A BAKHTINIAN ANALYSIS OF WILLIAM FAULKNER'S SELECTED NOVELS

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Abstract

The present dissertation attempts a fresh look at the narrative style and language of William Faulkner’s four selected novels, namely; The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, Light in August, and Absalom, Absalom! by applying mainly Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of polyphony, dialogism, heteroglossia and unfinalizability along with Tzvetan Todorov’s contribution to the role of the reader in constructing the meaning of the text. Bakhtin distinguishes between a traditional monologic narrative and a polyphonic narrative and argues that in a monologic structure, the authorial viewpoint and the character’s viewpoint are either the same, or they are closely correlated. Either a single main character represents the author, or the author’s viewpoint is tied to the narration. All characters exist and act within this context.

Following an Introductory chapter, which discusses the relevance of Bakhtin’s literary theories to Faulknerian texts and examines existing literature on Faulkner’s literary style and use of language, the first chapter examines the nature of the multi-voiced narrative of the members of one family recounting its decline and moral decadence in The Sound and the Fury. The second chapter studies As I Lay Dying, and explores its polyphonic narrative as a conceptual tool through which Faulkner tests language as signifying point of view. This chapter also examines Faulkner skill in allowing his characters to voice their own worldview and to be challenged by the unique languages of other characters. The third chapter reads Light in August, focusing on Faulkner’s use of a biased external narrator as a filter for the multi-leveled narrative. The chapter also probes the narrators’ participation in a social and ethical dialogue as they speak, listen, and respond to each other. The fourth chapter deals with Absalom, Absalom! and examines its narrative features as a dialogic and polyphonic novel emphasizing the limitations of knowledge and the problematic nature of language as a means of communication and apprehension of reality. The conclusion re-asserts William Faulkner’s position as a polyphonic author who radically creates his novels with the coexistence of multiple voices and interactivity between characters, and between characters and the reader in dialogue. Finally this study shows that the
examined novels have all the characteristics of a polyphonic and accordingly dialogic novel that Bakhtin talks about.