

Ethical Representatives of Inter-War American Fiction- A Study

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ABSTRACT: *Creative work of any writer must embody the ethos and pathos of the age in which they take shape. What makes a work enduring is the element, which satisfies the needs and demands of the moment, transcends it and finds it contemporary with later times. The endurance and greatness of a work is, ever-dependent on the insights that an author brings to bear on his characters and their experiences, thereby attributing them with the quality of universality.*

The drastic changes brought out by the twentieth century social conditions had a lasting impact on the society. Man lost in the moral confusion and commercial complexity, alienated from others, fragmented into purely egoistical units of consciousness, caught in a spiritual chaos, began his ever-haunting quest for values, survival, identity and authenticity. The writers began to produce different visions and versions of the wasteland and found an antidote to universal decay in visions involving a retreat to myth and traditional faith. They realized that morality and ethics receive their legitimate meaning only in the living world of consciousness and not in the dead debris of orthodox ideologies.

Keywords: *Ethics, Fiction, Disillusionment, Survival, Brotherhood etc.,*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the world war, the American novel reflects realism and believability, while replacing romance as the dominant form for long fiction, in the beginning of the 20th century. Later with the emergence of Herbert Spencer's social Darwinism that is naturalism, literature narrowed down realism to pave way to naturalism with the background of morality. Towards the close of 20th century, writers seemed to reflect a widespread concern about moral values, a remedy for their chaos of the modern world. Among the great American novelists of the 20th century, F Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck were the more prominent who contributed their part in reviving the moral and traditional standards. The themes of their works embrace the natural world of moral emptiness in the midst of economic and social upheaval; consummation of moral rotteness; and the ultimate realization and up gradation of moral consciousness.

At the beginning of the 20th century, American novelists expand fiction's social spectrum to encompass both high and low life and sometimes connect to the naturalist school of realism. Those are Edith Wharton, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser et al. Some like Edward Bellamy, Sinclair Lewis and Gertrude Stein have concentrated on social issues. Later F. Scott Fitzgerald expressed the mood of disillusionment of the war. He elicits some key American ideas like liberty, social unity, good governance, peace etc. in his works. Hemingway adheres to a moral code that emphasized "grace under pressure" and his protagonists were strong and silent. William Faulkner manages to encompass an enormous range of humanity in Yoknapatawpha county, a Mississippi region of his own invention. He recorded a stream of consciousness and a code of endurance in his works. Steinbeck was probably the most socially aware writer of his period for his interpretation of human beings struggles to lead a decent and honest life. These writers are concerned with social consciousness, moral awareness, value revival and cultural survival than many of their contemporaries. Hence, their works have been analyzed with the perspective of ethical intimations.

II. RESEARCH ELABORATIONS

Creative work of any writer should personify the cultural mores, ethos and pathos of the age to which he belongs, that makes a work enduring. Moreover, he has to satisfy the needs and demands of the moment, transcends it and finds its prevalence with later times. That is the writer has to empathize with his time and people, convey their feelings in his works and establish the universality of basic human tendencies. One can find the substantiation of this view in various sources. Gardener, the writer of *On Moral Fiction* states that "I believe absolutely that art always affects life. If a creative work of art has no effect on life, then its effect on life is that it tells the reader that life is not that important" (Harvey 77). Irrespective of origin, age, region and culture, art should be moral. In every generation, artists try to explore humanity. Hence, Literature should tell archetypal stories in which the victory of good and the defeat of evil are reflected. "Homer's Iliad, though primarily viewed as an exploration of the heroic ideals and its insane and grasping pride, ultimately deals with humanity"

(Bharathi 26). If one goes for a critical study of Homer, Dante and Tolstoy to elucidate the true nature of art, one finds them to be essentially morality-oriented and it is religious morality or morality from divine goodness. It is the duty of Homer's hero to provide a model image for the guidance of the people. It is the business of the hero to set a standard for the future generations to follow. Occasionally, the hero is directly possessed by God and thus for a while is the God, as Achilles is possessed by Zeus during his purgatory rampage. At other times, the Gods trick the hero into serving as their ideal. Hence one can judge Homer as a traditional artist who believes that the purpose of art is to instruct mankind.

If any person views fiction from critical point of view it looks serious because, some writers of fiction are intellectuals who express their creative ideas through stories. That's why Henry James tells us about American innocence; Melville focuses on how the quality of life is influenced by the presence of an indifferent universe, and so on. What literary critics claim is true: writers do convey ideas. Tolstoy's idea of art is primarily religious and his basic argument is that art definitely influences human conduct in general; if not all, at least some people, at sometimes. His moral vision is that the world should be governed by moral choice and not by authority. In such a world every man should aim to become divine. Also he argued that, only through moral art, or religious art, a world can be brought into existence.

The endurableness and greatness of a work of art are, ever- dependent on the insights that an author brings to bear on his characters and their experiences, thereby enduring them with the quality of universality. The writers have a responsibility to challenge the evils of the society. Writing can be considered as a form of liberation, a force that liberates others from moral, social and political oppression. John Barth, a contemporary American writer, suggests that artists should face the challenges of the world by creating their own world with their ideology and models:

If you are a novelist of certain type of temperament, then what you really want to do is to re-invent the world. . . What you want to do is re-invent philosophy and the rest-makeup your own whole history of the world. Why should it just be Plato and Aristotle? They're nice fellows, but why can't we start over, for variety's sake, and be somebody else instead and have all history go differently? (Barth 23)

The moral aspects should be inter- woven into the very fabric of the work of art. A work of art provides moral illumination because of its independence in the world of fictional reality which is concretized.

The twentieth century had certain distinctive features, effected by an accidental coincidence of many national and International events. Political and cultural changes of such phenomenal magnitude have seldom been witnessed in any other period before or since. This was preceded by events that resulted in the cessation of Americans more or less insular of social and political existence. By declaring war against Germany, the nation had joined the mainstream of world affairs. A political integration more pronounced than ever before, helped in the emergence of a national consciousness. Political and psychological transformations were indispensable due to America's war experience. The period witnessed a war and undergone a distress. This resulted in a renaissance and an eternal impact in the personification of American character.

The beginning of the 20th century may be considered as a land mark in the social, political and literary history of America. The scientific and technological developments that started in the late eighteenth century had brought about an industrial revolution resulting in a craze for materialism and material pursuits. The progressive era had a rosy-hued future in an American dream. The transition from the old agrarian to the new industrialized America brought a sense of insecurity. The changes were swift and confused and challenged all traditional assumptions. The hope of a new world of great potentialities had made Americans optimistic towards life but the sense of insecurity aroused the need to turn to something solid, to religion or to traditions, to find salvation. The period between 1890 and 1912 had been known for exploration and experiment. But the First World War marked an end to all this. The war brought disillusionment and chaos because the hopes and ideals were shattered. The disillusioned, skeptical and emancipated Americans became moral wrecks.

Americans, under the complacency of a boom era, thought that their wealth, technological power and developed economic strategies had lifted them to a plateau of absolute security. But, unconsciously, they were hurled into a whirl-pool of perils, both domestic and foreign. The panic was wilder, while even nature lent a hand in tormenting large sections of people with droughts, dust storms and floods. In this regard Bharathi opines that:

There is a tremendous need for the American people to change their attitude in the confused, troublesome, contemporary times. People who are becoming hostile in their behaviour should realize the importance of brotherhood and need for love. The "waste-land" outlook of the people should change to one of affirmation of human values. Celebration of life is important to affirm life. (15)

Soon a new consciousness began to emerge with a clear responsibility towards the American Society and nation. There began a search for spiritual satisfaction, salvation and happiness outside purely material values. There also began a new movement of economic and sociological analysis, definitely scientific in quality. Much of the economic analysis was contradictory. Much of the sociology was vague. But these new studies enriched American thought, banished much naiveté, broke down conventional assumptions, threw light on many

hidden relationships, and defined such concepts as well-being, freedom, equality and democracy with sharp realism.

The young writers naturally believed that hope for Americans lay in a complete reorganization of society. Saul Bellow, in his essay *The Writer as Moralist*, talks about the expectations of the readers in the writers. He says that : “The public never hesitate to demand an inordinate amount of goodness from writers. It considers clergymen, school teachers, and novelists, its moral servants. This is not an altogether unfair conception of things, but there are certain inconsistencies in the situation which often produce strange effects” (60). He also challenges the pessimistic vision of man by defining art as the community’s medicine for the worst disease of mind, the corruption of consciousness. Tolstoy also affirms that “a work is art only when it ‘inflects’ the reader, hearer, or viewer with the condition of the artist’s soul. If there is union between the artist and the audience through ‘infection’— that is, if a communication of sympathetic feelings is not conveyed-then the work has failed as art.” (*Encyclopedia Britannica* Vol. 18 : 485)

Man lost in the moral confusion and commercial complexity, alienated from others, fragmented into purely egoistical units of consciousness, caught in a spiritual chaos, began his quest - quest for values, survival, identity and authenticity. The writers began to produce different visions and versions of the wasteland and found an antidote to universal decay in visions involving a retreat to myth and traditional faith. In his *On Moral Fiction*, a manifesto of his critical theory, Gardner strongly advocates the need for good works of art as they have an unfailing impression on human life. He emphasizes the need for moral fiction for promoting positive values to make life more meaningful and happy. Hailed as ‘a conservator of traditional values and forms,’ (Moritz 145) he entirely agrees with the traditional view that true art is moral. He, therefore, feels the need for restoration of the traditional idea that true art is moral: it seems to improve life, not debase it. (Gardner 5).

They realized that morality and ethics receive their legitimate meaning only in the living world of consciousness and not in the dead debris of orthodox ideologies. Bharathi quotes Gardner that “true art establishes models of human action and aims at the affirmation of life. He believes that moral art is like an experiment and the artist should test the ideas very severely in order to determine the validity. He says that writers should not be cynical but should affirm the life” (28). The moral writer ought not to be a priest who always thinks of his religion and its preservation. He has to be fair and can comprehend the boundaries of morality, as fiction is a process of understanding and exploration. It directs and moulds human life. So, it is the moral obligation of the writer to give a positive model to the readers. It is said that moral fiction exists in three forms. The first and the best form of fiction guides the people by providing model heroes like Christ, Buddha and Tolstoy’s Pierre in *War and Peace* and Levin in *Anna Karenina*. In the second form, the writer presents a negative model, like Macbeth, whom the readers do not want to imitate. In the third form, an alternative does not exist.

Fitzgerald also represented the contemporary ethics and the American National character in his writings. Even though he admired the aspects like popularity, glamour, wealth, status etc., in the beginning of his career; he realized and brought into focus the unsatisfying consequences of these goals. Fitzgerald was crazy in the splendor of the twenties, but was at the same time aware of the enduring old-world conservative values like courage, sincerity, honesty and hard work. Fitzgerald’s generation lost faith only in the possibility of social progress through concerted action. But it was not disillusioned about, it did not sustain a loss of belief in, various personal goals-success in business, or escape from business into the world of art, or achieving grace under pressure, or acquiring a wealth of experience of simply having a good time-in the same desperate fashion that young men of other generations have committed themselves to social or religious or political ideals. In a sense, they too were living in an age of faith. (Siva Rama Krishna 43)

Fitzgerald was completely aware of the destructive influence of money and materials and what they did to his generation by setting unsuccessful standards, and condemnable habits that in his own case led to the inevitable crack-up. Looked at in this perspective, Fitzgerald would be seen not as a mere recorder of the events of the twenties and a victim of the excesses of that decade, but the perceptive delineator of the average American of all times.

Fitzgerald proved that, in spite of temperamental differences and geographical distances, the American writers subscribed to the same set of values and shared a sense of social experience. They were fully conscious of the American social institutions. Regional distinctions or social anomalies never stood in their way of realizing the American experience. Although Fitzgerald’s picture of American life reflects manners and social experience, it always leads into something else- fable, symbol, poetry.

This had been possible as Fitzgerald was completely involved with the life of his time, its feelings and values, its aspirations and anxieties. Even though he was so conscious of contemporary culture, he was equally committed to the dictates of a conscience implanted and nurtured by his progenitors of a different ethical hue. He was painfully conscious of the moral rotteness behind the glittering facade of his time and he lamented it

overtly. He wrote to his daughter that “My generation of radicals and breakers down never found anything to take the place of the old virtues of work and courage and the old graces of courtesy and politeness.” (Turnbul 36)

Fitzgerald’s characters were kept in an intoxicating atmosphere such that they had undergone deep metaphysical and physical distress. That distress was not a matter of chance, but it was effected by the fundamental lack of a clear moral sense, a lack of clear vision and order. On the whole, it is observed in his characters that there is a tension between values that appear to be anachronisms and dreams and achievements that seem to be the inevitable rejection of those values. The awareness of this conflict seems to invest his characters with a tragic appeal and an impact on future. All the traditional values are deep-rooted in all his works, which show a healthy influence on people ultimately.

“*The Great Gatsby* is the central novel of the 1920’s to assert a staunch moral point of view based on a sense of ‘fundamental decencies’ against a morality based solely on power and position. Despite the pessimism and determinism which run through his work, Fitzgerald still sees man as capable not only of choice but of a vision superior to what he himself may be” (Eble 159). Also, as Malcolm Cowley rightly points out, *Gatsby* remains as an exemplar and archetype, but not of the 1920s alone. In the end he represents the human spirit in one of its permanent forms.

In his famous work *The Great Gatsby* Fitzgerald is found to have created a sort of moral permanence. This moral permanence establishes the art of literature as a mentor to the generations forever. It has empowered the people with the everlasting faith in the success of goodness. Almost all the novels and short stories of Fitzgerald testify his abiding faith in a graceful life. Even in the more somber stories, manners and milieu are as important as the plot or the character. To quote a few, in *The Adjuster* Dr. Moon, a Psychiatrist tries to motivate a selfish young woman towards fulfillment of moral duties. In *The Diamond as big as the Ritz* Fitzgerald used the American west to explore its values in the context of history; in which the protagonist Sally Carrol lives up to the noble standards of life.

Perhaps no other American writer has felt himself as inextricably tied to the history of his country as F. Scott Fitzgerald. Born in 1896, at the end of an era of unprecedented national growth, he lived to see the traditions that had guided his parents’ generation and his own childhood cast aside. Indeed, he was commended by his contemporaries for culminating the manners and morals of his times.

Even William Faulkner, the contemporary novelist is known for his consciousness of the essence of man. It is observed that two forces played dominant roles in the creation of his fictional characters. The forces were his belief in the ‘Old universal truths... love and honour and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice,’ which he affirmed in his Nobel Prize Acceptance speech. The other one is his liking of people, which he affirmed over and over in countless conversations and interviews as he said; he is interested primarily in people, in man in conflict with himself, with his fellow man, or with his time and place, his environment. He said again and again to his followers that they have to tell stories about people, man in constant struggle with his own heart, with the hearts of others, and with his environment. And if one accepts the fact that reading Faulkner is not easy, if one nonetheless takes up this task, and if one gives his best efforts and attention to such a study, then he will find the essence of man. “Faulkner’s vision is a sort of improved Platonian, a world in which certain, not ideas in the antithetical Hegelian sense but ideals in the Kantian sense, subsistent realities, such as honour, courtesy, fidelity, integrity and love, are embodied and realized only in action” (Basset 400). The following excerpt from his Nobel Prize speech asserts the moral and human consciousness of Faulkner:

Our tragedy today is, a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only one question. When will I be blown up. Because of this, the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat. He must learn them again. He must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid and teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old varieties and truths of the heart, the universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed love and honour and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice.

I decline to accept the end of man. It is easy enough to say that man is immortal because he will endure; that when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tide legs in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound that of his puny in exhaustible voice, still talking. I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure; he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The Poet’s and the Writers, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honour and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past. The poet’s voice need not merely be the record of man, if can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail. Chief among Faulkner’s own statements deserving a more careful rehearing is this: The poet’s voice

need not merely be the record of man, it will be one of the props, the pillars to help him to endure and prevail. (Faulkner N. pag.)

Faulkner's major works highlighted the significance of these primary human and moral values and he stood as the acumen of morality to the literary generations. Many critics opine that Faulkner was a novelist whose works are the celebrations of heroism and chivalry. Its idealisms and its code of nobleness oblige. Chivalry preached the ideals like, Live one's life so that it is worthy of respect and honour ; Live for freedom, justice and all that is good ; Never attack an unarmed foe ; Avoid lying to your fellow man ; Avoid cheating ; Administer justice ; protect and defend the weak and innocent ; exhibit self-control ; exhibit courage in word and deed ; Fight with honour ; Avenge the wronged; never abandon a friend, ally for a noble cause ; Die with valour and honour ; Always keep one's word of honour ; Always maintain one's principles ; Never betray a confidence or comrade and Respect life and freedom. Faulkner's own view of himself was a private man and a farmer, a man of his region, a writer whose every fiber was shaped by his birth in the south, a Mississippi birth, an author writing of enduring human values, honour, endurance, compassion and sacrifice, in a rhetoric bred, as he put it, by 'oratory out of solitude'.

In such knowledge and in the face of complexities the Faulknerian protagonist may sometimes hang back, deeply hesitant, unsure of the right course however evident the wrong that should be opposed. The hesitation may show that extreme weariness which comes from bewilderment and a related doubt of personal adequacy, as well as a questioning of personal responsibility. (Beck 121)

Throughout the body of Faulkner's stories, there is a definite social theory, predicated upon certain clearly articulated moral assumptions about the land and the people of his fictional world. The theory is one which seeks to understand the present through a detailed knowledge of the past and which tests the hypothesis that present evils grew from past evils. This theory is necessarily historical because the evils which beset the present grew from man's attempts to possess the land, one of the two cardinal evils, a violation, according to Faulkner, of God's intention. "Nothing in Faulkner is more in keeping with his Southern heritage than Faulkner's keen awareness of the pervasiveness and power of evil and yet the nobility of stoic endurance." (Spivey 499)

The collision of the third and fourth generation's descendents of the original pioneers with post-civil war and early 20th century realities detonates the violence, sordidness and brutality of much of the fiction. The novels record the impact and explore its causes and its aftermath. Most of Faulkner's major themes are directly related to this encounter. The keywords of this most often tragic clash and exposure are Faulkner's famous "D" words doom, degeneration, decline, decay, decadence, disease and disintegration. The protagonists of most of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels, each one virtually an epic of degeneration, are decayed aristocrats of the Sartoris type. Whether their names are Sartoris (Sartoris), Compson (The Sound and the Fury), Benbow(Sanctuary), McCaslin(The Bear), Sutpen(Absalom,Absalom!), Grierson or Bundren(As I Lay Dying), they are once prominent; but are riddled with moral decay. They are twisted, morally diseased, and perverted. Yet they are shown as still finer than their antagonists.

Faulkner presents the virtues of the old order as being moral rather than material. Faulkner adores southern aristocrats for their uncomplaining acceptance of fate and for their moral code that reflected courage, honour, pride, pity, love of justice and liberty. "Faulkner writes, and often very sympathetically, of the older order of the antebellum plantation society. It was a society that valued honour, was capable of heroic action, and believed in courtesy and good manners. It had all the virtues and also many of the faults to which such a society was prone..." (Brooks, Contemporary Literary Criticism Vol.28: 145).

The old order was a moral order, briefly that was its strength and the secret lost by its heirs. Here is also another respect in which it differs from the southern story more commonly presented- it bore the moral burden of guilt so great that the civil war and even reconstruction were in some sense a merited punishment.

What finally concerned him most, as it concerns every significant writer, was to release a vision of human life that is serious and mature; a vision that can include both moral criticism and pleasure in sensuous experience, a vision that accepts both the power of fate, all that binds and breaks us, and the possibility of freedom, all that permits us to shape our being.

When Faulkner stepped forth to talk philosophy, he was somewhat less than impressive. In explicit statement he showed an alarming fondness for platitude, a fondness that lured him into portentous abstractions. But at his best he was a writer deeply concerned with the moral qualities and moral formulas of human existence. "In another novel, *Intruder in the Dust*, through the spokesman Gavin Stevens, Faulkner presents explicitly his new understanding of the nature of immortality: the whole chronicle of man's immortality is in the suffering he has endured, his struggle toward the stars in the stepping-stones of his expiations." (Fowler 64)

As it is expected from a writer bred in the South, Faulkner is much occupied with the notion of honour. Frequently invoked in his books, particularly the earlier ones, it is a notion that proves strangely elusive more a cry than a substance and increasingly cut off from moral issues. It allows some of Faulkner's characters a gamut of theatrical display, as also, at times, a release of more substantial values, such as their readiness to stake

everything on a personal act defined not so much through its intrinsic value as through the fullness of passion that is brought to it. But the concept of honour remains hard to define, and the code of honour hard to embody and justify in actual conduct. Perry Miller observes that “A curse hangs over all those Faulkner characters who reach into the depths of experience or struggle to extend the range of their consciousness.” (1021)

As Faulkner’s work developed, there is a gradual shift in emphasis from honour to integrity, a shift that reveals his deepening humaneness and thoughtfulness. Honour points to what one is in the world, integrity to what one is in oneself. Honour involves a standard of pride and dignity, a level of status and reputation; integrity an ease of being and a security of conscience. Honour depends upon an assertion of one’s worth, integrity upon a readiness to face the full burden of one’s existence. Many of the Whites in Faulkner’s novels are eager to preserve their honour; the more impressive among the Negroes, though not they alone exemplify the life of integrity. As he developed and deepens his sense of human life and human trouble he places a greater and greater stress upon the way a man looks inward, living out a dialogue with his own needs and conscience, confronting his own defeats and acknowledging his own value.

Some attempts have been made to see Faulkner as a Christian traditionalist. There can be no doubt that one of the more important sources of his moral outlook is an imperiled version of Christianity. The South in which he grew up is perhaps more concerned with Christian belief than most other sections of the country, but the quality of that concern is hardly such as to win the adherence of a sensitive young writer. For him the idea of Christianity could survive only when it wrenches from its institutional and perhaps historical context it survives, that is, as an extreme possibility of personal saintliness. “Faulkner is preaching that Christ is ever with us and may at any time be resurrected, or, in other words, that man is continuously faced with the responsibility to choose between good and evil and must take the consequences of his choice.” (Gold, *Delusion and Redemption in Faulkner’s A Fable* 147)

Like the Southern past, Christianity is felt mainly and most poignantly through its absence. Easter week forms a backdrop for the Compson tragedy in *The Sound and the Fury*, for the crucifixion of Christ and for the murder of Joe Christmas in *Light in August*. Christianity appears as an occasional standard of judgment, a force to resist, a memory that troubles, a principle of contrast, but not as a secure inheritance. He struggles to define his moral outlook against the back ground of dissolution of traditional beliefs, and usually the struggle matters more than the background.

Faulkner’s work, to be sure, is full of symbols, references, and echoes drawn from Christian drama, theology, and tradition. The recurrent figures of simple virtue – Dilsey, Byron Bunch, Isaac McCaslin – may be seen as embodiments of primitive Christian virtues like charity, love and compassion; and his commitment to these virtues as rooted in a sympathy for the uncontaminated Christianity has sometimes flourished among rural Negroes in the South. At the other extreme in his imagination, there are figures and emblems of crucifixion which show how deeply the story of Jesus and the stern doctrines of Protestantism have left their mark on him. None of these, however, is enough to warrant our speaking of him as a traditional Christian writer, for they constitute fragments of belief and memory rather than an integrated outlook. In moral outlook he is a writer who moved between the far extremes of simplicity and sophistication, and he does this as a man thoroughly caught up in the modern – that is, an uncertain and problematic – view of life. Joseph Gold aptly says that “Faulkner’s answer to man’s predicament comprises a type of non formal Christianity. Love of man is the basis of it. All men must live by the same values. Christ is really a humanitarian every man.” (William Faulkner *A Study in Humanism From Metaphor to Discourse* 140)

From all these facts, one can observe that Faulkner shared at least part of the modern outlook. It becomes understandable why Faulkner, like other contemporary writers, should have placed so heavy a stress upon integrity, the virtue which flows from within and does not depend upon the presence of a set belief. As he sees it, integrity is accessible to people of every social grade and is to be found in a wide variety of situations – though in his novels he favours the use of extreme situations because he wishes to submit all that is intractable and indomitable in human character to the most urgent pressures. Dramatically, this test occurs in the clash of antithetical forces of freedom and necessity in the Yoknapatawpha world. Cursed by the tragic need to compromise their freedom, men can still redeem themselves through a gesture which, if it does not mitigate their defeat, can at least declare their humanity in defeat. That is why always a tragedy inflicts upon all Faulkner characters thereby they reach into the depths of experience and struggle to widen the range of their social consciousness. It is the curse of what ever in life cannot be escaped, whatever is conditioned: Joe Christmas battling, his whiteness and his blackness; the Reverend Hightower unable to mediate between dream and reality; Bayard Sartoris wondering whether his existence has any purpose; Thomas Sutpen compelling to die in a squalor of exploitation; Quentin Compson driven to suicide by the sheer pain of consciousness. Whatever is burden in life be it the consequence of society or character, economics or sin, injustice or evil constitutes the curse. A key word in most of his books is *outrage*, a word which for him signifies both the workings of this curse and the violence with which men act it out. Joseph Gold substantiates his faith as “Faulkner believes both in free will and individual responsibility and social determinism; he believes in the possibility of social and

physical improvement and the eternal sameness of individual struggle and fulfillment; he believes in the necessity of faith, and he rejects the absolutes of rigid theology.” (William Faulkner *A Study in Humanism From Metaphor to Discourse* 188)

But there also remains available to each man the gesture, by which he can declare himself. This gesture can be one of rebellion or submission; it can signify adherence to ritual or the need to accept defeat in total loneliness; it can be, as with Absnopes in the short story *Barn Burning*, an arbitrary sign of selfhood or, as with Popeye’s request that his hair be fixed just before he is to be executed, a final assertion of indifference. But always it is the mark of distinct being, the way a man defines himself. Joseph Gold emphasizes his view that “Man is surely a part of the cosmos, and it is quite possible to see God working through man and nature as, say, Emerson and Thoreau do.” (William Faulkner *A Study in Humanism From Metaphor to Discourse* 192)

The opposition between curse and gesture forms the dramatic and moral pattern of Faulkner’s work, and within that opposition he declared the items of his bias: his respect before suffering, his contempt for deceit, his belief in the rightness of self-trust, his enlarging compassion for the defeated. At its greatest, the gesture shows that for him, heroism signifies exposure, the taking and enduring and resisting of everything that comes to man between birth and death.

Also one could easily bring out the particular moments that Hemingway always focuses on the moments of crisis, tension and passion towards morality in his works. For Hemingway existence and survival are the unconscious ambitions in-habited by his characters. In spite of vague conditions of the emptiness of human life, his heroes always struggle to overcome their crises by a ritual of orderliness. Nicholas McDowell remarks that “Hemingway’s best writing often deals with the tragic areas of man’s experience, with violent death and lost love, with the struggles of men and women to maintain their dignity in the face of personal crisis and battle.” (6)

Hemingway displayed himself to his public as an indomitable hero, a tough guy who had proved himself in war and excelled at dangerous sports. He was a boxer, a big-game hunter, a fanatical fan of bull-fighting. Courage under the threat of death, which he sometimes called “grace under pressure”, was the maxim that he admired most in others and hoped to stand for in the public eye. Underneath this mask of formidable masculinity, he was a sensitive, deeply troubled man who doubted his powers as a writer, a lover and a fighter.

Also, Hemingway always has a practical approach towards life. He emphasizes the unconscious moral conduct of his main characters. His protagonists strive to establish themselves in a chaotic world and ultimately they emerge as the idealistic personalities of man-kind, by practising the basic moral principles. They never deviate from the traditional hold of manhood. Frohock says “For him courage is permanent element in a tragic formula. Life is a trap in which man is bound to be beaten and at last destroyed, but he emerges triumphant, in his full stature, if he manages to keep his chin up.” (Contemporary Literary Criticism Vol.41:141)

Hemingway has influenced the American writing a lot with his thematic and structural excellence. His material is his experience and the cherished ideals of humanity. As most of his critics remarked, his overriding theme is honour, personal honour, by what shall a man live, by what shall a man die, in a world of violence. They rightly explore that his themes deal with real life situations bringing out the masculine ideals like disillusionment, stoicism and physical courage. As his personal life reflects his valour, he himself stands for his ideals. Hemingway, the son of Edmonds Hemingway and Grace Hall joined the army in the early years of his youth and fought in the 1st World War. As he was wounded, he was rejected by the army still he served the country a lot. For his valour, he was twice awarded by the Italian Government. While recuperating in Italy, he fell in love with an American nurse; a decade later this affair and his war experiences would furnish the background for his novel *A Farewell to Arms*. Mundra observes that:

From beginning to end Hemingway spun out a continuous romance about the lonely man striving for dignity, grace and honour in a war – worn world. He presented man as a captive of social circumstances, a victim of an impersonal mechanical system, a patient of neurotic fixations, driven by instincts. The pattern of his fiction is that of a recurring encounter in which he creates a sense of victory out of defeat. The heroes begin to face life when they face death. His works show his affinity with existentialism, alienation and code of conduct. (145)

The pattern of his fiction is that of a recurring encounter in which he creates a sense of victory out of defeat. The heroes begin to face life when they face death which reflects stoicism. His works show his affinity with existentialism, alienation and code of conduct. In Europe, by the impact of the Social milieu which included Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, F.S. Fitzgerald and other American literary expatriates of Paris, he initiated writing. He began to write fiction, applying the dictum that all the writers have to do is to write one true sentence and then go on from there. He brought out his first books *Three Stories and Ten Poems* and *In Our Time*, a collection of short stories that appeared in an expanded version in the United States. These stories, also introduced the typical Hemingway hero, the man who exhibited, in the author’s famous phrase ‘grace under pressure’. “Hemingway’s familiar phrase “grace under pressure” is found in almost all his novels: courage, endurance, honour and above all discipline and restraint that must be demanded of oneself in life as well as in sport.”(Mundra 143)

In October 1926, Hemingway published his first serious novel *The Sun Also Rises*, which was extraordinarily received by his critics and which established Hemingway as one of the most promising new literary talents. Having a portrait of a group of British and American expatriates in Paris and Spain, it was viewed by Hemingway's friends as a roman clef symbol of music. According to Carlos Baker, one of his most authoritative biographers, its depiction of the postwar generation formed an aspect of the social history of the 1920's. The main characters, members of what Gertrude Stein called the "Lost Generation," are all wounded spiritually. They seek to regain some meaning in their lives through various activities such as fishing, boxing, drinking etc. But the protagonist Jake Barnes, who's physically wounded, struggles him-self to retain the old cherished values like honour, courage, honesty and philanthropy; even though he has undergone severe pressures by the environment.

Hemingway's another finest work, *A Farewell to Arms* also depicts these virtues and the eventual victory of the ethical values with regard to the personal and social lives of a citizen. In the beginning the protagonist Henry is deviated from his moral duties and yields to momentary pleasures. In course of time, he realizes his mistake, feels guilty for his escaping nature. Finally, he has to face his fate which is a consequence of his actions. Edward Engelberg notes that:

Human capacity, perseverance and endurance produce merely a 'continuing static' and the condition of a given situation 'will continue to be an impasse.' Impasse, then, is perhaps the best word to describe the world of *A Farewell to Arms*, for the impasse of human relationships is the microcosm for the impasse of the war which seems to go on without end, a war fought on mountains where advance and retreat create a choreography of temporary patterns, neither decisive victories nor defeats. In the war, as in the lives it rules, 'there is no answer.' (201)

Even though, many critics thought that Hemingway's exaggerated masculinity undermined his art gradually, it has become an ideal pursuit for many citizens who cherish the culture and tradition of the past.

He was awarded Nobel Prize in 1954 in Literature for his mastery of the art of narrative, most recently demonstrated in *The Old Man and the Sea*, and for the influence that he has exerted on contemporary style. In his presentation speech, Anders Sterling of the Swedish Academy called him one of the great authors of the time. Praising the authors celebrated Novella, he remarked, within the frame of a sporting tale, a moving perspective of man's destiny is opened up; the story is a tribute to the fighting spirit, which does not give in even if the material gain is little, a tribute to the moral victory in the midst of defeat.

More than anyone else, perhaps, F.Scott.Fitzgerald was the most famous and Ernest Hemingway was the next representative of the "Lost Generation". This group of young writers contributed to one of the greatest outpourings of modern literature in our history. For the most part, they were young men who were either directly or indirectly involved in World War I and who belonged to a young generation that went to fight in that war, having been brought upon a very romantic and idealistic diet of Jeffersonianism and American Transcendentalism. Yet, they emerged from the experience of the war, disillusioned and bitter. This disillusionment served more than anything else as a stimulus for a remarkably impressive literary production and a philosophical stance on life.

The American Dream is an expression that has been used to describe America and its promise to the individual, in which one can detect the thrust of three very essential influences. Those are the Puritan wealth-goodness concept, Jeffersonian democracy, and the Transcendentalist Idea of the dignity of man. In *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald addressed the 'wealth goodness concept' and its effect on American life, clearly subordinating any notion of a positive correlation between the possession of wealth and the possession of character and goodness. Clearly, for him, rich people were not and are not the 'best' people. Hemingway, in his work, rejects the Transcendentalist notion that man is free to do what he wishes, that human beings create their own destinies that nothing is preordained, and that man is in complete control of his own life. Fate, according to the Transcendentalists, is an expression of nature, nature was one with God and God was higher than man. Hence, fate was no threat to man. His theme in most of his novels is a rejection of this principle.

Except for Nick Adams, his protagonist is essentially without family and, except for brief periods, without home and comfort. There is no church or permanent shelter for blessing, no country or community that surrounds him with a strength beyond his own strength. Though he may strive all his life with every fiber of his being to love or to make love possible, when love is in sight, it is snatched away from him. All things that are good are temporary; all things that threaten destruction and death are permanent. Knowing these things, it is the Hemingway protagonist's lot to fight anyway. He may not win. But he will fight. (Benson 46)

Hemingway's essential message is that man is a helpless victim of a malevolent environment, an environment which inflicts violence and pain. He believed that life wounds all of us unreasonably; it wounds each one of us in a way that is most painful. If we love something then we will lose it because life will rob us of it. John Aldridge, a well known American critic on literature, analyses that Hemingway's characters behave according to a 'code' which is necessary if one is to survive as a human being in a threatening world. It is the code of the hero who suffers from an unreasonable wound. He is inwardly tough and outwardly reticent, and he

must be able to live by self-restraint and perhaps even by self-hypnosis. He must show no emotions and form no emotional attachments. He must face life realistically without resorting to abstractions or to complex thought. This stance, this code of conduct, is clearly defensive. Hemingway has turned it into a kind of religion that insures safe-conduct through life.

With the loss of the conviction of masculine invincibility and authority after the war came a stoic attitude that is a compensatory stance for this new awareness of vulnerability. Hemingway's definition of courage, which he succinctly phrased as "grace under pressure," is in many respects a starting echo of the Victorian adage to "suffer and be still" that was directed to women who felt helpless to meet the demands of their sacrificial role. Just as the true woman was self-effacing in the name of familial and social stability, the ideal man of Hemingway's world consciously suppressed his feelings, thereby neutralizing his response in the name of courage or mastery and the need to protect his country. But the stoicism and willed mastery are seen as an obligation or a challenge to be met consciously rather than as a natural – that is to say, habitual – response. Certainly this form of willed courage is not glorious, nor is it even a prerogative; instead it is a necessity born out of the need to conceal masculine vulnerability and loss of certainty. (Martin 66 - 67)

Hemingway believes that emotions will tip off those who are out to get us. If we show emotions and find ourselves, for example, openly expressing love for someone, then that person will in time be taken away from us. We have tipped our hand by showing our emotions. If we become directly or intimately involved with someone else or with some cause, then that person or that cause will be destroyed. We have shown a weak spot by our involvement. Belma Otus remarks that "A recurrent theme in Hemingway's works is the man aware of NADA trying to live according to a code, to live in such a way that he will salvage something from life even though death and nothingness will finally claim him." (61)

In Hemingway's code, love is dangerous and therefore inadmissible since to love is to render oneself vulnerable to fate. When you love, you lose, and this law lies beyond the will of man. We cannot affect it, although we would like sometimes to think that we can. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederick Henry is living a relatively safe life as an ambulance driver on the Italian front in World War I. He has no genuine commitment to the war or to a cause. Things go well with him until he falls in love with a nurse and after that all hell starts. Catherine Barkley, the nurse, is taken away from him, and from then on his life is chaotic. He is ruined. But Belma Otus observes that "Hemingway's code heroes have moral seriousness and courage which enable them to take chances with death. By taking so many risks, death's importance diminishes. The hero is the master; he dominates death and can indulge in killing a God like attribute." (67)

Towards the end of *A Farewell to Arms*, Henry, the protagonist, awaiting the agonizing death of Catherine, says in a monologue: "They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you, or they killed you gratuitously like Aymo, or gave you the syphilis like Rinald; But they killed you in the end. You could count on that, stay around and they would kill you" (Hemingway 282). It seems that this is Hemingway's basic theme, the danger of commitment to anyone or to any cause, even to life itself. As a refutation of commitment, it exposes young people to a moral and ethical relativism insofar as it completely denies that human beings have any responsibilities to anything or to anyone other than to themselves. "Hemingway's hero cannot yield to claims of spontaneous human emotion because he has learned that the only way to hold on to honour, to individuality, and human order against the brute chaos of the world is to live or die by his code." (Belma Otus 61)

Hemingway confirms himself to the moral responsibility of a writer by retaining the life sustaining values in his characters. In *Death in the Afternoon* he seems to be pointing to this ideal in his retort to Aldous Huxley:

If a writer can make people live there may be no great characters in his book, but it is possible that his book will remain as a whole; as an entity; as a novel... No matter how good a phrase or a simile he may have if he puts it in where it is not absolutely necessary and irreplaceable he is spoiling his work for egotism. Prose is architecture, not interior decoration, and the Baroque is over... People in a novel... must be projected from the writer's assimilated experience, from his knowledge, from his head, from his heart and from all there is of him. If he ever has luck as well as seriousness and gets them out entire they will have more than one dimension and they will last a long time. (Rovit 165)

A number of critics have referred to this theme of moral consciousness as something central to Steinbeck's novels. It was Steinbeck's concern with the development and fragmentation of the human consciousness in the social group that attracted people most. His concern with human consciousness seems vital to all his philosophical, psychological, economic, moral and social ideas. Human experience takes its birth and a definite shape in the consciousness only. Human actions have no relevance outside this sea of consciousness, for if it expands and registers growth, which leads to knowledge and salvation. If it contracts and shrinks, it leads to the inner hell of egotistical existence and sinful selfishness. In his brief acceptance speech, he spoke of the high duties and the responsibilities of the makers of literature, who are charged with exposing our many

grievous faults and failures and whose task it is to declare and to celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit.

Steinbeck brings to light the fundamental truth of the human psyche that the central controlling power lies hidden in our own consciousness; the outside environment whether it is economic, social or political, reflects our inner world. It is by changing the inner that the outer can be modified and changed. In this respect, Steinbeck turns out to be the representative of the modern man caught in the whirlwind of confusion and skepticism. By showing the way to salvation from this modern muddle, he appeared to be the prophet of a new religion, which is built more on human experience than on purely occult principles created and cradled in religious sanctuaries.

Steinbeck's sensitive mind could feel the tensions and anxieties of his age. His opinions were based on his observations of modern degeneration and spiritual chaos. He learned a lot from his education and association with people. While working at a sugar factory, he discovered the genuine human qualities of the humble people, greed of the capitalists and the stupidity of the workers. Almost all his works reflect the moral consciousness of people and they are remembered as moral allegories. His themes include social realism, non-teleological thinking, scientific detachment, personal philosophy, moral concern and cosmic consciousness.

Steinbeck's Nobel Prize acceptance speech very clearly defines the role of a writer. He says that the ancient commission of the writer has not changed. He is charged with exposing our many grievous faults and failures, with dredging up to the light our dark and dangerous dreams for the purpose of improvement. Furthermore, the writer is delegated to declare and to celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit – for gallantry in defeat- for courage, compassion and love. "Essentially, the writer's urgent responsibility, in the present cynical and dehumanized society, is to create life-like characters to communicate the feelings as well as the idea of affirmative values." (Bharathi 37)

Steinbeck has given vent to the feeling of disillusionment brought out by the great depression, economic upheaval and the ethical erosion of the period. He has depicted human existence as a conflict and often as a savage battle but he was essentially an affirmative writer. He has expressed faith in the capabilities of men to make life worth- living. He believes that underneath their topmost layers of frailty, men want to be good and want to be loved. Indeed, most of their vices are attempted shortcuts to love.

III. RESULTS

All the above mentioned writers emphasize the ongoing internal struggle in each of us between good and evil. They believe that man is haunted by an inherent humane spirit. They establish the fact that all the literature is built on the never-ending contest in ourselves of good and evil; and that evil must constantly re-spawn, while good and virtue, is immortal. Vice has always a new fresh young face, while virtue is venerable as nothing else in the world is. "So a good artist should, through his fiction create in reader's mind a vivid and continuous dream in which the reader lives a virtual life, making moral judgments in a virtual state." (LeClair 29)

IV. CONCLUSION

All these four writers believe that art's morality lies in human consciousness and it has everlasting impact on the generations. The embodiment of these ethical values in their works, in co-relation to the philosophical ideas of Plato, Aristotle, Seneca and Epictetus can be established on further study.

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