



PAST AND FICTION: A SOUTHERN PERSPECTIVE

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The relations between past and fiction have been discussed since the classical time. It has become the core issue of discussion among the literary critics during the nineteenth century. Scott and his followers used the past for subject in fiction giving topic for critics of the relations between past and fiction. Since then, from time to time, the works outlining the relations between these issues have been published. A brief survey of such works is made here in order to mark the growing interest in the relations between past and fiction, particularly in the South.

Alstair Mac Donald Taylor's article "The Historical Novel: As A Source in History" in *Sewanee Review*, XLVI, (1938), discusses the complementary relationship between past and fiction. He tells that the writers like Scott used the past for subject in fiction making the forgotten past known to the readers. His view is that the fiction writer contributes to bringing the past to the present. The main thrust of his article is that the historical novel is playing a source in history. The relations between past and fiction appeared in historical fiction is commented by Arthur Bernon Tourtellot in his scholarly article, "History and the Historical Novel: Where Fact and Fancy Meet and Part" in *Saturday Review*, Issue 18, Vol. xxII; (Aug. 24, 1940). He remarks that historical fiction is a hybrid form of art springing from history and fiction. Historical fiction attempts to supplement history with fiction making history more alive and more real. Harvey Allen's article "History and the Novel" in *The Atlanta Monthly*, Issue 2, Vol. 173 (Feb. 1944) focuses on the writer's use of history in fiction, but more on his creation of illusion of the past in historical fiction. Historical novel's capacity to create an illusion of reliving past is the chief virtue on which the fiction type stands. Using historical material, Allen writes, for fiction, the writer alters literal historical facts for artistic purpose. Edmund Fuller holds the view that the character from history and events of the past offer rich material to the writer in his article "History and the Novelist" in *American Scholar*, Issue 1, Vol. 16 (Winter 1946-47). Refuting the charge of lacking invention in historical novel, he says that the use of historical or traditional subject matter is evident in major works from Homer to modern times. The writer's measure, Fuller adds, has nothing to do with the fact that he uses them; it will lie in the use he makes of them. In addition to these scholarly articles, there are a number of books by renowned writers fully devoted to the relations between past and fiction.

Southern Renaissance (Baltimore: 1953) by editors, Louis D. Rubin and Robert D. Jacob comprises two articles which perceive the intimate relations between past and fiction. The first one "The Southern Temper" by Robert B. Heilman comments that the Southern character's sense of the immanence of past in present makes the writers to deal with past in fictions. The second article, "Time and Place in Southern Fiction" by H. Blair Rouse makes a statement that time as the essence of all that has happened in the past dominates the Southern fictions. *Fiction Fights the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: 1957) by Robert A. Lively, is a work solely devoted to the subject of past and fiction. It states that the novelists present the fictional



view of history to the reader. Novel has become a medium of telling history of the South. *The Burden of Southern History*, Revi, edi, (Baton Rough: 1977) by C. Vann Woodward, acknowledges a vital relationship between past and fiction. It admits that the characters in Southern novels try to come to terms with their family past. They are drawn as an inextricable part of a living history and community. They are attached to, and determined in a thousand ways, by other wills and destinies of people they have only heard about.

Southern Writings in the Sixties: Fiction (Baton Rough: 1966) edtd. by John W. Corrington, includes some notable articles on past and fiction. The book discusses how Southern literature to this day still flushes out the ghosts from past and how it is moved by their specters, their dreams. *Three Modes of Southern Fiction* (Athens: 1966) by C. Hugh Holman, observes how in Southern fiction past is seen as symbolized by the timeless, by a series of events named Shiloh, Vicksburg and Gettysburg. For the characters in fictions, past lives with passion and enormous demands. They grew to manhood among phantoms, side by side with a ghost. *The Myth of Southern History: Historical Consciousness in Twentieth Century Literature* (Nashville: 1967) by F Garvin Devenport, Jr., reveals that the novelists in the South make past an essential element in fictions. They view that the tragedies and horrors of the present lives of the characters are rooted in the past. History is treated as the part of the present. *The Art of Southern Fiction: A Study of Some Modern Novelists* (Carbondale: 1967) by Frederick J. Hoffman, is a remarkable work on past and fiction. It traces out that history plays so large a role in Southern fiction even when there is no explicit reference to its history, the Southern character is assumed in terms of a regional history. *The Contrived Corridor: History and Fatality in Modern Literature* (Ann Arbor: 1971) by Harvey Gross, proves the fact that history becomes a radical reality in modern literature. Myth has been used to order the facts of history in literature. The historical findings are supported with a mythical framework in literature. The book also reveals the burden imposed by historical knowledge on Southern literary men. *Death by Melancholy: Essays on Modern Southern Fiction* (Baton Rouge: 1972) by Walter Sullivan, asserts that the Civil War has become a dramatic symbol in Southern fiction. For it is the pregnant moment in Southern history which contains all that has gone before. The war is always understood as the climax of Southern culture, the last moment of order in a traditional society.

Versions of the Past: Historical Imagination in the American Fiction (New York: 1974) by Harry B. Henderson, III, concludes that history becomes the modern myth in Southern fiction. Though time bound, it possesses contemporary relevance and emotional force. *The Dispossessed Garden: Pastoral and History in Southern Literature* (Athens: 1975) by Lewis P. Simpson, proves how Southern fiction is engaged in reconstructing the meaning of the past. *The Immoderate Past: The Southern Writer and History* (Athens: 1977) by C. Hugh Holman, is a major work in its study of past and fiction. The book reveals that the past heavily rests upon the serious Southern novelist as a major burden to be borne and understood. The Southern writers attempt to come to terms with their past. *The Future of the Past* (New York: 1989) by a prolific writer C. Vann Woodward, examines how southern novels are loaded with history. Even when Southern fictions treat the contemporary subject or period, the past is always a part of the present, shaping or haunting it. Past is indeed an essential dimension of the present. *The Fable of the Southern Writer* (London: 1994) by Lewis P. Simpson, offers an elaborate comment on the past and fiction. It develops a thesis that serving witness not to the



actual historical event but to the remembrance of it is a force that shapes the vocation of the Southern novelists. The metaphysics of remembrance is being equated with historical reality.

The use of history in Southern fictions has been remained a subject of great interest among the literary critics. They intend to know how the Southern writers use past for subject matter. In fact they are engaged in a critical task that gives an approach to the study of Southern fictions. A review of such critical works will help to locate the areas that the critics have successfully dealt with and the area which are not dealt with. In order to have a proper review of the critical works, it is necessary to approach those works under each individual writer.

Three Modes of Southern Fiction (Athens: 1966) by C. Hugh Holman, is a critical study of the use of history in Southern fiction, including the fictions of Faulkner. The book develops an argument that Faulkner uses history in novels to create the material of a cosmic fable. **American Literature 1919-1932: A Comparative History** (London: 1971) by John McCormick, offers a point that Faulkner uses history in order to construct a literary idea about the past. **Mississippi Quarterly**, xxv, Sup. (Spring: 1972) includes two notable articles on Faulkner's use of history. The First "Faulkner and History" by Cleanth Brooks argues that Faulkner uses history in order to understand it. His thoughtful characters often speculate about its meanings. The second article, "The Firmament of Man's History: Faulkner's Treatment of the Past" by Michael Millgate corroborates Brook's findings in Faulkner's fictions. **Versions of the Past: Historical Imagination in the American Fiction** (New York: 1974) by Harry B Henderson, III, reveals how Faulkner uses history in his novels laying emphasis on the social and individual past. **Uses of the Past in the Novels of William Faulkner** (Ann Arbor: 1974) by Carl E. Rollyson, Jr., is a scholarly analysis of use of history. Its finding is that Faulkner uses history in order to interpret the past and the capacity of interpretation stems from character's awareness of past events.

William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha County: (Baton Rouge: 1990) by Cleanth Brooks, offers some arguments that Faulkner uses history in order to dramatize the process of constructing Southern character. Faulkner intends to know how we can "know" the past. **Robert Penn Warren** (New York: 1964) by Charles Bohner, offers critical judgment on Warren's use of history as background against that the character can identify himself. It also comments on the nature of the impingement of the past on the present. The **Contrived Corridor: History and Fatality in Modern Literature** (Ann Arbor: 1971) by Harvey Gross, investigates Warren's purpose of using history in his novels. The purpose is to interpret it, to understand it. **Robert Penn Warren: Critical Perspective** (Kentucky: 1981) edited by Neil Nakadate, includes an article, "Robert Penn Warren: The Conservative Quest for Identity" by Chester E. Eisinger. It develops a critical argument that like a historian Warren seeks the meaning of the past to establish a concept of identity. **Robert Penn Warren's All the King's Men** (New York: 1982) edited by Harold Bloom, consists of some notable articles on the use of history. The first "The Assumption of the "Burden" of History in *All the Kings Men*" by Murray Krieger, proves how Warren's characters try to come to terms with history in order to free from the assumed burden of it. The second article "The American Novelist and American History: A Revaluation of *All the Kings Men*" by Richard Gray, expresses an opinion that Warren uses history to reformulate the past in the light of present recognition of it. **The Novels of Robert Penn Warren** (New Delhi: 1985) by Sr. Cleopatra, provides a critical perspective on the use of past in Warren's fictions. The central point developed in the book is that the problem of identity depends upon history for its solution.



A Still Moment: Essays on the Art of Eudora Welty (London: 1978) edited by John F. Desmond, includes two articles on the use of history in Welty's fictions. The first article "Time in the Fiction of Eudora Welty" by D. James Neault, reveals that Welty uses voluntary memory as a means of recapturing the time past. The second article "Metronome and Music: The Encounter Between History and Myth in *Golden Apples*" by Douglas Messerli, argues that time which is seen as occurring either in a linear or cyclical pattern may be experienced either as history or as myth. *Eudora Welty's Achievement of Order* (Baton Rouge: 1980) by Michael Kreyling, locates Welty's use of history in her novels. The book comments that Welty sees past as retrieval, as a circle where past and present meet. *The Past in the Present: A Thematic Study of Modern Southern Fiction* (Baton Rouge: 1981) by Thomas D. Young, offers criticism that Welty uses past to make her character realize that no amount of nostalgic longing can make the past much different from the present. *Flannery O'Connor: Voice of Peacock* (New Jersey: 1972) by Sister Kathleen Feeley, is a critical treatise on O'Connor's use of history. The work explains that to O'Connor lack of awareness of Southern history precludes an awareness of the large history of salvation. Behind the history of the South lies history of salvation. *The Flannery O'Connor Bulletin, Vol. I* (Autumn: 1972) contains an article, "The Lesson of History: Flannery O'Connor's 'Everything that Rises Must Converge'" by John F. Desmond, which deals with the way O'Connor uses history in fictions. The work explores how O'Connor thinks that dissociation from history entails dissociation from reality, and return to it demands a terrible cost.

The Past in the Present: A Thematic Study of Modern Southern Fiction (Baton Rouge: 1981) by Thomas D. Young, focuses on O'Connor's thematic concern. The book discusses how O'Connor labors to create dynamic relationship between past and present. Her religious viewpoint governs her view of Southern history. *Versions of the Past: Historical Imagination in the American Fiction* (New York: 1974) by Harry B. Henderson, III, offers elaborate comments on Ellison's use of past in fiction. The book comes out with a thesis that Ellison attempts to place the present in terms of an imaginable, pertinent past. *The Craft of Ralf Ellison* (Cambridge: 1980) by Robert G. O'Meally, is an attempt to study Ellison's use of past in fiction. The book offers a critical study of how Ellison believes that the more conscious a person of his personal, cultural and national history the freer he becomes. *Invisible Criticism: Ralf Ellison and the American Cannon* (Iowa City: 1988) by Alan Nadel, reveals how Ellison advocates that the perception of past is possible not by a static view of it but by a dynamic view of it. *New Essays on Invisible Man* (Cambridge: 1988) edited by Robert O'Meally, contains an article "The Meaning of Narration in *Invisible Man*" by Valerie Smith. It tells that Ellison uses history in his novels because it is a guide to learn about the present. History is closely involved in man's everyday affair and escape from it is impossible.

The critical works reviewed so far deal with the issue of the use of history in Southern novel. These critical books concentrate on the writer's need to use history and the way he adopts to its use. In conclusion we may say that history is used in Southern novels in order to understand it and to transform it to literary artifacts. But the issue of history and individual consciousness remains to be discussed fully. In Southern culture history is a matter of mind. To put it in another way, individual consciousness is a domain of history in the Southern culture. This issue is very much important and needs to be explored fully.



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