CHAPTER 4.

THE IMPACT OF THE PAST ON THE PRESENT
In William Faulkner's novels we find a present rising out of an ambiguous past. But in the novels of William Styron we find the past as the very part of the complicated present. In most of the novels of Styron, we have very little that happens in the present. And the past is the simply enormous in his novels. Some critics have made a passing reference to this aspect of William Styron's novels, but none of them has systematically analysed and explained this major aspect of his novels. This chapter endeavours to trace the pasts of the main characters in each of his novels and try to show how and to what extent they dominate their present thought, action and behaviour.

The first novel LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS by William Styron is one of the representative novels of 1950's in the tradition of the post war novels of anxiety and manners to which the American Jewish writers contributed so substantially. In this novel there is very little that happens in the present. Milton Loftis gets a letter telling him to pick up the dead body of his daughter Peyton, from the railway station. His wife Helen goes to the
railway station in the company of Carey Carr, the Priest. And Milton Loftis goes there with Dolly Bonner. The journey of the hearse from the railway station to the burial ground is the present:

Between the railroad station and the smoky industrial city of Portwarwick, lies a dissolute stretch of weeds and garbage heaps with rusty gas storage tanks towering above the wasteland. In the station Milton Loftis heavily drunk, self-indulgent and spiritually bankrupt anti-hero waits for a train bearing the coffin of his daughter Peyton who has committed suicide in Newyork...The journey from the railway station to the cemetery constitutes the time present of the novel. But as we move forward in space and time, listening with mourners to a murmur of thunder both ominous and promising, we move simultaneously into minds of Styron’s central characters—Milton, his mistress Dolly Bonner, Helen, the revered Carey Carr, and finally Peyton herself — taken into the past, preceding this terrible present. 1

The journey of the hearse from the railway station to the burial ground has in
the background the shouts, cries, songs and dances and music of the Negro celebration of Daddy Faith. Peyton is buried and Milton makes one last attempt of reconciliation with Helen. She rejects him and he disappears into oblivion. This much is the present of the novel.

And if we ask this simple present an equally simple question, "How did Peyton die?" we shall get the answer that she committed suicide. And the quarry that naturally follows is "why did she commit suicide?" And thereby hangs a tale. In order to answer this question and many others that shall logically follow, it is desirable to know the past of the protagonist and also the past of her kith and kin - her parents in particular, that has brought this sordid end. Hence it is essential to have a glimpse of their past lives without which the reality of the present could not be understood or be explained logically.

From the novel we learn that at the time of Peyton's burial, her father, Milton Loftis is just a little above fifty. As a youngman he had attended the University and had graduated in the law. At the university he had been
known to be a great talker and a 'big blow'.
His father was a lawyer and had died in 1920.
Once he had advised Milton "Remember son, your
first duty is always to yourself first...Keep
your chin up and kilts down and let the wind
blow." and Milton never forgot this solemn
advice of his father.

After the graduation he joined the army
and in the great war served as a lieutenant
and was promoted to the position of a captain.
It was during this time that he met Helen, the
daughter of a Colonel. Milton wrote about this
affair to his father and the old man came down
to attend the wedding and bless his son and
daughter-in-law.

After leaving the army, he started his
career as a lawyer. He had some political
ambition as well. But meanwhile his mother –
in-law died, leaving twenty thousand dollars
in the name of his daughter, Helen. And the
young couple got built a spacious and
comfortable house with a garden around it.

However this sudden flow in, of money,
turned out to be the first step towards the
slow degradation and degeneration leading to
the final downfall and disintegration of the
Loftis family. The twenty thousand dollars inherited by Helen and spent on making the life comfortable, took away Milton's initiative in life. Knowing that now he could live the rest of his life practically doing nothing, turned him into an idler.

Slowly he began losing interest in his job and started passing his time in playing golf and social drinking. The Loftis couple was blessed with two daughters —Peyton and Maudie. Peyton, the eldest one, grew into a great beauty but Maudie remained a mentally retarded girl. One fine morning in Virginia when Peyton was just nine years old she came running to her father in the garden and told him "Daddy, Daddy I am beautiful", And Milton held her to his chest and said, "Yes my baby is beautiful". Though these words seem very innocent but the small talk shows that Peyton was not only beautiful but had become conscious of her beauty pretty early. and later on it is seen how dangerous her beauty turns out to be—so dangerous indeed that it provokes her own father to entertain sinful thoughts about her and invites suspicion, jealousy and resentment and hatred of her own
mother, regarding her relation with her father.

The real trouble in the Loftis family began when Milton was introduced to Dolly Bonner. This can be called the second most important step leading to Peyton's suicide. Milton disliked Dolly's husband (whom he had nicknamed 'Pookie') because he had not been to a college. But the real cause of his dislike was the fact that he happened to be the husband of the "First women who after those many years of his married life, made him feel warm with desire."4

Dolly Bonner provided Milton with idolatory, tenderness, happiness and the joys of the flesh, all of which Helen had begun to deny him. The novelist describes the typical relation thus:

She was submissive and worshipped him and it was for these reasons that he loved her... It had been that way from the beginning... While through the curious interplay of self-esteem and self-effacement, there ran an undercurrent of emotions which they both were obliged to call love...5
Milton was found reaching a new low when one Sunday he was caught red-handed by Helen as he was persuading and cajoling Ela Swan (the Negro maid servant) to let him have her. Helen found him in the kitchen with a bottle of whiskey in his hand looking lecherously at Ela, and at once understood every thing. But she said nothing. About this particular trait in Milton's character, Robert K Morris has said:

In Milton one senses something other than a merely fallen, aging, middle class male... who seeks but never finds refuge and salvation in adultery and alcohol... Beyond the stereotype looms the archetype: that of a failed quester who had hoped to transform a common mistress into a divine Beatrice and drink into the ambrosia that preserves to the last dregs of mortality, shields him against age, despair, loss, inadequacy, pain, failure, impotence... instead he finds himself peering into horror and nothingness... 6

Milton seems to be troubled by the fact that he is growing old while the world around is still young, rather there is an unending line of youth behind him. He found it
difficult to adjust and compromise with this cruel reality of time and accept the fact of his old age gracefully and take solace and happiness in the company of his equally old wife.

But since he is unable to bring himself to accepting this truth, he goes on behaving like a libertine. It was Peyton’s sixteenth birthday party which the three of them had planned with one accord. But in the party when Helen saw Milton dancing with Dolly Bonner, she was greatly upset. And then she saw Milton offering Peyton a drink. Along with these two, there was dance, loud music, shout and cries which as they always did, began making Helen feel dizzy, jealous, and bitter. She excused herself on the ground of being tired, left the party, and went to her bedroom. The venom had begun to work on her mind. She called Peyton, tested her drink, found it strong whiskey, and poured it into the toilet. She got it confirmed that Milton had given it to her. She told Peyton:

"I have seen your father ruin himself with liquor. I won’t have it. Get your things. I am going to take you home."
Peyton remained puzzled for a second and then turned and faced her mother, "I despise you." and left. She was young. She was beautiful. And these things caused Helen the bitterest of anguish...  

This certainly is not a healthy sign. Any normal mother with a normal and healthy attitude towards life, is expected to rejoice at the fact that her daughter is young and beautiful. But Helen is anguishéd because her daughter's beauty and youth is (she suspected and not altogether baselessly) ensnaring her own husband.  

At the end of the party all the parents had gone away, leaving Milton and Dolly together. In the dark golf museum they made love and departed. Back home Milton and Helen had it out about Peyton’s whiskey. Her entire failure as a mother, a wife, flowed out in her words as she put Milton’s hands on her bare breasts and said:  

There are a lot of things that no matter how long I lived with you, I could never forgive you for. I love my God and you don’t. That is one thing. You betrayed us when you stopped going to church. You betrayed not only me but the whole
family. You betrayed Maudie, and you betrayed Peyton who loves you so... Don't you think I know about you and Dolly? Don't you think I have been able to smell the dirt you have been up to with her? Do you think I am blind? Listen Milton, I don't care about what you do at all. You have spoiled Peyton rotten. You have forgotten Maudie. You have destroyed love. You have destroyed every thing...

Milton very much wanted to embrace her, say a few soothing things and make it up with her but the memory of kissing, embracing and having Dolly, just a short while ago prevented him from taking that step of reconciliation. Thus Milton and Dolly continued their affair for more than six years when Helen decided to put an end to it by having a face to face talk with Dolly Bonner. She invited her to a Bide-A-Wee tea room and had it out with her:

Helen told Dolly, "I think you know why I wanted to see you... I think really I have had just about enough. Don't you? You see, I have a family, which is very important to me, a very important thing... Also... Frankly I am tired of these hints and rumours reaching me about the way Milton has been
carrying on. Now I know Milton isn’t beyond reproach. He has got many faults, like I suspect all husbands do...But I want to make it plain right now that I am not going to let you carry on like this any more...For six years I have known about you and Milton...watching you make a fool of him...breaking up my family...I won’t have it...

"Just wait a while," She whispered,"I will put things right out in open which you would never do...Listen, if I have done wrong with Milton, wrong as you put it, it has not been any six years. It was two weeks ago honey, at the country club, at your dance...There, see, that is a confession...And we are going to keep it on as long as Milton wants to. And I don’t care how much or where honey, people talk, because I love him and that is more than you do and you know it...Just remember that what ever Milton does it’s because he has just been lonesome...remember that ...

" Said Dolly and left."

It was a very bitter session with Dolly that Helen had. She returned back home with a great sense of defeat, humiliation and bitterness. In her bitter and confused state of mind she thought of taking refuse in religion. Tortured by her mental agony she
started going to Carey Carr more frequently. Carey Carr was a very pious priest in her eyes. She thought that she would get solace, comfort and peace of mind and good advice from the representative of the religion.

But even Carey Carr could do nothing to restore peace and happiness to Helen's home. It was just because the solutions to her problems lay nowhere outside but within herself. Carey Carr knew it but he dared not to tell it to her. The novelist describes one such encounter thus:

"Oh carey! should I get down on my knees to him.? Is that what he wants? What in the name of God does he want.?" said Helen. And to this Carey wanted to say, "He wants only affection, decency, humaness, and a women's tender greetings...Be humble for a moment and perhaps your prayer will cast a light through the darkness around you." But instead he said,"I can't help you, you know. I can only listen. You have to look into your own mind and heart...."10

Carey Carr knew that Helen was proud, unyeilding and unpardoning , therefore avoided
telling her what he really wanted to tell. She was not only unpardoning towards Peyton whom she considered her rival to Milton's love but also towards Milton who now had crossed fifty but was still possessing a dissipated youngness on his face. And in contrast to that, Helen had begun looking more than her age because of her worries. Milton hated the very idea of growing old and was trying to cling to his slipping out youth like a crazy man.

Milton, having toyed with the idea of grace, dismisses it in favour of mystic beatitude induced by whiskey...fleeting the responsibilities as a father and husband, he tries to fly to something he cannot attain—the perpetual youth and immutable beauty embodied by Peyton...11

In 1941 spring Peyton came home for the holidays. And they began to live like a good family. But during the dinner party Dolly telephoned Milton. Helen saw and heard him talking with Dolly Bonner and it made her mad with rage. She left the party and retired to her bedroom. And when Milton came to her and tried to offer an explanation, she cut him
short with:

It makes no difference any more about love or any thing like that. We stay like two boarders together and hold out the formal things. All the rest doesn't matter now...12

And hearing that Milton left her. He was disgusted with Helen. He considered himself young still and had some vitality in him. He saw Helen's greying streaks of hair and face pinched with worry and thought how she had grown old. He thought bitterly about Carey Carr also as he thought that he could be one reason of Helen's untimely agedness.

The Christmas dinner turned out to be even a worse disaster. By Peyton's mistake or carelessness, a jug full of water, tumbled down from the table. The entire water fell on the rug. Helen left her chair silently and began to mop the rug like she was a Negro maid servant. It created an awkward and embarrassing situation as the whole thing was happening before the eyes of Peyton's lover Dick. Peyton felt greatly humiliated and let down. And inorder to get rid of the oppressive atomosphere of home, she left for her college without passing her full holidays
with her parents. And Helen continued to pay her visits to Carey Carr regularly.

In 1942 summer, Maudie fell ill seriously. And Helen left with Maudie for university Hospital of Charlottesvile for getting her checked up. Milton felt happy at the prospect of being free from Helen for some time and telephoned Dolly. She came over to Milton’s place. And at Dolly’s insistence they slept in Helen’s bed just to spite her. And while Dolly was still with him, he received a telegramme telling him that Maudie’s condition was critical and he must reach the hospital at once.

He did. But by the time he reached there he had drunk heavily and had become incoherent and useless. Helen was utterly disappointed to find her husband unable to grasp any thing. Maudie died in the hospital. Maudie’s death brought a temporary peace in the Loftis home. And after one year of Maudie’s death, Peyton informed her parents that she had found her prince charming in a young Jew named Harry and wished to marry him.

The news made them happy. It brought them (Helen and Milton) a little more close to
each other. With one accord they invited Peyton and her lover to Portwarwick for a good and solemn wedding. Milton was surprised at this gesture of Helen when she herself went to Williamsburge to fetch Harry and Peyton home.

But unfortunately like the christmas dinner, the wedding too left a very sour taste behind. Half an hour before the wedding, Peyton and Milton drank heavily together. And during the wedding ceremony Milton was unable to take his eyes off his daughter. His feelings and thoughts are described thus by the novelist:

Those solid curved hips trembling ever so faintly, he thought desperately, hopelessly of something he could not admit to himself but he did... "Dear God" He thought, "what am I thinking, the flesh too, the wet hot, hot flesh, straining like bloody hot savage"... 13

His terrible thoughts, feeling and emotions did not stop at that. When he saw Harry kissing Peyton on the mouth stealthily, he felt the same "Visceral drowsy hunger he had felt in the morning..."14. He felt his whole person getting divided into two, with jealousy and tenderness at one and the same
time. He had never felt like this before. And then there came a point when his feelings became unbearable and he went up to the young couple. He didn't know how to bear the agony of his love for Peyton. The novelist says:

Milton found himself beside Peyton and began kissing her in front of every body, much more than a father. "Don't smother me Daddy." she whispered and pushed him away, "You are crazy what will people think...? Daddy don't... Damn you daddy ... You are spoiling every thing". 15

Helen and Harry saw it all as it was transpiring between the daughter and the father. Helen went to Carey Carr and told him about what she thought and felt of the whole thing and Carey Carr told her, "You should have some more common humility." 16 and she flared up with him and discarded him and his god with:

You have been my enemy too. You and your Church: Honestly carey, how could you be such a hypocrite.?... Pretending to understand my problems and mocking me behind my back...Your God is a silly old ass and my God is a devil...Did you too, conspire with that
tramp, that little whore?... Is she on your side with my poor Milton in the middle? You should die of shame... Don't you see, she has used him right up to the very end... The shameless bitch, who half killed her own sister and used her father's love, rubbed herself up against him 'till he was half crazy... She drained him dry... My money too drained through him... My poor weak Milton... You should die of shame for taking sides with a shameless bitch... 17.

And when Helen tried to lecture her daughter about that disgraceful behaviour (Her pushing away her daddy rudely) She (Peyton) "gouged out deep slits with her finger nails on Helen's cheeks." 18 and ran away from her. Milton sobered a little and bid goodbye to the guests. And then in his car, he sent Harry and Peyton to the station. That done he telephoned Dolly and told her that every thing had ended between him and Helen. Analysing Helen and Milton's character Robert H. Fossum has said:

Where as Milton's moral sense has no theological foundations, Helen's is based on stern thoughts and hazy religious beliefs. Her father is not
only God's double, the being she addresses her furtive apologies for sin, but also a forbidden object of sexual longings and consequently object and cause of a terrible ambivalence... Because all desirable men are surrogate of the father, whom, she both loves and fears, sex to Helen can never be free from guilt. To confirm her own righteousness she has projected this guilt on Dolly (who ironically also testified religion with father) on to Peyton( in Helen's eyes a shameless bitch, a reflection of her own repressed sensuality and rival for father's love) and on to men who provoke her ambivalence...Her most powerful enemy seems to be simply man; her father Milton, Carey Carr and even God himself—all those figurers in the possession of phallic powers, she both fears and lusts after...19

This shows that Helen is a typical case of sexual repression and father fixation. No wonder she continuously tried to forbid Peyton from being in the company of Milton, against which she revolted and tried to be as much near him and with him as she could. In this way she too got this father fixation from her mother.
On the other hand, some fault lies with Milton too. He should not have allowed Peyton that kind of closeness which had become irksome to Helen. Had his love for Peyton remained purely fatherly, most of the complications would not have arisen. In this connection Robert H. Fossum has commented:

Milton having toyed with the idea of grace, dismisses it in the favour of beatitude induced by whiskey... fleeing the responsibilities as a father and husband he tries to fly to some thing he can not attain—the perpetual youth, an immutable beauty embodied by Peyton... At Peyton's wedding...His lust for Peyton...merges with the memories of an oedipal time and his entire being becomes soft and damp and infantile. His failures are the failures of a man's will. He has never been past redemption. His sin is neither drunkeness nor adulterary but apathy...20

Thus the family made up of a drunkard and faithless father, and a bitter jealous mother of terrible ambivalance, a mentally retarded sister Maudie, makes Peyton grow up into a neurotic woman with many tangled emotions and complexes. She grows up into a neurotic girl
with electra complex inherited from her mother and infidelity inherited from her father. So when she married Harry, conditioned by her birth and upbringing, she herself could neither live in peace nor allow her husband to live in peace and love. Harry loved her enormously but her infidelity and fickleness and crazy ways and behaviour, ultimately forced him to sever his connections with her for good. His last words tell her whole story as a wife:

"I have tried my best Peyton, but I can do no more...You are Helen with her obsession directed in a different way...Go back to your Italian friend... There is a big difference between a pat on the tail and a quick roll in the hey with the milkman". "I won't do it again. I am drowning. I need you..."

"I have given you every chance in the world and you have said the same things when you came back from Greenwich or Dorian or where ever you went with that writer slob...And so, hell with you. I refuse to be needed unless I am loved too. so hell with you."-21.

And with those words Harry deserted her for good. She went to Berger and Lennie, who
were her own and Harry's friends and they advised her to mend her ways. Lennie took pity on her and gave her Harry's address. With a resolve to make it up with him she went to Harry's apartment. But the Helen in her was roused and she began to accuse him of infidelity and faithlessness which made Harry enraged and he ordered her out of his apartment. She went back to her own apartment, tore off her clothes and jumped down through her bathroom window and died. About this incidence Robert H Fossum say:

Peyton is a catalyst of her parent's conflicts... ending in emotional chaos. Her ramblings of unconscious, agonised meditations and monologues demand Freudian and religious interpretations. She is neurotic, irresponsible and sexually promiscuous, yet guilt ridden girl who seeks in death, the peace and purification she can not find in life. As incapable of forgiveness as Helen, when Peyton realises that Milton has betrayed her with Dolly, she seeks the arms of Charlie, then Dick, then Harry and continues her promiscuity even after her marriage, with Bergers, Tonies, Sanders and even milkmen...In all her recollections her father
appears as God whose love she has simultaneously desired and repulsed. The effect on her is self hatred and double-edged guilt for desiring her own father and having denied him. To assuage the latter she lies down in the darkness with other fathers. 22

Thus it can be safely deduced that Peyton's suicide is the ultimate result of the sordid effect of the past. She is damned to loneliness because of the incompatibility of her parents, engendering neurosis, irresponsibility and promiscuity in her. Even the death of Peyton could not bring Helen and Milton together again. Milton's last attempt to reconcile with Helen fails and Milton disappears into oblivion.

It's just heavy weather of the past that destroys things rather too quickly, without allowing the bloom of the spring to come. If Milton had been a little less selfish and more realistic and positive, he could have handled himself better and treated Peyton and Helen with the kind of love and consideration they deserved. That could have meant a healthier family life for all.

Like wise if Helen too had been a little
more honest to herself, considerate and understanding towards her husband and her daughter, she could have kept jealously, ill-will, distrust away from her home and thus would have been a better mother and a better wife. All this could have provided Peyton with a better family atmosphere full of love, affection, trust and all kinds of emotional securities. And then perhaps she would have grown up into a woman full of realistic and positive attitude towards life. D. Rubin Jr. points out this very aspect in his essay:

Had Milton Loftis's love for his daughter been less selfish, so that father had been willing to incur his daughter's momentary displeasure by insisting that she do what was right than what she wished to do; had Helen's firmness been the product of genuine love and not a hypocritical mask for jealously and hostility, then Peyton might have grown up into some one who is able to love in turn. But Milton sought in Peyton the affection that Helen didn't provide, and Helen struck out at Peyton inorder to punish Milton. Thus Peyton got indulgence on one hand and poorly masked jealously on the other. And when she married she sought a relationship on
just those terms...

So Harry must play the part of a forgiving indulgent father on one hand and an erring husband on the other, neither of which roles he merits. In psychological terms, she has to re-enact her relationship with her father and then her mother's relation with her father. It was too much for poor Harry and he rejects her. And so being denied the only kind of love and relation she can recognise, she takes her own life. A father's weakness and a mother's cruelty brought about a daughter's ruin and death.\

Peyton's death marks the definite division of the past and the present of the novel. From here onwards what we find is the simple and small present of the novel—the telegramme informing Peyton's death, arrival of her dead body by train to the railway station of Portwarwick; Helen, Milton Carey Carr and Dolly going to the station separately and all of them accompanying the dead body up to the burial ground, constitutes the present of the novel. Here Milton makes his last attempt of reconciliation with Peyton. It fails and he gets lost into the oblivion.
This present is the result of all the toposy-turvyness of the past. Peyton’s ruin and ultimate suicide are the heinous effects of the past: the conflict between her parents and the infidelity of her father. Robert H. Fossum says:

Each of the major happenings and episodes in the novel takes place on a day of crucial importance to her; the Sunday that inaugurates Milton’s fall from grace; her sixteenth birthday which is climaxed by her discovery of Milton’s affair with Dolly; the day of her departure for college, an occasion marred by the usual Loftis family quarrels; and the day of her wedding which Carey Carr would like to think of as “symbolic affirmation” of a moral order but which ends like so many of the important days of her life, into an emotional chaos. In all these episodes we see Peyton through the eyes of her parents. It is not until the day of her death described in the novel’s penultimate chapter, that Styron takes us into the mind of Peyton herself...She is a spiritual orphan who feels that she is drowning in a sea of despair...24

Thus we see that the cause of Peyton’s
suicide is not any thing generated by the present. It is the past of Milton, her father, the past of her mother, Helen that affected the past of Peyton so much that she grew up into a neurotic, irresponsible and promiscuous young woman. Thus her father's wayward life, mother's cruelty and jealously brought about the ruin and ultimate death to Peyton.

William Styron's second novel, THE LONG MARCH has an autobiographical background. It is based upon the personal experience of the time when the author worked as a Marine corps. It was after the World War Second that many soldiers and officers had left soldiering in preference to civilian life. But most of them had kept their positions reserved. Therefore when the Korean War erupted in 1950, all of them were called back to active duty again. And like many of his contemporaries, William Styron was also called to attend the physical fitness camp. He had remained a reserve officer for nine months and had to perform many forced duties as a part of the training. The worst of them was a forced long march of thirty six miles, which he turned into the central action of this second novel.
The present in the novel is the central action of thirty six miles long march, leading to the rebellion of Captain Mannix, his suffering and punishment. If we ask this present, "Why was this long march ordered.? Why did Captain Mannix rebel and in what way did he rebel.? and what was the end result of it all.? the answer will have to be searched into the pasts of the three major characters in the novel. For a logical understanding and explanation of the present, it is essential to have a glimpse of the pasts of Lieutenant Culver, Captain Mannix and Colonel Templeton.

The present of the novel has the Korean War in the background. The novel begins with the description of a military training camp. The training camp is meant for the reserve officers who have been called back to the active duty again. It is meant for preparing them physically and mentally fit for and capable of going to the front. So as a measure to make the reserves physically fit, the Colonel Templeton orders them a thirty six mile’s long march.

There were many who dropped out just after a few miles and boarded into trucks. But
Mannix and Culver completed the full distance in spite of raw blisters (culver) and nail bruised (Mannix) feet. At one point the Colonel himself asked Mannix to board a truck but Mannix declined the offer. And when they had covered a little more than the half of the distance, the Captain expressed his bitterness in foul words and the colonel threatened him with a court-martial. After this the rest of the march was completed without any further confrontation between the Captain and the Colonel.

Of the three major characters, Colonel Templeton was a regular. He was known as 'OldRocky'. He was neat, regular, jaunty and always immaculately dressed in well-creased uniform, clean utility cap and shining boots. The novelist describes him thus:

He (the Colonel) always wore at his side a pearl-handled .38 revolver glistening with silvery inlay. He was never known to shoot it, but it was always loaded...like his 'OldRocky' the revolver too belonged. He looked youthful, fresh and non-challant, displaying a studied casualness on an athletic confidence of his own victory before the race.
Templeton has been projected as a very strong and efficient officer. It was strength and efficiency that he valued uppermost. Of course he was considerate and was full of good intentions even when he ordered his subordinates to take up the rigorous duties. He himself was tough like a rock and expected his subordinates to be equally strong and tough.

Captain Mannix and lieutenant Culver are in every sense representatives of the rest of the reserves. The novel gives us some inkling into the pasts of these two characters, which will have to be accepted as the format of the past of all others like them. Both of them had actively participated in the 1945 war and when it had ended, they had gone back to their respective homes. They had put the idea of war out of their minds and settled down with civilian works and civilian ways and comforts of life.

Both of them had got married to girls of their liking and had sons and daughters and begun enjoying the comforts of life. Lieutenant Culver had got married to a
beautiful girl named Betsy. They had a lovely daughter. He had begun working in a law-firm. They had a good circle of friends and well-wishers comprising of lawyers, newspapermen, bankmen and many others of their own status. In a reverie we find Culver dreaming about:

The winter afternoon, when bundled to the ears the baby carriage jaggling bravely in the van, their Sunday strolls, shooey white tellers of recent snow...Old world calm, people like themselves passed in the streets...And Monday's challenges...The sordid little town outside the camp which possessed the horror of recognition, for Culver had been there before. Since there was no room at the camp they had left the baby with a sister and searched for accommodation...had found none...So Betsy had to go back home, with the baby in her arms and tears in her eyes...He felt his own tears against his cheeks...

The lines quoted above, tell us that Culver is a very fond father and a devoted, considerate and understanding husband. They also give us an inkling into the kind of life that he had left behind to come to the
training camp. He is a soldier and is seen shedding tears, recollecting the departure of his wife and baby from the camp. It shows how much he is emotionally attached to his family. Since he had so decently and comfortably settled in civilian way of life, coming back to the military discipline and rigorous training camp should naturally be a hell of an affair for him. This is what Richard Pierce says:

Having come of age during World War Second, Styron saw his situation as radically different from that of the writers who influenced him most—Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Wolfe and Hemingway... World War Second turned into cold war whose clammy presence oozed into our nights and days... And the cold war turned into Korean war for which Styron like so many of his contemporaries was recalled to duty. The work which captures this situation most explicitly is THE LONG MARCH where the central character like Mannix and Culver, recovered from their experiences in Okinawa and fattened by the post-war prosperity, are recalled to train for Korean Battlement...
Captain Mannix on the other hand is a Jew from Brooklyn. Like Culver and all other reserves, he too has been called to the training camp and had to come, leaving behind his wife, two children a radio-set and all other luxuries of a home of a civilian. From the novel we learn that Mannix is a very tall man with enormous physique. He is as passionate as he is formidable. Mannix's recollection of the past gives us an insight into his character. It was his encounter with death, that he recollects and tells his friend Culver:

I was afraid only once in life. Really afraid I mean. It was a hotel in San Francisco, We were five kids, drunk and polluted all of us... I was going to take a shower. It was midnight. I took the shower and came to the room naked... the two of those drunk guys were waiting. They grabbed and pushed me towards the window of that tenth floor room. I was loaded and could not battle with them. They pushed me out of the window and held me by the heels while I dangled up side down naked in space ten floors above the street... I got sober in a second. Can you imagine how I
felt then...The two guys laughing and trying to decide to let go or not...My ankles beginning to slip out of their hands, I really saw death then...I was praying, I guess. It was the other two sober guys, I believe, who got me hauled up somehow. Every time I remember that, a great, big, cold shudder runs up and down my spine... 28

It was the most frightening experience of Mannix's life which he could never forget. It contained the prospect of death but more than that it had made him helpless against a wanton sporting with his life. He had always been full of potential for dignity and heroism but suddenly he had been turned upside down, into a helpless clown, fearing for his life. This was his experience of the last war which he had tried to forget when he had settled down as a civilian. But when he was called back to the training camp, he once again began to feel that the world had been turned upside down.

All the reserves, like Culver and Mannix have their different pasts with one common similarity that they all had to leave behind their comfortable civilian lives and had come
to the training camp. There was Corporal Hobbs a tobacco chewing clown from Okalhama. There was O Leary and all others like themselves. All of them have some past or the other to recollect and day-dream about:

Their working hours are filled as in a bad dream, with a frantic and fantastic chase after an invisible enemy. Their leisure and factious luxury of an officer's club, is ironically dubbed as Heaven's Gate... Work and leisure alike seemed unreal...

Since Culver and Mannix are the representatives of all the reserves, their bitterness, disgust and hatred of the entire war machinery, reflects the hatred and bitterness of the whole company. At the training camp they all resented the "wanton atmosphere of alcohol, dances, vacant professional talk and the officers' beautiful wives' flaunting boldly their lecherous chastity at the wifeless reserves". The general atmosphere of the camp was made intolerable for the reserves by these factors.

There had been a compulsory lecture which all the officers had to attend. They had gathered in the lecture hall with their maps,
graphs, charts and pointers. During the lecture Mannix had slept peacefully in his chair. At the end of the lecture, Colonel Templeton had asked Mannix some questions and Mannix had answered them in the light of his own understanding and knowledge. Here is how it had taken place:

The colonel at random asked Mannix, "what will be your first considerations in cargo loading?" "I don't know sir," And then the Colonel patiently repeated his question and Mannix said, "I have just to repeat sir that I don't have the slightest idea about what my first considerations would be. I never went to a cargo loading school. I am an O302. And I would like to respectfully add sir, if I might, that there is hardly any body in this hall who knows the answer. They have forgotten every thing that they ever learnt seven years ago. Most of them don't even know how to take an M.T.apart. They are too old. They should be home with their families." 31

All the eyes in the hall had turned towards Mannix. He had dared to tell the truth. There was no anger or insolence but a controlled passion in his voice. He had told
only facts. A great hush had fallen and the colonel had found himself at a loss for words. He had looked unsteady on his legs. And in order to avoid confronting the facts pointed out by Mannix, he had called another name. The novelist comments about this, "It had been a court-martial offence, but nothing had been done." 32

Along with this past of the central action, there had been the pathetic and touching sight of the dead, dying and mutilated young marines who had become the victims of an accidental explosion of a mortar shell. The reserves had felt deeply disgusted with the entire war mechanism. The scene is very touchingly described by the novelist:

A group of young marines just finishing their noon time meal, are hit by a short round of mortar fire and are lying incongruously sprawled in a welter of blood and flesh and half eaten food...

Mannix's rebellion commences at the moment when in this gory afternoon, he confronts this spectacle of shattered youth. For Mannix and Culver, the two aging reserves the entire training camp is a bloody wasteland which God seems to have abandoned." 33
Mannix and Culver had watched the mortar fire explode. It had killed fifteen young marines. They were lying dead, or dying moaning and groaning in the agony of death. The sight of blood, wounds, mutilated bodies had become too much for them. Culver had gone behind the ambulance to get sick. Both of them had felt as if suddenly all strength had been drained out of their bodies, and they had become old. They thought that it was something very unreasonable. They couldn't comprehend as to why such a thing should have taken place in the peace time America.

So it was this kind of the past on which the present of the thirty-six miles long hike took shape and was executed. The colonel thought that since the entire company consisted of the reserves who had remained idle for seven or eight years, a long march would shake them out of their lethargy and slumber. So he made an announcement that a thirty-six miles hike shall be completed in about thirteen hours.

Hearing this sudden announcement, O Leary whistled but was tolerated by the Colonel.
But when Mannix murmured, "Thirty six miles! Jesus Christ!" with amazement and disbelief, there was a marked irritation on the colonel's face and he asked Mannix whether he thought it was too long a march and he replied, "No sir. I don't think it's too long... But it's certainly going some hike." The colonel smiled one of his understanding smiles and by way of explanation told them that this battalion consisted mostly of the reserves who till now had been living easy and comfortable lives. Therefore a long march was essential to shake off their laziness and idleness. And to this Mannix had again replied positively:

"That would be a little rough. Thirty six miles is a long way for any body, much less for the guys who have gone soft for the past six, seven years... Most of them are reserves." And the Colonel further explained his stand and intentions: "Wait a minute captain. I don't want you to think that I am taking it out on the battalion merely because of you. I don't want any marines doping off. They are going to be fit." And Mannix murmured "Yes sir." with the fury and suffering of a shackled
The Colonel’s words "I don’t want you to think that I am taking it out on the battalion merely because of you." need a greater attention here. These words point at all those things of the past that had bred hostility between Mannix and Colonel Templeton. And the Colonel had a vague belief that the entire battalion was aware that he didn’t like Mannix. He would sooner like to see the last of him than have him as a captain under himself. That colonel Templeton has mentioned this aspect, is a clear sign that Mannix and all the rest of his battalion may consider this long march to be the result of colonel’s hostility with the captain.

This is clearly recognised by the colonel, else he won’t have mentioned it. Of course how much truth is there in his denial, nobody would ever know. But at the same time, this statement has made it clear that the past hostilities were being considered and have to be taken note of. That is why when the Colonel had left, after announcing the march, Mannix was seen embittered, enraged and fuming with this impotent anger as he was telling
Culver:

He is son of a bitch...Thirty six miles! Christ on a crutch! Do you realise how far that is? Why man I have not walked a hundred consecutive miles since 1945. I can't go thirty six miles even if I were sliding down whole day on a sledge...And a, forced, march mind you...He can't take green troops like these and do that... But this silly son of a bitch is going to have all these flabby old men flapping around on the ground like a bunch of fish after first two miles. Christ on a frigging crutch...37

Mannix further told Culver that if his divisional office just got the wind of it they would take him (Templeton) to task. And Culver informed him that the colonel had already radioed to the regiment and had got the entire plan okayed. Hearing this Mannix muttered, "Swine! He wants to be known as tough."38 And now there was absolutely no escape from the thirty six miles long hike. Divisional office was his last hope. Now even that hope of getting the Colonel's orders revoked from there, was shattered. Mannix became silent sad and much more embittered.
So it is in this kind of embittered atmosphere that in the twilight of the evening the March started. The present in the novel begins from the point of beginning of the central action. And after a very short while Mannix found that a big nail had pierced through the heel of his right boot and had wounded his heel. There was a spatter of blood. He became much more touchy and continued his march more fretfully.

The nail went on piercing deeper and deeper into his heel at every footfall. Lieutenant Culver was marching beside Mannix. He advised Mannix to do something about the nail. He even suggested that if it was reported to the colonel he would let Mannix ride in one of the trucks for the rest of the distance. But Mannix continued his march more fiercely and told Culver:

Look at the little jerk (Templeton). He thinks he's gonna have us pooped up at at half the way mark...Well, he is not. He is a little sadist. But he's not gonna have Al Mannix crapped out. I will walk anywhere that son of a bitch goes and a mile further. He thinks H & S Company has been doping off. I will show
him. I will not ask him to ride in, if I had been walking over broken glass...I will...

After this, when he commanded his company, it was one of his bitterest of commands, worst of its kind and in the worst words, speaking volumes of his hatred against the entire silly business of the thirty six miles hike. Since he was in no position to avenge himself on Templeton, he started airing up his bottled up hatred and rage at his company:

All right H & S Company, Saddle up...get off your asses and straiten up...There is gonna trucks going in for those who can not make it. But I don't want any one from H & S Co. climbing on. If an oldman with as much flab as I have got, can make it, you people can too...

Thus like a chained gang of convicts who endured flogging without whimper, only to spite the flogger, they marched on...

Inspite of every thing, they had a vague notion that some how the march might not be completed. They still thought that the colonel might have started every thing simply by over -estimating his own capacities. So,
as and when, he would get exhausted, he would call the hike off. But when they had marched for more than eight hours, they knew for certain that their notions and hopes were futile.

At one point when they had a ten minutes' breather, Mannix and culver slumped down together on the ground breathing heavily. Both were unanimous about the futility of the whole affair that had made the entire company suffer this agony and misery. Mannix told Culver:

'Those goddam people won't keep it closed up. I have to dog them every minute.!
'Why don't you leave them alone.?' Said culver and gave Mannix a cigarette. He puffed and choked and said, 'You can't leave them alone. They don't want to make this lousy hike. They would like the trucks to haul them in...Man they are reserves. They don't care who sees them crap out. Fuck it...I can't help thinking about those kids lying out there in the weeds!'
'You don't really care if they make it. You, I, may be... but those guys... anybody else... what the hell... Do you.?' 'You are damn right. I do' Mannix looked at the major and the
Colonel (at a little distances from there) spat and told Culver, 'You see that little jerk standing there... He would like to see the H & S Co. crap out. It would do some thing to his ego... well, screw him jack, I will get my Co.in if I have to carry every one of them on my back..."41

It was the fifth ten minutes’ breather when Culver was seen flopping down near the stream of water. Mannix too came and sprawled beside him. Culver was sobbing with exhaustion. He had many blisters on the sole of his feet. He told Mannix to beat the nail and put a cotton strip on the wound. And just at that point the Colonel came to them and inquired what the matter was. Mannix replied that he had got a nail in his right boot. The Colonel sat down, took Mannix’s foot in his hands, inspected the wound and said tenderly, "That looks bad... Well, may be you should ride in one of the trucks. "42 Mannix withdrew his foot at once and fiercely answered, "No sir. I will make the frigging march"43 and with that he began to tie the lash of his boots. He got up and started limping off towards his Co. The Colonel said, "I think you are going to regret
it". And Mannix said "Who cares what you think" and with that he limped away. And with this remark he forced the Colonel to join in the vulgar battle against himself.

Lieutenant Culver had a good look at the Colonel. There was absolutely no sign of fatigue or tiredness on his face or in his limbs. Culver thought to himself: "The Bastard (Templeton) could outmarch twenty men, twenty raging Mannixe's". He looked like he had just sprinted a few yards to catch a bus. Even though Culver disliked Templeton, no less than Mannix, he was positive enough to recognise and admire his potentials. But Mannix in his blindness of fury and hatred could not see this reality altogether. After the seventh breather, when Mannix ordered his Co, his entire rage, bitterness and helplessness was there in his words "Let somebody else crap out but not you people. You people better face it. You got eighteen miles more to go." And just when they had covered just about the half of the distance, suddenly things moved to a climax. Culver saw Mannix shouting at a soldier with big blisters and raw wounds
on his feet. Mannix was ordering him to be up
and moving and he was pleading to be allowed
to drop out. Mannix was about to hit him when
Culver intervened and he let go. But the
Colonel had seen everything and he called
Mannix and said:

'I want you to go in on that truck.' 'No sir. I am going to
make this march.' He replied
and the Colonel looked utterly
whipped, bent knees, stance of
a man with blisters...making
Culver to concede that the
Colonel had made the march
somewhere towards the rear for
some legitimate reason of his
own. He heard the Colonel, "Not
with that foot... You are
not... Not with that foot." He
repeated.

"Listen Colonel, You ordered
this goddam hike and I am going
to walk it if I had not one
goddam man left. You can
yourself crap out for half the
march..." replied Mannix.48

Culver was very much upset. He very
desperately wanted to do something to prevent
Mannix from saying anything unpleasant,
because the realist that he was, had given him
insight and understanding that the hike was
not the point of prestige for him; that
courage, cowardice, sacrifice and suffering
had no meaning and no importance in his eyes. Culver thought that Mannix was an idiot not to see that the Colonel too had marched the whole way, and he was any thing but not a coward. But before he could do anything to stop things heading to a climax, he heard the Colonel:

"Wait a minute Captain, now for your information." "Fuck you and your information" said Mannix almost sobbing, "if you think," 'But he went no further, for the Colonel had made a quick and curious gesture, fantastic and subtle, stage gesture. It was like watching an old cowboy film to see the Colonel's hand go swiftly to the handle of his pistol and rest there; his eyes cool and passionate and forbidding. It was a gesture that balked even the Captain. Mannix's face went pale as if he had only then realised the words that had erupted from his mouth so heedlessly, and he said nothing. Sullen beaten, blinking at the glassy white handle of the pistol, and the Colonel went on; "For your information Captain, you are not the only one who made this march. But I am not interested in your observations. You march in...? I order you confined to your quarters and I am
going to see that you get a court-martial. Do you understand? I am going to have you tried for gross insubordination. I will have you sent to Korea. Now get back to your company. "49

Mannix is seen practicing Gandhian method of accepting to suffer inorder to make the oppressor realise his mistake. And he seems to have almost succeeded as is seen in Culver's observation when Mannix had refused to go into the truck: "No sir. I am going to make this march. 'And the Colonel looked utterly whipped" 50 But his foul language marred the entire purpose. Had he controlled himself and avoided uttering those foul words, his method, for certain would have produced better results.

After this climax the march was again resumed and it ended without any other unpleasanties taking place. And at the end of the March, when they trudged into the camp, Mannix grasped Culver's arm and said, "What the hell; We have made it " 51 And Culver thought that they all had made it in their own different ways.

After a short while, Culver was seen to be
full of tender thoughts and feelings and was looking for him. He took a turn at the corner, and saw Mannix naked, with just a towel round his waist, moving with great pain. He was clawing at the wall for support. Culver wanted to rush to him to help, but mean time he saw:

One of Negro maids came swinging along... and said, "Oh! my, you poor man... What you been doing.? Do it hurt.?"

Mannix looked up at her, silent, blinking then Culver saw, during this unspoken moment of sympathy, the towel slipped away slowly from his waist and fell to the floor. He was a mass of scars and naked as the day he had emerged from his mother's womb, save for the soap which he held feebly in one hand. He seemed to have neither the strength not ability to lean down and retrieve the towel and so merely stood there, huge and naked...and blinked and sent towards the woman, finally a sour apologetic smile, and told, not with self pity, but only with the tone of a man who having endured and lasted, was too weary to tell any thing but what was true,"Deed it does" He said...52

Thus this present characterized by the
thirty six miles long march is a powerful clue to the past and the future. For instance Mannix’s rebellion, his refusal to ride in the truck inspite of the nail bruised foot, his use of foul language and the Colonel’s threat of Court-martial, his nakedness in front of the Negro maid and inability and listlessness in retrieving the towel to cover his waist, are all the direct and reasonable result of the past— their easy and comfortable civic life, disgust and hatred at the sight of mutilated bodies of the young marines, Mannix’s readiness to tell the truth about the condition of the reserves, that they had forgotten every thing including how to take an .302 apart, and his protest in submission, are those milestones of the past, which, Styron seems to suggest, generate the present. This aspect has been very pertly analysed by Richard Pearce:

Styron drew on his own experience in 1950 when he was recalled to Marine duty during the Korean war and compelled to participate in a forced training march. With a realistic frame work he develops the contradictory irrational potential— the
destructive irrationality and
an irrational affirmation—with
the aid of comic devices;
Colonel Templeton’s impersonal
and irrational order for a
thirty six miles forced march.
Mannix’s determination to
assert the human value of his
own person and of his men in
the featureless face of the
Marine Corps is also
irrational. And the lieutenant
finds himself in a situation
similar to Peyton’s, caught
between warring powers which
can not be ethically
distinguished.

Captain Mannix tries to
achieve his end in an action
that is doubly irrational; he
will defy the Colonel by
driving his men to achieve the
impossible which is to complete
the march. And his defeat is
accomplished far less in the
prospective court-martial than
it is in the picture of the
heroic captain...“53

In this way the Marine Corps is a
faceless machinery. And the past of the
characters has just tried to bring some
humanness to it. But it remains a faceless
machinery. The world of THE LONG MARCH is
unreal. The enemies are imaginary. The
chase is unreal. The preparation is
unnecessary (in the eyes of the reserves). And
this disturbs the time sense of our narrator. The past and present get so badly mixed up that he finds himself adrift on a dark and endless sea of time:

Culver associates his peacetime existence with a day at the end of childhood, a day that has irrevocably vanished. And so suspended between a present without sequence and a period that either existed in the infinite past or dream-like again but never really at all. Culver feels adrift upon a dark and endless sea. His quarters are restricted... coffin-like universe, the radio signals resemble 'cries of souls in the anguish of hell' and the single night in his tent is as 'naked as the light...in an execution chamber'.

Mannix too is beset by feelings of constricted chaos, helplessness, abandonment, untimely ripped from the womb of peace. 54

It's not only Culver who finds himself surrounded by a chaos but Mannix too feels that his peace has been mutilated unnecessarily. They both feel that the present is useless, and totally absurd and meaningless. But they can do nothing to
change it because it has just sprung out of the past and they have no power to rectify the past.

In SET THIS HOUSE ON FIRE, the third novel by William Styron, the present is very small and diminutive in comparison to the past, which is so enormous and almost leviathanian in its dimensions. The present of the novel is represented by Peter Laverett's coming back from Sambuco and getting employed in a law firm in Newyork. He gets engaged to a girl named Annet. However, after two years Annet cancelled her engagement with him.

It was in this mood of dejection, when he was, once turning listlessly, the pages of THE TIMES and he chanced upon a painting in it by Cass Kinsolving. He wrote a letter to him and got an invitation from him after a month. He left Newyork and went to his father's place in Portwarwick. After staying a few days with his father he left for Charleston to meet Cass.

When the two friends met, they started working on the story of the life and the mystery of death of Mason Flagg. This is
present by the novelist in the form of a narrative dialogue. And it is this which forms the present of the novel. By re-examining the past "each man rises from the ashes of his own malais like recovered Luciano, and finds that he has freed himself from the history by accepting it."55

If one asked, "Why this freeing from history becomes necessary.? How is it done by accepting it.? And what is it that Cass accepts by which he is reborn and reformed.? What part does Mason Flagg's death play in it.?" In order to find an appropriate answer to all these questions, we have to unearth the pasts of all these characters.

Cass Kinsolving, the protagonist of the novel, was born in Columbus city and was orphaned in his childhood. He could not get education beyond the second year of the High school. At the age of fifteen, he with his uncle Lennie, plundered the house of a Negro radio repairer named Craford. And a sense of guilt of this act lingered in his mind for the rest of his life.

Cass joined army and took active part in the World War Second. Here his talk and his
behaviour was considered abnormal and he was sent to the clinic of a psychiatrist doctor who prescribed and gave Cass some copies of classics including OEDIPUS THE KING.

After leaving the military, he fell in love with a girl named Poppy and married her. He wanted to settle down as a painter. But he could not get going. So tortured by his inability to paint, Cass started whiling away his time in drinking and wandering about, pitying himself - in short doing every thing except confronting his talent. At last as if in search of his inspiration, he moved his family to Paris and started wandering in Europe. He told Peter that his days in Europe were simply worse:

"When I was in Europe...I was a biological disaster, a bag full of corruptions held together by one poisonous thought and that was how to destroy myself in the most agonising way there was."

Wandering about in Europe, he came to Sambuco. He went into Bella Vesta and had brandy. He began to make a fool of himself and was thrown out into the rain. He charged in again, fell and crashed down on the steps
of the hotel Bella Vesta.

When he came to his senses, he found himself at a police station. Windgaser, the owner of the hotel had charged him with breaking of his precious crockery. It was here that he met Fransesca in a very peculiar condition. She was a girl of about seventeen and had been brought to the police station by a shopkeeper with the complaint that she had tried to steal a windmill from his shop. She looked extremely beautiful and helpless against the indecent and crude behaviour of the sergeant dealing with her:

"I think I have seen you before, haven't I?...You have a nice big behind on you. A sweet big behind. Now, why does a grown girl like you with a sweet big behind want to steal a child's toy like this.? You should be down on the coast peddling that sweet behind to rich tourists...."

"It was for my little brother...

"Go to Rome and take room in a hotel and sell your lovely sweet behind...Do you know what the fine is for stealing.?"

"No" "The fine for stealing is one thousand lire. Do you have it?" "No" "Then do you know what we must do. We must take
that sweet behind of yours."
Rage burst inside Cass's head like a ball of insanity. "Lay off her, you miserable sonofabitch." He roared, "Lay off her, here me.? lay off her or I will stomp your teeth out. Lay off her."

Alarmed, pale, the sergeant let his hand go back to his holster. "I will pay for the thing" Cass said to the storekeeper—57.

Cass took out his vallet and gave two thousand lires to the shopkeeper and marched out of the police station. It was a great human gesture of Cass that impressed Corporal Luigie immensely. He followed Cass out of the station and introduced himself. They talked about this and that, learnt about one another and became very good friends.

Cass left Rome to fetch Poppy and children. In Rome he was informed by his lawyer that the forty thousand that Poppy had been getting from her father's property would stop thenceforth. So when they came to Sambuco they were broke. At Sambuco Cass came under the sway of Mason Flagg—a multi-millionaire American.

Peter Leverette came to Sambuco on Mason
Flagg's invitation. He had known Mason during the school days and been full of admiration for his wealth and maturity. When Peter reached Sambuco, Cass had already debased himself to the lowest ebb to Mason—working like a coolie and painting dirty pictures for him. He tells Peter:

I lost count of times I went over to Naples with him. It became a habit like booze or dope and thus I was tied to him, bound to him for reasons of pure survival not just of my own but all those about me.58

In this way the artist had sold his very soul to this incarnation of evil just for getting enough to eat and drink. Cass had debased himself much more than that. He had employed Frangesca and then let her out to Mason as a maid servant. And then through her he had begun getting soup, flour, sugar, soap and butter etc, removed from Mason's apartment and brought to his own. The theft was well planned. He used to tell Frangesca well in advance about Mason's arrival and departures. In fact Cass had lost all self-respect and dignity by the time Peter arrived at Sambuco.

With a glimpse of Peter's childhood, we
get a view of Mason's past as well. Peter and Mason had come together at St. Andrews school, where once Mason had told Peter that he had lost his virginity to a Hollywood film actress, when he was just thirteen years old. Describing his childhood impression of Mason Peter says:

His wealth, his glamorous connections and his premature ease with the things of flesh worked on me a profound fascination. And he liked me because I laughed and appreciated and admired his lies. 59

However, he was kicked out of St. Andrews also for raping a dull headed girl. So when Peter came to Sambuco he found a maturer satan in the form of Mason Flagg. He found that Mason Flagg had many mistresses each totally confident that he was very soon going to marry her.

One day Mason took Peter to show his den to him. It was just to please him and impress him. The den was decorated with elephant guns, Books, paintings of bull fight postures, head of an African buffalow, which he claimed to have slain himself. There
were many other wonders in his collections.

Peter found him talking authentically about the existence of Kuramaria Island, Guano Atolls off the coast of Aden, the difference between the apparent and absolute magnitude in the measurement of stars, the origin of the female circumcision among the tribes of Kalahari, the high tolerance of sexual perversion and method employed by Harun Indians, Thomas Kyd, Shakespeare, German influence on English writers, and every thing else including tumors.

Having heard and seen Mason in his present state, Peter was forced to concede that through the college had kicked him out, he had, with his personal labour and perseverance, compensated it all. It was clear to him that he had read a lot and kept most of it locked in his memory. And then one day, Mason took him to a 'Group -interplay.' The hall was full of howling saxophone, blue lights, bitter sweet smell of marijuana, high hallow giggles, copulations and copulatory motions. Peter along with his partner (procured for him by Mason) Liela (Who turned out to be Peter's type) left the hall and
whiled away their time gossipping in the garden. Peter say:

Indeed the more I saw Mason in his dual role of day time squire and night time nihilist, the more it became apparent to me that here was truly distinctive American, able in time of hideous surfet, revolting against the traditional values, plunging into dope sensation, fabricated sin and all the while keeping a firm grip on his two million dollars...rich, handsome, erudite, glorious, witty, gifted and a hero of a war. I felt pitifully small and commonplace. 60

But very soon his feeling of being ‘pitifully small’ was removed by Celia who came to him in the hotel when Mason had hit her and injured her. She told Peter that most of the things Mason had managed to make people believe about him were false in reality. She told Peter:

He was not a hero of war at all... He was a draft - dodger. The scar on his leg he picked up as a result of a bycicle collision at Princeton during his luckless semester; and Yugoslavia was all the result of an enthusiastic reading of Rebecca West’s BLACK LAMB and
GREY FALCON etc, from which he had acquired enough color and historical minutia to gull far less credulous souls than myself... It's all...just an expansion of his whole terrific imagination. 61

After Celia had told him truth, for the first time Peter realised that the scar on his leg that he paraded so proudly was the result of a bycyle collision and not that of bullet injury in the battle field. And the tales of romance in Yugoslavia were all the ideas taken from romantic novels which he made people believe that they had happened in his own life. Robert H. Fossum sums up Mason's credentials thus:

His (Mason's) autobiography is a fancifully constructed mosaic of others' experience passed off as his own, and his professedly prodigious activities are not an expression of his individual freedom as he would have others believe, but merely a Don Juanian counterpart of his auto obsession with cars and speed. To Mason only literal or figurative rape is satisfying...He was an inverted American Adam or an American Satan...father of lies who lusts to possess... with an amazing erudition, matchless
quackery and charm, all a mask for his malice and innocence... 62

The relationship between Cass and Mason is almost an epitome of degeneration. One evening, for example, on their return from Mason’s den, Mason called Cass and began behaving like a ringmaster. He invited all the people in the piazza to see Cass perform a trained whale act, citing his pedigree, imitating sex acts of various countries, limericks in which he made fun of even Alonzo Cripps, all the while looking clownish and dishonoured and disgraced for good. Cripps, the film director, intervened and Poppy and Peter took Cass home. Robert H. Fossum has remarked about this relation between Cass and Mason, thus:

Fleeing the land whose ugliness poisons the soul, Cass has come from America to sambuco via Paris, France and Rome. But his flight has proved futile. He encounters American(And America) behaviour every where reminding him that the country he can not help loving is land of vulgarity and ignorance...

Mason Flagg under whose sway he comes in Sambuco, is
the epitome of this warped and infantile culture... He is evil incarnate. And to this man the artist sells his soul in return for food, medicines, liquor, he can not do without. Cass reduces himself to the level of an utterly dependant animal by painting a pornographic picture and performing obscene clownish exhibitions for Mason and his guests.63

It is this kind of past which reaches its logical end when Rosemarie brings Peter to Mason's piazza. They were in time to watch a terrible sight. The moment they entered in, Mason's door flung open and a young girl (it was Franseca) rushed out, slipped and fell on the floor. She jumped up on to her feet, rubbed her elbow and began to sob as if her heart would break. Her bodice was ripped. For a few seconds she stood sobbing, striking her own face and then she ran out.

And then Mason Flagg burst forth skidding on the floor and throwing out his arms wildly. He had three band aids plastered on his face, he was dressed in a silken gown and his hair flew out in every direction. He asked Peter whether he had seen a girl running out of his room just a little
while ago. And when Peter replied in negative, he abused him and rushed out in the search of the girl.

Peter's curiosity, regarding what had really happened in Masson's room, was satisfied only when Cass in their fishing trip told him that Francesca had come straight to him and had told him that Mason had raped her. He had raped her once and tried a second time. But the second time he could not. She was ready and had hit him on the penis and had run out of his room. Even the first time it had not been easy for him because she had scratched his face, and that explained why he had band-aids plastered on his face. Cass told Peter:

The realisation that he had done it, left me shattered, I had never made love to her, I wanted to, and so did she and we would have sooner or later... Nothing to do with chastity or fidelity. I knew that if I waited long enough, it would just happen and would be a thousand times dearer to both of us... I always found some kind of joy in her, the joy I had been searching all my life... 

So by raping Francesca, Mason had raped
that joy of Cass. He told Peter that he had consoled her and told her to go home and she had murmured 'Adieu' which meant goodbye forever. And that had evoked his pride and sense of vengeance. Mason had not only declined to give the pills he had promised for Michael (for which he had painted a dirty picture for him) but had raped Francesca. And this had violated his sense of joy and dignity. Recollecting the entire episode, Cass tells Peter:

By raping her he had raped the two of us. Just at that very moment when through her I had conceived of a life as having some vestige of meaning, he tore that meaning from limb to limb...Who knows why he did it.? Because her beauty and innocence drove him crazy.? Because he knew she was mine.? Because the sodden wreck (I) he owned, was struggling out of the mire and out of his grasp.? Because in fear and fright she called 'Cass, Cass..?' Who knows why he did it.?65

Enraged by Mason's viciousness and wickedness, Cass went to Mason's house that very night. He searched for streptomicine pills and found the dirty picture he had
coming back to the piazza, he had found the film people in a mighty hurry to leave Sambuco. They had already packed their things and were sneaking out. He too left Sambuco the same day.

Cass told Peter that concerning the murders sergeant, Perrinello opined that the girl had two American lovers and Mason’s murder was a direct result of envy in love. It was nearly true but was rejected by the captain. Luckily for Cass, Corporal Luigie deliberately distorted the facts and explained that Mason had raped Francesca and committed suiciided out of a feeling of guilt. And Francesca had been killed by Saverio (A rich man’s son whom Perrinello was trying to protect) a lunatic of the area.

The captain had accepted Luigie’s suggestions and point of view, promoted him to the position of Sergeant, and appointed him the incharge of the investigation of this case. He demoted and transferred Perrinello for his inefficiency. And the first thing that Luigie did was, he went and destroyed all the proofs pointing at Cass as the murderer of Mason. He destroyed the foot-prints of Cass
and also the piece of stone with which he had broken Mason's skull.

Cass on the other hand, had kept himself hidden in the bushes near the golf-club, all the day. In the evening, however, he started towards the city and met the priest and his assistant who informed him that Mason and Fransesca had died. Hearing that, Cass fainted and collapsed there itself.

Luigie found Cass in the same condition and took him to the police station. And there when Cass came to his senses he had only one thought on his mind: that he should get the punishment for what he had done. So he asked Luigie to send him to Salerno Jail.

Luigie told Cass the story that he had fabricated and offered as solution of the crime to the captain with the purpose of protecting him. But Cass had insisted "A crime is a crime and I would suffer for it" and had tried to run away from the police station. But Luigie was quicker than Cass. He hit him on the head, brought him back, tied him to his cot and said:

I have wept only three times in my life. First when I saw my brother burning to death.
Second when I saw my English nun dying. And the third at the death of Fransesca...

You are a damnable romantic from the South of the very worst kind at that. I know in jail you would wallow in your guilt, I don’t wish to allow you that luxury... Do you now see, why I like you my friend.? For the love of God Cass, consider the good in yourself. Consider hope. consider joy. That is all I have to say... 68

Saying this he had freed Cass and thus had allowed him to return back to America with a different vision of life. In this way the artist came to realise that it was as important to kill an outer Mason as to kill an inner one. He came to realise that the cause of entire trouble lay within himself. Mason, whom he had murdered was just a medium of it. It was his hatred of himself that was at the centre of all evil. This is what Robert H Fossum also thinks:

The real causes of Cass’s debasement, have very little to do with his exploiter, as the painter eventually realises. Mason is not satan; he is merely a trash. The look of eternal damnation which Cass thinks he sees on Mason’s face
is a masked reflection of his own self, a self so close to total corruption that it glories in being owned by the likes of Mason Flagg...finally he recognises the corruption diagnoses it and cures it...

Since Mason had owned and dominated everyone and every thing around, he naturally wanted and to some extent succeeded as well in owning the artist Cass. Peter was able to see through Mason early, but Mason's attempt to own him continued. But since Peter and Cass were two different souls, he could not be owned by a fellow like Mason. Mason knew that only Cass and Peter could place him where he was, and therefore he was really afraid of them. He had possessed Cass but Peter was still free. He made the last attempt with peter but he told him point blank:

'You tell me these creepy cock and bull stories ...with a solemn face and expect me to believe them... You think I am a moron...You tell me that I am your confidant, your pal, your dollbaby and tell me dreary lies...You never were in Yugoslavia. You were a draft-dodger. And that play of yours is a soap bubble. You think I am that much of a fool. You
would better get your goddam head looked at...

'Jesus sake Peter! don't you have enough prescience to see that I was telling it all to you under the guise of truth only to see your reaction.?
Mason's gesture was one of recompense... and laden with a wish of friendliness. Before I could say another word or recover my wits long enough to really understand what he had given me, he was gone, swallowed up in the shore bound throng, leaving my hand clutched around a ball of French money he had got from somewhere all notes of ten thousand francs enough to buy a solid gold Swiss watch... I tried to call after him but he was already lost from the sight...  

From the above quotation it is clear that he had tried to buy Peter also, but he had failed miserably. Since he had been told the reality, he had tried to keep the artist under his control and subjugation more strongly and cruelly. He had raped the girl who had begun to function as Cass's inspiration. It was just to destroy his path of freedom from the mire.

Since Peter was a man of regular habits, and well studied, Mason could do no damage to
him what so ever. But with Cass things were different. He was not properly educated—not beyond High school. Therefore he fell an easy prey to Mason’s trap. Naturally with Cass he went as far as he could, reducing him to a total dependence on himself for his very existence, and thereby destroying all his sense of self-respect, sense of dignity and honour. The novelist describes one such degradation of Cass in the following manner:

Cass went on and on while Poppy wailed and cried for help... Cass continued with his display of sex act of various countries... clownish, prostrate and dishonoured... "That will be enough of this, do you hear?" Cripps said.
"But Jesus, Alonzo" Mason began in a whine...
"That will be enough, I said,"
Poppy pushed through the crowd towards Cass and fell on his shoulder... I suppose Cripps sensed in me (Peter) an ally and told me, "why don’t you help get him down stairs?"
I never saw such a disgusting business all my life..."71

But the real cause of Cass’s debasement was not his exploiter Mason Flagg. Any one as evil as Mason could have done it to Cass. The
cause of the debasement lay within his own lack of will to rise above the alcoholic daze and face the reality of his talent. As we later find out, it took Luigie to hit him on the head and point it out to him. Thus he returned back to America a saner man with a positive and realistic view and vision of life. In this connection Philip Roth says:

However, despite all his disgust with what American public life can do to a man's private life, Kinsolving like Henderson comes back to America at the end, having opted for existence. But the America we find him in, seems to me to be the America of his childhood and (if only in a metaphorical way) of every one's childhood: he tells his story while he fishes from a boat in a Carolina stream. The affirmation at the conclusion is not as go-getting... or jayous as Henderson's romp on the airfield...

Kinsolving says, "But to be truthful you see, I can tell you only this: that as for being and nothingness, the only thing I did know was that to choose between them was simply to choose being... "Being. Living. Not where one lives or with whom one lives, but that one lives..."
What I have tried to point out is that the vision of the self as inviolable, powerful, and nervy self imagined as the only seemingly real thing in an unreal seeming environment, has given some of our writers joy, solace and muscle. Certainly to have come through a serious personal struggle intact, simply to have survived is nothing to be made light of... 72

This vision of life, of 'being and nothingness' as communicated by Cass to Peter has been hard to arrive at. All this past is presented in the form of a narrative dialogue between Peter and Cass kinsolving. For almost two years after his return from Sambuco, Peter had remained in a dilemma about Mason's murder. He had thought and felt that in some vague way he too must be responsible for Mason's murder. And when Cass told him the whole story, Peter felt purged and purified and became free from all sense of guilt.

On the other hand, for Cass, the telling of the story had the effect of unburdening his heart and making him feel light-hearted. Thus by re-examining the past "Each man rises from the ashes of his own malaise...and finds that
he has freed himself from history in the act of accepting it." 73

Thus in SET THIS HOUSE ON FIRE there is very little of the present. It is just Peter's visit to Cass and their going fishing in Carolina stream where they talk about the past. And the narrative dialogue between Cass and Peter unearths the past. In this way the present is a very simple and small affair in the novel. It is the past that occupies the place of enormity and has all pervading effect.

THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER, the fourth novel by William Styron was an instant success. It became a best-seller and Walper Pictures purchased the rights for making a film on it. It won its author the Pulitzer award of 1968. THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER, a historical court document, dictated by a condemned slave of that name, to his lawyer named Thomas Gray, was first used by Harriet Breacher Stow as a subject of her novel THE DEAD, in 1844, just five years after the slave up-rise, started by a Negro slave named Nat Turner in 1839. The novel when it first came out was challenged by both the
historians and the literary critics:

Literary critics dismissed his work as mere subfictional rubbish, while the historians took him to task for tendentious meddling in the affairs of his betters. Each side conceived him as an interloper from the enemy camp. To the literary critic he was a cheap history-monger, decked out his wares illegally in the trappings of the novel. To the historian, on the other hand, he was a bad novelist, abusing historical method of disseminating ill-informed, rash and lurid personal speculations about the past...74

The social and racial conditions in the South made the publication of THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER a very hot issue during the sixties. The book had to go through a full cycle of fact-fiction debate. A great attempt was made by historians and philosophers like R.G. Collingwood and Harvey Allen and the like to bridge the gap between literature and history. R.G. Collingwood pointed out that "all history is the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind."75 But Harvey was even more emphatic about the need for an
epistemological basis of historical research
and the historical novel:

History and the historical novel are similar in that they both offer a philosophical comment on the past, direct or understood, based on the same kind of factual data drawn from the same sources. And they both combine similar kinds of truth, factual and artistic. 76

Since THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER is based on a factual data drawn from history and presented in the form of a novel with the art of literary characteristics, the novel presents all the past time as a part of the present. The present in the novel is very small and simple affair. Nat Turner is in the prison. He dictates his confessions to his court-appointed lawyer. There after he is taken to the gallows and is hanged to death. And if we ask questions like, why is Nat in Jail.? the answer is the failure of his rebellion. Why, how and what for did he rebel and why did he fail?. Why and what did he confess.? And lastly why is he hanged to death.? Inorder to know answers to all these quarries, we must have a full glimpse of the past which ultimately has sent him to the present
gallows.

Every step of the past, right from his birth, rather a little earlier than his birth, pointedly leads to this and only this possible end in the present, in the jail, the confession, and then hanging till death. Every important happening leading to this present is obviously rooted in his past. Hence it is desirable to unearth the horrible past of Nat which brought the sordid and unavoidable present. Since the protagonist himself is the narrator in the novel, he gives details of his heritage in the following words:

My mother’s mother was a girl of Coromantee tribe of Gold Coast. She was thirteen years old and pregnant when she was brought in chains to Yorktown aboard a schooner sailing out of New Port Rode Island (Africa) and sold to Alpheus Turner, father of Samuel Turner... Same summer my mother was born... My grand mother died within days of my mother’s birth. Alpheus Turner brought my mother to the big house and she was brought up by black aunts and grannies. They taught her Nigger English. Her name was Lau Ann. She died when I was fifteen... so I became a house
Nigger like my mother ... 77

Nat's mother had informed him that his father's name was Nathaniel—a run away slave. He had often heard his mother say proudly about his father: "your father, that man had pride." 78 Thus he had inherited the rebellious spirit from his father, a spirit that circumstances gradually shape, and push Nat into accepting the role of a revolutionary.

At the age of six he stole THE LIFE AND DEATH OF MR. BAD MAN, from Turner's library. Another servant named Abraham found him with the book and took him to Samuel Turner. Abraham was surprised to find that instead of being angry, Samuel Turner was jubilant at it. He told his brother, "you see Ben (his brother Benjamin Turner a great Negro-hater) it is true as I have told you... They will try and we will teach them." 79 Nat, in his childhood had a great desire to learn to read and write. And living in Samuel Turner's house made it easy for him:

So near to the white people, I absorb their language daily. I am a tireless eavesdropper and their talk and comment and even
their style of laughter vibrates endlessly in imagination...
I can not yet read THE LIFE AND DEATH OF MR. BADMAN, not even the title. My possession of it terrifies me because I have stolen it... I have known the crude shapes of simple words ever since I was six when Samuel Turner, a methodical, tidy and organised master set about labelling every chest and jar and canisters in the huge cellar beneath the kitchen where my mother dispatched me hourly every day... it was a great leap from mint, citron, salt and bacon to the LIFE AND DEATH OF Mr. BADMAN the book I stole from the library.

However, when Abraham reported the matter to Samuel Turner, he decided to make an experiment with Nat. He decided to get him learn to read and write. So, from that day Nat came under the direct protective care of Samuel Turner, the master of the house. Miss Nell and Miss Louisa began to teach him alphabets, numbers additions, subtractions and the rest of it. Nat turned out to be a quick learner and very soon he began to recite passages from the Bible. Master Samuel Turner felt very proud of him. He often told his
guests, "Listen to our darkie recite from Bible. He can speak it from memory as Reverend Epps."81

It was during this time of his life that he chanced to see Mc.Bride, an Irish overseer of Turner's farms, with his mother. He could never forget the scene for the rest of his life. He recollects it very vividly:

I saw the white man named Mc Bride, the Irish overseer of the fields, wrestling with my mother, She is on her back upon a table in the pantry, supporting the full weight of the overseer—fumbling, fumbling with her and his own clothes...I stand rooted at the door... My mother's moan tinged with urgency now... giggle...her brown long legs go up swiftly to embrace his waist; the two of them now joined and moving in a strange and brutal rhythm which I considered the pastime or habit of niggers alone.82

Till that day Nat had thought that the blacks and the whites were totally different beings. But this sight changed his ideas altogether. For the first time he realized that the natural, savage and brutal urge was common to both the blacks and the whites.
alike. Samuel Turner put him under Mr. Goadt, a German carpenter. In two years time, Nat became as clever and efficient as Mr. Goadt himself.

Till now Nat was fascinated by Louisa. And after her marriage, when she went away, Emmeline became the centre of his attractions. In the beginning he adored her with a kind of divine sanctity. But one day he chanced to see her being made love to, by her cousin, Lewis and all his sense of sanctity about her was shattered. It made him fully convinced that the blacks and the whites were no different regarding the animal urge. And this conclusion made Emmeline an object of his sexual cravings. Nat confesses:

The sainthoodness which had surrounded Miss Emmeline in my mind, dimmed, flickered out and disappeared...and in my fantasies she began to replace the innocent imaginary girl with the golden curls, as the object of my cravings. And on those Saturdays when I stole myself in to my private place into the carpenter's shop to relieve myself from my pent up desires, it was Emmeline whose bare, white full hips and belly responded wildly to all my lust.
But since he could only imagine to be doing it with Emmeline and masturbate and not find it possible to make love to her in reality, after every ejaculation he used to feel bitter hatred. Since he could not attain Emmeline, he decided to kill his natural craving of that of an animal in him and rise above both the blacks and the whites. In this regard Robert H. Fossum has said:

It convinced him that beastiality is not peculiar to the black field workers or socially inferior whites only. Close contact with his nominally superiors is then not the soil in which the seeds of his ultimate hatred take root; it is also the ground of his determination to deny the flesh and rise above both the blacks and the whites of this world. 84

However, bad times came when he had reached just eighteen. The entire Virginia region was hit by drought of a very severe kind. It brought poverty and misery to the whole region. Samuel turner was also very badly affected and had to sell away many of his mill and field slaves. Nat was the last to go. He did not sell Nat. Instead he
entrusted him to Reverend Epps and bid goodbye to Nat. Nat could never forget the departing scene: "He embraced me swiftly, awkwardly and the wagon moved away." 85

Unfortunately for Nat, Reverend Epps turned out to be a demon, a vicious and vile demon. He was cruel to Nat and finally sold him away to a slave trader. And the slave trader put him on auction and one Thomas Moore bought him. It was from this Mr. Moore that Nat for the first time in his life tasted the bite of a whip. Nat says:

They find out that I can read and write. "It doesn’t do good for a Nigger to get learning." my master said, "I am hungry," I said. I had not felt a whip before, and my master Thomas Moore whipped me with, "When I get ready to feed, I will tell you. You hear me... and say master... say master..." Moore cried, roared and whipped... I cried, "Mastah, Mastah... Mastah... "That’s better." He said.

I wiped the blood from my neck and crouched down shivering in my overcoat... 86

Nat’s spirit revolted against his white tormentor. And the rage and hatred that had ever been growing in him since his suffering
at the hands of Reverend Epps, became much more strong in him. Now onwards, he began to think, analyse to himself the relation between the Negro and his white master. And as the time passed, his bitterness continued to mount on and on, because every now and then Mr. Moore paraded Nat as a ludicrous freak, forcing him to recite from the Bible in front of his neighbours. Nat says:

Mr. Thomas Moore hated all Negroes with a blind obsessive hatred which verged upon a kind of daily ecstasy and I was certainly not exempt specially in the light of my book learning... He could treat me only with a passable decency and at the very worst advertise me to his neighbours as a kind of ludicrous freak. "I done bought me a black gospeler" he would say and make me recite from Bible. 87

Fortunately for Nat, Mr. Moore died and his widow married Mr. Travis. Thus Nat became the property of Mr. Travis, who had a Negro slave named Hark. Nat became friendly with Hark and found him brimful of hatred against the whites. Hark is described as "a regular gladiator, a fantastic specimen, a veritable black apollo, and as swift as a race horse." 88
Hark used to bring tales of horrible cruelties of the whites against the blacks. Once he is shown telling Nat:

"Des was a free nigger woman name Laurie, wife of old John Bright...dey took that woman and lent her up along side a fence and druv a three foot spike right up her old pussy..."

At yet another time he told Nat how Dred, a Negro was forced to copulate with a bitch dog before an assembly of the white trash. And of course he had himself witnessed how the whites made the Negroes fight with one another for the pleasure of their gentry. It used to boil up his blood with anger and hate. He decided to punish the whites for their cruelties. He says:

Approaching 1831, my acceptance of a divine mission to kill all the white people in the southampton and as far beyond... Discovering negroes in whom the hatred was already ablaze, cultivating hatred in the few remaining, testing, probing, discarding, those in whom pure hatred could not be nurtured—became my primary concern.

It was a market day that Nat saw Sam...
Will, the two young Negroes, fighting with one another. Both were bleeding badly and Nat felt enraged and started lecturing them at their stupidity. This made him their leader. They began to look at him with respect and honour. And to further expedite his vengeance he had a vision:

In the midst of the rent of the clouds I saw a black angel clothed in black armour with black wings, gigantic, hovering, speaking in a thundering voice...And then there appeared another white angel. The black and the white angels fought. The sun became dark...The white angel was vanquished. I interpreted this vision as a mandate to destroy all the white people. 91

And then Nat did something that alarmed all the white men in the region, and filled the Negroes with praise for him. In fact since then they all began to admire him and wonder at his potentials. He baptized a poor white man named Bantley. Since Richard Whitehead refused the use of church by Nat, he did it in the mill Pond with the white people standing at the bank and throwing stones at Bantley and Nat. Amid the showering of stones, he told Bantley "I advise you to leave this country
soon because all the white people are going to be destroyed here." This was the next step that sharpened Nat's hatred much more and made him resolve more firmly to destroy all the whites from that area. And then on another Sunday he lectured to his brethren thus:

Listen to this minister of holy words. This, there is no time for laughing...come closer...This is a time for weeping, for lamentation, for rage...You is men brothers, men, not beasts of the fields. You aint's no four legged dogs. You is men I say. Oh! my brothers, Where is yo' pride?."

My language was theirs. My rage had captured them utterly and I felt a thrill of power course out from myself to warp them round binding us as one for the moment... Them Jews was jus' like black people. They had to sweat they fool asses off fo' Ole Poroh. That white man had Jews haulin' pullin' rocks an' thrashin' corn an' makin' bricks until they was near about dead... Jews was in bondage...That was sad time of Egypt fo' them Jews it was a time fo' weepin' lamentation, a time of toil an' hunger and pain...Poroh he whupped them Jews untill they had red whelps on' em from head to toe an' ev'y night they went
to bed cryin' "Lord when is you goin' to make that white man set us free...".

The same smoke that hang over Jews in the bondage down there in Egypt, hangs over all the black folks... An' we got a tougher row... than even them Jews... Pride... Pride everlasting pride will make you free... arise shine for thy light is come an' the glory of the God is risen upon thee. Amen."93

Thus had Nat chided them and had tried to raise their hopes. And they had listened, wondered, admired and appreciated. The next Sunday, at Jerusalem, there were a bigger number of Negroes who had come to listen to their black leader speak. Nat had felt immensely happy and noted with pride that they had begun to greet him with looks of those for whom his arrival marked their most treasured hour. He had tasted the power of leadership and was simply enchanted by it. In this manner Nat's leadership took firm roots. In this connection Robert H. Fossum has rightly said:

Indeed pity, sympathy and improved conditions paradoxically fan the fires of Nat's hatred and increase his passion
to destroy the white devils who possess him... For himself and for us Nat explains the fiery crux of Negro existence that if you "tickle him with the idea of hope... he will slice your throat, like the Negroes of our time." Nat had been tickled with the hope; and when the hope proves false, the primary object of his rage are white liberals who tickled him. Combined with a partial education, less bearable than none at all, and with erotic energies that can find their only let out in Violence, Nat's frustrated hopes find a new shape; a carefully formulated plan for violent vengeance... He embues his disciples with the spirit of black militancy, converts Napoleon, Joshua, David into Negro heroes, bestriding the carnage of the white world like apocalyptic angel and preaches that only an everlasting pride will make them free.94

Meanwhile, due to steady rainfall in the region, the area was once again on its path of prosperity. And once again white men became lax in their pleasures. By now Nat had crossed thirty. One day he stole a map from the library of Mr Richard Whitehead. He copied it and replaced it to its place without
Mr Whitehead ever knowing any thing about it. With the help of this map Nat chalked out a detailed plan of the route, seizure of arms and ammunitions and also the modus operandi of his uprise. He specified the nine points of his plan and purpose:

1. From Whitehead, fifteen muskets, fifteen pistols, four swords and plenty of powder lead.
2. From Jerusalem armory one hundred muskets and eighty lb. powder.
3. Diamond swamp route.
4. Total surprise essential.
5. Problem of recruitment
6. Unending patience and trust in God.
7. Wait patiently for the last sign.
8. Must sternly prevent violation of women.
    "We shall not do to their women what they have done to ours."
9. Slay all; No hostages. No impediments.

These are the resolution that Nat set down as the guide line of his uprise. And inorder to further boost the courage of his associates, he also devised a method to give them a hero. He had heard a great deal about Napoleon Bonapart and his military endeavours.
In his lecture to his brethren he began to project Napoleon as a black hero.

Nat tried to drill into their ignorant heads that by murdering the whites and becoming victorious they would become like the former heroes of their tribe such as Joshua, David and Napoleon etc. Nat selected Hark, Nelson, Henry, and Sam as his inner four - the most dependable of them all.

But inspite of all these preparations Nat did not start his uprise in a hurry. He waited for a sign and signal from the above. But more than that he was waiting for the right time. And so far, when ever he had meditated for the sign, he had not dreams of fucking a Negro girl. In this regard, Robert H Fossum opines:

It is not the language of the suffering servant which inspires Nat and the followers he slowly gathers around him; it is the language of Old Testament prophets - Ezekiel, Daniel, Isaiah and Jeremiah...He feels the closet kinship with the divinely furious Ezekiel...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 angel, the antagonist... The primal source of these visions are not the Bible but the Satanic forge with in Nat’s tormented soul. 96

The right time that Nat had been waiting for, came. He received the information that a great camp meeting of all the whites was going to take place in Gates country in two month’s time. This gave him two more months to think and chalk out his plans to his satisfaction, with extreme secrecy and confidence.

He had, each of his inner four, swear total secrecy of the plan. These inner four were entrusted with the job of selecting other twelve tough, disperate and powerful Negroes. Will was one of those twelve. As a slave he had broken his master’s arms and hid himself in the woods. But when he learnt about Nat’s plan, he came out of his hiding to join Nat’s force. He told Nat:

I gwine git me some meat now; white meat and some white cunt too.
And Nat told him, "Awright, you can join up... But I am the boss... I runs this show. When I say jump there, you jump. Right. Brandy and women are out. Come on now." 97
Though Nat was doubtful about Will's obedience to himself, he allowed him to join the movement because his hatred of the whites was proven to be murderous. And that was what was needed for Nat's purpose. Of course he knew that Will was obsessed with the idea of raping the white women and also he had a great attraction for booze. And these two weaknesses of Will were against his resolutions and therefore somewhat problematic. But since Nat knew that Will was a dare devil, he allowed him to join the movement.

Nat knows about sexual obsessions of Will. But he is not aware of his own obsessions. He himself is no less obsessed with sex. As a matter of fact his obsession is greater than that of Will. It is also mixed up with his religious experience. Robert H Fossum explains the point thus:

Until Nat accepts kinship with other slaves, he is a messiah without a people to save. This is accomplished through a homosexual experience with Will, the first Negro for whom Nat has felt any real affection. To Nat obsessed with religion and given to spiritual
interpretations of most mundane events, the act is a symbol of communion with all his black brothers... He follows it by performing his first baptism... From this point onwards Nat's sexual and religious feelings are inextricably intertwined.

To control his physical desire, he goes into the wilderness for periods of prayer and fasting during which erotic fantasies are confused with religious visions and images of rapturous intimacy with white women, are increasingly replaced by images of their violation. Because society and conscience both prevent Nat from having what he so urgently wants, he would destroy what he wants specially those women whose pity and sympathy both inflame his passion and sharpen his anguished awareness of their inaccessibility.

Thus Will and Nat both have their obsessions with white women's flesh. Of course Nat intertwines it with his religious fervour and Will expresses it just as crudely as is natural to him.

It was a Thursday, the eighteenth of August when the meeting of the whites began in Gates county. Naturally the majority of the
white gentry had left for Gates to attend the camp meeting. This was the right time Nat had been so eagerly waiting for. So on this day at around ten in the night, Nat signalled his men into action. They started in a single line with Nelson in the lead. They gathered at Travis's wheel shop. They were only eight in number. Austine was asked to saddle up the horses and bring them out of Travis's stable. Sam and Nelson brought a ladder and climbed up into Travis's bedroom.

It needs to be remembered that inspite of all his talk of pure and murderous hatred, Nat was not a down right killer. He tried to kill Travis in vain. And finally it was Will who killed Mr and Mrs Travis. They killed every one in Travis's house including a boy born just two month back. Thus they had made a beginning of their uprise.

They left Travis's house and marched on following the route set down by Nat. Later on during the day, ten innocent children were slaughtered at Wallerses' place. Thus they continued killing mercilessly and marching in a serpentine manner towards Jerusalem. From Harris's plantation a girl just fourteen
years old, dodged them and ran away. She ran for two miles and informed Williams about this uprise of the Negroes. All these activities and Nat's role in it has been analysed by Robert H Fossum thus:

...The rebellion fails because at the moment when action is most imperative, Nat is unable to act. He is suddenly overwhelmed by the fact that Travis who was to be his first victim, is not some abstract instrument of a bondage but a man like himself. Nat cannot kill him. He can only yearn to flee into wilderness, hide himself from the eyes of God and man alike and leave the killing to Will. Nat does not flee, but by the time he commits his first and only murder he has gone long, since effectually relinquished his role of leader to Will. Later on, more over, he spares a young girl who is to sound alarm against his army. Hence the very quality that makes Nat morally superior to Will, allows the later to replace him as the "Black Avatar" of freedom. The very quality that makes him superior to his masters, the understanding that a man is neither an object nor an abstraction leads to his defeat at their hands.99
Nat's inability to kill Travis (As a leader he was expected to strike first) seized leadership from him and put it into the hands of Will. And the girl whom Nat had spared and who had warned the upcounty whites about the uprise, proved fatal to Nat, his men and their mission. The timely warning from the girl resulted in an elaborate preparations made in order to counter the Negro menace at Major Riddley's place. A big number of Negroes also gathered to protect and fight for their masters. They barricated the varandah and stood ready with guns and muskets rifles and even swords.

The moment Nat and his companions were in their range they started firing with as much passion and fury as their white owners. They had all gathered there to block Nat's passage to Jerusalem. Nat describes the counter attack and retreat of his men and of course failure of his uprise very accurately and honestly:

Each of us was mercilessly exposed. Our force not out numbered but out positioned and out gunned in a lopsided uphill assault...less by white men now, than hordes of household
and privileged town and upcounty Negroes. We had to fall back and disperse into the woods. My mission had become totally shattered. Will was shot dead. Henry was killed. Hark was booted and captured. I fled and escaped then...

Feeling sick with rage and the knowledge of defeat, I lit off alone hoping against hope that I could find Nelson, Austin and Jack, and re-group and swim across the river and make a three or four men attack at the armoury of Jerusalem...

And then I heard far of cavalry and knew that hope was pure lunacy...I sneaked out of woods in search of food and soon happened upon Vaugham's place. I took some food from the plundered kitchen and left.100

From Vaugham's place, Nat secretly went away and hid himself in a nearby cave. It was very near to his late master's place. Benjamin Phipps found him hiding in the cave, caught him, put him in chains and forced him to march towards the jail. Hark was already a beaten sack. He too was captured and sent to jail. Nat describes his arrest and march to jail in a vivid scenic manner:

I was beaten sack. The presence of my body in custody
had been verified and a hysteria hung over Jerusalem, like thunder...The chains around my neck, quadruple leg irons and the big ball of iron hung on to my ankles...the booted feet thund'ng into my back, behind and spine, and the fierce sting of hatpins in my shoulder, the blurred infuriated faces and the dust in my eyes and the gobs of their spit stringing from my nose, neck and cheeks (even now I could feel it on my face like an enormous scab dried and encrusted) and the hysterical voices, 'Burn the devil, burn him, burn the black devil.' I wished they could get it over with whatever they are going to do, burn or hang, right now...  

In this harrowing and horrible manner Nat is brought to the jail. The enormous past ends here and the diminutive present begins. He makes his confessions to his court-appointed lawyer Thomas Gray and is subsequently taken to the gallows.

Thus it can be seen that right from his birth, (he is the son of a run away slave) every thing turns out to be just another progressive step leading to his imprisonment and hanging till death. His getting special
attention at the Turner's; his learning to read and write and thereby the birth in him of the high hope; his first taste of whip at the hands of Mr. Thomas Moore; his harrassment at the hands of Reverend Epps, and every thing else including Hark's accounts of the tyrannies of the whites on the blacks, fanned the fire of rebellion in Nat.

Along with these, there is also his sexual frustration and religious mania to drive him to the execution of his bloody plan, its failure which was almost a certainty, with an equal certain aftermath of his being taken to the gallows. Thus the simple present is just an out-come of the past. But apart from this simple impact of the past on the present, there is something more interesting about the time phase in the novel. Nat tells his life-story when his death seems to him to be certain. This makes his past and present get fused together inextricably. Bernhard Reitz says this very thing:

Styron's Nat tells his story at that very point in his life where the only certainty left is the certainty of death. Through his deeds, as his visitor Gray makes plain, he
has severed his ties with mankind, and he also feels unable to negotiate with himself and God. The assurance of death is balanced not so much against the uncertainty of what comes after, but against the uncertainty of what has happened before. Thus Nat’s attempts to relate how he became the man he is, can indeed be described as an attempt to make sense of the fearful ambiguities of time and history. It is in this way that Nat’s story both completes and transcends his own history. 102

Thus, within the time sequence of Nat’s history, from his childhood onwards, the scene of drought-affected and blighted domain of Virginia is a flash forward into the dismal future that lies waiting for Nat at Thomas Moore’s farm. And here he is forced to resolve to eradicate what he believes to be the whiteman’s conspiracy against himself.

By placing Nat between the ideas of progress and religion as they were understood in the early nineteenth century, Styron makes us understand Nat not as someone standing apart but as an embodiment of his society and time. That is why in his identification with
the idea of progress, in his disillusionment and in his attitude towards religion, Nat reflects the notions and limits of the world he is part of. And at the end of Nat's meditation on the ambiguities of time and history, there remains no design greater than himself and it is for this reason that we can conceive the nineteenth century slave rebel as our contemporary.

SOPHIE'S CHOICE was first published in 1979 and was made into a successful film in 1982. Ever since its publication this novel has been the subject of critical debate. Some critics have found fault with Styron for writing about the holocaust while others have criticised it on the structural grounds. Morris Dickstein in SEWANEE REVIEW pointed out that this novel breaks apart into two separate and equal halves - Stingo's autobiography and Sophie and Nathan affair. William Heath in SOUTHERN REVIEW says that Styron has in this novel made the two stories of Sophie and Stingo compete with one another. However, Styron has integrated the stories of Stingo, Sophie and Nathan with the thematic motive involving all the three characters in the
novel.

The present time in the novel begins with coming together of the protagonist and the narrator at Yetta Zimmerman's in Brooklyn. After many strains and re-unions between Nathan and Sophie, together they commit suicide. Stingo the narrator sheds tears on their grave and in the end leaves for the farm, his father had asked him to overseer. If we want to know about why Sophie committed suicide or why she died with Nathan in particular, we will have to unearth the past lives of all the three characters, including that of the narrator also. The examination of narrator's past too is essential because without that, his aims achievements and his involvements with Sophie and Nathan would not be set in the proper perspective.

At Yetta Zimmerman's, when Stingo and Sophie had got real intimate she had let him into the dark recesses of her harrowing past bit by bit. She told him about her Polish parentage and childhood. During her childhood, her parents were her ideal. She had wanted to be a music teacher like her mother and marry some Mathematics teacher like her
father.

She was born in Cracow a very ancient city of Poland. The city was an ancient seat of learning with an ancient university and even more ancient Church of St. Mary from the balustrade of which a man used to blow trumpets to signify the hour. Sophie's parents were teachers in the university of Cracow, one of the oldest in Europe, started in the fourteenth century. Her mother was a teacher of music and her father taught mathematics. Her father was from Lubin and mother was from Lodz. They had met when they were students in Vienna and subsequently married.

Her parents were Catholics and devout church-goers. Naturally Sophie grew up under a great religious influence. As a child she had her parents as her ideal, quite naturally therefore her childhood dream was "to become a teacher of music like my mother and get married to some fine professor like father."103

At the age of thirteen she was married to an instructor in Maths named Casimir Kazik. She had two children out of this marriage a son named Jan Zavistowski and a daughter named Eva.
Zavistowski.

It was at this stage in her life that trouble started. Her father had started writing pamphlets in which he methodically philosophised the necessity of eliminating the Jews from all walks of life. Her husband became a devout disciple of her father. And along with her husband she was forced to distribute these pamphlets. It was a kind of betrayal and she lost all regard for her father and her husband. On the other hand, her husband also became very cool and calculated in his behaviour. Thus the warmth and the passion of their relationship was totally lost. Once he told her bluntly:

If I am no longer able to function with you it's not due to lack of virility but because almost every thing about you specially your body leaves me totally without sensations...I can not stand even the very smell of your bed. 104

This shows that a great rift had come between Sophie and her husband Kazik. Since she considered the pamphleteering of her father and her husband, as a kind of betrayal, they had lost all respect in her eyes. With
her husband she had lost all kinds of communication-mental and physical both. Therefore when the German Soldiers came to Cracaow and took her husband and her father into custody and finally killed them, she didn't feel any grief or remorse for them.

The people of Cracow were shocked and surprised at the arrival of the military in their city. But since the military had come in quietly and had not bombed the city, people had a vague notion that the military would not do any harm to them. They thought that the soldiers would treat them with respect and decency.

Of course they were mistaken. The first were the university teachers to go. They were all called (including Sophie's father and husband) together in the university courtyard. And that was the end of them. From the university courtyard they were deported to a concentration camp and killed. They were killed just because they were Polish. In one of her recollections of the past she tells Stingo, "My father and husband both were shot dead on the Newyear's day." Sophie herself was caught when she was trying
to smuggle meat for her mother who was suffering from tuberculosis. After a few months of that her mother died of hunger and malnutrition. Sophie recollects her journey through the hell, the most harrowing of which was her encounter with the S.S. Functionary Hauptsturmführer who at the concentration camp had told her:

You have come to a concentration camp, not to a sanatorium. And there is only one way out, up the chimney... and one who doesn't like that can try hanging himself on the wires. If there are Jews in this camp, you have no right to live more than two weeks... Any nuns here?...Like priests you have one month...All the rest three months...

After spending many horrible days and nights at the Gestapo camp, she was sent to a concentration camp. Here they find out that she can not only read and write but also knows shorthand and typing. Therefore the officials thought of sending her to Auschwitz. She tells Stingo:

Then by train I was deported to Auschwitz. Auschwitz was used for slave labour and Birkenau was used for
extermination. I was sent to Auschwitz because I was right age and good health. I was at Auschwitz for twenty months. When I arrived every one who was selected to be killed was sent to Birkenau...It was a place for the mass extermination of the Jews. The prisoners at Auschwitz worked...to help in the extermination at Birkenau...So the camp at Auschwitz became mostly composed of what Germans called the Aryans, who worked to maintain the Birkenau crematorium...But one must see that the Aryan prisoners were also to die finally...107

Sophie was sent to Auschwitz because she was young, healthy and extremely beautiful. She knew type and short-hand and could be useful. Here Sophie was horrified to find the evils and cruelties being perpetuated mostly by civilians and not by the soldiers. The soldiers just forced them into maintaining it all. But civilians could always be lax or revolt which they never did. They consisted of a cross-section of Germans—bakers, carpenters, physicians, book-makers, waiters, office-clerks, nurses, firmen, musicians, lawyers and every one else.
However, at Auschwitz, the worse onslaught came when she was forced to make a choice of keeping one of her two children and letting the other go to the gas chamber. She described the pathetic and touching scene to Stingos:

"You may keep one of your children. The other will have to go." the doctor said to Sophie. "You mean I have to choose."

"You are a Polack not a kid. That gives a priveledge... a choice."

"I can't choose."

"Hurry. now choose... Choose... Goddam it or I will send them both over there."

"Don't make me choose." She heard herself plead in a whisper, "I can't choose." And the doctor told his aid, "Send them both over there."

"Then take my little girl." She said. The aid tugged Eva's hand and led her away into the waiting legion of the damned. She would ever retain a dim impression that the child continued to look back beseaching... She was driven nearly mad by her last glimpse of that small vanishing form.

As a woman, a mother she had suffered the greatest blow in her life. And for the rest
of her life she could not pardon herself for this unmotherly act. As a result of this, an enormous sense of guilt haunted her for the rest of her life.

Sophie herself was not Jewish. But she suffered as much as any Jew who had suffered and survived the same plight. In many ways she had suffered more than her fair share of the calamity, just because many a times she had found herself forced to be an accomplice, while all along she had been a victim of the machine of torture. It was this aspect of her past that had produced a very strong sense of guilt in her. Stingo says:

It is now clear to me that a hideous sense of guilt always chiefly governed re-assessments she was forced to make of her past. I also come to see that she tended to view her own recent history through a filter of self-loathing—apparently not a rare phenomenon among those who had undergone her particular ordeal...Sophie was in general always secretive about her sojourn in the bowels of hell—secretive to the point of obsession—and if that is the way she wanted it, it was, God knows, a position one had to honour.
The sense of guilt increased many more times when she was sent to the house of Rudolf Hoss, the military chief at Auschwitz. She was sent there to work as a translator and steno-typist. From this house of the military chief whenever Sophie looked through the window, she always saw "a sickening vaporous residue spiraling skyward from the chimneys of Birkenau." 110 Where mass gasing and burning of the Jews was being done continuously.

Hoss's house was the only house in the area into which the smell of the burning of human flesh did not enter. Though the foul smell did not enter the house yet inside the house Sophie was always aware about what was happening outside the house. At Hoss's house she shared her quarters with some other prisoners like Broneck who was a member of the Polish Underground Resistance Group and Wilhelmine who was lesbian and had tried to make love to Sophie. Here Sophie tried to endear herself to Hoss so as to get her son freed. Recollecting it to Stingo Sophie tells:
Hoss was going soon to be transferred to Berlin. I must move quickly if I was to ... seduce Hoss, even if it makes me sick...hoping that somehow I could seduce him with my mind rather than with my body...I made a decision that in some way I might appear attractive to him, standing there by the window sexy you know...you know what I mean-looking as if I wanted to fuck...111

And when she felt she had gained some ground with her boss, she requested him to fetch her son and daughter from Berlin. Hoss went to Berlin and came back without her son or daughter. And she was so enraged that she scratched his face with her fingernails. However, even after that temporary outburst, she didn't stop flattering Hoss. She told Hoss about her father's anti-Jewish pamphlets. She even told him a lie that she hated Jews because a Jew had raped her sister. But Hoss had at once realised that she was telling a lie and cut her short with:

Jews are perpetrators of many gross evils but they are not rapists...You have been flirting shamelessly with me, it is hard to believe, you are Polish... so typically Aryan.
Yet it can not be entirely your own fault. You are an extremely attractive woman...

Once when Sophie and Hoss were in a very intimate position and he was somewhat passionate too and would have made love to her, there was a knock at the door which made them separate quickly. And when the intruder had left Hoss had come back to her, a more composed man. He had decided to tell her the truth. He had told her:

I long to have intercourse with you. Having intercourse with you will allow me to loose myself. But I can not and will not. It is too much of a risk. It will be doomed to disaster. If I were not leaving here, I would take the risk...I would risk a great deal to have relations with you. But I must go and so you must go too, to the block two from where you came.

But inspite of Hoss's telling her the truth of the matter, she continued to try to enchant Hoss by her beauty and her feminine charms. She became more deliberate in her attempts but failed in that too as Hoss realised that all her attempts at enchanting him were aimed at something more than mere
lust. In fact he told her as much, "What do you take me for? A dumpling. ... You think you can manipulate me because I expressed my special feelings for you." Though he had promised to make provisions to let her see her boy, she never saw her son again. She was greatly disgusted with herself and so disappointed that she wanted and tried to commit suicide by cutting her wrist with a sharp piece of glass. But when she had bled allot, she stopped the flow of blood, "not because I became afraid of dying or because of the pain of it but because I thought that till Hoss was alive in Poland or Germany, I could not die," ... After the war, Sophie found herself in a camp in Sweden in 1945. And from there an international relief organisation brought her to Brooklyn in America. She found herself in an alien country amidst strange people. She had lost her father, mother, husband and two children, her mother land and every thing else at the cruel hands of Nazism. In fact her identity itself was totally lost. In this regard Owen L Nagel says:

Sophie has the most complex
identity problem of the three figures in the book, perhaps in part because she relies on others for her sense of the self... Sophie's identity is entirely rational and dependant on the men around her. In her youth in Poland she was tied to her father, a man who had no more feeling for her than a servant. She is dutiful and respectful daughter and later she becomes the wife of a man who appears to be carbon copy of her father. But when these men are killed her sense of the self is shattered... ironically and tragically even her identity as a mother is also very cruelly assaulted when she is forced to choose between her two children... At Hoss's she is unable to bear the stench and cries out "I don't know what I am."

In Brooklyn we encounter this Sophie who has suffered a total loss of her identity. Here she becomes friendly with Nathan with whom she became so close that they began to live together like a married couple without really getting married. Nathan's parents were prosperous and he lived in a big house in Brooklyn Heights. Nathan's brother Larry told Stingo that once during the World War Second, "Nathan took into his head to try to burn down
the house and almost did".  

After that incident, naturally many restrictions had to be put on his freedom. He was not to be allowed to move out unattended. He had to be kept home. So he stayed home and studied all kinds of books, ranging from the books of Newton to those of Proust. Yet he could not be described as a man with a formal education.

Nathan’s father had a very close friend in Pfitzer Company (in which Nathan claimed to be a research biologist which he was not) and out of just a favour the company allowed Nathan to be a helping hand in the library. There was very little he was required to do, but when he was in control of himself, whatever little he did, he made a good job of it. Once his brother Larry told Stingo about Nathan:

He could have been anything, under the proper circumstances. I have no doubt that he could have been fantastically brilliant at any thing he might have tried out-writing, biology, mathematics, medicines, astronomy philosophy, whatever. But he never got his mind in order... The truth is my brother is quite mad...
Though Nathan had never been to Havard college, he boasted to every one that he was there. From the novel we learn that Nathan is an addict. This clearly indicates that Nathan too has lost his identity, what though its cause is his madness. In this regard the novel tells us that Nathan is very emphatic about his Jewish heritage. He considers himself to be many persons, a research biologist, a Havard Graduate, a writer out to outdo Hemingway. Gwen L Nagel says:

Magnetic Nathan is very convincing in creating illusions; both Stingo and Sophie believe he is a medical savant, a research scientist on the brink of a major breakthrough. But these self-assured poses mask the fact that Nathan’s portrait of himself is a jumble of contradiction and half truths. For example he identifies himself as a graduate from Havard, a frustrated writer, who... would have outdone Hemingway, a young man who was suposed to fulfill his family’s ambition of being a fiddle player... Nathan’s playful identification with imagined figures conveys his ability to charm by creating fanciful identities for himself, but it also foreshadows his suicide.
Nathan tells stories, plays roles and performs throughout the novel. But it is a make-believe; his identity is a sham....

Thus it can be clearly seen that Nathan is ironically suited to get involved with Sophie. For the kind of pasts these two major characters, Sophie and Nathan have had, their coming together seems to be destined. In his company Sophies tries to forget her harrowing past life and start a new life. And the present of the novel begins with the arrival of the narrator Stingo to the Pink Palace of Yetta Zimmerman.

The past of Stingo too has its shades. Stingo is not a static character like Nathan. Stingo is a writer, southerner and a virgin when we meet him at Yetta Zimmerman’s. Naturally we have to deduce that his past had been in the company of the great minds of both the past and his contemporaries. From the novel we learn that his burning ambition is to do for the South what Joyce had done for the Dublin. Later on Nathan is found talking about the great writers who possibly had influenced Stingo. And Stingo had acknowledged
that he had read Faulkner, Wolfe, Mc. Cullers and Warren along with many other great writers of the past. This confirms his literary involvement in the past.

This apart, there was in Stingo a sense of guilt and shame about something that had happened in the past. He says:

I felt shame over the kinship with Anglo-Saxon sub-humans who were torturers of Bobby Weed... the denizens of that Piney Coast near Brunswick where my savior Artist had toiled and suffered and died—had made sixteen year old Bobby Weed one of the last and most memorably wiped out victims of lynch justice the South was to witness... His reputed crime (resembling Artist's)... he had ogled or molested not raped Lula—daughter of a store-keeper... in punishment Bobby Weed's cock and balls had been hacked off and thrust into his mouth... Suddenly I began to feel sick with a past a place and a heritage I could neither believe in nor fathom....

Stingo had received five hundred dollars as his share from the Artist's sale. It was this money he was living on in Brooklyn. And Nathan's criticism of the South for its cruel treatment of the Negroes made Stingo feel
ashamed of his heritage and filled him with a sense of guilt as he was just then living on the money got out of the sale of a Negro slave, Artist.

The Artist episode was something distant in his life. It had not happened before his eyes. But there was something that had happened in his childhood that left a great scar on his psyche. Stingo describes the incidence himself:

I was twelve. My mother being devoured by cancer, fell and broke the tibia of her leg... walked with a cane... but generally remained sitting in chair reading Pearl S Buck's novels, near the fire place... It was my duty after the school to keep the fire going... It was freezing cold...I was lured away by the promise of a ride in a new Packard Clipper of my schoolmate... In the pine wood I felt vicious cold and thought of the hearth and deserted helpless lonely mother and 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, was at my mother's
side half an hour before I got there. When I reached, he was muttering to himself and was massaging 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 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 suffered... I would willingly have stayed there untill dawn or till I had frozen to death —so long as I was able to expiate my crime. Seven months later she died and I speculated with dread on the notion that my abandonement that day had sent her into the long decline from which she never recovered and finally died. —Built. Hateful guilt... 121

Thus this negligence on his part during his childhood had killed his mother. At least this is what Stingo thought then and could never get rid of the feeling that he himself had hastened the death of his mother. The sense of guilt never left him.

Stingo too has his identity problems. The narrator Stingo has two personalities in
the novel itself. There is one stingo who is young inexperienced and getting all the experiences. The other Stingo is mature retrospective, and tells the story of the young Stingo. The older narrator asserts himself through out his tale envying his former (youthful) self. The older and wiser narrator has stuided recent history and brings to his tale facts about Auschwitz and Birkenau, not known in 1947. This narrator has his family and is a man who hates April Fool's Day because it reminds him of Sophie's confinement in Auschwitz.

So it is this kind of young Stingo who arrives at Yetta Zimmerman's in Brooklyn. The present of the novel beings with Stingo's arrival to Yetta Zimmerman's. Here he comes in close contact with drug addict Nathan and ship-wrecked Sophie. He falls in love with Sophie at first sight. Initially he is surprised to find Sophie and Nathan living together like husband and wife without ever being married. But more than that, he was swept off his feet when Nathan Ladau introduced himself:

I Nathan Ladau, a common
citizen, research biologist, human being, witness to man's inhumanity to man, say that the fate of Bobby Weed at the hands of the white Southerners is as bottomlessly barbarous act as any act performed by the Nazis during the rule of Adolf Hitler... Each white Southerner is accountable for the tragedy of Bobby Weed.\textsuperscript{122}

Since Stingo himself was a Southerner, Nathan by this declaration of his had made Stingo feel greatly ashamed of his kinship with the "Anglo-Saxon sub-humans who were the torturers of Bobby Weed."\textsuperscript{123} And this was not the only time he had referred to the cruelties of the white Southerners. When ever he was on the high horse, his mind was out of control, he accused the Southerners and made Stingo feel ashamed of himself and his heritage.

Ever since Sophie had come to Brooklyn and met Dr. Blockstock, she had begun working for him. The doctor himself was an immigrant from Poland. He had been impressed by her beauty and had employed her. And thus she had begun her life with the decision to bury the past madness and turn over a new leaf.

When the three of them became very
friendly Nathan took some ninety odd pages of stingo's novel, read it and came to announce his judgement:

After reading those ninety odd pages of my novel in an hour and half, Nathan hustled in out of the night... sprawled down opposite Sophie.... His judgement hung in the air like a clap of thunder, "You have read Faulkner." He said slowly, "You have read Penn Warren." He paused, "I am sure you have read Thomas Wolf and even Carson McCullers... I am breaking my promise about no criticism"... And I thought, oh shit, He has got my number all right... I clenched my eyes shut, thinking, I should have never shown it to this cone man... His big hands grasped my shoulders and his lips smeared my brow with a wet and sloppy kiss. "Twenty two years old" He exclaimed "And you my God, you can write... of course you have read those writers. You would not be able to write a book if you hadn't. But you have absorbed them kid, absorbed them and made them your own. You have got your own voice. 124

This is an example of the sane self of Nathan Ladau. But when he goes off his balance, he is equally bitter and sarcastic
and even abusive. Around this very time Balckstock’s wife dies in an accident. She was an alcoholic and a problem drinker. Blackstock had no other relatives left in this wide world, and in this bereavement of his wife, Sophie found herself working as a kind of surrogate kin. Younger sister or a daughter, fetching sedatives, brewing tea and listening to his dirge for his wife.

Once, just by chance when Blackstock had come to drop Sophie home, Nathan saw it all. He saw Blackstock embracing Sophie. He thought that the doctor was trying to get more than a mere a daughterly comfort from Sophie and she too was getting some kind of sexual pleasure in it. Later on it became a regular point of quarrel between Sophie and Nathan.

This along with Nathan’s suspicions (not altogether baseless either) that Stingo and Sophie had developed a greater liking for one another, made Nathan much more bitter and suspicious. He began to get upset more frequently and take refuge in drugs. His insanity increased so much that once he took Sophie into the woods and made her suck his penis and tried to piss into her mouth abusing
her all the while"Suck me Irma, suck the Jew boy... suck me you fascist pig...jew burning cunt..." 125

And then one evening he brought two poison-containing capsules. But when he was asleep, Sophie threw them into the toilet and flushed it. In the morning when he had gained self control, he asked Sophie’s forgiveness and made love to her. But even then by these increased attacks of insanity Sophie had begun feeling fed up. And therefore when she assessed her entire past with Nathan, she thought that it was all a mistake right from the beginning. She should never have got involved with him. Once she told Stingo:

It was sick of me to be just a little kitten for him to fondle... to fuck...to fuck and fondle... He almost killed me, he beat me... I don’t need Nathan no more ....I am still young. I can find an another man easy. It is so very Jewish of Nathan. He wasn’t giving me his love, he was buying me with it like all Jews... Jews, God, I hate them. All my life I hated Jews. They deserve it. I hate them... Nathan has every thing that is bad in Jews... 126

After this turmoil, Sophie tried to
commit suicide by drowning herself. Stingo saved her and brought her back home. Nathan asked Sophie to quit her job at Blackstock's but she refused to oblige and told him that since she was not married to him, she had every right to enjoy some degree of independance in that respect.

Of course the truth was that she had really become fond of Blackstock. She had developed a liking for his company. She used to feel more at ease with him because she could talk with him in her mother tongue. Also she had developed a great liking for Stingo whom Nathan, not altogether baselessly, suspected to be aspiring for her love and affection.

But in spite of all these likings for Blackstock and fondness for Stingo, Sophie at the bottom of her heart had remained Nathan's and Nathan's alone. Nathan knew it and therefore he could not tolerate even the idea that Sophie should be enchanting to another male. So in order to get all the trouble sorted out they decided to get married. When Stingo had left for Jack Brown's, Nathan and Sophie went to Manhattan for a week end,
Nathan purchased a ring for Sophie. It was their engagement ring. It was big and costly "fit for a Hollywood princess". And then he purchased the wedding dress, boasting all the while to be celebrating a big discovery he had made as a scientist. Sophie knew that he was on the high horse and somehow managed to bring him back home. And there he began to pull the place down.

Morris Fink telephoned Stingo at Brown's and he came at once. Nathan had bruised and beaten Sophie very badly. After hearing every thing and seeing Sophie's condition, Stingo told Sophie, "I don't want to say it but Nathan must be put away. He is dangerous. He must be confined forever".

Just then Nathan arrived and began to shout at Stingo. He began to accuse him of betraying him:

You unspeakable creep! you wretched swine! God damn you to hell forever for betraying me behind my back, you whom I trusted like the best friend I ever had. And that shit-eating grin of yours day after day, cool as cucumber... Ah ghee Nathan, thank you so much... when not fifteen minutes earlier you had been humping
away in bed with the women I was going to marry. I say was going to, past tense, because I would burn in hell, before I would marry a two timing Polack who'd spread her legs for a sneaky Southern shitass betraying me like... I am coming to get you treacherous scum... 129

With those words, he let out a shot and left. And Stingo and Sophie fled, in fright. The next morning Stingo and Sophie left Brooklyn for Washington. Stingo telephoned Nathan's brother Larry (he was in Toronto) and told him to come back to Brooklyn at once. And then he telephoned his father that he had decided to go and overseer that farm in Virginia. His idea was to get himself established in Virginia, marry Sophie and live happily ever after.

In Washington they checked in a hotel, with Stingo giving his identity as Reverend Wilber Enwistle and Sophie as his wife. For credibility he had kept a copy of Bible in his hand. Even though Sophie had come that far with Stingo, he found her still obsessed with the memories of Nathan. She had brought along the nuptial garments purchased by Nathan.
Though Stingo did his best to make Sophie forget Nathan, but it was all in vain:

Sophie told Stingo, "I want to find out about Nathan. I want to see if he is all right." "Listen Sophie, that part is over... Can't you realise that he actually was on the point of killing us both. Larry will come down from Toronto, locate Nathan and deal with him. After all he is his brother, his closest relative. Nathan is insane. He has got to be institutionalised." And she began to weep.

Sophie began to weep and cry and sob, like her heart would break. In his attempt to pacify Sophie and make her feel at ease, Stingo achieved manhood. Till that day, one of the major pre-occupations of Stingo had been that he was still a virgin, because till then, he had failed in all his encounters with the opposite sex and had begun doubting his own virility, and sexuality. That night Sophie became his loving instructress in sex and he enjoyed it with her in the most enchanting and memorable way. However, when he woke up in the morning, he found Sophie gone, leaving behind a note for him which read:
My dearest Stingo,
You are such a beautiful lover. I hate to leave, and forgive me for not saying goodbye. Believe me, you will find some beautiful mademoiselle to make you happy on the farm. You should not think by this, I am being cruel. But when I woke up I was feeling so terrible in despair about Nathan. So I must be with Nathan again for whatever that may mean... I may not see you again. Forgive me my poor English. I love Nathan, but now feel this hate of life and God. Fuck God and all his handiwork. And all his life too and even what remains of love... Sophie.131

Stingo read the letter and started his journey back to Brooklyn. It was after reaching there that Stingo could understand the meaning of Sophie’s frenzied love-making with him in the night, in that Congress Hotel in Washington. He saw Nathan and Sophie lying dead. It was sodium cyanide that they had taken to finish themselves. Now he could understand that "the frenzied and frantic love-making was both a plunge into a carnal oblivion and a flight from the memory of grief... an organistic attempt to beat back
death."  

They were clad as that long ago Sunday when I first saw them together — she in her sporty togs from bygone times; he in those wide stripped raffish, anachronistic gray flannels that had made him look a successful gambler. Dressed thus but recumbent and entwined in each other's arms, they appeared, from where I stood, as peaceful as two lovers who had gaily costumed themselves for an afternoon stroll but on impulse had decided to lie down to nap or kiss and love or merely whisper to each other of fond matters, frozen in this grave and tender embrace for ever.

Sophie’s tragedy is the tragedy of a woman who after losing her self identity tried to re-established it in the company of insane drug addict, which was simply bound to lead to disaster. She had lost her father, mother husband, children and mother land also at the cruel hands of Nazism. And with that had come the unavoidable and horrible sense of loss of identity of the self. She tried to re-established it but unfortunately found herself associated with altogether a wrong man in Nathan who turned out to be insane and drug
addict. So when this second attempt too failed, her last attempt to give meaning to life ended and she decided to end her life and did it with Nathan.

Thus the past that had remained firmly rooted in memorary and psyche, always made her consider "what could have been and now can not be." how so ever hard she might try, and was in the end responsible for her crazy behaviour and ultimate suicide. The novelist says:

The turmoil that was grinding them had double origins, deriving perhaps equally from the black tormented underside of Nathan’s nature and from unrelinquished realities of Sophie’s immediate past, trailing its horrible smoke from the chimneys of Auschwitz and Birkenau - of anguish, confusion, self-deception and above all guilt.

Thus it can be logically said that it was ever haunting shadow of the horrible past that ultimately forced Sophie to decide to end her life with Nathan. Of course had she found a sane person, a positive realist as a companion, things would certainly have been different. But since that was not to be, she
was unable to get her mind off her horrible and guilt ridden past, the gloomy past becoming gloomier and future darker, asking her to put an end to her misery by ending her life. It is rightly observed in THE SOUTHERN TEMPER that:

A mere preoccupation with the past and with its relations to customs and human ceremony may very well lead to a rather empty life and there is enough of this attitude... in a suggestion of the past's residing in and influencing the present._136

Thus in this Novel it is the past guilt that overpowers the present. Styron's marvelous conjuring up of the past leads to the final present. The past had remained firmly locked in her memory and psyche and is responsible for her present behaviour and suicide.
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