CHAPTER IV
CHAPTER-IV

CONCEPT OF EXPIATION

Human beings are to be valued for many aspects like physical stamina, mental prowess, sense of humor, and sense of right and wrong. The strange mysterious nature of truth or lie, right or wrong, beauty or sordidness is that none can provide a precise definition for these abstract terms. Every individual is capable of doing good and bad actions, because every human being is a combination of vice and virtue, divinity and bestiality. The moral goodness possessed by an individual elevates him to the level of a noble human being, while the evil in him reduces him to the level of a beast.

Values differ. As D. H. Lawrence observes: "What is right in one case, is wrong in another, for Right and Wrong is an instinct" (135). It is right for a tiger to attack a lamb and to tear it into numerous pieces for its meal, because it is how God willed the eco system to be. But a developed man should not regress into animalism for the Creator intended that human beings should evolve into a higher and nobler creature. In our journey of life, we must ascend step by step from the lowest to the highest order in the Cosmos because the purpose of our existence is progress and development by evolution, and man should never slip into atavism.

The Hindu philosophy of expiation is based on the law of Karma, the principles of cause and effect. The Hindu view of life is that man is doomed to rebirth and destined to expiate the sins of unrememberable past lives. His present life, if good, will have its good impact in some next life. We reap
today the harvest of the unknown past sowing. It firmly believes that a man who has not expiated his sins in this life has to pay the penalty in the next. Manu Dharma Shastra 11:54 states that "Penances therefore must always be performed for the sake of purification, because those whose sins have not been expiated are born again."

Through a ceaseless cycle of births and deaths, through nobility of actions and purity of heart, through purgation of baser passions and burning of karmas, the soul finally has to unite itself with Brahma. Sanadhana Dharma teaches that our original nature is pure goodness and that we all can become one with God. The Hindu concept of expiation is the removal of impure thoughts, speeches and actions, which will enable him to return to his inherent pure being. This is salvation, which is sought by saints and sages.

Hinduism does not believe that human beings suffer from any original sin or inherent fault in their nature, which must be corrected by an external influence or special grace. It describes control of mind and senses along with a total dedication and surrender to God and love for all living beings as the means to attain Nirvana - the illumination of mind. A rigorous life is possible only to a few souls that are great, and it becomes impossible to a vast majority of ordinary mortals. At the same time it does not relent totally as to wink at sins. It still emphasizes a disciplined way of life so that the ordinary mortals can also qualify for the heavenly abode.
Christianity describes confession as a mode of expiation. Christians regard the crucifixion of Christ as His atonement for the sins of mankind. Christian theology insists that human beings should rely upon God's grace and the redemption provided by the death of Christ. The preaching of Gospel implies that through Christ, forgiveness, in the place of punishment is offered to those sinners who repent.

A sinner can never maintain a cordial relationship with others, because sin has the potentiality to isolate the sinner from others. As James M. Campbell describes, sinful feelings may make an individual to regard his/her conscience as "thousand swords" and he/she may feel the "torture of an inward hell" (47). The result of this may lead to self-harm. By his/her sinful behavior, an individual may acquire a stain on his soul and degenerate himself. 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.

We may say that all sinful thoughts and deeds are caused by ignorance- ignorance of us, others and of higher values. This ignorance paves way for moral transgression, which in turn may lead a man to become a sinner. Only with the illumination of knowledge can the evil things and ignorance be destroyed. True expiation comes from illumination and when expiation is done, sin dissolves away. As fire consumes all the things, so the fire of enlightenment may consume all evils.

Leon Grinberg observes: "Every religion is mainly based on the idea of sin or the feeling of guilt arising from an inability to fulfill prescribed
standards” (7). The awareness of having done wrong deeds may create the feeling of guilt and remorse in an individual and it may be accompanied by the need for expiation, which includes a need for punishment. In today’s world the term “expiation” has become a synonym for punishment and repentance. Repentance or expiation literally means, ‘change of mind’. This change should come from within one’s self.

The expiation of guilt can be achieved through mortification, which entails one to suffer for his sins. As cited by Beth A. Messner and Jacquelyn J. Buckrop, mortification involves: “...an open confession of an individual’s transgression against the Order and then [undergoing] some corresponding punishment which can be either actual or symbolic. Self inflicted punishments, self sacrifice and self-denials are signs of mortification.”

Each sinner owes atonement for the sins he has committed. Expiation involves repentance, apology, reparation and penance. It is good if a man regrets his sins willingly; if not, an individual can help another to make the necessary atonement – can persuade him to repent, help him to formulate the words of apology, and provide him the means by which to make reparation and penance. If a sinner is not in a position to atone for what he has done, it is good that someone puts him in that position so as to make proper atonement.

The fool in The Twelfth Night aptly describes: “Virtue that transgresses is but patched with sin; and Sin that amends is but patched with virtue” (1.5.43-45). No individual can be regarded as a sinner and for every
sin expiation is possible if the sinner realizes his mistakes and seeks forgiveness.

Commenting on the characters of Styron, Ihab Hassan observes that some of the characters of Styron experience "the loss, the pain, and bitterness of growth, and the fall from uneasy Grace." (21)

Analyzing the characters of *Lie Down in Darkness*, we realize that they fail to understand the root cause of their sufferings. We may even say that the attempts made by the characters of this novel make them to move from bad to worse state of things. Except Peyton Loftis in *Lie Down in Darkness*, Cass Kinsolving in *Set This House On Fire*, and Nathan and Sophie in *Sophie’s Choice*, none of the other characters to expiate their sins. Mason Flagg of *Set This House On Fire* and Stingo in *Sophie’s Choice* are made to expiate their sins.

Marriage is the product of the eternal contract of individuals and it is supposed to be the symbol of the closest possible human unity; it also symbolizes communion and a new life. "...a man shall leave his father and his mother, and cleave unto his wife;" says the book of Genesis, thus highlighting the primary intimacy of marital relationship. Each individual enters into this eternal bond of contract with his or her ideals about his/her role. It is important that each should be prepared to make sacrifices and compromises. In *Lie Down in Darkness*, it is to be noted that the marital life of Helen and Milton is an example of an absurd situation. Though they had courted each other before their marriage, their married life is not a happy
one. In their rare attempts to remedy the worst situations, gestures and words contradict their feelings, and they fail to expiate their sins.

We may say that Milton Loftis is aware of all the sins committed by him - his adultery, alcoholism, irresponsibility, phallic love for one of his daughters and the neglect of another. His conscience informs him that he had committed an unpardonable sin - "It was neither one of commissions, nor of omissions, but the worst combination of both – of apathy..." (209). The awareness of his sins does not induce him to change his behavior. Since, he is a man who believes in fatalism, he allows the events to take their course. Only once in the novel, he tries to expiate - when Peyton found fault with him for having left Maudie and Helen at the hospital, he realizes his mistake that he has expected too much from her.

Milton, thinking of Dolly, carelessly utters 'fine', 'fine' while discussing Maudie's condition with Helen. Then he realizes his mistake, feels so guilty and wants to expiate his sin: "... he felt that he would have given all his wealth for the ability to pay one moment's sober penance" (191). By way of expiation, he surrenders himself to Helen. As Styron comments: "He became crazed with guilt and so he threw himself at her [Helen's] knees, in throes of Byronic remorse, weeping wild eyed, hair in his eyes, asking her to forgive him for everything, for Dolly, for not being a better lawyer, for his drinking." (253)

When Helen consumed the sleeping pills, his sympathy for her forces him to confess his love for her and to expiate his sins through his confession
of love. His sincere effort to amend their breaking relationship is revealed when he says, “...I admit am nothing great. I guess. I was still willing to do anything to start things again” (256). This self-surrender of Milton helped him to “lift ... all troubles from her shoulders” (256). But later his voluntary surrender makes him to regret for having allowed her to get the upper hand.

The love Milton has for Helen is revealed when Helen retreats into a dark room after punishing Peyton for tying Maudie. Milton wants to pacify her, “he wished to sit down by her and take her hand because there was something wrong with her. But he loved her ...” (66). Thus, Milton is aware of his horrible life, but very rarely he makes an attempt to change his behavior and life style; even in that he fails miserably.

Freud in his “Anxiety and Instinctual Life” remarks as follows: “The belief in the goodness of human nature is one of those evil illusions by which mankind expect their lives to be beautiful and made easier, while in reality it only cause damage” (137) and this becomes true of the character of Helen for it is her self-righteousness and obsession with order that destroys not only her, but the whole family.

We may say that Helen is responsible for the destruction of her family to a certain extent. In her character, we encounter a mother who lacks the virtue of sympathy, forgiveness and self-less nature.

In his second lecture of Sesame and Lilies, John Ruskin emphasizes the nature of the role that has to be played by the mistress of the home. It is the ‘queen’ who creates serenity and peaceful atmosphere at home. With
love, affection and care she can convert a house into home, which can indeed become a ‘temple’. But, Helen fails to realize her responsibility.

Commenting on the nature of Helen, Reverend Carey Carr says, “She will not make compromises” (141). Peyton feels that “she was beyond hope ... the day she was born” (317). Dolly Bonner feels “that it is the fault of that Succubus who treated her so badly” (76). Peyton precisely defines the flaw in the character of Helen: her hatred for her own daughter and her inability to forgive others and herself.

Throughout the novel, Helen makes Peyton to feel that she is the cause of her sister’s death. Her inability to forgive Peyton in letting Maudie fall or tying her is revealed in the Charlottesville scene. The “proud and unalterable loathing” (274) of Helen for Peyton bursts out on the marriage occasion of Peyton. Her lack of forgiveness makes us to contrast her with Portia in The Merchant of Venice who highlights the qualities of Mercy.

The quality of mercy is not strained;

It droppeth as the gentle rain from the heaven
upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;
it blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

(4.1.179-183).

Since Helen lacks love for Peyton, she inflicts pain on her. She fails to understand that love cannot inflict pain except as a means to do some good. We are reminded of the words of Leonard Hodgson: “...all religious observances are vain without the faith which in all human relationships
expresses itself in the fulfillment of the law of love” (25). Further he opines, “Punishment is punishment only when it is deserved. We pay the penalty, because we owe it and for no other reason; and if punishment is inflicted for any other reason, it is gross immortality, a crying injustice, an abominable crime.” (54)

The desire to punish others is an instinct of revenge. The characteristic behavior of Helen, inflicting punishment on Peyton makes her daughter to regard her mother as a harpy. We may say that the holidays, birthday party, and wedding celebrations and every happy occasion invariably end up in frustration because of the anger, bitterness, hatred and the sharpness of Helen’s tongue. And whenever Helen punishes Peyton, she turns to Milton for solace and comfort, which further infuriates Helen.

The unforgiving nature of Helen is revealed, when looking at Milton’s shattered condition, she feels: “Perhaps that is good in a way. Perhaps that’s good for a man – finally to know what suffering is, to know what a woman somehow knows almost from the day she’s born.” (26)

We are also forced to question our own selves, how shall we, the erring mortals, expect Him to show His mercy on the Day of Judgment, if we relentlessly refuse to forgive the sins of our fellow human beings? The unforgiving quality of Helen makes us to feel that if she could forgive, or if she could at least make a moderate adjustment in the family, the members would not have been headed to such degeneration.
The agony felt by Helen over the loss of her Children when she says “Oh, Nothing, Nothing, Nothing” (389) reminds us of King Lear’s words “Nothing comes out of nothing” (1.1.89) and as Lear understands his daughter’s ‘love’ towards the end of the play, so too Helen understands the meaninglessness of her life after the death of Peyton.

At times she hides her feelings for Peyton in the presence of Milton. Peyton’s marriage is one such occasion where Helen makes all extravagant arrangements, so that others may regard her as a “woman who has sacrificed, whose suffering is known to the community, but who on the day of her daughter’s marriage presents only the face of humility and courage and goodwill” (273). It had been cruelly difficult to put on this act – to falsify her true feelings; she asked herself: “Who could tell, that this gentle sprightliness masked the most villainous intentions”. The irony of her situation is that she knew these thoughts to be “cruel intentions, cruel feelings and perhaps unnatural” (274) and regrets her inability to do anything to change her attitude towards her own flesh and blood.

With all her religiosity when she prays “not for guidance which seemed too vague and elementary, but rather that God please give her logic to direct blame in proper direction” (132), we become wonderstruck at her behavior.

The greatest flaw in the character of Helen is that she fails to understand the importance and necessity of providing love, care and affection for her child. Of the three kinds of parental discipline based on
Freud's theory- "permissive" [one who grants every wish of the child], "authoritative" [tries to formulate the child's action in a rational and issue oriented manner], and "authoritarian" [asserts their whims and fancies on the child and tries to control them in all their endeavors] (870) - we could classify Milton as belonging to the "permissive" group; and Helen as belonging to the "authoritarian" group.

The physical complaints of Helen are the manifestations of her mental conflicts. The suicidal impulse felt by her and the act of swallowing Nembutal tablets reveal the conflicts in her mind. Her excessive love for Maudie and hatred of Peyton reveal her inability to integrate love and hatred. Her frequent visits to Carey Carr reveal her dependence on him; Carr tries his best to cure the sickness of Helen, but he fails in it. The sense of despair experienced by Carr is revealed when he says "There is something wrong with you beyond curing; beyond anything I can do, any way" (147). The fact that Carey fails in his effort to cure Helen makes us to realize that change must come from within.

Peyton and Helen in Lie Down in Darkness and Cass Kinsolving in Set This House On Fire are sick of themselves. Cass, though sick, becomes aware of his own sickness and hence a change in him becomes possible. Peyton and Helen, too, are aware of their conditions but they are unable to change their nature or to forgive their own self.

It is not that Peyton alone lies down in darkness (ignorance). It is remarkable that all the Loftises fall back into the darkness of
their private and self-destructive spirits. Helen knew that by saying a single word such as ‘yes’ or ‘forgive’ or ‘Love’, she can set right everything. But she always refuses to say that. Like Helen, Milton thinks, “If [Helen] knew what was true, if I knew what truth was too, we could love each other” (96). But neither Helen nor Milton knows what truth is, for they are drowned in their self-pity and self pride and hence they do not attempt any expiation.

The suicide of Peyton in Lie Down in Darkness can be taken as an expiation of her sins. Her desire to escape from the feeling of guilt that is poisoning her life prompts her to commit suicide. This suicidal impulse is induced by the feeling of depression, which is revealed through mourning, her feelings of helplessness and despair accompanied by the weakening of moral and physical strength.

Freud in his “Mourning and Melancholia” observes:

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of capacity to love, inhibition in all activity and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterances in self-reproaches and self-reviling and culminates in delusional expectation of punishment. (244)

It is true that of all the characters in Lie Down in Darkness, Peyton is the one to be sympathized most. She is aware of her sins, hates and reproaches herself for she understands her mother’s hatred and jealousy,
feels guilty about her incestuous attachment to her father, and for her adulterous behavior.

Depression can be compared with illness, like cancer, which is foreign to the individual and invasive of the self; despair causes depression and it is further intensified by gloom, dread, alienation, and self-hatred. In despair an individual may commit suicide as done by Sophie, Peyton and Nathan or undergo self-analysis as done by Cass.

From the interior monologue of Peyton, we may surmise that she should have regretted for having been born; but having been born, she should have preferred to die as soon as possible. The pain and anguish undergone by her is revealed symbolically through the avenging furies haunting her. The flightless birds that accompany her symbolize her guilt and this recognition compels her to expiate her sins.

Peyton feels a sense of intolerable guilt on her final day, and it induces her to say, "Undivorced from guilt; I must divorce myself from life" (382). Unable to forgive herself, she questions herself: "When I lay down with all the other hostile men, the sin and the guilt, the feathers that rustled in the darkness, my drowning? Then, I would say; Oh my Harry, my lost sweet Harry, I have not fornicated in the darkness because I wanted to, but because I was punishing my self for punishing you." (359)

We may say that the phallic father-daughter attachment ruins the life of Peyton. On her sixteenth birthday, she discovers that her father has betrayed her and it is this feeling of betrayal that drives her to bed with men
like Tony and Dick "whose mind was like a sheet of paper, on which no thoughtful word was ever written" (342). Her adultery can be regarded as her desperate attempt to free herself from her love for Milton. It can also be regarded as a way of inflicting pain on her own self for having been unfaithful to Harry.

Just as Helen is dependant on her child Maudie, Carr, and Milton, Peyton is dependant on Milton and later on Harry. Like her mother, she is incapable of constant and steadfast love.

Her suspicion that Harry had been unfaithful to her adds to the feeling of loss and she finds herself in bed with many men. She takes vengeance on her father indirectly through Harry because all desirable men are surrogates of the father. The adulterous behavior of Peyton provokes hatred in the heart of Harry. He becomes disillusioned with her immoral behavior and her way of equating love with need. Being separated from Harry, she wanders from one place to another in search of him. On the suicidal day, she purchases an alarm clock, with a hope that inside the clock both of them would be safe.

She also hopes that this jeweled clock will protect her completely from her guilt for she regards the clock as a place where all her guilt will disappear. Her wish to get into the clock and to live there with Harry reveals her desperate need and longing for order, unity and perfection. At the same time, she has her own doubts, whether he would understand the miracle of her invention. This doubt of Peyton becomes true, as Harry rejects not only the clock, but also Peyton.
Like Peyton, Sophie in *Sophie’s Choice* too recalls one of her childhood thoughts:

I would lie there and think about clocks. ...once I opened the back of it and looked into it while it was running and saw a whole lot of levers and wheels and jewels- I think they were mostly rubies- shining in the reflection from the sun. So at night lying there I would think of myself inside clock – imagine anything so crazy from a child- where I would just float around on a spring and watch the levers moving and the various wheels turning and see the rubies, red and bright and as big as my head. (109)

Feeling guilty about her behavior, being depressed because of Harry’s rejection, she ponders on committing suicide. She would have thought of another possibility – that of returning to her parents. But, this prodigal daughter has already experienced a bitter taste on her marriage day and so she dismisses this thought for she is very sure her mother will not accept her. So, she turns to the next possibility of death, which will not reject her. She would have regarded suicide as a means of overcoming tremendous anguish, guilt, shame, hostility, vengefulness and depression. Her suicide becomes expiation for all her sins and by way of expiation, she commits a greater sin of violating the sacred life.

A letter written by an elderly person cited by Beth A. Messner and Jacquelyn J. Buckrop can be quoted here. The elderly man has justified his act of suicide by arguing in the following manner:
If I can choose between a life of torture and death, why should I not select the latter? As I have the ship in which I shall sail and the house which I shall inhabit, so I will choose death by which I leave life.... Why should I endure agonies, when I can emancipate myself from all of my torments?

Peyton finds herself in an exactly similar situation.

Before committing suicide, with a confused mind, she prays to God. “Oh Lord, make me clean and pure and without sin; God give me my Harry back, then, Harry give me my God back” (359). Her search for Harry or God is induced by her sense of guilt. At one point, she confesses: “Why was it, when I thought of prayer, I thought of home; why these two things always together giving me grief?” (361). The reason for her grief could be best understood with the help of a quotation from Kierkegaard: “It is a well-established ceremonial convention that if the finite spirit would see God, it must begin, by being guilty in turning towards him/her, he discovers guilt” (96). The awareness of her sins prompts her to expiate them. She wants to destroy herself, so she may escape from the agonies of life. But, by destroying herself, she hopes to rise again, to find a new home and a new father and so she jumps from the twelfth storey of a building in Harlem to death, removing all her clothes so that she might be pure.

T.S. Eliot's observation that 'In my end is my beginning' informs and illumines the life and death of Peyton Loftis for she drowns herself in the dark region only to rise again to find a new father, and a new home. The
very structure of the novel begins with the end of Peyton’s life and ends with the possible hope of her resurrection.

Kierkegaard observes: “... humanly speaking, death is the last thing of all and humanly speaking, there is hope only so long as there is life; But Christianly understood, death is by no means the last thing of all” (12). In accordance with the views of Kierkegaard, before jumping off to death, Peyton hopes to rise again; the hallelujah heard from the distance strengthens her hope. As she is about to commit a gross sin of violating the sacred life given by God, she suddenly recalls Helen’s admonishment that she must be proper; but she brushes away the advice of Helen with a mere “Oh! Pooh” (386). After her death, she is buried in Hart’s Island, which is a place for unclaimed bodies. Thus, her search for identity and love has become futile both in life and death.

Harry, the Jewish husband of Peyton, when he is about to identify the corpse of his wife, wonders that he doesn’t know whose fault it is. For the same question in our mind, ‘who is to be blamed for this calamity?’ we are unable to offer a satisfactory answer. A probable answer may be ‘the behavior of the characters and the circumstances and fate over which no individual has any command’.

After Harry’s identification, Peyton’s corpse is brought to Port Warwick and the funeral procession of Peyton passes through the polluted marshlands and garbage dumps. After crossing the garbage dumps, filling stations and gas storage tanks, the Loftises reach the cemetery chapel where
they experience thunder and August rain showers. The thunder heard in *Lie Down in Darkness* makes us to recall the thunder heard in T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. But instead of hope as in *The Waste Land* there is only violence and hatred as revealed by Milton’s behavior of choking Helen.

Commenting on *Lie Down in Darkness*, Donald Pizer observes as follows: “...the principal impact of reading this book is to enforce on us the conditioned nature of our lives” (131). Throughout the novel, the longing of Milton, Peyton and Helen for a better life is revealed. But, we, the readers know how vain their attempt is. Peyton longs for happy innocent childhood days. As she says, “make me as I was, when I was a child, when we walked along the sand and picked up shells” (359). Milton and Helen long for the kind of love, which they shared in their early-married life, a feeling free from pressures, tension and responsibilities of parenthood. For Peyton at least there is hope that she may rise again but there is no fresh dawn for the Loftises as the train leaves Port Warwick into the oncoming night, which symbolizes the perpetual darkness that may pervade the life of Loftises because they never make a whole-hearted attempt to expiate their sins.

With all their awareness of reality, they never feel the responsibility to change it. Marc L. Ratner aptly points out the flaw in the characters of *Lie Down in Darkness* as follows:

Peyton’s ... inability to be free of the ghosts of a past, ...

Milton experiencing all the desires of childhood hunger, thirst, ...

... while watching Peyton’s wedding; and Helen emanating
her jealous hatred of Peyton and desire for revenge – these are Styron’s ‘Children’, who remember, who are destroyed and who have the worst of both -the child’s and the adult’s world – immaturity and spiteful memory. (44)

Undoubtedly the Loftises are destroyed by the immaturity and spiteful memory.

The second novel of Styron, Set This House On Fire, emphatically portrays the struggle between good and evil in man’s nature; as health has to struggle hard with disease, life with death, grain with seeds, truth with falsehood, so also the good nature of man has to struggle hard with evil for mastery over man’s soul. Peter’s father, in the beginning of Set This House On Fire observes:

What this great land of ours needs is something to happen to it, something ferocious and tragic … something terrible so that when the people have been through hell fire and crucible, and have suffered agony enough and grief, they will be men again, human beings. (24)

This saying of Peter’s father becomes true, for two violent incidents occur in Sambuco that transform Cass Kinsolving who describes himself as a “terrible blob, this vegetable” (283), into a refined human being. “The act of atonement” (61) made by Cass and how Mason was made to atone are described in the novel. Cass is aware of the sins committed by him - that he is “trapped by booze”(66), that he is living his life without a focus; that he is
“sick as a dog inside” (67); that his mind is always inflicted with “a single poisonous thought and that was to destroy myself in the most agonizing way” (66). Added to his adultery and irresponsible nature, he is burdened with a sense of “undiscoverable crime” (306). This burden is induced by his awareness that “he had done something wretched and horrible … when he was about fifteen years old”, and that “no matter how you looked at it, could not mitigate the crime.” (410 - 411)

The guilt of Cass that he had assisted Lonnie in destroying the house of a nigger for having stolen a radio, makes him to feel that his act was “not just wrong”, but “awful, monstrous, abominable” (418) for, in those days, he was of the opinion that “a nigger wasn’t much more than an animal” any way (418). The “stench of dirt and sweat and … of too many human bodies in one place of poverty naked and horrid and unremitting” (416) in the house of Michele prompts him to recall the stench in Lonnie’s house, and they should have reminded him of his unforgivable crime at the age of fifteen. Cass’ meeting and acquaintance with Francesca and her family provides a chance to atone his sin. His conscience is so burdened with guilt, he dreams of violent nightmarish dreams. As Cass says, “Whatever nightmares I’d had – the one’s I remembered anyway-had been tied up with Negroes. Negroes in prison, Negroes being gassed, me being gassed, Negroes watching me the while I was being gassed.” (409)

Taking this chance as a right opportunity to amend his sin, he steals, trains Francesca to steal, becomes a slave of Mason, draws a nude picture
and does everything ordered by Mason Flagg; Already burdened with a sense of innate guilt, this guilt and shame "half-smothered" (420) Cass, and it prevents him from self-expression, because in front of a canvas, he feels "like a man who had both hands chopped off at the wrist" (280). Though outwardly he may "jeer and sneer and snicker and pooh pooh all amateurish stuff deep down in his heart, he was hurt ...at least they had produced something" (280). He feels that "Kinsolving pitted against Kinsolving' is a dreary battle."(280)

Like Milton, he resigns himself to fate passively: "...What was going to happen was going to happen" (302). Though he has resigned himself to fate, yet all on a sudden, he is so overwhelmed by a desire to commit suicide; but the mystery of life lies in the fact that "one of the exciting things about life is that some of our worst trials have miraculously kindly endings.” (324)

Though human beings possess dual nature, at times one of the qualities dominates. And miraculously at a particular moment, Cass feels "...the other part, the good part, the heart breaking and lovely part that had been hidden to me before and it all seemed to be beckoning me toward it”(309). Peter describes the characteristic of Cass as follows: ‘Generosity, hospitality, and kindness these were a part of his nature” (63). Unlike Helen, who never forgives her own daughter, Cass in Set This House On Fire is sympathetic and kind-hearted to others. As if he is blessed by God, the good that has been ‘dormant’ in his nature is roused at an appropriate moment.
His falling on a vase and breaking it, which is worthy of two hundred thousand lire, and being taken to the police station, can be regarded as a blessing in disguise because it is there, where he meets Francesca and the humanistic Corporal Luigi who develops a friendly attitude towards Cass. Seeing the soft-eyed oval of Francesca’s face smeared with rain and dirt, he wanted to clean her up, make her happy and “press upon her lips a full and passionate kiss.” (362)

His love for Francesca can be described as love at first sight and his act of expiation for his sins begins from this moment. When Cass came to know of the penalty to be paid by Francesca for having stolen a nickel windmill, he readily offers to pay for it. This spontaneous good action done by Cass breeds happiness, for it is this humanistic gesture that attracts Luigi towards Cass. In spite of his poverty-stricken condition of living, he employs Francesca at his home because Cass “found some joy in her who was almost enough to preserve my sanity” (486). It is this love for Francesca that induces him to wallow in slavishness so that he could help Francesca in providing medical aid to her father.

His love for Francesca is so true that he wants to share her burden of caring her father; we are made to remember Emerson’s views on love where he describes the magic consequences of falling in Love as follows:

... the enhancement of human life a certain divine rage and enthusiasm seizes on man at one period and works a revolution in his mind and body; unites him to his race, pledges him to
the domestic and civic relations, carries him with new sympathy into nature, enhances the power of the senses, opens the imagination... (161)

With Francesca's love, Cass undergoes a miraculous change. From despair he attains exultation in having conquered his meaningless existence through love. He gets regenerated and revived. The paradoxical position in which Cass places himself – becoming a slave and at the same time feeling exalted, makes us to recall the feelings of Adam after the fall. As Herbert Weisinger observes:

...a view of the fall [of Adam] may be termed a paradox because on the one hand the fall of man was indeed the occasion of the most bitter sorrow..., yet on the other hand, without it, the subsequent history of man would be without meaning and purpose, the incarnation and the Redemption could not take place ...Thus the fall of man is felt to be simultaneously harrowing and ecstatic, for at the very moment when man is thrown into the deepest despair, at that moment, and at that moment alone, he is made aware of the possibility of realizing the greatest good and in this way, and only in this way, does good come out of evil. (106-107)

The sin of Cass as that of reducing his human status itself and at the same time feeling a sense of selflessness and elation of his soul brings to our mind the excited feeling of Adam whether he has to rejoice or to repent for
his fall. This progress of Cass can be described as the victory of a man over
the brutal fact of meaningless existence.

Cass’ unconditional love for Francesca transforms his selfish nature
into selfless one and helps him to overcome his guilt. While in Paris, he had
not known the cause of his despair. He was so tied up in his egoistic self that
he was unable to analyze himself. We are astonished at the sense of
responsibility expressed by Cass when he feels that Michele will die if he
does not supply medicines to him. As Cass thinks:

I’ve got to get those pills down to Michele. I’ve just got to.
For already there had been the gap of a day and a half in the
treatment and his intuition … told him that too long a lapse
between the cessation of one drug and the beginning of
another would allow the disease to make savage renewed,
perhaps final inroads upon a system. Once I get this started,
I’ll be able to get some sleep. (480)

This burden of saving Michele moves him closer to the condition of
freedom.

Consciously and willingly he becomes a slave to Mason because only
with Mason’s influence can he get the 30c.c. of Streptomycin, plus two
hypodermic syringes and ten ampules of morphine too, to ease the pain in
Michele’s leg. When he was unable to alleviate the suffering of Michele,
blind outrage possesses him “... storming and raving at his own
inadequacy.” (467)
Cass feels if a person can prevent the loss of a human life, he is morally obliged to do so. As Cass says, "I strove to bring Michele back to health, each day I sweated and strained to regain my sanity by taking on this burden which God alone knows why I accepted—... to shirk it would have been to die." (490)

Cass is aware of his situation—"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)

The generous behavior of Cass makes us to accept the fact that we have the duty to justify ourselves, not only to us, but also to others. His love for Francesca has given him a new identity, a new awareness. And the paradox is that Cass is aware of his slavish relationship with Mason. As he says,

... this slavish contact with Mason that I had to preserve in order to save Michele freed me to come into that knowledge of selflessness I had thirsted for like a dying man, and into a state where such a thing as dependence on the likes of Mason would be unheard of, an impossibility ... he [Mason] must have understood a lot more than I did. He knew that for a while, he had a pluperfect victim - a man he could own completely. (490)

After Cass’ love affair with Francesca, Mason has found that his victim “had changed – had found something – some focus, some strength,
some reality and this was a dangerous situation for him” (491). Mason knew that Cass has moved closer to a condition of freedom and this he cannot bear; the evil in the mind of Mason makes him to rape Francesca, and through that destroy Cass; Mason knew that by destroying Francesca, he is destroying the newly found meaning in the life of Cass Kinsolving.

When the core of his life is destroyed, Cass to retaliate destroys the nude picture with his bare hands. As he says, “frame and all and stuffed it into an ashcan in the street. That was the first strike against Mason” (492). Francesca informs Cass about the violence she has been subjected to. Cass’ gesture while listening to her woeful talk reveals his love for her: “For a long moment, leaning there against the wall, they melted together in a tormented embrace” (206). At times, the small tokens of love expressed in appropriate moment eases the pain and agony in our heart. Styron asks, “Whether a part of love wasn’t just the perfectly human, uncondescending, magnanimous yearning to shelter in your arms someone else, who is hurt or lost or needs comfort…” (431). That night when Mason raped Francesca, Cass felt that Mason “had committed some filthy unspeakable violation upon life itself” (491). The slavish treatment extended by Mason to Cass and the violation of Francesca’s chastity roused the hatred and anger in the heart of Cass. At that moment, Cass realized that “the easiest thing in the world is to wish to kill a man and then to kill him without qualm, without hesitation or pause or delay.” (493)
But the good qualities of Cass are revealed when he says, “… to kill a man, even in hatred, even in revenge is like an amputation. Though this man may have done the foulest injustice in the world, when you have killed him, you have removed a part of yourself forever. It is a pain that will stay with you as long as you live” (493). This speech of Cass makes us to recall the question of Bassanio to Shylock while the Jew was insisting on a pound of flesh nearby the heart of Antonio: “Do all men kill the things they do not love?” (4.1.66). Cass is well aware of the nature of Mason – that he is lacking humanly qualities; “[he is] a creature from a different race who had taken on the disguise of a man” (493). Even then, Cass feels that he is not to be murdered. But, when Wind Gasser comments on the person who did that beastly act as “someone so totally lacking in any sense of decency … her skull fractured in two places, bones broken all over, I ask you what sort of a murderous beast is it, who would do such a vile and abominable thing” (505), the already fuming rage of Cass is kindled into a flame, and in his extreme rage, he commits the sin of murdering Mason Flagg.

After the murder he realizes that he has taken a man’s life for a sin, which he had not committed. Considering himself as a God, he judges, condemns Mason, tortures him and kills him. After murdering Mason, he feels that he “should be punished for what I had done – as swiftly as possible” (542), and so, he confesses the whole truth to Luigi.

Aristotle defines courage, generosity and integrity as virtuous qualities that characterize an ideal man. The naturally generous, loyal and
honest man will have a natural love for people and things, for parents and children, country and home; he will crave for the well being of not only his family, but also his neighbors and the society. The possession of virtuous qualities may be revealed in appropriate circumstances. What ultimately matters is what sort of a person one is and what is the character possessed by him. A basically good-natured man will definitely enjoy performing noble actions, which may induce the happiness of fellow human beings.

It is good, if a good action is done. It is even better if that is done naturally, readily and spontaneously. We may say that a noble self-sacrifice is an act that is done without any expectation of beneficiary returns. The earlier good deed done by Cass impresses Luigi. Added to this, his liking and sympathy for Cass makes him to tell a lie. As Luigi says, “I thought I was performing an act of compassion by delivering you from a prison sentence. ... I think it was an act of correction. It was to keep you from the luxury of any more guilt” (546). Luigi assumes the role of a redeemer because he understands that Cass would be wallowing in selfishness, if imprisoned. This act of Luigi, which testifies him as a man of noble character, destroys the walls of Cass’ self-imprisonment, and thus releases him from it.

The valuable advice given by Luigi presents two choices to Cass. He has to select either a life of guilt, despair, and uselessness or a life where he can expiate his sins by living; and Cass chooses the second choice. In Sophie’s Choice there is a constant struggle between life and death; in the
end, death overtakes life. Sophie can choose; she can live with Stingo and choose life if she prefers; but she chooses to die with Nathan.

Cass' love for Francesca and Luigi's concern and friendliness for Cass makes us to recall the views of Thomas Wolfe on love: "It [love] is the rare precious flower. Sometimes, it is the flower that gives us life that breaches the dark walls of all our loneliness and restores us to the fellowship of life, the family of the earth, the brotherhood of man."(162)

Luigi's sincere advice to Cass is to:

Consider a number of years in jail... Think whether these years in jail, away from your family will satisfy your guilt... your other guilt, the abominable guilt you have carried with you so long, ... if by now ... you have not learnt something, then five years, ten years or fifteen years in jail will teach you nothing.
Consider the Good in yourself; consider hope; consider joy.

(552)

The above advice given by Luigi creates a new feeling of awareness and responsibility in Cass' mind. From the state of despair, Cass proceeds to exultation. Towards the end of the novel, Cass experiences a feeling of having gained self-knowledge and power, which elevates him from ignorance to wisdom. This wisdom enables him to understand the order, purpose and design in this life and world which had hither to been meaningless. Cass' endeavors to expiate his sins, project him as a better character than all the other characters of Lie Down in Darkness.
Peyton is unable to conquer the emotional struggle and she is subdued by her struggle. But, Cass conquers his and becomes a successful person in the end. His statement, "ripeness is all," (554) reveals the mental growth of Cass. Towards the end of the novel Cass realizes: "The only true experience is the one, where a man learns to love himself and his country" (441). Hence, by attempting to expiate his sins, Cass has learnt to conquer self-pity, self-hatred and has cultivated love for himself, fellowmen and for his country.

None can deny the fact that happiness is one of the elements that make life worth living; but on the judgment day, a man will not be judged according to the pain or pleasure he had experienced, but in terms of his deeds. It is man's inhumanity to man that makes countless thousands to mourn. There are multitudes of people all over the world living a life of squalor and daily indignity. A careful observation of life reveals the fact that human beings by nature enslave, exploit, oppress, and torture their fellow beings.

The kind of relationship that exists between Mason and Cass Kinsolving is an ugly, wicked, cruel one that cannot be accepted by an ordinary, normal human being. As Alonso Cripps describes, their relationship is "low and contemptible ... so disgusting." (138)

For all the sins committed by him in different places, Mason is made to expiate in that beautiful small, idyllic village Sambuco. The description of this village induces a feeling that evil things were to happen here and this
feeling of ours becomes true for only here, Mason Flagg pays for all his sins committed elsewhere. It looks as though the place demands retribution. At the outset of the novel, we are exposed to the villainous nature of Mason. Peter, the friend of Mason, is wonderstruck at the supposed atonement made by Mason. As Peter observes:

> What I could never understand...what seemed to me so incredible was not so much what he done at first... rape? That was Mason's alley you know. No, may be not that kind of rape. I couldn't imagine him going that for Sadism ... killing all the rest ... But, the rape itself was at least believable. What I just couldn't figure out was this well, what must have been this remorse of his. The remorse and then what must have been the final courage or guts or something to finish something off like that in one last act of atonement. (61)

For raping Francesca, Mason does not make an attempt to atone voluntarily. He is made to do so by Cass, who is ignorant of the role played by the village idiot in bringing out the end of Francesca.

Enraged by Mason's violence to Francesca, Cass murders him. With a prayer of forgiveness for himself and for the shame he must bring to Francesca, Luigi spins a new tale that "Francesca had been having an affair with her employer" and "she wished to break it off. Repeatedly she spoke of her determination to break off the affair. He tried to force her to submit. But she refused. He went insane with fury and hit her with something hard. He
beat her repeatedly, her arms and head and legs. It seems, very plainly to be
murder and suicide.” (526)

The double murder committed in Set This House On Fire – the
village idiot killing Francesca, and Cass killing Mason Flagg— and the
circumstances described in the novel have a droll like quality.

The recollection of Mason’s school days and the rape committed by
him when he was a schoolboy is portrayed in the first part of the novel. After
being expelled from the school, Mason had to inform his mother about the
sin he had committed. His regret -“How am I going to tell her, for Jesus
sake” (95) clearly shows that he is not regretting for the sin committed by
him. But, he is more worried about the fact that he has to convey the
message that he is expelled from school to his mother. In a drunken state
when his mother reveals her dissatisfaction about her husband, submissively
Mason informs her: “...this time, it wasn’t my grades. I got caught playing
leapfrog with some dame” (102). The shock of the news makes her to give
‘hoarse, relentless sobs” and as a skilled trickster, to dissolve her grief
instantaneously, Mason stuck two cigarettes in his mouth, lit them and
casually but tenderly placed one of them between her lips. This behavior of
Mason makes us to recall the picture of sticking a lollipop in the mouth of a
crying child so that it may stop crying.

The confession of Celia reveals the dark side of Mason’s character--
his nature of telling lies and the cruelty of beating Celia. When she visited
Peter’s room her hair was smeared, her fingers were blood stained, and her
eyes were red; yet with all these "she looked both lovely and cruelly hurt, a flower upon which has been impressed the print of a dirty book" (184). When Peter questions Mason about his habit of lying and beating, Mason’s lips tremble; he is on the verge of tears. The expression of a lost child on the face of Mason mixed with agony reveals the regret of Mason for all his misdemeanors.

Mason’s habit of lying, beating and ill treating others makes us to become aware of the fact that doing an action of a certain kind frequently gives one the character of that kind.

Mason’s habit of purchasing friends through money does not allow him to see anything negative in it. He extends favors to his friends; and to Peter, he extends books, supplies girls as a way of entertainment and exhibits his pornography. The same habit makes him to provide groceries and whisky bottles to Cass so that he may employ Cass as a regular peon.

Every man though born as an individual is a member of a family. Through his family, he becomes a member of the local community, of the nation, and of the human race. The identity is given to him through his relationship in these various spheres.

When an individual sins against another, he does an injury to the other person. It may be a physical assault of causing bodily injury; it may be an act of dishonesty, which drills somebody’s purse: whatever be the sin, the effect of the evil deed may be like that of a pebble thrown into a bond - the ripples of evil- move outwards in ever widening circles.
Usually, favors can be regarded as acts that benefit other individuals. Normally, there is no obligation to accept favors. Often, not always, it is good that one should refuse to accept favors. Of course, it is gracious and courteous to allow others to do favors at times, because it implies friendship and love. But there are indeed occasions when it is good to refuse favors; else it may lead to trouble, just as it did in the case of Kinsolving and Peter. At least, Peter is lucky enough to escape from the everlasting control of Mason. Indeed, he becomes aware of his escape at one point in the novel when Mason made Cass to perform the one man show; being one of the spectators, Peter felt “Mason had Cass, had him securely in hand, just as in an entirely different but no less impregnable way up until this night at least, he had had me, I shuddered at the narrowness of my escape and at my ignorance.” (215)

Cass accepts all the favors extended by Mason to him; it is his habit of accepting favors from Mason that leads him into trouble. True, Cass was bitten by the horrid realities of life. Yet he could have refused the whisky bottle. In the beginning, Cass becomes a slave to Mason because of his poverty. Receiving gifts from Mason forces him to become obliged and indebted to him. Later, to save Michele, he degenerates himself to the lowest possible level.

Through his service to Michele, Cass tries to atone the sin he has done to Crowfoot because he cares for humanity. We may say that his life
degenerated the minute he received a bottle of whisky from Mason; his regeneration starts from the moment he sees Francesca.

Cass stoops to any-level to satisfy Mason and that makes us to wonder at the inhuman nature of Mason. He never realizes his tyrannical dictatorship over Cass and so takes advantages of Cass’ poverty stricken life and reduces him to the level of an animal. Mason derives a peculiar sort of pleasure from his domination over others.

The pleasure derived by Mason by mastering others forces him to spend lavishly on others. His wealth empowers his mastery. That is why he says to Cass, “… you can have all you want. Soon, as we put on our little show” (206). It is the same power of wealth that makes him to turn a deaf ear to the earnest pleadings of Poppy. “Don’t shame him anymore. Oh please, please leave him alone and let me put him to bed; don’t shame him any more” (209). But Mason is like a “ringmaster and his face still wore the stiff, absurd, almost painted smile” (210). The evil in man’s nature wants to destroy the happiness of others. The inhuman treatment extended by Mason chills the spinal cord of the readers. It is this dominating nature of Mason that paves the way for his destruction. The saying of Aurobindo in “The Tiger and the Deer”:

The mighty perish in their might;

The slain survives the slayer (24-25)

becomes true of Mason’s life and death.
In Sophie's Choice as a commander of the Nazi troop, Hoss has to carry out the orders issued by Hitler. His merciless way of murdering people makes us to wonder at the beastly nature of Hoss. Yet the other side of Hoss as described by Hannah Arendt is cited by Styron in Sophie's Choice. "Rudolf Hoss was hardly a sadist, nor was he a violent man or even particularly menacing" (201). Further, Styron in Sophie's Choice cites the views of the Polish editor of Hoss' autobiography Jerzy Rawicz on the nature of Hoss as follows:

The commandant was a homebody, but one dedicated blindly to duty and a cause. Yet even this automaton was made of flesh as you or I; he was brought up by a Christian, nearly became a catholic priest; twinges of conscience, even of remorse, attack him from time to time like the onset of some bizarre disease and it is this frailty, the human response that stirs within the implacable and obedient robot, that helps make his memoirs so fascinating so terrifying and educative. (201)

Once when Hoss has to order two children in the concentration camp to be murdered, Hoss felt so guilty about is designation. His pity for those two children was so great that he longed to disappear from the scene. Yet he is aware that he "should not show the slightest trace of emotion." (206)

Hoss expresses his feelings truly that after coming to Auschwitz, he was not at all happy. After sending a mass of Jews to the concentration camp, he used to get severe headache. To get rid of the loathsome feelings
he used to wander in his garden till the horridness of his action became eased in his mind. Listening to the miserable tale of Sophie, Hoss promises to make arrangement so that information may be given to Sophie once in a way about her son. The humanistic feeling in the heart of Hoss is revealed when he extends a bar of chocolate that he was eating to Sophie.

As the Commandant of concentration camps or in upper-echelon jobs connected with their administration for sixteen long years, Hoss has understood that "murder was his duty in life". He had to peep through the peep-hole of the gas chamber and he had the technique of passing or deluding himself into the belief that he "must carry out Hitler’s orders" which "could only be obtained by a stifling of all human emotions." (207)

The total domination of Nathan on Sophie is unimaginable. He stabs her, kicks her, beats her and does anything that he fancies. The physical violence of slapping Sophie makes Stingo and Morris Fink to regret and as Morris Fink decides to call the police, they see a different scene - "He’s [Nathan] crying. ...he’s got his head buried right in her crotch. He’s crying. He’s got his face right down in there and he’s crying away like a baby" (85). All the time Nathan was regretting how could he do that to her. The cruel treatment of Nathan towards Sophie induces an anguished question in our mind - ‘How could anyone love another and be so unbelievably cruel?’

With all his cruel behavior to Sophie, he lavishes his love on her. Though he tortures her for his imagined infidelity, he showers her with gifts and dresses. There are numerous instances in the novel for the ill treatment
of Sophie in the hands of Nathan; But he expiates his tortures by entertaining her—by taking her out, lavishing her with gifts and records, and by providing materialistic comforts. It is these obligations added with his love that creates a sense of indebtedness in the heart of Sophie to Nathan that she is unable to stay away from him. Towards the end of the novel, after her elopement with Stingo, Sophie realizes that she cannot stay away from Nathan and hence agrees to the suicide pact of Nathan.

Added to this torturous relationship, Sophie feels guilty about the way in which she had lived her life in the concentration camp. Later, she regrets the bad behavior of herself in the concentration camp; for she is aware of her prayers that the Jews must be regarded as the scapegoat in the camp, for only then she will be safe. She feels guilty about her immoral behavior with Hoss. The greatest feeling of guilt, which tortures her to death, is the fact that she has to choose one of her children. She has not revealed all the truth to Nathan for fear that it may create feelings of agony in his heart. Even to Stingo she does not confess the whole truth. Towards the end of the novel, when she has confessed all the truth to Stingo, she prefers to commit suicide for all her sinful ways of living. She finds it difficult to live with the guilt feelings; she decides to put an end to her life, agreeing to Nathan’s pact.

The sayings ‘As you sow, so shall you reap’ and ‘Violence begets violence’ become true of the life and death of Sophie’s father, who is an eminent professor in the university. It is an irony that this “aspiring Jew killer” (326) is killed by the Gestapo whose sole purpose in life is to
eradicate the race of Jew from the earth. Throughout his life, he struggled hard to terminate the race of the Jews from Poland but in the end he was himself arrested and murdered by the Gestapo. With all their works and pamphlets against the Jews, Sophie's father and her husband were not able to escape from the prison. He piteously writes in a letter to his wife that he was unable to get through to the authorities and make them understand his hatred for the Jews. Sophie reveals the cause of her father's hatred of the Jews. Sophie's sister was repeatedly raped by a Jew which resulted in her suicide and that made the father to hate the Jews.

Stingo remembers that at the age of twelve he had abandoned his mother who was ailing from cancer to the biting wind and chillness. He regrets the fact that he could never expiate the sin of abandoning his mother to the horrid chillness. As a punishment for this sin, he was made to stand in the cold wind and exposed to the pinpricks of snow.

These characters of Styron are aware of the sins committed by them. Some of the characters feel guilty about the sins committed by them. Cass Kinsolving, Peyton Loftis Nathan, Sophie and Stingo belong to this group. They make an attempt to expiate their sins. It is remarkable that a few of the characters in spite of their guilt feelings do not make an attempt to atone their sins at all. Milton and Helen belong to this group.

The emotions produced on the reader after reading these novels are entirely different. Reading the novel *Lie Down in Darkness* and *Sophie's Choice*, we search for the reasons of Loftises' calamity and the death of the
lovers; but we fail to find a valid reason except that of fate and circumstances. We understand that our life is shaped and influenced by the textures of our personalities. We realize how helpless we are and we are made to wonder at the conditioned nature of our life. Peyton's death implies a sense of resurrection for her. The hallelujah heard at the distance implies a sense of regeneration for Peyton; in the same way there is hope for Stingo in Sophie's Choice. But, for the Loftises, the future is doomed; the violent act of Milton choking the throat of Helen implies the possibility of permanent separation from each other.

The characters of Lie Down in Darkness and Sophie's Choice do not exhibit any of sign of progress. Very rarely they make an attempt to amend their life style; their fate is such that their situation becomes worse. Peyton's act of expiation ends in suicide, which does not create any change in the behavior of other characters. Nathan and Sophie realize their own nature and the realization of their self horrifies them and hence they commit suicide. A sense of painful agony is created in the mind of the readers at the end of Lie Down in Darkness and Sophie's Choice.

But, the impact of Set This House On Fire is different. The readers are able to visualize the growth in the character of Cass Kinsolving. From ignorance he tries to find himself out. The comment of William Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks are apt to be quoted here: "we are all torn between the desire to find ourselves and the desire to lose ourselves" (57) becomes true of Cass Kinsolving, Peyton Loftis, Nathan and Sophie. Cass tries to find out the
cause of his self-pity, hatred and he succeeds in his attempt. Through the proper guidance of Luigi, through his love for Francesca, he becomes aware of his self and so becomes a transformed, successful person.

Peyton Loftis tries her best to lose herself in love (by expecting a proper kind of love from her parents) and she fails miserably in her attempt. Peyton’s act of expiation ends in suicide, which does not create any change in the behavior of other characters. Nathan and Sophie realize their own nature and the realization of their self horrifies them and hence they commit suicide.