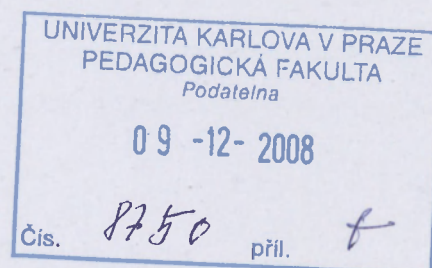


FACULTY OF EDUCATION, CHARLES UNIVERSITY, PRAGUE

Department of English Language and Literature



FAMILY TRAGEDY IN WILLIAM STYRON'S

LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS

(Diploma thesis)

RODINNÁ TRAGÉDIE V ROMÁNU WILLIAMA

STYRONA ULEHNI V TEMNOTÁCH

(Diplomová práce)

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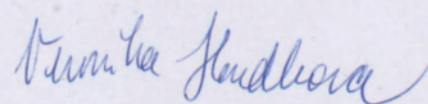
I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Jakub Ženíšek for his patience, suggestions, support and guidance through my work. I would also like to thank my friend Nathalie Gallen for her invaluable help with ordering the books necessary to write this thesis.

Prohlášení o původnosti práce

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně s použitím uvedených pramenů a literatury.

V Praze, dne 21. listopadu 2008

Veronika Houdková



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I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Jakub Ženíšek for his patience, suggestions, support and guidance through my work. I would also like to thank my friend Nathalie Gallert for her invaluable help with ordering the books necessary to write this thesis.

KEYWORDS:

William Styron, *Lie Down in Darkness*, multi-voiced novel, family, family tragedy, depression, suicide

ANOTACE:

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá složitými rodinnými vztahy hlavních postav z prvního románu Williama Styrona *Lie Down in Darkness*. Lofbovi totiž jen zdánlivě tvoří šťastnou a spokojenou rodinu. Hlavními hrdiny tedy jsou Milton a Helen Lofbovi a jejich dcera Peyton. Cílem této diplomové práce je ponořit se do jejich skrytých rodinných vztahů a provést rozbor postav, a to proto, abychom odhalili důvody stojící za touto osobní tragédií, neboli převážně za Peytoninou sebevraždou. Tato diplomová práce také představuje Williama Styrona spolu s jeho prvním románem, který byl bohužel v České Republice prakticky ignorován.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA: William Styron, *Lie Down in Darkness*, polyfonní román, rodina, rodinné vztahy, deprese, sebevražda

ABSTRACT:

This thesis deals with complicated family relationships of the main characters in William Styron's first novel *Lie Down in Darkness*. The Loftises only seemingly make a happy, perfect family. The main characters are Milton and Helen Loftis and their daughter, Peyton. The aim of the thesis to delve into the complicated family relationships and analyze the characters in order to discover the reasons behind this family's tragedy, namely Peyton's suicide. The thesis also introduces William Styron and his first novel that has unfortunately been virtually ignored in the Czech Republic.

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William Styron, *Lie Down in Darkness*, multi-voiced novel, family, family tragedy, depression, suicide

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List of abbreviations

DV	<i>Darkness Visible: Memoir of Madness</i>
LDD	<i>Lie Down in Darkness</i>
PR	the Paris Review
UT	<i>Ulehni v temnotách</i>
WFE	Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia

1. Introduction

Family and friends rate among the things we consider the most important in our life. Moreover, family is considered to be one of the cornerstones of any society since it is there where the children are born and brought up, which ensures the continuation and survival of a society. It is therefore deemed significant if a family fails to fulfil its functions.

The whole family, but mainly the nuclear family, forms our minds, beliefs, opinions, expectations and personalities since they are our models. When we grow up, we either reproduce their mistakes or we meticulously avoid them. In any case, a strong influence of one's family cannot be denied. There is no escape.

No escape indeed. That much we can see in William Styron's *Lie Down in Darkness*. The young woman who tries to escape her skin-deep perfect, but internally dysfunctional family ends up being just like her parents and eventually commits suicide.

I have been fascinated by this novel's troubled family and by the discrepancy between appearances and reality ever since I read the book for the first time. And every time I re-read the novel I managed to find something I previously did not notice, which is a sign of a good book. Unfortunately, this novel has been, in my opinion, unjustly ignored in this country.

Despite the fact that the novel's plot takes place in the first half of the twentieth century, its theme – a dysfunctional family – still remains relevant. People talk about a crisis of a family around the world, mainly in connection with juvenile delinquency, divorce rates, marriages between people of the same sex or atrocities committed within a family by one of its members against the others.

Appearances versus reality is also another aspect of our everyday life, although it might not seem so at first sight. Usually, our family and friends know our real self and they like and love us despite our imperfections. So while we can be ourselves with our friends and family, we present an outward image to strangers. In addition to this, we

play many social roles in our lives – we are men or women, parents and/or children, members of our profession, friends, we have certain hobbies, we own certain things, we enjoy a certain lifestyle etc. Obviously, different roles and situations call for different kinds of behaviour and qualities to fulfil the role's expectations. And we are more or less conscious of this. Therefore, every day when talking with other people, reading newspapers or watching the news, we are trying to decipher the real meaning hiding behind the actual words.

The aim of this diploma thesis is to provide an explanation of the Loftis family's tragedy, more precisely their younger daughter's suicide, which constitutes the central part in William Styron's novel *Lie Down in Darkness*. It will be achieved by detailed analyses of the Loftis family members, one by one, including the three main characters (Milton Loftis, Helen Loftis and their younger daughter Peyton) and two supporting characters (Milton and Helen's elder daughter Maudie and Peyton's husband Harry Miller).

The thesis itself is divided into three parts. The first part introduces William Styron who is widely known as the author of *Sophie's Choice*. It offers his biography and an overview of his works, together with an account of his battle with severe depression. Both Peyton Loftis and Sophie Zawistowska suffered from depression, their symptoms eerily mirroring Styron's own. This part also provides information about Styron's writing *Lie Down in Darkness* and the difficulties he had to face when writing it.

The second part presents the novel itself. Since the novel's plot is extremely complex and complicated, its plot summary is divided into two parts, the first one describing the actual plot of the novel – i.e. what happened on the day of Peyton's funeral – and the second one giving a brief chronological outline of what happened before that day. This part of the thesis also mentions the historic events that occurred in the first half of the twentieth century, which corresponds with the time period covered by the novel's plot.

2. Finally, the third part focuses on the comprehensive analysis of the members of the Loftis family. The analysis is carried out separately for each member and the events are presented from their unique points of view. Each character is introduced through the description of his/her life. This is followed by the character's detailed analysis, achieved by the interpretation of his/her appearances throughout the novel. In the end, a brief summary of each character is offered together with his/her comparison with the already described characters. After the characters' analyses, the reasons for this family tragedy are discussed and evaluated.

Although West (1978: 1-28) explores Styron's literature in much greater detail, here is the important information about William Styron's background:

His father, William Clark Styron, was a shipyard engineer in the town's shipyard but he came from Washington in North Carolina. Although the family was not poor, he would not have been able to attend a technical college in North Carolina if he had not won the scholarship. It was for this reason that he had to abandon the desire to study humanities.

As for his father's parents, his grandmother, Matilda Styron, nee Clark, came from a rich and influential North Carolinian family and even owned two slaves when she was a child. Her family were planters and slaveholders. His grandfather, Alpheus Styron, was inventive, imaginative and hardworking and pursued a lot of different business interests with variable degrees of success. However, his most promising business as a rubber manufacturer was lost due to a nationwide business panic in the 1890s.

His mother, Pauline Margaret Styron, nee Abraham, came from Uniontown in Pennsylvania from a privileged family and received quite a good education. She loved music and even spent a few years in Vienna studying it. She also visited all the major sights/cities in Europe at that time. She met her husband when she was working for the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) in Newport News. They got married in September 1921 in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, and their only son was born three and a

2. William Styron

2.1. William Styron's biography and work

William Clark Styron Jr., an American writer, was born on 11th June 1925 in the town of Newport News in Virginia. He was an only child of at that time late-in-life parents, William and Pauline Styron, and had deep roots both in the South and in the North thanks to his parents' families. While his Southern roots were provided by his father's family, his Northern roots stemmed from his mother's family.

Although West (1998: 3-26) explores Styron's ancestors in much greater detail, here is the important information about William Styron's background:

His father, William Clark Styron, was a shipyard engineer in the town's shipyard but he came from Washington in North Carolina. Although the family was not poor, he would not have been able to attend a technical college in North Carolina if he had not won the scholarship. It was for this reason that he had to abandon the desire to study humanities.

As for his father's parents, his grandmother, Marianna Styron, née Clark, came from a rich and influential North Carolinian family and even owned two slaves when she was a child. Her family were planters and slaveholders. His grandfather, Alpheus Styron, was inventive, imaginative and hardworking and pursued a lot of different business interests with variable degrees of success. However, his most promising business as a tobacco manufacturer was lost due to a nationwide business panic in the 1890s.

His mother, Pauline Margaret Styron, née Abraham, came from Uniontown in Pennsylvania from a privileged family and received quite a good education. She loved music and even spent a few years in Vienna studying it. She also visited all the major capital cities in Europe at that time. She met her husband when she was working for the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) in Newport News. They got married in September 1921 in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, and their only son was born three and a

half years later, in June 1925. Pauline was then thirty-seven years old and William was thirty-five years old.

As for his mother's parents, his grandfather, Enoch Clark, originally became a teacher but then changed his career to become a businessman. He entered Uniontown's coal business as a manager of one of the largest coke-producing companies. A few years later, he married Annabelle Rush and they had four children. In 1900, he became an owner of one of these companies. They were a well-to-do family and even could afford to send both their daughters to Europe to study music.

Both West (1998) and Lehmann-Haupt (2006) agree that Styron's childhood was idyllic and that his parents doted on him and were proud of him. He was very much interested in words and started to read quite early, at the age of five. Therefore, when he went to school at the age of six, he could read and so the texts for children would seem "so easy that he became bored and inattentive – a tendency he would show throughout his school career." (West 1998: 22) Nevertheless, he loved reading books, it "was his favorite thing to do: his father would later say that his interest in words was "almost an obsession." (ibid.) Even though the Styrons wanted to move elsewhere and start anew, it was not easy to find jobs due to the Great Depression, and so they finally decided to stay in Newport News and settle down there, and so they bought a house. (ibid.)

Even though his childhood was carefree and the Styrons had a good life, there was a tragic event that influenced their life – Styron's mother died of breast cancer in July 1939. She discovered that she had breast cancer when William was two and immediately had a double mastectomy. However, the cancer returned and spread throughout her body. Young Styron was kept in the dark most of the time. But as time went by and the cancer got worse, it was impossible for him not to notice that his mother was not well. But still nobody really explained to him how serious the illness was. However, the last two years of her life, Pauline Styron was in much pain and the pain got more and more severe. Styron was sent to live with their friends so that he would not be present during his mother's most painful moments. Her illness also put the family under financial strain. His father started to suffer from depression although

Styron did not know it at that time. After his mother died, people tried to cheer him up and distract him. Consequently, he could never really express his grief. (West 1998: 39-53)

In 1940, his father sent him to a two-year preparatory school in Christchurch, Virginia. His father did it because Styron's grades at high school had become worse and Styron himself had become a little rebellious – his father thought he needed more discipline. Also, since Styron inclined towards humanities rather than technical sciences, his father did not want him to repeat what he had done. He did not want him to study engineering at a technical college and then work the whole life in the shipyard. He wanted him to have good grades so that he could study whatever he would want. (West 1998: 54-62)

Styron liked Christchurch, a small school with family-like atmosphere. His grades were a little better. It was due to the fact that he only studied if he was interested in a certain subject. He loved history and geography, liked languages and hated mathematics. He co-edited the school's newspaper, he did a few drama performances with friends and was also introduced to drinking and dating. He graduated from Christchurch in 1942. (West 1998: 62-78)

In his second year at Christchurch, his father married Elizabeth Buxton, a nurse and a daughter of a prominent physician in Newport News. Since William Styron and Elizabeth did not like each other very much, Styron spent most of his free time from school visiting his friends and staying with their families. (West 1998: 62-78)

After graduating at Christchurch, Styron immediately went to Davidson College, North Carolina, near Charlotte, in June 1942. Davidson was a conservative college, and Styron was "unhappy with school's strict religious and academic standards" (Lehmann-Haupt 2006). Since the United States had already joined in the Second World War, "he enrolled in the accelerated program at Davidson and began thinking about enlisting" (West 1998: 80). Still seventeen, he enrolled in the Marine Corps in February 1943 and waited for his orders. He was to join the Marine Corps program at Duke University. Lazy student as he was, he managed to get a C from most of his classes. (West 1998: 90-91)

At Duke University, in Durham, North Carolina, he took classes he was interested in – English, French, history, philosophy, political science, psychology and elementary physics, a requirement for all Marine Corps trainees. He also signed up for a creative writing course taught by William Blackburn who encouraged him to become a writer and to read a lot. The *Archive*, Duke's literary magazine, published some of his submitted pieces of fiction. After finishing his fourth term at Duke, he was called up by the Marines in October 1944. (West 1998: 93-108)

Lehmann-Haupt (2006) nicely summarizes his army career: "Active duty followed in October 1944, and after nearly a year of hard training, he was commissioned a second lieutenant in late July 1945 and assigned to participate in the invasion of Japan. A month later, the atomic bomb attacks forced Japan's surrender, and he was discharged in December, relieved yet frustrated by his lack of combat experience."

After the war, he returned to Duke University, continued his friendship with Prof. Blackburn and graduated in the spring of 1947. He was now truly determined to become a writer. (West 1998: 129-141)

And so he moved to New York and started working as a beginning assistant editor at Whittlesley House, a division of McGraw-Hill. His job consisted of reading the manuscripts that had been sent to the publisher and write reports on them. The job started to bore him after a while, so when he was made redundant, he actually felt relieved and organized his life in order to start his writing career. (West 1998: 142-158)

After three years of rigorous work, he managed to finish his first novel, *Lie Down in Darkness*, in the spring of 1950 just before he was called back in active duty by the Marines due to the Korean War. He regretted his decision to sign up for the reserves. However, after a year of hard training, his eye defect – which Styron had hidden before so that he could have entered the Marines – was discovered. This time, he did not hide it and in August 1951 he was released from the Marine Corps for good. Before he returned to New York, he went to spend a few days in Newport News, where he received a copy of his first novel from his publisher, Bobbs-Merrill. (West 1998: 189-201)

Lie Down in Darkness, a story about the Loftis family that resulted in the suicide of their younger daughter, was published on 10th September 1951 when Styron was twenty-seven and it got all kinds of reviews – from utterly positive ones to negative ones with some mixed reviews in between. Consequently, all the attention marked him as an author that would be worth watching and reading in the future. “This kind of extended treatment in the national press – positive, negative, and mixed – was crucial in establishing William Styron as a serious author whose work was going to be watched. ... Even in the middle stages of his career, when there were long periods of silence between his novels, the literary world never lost interest in him.” (West 1998: 204)

Styron won the Prix de Rome in 1952, an award that was meant for young promising writers. It was awarded by the American Academy of Arts and Letters in Rome and included a year’s stay in Rome with all expenses paid by the Academy. Since Styron had already been thinking about going to Europe, he was extremely happy and excited. Before arriving to Rome in October 1952, however, he visited London, Copenhagen and Paris. (West 1998: 209-213)

He met George Plimpton in London and Peter Matthiessen in Paris and together with other authors, they founded *The Paris Review*, a quarterly literary magazine focused on literature and not criticism in Paris in 1953. Styron, not wanting to read manuscripts again, was an advisory editor. He was also thinking about his next novel. He wanted to write a book about a slave rebellion, but decided that he needed to know more about the subject. (West 1998: 213-223)

Still in Paris, he decided to write a short story about military service instead. The work continued well and he finished it still in Paris. It turned out to be a long short story or rather a novella, *The Long March*, which Styron intended to publish in *Discovery*, a new literary magazine. He was also asked by George Plimpton to write an opening statement for the first issue of *The Paris Review*. (West: 224-236)

In Rome, he met Rose Burgunder, a young American poet from Baltimore, and they got married in Rome on 4th May 1953. At the end of the year, they returned to the United States. They lived in New York for a while before they bought a house in

Roxbury, Connecticut. He came to realize that he needed a quiet, isolated place for his work. Since Rose came from a well-to-do family, her trust fund made things easier and they could live comfortably without financial worries. He had already begun to work on his second novel, *Set This House on Fire*, about Americans living in Italy. "Its dominant theme was to be a condemnation of postwar American culture – its vulgarity, commercialism, and insularity. Much if the novel is set in Europe, but it is an American story all the same; its expatriate characters are alienated from a homeland that has been, in Styron's view, morally shallow and ethically corrupt. ... [The] novel meant to shame his country into greater cultural sophistication". (West 1998: 279) The book was published in May 1960. By then, the Styrons had had two daughters, Margaret (born 1955) and Paola (born 1958) and a son, Thomas (born 1959). (West 1998: 252-296)

William Styron had by then found a day routine that suited him. He would sleep until noon, have lunch at one-thirty and then run errands or deal with the mail for an hour or two. Then he would sit in the living room and listen to classical music, which would awaken his imagination and creativity. At four o'clock, he would go to his study and work for four or five hours. In the evening, he would drink a few glasses of alcohol as a way of distancing himself from his work and soothe his nerves after his hard work. At nine-thirty, they would have dinner and talk about their day. Styron would then stay awake until two or three in the morning, drinking, reading, smoking and listening to music. (West 1998: 275-277)

The Styrons spent most of the year 1960 in Europe, mainly in Paris and Rome. The American reviews of his second novel were mostly negative, only a few of them were positive. Styron was unhappy and depressed, even though he had not expected completely positive reviews. He then began reading books on slavery and on a slave rebellion lead by Nat Turner so that he could finally write a novel that he had long had in mind. When reading extensively for his new novel, Styron went to France for the publication of *Set This House on Fire* by Gallimard. His book was an instant success, a best-seller, and had extremely favourable reviews. (West 1998: 306-330)

It took him five years to finish his third novel, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, which was published in 1967. It was about a slave rebellion in the 1830s in the South

that was lead by Nat Turner. The whole story is told from his perspective, in the first person narration, while he is waiting in his cell to be hanged. When writing the book, two important events occurred in his life. They bought a house on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, in 1964, and had another daughter, Alexandra (born 1966). He completed the novel in January 1967 and it was published in October 1967. *Confessions of Nat Turner* was a best-seller and got both positive and negative reviews. But the controversy of an Anglo-Saxon American writing about an African-American slave and speaking for him did not die down. However, the book won the Pulitzer Price for fiction but it continued being attacked, this time by African-American intellectuals (i.e. Vincent Harding, Ernest Kaiser, Mike Thelwell etc.), until the early 1970s. It is just to say though that Styron was not only attacked, but also defended, for example by historians Martin Duberman and Eugene D. Genovese. (West 1998: 331-401)

He began to write another novel, *The Way of the Warrior*, but was dissatisfied with it and eventually stopped writing it. In 1972, he wrote *In the Clap Shack*, a script for a play that was based on his experiences with a military hospital when he was a recruit. It was staged in 1972, but did not have favourable reviews. (West 1998: 401-402)

In the summer of 1972, Styron began working on *Sophie's Choice*, the novel he is most famous for. The novel's main characters are a survivor of the Holocaust, a Polish woman called Sophie, and an aspiring writer from the South who has just moved to New York, Stingo. Sophie's tragic life is slowly uncovered while Stingo tries to get rid of his virginity. Shortly before Styron completed the novel in December 1978, his father died. The novel was published in June 1979 and received mixed reviews at first. It became a best-seller, though, and movie rights were sold to director Alan J. Pakula, who made a movie of it, starring Meryl Streep as Sophie and Peter MacNicol as Stingo. Styron's novel also won the American Book Award for fiction. (West 1998: 411-430)

In 1981, Styron started working on a new version of *The Way of the Warrior*, but after a few years found himself confused and unhappy with the novel again. (West 1998: 431-432)

2.2 More importantly, in 1985, when he was sixty years old, Styron's body could not tolerate alcohol anymore. He had used alcohol to calm himself and his nerves after a day spent writing, it had been his constant companion in his evening routine. Now this help had disappeared and he could not sleep at night and was slipping into depression. When he was in Paris to receive the Prix Mondial Cino del Duca, a prize given to people whose work defended humanistic values, his depression became so acute that he was almost unable to attend. He realized that depression was a serious problem and immediately consulted a psychiatrist in New York. He began thinking about committing suicide and so he felt relieved when he was admitted to a clinic. He gradually got better and started to read extensively on the subject of clinical depression. He returned home in February 1986, ready to write. (West 1998: 433-446)

He wrote a story, *A Tidewater Morning*, which among other things included an account of his mother's death. He felt he needed to remember and relive her last days, even though at the time, he was not present in the house. He also started to write a novel that drew on his own experience with depression, but later abandoned the manuscript since he did not want to expose his private thoughts. However, he still wanted to write about the disease. Therefore, when the editor of *Vanity Fair* asked him to write about his depression for the magazine, he accepted. His essay, *Darkness Visible*, appeared in the magazine in December 1989. The response was immediate and strong. In 1990, a book version of it appeared – *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness*. In 1993, Styron published a collection of three long stories, *A Tidewater Morning: Three Tales from Youth*. (West 1998: 447-456)

He died of pneumonia on 1st November 2008 in his house at Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, after a long illness. He was eighty-one years old.

2.2. William Styron and *Lie Down in Darkness*

Styron started to write his first novel in the spring of 1947 and finished it in the spring 1950. This meant three years of hard work for him. During this time, the characters evolved, were added or dropped, and the narrative style changed.

It is not surprising then that the final version of the novel vastly differed from its initial version. In spite of this, however, the main heroine of the novel, Peyton, a young woman who eventually commits suicide, remained the same. Styron also knew that there would be some kind of family conflict involved.

The first version, written in New York under the working title of *Inheritance of Night*, was supposed to tell the story of a young woman, Peyton Loftis. West (1998: 151) cites from Styron's letter to his editor, Hiram Haydn:

"I intend for this novel to be divided into three books of from ten to fifteen sections apiece," he wrote. "Each book is to be preceded by a monologue, direct or interior, which is intended to throw light upon Peyton and her story."

The first book started with an interior monologue of Maudie Loftis, a simpleminded young woman, who had just been placed in a clinic by her father, Milton Loftis. In her monologue, Maudie was angry at her father for placing her there and for him favouring her younger sister. She also described her family – her father, Milton, was an alcoholic and her mother, Helen, a hypochondriac. The model for this monologue was an opening section from William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* which was narrated by Benjy Compson, a thirty-three years old mentally challenged man. (West 1998: 151-152)

However, after finishing this section, Styron did not know how to continue. He was also really satisfied with only a few pages of the manuscript. After reading Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*, the plot for his own book began to appear in his mind. The main heroine was to be a young woman who committed suicide. The novel

would start with the family funeral gathering in Virginia, the family waiting for the train that would bring the coffin with her body from New York City. Penn Warren's novel also inspired Styron to write some descriptive passages about the town of Port Warwick in the Virginia Tidewater and its history. The fictional town of Port Warwick is, of course, in reality Styron's hometown of Newport News. (West 1998: 154-155)

In the spring of 1948, the plot began to appear – the drama of a young woman, whom he decided to name Peyton. The main elements of *Lie Down in Darkness* were already there – an almost incestuous relationship between father and daughter, alcoholism, adultery, marital problems, suicide and family dissolution. Also the main characters were almost finished – Peyton, Maudie, Milton and Helen Loftises, their African-American cook Ella Swan, Milton's lover Dolly Bonner and others. At this point, one of the characters was Marcus Bonner, Styron's alter ego, who had tracked down Peyton's body in New York City and was bringing the coffin to Port Warwick. (West 1998: 155-157)

In the summer 1948, he stopped working at the manuscript. He was not happy with the character of Marcus Bonner but more importantly, he could see a great degree of imitateness in his novel – the influence of Robert Penn Warren, William Faulkner, and Francis Scott Fitzgerald would not be unnoticed. His ambition and self-criticism would not permit him to agree to print nothing short of perfect. (West 1998: 157)

In November 1948, after he moved to Durham because he had been tired of New York, Styron started working on the novel again. This second version was a revised and expanded version of *Inheritance of Night*, but in March or April 1948 he started to feel again that the novel is going nowhere. No matter how unhappy Styron was about the manuscript, the outlines of the story were clear – here is an extract from a letter Styron wrote (West 1998: 161):

The story, in short, is nothing but that of a modern upper South middle-class family, and the daughter of the family, named Peyton Loftis. I've got no drum to beat, political or otherwise. I just want to give a picture of a way of life that I have known, and of the people therein. ... Peyton, who is twenty-

four and something of a bitch, has just died violently and I must say horribly in New York and is being returned to her home town for a hasty and unpublicized internment. What transpires on the one day of her burial is the burden of the novel. Gradually, through their memories, you get a picture of Peyton and, I hope, of the "way of life" of which I was speaking.

The third, final version of the novel started to be worked on again in New York where Styron returned in May 1948. New York was noisy, however, and so Styron wrote most of his novel in a friend's house outside New York – his refuge. It was there that Styron decided to get rid of Marcus Bonner and how to narrate the story. Since he had already decided long ago that his novel would be "multivoiced", the only problem was how to arrange these voices. Getting rid of Marcus Bonner resulted in Styron's creating an omniscient background voice which begins and ends the story and which is used from time to time to tell us the background of characters or history of certain places, towns etc. However, most of the story is told through the inner monologue of the characters, each character having a unique and biased point of view on how things had happened. Therefore, we encounter the same situations several times, each time from a different perspective. Each time the characters are certain about their own respective truths and this affects the reader as well. (West 1998: 167-185)

West (1998: 173) makes an excellent point about why many readers find this novel so fascinating:

Very little of this story [...] is told neutrally ... and the reader's sympathies shift as the perspective changes. ...

One finds oneself on an old domestic battleground, listening to combatants who have had many years to work up their arguments and self-justifications. Their voices are alternately plaintive and argumentative, defensive and accusatory. Styron's uncanny ability to listen to these voices and to reproduce their moralizing and defensiveness makes the experience of reading *Lie Down in Darkness* quite unsettling. ...

The technique is entirely appropriate for a novel about "guilt and the failure to forgive.

As far as the characters are concerned, Styron usually used several people of his acquaintance to create one character, borrowing only some of their character traits and

behaviour. For example, both Peyton Loftis and Milton Loftis were based on at least three different people. However, Helen Loftis was entirely based on Styron's stepmother, Elizabeth Buxton Styron. Her "neurotic self-righteousness, her anger, her religiosity, her inability to forgive, her intolerance for weakness, and her failure to understand the workings of human love were all taken" to create "a brilliant characterization, a classic study in evil and self-destructiveness" (West 1998: 176).

Styron also decided to withhold Peyton's voice until the very end of the novel where she would get a long interior monologue that would reveal "the damage done by her father's fawning and her mother's hatred" (West 1998: 174). Styron, short on time, managed to finish the book in the spring 1950 just before he had to reenter the Marines. West (1998: 186) says that Styron "wrote the final one hundred pages of the manuscript in a single, sustained drive: most of this effort went into Peyton Loftis's interior monologue, which he composed in an extended, two-week stint. Styron lost fifteen pounds during this final push and was drained, physically and psychologically, at the end." This is quite easy to believe because the last part one the novel has to be read in much in the same way as it was written – you have to do it at a haul. Finally, Styron titled the novel *Lie Down in Darkness*, which was taken from Sir Thomas Browne's *Urn Burial*.

But that was not the end of his work. While in the Marines training camp, Styron had to, at the request of the publisher, Bobbs-Merrill, "tone down" the "sexually explicit language" in the last part of the book so that it would not offend the readers. Styron did it, albeit reluctantly. (West 1998: 191-192)

The novel was published on 10th September 1951 and immediately became a best-seller.

A few years later, in 1954, Styron said in his first Paris Review interview (PR 2008a), that he does not consider *Lie Down in Darkness* to be a Southern novel, "whatever that is". He claimed that "only certain things in the book are particularly Southern". And even though most of the novel is set in the South, this does not play such an important role. He insisted that the main heroine, Peyton, "didn't have to come

from Virginia. She would have wound up jumping from a window no matter where she came from.”

2.3. Styron's battle with depression

Since many women's characters in Styron's work, including Peyton Loftis, one of the main characters in *Lie Down in Darkness*, suffer from the same disease he had, I decided to include this part that draws on Styron's own account of his battle with clinical depression that was published in 1990 – *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness*. When I started reading this book, I could not fail to notice that the symptoms of clinical depression mentioned there almost perfectly matched Peyton's symptoms in *Lie Down in Darkness*.

However, the book is an uncannily fascinating reading for anyone, especially for people who would like to understand what a person suffering from clinical depression goes through. It offers a detailed insight into a deeply depressed mind that fights for life, with the hopeful conclusion of recovery.

Styron became consciously aware of his serious illness, clinical depression, for the first time in Paris where he came in October 1985 in order to receive the prestigious Prix Mondial Cine del Duca, which is awarded to people who somehow promote humanism through their work.

In June 1985, Styron, who turned sixty, had to stop drinking because his body could not tolerate alcohol anymore. He “had been abusing [alcohol] for forty years ... [and used it] as the magical conduit to fantasy and euphoria, and to the enhancement of the imagination.” (DV: 40) For him, alcohol had been a “soothing” agent that had contributed greatly to his writing. However, he never wrote under the influence of alcohol, he only drank once he had finished writing for the day. He used it as a means to let his mind “conceive visions that the unaltered, sober brain has no access to” (DV: 40). Later on, he was able to realize that alcohol was also “a means to calm the anxiety and

incipient dread that [he] had hidden away for so long somewhere in the dungeons of [his] spirit" (DV: 40). But when he first stopped drinking, he thought that the uncomfortable feeling he was experiencing was the result of his sudden non-use of alcohol. At first, the change was subtle, and he only noticed that his "surroundings took on a different tone at certain times: the shadows of nightfall seemed more somber, [his] mornings were less buoyant, walks in the woods became less zestful, and there was a moment when a kind of panic and anxiety overtook [him], just for a few minutes" (DV: 42). He was not alarmed, though.

However, his depression was progressing swiftly and he began feeling "an immense and aching solitude" and also experienced several "dreadful, pouncing seizures of anxiety" (DV: 46). He was fast losing interest in everything, and ate only because he had to, because "food, like everything else within the scope of sensation, was utterly without savour." (DV: 48) In addition to this, he could not sleep. Styron wrote that "exhaustion combined with sleeplessness is a rare torture" (DV: 48). Just before his trip to Paris, he unconsciously concluded that he would surely die if this would continue for a while. He put it rather bluntly: "Death ... was now a daily presence, blowing over me in cold gusts" (DV: 50).

In this state of mind, Styron went to Paris to receive the prize. He suffered through the whole ceremony and the festive lunch afterwards. In Paris, he experienced a sense of self-hatred, worthlessness and joylessness. He thought that "[he] would never recapture a lucidity that was slipping away from [him] with terrifying speed." (DV: 4) After a few days, he slowly accepted the fact that he suffered from a serious illness.

Immediately after his return to the States, he started medical treatment and he also began reading books on depression. But his illness was progressing further at an alarming speed. The symptoms of serious depression he names and describes are these: malaise, restlessness, sudden fits of anxiety, gloomy moods, self-loathing, panic seizures, distress, a sense of dread and alienation, confusion, memory lapses, inability to concentrate, disruption of sleep patterns, terrifying hallucinations, and an acute mental pain as if you were drowning or suffocating. (DV: 3-84) It is no wonder that he started to think about suicide. That was in November 1985. But his inability to write a good-

bye note, which was “the most difficult task of writing [he] had ever tackled” (DV: 65), saved him and in December 1985, he was admitted to hospital.

He spent about three months there and returned home in February, ready to start writing again. According to him, “seclusion and time” (DV: 69) helped him to get better. As a way of self-treatment, he accepted the offer to write a long essay for *Vanity Fair* about his fight with depression.

His book, *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness*, is in fact only a longer, revised and expanded version of this essay. In his book, Styron calls depression “despair beyond despair” (DV: 84). He also admits that depression was his constant companion during his career. When looking back at his work, he could see a lot of characters suffering from the same illness:

Until the onslaught of my own illness and its denouement, I never gave much thought to my work in terms of its connection with the subconscious ... But after I returned to health [...], I began to see clearly how depression had clung close to the outer edges of my life for many years. Suicide has been a persistent theme in my books – three of my major characters killed themselves. In re-reading, for the first time in years, sequences from my passages where my heroines have lurched down pathways toward doom – I was stunned to perceive how accurately I had created the landscape of depression ... Thus depression, when it finally came to me, was in fact no stranger, not even a visitor totally unannounced; it had been tapping at my door for decades.” (DV: 78-79)

Exactly. All the symptoms mentioned by Styron perfectly fit the description of Peyton’s behaviour. Peyton, like Styron, was trying to get rid of her anxiety and fear via alcohol. However, unlike him, she was unable to fight anymore.

In *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness*, Styron mentions Albert Camus and his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* when contemplating the theme of suicide in literature:

One of the century’s most famous intellectual pronouncements comes at the beginning of *The Myth of Sisyphus*: “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy.” (DV: 23)

3. Lie Down in Darkness

Unlike Peyton, Styron, who had read the book, obeyed its message that even “in the absence of hope we must still struggle to survive” (DV: 24). There is no quick remedy for depression. And even with the help of medication, depression does not disappear overnight. But Styron did struggle and so he survived.

The novel begins only after her death when her father, Milton Loftis, visits to the railway station to pick up the coffin with her body. The actual plot of the novel takes only a few hours on a summer day in August 1945. It begins with the train arriving in Port Warwick at about eleven o'clock in the morning and ends after Peyton's funeral is finished at about four o'clock in the afternoon.

In the space of these five hours, we follow the journey from the railway station to the cemetery and also the thoughts and memories of several people who knew Peyton. During this short journey, they are recalling different situations and thanks to this, we can uncover the truth about Peyton and her suicide.

The novel is divided into seven parts, each part marking a certain advancement of the journey to the cemetery. This is the part of the novel where we can see an omniscient narrator. This omniscient narrator is also present when giving description of certain places or information about people's background.

The actual story of Peyton's life, however, is not given through the perspective of this omniscient narrator. We see her life through the perspectives of several people – her father, Milton Loftis, her mother, Helen Loftis, the family priest, Carey Carr, her father's lover, Dolly Bougen, the undertaker, Mr. Casper, her husband, Harry Miller, and other minor characters. All these people have their own voices, their own perspectives, their own inner monologues that give their side of the story. They knew different parts of Peyton's life and see it from their unique points of view and through their own values.

It sometimes feels as if we were looking at a cubist painting – the reality is deconstructed and seen from many perspectives. Therefore, we encounter the same situation

3. Lie Down in Darkness

3.1. The novel

Lie Down in Darkness tells us a tragic story of Peyton Loftis, a young woman from Port Warwick, Virginia, who has committed suicide. The novel begins only after her death when her father, Milton Loftis, comes to the railway station to pick up the coffin with her body. The actual plot of the novel takes only a few hours on a summer day in August 1945. It begins with the train arriving to Port Warwick at about eleven o'clock in the morning and ends after Peyton's funeral is finished at about four o'clock in the afternoon.

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several times in the novel, but each time we see it from a different point of view. Each person has their own firmly fixed values and opinions and so they defend their own perspective and all of them are utterly convinced that they are right and that their version of what happened is the right one.

Peyton's story is also not given chronologically. We see it through different eyes and as these people's mind wander in no particular chronological order, we constantly jump back and forth in time. In addition to this, we also constantly switch the perspective from which we are looking. It is due to the fact that different people take the floor and they see things in a different way. I would compare it to a discussion through various streams of consciousness. A person takes the floor, speaks for a while, lets his/her mind wander in the process and then leaves the floor. Then a second person takes the floor, speaks for a while and leaves the floor. And so on. But naturally, some people may take the floor more often than others and speak for a longer time.

As far as Peyton herself is concerned, she is only seen through others' eyes in the first six parts of the book. Her own stream of consciousness comes at the end of the novel, in the seventh part. Her last day of life is seen exclusively through her own perspective, from the moment she wakes up until the moment she leaps from a window to kill herself. This over fifty-page-long stream of consciousness is the most intriguing and fascinating part of the novel. One cannot stop reading it. It represents the climax of the novel.

All this make it hard to precisely describe the structure of the novel and its narrative pattern. *Lie Down in Darkness* has an omniscient narrator, but this narrator is not important for Peyton's story because it is not him who tells it. At the same time, the novel features many stream of consciousness narrations by different characters, major or minor, which are crucial in order to understand why this tragedy happened.

Styron is an extremely convincing author. All the characters have a distinctive voice that makes it easy not to confuse them. Each character sees the events in a different way and expresses their own opinion. They defend their own actions and blame the others for not understanding them.

The plan of the novel was so carefully thought of that one might not be actually aware of it until the very end of the novel. The actual few-hour plot and the various streams of consciousness mix easily and effortlessly. As the characters are approaching the cemetery and the funeral ceremony is looming up, the tension starts increasing. The streams of consciousness clash with one another as the people begin to recall the controversial situations that happened. The atmosphere gets more and more tense only to climax at the very end of the novel. Styron builds up the tension and lets it explode at the end in Peyton's long stream of consciousness and her suicide.

3.2. Plot summary

As I have already mentioned, the plan of the novel is quite complicated. That is why I decided to sum up the actual plot of the novel first and then give a chronological overview of what happened before.

The actual plot of the novel takes place in a few hours between the arrival of the train that brings the coffin with Peyton's body and the end of the funeral ceremony. The actual funeral though is not described at all.

The novel begins when the train starts slowing down at the outskirts of Port Warwick, a port in the Virginia tidewater region. At the same time, a hearse and a limousine arrive at the railway station of Port Warwick. Mr. Casper, the undertaker, together with Milton Loftis, Peyton's father, Dolly Bonner, Milton's lover, and Ella Swan, Helen Loftis's African-American cook, came to the station to pick up the coffin and bring it to the cemetery. Milton Loftis, drunk and overcome by grief, cannot bear to see the coffin and finds a refuge in a bar near the station.

In the bar, he takes a letter out of his pocket and is immediately shocked because it is a letter from his dead daughter, Peyton, which she wrote on the day of her twenty-second birthday. She calls him "Bunny", as usual. She writes him that her husband, Harry Miller, has definitely left her now. She also mentions that she feels tired and ill

and has gloomy thoughts, as if she was drowning. She says that she is being pursued by wingless birds and that she would like to return home but she knows it is impossible. Milton stops reading after a while because the letter is quite confusing.

It is a hot sunny day, the air is stuffy and humid, the sun is shining and everyone is sweating. Finally, the two cars leave the station. Dolly tries to cheer the devastated Milton up but fails. At the same time, Reverend Carey Carr is on his way to Helen's house to pick her up and drive her to the cemetery. Carr is full of compassion for Helen since her elder daughter, Maudie, died two and a half years ago and now even the younger one is dead. Carr thinks that Helen must be devastated. Also, Helen and Milton are separated and their divorce should become final in October. When he arrives at her house, Helen is tired but calm and composed. Then they leave for the cemetery.

All three cars meet at a petrol station and then continue together. When they arrive at the cemetery, Milton does not want Dolly to come with him. She stays in the limousine and feels that her relationship with Milton is almost over. It starts raining. A storm is coming.

Milton, Helen and Carey Carr come out of the chapel. Milton, devastated, tries to persuade Helen to take him back because there is nothing left from their family except the two of them. But Helen does not care, she is indifferent, calm, cold. When she remarks that Peyton would like the fact that the two of them had nothing left, Milton cannot control himself anymore and he starts to throttle her. After a few moments, he stops. Crying, Milton runs away from the chapel into the storm.

Then, they could hear a train leaving the Port Warwick railway station.

Let us have a look now at the story of the Loftis family, as taken from the different streams of consciousness in the novel.

Milton Loftis and Helen Peyton met during the First World War at Governor's Island. Milton was a young officer, a lawyer, serving in the army's administration, and Helen was a colonel's daughter. They got married and moved to Port Warwick, Virginia. Helen gave birth to two daughters, Maudie and Peyton. Their elder daughter, Maudie, was mentally challenged and had to wear a brace on her leg. She was a very good and

obedient child and did not talk much. Peyton was her complete opposite. She was beautiful, energetic, talkative and wayward. Peyton was Milton's favourite daughter and Maudie was Helen's favourite daughter. The fact that their elder daughter was mentally challenged probably caused them to gradually grow apart. Helen then inherited a large sum of money from her mother and they started to live a very comfortable life and became a part of the local elite.

While Helen doted on Maudie, Milton doted on Peyton and was spoiling her rotten. Helen therefore tried to be even more strict with Peyton so that she would not be so much spoiled. While Milton adored Peyton and he behaved nicely towards Maudie, Helen loved Maudie and always criticized Peyton. Peyton noticed the difference and shifted all her love to Milton. Helen noticed and was a little jealous, which did not help in her relationships with Milton nor Peyton.

Helen also disapproved of alcohol while Milton was an alcoholic who spent his days drinking whiskey. This also did not help their relationship. Moreover, Milton met Dolly Bonner and was very much attracted to her. The Bonners were frequent visitors at Helen's house and Helen noticed Milton's attraction to Dolly and immediately started to suspect him of infidelity. Milton and Dolly, however, became lovers only several years later. Her familial and marital problems, together with her severeness, religiousness, self-righteousness and her belief that she knows best made her a very bitter person who was able to be nice only to her mentally challenged daughter.

The family was practically split in two pairs – Helen and Maudie versus Milton and Peyton. When Peyton was sixteen, she was sent to a girl's college in Sweet Briar. It was the time when Milton and Dolly became lovers. Due to an argument with Helen before she left for Sweet Briar, Peyton did not come home very often. She would rather visit her friends.

Milton and Dolly went on with their liaison and Peyton moved to New York. In November 1942, Maudie went for a routine check-up to a hospital in Charlottesville. Her condition worsened and she died. Helen was devastated but still very bitter in her sadness. After her demonstrative suicide attempt, Milton finished his affair with Dolly

and they tried to work on their marriage. It worked only for a few months, until Peyton's wedding in the autumn 1943.

In New York, Peyton lived a rather wild life, went to a lot of parties and drank a lot. Then she met Harry Miller who fell in love with her at first sight. Thanks to him, she stopped drinking excessively and her mental health improved dramatically. They were happy together and wanted to get married.

Milton persuaded Peyton to get married at home in Port Warwick. Peyton married Harry Miller, a painter of Jewish origin from New York City, in her parents' house. Helen was enjoying her time as a hostess and successful mother of a beautiful bride even though she still resented both Milton and Peyton. Even though Peyton saw through her mother's pretence, she herself pretended to be a happy bride for her father's sake. Milton was happy in his blissful ignorance. However, Helen and Peyton eventually had a big argument and Peyton left the house with Harry in a hurry. Milton, left with no hope that everything would be fine again, went to see Dolly and renewed their affair.

Peyton would never return home alive again. After the wedding, she began her profuse drinking again. Peyton and Harry would then argue more and more often about her drinking, carelessness with money and other things. Peyton, wanting a revenge on Harry for these arguments, would leave Harry with one of her lovers and come back several weeks later. One day, Harry ran out of patience and left Peyton for good.

Then, at the beginning of August 1945, Peyton committed suicide by jumping out of a window of a clothes factory, haunted by terrifying hallucinations of wingless birds that followed her everywhere.

Since the police could not identify her body, she was buried in New York's municipal graveyard for the nameless dead. It was Harry and his best friend, Lennie, who went to retrieve her body from there and sent it to Port Warwick. And it was Harry again who phoned Milton to inform him about Peyton's suicide.

If we consider the novel a family tragedy, then in the context of drama we may assume that the train's arrival to Port Warwick represents the curtain's rise and the start

of the stage time. Peyton's stream of consciousness and her suicide could be then considered as the climax of the story. Similarly, the train's departure from Port Warwick may represent the curtain's fall and end of drama.

3.3. Historic events in the novel

Even though the novel takes place in the first half of the 20th century when many important historic events happened, the plot and the characters are more important for the author and so he mentions the historic events only briefly. Since this is not a historical novel, historic events are taken into consideration only as a background for the story. They generally do not play a very important role in the novel. Nevertheless, let us have a look at them in chronological order.

World War I broke out in Europe in 1914 but the United States, following a policy of isolationism but quietly supporting the British, joined the war only in 1917. The US Congress declared war on Germany on 6th April 1917 after President Woodrow Wilson asked for it. The armistice with Germany was signed on 11th November 1918. In 1919, after Paris Peace conference, the Treaty of Versailles was signed with Germany. (WFE 2008a) Even though President Woodrow Wilson supported the idea of the League of Nations, he did not manage to persuade the Americans to join in. (Duncan and Goddard 2005: 25)

In the novel, World War I sets only the background for the meeting of Helen Peyton and Milton Loftis. Helen's father is a colonel and Milton is a young lawyer and officer serving in the administration and spending his time drinking and partying. They meet at an officer's club and get married at the end of the war.

The 1920s were an era of prosperity. Everybody wanted to enjoy themselves and the "Jazz Age", radio, advertising, movies and cars changed the life of people forever. People were partying and drinking even though the Eighteenth Amendment, passed in 1919, prohibited production, transportation or sale of alcohol. The Prohibition ended in

1933, when the Twenty-first Amendment nullified the Eighteenth. (Duncan and Goddard 2005: 25)

The Wall Street crash came on 29th October 1929, on “Black Tuesday”. The stock market crashed and marked the beginning of the Great Depression. Economy was in crisis and unemployment was very high. Franklin D. Roosevelt introduced the New Deal plan to restart the economy of the country. (WFE 2008a)

All these events are mentioned only briefly or not at all in the novel. The Prohibition atmosphere is present in the novel though, mainly through Milton’s constant drinking and Helen’s negative attitude towards it.

The Spanish Civil War lasted from 17th July 1936 to 1st April 1939. It ended with the victory of the rebels and then the Fascist General Franco came to power. (WFE 2008d)

This war is briefly mentioned only when characterizing Peyton’s future husband, Harry Miller, who fought in Spain in 1937. They met there with his best friend, Lennie, when Harry saved him from drowning.

The last historic event that took place during the first half of the 20th century was World War II. Officially, World War II started on 1st September 1939 when Hitler’s Germany invaded Poland. Subsequently, the United Kingdom and France declared war on Germany. (WFE 2008f) Since the United States did not want to get involved in another European war, they “declared neutrality but supplied the British” (Duncan and Goddard 2005: 27). This changed at the end of 1941 when “on Sunday, 7 December 1941 – in Roosevelt’s phrasing, “a date that will live in infamy” – the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor naval base rushed America into war” (Duncan and Goddard 2005: 27). The Congress declared war on Japan the following day, 8th December 1941. (WFE 2008f) Germany responded by declaring war on the United States on 11th December 1941. (WFE 2008a) In April 1945, President Roosevelt died and Harry S. Truman became the 33rd President of the USA. Germany surrendered in May 1945, but Japan continued fighting. The USA dropped two atomic bombs on Japan – the first one on Hiroshima on 6th August 1945 and the second one on Nagasaki on 9th August 1945. Japan surrendered unconditionally on 15th August 1945. (WFE 2008a)

4. The World War II is, without question, a historical event with the biggest presence in the novel. We can see it during the air-raid drills and alarms in Newport News, for example. It is true though that the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan provokes Harry Miller, Peyton's estranged husband, to create a masterpiece painting. In spite of it, however, World War II never plays an important role in the novel and even the atomic bombing somehow fades away on the day when Peyton finally commits suicide.

The novel is set in the 1940s. It is a family story and the father of two daughters, Maudie and Peyton. Maudie is the older daughter who is mentally and physically disabled. Peyton is their younger daughter who is, in contrast to Maudie, very lively and beautiful. She marries Harry Miller, a painter painter from New York, and so he becomes, by marriage, the fifth member of the family.

This superficial description might give an image of an almost perfect family. But appearances are deceptive and the Lotbys, in fact, a very dysfunctional family. The family's gradual disintegration that has been creeping in since the mid-1920s culminates in Peyton's suicide in 1945. Her funeral marks not only the end of the family but also the end of the novel.

Miller, Maudie and Peyton are the most important characters in the novel since they are the family's core. They are the leading roles in this family tragedy. The other characters, including Maudie and Harry, are reduced to play second fiddle. Even though Maudie is mentally disabled in most situations in the novel – she dies only in 1945, three years before Peyton's suicide – her mental disability does not prevent her to be an active participant in the family's disintegration. Harry, on the other hand, appears only in 1943, two years before Peyton's suicide, and therefore does not have enough time or space to become a major character.

The novel is a family story and by one to understand the reasons for this family tragedy.

4. The Loftises – general description

The Loftises live in the city of Port Warwick in Virginia. They are rich and have been regarded as a part of the upper-class society in tidewater Virginia since the 1920s until the end of the novel in August 1945.

Their nuclear family consists of four members. Milton Loftis, a lawyer, is the oldest one in the family, he is Helen's husband and the father of two daughters, Maudie and Peyton. Helen Loftis is Milton's wife and the mother of their two daughters. Maudie is their elder daughter who is mentally and physically disabled. Peyton is their younger daughter who is, in contrast to Maudie, very lively and beautiful. She marries Harry Miller, a Jewish painter from New York, and so he becomes, by marriage, the fifth member of the family.

This superficial description might give an image of an almost perfect family. But appearances are deceptive and the Loftises make, in fact, a very dysfunctional family. The family's gradual disintegration that has been creeping in since the mid-1920s culminates in Peyton's suicide in 1945. Her funeral marks not only the end of the family, but also the end of the novel.

Milton, Helen and Peyton are the most important characters in the novel since they are the characters who act out the leading roles in this family tragedy. The other characters, including Maudie and Harry, are doomed to play second fiddle. Even though Maudie is naturally present in most situations in the novel – she dies only in 1942, three years before Peyton's suicide – her mental disability does not permit her to be an active participant in the course of events. Harry, on the other hand, appears only in 1943, two years before Peyton's suicide, and therefore does not have enough time or space to become as important as the three major characters.

Now we will analyze the Loftises one by one to uncover the causes for this family tragedy.

4.1. Milton Loftis

4.1.1. Characterization

Milton Loftis is a lawyer who lives with his family in the city of Port Warwick in Virginia. He has got a wife, Helen, and two daughters, Maudie and Peyton. Later, he will also have a lover, Dolly Bonner.

Milton Stuart Loftis was born in Richmond, Virginia. Mr. Loftis, his father, was a lawyer, the profession being passed on from generation to generation. Mrs. Loftis, née Byrd, came from a rich and well-known family. Milton was an only child and they lived in an old mansion. His mother died when he was little so all he remembers about her are a few indistinct impressions. His father therefore brought him up alone in a kind but disciplined way and Milton was a dutiful son. His father sent him to university when he was seventeen. Despite his 'wild' university years, he graduated with unexpectedly good results and became a lawyer.

He enrolled in the army during the First World War only to feel relieved when his father secured him a 'safe' administrative post at Governor's Island. Milton, already an alcoholic, spent the war in exactly the same way as he had spent his studies – drinking and partying. At one of the parties, he met his future wife, Helen Peyton, a colonel's daughter. They got engaged after a few months and Milton was swiftly and effortlessly promoted to captain. They were both good-looking and liked to dance and socialize. Since Helen disapproved of alcohol and drunkenness, Milton stopped drinking for some time. He was also secretly delighted when Helen told him she was to inherit a substantial amount of money after her mother's death.

They got married at the end of the war and then moved to Port Warwick, Virginia, where his father set up a law practice for Milton and gave them a little money for the start. They were happy and in love, despite the fact that they were living in a shabby flat. Milton's father died in 1920. Their elder daughter, Maudie, was born mentally and physically challenged a few years later. Milton was never really able to come to terms with the fact that two normal good-looking people from respectable

families could have produced such a 'deficient' child. He reverted to heavy drinking. In August 1923, their younger daughter, Peyton, was born. Her first name was also her mother's maiden name. Milton felt relieved and happy to have a beautiful, lively, 'normal' child.

The family is now complete. Although he loves both his daughters, he absolutely adores Peyton, the beautiful, lovely, vivacious child. Peyton is his favourite child. Helen favours Maudie.

A few years after Peyton's birth, Helen's mother dies and Helen inherits one hundred thousand dollars. They have their house built near the sea and enjoy the life of a local high society family, mainly thanks to Helen's money. Despite his law practice not being particularly successful and him being an alcoholic, Milton enjoys a rich social life in the local golf club and is generally respected. Sometimes he even daydreams about becoming Congressman, Senator or even President. Needless to say, he never really does anything to make it become true. Milton devotes his time to drinking, playing golf and spoiling Peyton while Helen devotes her time to caring about Maudie and going to church. That is why they are continually growing apart. Ultimately, the disintegration of their marriage will bring about the disintegration of the family. From now on, the family splits into two pairs – Milton and Peyton versus Helen and Maudie.

But life goes on and they at least try to maintain a semblance of good marriage and happy family. So sometimes they organize a party and invite a lot of people. At one of these parties, Milton notices Dolly Bonner, an open and cheerful wife of one of his acquaintances, Sclater "Pookie" Bonner, and is attracted to her. Dolly likes him as well, so they start to flirt with each other, which Helen notices, of course. They keep flirting for several years, which provokes Helen's fixed idea about Milton being unfaithful to her, and her bitterness grows. Milton's occasional and brief attempts to talk things out with Helen go unnoticed and/or ignored.

Milton does not feel happy in the marriage and he knows he should do something about it, but he does not know what. After all, he leads a comfortable life thanks to Helen's money, he is respected, he plays golf with his friends every week and

he has his perfect daughter, Peyton. His laziness is another reason why Milton grows apathetic and resigns himself to the fact that he can do nothing about the situation.

In August 1939, a day before the Second World War begins, Milton and Helen organize a big celebration at the local golf club on the occasion of Peyton's sixteenth birthday. It is also Peyton's goodbye party before she goes to study to a girl's university, Sweet Briar. Everybody is there. Milton dances with Helen, Peyton and Dolly and gives Peyton a glass of whisky. When Helen finds out, she is angry and wants Peyton to leave her party and go home with her and Maudie. Peyton is upset and tells Helen that she hates her. Milton and Helen then have an argument and Helen leaves the party with Maudie. Peyton stays. Milton keeps drinking whisky and flirting with Dolly. When the adults have left and the young went swimming in the pool, Milton finds himself alone with Dolly. Milton, drunk, thinks about his marriage and the argument with Helen and gets angry. He kisses Dolly, they find an empty room in the club and become lovers. However, Milton does not know that Peyton saw them making love. About a week later Helen refuses to accompany Milton and Peyton to Sweet Briar, although originally they should have gone there as a family – all four of them.

Milton is unhappy about his favourite daughter leaving home and embarks on an affair with Dolly, an affair that Helen thinks has been already lasting for six years. During her first two years at university, Peyton comes home only for holidays but writes letters to Milton. However, she does not answer any of the three letters Helen writes her. Milton continues his affair with Dolly Bonner but does not like the fact that it is an open secret in Port Warwick.

Just before Christmas 1941, at the beginning of December, Pearl Harbor is attacked by the Japanese and the United States join the Second World War as a result. Since Peyton is coming for Christmas, Helen decorates the house and Milton is eagerly expecting her. They organize a party and invite a lot of people, including Helen's brother Edward, a colonel in the army. Then Helen answers the phone and leaves the party. It is Dolly who wants Milton to come and see her but Milton is angry with her about calling him home. Edward and Milton are both quite drunk by the time Peyton arrives with her boyfriend, Dick Cartwright. After an argument with Helen, Peyton

leaves with Dick to go to a dance. Milton and Edward keep drinking until after midnight. In spite of his drunkenness or perhaps thanks to it, Milton realizes that he should not be living like this, that he should leave Helen, but at the same time he knows that his indecisiveness and laziness will prevent him from doing anything in the end, as usual. He has a hangover the following morning, and so does Peyton when he wakes her up. He finds out from her that Edward has already left. Milton asks Peyton to stay until the New Year's Day, but she does not reply. Peyton then gets up and tells him to leave her room because she has to change. When she starts undressing, her back to Milton, he does not leave the room. He stands by the door, watching her undressing, and leaves only after naked Peyton tells him to go. He is excited, even aroused by the sight. When Helen and Maudie return home from church, Helen starts preparing the luncheon and Maudie plays with her Christmas presents. The atmosphere in the house becomes tense after an argument between Helen and Peyton and the tension escalates during lunch. Peyton runs away from the house, Milton runs after her and Helen goes upstairs to her room, dragging screaming Maudie with her. Milton finds Peyton standing at the seaside. She tells him that Helen is insane and that she will never come back again. He tries to calm her down, but knows that she is telling him the truth and feels desperate. In the evening, Peyton leaves with Dick Cartwright to spend the rest of the holiday at his parents' house in Rappahannock and Milton stays in the living room alone. He calls Dolly but she is not at home, so he keeps drinking.

Milton, as an ex-army officer, is appointed an air-raid warden. He has to check that all lights are turned off if an air-raid alarm sets off. Peyton does not come home again until her wedding in autumn 1943.

But in November 1942, Maudie dies in Charlottesville hospital. Since Christmas 1942 until now, Milton continues his affair with Dolly (but is nevertheless annoyed that everybody knows about them) and Peyton does not come home at all. Milton and Helen arrange their time in such a way that they do not meet or see each other too often. Since Milton misses Peyton, he goes to see her quite often. In the middle of November 1942 Helen and Maudie leave Port Warwick to go to Charlottesville hospital for Maudie's regular but thorough check-up. Milton enjoys having the house to himself for a week.

Then one morning, after having drunk too much again, he receives an urgent message from Helen to come to Charlottesville since Maudie's condition worsened considerably. Milton therefore spends several hours driving to the hospital with a terrible hangover, a headache and a bottle of whisky. But then he realizes that Peyton will be in Charlottesville as well, attending a football game, which improves his mood. In the hospital, Helen talks too fast when explaining about Maudie and Milton is too drunk to understand what she is saying. Helen gets angry and goes to talk to Maudie's doctor. Milton meets a friend and goes with him to a local club, where he sees Peyton who got engaged to Dick Cartwright the day before. Milton is surprised and wants to talk to her, but there are too many people there and Peyton does not see him, so she leaves with Dick for the football game. So Milton chases after her the whole day, going first to a restaurant where she was supposed to celebrate the engagement, then to the football game and then back to the club, where they finally meet and he tells her about Maudie. When the three of them are waiting in the hospital and smoking, Helen blames Peyton for everything – for letting Maudie fall a few years earlier, for not letting Milton be in the hospital with her all day, for thinking and caring only about men and drinking.

After Maudie's funeral, Helen unsuccessfully attempts to commit suicide. Milton realizes that they do not have much left and pleads Helen to give them a chance to start over. Helen agrees and Milton tries hard to make her happy and to change his life. He stops seeing Dolly and drinking excessively, and he takes care of Helen. Helen seems to feel better and better and to be happy. They even go for a three-week vacation together. When Helen tells him she would like to see Peyton coming home, Milton feels very happy. He thinks that this moment is a reward for his efforts. He believes Helen to be sincere. But she is not.

So he convinces Peyton to get married at home. They organize a lavish wedding and invite all the people they know. In the morning of the wedding day, Milton feels happy, excited and full of hope that they will be family again. Helen surprisingly offers to pick up Peyton and Harry Miller, her husband-to-be, which Milton considers to be a good sign. However, this happy bubble of his suffers the first blow even before the ceremony when he and Peyton drink whisky in her room and Peyton is wondering what

happened to Helen that she behaves like a loving mother, and calls her hypocritical and insincere. During the ceremony, Milton is staring at Peyton's hips and finds her very attractive. He is also wondering what their friends think about Peyton's marrying a Jewish painter from New York. Then the celebration starts and Milton, overcome by emotions, kisses Peyton passionately, which Helen sees. Milton keeps drinking whisky and champagne and speaks with different guests, Edward and Harry. Then he watches Helen and Peyton going upstairs and knows it is the decisive moment of their lives. He follows them upstairs after a while and sees the end of their heated argument. His happy bubble bursts completely and he recognizes the hopelessness of his efforts of the past year. Peyton and Harry leave the house in a hurry, Milton phones Dolly and decides to leave Helen.

Milton moves away from Helen's house. He rents a room in the golf club and continues his affair with Dolly who is already divorced. His divorce will become effective in October 1945 as a result of two-year separation from his wife.

Milton stays in contact with Peyton through letters and that is how he finds out about what is going on in her life. He thinks a lot about her and her marriage problems. One day in August 1945 Harry calls him to say that Peyton committed suicide. Milton, grief-stricken and drunk, immediately goes to tell Helen. He begs her to let him sleep in the house and to take him back. Helen makes the necessary calls to organize the private funeral, but refuses to go to the railway station with Milton to pick up the coffin. Since he cannot bear to go alone, he asks Dolly, his lover, and Ella Swan, Helen's African-American cook, to accompany him. But he could not bear the sight of the coffin, so he waits in a bar. Then his limousine and the hearse set out for a journey to the cemetery. Once there, Dolly stays in the car. Helen arrives with Carey Carr, a minister, who drove her to the cemetery.

After a short ceremony, they leave the chapel. Milton, desperate, wants to talk with Helen. He gets furious while Helen stays calm, indifferent. Then, all of a sudden, he grabs Helen and starts to throttle her. After a while, he stops, crying. Then he runs out into the storm.

4.1.2. Milton in the novel

Since Milton is a major character, he is omnipresent in the novel. We either see the reality from his perspective as he perceives it or we see him through the eyes of others in their streams of consciousness.

Milton makes his first appearance in the novel at the very beginning. He is one of the people who come to the railway station to pick up Peyton's remains. Milton is pictured as a grieving father who lost his beloved daughter and we feel much sympathy for him. He thinks: "If I can last out this day I might be all right. ... time cures all..." (LDD: 35), which sums up his strategy to get through this terrible day.

Grief-stricken Milton then recalls that morning's situation when Helen, his wife and Peyton's mother, refused to go to the station with him. She did it not because she would not be able to bear it, but simply because she did not want to go. When Milton pictures the present Helen as cold, calm, recluse, meticulously polite and cold-hearted, he confronts this reality with the picture of her when they first met. That Helen was a smiling, shy, tender beauty who enjoyed company and parties. The disparity between these two Helens seems to be even greater when Milton thinks about himself when he was young. The picture we get is simple enough – since university, Milton has been a good-looking, but lazy man with a penchant for drinking whisky and for a life that does not require too much effort of him.

At the station, Milton has a hangover and feels sick. It is understandable for a mourning father to drown his sorrow in whisky. However, we later find out that Milton is an alcoholic. We therefore see him either drinking or having a hangover or both. He always has a drink in hand and all his memories are also somehow connected with alcohol.

Several times in the novel, Milton makes it clear that he is aware of the fact that the family leads a comfortable, financially secure life mainly thanks to Helen's money. He is a little ashamed that he has not been more successful in his career as a lawyer. He admits his own laziness and the fact that he likes things to happen effortlessly. He is content with his ordinary life and lets Helen take care of everything.

As far as family is concerned, he adores Peyton and dotes on her. She is his perfect child, beautiful and vivacious, who returns his affection openly and honestly. In contrast, Maudie, his mentally disabled daughter, is usually apathetic and not able to give any emotional response. Since Milton does not like to endeavour to achieve something, he rarely initiates contact with Maudie. He feels guilty for creating a disabled child and would like to know who to blame. The only thing he can come up with is "the mystery of birth" (LDD: 49). But he likes her and does not overlook her.

However, when it comes to his wife, Milton does not understand her. He recalls that they were happy during the first few years of marriage but does not know why they have grown apart. He also resents the way she treats Peyton. He is no longer happy in the marriage and thinks he should do something about that but does not know what. His occasional attempts to really discuss things with Helen are without conviction and meet with no success. When he starts an affair with Dolly Bonner, he no longer tries to make the marriage work.

After Maudie's death and Helen's attempted suicide, Milton finds the courage to fight for the marriage again and ends his affair. On his knees, he apologizes to Helen for everything and begs her to give their marriage one more chance. He pleads that he will change and take care of her. Helen condescendingly agrees. Milton stops drinking excessively and becomes an attentive husband. He thinks that his sincere efforts will change Helen and when she tells him that she would like to see Peyton, he is elated.

He lives in blissful ignorance until Peyton's wedding. There, in the middle of the celebration, he suddenly realizes with terror that nothing has changed and that Helen and Peyton hate each other:

Then all at once he had a flicker of insight and during this moment – so brief that it lasted, literally, one blink of Peyton's eyes – he knew what the smiles were about and he had a crushing, chilling premonition of disaster. ... God help him, hadn't he known all along that they hated and despised each other? Had he had to spend twenty years deceiving himself, piling false hope upon false hope – only to discover on this day, of all days, the shattering, unadorned, bitter truth? Those smiles. ... Those smiles. He was chilled with a sudden horror. Those smiles. They had fluttered across the web of his life

like deceptive, lovely butterflies, always leading him on, always making him believe that, in spite of everything, these two women really did love each other. That, deep down, there was motherly, daughterly affection. But no. Now he saw the smiles in a split moment for what they were: women smiles – Great God, so treacherous, so false, displayed here – himself between them – like the hateful wings of bats. (LDD: 283-284)

His dreams of having the family back together are shattered. He somehow feels that his affection for Peyton and Helen's lack of affection for her are to blame for this situation. He thinks: "Oh, Peyton, I love you so ..." (LDD: 284). When thinking about Peyton, he would like to tell her: "forgive me, forgive all of us. Forgive your mother, too. ... Forgive me for loving you so [much]." (LDD: 291) He realizes that while "he himself could love too much, only Helen could love so little." (LDD: 291) After Peyton and Helen's last argument, he calls Helen a "monster", leaves her and asks for a divorce.

Milton's last appearance in the novel comes at the end of the book, after the funeral. He asks Helen to give them one more chance since there is nothing left from their family. He is shaken by the funeral, agitated. But Helen is smiling at him, cold and unmoved. Yelling "God damn you!", he throttles her for a few moments. He suddenly stops and runs out into the storm, screaming "Die, damn you, die!" at Helen.

4.1.3. Summary

Milton is not a very complicated character. He is exactly what he appears to be – a middle-aged man who has just lost his beloved daughter and therefore suffers from a terrible grief.

Still, he is not a very likeable character either. He is a heavy drinker who likes company and socializing. He is lazy but he married well and now he enjoys a comfortable life ensured by his wife's money. He used to dream about becoming an important politician but never did anything to make it come true. Even though his father set up a law practice for him, he never achieved anything important during his career. Were it not for Helen's money, he would be, in fact, a complete failure.

4.2 Even as a husband and a father, his achievements are nonexistent. In spite of liking his elder daughter, he could not bring himself to interact with her more often. As far as Peyton is concerned, she is his “little princess”, his perfect daughter. He does not make a perfect parent though. He dotes on Peyton and spoils her rotten. He directs all his affections towards her, happy that she returns them. As they gradually grow apart with Helen, Milton transfers his love to Peyton. Helen seems to be interested only in Maudie, but she is jealous that Peyton gets Milton’s attention and love instead of her. This is the beginning of the vicious circle that ultimately destroys the family.

As a husband, he also leaves a lot to be desired. They seem happy only during the first few years of marriage. They start to grow apart after Maudie’s disability is discovered. Helen showers Maudie with attention and does not have enough love left for Milton. Milton then centres his affections on Peyton who returns them immediately because she does not get enough attention from Helen who concentrates only on Maudie. Moreover, his affair with the married Dolly Bonner does not improve his image of a good husband.

So he finally resigns himself to keep up the pretence of their marriage and enjoy the life of Port Warwick’s upper-class society thanks to Helen’s money. He is too lazy to question their marriage or her behaviour. He accepts Helen’s “neuroses” as a part of their life. He accepts that Helen is the one deciding everything. He intervenes in her decisions only occasionally, usually for Peyton’s sake. He springs into action when it is usually too late. For example, he abandons Helen only after the damage is done and it is clear that Peyton will never return back home again.

His laziness and unfrontational behaviour, which helped him to maintain his comfortable lifestyle, proved to be a double-edged weapon. At the same time, they prevented him from taking action at a time when he could actually do something to save his marriage, his family or both. He fell victim to his own indecisiveness. His last action, when he tries to choke Helen at the cemetery in a desperate attempt to finally do something, is futile because it will neither solve nor salvage anything anymore.

4.2. Helen Loftis, née Peyton

4.2.1. Characterization

Helen is Milton's wife. She is a housewife and the mother of their two daughters, Maudie and Peyton. The family lives in Port Warwick, Virginia.

Helen Peyton was born to a military family which moved a lot. Her father, colonel Peyton, was a preacher's son and did not believe in spoiling his children, Helen and Edward. Her father was a severe, strict and religious man and demanded total obedience. No matter where they were, they would go to a church every Sunday. Helen adored her father very much and therefore was a dutiful daughter – pious, obedient, stone-cold sober, prim and proper.

During the First World War, she met Milton Loftis and fell in love with him despite his drinking habits. They dated for several months and got engaged. They openly talked about their plans after their wedding – Milton's father would set up a law practice for Milton in a growing town with a bright future and give them some money for the start. Helen then confided in Milton that she would inherit a substantial sum of money after her mother's death. Although Milton did not let her know it, he was pleased by that discovery.

They got married before the end of the war and moved to Port Warwick. They did not have much at first and lived in a shabby flat near the dockyard. But they did not mind because they were young and in love. They were happy. Maudie, their elder daughter, was born mentally and slightly physically challenged. Helen knew Milton was disappointed with this less-than-perfect child, and so she tried to compensate Maudie for her father's neglect by giving her her undivided care, love and attention. Milton, after a few years of controlled drinking, started drinking excessively again, much to her dismay. In August 1923, their younger daughter was born. They called her Peyton, probably as a tribute to Helen's father, colonel Peyton, whom Helen had admired and adored.

Since Helen and Milton will not have any other children, the family is now complete. Helen, feeling guilty about giving birth to a child that its father cannot really love, is fiercely protective of Maudie. She dotes on her and devotes her time to her, probably to make up for her father's inattentiveness. Milton, on the other hand, dotes on Peyton. Helen thinks he is spoiling Peyton rotten and therefore she tries to rectify it by being strict with her. Even though they still live in their run-down flat, they are happy. Sometimes they go to see her brother's family in the summer.

When Helen's mother dies and she inherits a fortune, they have a big house built in Port Warwick by the seaside. They enter the local golf club and enjoy their comfortable, worry-free life of the rich. Everyone admires Helen for being such a devoted and selfless mother to Maudie. However, by devoting all her time, love and attention to Maudie, she does not have much left for Peyton, the beautiful and clever daughter, and/or Milton.

They lead a busy social life and attend many parties at first. In their big house, Milton and Helen have separate bedrooms. At a party Milton meets Dolly Bonner, Sclater "Pookie" Bonner's cheerful wife, is attracted to her and they start flirting with each other. Helen notices that Milton likes Dolly and is not happy about it. She suspects Milton of being unfaithful to her. And so she has one more thing to lecture him about, in addition to his drinking and him spoiling Peyton. However, she never gets really angry, she never screams or cries. She does it with a kind of calm bitterness, politely suppressing her anger and jealousy for the sake of appearances.

She also feels unappreciated for sacrificing her life to care for Maudie. Moreover, she thinks that not only Dolly but also Peyton are stealing Milton's attention and love from her and Maudie. All this makes her feel very bitter.

On the last day of August 1939, they organize a big dancing party at the local country club to celebrate Peyton's sixteenth birthday. Everyone is enjoying themselves, except for Helen. She is jealous that Milton and Peyton are having a good time. Helen and Peyton have an argument because Helen can smell alcohol in Peyton's drink and orders Peyton to go home with her and Maudie. Peyton tells her she hates her. However, Milton is on Peyton's side and Helen leaves the party with Maudie.

But she is angry with both of them and wants them to pay for disregarding her wishes and orders. She pays them back by not accompanying Peyton to Sweet Briar a week later. Peyton therefore goes only with Milton even though they originally should have gone there as a family – all four of them.

She goes to see Dolly Bonner instead and demands that the affair between Dolly and Milton stop. Helen feels very self-confident and righteous about her claim and thinks that Dolly would be embarrassed and that she would end the affair immediately. Dolly surprises her by saying that it happened only once and quite recently and that she will be with Milton as long as he will want her. Helen is stunned that she could misread the situation so badly.

Since this time, Helen visits Reverend Carr every two or three months to talk with him about her situation. She confesses that she hates Peyton. She complains about everything and wants everybody to obey her orders and wishes. She is persuaded about her own moral superiority and wants Peyton and Milton to suffer because of their sins. Even though Carr tries to show her that she should learn to compromise, his efforts fail. Helen does not come for advice.

Since August 1939 Peyton comes home very rarely. The affair between Milton and Dolly is an open secret in Port Warwick, which makes Helen feel humiliated because to her appearances matter.

Peyton does come home for the Christmas 1941, though, and Helen seems pleased and she decorates the house so that Peyton could feel welcome. They organize an afternoon party and Helen's brother, Edward, a colonel, also pays them a visit. But in the middle of the party, the telephone rings and Helen answers it. It is Dolly. Helen immediately leaves the party and goes to her room which is full of pills and medicaments. When Peyton arrives, it is quite late. Moreover, she is with a friend, Dick Cartwright, both are a little drunk already and they plan to go to a party. Helen does not like that and they have an argument with Peyton. Helen feels angry and unappreciated for all her efforts.

On Boxing Day, Helen and Maudie go to church and then Helen prepares the festive lunch. When Peyton comes to the kitchen, Helen ignores her merry Christmas

wish and then they argue again. While Helen is finishing their lunch in the kitchen, the rest of the family is sitting by the Christmas tree. Maudie is the only one unwrapping her Christmas presents. The atmosphere is tense, but quiet. Everyone is determined not make a scene.

The table is impeccably set, the family is seated. The lunch is good, as if Helen wanted to show them that it was her who did all this and they should be grateful to her. She wanted to show them what a good wife and mother she was. Helen is calm and polite, as usual. She is very kind to Maudie but ignores Peyton completely. And then the tension explodes. Peyton runs away from the house, Milton runs after her and Helen takes Maudie and they go to see Reverend Carr.

From now on, Helen is only interested in Maudie and Carr. Helen and Milton try to see and meet each other only when necessary.

In November 1942, Helen takes Maudie to Charlottesville for her regular check-up. But Maudie's health is worsening and Helen contacts Milton to come there immediately. He finds Helen physically and mentally exhausted when he arrives. Helen tries to explain what is wrong with Maudie, but Milton is too drunk to understand, which makes Helen angry. When Maudie's doctor wants to talk to them, Helen does not want Milton to go and comes alone. She does not see Milton again during the day. He comes back to the hospital in the evening with Peyton. Helen, still angry, blames Peyton for everything. She blames her for letting Maudie fall from the stairs a few years earlier, for thinking only about men and drinking, for not letting Milton to be in the hospital with her all day. Peyton then leaves the hospital.

Maudie dies and after her funeral, Helen tries to commit suicide. Milton apologizes to Helen for everything and ends his affair with Dolly. He pleads Helen to forgive him and give them a chance to start again. He also considerably limits his drinking and becomes an attentive husband. Helen likes his attention and she is happy that Milton admitted his sins and corrected his behaviour. She is content that Milton does as she wants. However, she did not forgive him and she still hates Peyton. She only pretends. She wants everyone to start thinking about her finally as a good wife and

mother, not as a cheated wife. Their happiness of a few months is therefore a complete sham.

Helen even organizes a lavish wedding for Peyton and Harry Miller. There, everybody would finally see that she is a successful mother after all. She wants the people to know that she has worked hard to put the family together. She behaves like a loving mother but Peyton sees through her pretence. After a beautiful ceremony, the celebration started. Overcome by emotions, Milton kisses Peyton but she pushes him away. Helen sees it and becomes furious. First she speaks with Carr who tries to calm her down. Unsuccessfully. Then she and Peyton go upstairs where they have a big argument. Peyton and Harry leave the house shortly afterwards.

Milton, certain now that Peyton and Helen have been hating each other for years, leaves Helen, moves out of the house and starts their divorce procedure.

In August 1945, Milton comes to see her, bringing the news that Peyton is dead. Helen does not really react, she stays calm, composed while Milton is crying with grief. Helen calls the undertaker and lets Milton sleep in the house. She feels empty and indifferent at the same time.

On the day of Peyton's funeral, she refuses to go to the station with Milton to pick up the coffin and tells him to ask Dolly instead. She is emotionless, heartless, and perhaps a little numb. She drives to the cemetery with Carey Carr.

After the ceremony, Milton wants to talk to her and begs her to take him back since they do not have anything else left. He is desperate. Helen stays calm and wants to leave. Suddenly, Milton starts to throttle her. He stops as suddenly as he started and runs away, crying. Helen, still shocked, only repeats that she has nothing.

4.2.2. Helen in the novel

Helen Loftis is one of the three main characters in the novel. As such, her presence can be felt throughout the novel. We either see the reality through her eyes or we see Helen from the other characters' perspectives.

Unlike Milton, Helen is a complicated person. She is polite, but cold and has no friends. When she expresses her opinions, nobody seems to be able to follow her reasoning. That is why we will now enter and explore her mind.

The first opportunity to see Helen's private thoughts comes early in the novel. On the day of Peyton's funeral, after she refuses to accompany Milton to the station, Helen sits in her room and recalls the moments when Milton told her that Peyton was dead:

He had come in the evening yesterday as she stood, after her solitary supper, in the hall. ... He stood at the door for a moment, his face flushed, bewildered, saying nothing; then he blurted, "Helen, Peyton killed herself," and entered. She made no reply, the sudden shock striking somewhere inside her chest like an electric bolt, flickering at her finger tips, numbing her cheeks, but receding swiftly as she remembered, thought *so, so, well* – (LDD: 25)

What we see is a father who is shocked by the death of his daughter, still not believing that it actually happened. Helen, on the other hand, does not feel anything except a short intensive pain and that is all. Later on, she remembers a little detail about Peyton when she was about four or five years old:

How silly. Oh, how silly and absurd. Why, last night she crawled over against me on the bed – "Mama," she said, "do you love me?" And I said and she said ... oh, how silly, selfish. (LDD: 30)

What is interesting about this scene are two things. First, the fact that Peyton must have already felt insecure about her mother's love and so she asked Helen whether she loved her. Second, the fact that Helen cannot remember her answer. Apparently, the strained mother-daughter relationship, which later on grew into hatred, started very early.

Helen's conversations with Reverend Carey Carr represent another important source of information about Helen, her personality and opinions. As we know, Helen regularly came to speak with him since September 1939.

During their first conversation, we find out a lot about Helen's background. Her father was a colonel and was very strict, severe and religious. He required absolute obedience and model behaviour from his children for he did not tolerate any misconduct. Helen adored him, he was "just like God" (LDD: 114) to her. Therefore, she adopted his outlook on life and never rebelled against her severe upbringing. She was brought up to become strict, severe and religious. She also did not tolerate any personal weaknesses. Weakness equaled sin. Alcohol was a weakness, for example. Not attending church every Sunday was another weakness.

According to this logic, Milton was a poor sinner doomed to hell. He drank too much whisky, he did not go to church and even had an affair. She suspected him of infidelity long before it actually happened, but it nevertheless made her bitter.

She considered Peyton a troublemaker. Her dear Maudie was one hundred percent obedient, while Peyton always had her own will. Helen also admitted to Carr that she was jealous of Peyton's youth and beauty. She also resented the fact that Milton adored Peyton and was convinced that Peyton was stealing Milton's love and attention from her and Maudie. She slowly came to the conclusion that she loathed both Milton and Peyton, but was appalled by it – "Dear Lord, I can't hate my own husband; dear Lord, I can't hate Peyton, my own flesh and blood" (LDD: 132), she prayed.

After Maudie's death, she attempts to kill herself. But she does not regret it because "she had got what she wanted. She had got Milton back, along with the chance to watch him plead and grovel and humiliate himself." (LDD: 273) She has always felt superior to Milton and she enjoys the moments when he apologizes and begs her forgiveness. But in reality, she never forgives.

The most frightening example of Helen's thinking and cold-bloodedness comes during Peyton's wedding to Harry Miller. She is capable of everything in order to achieve her goal – to be seen as a successful mother and a martyr who suffered a lot but who, thanks to her sacrifice, has reunited the family:

And this day had really been a triumph for her. No one would ever know. No one would ever know what electric fulfillment she felt, beneath the soft,

tender dignity of her manner, behind the wrinkled, rather sad, but gracefully aging serenity of her brow. No one would ever know the struggle, either. The struggle to accomplish just this casual, collected air of the proud mother: the 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 gentle good will. It had been cruelly difficult to put on this act, and how she had connived, how she had falsified her true feelings! But she knew that any means justified *this* end, *this* day, and after she had murmured into Milton's ear, "Oh, darling, I do want Peyton to come home," she had rejoiced at the sincere and grateful look in his eyes; she could tell he didn't doubt her honesty. ... Oh, what was honesty, anyway? ... She felt that her marriage had been such a nightmare, she had endured so many insults ... that she could discard honest intentions in order to make this one day come true. *Anything, anything*, she had said to herself these past months, *anything at all*. Anything that Peyton should come home. Anything that people should know Helen Loftis was a good mother, a successful mother. Anything that people should know: it was Helen Loftis, that suffering woman, who had brought together the broken family. (LDD: 273-274)

It is a truly devilish plan. Although Peyton sees through it immediately and Milton eventually realizes Helen's pretence, to all the guests at the wedding it must seem as if the family is back together. However, I doubt they think it happened thanks to Helen as not many people in the town know or like her. Anyway, Carey Carr's wife once said about Helen that almost "everyone knows or at least should be able to tell that Helen Loftis is a *nest* of little hatreds." (LDD: 111)

The last scene with Helen takes place at the cemetery after the funeral. Milton, overcome by grief and resentment towards Helen, chokes her for a few moments and then runs away. Helen is shocked and she probably finally realizes her tremendous loss:

"Peyton," she said, "oh, God, Peyton. My child. Nothing! Nothing! Nothing! Nothing!" (LDD: 389)

4.2.3. Summary

Helen in the novel is described as a predominantly negative character. Helen is strict and religious. However, her faith does not instill humility and forgiveness in her. On the contrary, it makes her self-righteous. She is convinced that her knowledge of what is right and wrong makes her superior to others. Intolerance of any weaknesses and inability to forgive are another of her personality traits. Helen, just like her father, requires absolute obedience of her wishes.

As a mother, she is not capable of loving unconditionally. She doted on Maudie, the elder disabled daughter, and showered her with care and attention. Maudie could be difficult at times, but she was also totally obedient. She was almost like a puppet, which suited Helen very well. Since Milton was not particularly interested in Maudie, Helen devoted her time to caring about her. But it was at the expense of her marriage and her relationship with Peyton. Since Milton doted on Peyton, Helen started to resent her for it. In her mind, Peyton was stealing Milton's attention from her and Maudie.

As Peyton was growing up, Helen started to be jealous of her beauty and youth and her resentment turned into hatred.

It was the same with Milton. Helen was at first irritated by his drinking and him not going to church. She also resented him for not spending more time with her and Maudie. This was bad enough. But then Milton started his affair with Dolly Bonner, which was an open secret in Port Warwick. Naturally, it made Helen feel even more bitter and humiliated. Eventually, Helen started to loathe Milton too.

Helen saw herself as a martyr who had sacrificed her life for her family. She had no friends and spent her days caring for Maudie. She expected that her family would appreciate her efforts and praise her for it. That did not happen though, and she felt angry and bitter. On the outside, she was aloof, cold and painstakingly polite while inside, she was raging with emotions. This was probably the cause of her "neuroses", for which she kept numerous pills and medicines in her room.

It is clear that Helen's hatred chased Peyton out of Port Warwick. Helen's lack of maternal love and her resentment towards Peyton provoked similar feelings in Peyton

who, in turn, started to loathe her mother too. In the midst of their last argument at her wedding, Peyton tells Helen how she sees her:

“You’re like all the rest of the sad neurotics everywhere who huddle over their misery and take their vile, mean little hatreds out on anybody they envy. You know, I suspect you’ve always hated me for one thing or another ... [and] you’ve [also] hated Daddy for years, and the sad thing is that he hasn’t know it. ... I don’t hate anything that you haven’t forced me to hate and, damn you, you’ve forced me to hate you –” (LDD: 311-312)

This is a sad testimony about what remained from a family – nothing but a lot of hatred. Helen is, without doubt, the main villain of the novel.

4.3. Maudie Loftis

4.3.1. Characterization

Since Maudie is the only member of the family who cannot speak for herself, her characterization is based on how she is seen and described by the others, especially by Helen, but also by Milton. Her inability to voice her feelings is not only due to her mental incapacity, but also to the fact that she has been dead for almost three years when the “centralizing action” (Galloway 1970: 83) of the novel starts.

Maudie is the elder daughter of Milton and Helen. As a first-born child, her parents would expect her to be the model child, to set the example for her younger siblings, to look after them and perhaps to help her mother with raising them. Her parents would want to show her off and to boast about her talents, accomplishments and achievements. They would hope that she would marry somebody of the upper-class Port Warwick’s society and give them grandchildren.

However, Maudie is only Maudie. She is not even an average, ordinary, normal child, and certainly not a child that would or could fulfil the high expectations of her parents. Maudie is the mentally retarded and slightly physically disabled daughter. In

this sense, Maudie is a complete failure, she is the antithesis of a perfect child, and her parents are left wondering why it happened. On the one hand, they love her, but on the other hand, they cannot help feeling ashamed of her, which only makes them feel ashamed of themselves.

While Maudie fails their expectations completely, their second daughter, Peyton, might be considered their compensation for the first, less-than-perfect child. Maudie and Peyton are complete opposites. While Maudie is not ugly, Peyton is a beauty. Maudie is emotionless, impassive and does not encourage any interaction, physical or emotional. The fact that she does not respond to people is why Milton is a hands-off father in her case. She is also totally obedient, which is one of the reasons why Helen dotes on her. In contrast, Peyton is very lively, vivacious, curious, sociable and wants to do what she wants and not what her mother tells her to do. Her emotional responsiveness and accessibility and her ability to love back are the reasons why Milton dotes on her and spoils her rotten. Her independent and disobedient streak together with the fact that she is spoiled, however, are the reasons why Helen is so strict and severe with her.

Maudie, as described in the novel, is quite a pretty, quiet, calm child that used to whine or cry at night when little. Her mental abilities equal the ones of a pre-school child and she tires easily. She is very passive, absent-minded and obedient. She spends her days playing with toys and picture books, gazing at the sea, gazing into space or listening to stories and tales that Helen tells her. She occasionally utters a simple word or a greeting and calls her mother "Mamadear", her father "Papadaddy" and Peyton "Peytondear". As far as her physical handicap is concerned, one of her legs is not strong enough, so she has to wear a metal brace on the leg and limps.

She spends most of her time with her mother, Helen, and her life revolves around their regular visits to church, Sunday school and around an occasional outing or ride in a car, which are the highlights of her otherwise uneventful existence. Helen devotes her life to caring for Maudie to that extent that her life revolves around Maudie's and that she does not want the other family members to help her with Maudie. Every once in a while, she goes to Charlottesville hospital for regular check-ups because

of her frailness. During one of these check-ups, Maudie's frail health worsens and she dies in Charlottesville hospital in November 1942.

4.3.2. Maudie in the novel

The first mention of Maudie in the novel comes from Helen during the "bees" scene (LDD: 28-30) when the Loftises visit Helen's brother and his family. While the others were having fun, Helen went to find Maudie who "sat alone, her braced leg outstretched on a stool" (LDD: 30). Apparently, Maudie lives in her own world where no one can really reach her. Even as "Helen crushes the child into her arms" (LDD: 30), she does not receive any response from Maudie.

Then Helen remembers the time when they were happy. They were living in a shabby apartment; it was before she inherited money from her mother. "In the summer Maudie cried. (What's wrong with the kid? he'd say. She shouldn't holler like that.) What's wrong? What's wrong?" (LDD: 31). Milton here is irritated not only by her cries, but also by her mental retardation. Consequently, he becomes ashamed of himself for it and, since he dislikes unpleasant thoughts, tries to stop thinking about it.

However, one day Milton looks at Maudie and describes his feelings towards his first-born child in a moving, but somehow shallow, interior monologue:

He watched Maudie, too, and a gentle feeling of compassion came over him, mingled vaguely with bitter distress. Right now – said the doctor, a kindly old man in Richmond, lisping hesitantly – she no doubt knew all she would know; too bad, one could tell – the mystery of birth.

Great God in heaven, was it his fault! Well, whose? ... The mystery of birth –

Tragic – it happened to any man, in the best of families. Be calm – that's what he had told himself to do. They had loved her, taken care of her, been good to her – that's what people said. ... "oh, Helen is a saint, she's so good to her. You're so lucky." As if, he would think bitterly, Maudie were a burden, even in her affliction, instead of a joy. Yet the child troubled him. He loved her, he longed for an affection that could never really blossom ... Until Peyton was born, bleak doubt assailed him. He looked at his wife's body with suspicion and his own with infuriate guilt. The mystery of birth ... Poor dear gentle child. Now his heart went out to her yearningly.

But there was no doubt that at times she caused him dreadful unhappiness” (LDD: 49).

Milton’s feelings for Maudie include a whole range of feelings, from love and compassion through frustration and bitterness to guilt. However, Hadaller (1996: 28) claims that Maudie is “a source of primal guilt feelings for the rest of the family”, not only for Milton whose “sense of guilt resides in his anguish over siring a defective child”. Despite admitting to loving his daughter – which was probably provoked by the feeling of guilt – Milton’s love is only skin-deep. Milton is not an attentive father to Maudie, which makes Helen feel “guilt for bearing Maudie and for condemning the child ... to the cruel emotional rejection of her father who expected only beautiful children” (ibid. 28) and so she “ostensibly devotes herself to Maudie” (ibid. 29).

Peyton’s feelings of guilt are based on “two incidents – Maudie’s being gagged and tied and later “dropped” by Peyton ... accidentally or out of spite and anger at her mother” (ibid. 28). The first one happened when Peyton was nine years old. Peyton and Melvin Bonner (Dolly Bonner’s son) were playing together and since children are cruel and Maudie could not defend herself, they tied Maudie with ropes and gagged her. Helen slapped her and called her “little devil” (LDD: 63). When Peyton later apologized, Helen forgave her with her words, but nevertheless stayed unmoved and detached. The second incident happened when Peyton was sixteen and about to go to Sweet Briar. Peyton and Maudie were descending the stairs together, when Maudie slipped and fell. She only had a small bruise and did not hurt herself at all. Peyton said she “let her slip and fall” (LDD: 125) and apologized, however Helen was sure that Peyton did it on purpose. Since then, Helen has been regularly reminding Peyton of this. Moreover, she said that Peyton, due to this incident, was partly responsible for Maudie’s death three years later. Helen clearly brought the term “overprotective mother” to another level.

The chronologically last scene where Maudie appears is a story told to Milton and Peyton by Helen at the Charlottesville hospital before Maudie died. Before Helen and Maudie came to Charlottesville, Maudie met a man, Bennie, whom she liked very much. Bennie was about forty-year-old half-African-American, half-Native-American

with an ugly face who performed magic tricks for Maudie each and every day for three months. And "Maudie was happy. Stronger." (LDD: 221). But about a month before Helen and Maudie came to Charlottesville these meetings stopped. Bennie disappeared and "never came back. Maudie never went back again. ... Maudie never said a word about him or anything." (LDD: 224). "She became silent and peaceful" (LDD: 224), she was "like a dying flower" (LDD: 224). Helen is persuaded that "Maudie had known how to love, and had actually been in love with a small, thin, half-Negro, half-Indian man who performed tricks for her" (Galloway 1970: 87). This, however, is very possibly not true. Had Maudie been able to love, she would have demonstrated it already before meeting Bennie. Nevertheless, "Helen revels in the idea of Maudie's knowledge ... because of her intense desire that Maudie know some kind of happiness" (Galloway 1970: 87).

4.3.3. Summary

Maudie, the mentally challenged daughter who basically does not take any action, either in the novel or in the family, still manages to create by her "largely silent presence much of the ambience of the Loftis household" (Hadaller 1996: 29). At first sight, the Loftises might appear to be an almost-perfect family because "they are handsome, moneyed, educated, poised in public, but in their midst, day in and day out, Maudie reminds them of some mysterious genetic error that does not quite fit their pleasant surroundings" (ibid. 28). Since they are family, Milton, Helen and Peyton must relate to Maudie in some way, which is an experience that helps to shape their characters. The shared emotion that Maudie inspires in all of her family is guilt. Guilt is a strong emotion, indeed, and cannot be silenced easily. "Thus, even though Maudie in one sense is a "voiceless" character, she is nonetheless an important presence affecting the members of the Loftis family" (ibid. 29).

4.4. Peyton Miller, née Loftis

4.4.1. Characterization

Peyton is the younger daughter of Milton and Helen, born in August 1923. She has an older sister, Maudie, who is mentally challenged. The family leads a comfortable life and they live in the city of Port Warwick, Virginia. However, later on, Peyton will move to New York City.

Peyton is an ideal child in comparison with Maudie. She is beautiful, lively and curious. Milton is proud to have such a beautiful and energetic child and he enjoys playing with her and spending time with her. He is also spoiling her. Peyton feels his love and reciprocates it. While she is sure that her father loves her, that is not the case with her mother. She sees the difference in her mother's behaviour towards Maudie and herself.

From an early age, she is aware of the fact that her father loves her unconditionally and that her mother does not like her very much.

She is sociable, energetic, attractive and popular with boys. When she turns sixteen, in August 1939, her parents hold a party at the local golf club for her. She is having a great time and is dancing. Helen, who is not enjoying the party, finds out that Peyton drinks whisky. Helen is livid and wants Peyton to go home immediately. Since this is her birthday party, Peyton gets angry and tells Helen that she hates her. Milton intervenes and Peyton can stay. After most parents leave, the youngsters decide to go swimming in the swimming pool. Peyton then accidentally walks into a room where her father is making love to Dolly. They do not notice her, but Peyton is shocked.

About a week later, Peyton leaves Port Warwick to go to a girl's college, Sweet Briar. She comes home only for holidays but is in contact with Milton. They regularly exchange letters, but she does not reply to any of the three letters that Helen sends her.

When she comes home for Christmas 1941, she brings a friend with her, Dick Cartwright. They arrive late and a little tipsy and plan to go to a party in the city. Dick talks with her father and uncle, both already drunk, in the living room while she goes

upstairs. There she argues with her mother who tries to make her stay at home but Peyton does not want to change her plans. When Dick drops her home in the morning, she meets Helen and her uncle Edward, who is leaving, in front of the house.

Milton wakes Peyton up before lunch and asks her to stay until the New Year's Day, but she does not reply. She gets up and tells Milton to leave her room so that she could change. But Milton watches her undressing and leaves only after naked Peyton, with her back to him, tells him one more time to go. The festive lunch is a tense affair. Helen is nice to Maudie but completely ignores Peyton. Peyton runs away from the house and Milton goes after her. They watch the ocean and Peyton says that Helen went mad and that she will never return here. In the evening, Peyton leaves the house to spend the rest of the holiday with Dick Cartwright and his family in Rappahannock.

In November 1942, Peyton and Dick get engaged when in Charlottesville. Peyton does not know that Maudie and Helen are there too. Only when she sees her father at a party, she finds out that Maudie is unwell and is currently in the local hospital and so they immediately go there. Peyton tells him that he should have stayed in the hospital with Helen. When they arrive, Helen is angry. She tells them that Maudie is dying and blames Peyton for everything. She blames her for letting Maudie fall once. She blames her for holding Milton in the town so that he could not be with her in the hospital. She also blames her for not being a good girl and for thinking only about men and drinking.

She leaves the hospital and Dick drives them to his home. Peyton drinks a lot, she needs to forget what happened in the hospital. She plans to stop studying at Sweet Briar because it is paid for by her mother's money. Dick wants them to get married as soon as possible, but Peyton does not want to talk about this. Next morning, they make love for the first time.

Peyton moves to New York and keeps drinking. In spring 1943 she meets her future husband, Harry Miller. She can be either kind, calm, funny and sober or drunk, cruel and argumentative. Her gloomy moods get better after she meets him. She feels no longer alone and she can rely upon him. He takes care of her and loves her and so she does not need to drink too much.

Peyton and Harry get married in late autumn 1943 in her parents' house in Port Warwick. Peyton is nervous but pretends to be a shining bride for her father's sake. She does not know, however, why Helen is playing a good mother. In the middle of the celebration Milton kisses her quite passionately. Peyton feels that it is not right and gently pushes him away. Helen sees it, though, and at the end of the celebration wants to talk with Peyton. It is their last conversation, their last argument. Helen blames Peyton for her behaviour at the celebration. Peyton misunderstands and defends herself saying that everybody was drinking at the party. Only after a while Peyton realizes that Helen blames her for hating her father after so many years of never-ending seduction on her part. Peyton cannot believe her ears and does not understand her logic. She tells Helen that she, unlike Helen, likes her father, Port Warwick and everything else. The only thing she hates is Helen. She adds that she hates her because Helen made her feel hatred towards her. Helen then gets hysterical and calls Peyton a bitch. But when Helen insults Harry, Peyton loses her temper and scratches Helen deeply in her face.

Afterwards, Peyton and Harry leave for their honeymoon. They go to the port to catch a ferry. Peyton drinks a lot of whiskey and curses her parents. Harry is unhappy to see her in this state again.

When they come back to New York, Peyton gets worse and worse. Her moods are more melancholic, she drinks much more and becomes more absent-minded, forgetful and careless with money than before the wedding. She needs Harry's undivided attention and love at all times but at the same time she is constantly nagging him about one thing or other. She gets so disorientated and depressed that Lennie, Harry's best friend, drives her to a clinic so that she could receive some treatment. She runs away from the clinic with her new lover. Later, she pleads Harry to take her back. When he takes her back, she demands his whole attention etc. This vicious circle repeats several times until Harry puts an end to it. He cannot live like this anymore, so he leaves their flat and Peyton for good.

Since Harry was her link with sanity, Peyton's mental health gets even worse now. She has another lover who makes her have sex with him whenever he wants. But Peyton does not care anymore. She lives in her own world, adoring her new alarm clock

and wishing she could live inside of it. Everywhere she sees wingless birds that follow her and pursue her day and night.

The day when she commits suicide is a hot sunny day. She is searching for Harry at different places and finally finds him in an atelier. Harry is painting but she insists on talking with him. Their conversation goes nowhere since Peyton is clearly on the verge of insanity. Her talk does not make much sense. In one breath, she manages to apologize for her previous behaviour and to beg Harry to come back to her, and at the same time to nag him and to blame him for not loving her enough. Harry tells her to go away and makes her leave the atelier.

Afterwards, Peyton finds a tall building, and jumps out of the bathroom window on the last floor, naked and followed by the wingless birds.

4.4.2. Peyton in the novel

Peyton is one of the three major characters of the novel. She is the main heroine of *Lie Down in Darkness*. It is her suicide everybody tries to make sense out of. Since her death precedes the actual plot of the novel, it is logical that we see her only through other people's eyes. There is only one occasion to see the reality through her eyes, and that is her fifty-page stream-of-consciousness account of her last day, from the moment she wakes up until she jumps out of a window.

We can distinguish three different voices which describe Peyton. These voices belong to Milton, her father, Helen, her mother, and Harry, her husband. Each of them sees her in a different light.

Milton sees her as his little princess, his darling daughter. She is the beautiful, curious, energetic daughter. She is the daughter he adores and is proud of. In his opinion, she could do no wrong. She is also the one in the family who reciprocates his feelings since Maudie cannot and Helen is not willing to. And so he enjoys spoiling her. When she grows up, he finds her attractive and wants her to enjoy her life. He is aware of the fact that Peyton and Helen do not see eye to eye, but remains hopeful that this problem will be solved, somehow.

Helen, on the other hand, sees her differently. For her, Peyton is at first a wayward, disobedient child who revels in attracting attention. She is aware of the fact that Milton is spoiling Peyton rotten and so she tries to be more strict with her in order to even the balance. Then, when Peyton grows up, she sees her as an attractive young woman and is jealous of her youth and beauty. She resents the fact that Milton and Peyton like each other and get on well, and that she does not have any control over their relationship. For some reason, she thinks that Peyton is trying to seduce every man she meets, including Milton. In her opinion, Peyton is evil and sinful and is to blame for everything bad that has ever happened to her. She feels that Peyton needs to be "fixed".

Harry sees a more complex picture of Peyton than Milton and Helen. He sees his beautiful beloved wife as a woman who is fighting her own demons. Depending on how successful she is and how much she drinks, she is either sober, calm, funny and somewhat insecure or tipsy, quarrelsome, cruel and daring. She is also prone to dark and gloomy moods. In addition to this, she is untidy, forgetful, careless with money and she is always complaining about something. She leans on Harry and demands his constant attention. Harry thinks himself successful in "curing" her dark moods as Peyton becomes less melancholic and stops drinking to excess but he is forced to reconsider this immediately after their wedding. From then on, Peyton's moods get worse and worse. Harry gets a professional help for her, but she does not see it that way and runs away from the clinic with her future lover. Then she wants Harry to take her back. But this torture repeats every time they argue about something. Seeing that Peyton will not change, Harry decides to leave her.

When we finally get a glimpse of Peyton's own mind, she is already on the road to perdition. It is clear that she has lost her sanity. Throughout her last day, her mind wanders and she is not able to concentrate on anything. A number of things repeatedly occur in her mind – her new alarm clock, inside of which she would like to live because it would be peaceful, wingless birds that follow her everywhere, her menstrual pain, Harry, their marriage, some of her lovers, her father –, in no particular order. She is in pain, both mental and physical, and feels as if she was drowning. Apparently, she suffers from serious depression. Her symptoms are in accord with those described by

Styron in *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness*. Madness indeed. It does seem as if she went mad. Before she leaps from the window, she is calm and feels relieved that her suffering will be over in a while.

4.4.3. Summary

In the novel, we follow Peyton from the time when she was a child until the moment when she commits suicide. The promising child, lively and a little willful, grows up and becomes a charming and vivacious young lady prone to gloomy moods and drinking. At the age of twenty-two, deeply depressed, she commits suicide.

There is no doubt that Peyton suffers from depression. If we have a look at the list of symptoms of depression mentioned by Styron in *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness* – malaise, restlessness, sudden fits of anxiety, gloomy moods, self-loathing, panic seizures, distress, a sense of dread and alienation, confusion, memory lapses, inability to concentrate, disruption of sleep patterns, terrifying hallucinations, and an acute mental pain as if you were drowning or suffocating –, we see that Peyton's behaviour copies the list almost picture-perfectly.

Styron also made sure that there were several analogies and comparisons available for Peyton's character.

The first one is an obvious contrast with her elder sister. While Maudie is mentally and physically challenged, Peyton is not. While Maudie obediently follows their mother's orders, Peyton does not. While Maudie is loved by Helen, Peyton is not. On the other hand, while Peyton is adored by their father, Maudie is not. However, there is something that they do have in common. Both were born to the same family and both of them were buried by their parents. Also, both their funerals were strictly private ceremonies, albeit for different reasons.

The second comparison is less obvious. Although Helen and Peyton loathed each other and Peyton did what she could to be like her father, there are strong analogies in between Peyton's and Helen's behaviour and thinking. In brief, even though Peyton tried to get away from her mother as far as possible, she ended up by

mirroring her behaviour which she had despised. We can start by Helen's "neuroses" and Peyton's gloomy moods, which caused so much trouble to their respective husbands. Neither Milton nor Harry could work out what caused them and had to learn to live with them.

Another common trait to both Peyton and Helen was their conviction that their husbands had been unfaithful to them and that they would have to pay for it. Both Peyton and Helen made their husbands apologize many times for something that only they could see as bad. Both women were also unable to forgive even the most unimportant things that their husbands were 'guilty' of doing. Both Peyton's and Helen's marriages failed.

Despite this, Peyton and Helen are very different from each other. It is nevertheless interesting to point out the fact that they do share a number of characteristics.

4.5. Harry Miller

4.5.1. Characterization

Harry Miller is a native New Yorker of Jewish origin. He fought in the Spanish Civil War and saved Lennie from drowning in the Ebro river in 1937. The two of them, both native New Yorkers, became friends and graduated from the New York University together. They even shared a flat for a while before Lennie got married. Harry then taught at the New York University and Lennie had just started his career as an illustrator.

Harry is an artist and he is calm, reserved, sensitive, likeable, sensible and perhaps a little lonesome. His parents are no longer alive and he has no siblings. He is interested in the world's affairs and willing to fight for what he believes in.

He is a painter and lives in New York where he meets Peyton Loftis in spring 1943. He sees her in Albert Berger's apartment where people meet to discuss art and other things. He falls in love with her at first sight in spite of not liking her – she drinks

too much and then becomes verbally aggressive. But he cannot help himself because to him, "she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen" (LDD: 329). She becomes his muse and he worships her, comparing her to Dante's Beatrice. He feels that something troubles her and knows it will not be an easy relationship.

Harry and Peyton date for six months before they get married. Peyton drinks less and so her aggressive moods are less frequent. Thanks to Harry's loving care, endless patience and steady personality, Peyton gets slowly but gradually better. Although the relationship is not perfect, it is not unhappy either.

In late autumn 1943 they are married at Peyton's parents' house in Port Warwick. Peyton is twenty and Harry almost thirty. Despite being a little nervous, Harry enjoys the wedding but after Peyton and Helen's quarrel, they leave early for their honeymoon. Peyton is drunk again and becomes quite cantankerous, which disappoints and angers Harry who hoped that he had already cured Peyton of excessive drinking and her drunken vicious moods. As he sees his long-time efforts wasted in an instant, his hopes plummet.

The next year and a half of their marriage is an ordeal for Harry. Not only that Peyton does not get better, she gets worse and worse. They also argue a lot because Peyton is untidy, absent-minded, forgetful and careless with money – spends more money than they can afford. She is constantly demanding his attention, love and support but does not give them in return. One afternoon when they are at Albert Berger's, Peyton sees Harry kissing another woman, Marta Epstein. She is angry and will not stop nagging Harry for it till her death. Her mental condition gets so bad that Lennie drives her to a renowned psychiatrist's clinic so that she could be professionally helped. She runs away from there with her lover, a writer whom she meets there. Harry is brokenhearted and desperate, but he later forgives her and takes her back. However, the situation does not ameliorate. On the contrary, Peyton reacts to their arguments by cheating on Harry. He always takes her back, but at one point he cannot bear it anymore and so he packs all his things and moves out of their flat. He leaves her two months before her suicide.

Harry sees her again on the day of her suicide. She arrives while he is painting. He does not want to talk to her, but she insists. She is a completely different person by now, almost a lunatic. She apologizes for her behaviour, begs Harry to come back and nags him about Marta Epstein. Harry oscillates between fury and sympathy, interest and concern. Finally, he tells her to go away.

It is Harry, though, who recovers her body from Potter's Field cemetery at the Hart's Island, where they bury the nameless dead, and sends her coffin to Port Warwick. However, he does not attend the funeral because he does not want to meet or see Peyton's parents anymore – he is too much aware of the fact that they had the lion's share of her mental condition and her suicide.

4.5.2. Harry in the novel

The first mention of Harry in the novel is his mere name when grief-stricken Milton recalls his announcement of their daughter's suicide to Helen: "He [Milton] stood at the door for a moment, his face flushed, bewildered, saying nothing; then he blurted, "Helen, Peyton killed herself," ... "Harry called me at the club," he said" (LDD: 25). When recalling the conversation with Helen, Milton is waiting at the Port Warwick's railway station for the train that will bring the coffin with Peyton's body. But he cannot bear it and goes to the bar for a beer. There, he opens a letter delivered the previous day and is shocked to find out that it is from Peyton – "Peyton's voice from the grave" (Hadaller 1996: 56). She wrote this letter on her twenty-second birthday, about a week before her suicide.

In this letter, Peyton, among other things, writes about Harry and asks: "how could I have ever loved him? And yet I did love him once, I *did* very much. Wasn't it maybe I who had been unkind, who broke us up after all? Yet I couldn't admit it to myself" (LDD: 39). She also writes: "[when] he was gone, I could have died. Do I still love him, Daddy? Do I still love him?" (LDD: 39). In the letter, she admits to having loved Harry, but the truth is that she never told him so. She writes that she was desperate when Harry left her, which makes her wonder whether she still loved him.

She also reluctantly admits that it might have been her fault that Harry had left her. She is therefore implying that she previously blamed everything on Harry.

However, Harry as a *real, acting character* appears only in the second half of the book – on the occasion of his wedding, when he retrieves Peyton's coffin from Potter's Field and when Peyton comes to see him on the day of her suicide.

In late autumn 1943 Helen and Milton organize a big wedding for Peyton and Harry. Harry is nervous before the religious Episcopalian ceremony. Peyton tells her father: "Poor Harry, he was in such a stew over the ceremony. He told me just a while ago that he had never seen so many Aryans under one roof in all his life. He said that when he saw Mrs. Braunstein it was like finding his mother at a meeting of the D.A.R. [Daughters of the American Revolution]" (LDD: 262). Harry knows that people might not be openly racist, but a lot of them still are, albeit covertly. Everything seems to be perfect, the atmosphere is festive and the ceremony lovely. When the guests are congratulating the newly married couple, Peyton's uncle asks Milton if Harry is Jewish, which makes Milton wonder what people are thinking about Harry because of his origin. After the ceremony, all the guests fill the dining room and the celebration begins. During the feast, Harry circulates, speaks with the guests and sees Milton kissing Peyton twice, once on the cheek and once quite passionately, but he probably thinks Milton did it because he was either too drunk, or too unhappy. When Helen comes to Peyton and takes her upstairs to "talk", Harry is speaking with Milton, who is already drunk as a lord and who ensures him that people "like Jews down here [in Virginia] as well as anyone else" (LDD: 307). Then Peyton wants to leave immediately and so Harry drives them to the ferry station.

By the time they left, Peyton was drunk and she keeps drinking while they are waiting for their ferry. Harry tries to soothe her, make her think about something pleasant and persuade her to stop drinking, but it does not work. "Harry is presented as the sensible, sober [one] ... who reports his take on the day and is more than little taken aback by the venomous attacks Peyton hurls at her parents" (Hadaller 1996: 66). She calls her father "an ass" and her mother a "harpy" (LDD: 317):

"Look," he said, "take it easy on that bottle. Part of it was nice, though, honey. The service, I mean. I liked Carey Carr. ... And your old man."

"He's an ass."

"No, I don't think so. He was stewed to the eyes and confused. I think he thought you had attacked him, rejected him or something. He's not an ass, he was just sad - -"

"He's an ass. He's lived fifty years in total and utter confusion, made a mess out of his life."

"Don't be too bitter, baby -"

"Bitter! ... How can I be anything else? Don't you see - he's never been beyond redemption, like Helen. ... She was beyond hope I guess the day she was born. He's had so much that was good in him, but it was all wasted. He wasn't man enough to stand up like a man and make decisions and all the rest. Or to be able to tell her where to get off. ... that *harpy*! ... (LDD: 317).

The scene however continues and Peyton "begins to rant that Harry has not helped her enough, protected her enough from her mother" (Hadaller 1996: 67). She is also suspicious of Harry because he was talking with a girl during the celebration. She is completely self-centered and aggressive, not taking Harry's feelings into account. Harry is angry and disappointed by Peyton's tantrum because "It had been months since she'd been like this, and he'd thought he'd straightened her out" (LDD: 319). Harry realizes that all his efforts in the previous months were utterly wasted. She demands his constant attention and protection again and says she married him because she needs him, not because she loves him. She is not even able to say the words "I love you":

"All I want you to do is to watch out for me. I'm not a nagger really, or a shrew. I'm sorry for what I said, darling. I married you because I need you."

He looked into her eyes. "Need?"

"I mean --" She struggled to say something.

"Need?" he repeated.

"I mean--"

"Need? Love?"

She said nothing.

"Love? Love?" he said bitterly, holding her arms (LDD: 319-320).

Harry's last but one appearance in the novel is the most complex one and gives us a closer insight into his life and his personality. Harry is described as "quiet, almost

self-effacing” (LDD: 328), stable and even-tempered. He is a dedicated painter, leads a normal life and teaches at university but he is prepared to fight for what he believes in.

He suddenly appears in the text when he goes to the morgue and identifies the woman in a photograph as Peyton. Then he has to go to the Potter’s Field cemetery to exhume Peyton’s body. When driving to the cemetery with Lennie and the undertaker, Harry recalls his life since the moment he met Lennie in spring 1937 during the raging Spanish Civil War and the two became best friends. Then Lennie married Laura and the three “had big times during the first years of the war” (LDD: 329). He also remembers his first meeting with Peyton:

Then Harry met Peyton. It was at a party in the spring of 1943 at the house of Albert Berger. ... Harry didn’t remember how he met Albert, but he liked a few people who came there, and it was there that he fell in love with Peyton. She was quite drunk, aggressive and argumentative. He didn’t like her at all, but she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, and it was not hard to fall in love with her, in spite of not liking her. Presently, at about dawn, he found himself alone with her and Albert, ... Through the blue dawn he took her home, a one-room apartment near Sheridan Square. She clung to him, breathing whisky, and kissed him violently, disconsolately on the mouth. Although he wanted to, he didn’t allow himself to go in (LDD: 329-330).

This is certainly not an ideal first meeting with a future spouse. However, as an artist, Harry can appreciate beauty and falls head over heels in love with her at first sight. He feels that something troubles her, but does not know what. It seems to him that there are two Peytons – the first one that is “subdued and sober” (LDD: 330), and the second one that is “drunk, aggressive and argumentative” (LDD: 329). He himself does not know why he is so strongly attracted to her. Lennie does not like her at first and warns Harry that she might be attractive, but is also “weird” and “the dependent kind” (LDD: 332).

What follows is a brief “section narrating [Harry] and Peyton’s two years marriage and her courtship with Harry before the wedding [that] is chiefly told through Harry’s perspective” (Hadaller 1996: 67), who, grieving for Peyton, gives only the milestones of their relationship: how she got better, drank little and was very nice before

their wedding; how her state of mind and her drinking got much worse after the wedding; how she ran away for the first time with a lover; and how he left her, desperate because of her drinking and repeated cheating. During rough times, Lennie proved to be an invaluable friend to him, providing him with much-needed moral support. Lennie even accompanied him to Potter's Field and identified Peyton's remains instead of Harry, who "couldn't bear to see that beauty dead" (LDD: 333). Harry is not only grief-stricken, he also blames himself for not preventing Peyton from committing suicide: "'I could have stopped her.' ... *No*, he thought, *I just don't know whose fault it is.*" (LDD: 333).

Finally, Harry's last appearance comes during Peyton's recollection of her last day before she commits suicide and his recurrent presence in her thoughts culminates in their last encounter. There are a number of things that alternate in her inner monologue that day – her clock, her visions of birds, her paternal grandmother (née Byrd), her menstrual pain, her Daddy/Bunny, some of her lovers, and Harry – , one image transforming into another with a logic apparent only to her troubled mind. During the day, as she searches for Harry to convince him to come back to her, Peyton visualizes moments from their relationship, both good and bad.

However, the good moments are rare and include situations before their marriage when Harry compared her to Dante's Beatrice and Helena of Troy, telling her how beautiful she was: "Once I cried when Harry when Harry took me to the river and said that I was fairer than the evening air, clad in the beauty of a thousands stars" (LDD: 339).

Then there are the bad moments, which are considerably more frequent than the good ones. For example, Peyton pictures the scene of Harry kissing another woman:

And [I] got up and walked through the room smoky and submarine with chattering, eyeglassed faces, to find Harry. He was kissing a refugee girl in the kitchen; her name was Marta Epstein and he had his hand on her tail and I hated all Jews. And he said Forgive. Forgive me, he said. On his knees, he said it ... Something in me that was wrong refused to forgive, and I thought forever; I said, "You did it ... I'll never forgive you." ... He said finally, "Things that shatter you like that, well, they aren't the things at all, it's in

you, if you hold such a bitter vengeance.” And I knew he was right – “one defection so small,” as he put it – it should never have hurt so much. He was right and I hated him for his rightness; ... later I even kissed a sleepy-looking drunk while Harry watched” (LDD: 350-351).

Apparently, Peyton got her revenge and Harry got a dose of his own medicine that very night, and it should have ended that way. Only it did not because a humble apology was not enough for Peyton. Throughout their marriage, they were arguing about her being messy, forgetful, careless with money, cruel and unfaithful and him kissing Marta, not loving and protecting her enough, all this giving an apt picture of their disintegrating marriage:

“You are always out of things, darling,” he’d say. “What’s the matter, don’t you think of tomorrow at all?” Or, “Come on now, I’m *not* nagging at you, but is it too much to ask, too much to ask, that you clean beneath the bed?” Or, “They say that jealousy is the meanest of emotions but what the hell was the big idea tonight?” ... “It was always you,” he said, “who complained so bitterly before we got married. About this and that. About my neglect of you and the way I ignored, none of which –” and he smacked his hand with his fist – “I’ve ever done. Now this. Who’s degenerating now? Who’s gone off the deep end?” (LDD: 343).

“There was no defection so small,” he said, “there’s a big difference between a pat on the tail and a quick roll in the hay with the milkman.” ... “I’ll never do it again!” I hollered, “... I need you!” ... “*Need, need,*” he’d said, “I refuse to be needed unless I’m loved too and so to hell with you.” (LDD: 354).

“How can you be this way, Peyton?” he’d said to me. “Don’t you see what you’re doing to us? Don’t you see? What do you want me to do? I’m not your handmaiden. This is co-operation, not your dependence versus my so-called stalwart, solacing strength. Sometimes I think you’re as nutty as the so-called fruitcake.” (LDD: 350).

“What do you *mean* I don’t love you, Peyton? I love you more than you’ll ever know.[”] (LDD: 371).

“You’re asking the completely impossible. Something you inherited from your mother, only in reverse. You’re a Helen with her obsessions directed in a different way.[”] (LDD: 353).

In the end, Harry gave up fighting for their marriage, packed his things and left: "I've tried my best to help you, Peyton, but I can't do any more" (LDD: 244). It was too much for him to endure her drunken vicious moods, her repeated infidelities, and her irresponsibility. It was Harry who carried the whole responsibility, emotional and financial, for their marriage. He was the one who made their relationship work, at least for a while, the one who was fighting for it. He was the only adult in their relationship.

All these aspects of their marriage can be seen also in their last encounter in an atelier where Peyton finds him painting. In this time of personal as well as global crisis (the United States has just dropped the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki), the artist in him transforms all his misery into a masterpiece:

He was painting an old man. In grays, deep blues, an ancient monk or a rabbi lined and weathered, lifting proud, tragic eyes toward heaven; behind him were the ruins of a city, shattered, devastated, crumbled piles of concrete and stone that glowed from some half-hidden, rusty light, like the earth's last waning dusk. It was a landscape dead and forlorn yet retentive of some glowing, vagrant majesty, and against it the old man's eyes looked proudly upward, toward God perhaps, or perhaps just the dying sun (LDD: 374).

The conversation, or rather an argument, that follows represents a succinct overview of their relationship, but this time from Harry's point of view, as he explains how he fell in love with her, why he married her, what he hoped they would create together, what he hopes to achieve as a painter in the future, alone. He tells her:

I don't think I can even remember ... [the] time when you modeled for me and I was fool enough to say to myself that a girl with a face and body as lovely as yours could never be anything but beautiful inside, too. ... I guess I was a fool ... with all the suspicions I had, too. Inside. I ignored them. When you'd nag and nag and nag at me for my so-called attentions to other women. Just when you were so Goddamned beautiful that it made me itch just to be in the same room with you (LDD: 376).

...

Do you realize what the world's come to? Do you realize that the great American commonwealth just snuffled out one hundred thousand innocent lives this week? There was a time, you know, when I thought for some reason – maybe just to preserve your incomparable beauty – that I could spend my life catering to your needs, endure your suspicions and your mistrusts and all the rest, plus having to see you get laid in a fit of pique. I have other things to do. ... With your help I used to think I could go a long way, but you didn't help me. Now I'm on it alone. ... I want to paint and paint and paint because I think some agony is upon us. ... I want to crush in my hands all that agony and make beauty come out, because that's all that's left, and I don't have much time (LDD: 377).

As the conversation evolves, Harry can see that Peyton is losing her mind and his feigned indifference transforms into tender care. He would like to help her. Somehow, even this confused and disturbed Peyton does not lose her appeal to him. But when Peyton starts her usual nagging routine, Harry gets angry:

What are you talking about? Haven't tried, my eye! That's all I've spent two years doing, trying to understand you -- ... Are you trying to tell me now that just because on the few occasions when I didn't obey your tiniest whim or spoil you half to death, you had a right to cuckold me, and almost in front of my eyes! ... You just can't love. You come up here on a pretext that you're sorry and contrite when all you want me to do is to tell you that I'm the one who should be on my knees, begging *your* forgiveness for sins I didn't commit. Isn't that right, Peyton, isn't that right? ... Right at the moment I understand that you want me to go through the same routine you've wanted me to go through for months. To take you on my knee and put my strong arms around you and tell you that I was wrong because there was dirt beneath the bed, that I was wrong for calling you on your extravagance, that I was wrong for not letting you ruin us both by being the spoiled, willful child that you are – now you have the wrong idea. Now get the hell out of here. ... Get out. ... Get out. ... (LDD: 380-381).

Harry is the sensible, practical, reliable, creative adult while Peyton is a mentally unstable, childish, immature, irresponsible, mentally ill person who has never created anything, which makes the following scene ridiculous and extremely sad at the same time. When Peyton mentions children during their quarrel, Harry reacts: "We could have had children a year ago, but that was the time you said I was so unreliable that I

wouldn't know how to be a good father ... That was the time ... when I knew the truth and told you so: you are absolutely incapable of love." (LDD: 376). After she is thrown out of the atelier, Peyton will not mention Harry's name again.

4.5.3. Summary

Harry Miller is the only 'normal' person in the family. When he meets Peyton, he hopes for a true partnership. Moreover, he sees her as his muse, he feels inspired by her outward beauty. Although his declaration that he fell in love with her because of her immense beauty might have sounded shallow, it could be explained by his dedication to painting. He did not fall in love with her because of her beauty per se, he fell in love with her *because her beauty gave him further inspiration for his work*.

As was already mentioned, Harry was carrying the weight of their relationship on his shoulders. He was the pillar Peyton leaned on, he was the one who forgave and gave their marriage another chance, he was the one who wanted to help Peyton with whatever haunted her and even had got her professional help. He tried to get her to stop drinking and tolerated her difficult moods. He has done all this and in return expected respect, love, partnership and a normal, contented life. Since it has proved to be impossible, he had to act to maintain his own emotional well-being. He left Peyton for good, bringing his paintings with him. And if she had not committed suicide, he might have given her another chance. He did what he could and even if their marriage was a failure, he is irreproachable where Peyton is concerned.

As we saw already, there are many parallels in the book. In Harry's case, Styron made analogies, and contrasts, between him and Milton.

Harry and Milton both went to war and both married during a war. But while Milton spent the First World War as an army lawyer at Governor's Island, drank whisky, went to parties and married a colonel's daughter, Harry fought hard in the Spanish Civil War, saved Lennie's life and married Peyton during the Second World War. Milton profited, at least financially, from marrying Helen while Harry certainly did not profit from his brief marital relationship. Peyton managed to spend all their

money before her suicide and she quite probably negatively influenced Harry's creativity during their marriage.

Both of them fell in love with their wives because they were 'beautiful'. And Harry, like Milton, was not able to understand his wife and make her happy. Hadaller (1996: 67) similarly comments that "Harry's attempts at deciphering Peyton's moods mirror Milton's lifelong wrestle with Helen's "neuroses."", and therefore implying that Harry's and Milton's efforts were absolutely futile. While Milton at one point accepted Helen's 'neuroses' as a part of their life, Harry kept fighting Peyton's awful moods.

Both of them hoped for a happy marriage, but in vain. However, each of them reacted to this reality in a different way. Milton resigned himself to a farce of a marriage and a comfortable life ensured with Helen's money, which Peyton criticized, and managed to leave his wife only after twenty years of a predominantly unhappy marriage. By contrast, Peyton's own husband, Harry, ended their hopeless marriage quite swiftly.

And finally, Peyton is the most important thing that the two men have in common. More precisely, they both love her and are attracted to her. Considering Harry, it is not a problem. As her boyfriend and husband, he would be expected to love her and find her physically attractive. But it becomes a problem when considering Milton, whose love for Peyton clearly overstepped the limits for a healthy father-daughter relationship. But while Harry never hears her say "I love you", Milton does.

4.6. Family tragedy

While one cannot argue with the fact that a person's death is indeed tragic, and a suicide even more so, a slow dissolution of a family is also a tragedy in itself.

The Loftis family might be blessed with material fortune, but their comfortable life without any financial worries does not seem to have a positive effect on the family. It certainly does not improve their relationships.

On the contrary, while the family might seem as close to perfect as humanly possible from the outside, it is actually undergoing a process of slow and painful disintegration. From this point of view, one can consider the untimely death of Maudie as a mark of an advanced dissolution of their family. It is also a sign that tells us to expect something equally tragic to happen before the family disintegrates completely. One may therefore regard Peyton's suicide as *the* mark of a complete and irrevocable disintegration of the Loftis family.

There is no doubt that Peyton's depression contributed greatly to her suicide. The symptoms of depression are horrible enough for anyone to start thinking about suicide. These are the symptoms accompanying depression according to William Styron: malaise, restlessness, sudden fits of anxiety, gloomy moods, self-loathing, panic seizures, distress, a sense of dread and alienation, confusion, memory lapses, inability to concentrate, disruption of sleep patterns, loss of self-esteem and self-reliance, terrifying hallucinations, and an acute mental pain as if you were drowning or suffocating (DV: 3-84). When comparing this list with Harry's description of Peyton and with her own behaviour and thoughts, one must conclude that these two lists are almost identical. Peyton's forgetfulness, gloomy moods, melancholia, wandering mind, carelessness with money, her complete dependence on Harry, her never-ending need for Harry's undivided attention together with the visions of flightless birds following her everywhere – these are the signs of an advanced and severe depression. Unlike Styron, Peyton refused help and treatment, and died. In spite of this, one cannot help but feel compassion for her because she must have suffered terribly.

Styron says that even nowadays, "the disease of depression remains a great mystery" (DV: 11):

As a clinician in the field [of depression treatment] told me honestly and, I think, with a striking deftness of analogy: "If you compare our knowledge [of depression] with Columbus's discovery of America, America is yet unknown; we are still down on that little island in the Bahamas." (DV: 11)

It is assumed, though, that it is childhood, “where, to the best of anyone’s knowledge, the seeds of the illness take strong root” (DV: 36).

While Styron’s childhood was marked by the death of his mother when he was thirteen, let us have a look at Peyton’s childhood to find out whether she lived through something similarly traumatizing. And this brings us back to the gradual disintegration of the Loftis family.

At the beginning, however, nothing indicated such a disastrous outcome. Milton and Helen were just another young and attractive couple who moved to Port Warwick. Milton had a private law practice and they lived in a small flat. Maudie and Peyton were born. When Helen inherited a considerable amount of money from her mother, they had a nice house built near the seaside.

Even though Styron’s narrative does not make it clear when Helen and Milton realized that Maudie was mentally disabled, it must have had an impact on their relationship. Milton did not expect to have a mentally challenged daughter and it must have been hard for him to come to terms with it. It must have been hard for Helen as well, and so she tried to compensate Maudie for Milton’s lack of interest by devoting all her time to her. By doing this, however, she did not have any time for Milton, who then directed all his care and feelings to Peyton. Since Helen was occupied with Maudie all the time, Peyton was probably happy to have someone to take care of her. The disintegration of the family thus began, even though at that time they might have been able to stop it easily. From then on, the family would not be a unit of four people, two parents and two daughters, but rather a group of four people living under the same roof. These four people would be divided into two teams of two – Helen with Maudie and Milton with Peyton. This division of the family would prevail until the very end. The vicious circle that this division will bring on has already been explained, see section 4.1.3. It will result in mutual hatred of Peyton and Helen.

In this case, both Helen and Milton can be blamed for causing the disintegration of their family. Moreover, they are guilty of allowing it to continue for so long. They were the adult ones who should have done something to stop it.

The traumatizing event from Peyton's childhood can therefore be the awareness of the fact that her mother does not love her. Indeed, it must have been a dreadful thing to know that your own mother does not like you. When Peyton was about four years old, she once came to Helen's bed at night and asked her: "Mama, do you love me?" (LDD: 30). However, this trauma spans across her whole childhood and even to adulthood.

There is one more trauma Peyton suffered during her childhood. She accidentally saw her father making love to his mistress, Dolly Bonner, right after the party for her sixteenth birthday. That also must have been a great shock for her.

Both Peyton's parents, therefore, could be blamed for her predisposition to depression and subsequently for her suicide as well.

We can say that both Milton Loftis and Helen Loftis are responsible for this family's tragedy, including the disintegration of the family and Peyton's suicide. This is extremely sad because these two people were the ones who had created the family in the first place.

5. Conclusion

As I have said in the introduction, family and friends are extremely important in our life. Family is one of the cornerstones of any society and it should provide for its members. It should offer them a safe harbour to come to, love and respect, which are crucial for a person's well-being. Therefore, it is not a good sign if a family fails to fulfil its role.

We encounter the literary portrayal of such a dysfunctional family in this novel. Instead of love and respect, there is hatred, bitterness and contempt. This family is not a safe harbour to which its members return in bad times. On the contrary, its members try to escape it.

There are three key figures in this family. Milton Loftis, Helen Loftis and Peyton Loftis Miller. The key to the family tragedy lies in their relationships. The other two members of this family, Maudie Loftis and Harry Miller, play second fiddle.

Milton Loftis is an alcoholic who enjoys his comfortable lifestyle provided by his wife's money. He loves and adores his younger daughter, Peyton, and has an ambiguous relationship towards his elder daughter, Maudie, because of her mental and physical disability. Even though his marriage to Helen has been unhappy for a long time, he lacks the resolve and the will to do something about the situation. This eventually leads to Peyton's suicide. He usually acts only when it is too late. His escape from the family comes through alcohol and a love affair with Dolly Bonner.

Helen Loftis is a strict, religious, unforgiving woman full of anger and bitterness. She loves her elder daughter, Maudie, and ends up hating her younger daughter, Peyton. She sees herself as a martyr who sacrificed her life to caring about Maudie. She wants everybody to admire her and respect her for it. She feels morally superior to others and expects everyone to conform to her ideas of what is right and wrong. Her hatred, unforgiving nature and inability to accept others as they are are the factors that will greatly contribute to the disintegration of the family and Peyton's suicide.

Peyton Loftis Miller is from an early age aware that her mother does not love her. She is happy that her father does love her, but knows that it comes at a high price, for Helen will eventually loathe them both. Peyton is caught and torn in between her father's love and her mother's hatred. She longs for some 'normality' in her life. She tries to escape the family first by drinking, and then by moving to New York City and marrying Harry Miller. By the time she meets him, however, her depression is in progress. Although Harry represents a safe harbour for her, she ultimately chases him away with her infidelities and tantrums. Suffering from serious depression, she commits suicide.

Maudie Loftis the elder daughter of Helen and Milton. She is mentally and physically disabled, a perpetual child. Her presence in the family is nevertheless important as she inspires a feeling of guilt in the other family members. This guilt makes Milton unwilling to spend much time with her, which in turn makes Helen to devote her time to Maudie, which initiates the gradual disintegration of the family.

Harry Miller is Peyton's husband who helps Peyton to start a new life in New York. Although they never were really happy, he loves her. And so he struggles to understand her and fights for their marriage despite her many infidelities. In the end, he opts for maintaining his own sanity and leaves Peyton.

Helen and Milton are the people to blame for this family's tragedy because they did not prevent it from happening. They allowed the family to disintegrate, which eventually lead to Peyton's suicide. While it was her own decision to kill herself, we cannot ignore the fact that her depression had been brought about by the disastrous situation in her family.

While our family should be a safe harbour to us, it is sometimes necessary for our sanity to have another safety net available – our friends. Even the best family can be trying at times. Then we can depend on our friends to cheer us up or to commiserate. It is therefore especially important to have such a safety net if our family cannot fulfil its role properly.

One would think that Milton, Helen and Peyton would try to compensate for their dysfunctional family by having a circle of friends who would help them and support them in bad times. That is not the case though.

Although Milton and Peyton have many 'drinking' friends and acquaintances, they do not have any real friends. Helen's situation is the same. She knows some people from parties, but she has no friends.

Neither of them has real friends. They do not have close friends to talk to, to share their problems with. Therefore, they suffer alone.

However, all of them seemed to realize that they needed somebody to talk to, somebody to confide in. Milton found Dolly, Peyton found Harry and Helen started to visit Carey Carr, the family preacher. These were not real friends though.

Reverend Carey Carr characterized the Loftises as a "family, which had succeeded – almost effortlessly, it seemed – in destroying itself" (LDD: 239). That was a very apt observation.

The words "effortlessly" and "destroy" are very important. I think that this family's tragedy could have been avoided if Milton or Helen had done something about it. But by doing nothing, they allowed the family to disintegrate completely, lost their daughter and were left with nothing.

6. Résumé

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá rodinnou tragédií Loftisových, která tvoří ústřední zápletku prvního románu Williama Styrona *Ulehni v temnotách*. Spletité mezilidské vztahy třech hlavních postav – Milтона a Helen Loftisových a jejich mladší dcery Peyton – jsou klíčem k tomu, abychom pochopili příčiny stojící za Peytoninou sebevraždou.

Asi každý z nás považuje rodinu a přátele za jedny z nejdůležitějších věcí ve svém životě. Rodina, jakožto základní jednotka společnosti, plní několik nezastupitelných funkcí. Vychovává děti, a tím i tvaruje jejich osobnost, názory a očekávání, což ovlivní celý náš život. Před vlivem rodiny není úniku, což pozná i Peyton Loftisová, hlavní hrdinka tohoto románu.

Tato diplomová práce má tři části. První část se zabývá autorem tohoto románu, Williamem Styronem, a představuje jeho život a dílo. William Styron totiž není jen autorem *Sophiiny volby*, ale také například románů *Zapal tento dům* nebo *Doznání Nata Turnera*. Tato část ještě popisuje proces tvorby jeho prvotiny *Ulehni v temnotách* a jeho boj s depresí. Styron začal trpět depresemi až v době, kdy mu bylo šedesát, a je proto zajímavé sledovat, jak věrně popsal hlavní příznaky této nemoci o několik desítek let dříve ve svých románech – nejenom Peyton Loftisová z *Ulehni v temnotách*, ale i Sophie Zawistowská ze *Sophiiny volby* trpěly depresemi a spáchaly sebevraždu, kterou sám Styron také zvažoval, když ho pohltily deprese.

Druhá část této práce představuje samotný román *Ulehni v temnotách*. Stavba tohoto románu je výborně promyšlena. Již na začátku se dozvíme, že Milton Loftis si přijel na nádraží vyzvednout ostatky své dcery Peyton, která spáchala sebevraždu, a že jeho žena Helen s ním odmítla jít. Od tohoto okamžiku se napětí v románu stupňuje, až vyvrcholí na konci knihy Peytoninou sebevraždou. Vlastní děj tohoto románu trvá jen několik hodin, od okamžiku, kdy vlak vjíždí do města až po Peytonin pohřeb, a je triviální. Těžištěm románu je to, co se odehrává ve vědomí jednotlivých postav, skrze jejichž proudy vědomí my už jen pozorujeme sled událostí, které vedly k této tragédii.

Ulehni v temnotách je tedy polyfonním románem, vševědoucí vypravěč, ač přítomen, je autorem odsouzen k tomu, aby nás provedl pár hodinami tohoto srpnového dne.

Poslední, třetí část této práce, se věnuje členům rodiny Loftisových, třem hlavním postavám – Miltonu Loftisovi, jeho ženě Helen a jejich mladší dceři Peyton – a dvěma vedlejšími postavám – starší dceři Maudie Loftisové a Peytoninu manželovi Harrymu Millerovi. Vzhledem k tomu, že *Ulehni v temnotách* je polyfonním románem, každá z postav na věci nazírá svým vlastním osobitým způsobem. Jedna realita je tedy zobrazena z několika úhlů. Každé postavě je tedy věnována jedna sekce, kde je podrobně rozebrána a analyzována. Na konci každé sekce je shrnutí, které obsahuje to nejdůležitější o každé postavě, popřípadě ji i srovnává s již představenými postavami.

A tak poznáváme alkoholika Miliona Loftise, který je příliš pohodlný na to, aby jednal. Je pro něj snazší neřešit své rozpadlé manželství a vztah ke své starší postižené dceři Maudie, a věnovat se místo toho pohodlnému životu zajištěnému z Heleniných peněz, pití, a své mladší dceři Peyton, kterou zbožňuje. Po letech podezřívání ze strany Helen si také nakonec najde milenkou, Dolly Bonnerovou.

Helen Loftisová je přísná a zbožná, a považuje za hřích vše, co se jí nelíbí, například přílišné pití a odmítání. Je neschopná odpustit i ten nejmenší poklesek. Zbožňuje starší dceru Maudie a plně se jí věnuje a obětuje, čímž získává mučednický komplex a přesvědčení, že by ji měli všichni obdivovat a vážit si jí. To se ale neděje a Helen se stává čím dál tím víc zatrpklou. Závidí Peyton mládí a Miltonovu pozornost a nakonec ji začne nenávidět.

Maudie Loftisová je starší dcera Helen a Miliona. Je mentálně zaostalá a trochu fyzicky postižená. Její tichá přítomnost v domácnosti Loftisových je ovšem důležitá, neboť se kolem ní soustřeďují pocity viny všech tří hlavních postav. Milton se viní za zplození postiženého dítěte. Helen má pocit viny vůči Maudie, protože její otec ji plně neakceptuje. Peyton má pocit viny kvůli dvěma příhodám, kdy Maudie, byť nechťíc, ublížila.

Peyton Loftisová je mladší dcerou Miliona a Helen. Od dětství cítí, že jí matka nemá ráda, a proto svou náklonnost obrací k druhému rodiči, otci Miltonovi. Toto vědomí ji provází celý život. I kvůli tomu později upadá do depresí. Setkání s Harrym

její stav sice načas zlepšší, ale její sebevraždě nezabrání. Peyton, zmítaná mezi láskou k otci a nenávistí k matce a sužovaná depresemi, nevidí jiné řešení než smrt.

Harry Miller, Peytonin manžel, se do Peyton zamiloval na první pohled a i když jejich vztah není bez problémů, snaží se jí pomoci začít nový život v New Yorku. Pro Peyton představuje pilíř stability. A tak bojuje s Peytoninými depresemi a rozmary a snaží se zachránit jejich manželství i přes Peytoniny opakované nevěry. Harry tím pochopitelně hodně trpí a nakonec se rozhodne ukončit své utrpení a odchází od ní.

Peytonina sebevražda samozřejmě není jedinou tragédií v tomto románu. Je pouze jakýmsi vyvrcholením jiné tragédie – pomalého rozkladu celé rodiny Loftisových. K této tragédii přitom vůbec nemuselo dojít. Milton i Helen měli v ruce klíč k tomu, aby této tragédii předešli. Miltonova nečinnost, pohodlnost a neochota cokoliv udělat, stejně tak jako Helenina neschopnost odpustit a její nenávist k Peyton jsou tedy hlavními příčinami rozpadu celé jejich rodiny. Je to o to smutnější, když si uvědomíme, že oba nejprve stáli u zrodu této rodiny. Milton i Helen mohou být tedy považováni, společně s Peytoninými depresemi, za hlavní viníky sebevraždy jejich dcery.

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