

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

1968

William Styron| A modern traditionalist

Kari Gjertsen Johnson
The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Johnson, Kari Gjertsen, "William Styron| A modern traditionalist" (1968). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 4098.
<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/4098>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

WILLIAM STYRON: A MODERN TRADITIONALIST

By

Kari Johnson

B. A. University of Montana, 1965

Presented in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1968

Approved by:

Dexter M. Roberts

Chairman, Board of Examiners

John M. Stewart
Dean, Graduate School

July 24, 1968

Date

UMI Number: EP36415

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP36415

Published by ProQuest LLC (2012). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
I. <u>Introduction</u>	1
II. <u>'Lie Down in Darkness': The Search for Order</u>	5
III. <u>'The Long March': Man against Machine</u>	47
IV. <u>'Set This House on Fire': The Search for Identity</u> .	70
V. <u>Conclusion</u>	107
VI. <u>Bibliography</u>	111

I. Introduction

William Styron, born in Newport News, Virginia in 1925, attended Christ Church School, Virginia and Davidson College before he joined the Marine Unit at Duke University in 1943. After the war he returned to Duke and received his B. A. in 1947. At Duke he studied creative writing under William Blackburn and published two short stories, "The Long Dark Road" and "Autumn." For the latter he got Honorable Mention in a short story contest sponsored by Styry. He subsequently studied writing under Hiram Hayden at New York's New School and published two more stories, "A Moment in Trieste" (1948) and "The Emerous Window" (1950), before his first novel, Lie Down in Darkness (1950), appeared and won him Prix de Rome of Literature. Apart from several articles, Styron has written three more novels: The Long March (1952), Set This House on Fire (1960), and The Confessions of Nat Turner (1967) for which he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. In this thesis I will deal with Styron's first three novels.

T. S. Eliot in his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," defines a traditional writer by his historical sense:

the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the his-

terical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.¹

If we accept Eliot's definition, Styron most certainly is a traditional writer. Although he admits to being influenced by Flaubert, Joyce, and Faulkner in his style, he claims:

not many of these modern people have contributed much to my emotional climate.... the strong influences are out of the past -- the Bible, Marlowe, Blake, Shakespeare.²

His three novels continually echo literary themes and characters of the past. He deals with traditional issues such as man's role in the universe and his search for identity, justice, order, love, as well as problems such as free will versus fate or good and evil. Styron's characters are often reminiscent of great literary figures. In Lie Down in Darkness Milton Leftis to a large extent suggests John Milton, because the two are essentially

¹T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Selected Essays (3rd ed. rev.; London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1963), 14.

²Peter Matthiessen and George Plimpton, "William Styron," Writers at Work, ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: The Viking Press, 1959), 274.

concerned with the same problems: man's identity in the face of the universe, free will, salvation. But Milton Loftis is spiritually blind and unwilling to acknowledge his free will, not physically blind like John Milton. Peyton Loftis faintly echoes Ophelia in Hamlet. They both go mad: Shakespeare's heroine after Hamlet has killed her father, Peyton when she realizes that her father is for all intents and purposes dead, because she no longer can find comfort in his love. Captain Mannix of The Long March is, in his rebellion, a modern Prometheus, and his stature is similar to traditional war heroes such as Odysseus and Coriolanus, but also to revengers in Renaissance plays. Both Lieutenant Culver in The Long March and Peter Leverett in Set This House on Fire remind one of the people Dante condemned to Limbo in The Divine Comedy. Peter Leverett is also like St. Peter: three times he denies the good in himself by unhesitatingly accepting Mason Flagg's company -- at St. Andrew's, in New York, and in Sambuce. The speeches of Cass Kinsolving in Set This House on Fire have been compared by critics to those of Biblical prophets. And, like Othello, Cass discovers that no matter how evil other people are, he, Cass, has to combat the evil in himself. Finally, Mason Flagg is in many ways similar to Satan in Milton's Paradise Lost and to Iago in Shakespeare's Othello. Styron, then, certainly has what Eliot calls historical sense. Using his knowledge of, and feeling for,

the literature which has come before by suggesting similarities between his contemporary themes and those of earlier literature, between his modern characters and former literary figures, Styron in his novels suggests "a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together." Not only do his characters gain traditional significance, but traditional literary figures of the past gain a new meaning in light of Styron's work.

As a twentieth century writer Styron, like T. S. Eliot, Oswald Spengler and many other modern intellectuals, explores the disintegration of Western culture, and his characters are pitched against this background. However, asked where his emphasis in writing lies, he answers:

Character, definitely. And by character I mean a person drawn full-round, not a caricature. E. M. Forster refers to "flat" and "round" characters. I try to make all of mine round.... Story and character should grow together,.... They must, to give an impression of life being lived....³

Because Styron thinks that his characters are vitally important to his own work, I will deal with the major figures of his three first novels and show how they are "drawn full-round," but also suggest how they are reflected against the Western literary tradition and against the specific problems which face them in their own time.

³Matthiessen and Flimpten, 275-276.

II. 'Lie Down in Darkness':

The Search for Order

William Styron's first novel, Lie Down in Darkness, brought him several favorable reviews. John W. Aldridge writes that the book has "brilliant lyric power" and that Styron

has produced a first novel containing some of the elements of greatness, one with which the work of no other young writer of twenty-five can be compared.¹

Maxwell Geismar calls it the "best novel of the year by my standards."² Several critics link the book, thematically as well as technically, to William Faulkner's novel, The Sound and the Fury.³ For example, William Van O'Connor remarks that like

¹John W. Aldridge, Review of Lie Down in Darkness, by William Styron, New York Times (September 9, 1951), 5.

²Maxwell Geismar, Review of Lie Down in Darkness, Saturday Review of Literature (September 15, 1951), 12-13.

³Malcolm Cowley, Review of Lie Down in Darkness, New Republic (October 8, 1951), 125, compares the two novels in terms of characters and methods. Among other critics who remark on the resemblances are: John W. Aldridge, "William Styron and the Derivative Imagination," Time to Murder and Create: The Contemporary Novel in Crisis (New York: David Mc Kay Co., Inc., 1966), 30-51. Jonathan Baumbach, "Paradise Lost: Lie Down in Darkness by William Styron," The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (New York: New York University Press, 1965), 123-137. Harvey Breit, Review of Lie Down in Darkness, Atlantic, CLXXXVIII (October, 1951), 78-80.

The Sound and the Fury and many other novels, Lie Down in Darkness is concerned with the failure of Christianity, or with the inability of two generations or more to credit its validity.⁴

Also commenting upon the theme of the novel, Louise Y.

Gossett says:

In the foreground of Lie Down in Darkness is the frailty of man's will and in the background is the fall of a society which denies its ideals.⁵

I agree with Gossett in her statement, because I think that Styron in this novel explores how the "death of God" affects the social and psychic life of man in the twentieth century, and he explores the disintegration of Western culture by showing that its religious and social institutions no longer operate as sources of spiritual and psychological certainty or security, or as these absolutes against which man can measure his experience and actions.

As long as people within the Western culture could see their lives as parts of a Christian framework, an order seemed to exist, because man then had his specifically defined place within the Chain of Being. If he tried to live in accordance with Christian morality and

⁴William Van O'Connor, "John Updike and William Styron: The Burden of Talent," Contemporary American Novelists, ed. Harry T. Moore (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), 217.

⁵Louise Y. Gossett, "The Cost of Freedom: William Styron," Violence in Recent Southern Fiction (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1965), 130.

teachings he might, by the grace of God, obtain salvation: if life on earth seemed futile, he could always hope that in the next world he might know eternal joy. Thus, Christianity provided hope. As a Christian he could be forgiven for his sins through Christ. But significantly, as a true Christian he knew he had to love and forgive those around him in order to be forgiven. Ideally, then, he had love as a focus, whether it was God's love and grace or his own ability to love God, himself, and his neighbor. Thus, man's existence within a Christian universe was purposeful, his actions of infinite significance. Styron, on the other hand, seeks to define what man is, if his life is not seen as God-given and does not seem to have any inherent purpose. He partly describes the cultural and emotional climate of sterility, boredom, and uncertainty which surrounds man when he lacks a religious focus. But he also shows godless man in search of substitutes for the order he has dismissed. Perhaps he is saying that inherent in man's nature is the need for absolute values, for hope, and for salvation: that without faith in something man cannot exist. Lie Down in Darkness, then, largely deals with how man who has rejected God is desperately trying to regain order. To understand the novel as a whole it is necessary to explore Styron's evidence that Western culture is indeed disintegrating. The decay manifests itself in natural surroundings, in social and cultural

institutions, in moral and secular values, and finally in the lives of individuals whose very existence perpetuates this decay.

Similar to several other twentieth century intellectuals -- D. H. Lawrence and Joseph Wood Krutch, for example -- Styron blames the scientific mentality and consequently the development of technology and industry for distorting man's values from a religious attitude towards life to a secular and materialistic one.⁶ Therefore, as in his two later novels, he symbolically shows the disintegration and secularization of Western culture by describing how industry and mechanization have destroyed the beauty of the land:

Riding down to Port Warwick from Richmond, the train begins to pick up speed on the outskirts of the city, past the tobacco factories with their ever-present haze of acrid, sweetish dust and past the rows of uniformly brown clapboard houses which stretch down the hilly streets for miles, it seems, the hundreds of rooftops all reflecting the pale light of dawn; past the suburban roads still sluggish and sleepy with early morning traffic, and rattling swiftly now over the bridge which separates the last two hills where in the valley below you can see the James River winding beneath its acid-green crust of scum out beside the chemical plants and more rows of clapboard houses and into the woods beyond.⁷

⁶Peter Matthiessen and George Plimpton, "William Styron," Writers at Work, ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: The Viking Press, 1959), 281.

⁷William Styron, Lie Down in Darkness (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1951), 9. Page numbers immediately following quotations are from this edition.

Apart from the fact that this paragraph is one sentence and thus technically suggests the overwhelming uniformity of each feature mentioned, this seems a typical picture of how man's "progress" has perverted his natural surroundings by substituting mechanical devices for living things. Instead of horses there is the massive train, instead of farm-lands there are factories which give off a "haze of acrid, sweetish dust" bound to kill any vegetation, instead of a clear river with fish, there is the James River now polluted by chemical plants. Man's tendency to misuse his reason and ingenuity is proven in this description, because even if man sees the death of his land, he is still too proud of the technological advances he has made, and too content with controlling nature and its resources, to admit his destructiveness in corrupting his surroundings. In his pride for what he has achieved, or in his incapacity to return to simplicity, or perhaps even in his apathy towards what has happened to the land, man's vision is obscured: he can no longer discern what is more important -- spiritual or material values:

You look out at the pinewoods sweeping past ... until the white fog of smoke from the engine ahead swirls and dips against the window like a tattered scarf and obscures the view (10).

Thus, it is the smoke from the train, man's own invention, which obstructs his view of nature, and only he himself is

to blame for making his own existence seem foggy, confused, and aimless. Perhaps sensing that material advances cannot take the place of spiritual unity, people huddle together in "uniformly brown clapboard houses." Although these dwellings pollute the landscape and inevitably create feelings of impersonality and insignificance in the inhabitants, they perhaps fulfill man's inherent need to conform and to share the fate of other people. In fact, it seems that with no spiritual order as a common bond, people create secular substitutes, such as alike housing, to make their lives part of a secular order, however inadequate.

The implications which one can draw from the landscape descriptions, however, only symbolize what specifically has happened to religion in the twentieth century and to those who preach it. The two main upholders of Christianity in the novel are Carey Carr and Daddy Faith. Superficially they differ, because Carr is a temperate white middle-class minister, while Daddy Faith is the spiritual leader of passionate black Baptists, but they share a lack of belief in what they are preaching.

Carr chooses to become a minister, not because he believes that Christianity is vital to Western culture, or because he is "called by God," or because he has an overpowering faith that the Bible represents absolute truth, but because he is a disillusioned poet who does not know what to do for a living after he fails as an artist.

He is "shaken, immolated and vaguely unsatisfied," and he resolves "to become a minister, to retrieve his vision through a life of hard work and prayer" (106). Although he starts with the assumption that God exists, he implicitly begins to doubt the reality of God as soon as he becomes aware of the fact that God does not reveal himself: he feels "the strange and tragic sorrow ... at never having been able to attain a complete vision of God" (107). Although this implies that Carr needs material proof that God exists, consciously he does not admit to himself that he lacks faith until the end of the novel. Implicitly this seems to be the case, however, when he reflects that

a predicament, overwhelming and hopeless ... couldn't be helped by piety, or prayers ...; it was the human condition alone that he must minister to, and by flimsy human means ... (105).

By this very thought Carr admits he does not believe Christianity applies to concrete human life. Thus, he denies the relevance of God and moral absolutes altogether, because Christian dogma, if regarded merely as abstract ideals separate and apart from human existence, are meaningless; the vital connection between God and man is severed. Carr implicitly admits the irrelevance of God when, in an effort to help Helen Loftis, he reflects that it is "he himself from whom she must draw the greatest strength today" (108), rather than from any all powerful God. Thus,

religion for Carr is finally secular in essence, and Christianity as an all-encompassing world order is reduced to a front for relativity.

Carr's implicit assumption that God is dead brings him, in his personal life, to be concerned chiefly with secular things, and first and foremost his own image. One of the important realities that faces him is that he is not "bishop material":

he preferred life to sail along pleasantly and evenly, and this, he knew, was for him a minor sort of tragedy. For, being so guarded and reserved, how could one ever hope to become a bishop? (108.)

Carr, then, is like any businessman who wants to make it in an organization. His concern is not with how to please God, whose gospel he is preaching, but rather with his own personal recognition and power. Giving up his ambition to be promoted, he satisfies himself with becoming good at creating the right atmosphere in his church:

he was not bishop material, but in his own mild and plaintive way he was a sweet singer of the liturgy, and could embroider upon the fabric of Christian poetry, already so rich in texture, the most exquisite designs. An altar cloth had been laid across a gate-leg table, and there were candles, and as he read from the service the flickering light covered his spectacles with orbs of fire and made him look -- with his plump cheeks and small round chin and the deep furrow running from his nose to his pursed, budlike mouth -- like a compassionate, brunet owl (269).

Carr regards himself as an artisan in his trade, but he is really an imposter who goes through the appropriate motions

of his alleged faith. He never believes in the essence of Christianity, which is its dogma, faith, and absolute values.

Throughout the novel he wants God to reveal himself, because if he had a vision of God, he feels his life, both as a man and as a minister of the gospel, would take on meaning beyond the temporal and his work would become universally relevant. However, by his secular concerns and by his assumption that Christianity does not apply to human experience, he is denying the very order and significance he is seeking. Not until the very end of the novel does he admit his self-delusion, thinking: "Oh, my Lord. You shall never reveal Yourself!" (388.) Given Carr's character and his talent for deceiving himself for so long, it is questionable that he will ever be honest enough or strong enough to face life without God. Carr, therefore, who is a symbol of decaying, secularized Christianity in the novel, is finally a hoax, too weak to admit this truth about himself.

The second spokesman for Christianity in Lie Down in Darkness is Daddy Faith. He is a typical modern showman who has made it because he is "blessed" with a Hitler-Billy Graham personality, and therefore he is capable of producing mass-hysteria, as well as mass-devotion. His trade -- to promise hope and love to the Negroes in the novel -- proves profitable:

Perched on a seat of the Cadillac, Daddy Faith was bestowing grace upon the crowd. He was smiling; his face, black as night, was greasy with sweat. He made a wide arc with his hand, half a dozen diamond rings spun and glittered, and his shiny opera hat and diamond stickpin made beautiful flashes above the throng. A sigh, vast and reverential, went up from the crowd -- Aaaaah! -- and a shower of dollar bills, nickels, dimes and quarters cascaded over Daddy Faith, over the car and onto the ground (103).

Unlike Carr, Daddy Faith does not pretend to be a servant of God. Instead, by his splendor, he brings the crowd to worship material things, like his car or his diamonds, and bluntly he makes clear to his followers his own replacement of God:

'Who loves you, my people?'
 'You, Daddy! Daddy Faith! You loves us! You, Daddy!'
 'Dat's right,' he said.
 He paused, still chuckling.
 'My, dat's right.'
 He ceased his laughing, but a smile lingered on his face, and he shook his head, in amusement and with a certain wonder (397).

Although Daddy Faith is a preacher for profits, he is successful because he fills the need in his people for something to believe in. He represents a focus in the lives of his followers, and they gain recognition and identity chiefly in relationship to him. Thus, the Negroes who have a high standing in Daddy Faith's organization are awed and admired by the other members of the congregation. Daddy Faith, then, produces hope in his flock and the illusion that their lives are of universal significance.

Styron, by his portrait of this preacher, seems to suggest that the best any church can do today is to produce an illusion of order and purpose and salvation for those who are too weak to recognize the secularity of their worship. The contrast between this congregation's temporal delusion and the reality of their situation is expressed in the last paragraph of the novel:

'Yes, Jesus! I seen Him! Yeah! Yeah!' The train roared, trembled, came nearer. It was a ferocious noise 'Yes, Jesus! Yeah! Yeah!' The voice was almost drowned out. The train came on with a clatter, shaking the trestle, and its whistle went off full-blast in a spreading plume of steam. 'Yeah! Yeah!' Another blast from the whistle, a roar, a gigantic sound; and it seemed to soar into the dusk beyond and above them forever, with a noise, perhaps, like the clatter of the opening of everlasting gates and doors -- passed swiftly on -- toward Richmond, the North, the oncoming night (400).

This quotation seems to suggest that the train -- i. e., mechanization, bureaucracy, total social secularization -- cannot be ignored much longer, even by this congregation which thinks it has a permanent spiritual focus.

The three major characters in the novel, Milton, Helen, and Peyton Loftis, all reject the Christian religion as representing absolute truth, and none of them sees religious faith as an answer to their problems. Yet they, like Carey Carr and Daddy Faith's congregation, are seeking substitutes for the lost order. All of them attempt to find values to believe in, standards by which they can measure their lives, something external in light of which their lives may attain significance.

Milton Loftis is aware of the disintegration of Western culture, as well as of the fact that it is more difficult to live now that everything is relative, than it was, for example, a generation ago. His awareness of this is expressed in his reflections upon what has happened to the set ways of the past:

I do not propose to convince, his father had said (in the feeble light of a March afternoon thirty years ago, before the house was finally condemned, but not long before; when even the lightest footstep on the stairs sent a plaintive wooden squeal through the joists and beams, reminder not only of the swiftly aging house but of the passing of a finer, more tranquil age)... (14).

Intellectually, then, Milton is aware of the chaos which resulted when the house -- i. e., the very basis of Western culture -- was torn down. With this knowledge he firmly rejects modern Christianity, because with the core of religion gone, the pretense of faith is only a form of escapism. Symbolically his view becomes apparent through his reflections upon a radio sermon:

A Sunday school choir commenced a falsetto chirping. Jesus loves me. Methodists, probably. He could almost see it: a row of maple chairs, young women with bad breath and half-moons of sweat beneath their armpits, a basement somewhere smelling of stale leaking water and moldy religion. A sad, shadowy place, where the timeless rattle of Proverbs and Commandments outlasts age and decay and even the dusty, pious slant, itself, of Sunday sunlight upon worn Hymnals and broken electrical fixtures and cobwebbed concrete walls (55-56).

The loss of a cultural basis and the inapplicability of Christian order to man's life in the twentieth century

terrifies him, when he realizes what it implies about his own emotional security:

'S the U.S.A. We've gone to pot. It's a stupid war but the next one'll be stupider, and then we'll like my father said stand on the last reef of time and look up into the night and breathe the stench of the awful enfolding shroud.' 'We've lost our lewewards,' he went on wildly; 'what are they now? "I am the Resurrection and the Life." What does that mean?' 'What have I got? I'm perverted, religion's perverted -- look at Helen. Look at how religion's perverted her. What have we got left? What have I got? Nothing!' (186.)

Diverced from the past faith in man's place in the universe and from religion which provided an ideal of love for man to imitate, Milton knows that he can no longer count on any external universal order to give his life more than temporal meaning or to provide him with moral standards by which to live. Yet, this new and total freedom to do with his life and himself exactly what he pleases, does not produce the feeling of release from bondage, but rather the sensation of imprisonment by self and circumstance. Facing his alienation from the traditional order and from the certainty that human life is purposeful, Milton escapes his new freedom and responsibility to govern himself, by drinking:

[he] drank not only because whiskey made him drunk but because away from his father, he found the sudden freedom oppressive (15).

In an effort to escape self-determination, he repeatedly pretends to permit other people and external circumstances

to make choices for him. For example, during World War I he accepts "a commission in the Army legal branch" (16) which his father procures for him. Deciding to marry Helen, he relies upon his father's support: his "father had a little money; he'd set Milton up in practice in Port Warwick" (16). He further accepts a position of dependence in relationship to Helen: he is "elated" that "she is due to inherit a hundred thousand dollars" (16), and he ignores his own law-practice because it is easier to live on Helen's money.

Milton tries to delude himself into believing that it is his father's fault that he chooses to remain away from the battlefield. Thus, he despises "his father. The old man had given him too much" (17). Also, he wants to blame Helen for making him dependent upon her money, thinking:

Wife's house. That was the loophole, the imponderable, the paradox -- a trinity of troubles. For if it was your wife's house, and not strictly your own, if the greatest single burden of your life was not merely the loss of love for your wife, but the constant guilty knowledge of your debt to her -- and your dependence -- wouldn't the secret love-making here at home be a setting right of the score, a triumphant redemption? (178.)

However, to a large extent he is aware that he freely chooses these dependent positions because he is afraid of accepting the consequences of independence, and this awareness makes him feel cowardly:

He had been in the Great War, having made gestures toward joining the Army which years later he shamefully confessed to himself were trifling (16).

Aware of his weakness of constantly choosing the easy way out of a dilemma and of justifying his decisions by blaming these upon who he has become dependent, he reflects:

At the age of fifty he was beginning to discover, with a sense of panic, that his whole life had been in the nature of a hang-over, with faintly unpleasant pleasures being atoned for by the dull unalleviated pain of guilt. Had he the solace of knowing that he was an alcoholic, things would have been brighter, because he had read somewhere that alcoholism was a disease; but he was not, he assured himself, alcoholic, only self-indulgent, and his disease, whatever it was, resided in shadier corners of his soul -- where decisions were reached not through reason but by rationalization, and where a thin membranous growth of selfishness always seemed to prevent his decent motives from becoming happy actions (152-153).

Because he acknowledges his refusal to accept his freedom of choice, he despises himself for his weakness. At the same time, he is unwilling to discover these "shadier corners of his soul." Instead, he seeks for people to save him from himself and to create for him the "illusion of serenity" (266). This search is largely an attempt to find a substitute for an all-compassionate, all-forgiving God who can forgive his weaknesses and show him his own strengths.

Milton seeks out women as his saviors, perhaps because he has idealized his memory of the mother he hardly knew, but pictures as "refined and lovely" (15). In his relationships with Dolly Bonner, Peyton, and Helen, he

assumes the role of a child who only through acceptance, admiration, and emotional support is able to feel important, needed. He seeks Dolly because he is unable to cope with his relationship to Helen. With his wife he feels emasculated, since he is constantly reminded of his dependence upon her and his own failure as a husband. With Dolly, he feels the master of his own life, because she constantly provides him with the emotional support he craves:

She was submissive and she worshiped him, and it was for these reasons that he had loved her. It had been that way from the beginning: he talked and she listened, while through this curious interplay of self-esteem and self-effacement there ran an undercurrent of emotion they were both obliged to call love (43).

With her he can dream that he is strong and successful, and that he will gain social recognition through politics:

Youngish, well-to-do barrister Milton Stuart Leftis plans maybe legislative career, could be maybe junior senator (D-Va.), President (Nation Hails First Southern Chief Since Wilson). Question: Senator, what is your attitude toward the Common Man? Answer: Ah, since I'm a Democrat -- Question: Thank you. What is your attitude, Mr. President, toward the Common Negro? Answer: Ah, since I'm a Southerner -- (47).

Apart from the fact that Milton would never use his energy to realize his dream, this passage also suggests his compulsion to identify with other people, whether it be groups -- Democrats or Southerners -- or individuals like Dolly. Thus, he is totally unwilling to look at himself as an

individual entity, but must belong to something or somebody, because that provides him with security and a good place for him to hide his identity. Dolly, then, provides him with an escape from himself. If he feels bad, she lapses

into baby talk, saying, 'Peeh, baby, Dolly fix,' kissing him and soothing him, or concealing some blithe harmless entertainment to heal this malaise... (183).

As a substitute for self-respect, then, Dolly provides him for a time with a sense of security. However, he soon realizes that his extramarital affair does not conform with his ideal of himself as the genteel Virginian, and it is also contrary to his need to abide by middle-class morality:

The only unholy note which intruded in upon their pleasure was Leftis' awareness that everyone in town knew about them. It wasn't because of Helen that he wished to keep it secret. He only wished to wear his rectitude like a top-coat, concealing from others what embarrassed him and made him feel not quite a gentleman (174).

Like his father, Dolly has provided an escape for him from his problems. Thus, he blames her, as he did his father, for supplying him with a means of self-delusion: "It came to him swiftly: he hated Dolly" (204).

Milton also regards Peyton as his savior. As a child she makes him feel powerful and needed, because she constantly seeks his love and his protection from Helen. There is no one else who can give her approval. But

having once been the most important person in his daughter's life, Milton refuses to give up this important position, and he continually insists that she love only him. When she is home from college on a Christmas vacation, he persistently confronts her with his need to be loved by her:

He spanked her across the bottom. 'Merry Christmas!'

'Ow!' She sat up, hair falling across her face.

'Who do you love?' he asked.

'Me.'

'No,' he persisted, 'who do you love? Who's your sugar baby?'

She frowned, squinting into the light. Then she rested her head on his shoulder, and said sleepily:

'Bunny. Anyway, it's "whom" do you love. I think.'

'Spell it.'

'J-A-C-K-A-S-S' (165).

This quotation seems to suggest that Milton refuses to acknowledge the fact that Peyton is not a child anymore, because this would mean that she is not fully his, and perhaps that she does not regard him as her only object of affection. Milton acts rather selfishly, because he does not love Peyton for her own sake. If he did, he would be more concerned with her feelings and with the horrible conflicts of allegiance that he imposes upon her by his outbursts of fondness, full of sexual overtones. Instead, he mainly regards her as his private object to worship and to love, and to finally own. If his "right" to own her is challenged, he reacts like a child, whose mother has left him. At Peyton's wedding he reflects

that she was irretrievable, lost forever, that he had no claims on her anymore. That she not only had rejected him, crushed him utterly, but that now she was owned by someone else. Him. Harry (307).

Not only does Milton want to own Peyton's body, but he also craves her approval, because he thinks that her love can save him from the frustrations that are facing him. An example is the scene in Charlottesville when Maudie is dying and Helen is anxiously awaiting the doctors' verdict. Although he knows he ought to stay with his wife, he feels he is incapable of facing this situation with Helen alone. Thus he goes on his frantic quest for Peyton, thinking: "Peyton baby, you and I must grow older in a day, we must face this thing together" (209). Ironically, it becomes obvious that Peyton, whom he regards as his main savior, cannot save him from himself. Therefore, when he finds her, it does not create in him the sense of having discovered a solution to his problems. Instead, he is just as frustrated as before:

He held her hands tightly, grinning a little, asking her didn't she see, how it had been a torture for him all day: this pursuit of something which he had finally despaired of ever attaining... now here she was, he had found her, and wasn't that fine? And with a gay lie, the old panic returning, he kept on grinning... (215).

Peyton, then, like Dolly provides no final escape for him, although he chooses to believe she does until her death. Waiting for Peyton's body to arrive with the train, he

at last understands that he must face life without Peyton and without a savior:

he knew he was too old, too weary for paradoxes, that he couldn't evade immediacy, and that the train would come after all, bringing with it final proof of fate and circumstance (14).

But characteristically, Milton's intellectual insights do not correspond with his emotional needs. Once again he succumbs to self-pity and the expectation that someone or something external to himself will save him: "how can you expect me to endure" (12), he says, and then turns to his wife and his disintegrated marriage for support.

Throughout the novel, one of the chief sources for Milton's guilt is his marriage. Alienated from his wife because he does not answer to her expectations of the perfect husband, because he inevitably shows favoritism towards Peyton, because he knows he lives on Helen's money, and because as an escape from all these problems, he takes a mistress and drinks heavily, Milton wants to rid himself of his share of the blame for the failing marriage by ascribing it all to Helen:

He might have known; thirty years ago he might have guessed it, during their ambiguous, frustrated courtship; something might have informed him then, but he had been young and stupid, and it was too late now for recriminations. What else could he do, except stay married? (153.)

As this passage implies, although Milton resents Helen, he does want to stay with her. I think this is so for two

reassens. As in his relationship with Dolly and Peyton, he sees Helen as a mother-figure, and she treats him as a child: "I just think you're a child" (66), she says. Also, he needs her approval, in spite of the way he has acted in their marriage. After Maudie's death, he tells her:

Helen, you're all I've got, I'm all you've got. If you'll believe me, why, by God, the best years of our lives are ahead. I tell you Helen that we can defeat fear and grief and everything else if you'll only believe me and love me again. Honey, we can never die... (256).

He thinks Helen can save him if she believes in him, even though he does not believe in himself. Through her he could at least pretend to have self-respect, if she respected him. Also, their marriage could provide for him an order in light of which he would feel as if his life had more than temporal significance. But Helen also becomes the symbol of a stern judge, because it is mainly in relationship to her that he can recognize his frustrations and his guilt-feelings most clearly. In a sense, then, she functions as his guilt-conscience, because she invariably is the one who chides him for his drinking, who is jealous of the love he shows for Peyton, who catches him in situations that he feels he cannot handle -- as in the hospital in Charlottesville --and, who also knows about his attraction towards Dolly: "She's not supposed to know" (60), he thinks. Since Milton clearly recognizes that he

always takes the easy way out of any dilemma, that he is dependent upon Helen for her money, and since he also knows that these actions completely contradict what he finally believes an admirable man should be like, it is possible that in his relationship with Helen he receives the punishment that he feels is his due. Thus, Adrienne Carr is right in her comment about Milton: "Maybe he enjoys being emasculated" (248), she says. Milton, by his actions in connection with Helen, knows that she will never approve of his irresponsibility. Knowing her, he must be aware that he can only receive disapproval for them. Thus, it becomes ironic when he asks her: "what have you wanted from me, my manhood guts and balls and soul?" (255), because he has willingly given her all these things, by sacrificing his pride and his integrity for her money.

As a last attempt to find a savior, he turns to Helen when Peyton is dead. He wants to believe that their love never went away at all (36), even though throughout the novel there is little evidence which can sustain this: in fact it seems that they never loved each other at all, although they were once "in love" and although they have needed each other. Perhaps he admits this when he says to her: "you're the only thing left! My God, don't you see? We're both sick" (387). However, even in his plea for her to come back to him, the fact that he really does not love her comes out: "Why, God damn you, don't you see what

you're doing! With nothing left! Nothing! Nothing!
Nothing! Nothing!" (387-388.)

Milton, then, is seeking for an order in a universe where he assumes God does not apply. However, as Christian values are foreign to Milton's life, because they can only provide man with an external, intellectual ideal, so also do his substitute values and saviors finally not apply to his life. It is this that Milton fails to see, because he assumes he might be able to find a person whose presence would provide him with the unifying symbol of his life. Like Carey Carr he wonders if he will ever know that his life is more than temporarily significant, but unlike Carr he is constantly seeking for a secular god to reveal himself. As in Carr's case, in the end Milton knows that his god will never reveal himself, when Helen finally rejects him.

Because Milton never ceases to see his life in relationship to those around him, because he never dares to face his own being as it exists independently of all externals, he never attempts to discover order within himself. Milton, then, unlike Cass Kinsolving in Set This House on Fire, never dares to fully explore the hell inside of himself so that he can find his being. Thus, he never fully discovers that his awesome jailer is himself, and that his sin is hiding his very identity from himself:

sitting here evading all, hiding his very identity among people for whom that fact, at least, was of no importance, he had committed the unpardonable crime (209).

Like her husband, Helen Leftis is in search of order, but as her family background is different from Milton's, so is her psychological make-up and the nature of her quest. The primary influence on Helen is her father, Colonel Peyton, who, as the typical military man, is obsessed with enforcing discipline, control, and order. Helen sees her father as a God-figure -- a man who by his strong belief in Christian morality, in accepted social customs, together with his power to control and command his men, epitomizes an all-powerful force who knows what is right and what is wrong with the world. She describes him to Carey Carr in this way:

Daddy was very religious. 'Helen,' he'd say. 'Helen, sweetheart. We must stand fast with the good. The Army of the Lord is on the march. We'll lick the Huns and the devil comes next. Your daddy knows what's right'---and go swaggering off in his jodspurs and riding crop, and I thought he was just like God. The men loved him. He put the fear of the Lord in them, sitting on his horse (...and you've never seen anyone mounted so headstrongly, so commanding...). Fort Myer, with the beautiful woods and the river so full of the softest pastels - you could see them at evening parade. And Daddy on his mount -- a silver gelding it was, named Champ, I remember. Daddy saying: 'I'll tolerate no misconduct in my outfit. We're marching like men to war, not like rummies and sinners.' They called him Bleed and Jesus Peyton.... And severe and strict he was. But it was good for me. I learned what's right and what's wrong (114).

For Helen, then, her father is a symbol of ultimate authority, because he is strong, masculine, and a ki

cousness. Unlike Milton she has from the start found a secular substitute for God, and she feels that under her father's rule she is part of an order, since her life attains meaning in relationship to his values, which are largely military. Having only known this security, Helen thinks that this is what her life will always be like: "a nice, long, congenial tea party, where everyone talked a little, danced a little and had polite manners" (273). She dreams that her knight in shining armour will come one day and admire her and love her:

she saw smooth skin as glossy white as the petal of gardenia, lips which seemed but sixteen or twenty, and as unblemished by any trouble as those she had held up to another mirror thirty years before, whispering 'Dearest' to an invisible and quite imaginary lover (24).

It would be hard for any man to measure up to the idol of her father and to the picture she has of her dream-lover. Thus, Milton has no possibility of ever gaining the awe, respect, and esteem that is her father's. Since she chooses to marry him, one might speculate that she does not want any man to substitute for her father in her heart, because surely she must be aware from the beginning that Milton is the antithesis to her father: that he gets his military promotion the easy way, that he drinks, and that he wants to remain dependent upon his father and upon her inheritance. Rather than regarding him as the source of order in her life, she calls him "peer, blind, dumb Milton"

(296), and she often refers to him as a child. But because she thinks she wants a man like her father, she feels horror when she realizes that her world as a married woman proves to be quite different from her childhood existence: "she had come to the party and it had been ghastly: everyone misbehaved and no one had a good time" (273).

As Helen discovers that nobody provides order for her in her adult life, she takes it upon herself to become the ordering, controlling, and saving force. Like her father's, Helen's moral system is secular, but she calls it Christian. With a feeling of moral superiority she is convinced that only she knows what is right and what is wrong, that she alone knows what sin is. She tells Milton:

I love my God and you don't You betrayed us when you stepped going to church; you betrayed not only me but the whole family Let me tell you, too I know what sin is In knowing that I'll always be superior to you ... (95).

Under the pretense that she is a Christian, she constructs a relative value system, calling everything she does not agree with or does not like sinful. Thus, she makes herself into the moral center and sees the people around her and their actions in light of what they make her feel. From the beginning, she is jealous of Peyton, because Milton shows attention to her. She starts to punish Peyton for accepting her father's love, and she calls her spoiled, selfish, evil, a "little devil" (63). She totally refrains

from showing Peyton any love or support. She abhors Dolly, but she also pretends to judge her in a moral light, by thinking of her as "an evil woman" who has "smeared" Milton "with sluttish filth" (294). Helen also regards herself as a savior for other people. When Milton has come back to her after Maudie's death, she feels that she, "Helen, had raised him up, re-formed him in the image of decency, exalted him" (294). It appears, then, that Helen only feels safe psychologically when she has complete control over her surroundings. Therefore, she thinks that she loves Maudie, because the girl does not pose any threat to her authority: she is passive, obedient, and she responds blindly to Helen's wishes. Therefore, by Helen's standards, she is good and knows what love is. She also thinks she loves Milton, because he

had realized the error of his ways. He had come back to her, as she had always known he would, literally on his knees, dragging his heels, remorseful, in tears. Milton she would excuse, of course. Milton had yielded to her. Milton had said, 'I quit,' had admitted she had been right all along (296).

But, as this passage indicates, she "loves" him only because, like Maudie, he recognizes her righteousness, and because she thinks he finally regards her as his god. When anybody challenges her power, however, by acting contrary to her wishes, her anger and hatred are aroused. I think one of the big reasons why she hates Peyton is that she

feels she cannot control her -- Peyton insists on living her own life and defies Helen's authority by leaving the house on Christmas eve, for instance.

Only as long as she feels she has full control over her family can she stay sane and pretend she is a good, dutiful, Christian wife who attends church and orders her household in accordance with what is right and good and decent. But as she gradually alienates everybody around her, and as Maudie dies and Peyton leaves home and Milton wavers between Dolly and herself, Helen retreats into a dream world where everything is ordered and controlled by her. I think it is important to analyze Helen's dreams, because symbolically they explain her personality. It is during Peyton's wedding, when Peyton has discouraged Milton from kissing her in front of everybody, and Helen, seething with anger, seeks Carr's support, that she recalls her dreams. The first one goes like this:

Three enemies had always dwelt there, in her dream country, three enemies and a friend. Maudie had been sweet, like something musical, always hobbling near... and Maudie she had always hid behind her in her dreams, hiding her from sight of the planetary, fearsome half-light, the finger-ing shadows, the enemies who, somehow, would rape Maudie first, then her. Maudie had been her friend. Then there had been the big enemy, once the most fearsome of all, now dead, vanquished, done with: Dolly Benner. That bitch, that whore. Many times Dolly had died in her dreams, often by the knife that Helen wielded, grinning.... In this landscape there were always the vaguest outlines of a city, with many ornate towers, from which pestilence rose like smoke through the air.... Through this vapor Helen strolled, clad in her party best, and always with a man. Though now and then the man was Carey or her father, it was more

likely Milton or someone in a mask. The corpses which lay strewn about were faceless, iridescent with decay... invariably female. So, fanning themselves, sedate, she and Milton or whoever he was strolled for infinite miles, it seemed, through this land of the female dead, offended by, and commenting upon, the musky, floral odor, but mutually delighted by one corpse in particular, faceless like the rest, head down in the shadows, with its legs -- suppurating, clotted by a swarm of sucking, avid flies -- unmistakably Dolly's.... The more leathsome parts of the dream -- the dried-up female organs... these faded away quickly upon awakening.... That dream had come only in the past few years and, triumph or not, the ensuing days always seemed gray and bleak with a crushing guilt (297-298).

Since Maudie throughout the novel is a picture of innocence and of lack of understanding of the complexities of adult life, it seems that Helen is defending both these qualities in herself. She sees herself as innocent -- i. e., uncorrupted and righteous. At the same time she is incapable of understanding what motivates wickedness, such as that which Dolly and Peyton partake in. Therefore, in a sense she is "retarded" like Maudie, because she is unable to understand the adults around her. Helen, then, identifies herself with Maudie in her dream.

Freud, in his book The Interpretation of Dreams, claims that "long, stiff objects and weapons" are exclusively dream symbols of male genitals.⁸ Since Dolly dies by "the knife that Helen wielded," it seems that Helen takes on the role of a man in her dream, and perhaps expresses her

⁸Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams. In The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, trans. and ed. A. A. Brill (New York: The Modern Library [Copyright, 1938, by Random House, Inc.]), 375.

latent homosexual tendencies towards Dolly, since dying is a traditional symbol for sexual relationship. The landscape has "many ornate towers" (again suggesting the presence of male sexuality), from which "pestilence rose like smoke." If the smoke is a symbol for semen, then it is indicative of Helen's attitude towards sexuality that it is connected with the word "pestilent," which has the figurative meaning of "being injurious to morals."⁹ Since Helen is always with a man in her dream, she further identifies herself with masculinity: she is the man in her dream. In one sense, Helen's dream fulfills her wish of becoming her father: she is a knight of righteousness, who with her knife stamps out all evil. This moral identification also is shown in the second dream in which she kills Dolly from a "horse, white and named Champ, just like her father's" (298). The main evil, as the dream suggests, is, in Helen's mind, sexuality. Her obsession with it is shown by the fact that she finds the "dried-up female organs" to be the most loathsome part of her dream. But also, her disgust is expressed when she sees many female corpses, not just one. By creating in her imagination a number of dying females, she expresses the intensity of her feeling that sex is sinful and bad.

⁹H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler (eds.), The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English (4th ed. rev.; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959), 890.

It seems that Helen's dream points to at least three things in her character: by killing Dolly (and later she discovers that she is also killing Peyton in her dream), she is assuming the role that she thought her father had in stamping out evil, i. e., sexuality; but by the same act she expresses her homosexual tendencies; finally, she also identifies with the women in her dream, because she sometimes dreams that she herself is bad (298) and that Maudie, i. e., her innocent or moral part, is dead. Thus, her dream to a certain extent threatens that she might become infected with Peyton's or Dolly's evil. Her hate for sexuality and fear of men becomes clear, when after she has recalled her dreams she realizes that Carr is carrying a stick and cries out: "Don't come near me with that stick! I've seen it all my life" (300). The stick -- a phallus symbol like the knife in the dream -- in itself signifies a threat to her, because if she comes into contact with it she will be contaminated. It also means that as a male, Carey threatens her own role as the controller. Thus, Helen hates all men and dreams about "the defeat of men in general" (296). Helen's homosexuality is expressed whenever she reflects on Peyton's body:

She saw Milton and Peyton together, and the tender, corrupt solemnity of their caresses: a multitude of red, soft lips, Milton's hair, Peyton's breasts, the torture of twenty years. 'Damn you, Carey,' she said.... 'I'll fix her alone!' (301.)

Furthermore, Helen is seldom seen by other characters in the novel as feminine. Peyton and Milton sees her hands as "bird-like" and Dr. Holcomb at Peyton's wedding reflects that she is like a snake and like a genie from a bottle (305), all symbols of male sexuality.

Helen's main need, then, is to achieve order, but because she psychologically comes close to paranoia, she can only achieve her goal if she controls everything and everybody around her. As soon as she loses her grip on her family, her main problem remains to keep herself undefiled by the chaos around her. Therefore, on her way to Peyton's funeral, she is afraid she might be infected by the mere sight of Dolly. I think that is why she says to Carr: "I don't want to see that woman. I don't want to lay eyes on her" (241). Of course her wish to stay away from Dolly also reflects her hatred for the woman who made her lose control over Milton. Since Helen's homosexual tendencies clash with her middle-class upbringing and her ideal of what life is supposed to be, she can never let them become realized, and her psychological defenses do not even let her become fully aware of them. But in order to remain safe in her alabaster chamber, she has to reject sexuality altogether. Thus, it is out of necessity to keep whatever sanity she has left, that she finally must reject Milton, saying:

'Milton, I've told you that anything you need or want from me you can have. Except --' she paused, still smiling -- 'except -- Well, we've been through it all, haven't we? One has pride --' (388).

Like Carr, Daddy Faith's congregation, and Milton, Helen desperately craves an orderly system within which her life can obtain significance. Unlike Milton she starts out with a secular system, and as its premises are challenged when she leaves her father, she is unwilling to see that the system which provided security for her was relative from the start. So, she clings to her father's notions as if they were absolutes. Since she has lost her external God-symbol, she must take strength from herself -- even if her power lies in hatred for other people as well as for herself. Helen, then, fights to keep her childhood security and innocence, and, because she does not want to grow by her experience, she takes refuge in her own madness, where she can finally close herself off from all feeling and become one of the living dead.

To a large extent Peyton is caught between the psychological problems of her parents. She finds herself in an insoluble conflict. On the one hand, she knows she is a symbol of salvation for her father, and on the other hand, the object of intense hatred for her mother; and she wants to please them both. However, in order to please Helen she must accept her mother's full control over her life, which means she could not accept her father's love.

But she needs love, and in order to receive love from Milton, she has to return his attentions.

Helen from the start takes the position of an ultimate judge in her life. She constantly tells Peyton that she is evil, sinful, selfish, spoiled -- that she deliberately lets Maudie fall and therefore indirectly is the cause of Maudie's death, that by her wilfulness she is destroying the family harmony. Because of her insane jealousy she tells Peyton that she is immoral and a whore. Although Peyton does not believe in a Christian moral system, she still feels guilty for all the sins she is accused of having committed, even if she rationally knows that she has not committed them, and even though she knows that Helen's accusations arise from an insane hatred. She tells her mother:

You hate men, you've hated Daddy for years, and the sad thing is that he hasn't known it. And the terrible thing is that you hate yourself so much that you just don't hate men or Daddy but you hate everything, animal, vegetable and mineral. Especially you hate me.... I'm free and you can't stand it... (311-312).

Objectively she also knows that she must relate to Milton as a daughter, in spite of his constant demanding that she be something else. Thus, in Charlottesville she totally declines to be his mother or his savior:

Now her face was cool and grave, reproachful. Trustfully he Milton had made his confessional, told her everything -- and look what had happened....

'Bunny what about Maudie? Why didn't you stay with Mother?'

'This whole family's nuts. Absolute nuts!' She turned; tears were running down her face, tears not of sorrow but of anger and frustration and regret. 'Why can't you stay sober once, Bunny?' (215-216.)

Peyton's struggle is to resist being choked by her parents' conflicting demands upon her and to try to live her own life in spite of them. At her wedding she tells Dr. Helcomb that she wants to be understood for what she is, "neither to be loved to death nor despised just because [she is] young" (304), and she tells Milton that she wants to be normal (268).

But Peyton is so caught up in her parents' relationship that it is very difficult for her to live a free life and forget about her conflicts with them. Thus, on her honeymoon she is obsessed with the horror of her wedding and tells Harry:

don't be bitter, you say. How can I be anything else? Don't you see -- he's never been beyond redemption, like Helen. That's the terrible part. Can't you see? She was beyond hope I guess the day she was born. But Daddy! He's had so much that was good in him, but it was all wasted. He wasn't man enough to stand up like a man and make decisions and all the rest. Or to be able to tell her where to get off (317).

Although Peyton sees what is wrong with both her parents, she does not realize that in her own obsession with them, she is in the process of destroying her own marriage with Harry by committing their errors. Like Milton, she starts

to expect that other people solve her problems for her. Thus, she turns to Harry for salvation in the same way that Milton has turned to her. She tells Harry after the wedding:

You could have done something. But you weren't there. You left me just like you always do. When I needed you. Why didn't you come and rescue me? Didn't you see -- (319).

Like Helen, she demands total attention from her mate, expecting him to show no attention to other people. She becomes madly jealous when he kisses another woman:

He was kissing a refugee girl in the kitchen; her name was Marta Epstein and he had his hand on her tail and I hated all Jews. And he said Forgive. Forgive me, he said. On his knees he said it, but the chimes were still in my brain and I was drowning and I knew something was wrong on earth. Something in me that was wrong refused to forgive, and I thought forever; I said, 'You did it while I was drowning, that's what makes it so awful. I'll never forgive you' (350).

Although she knows that she cannot expect perfection from Harry, since he is human and not the god she wants him to be, she -- like her mother -- is unable to forgive. At the same time she desperately wants to be forgiven by Harry, for not forgiving him. She wants to be loved without loving. Therefore, Harry is right in charging that she is incapable of love, and I think that the main reason for this is that she has been conditioned by Helen to feel that it is wrong to love her father, while at the same time she has never received love from Helen. Thus, her need for love has never been met and her giving of love has been thwarted.

Peyton is seeking for an order in love, but since she cannot discover how to rid herself of her obsession to expect perfection in Harry, and since she can find no forgiveness for her own sins inside of herself, she -- after lacerating and punishing herself by being promiscuous -- starts to dream of a state in which her conscience will not bother her and in which love can exist without interference: she in effect seeks a state of innocence and childhood. Thus, she wants to live inside the alarm-clock, because then the luminous dots, i.e., her conscience, can not be seen by her anymore, and nothing will interfere with her expression of love for Harry. She thinks: "Harry and I sprawled along the springs.... we'd have our sun ... and our love forever" (339). The clock, then, for Peyton symbolizes the womb, because of the safety and seclusion it will provide her: she thinks of it as a "perfect, ordered, whole" (345). What she wants is a state of oblivion or unconsciousness, where there is no responsibility, no free choice, and where the mechanical clock will rule her life, take responsibility for her sins, and let her exist without will.

However Peyton is living in the real world enough to know that it is impossible to escape into a clock. She knows that she is the one who has deceived and forsaken herself, when she is unable to love herself and forgive Harry. At the same time, unlike Milton and Helen, she

thinks that without the reality of an all-loving and all-forgiving God, it is difficult for man in general -- and her in particular -- to even know what love is and to know how to love. Thus, she thinks:

it was not he who rejected me, but I him, and I had known all day that that must happen, by that rejection making the first part of my wished-for, yearned-for death-act, my head now glued to the executioner's block... oh my God, why have I forsaken You? Have I through some evil inherited in a sad century cut myself off from You forever, and thus only by dying must take the fatal chance: to walk into a dark closet and lie down there and dream away my sins, hoping to wake in another land, in a far, fantastic dawn?.... I want to be bursting with love, and not with this sorrow.... What a prayer it was I said; I knew He wasn't listening, marking the sparrow but not me (382-383).

Because love is necessary for Peyton to live, since without it she cannot forgive others or herself, she decides to rid this earth of her stain: "undivorced from guilt, I must divorce myself from life" (382). She is like Cass Kinsolving in Set This House on Fire, but unlike Cass, she has no grain of self-love to save her -- only self-loathing and self-pity. Because she cannot find any order in the world to live by, because there is no love in herself which can create an order in her, because she is overflowing with guilt and is incapable of forgiving herself and others, she has to commit suicide to escape her torture. Tearing her dress apart before putting it in the garbage can, she symbolically destroys every trace of herself from this world.

Ironically, Peyton can only be saved by dying, because only death can separate her and her guilt: "one by one ascending my flightless birds through the suffocating night, toward paradise" (386), the birds being symbols of sexual guilt (340, 341), but also of all her guilt which she feels in her inability to love and forgive.

Maxwell Geismar charges that an Electra-complex "is surely the deepest and darkest source of Peyton's grief,"¹⁰ and obviously she does have such a complex. Throughout the novel she tells Milton she loves him, and in the stream of consciousness sequence she continually confuses Bunny with Harry. However, she is also reacting to him as a mother, as if she has been aware that he sees in her a mother-savior. Thus, she reflects:

how lovely and exciting, I thought, to be your father's grandmother and have him climb up on your knees, pink-faced like he is now, I guess... (338-339).

But she also identifies with her father because, she, like him, is seeking a mother. Thus, she dreams of the grandmother she never knew:

she was dressed in lace... and there was a dear loving look in her eye as if, when you climbed into her lap, she would hold you and tell you stories about little girls in the War between the States and rock you to sleep (337). saying, 'Don't you fret, Peyton honey' (336).

Peyton is also dreaming of her own mother:

¹⁰Maxwell Geismar, American Moderns: From Rebellion to Conformity (New York: Hill and Wang, 1958), 242.

I called aloud 'Mother, Mother, Mother.' And she came in her slip, a lovely silhouette against the door. Shame on you, Peyton. Shame. Shame. Shame. Shame. The door closed and I was alone (363).

Because of Helen's answer, she knows her mother can never save her, because Helen cannot forgive: "I reached out my arms, cried mother mother mother, to that image even then twenty years before turned to bones and dust" (384). As this quotation implies, Peyton realizes that her mother has been one of the living dead, without love, for a long time. I think that Helen's withholding love from Peyton and blocking Peyton's own expression of love is what, more than anything, brings about her suicide. Since Peyton knows she will never receive any love from Helen, Peyton symbolically returns to Helen's womb by drowning, because water and drowning are traditional symbols for dying and rebirth. Therefore, dying she in fact regains the blissful oblivion of pre-existence.

Like her parents, Peyton seeks for an order with which she can identify. Her quest leads her beyond her parents' temporary solutions: she cannot accept her mother's relative value system, nor her father's way of seeking secular saviors. Finally, she cannot find meaningful order in the mechanical clock, because it only echoes modern mechanized secular society, and it cannot provide her with permanence. Symbolically she throws the clock in the drain (382). Peyton lives what Milton means when

he says "We've lost our lovewords" (186), because her most significant quest is for love which she is unable to discover. Thus, appropriately she is buried in Potter's Field among the unknown, because she is unable to identify herself.

As a whole, Lie Down in Darkness illustrates man's search for order in a world which has refuted its spiritual and cultural foundations. Ironically, the three main characters are seeking the very same values that once were part of Christianity. Milton seeks a savior: he substitutes Peyton for the all-forgiving and understanding God, and Helen for absolute moral judgement. Helen seeks a world of security, but she finds that she herself has to take up the sword of righteousness, because the world is corrupt. Peyton demands understanding and love and absolution of her sins, but she has to act the role of deliverer for herself by committing suicide, because she is unable to forgive herself -- which implies that she is ultimately incapable of being her own savior. All three of them seek a secular paradise, where they can be accepted and identified, but they ignore that in a secular world they first and foremost must accept and identify themselves. Thus, Loftis's father says truly: "Your first duty... is always to yourself" (15).

Since they are living in a secular world, their problems are secular, their sins are secular, and their

saviors are secular. Thus, their spiritual ideals are lost, and life becomes a seemingly insoluble puzzle, full of words such as love, honor, sin, which seem totally meaningless, since the cultural foundation for these words does not exist any longer. The people who go to Peyton's funeral -- Milton, Helen, Dolly Bonner, Ella, and Carey Carr -- are finally attending their own funeral, because they, like Peyton, have all dismissed a cultural order and they are incapable of finding a secular system by which their lives can obtain significance. Symbolically Harry, Peyton's husband, does not attend the funeral, because he is not deemed as are the others. Out of the disintegration he sees around him, he paints the background for new life and regeneration, as symbolized by the old man in his picture. Harry, therefore, foreshadows Cass Kinsolving of Set This House on Fire, because -- in spite of his limited role in the novel -- he seems to suggest a way for man to rise above his crushing circumstances through self-understanding and complete acceptance of being in an absurd world.

III. 'The Long March':

Man against Machine

Styron's second novel, The Long March, primarily reflects the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of Lieutenant Culver. Apart from the few scenes of direct dialogue between Culver and other characters, or between others when Culver is present, the reader has access only to the lieutenant's reactions, his speculations about Captain Mannix and Colonel Templeton, his interpretations of events.¹ Since no objective view of events exists in this novel, the reader may choose to agree with Culver's perspective, or he may discern gaps between it and what appears in dialogue. Of course any such construction will be the reader's subjective view of what is objectively true about the novel.

With this in mind, it is understandable that literary critics who deal with this novel reach very different conclusions about its themes. Augustine Nigre, for instance, suggests that The Long March is

a fable in which a few concrete images and symbols tell at least three related tales: the story of a forced march in

¹The reader is reminded of this by the constantly occurring "Culver thought," "Culver felt," "Culver saw," "Culver heard."

a Marine camp, which demonstrates Styron's belief 'that military life corrupts and we would be a lot better off without it;'² the story of the American experience in which the individual's dream of a free and peaceful Utopia is betrayed by the suppression and bondage of a closed, tightly-organized society; and finally the story of the degeneration of the hero in western civilization, from a figure who personifies the aspirations of the common man and the values of society to a grotesque anti-hero who makes a futile, but necessary, attempt to assert his personal freedom and identity in the face of a society which is consistently demanding that he sacrifice both.³

Peter L. Hays, on the other hand, is one of those critics who identifies Culver with Styron. He writes:

Styron ... says of Mannix, 'He only mutilated himself by this perverse and violent rebellion,'⁴ a comment which might apply as well to Hephaestus, Prometheus, Satan, or even Jesus.⁵

Finally, Eugene McNamara, while believing the novel to illustrate that we can have peace in the world only if the individual is obedient to the systems of his society, blatantly assumes that Templeton is Styron's spokesman:

But Styron (Templeton) forces us through the ritual of the march and the reality is evident at the end. The obedience

²William Styron, "If You Write for Television...", New Republic, CXLVI (April, 1959), 16.

³Augustine John Nigre, Jr., "The Long March: The Expansive Hero in a Closed World," Critique, IX, 111 (Summer, 1967), 103-104.

⁴William Styron, The Long March (New York: Random House, Inc., 1956 [Vintage Book]), 101. Page numbers immediately following quotations are from this edition.

⁵Peter L. Hays, "The Nature of Rebellion in The Long March," Critique, VIII, 11 (Winter, 1965-66), 73.

suggested here is not the blind obedience of the Organization Man. Because this is not sociology. It is a kind of metatheology.⁶

I agree with Nigro that The Long March is a fable, but I think it also has allegorical elements. To illuminate one of these elements, it is necessary first to deal with the setting of the novel, which centers upon military institutions and even perhaps rituals.

Within the novel, as in actuality, the military is built upon a hierarchy of ranks. A man in uniform is supposed to show absolute obedience to orders from anyone of superior rank, and he is expected to do so with politeness and without opposition or argument. Lack of adherence to this military code usually leads to court-martial or other punishment. This system, then, functions as a totalitarian institution in which only a limited amount of individual free will can exist: it extends only to the choice between obeying orders or not obeying and risking certain punishment. Every man in uniform is aware of these two choices. He is by the very nature of military training and enforced discipline, psychologically conditioned to obey orders blindly or instinctively for self-protection; and, like Pavlov's dog, he soon does not even consider alternatives to obedience, for disobedience is

⁶Eugene McNamara, "William Styron's Long March: Absurdity and Authority," Western Humanities Review, XV, 111 (Summer, 1961), 272.

certain to lead to difficulties. The Long March suggests that the totalitarian and bureaucratic military system functions as a secular religion for the people involved in it. Culver reflects that in men like Colonel Templeton

all emotions -- all smiles, all anger -- emanated from a priestlike, religious fervor, throbbing inwardly with the cadence of parades and beated footfalls (30).

Because he has military law (secular commandments) on his side, he is in position to command his men, punish them for their disobedience (sin), by making them face a court-martial (the day of judgement) or by suggesting to his superiors a transfer to Korea, a secular hell. He also has the power to exempt them from punishment, which parallels the power of a priest to forgive sins. Culver is aware of Templeton's powers given him by his military rank, when he thinks that

rebels are ordered into quick damnation but simple doubters sometimes find indulgence -- depending upon the priest, who may be one ever rapt in some litany of punishment and court-martial (30).

In contrast to Christianity the secular "religion" of militarism is not based upon moral absolutes, but upon arbitrarily selected secular codes. Templeton gives the men orders to perform physical tasks which are amoral, and a man is judged, not on the basis of his moral or human worth, but from his skill in performing tasks of amoral

nature as efficiently as possible. Among the military virtues are obedience to orders, politeness towards officers, discipline, physical aptness, and blindness to faults of superiors or their commands. The military wants its men to respond mechanically to orders and not to ask any questions or to use their intelligence for any other purpose than to carry out commands. The military value-system, then, stands in opposition, not only to the Christian value-system, but to humanistic conceptions of man as a creature capable of self-government through the intelligent exercise of his will and reason. Therefore it seems that the military in effect debases man to the level of an efficiently functioning machine by depriving him of his human rights to think, to feel, and to make choices.⁷

Colonel Templeton epitomizes the machine he represents. First and foremost he wants his men to be physically efficient in the Marine Corps. When Mannix voices the opinion that his men are reserves and not likely to be in good condition for a long march, Templeton responds:

But they aren't reserves. They're marines. Comprend? Technically it's true that a lot of these new men are reserves -- that is, they have an 'R' affixed at the end of the 'USMC.' But it's only a technical difference, you see.

⁷Therefore, I agree with Styron that "military life corrupts and we would be a lot better off without it," and with Nigre who claims that this attitude is a part of The Long March.

Because first and foremost they're marines. I don't want my marines doping off. They're going to act like marines. They're going to be fit (28).

Templeton's remark implies that he regards the men as his own property and not as free, individual persons. Furthermore, it implies that he wants them to be efficient cogs in the machine that he represents. Therefore, he ultimately seeks to deprive them of human dignity, as he does with Mannix, telling him that he is "not interested in his observations" (112). Personal opinions, opposition, or disagreement on the part of the men disrupts the machine. Templeton therefore will discourage it or even punish it, as he does with Mannix:

You quiet down now, hear? You march in, see? I order you confined to your quarters, and I'm going to see that you get a court-martial. Do you understand? I'm going to have you tried for gross insubordination. I'll have you sent to Korea. Keep your mouth shut (112-113).

Like the system he perpetuates Templeton seems mechanical and robot-like. His physical appearance as seen by Culver is neutral and sexless, neither masculine nor feminine:

the frail, little-boned, almost pretty face peering upward with a look of attitudinized contemplation, the pensive bulge of tongue sliding inside the rim of one tanned cheek to gouge out some particle of food; small hands working calmly in the folds of the handkerchief -- surely all this was more final, more commanding than the arrogant loud mastery of a Booth, more like the skill of Bernhardt, who could cow men by the mystery of her smallest twitch (14).

His movements Culver describes as robot-like:

The Colonel pushed ahead in front of him with the absolute mechanical confidence of a wound-up, strutting tin soldier on a table top (74).

Aside from these outward physical signs of the sterility of a mechanism, his unsympathetic responses to people are perhaps most symptomatic of his internal rigidity and imperviousness. An example is when he discovers during the march that Mannix's foot is swollen. Then Culver reflects that Templeton

had too long been conditioned by the system to perform with grace a human act. Too ignorant to know that with this gesture -- so nakedly human in the midst of a crazy, capricious punishment which he himself had imposed -- he lacerated the Captain by his very touch (89-90).

If Templeton is a secular priest, his mission consists of trying to change men into mechanical beings, whose responses are correct and efficient according to military law and order. The Long March explores how an amoral system, such as the military, deprives man of his human dignity: his intellect, consciousness, free will, and "soul" are at stake. The novel also poses the questions of what happens to man if he becomes conditioned to think and act amorally, why is it so easy for man to submit to authority, and how responsible he is for his own degeneration.

Mannix and Culver are two of the men that Templeton wants to incorporate into the military system, and Mannix,

as is reflected in his dialogue and to a certain extent by Culver's reflections about him, embodies a rebellious threat to the system. Hays writes that

Mannix is a heretic and Templeton a priest, but it is important to see Mannix's heresy in terms of Christ's and to see Templeton as someone like Destoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor.⁸

The fact that he is Jewish and therefore of a minority group in the midst of typically white, Protestant middle-class Americans from the start tends to make him an outsider, and if not in conflict with, at least somewhat alienated from the majority. Possibly his Jewishness symbolizes in itself a conflict between religious (Jewish) and secular (military, as well as white American Christian) values. Critics point out his similarities to traditional and modern heroic types. Nigro establishes his likeness to Christian and Greek heroes, such as Christ, Adam, Prometheus;⁹ McNamara points out Mannix's similarities with Adam, Satan, Private Prewitt in James Jones's novel, From Here to Eternity, and with Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's play, Death of a Salesman;¹⁰ and Culver throughout the novel attributes various qualities to Mannix which coincide with those often ascribed to traditional heroes. Physically, Culver reports that he is "an enormous man" (49), much taller than the other men surrounding him. His

⁸Hays, 73. ⁹Nigro, 103-112. ¹⁰McNamara, 270-271.

mere size suggests that he is bigger and more important than the men surrounding him, not only physically, but perhaps also in his moral awareness, vision, and capacity for understanding. Like a traditional war hero (Odysseus or Coriolanus, for instance) he has a "raw deeply-dented, livid scar" (43) and "smaller scars all over his body" (43). The fact that he is scarred also suggests his common humanity -- his potential to be hurt. Moreover, his scarred body is implicitly compared to Templeton's smooth and unmarred physique, which suggests that the colonel is immune to human afflictions. Also, unlike Templeton, but like traditional heroes, Mannix has "suffered once, that 'once' being, in his own words, 'once too goddam many'" (45). Even if we never get to know the exact nature of his suffering, we may assume that his experience inevitably makes it impossible for him to be as innocent or uncritical as O'Leary is of the military system, or of anything that deprives him of the right to question, to criticize, or to make his own free choices. Culver reflects that in this attitude Mannix "was like nearly all the reserves ... but he was more noisily frank in regard to his position" (19). This seems to indicate that Mannix is different from the other men in that he stands up for what he believes in. The other men may grumble or be dissatisfied in silence, like Culver, but only a Mannix will stand up during the compulsory lectures and claim in the face of authority that

the men in the reserves are "too old. They should be home with their family" (51). His individual bravery, expressed in his wish to oppose what he considers to be unjust and evil authority, and his other personal traits, qualify him to join the literary heroes (or anti-heroes) such as Titus Andronicus, Hieronimo in Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy, or even Vendice in Cyril Tournour's The Revenger's Tragedy. Like these Renaissance revengers he first gains the sympathy of the readers because his objections to authority (in this case military authority) seem justified. But, like the traditional revenger, in his attempts to destroy injustice, he sinks into a paradox -- he partakes in the same evil that he objects to. In his rebellion he becomes a worse bully towards his own men than Templeton, particularly when he quite hysterically tries to force them to complete the march that he has objected to in the first place. Since he tries to beat Templeton and the military system at their own game, he becomes a Sisyphus eagerly rolling the stone uphill, because he wants to show the gods that he can do it, and like the traditional revenger, he goes through a metamorphosis and emerges as the epitome of what he initially fought against. Through Culver, we see his transformation this way:

Later, Mannix's actions seemed to become mixed up and a part of the general scheme, the nightmare. But here at first Culver's mind was enough in focus for Mannix's transformation to emerge clearly, even if with the chill,

unreal outlines of coming doom -- like a man conversing, who might turn around briefly to a mirror and see behind him in the room no longer his familiar friend, but something else -- a shape, a ghost, a horror -- a wild and threatening face reflected from the glass (78-79).

Mannix wants to prove to Templeton that he is as physically capable of performing hard manual tasks as is the colonel who has been in training ever since the end of World War II. Physically, then, he is bound to lose even if he does manage to finish the march, because the objective fact is that he has not been in training, is therefore out of shape, and can only undertake the struggle at great cost (the pain the march entails) to himself. The nail in his boot which hurts him may be taken as symbolic of the strike he has against him from the start: he cannot win over the system and Templeton by fighting him and it on their own terms. The nail seems to be there to remind him (and the reader) that he constantly feels the pain of adhering to and trying to exceed a system he abhors. Here again, as in the case of the scars, he is compared to Templeton, whom no nail could hurt, because he is a mechanism. This suggests a psychological conflict between the two. Mannix can only communicate with people who show their feelings and are capable of being hurt. As a true neurotic, he comes to frustration when he meets with indifference, as with Templeton, who never responds to people with enthusiasm or dislike, but with neutrality, indifference, and "correctness."

While Templeton is cold, controlling, and withholding of warmth, Mannix is spontaneous, warm, and in need of response. The scene in which the colonel communicates his intention to conduct a forced march reveals their psychological differences:

Mannix had murmured, 'Thirty-six miles, Jesus Christ,' in a tone, however, laden with no more disbelief or no more pain than O'Leary's whistle, and Culver had seen the Colonel's smile vanish, replaced on the fragile little face by a subtle, delicate shadow of irritation. 'You think that's too long?' the Colonel had said to Mannix then, turning slightly. There had been no hostility in his voice, or even reproof; it had, in fact, seemed merely a question candidly stated ... (23-24).

More than anything, I think, the colonel's indifference is what causes Mannix's rage against him and against what he stands for. This psychological clash becomes clear to us through Culver's reflections upon the two men's reactions to each other:

It was an odd picture because from where he sat Culver was the only one in the tent who could see, at the same instant, both of their expressions. In the marked comfortless light they were like classical Greek masks, made of chrome or tin, reflecting an almost theatrical disharmony: the Colonel's fleeting grin sculpted clearly and prettily in the unshadowed air above the Captain's darkened, downcast face where, for a flicker of a second, something outraged and agonized was swiftly graven and swiftly scratched out. The Colonel's smile was not complacent or unfriendly. It was not so much as if he had achieved a triumph but merely equilibrium ... (29).

No matter how much he tries, Mannix is not capable of evoking a spontaneously felt response from Templeton --

the colonel's passions, if he has them, are all safely smothered beneath the impassive structure of military dignity and necessity. As a defense mechanism against this iceberg, Mannix creates his own illusion: that he and the colonel are physically competing with each other; that the colonel orders the march, if not solely, at least largely to challenge Mannix's capacities, that the completion of the march finally means a strong show of manhood. For Mannix the march provides an opportunity to show that he is physically superior to the frail, cold colonel. Culver, who is more temperate than Mannix, sees this struggle going on inside Mannix:

Couldn't he see? That the Colonel didn't care and that was that? That with him the hike had had nothing to do with courage or sacrifice or suffering, but was only a task to be performed, that whatever he was he was no coward, he had marched the whole way, or most of it, any idiot could see that -- and that he was as far removed from the vulgar battle, the competition, which Mannix had tried to promote as the frozen, remotest stars. He just didn't care (111).

Mannix, in one sense, loses the competition with Templeton and the system because he remains human, and remains therefore subject to human delusions. In order to outdo the system, he would have had to be more of a robot and less of a man. If Mannix in The Long March were merely metamorphosed into a machine, he would hardly be a hero. Even though he does fight the system on its own terms, and even though he does drive his men to finish the march in

much the same way that Templeton would have admired, he does these things, not out of commitment to the values of the system, but out of intense personal rage and indignation. Thus Mannix never becomes indifferent like Templeton. At the end of the novel, when Mannix admits to his human frailty, at the same time he reveals how far he is from the Templetons of the world -- he is no robot like Templeton, and he could never and would never want to become one. By admitting his humanity, he is far removed from the traditional Renaissance revenger who usually loses all traces of humanity. Nigro states that Mannix is finally "crushed by society,"¹¹ but I disagree, because by his naked humanness and his capacity to be hurt, he in one sense becomes larger than the system:

he merely stood there huge and naked in the slanting dusty light and blinked and sent toward the woman, finally, a sour, apologetic smile, his words uttered, it seemed to Culver, not with self-pity but only with the tone of a man who, having endured and lasted, was too weary to tell her anything but what was true. 'Deed it does,' he said (120).

Mannix, then, has endured and lasted three things: the march imposed on him by Templeton, the physical pain of the nail, and his own personal metamorphosis -- he has in fact outlasted the system. Therefore, Mannix and the machine will remain mutually repulsive. He seems to have learned his lesson: that systems, and system men like

¹¹Nigro, 110.

Templeton, although powerful, are not admirable because they are incapable of being human, but that even the realization of this cannot bring about the overthrow of the system.

Between the two extremes of man and machine stands Culver, who, apart from being the concealed narrator, also is a character in his own right in The Long March. For him the recall from civilian life to military life represents a pressure-point, a time of reflection, reconsideration, and choice between individual and military values. Strangely enough, he needs this return to the marines to discover that he, as an individual, has choices to make, because during the years after the war it appears that he willingly has let time pass, has let chance take him where it would. Therefore, these years appear to him as an unreal, pleasant dream, rather than reality:

Culver had felt weirdly as if he had fallen asleep in some barracks in 1945 and had awakened in a half-dozen years or so to find that the intervening freedom, growth, and serenity had been only a glorious if somewhat prolonged dream (7).

Since he regards military life as more real than his civilian life, Styron might be saying that people feel most alive under extreme conditions of physical strain or emotional upheavals when the pressure of decisions is present.

Culver seems to be involved in a mass of contradictions. On the one hand, he feels that despite the inter-

vening years as a civilian he is still basically a marine, implying that he is a system man who answers to commands without opposition:

How stupid to think they had ever made their own philosophy; it was as puny as a house of straw, and at this moment -- by the noise in their brains of these words, you will -- it was being blasted to the winds like dust (69).

Although this reflection implies a regret, it reveals the way Culver regards himself as well as Mannix in relation to the system. There are further indications in the novel that Culver does think that as a marine it is his duty to act as one. An example is when he discovers the dead boys and the sight is abhorrent to him:

The sight of death was the sort of thing which in war-time is expected, which one protects oneself against, and which is finally excused or at least ignored, in the same way that a beggar is ignored, or a head cold, or a social problem. But in training here in the States in peace time (or what, this sweltering summer in the early 1950's, passed as peace time) one had felt no particular need for that type of self-defense ... (5-6).

The fact that he has been ready to accept the posture of self-defense and that he wishes he had been ready for the sight which confronts him, seems to point towards his inclination to act, feel, and think the way the system expects him to : he seeks, in effect, to construct the same defenses which are so fundamental to Templeton's character, to construct barriers between himself and the cruelties

inherent in the system in order to tolerate what the system produces. But, unlike Templeton, he is not a robot -- with regret he admits the change within himself: he "was almost thirty, he was old, and he was afraid" (6). Largely because he wants to test his own physical strength, and because he still is conditioned by the system to obey orders, he wants to complete the march, even if (or maybe because) he is scared that he may not make it (69).

Culver's feelings, however, are divided. While on the one hand he believes it is right to conform to the military system, he is on the other hand quite incapable of fully doing so. Instead of blindly accepting the system, he continually asks questions which tend to illuminate his critical and hesitant resignation to the machine which Templeton easily accepts: "how?" "why?" had the mortar shells misfired and killed the boys (4). "Of course it had been an accident. But why?" (5.) He tries to find the reason why the colonel orders the march, why Mannix resists, why Mannix does not see his battle as meaningless, why he does not see that it matters to no one if they finish the march or not. He never finds adequate answers to his questions. But the very fact that he is always asking them implies that he has not fully conformed to the system, because it, like everything else so far in his life, has no more than relative significance or value, and Culver is a man in search of something to believe in.

The part of him that asks questions produces his fascination for Mannix, because, to Culver who seeks meaning, Mannix may have an answer to his quest. That Culver is seeking meaning seems obvious when one considers the fact that it is Culver who ponders over Mannix's heroic qualities:

Yet, Culver speculated, who really was a hero anyway, any more? Mannix's disavowal of faith put him automatically out of the hero category, in the classical sense, yet if suffering was part of the hero's role, wasn't Mannix as heroic as any? (43.)

Culver seeks a hero to identify with, because that would make life more meaningful. He wants to think that Mannix is brave to stand up for what he believes in. Yet, even if Mannix is a hero in his own way, it finally cannot change Culver's attitude towards life which is basically one of defeat. Therefore, he projects his own hopelessness onto Mannix:

Born into a generation of conformists, even Mannix (so Culver sensed) was aware that his gestures were not symbolic, but individual, therefore hopeless, maybe even absurd, and that he was trapped like all of them in a predicament which one personal insurrection could, if anything, only make worse (55-56).

We can only guess if Mannix feels this, but we can be sure that Culver feels it. Thus, it seems as if his feelings towards Mannix are ambiguous. On the one hand he admires his friend's independence and perhaps he wishes he could be as brave as him. On the other hand, since he intel-

lectually has resigned himself to conformism, he pities Mannix's feverous attempt to buck the system. Similarly, his feelings toward Templeton are confused and constantly shifting. At one point, he almost likes him (p. 30) because he can respect the Colonel's commitment to the military structure of values. Yet at another point he feels "...that he knew of no one on earth he had ever loathed so much before" because the Colonel "had too long been conditioned by the system to perform with grace a human act" (p. 89).

As the novel progresses Culver gradually changes. In the beginning of the novel he seems equally torn between wishing to obey the system and wanting to believe that Mannix is a hero who may represent meaningful values. But when the captain starts to treat his men badly through his obsessive desire to finish the march, Culver reacts with horror, and at once he is thrown into the act of trying to stop Mannix's monomania:

The Captain, poised on his crippled feet, made a swift, awkward gesture toward the man, as if to drag him to his feet; Culver grabbed him by the arm, shouting furiously: 'Stop it, Al! Stop it.' He paused, looking into Mannix's dull hot eyes. 'Enough!' he said, more quietly Then gently, 'That's enough, Al...' (106).

Mannix's change forces Culver to realize that even if the captain has heroic qualities, he is still a man, capable of hate as well as love, and of becoming a slave-driver

when gripped by an obsession. This impels Culver to realize that Mannix is no ideal, but a friend who needs his support and help. The lieutenant consequently shifts from a state of abstract questioning and observing to action when he tries to calm Mannix down. Culver's feeling of pity and compassion towards Mannix, which leads to the act of trying to protect him from himself and then from Templeton, engrosses him so that it becomes less important for him to find answers to his existential questions. This change in him becomes evident when he once more reflects about the eight dead boys:

Culver let his head fall on his arm. Yes, they had had it -- those eight boys -- he thought, there was no doubt of that. In mindless slumber now, they were past caring, though diadems might drop or Doges surrender. They were ignorant of all. And that they had never grown old enough to know anything, even the tender miracle of pity, was perhaps a better ending -- it was hard to tell (116).

There is a new kind of acceptance in Culver when he thinks "it was hard to tell." He still sees the ambiguities of any given situation and he still has no answers, but he seems to face the cold fact that he will never find any solutions to his questions. He reflects "that he had hardly ever known a time in his life when he was not marching or sick with loneliness or afraid" (p. 117), and by the end of the novel he knows that this is the way his life will continue to be. Mannix's admission at the end of the novel

that he hurts holds true for Culver too, because he has to accept the absurdity of life, the sterility of the military, and the miserable fact that man has to live alone and grapple with his own problems, and all this hurts. I cannot agree with Shaun O'Connell that "Culver and Mannix fully understand their predicament"¹² from the start, because, as I have indicated, there is a process of growth going on in both men: Culver begins in a state of agonizing uncertainty about what is more right -- to obey an arbitrary, amoral machine which sets itself up as an absolute religion, or to try to preserve his individual right to free choice and free thinking which in turn implies not pretending that absolute answers exist to anything. Although the first alternative may have been the more comfortable, he chooses the second because he is incapable of submitting to a system he does not finally believe in. Mannix changes from a blindly rebellious attempt to overthrow the system to an acceptance of the mutual exclusiveness of himself and that system.

The military machine in The Long March represents an extreme form of totalitarianism, but I think it mirrors the social systems which every civilian is subjected to in our culture. Therefore, all aspects of the novel -- the situation of the forced march, the choices between succumbing to the system or rebelling, between accepting the secular

¹²Shaun O'Connell, "Expense of Spirit: The Vision of William Styron," Criticism, VIII, 11 (Winter, 1965-66), 27.

machine as if it were a religion or questioning it, between deciding what is more important: abstract thinking or action -- make up a microcosm of life in the twentieth century. The novel explores an old issue: the conflict between self and society, between personal values and institutional values. Existentialists have established two terms which clearly are applicable to The Long March -- the terms "authentic" versus "inauthentic" existence. To live authentically, Sartre argues, is to affirm one's freedom in a world without absolutes and to create oneself through action. From this point of view Mannix is a man who seeks to live authentically, because he wants to affirm values in spite of the crushing pressure of the forces which tend to suppress individuality. Templeton, on the other extreme, epitomizes inauthenticity. His values and his very "moral" fiber are given to him by the system he so eagerly supports: therefore, he is a man who allows himself to be defined, rather than a man who defines himself. It is perhaps no accident that Templeton's inhumanity is equated with his amorality and that both stem from his obliviousness to the burden of personal freedom and responsibility. However, Culver is the man whose position is most difficult, because he recognizes the absurdities of the system which defines Templeton, but he is also aware of the apparent futility of the authentic response which expresses itself in Mannix's rebellion. Culver, then, is caught between two unsatisfactory

alternatives, but through his awareness of his dilemma he reaches the inevitable conclusion: that he has to stand alone and face the problems of his own existence. Finally, then, it seems that for Culver action which results from his feelings of what is right and good becomes more important to him than intellectual answers to existential problems. Thus, perhaps the novel as a whole refutes extreme intellectual idealism, both of Mannix's and of Templeton's kind, because any ideas when they lead to monomania tend to exclude too much of reality and may ultimately lead to evil.

IV. 'Set This House on Fire':

The Search for Identity

The appearance of Set This House on Fire caused an avalanche of adverse criticism. Richard Foster claims that the novel is "an orgy of commerce.... There is nothing good about it. Nothing true."¹ John W. Aldridge, who in 1951 praised Styron's first novel for its "brilliant lyric power" and its "elements of greatness,"² questions his artistic integrity, saying that there

can be no doubt that Kinsolving is an embodiment of Styron's effort to imitate the works of his serious contemporaries and thereby improve himself critically.³

Robert Gerham Davis suggests

the novel is a huge fiction in a double sense, worked up with great intensity and talent out of nothing, referring to nothing, meaning nothing.⁴

¹Richard Foster, "An Orgy of Commerce: William Styron's Set This House on Fire," Critique, III, 111 (Summer, 1960), 69-70.

²John W. Aldridge, Review of Lie Down in Darkness, by William Styron, New York Times (September 9, 1951), 5.

³John W. Aldridge, "William Styron and the Derivative Imagination," Time to Murder and Create: The Contemporary Novel in Crisis (New York: David Mc Kay Co., Inc., 1966), 43.

⁴Robert Gerham Davis, "Styron and the Students," Critique, III, 111 (Summer, 1960), 45.

Other critics question whether or not the novel is a unified work of art. John M. Bradbury, for instance, comments:

Despite its brilliant picture of American artists and dillottantes in Italy, despite some probing and sensitive portrayals and effective use of symbols, Set This House on Fire never coheres into a unified work of art. Styron presents too much material which cannot be absorbed within the novel's thematic and structural framework.⁵

Among the favorable critics there is disagreement over what the major themes of the novel are. Jerry H. Bryant suggests that its main theme parallels that of Styron's other novels -- human endurance in face of adversity;⁶ Lewis Lawson sees the novel mainly as a dramatization of Søren Kierkegaard's book, The Sickness Unto Death;⁷ Kenneth A. Robb shows the parallels which exist between Set This House on Fire and Mozart's Don Giovanni and The Magic Flute as well as Kierkegaard's Either/ Or and The Sickness Unto Death;⁸ Hugh L. Moore interprets the novel in light of Sophocles's Oedipus-plays and

⁵John M. Bradbury, "The Later Traditionalists," Renaissance in the South (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 122.

⁶Jerry H. Bryant, "The Hopeful Stoicism of William Styron," South Atlantic Quarterly, LXII, iv (Autumn, 1963), 540.

⁷Lewis Lawson, "Cass Kinsolving: Kierkegaardian Man of Despair," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, III, iii (Fall, 1962), 54-66.

⁸Kenneth A. Robb, "William Styron's Don Juan," Critique, VIII, ii (Winter, 1965-66), 34-46.

Euripides's Iphigenia in Tauris;⁹ Robert Detweiler suggests several connections between Styron's book and the philosophy of Paul Tillich;¹⁰ Shaun O'Connell claims the novel

presents a sharp and convincing social attack to form a substitute for the drama of personal tragedies which follow.¹¹

Finally, Louise Y. Gossett argues that

Styron's Americans act out the moral and spiritual anarchy which the author believes threatens to ruin this nation.¹²

Though these critics have contributed to the understanding of this novel, there still remain a number of issues which have not been sufficiently dealt with. In Set This House on Fire Styron continues to probe Western culture and twentieth century life as he has done in Lie Down in Darkness and in The Long March: he explores the effects of decadence and disintegration, but he also seeks out the

⁹Hugh L. Moore, "Robert Penn Warren, William Styron and the Use of Greek Myth," Critique, VIII, 11 (Winter, 1965-66), 75-87.

¹⁰Robert Detweiler, "William Styron and the Courage to Be," Four Spiritual Crisis in Mid-Century American Fiction ("University of Florida Monographs: Humanities," xiv; Gainesville: University of Florida Press, Fall 1963), 6-13.

¹¹Shaun O'Connell, "Expense of Spirit: The Vision of William Styron," Critique, VIII, 11 (Winter, 1965-66), 29.

¹²Louise Y. Gossett, "The Cost of Freedom: William Styron," Violence in Recent Southern Fiction (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1965), 128.

causes for the decline of the West. By looking into the attitudes, actions, and emotions of people who constitute this society, it becomes clear that they are largely responsible for the disintegration, but also, that they alone have the potential for redeeming themselves and their culture.

As in Lie Down in Darkness and in The Long March, the reader of Set This House on Fire is from the start informed about the secularization and vulgarity of present Western civilization. Peter Leverett, visiting his home town, Port Warwick, Virginia, reflects on the change that is taking place in that town:

We traveled all the old avenues, many of them strange to me now (the largest and most venerable trees seem to be the first victims of a municipal renaissance: not only the magnolias but the oaks and elms had fallen, in a process of rebuilding...)¹³

This quotation implies that society destroys natural beauty in the name of progress and improvement. But the individuals who make up the society are the ones who are responsible for raping their surroundings and calling it "rebuilding." Realizing this, Alfred Leverett says:

We've sold our birthright.... We've sold out, right down to the garters, and you know what we've sold out for? A bunch of ohromium junk from Detroit put together with chewing gum and spit! (15)

¹³William Styron, Set This House on Fire (New York: Random House, Inc., 1960), 11. Page numbers immediately following quotations are from this edition.

According to old Leverett we have not only sold our surroundings, but we have sold our moral values, our human dignity, our whole culture, and in their stead adopted secular substitutes:

The common man he had his belly stuffed, but what was he? He wasn't God's noble creature no more, he was just plain common. He hadn't grown in dignity or wisdom. All he had grown in was his gut and his pocketbook. He forswore his Creator..., while worshiping with all his heart nothing but the almighty dollar. He plundered a whole continent of its resources and wildlife and beauty. The wisdom of all ages, all the precious teachings of his ancestors, they were lost upon him. He spat on his negro brother and wore out his eyes looking at TV and fornicated with his best friend's wife at the country club. He had all these wonder drugs to prolong his life, and what happened? At the age of seventy he was an empty husk, saddled with a lot of ill-gotten lucre and a pile of guilt, terrified of death and laying down there on the sand at Miami Beach pitying himself. A husk... (15-16).

Like Oswald Spengler, Alfred Leverett calls man's secularization of his values and his culture "the decline of the West" (10), and he predicts that it will all end in moral "and spiritual anarchy" (12), because as man's values become relative, secular, and amoral, he loses his identity, and he loses sight of his worth as a man. What remains is a wasteland -- a nightmare-landscape of emptiness, perversion, and narcissism, for which man himself is responsible. The only hope for Western culture is that it may be reborn ("we've got to start from scratch again, build from the ground floor up" 15). But to do this, man first has to redeem himself by purging himself of his willingness to sell his soul:

What this great land of ours needs is something to happen to it. Something ferocious and tragic, like what happened to Jericho or the cities of the plain -- something terrible I mean... so that when the people have been through hell-fire and the crucible, and have suffered agony enough and grief, they'll be men again, human beings, not a bunch of smug contented hogs rooting at the trough. Ciphers without mind or soul or heart (15).

The conclusions that can be drawn from Leverett's speeches are not new insights. Indeed, they have been stated and restated throughout the ages, but they apply equally well to people living in the twentieth century. Essentially, the message is that man is inherently capable of both evil and good, but it is up to him to choose what qualities in himself he wants to activate. As Leverett sees it, to accept secularization is an evil act. It involves self-degradation and self-deprivation, since man, when he accepts this, becomes a husk, committed to nothing, believing in nothing, doing nothing of significance. He blames chance for his boredom or his sense of futility and feels no responsibility for himself and his life. On the other hand, Leverett seems to suggest that self-realization, acceptance of self-determination, and awareness of good and evil may lead man to ascend from the state of a hog and reclaim his proper place within the Chain of Being.

Alfred Leverett, then, states the major themes of Set This House on Fire. In order to explore these themes Styron presents us with three representative characters of our culture, Cass Kinsolving, Peter Leverett, and

Mason Flagg. Each is responsible for his own self-deprivation and is symbolically to blame for the cultural disintegration. But each has latent power for regeneration and self-redemption.

These three major characters are all many-dimensionally drawn: we get to know their psychological make-up, their moral and secular values, and their behavior-patterns. However, we get to know Cass most fully. We see him through dialogue with Peter, through his first-person narrative when he tells Peter about himself, and through his diary. We know much less about Peter than about Cass, even though Peter is the narrator throughout most of the novel. We discern glimpses of his personality in his narrative when he reflects on the novel's other characters, as well as when he tells us about himself. Through these reflections we can glimpse his premises for judgement, his concerns, his moral, psychological, and spiritual habits and values. Mason is portrayed only indirectly. We know him as he appears in dialogues and as he is reflected by other people, mainly by Peter and Cass. I disagree with Aldridge¹⁴ and Louis D. Rubin¹⁵ both of whom claim it is a flaw in the novel that Mason is always seen from the outside and through the eyes of two people.

¹⁴Aldridge, Time to Murder and Create, 47.

¹⁵Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "An Artist in Bonds," Sewanee Review, LXIX, 1 (January - March, 1961), 176.

Instead, I think it is important that the reader has no more access to the real Mason than do Peter and Cass. After all, one of the important problems which Cass and Peter are faced with is their feeling that in order to determine their own shares of responsibility and guilt for what happened in Sambuco they must understand Mason. As the novel progresses -- and as Peter and Cass grow in understanding of themselves -- it becomes clear that an understanding of Mason is not necessary for them to determine the extent of their own responsibility, because Mason, in a sense, is only a stage in their development. I think that Styron, by forcing Cass, Peter, and the reader to remain outside Mason, is suggesting that although it is possible to make certain inferences about Mason's psychological make-up and about the extent to which his past influences his present self, he is finally not graspable as a whole person, for he represents innate evil.

From a psychoanalytical point of view one could argue that Mason is not responsible for his character, because from Peter's observations it becomes clear that he was never loved by his parents. Peter remarks on the curious lack of communication between Mason and his father: "I was constantly aware of some unspoken resentment between them which Mason...would relieve by stealing the old man's liquor" (76). When the oysterman comes to punish him for

having assailed his daughter, Justin Flagg calls Mason "a contemptible swine" (92). It is difficult to know who is responsible for the resentment between father and son. We do not know if Justin hated Mason from the day he was born, or if Mason, intuiting that Wendy was the more lenient of his parents, sought her out instead of him. However, given Wendy's personality, it is more probable that she kept Mason to herself and did not allow her husband to influence him. Peter claims that Wendy "worshipped Mason" (77), but it seems that he was pampered by her because she saw him as an extension of her own personality. For example, she begs him to stay in school, not because she thinks it will make him happy eventually to go to Princeton, but because she wants her son to become a success. Peter reflects that after a few drinks she would begin

to weep and fawn over Mason, telling him that for her sake, for his future's sake, for Princeton, he must be a good boy at school, suggesting now with a hoarse sob, now with a martyred shrug or a final haggard grimace, that since his father was seeking another woman's bed, he, Mason, was the only thing she had left on earth (77).¹⁶

This quotation suggests that Wendy is no loving mother, but a self-pitying, narcissistic woman who considers people only as they reflect her own ego. Thus, she refers to Mason as a thing, and not as a person who she loves for

¹⁶Italics mine.

his own sake. In her wasteland-world she is wallowing in nothingness, blaming her husband and external circumstances for the monotony she feels (83), refusing to take any responsibility for the futility in her own life, and therefore she is truly a husk by Alfred Leverett's definition.

Although Mason at times seems concerned about his mother, I think this is just a role he plays when he feels like it. His actions show that it is more important to him to copulate with the retarded girl at St. Andrew's than it is to stay in school and please his mother. Thus, Mason and Wendy are alike because they are both unwilling to care for anybody but themselves, they both seek excitement to take away the boredom of their lives -- Mason chooses to make love in a chapel for added pleasure, while Wendy needs booze to face the world. They are also alike because they both blame other people and external circumstances for whatever bad happens to them -- Wendy blames her husband and being without a horse for her boredom, while Mason blames the feeble-minded girl for his expulsion from St. Andrew's. "I guess I've screwed myself for life on account of a lousy two-bit pig!" (81) he says.

It seems that Mason derived his hatred for women from his relationship with Wendy. Peter observes that when drunk, Wendy becomes vulgar, and her voice, customarily so silken and tender, takes on "a gravelly, slurred,

barmaid's tone" (84). If Peter as an outsider perceives this change in her, surely Mason does. Although he plays the role of a loving son, it is likely that Mason despises Wendy for her weakness, her self-pity, her vulgarity, and hates her for her inability to love him: therefore he comes to despise women in general, because he assumes that they are all like his mother. As if to affirm this belief he continually has affairs with women who look like Wendy -- for example, Carole and Rosemarie. From his experience with Wendy he has learned that he can buy women by catering to their narcissism, egocentrism, wish to be babied, mother instinct. Therefore, he treats his women as he treats Wendy. But because he projects his feelings for his mother to them, he ends up by punishing Wendy through them, finally showing his disgust and hatred by beating them up and by calling both Carole and Rosemarie a "lousy bitch" (168; 69). He relates his disgust for women to Peter, saying "women are another race! They're like cannibals. Turn your back, and they're ready to eat you alive" (169).

Since Mason does not believe that his parents ever loved him, and since he never loved them, he seems to think that love does not exist, that it is merely a show people put on. Because he is intelligent he knows that in order to be surrounded by people he has to pretend he cares for them. He develops his supreme talent for faking love

so that his girl-friends, as well as both Peter and Cass, are fooled, and they all discover with surprise that Mason's feelings for them is hatred and disgust and not friendliness at all.

Mason not only fakes love and friendship: he also invents for himself roles which fit his self-made identity. For instance, he wants to be regarded as an open-minded, experienced man of the world who is opposed to middle-class conventionalities. As if to convince himself that his image of himself is true, he constantly regards Peter as totally different from himself by calling him a square, and by referring to himself as being far from a Rotarian (64), as loving popular things like jazz (393), modern painting, but as being of the avant-garde opinion that art is dead (145). He also pretends that he is a suffering artist (171), but most of all he wants to be regarded as a revolutionary concerning sexuality. Thus he continually preaches that

Sex is the last frontier.... In art as in life... sex is the only area left where men can find full expression of their individuality, full freedom. Where men can cast off the constrictions and conventions of society and regain their identity as humans (151).

It is ironic that Mason wants to be a spokesman for full individual expression and human identity, because the only identity he allows himself is the image that he has constructed for himself. It is also ironic that Mason preaches

sex as the only way for man to feel fulfilled, because he is not capable of having this fulfillment. Cass perceives this irony when he tries to understand why Mason raped Francesca:

Often I've thought it was bound up with... this difficulty I always suspected him of having, this failing which must be one of the most agonizing things that can afflict a man, this raging constant desire with no outlet, a starvation with no chance of fulfillment, which must fever and shake and torment a man until he can only find a release in violence. Maybe the only way Mason could be satisfied with a woman was through violence (442).

Mason, who acts the priest for the cult of experience is unable to enjoy life as it is because he is incapable of love. Like Wendy he is sick from the monotony of his life, and like her he looks to the outside world for amusement, and for extreme means to arouse some feeling in himself. But because he continually plays roles and refuses to return to himself to seek the source of futility in his life, he is unable to experience the smallest joy. Only a few times in the novel is this truth about Mason revealed. Peter takes a picture of him and

his face wears an expression of total dejection. It is an odd look, one Mason rarely wore -- of heaviness, of weariness, and disgust with life... (148).

Because Mason's chief values are to "wear" the right expressions and to act in accordance with his roles, he also measures other people in terms of their externals, and

things for their material value. He is truly a machine, totally void of deep feelings and without any ability to grow from his experience. Bryant makes the observation that Mason personifies everything that secular society stands for, including dehumanization and mechanization;¹⁷ and significantly, Cass reflects that Mason has "an empty ritualistic coupling with a machine, self-possessed, craven, autoerotic, devoid of pleasure much less joy" (411). Mason, then, psychologically is a sociopath suffering from an all-encompassing impotency, which manifests itself in a total inability to love and to allow himself to be loved, to explore his talents, whatever they are, to look inside himself for whatever potential of good is in him and allow these powers of regeneration to grow, to feel guilt, or to be committed to anything but playing the meaningless roles that he creates for himself. Thus, for Mason

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.¹⁸

Because he is unable to love, he wants to believe that love does not exist. But his assumption is threatened

¹⁷Bryant, 541-542.

¹⁸William Shakespeare, Macbeth, V, v, 24-28, The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, eds. W. G. Clark and W. Aldis Wright (New York: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1962), II, 813.

if anybody else seems capable of it. Therefore, the relationship between Cass and Francesca threatens everything he stands for, because he cannot define their relationship in terms of fun for its own sake or selfish love or self-advantage. Like Iago he cannot accept that immaterial values exist, so it is necessary for him to prove that Cass and Francesca do not experience anything that he has not experienced with his various girl-friends. Therefore, he refers to their relationship as a "cheap smelly roll in the hay" (180), and he applies his hatred for women to Francesca by calling her an "unspeakable, filthy dago slut" (179), and by implying that she is out to steal everything he owns:

'Do you see why I might be peeved,' he asked, with a heavy load of sarcasm, 'when this dirty little twat of a housemaid has the temerity -- the gall -- to walk out beneath my nose with practically everything I own? Can't you see how I might be vexed, to say the least?' (180.)

His arguments are only assumptions and empty self-justifications for his behavior towards her, including the rape, because he ignores that she is a warm-hearted girl, concerned about the welfare of her starving family and humanly justified in taking food for them. It seems to infuriate him that Francesca loves a moneyless drunkard like Cass instead of himself. It maddens him that Cass, who is willing to perform perverse acts in return for booze, will not sacrifice Francesca, will not stop defending her. I think

Mason rapes Francesca largely to show Cass that she is far from inaccessible and far from pure: that she is just like all women (as Mason sees them) and not worth caring for. In effect, he is trying to show Cass that life consists of buying and selling only, that nothing has any value beyond temporal excitement. Thus, his rape symbolically signifies the attempt of evil to destroy everything of immaterial value, and Mason himself is a personification of all man's capacity for evil realized: including the potential for evil in Cass and Peter. It seems Styron says that even today, when we know much more about human psychology than in former ages, we are still incapable of understanding evil: we are only able to call it by different names.

Symbolically, the eternal presence of evil is expressed by Peter who says:

I knew that what was left of Mason... now rested -- if even a dead Mason could be said to be at rest -- somewhere in American soil (6).

On the same subject Cass remarks:

It's really curious.... this business about evil -- what it is, whether it's a reality, or just a figment of the mind. Whether it's a sickness like cancer, something that can be cut out and destroyed, with maybe some head doctor acting as the surgeon, or whether it's something you can't cure at all, but have to stomp on like you would a flea carrying bubonic plague, getting rid of the disease and the carrier all at once (128-129).

It seems that Cass here reaches the same conclusions that may be reached from reading Othello: even if one is able to identify some of the causes for why evil exists and some of its effects, evil, like its personifications -- Satan or Iago or Mason -- is finally ungraspable. One can only be aware of it and try to withstand it in others, as well as in oneself. Cass recognizes this and says about Mason:

For him there was no history, or, if there was, it began on the day he was born. Before that there was nothing, and out of that nothing sprang this creature, committed to nothingness because of the nothingness that informed all time before and after the hour of his birth. And it was impossible to understand a creature like this... (446).

If Mason were the only evil person in the world, he might be destructive, but he could never have much influence unless other people fall for his charm, share his views or feelings, or are willing to be bought. Therefore, to stamp out the flea which carries evil all people would have to be killed, because, as we see from the novel as a whole, and as Peter and Cass discover, most people are willing to go along with some part of Mason. One of them is Peter.

While Mason wants to appear avant-garde, Peter, almost with equal obsession, from the start makes it clear that he wants to be regarded as a normal, typical young American:

My name is Peter Leverett. I am white, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon, Virginia-bred, just past thirty, in good health, tolerable enough looking though possessing no romantic glint or cast, given to orderly habits, more than commonly inquisitive, and strongly sexed -- though this is a conceit peculiar to all normal young men.... It is with neither pride nor distress that I confess that -- in the idiom of our time -- I am something of a square. By profession I am a lawyer (4-5).

But in spite of this initial difference between the two, they have several things in common. Like Mason, Peter has dreams of being an artist, a composer, but he gives up his ambition because it does not pay as much as being a lawyer;

besides, in America no one listens to composers, while the law, in a way that is at once subtle and majestic and fascinating, still works its own music upon the minds of men (5).

This suggests that he became a lawyer, not because he thought a law-practice would be fascinating or because he is committed to law, but because his position would make him gain admiration among middle class people. In fact, while Mason has constructed for himself the role of an experienced man of the world, Peter has created, and is acting as well as he can, the role of the typical, promising, young American lawyer. Therefore Peter, like Mason, regards life as a game, and he admires people who play their parts well. He has a great admiration for actors, and one of the great advantages in knowing Mason, as Peter sees it, is that he is a means for Peter to be close to movie-people. In Sambuco he reflects:

Through his family Mason had always been in contact with the movie world, but although I had known him off and on since boyhood my acquaintance with the celebrities of the world had been more distant than I might have wished. I had an awe of those people almost teen-age in its dazzlement, and the hope now of some actual fellowship -- no matter how fugitive -- colored my imagination... (59).

I think he is dazzled by them because they reflect Mason, as well as himself: they are not only individual people doing their acts, but professionals, who supremely reflect any image they choose. Even when he sees the empty, brainless narcissism of Alice Adair and Dawn O'Donnell, he still feels "a kind of brazen and totally unwarranted palship with them" (105).¹⁹ His fascination for the actors is the same feeling which attracts him to Mason when he first meets him at St. Andrew's: "Mason burst like some debauched cheer in the midst of worship, confounding and fascinating us all" (73-74).

Since Peter is overwhelmed by getting to know important people and by Mason's accounts of his erotic experiences, he is more than willing to be bought by Mason from the start, first at St. Andrew's and later in New York. Here he again affirms their relationship, letting Mason pay his checks and provide him with bedmates, even though, at this time, he is quite aware of the fact that he is being bought:

¹⁹I disagree with Davis who argues that the movie-company hardly serves any purpose in the novel (Davis, 43). Instead, I think it serves to extend the personalities of all the main characters.

I relented.... It was a cozy situation to find oneself in More than once I wondered whether... it might not be possible to remain under Mason's aegis for the rest of my days.... if I suspected that there was lust for a kind of ownership in these big gestures of Mason's, I also realized with some shame that my willingness to be owned was stronger than I ever wanted to admit. But who could blame me? Each night... brought me a different girl.... What a treat to be in the hands of such a casual, big-hearted procurer! (149.)

When we consider that Peter knows during this time of Mason's shameful behavior towards his wife, Mason's desire to buy him for money and girls, we can call him an immoral person, void of self-respect and quite willing to deprive himself of his human dignity and his capacity to activate his self-redemptive powers. Thus, I disagree with David D. Galloway, who thinks that "Peter remains the only uncorrupted male character in the book."²⁰ Instead, I think Peter is as perverse as Mason, because he is fully aware of the implications of his actions, and still he goes along with Mason. Only when he has had his days of fun in New York is he willing to argue with Mason about his behavior, but by then his fun is paid for and he has nothing to lose, because he is already on the boat for Europe. But even then, his main concern is that Mason has made a fool of him by making him believe a lie. Only secondly is he disturbed by Mason's treatment of Celia (171-173). This

²⁰David D. Galloway, "The Absurd Man as a Tragic Hero: The Novels of William Styron," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, VI, iv (Winter, 1965), 523.

same behavior-pattern occurs in Sambuco. By the time he reaches Mason's palace for the first time, Poppy has told him that Mason "uses" Cass, he knows that his host treats Rosemarie badly and that something weird is going on between Francesca and Mason. However, his main worry is that Mason is a bad host to him:

I don't know what the hell's going on around here, but I can tell you I've had it! Do you think I'm some lousy contadino -- some peasant you can push around? You invited me down here as your guest and I've felt about as welcome as a case of typhoid! If it hadn't been for Rosemarie, understand, I wouldn't even have gotten fed! (176.)

Like most people Peter cares first and foremost for himself: it is more important for him to get a good steak when he is hungry than it is to prevent Mason from raping Francesca; it is more important to him to get his sleep than to worry about a Michele dying; it is more important to him to have a new woman every night than it is to try to stop Mason from continually hurting Celia; it is finally more important to him to have his fun than to preserve his integrity as a man. For his sins Dante would perhaps have placed him in Limbo, because he is forever willing to conform and forever unwilling to commit himself to either evil or good. Peter's weakness is that of most people, and therefore it aids the disintegration of mankind and our culture, because most people are egocentric and do not really care that the world is selling out to

plastic and chrome as long as we have our comforts: our food and sleep and sex and ambition. Styron, in his portrayal of Peter, subtly makes the reader identify with Peter's needs and thoughts and attitudes, but by identifying with Peter the reader condemns himself to Limbo, and he too becomes a cipher "without mind or soul or heart."

It seems, then, that Peter potentially is an evil as Mason, but what saves Peter is that he wants to use his capacity to redeem himself. He is capable of compassion, as when he advises Cass not to drink, because he knows Cass has to go and help Michele; as when he takes care of Poppy and her children when Cass has disappeared; and as when he feels both compassion and guilt for di Lieto's accident. He also is capable of self-examination: the chief reason he goes to see Cass in Charleston is that he feels "that though I was in no way the cause of Mason's death I might have been in a position to prevent it" (6). This implies that he is willing to accept responsibility for his own actions, if he only can discover wherein he goes wrong. This, in turn, implies that Peter is a man in search of his identity and he knows it, which means that he wants to use his regenerative powers, if he can only discover them in himself. After his conversation with his father in Port Warwick he reflects:

My father's words had left me jaded and depressed. I felt unaccountably weary and worn out -- old before my time --

and I had a sudden sharp pang of total estrangement, as if my identity had slipped away, leaving me without knowledge of who I was and where I had been and where I was ever going. The mood lingered, filling me with lassitude, weariness, discontent (16).

Estranged from myself and from my time, dwelling neither in the destroyed past nor in the fantastic and incomprehensible present, I knew that I must find the answer to at least several things before taking hold of myself... (18-19).

Because Peter does not know who he is: whether he is as daemonic as Mason because of his apathy, or whether he possesses any redemptive qualities, he must see Cass to learn his own role in the murder in Sambucco, but he also needs to tell Cass about himself. Thus, Peter's narrative emerges as a confession, because presently he knows how he has been willing to be bought, how he has not taken any decisive actions to stop Mason in his perversions, how he has claimed Mason as his best friend even after the rape, how he has in effect betrayed the potential of good in himself. By understanding his own part of the horror in Sambucco he finds the answer to his dream about treachery and betrayal. It is his own face that appears "baleful" and "murderous" at his window (6), since he has finally betrayed himself. By his willingness to recognize his guilt through his confession, he redeems himself, and, by implication, his new understanding of himself and his acceptance of his own identity makes him able to activate the good in himself. Symbolically, he is absolved of his guilt by the recovery

of Luciano di Lieto from the accident in which Peter was involved.

While Peter's sin is apathy towards evil, as long as it does not interfere with his own life, Cass's sin is a total withdrawal from the world and into himself, where he can remain untouched by the evil outside himself and can wallow in his own crimes, in self-pity, self-hatred, and guilt. But like Peter, Cass is a man seeking his identity, and in order to find it he goes through different phases of self-understanding. Lewis Lawson in his brilliant article, "Cass Kinsolving: Kierkegaardian Man of Despair," explains how Cass's various steps toward understanding himself closely resemble those discussed by Kierkegaard in his book, The Sickness Unto Death.²¹ Although I generally agree with Lawson's thesis, I do not think that Styron's chief reason for writing Set This House on Fire was to translate any particular book of philosophy into fiction, but rather to recreate in writing, human experience and life as he sees it. Thus, I think it is important to examine Cass and his development as a character in more general psychological terms in order to determine how he fits into the novel as a whole

Cass Kinsolving starts out as a self-pitying and self-destructive individual: an artist who is unwilling

²¹ Lawson's article is mentioned above.

to face up to the fact that he has talent. Lacking self-respect which is necessary for him to go on living, his self-criticism evolves into self-hatred. In self-defense against his guilt, he blames the world in general and the people around him for his miseries. Later, he relates to Peter that in Paris

I was as faithless as an alleycat. Godalmighty, the rationalizations I used, and the lies! I told myself I had no talent, you see; that was the first evasion. Yet, hell, I knew I had talent, knew it in my soul, knew it as well as I know my own name. I had it, there was no getting around it, and the knowledge that I had it and wouldn't use it or was afraid to use it or refused to use it just made my misery that much worse.... So, when I examined myself and found that the no-talent excuse wouldn't go, I dreamed up all sorts of other answers: the time was out of joint, society was against me, painting had been supplanted by photography anyway, all of that. Boy, Kinsolving pitted against Kinsolving, what a dreary battle! (250.)

His failure to take responsibility for his artistic talent spreads to unwillingness to accept responsibility for other areas of his life. He blames Poppy for having tricked him into marrying her, for not keeping the children quiet, for not keeping the house clean, even for being a Catholic and of Irish descent. He blames his bad luck for being an orphan, America and the world in general for not appreciating art. Cass does know that he must be the one to blame for some of his own misery, but because he is too weak to face up to it, he becomes an alcoholic:

all this pressure was in me.... There I was in the most beautiful -- no, second most, Florence has the edge -- city

on earth, all in a sweat and fever to capture something... and I had no more ability to do it than some blind old eunuch of ninety-five. What a set-up, what a perfect way to become a whiskey-head! (251.)

Cass in Europe is "sick from despair and self-loathing and greed and selfishness and spite": "I was sick with a paralysis of the soul," he says (269). Thus, this former Cass is similar to Mason, as well as to Peter, because he lives for nothing, believes in nothing, lives in terms of nothingness. As Alfred Leverett predicts that the culture has to go through suffering and grief to rise again, so Cass as an individual has to know the full extent of nothingness and hell in order to gain faith in himself and be born again through self-redemption.

Metaphorically speaking, the next circle of hell he has to go through is that of self-delusion, which comes with his failure to respond to his vision in Paris of perfect, harmonic beauty:

It wasn't just a scene... it was the sense, the bleeding essence of the thing. It was as if I had been given for an instant the capacity to understand not just beauty itself by its outward signs, but the other -- the eigeness in beauty, this continuity of beauty in the scheme of all life which triumphs even to the point of taking in sordidness and shabbiness and ugliness, which goes on and on and on, and of which this was only a moment, I guess, divinity crystalized (257).

Lawson argues that this vision represents a state of false happiness in the development of Cass as a man of despair,²²

²²Lawson, 58.

but though this may be true from a Kierkegaardian point of view, I believe that essentially this is a positive moment in the development of Cass, because at that instant he sees beyond what is wrong with the world: he sees that beauty is possible. Cass calls it "the first moment of reality I think I had ever known" (257), and maintains he had "a pre-sentiment of selflessness" (257). However, because Cass is used to attributing his states of being to outside influences, he ascribes his moment of joy to the booze. Thus, instead of looking inward and perhaps glimpsing that there is something good and productive in him, he decides that it is important to keep drinking, just to have a chance for the vision to reoccur.

Because Cass is under the illusion that the rapturous vision is produced by something outside himself, he does not give the grain of self-love in himself a chance to grow. Instead he continues to nurture his self-hatred, punishing his body with alcohol, using up Poppy's money to support his habit, and therefore punishing himself through feeling guilty for the way he deprives his family. In this situation, he is virtually looking for a sadist to give him the punishment he wants. Therefore, when Mason comes along, ready to buy souls, no urging is necessary to make Cass at once willing to humiliate himself as best he knows. So, he is quite ready to be bought by Mason for booze and for food:

It was not exactly a tip for my services, yet it was a tip too. I'll swear, I never saw anybody give something with less feeling, less charm.... It was bad and I knew it, I knew it right down to the bottom of my guts, but I couldn't resist that sauce. So I took it and I mumbled my humble thanks, and then I got out of there, flaming like an oven. If I had offered to pay for it, why even that might have taken a little of the curse off it. But I didn't offer to pay for it... because decency had left me, and good sense, and pride. I just took it, that's all (401-402).

His rationalization for being bought is that he needs food for his family, and he says

I was tied to him, bound to him for reasons of pure survival, and not just my own, either, but of all those around me that I in turn had committed myself to save (402).

However, this is not a good reason, since Cass knows well that if he had pride, he would work to get money. So it becomes clear that he needed and wanted Mason to humiliate him, equally as much as Mason wanted to own Cass: "it got so bad I was paying him for the time of day," he says (127). Seen in this light, his humiliating scenes in front of the movie-people, as well as his pornographic painting which he sells to Mason, are only symptoms of his continual self-degradation: the first signifies his wish to show the whole world that he is totally void of human pride and dignity -- that he is in reality only Mason's private fool; the second is a final repudiation of his artistic talent.

In the midst of his self-hatred and self-deprivation, Cass thinks he wants to destroy himself and remove all trace of his existence from the world. He reflects:

a man bent on annihilating his own and dearest and best might be a lunatic but he might too be someone else and contain within him the cool clear logic of eternity: a man just like me, maybe, who had dreamed wild Manichean dreams, dreams that told him that God was not even a lie, but worse, that He was weaker even than the evil He created and allowed to reside in the soul of man, that God Himself was doomed, and the landscape of heaven was not gold and singing but a space of terror which stretched in darkness from horizon to horizon. Such a man knew the truth and, knowing it, would take the best way out. Which was to remove from this earth all mark and sign and stain of himself, his love and his vain hope and his pathetic creations and his guilt, and be duped by life no longer. And he'd be cool about it, and collected, because it wouldn't pay to bungle (275-276).

But if Cass had committed suicide it would have ended all his possibility for punishing himself; and, he almost tries to convince himself that God created him to punish him and to let him continue to be one of the living dead. He says:

I realized that this was... He who in His capricious error had created suffering mortal flesh which refused to die, even in its own extremity. Which suffered all the more because even He in His mighty belated compassion could not deliver His creatures from their living pain.... He is beating us... (358).

Lawson²³ and Galloway²⁴ both argue that Cass's love for Francesca and his concern for Michele are the turning points in Cass's spiritual development. Although it is true that his relationship to them is very important, I do not see it as the most crucial factor which starts to bring Cass towards "being" again. Instead, the first significant point of change occurs when Cass almost falls off

²³Lawson, 65.

²⁴Galloway, 525-526.

the cliff in Sambuco. Right before he falls, he whispers: "Take me now" (359), and, as if his prayer has been answered, he starts to slide. It is at this moment that he takes his first decisive action to save himself by trying to escape the death he welcomed only a moment before:

With a cry strangled in his throat he tried to regain balance.... But all was lost. Lost! More mortar gave way; he slipped again. For a moment he dove forward into thin air, arms thrown out, supplicant, and all space seemed his destiny. Spread-eagled in nothingness, he held himself by his aching thighs, and by his heels, miraculously trapped beneath some rock or stone. At last with floundering arms and straining legs he pulled himself back up over the ledge.... Then he was safe (359).

Although this passage symbolically sums up what happens to Cass in its entirety, literally it is the first consciously life-affirming action he takes, and it is immediately following this accident that he clearly recognizes his own part in his self-destruction:

Self, he thought. Merciful Christ. Self. If I don't find a way out of it soon I'll be over the bleeding edge for sure (361).

He not only starts to admit that he is the chief determiner of his own life, but also that in degrading himself he is a coward. "Self-destruction is the last refuge of the cowardly man" (362), he says, echoing his psychoanalyst, Slotkin. Significantly, this insight comes before he ever meets Mason, but it seems that if the vision in Paris is a first glimpse of good in himself, the scene at

the cliff is the first step in the direction of self-knowledge.

However, other experiences help him to recognize his power of self-determination beyond any doubt. The struggling peasant women have no choice but to wrestle with their heavy burdens; there is no way Michele can pay for medical care, so he has to die; there is no way for the peasants in Tramonti to get milk, because their cows do not have enough to eat to produce it: all these inevitable conditions -- these unavoidable human deprivations -- make Cass suffer, and he wants them changed. Perhaps watching the deprivations of these people makes him understand how fortunate he is, because at least he has a choice between destroying himself or not. In the contrast between the lives of Peter, Mason, and Cass on the one hand and the destitute peasants on the other, it is impossible that the sensitive Cass would not discern between the luxury of the first and the misery of the second, because although both Cass and Michele are materially, as well as spiritually destitute, Cass has chosen his deprivation. In a sense the temporary woes of Cass or the self-inflicted boredom of the movie-people seem largely unimportant in the face of genuine misery and inevitable deprivation. These contrasts create a sense of the smallness of one individual when seen in view of the whole universe, or the insignificance of petty problems in the face of overwhelming and ever-

lasting hardship: how little Cass's self-pity seems aside the dying Michele. Cass's increasing awareness of the disparity between his own sorrows and those of the peasants gradually brings him outside himself, but the main catalyst of this is his reaction to Francesca.

From their first meeting when he bails her out of jail Cass is attracted to her, not only because she is strikingly beautiful, but also because she seems so innocent, confused, pitiable, and lost. Cass's growing fondness for her brings him toward believing in self-determination, because he knows that Francesca did not trick him into any relationship, as he feels his wife did. Therefore, he cannot blame her for breaking up his marriage or making him miserable. He knows he is as guilty of falling in love with her, as she is of caring for him. He decides to give her the job as a cook for his family, he resolves to meet her family, and he knows that in his relationship with Francesca he himself, in all regards, is responsible for choosing to act as he does. Because he is so intensely involved with her and her family, his own self-pity becomes less important.

Starting to wake up to his power of self-determination, he gradually begins to see how he has done awful things in his life, without suffering for them. He feels guilty about what he is doing to himself, how he is treating his family, and what he did to the negro-cabin in

Virginia. Because he is neurotic, he gradually develops an overwhelming feeling of guilt whenever he witnesses injustice or suffering; and, because he feels responsible for all wrong, he is obsessed with rectifying it. Thus, he thinks: "Michele will die because I have not given.... hell is not giving..." (453). Gradually, through an all-encompassing compassion and guilt, he develops a God-complex: he feels he must give, must be the champion of the suffering, must save Michele. Half-dreaming, he thinks he has the power of God and says:

'Rise up, Michele, rise up and walk!' And for the briefest space of time, between dark and light, he thought he saw the man, healed now, cured, staunch and upright, striding toward him, O rise up Michele, my brother rise! (425.)

Significantly, he blames Mason for the fact that Michele has to die, because Mason "could get Michele fixed up just out of his petty cash" (422). I think the reason why he kills Mason is a part of his God-complex. Because he adores Francesca and wants to protect her from the evils of the world, he cannot let her be defiled by Mason. The rape sorrows him, but her murder makes him mad with feeling of personal loss, senseless evil, and overpowering injustice. Therefore, he feels he has to uproot the cause of evil, by eliminating the incarnation of it. Thus, he commits the same error that Mannix in The Long March is guilty of, because by killing Mason he becomes part of the same evil that he is fighting against.

His murder is what finally brings him to realize that he is not God, but simply a man, and that therefore he is incapable of purging the whole world of evil:

To kill a man... is like an amputation. Though this man may have done you the foulest injustice in the world, when you have killed him you have removed a part of yourself forever.... You have acted the role of God, you have judged and condemned him (446).

Luigi's words, "Your sin is your guilt" (490), takes on new meaning in this light, because it is his guilt which has produced in him the feeling that he must give, must save, must fight evil. Only when Cass can see his guilt in its proper perspective, when he can admit to himself that his chief task lies in finding the causes for his guilt inside himself, so that he can face up to the responsibility for his own life, then is he able to begin to activate his talent as an artist and as a husband and father: only then is he ready to capture his own spirit and be reborn.

Aldridge argues that Cass's

last-minute choice of "being" over "nothingness" seems mechanically trite, and imposed from the outside rather than prepared for by facts as they have been given from the beginning.²⁵

I disagree both with his statement that Cass's choice is a "last-minute choice," and that we have not been prepared

²⁵Aldridge, Time to Murder and Create, 48. Davis agrees with Aldridge on this issue. Davis, 44.

for this choice throughout the novel. The overall function of Cass in Set This House on Fire, I think, is to show that man has potential for good, which in the novel includes self-knowledge. I stated in the beginning of this chapter Alfred Leverett's idea that

when the people have been through hellfire... and have suffered agony enough and grief, they'll be men again, human beings, not a bunch of smug contented hogs... (15).

Seen in connection with Leverett's view of Western civilization as a whole, Cass, the individual -- as a part of his culture -- is as sick as his society. Therefore, it is not possible for him to use his inherent capacity of regeneration until he knows what his sickness is. The rationale behind this kind of thinking is Blakian, because Styron seems to convey that only through experience can man know the difference between good and evil and be able to choose between them by his own free will. Thus, Cass's descent into nothingness and ascent into being clearly parallel man's fall as presented by Milton in Paradise Lost, because, paradoxically Cass's hellish experiences make him fully aware that he is not living by his free will, but by his psychological compulsions, when he lives in nothingness. His fall makes it clear to him that in order to activate his free will, he has to choose being, or, in Cass's words: "to triumph over self is to triumph over Death" (254).

Set This House on Fire as a whole, then, explores fallen man in a disintegrating world, and it identifies evil and the effects of evil. The overriding symbol of fallen man is his impotency -- sexual, as well as moral, spiritual, and artistic. This impotency, Styron seems to say, is the chief cause for man's apathetically letting his world be raped and letting himself rot in nothingness. By accepting his impotency man deprives himself of being, since he is capable of being born again, if he uses his will. Styron seems to agree with God's words in Milton's Paradise Lost:

without least impulse or shadow of Fate,

...
They trespass, Authors to themselves in all
Both what they judge and what they choose....²⁶

Thus, the novel is a document of man's capacity to use his free will and to redeem himself through self-knowledge.

If man does not bother to discover evil and good, he remains without knowledge of his own identity, and therefore he has to assume an arbitrary identity which is hardly himself. If man is satisfied with his disguise, or if he does not want to shed it in order to find his real self, he becomes a paragon of evil, like Mason, because he chooses not to see that the "only true experience...

²⁶John Milton, Paradise Lost, III, 120, 122-123, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1962), 64.

is the one where a man learns to love himself" (397), but instead narcissistically loves the image that he has created of himself. If, however, he is willing to recognize that his image only cloaks what is underneath, then he may choose to discover the evil and the good in himself. As Cass discovers, this is a frightening experience:

I thought of being. I thought of nothingness. I put my head into my hands, and for a moment the sharp horror of being seemed so enormous as to make the horror of nothingness less than nothing by its side... (489-490).

If man chooses to accept what he discovers is his essence, if he can love it and continually seek to live in terms of the good in himself, then he is capable of living in terms of being, because his cloaks of nothingness do not hinder his movements any longer. Thus, it is much more difficult to be, than not to be, because the state of being requires man to exercise his free will and to be responsible for all his actions. However, only through finding the joy in being, as Cass finally finds it,²⁷ can man rise and reclaim his dignity, and only through such a personal reclamation can the whole culture be reborn.

²⁷Cass finds the joy in being when he says: 'as for being and nothingness, the one thing I did know was that to choose between them was simply to choose being, not for the sake of being, or even the love of being, much less the desire to be forever -- but in the hope of being what I could be for a time. This would be an ecstasy' (500-501).

Y. Conclusion

As I stated in the introduction, Styron is a traditional writer according to T. S. Eliot's definition, which has historical sense as its main criterion. I referred to Eliot's claim that this historical sense "makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity."¹ This statement applies to the three novels that I have dealt with in this thesis. Because Styron is aware that the Western culture once was morally unified and ordered, he can with justification let his characters refer to the present as a husk-culture,² since the Judeo-Christian spiritual foundation is gone and the culture is decaying. Thus, his characters simultaneously are pitched against the universal order of the past and the disintegrating present, and their most compelling problem is to determine their identity.

In Lie Down in Darkness Milton, Helen, and Peyton Leftis, as well as Daddy Faith's congregation and Carey

¹T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Selected Essays (3rd ed. rev.; London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1963), 14.

²William Styron, Lie Down in Darkness (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1951), 363; and William Styron, Set This House on Fire (New York: Random House, Inc., 1960), 16.

Garr, are all trying to define themselves by something or someone external to themselves, and they all destroy themselves, figuratively speaking, because they cannot discover a permanent order. Lieutenant Culver in The Long March is torn between molding his life by the ideal of Colonel Templeton who represents a secular substitute for the lost moral order, and Captain Mannix who refuses to accept the military order as an absolute. Culver, unlike the people in Styron's first novel, does not destroy himself because he realizes that to be honest with himself he must accept his own identity as a separate entity, apart from both Mannix and Templeton. Mason Flagg, in Set This House on Fire, consciously creates an image for himself. Thus, his identity is secular, mechanical, and man-made. Peter Leverett feels he has lost his identity and must find it. Cass Kinsolving desperately tries to hide his true self, because a full realization would be painful. Captain Mannix in The Long March thinks he knows his identity, but through his experience he rediscovers himself. Only two characters in these three novels appear to know themselves: Harry Miller in Lie Down in Darkness and the policeman, Luigi, in Set This House on Fire; and neither of them depends upon externals to give his life significance. This constant quest for individual identity occurs because the cultural framework is lost:

The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
 Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned....³

Styren's three novels echo these lines by Yeats.

Styren's vision becomes clarified as we move from the first novel to the third. Lie Down in Darkness is to a certain extent a song of innocence, because the characters in this novel refuse to give up their childhood security. However, realistically all innocence is gone. Therefore, the people who close their eyes to this, commit a tragic error, since their world is fallen and they cannot exist without accepting their experience and their adulthood. Lieutenant Culver and Captain Mannix in The Long March signify this progression of man towards knowledge through experience, but only Cass Kinsolving in Set This House on Fire dares go the whole way through hell in order to know the full extent of nothingness and being.

It seems that Cass's ascent into being represents Styren's belief that man is capable of regeneration in the midst of cultural decay, but only if he accepts himself as a separate entity, undefined by the universe or any other externals, and only if he is capable of having faith in

³William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming," The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1966), 184-185.

himself. What Styron's characters seek, then, is some faith, in spite of their separation from the universe. Thus, their quest is essentially religious, and Paul Tillich's kind of faith seems to be close to what they seek and to what Cass Kinsolving finally discovers:

The faith which makes the courage of despair possible is the acceptance of the power of being, even in the grip of non-being.... The act of accepting meaninglessness is in itself a meaningful act. It is an act of faith. We have seen that he who has the courage to affirm his being in spite of fate and guilt has not removed them.... The same is true of doubt and meaninglessness. The faith which creates the courage to take them into itself has no special content. It is simply faith, undirected, absolute. It is undefinable since everything defined is dissolved by doubt and meaninglessness.⁴

⁴Paul Tillich, The Courage to Be (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 176.

VI. Bibliography

Primary Sources

Novels

The Confessions of Nat Turner. New York: Random House, Inc., 1967.

Lie Down in Darkness. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1951.

The Long March. New York: Random House, Inc., 1956.

Set This House on Fire. New York: Random House, Inc., 1960.

Short Stories

"Autumn," in One and Twenty: Duke Narrative and Verse, 1924-1945. Edited by William Blackburn. Durham: Duke University Press, 1945.

"The Enormous Window," in American Vanguard, 1950. Edited by Charles I. Glicksberg. New York: New School for Social Research, 1950.

"The Long Dark Road," in One and Twenty: Duke Narrative and Verse, 1924-1945. Edited by William Blackburn. Durham: Duke University Press, 1945.

"A Moment in Trieste," in American Vanguard, 1948. Edited by Don M. Wolfe. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1948.

Articles

"If You Write for Television....," New Republic, CXLVI (April, 1959), 16.

"Introduction," Best Short Stories from The Paris Review. New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1959, 9-16.

"Letter to an Editor," Paris Review, 1 (Spring, 1953), 9-13.

- "The Paris Review," Harper's Bazaar, LXXXVII (August, 1953), 122-173.
- "The Prevalence of Wonders," Nation, CLXXVI (May 2, 1953), 370-371.

Secondary Sources

Books

- Aldridge, John W. In Search of Heresy. New York: Mc Graw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1956.
- _____. Time to Murder and Create: The Contemporary Novel in Crisis. New York: David Mc Kay Co., Inc., 1966.
- Baumbach, Jonathan. The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel. New York: New York University Press, 1965.
- Bradbury, John M. Renaissance in the South. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963.
- Detweiler, Robert. Four Spiritual Crisis in Mid-Century American Fiction. ("University of Florida Monographs: Humanities," xiv.) Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1963.
- Fowler, H. W., and Fowler, F. G. (eds) The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English. 4th ed. revised. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959.
- Freud, Sigmund. The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud. Translated and edited by A. A. Brill. New York: The Modern Library. (Copyright, 1938, by Random House, Inc.).
- Geismar, Maxwell. American Moderns: From Rebellion to Conformity. New York: Hill and Wang, 1958.
- Gossett, Louise Y. Violence in Recent Southern Fiction. Durham: Duke University Press, 1965.
- Hassan, Ihab. Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961.
- Moore, Harry T. (ed.) . Contemporary American Novelists. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964.

Fillich, Paul. The Courage to Be. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952.

Articles

- Aldridge, John W. Review of Lie Down in Darkness, New York Times (September 9, 1951), 5.
- Breit, Harvey. Review of Lie Down in Darkness, Atlantic, OLXXXVIII (October, 1951), 78-80.
- Bryant, Jerry H. "The Hopeful Stoicism of William Styren," South Atlantic Quarterly, LXII, iv (Autumn, 1963), 539-550.
- Cowley, Malcolm. Review of Lie Down in Darkness, New Republic (October 8, 1951), 125.
- Davis, Robert Graham. "The American Individualist Tradition: Bellow and Styren," The Creative Present: Notes on Contemporary American Fiction. Edited by Hena Balakian and Charles Simmons. New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1963, 109-141.
- _____. "Styren and the Students," Critique, III, iii (Summer, 1960), 37-46.
- Denney, David. "Talk with William Styren," New York Times (September 9, 1951), 27.
- Eliot, T. S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Selected Essays. 3rd ed. revised. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1963, 13-22.
- Fenton, Charles A. "William Styren and the Age of the Slob," South Atlantic Quarterly, LIX (Autumn, 1965), 469-476.
- Foster, Richard. "An Orgy of Commerce: William Styren's Set This House on Fire," Critique, III, iii (Summer, 1960), 59-70.
- Galleway, David D. "The Absurd Man as a Tragic Hero: The Novels of William Styren," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, VI, iv (Winter, 1965), 512-534.
- Geismar, Maxwell. Review of Lie Down in Darkness, Saturday Review of Literature (September 15, 1951), 12-13.
- Hays, Peter L. "The Nature of Rebellion in The Long March."

- Critique, VIII, 11 (Winter, 1965-66), 70-74.
- Jones, James, and Styren, William. "Two Writers Talk It Over," Esquire, LX, 1 (1963), 57-59.
- Lawson, Lewis. "Oass Kinsolving: Kierkegaardian Man of Despair," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, III, 111 (Fall, 1962), 54-66.
- Matthiessen, Peter, and Plimpton, George. "William Styren," Writers at Work. Edited by Malcolm Cowley. New York: The Viking Press, Inc., 1958, 267-282.
- McNamara, Eugene. "William Styren's Long March: Absurdity and Authority," Western Humanities Review, XV, 111 (Summer, 1961), 267-272.
- Meeker, Richard K. "The Youngest Generation of Southern Fiction Writers," Southern Writers: Appraisals in our Time. Edited by R. C. Simonini, Jr. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1964, 162-191.
- Moore, L. Hugh. "Robert Penn Warren, William Styren and the Use of Greek Myth," Critique, VIII, 11 (Winter, 1965-66), 75-87.
- Nigro, Augustine John, Jr. "The Long March: The Expansive Here in a Closed World," Critique, IX, 111 (Summer, 1967), 103-112.
- O'Connell, Shaun. "Expense of Spirit: The Vision of William Styren," Critique, VIII, 11 (Winter, 1965-66), 20-33.
- O'Conner, William Van. "John Updike and William Styren: The Burden of Talent," Contemporary American Novelists. Edited by Harry T. Moore. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964, 205-221.
- Rebb, Kenneth A. "William Styren's Don Juan," Critique, VIII, 11 (Winter, 1965-66), 34-46.
- Rubin, Louis D., Jr. "An Artist in Bonds," Sewanee Review, LXIX, 1 (January--March, 1961), 174-179.
- Stevenson, David L. "Styren and the Fiction of the Fifties," Critique, III, 111 (Summer, 1960), 47-58.
- Urang, Gunnar. "The Broader Vision: William Styren's Set This House on Fire," Critique, VIII, 11 (Winter, 1965-66), 47-59.