CHAPTER 9.

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES
In his ASPECTS OF NOVEL, E.M. Forster said that a valuable literary fiction must have something more than a mere story in it. It is that 'something more' in the story that makes the work outstanding. It is this in which every genuine and careful and serious reader is interested. And this 'something more' may come in the form of allegory, satire, symbols, images, and suggestions of various kinds. Though William Styron claimed that his novels have no contemporary statements of any kind, they are interspersed with innumerable interesting and intricate suggestions, symbols, images, and allegories that give his novels a better literary positions and make them interesting and valuable.

William Styron's first novel LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS has at its end the Negro-baptism which at first glance seems to be totally irrelevant to the main story. Daddy Faith has been presented as a very ridiculous kind of figure like, ''a round tub of a man, completely black." Beneath the lamp flickering 'LOVE' the fellow talked about bombs and wars. He collected a lot of money from those poor Negroes. And inspite of every thing his
followers believed that baptism by him would get them rid of their sins. In this connection, Robert H Fossum says:

Daddy Faith as a Southern saviour is paraded as Peyton is being buried...He is a grotesque mixture of mythic, pagan and Christian symbolism...Daddy Faith is to La Ruth, Ella's daughter, what Milton is to Peyton: a demi-god whose way leads to sexual satisfaction... suggesting that pigmentation has nothing to do with guilt or innocence.²

This certainly is true. But William Styron seems to have put it in, to signify a kind of contrast with the Loftis family, leading to the next step of contrast between the two races— the blacks and the whites, and their religious faiths. This naturally brings Carey Carr Vs. Daddy Faith together and one begins to compare and contrast them. The Negro servants Ela Swan, La Ruth are believers and the solid foundation of their belief gives them force and tolerance enough to live their lives to a satisfying and satisfactory end. But in the Loftis family, first of all it is Milton who rejects God and then Helen too
rejects God, the Church and Carey Carr the priest. She tells the priest "Your God is a silly old ass" and they both end in total discontent and disintegration. Louis D. Rubin Jr. says in this regard:

If any thing he (Styron) seems to be making a much weaker, pessimistic observation which is, that the moral usefulness of religious truth decreases in direct proportion to the increase in the intelligence and sophistication of the believer. The implication is that religion can function effectively as a morality only when its communicants are ignorant and superstitious...  

The moral usefulness of religious truth does not decrease with the increase in intelligence, as Louis Rubin says. In reality it increases if the religion is scientific. In fact the religious truths have been experienced by the most highly sophisticated and intellectually developed individuals like Buddha, Loa-tse, and Jesus etc. However this novel presents its protagonist's mother, Helen, with excessive attachment to her garden. When ever she feels depressed or low-spirited, she rushes to her garden as a
thirsty man rushes to water. She had developed a notion that amidst all the transitory things in the world, her garden was some thing constant. Here she could feel to have her roots deep into the soil:

To recognise that love, life and death are only inextricably related, is to recognise the nature of seasonal rhythms. Amidst all the infidelities of this novel only the truth of the earth remains constant. Helen sees her garden as the only constant thing in a world where changes mystify her. She wished she could tell Carey Carr how much her Garden meant to her. When ever the dreadful depression came back, she would fly towards her garden, as one dying of thirst runs towards water... it is a trapping of ancient fertility myth... to restore fertility to the kingdom of sterility...Except for the blacks there are no children born in this novel, nor is there any prospect in the Loftsis family...Every one is afraid of giving birth.

According to Gordon, fertility could be restored by giving birth, by being reborn. And for being reborn one has to confront his own death. And this would have happened if
Peyton's dead body had been brought face to face with the baptismal raft of Daddy Faith. But this is not allowed to take place as they opt for another path taking to the burial ground. This is an other example of:

Circuitousness that prevails the wanderers and travellers in the novel. All the trappings of fertility myth are there, including the beggar-fisherman whom Peyton meets on her last walk and finds him trying to catch coins out of a sub-way grate with a string attached to a pole. But there is no renewal, for these people because they can not imagine death and life as part of natural order of things...

The next important thing in this novel is the protagonist's excessive attachment to her clock, which signifies an individual's search for an orderly, systematic and secure world devoid of the fears of untimely and unreasonable separations, deaths and destructions. That is why Richard Pearce thinks that Peyton's fantastic dream inside a clock is reflective of her pathetic attempt at finding some kind of harmony in this chaotic world around her.
Inspite of the author's claim that LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS is the story of four tragically fated people, it is worth noticing that inspire of desbelief, despair, death and disintegration affecting its major characters, the novel has some minor characters who signify something very different. There is Harry whose paintings, in the face of Hiroshima and Peyton's death, confirm that man has infinite capacities to create beauty and order. Ela Swan on the other hand seems to have experienced every thing and expects nothing and even her tragic view includes the vision of Jesus Christ. Thus they denote a note of optimism—that inspire of death, war destruction, disintegration, disbelief, all is not lost.

William Styron's second novel THE LONG MARCH deals with a religious content in the form of a parody, of the profane belief in the supremacy of military powers. There are some very potent and significant hints and implications in the novel which require special attention. For example Colonel's nickname is 'Old Rocky' and 'Templeton' Mannix is nailbruised and his towel slips down
exposing him naked like the day he had emerged out of his mother's womb, just in front of the Negro maid-servant. And the first word that we hear from Mannix is "Christ on a crutch." All these aspects have been analysed by Robert H Fossum thus:

In THE LONG MARCH the religious substance has been presented as a profane parody. The spirit of this new religion is famous Marine espirit de Corps... the institution supporting this theology of war is Corps. The rock on which its temple is built, its high priest even perhaps its God is Colonel Templeton Rocky.

His nail bruised heel, his refusal to honour the religion of the corps, the great emptiness in his tormented soul, the smoking bonfire of his hubris—smitten spirit—all these imply that he is a type of Satan or old Adam to Templeton's God...Certainly the thirty six miles long march marked at each station by increasing pain from the nail in Mannix's shoe, recalls Christ's journey to the cross as well as the period of time from his death to resurrection...

In his final scene he (Styron) ...brings two representatives of racial
indurance face to face. Naked except for a towel around his waist Mannix the Jew encounters a black maid in the barrack's hallway, with infinitely compassionate understanding... Clutching a bar of soap denotes his purification - purification of the man who has endured.

From the above explanation it is clear that it is old Testament benediction and damnation that has been parodied in the novel. The Captain can be safely put in the place of Christ because of his nail bruised foot and the threat of court-martial. Colonel Templeton is all powerful hence he is the God himself. And once it is established that Rocky Templeton is the high priest or God of this new religion of military supremacy, Culver invariably becomes (since he is neither in the group of believers nor in the group of heretics), a poet, a philosopher, a logician, a thinker, observing every thing as it happens. And inorder to complete the religious parody what is further needed is the damnation, which in the novel comes in the form of Mannix's court-martial.

Apart from this religious parody, there
is yet another incidence in the novel that suggests a great deal. Captain Mannix tells Culver that he had been afraid only once in life—and that was when two drunks had dangled him upside down from the tenth floor window of his room. About this incidence Richard Pearce says:

In an environment that is urban, military and dark, man is surprised, ambushed and senselessly assaulted—not to the end of defeat or destruction not to any end at all. He is suddenly and capriciously turned upside down (like Mannix), turned from a man with potentials of dignity and heroism into a helpless clown acutely aware of life’s terrors. This terror is caused by not hostile power or even by an indifferent universe but by a wanton sporting with individual’s life.  

Mannix being dangled upside down conveys the terror of the world governed by capricious forces against which man becomes helpless. Also turning upside down signifies turning upside down of the old values.

William Styron’s third novel, SET THIS HOUSE ON FIRE too has many and somewhat
complicated suggestions and images. First of all there is Cass’s regular vision of a swallow bird trapped in a palace. This has been thought to be the central symbol of the novel as it reflects the conditions of the protagonist. Robert H Fossum says:

The central symbol of the novel is the swallow bird which is trapped inside a palace. The bird which swooped down among the fluted columns, then upward and still beat its wings against the skylight towards the inaccessible sun. This is of course a Symbol for Cass, the struggling artist to rise above the spiritual abyss into which he has fallen.  

The swallow bird is the artist, Cass himself. The huge palace is Mason Flagg. The skylight is the awakening of the soul. And the artist must come out of the strong hold of Mason to reach the light of realisation of his artistic potential.

According to Hindu belief birds represent the higher status of being. The soul is compared to a bird. The folklores all over the world have something akin to it. This swallow bird flies up and down in the room in
which there is a frieze of a dingy nymph. It is just to represent the contrast between the hope of the protagonist for spirituality for which he will have to transcend Mason Flagg's carnality. The Swallow must fly away from the palace for freedom and regeneration, suggesting that the artist must fly away from the strong hold of Mason Flag to be reborn into an artist.

When Cass and Mason Flagg were fighting with one another, the novelist points out that there was a single pigeon that hovered above them and then veered aslant in fright. It has been pointed out that replacement of swallow with dove is significant. It has been pointed out by many critics to be a benediction of the holy spirit. The swallow dies but returns in the form of a dove which is suggestive of rebirth of the spirit.

There is yet another death of a bird, the Flemish speaking parrot of Poppy. The death of this parrot too signifies that the death of the body is essential for the rebirth of the spirit. However, one wonders whether it is not a Hindu concept that has been ushered into the novel, for Islam and Christianity don't
have the concept of rebirth.

In this novel there is yet another suggestive description of that of a Tom Cat. The Tom Cat is described as sitting with a mouse trapped between its paws. The Tom cat is Mason Flagg and the mouse is naturally Cass Kinsolving or it could be any one like Fransesca, Rosemarie, Nancy, Celia, Cathy or any one else but most importantly it is Cass.

Also there are recurrent dreams of Cass, that need explanation. One of them is the vision of a dog crushed under the wheels of a bus but it refuses to die and a doctor out of pity, tries to beat it dead. Concerning this recurrent dream of Cass, Robert H fossum says:

  The dog has ben crushed but its head survives miraculousy...
  The separation of the body and the head are symbolic of the carnal and spiritual in Cass. The Dog being beaten by the pitying doctor is an allegory of us mortals in the hands of God - He is beating us yet mercifully

  Other things that Cass gets usually in his dreams are very big webs-spider’s webs of gigantic sizes. This could best be explained in view of Hindu belief which says that the
"Maya world is a spider's web." a world of illusion. The other recurrent dream is that of a woman bearing wood, struggling under the burden. This signifies the burden of the world that every one of us mortals has to bear.

Apart from these significant and recurrent dreams, the other very important aspect is that names of some of the characters are full of meaning and suggest a lot in their relations to other characters. Robert K Morris and Irving Malin's books says in this regard:

Cass's name invokes spirituality. Styron implies that it is through reaching out to our kin that we can solve (solving) our problems - a lesson that Cass learns so late in life. Michael's illness is parallel to Cass's spiritual illness.13

And Michael Rucky invites comparison with saint Michael who fought with the dragon. In Rucky's case the dragon is his tuberculosis. Like wise Poppy can be compared to poppy flower which is symbolic of consolation and solace, but at the same time
it is a strong sedative as well, for sedative drugs. Gavin Cologne Brookes analyses this aspect thus:

If Poppy is to offer a realistic stability, she must be unlike Francesca, a fully realised character possessed not of illusory charms but of both good and bad facets. Her name illustrates her dual nature. Heroin comes from poppies and at worst she is like another drug for Cass, always forgiving, never questioning and thus allowing Cass to get away with his self-pitying debauchery. Yet her weaknesses are also her strengths. Poppy’s name is equally suggestive of pastoral harmony. Just as Poppies sprang up in the Flander’s fields after the carnage of World War First, so Poppy herself like the pastoral imagery gradually more pervasive in part two, withstands the storm of Cass’s metaphysical struggle, his drunkenness and adultery; and she remains faithfully there at the end, glad simply that Cass has come back...

In spite of all kinds of contradictory symbols and suggestions, Luigie, Poppy and Peter help Cass turn about. Like Peter who summerises Luigie’s thoughts when Luigie helps
Cass, Cass appreciates Luigie's positive qualities. Thus just as Poppy presents a potential source of harmony so Luigie's castigation of Cass for his headlong drive towards self destruction, helps drive Cass to steady himself, to sober up and to begin his recovery.

The fourth novel of William Styron THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER has been called a religious allegory by Robert H Fossum. This novel is certainly interspersed with innumerable dreams, visions, suggestive happenings, images and symbols that have been interpreted by various critics in the light of their varied and varying wisdom.

The most suggestive happening takes place when Nat was still working at Turner's Mill. He was learning carpentry under one German named Mr. Goat. One day, Nat at work punctured his hand with a hand drill. It was an accident simple and pure. But the happening has been claimed as suggestive of the future crucifixion of Nat Turner. And that turns out to be true as it is seen that Nat is ultimately taken to the gallows.

Before he started the great ruction, he
had a vision of two angels - one black and the other white. They fought and the white angel was vanquished. This was thought by Nat to be a sign that divine forces wanted him to begin the ruction against the whites and his victory was certain. Regarding this vision of Nat, Robert H Fossum has said:

His visions are not of tranquility and unity but of a great gaping rupture of the heavens out of which a black angel emerges to vanquish a pure white antagonist... the primal source of these visions is not the Bible but the satanic forge of Nat's own tortured soul... His voices and visions are hallucinations brought on by fasting, religious mania and sexual deprivations. They are the slavery induced voices of fury, frustration and a passion for a vengeful justice...\(^\text{15}\)

When Nat's rebellion failed he hid himself into a cave very near to his late master's house. Mr. Robert H Fossum considers it a "fitting tribute, an emblem for the bog of despair, the cave of error, the jungle of tangled emotions in which his mission had been conceived."\(^\text{16}\)
Like wise, Nat's only murder, of that Margaret Whitehead, poses some ethical problems. Nat killed her and then made an ordained circuit of her body as if it was a ceaseless pilgrimage. How can this action of Nat be explained going by the tradition and codes of the Christian religious rituals. Christianity and Islam don't have the 'ordained circuit' as a form of religious ritual, performed at the religious places by going round the deity for seven times or going round the pyre before putting fire to it. It is absolutely and exclusively a Hindu religious ritual known as Pradakshina of dieties or shrines or of a dead body before consuming it to the flames.

But more surprising are the words of Hark. When he was being taken to his gallows, he passed by Nat's cell and told Nat:

Hark was bound in seated shape, like the silhouette of some marvelous black potenate borne in stately procession towards the throne, passes slowly by my door, "Dis yere some way to go" I hear Hark say, "Goodbye Ole Nat" He calls, "Hit gwine be all right... Dis yere ain't nothin' Nat, nothin' at all... Goodbye Ole Nat.... Good
Harks's words, "Dis yere ain't nothin'" poses many difficulties. If Nat had accepted Thomas Grey's anti-christian teachings, it could stand to reason his saying like this. But Hark's saying it makes it difficult for logic to fix it into a proper frame, particularly because Christian religion believes and preaches that sin, atone-ments, purifications, and judgement will all be here on this earth itself and in this world itself. It doesn't have any thing like the Hindu concept of seven worlds of spiritual dimensions which are of different grades and are the only valuable attainments, beginning with the astral body, for the seeker of the spiritual upliftment. The point needs a great deal of pondering over.

However, those words make Hark die a better man than Nat. His last words denote that he is more deeply steeped in the philosophy of life ringing Hindu resignation towards this world, its achievements and failures. He goes to meet his death gladly or at least with better equanimity than Nat. Nat
on the other hand, before he is taken to the gallows is seen to be full of carnality:

As I think of her (Margaret Whitehead) the desire swells with in me and I am stirred up by a longing so great that...it seems more than my heart can abide. "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God." Her voice is close, familiar, real and for an instant I mistake the wind against my ear for her breath and I turn to seek her in the darkness. And now beyond all fear, dread, and emptiness I feel the warmth flow into my loins and my legs tingle with desire. I tremble and search for her face in my mind, seek her young body, yearning for her suddenly with a rage that rocks me with a craving beyond pain; with tender stroking motions, I pour out my love with in her; pulsing flood; she arches against me, cries out, and the twain, black and white are one...I slowly faint. 18

Much has been made of this passage by Styron critics in trying to explain it in the forms of religious and spiritual union of the black and the white and thereby establishing
the fact that it aims at presenting a solution to the racial problem. But since William Styron offers no solutions in any of his novels, it is difficult to believe he has done so in this novel. It is clear from the description that Nat was so obsessed with sex that even before a few minutes of his being taken to the gallows, he imaginatively made love to Margaret Whitehead, masturbated and ejaculated so profusely that he fainted.

In the last novel of William Styron, SOPHIE'S CHOICE there are some very curious suggestions and images and implications which require a very close and careful analysis, and interpretation. For example as one reads the novel, one becomes increasingly aware of implications of sounds in this novel along with the frequency of musical metaphors. Stingo describes Mc.Grawhills senior editor as "a fellow victim to the ambitionless dronelike quietitude into which as if some mammoth beehive, the company continually numbed its employees."

Like wise, Stingo compared the serene setting of the parade ground with the hustle
bustle of the crowd on the Flatbush avenue. He calls Nathan's voice as "pedantic, pompous and insufferable"\(^{20}\) and Sophie describes Hoss's pauses" as audible as thudding tread of thought."\(^{21}\) In this regard Frederick N. Smith has said:

To Sophie, Nathan and Stingo himself music was more than simple meat and drink; it was an essential opiate and something resembling a divine breath. Indeed the three principles of the story are pulled fatefuly together as a result of their intense love for music, which cuts across their wide ethnic differences. Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Purcell Heydn, Handel, Scarlatti, Chopin, Mahler and Brahms are all mentioned in SOPHIE'S CHOICE, sometimes by allusion to specific compositions. Classical music assumes special importance in the novel. When Nathan and Sophie quarrel, Nathan wants his records back...for he knows that music touches her more than anything else.... It is like wise opposed to the sheer noise of Auschwitz and Brooklyn. Sophie's thread bare life in Auschwitz is punctuated not only by relentless polka, but also by the clack of her own typewriter, the thudding of boots, the jangle of
telephones, the shrieking of the camp whistle and the rumble of boxcars. These noises pursue Sophie even after the war...

Whereas the classical music in the novel is representative of hope and positive memories, the city siren, reminiscent of the camp whistle, suggests the discord of so called civilization, chaos rather than order, and the aggressive isolation of man from man...\(^{22}\)

Apart from sounds, there are the costumes of the protagonist and her friend Nathan that are equally significant. They contribute to the personality of the characters. Of course the dresses of some other characters too apart from Sophie and Nathan are worth marking. Sophie's father wore antiquated costumes. Once Nathan told Stingo,

"Today we are wearing early thirties. Just a little fad of ours. We have got clothes from twenties, World War First, period, gay nineties and even earlier than that\(^{23}\)

These period costumes that they have and that they wear sometimes, suggest that they want to
escape from the drab and dreary present.

Costumes serve Nathan well for they allow him to have many identities by just purchasing new dresses. Indeed his madness is linked with clothing because his madness invariably is accompanied by cloth purchasing sprees. At one point he purchases a trousseau for Sophie which was fit for any Hollywood princess. Clothing is more than a hobby for them. It is a manifestation of Nathan's pathology and Sophie's need for escaping from her past. This is what Gwen L. Nagel also thinks:

Sophie is really reborn in America, and with Nathan she dresses in the costumes of their shared fantasies. Costumes are another central image that contribute to the identity theme... The period costumes Sophie and Nathan wear suggest their shared desire to escape the present... Sophie is an easy prey to Nathan's fantasies and masquerades because they provide her with an identity she lacks, illusory though it is. When she and Nathan put on their costumes they are in effect donning new identities. Both of them ill in different ways—she devoid of a sense of herself, he has
many identities—create new fantasy selves through their clothing.24

Even Stingo, towards the end of the novel, travelling towards the South with Sophie, disguises himself as a priest named Reverened Wilber Entwistle, a disguise that allows him to check into a decent hotel, with Sophie as his wife. He looses himself in this role because that is only way he could pass for, as Sophie’s husband. Thus it can be seen that the sounds voices, music and costumes are very important as without their comparison, contrast and underlying hints many things would remain unnoticed and unsaid, specially those things that can be communicated through suggestions and implications only.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


6. ......................ibid. .............P-119.


P-15-16.

11. .................ibid..................P-30.
12. A Sooth saying: TRANSLATED FROM HINDI SAINT POET KABIR.

18. ..................ibid..................P-261.
20. ..................ibid..................P-222.