

THE DIALECTICS OF SUPPRESSION: WILLIAM STYRON'S THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER

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ABSTRACT

The paper seeks to explore how William Styron's fourth novel, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, affirms his faith in the suppressed hero. It endeavours to explore in this novel the dialectics through which the Negroes were suppressed and their miserable conditions in which they were subjected to live in antebellum South. It is a sort of a deep study of the domination of the whites over the blacks. Styron through this novel very successfully examines Nat Turner's 1831 Southampton County Virginia slave revolt. The paper explores how Southerners favoured the enslavement of Africans mainly for three main viewpoints. Firstly, the rationalist believed that Negroes were inferior to whites and, therefore, could be treated as slaves. The Whites believed that slavery had to be accepted for the economic welfare of the Southern states of America. Secondly, the proslavery pseudo-scientists tried to highlight biological and cultural differences between the races i.e. blacks and whites that would make the enslavement of black people justified. Thirdly, the proslavery evangelic clergymen supported slavery on the theological grounds citing the Scriptures. In Styron's this novel, these three proslavery arguments which form the strong pillars of dialectics of human bondage and suffering are expressed by numerous white characters. The paper deals with the instances of racial discrimination, demonic suppression and exploitation of Negroes by the whites, and the whites' dialectics through which the Negroes themselves accepted to be enslaved and exploited.

Keywords: Antebellum South, Whites, Negroes, Slavery, Third World War, Wasteland.

William Styron's fourth novel which happened to be his first commercial success, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, affirms his faith in his suppressed hero. It very sharply depicts the dialectics through which the Negroes were suppressed and their miserable conditions in which they were subjected to live in antebellum South of the United States of America. It is a sort of a deep study of the domination of the whites over the blacks. Styron through this novel very successfully examines Nat Turner's 1831 Southampton County Virginia slave revolt in which Nat Turner led 60-80 suppressed slave rebels in the property destruction and the ruthless murder of roughly 60 whites, as a response to their inhuman suppression by the southern whites. This insurrection according to Raymond A. Sokolov happened to be "the only carefully planned and effective slave revolt in American history" (65). In this novel Styron very critically analyses the dialectics of inhuman human domination of the blacks by the whites in antebellum South which were instrumental in this bloody insurrection. Raymond A. Sokolov finds universal importance of this novel when he points out that it is "one of those novels that is in act of revelation to a whole society" (66). C. Vann Woodward appreciated William Styron for accepting a challenge to write on a subject which has been accepted by a very few writers before him. This makes him call it "the most profound treatment of slavery in our literature" (26).

In an interview conducted by R.W.B Lewis and C. Vann Woodward and published in *Yale Alumni Magazine*, 1967, Styron himself has made it clear that *The Confessions of Nat Turner* was historical, social and topical only peripherally (34). Its real purpose was to explore the mysterious human psyche grappling with the experience of suppression, exploitation, suffering, violence and redemption. The novel is an endeavour of man's search for love and bliss in a world which accommodates evil in its darkest form. In an interview with George Plimpton, Styron reveals that he has seen the implication of "a tremendous theme" in the historical Nat Turner's bloody mission to free his fellow slaves from white masters (2).

This historical slave insurrection of Negro slaves against their white masters took place under the leadership of and supervision of Nat Turner in the late summer of 1831, in a remote section of South-Eastern Virginia. Through this short lived rebellion was put down immediately even then it took a toll of sixty white people. The rebels were arrested and ultimately executed. During the retaliation that followed the insurrection, about two hundred innocent Negroes were brutally butchered by the whites in an attempt to teach them a lesson. Nat Turner remained escaped for some days but was finally captured on October 30th, 1831 and was taken the following day to the jail in Jerusalem county seat of Southampton County. In the cell, a white court appointed lawyer named Thomas R. Gray, eager to know as much as he could about the bloody insurrection against the white masters from the leader of the insurrection himself, found Nat ready to talk. Subsequently, Gray recorded Nat's statements and published a five thousand word pamphlet about twenty pages entitled, "The Confessions of Nat Turner", which also included a list of the white victims and the blacks who were charged with participation in the rebellion. In his Introduction, "To the Public" Gray wrote which Styron also attached with his novel:

This is a faithful record of his [Nat Turner's] confessions . . . They certainly bear one stamp of truth and sincerity. He makes no attempt (as all the other insurgents who were examined did) to exculpate himself, but frankly acknowledges his full participation in all the guilt of the transaction. He was not only the contriver of the conspiracy, but gave the first blow towards its execution. (xii) (emphasis original)

This brief pamphlet by Gray is the single most authentic and important source of information regarding the only effective uprising related with Nat Turner of the South. It does reveal some important facts about Nat Turner, his early life, his mastery of the Bible, his religious fanaticism and his understanding of his inhuman exploitation which compelled him to rise up against the white masters of the Southampton County.

After detailed analyses of Gray's "The Confessions of Nat Turner", Nat emerges as a unique character. One comes to know that it was Nat who masterminded the bloody insurrection though he did not personally suffer much the atrocities of slavery because his masters had been, to some extent, kind to him and had placed much confidence in him. During the insurrection, Nat emerges as an individual who found himself unable to murder when occasion demanded though he had directed his followers that neither age nor sex was to be spared. Nat's only murder was that of Margaret Whitehead.

The historical facts of Nat which Styron has woven in the story of the novel connect with Nat's understanding of inhuman treatment of blacks at the hands of whites as motivation for violence against white masters with the demonic institution of slavery, suppression, exploitation and its inbred psychosexual problems. In Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, the story is narrated by the protagonist i.e. Nat Turner himself. The novel begins with the "Judgment Day" on which Nat after a trial is sentenced to die on the gallows. The novel then takes us back in narration by "Old Times Past: Visions, Dreams, Recollections". Nat's childhood and youth have been depicted in "Old Times Past", then the novel takes us to the description of the massacre in "Study War" and the novel ends with Nat's execution in "It Is Done". Styron has very carefully used the language in his *The Confessions of Nat Turner* as a fit medium to express the tangled emotions and to meet the challenges of various needs to a slave's condition in antebellum American South. Styron has made Nat speak to his white masters in a

slavish manner, to his suppressed and exploited Negro brothers in bondage in a carefully articulated language of an oppressed person, and to himself and God Nat is made to speak in an archaic Biblical language. No doubt, Styron took a bold step in dealing with Nat and history under the direction of his creative imagination in his *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, yet he was tremendously successful in achieving personal identification with his character by narrating the whole story of the novel in first person. Styron in an interview with Plimpton spoke about the significance of the technique which he used in this novel:

I was up on Martha's Vineyard and I had just read for the first time Camus's *The Stranger*. It is a brilliant book, the best of Camus, and it impressed me enormously; there was something about poignancy of the condemned man in his jail cell on the day of his execution—the existential predicament of man—that hit me. And so did the use of the first person, the book being told through the eye of the condemned. The effect of all this was so strong that I suddenly realized that my Nat Turner could be done the same way: that, like Camus, I would centre the novel around a man facing his own death in a jail cell, which of course was true of Turner and how his life ended. And so there suddenly provided, was the architecture of the book, its framework, along with the idea of telling the story in the first person. (38)

This mentioned "The existential predicament" and "the poignancy of the condemned man" provide an understanding into the pattern of the novel. In this novel, Styron is not concerned that much with the factual history as much he is concerned with the basic human element involved in the terrible tragedy that has happened in history of Southern America. In his *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, Styron is not in fact interested that much in the external features of the historical time and place, as much in this novel he does a meditation on history with special focus on the dialectics of suppression in the way that he exploits the historical facts to reveal the themes that according to George Core, "that concern the human life and its peculiar emotional gravity in this period and any other—the inner world" (157). In an endeavour to probe the tragedy that has overtaken a sensitive human being in a particular period in antebellum South America, Styron unravels the tragic aspects of human life transcending time and place of history and gives what according to George Core is "a concrete prehistory of the present" (165). Core reveals that Styron's major concern is to bring "Nat to life as a complex, deeply human person of tragic dimensions" (165). The other historical details and Styron's departure from the facts of the text of Gray's "The Confessions of Nat Turner" are not really important to weaken the shoulders of Styron to bear the burden of the past in his *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. It has been proved by Styron that loyalty to the outer world which is the base of the actual and factual events and characters of a particular historical period should be recreated imaginatively to reveal the emotional life or what George Lukacs calls, "the life of the common people and the way history (as we know it from the vantage point of the present) impinges upon them" (58). It gets clear, on thoroughly analyzing the novel as Styron himself has put it as his aim "to recreate a man and his era, and to produce a work that is less a "historical novel" in conventional terms than a "meditation on history" (ix). Styron is very conscious that the man he wanted to recreate was one of the few slaves in American history who has achieved identity. The achievement of Styron in his *The Confessions of Nat Turner* can be comprehended better when the novel is interpreted as a study of complex human being who was unique and whose history according to George Lukacs has, "a felt relationship with the present" (57). In an interview with George Plimpton Styron revealed his satisfaction, "to tell the truth about what it was to be a slave of a certain sort in early years of the last century" in relation with the slavery which was outrage and horror, he did not want "to shirk what must have been after all the tolerable aspect of the situation" since the poised depiction would unravel its malice more expressively (37). In the same interview Styron tells Plimpton that undefeatable courage to confront facts in their totality prompted him, "to assume the persona of a Negro" (38). For him Negro symbolizes the dispossessed. Styron tells Plimpton that, "if you can sympathize with dispossessed, you can certainly take on the lineaments of the Negro" (38). The first person narrative technique for Styron was not merely a technique or bold acceptance of a challenge, but, it was more properly a moral imperative for him. In "This Quiet Dust" Styron tells that he wanted to think and to live Negro (38). In the same write up Styron tells that once the first person narrative was solved technically, he took upon himself to get inside the mind and psyche of "the prodigious blackman" (39). S. Laxmana Murthy supports Styron's adventure to unravel the politics of demonic exploitation in his *The Confessions of Nat Turner*:

The objections raised against the propriety of the technique fail to impress because something more serious than mere technicality is involved—the stature of the protagonist as a man evolving through the conditions of his servitude, his spirituality, his religious fanaticisms and his psycho-sexual complexity. Styron has thus attempted a complex fable to embody the dynamics of suffering, violence and compassion. The departures from the Gray's original "Confessions" and all the inaccuracies that Styron is accused of become meaningful in structuring the fable. The fable calls for interpretation on various levels as it explores the social, religious and personal compulsions of violence. (139)

According to Rupe Simms, in antebellum American South the proslavery Southerners favoured the enslavement of Africans mainly for three main viewpoints. Firstly, the rationalist believed that Negroes were inferior to whites and, therefore, could be treated as slaves. Thomas Jefferson who himself was a rationalist, believed that slavery in itself was immoral, but it had to be accepted for the economic welfare of the Southern states of America. Secondly, the proslavery pseudo-scientists tried to highlight biological and cultural differences between the races i.e. blacks and whites that would make the enslavement of black people justified. Thirdly, the proslavery evangelic clergymen supported slavery on the theological grounds citing the Scriptures (50-51). In Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, these three proslavery arguments which form the strong pillars of dialectics of human bondage and suffering are expressed by numerous white characters. In his novel Styron portrays the Southampton County lawyer Thomas R. Gray as an atheist who firmly believes in the power of science. In order to prove the wickedness of Negroes' character, he fills his court speech with pseudoscientific statements typical of the time and causes the aimless and the pathetic and futile slaughter of Nat Turner. For example Gray, in his court speech refers to an important work of Professor Mebane:

[The work] remained the achievement of Professor Mebane to prove beyond the iota of doubt that the Negro is a biologically inferior species . . . all the characteristics of nigger head . . . conclusively demonstrate that the Negro occupies at best but a middling position amongst all the species, possessing a relationship which is not cousin-german to the other human races but one which is far closer to the skulking baboon of that dark continent from which he springs. . . . (92)

Styron beautifully portrays Gray as a character of the novel who makes use of the pseudoscientific arguments in order to convince African Americans' brutal treatment at the hands of their white masters. In an indirect manner Gray confirms the legitimate right of whites to subjugate blacks and tries to favour the oppressive and exploitative behaviour of the Southern white masters towards their Negro slaves. Similarly, Benjamin Turner, Nat's first owner and another proslavery character of Styron's novel, represents proslavery rationalists. In the novel, he strongly stresses the so called fact of the time that Negroes are both intellectually and morally inferior to their white masters when he speaks in the conversation about slavery with the visiting clergymen and his brother Samuel Turner. He even claims that the blacks are mere animals "with the brain of a human child" (158) and their only meaning for existence is the work that they can do for their masters. He even accepts that he does not personally support the institution of slavery but simultaneously states that slavery is something that they have to accept. He would say goodbye to the slavery system forever if a machine gets invented that would do all the work the darkies do. Styron's novel in real sense becomes "a meditation on history" when he imagines the situations where Bible was also used to argue in favour of the institution of slavery, for instance, the situation created by novelist in which the discussion takes place between powerful and wealthy white men, like the Turner brothers and clergymen. In the Old South it was commonly believed that without the work done by the black slaves it would be impossible for whites to cultivate their plantations. The whites of the South clung to an old myth that while whites would die in the summer heat on the boiling swamp blacks only thrived in these conditions. They believed that God created the Negroes to work for white masters and to turn his wilderness into fertile land. But despite the important role played by the Negroes in the Old South, Southerners like Benjamin in the novel regretted that their slaves ate them bankrupt because they must take care of them when they were infant, sick and old. The Negroes were exploited so much that they sometimes surreptitiously murdered their white masters. For instance in the novel, when Marse Benjamin dies in Styron's novel, an interesting situation happens. The slaves sing a song on the funeral day behind the Big House: "O my massah's gone! massah's gone! My massah's gone to heaven, my Lord! I can't stay behind!" (163). Styron continues with the following words: "the insincerity of their words was plain as the difference between gold and brass" (163). This statement symbolically tells that the slaves were hiding their genuine feelings in their mourning song. They never grieved over Benjamin's passing nor believed that a slaveholder can be graced in heaven. There were also doubts of some "foul play" concerning Benjamin's death when he was with his slaves in the woods when a falling tree crushed him to death and it is doubted that Benjamin did not die because of the accident but was actually murdered by the slaves.

Another important white character created by Styron in this novel is Samuel Turner who is portrayed as a slaveholder with abolitionist views. According to James West, Styron got inspired for the character of Samuel Turner from John Hartwell Cocke's life. Cocke became a strong abolitionist who was a philanthropist and a devoted Christian. He treated his slaves humanly, taught them to read and count, gave them religious instructions and told them to resist gambling and alcohol. Cocke failed in his mission of philanthropy because so few other whites shared his views. Like Cocke, Samuel Turner in the novel also several times stresses that slaves should be educated before emancipation (352-53). Styron puts anti slavery arguments in his novel through the mouth of Samuel Turner:

I have long and do still steadfastly believe that slavery is the great cause of all the chief evils of our land.

It is a cancer eating at our bowels, the source of all our misery, individual, political and economic . . . I am not without faith and I pray nightly for the miracle, for the divine guidance which will somehow show us the way out of this terrible condition. It is evil to keep these people in bondage, yet they cannot be freed. They must be educated! To free these people without education and with the prejudice that presently exists against them would be a ghastly crime. (156)

In order to prove that Negroes are as capable and intelligent as whites, Samuel Turner decides to educate Nat. He comprehends the importance of training for a slave and so accordingly sends Nat to learn the carpenter trade. But because of financial difficulties, Samuel abandons his plans of instructing Nat and sells him after having promised to emancipate him in his twenty fifth year of his life. Unlike Cocke, Samuel Turner's idealism proves to be hollow and this shatters Nat completely.

Clergy also plays important role in proslavery mindset in American South in Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. In the novel, Styron depicts Richard Whitehead as a young Methodist minister who preaches to the slaves of Virginia on Mission Sunday in the church. He exhorts the Negro slaves with the exact words of Meade, the Bishop of the Church of England:

Your bodies, you know, are not your own; they are at the disposal of those you belong to . . . for your idleness and wickedness are generally found out and your bodies suffer for it here . . . I say, that what faults you are guilty of towards your masters and mistresses are faults done against God Himself, who has set your masters and mistresses over you in His own stead, and expects that you would do for them just as you would do for Him. (96-100) (emphasis original)

According to Harriet Stowe, different Southern denominations' formal stance on the issue of the institution of slavery was racist and proslavery. For instance, the Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist denominations believed that as the Scriptures taught "the relative duties of master and slave", in the same manner "as those of parent and child, and husband and wife", slavery was not against the will of God. The church had no right to interfere in the matter of slavery because it was a political issue. The Southern denominations believed that as an arrangement of society God had left slavery to the rein of white masters completely, and the church's role was only to define the reciprocal responsibilities of slaveholders and slaves (125).

In order to show the fact that how the clergy in the South in those times avoided to take any political stance on the issue of slavery, Styron weaves the episode of the two Episcopal clergymen's visit to the Turner brothers in the novel. The younger minister is very feminine in appearance and symbolically hints at the weakness of churchmen in the matter of slavery. During the conversation, he remains almost passive. The elder clergyman named Dr. Ballard is depicted as choosing his words very carefully and he remains as neutral as possible. He is depicted as being afraid of supporting Samuel Turner's views on the education of slaves, because he finds Samuel radical enough to be supported. He can only utter just two words on the issue, "how interesting" (156-61). On the other hand his answer to Benjamin Turner's proslavery thoughts is: "yes, I see what you mean . . . yes, I do see clearly what you mean" (156-61). He supports Benjamin because the latter represents the prevailing thinking of the slaveholders. Ballard flatters the wealthy slave owners with such words: "God watch over your dreams, Mr. Turner". No doubt the church had the authority to change society and take a radical stand on any prejudice; nonetheless, it was weak enough to exercise its power and was toothless on the issue of institution of slavery in America. The reason for this blindness of the church was very likely the fact that the church was itself dependent on the financial support of its members.

The third master of Nat Turner, a hypocritically religious white slave owner named Reverend Eppes is portrayed by Styron as a person in the antebellum South who claims to be a Christian but actually is most brutal and demonic towards his black slaves. Being a stonehearted master, Eppes makes Nat to labour for him and his parishioners seven days a week from sunup to sundown, rain or shine, to a point of collapse. In this inhuman manner Eppes wants to break the will of Nat and make as much profit as he can by exploiting the labour of Nat. Styron very skillfully portrays the fact in the novel that as a well known dictum divide and rule, the whites had segregated Negroes hierarchically. For instance, novel's Nat's mother Lou-Ann was brought to the Big House and was raised by the house-servants. She is portrayed as a tall and beautiful woman who occupies a privileged position as a cook. Slave society was a hierarchical system in which the field slaves were at the bottom of the hierarchy whereas house servants, blacksmiths, wheelwrights and carpenters were at the top of the same hierarchy. In the novel Lou-Ann is aware of her better status in this slave hierarchy and expresses her contempt for the field slaves and calls herself as quality. She is the person who infects her son with her loathing towards the field slaves. This system of hierarchy was devised by whites for Negroes' exploitation. Chosen as a house hold nigger in the house of Samuel Turner, even Nat considers himself superior to his brothers of his own colour and race. He believes in his mother Lou Ann and just like her he also feels, "Us folks in de house is *quality*!" (133) (emphasis original). Thus, Nat alienates himself because of his special ness from his black play mates and even denies to accept their identity. Styron depicts Nat as a "house nigger" "contemptuous and aloof,

filled with disdain for the black riffraff which dwells beyond the close perimeter of the big house" (133). In this manner Nat hates his Negro brothers. He thinks contemptuously of the Negro "as a lower order of people—a ragtag mob, coarse, raucous, clownish, uncouth." (133) For instance, when Nat observes the Negroes in the wagon on the way to the slave auction he describes them as:

They cared nothing about where they came from or where they were going . . . Like animals they relinquished the past with as much dumb composure as they accepted the present, and were unaware of any future at all. Such creatures deserved to be sold, I thought bitterly, and I was torn between detestation for them and regret that it was too late for me to save them through the power of the Word. (219)

Nat remarks for himself that he had been made "the smartest nigger in Southampton County" (335) and remarks pitifully for other Negroes, "beat a nigger, starve him, leave him wallowing in his own shit, and he will be yours for life. Awe him by some unforeseen hint of philanthropy, tickle him with the idea of hope, and he will want to slice your throat" (69).

Nat's attachment with the Negroes takes shape slowly. His homosexual binding with Willis is looked upon as the spiritual union of two souls and Nat construes it as "*The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul*" (200) (emphasis original). Nat and Willis become inseparable in their spiritual kinship. Nat's disappointment is acute when Samuel Turner sells away Willis to South making Nat an innocent accomplice in the sad affair. This episode shatters the absolute faith of Nat and puts an everlasting effect on him because Willis due to this inhuman institution of slavery gets treated as an inhuman possession of a white master and is forced to get separated from his wife and the child. Nat and Willis come closer in the carpenter's shop. By getting separated from Willis Nat feels lonely. Later when Nat himself hands over his friend to a slave trader at the midnight, this incident haunts him for ever. Samuel Turner befools Nat in order to sell Willis as he tells Nat that Willis is only to be hired on another Virginia plantation for some time. Nat realizes the truth only after he has handed over Willis to a slave trader, and keeps sitting in his wagon with an emptiness that he has never felt before. His belief in Turners finally gets devastated when they sell the Mill. Nat gets outraged when Samuel Turner even sells him to Reverend Eppes because of the economic crisis. Marse Samuel tells Nat that he has put him "under the protection" of Eppes for a year, and after a year he would start an apprenticeship in Richmond and soon be an emancipated man. Marse Samuel promises Nat to write to him but he never writes. Nat's maltreatment in the hands of his benevolent master Marse Samuel is not physical but mental, not bad but the worst he becomes a target of Samuel Turner's changing mind. No doubt Samuel seems to be a noble and truthful person and holds Nat as a human being equal to him, yet, at bottom of his heart, just like other white slaveholders of the South, he considers and treats Nat only as his inanimate property. Nat's devotion to Marse Samuel is shattered completely, and when he is sold to Reverend Eppes, he forgets his previous master "as one banishes the memory of any disgraced and downfall prince." After being deserted by white society he starts feeling fellow feeling for his black brothers. Now, Nat is destined to taste the first waters of slave hood. As a slave of his new master, Reverend Eppes, Nat now has to perform menial jobs at the farm like ordinary slaves. His illusion of being special is disillusioned when he is treated just like a field darky. For the first time now, he experiences the true life of his nigger brothers. He "began to sense the world, the true world, in which a Negro moves and breathes. It was like being plunged into freezing water." He does not feel disgust or anger for Reverend Eppes, but his hatred for Samuel Turner, his Apollo is immense. Nat's passionate hatred towards his former master begins to grow right after he realizes that he is betrayed, "[H]atred so bitter that I grew dizzy and thought I might get sick on the floor . . . for Marse Samuel, and the rage rose and rose in my breast until I earnestly wished him dead, and in my mind's eye I saw him strangled by my own hands" (241). No doubt, it is obligatory for Reverend Eppes to emancipate Nat in the promised year, yet he further sells Nat to the illiterate man named Tom Moore. Now feeling the burden of slavery unbearable anymore, Nat decides to emancipate himself as well as his other black brothers himself. He gets disillusioned and comes to know the reality that he and other Negroes are living in a society which does not even grant them the human identity. Finally he makes up his mind to take the revenge on a system of suppression created by white people which denies him and his black brothers even the right to be a human being. When Nat is sold on a winter day he shares his experience:

I experienced a kind of disbelief which verged close upon madness, then a sense of betrayal, then fury such as I had never known before, then finally, to my dismay, hatred so bitter that I grew dizzy and thought I might get sick on the floor. (240-41)

Shattered completely by the false promises and philanthropy of the white masters, Nat takes Negroes into consideration and the picture of man as "little lower" only to the angels seems quite amusing to him. When he is sold to Reverend Eppes, his faith in the superiority of whites gets vanished. This incident completely shatters Nat's faith in the whites as well as in their religion. He realizes that he does not belong to them, and this new realization creates a fatal rage and anguish in his mind against all whites. He makes up his mind in terrible anguish to take revenge on the whites who have

refused to acknowledge his identity as well as all the blacks'. Nat gets treated just like an inhuman, lifeless machine in the hands of all his masters despite the fact that he works very sincerely with all of them. Now, Nat gets aware of the terrifying wretchedness of slaves in the South. He gets depressed by the feeling that there is no way out of this inhuman existence. His keen sensitivity is exacerbated when he looks at Tom and Andrew struggling with a painfully heavy burden of the crude oaken timbers:

Ah! They fell as I watched, tumbling down with a lumpish clatter. Then slowly the blessed nincompoops rearranged the saw horses into a stack again, hoisted them up and continued their hunched, and lead-footed pilgrimage across the field, two raggedy silhouettes against a frieze of pinewoods and wintry sky, bound as if for nowhere on to the uttermost limits of the earth—black faceless paradigms of an absurd and immemorial futility. I gave a quick shiver in the chill and thought: Why do men live at all? Why do men wrassle so with air, with nothing? (318-19)

To take revenge for being treated inhumanly Nat organizes other Negroes to assert themselves against slavery. Now, Nat starts identifying himself with his people as he starts spending most of the time with the blacks. Nat compares the life of a Negro to that of a fly:

In many ways, I thought, a fly must be one of the most fortunate of God's creatures. Brainless born, brainlessly seeking its sustenance from anything wet and warm, it found its brainless mate, reproduced, and died brainless, unacquainted with misery or grief. But then I asked myself: How could I be sure? Who could say that flies were not instead God's supreme outcasts, buzzing eternally between heaven and oblivion in a pure agony of mindless twitching, forced by instinct to dine off sweat and slime and offal, their very brainlessness and everlasting torment? So that even if someone, well-meaning but mistaken, wished himself out of human misery and into a fly's estate, he would only find himself in a more monstrous hell than he had even imagined—an existence in which there was no act of will, no choice, but a blind and automatic obedience to instinct which caused him to feast endlessly and gluttonously and revoltingly upon the guts of a rotting fox or a bucket of prisoner's slops. Surely then, that would be the ultimate damnation: to exist in the world of a fly, eating thus, without will or choice and against all desire. (27-28)

In this manner, Styron depicts, Negroes in the antebellum American South leading an invisible life like a fly. They even do not have time for sex in their degraded and inhuman life. When Nat encounters the blasphemous Miss Emmeline at night with her cousin he is reminded of the unfortunate sexual assault of an Irish overseer named McBride on his mother Lou-Ann. The situation is very tensed and violent, for McBride is heavily drunk and threatens to cut Lou-Ann's throat with a broken neck of a liquor bottle if she is not willing to have a sexual intercourse with him. She as conditioned thoroughly by the institution of slavery yields to his amoral advances instead of resisting them. She accepts it as God's will:

For Jesus come and lock de do'
An' carry de keys away. . . . (147)

Through this song, Styron uncovers the Negro psyche at that particular era in American South. Nat's mother is portrayed in a way as a Sambo figure in her relationship with McBride. Because of the fear she suddenly submits to his advances, starts to please him and shows her submission with a childish giggling. The Negroes believed themselves to be God's chosen people. They hoped that God will take revenge upon their exploiters. Because of this firm hope, Nat gets inspired to identify himself with the Messiah who is bound to emancipate his Chosen people from the yoke of oppressors.

As left with no other option, in response to this sheer exploitation, Nat thinks of revolt. In due course of events, he evolves a firm faith in his Negro brothers to avenge the white exploiters. In the revolt other Negroes display outstanding courage to exterminate the whites, whereas Nat lacks the ability to kill to perform. When he happens to kill Mr. Travis, he wavers in his resolve. When Nat fails to murder his master even after two blows, Willis murders him with a single stroke. Willis and Hark develop acute hatred in their hearts for the whites and make their axes sing very smoothly. For them the whites are not human beings but the things to be dispatched from this life. But Nat fails in his performance to kill. The insurrection continues as the Negro slaves attack their white masters from one farm to another.

Nat in order to keep his leadership kills Margaret Whitehead. Now, Nat realizes that by the utter violence he has himself negated human attributes in him. That is probably why he hates Will's brutality and finds it revolting because it is devoid of human values. After his only murder of Margaret Whitehead Nat, throws the "hateful, shattered club far up into the weeds" (403) with which he has murdered Margaret, and feels deserted by the God. Because of his only murder of Margaret, Nat comes to know God's love, charity and love. He is now convinced of the meaning and value of life. Now he does not keep any hatred for the white people. He comes to regard Gray and Cobb (the whites) with fellow feeling. On the day of his execution, Nat gazing up at the morning star, experiences an autistic union with Margaret:

And as I think of her, the desire swells within me and I am stirred by a longing so great that like those memories of time past and long-ago voices, flowing waters, rushing winds, it seems more than my heart can

abide. *Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God, and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.* Her voice is close, familiar, real, and for an instant I mistake the wind against my ear, a gentle gust, for her breath, and I turn to seek her in the darkness. And now beyond my fear, beyond my dread and emptiness, I feel the warmth flow into my loins and my legs tingle with desire. I tremble and I search for her face in my mind, seek her young body, yearning for her suddenly with a rage that racks me with a craving beyond pain; with tender stroking motions I pour out my love within her; pulsing flood; she arches against me, cries out, and the twain—black and white—are one. I faint slowly. My head falls toward the window, my breath comes hard. I recall a meadow, June, the voice of a whisper: *Is it not true, Nat? Did He not say, I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star?* (414) (emphasis original)

Finally, Nat gets God's nearness and his ability to pray returns to him. Nat finds the call of the executioner for him, in Christian notes and sympathetic:

"Come!" the voice booms, but commanding me now:

Come, My son! I turn in surrender.

Surely I come quickly. Amen.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

Oh how bright and fair the morning star. . . . (416) (ellipses and emphasis original)

Thus, in his *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, William Styron has been very successful in dealing with the dialectics of suppression in his adventure of recreating Nat Turner and the realistic Old South of America with the real horrors of its institution of slavery. Styron very successfully endeavors to uncover the inner life of the antebellum South of America that found justification for the exploitation, domination and suppression of the Negroes through the institution of slavery and also justified the man oppressed by this demonic institution to the extent that the bloody insurrection became unavoidable. The antebellum South of America with its crushing institution of slavery that suppressed the Negroes terribly made the man. Nat revolted not only because the demonic slavery was intolerable, but also because he realized that his and his Negroes brothers' humanity could not be subdued inhumanly. The inhuman treatment of his own being, the misery of his own life and his fellow feeling for the Negro slaves around him came to have a special significance and bearing in the light of Nat's capacity to comprehend, observe, meditate and retaliate. The final observation of Styron's Nat that "the twain—black and white—are one" (414) makes the novel a classic piece, which is very relevant today and offers a solution as Love, Respect and Understanding for each other in our times when we are probably heading towards the Third World War and complete Waste Land.

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