CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Certainly, the many isolated perceptions found in the critical literature substantiate the existence of an existential perspective in modern American plays. The question is not if such an influence exists, but how this influence has been applied. The purpose of this study is to investigate O'Neill's *A Long Day's Journey into Night*, Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, and William's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* to determine if this philosophical paradigm has shaped the author's design.

It is not the intent of this study to attempt to prove that Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams authored their entire dramatic canon using one dramatic form. An investigation of O'Neill's works alone, his fluctuation in developing alternative approaches ranging from naturalism to expressionism, would render such a generalized venture meaningless. A close study of a section of modern American authors however indicates that an identical philosophical perspective transposed by each playwright in a particular play into the same dramatic form, minimizes the perceived disparity in American dramatic literature. Such a study sheds some light upon the nature of these specific plays. By identifying those plays which belong to the same genre and project the same world view, a better understanding of the American dramatic character can be achieved. Such an investigation may reveal a distinct dramatic form, a specific type of play utilized by O'Neill, Miller, and Williams. This form would balance the seemingly disjointed concerns identified by Halio, Overland, and Kerr: death, a spiritual quest, family, social values, and alienation. This type of investigation will identify the parallels in dramatic form from playwright to playwright. It will also identify those predominant cultural influences which have supplied the philosophical base, the dramatic vision for the plays. The end product of such an endeavor will provide an additional aid in evaluating American dramatic literature.
The thematic elements documented in the critical literature which have been associated with Eugene O'Neill's *A Long Day's Journey into Night*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, and Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, bear a striking resemblance to modern prose and poetry selections classified by scholars as existential. This philosophical perspective comprising such a widespread influence in twentieth century life has been identified in a broad spectrum of modern poetry and prose works ranging from T.S. Elliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," to William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, and Ernest Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro." The pervasive use of the term in studies designed to investigate both poetry and prose signals a specific focus, a way of looking at these works. It has been utilized as a tool to discern if the author has crafted a uniform literary work, manipulating both content and form to project an existential world view.

This type of endeavor has not been rigorously applied to the study of American dramatic literature. Although *Long Day's Journey*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* have been recognized in terms of their existential philosophical base, they have not been systematically analyzed in this regard. A comprehensive definition of existentialism has not been established and no model has been identified which could be applied to a study of modern American dramatic literature. For this reason a finite description of the ontology randomly alluded to in the critical literature must precede any effort to use this philosophical paradigm as a means of investigating O'Neill's *Long Journey*, Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, or Willam's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. It is the purpose of this study to provide a comprehensive definition of existentialism so that this construct may then be compared to the constituents of dramatic form in these three plays. This type of investigation should provide a more systematic, a more complete understanding between this philosophical perspective and dramatic form. The study is designed to clarify the concept of existentialism referred to in the critical literature, to compare this perspective with O'Neill's, Miller's and Williams'
development of dramatic form. It is also designed to collate the individual perceptions of dramatic theorists. This last aspect of the study will serve to organize critical perceptions of this relationship between existentialism and dramatic form.

The broad spectrum of critical literature examining the works of twentieth century's most notable American playwrights has not emphasized a similarity in form in the works of Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams. On the contrary, the vast number of journal articles, dissertations, and texts studying these author's plays have detailed for the most part a disparity in form which makes the plays of each quite unique. For this reason a full and complete investigation of the application of existentialism alluded to in the critical literature, and discovered in the plays themselves, justifies a systematic study of an existential dramatic form incorporated in these modern American plays. A brief examination of the critical literature demonstrates the sporadic approach to the study of these plays, an approach which demands a comprehensive in-depth analysis of the plays.

Although many studies shed some light upon the works of various American playwrights in regard to their continuing refinement of recurring themes, these investigations seldom if ever approach a study of how these themes are translated into concrete dramatic form on the stage. The critical literature is replete with studies which examine one facet of dramatic form in O'Neill's, Miller's, and Williams' plays. Scholars like Mary Beth Dakoske, Tom Scanlan, and Roy Alvin Watson have not been incorrect in identifying thematic trends in these playwright's works. They have not proceeded however, with an exhaustive investigation of how these themes are manipulated to present a distinct vision of reality. The many studies to date which examine O'Neill's Long Day's Journey, Miller's Death of a Salesman, and William's Cat separate the play's contents from their designated form. These endeavors have not examined the plays' subject matter in terms of how these subjects are presented in concrete dramatic form on the stage. These themes are synonymous with a
concern with consciousness, authentic values, a spiritual quest, and nothingness. This symbiotic relationship between content and form in each play has not been systematically examined. Nor have the scattered references in the critical literature which identify the existential foundation of the plays been methodically collected, organized, and compared to each dramatic constituent in the plays to determine if O'Neill, Miller, and Williams have crafted plays presenting a uniform existential design.

Several theorists have examined American dramatic literature in terms of its reliance upon the family. In this respect, scholars like Mary Beth Dakoske, Roy Alvin Watson, and Tom Scanlan, have compared the works of these American dramatists and their use of the family as subject. For instance, Mary Beth Dakoske in her dissertation entitled, "Archetypal Images of the Family in Selected Modern Plays," identifies several ways in which the family as subject is manipulated in a similar fashion by modern playwrights. As Dakoske states early in her study:

*It is not the intent of this dissertation to prove that the family as an institution will survive. This study is rather an investigation of some of the recurrent patterns of family life that remain viable in the theatre. In isolating these constants, one senses something larger than a social institution, something at the core of human life, something mythic.*

This focus upon the family as the primary concern of her investigation emphasizes this single social-cultural phenomenon as he characterizing feature in Pinter's *The Homecoming*, Eliot's *The Family Reunion*, O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, William's *The Glass Menagerie*, and Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. Dakoske presents myth and its residual set of patterns, the archetypes derived from familial groupings, not only as the single most important factor in understanding the plays, but as the quintessential ingredient responsible for their creation. "In the families we meet in these plays we meet the family of man." It is this familial orientation that Dakoske identifies which she offers as the most characteristic aspect of the plays named in her study. O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into*
Night, Miller's Death of a Salesman, and Williams' Glass Menagerie are compared then according to their conformity to domestic themes.

Dakoske posits five major categories which act as thematic catalysts in these plays. It is this development of theme with which she is primarily concerned:

In the plays selected for this study, Five archetypal images or Family life appear. These are the homecoming motif, the search for origins, the nocturnal journey, the relationship between past, present, and future, and finally the family's connection with society.¹

Dakoske initiates a correlation between the use of the family as subject and its translation into a distinctive philosophical paradigm. This symbiotic relationship between the family and existential ideologies as they relate to modern drama is never developed, nor is it traced in terms of its social and cultural roots and most certainly never named. She draws upon isolated tenets of existential philosophy in a random fashion, but never supplies a concrete bridge between this perspective in the dramas and its filial connection. Statements like the following, however, provide proof that Dakoske understands the presence of an existential foundation in the plays:

The homecoming event elicits powerful and often ambivalent emotions of love and hate, tenderness and spite, pity and resentment. The homecoming "angst" is experienced as that disappointed expectation of the needs that prompted the journey home.⁴

The influence of this philosophical perspective remains undiagnosed, leaving a perception of the plays dependent solely upon the family. The philosophical foundation Dakoske uncovers becomes an afterthought, secondary to the family in importance, and its evolution into dramatic form remains mute. Theme and form are treated as similar, but separate entities, and the existential ideologies she employs are not explained in terms of production constituents, but are relocated to an interpretation of family myths:

The homecoming quest posits the need for familial relatedness, for a sense of belonging. Ultimately the theme suggests a coming home to oneself, a sense of interior belonging.⁵
Dakoske alludes to existential notions of angst and consciousness. She also forces an alignment of Arthur Miller's statement concerning the individual's rise to consciousness (including his search for dignity, his unyielding desire to imprint his existence in an impersonal world, to manifest and to feel love) with her impressions of the family archetype. Miller's statement, taken from a 1956 article appearing in the *Atlantic Monthly*, entitled "The Family in Modern Drama," emphasizes an individual perspective. In the article, Miller relates this concern for the individual psyche to the family and its capacity to nurture or inhibit individual awareness and growth:

_I should like to make a bold statement that all plays we call great, let alone those we call serious, are ultimately involved with some aspect of a single problem. It is this: how may a man make of the outside world a home? How and in what ways must he struggle, what must he strive to change and overcome within himself if he is to have safety, the surroundings of love, the case of the soul, the sense of identity and honor which, evidently all men have connected in their memories with ideas of family?_" 

Given this single and exclusive orientation, Dakoske's views of O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey*, and Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, become assumptions irrespective of such factors as set design, lighting design, dramatic action, and symbol. According to Dakoske, Miller's play becomes Willy's descent into fantasy and illusion, and not the dramatic externalization of what is going on in Willy's head. "Willy's fantasies abound at night as he rumages alone in the dark kitchen." And, "In Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Biff's homecoming releases his father's stream of memories, fantasy and fatal guilt."

Dakoske has taken the dramatic incident out of contest. She has ignored the mitigating factors explicit in the text which compel Willy to grasp the most meaningful moments in his life, to relive them once again in order to derive some tacit sense of meaning in his existence. She ignores any facet of the dramatic script which cannot be explained in terms of the family and its immediate influence. Nor does she develop her theory in terms of a consistent analysis of production constituents which offer a set undivided by walls. It is this physical
environment characterized by transparencies, and by the coexistence of past and present which reflects a reality at the core of Willy's world. This unique and personal reality permeates a less literal facade as it stretches toward the world outside the safety and love of Willy's home. The set becomes synonymous with Willy's way of thinking, his consciousness.

As will be demonstrated in a later chapter devoted to a rigorous examination of the dramatic form Miller develops in his *Death of a Salesman*, this emphasis upon family is but one aspect of a more comprehensive phenomenon. This perspective which includes the family is primarily concerned with individual consciousness. It is this emphasis upon consciousness which can be used as a key in investigating all facets of the dramatic script. The family indeed serves as a conduit providing a dramatic vehicle for the revelation of Willy's consciousness, but it is not the repository, nor the instigating factor preeminent in determining dramatic form. The family has not dictated the presence of realistic set pieces in the kitchen as they coexist with the stylized backdrop of the encroaching city. Willy's consciousness, his perception of the world around him has dictated the design.

Dakoske and many scholars like her, identifying O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey*, Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, and Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* as domestic dramas, have oversimplified each playwright's manipulation of dramatic form. They have reduced dramatic form to a literary involvement. By concentrating upon the playwright's inclusion of family as subject, they have distorted or ignored the broader philosophical base of the plays, and the translation of that abstract base into a specific vision of reality on stage.

In a similar vein, Roy Alvin Watson's dissertation "The Archetype of the Family in the Drama of Tennessee Williams', "examines the influence of the family as a thematic catalyst in Williams' dramas. Watson's study "proposes the family archetypes as central to Williams' best plays." Watson proceeds further when he states," ... the family archetype
ceased to be the primary thematic concern of the plays after 1958, and that the lack of success of the more recent plays may be attributed to Williams' having exhausted that vein."

Like Dakoske, Watson's study concentrates upon the family in terms of its translation into theme, with the inherent conflicts in that phenomenon dictating plot development. And once again it is presented as the single most important element, the only distinguishing characteristic responsible for determining dramatic form. Of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Watson states:

For this play even more than any other up to this time is a play about the death of the father in its familiar context as well as the other contexts of this rich play. The themes of mendacity, avarice, and homosexuality (and friendship) are explored and dissected in an evening in which a Mississippi planter celebrate his sixty-fifth birthday.

Again the family becomes the central focus in understanding the dramas, and in Watson's view it dictates both theme and form. As he states:

Certain names and nicknames of the characters in *Cat* point to the focus on the family role of each. Big Daddy is not only a rich Mississippi planter, but in fact, a father in the truest patriarchal form. Big Mama, a name which makes Big Daddy seem more natural, is just that, an obese woman who is devoted to her husband and also to Brick, her second son.

This focus upon the family and its relationship to American dramatic literature continues in the critical literature in Tom Scanlan's *Family, Drama, and American Dreams*. Scanlan also ascribes the distinguishing feature of American drama to its reliance upon the family as subject:

... *I am arguing that the family situation is the crucial subject of American drama. In our plays, family life embodies an important dilemma, one which reflects the strains of a changing family structure.*

Scanlan continues to stress the importance of the family and its relationship to American drama. He concludes that this social cultural influence shapes American drama into a realistic mode:
American drama in the twentieth century has been strikingly preoccupied with problems of family life. Its most characteristic moments are realistic scenes of family strife and squabble and bliss wherein conflicting themes of freedom and security recur and are expressed as dilemmas of family relations and personal psychology.¹⁴

This last point, relating family themes and psychological construct to dramatic form, is never developed in the study. It is the translation of the family as subject into a series of events which Scanlan feels distinguishes the plays. Again, Scanlan like Dakoske and Watson views Long Day's Journey and Death of a Salesman as domestic dramas. Each facet of dramatic form, each nuance of character, each aspect of dialogue and symbol is attributed to this one source alone. "The protagonist searches for freedom and longs for security. He may escape from the family, may triumph over its oppression, or may be destroyed by it."¹⁵

In this manner Scanlan fluctuates between the employment of a strictly sociological perspective as the key to understanding O'Neill's, Miller's, and William's plays, and their rather loose designation of dramatic form, as the key to interpreting social norms and mores. Perhaps this over-simplification more than any other perspective in the critical writing distorts the nature of the plays which offer a single entity in which form and meaning are inseparable and synonymous. For this reason a rigorous examination of these three playwright's works is warranted, an approach which embraces the cumulative effect of all the plays' dramatic constituents as these elements are presented in concrete form on the stage. As William Handy states in his Modern Fiction : A Formalist Approach :

T.S. Eliot's concept of the "objective correlative," although most often applied to the understanding of the way expressive meaning is formulated in poetry is I believe, fully as applicable to the understanding of the way expressive meaning is formulated in drama and fiction. Indeed, Eliot conceived the principle while examining a work of drama.⁶⁶

The phenomenon to which Professor Handy refers, Eliot's "objective correlative," is defined by Eliot in the following manner:
The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative," in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of the particular emotion such that when the external facts which must terminate in the sensory experience are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.17

In other words, the dramatic form a play develops is a concrete presentation of meaning, meaning which is derived through form. This juncture stipulates that a play's essence is indeed connotative, not denotative, a concrete presentation in the form of scenes and episodes and not a separate philosophical, social, or cultural abstraction.

When Scanlan specifies, "In my argument, the method is twofold: I am looking at plays as an index to society; and, also I am looking at represented social structure as a key to the plays,"18 he reduces dramatic form to a reordering of social theory. Even his qualification embodying Harry Levin's" ... literature instead of reflecting life, refracts it. Our task in any given case is to determine the angle of refraction,"19 do not proceed far enough in Scanlan's examination of the dramas. Certainly, dramatic action is derived from absorption of social theory, scientific perspectives, cultural phenomenon, philosophical directives, and artistic designs; but it is first and last a dramatic form exhibiting its own unique design. In this way Scanlan's stipulation that his study will focus upon dramatic action does not take into consideration that dramatic action implies more than the sum total of events. It is a significant action, a conscious, purposeful one which precipitates consequences, hence, the denouement, the unraveling of the complication. It is not necessarily overt.

Scanlan's statement of purpose proceeds to a pervasive simplification of American drama as reconstituted social theory:

From O'Neill on, our playwrights have been obsessed with the failure of family harmony and with family disintegration. Similarly, our popular drama is of family life strained by the conflicting tensions of security and freedom, mutuality and selfhood.20
Cultural history and social history although integrated remain two disparate integers. Scanlan's hypothesis of the plays' meaning, derived solely from a sociological perspective, again like Dakoske and Watson, reduces dramatic form to a distillation of theme and a corroboration of social theory in the guise of an empiric proof. Little if any attention is paid to genre or style in the plays examined in any one of the studies by Dakoske, Watson, or Scanlan. Both concepts are indelibly connected to dramatic form and provide a bridge connecting the more literary thematic concerns with investigations illuminating how these themes are presented in concrete form on the stage. Indeed, the concept of dramatic form remains ambiguous in each investigation, with the emphasis upon the literary endeavor and not upon each play's life on the state. Production constituents when mentioned are aligned to familial themes. Once again these views remain oblivious to the theatre, its environment, its demands, its history, and its influence upon dramatic form and American dramatic literature. All of these factors shed some light upon the plays, their meaning, their form, and their place in American theatre history.

It is this propensity to examine the plays piecemeal, to extract an identifiable theme, to examine it without relating this constituent to all other components in the dramas which restricts the dramatic works to the printed page. The manner in which these themes of family disharmony, the search for the self, and nonbeing are presented on the stage is as important as an illumination of the subject matter itself.

I have selected three plays representative of America's finest dramatic works of 20th century. A consensus of dramatic awards including Pulitzer Prizes, Tony Awards, New York Drama Critics Awards, impressive production histories ranging from considerable original runs to their continued production today and the overwhelming acclaim established by major reviewers, theorists, and scholars; have identified all three works in terms of their artistic merit. Long Day's Journey into Night, Death of a Salesman, and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof are
hallmarks in American dramatic literature and deserve a full and careful study. In addition to this criterion of excellence, I have selected these American plays which I believe may conform to an identical dramatic form, an existential-familial form.

Eugene O'Neill's *A Long Journey into Night*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, and Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* seem to present an ontological-familial theme which is translated into concrete dramatic form, such that subject, theme, dramatic action, characterization, dialogue, symbol, set design, lighting design, and stage reality, are all projections of an existential ideology. In these three modern American plays, not only do all of the constituents of dramatic form point to this fusion of family and existential philosophy, but the manner in which these elements join together, the vision each play creates reflects a singular existential-familial genre. A cohesive dramatic continuum beginning with O'Neill's play and running through each of the works named can be identified. By vivisecting each of the plays and examining each separate production constituent, the relation of each to the whole, and the gestalt of the cumulative effect of the elements combined in a prescribed manner, a dramatic design can be identified. This study will provide an examination of the basic elements of dramatic form manipulated by O'Neill, Miller, and William. Such a study will determine if these three American plays adhere to the same dramatic form and if that form is characterized by an existential perspective.

In order to determine if O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey*, Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, and Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* present a consistent existential design, a composite definition of existentialism employing the related perceptions of existential theorists must be established. These gathered observations provide a structure, a model which can be compared with dramatic constituents in each of the plays.
William Barrett's *What is Existentialism?* Provides a description of existentialism which readily correlates the events in the plays and the form of the plays with their philosophical antecedent:

*These themes-the incurable isolation of the individual, the absurd mechanisms of society that destroy him, and the courage to face death while affirming life-have been persistent ones in existentialism, or at least one side of existentialism.*

Any examination of such a complex philosophical construct must take into account the perceptions of existential philosophers. Such critical observations serve to clarify an existential perspective and to illuminate its relationship to dramatic form. Jean-Paul Sartre in his *Existentialism and Human Emotions,* identifies a primary component of the existential perspective, one which appears in all of the drama selected for this study. He emphasizes consciousness as a primary factor in all such works. "What they have in common is that they think existence precedes essence, or if you prefer, that subjectivity must be the starting point."

Sartre also identifies choice, freedom, and responsibility in terms of individual consciousness and man's necessity to create his own existence. "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself." Not only do these perspectives correlate to character objectives in the plays (Big Daddy's self proclaimed value system in *Cat*, Biff's fear that he has done nothing with his life in *Death of a Salesman*) they also establish a framework which allows this search for growth to assume a concrete form on stage. Each play becomes not so much a series of events, but an externalization of meaningful moments in terms of individual consciousness.

Also integral to the plays is the existential notion of nothingness as it stands in relation to man's being. William Spanos in his *A Casebook on Existentialism* describes that idea in the following manner:

*Whether atheistic or theistic, the philosophy and art of the twentieth century constitutes largely an encounter with nothingness and the effort to transcend the threat that it poses to man's existence as man.*
This philosophical concept is translated into dramatic terms in O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* as the fog and the darkness creep in over the Tyrone family. And it is a related existential tenet, alienation, which Spanos also identifies which reinforces man's tenuous position in the universe. It is this sense of displacement that results in man's awareness of his alienation from the world around him:

*As a self-conscious, that is free, creature, man constitutes a minority in a cosmos governed by natural law. From a rational point of view, the, he is by virtue of his consciousness an anomaly.*

Certainly this perception which states that man is in, but not of the natural world and that objective reality tends to dehumanize him, explains the isolation and sense of alienation that permeates man's existence. Willy Lowman, like protagonists in the other two plays, experiences the full weight of this alienation. As a private man surrounded by a world of strangers, men who value position and wealth more than any outstanding attribute of character, he is overcome by this sense of displacement. He is set apart as the result of his knowledge of self. However limited that knowledge may be, it causes him to strive for some meaning, some purposes and some degree of perfection in life. In essence, this view characterizes man as a spiritual being set adrift in a material world.

Spanos adds another existential tenet to the philosophical perspective when he observes, "Despite the absence of rational justification, he irrationally affirms life against death. In this revolt against the cosmos he becomes the absurd man." This affirmation persists in all three of the plays represented in this study. It paraphrases Willy's cry for a meaningful life fulfilled with the basic elements of human dignity, respect, accomplishment, and love. Only when these falter and elude his grasp does he refuse to accept the death-in-life drudgery of his own pathetic existence. Edmund in O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey* exhibits this same affirmation in his longings for a union with the universe. Maggie, in Williams' *Cat*
rebukes Brick for turning from life. She scorns his denial of the life force and tries to revive the human contact in their marriage.

Primary to any understanding of existentialism is the concept of angst, an undirected fear emanating not from man's sense of his own mortality alone, the act of dying, but of the ever-present possibility of nonbeing. Spanos states:

*Stripped of the ethical guides deduced from theological or rational systems, the individual is left naked and alone to face in fear and trembling, the great void and to adapt King Lear's words, to decide whether to make something out of nothing.*

27

Soren Kierkegaard identifies this same view in *The Concept Of Dread* when he states, "Everything turns upon dread coming into view."28 Both Spanos and Kierkegaard establish its importance in existential ideology and in existential art.

Dasein, that element of existential ideology identified by Martin Heidegger, places an emphasis on considering life and the world around us in a different manner as the result of a new found consciousness. It is a primary component of existentialism. Roughly translated as "being there," being present in the world, it implies an insight, a new range of conduct. This behaviour is not bound by surface reality, but related to the temporality of past, present, and future, and the relationships which give these abstractions concrete form. Heidegger's description of doeskin also points to the importance of relationships in existential philosophy and their potential to generate spiritual growth.

Martin Buber devotes an entire text to this concept in his *I and Thou*, in which he elaborates on the I-It attitude pervasive in society as a whole. This view separates man from his fellow man and denies spiritual growth. Working in conjunction with this aspect of the philosophical paradigm, Heidegger describes what he labels as the call of care that sensitized conscience, aware of nothingness which moves the individual to extend self and establish relationships capable of engendering spiritual growth. These actions imply a series of concrete events, not abstractions to be analyzed.
In this regard each play in this study exists as a projection of consciousness and of this need to develop, nurture human contact. Many absurdist plays like Beckett's *Endgame* utilize sets as blatant reproductions of the human cranium to emphasize man as a thinking, conscious being, and one who is isolated in an uncaring world. The plays selected for this study, because of their existential form present claustrophobic, closed environment which reflect the characters' inner lives and their reliance upon one another. The difference is not only a matter of subtlety. These closed-world vistas we view on stage minimize contact with the superficial outside world and make the family, the real world inside, primary.

William Spanos in his *A Casebook on Existentialism* defines two final aspects of existentialism which shape the dramas named in this study. His designation of the importance of authentic values in contrast to inauthentic ones, and mass man's propensity to deny is self-hood in spiritual suicide provides not only a thematic structure in the plays, but a design for dramatic action, characterization, symbol, and dialogue. In Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Lowman projects a specific vision of reality. This externalization of Willy's mind, his way of thinking, presents a type of battle with the self. Willy provides an endless string of contradictions reinforcing first his concern of financial success and notoriety. Willy is cognizant of the beauty of nature surrounding him, the wisteria, the trees in the yard. On the other hand, he acquiesces to a social compulsion to achieve success at any cost. If Biff has stolen a football from his high school gym, then Willy exonerates him for taking the initiative to practice his passing. Getting ahead takes precedence over personal scruples. The impersonal pressure of an encroaching society allows Willy to compromise himself.

Spanos assesses this emphasis upon authentic values and individuation in terms of the individual's freedom to choose how to live his or her own life. In his view, social pressures negate that freedom choice, a freedom to create one's own being in the world. As he states,
"For a crowd is the untruth." Spanos reiterates the importance of this tenet of existential philosophy, the cultivation of authentic values, when he states:

Hence where there is a multitude, a crowd, or where decisive significance is attached to the fact that there is a multitude, there it is sure that no one is working, living, striving for the highest aim, but only for one or another earthly aim...

William Barrett also recognizes this aspect of the existential perspective in *What is Existentialism?* In relating this concern to Martin Heidegger's critical writings Barrett explains:

His analysis of death is perhaps the most important and satisfying interpretation in his whole picture of man. It is, in a certain way, the keystone of his analysis, since we are able to attain an authentic existence only if we come face to face unblinkingly with the possibility of our death, for it is death that tears us out of the external banality of everyday existence.

Such an overview of the perspective provides an identification of the ten fundamental components of existentialism. This pattern, this composite delineation of existentialism: consciousness, alienation, the affirmation of life, freedom and choice in relation to man's capacity to create his own being, angst, Dassin, the call of care and the capacity of human relationships to encourage spiritual growth, authentic values, and a presentation of the concrete in contrast to an analysis of the abstract; will be employed in comparing production constituents from each play with an existential ideology. By employing specific tenets of the philosophical base and comparing them to the dramatic constituents in each play, a determination can be made concerning the translation of this body of philosophy into American dramatic form. By utilizing a comprehensive definition of the term and avoiding the generalized references to existentialism, the often ambiguous inclusions in the critical writing, a clear picture of the relationship between this influence and modern American dramatic literature may be illuminated. Ten existential tenets will be employed in this study to determine if Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a
Salesman, and Tennessee Williams' Cat on a Hot Tin Roof comprise an existential-familial dramatic form.

This study will pursue a four point approach. First, it will present and examine a broad section of the critical literature to ascertain if there is a consensus among dramatic theorists identifying an existential foundation in Long Day's Journey, Death of a Salesman, and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. Second, it will consolidate the perceptions of existential philosophers to provide a comprehensive definition of existentialism. This pattern once identified, will clarify the relationship between this philosophical influence and the dramatic form developed in these three plays. It will supply a tool which can be employed in dramatic analysis. Third, this study will present a systematic, in-depth examination of the dramatic constituents in each play including: subject, theme, dramatic action, characterization, dialogue, symbol, set design lighting and sound. These elements will be studied to determine if O'Neill, Miller and Williams have manipulated these components to present a unique vision of reality coinciding with an existential perspective. Finally, the study will collate the scattered perceptions in the critical literature which address the existential nature of each play. These observations will be organized so that each facet of the dramatic scripts is considered in a comparison study of existentialism and dramatic form. Such an addition augments the credibility of this type of study for it establishes a heretofore uncorroborated substantiation of the existential design in each of these dramatic works. In the Theatre of Revolt, Robert Brustein offers this observation of O'Neill's plays:

O'Neill's messianic revolt centers on the dilemma of modern man in a world without God; and it is informed by the spirit of a philosopher who was also important in Strindberg's life-Frederick Nietzsche.32

In Designing for the Theatre, Jo Mielziner as designer create set designs which prescribed a vision of reality on stage reflective of individual consciousness:

My use of translucent and transparent scenic interior walls was not just another trick. It was a true reflection of the contemporary playwright's interest
in—and at times obsession with - the exploration of the inner man. Williams was writing not only a memory play, but a play of influences that were not confined within the walls of a room.33

Mielziners’ comments about the set design for The Glass Menagerie apply to several of Williams’ plays, plays that stress the forces operative in the individual mind.

As each of these plays employ the family in terms of environment and subject matter, this influence will be addressed to determine if this factor is in any way connected with an existential world view. Excerpts from a number of sociological articles will be presented and compared to dramatic constituents in conjunction with related observations by dramatic theorists. In this manner, the study will not endeavor to refute the multitude of investigations by dramatic theorists and sociologists alike who identify a facet of Long Day's Journey, Death of a Salesman, or Cat on a Hot Tin Roof which aligns these plays with an existential perspective. The study endeavors to organize these critical observations, to illustrate their similarity in a systematic study of all of the dramatic constituents in each play. The study is designed to illustrate the compatibility of these various viewpoints, to verify that one does not refute another, but that each is a related part of an existential dramatic design.

Sociologists Lyle Larson, Theodore Johannis, Francis Bremer, James Bossard, Eleanor Bell, Lawrence Fuchs, and Ruth Nanda Anshen provide ample justification of an assessment of the family in direct connection with an existential format. Anshen in her article "The Family in Transition," which appears in The Family: Its Function and Destiny, characterizes the family in the following manner:

The possession of the self-awareness-consciousness of one's individuality—within this unity as the essence of oneself, results in the recognition the one exists in the family not as an isolated, independent person, but rather as a member of the microcosm pattern of the dynamic world community34

A close study of O'Neill's Long Day's Journey into Night, Miller's Death of a Salesman, and William's Cat on a Hot Tin Roof offers explicit evidence of existential constituents in the plays themselves. By charting this influence and by employing a close
study of each text and the plays' life on the stage, an intersection of this influence and dramatic form may be determined. In this way, the distinctive presence of an artistic design may be analyzed. By so doing, these plays can be addressed more fully, more rightly, with a finite understanding of the distinct elements in each play and how these unique components shape the completed work.

The primary importance of this study resides in its capacity to elucidate the concept of existentialism and to provide a means of comparing this philosophical perspective with dramatic form. This clarification of existentialism offers an appropriate tool suited for dramatic analysis. The study then, is significant in not only defining an entity loosely referred to in the critical literature, it also serves to demonstrate the compatibility between existential tenets and the dramatic constituents in O'Neill's, Miller's, and Williams' play. It provides a distinct means of studying Long Day's Journey into Night, Death of a Salesman, and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. It also suggests that this particular approach may well be suited to other modern plays exhibiting similar characteristics.

Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf?, Sam Shepard's Buried Child, and David Rabe's Sticks and Bones are briefly examined in the last chapter in terms of each playwright's translation of specific existential ideologies into traumatic constituents of characterization, dialogue, and dramatic action. This cursory investigation of these three plays coupled with a review of the critical literature addressing these works suggests that this type of study might well apply to other modern American plays. Indeed, this type of approach, establishing a clear and comprehensive definition of existentialism, and then applying this pattern to an investigation of dramatic form may well apply to a number of contemporary plays focusing on man's immediate relationship with nonbeing. The overall impetus of this type of endeavor is its capacity to provide a new means of exploring Long Day's Journey, Death of a Salesman, and Cat. This quality of the study is further enhanced by
the possibility of applying this comprehensive definition of existentialism to a broad number of plays dealing with consciousness and nonbeing. For this pattern serves as a reservoir and a distillation of the perceptions of a majority of existential theorists. And it is this pattern which provides the most comprehensive means of investigating each constituent of dramatic form in a design reflecting individual consciousness and nonbeing.

This type of approach throws more light on the plays. It facilitates in in-depth understanding not only of the absorption of an existential perspective into American dramatic form, it also augments our knowledge of dramatic form itself. For such a study provides a different way of viewing this hallmark in American dramatic literature, a method which dictates a systematic study uniting content and presentation. The study clarifies the demarcation separating thematic elements and a uniform dramatic presentation of these concerns on stage.

It would be a gross overstatement to assert that each of these playwrights confined himself to a particular existential dramatic format emphasizing individual consciousness. And indeed, a close textual examination and an evaluation of the critical literature examining such works as Miller's *All My Sons* do not support such an interpretation. Nor is the vision of reality Miller creates in this plays even remotely akin to the environment established in *Death of a Salesman*.

Similarly, O'Neill's *Desire under the Elms*, and Williams' *Night of the Iguana* do not seem to conform to this existential design characterized by the convergence of ten primary existential tenets with the constituents of dramatic form. This study will be confined to an examination of *Long Day's Journey*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and the forces operative in their design. Such an undertaking involves a considerable commitment of time and resources. Perhaps a future study examining a number of plays concentrating on consciousness and nonbeing could provide additional insights illuminating how these abstract
philosophical ideas are translated into concrete dramatic form in the works of other American playwrights. As this study is limited to an investigation of these three plays no legitimate projection can be made assessing the viability of this design as it might apply to other plays written by modern American playwrights, or a number of contemporary American playwrights presently in the process of creating new works.

A thorough investigation of the plays authored by Edward Albee, Sam Shepard, David Rabe, or Lanford Wilson might reveal that this same existential design is being employed in the creation of contemporary American plays. This is but one possibility. An examination of these playwright's works might reveal that the existential design developed in Long Day's Journey, Death of a Salesman, and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof has been altered in some fashion to accommodate additional philosophical influences presently at work in contemporary society. Such a metamorphosis would illuminate not only a great deal about our conception of existentialism and its application to dramatic analysis, it would also detail how changing views have altered our conception of dramatic form. This type of future study might also reveal how a translation of existentialism directly affects the vision of reality presented on stage in the works of contemporary American playwrights. In other words, such an investigation may disclose the degree to which contemporary American plays employing an existential design have migrated beyond selective realism toward a more subjective realism of the spirit.

A study of contemporary American plays might reveal a total absence of the existential dramatic form identified in Long Day's Journey, Death of a Salesman, and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. This possibility is no less intriguing for it initiates a wide range of plausible explanations. Perhaps the existential design employed by O'Neill, Miller, and Williams is contingent upon a chronological sequence in which the philosophical perspective was more popular among American playwrights. Perhaps another philosophical orientation has gained
impetus and can be identified and defined in contemporary American plays. This certainly would provide an interesting comparison given how these two philosophical perspectives might shape dramatic constituents and alter dramatic form.

This study does not proceed in an investigation of the application of an existential dramatic form in the works of foreign playwrights. Additional studies may disclose that the existential design identified in this study may be confined to American dramatic works. Such a finding would imply that this design has been forged by social and artistic forces indigenous to this country alone, forces which have uniquely shaped our approach to dramatic form. Further studies may reveal that the existential design identified in this study may be found in a large number of foreign plays, indicating the universal nature of this existential design and its importance in the development of dramatic works in this century. Such a study might prompt a review of the critical literature addressing a broad spectrum of plays dealing with consciousness and nonbeing. A consensus might be established identifying the type or existential design outlined in this study as a unique genre in dramatic literature along side expressionism and the theatre of the absurd.

This study does not examine dramatic works written in any time frame other than the limited fifteen year period of the 1940s and 1950s during which Long Day's Journey, Death of a Salesman, and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof were written. Further studies applying this pattern of existentialism and this methodology of comparing philosophical tenets and dramatic constituents to plays written in the nineteenth century for example, may reveal an absence of this particular dramatic design. Such results might illuminate how this philosophical paradigm has been absorbed into American culture and dramatic literature. For any discovery or charting of its initial existence, even fragmentary, in American drama not only sheds some light on the nature of our culture, it would document an influence affecting our theatre history.
These types of omissions in regard to the investigation of other modern or contemporary American plays, foreign plays, or plays written in a different time period do not imply in any way that the existential format operative in Long Day's Journey, Death of a Salesman and Cat, has been exclusively adopted by these three American playwrights in only these specific plays. This study serves to acknowledge the existential foundation of these three plays which has been identified in the critical literature. It proceeds in a systematic analysis of existential tenets as they coincide with O'Neill's, Miller's and Williams' manipulation of dramatic constituents in these plays. Again the question is not if such an influence exists but how this perspective has been consistently applied to these playwright's development of dramatic form. The study is organized to facilitate a point by point comparison of existential tenets and dramatic constituents. It is augmented by the inclusion of excerpts from the critical literature which aids in substantiating the translation of these existential tenets into concrete dramatic form on the stage.

diamonds
NOTES

2. Ibid., p. 2.
3. Ibid., p. 6.
4. Ibid., p. 8.
5. Ibid., p. 8.
7. Ibid., p. 17.
8. Ibid., p. 8.
10. Ibid., p. v.
11. Ibid., p. 117.
12. Ibid., p. 120.
15. Ibid., p. 7.
17. Ibid.
20. Ibid., p. 49.
23. Ibid.
25. Ibid., p. 5.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., p. 6.
30. Ibid., p. 237.