

# Portrayal of Women in William Styron's the Confession of Nat Turner

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## Abstract

*The Confessions of Nat Turner*, a novel by William Styron, was based on the 1831 revolt of an African-American slave in Virginia. After first receiving a mostly white American audience of critics, the work has subsequently been caught in the heavy polemical gunfire exchanged between two fundamentally opposed factions for a long period. These two "interpretive networks," to use Stanley Fish's phrase, have presented significantly different, if not incongruent, interpretations of Styron's text. The philosophical foundation on which the creator's guardians and skeptics have fought endlessly and typically bitterly is built on ideas like true truth, verifiable accuracy, mental verisimilitude, authorial aim, creative trustworthiness, and racial depiction. Even if everything is equal, *The Confessions of Nat Turner* poses a plethora of fascinating questions. For the reasons for the present article, in any event, I shall confine myself to exploring just one of the essential conflicts of women characters in Nat Turner's tale.

**Keywords:** Constituents, Defenders, Implications.

## Introduction

As in *Set This House on Fire*, Styron's *Confessions* female characters fall into three distinct categories: mother, witch, and sexual object. Mother and which are manifestations of mother model, and the aesthetically appealing female is a great example of the anima prime example, as explained in the previous section. Nat's contempt for everything that fostered him as a child is rooted in his portrayals of feminine voices that reveal scorn, madness, or lesser concerns. A gruesome dramatization of Nat's combined desire to both physically possess and murder the white girl who has had the most power to ignite his passions is the death of Margaret Whitened. Nat, on the other hand, only regains his connection to God and his final healing via learning to feel sorrow for her murder. Sterling Lecater Bland Jr's criticism of Gray' "Because of the way it varies from actual court transcripts, its resist categorization as a reliable representation of either history or the legal process" (43)

### **Portrayal of Women in *The Confession of Nat Turner***

Nell Turner, Nat's first wife and business partner, pays attention to the list of white women in Nat's life who serve as role models for motherhood. Despite her whininess, she is an essential character since she passed on to her daughter the responsibility of passing down to Nat the ability to read. O.F Kemberg 1948 in his book *Severe Personality Disorder* explored the concept of identitarian trauma arguing that each individual in society is treated as a toll. Nell, as Nat refers to her, has a gentle disposition that we witness when she whispers an instruction to him rather than yelling it out. At that moment I turn up and see her lips forming the mumbled word "juice" as she recalls, "I...feel the attention of my escort, Miss Nell, upon me" (123). We can see Nat being trained to read white women in this scene, as he is being taught to take control of their value. At a dinner party when Nat stays close to the table and distributes drinks, Styron emphasizes the sounds of women's voices like he has in previous works. The sound of Miss Nell's voice resonates deeply with Nat "and bright, you could have a hard time believing': delicate and liberal as it falls from the intriguing white big air above him asked the wandering man: 'Ask him to spell something for you, Nat.' (124). Not only is Nella ecstatic with Nat's abilities, but we also discover that she spent a significant amount of time working with her:

With Marse Samuel and Missa Nell's help, I was ushered into the family's embrace and sheltered beneath their protective wing for many years to come. (156)

In this manner, the Turner women compose a fantastic mother model, maintaining and shielding Nat and boosting his cerebral progress. Nat's concluding portrayal of Mrs. Turner tempers the compassion with a touch of interior turmoil, although in overall she is a wonderful mother:

Miss Nella (was) a patient, wispy creature whose already fervent religious leaning had been exacerbated by some deep inner turmoil.(168)

Nat's wrathful viciousness is foreshadowed by the words. *Lie Down in Darkness's* Helen and *Set This House on Fire's* older English lady who dies alone in the boarding house are both examples of how Styron can turn a good mother's warmth into a hag, but Miss Sarah Trivisa lacks the strict enthusiasm that often turns Styron's female characters into hags. By way of comparison, Nat paints Sarah as a sweet woman with little knowledge but an enough amount of good cheer that permitted her to spew without effort peals of jolly and goofy giggling' (50)..(273).

There was a full unmanly straightforwardness of nature about her that caused her, alone among the family, to treat me at times with what might pass for true love, temporarily: "There was a full unman straightforwardness of nature about her that caused her" (273). It's only natural that this depiction of a kind, good-natured woman contrasts sharply with the brutality of her fate. Nat says she "shrieked like a demented holy messenger" (388) when he attempted to kill her significant other, and when Will takes over the gig, "Miss Sarah's shout, rising now to an even higher pitch of daze" (389) portrays screams of a woman reduced to deliriums. When Nat and his band enter the Trivises bedroom, her face registers "naked fear" (387). Her

degrading attack by Will is the last straw, as Nat's inability to kill her quickly results in him lying firm and lengthening his search like a sweetheart between Miss Sarah's lashing and her nude legs (390). It's at this point in the song when Nat notices Willa has "an incomprehensible amount of blood spilled forward" in her eye (390). The kindness he met at the Turners' house and the resulting terrible double-cross of chance enable Nat to unleash his lethal rage in a relaxing way by seeing the suffering and murder that he orchestrated and carried out. Leslie Paul says:

And this torment is not so different whether he indulges his lists or  
repress them. Sex and love do not inevitably run together, and in  
many of its manifestation sex, perversion and murder gallop as  
dangerously together as any troika of wild horses. Literature testifies  
That man seeks in vain outside his moments of orgasm, for meaning hope  
and identity. (34)

Sarah Travis, on the other hand, Mrs. Caty Whitened has no feelings for Nat other than energy for his powers, and Nat is impartial toward her, even though he knows he will try to murder her in the very near future. As Mr. Gray reads from Nat's confession, "I observed Will hauling Mrs. Whitehead out of the house, and at the step he practically separated her head from her body with his broadax," we learn that Will was also responsible for Mrs. Whitehead's death (36). It doesn't matter how terrible the violence is; Mrs. Whitehead's bigotry makes us feel less empathy for her. Tells Margareta she thinks the lesson given by her kid to keep the slaves contented and industrious and fearful of the consequences of their failure to be "excellent" slaves was "very affecting." (104).

A cold and distant woman who didn't mince words while dealing with her favorite draughtsman, Nat describes Mrs. Whitehead as "an austere woman." Regardless of the circumstances, she was completely fair and genuine, and tolerated no maltreatment of her African-Americans" (322). She doesn't see Nat as a human being, but rather as efficient and well-equipped property, because she hates her recognition of Nat's abilities and insight: "Set she had not even once eliminated herself from the realm of records, benefits, pelt as though the being to whom she was talking and around whom she had turned such a cocoon of imagination had not been an animal with lips and eyebrows and tonsils but some miraculous push" (327-28). The same way he would treat a stump that was meant to be unearthed, Nat treats her the same way (322). This scenario chillingly depicts the dehumanizing effects of slavery, in which both the owner and the enslaved see each other as nothing more than pieces of wood.

All of the black women characters that appear as mother models for Nat are portrayed as victims. Even though Lou-Anna, Nat's mother, has a prominent place in this gathering, her apparent delight in being assaulted undermines her victim status and serves as the first in a

series of shocking revelations to Nat about the erotic nature of women. Nat's mother, in any case, has an important role to play in Nat's mysterious transformation. As a first step, she instills in Nat a belief in his ability to foretell the future. Nat informed Mr. Gray, "When I was three or four years old, I was telling them something, which my mother overheard, had occurred before I was created." (30).

Since his mother told him "in my presence that I was expected for some great reason," Nat grew up believing he was unique because of her encouragement as a parent (31). Beyond that, she served as a sexual object for which Nat harbors nebulous desires, giving him hope for a bright future. When it comes to his relationship with his mother, Nat's is a shadow of the suggestively charged one that exists between Mason and his mother, as well as Peyton and Milton. All of these enigmatically incestuous parent-child connections present a profound mental flimsiness to the children, leading Peyton to self destruction, Mason to assault and misuse, and Nat to murder.

however, Nat's forbidden feelings are only hinted at. When he thinks back to his mother's cooking, he recalls the contrast between the humble nature of her job as cook and her slave discourse: "9 am back with my tall, lovely mother banging and protesting in a twirl of oily smoke" Thaniel, you better get information spread down in de basement lake I told you!" he writes. (127). This gives Nat the feeling that everything is fine and the beginnings of sensual feelings, because he remembers his mother's strides as she moves from the kitchen into our tiny room and lies down next to me out of the loop (128). Nat says that after she falls asleep, he would "reach out and softly touch the rough cotton shift over her ribs, to make certain she was there". (128). Even if this contact is free of any suggestive undertones, Nat's sense of innocence about his mother's sexual orientation is shattered when he witnesses her assault. As Earle V. Bryant remarks in his analysis of Richard Wright's story "*The Man Who Killed a Shadow*". "The stereotypical conception of black male sexuality is one of the most stereotypes in white America's racial mythology" (119)

Two different pictures of dark women as moms show up momentarily in the book: that of Wash's mom as a terrible mother and Isham's significant other as another casualty. Wash's mom is just a foil for Lou-Ann, serving to underline Lou-fundamental Ann's goodness; she is a Medusa figure who beats Nat and Wash. For the record, she's described by Nat as "a light West Indian lady who was part Creole and had dark curls around her heed that looked like wet serpents" who "tortured Nat and Wash by beating them on the legs with their hands and feet until they were covered in red marks" (140-41). The love of Isham's life discusses the tenacity of free blacks in tough economic times. Nat observes the impoverished mother, a picture of scourged parenting, "Any and haggard softly shaking in her arms the fishless black body of a youngster that gave off a sense of being near death" (296). Nat's owner Moore decides to ignore this ailment and the photograph of Isham's wife highlights the failure of the free individual of colour to take care of his family and the sheer exploitation of mother and child. In his interview with George Plimpton in *The New York Times*, Styron indicated that *The Confession of Nat Turner* is a "sort of religious parable and a story of exculpation" (2)

As a result, white moms resemble Saraha and Tell, or Mrs. Whitehead, who are full, kind, and cool. When Will humiliates Miss Saraha and Miss Caty in front of Nat, much as he witnessed his mother's degradation and that of Isham's significant other and imagined his grandma's plight, Nat watches in horror. But in Jungian terms, Nat does not confront his mother complex until he is able to feel profoundly for a female. The deaths of the white mothers are a form of vengeance Nat demands for the exploitation and corruption of the black mothers.

## Conclusion

A male character or author can use any form of the female to represent the archetype of the anima (the feminine). Styron's earlier work, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, has fewer hag characters, and the ones with the longest presentations aren't as elderly as Francesca's mother or the nameless old ladies carrying their bundles in *Set This House on Fire*. Three white ladies who appear briefly as ugly women make up the group.

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