EPILLOGUE

The preceding analysis suggests that while William Styron is by any standards "Southern," he has nonetheless turned away from the traditional concerns of the South to address himself to the tasks of this age. Styron has used Southern trappings, but his own private vision has moulded them into taking startlingly new and unexpected directions. Combining profound humanism with brilliant artistic talent, Styron, in his works, projects a vision that reflects modern man's quest for a spiritual anchorage. His peculiar concerns with man and his tragic destiny have exploded into the American consciousness, and have brought him into the very heart of American literature—a literature that remains true to the tradition of humanism.

Styron's distinctive approach to life and art becomes more apparent when his work is compared to contemporary Southern writers—Robert Penn Warren, Truman Capote, and Flannery O'Connor. All these writers have used the habitues of Southern fiction—the Negro, inherited blood guilt, Fundamentalist religion and the like—and have shown a world of violent contrasts, filled with men doing violence to each other and to the land. Speaking of the Southern heritage
and why the South provides such "wonderful material,"

Styron has said:

well, first, there's that old heritage of biblical rhetoric and story-telling. Then the South simply provides such wonderful material. Take, for instance, the conflict between the ordered Protestant tradition, the fundamentalism based on the Old Testament, and the twentieth century—movies, cars, television. The poetic juxtapositions you find in this conflict—a crazy coloured preacher howling those tremendously moving verses from Isaiah 40, while riding around in a maroon Packard. It's wonderful stuff.

Yet the way in which Styron has used this heritage makes him different from all his Southern contemporaries with the exception of William Faulkner. Both Styron and Faulkner, it must be pointed out, are writers endowed to a high degree with a vision that is essentially tragic. W.H. Frohock has pointed out that if we read Faulkner "as though he were a tragic poet, many difficulties disappear." Like Faulkner, Styron evolves his own myth to communicate the tragic predicament of man in modern times. The world of his fiction, like the world of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha is a microcosm of the modern world—sometimes a nightmare filled with violence,


lacking an ethical centre, and hurtling toward final disaster. But in such a world, the characters confront their tragic destinies with courage, and are ultimately able to "prevail." Though much that is worthy in man is destroyed, there is in the end an affirmation which transcends inevitable destruction and disaster. "The salvation of the world is in man's suffering," says Daven Stevens in Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun.* Styron has similarly used the concept of suffering in his thematically unified body of fiction. Each novel, it has been seen, broadens and extends the connotation of "the meaning of suffering." The image of man in Styron's tragic novels has different phases. His fiction readily lends itself to a progressive development of man from a state of innocence to a level of consciousness where he achieves a peace that endures, even in the face of evil or adversity.

In many ways, *His Down in Darkness* is Styron's vision of man after his fall from grace—a fictional version of Paradise Lost. The novel ends on a note of fear and a sense of waste. In this the end of man, we are moved to ask. The Negroes alone preserve their souls through faith and love. In the grim world of *His Down in Darkness,* man suffers, intensely and despairingly, and the characters are arrested

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and destroyed even in the process of moral development. The novel projects some of the fundamental questions that great tragedy invariably asks—questions that force us to redefine ourselves. In this world of tragic waste only those who have faith and love can hope to survive. Styron's pervasive sense of tragedy finds expression in a kind of moral wasteland, where man moves from despair to despair, from suffering to suffering, without any hope of redemption or a possibility of deliverance. Against the background of the holocaust at Hiroshima, Styron creates a world which can redeem itself only through the kind of faith we perceive in the revival meeting of Daddy Faith. This theme continues to engage Styron's attention in his successive novels.

In *The Long March*, the theme of rebellion against an oppressive "system" is given a new dimension. Styron is aware of the futility and, to some extent, the absurdity of human struggle against forces too powerful to be destroyed or to be reconciled with. While recognizing the absurdity of a struggle against the social order, Styron resolves the dilemma by positing the injunction—"Know Thyself." Mannix's self-awareness, his *anagnorisis* as it were, consists in the recognition of the absurdity and futility of his rebellion; and the answer to this all-pervading sense of nullity lies in the knowledge of his individual self—in the torment of insight.
In *The House on Fire*, Styron once again deals with man's predicament in a world without assists of any kind. Through immeasurable self-laceration and the despair born of "sickness," Cass finally "draws near in faith." Through suffering he finds the solace of faith, a rock where anything might prevail, where death itself is no longer death, "but a resurrection."

In *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, the theme of affirmation finds a positive resolution. In this novel, more poignantly than ever before, man "prevails," and attains peace in the acceptance of love. Styron's tragic voice finally declines to accept the "end of man." If tragedy is a measure of man's dignity and fortitude, then Styron's protagonists are richly endowed to face their tragic destinies.

In Styron's fiction, man moves progressively from the dooms of despair, through the pangs of suffering, achieving finally, a kind of transcendence that rises above everything else. Styron projects man's eternal will to live and to suffer, to strive and to create. While admitting the presence of doubt and despair, Styron's philosophy leads to the vision of an age to come, where the individual rebel shall again emerge triumphant. Speaking of the hero today,
Joseph Campbell has observed that "the hero-deed to be wrought is not today what it was in the century of Galileo, where then there was darkness, now there is light; but also, where light was, there is darkness. The modern hero-deed must be that of questing to bring to light again the lost Atlantis of the co-ordinated soul." In this chaotic, frenzied world given over to destruction, and indifferent to man's hostile lot, Styron's heroes seek salvation through spiritual integration with other human beings. Amid the crippling absence of the loss of values, and in the midst of "the never-endingness" of war, man in Styron's fiction may yet affirm like Albert Camus' rebel protagonist:

At the end of the tunnel of darkness, there is inevitably a light for which we have to fight. All of us, among the ruins, are preparing a renaissance beyond the limits of nihilism.  

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