

Vision and Revision: William Styron's *Lie Down in Darkness* and *Set This House on Fire*

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Abstract---Between 1951-1960 William Styron published two novels, *Lie Down in Darkness* and *Set This House on Fire* and a novella, *The Long March*. *Lie Down in Darkness* depicts the South and America as life-killing experiences and expresses an apocalyptic vision of life coming to an end by a self-destructiveness inherent in and is the hallmark of the Southern legacy and white Anglo-Saxon Protestant America. The novel's derivativeness shows that Styron reflects the mindset of his time rather than expresses his own mind. *Set This House on Fire*, which is flawed in structure and shaky in content, is essentially a revision of the first novel. It projects the South as the source and locus of life and a return to and an affirmation and a celebration of the South as a deliverance and a redemption. However, the revision in this novel is achieved by oversimplifying complex issues and skirting difficult dilemmas.

Keywords---vision, death, American South, revision

I. INTRODUCTION

AMERICAN author William Styron's reputation rests largely on his two novels: *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967) and *Sophie's Choice* (1979) and the account of the suicidal depression he suffered in 1985, *Darkness Visible* (1990), which revived his fame in the last two decades of his life. While his other works are largely minor efforts compared to those acclaimed two novels, they, nonetheless, lay the basis and bring out important aspects of the vision and the expression that have come to distinguish this author and make his claim to recognition. During the period between 1951 and 1960, Styron produced two novels: *Lie Down in Darkness* (1951) and *Set this House on Fire* (1960) and a novella, *The Long March* (1953).

The first novel brought Styron instant recognition and was considered one of the best novels to appear after World War Two. The second novel was, however, less enthusiastically received and in spite of some good reviews and some brilliant academic criticism (70-125, 191-206) [1], the book generally caused disappointment in readers and critics who had waited nine years for it. Louis D. Rubin Jr. expresses this sense when he remarks that Styron "did not write the kind of book he was supposed to write at all. The novel that he brought forth after nine years of silence was far removed from the familiar mode of southern fiction...this young, talented novelist, so heralded, so praised, had failed to do what was expected of him."(93)[1] The novel was defective and flawed in ways that readers were not prepared for. Two of its obvious defects were its deficient structure and

its fortuitous ending. Yet while these flaws and defects and others have been noted, no effort has been made to account for them or see in them more than their face value. Of course, what has happened in the case of *Set This House on Fire*, has happened to many authors and many second novels that came after brilliant first novels, and the phenomenon may hardly require an elaborate explanation. Yet a careful and close consideration of the two novels and their relation to each other will show that the issue in this instance is not that simple. The second novel does not succeed with most readers and critics in the way the first one has, because the author, instead of writing a book that continues the vein and vision in his first book, as was expected of him, makes effort to revise what he has done before and produce an alternative image that expresses his mind completely. Conscious and deliberate revision is the explanation of what Styron has done in *Set This House on Fire*. Styron makes this point clear when he spoke of his pride in having written *Set This House on Fire* in an interview with *The Paris Review* in 1975:

...over the past few years I have gone back to *Set This House on Fire* and though it is somewhat less perfectly formed than the others, at the same time it has some of my most passionate and best stuff and I am proud to have written it. (27)[2]

We must remember that Styron labored under accusations of imitating Faulkner and that *Lie Down in Darkness* was continuously compared to Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury*. The revision must be seen as part of his effort to stress the originality and perhaps uniqueness of his vision and style. He has expressed reservation about, and, sometimes, rejection of the description that he is a Southern writer or that he is in the Southern school. In an interview, with Robert K. Morris, he remarks:

...I don't consider myself a Southern writer, in the sense that, let us say, Eudora Welty might consider herself one. She, and Flannery O'Connor is another, an almost perfect example of fine "regional" Southern novelist. Basically, I guess, I am trying to make a distinction between Southern regionalism (which can be very strong, fine thrust in literature), and my own work, which is Southern but not regionally Southern." (27)[1]

II. VISION: DEATH PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL

In his effort to achieve this difference Styron couches the particular experience he projects (the South) within broad universal themes, for example, the broad theme of both *Lie Down in Darkness* and *Set This House on Fire* is death; or he

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relates the experience of the South to other experiences geographically and historically removed from it as in *Sophie's Choice* and *Set This House on Fire*. But what he expresses essentially in all his work is his sense of the Southern experience; and the broad universal theme may provide a clue to how he regards that particular experience. The theme of death will be immediately recognized at the beginning of *Lie Down in Darkness* after the opening scene of the novel when Peyton Loftis's body arrives home to be buried; the same theme is referred to at the opening of *Set This House on Fire* when the narrator states that the events of the story include "a murder and rape which ended in death..."(4)[3] In a sense the broad theme of both novels is announced even before the novels begin, in the epigraphs affixed to the novels and from which their titles are derived. Both epigraphs focus on the idea of death and its different manifestations: physical death in the epigraph to *Lie Down in Darkness* and spiritual death which is the result of being estranged from God in the epigraph to *Set This House on Fire*. Physical death, as it is described by Sir Thomas Browne in *Urn Burial*, from which the epigraph of *Lie Down in Darkness* is taken, has about it inevitability, a finality and a universality which preclude any possibility of deliverance from it. In the other epigraph John Donne describes a worse kind of death compared to which physical death is, as he says, "paradise...amber...a marriage bed." However, this kind of death, in spite of its horror, always includes the possibility of deliverance since estrangement from God, as the words of the epigraph imply, cannot be forever. In *Lie Down in Darkness*, death is the final word, and it is not just the death of Peyton but the quality of death at the heart of the experience that makes the context of her life. On the other hand there is a significant regenerative experience after death that possibly offsets its effect in *Set This House on Fire*. In effect, the epigraphs bring forth the vital connection between the two novels and at the same time reveal the difference and even the contradiction in what they express. More importantly they provide the first clue to the idea that this connection is created deliberately to achieve a revision of Styron's initial-and what he implicitly regards as unoriginal-vision of the Southern experience. As will be seen the idea of revision is clear in the extreme manner each novel depicts and views the South: the dark vision of the South in *Lie Down in Darkness* contradicted by the affirmation and celebration of that very experience, in *Set This House on Fire*.

III. VISION: THE SOUTH AS A SPIRITUAL WASTE LAND

Lie Down in Darkness brings out the extreme implications of the modernist vision of life, in the twentieth century, in the absence of faith and love. The senselessness of this kind of life and the absurdity of any effort to inform it with meaning is enhanced by the fact that death is the only certainty in it. As described in the novel, the state of faithlessness and the absence of love is a living or spiritual death that has about it the finality of actual death. This state becomes a description of a certain kind of man: the man who has lost his real self and is ontologically insecure; and of a certain kind of American: the white Anglo-Saxon protestant who is restricted by that identity to the point of forfeiting his essential humanity; and of the Southerner who, burdened with a legacy

of guilt and fear, has become completely drained of life. The kind of life that the novel describes is a life senselessly moving toward death and on the way to death it is beset by crises and tragedies.

This state of life is brought out in the central action of the novel and in the imagery associated with it. The action occurs in the space of a few hours during which time the funeral of Peyton Loftis moves from the station to the cemetery and the events of more than a quarter of a century are recapitulated. In the conjunction of motion and recollection there is a sense of life in this place being pushed forward toward death by motion (everyday living) and backward to the dead past by the mind. The imagery express this idea more clearly. The central and dominating images in the novel are images of motion. The novel opens and closes with a train in motion, and between the opening and close of the novel there is the motion of the hearse from the station to the cemetery, a motion which is interrupted because of a defect in the hearse, and the motion of Carey Carr's car interrupted by the traffic. The image of interrupted motion gives a sense of life moving toward death and at the same time beset and troubled by contingency. This idea is corroborated by the structure of the novel. The novel is made up of seven parts, six of which recount the movement of the hearse from the station to the cemetery and the movement of Carey Carr from his house to Helen Loftis's house and from there to the cemetery. The description of those movements alternate with the recapitulation of events that occur in both the recent and distant past. These events are mainly crises that precipitate the ultimate crisis of the death of Peyton or that result from it and that reveal the characters' inability to love and to relate to each other meaningfully.

Opposed to the central action of the novel is a minor but a significant action: that of the procession of Daddy Faith moving in the opposite direction to the sea and baptism. From the beginning this is a movement toward life and rejuvenation. The Negroes are jubilant and chant "Happy I am ...in my redeemer!"(98)[4] There is a strong sense of life that is not troubled even by problems and concerns and that is beyond the reach of death. The procession of Daddy Faith moves uninterrupted, the traffic stops until it passes and reaches the sea. In its movement the procession conveys the sense of life as a series of festivities that move not toward the end but toward the beginning that is symbolized by the sea and baptism. The source of all this life-affirming activity is Daddy Faith who, though the symbol of faith for his followers, is probably a charlatan, which only emphasizes the idea that faith, any faith at all, inspires life in the faithful. The last part of the book which conjoins Peyton's death with the Negroes' baptism, sums up the ideas in this novel and expresses them neatly and with great intensity. It opens in the cemetery in Hart's island, in New York City, where Peyton lies dead with the anonymous and unconnected dead until her body is retrieved by her Jewish husband. Then it moves to the cemetery in Port Warwick where Peyton finds a new grave. Between the two cemeteries occurs Peyton's monologue which recounts her last days in New York where she feels so completely drained of life that she kills herself. Then this part of the book moves to the Negroes' baptism and ends finally with the train going back North.

Styron, in this novel, expresses his sense of life in the American South in terms that come close to Faulkner's in the novels of his prolific period, 1929-1936, as a spiritual wasteland pervaded by inescapable despair. Notable is the manner in which Styron manipulates racial division to damn the white society of the South. *Lie Down in Darkness* opens with Peyton already dead indicating in this manner that she is dead even before she begins her life and what remains of her to be buried in Port Warwick is a dead body horribly scarred; and between one cemetery and another Peyton lives a long and agonized dying from which she can be delivered only by death. Contrasted to this ineluctable and complete death-in-life state is the emphatic suggestion of life and joy in the Negroes' celebration and baptism where there is no possibility of agony or loss. When a little girl strays away from her mother she finds such joyful company that she does not miss her mother, but she is also rejoined to her mother in the end.

The power of the novel comes, to a great extent, from Styron's skillful use and orchestration of certain images and symbols and from structuring the events of his story in such a way that his meaning comes out clearly and emphatically. The book often reads like a medieval allegory interspersed with modernist writing. This is not to say that Styron ignores narrative or that his narrative is weak. On the contrary the narrative is rich both in interest and meaning.

The narrative of *Lie Down in Darkness* makes clear the ideas suggested by the imagery and structure and brings together in a necessary way the general and the particular in Styron's vision. It is the story of a Southern family that ruins itself. The parents' inability to love each other leads them to destroy themselves and cause the death of their children. The parents are victims of their own parents and victimizers of their children. From the beginning Milton Loftis's reminiscences of his own father go hand in hand with his own grief for his daughter. He hears his father's voice at critical moments of his life and it becomes clear that his father has become his conscience and source of knowledge. Although the young Milton revolted against his father, the older Milton becomes and the more experience he goes through, the more acquiescent with and more appreciative of his father he is. In fact the older he is the more dependent on the guidance and direction of the father he has internalized. Similarly, his wife, Helen, is in the complete emotional thrall of her father. When she takes an overdose of Nembutal in a fake attempt at suicide, she does that "with a prayer on her lips and a mysterious whispered apology to her father" (226)[4]. It is because of this emotional bondage to their parents that both Milton and Helen Loftis lack the stamina and the autonomy which would enable them to respond adequately to experience and make sense of their life. Instead of this they yearn to go back to childhood, and this yearning is expressed in Milton's incestuous feeling for Peyton and in Helen's possessiveness of Maudie. The parents, in a clear sense, attempt to arrest their children's development at childhood, possess them at that moment, and make them extensions of themselves. They enact a sort of emotional vampirism on their children and the death of the children is inevitable. Maudie's retardation is an expression of an extreme form of an emotional draining and depletion that continue until she is dead. Peyton's progress toward suicide and her suicide express the same idea

forcefully. Her inability to sustain a meaningful relationship with anybody, her drunkenness, and, later, her nymphomania are expressions of missing her real self and discovering a horrid vacuum in its place. The manner of her suicide expresses clearly her sense of missing the self: she goes to a bathroom in Harlem, takes off all clothes and jumps from the seventh floor; and, found with no identification, she is buried with the anonymous dead in Hart's Island.

The story, however, is only on the surface about the victimization of the child by the parent. In a more important sense it deals with the existential and cultural purport of the idea. The characters live in a senseless chaos tormenting themselves and inflicting pain on each other. The tragedy of these people, however, is that they are so insecure in themselves that they cannot experience love. Because of this they have replaced love by need or the preying on the being of another, and have become, as a result, emotionally and spiritually impoverished and self-destructive. The disastrous consequences of the substitution of love by need are illustrated in Milton's drunkenness, his failure in everything he attempts, and the general purposelessness of his life, and in the hollowness of Helen's life and her final insanity.

The children represent in a live and concrete form the tragic consequences of their parents' experiences. Each is an extension and, metaphorically, an offspring of one parent. Maudie represents the hollow mindlessness that the mother is reaching for, while Peyton, who is dearly loved by her father, brings out clearly the chaos and the loss that are the essence of his life. Both children die because the legacy that their parents hand to them is one of despair and death. Peyton expresses this idea and places it in the right context when she says to Dick Cartwright: "Those people in the lost generation, Daddy, I guess. Anybody who thought about anything at all. They thought they were lost. They were crazy. What they were doing was losing us." (224)[4] Toward the end, the book makes this point more specifically, that the chaos and nightmare of present-day American life are consequences of the practices of the lost generation. With a few exceptions the characters of the book are frustrated, doomed, have experienced some kind of tragedy or now lead a tragic life

Styron expresses in *Lie Down in Darkness* an apocalyptic vision of a life coming to an end, an end brought about not so much by the atom bomb, so ubiquitously present in the last part of the book, but by an inherent self-destructiveness that is an essential part of the legacy of the white Anglo-Saxon protestant American. Those that are delivered from the chaos and death are those who never originally belonged to America and who have always stood outside it. The only positive characters in the novel are the characters that have not been recognized as part of the American experience: the Negro, the Indian, and the Jew. They possess something essential and vital to life and that is terribly lacking in the life of the white American. Bernie, the half-Indian, half-Negro magician, who entertains Maudie with his magic, is described by Helen Loftis as being: "like an old magician, old artificer from another country, and his eyes were black and tender: it was as if he had many secrets and somehow knew everything there was to know: not just those dancing balls, but the earth and the sky, leaves and winds and falling rain; he knew their

sorcery, knew their mysteries and knew this girl he he'd never spoken to...There was something in him that understood love and death and the hollow space of mindlessness." (211-212)[4] Likewise, Harry Miller, the Jewish artist and husband of Peyton, who creates his masterpiece immediately after the war and during a harrowing emotional experience, is presented as a contrast to the white Southerners who are overwhelmed by crises of their own creation.

IV. TRANSITION

After reading the novel one has the sense that, though the first novel of a young author, it is brilliant in a distinct way as it shows clearly that Styron masters his vision and his technique. Yet, because the expression is extreme and because there are excesses in Styron's ideas and portrait of the post-World-War-Two era and of the South the doubt lurks that Styron may be reproducing the mood and the ideas prevalent at the time rather than expressing his own mind. Louis Rubin has remarked that Styron, in *Lie Down in Darkness*, more than any other postwar writer, conveys a sense of speaking "directly to the experiences of his time."(193)[5] But given the obvious derivativeness of the novel, noted by John Aldridge (206-216) [6], it would seem that Styron speaks to the experiences of his time not always in his own tongue but often in that of his time. This sense is, to some extent, confirmed when one reads Styron's second novel, *Set This House on Fire*. The extremity and excess in the expression of ideas is still there but it is clear that Styron is setting out to correct the picture of the American South he has given in his first novel. The revision and correction are anticipated and, in a sense, prepared for in Styron's novella *The Long March*. Gavin Cologne-Brookes asserts that *The Long March* "was written to stand alone" (3) [7]. However, a careful reading that takes the novella seriously would show that it connects the two novels and is closely related to them and that it makes possible a better understanding of what Styron is expressing in his first two novels. Ostensibly, *The Long March* is a story that exposes and indicts military authoritarianism and its stupid excesses. But on a deeper level, the story is a recasting of the myth of Sisyphus as interpreted by Albert Camus, now played on an American landscape where life is prey to accidents and contingencies beyond the control of man and at the same time to cruel and stupid regimentation and restriction imposed by man himself. In this context living becomes expiation for crimes no one has committed and suffering ends in further trials and a possible indictment. And in the manner of Camus, Styron creates a hero who affirms his humanity by the defiant gesture of living life as fully and completely as he can and against all odds. Mannix defies Templeton, who orders a march of thirty-six miles for his battalion, by following his commands to the letter and going through the long march with a swollen foot. Although the march ends for him with a court-martial, he is satisfied, "'What the hell,' he whispered, 'we've made it.'" (79) [8]

Thematically and stylistically *The Long March* is in contrast to *Lie Down in Darkness*. The excessive pessimism and excessive celebration are replaced by a largely sober outlook on experience. The story uses a simple narrative technique of

relating what happens in a chronological order which brings clarity and simplicity to the story that are strengthened by the tendency of the story toward allegory. The narration of the story from the perspective of one character has the effect of giving the story urgency and immediacy that are generally absent in omniscient narration. But, more important, it makes the story not so much a simple recounting of an incident as a speculation on the human condition.

It is in its contrast to *Lie Down in Darkness* that *The Long March* anticipates *Set This House on Fire*. The feeling one gets from this novella is of Styron breaking away from the derivativeness of *Lie Down in Darkness* and trying to find his own voice. But there are still echoes of other writers and traces of the prevalent ideas and mood of the time. The book is similar, in some ways, to the war novels published at the time but it is significant that it is a novella and not a novel. Styron, perhaps, did not want to expend his energy on a book that could be another war novel but reserve it for a book more expressive of his mind. Coming after *The Long March*, *Set This House on Fire* should have been less surprising than it had been.

V. REVISION: SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Although a long book, *Set This House on Fire* is far simpler in story, theme and technique than *Lie Down in Darkness*. The two accounts given by Peter Leverett and Cass Kinsolving of Mason Flagg's attempt to dominate and degrade them and their resistance of Flagg which ends in Cass Kinsolving killing Flagg and experiencing a sense of liberation which Leverett implicitly shares, broadly express the related themes of the quest for knowledge and meaningful relationship. Both characters attain self-knowledge which liberates them from guilt and fear, and enables each to have hope and a meaningful relationship with oneself and others. The positive note in which the novel ends, and which critics describe as a fortuitous ending, is Styron's suggestion that a liberating knowledge of the self, of the other and of the world can be attained and that its consequences are sure and fast and it may work miracles. At the end of the novel, after such knowledge is attained, everything is set right in a simple way that gets around the usual logic of experience. This resolution includes an Italian, who has been hit by Leverett's car, and who, at the end of the book, miraculously pulls out of the coma he has been in for two years and becomes as healthy as everybody. Styron, as will be seen, succumbs to a facile resolution and ends his story by oversimplifying issues laden with complexity but this may have occurred because of an effort to be free of the nihilism and the whole mindset that prevailed after World War Two. This is what this novel insinuates.

The quest for knowledge takes a definite form and becomes an important part of the experience of the two Southern characters. Both these elements, self-knowledge and a deep personal experience, are lacking in *Lie Down in Darkness*. The idea of knowledge is vaguely there in that novel. The train that appears at the opening and close of the novel brings a person-the reader-to become a witness to the experience of this place and to tell about it when he or she goes north. There is no suggestion that knowledge has any value beyond this. In

Set This House on Fire Leverett deliberately sets out to seek knowledge as a way out of a negative state of mind – which he describes as torpor and uneasiness- developed in response to the world he is living in. His movement south is a necessary movement in every aspect and at every stage. It is going to the source not just to see and be informed but to have his perspective on things and his values and standards of judgment corrected. This is not a casual experience but an important stage in the education of Leverett and it provides an instance of this novel's revision of the previous one. Leverette's father, a Southern liberal who advocates vehemently equal rights for the Negro, gives an idea of the relation of parent and child completely different from that in the first novel and altogether contributes to the alternative image of the Southerner and the Southern legacy this novel is building up and that is clearly offered to contradict what is expressed in *Lie Down in Darkness*. Unlike Loftis and Loftis's father, he does not encroach on the autonomy of his son, and the fact that he is a liberal indicates his acknowledgment and respect of the autonomy and freedom of the other. Although he is a minor character and his role is limited, he provides a necessary and important preface to the novel and an instance of this novel revising the first one.

VI. REVISION: CELEBRATION OF THE SOUTH AS A SOURCE AND LOCALE OF REAL LIFE

In this novel, as in *The Long March*, names are indicative of character. Leverett's name means "a hare in its first year," and also "a pale person," and Leveret's account of his experience gives him away as indeed pale in character and with little knowledge and experience. Cass Kinsolving's name, on the other hand, is not only indicative of his character but it is also, and more importantly, an index to the meaning of the story. An anagram of kin loving, Cass's name indicates that the story he tells and that the novel, whose protagonist he is, is about the redeeming outcome of loving one's kin. Cass's kin are the Southern whites and blacks and the novel suggests that it is his love of kin and his return to the South that saves him from the despair and nihilism he has been wallowing in in Italy and Europe. Similarly, Leverett's travel to the South and his association with Cass are attempts to go beyond his smallness and find a meaningful life. The return of both characters to the South is, unlike Peyton's, not to be buried but, metaphorically, to be baptized. The idea of the South as the locale and source of real life and of the return to the South as a kind of rebirth is the essence of the book not only in the sense that it is the main theme but also, and more importantly, in the sense that the book, and the author, return to the South in a manner similar to that of Cass Kinsolving's and Leverett's return: to affirm and celebrate the South. It is in its celebration of the South that this book contradicts and makes its major revision of *Lie Down in Darkness* in that book's portrayal of the South as source of death.

The return to the South is achieved and, in a sense, becomes inevitable after a harrowing encounter with the North in a setting chosen to bring out the extreme image of the North in Southern prejudice. Italy is the perfect place to lay bare what is perceived as the sinisterness of the North which becomes clear when the North is taken out of its

pretentious context. The relationship of Mason Flagg, the deceptive and decadent Yankee, to both Cass Kinsolving and Leverett, reproduces in a simple manner a typical and an old sense of how the North relates to and deals with the South. The relationship takes the sinister form of treachery, betrayal, and exploitation of the other and an effort to deprive the other of freedom and possess him. While Mason Flagg has control over experience, he distorts and destroys life, and his self-exaltation and perversion and desecration of everything that is, or is cherished as, human, good, and creative in man, expose the diabolism that is the core of his character. In sharp contrast, both Leverett and Cass, and more clearly Cass, are depicted as selfless characters who are moved by moral and creative impulses to find meaning and order in life. But Cass is estranged from himself and from his roots and is crippled by guilt and despair. He does not realize that his inability to paint is a reaction against the deception and decadence in life and art in Europe where art has become pornography and commercialism exemplified by the film made in Sambuco about Lucrezia Borgia in modern costumes. Acting like lost generation Americans, he moves restlessly trailing his agony and despair from one European city or town to another until he virtually loses his real self not realizing that moving away from home brings estrangement from rather than knowledge and realization of the self. This is indicated when Flagg mistakes him, in their first meeting, for another beat painter who has been living away from America and virtually away from all life. It is because of this sense of himself and because of his material needs and then because of his friends' needs, that Cass falls in the grips of Mason Flagg. Cass easily betrays himself and permits himself to be degraded when, for example, he performs, while he is drunk, clownish acts parodying himself and the South to entertain Flagg's guests, and when he, out of need for money, paints a pornographic picture for Flagg. The only meaningful experience that Cass lives in Europe and that gives him some sense of purpose is his relation to Francesca and her poor family. For the first time since he came to Europe, Cass feels that he has found himself because Francesca and her family bring to his mind his native experience: "The niggers. The same things. It is the smell of a black sharecropper's cabin in Sussex County, Virginia."(424)[3] The crisis of the story is precipitated when Flagg rapes Francesca and indirectly causes her death. For Cass the course of degradation and perversion culminates in that incident. His story ends by his murder of Flagg in retaliation and then by being helped out of the state of despair and self-loathing by an Italian policeman who persuades him to embrace an ethic of expediency that enables him to return to normal life. But the denouement of the story is really in the sense of liberation that the murder of Flagg produces in him and that paves the way for his return to the South. Cass becomes a totally new person who has developed a new and positive perception of the South.

He rebaited his hook and cast out the line again squinting against the light. The river shores were immensities of shade— water oak and cypress and cedar; the heat and the stillness were like a narcotic. "September's good month for this kind of fishing," he said after a spell of

silence. "Look at that sky. Did you ever see anything so *clean* and beautiful?"[3]

Styron presents Cass's regeneration-his ability to bring into his life order and peace, to achieve integrity, and assume moral responsibility- as inextricably connected to his return to the South and seeing his life as possible only there. Significantly he returns to a new South which is found in Charleston not the old South in Virginia or North Carolina where he and Leverett were brought up and which has virtually disappeared after massive onslaughts of urbanization. He tells Leverett:

"Funny thing you know, in Europe, there sometimes, when everything got as it can get for me, and I was hating America so much that I could not even contain my hatred—why even then I'd get to thinking about Charleston. About how I'd like to go back there and live. It almost never was in North Carolina, or the pinewoods up there in Columbus County where I was brought up. I didn't want to go back there and sure as hell I didn't want to go back to New York. It was Charleston that I remembered, straight out of these memories I had when I was a boy. And here I am." He pointed across the wide harbor, radiant and gray-green and still as glass, then in an arc around the lower edge of the town where the old homes, deep in shade, in hollyhock and trumpet vine and bumblebees, had been defiled by no modish alteration, no capricious change. You'll search a long way for that kind of purity," he said. "Look at that brickwork. Why, one of those houses is worth every cantilevered, picture-doghouse in the state of New Jersey." [3]

In these words and in Cass's story ending by a therapeutic return to the South and in another therapeutic travel to the South played on a low key for Leverett, it becomes clear that Styron is playing the South against the North not in a plausible way and that he is resolving the thematic entanglements in a rather simple and easy manner. The murder of Flagg and the sense of liberation it produces in both characters make up a facile resolution of the conflicts and a sense of Styron oversimplifying complex issues and skirting difficult dilemmas. In a clear and direct way he attempts to resurrect the South he has killed in his first novel and offset the effect of that novel by simply expressing ideas and projecting images in his second novel that are the opposite of what he has expressed and projected in that first one. Styron seems not only to revise in *Set This House on Fire* what he has expressed in *Lie Down in Darkness* but also to greatly oversimplify his ideas and views on the complex experience he has projected before. Perhaps only through the oversimplification of the obvious complexities in experience and thought is this kind of revision possible. No wonder readers and critics are disappointed in the second novel. However, what Styron has done here must be appreciated as an effort to come close to what he has possibly come to regard as the truth which he locates in the experience and the

tradition of the South. He has obviously come to identify with this experience and tradition and to regard them as the bases of solid identity. Faulkner has done this kind of revision in a more complex manner in his last novel *The Reivers*, where he revises *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and its vision of an America that is totally free of history and tradition, and where he revises his own vision of the South as a waste land of despair and death. [9] In essence this kind of revision and what it seeks is the same as the literary revisionism which Harold Bloom expounded in the 1970s-1980s. Jean-Pierre Mileur states that

According to Bloom, revisionism is best characterized by the poet's desire to discover an original relation to truth and thus to open the tradition and its texts to his own experience. As a process, revision involves re-seeing, leading to a re-valuing, leading to a re-aiming. This last step might as accurately be called a reconciliation or restitution since, as the above definition implies, revisionism aims not at transforming truth and the tradition it sustains so much as reconciling us with it in an altered relation. (5)[10]

VII. CONCLUSION

I think both Styron and Faulkner- Styron at the beginning of his career and Faulkner in his last works- strove to reconcile themselves and their readers with the tradition they had spoken against vehemently before and which they have come to see now as the source of their true identity. The reconciliation may have been achieved for the two writers, but not for most of their readers and critics, and it is achieved at the expense of their art. Styron's second novels and Faulkner's novels after the Nobel prize are flawed in ways that make their revisionary efforts seem regrettable and that would make readers and critics locate the art that brought them recognition in the works that express the unrevised vision.

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- [9] See Ahmed Elnimeiri. "The Huck Finn Novel: Faulkner's Revision of Twain." *Journal of Language and Cultural Education*, vol 2, no. 2, pp.103-122.
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