CHAPTER 8.

CHARACTORS REPRESENTING ATTITUDES AND TRAITS
There are some sets of characters in the novels of William Styron that are seen surviving from novel to novel. They represent attitudes and tendencies. Of course their names and positions change from novel to novel but the attitudes, tendencies and traits that they represent, never change. And whatever change is seen in their thought, action and speech is reflection of the change of the times. Some of them are called father figures or voices of wisdom, others as alcoholics, others as sex-prudes, still others as representatives of slavery and the like.

In LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS Milton's father's voice is generally thought to be the voice of wisdom. But Milton's father is dead and gone. Milton is sometimes shown as recollecting some of his father's admonishes. Perhaps it is his mental haziness on account of his excessive drinking that conjures up his father's vision to him. Once Milton is seen recollecting his father's advice:

His father had told him once, "Most people whether they know it or not, get on through life by a sophomoric fatalism. Only poets and thieves can exercise free will and most of them die
young. 1

At yet an other time he saw first his mother's ghost in his drunken state, followed by the ghost of his father. During this visitation he told something that the faithful son tried to follow all his life:

It had seemed to Milton, there was his mother's vacant hovering face unseen...and finally...his father's figure appeared and said, "Your first duty, remember son, is always to yourself. Keep your chin up and kilts down and let the wind blow." 2

There is no further worth mentioning appearance of Milton's father except on these two occasions. And being dead and gone, deprives him from being a living voice of wisdom. It would be better to allow La Ruth the daughter of Ela Swan to occupy the position of being the voice of wisdom because her words, comments show that she is sane, positive, wise and realistic in her study and assessment of characters and happenings. She happens to be in the thick and thin of it. And because her words are not heeded at, the Loftis family is destroyed.
It is seen in the novel that even Carey Carr who is a well-wisher of Helen is afraid of Helen and avoids to tell her the unpleasant truth. It is La Ruth who cried for help when she saw what Peyton was doing to Maudie. She had tied her with a mass of rope and was stuffing her mouth with a handkerchief. It could have killed Maudie but for La Ruth’s cry of alarm and help which saved the disaster.

When La Ruth sees that the Loftis family is at the verge of disintegration, she does not hesitate in telling Helen the plain truth. Of course she took the pretext that her mother had been telling her all that. She told Helen:

"Oh Miss Helen, mama she tol' me that what you need is Cap'n Milton back. Fo' to keep you on dis lovin' earth 'cause mama say po' thing now with you' chillun flown up to the bosom of God you need to bide out yo' days with a dear sweet man. Mama say take him back 'cause po' man being a man he's de sinful kind and can't help it. Dat's what mama says..." 3

And anybody can see that it would have made the tragic end bearable had Helen heeded
the solemn voices of wisdom. But since Helen did not listen to La Ruth, and rejected Milton at the last moment, they had to go away their different ways, making the disaster and disintegration complete.

There is one occasion in the novel when Carey Carr thought of right things to say but instead of saying that, he said something different. He had no courage to face Helen's wrath. Helen had been talking about family problems hoping to get some solutions from Carey Carr the priest. But the priest is afraid of telling her the truth:

"Oh Carey, should I get down on my knees to him? Is that what he wants.? What in the God's name does he want.? Carey Carr wanted to say: He wants only affection decency, humanness a woman's tender greetings...You get down to your knees not to him but to yourself. Be humble for a moment and perhaps your prayer will cast a light through the darkness around you. Ask for forgiveness for despising yourself." But he did not, and said, "I can't help you you know. I can only listen. You have to look into your own heart and mind."
But since Carey Carr didn't dare to say these words to Helen simply because he is timid and doesn't want Helen to get angry with him, he avoids saying what he had very much wanted to say. And naturally he misses out on being suitable for the great position of a father figure what though he is Father Carey Carr— the well respected priest.

In THE LONG MARCH it is in Lieutenant Culver that the voice of wisdom is embedded. It has been pointed out by all major critics of Styron that he is the nerve centre of the novel. But the truth remains that he doesn't say much. He is a silent observer of people and happenings and passes very few comments. It is seen that when Mannix was about to hit a solider Culver intervened and told him. "It's enough Al, they have just had enough." And Mannix accepted it. And this in effect saved Mannix from pulling down the catastrophe on his own head for the time being. About Culver, Irving Malin says:

Culver—a man of action and feeling, not a career officer but an ironic commentator...a tired thirty year old who seems to be out of place, having been called back to service during
korean war...He is a kind of visionary who makes odd poetic connections...his recurrent vision of the Sunday stroll in the park...nature kind and calm...contrasts peace with war, thought and action: vision and reality; design and accident; humanity and nonhumanity...  

Culver is shocked and surprised to see the dead, dying and mutilated young marines who had become the victims of an accidental explosion of a mortar shell. He is so upset that he has to go behind the ambulance to get sick. He thought that it was some thing illogical and unreasonable that such a thing should happen in the peace-time America.

Since he has a poetic temperament and is a visionary, he naturally finds himself out of place in the military training camp. He is a man of action and feeling, both always directed in the positive direction. He thinks rightly even about those whom he hates. For example he dislikes the Colonel no less than Mannix. But whereas Mannix becomes blind with rage, Culver retains his impartial rationality and gives praise where it is due.
Culver wanted desperately to do something to some how stop Mannix from pulling catastrophe down on hiw own head but he couldn’t. ‘Couldn’t he (Mannix) see that he (Colonel) didn’t care. And that was that. With him the hike had nothing to do with cowardice, courage or sacrifice or suffering but only a task to be performed; that whatever he was, he was not a coward. He had marched the whole way, any idiot could see that, and he was far away from the vulgar battle Mannix had tried to promote. But before Culver could intervene, he heard Mannix charging...

Culver praised and admired Mannix for his capacity to tell the truth. At the end of the lecture he tells Templeton that the reserves had forgotten every thing that they had ever learnt. But at the same time he didn’t like it when Mannix started using foul words for Templeton inspite of all his liking and sympathies with Mannix.

But inspite of every thing, Culver doesn’t become a father-figure simply because he doesn’t happen to be the father of any important character in the novel nor he has got that reverential title. And on that count
even Milton’s father in LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS doesn’t seem to be important enough to be treated separately. It is in the remaining three novels that we come across some very highly potential father figures, or the voices of the wisdom.

In SET THIS HOUSE ON FIRE there is Peter Leverette’s father whose concerns make him the father figure in the novel. He is very vociferous in his condemnation of evils and proclamations of everlasting virtue, and values of life. Even his son admires and admits the integrity of his character:

Rare and prodigious man, my father...the only true liberal I think I have ever known in my life. He had thirsted for knowledge, understanding and wisdom in the same way that others yearned for money or prestige. And I think at last he had found a large measure of them...He was one of the few men in Portwarick who had ever read a book...Age had bowed him and shrunk him a little but not life and he had grown larger and larger in my eyes. 

This is the best tribute a father could get from his son. These views of Peter about his father place him virtually on a very high
pedestal of honour. The old man had led his entire life in being just and honest. He practised what he preached. There was perfect harmony between the outer and the inner Alfred Leverett. He always opposed all social injustices inflicted upon the Negroes and pleaded their cause with every one who could understand a logical analysis of racial problem that afflicted the region. He lamented the poor condition of the educational institutions. Once he told his son:

"Son, life is a search for justice...I guess I have near about become a Pariah in this town Peter...I think I run off at the mouth too much...I have been trying to tell these people for going on to forty years now...They will vote in year after year this millionair apple farmer who guarantees them good roads and miserable schools. And above all that, the Negro will never get an even break...Let them go to hell...I am through with them all...

Sometimes I think this is just a nation of children, of childish little minds. The supreme Court did not have no right to do what it did, than I would have in telling an Arab or a Chinaman how to run his life. It was a dumb poor thing
they did, the way they did it any way. And every one is going to suffer because of it. They don't realise that the Negro has got to get his payment for all those years of bondage...Look out son." He waved towards the sparkling water, "That's where they came in, in the year 1619. Right out there, It was one of the saddest day in the history of man...and I mean black and white." 9

Peter's father is sincerely sorry for the evil goingson in the South. He is thoughtful and visionary and that is why he is so greatly concerned about the social injustice against the Negroes. Every now and then he expresses his dislike and utter hatred at the goings on in the region. And the cause of the entire trouble in his eyes is the general loss of morality in the people, loss of virtues and an utter disregard for the old values of life. At yet another time we find him expressing his inner turmoil, always grinding him:

There will be bloodshed and tears ...what this great land of ours needs is something to happen to it—something ferocious and terrible and tragic...so that when people
have been through hell fire and the crucible and have suffered agony enough and grief, they will be men again, human beings, not a bunch of contented hogs rooting at the trough, ciphers without mind, soul or heart...Soap peddlers... No I mean son, these are miserable times... the wisdom of all the ages, all the precious teachings of his ancestors, they were lost upon him. He spat on his brother Negro and wore out his eyes looking at T.V. and fornicated with his best friend's wife at the country club. He had all these here wonder drugs to prolong his life and what happened...At the age of seventy he was an empty husk, saddled with a lot of ill gotten lucre and a pile of guilt, terrified of death and lying down there on the sand at Miami beach pitying himself..."10

Thus it is apparent that the Old Leverette's concern is very broad and has far reaching implications. He is concerned about the racial problem of the country, the worship of Mamon, decay and degeneration in the moral and spiritual life of the nation making men baser than animals. The old man can fore-see the impact of this degradation and the signs
upset him:

I know. I know Peter. These are miserable times. Empty times. Mediocre times... they are going to get worse. Read Carlyle. Read Gibbon... Newness, slickness and thrills are all... what do you come to at last... moral and spiritual anarchy... political anarchy, then dictatorship... 11

The attractions towards newness, thrills would lead no where, thought the oldman because according to him it had the potential of making the old and well tested old values get neglected, forgotten and vanish from the life of the nation. And once that has happened, the political anarchy was a certainty. And that in its effect will destroy the entire country itself. That is why the oldman preaches the solemn ways of life, old values and a return back to sanity by adhering to the wisdom of the ancients.

The fourth novel, THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER by William Styron has Jeremiah Cobb who functions as the voice of wisdom in the novel. He is not only Father Cobb or Father Jeremish but also some one concerned with the well being of the whole region. He is a lordly
figure who long ago had spoken to Nat in prophetic tones of the doom awaiting his beloved Virginia.

Father Jeremiah Cobb's concern for his native land is worth the praise it gets in the novel. He is greatly upset by the draught affecting the entire region. He is seen equally worried about the loss of fertility of the soil due to the greedy and crazy tobacco plantation in the area. Even the presence of the Negro slavery touches some deep cord in his inner self. He is seen deploring the sordid conditions:

God, God, my poor Virginia, blighted domain! the soil wrecked and ravaged on every hand, turned to useless dust by that abominable weed. Tobacco we can not grow any longer nor cotton even, save for a meagre in these few Southern countries, nor oats nor barley nor wheat. A waste land. A plump virginal principality, a cornucopia of riches, the like of which the world has never seen, transformed within a space of a century, to a withering defeated hag! And all just to satisfy the demand of ten million Englishmen for a pipeful of Virginia leaf... Now even that is gone and all that
we can raise now is horses and pickaninnies (black).... damn the day when the poor black men in chains first trod upon thy sacred strands...12

Father Cobb's concern is related with the happenings in the society too. It is he who sits in the chair of the Judge to pass the verdict about Nat and his companions. He had looked at Nat as ravished by sorrow and injustice as any slave and therefore as deserving of mercy.

During Nat's trial, his stature in Nat's eyes increases manifold. He viewed Cobb not as a pilate but as a father condemning his son to a fore-ordained crucifixion. Robert H. Fossum says:

Nat views Cobb not as a pilate in a hysterical Jerusalem but as a father God... Like some predestinating yet grieving diety the judge seems to regard Nat from immeasurable distances, with eyes, that profound as all eternity, suggest that he shares with the condemned man a secret unknown to other men—of all time, all morality and sin and grief.13

Thus it can be seen that Father Jeremiah Cobb is deeply concerned about the disturbing
changes taking place in the region. The reckless planting of tobacco making Virginia a wasteland, the economic greed, the curse of slavery leading to the breakdown of the tide water plantation society, social, political, and economic changes taking place in the region for worse, affecting the people, worry him endlessly. The arrogant commercialism and its inhumanity affecting the black and the white alike, are the cause of his concern.

It must be observed that the voice of wisdom which has been just faint and almost negligible in LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS, and THE LONG MARCH, becomes stronger and stronger in every preceding novel. It becomes stronger in THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER and stronger still in SET THIS HOUSE OF FIRE, as it is seen to have become more concerned and vocal in expression. The voice broadens in its aspects and becomes stronger still in SOPHIE'S CHOICE.

In SOPHIE'S CHOICE it is Stingo's father who functions as the father figure, or the voice of wisdom. Stingo is the narrator in this novel. He recollects how once his father had punished him for dereliction of his duties towards his mother. The why and how of the
punishment reflect a great deal about the mental make up and the personality of the oldman.

Stingo remembers that he was twelve years old when it was discovered that his mother was suffering from cancer. It was slowly devouring her. And to top it, she fell and broke the tibia of her leg and was confined to a sitting chair or bed, usually passing her time reading Pearls S Buck's novels near the fire place. After the school it was his (Stingo's) duty to keep the fire going. one evening when it had got freezing cold, he was lured away by his love and attraction of riding in a new car of one of his school mates. In the pine wood he felt a terrible cold and remembered his mother. When he came back home, he found his father massaging her hands. Stingo describes the scene:

I was lured away by the promise of a ride in a new Packard Clipper of my school mate... in the pinewood I felt vicious cold and thought of the hearth and deserted helpless lonely mother...became sick with alarm...Ten years later I reflected with a stab of anguish upon my guilt, the queer tender grace with which
the oldman (my father) had confronted and dealt with my dereliction...

My father had returned and was at my mother's side half an hour before I got there. When I reached he was muttering to himself and was masaging her hands. The fire had died out... Her face chalky dry. She looked at me and turned her gaze swiftly away and that defined my guilt. She wept then and I wept. My father marched me into the blood congealing cold darkness of the woodshed and made me stay there for long two hours. I shivered and wept. I was suffering as my mother had. I would have willingly stayed there until dawn or till I had frozen to death so long as I was able to expiate my crime... Seven months later she died... 14

Here is an instance that shows that Father Stingo did not believe in punishment or beatings. He just believed in making one feel, realise, what his negligence or indifference had done to the other. He made his son feel the same chilling cold that his mother had suffered, inorder to let him realise and experience the pain and misery his carelessness had caused his mother. And
whenever Stingo reflected on this episode, he
felt a stab of anguish resulting from his
guilt and "the queer grace with which the
old man (my father) had confronted and dealt
with my dereliction." 15

Stingo's father is greatly pained at the
sight of a human being degrading himself,
behaving indecently or being unjust to another
fellow human being. He hated big cities
because they could not afford to be decent,
polite and stay bound with the norms of
etiquettes and manners:

His Southern hatred of Newyork
was not primitive weirdly
solipstic hatred of the father
of a friend of mine who hated
Newyork apocalyptically as once
in Time Square Cafetaria, the
chair beside him was occupied
by a large Negro where upon he
lifted the bottle and bashed it
at the black bastard's head...
and had got five years in Sing
Sing... He detested Newyork for
its barbarity, lack of
courtesy, total bankruptcy in
the estimable domain of public
manners, snarling command of
traffic cops, blaring insult of
horns, all the needlessly
raised voices of the night
denizens of Manhatten, swarming,
obstreperous and brutal human
tides of the metropolis. 16
Stingo's father hated all those whites who discriminated against the Negroes. The most vocal and vociferous was one Theodore Gilmore Bilbo who preached and practised anti-Negro ideas and coined slogans for the purpose. When Bilbo died of the cancer of the mouth, Stingo's father wrote a letter to his son, expressing his joy:

Theodore Gilmore Bilbo, that anti-Negro... has died of the cancer of the mouth... served him rightly... I was awfully glad to see the old devil go. Of all those who had so foully tarnished image of the modern South, he was a leading mischief maker... 17

His deep thinking about the social fabric of the South had made him see that the Negro had to be given his fair share in every thing. It was what the social justice demanded and without that there would be trouble every where and for every one. And also anything less than that would not serve the purpose. This is what we find expressed in his talk to Stingo:

Do you think slums of Harlem,
truly represent an advance for Negro over Pea-nut patch in Southampton county.? Do you think the Negro is going to remain content in that insufferable squalor.?... Some day it will be clearly demonstrated that the North is every bit steeped in prejudice as the South, if not more so... At least in the South the prejudice is out there in the open...but up here... 18

Stingo's father is an open minded person. He disliked the North for its secretive hatred of the Negroses. He considered it worse than the Southern hatred because in the South it all was done openly but in the North they were hypocritical in this regard.

Stingo's father believed, preached and practised decency is thought action and behaviour, and even in the use of language. As a matter of fact he favoured the Negroses but did not spare them from chastising if he found them doing or saying any thing indecent.

When Stingo's father came to Brooklyn to meet his son Stingo, he happened to make a mistake of giving a tip to the Negro Taxi-driver named Thomas Mc. Guiri. A Southern cab driver even if hurt by the tip would have kept
his silence. It is interesting to witness the scene between the taxi-driver and Stingo’s father:

Father made the mistake of giving a tip to the taxi-driver Thomas Mc. Guiri and he snarled “ Fucking ass hole”... A Southern cab driver even if hurt by the tip would have kept his peace...

“What did I hear you say.?" My father demanded instead of "What did you say.?" the difference is worth noting. "I said you must be some fucking asshole" Answered the cab-driver.

“ And I think you must be part of bottomless dregs of this loathsome city that spawned you and all your foul mouthed breed... You are no more civilized than a sewer rat. In any decent place in the United States a person like you disgorging your disgusting filth would be taken out into a public square and horse whipped...”

"But this is neither a decent nor a civilised place and you are free to spew your putrid language upon fellow citizens." Said the Cabby and was gone. Father whirled around and his head collided with a hard steel shaft of a no park stanchion.19

Thus in SOPHIE’S CHOICE, the voice of
wisdom of Stingo's father could be heard anywhere in the novel where ever there is social injustice, indecency in thought, action behaviour or speech, hypocrisy or lack of etiquettes and manners.

It is surprising to note how similar are all the voices of wisdom, all the father figures, in their thoughts diction and concern for the major aspects of the national life. The three major father figures—Father Jeremiah Cobb in THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER, Peter Leverette's father, Alfred Liverette in SET THIS HOUSE ON FIRE and Stingo's father in SOPHIE'S CHOICE are very similar in their thought and speech. It would be interesting to compare Jeremiah Cobb's words:

"Damn the day when poor black man in chains first trod upon thy sacred strands..."20 with Alfred Leverette's:
"That's where they came...It was the saddest day in the history of man and I mean the black and the white."21 And with the words of Stingo's father:
"Do you think the Negro is going to remain content in that insufferable squalor."22
It is not simply the racial problem on which they seem to share their thoughts and views but even in other matters concerned with the life of the common man they are so similar that one wonders whether they are not one and the same person coming in different positions with the different name in the novels of William Styron. Of course with every novel the voice goes on becoming more and more forceful, demanding urgent attention.

As the voice makes a faint beginning with Milton’s father and Culver and goes on becoming stronger from novel to novel, so there is a very striking presence and constant growth of some characters in all the novels of William Styron.

There are some characters that can be seen surviving from novel to novel with just their names and positions altered. That is why the ever haunting voice of wisdom of Milton’s father in LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS survives in the form of lieutenant Culver in THE LONG MARCH. He comes in the form of Father Jeremian Cobb in THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER and Alfred Leverette, father of Peter Leverette in SET THIS HOUSE ON FIRE and
Stingo's father in SOPHIE'S CHOICE.

As the father figures/voices of wisdom become more and more forceful, so do many other characters that survive from novel to novel under changed positions and names. For a proper understanding of it we would have to keep THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER as the first in the list because it deals with the people and matter that existed a whole century before.

In this novel there are ill-treated negro-household women servants like Lou Ann; ill treated Negro servants like Hark, Will, Nelson, illiterate masters like Thomas Moore who hate Nagross and Mc. Bride who has illicit relations with Negro women. Lou Ann of THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER becomes Ela Swan in LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS and instead of Mc Bride, here Milton is found to be persuading her to go to bed with him. The only change is the change of authority. Mc.Bride expressed the desire and it was fulfilled but Milton has to bribe and persuade.

This same Lou Ann further makes progress in the third novel, THE LONG MARCH and comes in
the garb of a Nurse who confronts Mannix in the last scene of the novel. The whipped tortured and beaten Will comes as Casper the hearse driver in LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS. And in SET THIS HOUSE OF FIRE he is seen to have become the owner of a radio-repairing shop. He is Crawford whose shop was plundered by Cass and his uncle. And in SOPHIE'S CHOICE he makes so much progress that he dares to mock and defy Stingo's father, a white man. He is the taxi driver Mr. Guiri.

Likewise there is a definite progress amongst the alcoholics too. Thomas Moore of THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER grows into even worse alcoholic in the form of Milton in LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS and worse still in THE LONG MARCH in the form of Mannix who in his drunken state had tried to burn down the military set up. He changes into even further problematic drunkard in SET THIS HOUSE ON FIRE in the form of Cass Kinsolving. We find him in the worst condition in SOPHIE'S CHOICE known as Nathan Ladau, a drug addict. Thus the continuation of booze goes on making progress up to the drugs, narcotics and brown sugar.

In THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER there is
Miss Emmeline who allures, attracts, enchants but doesn't quench the thirst of Nat. In LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS she is reborn as Helen who keeps Milton sexually hungery and run after other women. We meet her again in SET THIS HOUSE ON FIRE as Francesca and Leslie Lapidus in SOPHIE'S CHOICE with Victorian prudery about sex. Inspite of all those datings and outings with Stingo she never went to bed with him.

Likewise Margarette Whitehead of THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER is reborn in LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS as Peyton Loftis. She is Celia or Nancy in SET THIS HOUSE ON FIRE. And in SOPHIE'S CHOICE we find her having all the traits in the character of Sophie herself.

It is no less interesting to note that many characters in Styron's novels, who have the first letter of names as 'C' are similar in their other characteristics too. In LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS, there is Carey Carr, and in THE LONG MARCH there is Culver. SET THIS HOUSE ON FIRE has Cripps the only person who dared to oppose Flagg. And in SOPHIE'S CHOICE we have Calterborn the radio announcer. All these have not only 'C' as the beginning
letter of their names but they are almost identical in their purpose, tone, diction and thought.

Thus these characters whether they are voices of wisdom or father figures or representatives of attitudes or growth of tendencies, they are present in almost all the novels of William Styron. What though their names and positions change with the change of the novel, their thoughts diction attitudes and tendencies never change. Though they seem to be minor characters but they serve the basic purpose of structuring and building up the background and locale for major character and major happenings.
2. ..................ibid..................P-12.
3. ..................ibid..................P-140.
4. ..................ibid..................P-134.
11 ..................ibid..................P-16.
15. .......................ibid....................P-360.
16. .......................ibid....................P-229.
17. .......................ibid....................P-229.
18. .......................ibid....................P-352.
19. .......................ibid....................P-356.
22. .......................ibid....................P-352.