

# REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN WILLIAM STYRON'S *THE CONFESSION OF NAT TURNER*

N. Francis Christopher<sup>1</sup>, Dr. K. Padmanaban<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D- Research Scholar, Department of English, Annamalai University, Chidhamparam.

Email: [francis20lit@gmail.com](mailto:francis20lit@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Research Supervisor, Assistant Professor of English, FEAT, Annamalai University, Chidhamparam.

DOI: 10.47750/pnr.2022.13.507.444

## Abstract

*The Confessions of Nat Turner*, a story by William Styron, was based on the 1831 revolt of an African-American slave in Virginia. After first finding a mostly white American audience of critics, the job has subsequently been caught in the heavy polemical gunfire exchanged between two fundamentally opposed factions for an extended period. Both of these “interpretive networks,” to use Stanley Fish's phrase, have presented significantly different, or even incongruent, interpretations of Styron's text. The philosophical foundation on that your creator's guardians and sceptics have fought endlessly and typically bitterly is made on ideas like true truth, verifiable accuracy, mental verisimilitude, authorial aim, creative reliability, and racial depiction. Even though everything is equal, *The Confessions of Nat Turner* poses an array of fascinating questions. For the reason why for the current article, the point is, I'll confine myself to exploring just one of the primary conflicts of women characters in Nat Turner's tale.

**Keywords:** constituents, defenders, implications, skeptics.

## Introduction

Like *Set This House on Fire* Female characters in Styron's *Confessions of Nat Turner* can be divided into three groups: mothers, witches, and sexual objects. Mother and, which are representations of the mother model, are both excellent examples of the anima prime example, as was previously discussed. Nat's depictions of feminine voices that convey mockery, insanity, or less important concerns are the foundation of his disdain for everything that raised him as a youngster. The death of Margaret Whitened is a grisly portrayal of Nat's simultaneous desire to both physically possess and murder the white female who has had the most power to spark his passions. Nat, on the other hand, can only find his final healing and restoration of his relationship with God through experiencing sorrow over her slaying. 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)

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

The white women in Nat's life who serve as role models for parenthood are noted by Nell Turner, Nat's first wife and business partner. Despite her whininess, she is a crucial character because she assigned her daughter the task of teaching Nat how 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 could see Nat being experienced to see bright ladies in that world, as he's being shown

to assume control of the value. At a social gathering when Nat continues near the desk and blows products, Styron highlights the appears of women's sounds like his in prior works. The noise of Skip Nell's style resonates profoundly with Nat "and brilliant, you can have trouble believing': fine and generous since it comes from the exciting bright huge air over him requested the wandering person: '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:

I was ushered into the family's embrace and  
sheltered beneath their protective wing  
for many years to come. (156)

We are able to see Nat being trained to see white women in that world, as he's being taught to assume control of their value. At a dinner party when Nat keeps close to the table and directs beverages, Styron stresses the seams of women's voices like he's in past works. The noise of Miss Nell's voice resonates deeply with Nat "and brilliant, you may have trouble believing': delicate and liberal since it falls from the exciting white large air above him requested the wandering person:

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 Helen and Set This House on Fire older English woman who dies alone in the boarding home are both types of how Styron can change a great mother's heat into a hag, but Skip Debbie Travisa lacks the strict passion that always turns Styron's woman heroes into hags. By means of contrast, Nat offers Debbie as a nice woman with little information but an enough amount of great encourage that permitted her to spew without work peals of jolly and goofy giggling. It's at this time 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 calming way by seeing the suffering and murder he orchestrated and carried out.

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 does not have any feelings for Nat besides energy for his powers, and Nat is impartial toward her, even though he knows he will attempt 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 heed 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 written by her kid to keep the slaves contented and industrious and fearful of the effects of the failure to be "excellent" slaves was very affecting.

A cold and distant woman who didn't mince words while coping with her favourite 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. She doesn't see Nat as a human being, but instead 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 ramifications of slavery, in which both the dog owner and the enslaved see one another as nothing more than bits 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 very first in some shocking revelations to Nat concerning the erotic nature of women. Nat's mother, whatever the case, has an important role to play in Nat's mysterious transformation. As a first step, she instils in Nat a belief in his capability 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 which is why Nat harbours nebulous desires, giving him hope for a brilliant future. As it pertains to his relationship with his mother, Nat's is a shadow of the suggestively charged one which exists between Mason and his mother, as well as Peyton and Milton. Many of these enigmatically incestuous parent-child connections present a profound mental flimsiness to the youngsters, leading Peyton to self destruction, Mason to assault and misuse, and Nat to murder. However, Nat's forbidden feelings are merely hinted at. When he thinks back to his mother's cooking, he recalls the contrast involving 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).

Two different pictures of dark women as moms appear momentarily in the book: that of Wash's mom as a dreadful 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 simply 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 these were covered in red marks. 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 color 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)

Consequently, white moms resemble Saraha and Tell, or Mrs. Whitehead that are full, kind, and cool. When Will humiliates Miss Saraha and Miss Caty before Nat, much as he witnessed his mother's degradation and that of Isham's mate and imagined his grandma's plight, Nat watches in horror. But in Jungian terms, Nat does not confront his mother complex until he can 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 may 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 people 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.

## References

1. Bland, Sterling Lecater Jr. *Voices of the Fugitives: Runaway Slave Stories and their Fictions of Self- Creation*. Westport (Conn.): Greenwood Press, 2000.
2. Kernberg, O.F. "Recent developments in the technical approaches of English language psychoanalytic schools." *Psychoanalysis Quarterly*, vol.70, no.3, 2001, pp. 519-547.
3. Plimpton, George. "The Confessions of Nat Turner" *The New York Times*, January, 1986, pp. 2
4. Styron, William. *The Confessions of Nat Turner* New York: First Vintage International, 1993.
5. Web. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confession\\_of\\_Nat\\_Turner\\_\(novel\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confession_of_Nat_Turner_(novel))
6. Web. <https://genderedinnovations.stanford.edu/terms/race.html>
7. Web. <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/study-guides/sociology/social-and-globalstratification/types-of-social-classes-of-people>
8. Web. <http://www.enotes.com/topics/william-styron/critical-essays>
9. Web. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1968/sep/12/the-nat-turner-case/>