view, intricate imagery and symbolism and involved themes. A summary merely suggests the novel's dazzling technical complexity and its profound insight into human behaviour.

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### 3.2 WHAT HAPPENS IN *LIGHT IN AUGUST*?

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A novel is representation of life. A good novelist imposes an aesthetic order on discordant elements in life and create a work of art. Let us see how Faulkner achieves it in *Light in August*.

There are three strands in the narrative of *Light in August* --the stories of Lena Grove, Joe Christmas, and Gail Hightower. They are separate stories but they interact with one another and bring about a unity of plot.

Lena Grove's story provides not only the framework for the novel but also a meaning and a message. The novel opens with Lena travelling from Alabama to Jefferson in search of one Lucas Burch, the father of her unborn child. She learns that Lucas is working at a lumber planing mill in Jefferson. The way she trudges on calmly and confidently, braving a lot of discomfort in her advanced state of pregnancy, speaks volumes of her patience and endurance. When she finally arrives in Jefferson on a Friday morning she sees a house burning at a distance.

On another Friday morning, three years before, a taciturn young stranger, called Joe Christmas, started working at the mill. Six months before Lena's arrival, a brash, garrulous and irresponsible young man called Joe Brown (he is Lucas Burch for whom Lena has been searching), also started working there.

Joe Christmas and Joe Brown were partners in a bootlegging operation. Another important mill worker, who represents the moral values and his strength of character celebrated in novel after novel by Faulkner, he is Byron Bunch who has worked in the mill for nine years. The three strands in the novel are linked together by Byron Bunch, the friendly and helpful man. On weekends he sings with a Church choir and every now and then he visits Gail Hightower with whom he spends a long time in conversation. He is Gail Hightower's only link with the outside world.

Gail Hightower came to preach in Jefferson with his young wife many years earlier. This one time Presbyterian minister is now a recluse who has abandoned his ministry and lost his wife. She was a strange lady. She rarely attended Church services and, one day, when she attended a service, she interrupted the proceedings by going into hysterics. She was treated as a mental patient for some time. Her mysterious disappearance from Jefferson on weekends was the subject of rumours. One day she was discovered with a stranger in a Memphis hotel room and leaped out of a window to her death.

Hightower got too deeply involved with his ancestors' exploits in the civil war that he got his sermon all mixed up with them. As a result his sermons were confused and frenzied. After his wife's death he was asked to resign his post but he refused. He was

then accused of adultery with his Negro cook and beaten by The Ku Klux Klan hoodlums and was forced to resign and live in virtual isolation shunned by everybody except Byron Bunch.

On the evening of Lena Grove's arrival in Jefferson, Byron tells Hightower about the significant events of the day like Lena's visit to the mill, the murder of Joanne Burden and the burning of the house. At the mill Lena tells Byron about Lucas and his identification mark. Byron understands with a shock of recognition that Joe Brown is none other than Lucas Burch. Hightower guesses from Byron's protective attitude towards Lena that he's in love with her. Byron tells Hightower about Joe Brown's involvement in the murder of Joanne Burden and the burning of her house. Hearing about a reward for the capture of Joanne Burden's murderer, Brown tells the police that Joe Christmas is the culprit and that he is a Negro in spite of his complexion.

Listening to Byron's narration, Hightower feels a sense of insecurity that these events may disrupt his detached way of life and that he may be deprived of the only human companion in the world viz. Byron Bunch.

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### 3.3 THE SAD SAGA OF JOE CHRISTMAS

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Joe Christmas's story unfolds through multiple flashbacks. He recollects a childhood experience. In his fifth year he lived in a white orphanage. He hid behind a curtain in the room of Ms Atkins, the dietician, eating toothpaste. Meanwhile Ms Atkins and a young doctor entered the room and from behind the curtain Joe Christmas heard the sounds of their love making. The toothpaste makes him sick and vomit and he was discovered. She was furious and called him 'a nigger'. This memory haunts him in all his life. Ms Atkins sought the help of Doc Hines, the janitor, who tried to steal the child and admit him in a Negro orphanage this attempt was discovered and Joe was brought back. The matron then entrusted him to the care of the McEachern's, a white family.

On account of his racial identity and his white complexion, Joe is neither here nor there. He is haunted all his life by this contradiction. His experiences in the McEachern home aggravate his racial and sexual bitterness. He is mercilessly beaten by McEachern, a stern moralist, for failing to learn his catechism. He messes up his first sexual venture with a black girl by brutally beating and kicking her. He has his first real sexual experience with a white woman in her Thirties called Bobbie Allen whom he tells that he is a mulatto. He later learnt that she is a prostitute, beats her up but remains her lover, paying her from the money stolen from Mrs McEachern, his foster mother.

McEachern discovers Joe at a dance with Bobbie Allen and attacks him. Joe hits him with a chair, returns home, steals Mrs McEachern's money and their horse and rides to Bobbie's home. There he throws the money on her bed and strikes her. She calls for help and tells her friends that Joe is a Negro. They beat him up.

Later, Joe works at several jobs, sleeps with several women, tells them he is a Negro and suffers insults or beatings. He gets used to this masochistic self-flagellation. When one of his women is indifferent to his race he beats her mercilessly. Thus the crisis of his racial identity results in either sadistic aggression or masochistic suffering.

He is thirty-three when he arrives at Jefferson. He is drawn to the large home of Joanne Burden who asks him to stay on in a cabin near the house. Intolerant of her haughtiness he rapes her one night. He expects Joanne to take revenge on him. But nothing happens, and one day Joanne comes to his cabin and tells him everything

about herself, the sacrifice made by her, her abolitionist family and a feeling of guilt which she must atone for. She has an obsession with the Negroes. During their love making, at the height of her passion, she whispers 'Negro, Negro, Negro'. Her demanding and domineering nature frightens Joe but he stays on although he longs to escape from her.

Joanne is repentant of carnal sins and tries to expiate them but finds temptation too hard. She tries to force Joe to share her expiation. She wants him to attend a Negro College. He refuses. She wants him at least to pray for his soul. He refuses again. The conflict grows between them. One night she points a revolver at him and he cuts her throat and flees. His room-mate, the drunken Lucas Burch discovers the body and accidentally sets the house on fire.

Lucas betrays his friend, Joe Christmas, by informing the police that Joe is the killer and that he is a Negro. He does this to claim the reward for information about the murderer--an act reminiscent of Judas betraying Jesus Christ for a few pieces of silver.

Joe's flight turns into a violent and catastrophic manhunt. The police and the hounds chase him. He barges into a Negro revivalist meeting, knocks down the preacher on the pulpit and makes a speech against God. He breaks the head of the preacher's son, who attacks him with a knife. On the seventh day of his flight, Joe enters Mottstown, twenty miles from Jefferson. He has his hair cut, buys new clothes and walks along the main street where he is recognized and arrested. Doc Hines, former janitor of Joe's boyhood orphanage who has been a preacher in Mottstown, preaching the gospel of hatred of the Negroes tries to rouse the mob to lynch Joe. But lynching is averted and Joe is shifted to the jail in Jefferson--he to get Joe lynched and she to learn the truth about Joe, her daughter's son, whose existence has been kept secret by Doc Hines. She discloses this to Hightower to whom she is introduced by Byron Bunch.

Joe Christmas, the son of the daughter of the Hineses by a man she describes as a Mexican but believed to be a Negro by Doc Hines. Doc Hines kills him and allows his daughter to die by denying her the medical care she needs. He takes the child without the knowledge of his wife and leaves him at the doorstep of a brothel. Thus Joe Christmas's origin is a mock parallel of Jesus Christ's. Joe is the son of an unmarried girl and he grows up separated from his home.

On his way to the courthouse, Joe breaks free and runs, threatening the shocked crowd with a gun. Percy Grimm, a young chauvinistic and rascistic national guardsman, keeps Joe in sight and chases him along with the crowd. Grimm chases Joe from behind a Negro's cabin into Hightower's house. Joe strikes Hightower on the face with his gun, runs into the kitchen, overturns a table and hides behind it. Grimm follows him into the house and is told by an injured Hightower that Joe is innocent and that he was with Joe on the night of the murder. Grimm brushes him aside and enters the kitchen firing. When the other deputies arrive, they find Grimm bending over the dying Joe and castrating him.

Even as Joe dies in Hightower's house, Lena Grove gives birth to her child in the cabin once occupied by Joe and Lucas (Brown) on Joanne Burden's premises. Byron, who takes care of Lena, sends Mrs. Hines to help deliver the child. Mrs. Hines, driven crazy by the violent and tragic happenings, mistakes Lena for Millie and the child for his grandson Joe.

Byron Bunch uses his good offices with the sheriff to bring Lucas (Joe Brown) to Lena Grove. Lucas spends a few minutes in the cabin and leaves promising falsely to return. Byron chases him but is thrashed by Lucas who boards a freight train and escapes.

As the novel ends we understand from the conversation of a furniture dealer and his wife that he gave a lift to Lena with her son and Byron Bunch on his truck, that Byron said to Lena "I done come too far now. I be dog if I'm going to quit now," and Lena replies, "Ain't nobody never said for you to quit." This suggests that they are going to stick together as a patient, optimistic, enduring couple. Joe Christmas, who led a lonely life, never giving or taking love, giving and taking only pain, is killed in the end in the most brutal fashion. Rev. Gail Hightower, another sad forsaken character, loves his only friend, Byron Bunch, and slips back into his isolated cocoon. Lucas Burch is on the run again. Lena Grove is on the road again, this time with Byron Bunch to help her physically, morally, emotionally and materially. She has a little one with her—*the Light in August*, the month in which the story takes place.

This is what happens in *Light in August*.

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### 3.4 THE THREE PLOTS

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Now let us take a closer look at the story and read between the lines where necessary. I have already called your attention to the separate plots in the novel--- of Lena Grove, Joe Christmas, and Gail Hightower which almost never meet one other. The stories of Lena and Joe run parallel without the two meeting and this serves two purposes---(1) underlining the theme of alienation and frustration and (2) showing the contrast between Joe's tormented soul and Lena's tranquil self. Even when people meet in the novel, they cannot communicate with one another. Major characters like Joe, Joanne and Hightower, and minor characters like the McEacherns and the Hineses have communication problems of different kinds.

Let us take a closer look at the interaction of these plots and the narrative strategies adopted in the following unit.

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### 3.5 A SAMPLING OF THE ORIGINAL REVIEWS

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The original reviewers of *Light in August* did not go beyond the recognition that the novel was about the South and was set in Jefferson, Yoknapatawpha county. They did not take into consideration the relationships and interreflections that Faulkner was working on and the texture and technical strategies he was adopting. George Marion O'Donnell's Review in the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, however, hinted at the possibilities this novel held for the discerning reader.

The author has employed third person, past tense and present tense narration, the stream of consciousness, first person narration and conversation, blending the various methods that he has used separately in previous books into a whole that is admirably effective if not always smooth. This synchronization gives the impression that Faulkner is striving for a novel form in which all modes will be blended into a perfect narrative. This perfection is not attained in *Light in August*, but it is approached (John Bassett, 1975, p.139).

The following is an anonymous reviewer's comment on the novel's first impression on a reader:

From threads of horror, hatred, lust, brutality, and obsession (Faulkner) weaves the intricate pattern of a tapestry dark indeed, yet rich and glowing with a thunderous threatening beauty. Life as he portrays it is terrible but vital; it is life, not merely existence; and the reader, even against his will, is compelled to participation by the sheer intensity and expression, an almost



rhapsodic assurance in intuition, a nearly tactile sensitiveness in the use of colloquial prose (*The Times Literary Supplement*, February 16, 1933, p.106).

*Light In August:*  
Structure and  
Narrative Strategies

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### 3.6 PRIVATE SELVES AND PUBLIC ROLES

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Olga Vickery's *The Novels of William Faulkner*, published in 1959, was the first of the book length studies of Faulkner's work. She emphasized the tension between the private selves of the major characters of *Light in August* and the public roles forced upon them by society.

A somewhat similar view is voiced by Irving Howe in his *William Faulkner: A Critical Study* when he says:

In *Light in August* a central concern is with the relation between a man's social role and private being: Hightower as a failed minister who rots in quiet neglect and Hightower as a ruminative observer of human folly, Joe Christmas as a harried mulatto who starts life without even a name and Joe Christmas as a bewildered man struggling towards the rudiments of consciousness. The one character, Lena Grove, in whom the distance between social role and private being is slight, necessarily emerges as a comic figure (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991, p.201).

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### 3.7 NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

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The tension, the contrapuntal relation between a man's private self and his public social role could be seen in the disjointed, fragmented structure of the novel. If you look for direct narration or simple dramatization in Faulkner's novels you will be disappointed. They are polyphonic sections representing different narrative perspectives and consciousnesses. Faulkner makes use of juxtaposition and counterpoint to tell his story. The structure is based on the principle of dressing a showcase window as Faulkner said in a class conference at the University of Virginia in 1957. He was asked why he had placed the chapter on Hightower's early life towards the end of the book and he answered thus:

Unless a book follows a simple direct line such as a story of adventure it becomes a series of pieces. It is a good deal like dressing a show case window. It takes a certain amount of judgment and taste to arrange the different pieces in the most effective place in juxtaposition to one another. That was the reason. It seemed to me that was the most effective place to put that, to underline the tragedy of Christmas's story by the tragedy of his antithesis (*Faulkner in the University*, 1959, p.45).

This method forces the reader into an active role rebuilding the different blocks into a more comprehensible structure.

While the opening of the novel gives us the impression that it is Lena Grove's story, the subsequent chapters belie our expectations and make us feel that we are on a false scent. When we begin to feel that it is 'Byron Bunch's story or Joe Christmas's story, we are in for a surprise with the focus shifting from Gail Hightower to Joanne Burden and to the flashbacks. At every turn fresh expectations are generated in our minds only to remain unfulfilled like the lives of the characters in the novel.

The novel opens *medias res* with Lena Grove traveling from Alabama to Jefferson in search of Lucas Burch, the father of the child in her womb. There is a slow-moving

wagon in the opening chapter reminiscent of one of Thomas Hardy's rural scenes in content, manner, and style.

The sharp and brittle crack and clatter of its weathered and ungreased wood and metal is slow and terrific: a series of dry sluggish reports carrying for a half mile across the hot still pinewiney silence of the August afternoon. Though the mules plod in a steady and unflagging hypnosis, the vehicle does not seem to progress. It seems to hang suspended in the middle distance forever and forever, so infinitesimal is its progress, like a shabby bead upon the mild red string of road. So much is this so that in the watching of it the eye loses it as sight and sense drowsily merge and blend, like the road itself, with all the peaceful and monotonous changes between darkness and day, like already measured thread being rewound onto a spool. So that at last, as though out of some trivial and unimportant region beyond even distance, the sound of it seems to come slow and terrific and without moving, as though it were a ghost traveling a half mile ahead of its own shape (*Light in August*, p.7).

The first chapter ends again with Lena's words "My, my. A body does get around," making the first chapter look like a prologue to the novel. This is balanced by the last chapter in which the story returns to Lena's unhurried travel through the Mississippi of her life. This chapter reads like an epilogue and underlines the great truth of life presented by Thomas Hardy (Hardy again!) in his well known poem, "In Time of the Breaking of Nations":

Yonder a maid and her weight  
Come whispering by:  
Wars annals will cloud into night  
Ere their story die.

Lena is the eternal female representing the life force. She is not affected by the news of violent happenings around her and goes through it all with an unruffled calm.

Chapter 2 and the subsequent chapters present a new direction and, instead of taking us forward in Lena's search, take us backward towards the past in flashbacks involving Joe Christmas, Joe Brown, Miss Burden, and Gail Hightower.

As we go back from the flames enveloping Miss Burden's house to Joe Christmas and Joe Brown, we find an air of mystery hanging over them. While we have glimpses of Joe Christmas's past we have virtually no information on Joe Brown except that he figures in the stories of Joe Christmas, Joanne Burden, and Byron Bunch in a peripheral manner, and in Lena Grove's in a more material way becoming the cause of her great journey with which the novel starts and which does not end with the novel.

Faulkner plays upon the names, 'Burch' and 'Bunch', which lead to some confusion in the story and, as the novel ends, Bunch is very close to taking the place of the elusive Burch.

The story centers on the 'burning house' or the 'burned house', for this house harboured a couple of bootleggers and the lady of the house had an immoral liaison with one of them—a half Negro at that, which had sinister implications in the time of the action of the story. It transpires that they are not just bootleggers but are amoral, greedy, and unscrupulous. One of them, Brown, not only ditched a girl after making her pregnant but changed his name from Lucas Burch to Joe Brown to escape detection, while the other, Joe Christmas, the white man with black blood, who could not live down this truth and had a burning rage within him, which made him violent in the extreme, either giving pain or taking it, and finally came to Jefferson for his tryst with destiny.

We meet another character called Gail Hightower in chapter 3 and are propelled backwards into another flashback about the twenty-five years he lived in disgrace in Jefferson.

The first three chapters are expository. In the fourth chapter we find Byron narrating the events connected with Lena's arrival to Hightower. Hightower acts as the 'narratee' representing our (readers') responses and doubts, e.g., when Byron tells Hightower about the fire and Lena's lover who has been identified through the scar (a classical means of identification with echoes of *Odyssey*, Hightower voices our doubts: "The house that burned yesterday. But I don't see any connection between . . ." It is this connection that engages the reader in the rest of the novel. This is very subtly suggested in Byron's narration leading to the slow unfolding of the story as a reference is made to Byron's problem in telling Lena about her lover's involvement in illegal activities like bootlegging. This naturally points to Christmas's involvement in the same crimes and his further and more serious involvement with Miss Burden, which throws us backward into Christmas's past and brings us back to the present, to the central event of the novel – the burning of the house.

Here, like a railway train unobtrusively changing its track, the story takes us along a different road as Byron offers the seemingly simple and routine information: "About Christmas. About yesterday and Christmas. Christmas is part nigger. About him and Brown and yesterday." The whole narrative is encapsulated in these cryptic statements.

If you were a discerning reader you would suddenly find your expectations revolving around Christmas ("About yesterday and Christmas," "Christmas is part nigger," and "About him and Brown and yesterday").

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### 3.8 LET US SUM UP

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There are three strands in the narrative – the stories of Lena Grove, Joe Christmas and Gail Hightower. They interact with one another resulting in the unity of action. As the novel ends, Joe Christmas, who has given and taken only pain dies a brutal and painful death. Hightower slips back into his isolated cocoon, Lucas Burch is on the run again and Lena is on the road again. Lena's story give a circular structure to the narrative and lends a meaning and a silver lining in the end in the form of a little child – the light in August, the month in which the story takes place.

Some of the early review of the novel were very insightful and appreciative. The contrapuntal relation between a man's private self and his public social role causes an aesthetic tension in the novel. This is emphasized by eminent Faulkner critics like Olga Vickey and Irving Howe.

The narrative strategies involve a polyphonic narration from multiple points of view and flashbacks and a lot of moving back and forth and suggesting a great deal and building up narrative tension and suspense through short, cryptic and vague and, sometimes, half expressed or much suppressed utterances. Every now and then the reader's expectations are raised only a remain unfulfilled but this strategy makes the reader an active participant in the story.

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### 3.9 QUESTIONS

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1. Trace the circumstances leading to the murder of Joanne Burden.
2. Why does Lena Grove travel from Alabama to Jefferson? How successful is her journey?

***Light In August***

3. Discuss the parts played by the McEacherns and the Hineses in the novel.
4. What does Faulkner mean by "dressing a show case window"?
5. Do you find any echoes of Thomas Hardy's prose and verse in *Light in August*? Explain their significance.
6. Attempt a critique of the plot-structure of *Light in August*.
7. Comment briefly on Faulkner's narrative strategies in *Light in August*.

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## UNIT 4 CHARACTERIZATION AND CRITICAL APPROACHES

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### Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Critical Analysis of *The Sound And The Fury*
- 4.3 Main Characters
  - 4.3.1 Joe Christmas
  - 4.3.2 Jaonne Burden
  - 4.3.3 Gail Hightower
  - 4.3.4 Lena Grove
  - 4.3.5 Byron Bunch
- 4.4 Some Critical Approaches
  - 4.4.1 Light in August in the light of Bakhtin's Views
  - 4.4.2 Religious Approach
  - 4.4.3 Psycho-Analytical and Feminist Approach
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.6 Questions
- 4.7 Suggested Reading

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### 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this Unit we will discuss the main characters. Also, we will provide you with an analysis of some of the critical approaches to *Light In August*.

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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A novel is a fictional world peopled by characters and a novel's quality like a play's depends upon characterization. In this unit I propose to analyse the main characters in the novel viz. Joe Christmas, Joanne Burden, Gail Hightower, Lena Grove and Byron Bunch. I also propose to discuss some critical approaches to the novel like the dialogical, the Biblical, the psycho-analytical and the feminist approaches.

Modern literature offers both the frustration of a journey without maps. The supportive paraphernalia of definitive biographies and major critical books is often missing, and in its absence the student can enjoy the freedom of discovering and judging for himself. But although the literary history of the present age cannot yet be written adequately, the American novelists represented in this section can still be placed in a tentative historical framework.

The two earliest writers considered here William Faulkner and John Steinbeck, are close in time to the Lost Generation but significantly different in spirit. Faulkner is distinguished from men like Hemingway and Scott Fitzgerald by the idiosyncratic (and sometimes wayward) nature of his own genius with his deep involvement in southern culture Faulkner ploughed a brave and rather lovely furrow; his work is now beginning to seem one of the main achievements of twentieth century fiction. Steinbeck differs from the Lost Generation in a simpler way. Deeply influenced by the Depression, he abandoned wistful romanticism for a gritty and naturalism with undercurrents of racial protest; he became, in fact, the heir to that earlier tradition pioneered by Norris and Dreiser.

Critics have often succumbed to the temptation of presenting Faulkner and Steinbeck as opposing models between whom subsequent writers have had to choose. The American novelist, so this argument goes, may write either in the romance tradition epitomized by Faulkner or the realist tradition represented by Steinbeck. There is certainly evidence to support this view. There has been, for example, a whole school of Southern Writers using Faulkner's mode of Gothic romance: Paul Bowles, Truman Capote, William Styron and Flannery O'Connor. And one can certainly see the influence of *The Grapes of Wrath* on Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*. Yet this interpretation simplifies contemporary American fiction to the point of distortion.

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## 4.2 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF *THE SOUND AND THE FURY*

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*The Sound and the Fury* was Faulkner's own favourite amongst his novels. 'I have the most tenderness for that book,' he told an audience of students at the University of Nagano. Earlier, in a preface to the Modern Literary edition of *Sanctuary* (1932), he spoke of 'having written my guts into 'The Sound and the Fury'. Modern Criticism has concurred with this preference. Today *The Sound and the Fury* is widely acknowledged to be Faulkner's finest achievement – and hence one of the finest achievements of modern American Literature.

Yet at the time of the Novel's publication in 1929 its critical reception was discouraging; as he confessed in the *Sanctuary* preface, Faulkner 'believed then that I would never be published again. I had stopped thinking of myself in publishing terms.' The most frequent voiced objection was the baffling obscurity of Faulkner's narrative technique. Indeed, when the novel was published as part of Malcolm Cowley's *The Portable Faulkner* in 1946, the editor and publisher persuaded Faulkner to add an Appendix elucidating much of the plot. The author had, after all, a simple enough story to tell. He wanted to recount the traumatic and unhappy lines of the four Compson Children – Caddy, Quentin, Jason and Benjy – and suggest the ways in which their separate tragedies echoed the general decline of the old Southern aristocratic families.

Faulkner took his title for the novel from Macbeth's nihilistic speech about life's futility; and the fate of the Compson family would seem to fulfill this pessimistic note yet the decision to add a fourth section to the novel, concentrating on the black servant Dilbey, introduces a lot of qualified optimism. Alone amongst the characters in the novel Dilbey retains an ability, not to enjoy life or even to ask much from it, but to survive and help others to survive. As she goes about her depressing round of chores – gathering firewood, cooking breakfast, comforting the querulous Mrs. Compson and the tearful Benjy – Dilsey radiates an atmosphere of warmth and stability. In the final sentence of his 1946 Appendix Faulkner paid a cryptic but moving tribute to Dilsey and her fellow blacks: 'they endured'. In his Nobel Prize speech Faulkner returned, though in more confident and assertive vein, to this notion of endurance. He believed, he said, 'that man will not merely endure. He will prevail...because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.'

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## 4.3 THE MAIN CHARACTERS

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The southern myth is a story or a cluster of stories that expresses the deepest attitudes and reflects the most fundamental experiences of a people. Its subject is the fate of a ruined homeland. The homeland—so the story goes—had proudly insisted that it alone should determine its destiny. Provoked into

a war impossible to win, it had nevertheless fought to its last strength, and it had fought this war with a reckless gallantry and a superb heroism that, as Faulkner might say, made of its defeat not a shame but almost a vindication. Yet the homeland fell, and from this fall came misery and squalor; ravaging by the conquerors, loss of faith among the descendants of the defeated, and the rise of a new breed of faceless men . . .

[Irving Howe, *William Faulkner: A Critical Study* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1952), pp.27-28]

Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels are representations of this myth. Jefferson is the locale of this myth in *Light in August*, and the main characters in the novel are creatures of this myth whether they are native to the soil or immigrants there. As Olga W. Vickery points out,

Collectively Jefferson is Southern, White, and Elect, qualities which have meaning within a context which recognized something or someone as Northern, or Black or Damned. This antithesis is periodically affirmed through the sacrifice of a scapegoat who represents, in fact or popular conviction, those qualities which must be rejected if Jefferson is to maintain its self-defined character.

[*The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), pp.67-68].

Joe Christmas, Gail Hightower and Joanne Burden serve as such scapegoats while Lena Grove and Byron Bunch belong to a land outside the limits of this myth.

#### 4.3.1 Joe Christmas

Joe Christmas is a bundle of contradictions and thus poses a threat to all established and accepted categories. He does not belong to any category. He feels a Black before Whites and a White before Blacks. He is, in Shakespeare's famous phrase, an 'unaccommodated man' (*King Lear*, III). He is rootless and becomes the antagonist.

Mrs. Hines's account throws light on the pathetic nature of Christmas's birth and life. Hines, who is unable to forgive his daughter Millie's pregnancy, calls her lover a nigger, kills him, and looks for a scapegoat to bear the guilt and punishment. Later this identification finds support in the dietician's outburst when she and her lover are surprised in the midst of their love-making. Both Hines and the dietician, motivated by personal reasons, contribute to Christmas's awareness as a Negro and force the matron to act on that assumption.

He accepts Mr. McEachern's Calvinistic discipline as an escape from responsibilities and self-judgment. But when he finds a human relationship with Bobbie, the waitress, based on love, he rebels against McEachern's religious discipline. But this relationship is short-lived for Bobbie turns against him after he beats her for not being horrified by his confession that there is Negro blood in him. She watches as her friends beat him up. This further intensifies his awareness of his predicament. He now finds that he provokes racial violence from Negro and White alike.

His tensions become more acute during his relationship with Joanne Burden. Her racial, political and religious obsessions contribute to the heightening of the tensions between them. Their love-making reflects this tension and the inbuilt contradiction. In the ecstasy of her love she mutters *Negro! Negro! Negro!* Instead of *Joe! Joe! Joe!* or any other endearing term. This reflects her obsession and agonizing tension.

She insists that he accept the role of a Negro and that of a repentant sinner. This is a choice he has been avoiding all along and when it is his razor against her old civil

war pistol we are not surprised. The knife he uses to kill her is used towards the end to castrate him.

During his flight Christmas pauses at a Negro church. He assaults the elderly parson, stands in the pulpit, and declaims against God. He strikes an attitude characteristic of the anti-Christ. This completes the parallel course of Christmas's passion, running through the episodes involving Hines, the dietician, McEachern, Bobbie, and Miss Burden, and leads to his crucifixion. As he is shot and castrated by Grimm, he transcends the categories of Black and White, and experiences for a moment the awareness that he belongs to the human race. He ascends neither as the son of a Negro nor as the son of a White man but as the son of Man:

He just lay there, with his eye open and empty of everything save consciousness, and with something, a shadow, about his mouth. For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes. Then his face, body, all, seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out the slashed garments about his hips and loins the pent black blood seemed to rush like a released breath. It seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever.

*(Light in August, p. 407)*

The other two main characters barring Lena Grove, who serves as a foil to these three and a frame for the novel, are Joanne Burden and Gail Hightower. Joe Christmas, Miss Burden and Hightower represent the three categories in terms of which the South establishes its identity – the racial, the geographical and the religious. As Olga Vickery observes, "The Negro, the Yankee, the Apostate – these are the key figures in a society which defines itself by exclusion" (*The Novels of William Faulkner*, p. 75)

#### **4.3.2 Joanne Burden**

Joanne Burden's father, Nathaniel Burden, injects a moral attitude into her perception of the physical black and white. She learnt to see them "not as people, but as a thing, a shadow in which I lived, we lived, all white people, all other people. I thought of all the children coming forever and ever into the world, white, with the black shadow already falling upon them before they drew breath. And I seemed to see the black shadow in the shape of a cross (*Light in August*, p. 221)

Miss Burden thinks of herself as a martyr to the 'black cross'. She is a Northern woman carrying the burden of the cross. The conflict between the female in her and her intellectual heritage makes her a dual personality. Her identification of sex with sin and sexual superstitions associated with a Negro make her feel that "she is not having intercourse with a man but with an image of her own creation, with the idea of Negro for which she has given up her life. Accordingly, she emerges from the affair with her instincts once more crystallized and intensified" (Olga Vickery, p. 76).

Christmas becomes an obsession with Miss Burden. She cannot leave him alone. He is Miss Burden's burden. He represents her responsibility, her sin and her salvation. She insists that he admit his black blood and act in accordance with her concepts of race and religion. Joe's refusal to do so draws a violent reaction from her. It is an interesting irony that what she fails to do the mob does later forcing him to become a Negro by lynching him and castrating him. He is at last nailed on the black cross.

#### **4.3.3 Gail Hightower**

If Christmas and Joanne are obsessed with race and religion, Gail Hightower is obsessed with the exploits of the Southern heroes, represented by his grand father, in the civil war. He finds it impossible to live down these legends, which come to



dominate his mind completely. This eventually destroys him for he becomes indifferent to the quality of his actual expression.

## Characterisation and Critical Approaches

And they told Byron how the young minister was still excited even after six months, still talking about the civil war and his grand father, a cavalryman, who was killed, and about General Grant's stores burning in Jefferson until it did not make sense at all. They told Byron how he seemed to talk that way in the pulpit too, wild too in the pulpit, using the religion as though it were a dream. (*Light in August*, P.52-53)

Like Christmas, Hightower is isolated from his community. He is the religious face while Christmas is the racial face of this isolation. His every action becomes a defiance of the will of the community, and he invites humiliation and violence against himself. Forced to resign from the church, beaten by the Ku Klux Klan and by Joe Christmas and brushed aside and pushed away by Percy Grimm he is the ever rejected and alienated figure living in his lonely house visited by only one man, Byron Bunch, his only link with the world. It is only at the instance of Byron that he attends the birth of Lena's child and makes a feeble and infructuous attempt to save Christmas--gestures of momentary participation in life; otherwise he remains only a spectator of life. In both the cases his participation in life has a vital significance in that it aims at saving life, assisting at a birth and staving off death.

### 4.3.4 Lena Grove

Lena Grove's story enfolds the entire action of the novel with the warmth of life transcending moral and social considerations and categories. Her calm provides a foil to the obsessions and agonies of Christmas, Joanne and Hightower. Lena lends a circular structure to the story. The story begins with her as an unmarried pregnant woman -- a Virgin Mary figure--and ends with her as a happy mother holding her baby--a Madonna figure. She provokes different reactions from different people. Some of them are contemptuous but not unkind. Mrs. Armstid regards her as a fallen woman. The men at the store treat her with scorn and pity. Brown (Lucas Burch), who is the father of her child, considers her as a responsibility to be shunned. Byron, who loves her looks upon her as an innocent girl seduced by a scoundrel.

As the curtain rises on the novel, we see Lena sitting beside the road, watching the wagon, and thinking 'I have come from Alabama: a fur piece. All the way from Alabama a-walking. A fur piece'. (*Light in August*, p.3)

Look at this portrait of her in Faulkner's words:

From beneath a sunbonnet of faded blue, weathered now by other than formal soap and water, she looks up at him quietly and pleasantly: young, pleasant faced, candid, friendly, and alert. She does not move yet. Beneath the faded garment of that same weathered blue her body is shapeless and immobile. The fan and bundle lie on her lap. She wears no stockings. Her bare feet rest side by side in the shallow ditch. The pair of dusty, heavy, man looking shoes beside them are not more inert. (*Light in August*, p.10)

The words chosen to sketch her personality are 'young', 'pleasant faced', 'candid', 'friendly' and 'alert'. Her immobility and her feet resting and inert indicate how calm and relaxed she is. Lena commits an offence against conventional morality. Still society treats her leniently and sympathetically. Some people express their disapproval of her pregnancy without marriage but they help her in her need. Even the Sheriff is not rigid about the law and permits her the use of Miss Burden's cottage. The truck driver gives up his bed for her. This is because of Lena's calm, candid and friendly attitude in which there is no place for any kind of antagonism or bitterness. While Joe Christmas, Joanne Burden and Gail Hightower build barricades between themselves and society and alienate themselves, Lena Grove demolishes all barriers with her humility and friendliness. She accepts the food and shelter offered

by others as sustaining things and is indifferent to the spirit or prejudices behind the offer. This is in sharp contrast to Christmas's rejection of the food offered thus because of his obsessive ideas and his hypersensitiveness to the thoughts and attitudes of the giver.

#### 4.3.5 Byron Bunch

Byron Bunch is an uncommitted person leading an isolated life. He takes no interest in affairs which do not concern him. But his love for Lena brings about a transformation in his character and world view. It is love and the desire to care for Lena that bring about this change. This makes him flow out and help others. He goes to great lengths to persuade the Sheriff to arrange a meeting between Lena and Lucas Burch. He persuades Hightower to try to save Christmas. He is the only source of comfort to the unfortunate and lonely Hightower.

Byron's love and loyalty towards Lena put us in mind of a solid character like Thomas Hardy's Gabriel Oak. As we develop sympathy for Lena, it is comforting to know that she is not left alone and that Byron's love is not spurned if not accepted without any reservations.

And he (Byron) came around the back of it and he stood there and her not even surprised "I done come too far now," he says "I be dog if I'm going to quit now." And her looking at him like she had known all the time what he was going to do before he even know himself that he was goig to, and that whatever he done, he wasn't going to mean it.  
"Aint nobody never said for you to quit." She says (*Light in August*, 443)

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#### 4.4 SOME CRITICAL APPROACHES

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Critics have taken pains to demonstrate how Faulkner's technique serves his theme in the novel. The separate plots about Joe, Lena, and Hightower, for example, testify powerfully to man's isolation. And even when people do meet, or, as with Joe and Joanna, collide, they never do really communicate with one another. Each is sealed off in his own traumatic world of self. The same fate befalls even the minor characters: Doc Hines, McEachern, and Percy Grimm. By keeping characters like Joe and Lena from ever meeting, Faulkner not only underscores the theme of alienation and frustration but counterpoints Joe's agony against Lena's serenity.

Similarly, the varied points of view used to narrate the story suggest how impossible it is for any single mind to comprehend the range of experience. Shifting from Lena's intuitive mind to Joe's inwardness and then to Hightower's agonized detachment, the reader begins to appreciate the kind of omniscience required to understand the power and weakness of man.

Many critics have seen in the story of Joe Christmas an ironic parallel to the New Testament account of Jesus Christ. Among the more obvious analogies are these: Joe's wandering in his early manhood, and his inevitable progress towards crucifixion during the last seven days of his life. But Joe is no savior. His death saves no soul, frees no spirit. Indeed, as Edmond Volpe points out, Joe alone finds release, not the society whose racist concept crucifies him: "the fear and guilt of his society... are reinforced... and the concept will be imposed during childhood, for the heirs of the executioners and make these victims, in their turn, executioners." Joe cannot save the south from its puritanical mentality. He can serve only as a scapegoat, suffering torment for a tormented people, white and black alike.

Joe dies trying to discover some justification for living. Hightower, on the other hand, surrenders his quest. "I am not in life any more," he says, rejecting at last the forces

of life and death symbolized by Lena and Joe. Only Byron Bunch and Lena Grove survive to face the future. Yet Faulkner holds forth no shining promise for them: Lena is too primitive, Byron more dogged than delighted about his commitment to experience. Lena's delivery of her child is only an affirmation of a natural process. She is "Light in August", as a cow might be; she has delivered her bodily burden. But no other "light" shines through to beckon her or the others. The "shadow" of Joe Christmas still falls darkly across the land when the novel ends.

#### 4.4.1 Bakhtin's Views

Faulkner seems to be interested in the dualism of order and disorder, art and reality. His creations of Yoknapatawpha was a way of imposing an order on contemporary history which was a panorama of futility and anarchy. By creating a region, which was a parallel reality ruled by art, Faulkner creates a world which he could deal with on his terms.

As Barthes says, it is a word-oriented world that confronts the myth of reality by mythifying it in turn to produce an artificial myth. This reconstituted myth may be described as a counter myth that subverts reality by recreating it (Barthes, p.147).

*Light in August* may be viewed as a significant attempt on Faulkner's part at exploring the polyvalent significance of self, history and art in the modern world. This novel may be called, in Bakhtin's famous phrase, a 'polyphonic novel', which views reality as multiple in nature. The multiple discourses in the novel construct different versions of reality from different points of view. Here we find Faulkner subverting the mimetic tradition using multiple perspectives. We do not find a fictional rendering of objective reality here, for Faulkner's discourse tries to establish a dialogical contact between the subjective and the objective. This militates against the notion of the unity of a work of art.

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin decries the attempt to find in Dostoevsky's novels a specific monological authorial idea (Bakhtin, 1984, p.229). He expresses himself in favour of 'the living mix of varied and opposing voices' (The Dialogic Imagination, 1981, p.49). Thus the two main character-zones of the novel, Christmas's and Lena's remain separate and antithetical, each qualifying the other. This underlines the truth that life is too large and complex for definitions.

The multiple voices and perspectives break down the definitiveness of authorial omniscience and assert the fluidity of experiential reality. Faulkner employs the dialectic of motion and stasis. As he says, "the aim of every artist is to arrest motion which is life and hold it fixed so that 100 years later, when a stranger looks at it, it moves again since it is life" (*Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner*, 1968, p.253). This is also adopted in the cinematographic technique of arresting motion and restoring it. Manisha Mukhopadhyay points out: 1

The dialectic of dynamism and inertia is the governing artistic principle of the novel, embodied by the central image of the novel, that of the road with which the novel begins and ends; the road that Christmas travels in circles and the road that stretches out before Lena in an uncomplicated linearity; the road through which Percy Grimm pursues Christmas (*William Faulkner: A Centennial Tribute*, 1999, p.131).

Now look at what Bakhtin says on the metaphor of the road:

On the road the spatial and temporal series defining human fates and lives combine with one another in distinctive ways even as they become more complex and more concrete by the collapse of social distances. The chronotope of the road is both a point of new departures and a place for

#### 4.4.2 Religious Approach

We find Faulkner using a Biblical frame-work in *The Sound and the Fury*. The first four sections of the novel, narrated by four people from their different points of view, are patterned on the four Gospels. In *Light in August* also, Faulkner uses a Christological frame-work playing on the words, *Christmas*, *rise*, *Light*, and *The Player*.

In the *New Testament* story, Jesus was crucified and killed, but the 'The Light of the World', promising eternal life, was born. In *Light in August*, Christmas was killed on the black cross, and the Light was born in the form of Lena's child. Jesus knew that he would be killed and walked to his death. Christmas also knew that he would be killed and moved towards his doom. In both the cases, it was 'The Player', the supreme power that moved them. Faulkner, in the course of the man-hunt after Christmas, uses the word, 'The Player' for the inexorable and irresistible force that propels everybody and everything including Christmas and his executioner, Percy Grimm. Gail Hightower, the holy man, assists in the birth of the 'Light in August' (Lena's child) even as the wise men of the East were present when 'The Light of the World' was born, and John, the Baptist, was present at Jesus's Baptism. The thought that he is the author and instrument of his wife's death leads Hightower to this self-knowledge: "If I am the instrument of her despair and death, then I am in turn instrument of someone outside myself" (*Light in August*, p. 465).

The child, who represents the continuity of life and hence is called the 'Light in August' is set off against the dark background of Joe Christmas's violent death and the flight of Lucas Burch, the Judas figure who betrays his friend, Christmas, for the reward announced. The allusion to the ascension of Jesus in the use of the word 'rise' while describing Christmas's death is also significant. The child, who appears briefly in the novel, is given a great deal of symbolic importance in that it provides an emotional comfort to the alienated characters in the novel. As Manisha Mukhopadhyay says, "Mrs. Hines perceives him as an incarnation of Joe; he further parallels Joe in his status as a potential Christ-figure – with Byron as surrogate father, his family is an image of the holy family of Christ. Hightower too views him as his link with posterity" (*William Faulkner: A Centennial Tribute*, p. 129).

#### 4.4.3 Psycho-Analytical and Feminist Approach

French feminism has been deeply affected by psycho-analysis, especially by Lacan's reworking of Freud's theories. French feminists, by following Lacan's theories, have overcome the hostility towards Freud shared by most feminists. Before Lacan, Freud's theories, especially in the United States had been reduced to a crude biological level. "According to Freud, 'Penis-envy' is universal in women and is responsible for their 'castration complex', which results in their regarding themselves as *hommes manques* rather than a positive sex in their own right."

(Raman Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 1990 P. 146)

Ernest Jones's term 'phallogocentric' for this theory is widely adopted by Feminists when discussing male domination in general. They have reacted bitterly to a view of woman as passive and penis-envying rather than as a woman in her own right as a man is a man in his own right.

Lena is an example of the passive woman badly exploited by Lucas Burch, the man whom she trusts implicitly. Even after he deserts her she goes in search of him traveling great distances. In spite of his betrayal, she never even once talks ill of him. She is the innocent, dedicated, passive woman who never loses her trust in her man however bad he may be. This is a case of phallogocentrism where the man takes the woman for granted and abuses her innocence and goodness.

Joanne Burden is an example of the penis-envying woman. She is the kind of woman who would like to be a man--dominating and dynamic. She is haughty and superior with a white-woman's-burden-complex, which Christmas finds insufferable. She is demanding and dominating, in complete contrast to Lena. She has plans for Christmas's future but Christmas does not fit in with those plans. In the end the two self-willed people confront each other-- Joanne with an old revolver and Christmas with a knife. Christmas kills her and this act sets off a chain of events culminating in the end of Joe Christmas's search for identity.

Let us forget for a moment Freud and Lacan and look at Lena and Joanne as two remarkable women. Both are strong in different ways. Lena's unruffled calm gives her an inward strength, which helps her not only to endure but to prevail in the end when she strikes us as a Madonna figure holding in her arms the 'light of life' in a strife-torn world. Her simplicity, love, and faith, positive virtues in any age, give her this inward,, unruffled calm.

On the other hand, Joanne's loneliness and passionate nature get her involved with a psychologically abnormal, violent man. Her desire to dominate and impose her will on him leads to a bitter hostility and her untimely and tragic death.

*Light in August* seems to uphold simplicity, love, faith, and gentleness rather than a superior attitude and a desire to dominate as qualities that give strength to a woman. Mrs. Hines and Mrs. McEachern, like Lena, offer a striking contrast to Joanne, and they also endure.

#### 4.5 LET US SUM UP

We have attempted to discuss Faulkner and *Light in August* from different points of view. There may be things in a novel which we do not like and do not want to happen in our lives but, in the hands of a master craftsman like Faulkner, they give us a sense of life and its deeper meanings. Faulkner's style and narrative strategies, sometimes, pose initial problems to the reader, but once he overcomes these initial resistences and gets into the text of the novel, he will be richly rewarded. *Light in August* is no exception. It is a challenging novel. Take up the challenge and enjoy the text.

#### 4.6 QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on the character of Joe Christmas.
2. "Lena Grove's story enfolds the entire action of the novel, *Light in August*". Discuss.
3. Do you find any religious meaning in *Light in August*? Explain.
4. What do you find interesting in the role of Gail Hightower.
5. Write a long notes on Bakhtin's Views on *Light In August*.

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