 CHAPTER 2.

WITHIN THE SOUTH
William Styron's three novels, beginning with *Lie Down in Darkness*, followed by *The Long March* and *The Confessions of Nat Turner* remain firmly rooted in the soil of the south. These novels begin and end with the south. Their characters, themes, sequences of events speciality of language and thought, all grow from out of the soil of the south.

Since *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, of all the novels of Styron, provides us with the earliest view of the South (the beginning of the nineteenth century) it would be worth while to get a glimpse of it as it is in this novel. The entire area had very severely suffered from draught around the third decade of the nineteenth century. One of the well-wishers of the region expresses his grief in the following words:

My poor Virginia, a blighted domain, the soil wrecked and ravaged on every hand, turned to useless dust by that abominable weed. Tobacco we can not any longer raise, nor cotton even, save for a meagre in these few Southern counties, nor oats, nor barley nor wheat. A waste land, a plump Virginia principality, a cornocopia 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 to satisfy the demand of ten million Englishmen for a pipe of Virginia leaf...Now even that is gone. And all that we can raise now, is horses and picaninies...Damn the day when the poor black men in chain, first trod upon thy sacred strands.1

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the South which is the scene of action of THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER, there were planters, wheat-growers, cotton-growers, overseers, big county houses of white men with large number of negro slaves, working as farm hands, house-niggers, work-shop and mill-slaves.

There were fat whitemen, a very common sight, travelling up and down the South in their enormously big vagons, packed with farm equipments, drawn by sturdy team of horses, peddling their wares and gossiping about the previous clients. The whitemen sent their children to Schools and Negro children passed their childhood in:

Playing crude games, climbed trees, hunted caves in the old ravines,
swung on grape vines at the edge of the woods and tried to see who could piss the farthest; built fort of mud, smeared their naked bodies with the liquid clay, howled in mad delight at their resemblance to the white boys…

This South had another very common spectacle, that of slave-traders and slave-auctioneering. Caravans of big number of Negro men, women and children could be seen being sent from one place to another. The speciality of the region was the great annual camp at Jerusalem where all the planters, and farmers gathered to attend the Baptist ceremony. About this Society George Core says:

The society revealed in the CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER is a fuedal society without a fuedal religion, hence only a semi-fuedal society. The old South was incapable of creating an appropriate religion for its way of life. The economy politics, and culture of the religion… the God of the Old South was created by the new merchants of the sixteenth century.

The mythology of the old South was therefore incomplete. The fabric of its life was totally marred by the divergence between the secular
and the religious impulses...
The enveloing action of THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER deals in a large part with this failure of protestantism due to the curse of the slavery. This to my mind is the most important social dimension of the novel.

Thus slavery and failure of protestantism become the main cause, necessiating social, economic, and political changes, which take place in Nat’s world. The collapse of the society was caused by the arrogant commercialism and its inhumanity. And Nat Turner, like any other slave, was affected most heinously.

Since in this novel, Nat Turner, a chattel slave, is the narrator, the novel is autobiographical in its tone and manner. He tells his story beginning with his childhood, or rather from a little earlier than his childhood. He tells us how his mother was publically born, which signifies that Negroes were treated like animals. His mother’s mother died leaving no option for Alpheus Turner but taking her (Nat’s mother) inside the house to be reared up by negro aunts and grannies. Thus she became a house slave. And
Nat being the son of a house slave, became a household servant, when his mother's untimely death took place. Thus Nat became the slave of Samuel Turner, the son of Alpheus Turner.

Samuel Turner taught him to read and write. He was the first and the only Negro to have the holy book, Bible. Here his infatuation for Emmeline began with something of a divine sanctity but slowly it degenerated into a carnal lust. Samuel Turner got him trained as a carpenter and would have freed him from bondage but the draught affected the entire area and he had to sell away all his slaves and property. He did not sell Nat but entrusted him to Reverend Epps, who sold him to a slave trader. And from this trader, Thomas Moore purchased him. It was from this Thomas Moore that Nat for the first time tasted the bite of a whip.

Thomas Moore's treatment was unpardonably cruel and every day it increased Nat's hatred of him. Thomas Moore died and his widow married Mr. Travis. Thus Nat became the property of Mr. Travis, this family hired Nat to Whitehead family. Here Nat began to adore Margarete Whitehead. And here he met Hark
and Will and Nelson and many other negroes, all of whom were full of hatred for their white masters and oppressors.

Being able to read, write and sermonise from Bible, Nat gained their respect and became their leader. His hatred of the whites increased more and more as tales of the whitemen's cruelties came to him and finally he decided to wipe out all the whitemen from the area. The uprise began with wiping out Travis family and marched on. The news of the Negro uprise reached Major Riddley's and a big preparation was made to counter attack the Negro force. Nat's plan to capture Jerusalem Armoury, was foiled. Most of the Nat's men were either killed or had to run away. Nat himself was arrested and sent to jail. Here he made his confessions to his court appointed lawyer, Thomas Gray and was sent to the gallows.

William Styron has provided Nat with two kind of English language, as prevalent in the South—the whitemen's, in which he makes his confession, giving the account of his life, and the other is the nigger English in which he communicated with his brethren. In this
respect George Core says:

Nat has two voices— the one is a received standard nineteenth century rhetoric which has much in common with the similar language of Faulkner, Wolfe, and Warren approximating the written words, in keeping with the language of the educated Southerner; and the other is the plantation Negro dialect of the same period, enduring but less literary, may still be often heard even today, which Nat needs to antagonise his masters and to communicate with his brother Negroes.4

William Styron was a native of Virginia Tide Water county, where in 1831 Nat Turner’s short lived insurrection had taken place. By choosing this historical subject as the theme of his novel, Styron got every opportunity to present the most vivid picture of the then South. All the characters, and happenings are firmly rooted into the soil of the south.

From the nineteenth century to the second quarter of the twentieth century south, is a big jump. And the jump has to be taken into account, to enter the world of LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS. Here in, we find a great deal of change in the topography of places and also in
men. We also notice equally great change in their mentality, behaviour, manners and also positions. The society is no more feudal. Negroes are no more traded. Most of them have become tenants or landowners.

Portwarwick, the port city of Virginia, which is the centre of all action in LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS, has undergone enormous change. There is industrialisation in the city and a general expansion in its market place, the port, and rail roads. Horse - drawn carriages have been replaced by cars, trucks, buses, and trains. The feudal families have disappeared giving place to the middle class gentry. Robert K. Morris has very subtly commented in this regard:

Styron's white middle class protestant South is almost exclusively a choked world of collective county clubs, churches, fraternity and cocktail parties, socials and smokers...where being alone even for a moment becomes synonymous with loneliness, immediately summoning some crutch like drink or sex or God as support against anxiety and fear. 5

It is this middle class protestant South
that is so powerfully and imaginatively portrayed in LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS. The major characters in this novel are Milton Loftis, Helen, and Peyton Loftis, of a typical middle class southern family, with their middle class moralities and protestant moral inhibitions, fears and loneliness. This makes Milton take refuse in booze and women, Peyton in drinks and adultery and Helen in religion. Robert H. Fossum's diagnosis seems to be perfectly true:

Loftis family, terrified by the thought of a future even more painful than the present, retreat into infantilism and into memories of that great good place of childhood innocence, harmony and irresponsible self indulgence from whence time has banished them... The journey from the railroad station to the cemetery is marked by repeated breakdown of cars, signifying breakdown of America's technological orientation, emotional and spiritual disruption of a world in which propriety has replaced morality, lust has replaced love, and the carefully tended houses and lawns of the middle class, disguise their spiritual disorder.6

Peyton's tragedy is the result of an
unhappy home, a conflict that is beyond solution, causing an emotional chaos in the house. Since she was born and brought up by the parents who didn't have love, trust, and a happy home to provide, Peyton grows up into a neurotic, irresponsible, sexually promiscuous yet guilt-ridden young woman who ultimately commits suicide.

In this as well as in other subsequent novels, the entire region is shown to have made a great deal of unwelcome progress — unwelcome to the older generation of people and some sensitive ones of the younger generation as well. Portwarwick has now become streamlined, over run by tract homes, commercial sprawls, and culturally levelled by T. V.

Obviously LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS is firmly rooted into the soil of the South as it contains the living and vivid picture of the South of the mid forties. Maudie's magician with his crude tricks, dancing balls and bulging his cheeks like a rabbit; the grotesque figure of Daddy Faith in whom the Negroes have firm belief, Carey Carr and his church, the policemen in the search of a Negro
culprit, the grave diggers of the prison, opening up twenty years old graves to accomodate the new dead bodies, the fisherman whom Peyton meets when he was trying to catch coins out of a subway grate with a string attached to a pole, are all other typical qualities belonging to the same southern locale.

Inspite of certain basic differences between the worlds of THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER and LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS some elemental similarities remain lingering regarding the language, sex and the God. The nigger English of Nat, Hark, Nelson, Will and Lou Ann comes down to Ella Swan and Ruth in LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS exactly as it is in THE CONFESSION OF NAT TURNER. A sample of Nat's speech:

Many of yo' has been to the church with yo' mastah and mist'ess. But most of yo' hasn't got no religion. Whiteman's religion doesn't teach nothin' to the black folk...

It has a deep affinity with La Ruth's words:

Oh! Miss Helen Mama she tol' me dat what you need is cap'n Milton back fo' to keep yo' on dis lovin' earth...
And as regards attitude towards sex, in THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER Nat had seen his mother and Mc Bride copulating and in LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS Helen catches Milton, her husband, with Ella Swan, not exactly copulating but persuading her for it.

Likewise in the field of religion there is Thomas Gray in the THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER, who denies God and his presence totally as he tells Nat:

Christianity: rapine, plunder, butchery death and destruction, and misery and suffering for untold generations. That was the accomplishment of your Christianity... Nineteen hundred years of Christian teaching pluse a black preacher is all it takes to prove that God is a God durned lie...

This same rejection of God can be seen in Milton's rejection of God in LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS, as he refuses to go to church with his wife and daughters. And worse than that is Helen's rejection as she tells Carey:

You have been my enemy too. You and your church! Honestly Carey! how could you be such a hypocrite...? Your God is silly old ass. And my God ... My God is a devil...
Thus we see that every character and happening in \textit{LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS} is typically Southern. Loftis family is a typical middle class family of the mid fifties. All the character remain strictly within the geographical boundary of the South. Only Peyton moves out, up to Newyork but her dead body is ultimately brought back to Portwarwick for final burial.

In \textit{THE LONG MARCH} it is a Carolina summer of 1950, in the scathing heat of which, the central action of the novel—the thirty six miles' long march takes place. It is the suburban area of Carolina military barracks. From his room in the bachelor's quarters, Culver day-dreams about his good old days in the portwarwick city:

He would find himself gazing up from his work in a day dream...of winter afternoons when bundled to the ears, baby carriage jiggling bravely in the van, their Sunday strolls, sooty white teller of recent snow ...the old world calm, people like themselves passed in the streets. And Monday's challenges...the sordid little town out side the camp possessed the horror of recognition, for Culver had
been there before... 11

In front of Bachelor's quarters, there was a vast open space, a kind of play ground. Usually at four, Mannix the captain and lieutenant Culver could be found on this reviera resort under one of the beach umbrellas, sullen, disgruntled and full of hatred for the place as it got on their nerves due to:

It's facticious luxury, wanton atmosphere and turpid ease and dances, the vacant professional talk of regular officers and the constant teasing presence of their wives who were beautiful and spoke in tender drawls and boldly flaunted at the wifeless reserves— in a propriety, their lecherous sort of chastity. 12

Though the world depicted in THE LONG MARCH is different from the civilian world, and is equal to the life in a military barrack any where in the world, the geographical area in which the central action of thirty six miles' hike is completed, reamins within the south.

The World War Second had ended, pulling America not only out of depression but also
leaving it as a one of the richest countries in the world. Most military men had kept their cards, kept their positions reserved and gone back home. They had begun living civilian lives with civilian ease and comfort. But after seven years the Korean War had erupted and the reserves were called back to active duty. They were summoned to this military barrack at Carolina to attend the training camp for making them physically fit and efficient for the war.

Since the civilian life had made them soft-hearted, they were disturbed at the sight of fifteen young marines lying dead or dying in their own pools of blood. They were hit by a mortar shell. It did not make any impact on Templeton but all the reserves were greatly upset. The entire training maneuver of imaginary enemy, symbolical guns and endless chase, all seems to reserves to be a waste of energy and time. Though it may seem to be something of very general nature which could be seen in military barracks anywhere, the landscape of all the activities in this novel remains confined to the south.

Thus the three novels that have remained
absolutely confined to the south, depict three different aspects of the south. THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TUNER presents the mid nineteenth century South with its feudal world of slave-trade, and the historical Negro-uprise. LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS presents the South of 1950's with its middle class gentry, failure of protestantism, post-war wealth and its impact getting expressed in alcoholism, adultery, death-wish and the degeneration that had set in the values of life leading to loss of self identity and faith in the god and his handy work.

THE LONG MARCH on the other hand depicts altogether a different world of that of military training. The location of the military barrack, the beach side, the swamp, the river bank by which there goes the parallel road on which the thirty six miles long march is made and the recollections of the reserves, all remain firmly rooted in the Southern soil.

Even the other two novels, SET THIS HOUSE ON FIRE and SOPHIE'S CHOICE in which the central actions take place outside the South, and the main characters either venture out
abroad or are from some other country, a link with the South remains intact.

In *SET THIS HOUSE ON FIRE* when Peter Leverette returns back from Italy he comes to Portwarwick to meet his father and finds that his home town has changed alot. The changes upset him. He finds the city "hectic, hustling throbbing, prosperity filled, nomads, rootless, and uprooted and uprooting." 13 And his father expresses his disgust about the material progress and moral degeneration of the people;

The wisdom of all ages, all precious teaching of his ancestors were lost upon him. He spat on his brother Negro and wore out his eyes looking at T. V. and fornicking with his best friend's wife at the county club. He has all these wonder drugs to prolong his life and what has 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. 14

The protagonist of this novel, Cass Kinsolving was born in a small coastal town of north Carolina, the son of Episcopal
minister, left orphan at the age of ten, and was brought up by Methodist uncle and aunt. It is interesting to note that after he returns from Italy, he doesn’t settle down in the North Carolina but into Charleston—a South Carolina, sea port city. In fact what Portwarwick is to Peter, South Carolina is to Cass. Thus inspite of the setting of the main action on a foreign soil, the narrator as well as the protagonist keep their Southern connections alive through their recollections and final return back to the South.

Also in SOPHIE’S CHOICE though the protagonist is from Poland, but she is living in Brooklyn, the narrator Stingo is from the South. The South comes alive in Nathan’s outbursts accusing the South for its cruelties on Negroes, and making Stingo feel ashamed of his Southern heritage. Bobby Weed was a Negro. He was falsely accused to have tried to rape a white young girl. As a punishment his penis and testicles were chopped off. Later on it was discovered that the entire accusation was false. Nathan expresses his anger against the white Southerners referring to this cruelty and say:
Nathan Ladau, common citizen, research biologist, human being, witness to man's inhumanity to man, say that the fate of Bobby Weed at the hands of a white Southerner is as bottomlessly barbaric as any act performed by the Nazis during the rule of Adolf Hitler... Each white Southerner is accountable for the tragedy of Bobby Weed... 15

Stingo feels doubly ashamed, firstly for his Southern heritage and secondly for his present source of sustenance which was the sum of money that he had received as his share from Artist's (a Negro) sale. In the novel there is yet another occasion when South comes out alive, and that is when Nathan, Stingo and Sophie together plan their trip to the south:

We could start in Washington and head on down, visit all Northern Virginia battlefield... Richmond, Petersburg, North Carolina (where my dear old daddy grew up) then Charleston, Savannah, Atlanta, through the heart of Dixieland... and we get down to Southampton, we can ride all over Nat Turner county. 16

The discontented Southern Daddy of Stingo
comes to Brooklyn to know about his son's well-being and to persuade him to come over to Southampton and overseer the farm that his friend Frank Bob had left to his care and custody before he had died. "I am in need of an overseer for the farm." Stingo's father had written to him but stingo had declined to accept the offer. So he had himself come to Brooklyn to meet his son. About this Stingo says:

There was something infrangibly Southern, so old fashioned, about such a gesture, that it was almost paleological... but it warmed my heart deeply.  

During his stay in Brooklyn, Stingo's father once snubbed a taxie-driver for his use of foul language and expressed his utter dislike for the metropolis. And just then he remembered Gilmore Bilbo's death. The fellow was the wrost Negro-hater. He told his son:

I was awfully glad to see the old devil go...Of all those who had tarnished the image of the modern South, he was a leading mischief maker. He died of cancer of the mouth. Kind of served him right.  

And ofcourse there is the happy picture
of the peanut farm that Stingo describes to Sophie, planning to settle down there with her. And when she said that she would prefer to live with him, without marrying him, Stingo reminded her that it would not do because in Southampton "good hearted, decent, generous Southerner folks are Christians and it won't do." \(^{20}\) Sophie was surprised at that and said, "And I thought Poland was puritanical, but imagine..." \(^{21}\)

Thus even in these two novels, though the main characters and chief actions have shifted to foreign strands, a definite and decisive relation with the South remains intact.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

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21 ..................ibid ................P-562.