CHAPTER III
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CONCEPT OF REMORSE

Many of us are forced to live in an existential vacuum and our day-to-day life is filled with frets, fevers, phobias and worries. “Hymn to Adversity” by Thomas Gray highlights the view that suffering ennobles a human being. Endurance can be described as a moral quality, which leads human beings to understand the self and to provide an opportunity for purification or transformation. Henry Heon-Young Whang in his “Self Psychology and the Christian-Concept of Sin” states: “All the miseries and agonies of human life are supposed to have resulted from the original guilt caused by the sin that the first human couple committed, following their misled desires”. Feelings of guilt may weigh heavily on an individual’s conscience and it would demand a release from the burden. The force of this guilt drives him/her to expiate through confession, attrition, reparation, repentance, and to seek forgiveness and make atonement.

Psychology describes guilt as a feeling, experienced by an individual for having done a wrong action, thought, or speech. The psychological content of guilt feeling arises from the awareness felt by an individual, that he/she has violated the moral, social or ethical code of behavior, and that he or she must be punished for it. As an emotion, feeling of guilt is accompanied by feeling of humiliation and it may make a man weak, physically and mentally. It is revealed through irritability, ill temper, depression, sadness, and apathy, reduction of self esteem to a greater or
lesser degree, emptiness, despair, self reproach and psychosomatic disorders. It is always accompanied by feelings of misery and depression; it is remarkable that people who are inflicted with feelings of guilt feel an inevitable need for punishment.

Guilt feelings may induce a struggle between life instincts and death instincts. The consciousness of guilt can change the life style of an individual, spoil the otherwise pleasant life, and induce fear, worries and burden of mind. This feeling of guilt experienced during childhood creates a disposition to mental illness and instability of character. Very rarely, such feelings have a stimulating effect also, for, they may induce competence, and feelings of love. But an extreme sense of guilt may have terrible consequences. It may lead to suicide too.

David Padfield observes: “Guilt is one of the great destroyers of soul. Guilt, whether imagined or real, leads individuals on a downward spiral which will destroy their relationship in life and render them worthless in the kingdom of God”. He further states: “sin lies at the root of the problem, leads to guilt and depression and further complicates matters, leading to greater guilt and greater depression.”

Stephen S Kalmar in his “About Guilt and Guilt Feelings” emphasizes: “The concept of guilt is of great importance in many schools of psychology, in religions, in law, morality and ethics.” An expression linked with guilt feelings is remorse. Freud refers to remorse as a global term and the feeling of remorse may induce the need for punishment, which may be
expressed through acts of violence. A healthy sense of remorse on the other hand, reveals what is right and wrong, and may make an individual to realize his/her responsibilities, and will lead him/her in the path of expiation.

Guilt is one of the feelings that constitute the most important artistic sources. There are ample examples to show the important role played by the feelings of guilt and remorse in literature. Shakespeare’s works Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, King Lear, and The Winter’s Tale deal with the concept of sin, remorse and expiation.

The famous oscillation of Hamlet in Hamlet, whether to kill King Claudius, the murderer of his dear father, whom his mother marries in haste, creates a feeling of guilt in his mind that he is not taking revenge upon his uncle for the murder of his father.

As a result of guilt feelings, Hamlet suffers from depression, speculates on death, and ponders on committing suicide; he walks “four hours together”, (2.2.158) in the palace hall; his gait and visage expresses his melancholy which appears to his friends as unnatural. His feeling of remorse for the dead father and his sympathy towards the tortures endured by the ghost of his father evokes the reader’s sympathy for him.

Macbeth portrays the feeling of remorse felt by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth for having murdered Banquo. As per the prediction of the witches, none of Macbeth’s sons would become kings and hence he regrets:

No son of mine succeeding. If’t be so

For Banquo’s issue have I fil’d my mind;
For them, the gracious Duncan have I murder'd;
Put rancours in the vessel of my peace
Only for them, and mine eternal jewel

Given to the common enemy of man…. (3.1.63 - 68)

In spite of all her outward fortitude, Lady Macbeth too reveals her feelings of guilt and she blurts out her mind unconsciously in the sleepwalking scene.

Out damned spot! Out I say – One, two (5.1.32)… The Thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now? – What, will these hands never be clean? - No more o’ that my Lord, no more of that; (5.1.39 - 42) … Here’s the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, Oh!

Oh! (5.1.48 -50)

All the works of William Styron, deal with the concept of sin, remorse and expiation. In his novels, man is portrayed not as a victim of social forces, but as a victim of his own guilt and sin. Samuel Coale opines: “All of Styron’s major characters have palpably suffered from feeling guilty for everything they have done” (5) and that “Guilt lies at the core of the self in Styron’s fiction” (34). For them, guilt rises from their past and threatens to destroy the present.

The characters of Lie Down in Darkness are aware of the sins committed by them and hence feel remorse. The opening pages of the novel portray Milton as a man who is confounded beyond all hope. His financial
dependence on Helen and the fact that he was earning a marginal income made him to become aware of the submissive role he has to play. Since both Milton and Helen feel bad about their boarder's style of existence, they seldom spoke with each other except on money matters. By a mutual unspoken agreement, they had scheduled their programmes in such a way that they do not have to face each other everyday.

Milton feels remorse that they have lost their love words. He had dreamt a successful life and the awareness of his failure in his profession prompts him to feel that he is a "goddamn rotten failure" (88). We may say that his awareness of the situation in his life does not prompt him to change it. He passively resigns himself to fate by saying, "What had happened had happened and what might happen would happen, and so he took a drink." (97)

When Dolly visits him in the absence of Helen, Milton feels guilty; he feels uneasy and discontented because he feels that he would be committing a sin if he made love to Dolly in Helen's home. Lying in bed with Dolly, he is smothered by dreams of shame. Recalling his adolescent days, he feels that he had jilted Audrey at the age of eighteen, because at that age it was so easy to be cruel "since eighteen has no heart." (194)

Milton's nostalgia for the past is revealed when he accompanies Peyton to Helen's room to seek forgiveness. Entering the room, they are stifled by the "mysterious scents and they stung his senses with memories of dances and parties in the distant past and of love" (63) and he wonders
whether anything has happened to those loving hands that once embraced them. Sympathizing Helen, he feels a desire to sit down next to her because he felt that something was wrong with her.

Visiting Maudie at the hospital, thinking of Dolly and apparently listening to Helen’s description of Maudie’s condition, Milton commits one of the worst blunders in his life by saying ‘fine, fine’. But, when he realized the meaning of his own words, he felt as if someone has hit him on the head with a brick. Earnestly overtaken by remorse, he wants to withdraw his words and is ready to “…sacrifice all his wealth just to pay one moment’s sober penance” (191). Later, remembering that day, he had become crazed with guilt and to calm his conscience, he “threw himself at her knees in throes of Byronic remorse, wild eyed, weeping, hair in his eyes, asking her to forgive him for everything, for Dolly, for not being a better lawyer, for his drinking.” (235)

The feeling of guilt and the consequent remorse in his heart made him to confess his love for her - that she is an integral part of his existence and that his life would become meaningless, if she were not a part of it. As he vents out his grief over his failures, he observes an expression of obstinate refusal in the face of Helen and understanding that expression, Milton despairingly says, “I offer you myself and that’s all I can offer”. (255)

On another occasion Milton feels that he is ready to do anything to start things right again. By his voluntary and submissive surrender to Helen, he feels that he has “lifted all troubles from her shoulders” (256). But later,
he finds it hard to adjust with Helen everyday and when the desire to drink overwhelms him completely, he regrets his voluntary surrender to her. Observing Helen’s behavior on the Christmas day, he felt that she has been executing a drama of frustration and he wished that he had “the courage to slap her across her drawn tortured face” (170). Unable to reconcile with the behavior of Helen, Milton feels that “it was rotten to treat my baby like that” (184). When Peyton does not come home for the holidays, Milton felt an “inflaming [of] his emotions, his affairs and … [he] retreated from contact with Helen in almost any form” (173). He regrets the fact that Helen loves Peyton so little. The hostile behavior of Helen towards Peyton even on her marriage day induces feelings of anger in his heart and he feels that if he had a gun, he would shoot her and watch her “fall, slain, and bleeding among the guests” (308). Seeing the expression on Milton’s face while he is arguing with Helen, the doctor feels that his face “…was so startling, so troubling; …It seemed to be the face of a man making a last plea to some adamant, inquisitional power.” (304)

On the marriage occasion, a bitter truth dawns in his mind that “it has always been he himself who had been at the focus of these appalling female emotions” (284). Till recently, he has been fooling himself that these two women have a tinge of love and affection for each other. But on this occasion, he understands that he is caught “weaponless and defenseless between two desperate warring female machines.” (284)
Feeling of guilt at times may make a human being to realize his own true nature. Milton on the marriage occasion of Peyton realizes his excessive attachment for his daughter and becomes angry with himself: “And why? Why did he worry? It infuriated him....that he should worry so about Peyton’s happiness” (280). His love and affection for his daughter is so great that even a little displeasure in the face of Peyton creates confusion in his mind and left him shaken, disturbed and furious. Those confused feelings would make him to feel like a bug wriggling upside down on the floor.

On the sixteenth birthday of Peyton, when Helen finds fault with Milton for his affair with Dolly, for his neglect of Maudie, and for his spoiling of Peyton, Milton sincerely regrets his behavior and he wants to comfort her a little; but he can not bring himself to do it, for the kiss he has sealed on Dolly’s lips has sealed his life forever.

Milton is aware that religion has not channelized him in proper direction. He feels that he has nothing in his life – “what have I got? I’m perverted, religion’s perverted... What have we got left? (186). His despair and frustration make him pray to God, even though he does not believe in His presence – “God, if you are there, forgive your foolish son - ....” (213)

Styron describes the sorrow that overwhelms Milton on receiving the suicidal news of Peyton as follows:

Yesterday he had been happy, but this sorrow- descending upon him as it had the night before - seemed to have
confounded him beyond all hope, since, for the first time in his life, he was unable to cut his trouble adrift, to shed it like some startling and unwelcome chrysalis and finally to explain it away as one of the things. (13)

Thakur Guru Prasad regards Milton as a

...representative of a middle class morality, suffering in wedlock, a weak man of straw, parasite husband of the puritanically self righteous Helen, all the time emotionally starved and hankering after drops of love in the forbidden doses of adultery with Dolly Bonner. (72)

The reason for his affair with Dolly is that he wants company because he is afraid of being alone. He has to talk to someone as he feels that “he could disburden himself of any uneasiness by merely talking.”(36)

The opening pages of Lie Down in Darkness vividly portray the remorse and agony felt by Helen. On receiving the suicidal news of Peyton, though she does not make any reply, she feels a vast emptiness in her heart. Styron describes the feelings felt by Helen as follows: “the sudden shock striking somewhere inside her chest like an electric flickering at her finger tips; numbing her cheeks, but receding swiftly as she remembered…” (25).

In the cemetery, after her anguished encounter with Milton, Helen cries out, “Peyton..., oh God, Peyton, My child! Nothing! Nothing! Nothing!” (389). She feels that “…everything had suddenly drained forth from her flesh, leaving her as limp as some pale jellyfish.” (24)
The death of her children drives her to feel empty and desperate. She pathetically says, "I was a mother for 23 years. This is the first day, I have awakened knowing that I'm a mother no longer and that I shall never be a mother again" (24). Helen is aware that she has been a rotten and cruel mother to Peyton. The irony of her situation is that she is aware that she cannot hate her husband and her daughter Peyton; yet she cannot change her nature. When Milton begs her to allow his stay in her house, she feels desolation in her heart that has never been felt by her. Then she runs to her room weeping helpless, unfamiliar tears. Her tears speak out her feelings of remorse.

When Peyton goes to college, Milton and Helen stay with each other. Though everything would go along smoothly yet at times, Helen would remember the extra marital affair of Milton and then she would stop talking with Milton, spend much of her time in the garden, or take Maudie for long trips. The best refuge sought by her is a visit to Carey Carr.

When Milton returns after visiting Peyton, she enquires him whether Peyton said anything about Helen for not accompanying her to college. Milton's answer that she [Peyton] is hurt makes her to shed tears, and she begs forgiveness from Milton. On another occasion, when Milton is preparing to visit Peyton, Helen conveys her love to Peyton. She even kisses him on the cheek and he realizes that it is the first time she has kissed him in a year. At another time, she asks Milton to teach her to write a letter
to Peyton, since she wants Peyton "to come back home, for a while any way." (259)

Helen prepares the house to receive Peyton during the holidays and she decorates the house with wreathes, ribbons and tinsel bells. In an off-handed way, she makes it known to Milton that all those arrangements are made for Peyton. In another occasion, when Milton requests Helen to bear with Peyton for just another night, she finds fault with him for saying so.

Helen remembers her visit to her brother’s home where Peyton was stung by bees. With outstretched arms, when she got up to hold Peyton, she saw Milton running from his chair and felt a helpless frustration in her heart. Later, when Peyton walked away from the place with her father, Helen felt chilled and terribly empty. After this incident, when she sat with Maudie, she felt a sense of contentment and warmth of love in her heart.

Once when Peyton ties Maudie in a playful way, Helen extricates her and slaps Peyton viciously. Later when Peyton feels sorry for her behavior, Helen consoles her by saying, "...I know you’re sorry. I know. I know I’m sorry too. And, together, both of them weeping a bit, they made the soft soothing sounds two women make when they try to forgive each other."(65)

When Peyton offers to bring Maudie down, Helen does not want Peyton to carry Maudie. At the same time she is afraid of revealing herself. Feeling cruel thoughts in her mind, she says to herself, "I won’t let him see, he’s seen too much already" (123). At Charlottesville, observing the condition of Milton as a drowned man in whisky, Helen regrets his inability
to understand the reality and becomes wild, for he is not sane enough to know what is happening around him.

Both Helen and Peyton are equally pretentious. During the first few years, in summer and during Peyton’s vacations, both of them managed to get on together with a minimum of friction. Although they seldom wrote to each other, arrivals and departures were solemnized by kisses. They exchanged small gifts and “in general disguised their feelings...beneath masks of smooth feminine guilelessness.” (155)

On the marriage day of Peyton, Helen, observing the expression on Milton’s face, regrets that “it’s pathetic...that he should love her so, when it is obvious she despises him” (293). The Episcopal minister reverend Carey Carr feels that “he had failed” (239) to induce feelings of faith in Helen. The sense of horror and failure “clutched his spine like the wet, wrinkled hand of a drowned woman” and he felt that “he had not saved her; he had not taught her faith enough to endure disaster.”(239)

Carey Carr to whom Helen confides everything regrets the fact that she has a self-conceited opinion. Sometimes he thinks that she really is in need of a doctor. Observing Helen’s behavior with Milton, Carey wants to say, “He wants only affection, decency, humanness, and a woman’s tender greetings...be humble for one moment...ask forgiveness for despising yourself” (141). Since all these qualities are lacking in Helen’s character, Milton has chosen Dolly Bonner as his mistress.
Commenting on the character of Helen, Robert H. Fossum observes as follows: "Helen exercises her will in the service of hatred and vengeance, thereby destroying her capacity to love" (14). Helen's awareness of her own position is revealed when she defines 'hurt women' to Carey. She defines them as people who feel insecure or stupid or something, that they run around crazily, trying to find something to hold on to and cries out that she does not want to be a hurt woman; the cry of Helen evokes pity in the reader.

Psychology informs us that a person's life is shaped in the years of childhood. Oedipus or Electra complex creates the basic notions of guilt and it constitutes the fundamental problems that govern the development of an individual. Sigmund Freud in his "Explanations, Applications and Orientations" opines that the object of a child's first love is his/her parent. Freud also emphasizes the important role played by parents in shaping the future of their children. He observes: "A parent must give him [the child] the right amount of love and at the same time preserve an effective degree of authority" (870). Sophie's remark in Sophie's Choice "Mothers and fathers – they are at the core of one's own life somehow" (614) aptly illumines the life and character of Peyton.

Leon Grinberg observes: "...guilt in the earliest periods of life ...creates a disposition to mental illness, instability and crime" (48). Analyzing the life of Peyton we understand that Milton's incestuous attachment and Helen's irrational jealousy and hatred for Peyton exercise a
tremendous negative impact on the childhood of Peyton which becomes instrumental in molding her later role as an irresponsible wife and disobeying daughter. The intensely passionate interior monologue of Peyton creates a vivid picture of Peyton's childhood, which is filled with unpleasant events, nourished by her willfully.

It is remarkable that both Milton and Helen in *Lie Down in Darkness* fail to set a role model for their daughter. Peyton though young is aware of the cause of the sorrows and sufferings in her life and her awareness is revealed when she regrets: "If just she'd [Helen] had a soul and you'd [Milton] had some guts... to stand up like a man and make decisions and all the rest" (269), her life would have been a different one. Peyton painfully says, "Those people back in the Lost Generation, They thought they were lost. They were crazy. They weren't lost, what they were doing was losing us" (235). Reading the interior monologue of Peyton, we may readily agree with the fact that today's youngsters are not careless; but that they are cared less.

Peyton is aware that she cannot stay away from her parents. She compares herself to a prodigal daughter, who has "...come back home at her parents whim, seeing the error of her ways..." (268). Her longing for a normal home is revealed when she says: "...home is where I want to be, home is where Daddy and Mother want me" (268). She has her own reasons for coming home and regrets much for the aimless and lost behavior of hers.
Feeling guilty, she wanders from one place to another in search of identity. One is filled with sympathy with her when she asks, “What have we done with our lives, so that everywhere we turn, no matter how hard we try not to, - we cause other people sorrow?” (38). Commenting on the family members, Peyton says that the whole family is nuts, and from her behavior it is obvious that she does not care for her mother. Dickcartwright has commented upon the affection she has for her parents as follows: “she was somehow deviously tied to her home, her father, and that a letter from him or news from her family was apt to make her remote and unapproachable or worse....” (231)

Peyton is aware of the reason for the misery in her life - The reason being the Freudian attachment that exists between the father and daughter. She understands her father’s incestuous feelings for her. Her awareness prompts her to feel remorse for her behavior. When Milton tries to embrace her repeatedly at the marriage ceremony, she says, “Don’t...don’t Bunny, I’m sorry” and by her look, she held him off without even a word and “…she had finished erecting between them a curtain of stone …” (268). This act of Peyton can be regarded as an attempt to put an end to the oedipal relation that exists between them. Her act of lying down in darkness may be regarded as a search for her father since she feels that she has known no father.

Peyton’s awareness of her mother’s jealousy is revealed when she vehemently fights with her mother and says, “I suspect you’ve always hated
me for one thing or another, but, lately I've become a symbol to you, you couldn't stand" (311). Forgiveness, which is supposed to be a divine quality, is lacking in the character of Peyton. After the vehement peeling and scratching of the skin at Helen's face, she does not feel even a trace of remorse. Her inability to forgive and forget the ills of Helen is revealed when she narrates the event to Harry: "I want to remember it always. I went deep when I did it; I could have gone deeper if I'd wanted to, only, I didn't have enough time; I could have gone right down to the bone...." (316)

It is remarkable that Peyton, like her mother, fails to understand, that forgiveness is a source of salvation and a prize of repentance. Her continuous reference to this event forces Harry to suggest that she may not feel so badly if she forgets the unpleasant event. But the true nature of Peyton is revealed when she says, "I don't want to forget it; I want to remember it always, the blood coming out" (316). Peyton is aware of her true nature when she says: "something in me that was wrong, refused to forgive..." (350)

The shrewdness of Peyton's mind enables her to understand the pretence of her mother and she says to herself. "I'll put up a real good front for you" (269). When Milton comes to visit her leaving Maudie and Helen at Charlottesville, she finds fault with Milton for his irresponsible behavior. Seeing Helen crying tearlessly, she is moved by guilt and sorrow.

Regretting the fact that she has not been brought up right, she drinks excessively. As she says, "you don't drink like that when you are happy"
A selfless, just and noble love can never be experienced by Peyton for she has a drunken, irresponsible and selfish man as her father, and a self-righteous, proud woman as her mother. There is no role model for her. Hence she feels miserable and regrets the fact that the members of her family "have been so unkind" (39) to each other.

The fact that she is tormented by her past sinful activities is revealed when she feels the physical presence of the wingless birds. Her behavior makes us to recall the behavior of Harry in The Family Reunion who feels guilty for having pushed his wife from a liner. The intensified feeling of guilt felt by her is revealed through her visualization of the birds. With all her sinful behavior, she longs to be united with Harry. From one place to another, she wanders in search of Harry, hoping to convince him and to offer promises of a peaceful and loving life. Harry's act of rejecting her disillusions her and she loses all hopes in life. Her feeling of remorse forces her to regret her past actions and hence she prepares herself to jump from the twelfth floor of a building.

Almost all the characters in Lie Down in Darkness are guilty of their sins. Styron describes the Sunday lawn gathering, as follows: "...the cluster around them of quiet Middle class homes, hedged and pruned and proper, all touched at this moment by a somber trouble; while each mind, turned toward ... upon his own particular guilt" (63). Towards the end of the novel, Carey Carr himself wonders: "Who finally, lest it be God himself, could know where the circle, composed as it was of such tragic suspicious and
misunderstandings began and where it ended? Who was the author of the Original misdeed?” (239)

The major characters of Set This House On Fire - Mason Flagg and Cass Kinsolving, feel remorse at times. Mason Flagg, who is portrayed as an inhuman creature, seduces a girl of thirteen and he regrets much for he has to inform his mother about his expulsion from the school. Observing his behavior Peter comments as follows: “...he seemed so despondent and crest fallen, drops of sweat stood out on his brow” (95). Feeling of guilt, added with fear, makes him to regret that he has “destroyed, ruined” his life and he regrets: “How am I going to tell her [mother] for Jesus’ sake” (95). He finds it difficult to give this information to his mother in the normal course and so waits for the right opportunity. By supplying an excess of alcohol, and by cajoling her as ‘Wendy darling’, he reveals the fact that at school, he was expelled for “playing leap frog with some dame.” (102)

Just as Helen is fond of Maudie, Wendy the mother of Mason in Set This House On Fire is excessively fond of him. When Mason speaks out his expulsion from his School, she advises him that he must be a good boy; hugs him with adoration and says that he is the only thing she has on earth. Drunk, she blabbers, “you’re all Wendy has.... you see. You’re the bright star in my crown” (99). With regrets she informs him that his father is seeking another woman’s bed; feels depressed and finds fault with Mason’s father for refusing to get her a horse, and for having sex with other women. In that drunken condition, listening to Mason’s words, she starts letting out
Mason Flagg expresses his feeling of remorse when Peter is about to leave for Europe. Mason apologizes to Peter for having hit his wife the previous night by saying that it was the “first time I ever laid hands on her” (193). When Peter questions him for having lied, Mason is hurt, and he regrets the fact that Peter cannot make the subtle distinction between “a lie and between…. a jazzy kind of bull shit extravaganza,” (196) like the one he is telling Peter with an intention to edify and entertain. He takes Peter’s hands with trembling lips, “turning that simple gesture of farewell into the sorriest act of loneliness, of naked longing.” (197)

Mason Flagg feels remorse at times. When Mason is murdered by Cass for raping Francesca in a brutal way, the villagers, not knowing the truth, thought that Mason has committed suicide in remorse. But Peter opines that it is incredible for Mason to feel remorse as he knows the true nature of Mason Flagg.

Just as Peter knows the true nature of Mason, he knows the character of Cass also - the “bespectacled American in khaki; with a look in his eyes of the fixity of doom” (518). The generosity, hospitality and kindness of Cass Kinsolving impress Peter. Cass is sick inside his soul, and he cannot
figure out from where the sickness came. For a long time, he felt that “dirt, poor orphan hood was the reason” (67) for his sickness. He regrets the fact that he is a failure in his profession with all his talents. He feels as one who is amputated in front of a sketchpad, and in the depth of his heart he feels pain and agony about it. The remorse in the heart of Cass may be the result of his awareness of reality. After his drunken argument with Poppy, Cass spends the night with Yvonne; afterwards, he regrets the fact that the money he gave to Yvonne was actually Poppy’s money.

Cass feels sorry about the fact that he had spent much of his time feeling sick about life. He is aware that this sickness has originated from “despair, self loathing, and greed and selfishness and spite” (302). Added to this, he feels that he has done some “nameless and enormous crime” (305). His feeling of remorse increases, because he cannot name his crime and his conscience has become “burdened.” (306)

On a fine day, after a horrible dream, Cass realizes that he has done some wretched and horrible deed in the past and the recollection of that event induces feelings of shame in his conscience. The awareness of the sin committed by him in his adolescent playful age adds immense burden to the guilt and shame he has already felt. After understanding the cause of his sickness, the burden of guilt is increased. Feeling miserable and wretched about it, he thinks that he can never mitigate the crime, because it is awful and monstrous; and that there is no atonement for it.
As Cass observes he has understood "one more dirty face, one more foul and unclean image" (420) of himself. Suffering all these thoughts, Cass feels like a total stranger to his own self. The burdensome feelings felt by Cass are revealed when he asks, "How will I ever forgive myself, for all the things I have done." (441)

The remorse he feels in his heart for the sad and sorrowful plight of Francesca is expressed through his embrace and this action of Cass makes us to recall his own words in Set This House On Fire: "I have often wondered ... whether a part of love wasn't just the perfectly human, uncondescending, magnanimous yearning to shelter in your arms some one else who is hurt or lost or needs comfort" (431). The humanism in Cass' character is revealed when he embraces and consoles Francesca, who has been sobbing "as if all the injustice and pain and cruelty in the world had come ...to her" (484). He is touched by the remorse felt by Francesca that for a while he holds her in his arms as though by his embrace he would erase out the feeling of humiliation, shame and bitterness felt by his beloved. For a long time leaning against the wall, they melt together in a tormented embrace.

We may say that it is the first instance of physical touch experienced by Cass and Francesca. Looking at them, Peter is able to sense vaguely "how much he cared for the girl" (144). It is this feeling of remorse mixed with love for Francesca that makes him to feel that a "dynamite had gone off" (487) inside him and exploded him into bits, after she left the palace. Later, it is this shattered feeling that induces him to commit the greatest sin
of murdering Mason Flagg. After listening to Wind Gasser’s description of the cruel way in which Francesca is raped, Cass murders Mason Flagg. On his way to home, he meets a priest who informs him of the death of Michele. On hearing the death news of Michele, Cass faints.

The feeling of grief overwhelms him and his mind is obsessed with just one single thought that he should be punished for what he has done. About his act of murdering Mason, Cass regrets “...to kill a man, even in hatred, even in revenge is like an amputation” (493). By killing Mason wrongly, he feels that he has amputated a part of himself forever; feels that he has wrongly judged and condemned a person. He regrets that it is a pain that will stay with him as long as he lives; and this feeling of remorse forces him to confess his sinful act to Luigi.

Sophie in Sophie’s Choice feels remorse for the happy bygone days. Her happy peaceful life in Cracow had been shattered when her father and husband were rounded up, deported and murdered by the Nazis. She regrets the fact that she had quarreled with her husband, when they were together the last time; they had “a big fight and that was terrible.” (118). While quarreling she had cursed him “Drop dead” (119), and he rushed away from her. Remembering the fact that she did not say farewell to her husband or her father, Sophie experiences feelings of guilt. Recalling that night she observes: “…I have never seen him, even once after that. So that is what I found it so difficult to bear, that we don’t have even a gentle parting, a kiss, an embrace, nothing”. Recollecting this event she had cried to that extent
that there were "no more tears in me to pour on the earth." (119)

Confession of her past to Stingo magnifies the feelings of guilt in Sophie. Her awareness of her attempts to attract Rudolf Hoss to her feminine charms pinches her conscience and in consequence, she is filled with self-hatred. Added to this, she feels guilty about her hopes and prayer that the Nazis should focus their attention on the Jews as scapegoats, for only then she could remain alive in the concentration camp. She regards herself as a filthy collaborator and feels that she had done everything that was bad just to save her and feels shameful about her past conduct. This shameful feeling induces a sense of unworthiness of life.

Sophie feels guilty about the lies she has told to Stingo. With remorse in her heart she confesses about her lover Jozef, and about the choice she has to make in choosing between her children, so that she may escape the torturous death in the concentration camp. She feels that her sin is a devastating guilt and regrets the fact that every morning she has to wake up with a sense of "suffocating knowledge of her guilt" (293), which weighs heavily on her soul. This feeling of guilt forces Sophie to commit suicide as she is aware that only death can give her the solace that she is craving for in life. Hence, she tries to put an end to her life by cutting her wrist with a piece of glass.

Recalling the "digital rape" (126) she underwent in the sub-way tram, she feels terribly lost and miserable. The impact of this event is very deep; she feels: "... self-assurance and sanity had...been stripped bare ... she felt
once more the freezing cold of the spirit" (127). As a result of this loathsome event, Sophie felt that her confinement in the camp for twenty months with its daily, inhuman degradation and nakedness could not make her feel less befouled. Added to this is the fact that she is a catholic and a polish and a child of her upbringing would definitely feel ashamed of the “unconventional” (133) rape. The ghastliness of this event results in profuse bleeding and it drains the life energy from her and “her face was as devoid of any of the animating pink of life as those bleached skulls of ancient monks she recalled from the underground sepulchre of an Italian church” (137). She regards the rape as a “stab in the back from some vile marauder” (127). This gross insult makes her to feel that “A straight forward …rape would have done less violation to her spirit and identity” (126). Her grief is further intensified by her realization that Brooklyn is not as safe as she thought it to be.

Remembrance of her childhood days forces her to recall the fact that she worked as a stenographer for her father who purposely made her to learn typewriting in Polish and German languages, and short hand too. Once, while taking down the notes of her father for a pamphlet “Poland’s Jewish Problems”, knowing the admiration of her father for Neville Chamberlain, the author of “Foundation of the Nineteenth Century”, Sophie commits the blunder of including his name in the pamphlet and she is furiously flayed by her father for this inclusion. Sophie turns to her husband for consolation but feels aghast, because the smile in his face reveals the fact that he shares her
father’s contempt for her. At that time Sophie realized that she had no love for Kazik. As she observes: “I had no more love for my husband than for a stone faced stranger I had never seen before in my life” (328). When her father ordered her to distribute the pamphlet in the university she felt hatred for her father who has “no more feeling for me than a servant, some peasant or slave.” (330)

Stingo in Sophie’s Choice also feels remorse. He remembers that at the age of twelve, he had abandoned his mother who was ailing from cancer to the biting wind and chillness. As a grown up person, his conscience pricked him for this unpardonable act. Added to this, Stingo remembers that his grandfather possessed two small Negro maidens and that he sold the brother “an innocent boy of 16” into the grinding hell of the “Georgia turpentine forests.” (47)

The remorse felt by Rudolf Hoss, the commander of the concentration camp, brings out the humanistic feelings in him. Hoss recalls the occasion when two small children who were playing in the camp were to be taken into the gas chambers. His pity for those youngsters was so immense that he wanted to vanish away from the scene. Taking a firm decision against this feeling in his mind, he decided not to “show the slightest trace of emotion” (206). Hoss rues over the fact that he is not happy in Auschwitz, once those mass exterminations had begun. To escape from the feelings of guilt, he would mount on his horse until he had chased the terrible feelings away from his mind; at times he may go for long walks through the stables and
seek relief among his pet animals. Looking at his own children, the feeling of guilt increases and he used to question himself: "how long will our happiness lost?" (207). Undoubtedly, this doubtful question is induced by the awareness of the sins committed by him.

The characters of William Styron are aware of their sins; and are filled with remorse. Yet they do nothing to change the situations; except Peyton, Cass Kinsolving, Sophie, Nathan and Stingo, none of the other characters attempt to change their way of living. Peyton, Sophie and Nathan expiate their sins by committing suicide. Cass Kinsolving makes an attempt to expiate by willingly offering to go to prison but he is chanalized by Luigi in a different, right way of living. Mason Flagg and Stingo are made to expiate their sins by Cass Kinsolving and Stingo’s father.