CHAPTER V
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CONCLUSION

The picture of modern man portrayed in contemporary literature is that of an individual tormented and haunted by the established conventions of society, religion and the hallucinations of neurosis. Theme of alienation plays an important role in contemporary literature. In today's world, man suffers from despair because of lack of faith in God. The spiritual emptiness felt by human beings, the feeling of loneliness, and lack of love create an unpleasant life on earth and Styron vividly portrays these in his works. The world of Styron is like the world of T.S.Eliot's *The Waste Land* for he portrays the sterility of the twentieth century world, which is devoid of spiritualism and humanism. Lack of faith and belief in religion and lack of a code of conduct create this sterility. Human sufferings become the source of Styron's writings for he firmly believes that the main aim of any writer is to represent life. One can say that the central conflict in Styron's novel is not between the individual and the society but it is between the individual and the causes that constitute his rebellion and isolation.

Commenting on the theme of *Lie down in Darkness*, Vishweswara Rao observes as follows:

Loneliness, guilt, depravity, loss of identity, anxiety, anguish, disaster and disintegration mark the personalities of outstanding fictional characters emerging from modern writing....his [modern writer’s] concern is the inner man....,
psychic states and patterns of morbid behavior... The focus turns to the dark recesses of life, such as incest, insanity, promiscuity, suicide and strangulation. (71)

The views of Vishweshwara Rao are exemplified not only in the novel *Lie Down in Darkness* but almost in all the writings of Styron, for his novels deal with the inner man, the conflicts, and the agonies felt by him.

Styron in his works expresses his deep and mature understanding of human nature. We realize that every individual is unique in his or her own way, and that the consciousness of each human being differs as each individual has a different set of values. "A study of Sin, Remorse and Expiation in the Select Novels of William Styron" compels us to realize that there is much to be endured and little to be enjoyed in this world.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. In Chapter I, "Introduction", a survey of the origin and development of American, fiction writing in particular, is made. The impact of southern literary movement and that of Harlem renaissance are highlighted. It is followed by an analysis of the significance of Styron in American literary scenario and his major literary preoccupations. This chapter presents the hypothesis of the present researcher that a certain gap has been left unfilled by the studies conducted on Styron's works so far and the same - his preoccupation with man's sinful nature, the sense of guilt felt by his characters and their yearning for atonement - is analyzed and highlighted. It is also stated that the present researcher has adopted an eclectic approach for an interpretation of the
novels of Styron. An admission about the limitations of the study is also made as only three of his novels have been considered for this dissertation.

The second chapter, entitled "Concept of Sin", offers a general discussion on the nature of sin and an analysis of the various sins committed by the characters of Styron is carried out. The sins in the selected novels of Styron are the sin of despair, deception of the senses through alcohol, adultery, sin of pride, inhumanity to fellow human beings, lying, raping, murder and suicide. Milton and Peyton Loftis in Lie Down in Darkness, Cass Kinsolving and Mason Flagg in Set This House On Fire. Nathan, Sophie and Stingo in Sophie's Choice commit the sin of adultery, despair and alcoholism. Helen in Lie Down in Darkness commits the sin of pride, jealousy and a stubborn refusal of forgiveness. Deception of the senses through sex, alcohol, and adultery is sought by Milton, Peyton, Cass Kinsolving, Mason Flagg, Nathan and Sophie. Helen tries to escape through drugs and religion; Mason Flagg, Sophie and Nathan are given to lying; Mason Flagg commits the sin of raping; the sin of dominating fellow human being is committed by Mason Flagg and Nathan. Cass attempts suicide and commits the sin of murder also. Peyton, Nathan and Sophie commit the greatest sin of suicide.

The third chapter, entitled "Concept of Remorse", defines the nature of guilt and it has discussed the feelings of remorse felt by the characters of Styron. This chapter has highlighted the fact that the awareness of having committed sins may prick the conscience of the concerned person and it may
induce feelings of insecurity, which in turn may lead the individual to isolate himself/herself and to feel depressed about life. The feelings of guilt may induce a struggle between life and death instincts and may make a person weak - physically and mentally. It is also pointed out that extreme consciousness of guilt may have terrible consequences. On the other hand, a healthy sense of remorse can lead to self-awareness, and enable the individual to seek expiation. It is remarkable that Milton, Peyton, and Helen at times feel remorse and guilt. Mason Flagg does not feel guilty at all for his sins; Cass Kinsolving feels remorse for the sin committed by him at the age of fifteen. Sophie and, to a certain extent, Nathan also regret their sins.

Chapter IV, entitled “Concept of Expiation” explains the concept of expiation in general quoting various sources and it focuses on Styron’s handling of this concept in his novels. Expiation involves repentance, apology, reparation and penance. The characters of Styron, though they are aware of their sinful deeds, initially find it difficult to desist from them. Ultimately, most of his characters become aware of their sins and are prompted by an inner urge to change their nature.

As cited by Marc.L Ratner, Styron comments on the impact of Freudian knowledge as follows: “This new knowledge, [psychology and all the new psychiatric wisdom] has contributed to a new trend towards introspection in fiction” (19). This saying of Styron reminds us of T.S. Eliot’s words, “When there is distress, Man’s curiosity searches past and future” (44). The novels of Styron describe the events that have happened in
the past. To reveal the incidents, he uses the introspective technique, which gives a powerful sense of re-enactment. The universal aspects of modern literature such as violence and disorder, darkness and nothingness, loneliness and guilt, horror, madness and immorality are depicted in these novels.

Analyzing the novel *Lie Down in Darkness*, we realize that the characters fail to understand the root cause of their sufferings, which is their own proclivity for evil. Except Peyton, in this novel, none of the other characters expiate their sins. Milton and Helen with all their awareness only occasionally change their attitudes but revert to their old sinful ways. So, they cannot be considered as fully expiating in order to qualify for mercy. We may even say that the attempts made by the characters make them to move from bad to worse.

Cass Kinsolving in *Set This House On Fire* expiates his sins. Living a life of self-imprisonment, he commits various sins. He feels a strong sense of guilt at his own innate sinful nature, which he has inherited as an inescapable part of humanity; added to this, he feels guilty for having committed an unpardonable sin at the age of fifteen, which weighs heavily on his soul. The guilt and the consequent suffering from a sense of remorse pave the way for self-realization and regeneration. By way of expiation, he becomes the slave of Mason and helps Michele by stealing from Mason. Cass’ love for Francesca regenerates and revives him in a miraculous way. Added to this love, the friendship and advice extended by Luigi guides him
in the proper path. The meaningless existence of Cass attains meaning and from the state of despair, Cass proceeds to exultation through his act of expiation. Mason Flagg, the rich film producer who enslaves his victims like Cass and Peter, finally overtly regrets his sin of raping Francesca and this can be viewed as his attempt at expiation.

In Sophie's Choice, Nathan and Sophie expiate their sins by committing suicide. Her sense of gratitude to Nathan prompts her to accept any treatment of Nathan and without even a tinge of ego, she surrenders herself to Nathan. The kind of surrender Sophie willingly undertakes is rather a peculiar one. The immense love Sophie has for Nathan is revealed when she hides her sufferings at the concentration camp from Nathan with a view to save Nathan from agony. Again it is strange that with such immense love for Sophie, he tortures her in a cruel way. The treatment extended to Sophie makes us to wonder at the evil in the nature of Nathan. Sophie with all her confessions to Stingo is unable to get rid of her guilt feelings. Remembrance of her past increases her guilt and recalling her past life, she is unable to escape from the labyrinthine of her past life in the concentration camp. Nathan too is aware of his inhuman treatment extended by Sophie. Hence, at times he cries and he questions himself how he could torture his beloved in such a cruel way.

Milton and Helen apart, most characters in the selected works of Styron are overtaken by a sense of remorse and attempt at atonement. But it is ironical that except Cass Kinsolving the other major characters - Peyton,
Nathan and Sophie-- attempt to expiate their sins through a greater sin, that of violating their life.

This dissertation entitled “A Study of Sin, Remorse and Expiation in the Select Novels of William Styron” has brought to light the following findings. Of all the sufferings in the world, we may say that the pain of loss is the greatest suffering. The great tragedies of literature vividly portray the pain of loss – it may be the pangs of separation felt by the creature from the Creator, or one human being from another, or the lover from the beloved. This pain of loss is induced by the feeling of love and affection in the human beings.

The most prominent characteristic quality of Lie Down in Darkness, Set This House On Fire and Sophie’s Choice is that they vividly describe the nature of loss experienced by the characters and their mode of reaction to their loss. The novel Lie Down in Darkness is inspired by the loss of a girl named Maria Hunt; the suicidal loss of Peyton provides the framework of the novel. The loss of Helen’s love drives Milton to seek extra-marital affair with Dolly; Milton regrets the loss of Peyton’s love on the marriage day; Peyton longs for a normal home and for a loving mother; the loss of the love of Harry and Milton drives Peyton to commit suicide; Helen yearns for Milton’s love occasionally. The agony felt by Helen over the loss of her children induces painful feelings in the reader’s heart.

In Set This House On Fire, Cass feels agony over the loss of his artistic talents. The loss of chastity felt by Francesca forces her to fight with
the village idiot Saverio. The death of his beloved Francesca maddens Cass Kinsolving and hence he murders Mason Flagg. The pain of loss felt by these characters makes them to suffer and in consequence of their suffering, they inflict pain on others.

In Sophie's Choice, Sophie regrets the fact that she has to lose one of her children in the concentration camp for death and one for life. The fear of losing her life in the camp forces her to pray and hope that the Gestapo will focus on the Jews for their extermination and it is the same fear that makes her to stoop to the level of a whore and to attract the commandant of the camp, Rudolf Hoss. Fear of losing her life made her to run away from Brooklyn with Stingo. But in the end she realizes that she can never live a happy life without Nathan and decides to die with him. The sense of loss experienced by these characters drives them to despair. Except Cass Kinsolving, Peyton, Nathan and Sophie are subdued by despair and hence they commit suicide.

Robert G. Davis opines, "The great interest of the novel Lie Down in Darkness is a moral one" (114). John Pendy Kerby is of the opinion that this novel enforces the necessity of maintaining "...the dignity of personal relationships and the integrity of the individual" (130); also the need to possess optimistic attitude towards life. An individual with a pessimistic view will necessarily lead a tragic life and Peyton, needless to say, has a pessimistic attitude towards life.
Freud firmly believes that a child is capable of manifestations of love, tenderness, jealousy and devotion. He also opines that the object of a child's first love is his parent. Stingo's comment in *Sophie's Choice* that "Mothers and Fathers – they're at the core of one's life somehow" (614) is an apt judgment of the novel *Lie Down in Darkness*, because it describes the significant influence of Milton, the father and Helen, the mother on their daughter, Peyton. Freud observes: "If the mother is absent or has withdrawn her love from the child, it can no longer be certain that its needs will be satisfied and may be exposed to the most painful feelings of tension." (843)

Love, especially that of the parents', is important for a child, because only the childhood experiences determine one's later role as a wife/husband and mother/father. Small frictions in early childhood are likely to become major disruptions in the child's later life. When parents prefer one child to another, they evoke feelings of hostility in the neglected child. Besides this, children who adjust poorly with environment or with other people are the product of unfavorable parent-child relationship. Broken homes and lack of affection and understanding can produce great stress in the child.

We may agree with the views of Sigmund Freud that "a parent must give [the child] the right amount of love and at the same time, preserve an effective degree of authority" (870). Since neither Helen nor Milton provides the right kind of love to Peyton, she becomes desperate - commits adultery, becomes an alcoholic and in the end commits suicide. The failure of the parents, especially the lack of motherly love and affection, induces
Peyton to commit suicide. Her assessment of her own self is revealed in her interior monologue. Her suicidal act implies the fact that she regards suicide as the final victory over the bitter unpleasant realities of life, which horrify her. She could be regarded as a rebel, revolting against the torturous reality. In a sense, it is good to revolt, because it paves way for a change.

Lack of faith induces despair. According to Kierkegaard the despair which is sickness unto death may take any one of the three forms - it may be the despair of not being conscious of having a self; it may be the despair of not willing to be oneself; or it may be the despair of willing to be oneself.” (345, 349, 365).

Of the above mentioned three types, we may classify Cass, Milton, Nathan and Sophie as belonging to the second category, for they are aware of their selves, but they do not will it; Peyton Loftis could be easily classified as belonging to the third category, for it is her desperate “willing” and search for self that drives her to commit suicide in the end.

Nathan Scott, as cited by Robert H. Fossum, defines the contemporary novel as one, which “deals with the difficult marriage, the intricate maze of personal relationships with in the family, and the crisis of self – realization in middle age” (9). The world of the Loftises is filled with misunderstanding; yet, they are not totally devoid of choice. With all our sympathy for them, we realize that what happens is what the Loftises themselves have willed though any attempt made by these characters to change their situation worsens it. As Aruna observes in “Kargil”: 
Nothing changes. If at all, the change is for the worse only. Such is the quality especially of humanity that instincts mean and base lurking at the back leap to the fore on the least spur. (1-5)

In a similar way though Cass Kinsolving and Sophie have the choice of leaving Mason and Nathan if they so desire, but they do not. Language in our daily usage can be regarded as an expression of manners through which we reveal ourselves, make ourselves happy or miserable. It is a pity that language in Lie Down in Darkness serves not to unite or communicate, but to dominate, deceive one another and to express hatred.

Lack of communication within the family of the Loftises definitely adds to their misunderstanding. To put it in a different way, the novel Lie Down in Darkness enforces the importance of communication, which becomes the effective means of maintaining a good relationship. Each character lives in his/her dark world, encircling him/herself in his/her private hell. Had the Loftises shared their happiness or misery or suffering, one is sure, there would not have been such calamitous happenings in the family. These characters exemplify the views of Francis Bacon:

The human understanding, when it has once adopted an opinion draws all things else to support and agree with it. And though there be greater number and weight of instances to be
The title *Lie Down in Darkness* suggests the idea of the characters existing in darkness, which is ignorance. They want to escape from the awareness of their frightful existence and hence they lie down in darkness willfully cherishing their hurtful memories. At another level, it refers to Peyton’s act of lying down with strange men. As Ihab Hassan aptly comments, “All lie down in darkness, but there is one character, whose light is found in ashes—Peyton.” (125)

In *Set This House On Fire*, the body of human beings is compared to a house and the diseases, which infect the body, is regarded as God’s violent ways of shaking a man. Through this testing He may purify and elevate the soul of a man. The sufferings undergone by Cass Kinsolving release him from the self-imprisonment and from ignorance; he emerges into wisdom.

The title of the novel *Sophie’s Choice* refers to the choice made by Sophie in the concentration camp. To assert his power and to confirm his belief in the existence of God, Dr. Von Niemand orders Sophie to choose among her children. She chose her girl child to camp and her son Jan for life. The title also includes another choice made by Sophie - that of choosing death over life. By preferring Nathan to Stingo, she has proved that her choice in life is death, as she found it difficult to live with all the feelings of guilt she suffers from for her behavior at the camp.
It is remarkable that the major characters of Styron are alienated from each other, lost within themselves and in this respect they represent the modern society. The flow of time does not provide any solace to Styron’s characters. Remembrance of their past neither guarantees wisdom nor happiness. They are both victims and victimizers. The agony of their suffering is great. We could neither blame them as guilty, nor could we label them as guiltless. These characters exemplify the view of Styron in *Set This House On Fire* that “we just can’t trifle with fate” (277). Styron seems to say that a considerable detachment from the past is needed, though the nature of human beings is to long for the golden past. Milton and Helen constantly long for the past style of living when they were free from parental responsibilities. The sadness felt by Milton on the marriage day of Peyton in *Lie Down in Darkness* shocks us because as Styron says in *Set This House On Fire*, “… only fools lament change in itself.” (20)

The desperate search for love and understanding by Peyton represents the hopelessness of modern man who, devoid of faith, longs for a hold. Peyton’s frustrated cry that she is lost represents the feelings of the younger generation of this swiftly changing, scientific, mechanical age, which is loveless, incapable of love, understanding and compassion. The youngsters projected in *Lie Down in Darkness* long for the right kind of love and care, which is becoming rare to find in this hastily changing world. By portraying Peyton as rebelling against her mother, Styron criticizes the false values of people who follow the religious dictum only by words. As Irving Malin
says, "...by showing his generation where he felt it went wrong, Styron was indicating how it might go right" (19). Besides the fact that Peyton commits suicide when the United States dropped atom bomb on Hiroshima thereby enforcing the idea of violence and destructive power of human beings, the sociological factors for the destruction of the Loftises family are not explained.

It is remarkable that in this novel only the season of autumn and the hectic month of September are described. The season of spring, which symbolizes rebirth, optimism, and joy, does not find its description in this novel.

A study of the novels of Styron helps us to comment confidently that the moral lesson in these novels is that it teaches us to love fellow human beings in the right way. Frederick J. Hoffman observes: "In Lie Down in Darkness, lack of belief poses great cracks in the human landscape" (145) and this crack in human landscape is induced by lack of genuine love for fellow human beings, and lack of values and meaning in life.

Albert Bergar in Lie Down in Darkness remarks, "It is symptomatic of that society from which you [Peyton] emanate, that it should produce the dissolving family ... Symptomatic ... of our... society ... the machine culture" (346). The hangover sort of boarder's life of Milton and Helen symbolizes disintegration of love and faith.

The novel Lie Down in Darkness attains significance because, as Jeanne R. Nostrandt says, "It highlights the fact that humanity, society, and
family cannot survive in a Godless, loveless wasteland" (66). Discussing the theme of solipsism, and the isolation of the individual behind the walls of self, Styron explicitly reveals his concurrence with Thomas Wolfe's comment that "a life of loneliness could be destroyed by the life of love." (161)

Of all the feelings that exist in this world, we may say that love and compassion are the greatest. The classics of literature portray love as the fountainhead, and as the inexhaustible source of energy of life. Romeo's love for Juliet, Dante's love for Beatrice, Edmund Spencer's love for Elizabeth Boyle, Napoleon's love for Eva Browne, and Tennyson's love for Hallam are fondly remembered by the readers even today.

In a much similar way, the compassionate acts of noble human beings stand the test of time. Albert Switzer's love and compassion for the South African tribes, Father Damien's compassion for the Hawaiian lepers, and Mother Teresa's love for the poorest of the poor are some of the few examples of noble people who have alleviated the sorrows and sufferings of fellow human beings through love and compassion.

But, love could be what T.S. Eliot in *Four Quartets* says, "Love ... of the wrong thing" (28) also which in turn may destroy everything. Love of wrong kind, such as, Milton's phallic love for his daughter, Mason's incestuous attraction for Francesca and Nathan and Sophie's destructive love becomes the cause of their destruction. Contrary to this love, the love of Cass for Francesca and Maudie's love for Benny are portrayed. The selfless
love of Cass does not bring ruination. Instead, it forces him to revive and regenerate his original qualities. Cass has understood the power of love.

As Aruna observes, love alone has the capacity to spread and embrace all fellow beings and relating them to a divinity. As he observes:

... far and wide netting souls sick and weak

Binding the Atman to Paramatman (8-9).

This unconditional, self-sacrificing love of Cass makes us to recall the words of Kahlil Gibran in *The Prophet*, where he describes the characteristic qualities of love:

Love gives naught but itself and takes naught but from itself;

Love possesses not, nor would it be possessed;

For Love is sufficient unto love. (12)

Describing the nature of love, Styron says in *Set This House On Fire* that “A love affair, like some prodigy of plastic surgery is flesh laid on to living flesh and to break it up is to tear down off great hunks and parts of yourself” (18). A part of the flesh torn from flesh will definitely cause pain.

*Lie Down in Darkness* and *Sophie’s Choice* seem to end with despair and frustration. But there is a silver lining. In the last scene of the former book, the black revivalist scene, describing the hallelujahs heard in the distant suggests a possible hope of Peyton finding a new father and a new home. In *Sophie’s Choice*, Stingo, looking at the bright morning star experiences an affirmation of his resurrection on Coney Island.

But in *Set This House On Fire*, the affirmation that tomorrow may be
a bright day is positively emphasized. The concluding chapter of the novels can be contrasted. *Lie Down in Darkness* ends with the description of descendence of dark night. As Styron describes:

> Darkness could be coming soon. The red fires had disappeared from the water, now it had only the green of dusk in it and the palest pink from the vanished setting sun (397)…

> Twilight fell around them; the evening became sprinkled with stars. …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)

Contrary to this, in *Set This House On Fire*, we are made to feel the approaching dawn. Cass describes the dawn as follows:

> Something about the dawn made me think of America and how the light would come slowly over the eastern coast, miles and miles of it… I kept thinking of the new sun coming up over the coast of Virginia… When after black night, dawn broke like a trumpet blast and there it was immense and green and glistening against the crashing seas. (553)

This experience of Cass makes us to recall the words of Shelley, “If winter comes can spring be far behind?” (70), which in turn makes us to feel that there can never be a night that will not have a dawn.
Wimsatt and Brooks aptly say in *Literary Criticism*: “We are all torn between the desire to find ourselves and the desire to lose ourselves” (54). The desire to find ourselves is self realization and the desire to lose ourselves has to be achieved through the right kind of love which may enable us to become one with humanity. Recognition of self horrifies Peyton and Sophie and so they destroy themselves. Cass achieves self-realization, which revives and regenerates him. The dictum of Socrates that ‘Life without self-examination is unworthy of man’ is faithfully followed by Peyton, Sophie, and Cass Kinsolving.

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in *The Adventure of Criticism* comments as follows: “The Life of men ... ranges from bad to worse. It is never distinguished by undiluted happiness... The longer we live, the longer we bear the weight of our misfortune; the longer we enact hell in our midst” (94). The readers of *Lie Down in Darkness* and *Sophie’s Choice* will definitely agree with the views of Iyengar.

The truth about the characteristic quality of man is that it can never be grappled with. None can deny the fact that all literature highlights poetic justice – Good rewarded and Evil punished. Always preferring or wanting what is not available to him, man’s nature includes wickedness, greed, lust, and other evils. Most of us would agree with the fact that the concept of joys and sorrows, light and darkness, love and hatred, ignorance and intelligence, and lie and truth are not contradictory but complimentary. One can never be separated from the other. Only in the interface of the one can
we understand the qualities of the other. In a much similar way, the dual qualities that exist in the nature of human beings are also a complimentary one. Only in the presence of evil, can we understand the good qualities of a man.

The novel *Set This House On Fire* and *Sophie’s Choice* force us to see the inherent evil in man’s nature, the realization of which shocks us. The barbaric and savage nature in man may be regarded as the vice or evil in man. When a man walks in the jungle path of beastliness he becomes degraded. An individual can be described as a human being if he or she has human compassion. One who is devoid of this humanistic feeling can no longer be regarded as a human being, but as a beast.

In an interview, Conducted by Robert K. Morris, Styron comments on the nature of human beings as follows:

We don’t know why we’re here. And yet, the possibilities of life are limitless. We exist capable of great joy, ecstasy even. And these make the whole trip worthwhile. But the fly in the ointment what pollutes the whole thing is this evil which human beings alone are capable of; The sky is not capable of evil; nor is the water; Human beings are the only vehicle through which the whole order is overturned; we ourselves are the agents of our own destruction, and this is what makes the human existence so desperately perilous. Our beautiful opportunities which we have as human beings are absolutely
destroyed, because of our proclivity toward hatred and massive domination of each other. (57)

In the same interview, Styron regrets on the wretchedness found in the universe. He observes:

People live in wretched unhappiness. And this seems to be the largest mystery of human existence. Why, we here on earth, we fellow human beings, theoretically a family should find ourselves in such constant and universal discord, not supportive of each others, not sympathetic, not loving, but filled with hate and revenge and the desire to annihilate our own kind. All my work has been an effort to try to understand why? (56)

With all his ability to do good or evil, man is free to exercise his will. He is endowed with a reasoning capacity so as to choose between good and evil. Man will be justified, if he has chosen the good. He will be certainly condemned by God and the society if he chooses evil. The ability of a man to relate himself to the community, to do the right thing and to strike a balance between the interest of others and the interest of the self paves way for solace in his life. The novels of Styron are a testimony to the truth that every human being is his or her own arbiter.

All the great religions of the world explicitly state that man should necessarily overcome his innate selfishness. By self-discipline, man learns to control his own base nature. Analyzing Cass’ response to life, we understand
that the greatness of human beings lies in the fact that we are endowed with a capacity to love and serve. This selfless love may help man to obliterate his self-centeredness, which is the evil in him, and find inner harmony, peace and salvation.

*Set This House On Fire* abounds with the humanism of William Styron. In this novel, Styron proclaims the view that no man is an island, besides revealing the essential dependence of human beings on one another. Styron heralds a valuable lesson that our way of pursuing happiness should not inflict pain on others. Defining the noblest dream dreamt by mankind, Styron says, “It is freedom and a full belly and a right to pursue his own happiness” (*Set This House On Fire*, 24). The right to pursue our own happiness should not humiliate us or harm others. Accentuating the evil nature of Mason Flagg helps Styron to succeed in portraying Luigi as the representative of Love and Compassion.

A careful observation of life proves that in our ordinary day-to-day life the innocents suffer not only because of tragic destiny, but also because of the deliberate crimes of villainous people. The bad men suffer as a punishment for sins, while the good men, like Job, suffer as a test from God. We may say that when a human being chooses to behave in an evil way, he contributes not only to the suffering of his victims, but also to his own inevitable destruction.

In *Set This House On Fire*, Mason Flagg represents the symbol of evil in the universe. The evil in him paves the way for the destruction of himself
and Francesca. Through the character of Mason, Styron exemplifies the fact that the root of hostility, evil and destruction lies in the will of man. The views of Willard Farnham that “Man’s soul can soar much too cheaply and easily. Man in the flesh must never forget the natural lout that is in him; ready to make him ridiculous or even to mark him for hell” (434), illumines the life of Mason. The evil or the lout in man destroys. The most pathetic situation of human life is that all the teachings of Moses, Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed and the great leaders of this world like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Mandela are unable to remove the inherent selfishness in man. We realize the fact that every individual has to understand the evil in him and try to control it. If not, the evil will gain complete mastery over him and destroy not only him but also others.

The sinful life and death of Mason makes us to realize that “He who lives by violence shall die by violence” (250) as ‘violence begets violence’. Mason Flagg’s life ends in a most pathetic way because, as Styron says, “wickedness begets infinity of sorrow.” (536)

The domination of one human being over another has been one of the causes of the innumerable sufferings in this world. The master-slave relationship that exists between Mason Flagg and Cass Kinsolving is a peculiar one. Styron while defining the nature of evil says, “Total domination of human beings by others up to the point of extermination seems to me to come as close as one can to the notion of absolute evil.” (67)
Rhodo Sirlin aptly observes: "The rope which binds all of us permits no mastership, only mutual dependence" (91). The effect of Flagg's domination over Cass reduces him to the level of a beast and the mastery of Nathan over Sophie reduces her to that of a slave. The behavior of Mason Flagg and that of Nathan adheres to the views of Swami Vivekananda in "The Secret of Work": "There are two things which guide the conduct of men- might and mercy. The exercise of might is invariably an act of selfishness; all men and women try to make the most of whatever power or advantage they have; Mercy is heavenly; to be good, we all have to be merciful." (63)

Mason and Nathan are embodiment of selfishness. They must necessarily dominate their fellow beings in order to feel proud of themselves. Cass is well aware of the hold of Mason over his existence. And in a similar way, Sophie too is aware of the fact that she is an object possessed by Nathan so he may do anything to her that he prefers. Mason and Nathan by their sinful behavior of domination fail to understand the truth that "all our acts are our creaturely response to our creator; all our sins are ultimately sins against God" (Leonard Hodgson, 67) because every human being is an incarnation of divinity. The evil portrayed by Styron through these two characters forces us to think deeply of how man himself can be the cause of his own destruction. Their behavior makes us to realize that at times men's toleration or indulgence of life becomes depressing and disgusting.
It is true that Cass Kinsolving and Sophie lead a life of subjugation and become slaves on their own volition. The noble characteristic quality of Cass is revealed when he becomes the slave of Flagg. Wanting to atone for the sins he committed at the age of fifteen, he takes up the responsibility of saving Michele and it is this feeling of responsibility that compels him to steal; and we are not repelled by his behavior. His love for Michele forces us to agree with his action and justifies his desire to give. Cass’ sense of responsibility to provide medical aid to Michele makes us to recall the words of Gibran, “... to withhold is to perish” (28). Further his behavior adheres to Gibran’s saying, “There are those who give with joy and Joy is their reward” (28). Cass understands that there is pleasure in giving. Induced by his love for Francesca, Cass is willing to “bleed willingly and joyfully” (Gibran, 15). Though Francesca does not ask for his help, Cass extends his help to her voluntarily and takes pride in his role as a giver because, “it is well to give when asked, but it is better to give unasked through understanding” (Gibran 28). Every work we do, every thought we have, leaves an impression in this cosmos. In a similar way, what we give will definitely come back to us. If we give the best, the best will be given to us; the good action done by Cass to Francesca gains Luigi’s friendship and guidance for him.

The first time when he extended help to Francesca, he knew very well that he could not spare any money for her. Still he helped her and that good help was restored to him in a different way. Cass’ act of extending help to Francesca makes us to remember the exquisite story of Oscar Wilde, “The
Model Millionaire" where Hughie Erskine gives one sovereign to the millionaire model. His act of help extended to the model without any expectation brought him an unexpected reward. In a similar way the help extended by Cass to Francesca saves him in an unexpected way.

Somewhat paradoxical to the story of the "Model Millionaire" is the verse of Tagore. In Stanza L of Gitanjali, the beggar woman waiting by the roadside for "alms to be given unasked" by the king is "confused and stood undecided" when the king asks her, "What hast thou to give to me?" She extends "least little grain" to him, and returning home, when she emptied her bag on the floor, finds a "gram of gold among the poor heap" and

........bitterly wept;

...wished that I had had the heart to

Give thee my all. (51-52)

Styron's comment in This Quiet Dust and Other Writings "... even in the midst of ultimate process of dehumanization, the human spirit cannot be utterly drowned or denied" (341) becomes true of the characteristic quality of Cass Kinsolving. The voluntary suffering of Cass for the sake of Francesca reveals him to be a man of compassion and hence his sinful behavior of stealing and degrading becomes agreeable. By degrading himself for a good cause he has elevated himself to the position of a giver. We may say that by his act, this sinner has become a saint. The behavior of Cass and Sophie makes us to realize the truth of Faulkner's saying in his "Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech" that 'Man will endure, not withstanding
the menace surrounding him, because he has a soul, a spirit capable of
compassion, sacrificing and endurance.” (368)

The behavior of Cass and Sophie makes us to realize that it is good to
provide for the comfort and convenience of fellow human beings even by
sacrificing one’s own needs. Sophie can never stay away from Nathan
because of her immense love for him and because she knows that Nathan
may feel miserable without her.

Through Cass Kinsolving and Luigi, Styron portrays the universal
truth that human beings are endowed with the capacity for love, honor, pity,
compassion and sacrifice. Luigi understands the nobility in the character of
Cass. He must have understood the concept of help in a proper way’ that is,
if a man’s needs can be fulfilled for an hour, it is help in deed; if his wants
can be fulfilled for sometime, it will be of more help to him; but, if his wants
can be satisfied forever, it would be the greatest help rendered by an
individual. The saying ‘Nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so’
becomes true in the case of Luigi’s and Cass’ behavior.

Generally, there are two ways of living - reacting to life and
responding to it. The third law of Newton, ‘for each and every action there is
an equal and opposite reaction’, if applied to life will create hell on earth
because, a violent action will breed violence and so the chain of reaction
may go on and on, creating a bitter, unpleasant life. But responding to life
will make life pleasant, for response comes from the heart, while reaction is
induced from the mind. Instead of reacting to Cass’ violent action, Luigi
responds to the good deed of Cass. Instead of confessing the truth about Mason's murder, Luigi creates a believable lie and through this lie, he saves Cass and canalizes him in the right path.

Luigi's act of lying does not force us to regard him as a sinner, because his lie changes the behavior and the life style of an individual. He elevates the sinful Cass from a state of spiritual death and restores him to life. His act proves that love towards fellow human beings and all living beings is the root of all the good in the world and inhumanity to fellow human beings is the worst sin. The nobility in the character of Luigi is revealed through his advice to Cass: "If there is one thing of highest value, it is this: that the primary moral sin is self-destruction, the wish for death; the single good is respect for the force of life" (221). Through this advice, Styron urges the readers to become a part of the life force, a force which compels us toward good; toward the "birth right, to try to free people into the condition of love." (362)

By his lie, he knew that he could prevent Cass from great harm like that of not wallowing in self-pity, which in the past made him a failure in his art. The precise reason of Luigi for telling the lie is that "... if by now ... you have not learned something, ... then five years, ten years, fifteen years in jail will teach you nothing. Consider the good in yourself, consider hope, consider joy." (520)

From the behavior of Luigi, we realize the fact that virtue is that quality of generosity, which extends itself willingly to a man in distress. The
lie of Luigi has made Cass to view the world in a different way and to respond to it in an optimistic way. Luigi offers a valuable advice to Cass: “Everywhere man is in fetters; if man wills, he can free himself from the manacles of his own imprisonment” (499). Tennessee Williams’ view, “we’re all sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins” (7) is endorsed by Luigi, when he agrees to the views of “that English woman who opined that we are serving our sentences in solitary confinement” (550). It is because of the advice of Luigi, Cass changes his own self. From a doubtful and perplexed way of living, Cass emerges as a successful man, and cultivates the ability to love, to care for fellow human beings, to act justly and responsibly and to be kind and generous.

As Robert Philip opines: “Cass redeems himself through two acts—personal sacrifice in attempting to save the dying peasant Michele’s life and personal regeneration in succeeding in taking the life of the degenerate Mason Flagg” (193). Commenting on the successful progress of Cass, David Galloway observes as follows: “In triumphing over self, in defeating his sense of guilt, in establishing love for humanity, Cass has achieved a singular victory” (81). As the novel progresses, we are drawn closer to Cass. He must have felt that life is a learning process and by his mistakes Cass learns valuable lessons like solace can be obtained through self-knowledge and selfless love; that selflessness and self-sacrificing love are the greatest significant qualities, which provide identity to us as human beings.
The difference between *Lie Down in Darkness* and *Set This House On Fire* is that in the former novel, recognition of the self horrifies Peyton. All the characters except Maudie fail to overcome their selfishness, which prevents them from understanding each other. Aghast at the parental selfishness and through the recognition of her own self, Peyton commits suicide. But in *Set This House On Fire*, Cass discovers his self, learns to undo his selfishness and cultivates mastery over the self. Cass was dead spiritually when he was ignorant of his own self. Luigi induces his spiritual regeneration.

*Set This House On Fire* reveals the maturity of Styron's mind. The humanistic values of Styron find their expression through the sufferings of Cass. In the case of *Lie Down in Darkness*, there is no progress in the characters. In *Set This House On Fire*, Cass progresses from ignorance to enlightenment and attains solace of mind.

The saying of Cass in the end that "ripeness is all" (554) echoes the wisdom of the Fool in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and it reveals the maturity of his mind. It represents many things: it makes us to realize that this maturity is obtained through sorrows and sufferings, pains and pleasures which mould and shape us. It makes us to realize that in spite of all ills of life, man should master his fate and view life in a confident manner. An individual has to realize the fact that change should come from within oneself; it makes us to realize that forgiveness of sins is a source of salvation.
Styron’s writing makes us to feel that God spins a miserable existence for human beings on earth so that they should live in pain. Cass says, ‘Sometimes life is even worse than war” (321). Man is portrayed as a prisoner, unable to escape from the miserable existence.

Besides revealing the humanism of Styron, the novel Set This House On Fire portrays his philosophical views. Akin to the Hindu view of life that we should live a detached life, Styron advocates the idea of living a life without expectations; because, if our expectations are greater, the disappointments would also be greater. Styron observes thus: “… the higher you kite upward, the harder you hit the ground when you fall” (299-300). On the necessity of living a disciplined life, the writer warns: “[If you] waste away your substances while you’re young and you will live only to regret it” (312). Commenting on the noblest dream of mankind, he says it is “freedom and a full belly and a right to pursue his own way of happiness” (24) that do not cause pain to others.

There is a compelling need in the heart of every human being to express his selfhood, which is the most sacred aspect of his personality. The expression of the self can be achieved through love and sympathy to fellow human beings.

Helen Gardner in “Milton’s Satan and the Theme of Damnation in Elizabethan Tragedy” has commented that “the essence of tragedy is that it forces us to look at what we normally do not care to look and have not
invented for ourselves” (61) and exactly it is this task that Styron’s novels fulfill.

To conclude, we may say that though the evil in man is highlighted through his characters, Styron also portrays a little vision of good. In Lie Down in Darkness, Styron poses a question through the character of Peyton. She regrets: “Why is happiness such a precious thing? What have we done with our lives, so that everywhere we turn—no matter how hard we try not to—we cause other people sorrow?” (38). We realize that our every day life is filled with sorrows, suffering, misery, pain and anguish and we may readily agree with the views of Robert Frost in his poem, “Home Burial”:

But the world’s evil. I won’t have grief so
If I can change it. Oh, I won’t, I won’t! (111-112)

The novels of Styron provide a possible solution for the mitigation of the sorrows, sufferings and miseries of this world. In Sophie’s Choice, he strongly advocates the message, “Let your love flow out on all living things” (681). As Styron observes: “…we are all of a species, you and I and all of our ancestors, we came from the same womb, the same source and we are in effect brothers” (233). The best we can hope for in this world is to believe that our journey here will not be futile if we enrich our hearts with the fertilizer called Love and Compassion for fellow human beings, for it is love, responsibility and compassion that make life more purposeful than wealth and fame.