CHAPTER II
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CONCEPT OF SIN

The concept of sin has been dealt by many writers in various ways. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, sin is “an offence against God or against a religious or moral law” (1200). Hinduism describes sin as the result of Ignorance, Ego, Attachment, Aversion and Fear. Original sin as described in the Hindu Scriptures is Maya or Illusion or False Knowledge.

A man is born according to his past deeds, says Bhagavad-Gita. Chapter 4, verse 36 of the same book observes: “Even if thou art the most sinful of sinners, yet thou shalt verily cross all sins by the raft of knowledge”. The concept of rebirth is an elaborate form of expiation in Hinduism.

In The Mahabharata, Bhishma explains the origin of sin. He describes covetousness as the fountainhead of all hypocrisy in the world. This covetousness induces human beings to commit sins. From the viewpoint of Hinduism, it is a great sin to call a person a sinner, for it believes that every human being is an incarnation of divinity and an individual commits mistakes only because of ignorance.

In the Canto entitled “Anusasana Parva”, section CLXII of The Mahabharata, Bhishma says that when expiation is performed, sin dissolves away. One who feels the pangs of repentance and desires on contemplation
need not undergo the consequences of his/her sin. One becomes freed from one’s sins in proportion as one repents for them.

Swami Paramananda Bharati observes, “All sin originates from the love for the body and the ego. Otherwise, the jivatma, the individual soul, is by nature very pure. In this sense, the real culprits in sin are only the body and the ego. So the cleansing process consists in punishing the body and the ego.”

Christian theology describes Pride, Covetousness, Envy, Wrath, Gluttony, Sloth and Lechery as deadly sins. Old Testament describes transgression against the commands of God as sin. Pride is one of the most deadly sins because Satan is pride personified. In The Holy Bible, Proverb 16: 18 describe pride as sin. “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.” (482)

Infinite misery and sorrow springs from Envy. When we are jealous, we forget the good qualities of a person and we torment the person we love. Jealousy can give birth to hatred, betrayal and in extreme cases it may lead to murder. It is remarkable that Christianity describes human beings as sinful by birth; it also opines that sin is transmitted from generation to generation. The innate theory of sin, speaks of sin as a condition in which we are born. The sin of Adam is passed on to us through our parents. For an understanding of sin by example, the theory of Pelagius, a British monk and theologian who settled in Rome about 400 A. D, as summarized by Hoekema may be quoted here:
Adam was created neutral; neither good nor bad. Man today is born in the same condition. There is no such thing as original sin; there is no transmission of guilt from Adam to us... Sin is not a condition into which one is born. Human beings today have wills that are totally free; they can do either good or bad as they please. Adam set before his descendants a bad example. Most of us tend to imitate the bad example of our parents, brothers, and sisters, wives or husbands, friends and associates. (154-155)

The preaching of Christ—the incarnation of divine virtues and divine innocence, paved the way to man’s redemption. Christ offered to man the choice of confession which encompasses self-knowledge and self-realization of the sins committed by an individual. Confession suggests that man's salvation resides in his adherence to his inherited moral will. If man desires to regain the bliss and happiness of the Garden, he has to struggle hard to retain the innate good in him.

Karl Menninger observes: “Sin is transgression of the law of God; disobedience of the divine will; moral failure” (18). Further he opines, "the willful disregard or sacrifice of the welfare of others for the welfare or satisfaction of the self is an essential quality of the concept of sin.” (19)

Basilea Schlink opines: “Vanity is a great sin because it idolizes the ego. Our conceitedness wants others to admire our looks, our intelligence, our talents and our abilities and burn incense to them” (51). Campolo, a
sociologist, describes sin as "...attitudes, emotions and our behavior in ways that are destructive to ourselves and to those who are around us." (12-13)

Most recently, Schimmel has presented the view that many of the "sins ...are primarily concerned with what it means to be human and humane and the responsibilities that we have to fulfill if we want to be considered as such" (4). Marcus Clark describes sin as "ignorance, ignorance of others, ignorance of ourselves, and ignorance of our higher values."

Kierkegaard opines that "Sin is ignorance" and gives a Christian explanation of "weakness of will" as follows:

If someone does the right thing, then he certainly does not sin; and if he does not do what is right, then he did not understand it, either; if he had really and truly understood it, it would quickly have prompted him to do it; it would quickly have made him a chaldni figure for his understanding: ergo, sin is ignorance. (Hong, 93)

The concept of sin in the West carries certain theological Connotation, which varies from Hindu Philosophy. For example there is the idea of "original" or "inherent" sin, the result of Adam's disobedience to God in the Garden of Eden. This according to Christian theology, is shared by all people, and can only be removed by faith in Jesus. Hinduism does not hold this doctrine of original sin. Western theologies tend to consider sin as a
crime against God, whereas Hinduism views it as an act against dharma, moral order and one's own self.

Psychology describes the guilt that corrodes one's personality and inhibits one's development as sin. 'Aggressive' and 'Self-destructive' are the two adjectives that are usually associated with sinful behavior in psychology. An individual has to be honest with himself and with others. One can never deny the fact that every individual is bound by duties and responsibilities for his self, family, society and universe. By violating the moral and social codes of behavior, by his sinful actions, an individual may degenerate himself and acquire a stain on his soul. This degeneration does not mean the ruining of him alone; it can be regarded as an offence and insult to God, who bestowed his Being into him. In a nutshell, we may say, sin is that which destroys life and morality is that which sustains it.

The theme of sin and expiation has fascinated the eminent writers of literature from time immemorial. Aristotle defines ignorance as sin. Hirabayashi Takahiro states: "He [Aristotle] believed that the virtue of human beings is not only knowledge, but also the ability to govern the illogical side of the Human soul" (16). The puritan poet John Milton was agitated over the sin committed by our fore parents and he wrote Paradise Lost.

The great tragedies of Shakespeare portray sin from various angles. To name a few of his works, we may cite the example of Othello, King Lear, Macbeth and The Winter's Tale wherein the writer portrays suspicion,
ignorance, anger, avarice and jealousy as sins respectively. As expiation, Othello commits suicide; King Lear suffers and dies; Macbeth pays his life and Leontes loses his son and suffers for sixteen long years. Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter and T.S. Eliot’s The Family Reunion deal with the concept of sin and expiation in modern times.

Styron in all his works emphatically portrays the various forms of sins that prevail in today’s world; by presenting these sins, he aims to purify the society and to sustain humanity. His characters commit various sins because of ignorance, pride, self-pity, irresponsibility, indulgence, and also because of their inability to forgive others and themselves. A young prolific writer, who started his career at a very young age of twenty-six, Styron in Sophie’s Choice observes that as a writer he was “always attracted to morbid themes - suicide, rape, murder, military life, marriage and slavery.” (149)

In this book, Stingo in the persona of writer-narrator, speaks about the creative spark of fire that induced him to write Lie Down in Darkness. He recalls the day on which he received a letter from his father: “It announced the death by suicide, at the age of twenty two, of a beautiful girl with whom I had been hopelessly in love during several of the rocky years of my early adolescence. Her name was Maria Hunt, and at fifteen I had been so feverish in my infatuation for her that it seems in retrospect, a small scale madness” (62). In This Quiet Dust and Other Writings, Styron describes her as the source of his “earliest and most aching infatuation.” (329).
Commenting on her death, Styron in *Sophie's Choice* observes:

One of the most poignant aspects of the account [of her death in his father’s letter] was that her body had for complicated and obscure reasons gone unidentified, had been buried in a pauper’s grave and only after a matter of weeks had been disinterred and sent back for final burial in Virginia. (63)

Reading the letter, Stingo in the same book feels that “there was a great deal of unresolved guilt and hatred pervading that sad home” (64); In *This Quiet Dust and Other Writings*, Styron describes the family of Maria Hunt as a family which is “filled with discord and strife”. Though he was “haunted and appalled” (329), by the news of her death, later he felt that “she had died just at that moment when I most needed that wondrous psychic jolt known as inspiration”; when he was able to shake off the shock, “he took a professional view of her grotesque ending” (*Sophie's Choice*, 150), and wrote *Lie Down in Darkness*.

The title of his first novel *Lie Down in Darkness* (1925) was taken from Sir Thomas Browne’s *Urn Burial*. A quotation from the same serves as an epigraph of the novel: “...and therefore it cannot be long before we lie down in darkness and have our light in ashes. Since the brother of death daily haunts us with dying mementos, time that grows old in itself bids us hopes no longer; diuturnity is a dream and folly of expectation”. The original title for this novel was *Inheritance of Night*. Later, it was changed as *Lie Down in Darkness*. 
Commenting on the significance of this title, Robert K. Morris and Irving Malin observe: “Sex, death, guilt, suicide, sin and loss lie within the title of the novel” (40). The comment of Eugene O’Neil about the darkness of life in *Mourning Becomes Electra* can be applied to the characters of *Lie Down in Darkness*, for they indulge in ignorance, “renouncing the day in which normal people live... Perpetual night... darkness of death in life. That is the fitting habitat for Guilt” (24). The characters of *Lie Down in Darkness* exist in ignorance. These characters want to escape from the awareness of their frightful existence and hence they lie down in darkness (ignorance), willfully cherishing their hurtful memories.

Styron in *This Quiet Dust and Other Writings* describes *Lie Down in Darkness* as a novel which deals with “four tragically fated people- father, mother, sister and the girl herself, all doomed by fatal hostility, and misunderstanding, all helpless victims of a domestic tragedy” (329). Stingo, in *Sophie’s Choice* comments on *Lie Down in Darkness*, as a novel, which deals with:

The desperate wreck of the father...a chronic lush, and also something of a womanizer, the mother slightly unbalanced and a grim pietist, known throughout the upper middle class country club and high Episcopal echelons of the city for her long suffering tolerance of her husband’s mistress, and the daughter...doomed and a victim from the outset through all the tangled misunderstandings, petty hatreds, and vindictive hurts
that are capable of making the family life the closest thing to hell on earth. (150-151)

In *Lie Down in Darkness*, Milton describes the wife's side of the family as the "family of warriors" (281), which constitutes one another's hell. Their home becomes a kind of prison from which they are unable to escape. These characters deny the simple pleasures of life magnify little disappointments, sigh and sulk and react to events, which affect them as individuals.

The novel *Lie Down in Darkness* begins at Port Warwick railway station, where the major characters - Milton Loftis, Helen, Dolly Bonner and Carey Carr have gathered to receive the corpse of Peyton. The time taken to transport the corpse from the railway station to the cemetery makes the characters to recollect some of the crucial incidents that had occurred in Peyton's life. Through their recollection, Styron exposes the emotional turmoil undergone by Peyton. The story is revealed through the stream of consciousness technique.

Ihab Hassan opines: "Milton Loftis, his wife Helen and their daughter Peyton are all locked in a domestic tragedy in which love must wear the face of guilt and the search for childhood innocence must acquaint the seeker with death" (125). The characters of *Lie Down in Darkness* - Milton, Helen and Peyton - by their irresponsibility and unforgiving quality have created sufferings, isolation and death in the family.
The maxim that “the fruits of excess are always evil” fits in with the preoccupation of the novelist in this book - *Lie Down in Darkness*. Commenting on the novel, Jan .B. Gordon observes: “Everyone in the novel *Lie Down in Darkness* seems to be afflicted with illness, either spiritual or physical, so that the entire novel comes to resemble a hospital room” (173). The sickness of these characters could be attributed to their abnormal attachment for the past.

Commenting on *Set This House On Fire*, Daniel Ross observes:

[It]...raises powerful questions...about how man, with his limited vision and understanding, can distinguish good from evil. Therefore, what matters most in this novel is not the nature of actions, but the ability of the perpetrator to redeem himself- to repent and find cathartic relief from sin. (5)

The title for his second novel, *Set This House On Fire* (1960), was taken from a sermon of Donne- *To the Earle of Carlyle and His Company at Sion*. The ability of the lower class white southerner to rise above his guilt and despair and to discover significant values about life is portrayed emphatically in this novel. The body of human beings can be compared to a house and the diseases, which infect the body, could be described as God’s violent ways of shaking a man. Through this testing, He may purify and elevate the soul of a man.

Peter Leverett receives a letter from Mason Flagg, inviting him for a stay at Sambuco, Italy. Accepting this invitation, Peter sets out to visit
Mason. On the way, he meets with an accident with a one-eyed Luciano. The terrible events that had happened on a single day in Sambuco village form the plot of *Set This House On Fire*. The quest of Peter about the mysterious circumstances leading to the death of Mason forms the first part of the novel. The rape and murder of Francesca that led Cass to murder Mason Flagg form the nucleus. The feeling of guilt felt by Cass Kinsolving and how he conquered them are discussed in the second part of the novel.

In *Sophie's Choice* Styron defines his aim in writing the book. He observes: “I seek that essential region of the soul where absolute evil confronts brotherhood” (8). The title of the book refers not only to the choice made by Sophie in the camp as that of losing her daughter for her son; it also refers to the choice made by Sophie to commit suicide with Nathan, rather than living with Stingo.

*Sophie's Choice* can be described as a story that deals with two lovers- Nathan Landau a “senior researcher at Charles Pfizer Company” (92), and Sophie a beautiful Polish survivor of Auschwitz. To Stingo, Nathan is a man who “posed riddles of personality” (159), an embodiment of everything “attractive and envied” (249), “a person of generosity, mind-and-life enlarging mentor, pal, savior, sorcerer, who was utterly, fatally glamorous” (251). Along with the love story of Nathan and Sophie Zawistowska, Styron fabricates the historical background of World War II, and the European Holocaust, highlighting the evil in human beings. The tale of Sophie is told in bits and fragments, occasionally in her words, but for
most of the time, through the words of Stingo which reveal "the perplexity, amazement, recollected terror, recaptured grief, rage, hatred, loss, love and resignation", (543-544) experienced by Sophie at the concentration camp. Commenting on this book, Rhodo Sirlin observes: "Styron shows how women are often the victims of men..." (39). It also describes the essential tendency of mankind to cling to another human being for support in distress.

The wise words of Leo Tolstoy in Anna Karenina that "All happy families are more or less like each other; but every unhappy family is unhappy in its own particular way"(1), become true of Lie Down in Darkness, Set This House On Fire, and Sophie's Choice, for these novels portray unhappy families. The events that occur in the life of these characters and their impact on them make us to wonder at the mystery of human nature and fate.

Judith Ruderman, comments on the impact of reading the novels of William Styron: "... a bleak vision of life remains. The bleakness lies not in the fact that death and decay are inevitable, but rather in that human beings consistently make messes of the short time they have" (49). The novels of Styron can be regarded as a journey towards self-discovery and they force us to become aware of the limitations of human beings. His characters are portrayed as the prey of their own actions. The readers may agree with the view of Robert K Morris and Irving Malin, that in the world of Styron: "class fails, love fails, sex fails, religion fails, and psychotherapy fails" (19). The inner turmoil, guilt, and loneliness expressed by his characters arouse
pity and dread in the reader. As stated by Styron in an interview with Robert K. Morris, these novels deal with "humanly contrived situations, which cause people to live in wretched unhappiness." (56)

Commenting on Styron's characters, John Kenny Crane observes as follows: "To my mind, the root of all evil in Styron's universe is the inability to feel guilt for one's actions" (25). But a careful analysis of the works of William Styron reveals the fact that the writer has portrayed his characters as victims of guilt.

In general, sins are committed for the sake of selfishness, greed, self-delusion, self-assertion and self-preservation. The sins in the selected novels of Styron - Lie Down in Darkness, Set This House On Fire, and Sophie's Choice can be classified as the sin of despair, deception of the senses through alcohol, Nembutal and adultery, sin of pride, jealousy, lying, rape, murder, suicide, inhumanity to fellow human beings, and domination of one human being over another.

Francis Bacon in his "On the Nature of Things" observes as follows: "The greatest hindrance and aberration of the human understanding proceeds from the dullness, in competency, and the deception of the senses..." (92). In accordance with the views of Francis Bacon, the characters of William Styron use religion, alcoholism, and art to deceive their senses.

Milton Loftis and Peyton 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 despair, and alcoholism. Helen in Lie
Down in Darkness commits the sin of pride, jealousy and lack of forgiveness. Milton Loftis, Peyton, Mason, Cass, Nathan, Sophie and Stingo try to escape from the awareness of reality through sex and drink; Helen tries to escape through Nembutal and religion. Milton, Peyton, Cass, Mason, Sophie and Stingo commit the sin of adultery. Mason Flagg, Sophie and Nathan are liars. Mason commits the sin of raping. Nathan and Mason dominate fellow human beings. Peyton, Nathan, and Sophie commit the sin of suicide. Cass attempts suicide, and commits the sin of murder.

"To despair is sin" observes Christianity. Milton in Lie Down in Darkness commits the sin of despair. The opening pages of the novel portray Milton Loftis as a desperate man, shattered by the suicide of his beautiful young daughter Peyton Loftis. At the railway station, he is "awaiting the symbol of his doom", "the evidence of all his errors and of all his love" (14), the corpse of his daughter which the train would bring. While waiting he recalls the anguished moments he had with Helen, begging her to accompany him to Port Warwick railway station to receive the corpse of Peyton, which was coldly denied by Helen.

He realizes that his whole life had been in the nature of "a hang over" (152) and this realization forces him to feel desperate. His feeling of despair is intensified by the awareness that he is dependant on his wife on financial matters. He had great hopes when he started his career as a lawyer. He was sure that he would become a politician, a great man, a great lawyer and a great poet. At the very least, he thought that he would be the
Commonwealth's attorney. Contrary to his expectation, he just received a marginal income from his law practice and felt that it was an "increasing bore" (173). If he sets out on his own practice, he knew very well that, he could never earn enough to maintain his style of living. His financial dependence made him to regard himself as a bloodsucker, a parasite, sucking his wife's money. Milton feels that the greatest single burden of his life was not merely the loss of love for his wife, but the constant guilty knowledge of his debt to her. The birth of Maudie, the handicapped child, induced doubts in his mind. His despair is increased when he realizes that he has completely neglected Maudie. "In all my life, I had given such little thought to her." (189)

The loveless life led by them intensifies the feeling of despair felt by him. About the nature of their life, Milton feels that he has "lived with her, not so much in a state of matrimony as in a gentle state of irritation, together like the negative poles of a magnet, gradually but firmly repelling each other" (93). In a moment of introspection, Milton feels that he is no more than a collapsed balloon:

Most people in the midst of disaster have got one hope that lingers on some misty horizon - the possibility of love, money coming; the assurance that time cures all hurts, no matter how painful. But Loftis, gazing out at the meadow had no such assurance; his deposit, it seemed on all of life's happiness had been withdrawn in full and his heart had shriveled within him like a collapsed balloon. (102)
The portrayal of Milton’s life, devoid of hopes brings to our mind the poetic lines of Peeran in “A Call from Unknown”, where he insists on the necessity of possessing hope and faith in life:

We need hopes to overcome failures
desolate feelings and to turn our blues
To overcome the bitter taste of defeat;
To maintain the garden of virtues. (1-4)

Both Helen and Milton live a life of isolation. It is more than regrettable that their family atmosphere is filled with hatred and violence. The disharmony in their life is due to the irresponsible nature of Milton. His characteristic behavior of evading his responsibility is revealed when he is waiting for the corpse of Peyton. While waiting, he thought “I won’t think too much about this ... Easy ... if I only think of this second, this moment the train won’t come at all...” (13), and he tries to fool himself by thinking that he is not responsible for the death of Peyton. With all his wishful thinking, he knew very well that the train would come, bringing “the final proof of fate and circumstances.” (14)

When he conveyed the death news of Peyton to Helen, he was “wearing the vaguely startled looks of a man, who is plotting a way out, an escape” (25). At the age of fifty, he realizes that his life has been in the nature of hangover. As Styron says, “Had he the solace of knowing that he was an alcoholic, things would have been brighter, ... but he was not, he assured himself, alcoholic, only self indulgent...” (152). Being conscious of
the failure of his married life, and to escape from bitter reality, he deceives himself by thinking about Peyton or Dolly Bonner. His passive resignation to fate is revealed when he questions himself—“What else could he do except stay married? What else” (153). Another example of his passive resignation to fate is when he consoles himself by saying: “What has happened had happened and what might happen would happen and so he took a drink and let his knee rest against Dolly’s, safe in the all inclusive logic of determinism” (97). Again at the wedding ceremony of Peyton, Milton feels an insatiable desire for whisky, drinks excessively, and kisses Peyton which leads to miserable calamities. A bitter truth dawns on his mind:

…it had always been he himself who had been at the focus of these appalling, baffling female emotions… None of his actions, whether right or wrong, had caused this tragedy, so much as the pure fact of himself, his very existence, interposed weaponless and defenseless in no-man’s-land between two desperate, warring female machines. (284)

He becomes aware of the fact that he has been fooling himself all these days by believing that “in spite of everything, these two women really did love each other” (284). He chides himself, “… hadn’t he known all along that they hated and despised each other? Had he to spend 20 years deceiving him, piling false hope upon false hope…” (283)
Peyton in *Lie Down in Darkness* commits the sin of despair. She feels desperate because of the excessive attachment of her father and the extreme hatred and jealousy of her mother. Alienated from the parents, her husband, and from her own self, Peyton's life bears testimony to the comment of Scoby in Graham Greene's fiction, *The Heart of the Matter* that: "couldn't we have committed our first major sin at seven, have ruined ourselves for love or hate at ten, have clutched at redemption on a fifteen years old death bed..." (52). Experiencing a terrible sense of loneliness, she wanders from one place to another, feels desperate, becomes alcoholic, commits adultery and in the end commits suicide. Sigmund Freud in his "Development of the Libido and Sexual Organization" comments: "One of the most important sources of the sense of guilt which so torments people is to be found in the Oedipus complex" (582). To have a clear understanding of this quotation, it becomes necessary to define the term "Oedipal" and "Electra" complexes. Psychology informs us that the father usually prefers the daughter, while the mother prefers the son. *The Encyclopedia Americana* defines the term "Oedipal complex" as the "condition in which through abnormal circumstances, a male develops an excessive love for his mother, usually accompanied by a corresponding hatred for his father" (644). Electra complex can be defined as an excessive attachment of the daughter with the father wishing to re-place and inherit the place of the mother, usually accompanied by an intense hatred for the mother. In *Lie Down in Darkness*,...
it is remarkable that the father and the daughter develop an incestuous attachment with each other.

Maxwell Geismar aptly remarks: "Lie down in Darkness deals with the story of an illicit oedipal relationship between father and daughter" (242). Many incidents that are described in the book portray Milton as a Paedo-phile. Peyton too observes: "I think we've got a Freudian attachment" (235). She is aware of their incestuous relationship and her feeling of guilt is revealed in her interior monologue. It also reveals the painful experiences undergone by Peyton in her childhood days. Remembering the innocent childhood days Peyton observes “…my memory of flowers and summer and larkspur is conjoined equally with pain” (383-384). This pain undoubtedly is caused by the excessive attachment of Milton and the intense hatred and jealousy of Helen.

There are adequate evidences in the novel that bear testimony to the incestuous attachment between father and daughter. As a child, she has wondered, “Could there ever be a love like ours” (363). When Peyton and Milton were in the Bell tower, she was scared by the shudders of timbers and as she clung to him, he smoothed the dust from her and kissed her. Styron comments on the feelings felt by Milton as follows: “…he doesn’t know why his heart pounds so nor, when he kisses her again in an agony of love, why she should push him so violently away with her warm small hands…” (290). On another occasion, Peyton dressed as the spirit of light was sitting on the lap of her father and when she got down from him she
realized that his "face was red and tense like a baby when it goes off in its diapers" (359). On her sixteenth birthday, she discovered her father's affair with Dolly and feels that he has betrayed her. On the morning of Christmas, Milton kissed and awoke Peyton. Alarmed by the latent passion that was explicit in his action, Peyton pushed him away.

Peyton's wedding ceremony becomes an exhibition of the phallic love that exists between the father and daughter. The behavior of Milton-kissing his daughter, fondling, gazing at her and admiring her beauty- makes us to feel that he is more a lover than a father. Again at Peyton's wedding ceremony, Milton kept "...kissing her in front of everyone much more than a father" (286). Within five minutes, he had kissed her twice, and while the wedding ceremony was on, he had not taken his eyes off. "They had held hands once, and it was as if by that touch magically she had erased his tension and anxiety and comforted him..." (279). On the wedding day of Peyton, he kissed "her helplessly. She lay tender and unresisting against his shoulder; he breathed the perfume in her hair and was stricken by beauty at the sight of a gardenia pinned there, nestling just beneath his left eye. "'Bunny', she said finally, pushing away from him, 'you are such a demonstrative old bum. Come on, quit it now. I've got lipstick on your neck'" (262). When he saw Peyton and Harry kiss each other, "he was split up the middle with a violent, jealous tenderness such as he had rarely felt before." (278)
Appreciating the charm of his daughter on her wedding day, Milton reveals the ugly thoughts in his mind. A repulsive feeling towards this father-lover is induced in the mind of the readers, when we analyze the incestuous thought in his mind:

...he saw Peyton, those solid curved hips trembling ever so faintly; he thought desperately, hopelessly, of something he could not admit to himself, but did: of now being above-most animal and horrid, but loving- some one young and dear that he had loved ... Yes, dear God, he thought (and he thought dear God, what am I thinking?) the flesh too, the wet hot flesh, straining like a beautiful, bloody savage. (271)

After the marriage, Milton felt that Peyton was "irretrievable, lost forever, that he had no claims on her, anymore...now, she was owned by someone else" (307). Thinking of Peyton and ‘this boy’ together, Milton felt that his heart was wrung with pain. Milton’s attachment with the daughter is revealed in the incident where he gives his ring to Peyton. Later, Peyton ruefully says to Dickcartwright that her father has lost her. All these incidents reveal the incestuous attachment between father and daughter.

Robert H Fossum comments on the impact of Milton’s incestuous love for Peyton as follows: “The effect of these experiences on Peyton is self hatred and a double edged guilt – guilt for desiring the father and for having denied him. To assuage the latter, she lies down in darkness with other fathers” (16 –17). Peyton’s remembrance of backaches on her marriage day
saddens Milton and he questions himself why he had to worry so much about her happiness. It infuriated him that he should worry so much about Peyton’s happiness.

John Kenny Crane commenting on the relationship of Milton and Peyton observes as follows: “Milton needs Peyton as a surrogate love. He forces as much physical contact with her as she dares, hangs on as possible to watch her undress ... has her call him as Bunny.... In doing so, he has created a love, which is not entirely healthy for Peyton’s development.” (87-88)

Sigmund Freud in his essay “Feminity” comments about the two stages in a girl child’s identification with her mother figure:

The pre-Oedipal ... which takes her [the mother] as a model and the Oedipal, which tries to get rid of her.... But the phase of the tender Pre – Oedipal stage is a decisive one. It paves the way for her acquisition of those characteristics that will later enable her to play her part in the sexual function adequately and carry out her inestimable social activities. (168)

It is a pity that this pre-oedipal stage does not occur in Peyton’s childhood. She remembers the spanks she received from her mother, because she made Bunny to cut her lovely hair short. Peyton remembers the party in her uncle’s home, where Helen sealed her in a dark room with only a child’s fearsome conscience. When she cried out loudly, it was Milton who came from the party and lied next to her. She remembers the screams of Helen,
from behind the mimosa trees, when her father offered her drink. Since the pre-oedipal stage did not occur in Peyton’s childhood, she is unable to develop warm friendship or love and it is precisely this characteristic of hers, which made Dr. Straussaman say that she was “incapable of sexual fidelity” (368). The anguished statement of Peyton to Harry that “…if you want to know why I am like this, it’s because I don’t love you and I never have. Not because of you or anything like that, but just because I don’t love and I can’t love and isn’t that too bad?” (236) Coheres with the above-mentioned psychological truth.

We may say that Peyton’s sin of despair is also induced by the hatred and jealousy of Helen. Frustrated by Milton’s affair with Dolly and his excessive attachment with Peyton, Helen considers Peyton as her rival. Added to this, is the fact that Peyton was young and beautiful and these two things together caused anguish in Helen. In her view, her young and buoyant daughter becomes “a shameless little seducer, who used her father’s love to get everything she wants in life, who half killed her own sister through negligence … Who used her father’s love, played on it like a sheer music box, rubbed herself up against him until he was half crazy…” (300). The feelings felt by Helen sum up her attitude towards her daughter.

Peyton and Melvin, once while playing tied Maudie with a rope. After extricating her, Helen gently placed Maudie in Ella Swan’s arms, whirled savagely and gave Peyton “a hard vicious slap across the cheek”
Peyton, the shrewd and sensitive child, understands the stiffness and resentment of the mother and becomes intimate with the father.

On the eve of Peyton’s departure to college, watching Peyton and Milton Loftis through the window, Helen felt that her husband has betrayed her through infidelity, while the daughter has betrayed her through vice and meanness. Leaving Maudie in her room, Helen came down to the garden and started discussing about Peyton, going to school. Peyton responded in monosyllabic words and Helen feeling insulted, decided not to accompany Peyton to college the next day.

When Peyton offered to bring Maudie down, she felt hesitant to allow her. She should have felt relieved but she had strange feelings: “Usurping my place. That’s what; it’s not enough if she [Peyton] play[s] with Milton but now she goes to Maudie too” (123). When Peyton let Maudie fall, Helen thought that Peyton was “showing her independence, the little devil” (129) and felt that Peyton had let Maudie fall intentionally. Later, she prayed to God that He should give her logic to direct blame in proper direction.

On the eve of Christmas, Helen tried to make Peyton stay at home because her brother Edward had come. Disobeying her, Peyton attended a party with Dick Cartwright. Returning from the Church, Helen created hell, by finding fault with Peyton for having come home with a drunken boy. Milton felt that it was “like a house in which some one was lying gravely ill” (163). After their frustrated and desperate quarrel with each other for what seemed as Peyton’s insult to Uncle Edward, they were eating the Christmas
dinner under a "fog of hostility" (168). This brings to our mind the paradoxical comment of T.S. Eliot in The Family Reunion:

What is more formal than a family dinner?

An official occasion of uncomfortable people who meet very seldom, making conversation. (1. 2. 21-23.)

At the table, when Peyton spilled a glass of water, Helen "mopped it with an air of infinite weariness" (169). Helen's response to Peyton and Maudie differs widely. When the daughters praised turkey, the special dish of Christmas, responding to Maudie, Helen beamed with happiness and with an adoring look, she said, "Thank you darling"; responding to Peyton she said, "thank you" and "her eyes fell only on the walls."(169)

The hatred that exists between Helen and her daughter reaches its zenith at the marriage ceremony of Peyton, which to Carey represents a "symbolic affirmation of a moral order in the world" (248). Smothering her with kisses, Milton tried to embrace Peyton. She held him off without even a look. By her silence, she had erected "a curtain of stone" (168) between them. Looking at Peyton, Milton understood that he had somehow hurt her. The snubbing expression of Peyton and the anguished look on Milton's face made Helen to quarrel with Peyton. Exchange of poisonous words forced them to violent action and Peyton scratches and claws at Helen's face in such a way that the skin peels away.
Narrating this incident to Harry, Peyton says: “I went deep when I did it. I want to remember it always. The blood coming out, the way the skin peeled away; I could feel the skin peeling away beneath the nail, and then it broke” (316). Peyton understands that she has lately become a symbol, which Helen cannot tolerate. Helen’s treatment and her attitude hurt Peyton and we feel that Peyton is justified when she says, “I don’t hate anything that you have not forced me to hate you and damn you, you have forced me to hate you” (312). She understands that Helen hates everything—“animal, vegetable and mineral” (312). Milton too is aware of his excessive attachment and Helen’s ambivalent relation with Peyton. Hence, he requests Harry to take care of Peyton, because nobody has ever loved her in the proper way. These above mentioned incidents reveal the hatred of the mother for her daughter, which induces Peyton to commit the sin of despair.

Freud in his, “Explanations, Applications, and Orientations” opines: the “first years of infancy are, for a number of reasons of special importance, (869) [because] as he observes in “Introduction” “only the childhood experience can give explanation for the sensitivity to later trauma” (14). This view of Freud becomes true of Peyton and Cass, for both of them commit the sin of despair and feel self-hatred because of the unpleasant events that had happened in their childhood.

Cass Kinsolving, “the drunken rascal” (444) in Set This House On Fire who regards himself as a “terrible blob, the master of the house, this vegetable, this wreck, this painter without a portfolio” (283) commits the sin
of despair and self-hatred. With all his mastery over Montaigne, who stated that "the most bestial emotion that can afflict a man is self hatred" (327), Cass is unable to get rid of his self-hatred and despair. Like Milton in Lie Down in Darkness, Cass commits the sin of despair, self-hatred, being a drunkard, and an irresponsible father and these sins force him to feel desperate in life.

Living his life in an alcoholic daze he wastes his talents by wandering about and pitying himself. When he was in Europe, he felt that he was "half a person, trapped by terror, trapped by booze, trapped by self, ...a bag full of corruption held together by one single poisonous thought" (66) and that was to destroy himself in the most agonizing way. He felt sick as a dog inside his soul and he couldn't figure out from where that sickness came. As Cass himself says "it wasn't Mason who was the wicked party. It started in my own heart.... on the day I was born" (278) and feels that he is a sinful man by birth.

Like the classicists, Cass believed in the inherited limitation and the innate sin of man. In an excellent way, Cass analyses the cause of his self-hatred and sickness as follows: "what I was really sick from was despair and self loathing and greed and selfishness and spite" (302). He traces the origin of his sickness to "deprivation"- "I had deprived myself of all belief in the good in myself- the good which is very close to God." (302)

Once in Paris, when he was returning from a whore's house, he experienced a strange sense of panic that something will happen and that he
may be getting the right punishment. To escape from that desperate feeling, he “got into bed and pulled the blanket over his head and lay there trembling and whining like some miserable old woman who thinks she hears someone outside trying to break into the house.” (303)

Cass’ feeling of despair increases because of his awareness of his failure in his profession. He knows that he is talented, and that he is unable to use it. This fact made his misery much worse, for it made him to feel like a man who “suddenly had both hands chopped off at the wrist” (280). Looking at the art galleries, and the modern paintings, he felt guiltier because those artists had produced at least something. Examining himself, he realizes that he couldn’t escape from his “no talent excuse” (280). Unable to qualm his conscience, Cass invents all sorts of other answers - such as that the time is not ripe, society is against him and that painting has been supplanted by photography.

Cass remembers that he had done something “awful, monstrous, and abominable” (418), when he was fifteen years old. He feels that this crime had “dogged him and terrified him” (306). His feeling of despair is intensified by the dreams he dreamed. They reveal him as a man who has committed a notorious, nameless and enormous crime. Wherever he goes, he feels that his crime dogs him and that he can never mitigate his crime. He recalls that he had accompanied Lonnie to Crowfoot’s house, at Stony Creek, in search of a radio where he felt the presence of “poverty, naked and horrid and unremitting” (416). Their fancy that the Negro might have
hidden it, made them to become furious and so with frantic rage, frustration and resentment, swept away every jar, bottle and can of beans off the shelf. They destroyed the photographs in the house, kicked at "the flimsy kitchen table ...brought the whole clutter of china cups and plates and saucers, sugar in cans, flour and meal and bacon fat, down to the floor in one monstrous and godawful detonation" (417). Cass assisted Lonnie to topple down the stove and the dishpan. This act, committed by him when he was young, made him to feel guilty. Added to this, he feels guilty because of being an American, since Americans are rich. Being a white man, he feels guilty about the condition of the black slaves.

Nathan, Sophie and Stingo in Sophie's Choice commit the sin of despair. Stingo, with all his itching for writing, feels desperate when he is unable to write. His inability to change the pathetic condition of Sophie increases his feelings of despair. Towards the end of the novel, when Sophie deserts him to join Nathan, Stingo feels dejected in life. In the case of Peyton, the desperate feelings are induced by the incestuous attachment of her father and insane hatred of her mother. We may contrast this incestuous attachment of Peyton with the feelings felt by Sophie towards her father.

Sophie in Sophie's Choice realizes her hatred for her father, because the renowned professor has made his daughter as a stenographer for him. The fact that Sophie had to recall her arrest and confinement in the concentration camp increases the feelings of agony in her. Recalling her past and speaking about it would undoubtedly cause her "physical anguish -
like tearing open a nearly healed sore or trying to hobble on a broken limb, incompletely mended” (193). The despair and anguish felt by Sophie while in Camp and even after her release is immense. Added to this, she feels desperate whenever Nathan flays her for the suspected infidelity. It is true, she has tried her feminine charms to escape from the horrors of the camp but it was of no avail. The desperate feeling of guilt induced by the realization of her behavior arouses sympathy in the heart of the readers. Recalling her behavior in the camp, and unable to forgive herself, she attempts suicide; when she is saved by Stingo, she cries out pathetically: “You should have let me drown Stingo. No one is filled with such badness. No one! No one has such badness.” (485)

Sophie has to confess her past to Stingo and at times to Nathan and these confessions induce feelings of despair in her. This despair is further intensified by the fact that she cannot confess all the sufferings endured by her in the concentration camp to Nathan, because she feels that his love for her is immense and the confession of her past sufferings may induce feelings of agony in Nathan. Her awareness that “She was so chaotically in love with Nathan, that it was like dementia” (198) prompted her to spare “groundless pain” (198) to him, and at the same time, she is in need of a person to whom she can confide the circumstances and happenings in her past life and this feeling makes her to endow the role of a priest to Stingo, to whom she can confide her past truly (to a certain extent).
Sophie feels she can never get rid of the guilt of using her feminine charms in alluring Hoss towards her. As she herself confesses, “This guilt is something I cannot get rid of and I think I never will” (383). The desperate longing to escape from the concentration camp and if possible, to have a glimpse of her son, just for a single minute and to hold him in her arms made Sophie to stoop to this level.

Nathan feels desperate over the imagined infidelity of Sophie. Whenever he happens to hear news about the ill treatment extended to Jews, he becomes violent and vents out his feelings on Sophie, who is a survivor of the camp. Being a Jew, Nathan feels desperate about the inhuman treatment extended to Jews throughout the European countries.

Added to the sin of despair, these characters - Milton, Peyton, Cass Kinsolving, Mason Flagg, Nathan, Sophie and Stingo - commit the sin of deceiving their senses through alcohol. As Styron observes in The Confessions of Nat Turner, the above-mentioned characters regard alcohol as the comforter to the “lonely and outcast, an anodyne for pain, a shelter against the chill wind or remorseless oncoming death.” (70)

Commenting on the theme of alcoholism in the novels of Styron, William J. Scheick observes as follows:

It is significant that the rainbow world of drunkenness provides no faith at all...By proffering the illusion that the time’s flow can be halted or transcended, religion and drunkenness promote an empty hope in man’s ability to float
safely in or on the flood of reality... religion creates a prevalent illusion of promise, drunkenness offers only an evasion of despair. (250)

Alcohol, sex, adultery, art and religion create an illusion in the mind of these characters - that they may drown themselves in oblivion. Milton couldn't help being a "solitary drinker" (202), because as John Alridge observes: "...only with alcohol can he bear the rich domineering wife, to whose purse strings he is tied" (106). At the railway station, the awareness of returning to Helen frightened him and so to escape from bitter reality, he drinks a bottle of whisky, like "a frightened baby's sucking of a nipple." (242)

During Peyton's wedding ceremony, Milton felt an insatiable desire to drink, to drown himself utterly in whisky, and felt that his conscience was like a drowning man in the flood of whisky. Peyton started drinking alcohol even at the age of sixteen. Helen drowns her senses through Nembutal and sleep and by visiting the church frequently. Wendy, the mother of Mason Flagg, is also a drunkard. Cass seeks the aid of alcohol to escape from the dire needs of his family and the bitter reality of poverty stricken life. Cass himself admits that he is "trapped by booze" (66) two thirds of the time. Drinking, he became stone blind.

The characters of Sophie's Choice too, drown themselves in whisky. Stingo at times consumes half a dozen glasses of beer. When Nathan was torturing Sophie, to muster up his courage, Stingo swallows "five or may be
six medium-sized glasses of Rheingold” (283). Needless to say Nathan and Sophie consume bottles and bottles of alcohol as part of celebration or as a means to escape from the torturous realities of life.

The wise comment of the clown in Twelfth Night that a drunken man is like a “drowned man, a fool and a mad man: one draught above heat makes him a fool; the second mads him; and a third drowns him” (Shakespeare, 1. 5.123 -125), becomes true of these characters, for most of the time they drown themselves in alcohol.

Milton, Peyton, Cass Kinsolving, Mason Flagg, Sophie and Stingo commit the sin of adultery. Analyzing the novel Lie Down in Darkness, the readers may readily agree with the fact that Milton commits the sin of adultery and alcoholism because he is perpetually conscious of the failure of his married life. Milton is aware of the fact that he can never lean on his wife, who, for most of the time rejects him. A walk, down his memory lane makes him to recall his adolescent days and he becomes aware of the morality he has violated and the guilt he has incurred with his drink and adultery. He remembers that he has jilted Audrey and that “It had been so simple at that age to be cruel, since eighteen has no heart” (194). At the age of nineteen, he was a campus character known as a “blow” (15) and he was pleasantly surprised to find that he had performed so well, considering the time spent drunk and in the town whorehouse which catered mainly to college boys.
When Helen obstinately refused to accompany him to Port Warwick railway station, Milton requested Dolly Bonner to accompany him. As Dolly sat beside him, in the limousine, he tried his best to ignore, wanted to avoid conversing with her; and when the limousine stopped, he went away from her to indulge in loneliness and self-pity. Intuitively, Dolly felt that he might leave her once for all.

Most obviously he takes Dolly as his mistress, a woman whom he does not love, but caters to the purpose of filling up the void created by Helen in his life, and also to take revenge against Helen. When Dolly came home in the absence of Helen, he took her to Helen’s room just to show his vengeance. His irresponsible nature is revealed, when conscious of his failure, he tried to curse himself but couldn’t and found himself cursing “the obstinate female flesh which had destroyed his conscience even more brutally than time” (194). Added to the fear of loneliness, was the fact that Dolly was submissive and she worshipped him. It was for this reason he loved her. “It had been that way from the beginning - he talked and she listened; There was an under current of emotion they were obliged to call love” (43). We may say that loneliness drives him to commit adultery through which he hopes to derive some solace. Marc L Ratner aptly observes: “His adultery with Dolly is his rather banal rebellion against Helen’s Puritanism and her castrating self righteousness” (123). Hence he tries to escape through adultery and alcohol.
Peyton commits the sin of adultery because Peyton loves her father and hates her mother. She maintains an ambivalent relationship with Harry. Freud in his "The Psychology of Woman" observes: "The husband, who had in the first instance inherited his position from his father, comes in the course of time to inherit the position of the mother as well" (863). At times, she loves Harry. But, for most of the time, she enacts her behavior with Helen. She cannot give selfless love to Harry because she has not received such love from her parents. It is precisely this behavior of Peyton that prompts Harry to say, "You are a Helen with her obsessions directed in a different way" (353). That is why she says to Harry, "I married you because I need you" (319). Like Helen, she is unforgiving -"something in me that was wrong, refused to forgive" (350). She is aware that she has Freudian attachment for her father and so feels guilty about it and this feeling of guilt makes her to lie down with men "in strange bed, in strange land." (383)

Peyton commits the sin of adultery and alcoholism because she inherits the sins of both the father and mother. It is apt to quote the words of D.H. Lawrence in this context: "The sins of the father [parents] are visited on the children" (129). Like Milton, she drinks and commits adultery, behaves in an irresponsible way, and like Helen she is unforgiving. The interior monologue of Peyton depicts her intense longing for her innocent childhood days. This shows her refusal to compromise with reality. Peyton like Harry in The Family Reunion regards her life as "...an isolated ruin / A casual bit of waste in an orderly universe" (2.1.335). The feeling of guilt
haunts her and so she wanders from one place to another like a prodigal daughter. This wandering of Peyton can be regarded as a quest for self-identity. Her sin of adultery can be regarded as a search for a new father, a normal home. Alienated from her parents, her husband and from her own self, Peyton captures our sympathy when she says that "...my life hath known no father" (368); "...and I have sinned only in order to lie down in darkness and find somewhere in the net of dreams, a new father, a new home" (379). When Harry refuses to accept her, she is driven mad. She doubts Harry that he has been unfaithful to her, which maddens her and so she lends herself to men like Dick Cartwright, Tony and Earl Sanders. This act of Peyton could be regarded as an act of vengeance. By this act, she wants to prove to Harry that "...if he doesn't love me, then, there is one that will" (368). At times Peyton feels, "...not out of vengeance have I accomplished all my sin, but because something has always been close to dying in my soul...." (379)

Peyton's sin of adultery does not portray her as one who enjoys it. All the sexual intercourses of Peyton picture her as one experiencing pain because of her remembrance of her father. The wingless birds haunting her further intensify her feelings of guilt. For the first time, Peyton becomes aware of them when she lies down with Dick Cartwright. These birds become alive when she lies with Earl Sanders in Darien. The image of drowning is used to reveal the helplessness experienced by Peyton. "I feel adrift, as if I were drowning out in the dark space, somewhere without
anything to pull me back to earth again”(38). Peyton’s sense of drowning makes us to recall Psalm 69:

Save me, O God!

For the waters have come up to my neck.

I have come into deep waters,

and the flood sweeps over me.

I am weary with my crying;

my throat is parched. (449)

From her monologue it is obvious, that Peyton longs for liters of water to drink so as to quench her thirst. Towards the end of her monologue, Styron emphatically brings out the longing of Peyton to save her soul. Her cry “one drop of anything... would save the life of poor damned Peyton, for it had all been so immoral...” (357) forces us to recall the anguished saying of Faustus: “One drop would save my soul / half a drop; ah, my Christ! -” (5.3. 80-81)

Cass Kinsolving in Set This House On Fire too commits the sin of adultery. He vividly remembers the ecstasy experienced by him when he had sex with a young, Jehovah girl. After spending a night with her, Cass felt guilty over the fact that he had paid Poppy’s money to this “Floozy” (301). Mason Flagg has innumerable mistresses, and Celia, the wife of Mason, lists out the mistresses of Mason - Carole, Anya, and Nancy and Kathy... and we may say the list is endless. Milton and Dolly did not want others to know of
Mason commits the sin of adultery because, he feels firmly that “sex is the only area left where men can find full expression of their individuality, full freedom, where men can cast off the constrictions and conventions of society and regain their identity as humans”(173). Peter recalls the day on which Mason Flagg was expelled from St. Andrews for “playing leap frog with some dame” of thirteen (102). Mason shows his collection of erotica to Peter. He firmly believes that “pornography was a liberating force” (489). It is this belief that made Mason to pay seventy thousand lire, three bottles of French brandy, and three vials containing 10cc. each of streptomycin to Cass, for the picture of a nude lady with her lover.

The sin of adultery is committed by Stingo also. At the first instance, when he sees Sophie in the Pink Palace, Stingo is obsessed with feelings of sex for her. Becoming aware of the inhuman treatment extended by Nathan, Stingo thinks: “…granting me the luck and strength, I would take over this flaxen polish treasure where Nathan, the thankless swine had left off” (71). His infatuation for Sophie forces him to hide his feelings for her in the presence of Nathan. On a weekend trip with Stingo, Sophie commits the sin of adultery. Enraged by this weekend trip of Sophie and Stingo, Nathan behaves in a possessed way. He finds fault with Sophie for having been unfaithful to him; his anger drags him to the verge of murdering Sophie and when Stingo spoke over the line, he frankly accuses Stingo for his
betrayal, for having sex with the mistress of his friend, and terrifies that he is returning to the pink palace just to murder them [Sophie and Stingo]. As an attempt to flee from the anger of Nathan, Sophie and Stingo run away from Brooklyn to Washington D.C. Traveling by train, Stingo dreams of a pleasant peaceful future where he may live happily after marrying Sophie and dreams of having children too.

The adultery committed by Sophie can be regarded as a means of delusion through which she wants to escape the bitter realities of life and the horrors she has experienced in the camp. Her attempt to entice Hoss to her feminine charms can be regarded as a means to escape from the concentration camp, in which she fails miserably.

We may say that Milton, Peyton, Cass, Sophie, Stingo and Mason Flagg commit the sin of adultery, alcoholism and despair because they are haunted by loneliness. Paul Elmer More’s observation: “The stress of youth, the feebleness of age, all the passions and desires of manhood, lead but to this inevitable solitude and isolation of spirit” (125), can be cited to describe the life of these characters. But, there is a subtle difference between alienation and solitude. Alienation is the result of the rejection of a person by fellow human beings or his inability to live with others; solitude on the other hand refers to the ability of a human being to be at peace with him even when he is alone. It helps a man to relax and to enjoy nature. It is remarkable that none of these characters feel solitude; all feel loneliness.

The above mentioned characters exemplify the saying of Thomas Wolfe that
“loneliness is the central and inevitable fact of human existence” and “that in
our loneliness shameful feelings of inferiority will rise up suddenly to
overwhelm us in a poisonous flood of horror, disbelief, and desolation to
sicken and corrupt our health and confidence, to spread pollution at the very
root of strong, exultant joy.” (155)

Milton tries to escape from the feeling of loneliness by talking
endlessly. He is aware of the fact that he could disburden himself of any
uneasiness by merely talking. Further he liked “the round meaningful shape
of the words and he was afraid of being alone.” (36)

The views of Kahlil Gibran that:

you talk when you cease to be at peace with your thoughts,

and when you can no longer dwell in the solitude of your

heart,

You live in your lips, and sound is a diversion and past time
(71), illumines the behavior of Milton Loftis. He was such an incessant
talker that Dolly had identified him with talk, but she was not a listener to
the substance of what he said than to the tone of the words, “the melodious
way ....he told them.” (71)

Milton and Helen in Lie Down in Darkness loved each other. Yet
their married life is not based on love. True, they had courted each other.
But he felt happy about his proposal to Helen only after her inheritance of
one thousand dollars from her mother. After marriage, he was dependant on
Helen because of his financial position and she depended on him for the
sake of their children. The loveless life led by Milton and Helen, his failure in his profession, his financial dependence on Helen, and the fact that he had already failed utterly in Helen's eyes, the awareness of reality, all these forced him to regard himself as a solitary drinker and a solitary man.

The terrible feeling of loneliness felt by Peyton is expressed in her letter to Milton in which she reveals her loneliness: "I'm lonely. After you have lived with someone for a time, it leaves a huge gap in your life when they're gone even if they're impossible or downright horrible" (38). Thinking of Milton helps her at times to escape from loneliness, but nothing seems to help her for a long time. Cass Kinsolving and Mason Flagg in the novel Set This House On Fire feel lonely and to escape from their loneliness they drink and commit adultery. The loneliness and isolation felt by Stingo drives him to enter into a "volatile, destructive relationship" (86). Stingo allows himself to listen to the woeful tales of Sophie as a way to escape from loneliness and to provide some solace to Sophie. His feeling of loneliness is intensified when Sophie moves out of the Pink Palace after her quarrel with Nathan. Even Rudolf Hoss, the SS commander, observes that he has always felt alienated in life. Needless to say both Nathan and Sophie seek each other because of the haunted sense of loneliness felt by them.

We may say that Peyton feels alienated because she is disturbed by the separation of her parents. Commenting on Peyton's affection for her parents, Dick Cartwright in Lie Down in Darkness observes: "...a letter from him [her father] or news from her family was apt to make worse, and
ever since they broke up, she was at loose ends” (230). The guilt and alienated feelings make her to feel that she is drowning in dark space with nothing to pull her down to normalcy. The imagery of drowning is best expressed in Peyton’s letter to Milton at the beginning and at the end of the novel.

Peyton has never experienced selfless love from her parents and hence she can never express such love to Harry. Barbara Newmann observes: “A person’s ability to develop warm and rewarding friendship depends to some extend on having been able to develop an initial sense of attachment with the mother figure” (23). It is remarkable that this initial sense of attachment with her mother does not occur in Peyton’s childhood.

The feeling of guilt, despair and loneliness compels her to feel that she is drowning and that the wingless birds are haunting her. Birds, which symbolize freedom, innocence, and purity, gain their added symbolic significance as the novel proceeds. The desperate cry of Peyton that the wingless birds are haunting her beyond belief brings to our mind the portrait of the avenging furies pursuing Electra in Agamemnon and Harry in The Family Reunion. Towards the end of the novel, the bird imagery becomes a symbol of Peyton’s guilt consciousness. They become the psychotic manifestation of Peyton’s guilt.

The fear of flood threatening to engulf her drives her to seek lover-God-Father in Harry. Peyton’s desperate feeling that “…all souls must go down before ascending upward; only we, most egregious sinners, to shed
our sin in self-destruction must go upward before the last descent” (385) induces Peyton to commit the sin of suicide. Rainbow, which is traditionally regarded as a symbol of promise and fulfillment, is believed to be God’s promise that the world will not be destroyed by flood. This view brings to our mind the Christian belief that the final apocalypse would be by fire. Since Peyton is an atheist, she does not believe in the promise of God that the world will not be destroyed by water. That is why for most of the time she feels that she is drowning.

Peyton, Nathan and Sophie commit the sin of suicide. In The Crucible, Arthur Miller describes life as “God’s most precious gift. No principle, however glorious [or inglorious], may justify the taking of it” (4, 320). It is remarkable that Peyton fails to understand that the greatest sin that could be committed by an individual is self-destruction and that taking one’s life is a cowardly sin. Peyton’s suicide bears testimony to the saying of Paul Elmer More: “Your life shall indeed be solitary until death, the great solitude, absorbs it at last. …this is, the burden and the penalty laid upon us, by the external decrees for the sin we have done, and the sins of our fathers before us” (123). Her sin of suicide makes us to recall the views of Sartre, as observed by Sudipta, who advocates suicide for people with unfulfilled aspirations, as their life would become naturally meaningless. (57)

Cass Kinsolving commits the sin of suicidal attempts many times in the novel Set This House On Fire. Haunted hopelessly by the feeling of despair and guilt, Cass passionately wants to die. While in Europe, a single
thought pre-occupies his mind and that is to destroy him in a most agonizing way. Blaspheming God, Cass believes that a man who has such ill thoughts against God has no right to live and that he has to remove himself from the earth. Hence he turns on the four burners of the oven for a full blast for a moment, and then turns them off again. He decides that he may allow his family members to sleep and in the morning he may get up and “do the job and finish himself off” (309). At another time, he attempts suicide by wandering to distant places amidst thunder and rain.

Nathan in Sophie’s Choice carries cyanide capsules with him. On the theme of suicide, he seems to possess a certain preoccupation and he touches on this theme for more than once in the novel. Sophie in the same novel attempts to commit suicide more than once. Stingo saves Sophie from drowning but he fails to save her from the suicide pact with Nathan, through which she proves her final explicit obedience to Nathan.

Sin of pride, jealousy, pretension, and deception of the senses through Nembutal are committed by Helen in Lie Down in Darkness. Adrienne, the wife of Carey Carr, describes Helen as a “nest of little hatreds” (111). Having got “a streak of pride a mile wide inside her” (182), Helen inherits the feeling of superiority and obsession with order from her father. Brought up in a rigid way, Helen has been very sensitive about right and wrong in all her life and boasts of her knowledge of knowing what sin is and in knowing that, she regards herself as superior to others.
Basilea Schlink observes: "Self righteousness is the root of all other sins. Self-righteous are so proud and are not prepared to admit that anything in their words and actions is not right. It would humiliate them to do that" (155). In accordance with the views of Basilea Schlink, Helen as a proud person never admits her mistakes. Being the daughter of a Colonel, who imbibed army regimentation, authoritative domination alone comes closer to her notion of order. She had been brought up in a very orderly fashion that picking up the morning newspaper from the front steps bothers her, for it has been an act quite out of keeping with the serene and orderly character of her life. Unable to inherit true religious feelings of Christianity, Helen acquires the religiosity of her stern father, which consists of going to church every Sunday. One of her complaints against Milton is that he has betrayed her when he stopped going to church.

She magnifies the simple mistakes of Peyton and glorifies herself in pointing out the mistakes of others. She has a self-conceited opinion that she knows suffering from the day she is born and regrets that “she had endured so many insults” (274). Discussing Milton’s extra-marital affair with Dolly, she refuses to reveal the name of Dolly to Carey Carr. Her feeling of superiority and righteousness is revealed in her statement: “Mrs. X, which I will call her, since I have no intention of betraying her even in her guilt” (114). An egoist, she always boasts that she loved Milton with all his weakness and his faults and that she loved him more than any woman could ever imagine loving a man with all his drinking and everything.
Aruna's poem, "Shun the Virtuous" exemplifies the character and behavior of Helen. He observes:

The virtuous are the most dangerous; 
agents of many a wreck and ruin. 
Drunk with a sense of superiority 
oft they become arrogant and obdurate. 
Pour they out venom on poor mortals 
prone to little foibles and frailties. 
They sting with their tongues 
and bite with their fangs. 

In your pride you scorn, smite, 
despise, deride and hate. 
And hate you not others only 
but yourselves too.

You loose your peace and 
shatter that of others too. (1-21)

Helen's attitude to her father is ambivalent. While speaking to Carey Carr, she says that she loves and admires her father. But, her dreams reveal her hatred for her father, Milton, Dolly, Peyton, and men in general. When Helen, in all her enormous solicitude, could not find fault with Peyton or Milton, she feels that it was September, the "hectic month...making people feel tired and a little frantic...." (131)
Psychology informs us that dreams are the royal road to one’s innermost being. They permit one occasional glimpse of the deepest and innermost recesses of one’s being. Sometimes, these dreams become the fulfillment of a suppressed wish. As such, one could easily deduce that Helen’s dreams reveal her hatred for Milton, Dolly and Peyton; she awakes with “her teeth hurting, from all the gnashing and grinding while she slept” (297). This is because her dreams are always crowded with three enemies and a friend. Those three enemies are Peyton, Milton and Dolly, and the friend undoubtedly is Maudie.

Sometimes Helen dreams that Dolly died by the knife wielded by her, more often by disease. At times Dolly died on the “field of battle, or in the electric chair”. After such dreams, she would awake “cleansed and healthy”. And at times “she was the enemy; she was the one who threatened people.” (298)

Helen’s hatred for Peyton destroys the family. One of her complaints about Milton is that he has spoiled Peyton and forgotten Maudie. She feels jealous of the youth and beauty of Peyton and she considers her own daughter as a “rival, a shameless little seducer” (300) and a “little devil” (129). Watching Peyton and Milton together, she experiences a sense of burning jealousy in her mind and with jaundiced eyes regards that “everything wrong and hurtful in the world had gathered around the house.” (118)
Helen feels that Peyton is half the cause of all the confusions in her family. Once when Peyton and Melvin had tied Maudie, Helen extricated Maudie; then she gently placed Maudie in Ella Swan’s arms, and whirled savagely and gave Peyton a hard, vicious slap across the cheek. Peyton, the shrewd and sensitive child, understands the stiffness and resentment of the mother and becomes intimate with the father.

Helen accuses Peyton that she did not care for anything and that is why she kept her father away from the hospital all day long. In another instance, she did not allow Peyton and Milton to see the ailing Maudie, when she was hospitalized at Charlottesville for she firmly believed that they do not know the meaning of love. She also reminds Peyton about her carelessness in letting Maudie fall.

The sin of Helen is not that she loves Maudie excessively but that she has been “beastly to Peyton.” (239). This excessive attachment of Helen for Maudie can be explained with the help of a quotation from Sigmund Freud’s: “Revision of Dream Theory:” “...it is usual for mothers whom fate has presented with a child who is sickly or otherwise at a disadvantage, to try to compensate him/her, for his or her unfair handicap by a super abundance of love.” (98)

The words of Francis Bacon are apt to be quoted here.

The human mind when it has once adopted an opinion draws all things else to support and agree with it. And though there be a greater number and weight of instances to be found on the
other side, yet, these it either neglects and despises or else by some distinction sets aside and rejects. (90)

Reverend Carey to whom Helen confides all her thoughts feels that Helen is “too selfish, too unwilling to make the usual compromises to be happy” (126). He also opines that she has “lost the capacity for love or grief like a spring in some arid upland, drained dry by the sun” (108-109). Her pride and self-righteousness makes Carr to think that something is wrong with her beyond curing, beyond anything that he could do any way. Helen is aware that by saying a single word like ‘love’ or ‘forgive’, she could save the family from damnation; but she will never utter it. Analyzing the behavior of Helen, we are reminded of the words of Mary in T.S. Eliot’s The Family Reunion:

“You attach yourself to loathing
As others do to loving” (1.2. 232).

A skilled pretender, the cunningness of Helen is revealed in the wedding ceremony of Peyton. Describing Peyton as the youngest, studying arts in New York, Helen comments that “she is such a dear” (259). Unable to believe his ears, Milton asks her to repeat it, and the cool constant bitterness of Helen is revealed when she asks, “Wasn’t it a fierce old lie darling?” (259)

On the marriage day of Peyton, Helen assumes the best manners. But, the venomous jealous feelings of Helen are revealed when she questions herself:
Who could tell, she asked herself...that this genteel sprightliness masked the most villainous intentions? Well they were villainous....They were cruel intentions, cruel feelings and perhaps unnatural, but what could she do? This profound and unalterable loathing of Peyton...Dishonorable, sinful. It had been cruelly difficult to put on this act... how she had falsified her true feelings. (273 - 274)

Peyton understands the hypocritical mask of jealousy and hostility of her mother. She regards her mother as “a faker” (268), and decides that she too will put up a real good front for Helen. Commenting on her own role-play, Peyton asks Milton, “I’m playing it pretty well, aren’t I? Kissing mother back when she kisses me, pretending to forget everything” (268). The doctor watching Helen at the marriage ceremony, describes her as “an adder” (305). All that she expects from the society is that, it must praise and regard her as a good and successful mother. As Judith Ruder Mann comments, Helen “regards herself as a suffering martyr” (36). Like a slave after fame, Helen behaved in a humble and well-refined manner, so that others would regard her as the suffering woman, who had brought the fractured family together.

Helen lacks forgiveness and she creates hell in her family by her bitter behavior. She fails to realize that the greatest thing a human being could offer in the world is to ‘give’ him. That is why she misses the full
implication of Milton's words when he says: "I offer you myself and that is all I can offer." (255)

Commenting on the characteristic quality of Helen, Robert H Fossum opines: "She exercises her will in the service of hatred and vengeance, thereby destroying her capacity to love." (14)

Mason Flagg in *Set This House On Fire* and Nathan in *Sophie's Choice* commit the sin of dominating other human beings. Samuel Coale describes Mason Flagg as "an exhibitionist, a liar, a braggart, a procurer and an emotional leech ..." (70). In the opening pages of the novel, Poppy, the wife of Cass, describes Mason as a "terrible man, just wicked and terrible, a phony creep" (51) who is "seductively glib, winning, and quick witted and beautiful" (88). We may comment that both *Set This House On Fire* and *Sophie's Choice* portray the evil in human nature and the amazing powers of humanity to endure suffering.

Cass in *Set This House On Fire* recalls the beginning of his friendship with Mason. He has come to settle at Sambuco, a small town in Italy, shifting his residence from America. Cass was residing in the out-house of the palace, which was purchased by Mason Flagg. Mistaking Cass to be Kasz, the famous painter of Rimini, Poland, Mason requests him to show his paintings and he appreciated them for their "incredible humanity"; later, understanding the mistake, they "mumbled a few apologies at each other" (442). After some days, seeing the truck loaded with boxes, Cass decides to extend a helping hand in unloading the truck, with an intention of borrowing
books from Mason. For the service rendered by Cass, Mason generously offered a wine bottle, "not exactly a tip, yet, it was a tip" (445). Receiving the bottle from Mason, Cass mumbles his thanks, "flaming like an oven" (445). He did not offer to pay for it, not because he did not have any money with him but because decency, good sense and pride had left him.

Soon, Cass was made to sweat like a coolie. He became a "regular peon" (146). An alcoholic, who can never refrain himself from drinks, Cass succumbs easily to the wine bottles offered by Mason. Cass describes his relationship with Mason as follows: "I was tied to him, bound to him for reasons of pure survival and not just my own, either, but of all those around me that I in turn had committed to save" (445). Ruined by poverty, Cass regards Mason as a solid gold young Santa Claus and his relationship with Mason is a need based one. He knows that the ten thousand lire of Poppy may dwindle to nothing, for he has to pay the rent and a bill at the café; he has to provide milk and food to his children. His voluntary surrender to Mason is revealed in his rueful thought, "I had allowed him to own me.... out of spinelessness at first, out of whisky, greed and desolation of the spirit, but at last out of necessity" (490). He felt that the 'fleas of life' were constantly biting him. The bitter sufferings experienced by Cass make us to recall Shelley's words in "Ode to the West Wind": "I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed" (54). His poverty forces him to become submissive to Mason Flagg.
Mason’s hold over Cass is based on the supply of liquor and medicine. The foremost important reason for Cass to allow the domination of Mason, whose cruelty and meanness are of a different kind, is the medical aid he may receive for Francesca’s father. Once accompanying Mason to Naples PX Store, Cass has obtained 30c.c. of streptomycin plus hypodermic syringe, and ten ampules of morphine, to ease the pain in Michele’s leg. At times, he can choose few things for his wife and children. At the PX store, Mason treats him as a porter, to carry things for him. Since Mason has abundance of everything, Cass believes that he may not need all goods just for him and so decides to be “sober enough to be a clever thief.” (225)

The extreme domination of Mason reaches its zenith when he presents the ‘greatest personality’ - Cass, performing ‘the greatest one-man show’ to his guests. The drunken Cass is made to drink more and ordered to put on a little show and to sing songs about Abraham Lincoln. After that when he is asked to yell like a rebel, Cass suddenly comes alive, throws back his head and lets out an ear splitting screeching noise. Then Cass is made to recite a series of limericks and to mimic “an authentic re-creation of a Paris exhibition” (216). This scene provokes unpleasant feelings in the mind of the readers since it forces us to visualize the picture of a monkey chained, obeying its master and entertaining a crowd by its performance. Sudipta observes:

Every human being has been endowed with an independent mind and a free will. It is an offence to mankind if a man
leads a life of subjugation, as his prime duty is to nurture his personality and ensure its optimum growth. (61)

By his behavior, Mason has violated human dignity. He has proved himself as a "beast, bastard, crook and a viper" (279). The horridness of this scene is heightened by Poppy begging Mason not to ill-treat Cass. She begs Mason to realize the condition of Cass and asks him: "Don’t you know he loses all command of himself when he is like this? Don’t shame him any more." (209)

Unable to bear the humiliated condition of Cass and the frustrated cry of Poppy, Peter suggests that Mason should leave Cass. He is warned severely by Mason not to interfere. Observing Mason’s treatment of Cass, Alonzo Cripps feels that “Mason has got him on some sort of hook” (138). Cripps is the only humanist in that crowd who is displeased with Mason’s behavior. He commands Peter to take Cass out of the room. On the way to his house, Cass recalls that a few days earlier he was made to play the role of a clown and a drunkard. He is aware of the truth that he has to play any role that was dreamt by Mason.

Acting out the buffoonery role, before leaving Mason’s palace, Cass steals Para Amino Salicylic Acid, Lederal, a bottle, several cans of sardines, half a loaf of bread, and three or four bruised apples to save Michele, the hopeless man.

This behavior of Cass makes us to agree with the comment of William Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks that “there is not one norm of human behavior, but many; some of them widely divergent and even contradictory.” (55)
In the beginning, Cass becomes a slave to Mason because of his poverty. As days pass on, he wallows in slavishness because of Francesca. Cass’ meeting with Francesca occurs when he is taken to the police station for breaking the flower vase in a restaurant. She was brought there on the charge of having stolen gaily-colored celluloid windmills worth a nickel or a dime. Loving Francesca at the first sight, Cass generously offers to pay two thousand liras as penalty for her; he obtains some solace in rendering help to Michele, the father of Francesca, who is riddled with tuberculosis from head to toe, bones and kidneys, liver and lungs.

Cass also assists Francesca in stealing groceries like sugar, butter, flour, cans of soup from Mason’s house by informing her as to the quantity of goods she might safely steal from Mason’s home; Commenting on the steak thievery of Francesca, Mason says that he could pay for a trip back to New York just on the sugar she had stolen from his house.

If Cass and Sophie commit the sin of being dominated, Mason Flagg and Nathan commit the sin of domination over fellow human beings. Mason and Nathan’s desire for domination is revealed through their behavior not only to Cass and Sophie, but also to Peter, Celia, and Francesca and to Stingo and the film company. They have to behave so, in order to feed their pride and to escape from loneliness.

As the inheritor of the film company, Mason rules over it. Empowered by his wealth, Mason Flagg commits the sin of dominating fellow human beings. The rich financial status endowed by his father makes
him to be proud, that he can purchase anything in the world. Mason’s relationship with Cass and that of Nathan’s relationship with Sophie is of master-slave bondage; Mason’s relationship with Peter and that of Nathan’s with Stingo is of a different type.

Like Mason Flagg in Set This House On Fire, Nathan in Sophie’s Choice is generous and Sophie like Peter accepts the generosity of Nathan. Just as Mason Flagg felt happy over his control on Cass Kinsolving, Nathan feels proud of his control on Sophie. If Mason’s domination of Cass is of one kind, the domination of Nathan over Sophie is of a worse kind. The way in which Nathan treats Sophie and the worst kind of slavish relationship that exists between them induces a feeling of repulsion in the heart of the reader. Without even a tinge of ego, she allows him to rape, stab, beat, blind her and do anything with her that he desires. He kicks on her face with his shoes, breaks her ribs, urinates into her mouth and all these are patiently borne by Sophie. Like Cass, she is aware of Nathan’s possession of her and that he “could use me, have me, fuck me, beat me, and have some object to possess! That’s all, some object” (469). A normal human being will definitely regard all these treatment as unimaginable and unendurable.

Nathan and Sophie in Sophie’s Choice maintain an ambivalent relationship and it is revealed throughout the novel. At one point Sophie describes Nathan as her savior. He can be described both as the savior and destroyer of Sophie. In an interview with Michel Braudeau, Styron observes: “the process of Sophie’s destruction began at Auschwitz; Nathan completed
it in Brooklyn” (248). At times, Nathan is afflicted with madness and this madness of his can be comprehended by the readers for he is a Jew; and as a Jew he is affected by the anti-Semitism that is widespread, and the inability of the Jews to live safely anywhere in Europe. Though at times Nathan is “very tender, capable of boundless generosity” (Michel Braudeau, 248), for most of the time, he tortures her for her ability in having survived in Auschwitz.

Nathan tortures her repeatedly to clarify to his satisfaction the way in which she survived Auschwitz while the others perished. Often, the same query is posed to her: “Tell me why it is, oh! beauteous Zawistowska, that you inhabit the land of the living. Did splendid little tricks and stratagems spring from that lovely head of yours to allow you to breathe the clear Polish air while the multitudes at Auschwitz choked slowly on the gas? A reply to this would be most welcome.” (280-281)

Peter in Set This House On Fire is regards himself as the ‘Crown Prince’ among the ‘free loaders’ - a term used by Styron to refer to those who are showered with gifts by Mason- regards himself as a fortunate man in having the friendship of a vivid “inexhaustible, rich, gloriously handsome, erudite, witty, gifted, a hero of war…” (183). Peter is attracted towards Mason, because of his wealth, glamorous connections, and the pre-mature ease of Mason with flesh – which created a profound sense of fascination in Peter. Staying with Mason for four or five days and getting girls supplied by way of entertainment, Peter feels proud of himself and feels jubilant for each
night brought him a different girl. On the day of departure, entering his cabin in the ship, Peter felt that he had entered into a wrong cabin because his room was filled with

...the most outstanding assortment of delicacies, a whole case of Champaign, two enormous wicker baskets of fruit, a flat box of candy, a high stack of books. On the floor, a clutch of whisky bottles, several baskets of noddling flowers, half a dozen cartons of cigarettes, a pile of magazines, an iced tin of caviar. (190)

Peter recalls his first day at Sambuco. He was crossing an extensive room to attend the party given by Mason and he saw a girl of eighteen or twenty dashing into the room, sobbing as if her heart would break. There was so much terror and fear in her eyes. Her dress was torn too. Chasing her was Mason who had three band-aids plastered on his face. He enquired Peter whether he saw a young girl. Receiving a negative answer from Peter, Mason became wild and commenting on that expression, Peter says, “I have never seen him quite like this before. He wore a brutish wild expression. ... [There was] pure malice and venom in his voice and hatred” (143). After attending the party, Peter understands Mason’s treatment of Cass and his own plight. Observing Mason’s treatment of Cass, a revelation dawns on Peter that “Mason had Cass, had him securely in hand just as in an entirely different but no less impregnable way... he had me” (215), and Peter shuddered at the narrowness of his escape. He became aware of the reality
that he had been "susceptible to [Mason's] wealth" and that Mason "actually disliked me as much as I did him." (209)

Like Peter, Stingo is aware of Nathan's hold on him, but in a different way. He eagerly awaits the criticism of Nathan for the book he has written; looks forward for the trip with Sophie and Nathan and readily accepts the offer rendered by Nathan when he loses three hundred pounds. Peter's relationship with Mason and Stingo's relationship with Nathan to a certain extent includes the benefits they enjoy from each other.

Sin of domination is best exemplified in Sophie's Choice. This domination for most of the time is gained through materialistic possessions and earthly power. The atrocious practices in the concentration camps make us to recall the dictum- "Power Corrupts". We are reminded of the views of Isabella in Shakespeare's Measure for Measure:

........................................man, proud man

Dressed in a little brief authority,

.................................................................

Plays such fantastic tricks before the high heaven

As makes the angels weep; (2.2.117-122)

If we review the entire history of humanity, we may say that the prominent theme in it has been the desire of human beings to dominate one another. In an interview with Robert K. Morris, William Styron has expressed his belief that "the beautiful opportunities which we have as human beings are absolutely destroyed because of our proclivity toward
hatred and toward massive domination of each other" (57). In the same interview, Styron defines his concept of evil, as “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). Inhumanity to fellow human beings can be regarded as the greatest sin and Sophie’s Choice best exemplifies the evil inherent in man’s nature. There is no room in this thesis to do justice to the complete horror and ill treatment extended by the Nazis in the concentration camps.

The story of Sophie is told in fragments and the narration reveals the utmost evil in the heart of human beings. In this novel, Sophie narrates six tales of revelation - her childhood life in Cracow, her capture and consignment to Auschwitz on April 1, her relationship with Rudolf Hoss at Auschwitz, her love affair with Josef in Warsaw and the resistance movement, a splintered version of her relationship with Walter Durrfeld in Cracow in 1937 and at Auschwitz, and the anguished moment of choice where she has to decide the fate of one of her children. (Samuel Coale 104)

Sophie is caught as a prisoner by the Gestapo and taken to Warsaw while smuggling meat for her mother who was ailing from tuberculosis. It was a crime to smuggle meat since it was forbidden to ordinary citizens as it "was all commanded to go to the German army" (194). As a prisoner, she was not allowed to visit her mother and after three months she learnt that her mother had expired. During her confinement in the camp for six months in the camp, she was fairly in good health because she had been employed as
the personal secretary to Hoss. An efficient bilingual in Polish and German, she was also proficient in typing both the languages, and knew Gabels – Berger shorthand and hence she was commanded to do the translation work in the Birkenau office; she was included in the list of the “elite” (313) members whose services were considered invaluable in the camp. From the narration of Sophie we understand that the Nazis have established two camps. The difference between them was that Auschwitz was used for slave labor and Birkenau was used for extermination. People who were selected to be exterminated were sent to Birkenau; very soon it became an exclusive place for the “mass extermination of the Jews” (196). Sophie was selected to Auschwitz for labor. This is because she was of the right age and possessed good health; and she stayed there for twenty months. The captives at Auschwitz were allotted the duty of maintaining the Birkenau crematoriums and to assist the administrators to murder the Jews. When the captives became aged and weak, they were shot dead or sent to the gas chambers at Birkenau.

The inhumanity that prevailed in the concentration camps is vividly portrayed in the following description. Mass extermination at Birkenau was carried out by “shooting or by introducing carbon monoxide into an enclosed sealed space, a method which was inefficient and prohibitively time consuming” (203). Observing the power of a crystallized hydrocyanic compound called Zyklon B, when used as a vapor on rats and the other verminous creatures that infested Auschwitz, Hoss the Commandant of SS
troop suggested this as a means of mass murder in concentration camps. As an experimental measure he turned nine hundred Russian prisoners of war into guinea pigs and found the gas splendidly suited to the quick extermination of human beings. Thereafter it was extensively used on countless inmates of whatever region; but after April 1943 it was used exclusively for murdering the Jews and the gypsies.

The sinful Hoss was also an innovator in the use of such techniques as to blow up wayward or escaping prisoners, and to electrocute them through high voltage fences. A hound of Alsatians and Doberman were trained to chew those “inmates to shreds” (203) if they make an attempt to escape.

The evil in man is revealed when one of the functionaries of SS addresses the mass that has been brought to the camp as follows:

You have come to a concentration camp, not to a sanitarium, and there is only one way out - up the chimney. Any one who don’t like this can try hanging himself on the wires. If there are Jews in this group, you have no right to live more than two weeks...Any nuns here? Like the priests, you have one month. All the rest, three months. (316)

The inhuman events that Sophie experiences in Auschwitz create a sense of horror and meaninglessness of life in the minds of the reader, and stand as testimony to the sinful acts of the commandants. Life becomes unworthy of living if there is no compassion or love for fellow human
beings. Sophie’s description of the Camp as a place filled with the smell of burning Jews days and night, and the starvation of people to death is terrific. Another atrocity she had seen in the camp is committed by a guard who stripped away the clothes off a nun and set his dog to shred her to pieces that the nun died few hours later.

Sophie was sent back to Auschwitz camp after the transfer of Rudolf Hoss, where she was made to starve; as a consequence of starvation, she had scurvy, typhus and scarlet fever. After twenty months of confinement in the camp she was released. Physically free from the tortures of the concentration camp, Sophie comes to Brooklyn where she feels helpless and adrift. She feels like a puppy “that has been hurled floundering into a turbulent pool” (416). Circumstances force Sophie to accept the help and love of Nathan who is a Jew. When Nathan first met Sophie, she was “a rag, a bone, and a hank of hair” (90). She herself describes her appearance as “an old witch..., the scarecrow” (90). The distress and the agony experienced by Sophie in the camp, along with the fact that she has become an orphan, force her to cling closer to Nathan. She regards Nathan as a redemptive knight who has restored her to life; and in the due course she surrenders herself totally to him allowing herself to commit the sin of being dominated by fellow human beings.

All these characters regret the fact that they are unable to escape from the past. Time and remembrance, fate and circumstances cause destruction of these characters. The comment of Graham Greene: “Sometimes you want
to begin fresh, and then, someone praying or a smell or something you read in the paper and it [the feeling of hatred] is back again” (149), best exemplifies the behavior of the characters of Styron. The pitiable thing about these characters is that when they make an attempt for compromise, or to change themselves, something happens - an event, a smile or fate interferes and that spoils their lives – Peyton, Milton and Sophie suffer like this.

At one instance, Nathan and Sophie in Sophie’s Choice have a weekend trip to Connecticut; Sophie is accused of having behaved like a whore in Auschwitz to get out of it and he grills her to such an extent that she cries and cries. The mirth of Nathan is spoiled by the special bulletin, which announced the suicide of Marshal Hermann Goring, “who was the real father of such places which shall be ever known in infamy as Dachau, Buchenwalk and Auschwitz” (428). Before driving to the party, Nathan consumes a Benzedrine pill, which made him feel elated and in the party he intends to announce his marriage with Sophie. But the suicidal news of Goring disturbs him and his friends, and with irritation he orders her to go to the pink house. The next day he takes her for a trip to New England and to Connecticut and on the way, tortures her for the supposed infidelity of hers.

Apart from the sin of domination over fellow human beings, Mason commits the sin of lying also. Many of Styron’s characters would agree with the views of T.S.Eliot in The Family Reunion: “...life would be unendurable/ If you were wide awake” (1.1.305). It is remarkable that an
individual may feel frustration if he/she becomes too conscious of his/her own self because human kind cannot bear too much reality and as a way of escape from the bitter reality, as Styron says in an interview with Robert K. Morris, these characters surround themselves "with a smoke screen of lies." (58)

Peter in *Set This House On Fire* recalls the lies told by Mason as a student. At school, he had boasted that he had lost his virginity at the age of thirteen. Though Mason had the making of a good athlete, he counterfeited sprain in his leg and sat throughout the football season. All the other boys except Peter regarded that as an act of cowardice. As a grown up, he has described himself as a Yugoslavian business man, has given a glorious picture about his service in the army, about the scar on his leg, and about the play he may write.

On the day of departure to Europe, as Peter was packing for his trip to Europe, he heard a frantic rapping at the door. Celia, the wife of Mason, with plasters on her forehead and cheek was standing there. She revealed the fact that Mason had hit her with a platter. For the next two hours, Peter was listening to the facts told by Celia. Commenting on the brutal assault of Mason, Celia says "... he scares me when he hits me like that." (188)

Celia, Mason’s wife, revealed the truth about his lies to Peter. She described Mason as a liar. The Yugoslavia business was an example of that and he had used some kind of influence to escape from army service. Commenting on the scar on his leg she said, "Oh! It was some kind of traffic
accident” (185). Celia believed firmly that those lies uttered by Mason were “a representation of his left over energy, and expanse of his whole terrific imagination.” (185)

When Mason came to send off Peter, at the very sight of Mason, Peter started burning with anger for what he had done to Celia. Mason introduced Peter to the crews as the Prince of Yugoslavia and he apologized for his behavior to Celia by saying that it was the first time he ever laid hands on her. Drinking champagne in the company of Mason, Peter felt a slow intolerable hardening of his heart towards Mason. Looking at the gifts of Mason, Peter felt a debased feeling as if he was the receiver of bribes.

John Kenny Crane classifies the lies told by Styron’s characters in Sophie’s Choice into three broad categories:

Fundamental conscious attempts to make facts seem other than they are... “Purposeful ignorance” and “active denial of truth” form the first major division. Sex, addiction to drinks, and drugs come under the second group of lies and to the third, he assigns the attempts of the characters to “rewrite reality in a different form, as opposed to denying it (the first category) or blinding oneself to it (the second). (31)

The lies told by Sophie that Nathan is the only man other than her husband she ever made love to, her omission that she had two children not one, or her attempt to justify Nathan’s drugged speeding to a Connecticut
policeman by saying that his mother was dying in Boston, all these form the first group of lies- “fundamental conscious attempts”.

Commenting on the lies told by Sophie, Samuel Coale observes:

The lies keep her fragile equilibrium of consciousness intact, protecting her from the guilt that is consuming her and from the inevitable death that will occur upon completion of her confession. Once she reveals her secret, her most horrible choice, she in effect signs the death warrant. She has lived to tell her tale, and the very telling of it ensures her demise. (104)

The refusal to learn the truth when it is readily available forms the basis of “purposeful ignorance”. As examples, we may cite the act of Morris Fink not answering the telephone for fear of what he might hear; Sophie retiring to Hoss’ basement in order to escape from the bitter reality of smelling the burning human flesh and closing her eyes so she may not see the newsreel of war-torn Europe; The lies told by Nathan when he accuses Sophie for having slept with Katz, Black Stock, Stingo and Hoss or with every Nazi officer as an attempt to save her life come under the second category.

Simple self-delusion, the belief that one is headed for better things forms the third group. Stingo’s dream of having sex with Leslie Lapidus, Sophie’s dream of answered prayer and jubilant resurrection, Nathan’s dream of discovering medicine for cancer comes under this group.
Nathan commits the sin of lying also. The research conducted by Nathan is kept as a secret from Sophie. He is of the firm opinion that if his project becomes successful, it will be hailed as one of the “greatest medical advances of all time” (261). He is very proud of his contribution and is even sure to get Nobel Prize. Stingo feels so proud of his friend for he is very sure that “this scientific genius whom, I am privileged to call a friend had discovered a cure for cancer” (261). Nathan has promised to reveal the theme of his research to Stingo and Sophie after a grand celebration. But, the awareness of the lie creates a severe headache in Nathan and he becomes very pale and perspiring. This excited state of Nathan is so keenly observed and described by Sophie: “Sometimes it makes him so very, very strange! it’s like he gets so... so happy and flying that he is like an airplane going up and up into the stratosphere where the air is so thin that he can’t fly no more and the only way is down. I mean all the way down .....” (263)

On that particular day when he decides to reveal the success of his research, he becomes upset for he is aware of his lie. To evade his responsibility of revealing the ‘success’ of his ‘research’, Nathan uses Dr.Katz’ visit as a pre-text. Dr.Katz had entered Sophie’s into room to fix up the changer part of the phonograph. Seeing them together Nathan feels that his mood of celebration is deflated by the supposed treachery of Sophie and with a toast for dissociation from Sophie and Stingo, he announces his decision to leave them. Commenting on this habitual behavior of Nathan, Sophie observes: “Always he get this way. First he is so excited, full of joy.
Then he comes down, and when he comes down, it is always that I have been unfaithful and then he wants to leave me.” (272)

Larry, the brother of Nathan, invites Stingo and reveals the truth about Nathan. “Nathan is not a research biologist. He is not a bona-fide scientist, and he has no degree of any kind. All that, is a simple fabrication” (564), and he confesses the truth that his brother is suffering from ‘paranoid Schizophrenia’. Nathan, a sinecure, has a job in the company Library, where he can do a lot of reading without bothering anyone, and occasionally he does a little research for one of the official biologists. During war times, Nathan tried to join the paratroopers, but was prevented by people at home and so he was made to stay at home and read the works of Proust and Newton. As Helen is addicted to Nembutal, Nathan is addicted to Benzedrine and cocaine in huge doses. And Sophie attributes the unusual “seizures of rage, of seething violence, of paranoia” (415) of Nathan to these drugs.

Mason and Cass Kinsolving in *Set This House On Fire* commit the sin of rape and murder. The rape of Francesca is regarded as the first “mortal act of violence” (248) in the town since the last century, and this incident shook the whole village. The dapper little man reports the death of Mason to Peter that “a peasant girl...was found ravished and dying” (248) and that Mr.Flagg is dead. Even after hearing the news of Mason’s death, Peter does not regret for it.
Mason Flagg commits sin of rape. By assaulting Francesca, Mason dominates her physically. He has raped her in a cruel way that her ribs were broken. The horridness of Francesca’s death is revealed when Maggie says, “He [one who raped Francesca] must have been a monster; they say that the girl did not have one unbroken bone left in her body” (261). Mason performs this cruel act because he has understood the change in the behavior of Cass after his acquaintance with Francesca. Mason has become aware of the fact that Cass, by loving Francesca, has found something—some focus, some purpose and some meaning in life. Ironically, Cass too is aware of the reason that induced Mason to rape Francesca— that by raping her, “he was raping me” (490). By destroying the fountain strength of Cass, Mason has indirectly destroyed Cass himself.

As Basilea Schlink observes, “Everything that is an enemy of love is sin. Indeed the sin against love is the greatest sin, because love is the greatest achievement of Jesus’ redemption” (151) and Mason through his sinful act of destroying Cass’ beloved, commits the sin against love.

After being raped by Mason, on her way to home, Francesca met Saverio who extended his arm to greet her. The touch of Saverio brought the ‘horror’ back to her mind she had gone through because of Mason and she “shrieked and scratched at the face [of the village idiot]. Then he drew back, hit her and she fell” (527). The villagers believed that the peasant girl was ravished and killed by Mason. They imagined that Mason Flagg felt remorse over the deed he had committed and so he has violated his life.
Sophie in *Sophie's Choice* is raped in the subway as she was returning home from work on the Brooklyn BMT. When the train came to a halt, and the lights went out suddenly, she was crushed between two sweating figures. She felt a finger that worked with "surgical skill and haste" rising between her thighs. Fear and horrified disbelief made her to utter "please" to the strangers. This gross insult to her made her to feel that "A straightforward rape would have done less violation to her spirit and identity." (126)

Even at the beginning of her confinement in the camp, a lady who was appointed by the head quarters to maintain discipline among the female inmates of the prison, tried to rape Sophie. But the screams of Sophie drew the attention of the block leader who put an end to that nasty act; but the irony is that her saviour was a prostitute; she was so impressed by the communicative skill of Sophie in languages like German, Polish and shorthand writing and so, she introduced her to Hauptscharfuhrer Günter, an administrative officer who transferred her to the stenographic section. Again, Sophie in the camp was raped by Wilhelmine; It was nothing new to her for she had been nearly raped by a woman guard months before, shortly after her arrival. Precisely at this moment Sophie realized that "a woman's desire for another woman could be so-so violent." (364)

Thomas Wolfe emphatically comments on love as follows: "Sometimes love is the flower that brings us death, and from it we get pain and darkness and the mutilations of the soul, the maddening of the brain may be in it" (162). In accordance with the saying of Wolfe, we may comment
that love that is portrayed in these novels is not a healthy love. For Milton, love wears the mask of incestuous attachment and forbidden adultery. Milton’s love for his daughter is a selfish incestuous love and he derives emotional satisfaction from it. His love for Dolly is an act of revenge against his wife Helen, who has become “a symbol of horribly purposeful of all that can plague a man.” (36)

Almost all the characters of Styron equate love with need. Helen with all her righteousness is no exception. After Peyton’s departure to college, she arranges a meeting with Dolly Bonner, because her daughter “has gone off to school and I need him [Milton] ever more” (138). Helen’s love for Peyton is a mask for her jealousy. As a crippled daughter, Maudie is dependant on her; she does not pose any threat to her mother; Added to this, Maudie creates a feeling of usefulness in the heart of Helen. Since Peyton is independent, Helen is unable to love her. Peyton while quarreling with Helen asks her, “I know I’m not perfect; but I’m free and young...If I’d hung around in Port Warwick and married some simple minded little boy, who worked in the shipyard and lived in a little bungalow somewhere and came to see you and Daddy every Sunday, ... you’d be perfectly content. You’d have your claws in me then” (312). It is because of this independent nature of Peyton Helen regards her as a rival.

Peyton, like Helen, equates love with need. Helen is of the firm opinion that Peyton is a “...shameless little seducer who used her father’s love to get everything she wants in life...” (300). When Milton agreed to get
Peyton a red limousine, she kisses him. Peyton for her part loves her father excessively and hates her mother. Both, Peyton and Milton fail to realize that their love is wrong, and that love of wrong things will definitely lead to destruction. Loved in a wrong way and hated extremely, she longs for a normal home where she would be “understood for what you are, neither to be loved to death, nor despised just because you are young” (309). The wisdom of Robert Frost in “The Death of the Hired Man” exemplifies the behavior of Peyton for she expects her home to be a place where,

\[ \text{... when you have to go there,} \]
\[ \text{They have to take you in.} \]
\[ \text{... I should have called it} \]
\[ \text{Something you somehow haven’t to deserve. (123-126)} \]

Mason’s love for Cass is a master’s love for his slave. Mason prefers Cass, for he has become almost a peon to him. Realizing the bond between them, Mason feels glorious about his hold on Cass and asks him, “… I think you can see how utterly dependent upon me you have become” (475). Cass is well aware of the nature of his relationship with Mason that it is a need based one.

Sophie and Nathan’s love for each other is also a need based one. Sophie is aware of the fact that Nathan helps her in all the ways so that he could possess her as he would possess an object.

All the characters of William Styron lack faith in God. They either do not believe in the existence of God or if they believe in the existence of a
God, they regard Him as one who does not care for human beings. Religion does not offer any solace to these characters. They disagree with the view of Tagore in “Indian Folk Religion” that “Man is not a mere casual visitor at the palace gates of the world, but the invited guest, whose presence is needed to give the royal banquet its sole meaning” (10). They fail to realize as Tagore feels: “God’s manifest shower falls direct on the plain of humble hearts, flowing there in various channels” (10) and they have no regard for man’s life.

These characters as described in Set This House On Fire do not regard God “as a gentle benign Christian, who...would...let you get by through honest penance”, but as “a mean old Jew with a dirty beard and flashing eyes and nostrils snorting smoke and hell fire” (323). They feel that “God surely had clever ways of tormenting a man.” (380)

Peter Leveret and Peyton believe that if there is a God in this world, he has long since deserted His post. Michele and Luigi regard God as evil and for Cass, God is a vengeful Jehovah. Helen with all her religiositiy and Puritanism feel that her God is a devil and fails to trust in the existence of God. The doubtful faith felt by her at times is revealed when she says, “life is just one huge misunderstanding and God must be really sorry for confusing the issues so” (116). When Maudie died, Helen felt that God has abandoned her at the critical moment and this frustration in life made her to regard religion as “a toy, a trifle and to cast it aside in despair.” (273)
The pathetic condition of Helen is that her religion has not taught her the value of forgiveness, or selfless love. To pray for guidance becomes vague and elementary. Carey, though a minister at the church, feels that he has not taught her faith enough to endure disaster, and he feels that he has failed to induce lasting faith and selfless love in Helen and this sense of horror and failure clutched his spine "like the wet, and wrinkled hand of a drowned woman" (239). Finding fault with Carey, for not understanding her in a proper way, Helen says, "Your God is a silly old ass. ...And my God... my God is the devil." (299)

Milton has no belief in religion. After running away from his responsibilities in search of Peyton, Milton with doubt in his heart prays to God to forgive his foolish son. Before committing suicide, Peyton thinks of God-Father-Lover. She can pray only to her innocence and not to Him, because, she does not believe in the existence of God.

Cass Kinsolving agrees with the Manichean view of God as one existing to torment and annihilate mankind. He at times feels a strange and tragic sense of sorrow for his inability to retain a complete vision of God. The dreams of Cass reveal that he does not even regard God as a lie, but "worse than that...He was weaker than the evil He created and allowed to reside in the soul of man" (309). Cass regards God as a "...black, baleful and depraved deity, who seemed coolly to annihilate His Creatures, not in spite of but almost because of the fact that they learned to heal their bodies, if not their souls..." (467). His lack of faith forces him to believe that God
may take away one of his children who was infected with fever as a revenge for his blasphemy. Michele, the father of Francesca, believes that God is evil, for He has “put us down into this place where we work and slave…. He drains us dry - of everything - at last He throws us away, as if we had cast Him nothing… He is evil; He is a monster.” (242)

Even Luigi, who understands the humanism in Cass’ character, does not believe in God. God becomes “a monster” (264) for Sophie. She like Helen feels that she could no longer pray to Him for she is of the opinion that “Christ had turned His face away from me and I could no longer pray to Him as I did once in Cracow”(118). She feels, “only a Jesus who had no pity and who no longer care for me, could permit the people I loved to be killed” (118). Listening to the song ‘I knew that my Redeemer liveth’ Sophie cries, “because of all my guilt, and also because I know that my redeemer don’t live and my body will be destroyed by worms and my eyes will never, never again see God.”(119)

Like Helen Sophie too lacks faith in God and feels that God has abandoned her at the crucial times. “He has turned his back on me. And if He has turned His back on me, then I hate Him so that to show and prove my hatred I would commit the greatest sacrilege I could think of. Which is, I would commit my suicide in His church, on sacred ground” (544). And while attempting suicide in a church with a piece of glass in her hand, all on a sudden she is reminded of Rudolf Hoss and realizes that she “cannot die as long as Rudolf Hoss is alive.”(545)
We may attribute the truth that only the spiritual emptiness felt by the characters makes them to view life as a meaningless and dark voyage in this world. Freud in his “Lecture on Religion” comments: “The feeling of security with which he [or she] fortifies himself [or herself] against the dangers both of the external world and of his human environment is founded on his love of God, and the consciousness of God’s love for him”(925). As mentioned earlier, since these characters do not have faith, they are not able to feel the presence of or to pray to Him. Except Harry in Lie Down in Darkness and Poppy in Set This House On Fire, other characters lack faith that makes them to commit the sin of despair.

The novels of William Styron induce the reader to realize that human relationships are so fascinating and diverse, that the more one understands them, the more is there to learn. It would be apt to quote the words of Douglas Perry to comment on the behavior of the characters of Styron: “…the nature of our relations with our fellow man is to ask him to answer for our inadequacies, to fulfill us; and the nature of our fellowman is such that he cannot do this. So, each character projects his inadequacies and frustrations on the other” (189). These characters of Styron are both victims and victimizers. The agony felt by them is painful. Thrusting their inadequacies and frustrations on others, these characters commit numerous sins. The irony of their situation is that they are aware of their sins, yet they are helpless to change their nature. We may say that the pre-ordained destiny together with the characteristic qualities of these people governs
their lives. Some of the characters feel remorse and a few of them attempt to expiate their sins.