Chapter – IV

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One of the more significant literary movements in the twentieth century has been nourished by racial conflicts and social unrest in the United States in America’s South. In the works of Faulkner, Caldwell, Tennessee Williams and Robert Pen Warren, the history of slavery and segregation in the country has been made to seem even more troublesome to the conscience of the nation than the injustices of modern capitalism. These writers have been witnesses of the degeneration of the South’s old, white aristocracy after the Civil war. Twentieth century witnessed global level upheavals, such as World Wars, the spread of Communism and the rise and fall of Fascism, and such America’s national events as the Great Dust Bowl disaster to Mid-West- Agriculture, the Great Depression of the thirties, and the prohibition experiment of the twenties. The increasing Urbanization and the concentration of population in suburban areas, the advent of automobile, the radio, theatres and the electrification of rural America have been factors modifying the social, cultural and literary life of the country. This scene at the turn of the twentieth century is one of great complexity and diversity. This complexity and diversity is fully mirrored in the literature of the age, more so as it is the era of the common man and the aspirations of the masses find increasing expression in literature. With the passing of time this complexity and intricacy continues to increase owing to various causes, which include influences from the other side of the Atlantic, chief of such influences being the of the new psychology of Sigmund Freud, Jung and Bergson and teaching of Karl Marx and
his followers. Rapid industrialization and urbanization bring with them their own problems and difficulties which colour the literature of the new century. The anxiety, ennui, boredom, the sense of loneliness and neurosis, caused by these developments find their own place in literature. (Johnston, Brian. *Courses in Dramatic Literature from Ancient to Modern Drama*)

Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller are popular American playwrights who address the anxieties of their age. They have been concerned with the state of their society and examining the fate of fundamental American myths having to do with liberal individualism, a sense of community and a utopian vision. What they chiefly seem to regret is the decay of a metaphor- the metaphor which one linked history with the notion of growth and located the individual in a natural cycle which pulled him or her into harmony with the world he or she inhabited and with those who shared that fate. They lament the decline of the morality band the slow fading of a vision but in doing so they implicitly make a case for the possibility of change and indeed see in the theatre itself a chief agent of transformation and a paradigm of the social, moral and spiritual community whose decline they regret. A careful reading of their plays reveals their social concerns and world views.

O’Neill’s tremendous success as a dramatist depends to a great extent upon the fact that he has had something to say about the modern social order that has been worth saying. His technique has been admirable vehicle for an interpretation of the conflict which arises out of the circumstances of the society in which he lived. It is not man, as an individual alone that concerns O’Neill: it is man in a social order,
tortured, starved, disillusioned, thwarted and driven to disaster by the forces of a system which cares nothing for the general welfare of society. Man moves across the stage of an O’Neill play not as a free and detached individual, not merely as an individual in relation to a few characters who are associated with him in the immediate drama which makes the play, but he treats man against a rich background of social forces. It is the social implication that makes his play have a life in the mind of the audience after it has left the theatre and scattered to the quiet of individual thought. That O’Neill is concerned with the problem of man in relation to the present social order is apparent in all of his plays. The social implication of the greed for empire is boldly set forth in *The Emperor Jones*. When Brutus Jones lost his nerve in the forest, the grim shadows of his past came to haunt him. Jones escapes the direct punishment, but he could not escape the deep scars left by a vicious system. In the pantomime of the prison scene and at the auction mart our social order as well as the character of Jones is clearly revealed. O’Neill presents man’s desire for psychic wholeness urges him to turn the negative experiences of isolation and difference into a positive one through involvement in the task of relieving human beings of misery and sufferings. Richard Gray remarks,

> The fundamental problem O’Neill dramatizes and develops in all his works is that of the relation of the human being to something, anything, outside himself; something to which he can belong, something in which he can ground his life so that it can have more shape, a sense of purpose, somewhat saves him from feeling lonely, lost an existential exile. (*History of American Literature* 459)
The Hairy Ape is a significant play of social criticism. It presents a negative view of the state, of mechanized America, where the worker best adjusted to the system is a ‘hairy ape’, and where the “Capitalist class” is even more terribly dehumanized, for it has lost all connection with life, is simply ‘a procession of gaudy marionettes’. According to this play, both government and religion are devices for maintaining the status quo. The Church substitute political conservatism for Christianity substitute bazaars, methods of making money, for a concern with the meaning of life and death. The Government is equally at the service of the marionettes. On the legislative side, it is exemplified by the windy oratory of Senator Queen, glorifying the status quo and denouncing with ignorant terror any threat to it like the I.W.W (Industrial Workers World). On the enforcement side, it is exemplified by police who function to keep the workers from disturbing the wealthy.

On the whole, the state, as pictured in The Hairy Ape is a device for dehumanizing its citizens, and for preventing change. The sickness of the machine age is not wholly a problem of relating production and consumption. It goes much deeper than that. The whole concept of life, of man’s relation to the world, of his place in it is involved. Yank in Hairy Ape was not concerned about distribution—vitally important as that is—he wanted to be a creative part of the social structure, and no man working in the stoke-hole of a liner or making the two hundred and fifty-sixth part of a shoe in regulation eight-hour shifts can ever ‘belong’ in the, same sense that man belonged as a creative worker in the eighteenth century. Yank is a protest against the mordant success of the machine age.
In O’Neill’s opinion, man finds himself totally isolated in a spiritually sterile universe and, therefore, cannot have a sense of harmony in it. In his search for identity, and also his need to belong, he feels his losing more intensely. It is evident from his plays that a man has to face tough times in a world without god, love and faith in life, and that he may belong, but it is possible only after sacrificing his life. It happens in the case of yank, Robert Mayo and Orin Mannon. The importance of O’Neill as a social critic lies in the fact that he emphasizes the psychological aspect of the modern social order.

He is critical about America’s acquisitive society. He does not merely stress the fact that workers are exploited to create wealth for the few, but shows how in our modern machine-made world they are deprived of the sense of harmony and mental well-being that comes from doing something that seems important and necessary. Man’s work is a necessary part of his personality; it is an extension of his ego; it makes him feel that he is a necessary part of the life of the world in which he lives. Modern industry tends to destroy this psychological counterpart of work, and in so far as it does, it leaves the worker a nervous, irritable and dissatisfied misfit. Yank was such a worker, and at the same time, conscious of the thing he had lost. He didn’t want a job simply because it would be a means to earning a living; he wanted a job in which he could live. (Monika, Gupta. *The Plays of Eugene O’Neill – Critical Study* 56)

The play *All God’s Chillun Got Wings* deals with the problems of social inequality in modern America. The American Negro is technically free, but psychologically he is still in bondage. The social pressure of a society that cannot
overcome its race prejudice makes its individual a failure and depressed. Jim failed because the social system denied him something that he wanted more than wages and votes, it denied him the right to belong. Here O’Neill has selected the material out of which the modern Negro’s tragedy is perpetuated beyond the termination of his physical slavery. He has arraigned the deep and powerful prejudices of American civilization before the bar of true justice. O’Neill has stressed in his plays the personal weakness of those who strive for wealth. Billy Brown is helpless without the creative strength of Dion Anthony. Marco Polo becomes despondent when lack of external activity forces him to think. Sam Evans, the successful businessman of Strange Interlude, is totally without inner resources. “How weak he is!” his wife thinks early in the play. When he gains power, it is purely external: “What a fount of meaningless energy he’s tapped!...always on the go..., typical, terrible child of the age.”

In an earlier play Lazarus Laughed, O’Neill showed that the craving for political power is also a compensation for inward weakness, emptiness. The depraved, power-mad Caligula is above all, weak, frightened, spiritually dead. After murdering Tiberius, he cries savagely to the empty amphitheatre:

    Kneel down! Abase yourselves! I am your Caesar and your God!

But, a moment later, he becomes aware of his loneliness, and ends by

    “groveling in a paroxysm of terror” (Gupta, Monika. The Plays of Eugene O’Neill 45)

All those who seek wealth, power over others, in the plays of Eugene O’Neill, do so out of personal weakness. When they do gain power, wealth, they are ‘poorer
thereby’. This interpretation of financial, worldly success was behind O’Neill’s declaration that the United States is “the greatest failure”. He explains: “We are the greatest example of ‘For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?’ “O’Neill’s most bitter condemnation of the status quo is thus based on his Nietzschean philosophy. Both O’Neill and Nietzsche believe that the state produces soulless conformity, that those who seek worldly power and money, do so out of inner weakness and sterility.

O’Neill believed that individuals must gain the “courage to possess their own souls” before man can begin to think of establishing a just society. As Larry Slade of The Iceman Cometh puts it, “The material the ideal free society must be constructed from is men themselves and you can’t build a marble temple out of a mixture of mud and manure. When man’s soul isn’t a sow’s ear, it will be time enough to dream of silk purses.” (The Iceman Cometh 45) For O’Neill, then, it is not a better state that makes better men, but better men who make a better state. The world revealed by Eugene O’Neill is tragic because it is without intelligent social organization. Ignorance, brutality, selfishness, greed and hatred are the dominant forces in this world of O’Neill. The multitude of men and women who pass by in the imagination as one tries to envision the sum total of life that O’Neill has presented in his plays is a sorry lot. Here by the roadside lies a young man coughing his lungs out as he cries for the beauty which lies beyond the horizon; here is a girl tortured into committing a murder; another passes with a fixed look of dry-eyed sorrow that, is just breaking into insanity over her lover killed in war; a handsome Negro passes with the
sorrow of hopeless despair furrowing every line of his face; in a narrow room another
breaks under the strain, of life as his fevered imagination turns gilded trinkets into
gold; in, the cold seas of the north a woman goes mad from loneliness; in a beautiful
New England home starved and misguided love brings endless tragedy; and so one
could go on with the enumeration. O'Neill emphasizes the fact of a social system
which is destructive in itself, which thwarts every effort to achieve happiness, which
puts a value on misery and pain as a good in itself, and worst of all encourages and
rewards everything that is predatory and destructive, condemning beauty, well-being
and happiness as a sin.

Interestingly, both O'Neill and Tennessee Williams were influenced by
Sigmund Freud. Tennessee Williams was suffering from Oedipus complex because in
his earlier life he could not get attached to his father; he found convincing attraction
in his mother. While leading a Bohemian lifestyle in New Orleans, he became aware
that he had homosexual tendencies. His unconscious rationalization or repression
made him explore the world of gaiety and frivolity. Unconsciously it affected him and
it found expression in his writings, in the form of portraits— at times as that of his
sister and at others in his own.

In the play Orpheus Descending Mrs. Torrance and, in A Streetcar Named
Desire, Blanche Dubois symbolically refers to his mental state. In these plays sex,
which was considered a taboo, is treated by Williams in a shocking and revolutionary
manner. He generated the germ of the new spirit of freedom for woman to find sexual
fulfillment (symbolized by the West) and this idea is in conflict with the moral
Puritanism of New England. Actually he tries to balance his mental delirium through wish-fulfillment of his repressed desires which had been controlled by the Puritanical code of conduct taught by his mother Edwina Williams. The extrasensory perception and heightened emotionalism of Tennessee Williams’ writings have inspired numerous attempts at interpretations over the years. Even though the form of the plays is deviated from conventional standards as well as their seemingly secret yearnings shame the society and they are shunned from mainstream society, yet the plays are still held to be more successful due to their inner probing of a lost person in the corrupt and materialistic world of the twentieth century.

His two plays *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* analyze the very important problem gender conflicts in the American society. The two dramas represent not only very fruitful sources for gender conflicts, but also contrasting and unanimous elements on the issues. *The Glass Menagerie* also discusses the gender conflicts in Southern culture, but it was found not suitable in terms of sexuality and especially homosexuality, as it entirely lacks elements of the latter, and homosexuality is regarded as a very important and interesting factor in the analysis of gender and its related conflicts. The proverbial conflict between males and females has often been termed the "battle of the sexes." Sexual hostilities rage throughout the play. According to Williams, the universe is fragmented and man born into it is born into incompletion. Everything that governs human action emanates from this broken condition which is the root condition of the universe. Man’s life is a constant attempt to compensate for this lack of wholeness which he feels in himself. In the work of
Tennessee Williams, human action is defined by universal incompleteness. Not only can the individual not appeal to forces beyond himself, but because his life is defined in terms of his universe and is thus marked by guilt and atonement, he cannot rely even upon personal responsibility. There is no sense of individual responsibility in this deterministic view of existence.

Arthur Miller is linked with Eugene O’Neill and Tennessee Williams, and is one of the five major American dramatists of international repute, namely Eugene O’Neill, Thornton Wilder, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and Edward Albee. During the last two decades a whole host of playwrights have had to face the oblivion of anonymity while Miller’s plays continue to attract, arouse amuse and provoke the readers and the audience alike. Marching ahead with greater determination, steadier steps and increasing boldness, Miller has continued to maintain his pace in the glorious high road of American drama. Miller has been able to maintain his faith in values like courage, trust, responsibility, and faith.

The American liberal intelligentsia took a drastic turn for the worse in the middle of the twentieth century, making a bargain with the most dastardly elements in American society. The Wall Street Crash had a major impact on the U.S. and world economy, and it has been the source of intense academic debate historical, economic, and political—from its aftermath until the present day. Some people believed that abuses by utility holding companies contributed to the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the Depression that followed. Many people blamed the crash on commercial banks that were too eager to put deposits at risk on the stock market. Arthur Miller
maintained a critical attitude toward American society until the end of his life. He supported and participated in the civil rights struggle and opposed the Vietnam War. Most recently, he criticized the US invasion of Iraq. Arthur Miller based his works on American history, his own life, and his observations of the American scene. Though uniquely American, they simultaneously were universal stories about an individual's struggle with his society, his family, and especially, himself. He stood up to McCarthyism in the Fifties as bravely as any American. In the mid-Sixties he stood up to communism by helping Soviet bloc authors as president of PEN, the international writers’ organization. Through the early Seventies he raised one of the most urgent, resonant voices against the Vietnam War.” The New York Times has led the way in this effort, publishing no less than six obituaries, op-ed pieces and assorted articles on Miller in the first few days after his death, in addition to slide shows on its web site. Arthur Miller utilizes the concept of the American family as an underlying context in a number of his plays. The ideals that come with such a stigma vary, yet some remain stark and vital in Miller's works, such as the notions of grasping the American Dream at any cost, family dysfunction, success, failure, and hard work. These concepts become prevalent in The Man Who Had All the Luck, Miller's earliest play. Utilizing these ideals as driving forces for character development, the protagonist David emerges, bringing the audience to its knees as he battles internal and external demons for a chance at an honest, beautiful American life. Arthur Miller was called to testify in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee to name names of communist sympathizers in 1956, the height of the McCarthy Era. Miller
refused to do so and was heralded by the arts community for his strength of conviction and loyalty. In 1957, Miller was charged with contempt, a ruling later reversed by the U.S. Court of Appeals. Miller, like Eddie Carbone, was faced with the problem of choosing to be American or not, specifically by naming names of people who were doing (what were considered then) unlawful acts. Miller's own struggle with this issue is very present in *A View from the Bridge*. Unlike Eddie Carbone, Miller chose to be loyal to his fellow artists, but like Carbone, Miller went against the cultural consensus at the time. Miller, in the play, has reversed the scene—rather than the mass culture supporting the extrication of possible communists, Miller chose to script a community that accepted and protected unlawful people. The consequences and eventual repercussions of naming names, for Eddie Carbone, are drastic. Miller used this play to strongly condemn the McCarthy trials and those who named the names of innocent artists. Eddie in *A View from the Bridge* loses control of his actions in the play. Driven and possessed by incestuous love for his niece, Eddie resorts to desperate measures to protect his identity and name in the community. Alfieri’s commentary often remarks on this theme. Alfieri seems constantly amazed by Eddie's actions and his own reactions to the events of the play. Alfieri sees his own irrational thinking, just as he recognizes Eddie's irrational behavior. Irrationality is also how Alfieri defines acting wholly. The human animal becomes irrational when he acts fully on his instincts—just as Eddie does in the play. Alfieri proposes that humans must act as a half, or restrain some of our instinctual needs or wants for reason.
Miller was not primarily a political activist. He determined at a relatively early age on writing as a vocation. He studied plays and playwriting in university: Ibsen in particular, but also Greek tragedy, the German expressionists, Brecht, Büchner, Frank Wedekind. Eugene O’Neill, the dominant figure in the American theater in the 1920s and 1930s, seemed too “cosmic” to Miller and unresponsive to social realities. He was more sympathetic to the efforts of Clifford Odets, author of Waiting for Lefty and other works, the leading left-wing playwright of the time. Shakespeare, oddly, is not mentioned in Gottfried’s biography as a subject of study. The American theater, as a serious institution, dates from the period around World War I, when groups such as the Washington Square Players and the Provincetown Players established themselves. O’Neill, associated with the latter group, poured forth a series of expressive, often insufferable works (Desire Under the Elms, Strange Interlude and Mourning Becomes Electra and many others), influenced by Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Freud (and Jung), which nonetheless transformed the American stage. The “left” theater, which arose in the aftermath of the Crash of 1929, hardly offered an alluring alternative to O’Neill’s cosmic and static fatalism. In the hands of Stalinist chief literary thug Michael Gold, subtlety and nuance were reduced to naught. Upon graduating from the University of Michigan in 1938, Miller returned to Brooklyn, working briefly for the Federal Theater program. He married Mary Slattery, a Catholic from Ohio, in 1940. A few months after the US entered World War II, in the spring of 1942, Miller went to work at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. (Robert E. Spiller. Literary History of the United States: History)
His first produced play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, opened and closed quickly in New York in 1944. *All My Sons* concerns two families in Ohio (the play was inspired by an anecdote related by his mother-in-law), the Kellers and the Deevers. More than its obvious social statement, about war profiteering and one’s larger responsibility to society, the play’s enduring impact, such as it is, emerges from the anger of the younger men against Keller and his generation. Something of Miller’s own background and feelings makes itself felt in the seething fury of George Deever in particular. Other than that, *All My Sons* is largely patriotic, pat and contrived. Nonetheless, the drama clearly struck a chord with audiences still hopeful, like Miller himself, that a more populist, vaguely anti-capitalist New Dealism would flourish in postwar America. By the time *Death of a Salesman* opened in February 1949 that particular illusion had surely been crushed, with the onset of the Cold War and the anticommunist crusade, and Miller’s new play no doubt reflects that reality. The political situation in the US had transformed itself within a matter of months in 1947-48. The prospects for third-party candidate and former vice president Henry Wallace, who received the support of the American Stalinists, seemed relatively propitious when he began considering running for president in 1947, his campaign had virtually collapsed by the following summer. The American political and media establishment’s anticommunist campaign had shifted into full gear. The House Un-American Activities Committee hearings into “Communist influence” in Hollywood grabbed headlines day after day in the autumn of 1947; ultimately, the “Hollywood Ten” were convicted and sentenced in April 1948. The Communist Party leadership in
New York City faced prosecution under the Smith Act, which outlawed conspiring to advocate forcible overthrow of the government; in August 1948 congressional hearings (presided over by Richard Nixon) began into accusations that former State Department official Alger Hiss had spied for the Soviet Union; the following summer, indicating the general climate, a right-wing mob broke up a Paul Robeson concert in Peekskill, New York. (Bigsby, C.W.E. *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller*)

Even while drawing fairly sharp conclusions about *Death of a Salesman*’s failings, one always has to bear in mind the conditions in the teeth of which Miller wrote the play; the unfavorable atmosphere goes a considerable distance toward explaining some of its more obvious weaknesses. The piece, Miller’s best-known work, treats the final hours in the life of an aging salesman, Willy Loman. In the course of one day Loman quarrels repeatedly with his older son, Biff, an idler, who has returned home after spending time out West; gets fired by his firm after more than 30 years of backbreaking effort on its behalf; continues to borrow money from an old friend to cover up the fact that he has not been earning anything from his sales work; conjures up the presence of his dead brother and other memories of a happier past; recalls as well the traumatic moment when Biff, a teenager, discovered him in a hotel room with another woman; and, finally, because he is worth more dead than alive (thanks to an insurance policy), kills himself at the wheel of his automobile. In an epilogue, his neighbor defends Willy’s memory, “Nobody dast blame this man. A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory.” *Death of a Salesman* was an instant success, provoking rapturous praise from the New York press, Brooks
Atkinson of the *New York Times* being the most prominent at the time, and guaranteed Miller’s stature as an important American writer. The play has achieved a reputation as a critique of American capitalist society or at least its moral and social standards, and audiences and readers have seen it in that light for decades. Despite the undeniable moments of truth, at the center of *Death of a Salesman* is a profound ambiguity, which must reflect, in the end, the playwright’s own ambiguous feelings about American society and the American dream. The play refers to moods more bound up with the Depression, or Miller’s conception of it. America was about to “take off” in 1949, the American salesman was entering a golden age. Arthur Miller criticized certain tendencies in American society such as selfishness, mediocrity, cowardice, sometimes sharply; on the other, he offered “understanding” that amounted, in the end, to a form of approval or at least acquiescence. One never derives any sense of a necessary historical and social process from Miller’s plays. Again, it is tempting to seek at least a partial explanation in his own experience in the financial crash. Social events arrive in his plays inexplicably and rather arbitrarily. *The Crucible* was intended at least in part as a response to the anticommunist witch-hunting of the 1950s, and, in the mechanisms and mentality it exposes, it has a certain value. One would find it nearly impossible to argue, however, that the piece illuminates in any way the set of conditions in America that made the “red scare” possible. The sanctimoniousness and self-aggrandizement of its central character, John Proctor, stands in direct proportion to the play’s historical or social abstractness. *A View from the Bridge* is a poor work from nearly any point of view. The story of a
Brooklyn longshoreman, driven by jealousy and possible repressed homosexual longing, to turn in a pair of illegal immigrants, is unconvincing as a picture of working class life and unserious as a moral-social critique. The knowledge that this misbegotten play was intended as a reply both to Kazan’s infamous act of “naming names” and the latter’s defense of his informing in *On the Waterfront* merely reveals how little Miller understood, or allowed himself to understand, of postwar American society. While the height of the McCarthyite period had passed, Miller was still to face threats and harassment from the red-baiters in Washington. In 1954 he was refused a passport he needed to attend a performance of *The Crucible* in Belgium on the grounds that his presence abroad “would not be in the national interest. The playwright was summoned to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in June 1956 on entirely spurious grounds, “The Unauthorized Use of United States Passports.” Singer Paul Robeson was obliged to appear in the same round of hearings. When asked whether he had suggested that black Americans would never go to war against the Soviet Union, Robeson replied,

> Listen to me, I said it was unthinkable that my people would take arms in the name of an Eastland [the racist senator James O. Eastland of Mississippi] to go against anybody, and gentlemen, I still say that.

(quoted from infoplease.com)

Miller was eventually convicted of contempt of Congress and the conviction was overturned by the Supreme Court in 1956. A period of nine years separates *A View from the Bridge* from the staging of *After the Fall* and *Incident at Vichy* in 1964.
During that time, in addition to his difficulties with HUAC, Miller was divorced from his first wife, married movie star Marilyn Monroe and then divorced her. Monroe committed suicide one year later in 1962. Miller’s depiction of Monroe in *After the Fall*, for the most part a travesty of a play, was poorly received by critics and the public at large. Its unflattering portrait was viewed as uncharitable, an instance of speaking ill of the dead. The play *After the Fall* takes place in the mind of Quentin, a New York lawyer, who recalls various experiences with his three wives in particular. Monroe appears as Maggie, a self-destructive and “ingenuous whore,” in Martin Gottfried’s words. The play rejects the “fantasy of innocence.” Quentin feels like “an accomplice” in the shadow of the concentration camp.

In 1947 Miller told an interviewer that his writing evolved from settings and dramatic situations “which involve real questions of right and wrong.” He meant it sincerely, but this type of conventional moralizing inevitably proves a very limited and inadequate guide to the complexities of modern life. Miller’s failure to make any serious analysis of social life and history brought him to this unattractive and untenable position in *After the Fall*. *Incident at Vichy* raises similar concerns. One confronts here the demoralization of the liberal intelligentsia, its “overwhelmedness,” in the face of the traumas of the mid-twentieth century. *After the Fall* also suffers from a type of false self-criticism that abounds in the modern theater. The problem with Miller’s characterization of Monroe is not chiefly that he is unkind to her. He had the right, after all, to portray her as he thought she was. But the “self-criticism” Quentin/Miller offers—that he fooled himself into thinking he could be her savior
(“this cheap benefactor”) and then abandoned her in the end—misses the point, at least in relation to Miller’s own life and condition. The Miller-Monroe coupling, in real life, was not a long-lived or happy affair, although it began idyllically enough. Monroe, Miller discovered, was a deeply unhappy and insecure woman; in addition, she was addicted to barbiturates. Her film roles, as a “dumb blonde,” a “joke,” in her own words, deeply frustrated and depressed her. Miller’s last play to receive significant attention, *The Price*, was staged in 1968. The drama centers on the relationship of two brothers and resonates with the experience of Miller and his brother Kermit and their father, who went into a deep depression after the collapse of his enterprise. Miller’s later pieces, such as *The American Clock, The Ride down Mt. Morgan* and *Broken Glass* reveal that the playwright maintained his limited artistic virtues to the end of his life.

Arthur Miller has denounced writers who conform to commercial specifications, businessmen and politicians who exploit other men’s insecurities, informers who betray friends in order to preserve their own reputations, civilians who passively tolerate wartime atrocities and veterans who quickly forget the comradeship they knew during combat. Arthur Miller repeatedly stresses the idea that the proper business of serious drama is to demonstrate the feasibility of such communication and the disastrous results of its absence. Throughout his career, Arthur Miller has continually addressed several distinct but related issues in both his dramatic and expository writings. In his early plays and in a series of essays published in the 1940s and 50s, Arthur Miller first outlined a form of tragedy applicable to modern times and
contemporary characters, challenging traditional notions suggesting that only kings, queens, princes, and other members of the nobility can be suitable subjects for tragedy. In *Tragedy and the Common Man*, Miller asserts that the "underlying struggle" of all such dramas "is that of the individual attempting to gain his `rightful' position in society." Consequently, "the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing—his sense of personal dignity"(29) within a society that inhibits such endeavors. According to this view, even an individual like Willy Loman, the protagonist of *Death of a Salesman* can achieve truly tragic stature. It is this issue of the individual's relationship to society, and its representation on stage, that forms the second of Miller's abiding concerns. Throughout his work, Miller has sought to fuse the moral and political messages of social plays with the realism and intensity of psychological dramas that focus on the individual.

Arthur Miller has conveyed his conviction that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy as kings were. The tragic feeling does not anchor on the social status of the protagonist. It is aroused in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life to secure his personal dignity. Arthur Miller feels that tragedy is the consequence of man’s total compulsion to evaluate himself. Man constantly fights back the hostile cosmos, tries to get the better of the strangling, choking environment, and from this springs the terror and fear associated with classical tragedy. Tragedy is “the consequence of a man’s total compulsion to evaluate himself justly, his destruction in the attempt, posits a wrong or an evil in his
environment”. And this is precisely the morality of tragedy and its lesson. An otherwise ordinary and common protagonist may rise to the stature of a tragic hero because of his extraordinarily intense zeal and fervour and the sincerity of commitment to his goal—his eagerness to give up anything required in this battle of achieving his proper place in this world.

The plays of Arthur Miller are never devoid of social context. Arthur Miller is of the view that the protagonist of the drama must be a part of meaningful social relationships. A lonely, isolated individual living in his own ivory tower or an individual marooned on an island or sailing in the vast seas—any individual, so to say bound by any type of physical or mental confines—is not suitable for a play. Normal man lives in society and the play should depict the interaction between the individual and society. Miller’s characters have served this purpose. His characters possess “the worth, the innate dignity, of a whole people asking a basic question and demanding its answer”. The playwright and the protagonist join hands and try to find an answer to the question: how may man make for himself, a home in that vastness of strangers and how may he transform that vastness into a home?” (Sharma, Rani. *The Plays of Arthur Miller* 23)

The central issue of Miller’s plays is: “The struggle of the individual attempting to gain his rightful position in his society and his family.” Miller, however, does not make out society to be the sole villain. The society finds it easier for its hostility to work because of the tragic flaw or the weaknesses of the characters. An individual can maintain his own and society’s stability by resisting hatred and
exclusiveness, or an individual may upset social equilibrium by enforcing the exaggerated demands of an inflated ego. Though Joe Keller (All My Sons) and Willy Loman (the Death of a Salesman) adopt popular norms, they get estranged from themselves and their families because of their stubbornly uncompromising self-will. Miller’s characters are life-like. Drawn from the contemporary American society, they verge on the border of universality. They represent their counterpart, at least in their own country by facing similar dilemmas, similar predicaments and similar options. The protagonist does not and cannot function without entering into social relationships. Miller’s plays are concerned with rebellious sons, betrayed fathers, down-trodden workers, persecuted citizens and the like. Miller tries to achieve a harmonious blend of ‘I’ and ‘We’. Miller is one who may be compared to his nearest associate Eugene O’Neill. O’Neill fails to connect his characters with the social environment, while Miller comes out triumphant.

Willy’s quest to realize what he views as the American Dream—the "self-made man" who rises out of poverty and becomes rich and famous—is a dominant theme in Death of a Salesman. Willy believed wholeheartedly in this treasured national myth, which began during colonial times, and which was further developed during the 19th century by such industry tycoons as Andrew Carnegie and J.D. Rockefeller. In the 1920s, the American Dream was represented by Henry Ford, whose great success in the automotive industry was achieved when he developed the assembly line. Also in the 1920s, a career in sales was being hailed as a way for a man without training or education to achieve financial success. Pamphlets, lectures,
correspondence courses promoting strategies for improving the skills of salesmen were widely distributed during this decade. These strategies focused on teaching salesmen how to effectively manipulate their clients. Willy would have begun his career as a salesman in the 1920s, when belief that salesmen adept at manipulation and "people skills" were destined for wealth and fame was widespread. However, by the late 1940s, when *Death of a Salesman* takes place, the job market and prevailing belief has changed, and salesmen (and other workers) required specialized knowledge and training in order to succeed. Because he lacks such knowledge or training, Willy is destined to fail in a business world that demands the ability to play a specific part in a large establishment. Willy, of course, does not realize how things have changed, and he continues to try to strike it rich using his powers of persuasion. Willy's personal representations of the American Dream are his brother Ben and the salesman Dave Singleman, and he views the success of these two men as proof that he can indeed attain the success he is so desperate to achieve. According to Willy's version of the American Dream, he is a complete failure. (Sharma, Rani. *The Plays of Arthur Miller* 23

Selective realism in American drama was a mid-20th century movement in writing for the stage, which began as a result of the post war mood of the country. The pioneers and forerunners of the American realistic movement were Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, two of America’s most celebrated playwrights today. They brought realism to the American stage in post-WWII theatre. Throughout theatre history, theatergoers would see plays to escape real life and get a taste of otherworldly themes, through supernatural places and mythical figures. This principle carries its
weight through Asian drama, ancient European, and modern European works. The realist movement, however, presented real life just as real as ever: no subject matter was left out, and audiences were shocked. In post-WWII American theatre, audiences preferred more fantastic presentations, which is evident by their leanings towards musical theatre, as well as the overarching popularity of absurdist movements and surrealism in theatre. Nevertheless, this did not stop the American realistic playwrights from writing some of the most celebrated and frequently produced shows today, most notably Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* and Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Glass Menagerie*.

The origins and primary influence of the American realistic movement can be attributed to the early 19th century works of Henrik Ibsen, the founder of modern-day realism. He wrote such in your face and true to life works as *A Doll’s House*, which dealt with spousal neglect in the home. Also important is the overarching influences on the general realistic movement of Eugène Scribe and Victorien Sardou, who wrote the first ‘well-made’ plays. These plays implored a specific construction of events unfolding which playwrights will still utilize today. Ibsen is arguably the primary influence on the realistic writing styles of Miller and Williams and other American 20th Century realistic dramatists. In the 1930s the Great Depression, economics dominated politics and the American Dream turned into a nightmare. What once was the land of opportunity and hope became a land of desperation. In other words, the land of hope, optimism, and the symbol of prosperity became the land of despair. Many farmers migrated to the big cities in the hope of getting a job. Instead of
advancement, survival became the major problem. By the emergence of the World War II, the situation deteriorated, which inevitably influenced the lives of ordinary American people in a negative way. Arthur Miller draws reader’s attention to the devastating effects of the economics and politics of the era on a fictional character that mostly represents a member of an ordinary American family with an American Dream.

His play, *Death of a Salesman*, focused on the individual’s role in the family and his struggles. This play presents in a realistic sense the father’s role in the family and society, focusing on the themes of responsibility. In an interview with William R. Ferri Miller remarks thus,

I suppose she was speaking about the care and support that his family might give him, in that context. Of course, there is a larger context, which is social and even political—that a lot of people give a lot of their lives to a company or even the government, and when they are no longer needed, when they are used up, they're tossed aside. I guess that would encompass it. (*Humanities* magazine, *NEH* March-April 2001 issue)

The play *An Enemy of the People* is Miller’s remarkable creation of its time. During the time when so many playwrights are dealing with modern man’s isolation and loneliness, Miller, without denying either the loneliness or the isolation is convinced that the world is moving toward a unity, a unity won not alone by the necessities of the physical developments themselves, but by the painful and confused
reassertion of man’s inherited will to survive. The play suggests the answer that when
the times are out of joint; the individual must be true to himself. Stockman clings to
the truth and suffers the social consequences. The play is story of a scientist who
discovers an evil and innocently believes that he has done a service to humanity. He
expects that he will be thanked by the people. However the town has vested interest in
the perpetuation of that evil, and his ‘truth’, when confronted with that interest, must
be made to conform. The scientist cannot change the truth for any reason
disconnected with the evil, and this brings sufferings for him. This theme is valid
today just as it will always be in Miller’s view.

Tennessee Williams’ plays, while different from Miller’s style of writing in
many ways, still retained the realistic style of the time. Tennessee Williams focused
on putting everyday characters, usually on the lower end of the socioeconomic food
chain, into heated environments (literally and figuratively in A Streetcar Named
Desire – the play is set in New Orleans). A great example is in The Glass Menagerie,
where Tom is trapped at home for financial reasons to take care of his family, who
based on their character flaws will never change. Many of Williams’ plays dealt with
characters that felt ‘trapped’ by society; this is probably reminiscent of Williams’ own
financial situations, which did not permit him finishing college until a much later age.

Also of note in Williams’ plays is his use of stage directions. He writes some of the
most descriptive stage directions of all time, painting a picture on stage (sometimes
literally) and taking away the job of blocking from the director. Both Arthur Miller
and Tennessee Williams incorporated large amounts of symbolism in their works, and
this is a principle theme in 20th Century realism. Symbolism most commonly reflects character’s personalities and flaws. For example, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, our first interaction with Stanley is when he comes home, yells “Stella!!! Meat.” and throws up the meat he just bought from the butcher’s to Stella, which she catches. This is a perfect symbol of Stanley’s masculinity, and the relationship between Stella and Stanley.

Miller observes the process of materialism, capitalism, and false success policies which bring disillusionment, isolation, and alienation. Post-war American dramatists attempt to redefine domestic life that becomes a disappointing matter because it mostly illustrates disintegration in the family life. As Bigsby suggests, the central theme of the twentieth-century American drama is “alienation: man from God, from his environment, from his fellow/man and from himself” (Bigsby 125). It is a world in which the relationship between man and environment is destroyed. For the writers of 1930s, alienation is seen as a sense of loss, bred by social injustice. In fact, the effects of alienation could be seen in various stages of Eugene O’Neill, Clifford Odet, Lillian Hellman, Edward Albee and Miller. Fromm describes the cause of this alienation; not only economic, but also the personal relations between men have this character of alienation. In fact, Willy is partly the victim of an unjust competitive society: “Willy is a victim of society. But he is also a consenting victim, or a victim of himself.

Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, maintain similarities in styles of writing, but differ on overarching sociopolitical themes in their plays. Arthur Miller
focused more on the individual, whereas Williams’ plays were based upon characters’ interactions, and societal influences on households. Nevertheless, they remain two of the most important American playwrights of the 20th century, pillars in theatre history. They continuously influence playwrights today, in both dramatic, and comedic works.

Recently, playwright Christopher Durang wrote a parody of Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie* entitled *For Whom the Southern Belle Tolls*, poking fun at Tennessee Williams’ use of southern settings, and characters self-inflicted handicaps. Instead of a menagerie, the play revolves around Lawrence and his collection of glass cocktail stirrers. Durang also pokes fun at Williams’ own homosexuality and how it reflects in his plays, switching the gentleman caller to a ‘feminine caller,’ and making her a lesbian.

Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams were at the forefront of American Realism movement, and despite the slight differences in their works, they produced what is considered the best dramatic pieces of American realism, many of which are celebrated and still produced today. Tennessee Williams’ plays represent the side of American life, and they do not have happy endings. They plumb the depths of problems such as homosexuality, symbolic cannibalism, alcoholism and lurid behavior. Tennessee Williams’ general view of life is pessimistic, morbid tragic. In his plays, he raises issues about the relationship of people to the organizational and corporate world symbolically and indirectly.

Arthur Miller has denounced writers who conform to commercial specifications, businessmen and politicians who exploit other men’s insecurities, informers who
betray friends in order to preserve their own reputations, civilians who passively tolerate wartime atrocities and veterans who quickly forget the comradeship they knew during combat. He encountered the last while gathering material in American army camps for a movie. Miller repeatedly stresses the idea that the proper business of serious drama is to demonstrate the feasibility of such communication and the disastrous results of its absence. The protagonist of this drama must enter into meaningful social relationships, if only to challenge conventional norms. He should possess “the worth, the innate dignity, of a whole people asking a basic question and demanding its answer” (“on social plays”). The “identity” he moulds within the intimate bounds of his family must be tried to in an inhospitable world society, as a whole. Miller explains in *The Family in Modern Drama* (1956) family is “mutable, accidental, and consequently of a profoundly arbitrary nature to us”, a limited theatre will, therefore, restrict its scope to the family, which symbolizes what is “real” and abiding in human affairs.

Much of Miller's work displays his deep and abiding concern with conscience and morality, with one's dual—and often conflicting—responsibilities to oneself and to one's fellow human beings. It is only through relationships with others, Miller's plays suggest, that our humanity truly emerges. *The Crucible* is widely considered Miller's most controversial and best-known work since his highly acclaimed *Death of a Salesman*. Based upon the witch trials held in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692, *The Crucible* uses characters based on historical personages to address the complex moral dilemmas of John Proctor, a man wrongly accused of practicing witchcraft. Through
his depiction of the mass hysteria that propelled the witch-hunts, Miller examines the social and psychological aspects of group pressure and its effect on individual ethics, dignity, and beliefs. *The Crucible* begins after the Reverend Parris discovers several teenage girls dancing nude in a forest after dark. To escape punishment, the girls accuse several townspeople of having possessed them and of initiating them into witchcraft. Abigail Williams, one of the girls, claims that she was under the spell of Elizabeth Proctor, who had employed her as a servant until she discovered that her husband and Abigail were having an affair. Several members of the community are subsequently accused, convicted of witchcraft, and threatened with a sentence of death unless they confess their involvement in demonism and name their co-conspirators. Because she is pregnant, Elizabeth Proctor is not sentenced to hang; however, her husband's refusal to cooperate with the court and falsely confess his participation in witchcraft ultimately leads to his destruction. When *The Crucible* was first staged, a number of critics maintained that Miller had failed in his characteristic attempt to merge the personal and the social. According to historical records Williams was a victim herself, a young child who became infected by a hysteria already rampant in her community. In *The Crucible* Abigail is depicted as a shrewd and sinister teenager and thus a difficult character for an audience to view as a victim of a corrupt society. Soon after the play's first production, critics noted similarities between the events in *The Crucible* and the investigations headed by Senator Joseph McCarthy and his House Committee on Un-American Activities into an unsubstantiated communist conspiracy.
What is interesting to observe in O’Neill, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller is they are the products of American culture and they criticize the American society in their plays. They are critical of American society and share their concerns in their plays.