CHAPTER V

AESTHETICS: MURDER AND IDEOLOGY

Black, in his book The Aesthetics of Murder, says that there are two ways by which an object, idea, event or act can achieve artistic status. On the one hand, the object can be created, the idea conceived, the event engineered, or the act performed by the artist with the intention of making it a work of art, whatever the "artist" may mean or understand by "art". On the other hand, any object or idea may be experienced or interpreted by a beholder or a witness as a work of art, according to whatever the beholder's definition of "art" may be. "The first alternative is artistic, and entails the artist's production of an artifact. The second alternative is aesthetic, and refers exclusively to the beholder's subjective experience, regardless of whether or not the object of this experience was intended as a work of art or designed for the beholder's aesthetic enjoyment" (12). Black adds that the object of aesthetic contemplation need not be a work of art, or a mere artefact; it can be an experience of natural phenomena. Just as a painting created by an artist is generally appreciated as a work of art, the objects of nature can also be aesthetically experienced. "When we experience a natural scene aesthetically, we respond to nature as if it were a work of art" (13). We do this, in spite of our awareness that nature by definition is not art. If "natural" phenomena can be experienced as if they
were art, it ought to be possible to experience certain “nonnatural” phenomena as art, since art by definition, is itself unnatural.

Just as we aesthetically experience the tranquil natural landscapes, we can also aesthetically experience the turbulent, life-threatening natural cataclysms like hurricanes, earthquakes, fires and floods, which overwhelm us with their magnitude and their devastating power. Therefore when the classical discipline of art theory began to give way in the late eighteenth century to the new philosophy of aesthetics, “The new aesthetic theorists took painful as well as pleasurable perceptions into consideration” (Black 13).

Several years later, Burk, associating “the ideas of pain, and danger” with the sublime, says that pain and danger far exceed the beautiful in its effect on the observer because “the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure” (39). Hence scenes of natural violence were considered as possible sources of aesthetic experiences. Similarly, human violence, which inspires perhaps even greater terror, can be a potential source of aesthetic experience. Black, justifying the aesthetic experiences of violence like murder, argues:

Why shouldn’t the malevolence and the inscrutable purpose of the murderer—the heir of Cain, the transgressor of the sixth commandment—be capable of stirring us with awe? If any human act evokes the aesthetic experience of the
s sublime, certainly it is the act of murder. And if murder can be experienced aesthetically, the murderer can in turn be regarded as a kind of artist—a performance artist or anti-artist whose specialty is not creation but destruction.

(14)
The aesthetic approach to murder views murder like any other art and the murderer, an artist. Endorsing this view, De Quincey in his 1827 “Murder” essays jested that the most brutal killings can be appreciated as works of art if only they are viewed from an aesthetic, or disinterested, amoral perspective. By treating murder as an art form, De Quincey demonstrated the aesthetic subversion of the beautiful by the sublime, and more generally, the philosophical subversion of ethics by aesthetics.

Fourteen years after De Quincey’s first “Murder” essays, Poe developed in his tale “The Murder in the Rue Morgue” what Dennis Porter calls “the fine art of murder” into “the fine art of detection” thereby laying the foundations for the modern genre of detective fiction (22-23). Unfortunately the tremendous popularity of detective stories has had the unfortunate effect of overshadowing De Quincey’s earlier experiment in criminal literature in which the murderer was portrayed as an artist and murder as an art form.

As De Quincey says, if we view the violent acts like murder exclusively from the aesthetic point of view, ignoring its ethical point of
view, we can experience the aesthetics of murder. Just as we experience the aesthetics of natural scenery, we can also aesthetically look at a murder; just as a painting of a murder scene can be appreciated based on its hue and presentation of art rather than on its theme and its moral effect on society, murder in literature can also be aesthetically analysed. On the strength of this proposition, this chapter seeks to analyse the aesthetic presentation of murder in the novels selected for study. When we consider a murder a work of art that can be viewed aesthetically, the murderer is the artist or author who is responsible for its birth.

This chapter also attempts to inquire into the much-debated question whether literature or a work of art suffers because of treating murder, or murder suffers because it is treated by a work of art. It also examines whether literature suffers because of incorporating ideology in it, or whether ideology suffers because of its treatment in literature. Further, this chapter attempts to present the aesthetic aspects of the novels under study and examines such details as form whose point of view the murder is narrated, whether the point of view justifies or condemns the act of murder, and whether it uses any imagery supporting or opposing the act of murder in each of the select novels. It analyses the aesthetic/un-aesthetic presentation of the murder, the prevalence of biographical/autobiographical elements in the novel and the sanction of the authorial authenticity to whatever the murderer-protagonist does in the novel.
An ethical approach to the treatment of murder in a work of art may condemn the work of art on moral grounds. Whereas, an aesthetic approach views such a work of art treating murder as an object of appreciation like a painting. Just as we appreciate a painting depicting the crucifixion of Jesus Christ without thinking about the ethical aspects of crucifixion, we can also aesthetically appreciate the treatment of murder in a work of art. In this regard, Kant (1790), the founding father of the European Aestheticism, says, that “aesthetic contemplation is ‘disinterested’, indifferent both to the reality and to the utility of the beautiful object” (Abrams 1). This is also influenced by the view of Edgar Allen Poe, who, in his essay “The Poetic Principle” 1950, says that the supreme work is a “poem per se”, a poem written solely for the poem’s sake. The French Aestheticism founded by Theophile Gautier and developed by Baudelaire, Flaubert, Mallarme, and other writers developed the doctrine that “art is the supreme value among the works of man because it is self-sufficient and has no aim beyond its own perfection: the end of a work of art is simply to exist, and to be beautiful” (Abrams 1). The society approaches a work of art from an ethical point of view and it is indifferent and hostile to any art that does not inculcate the current utilitarian social value. On ethical grounds, it may even condemn a work of art that treats murder; whereas an aesthetic approach to such a work of
art appreciates even a murder as a thing of beauty, totally ignoring its ethical effects on society.

Judged by the aesthetic canons, the treatment of violent acts like murder or assassination in a work of art does not affect its literary value; instead, the dexterous portrayal of such scenes of murder, sometimes, enhances the aesthetic beauty of a work of art. So the presentation of murder in a novel does not undervalue its literary potentials. Art is representation of life; it attempts to re-present even the cruel and turbulent aspects of life. Murder and literature, therefore, are not two antithetical ideas; the former being the real and the latter a mimetic representation through the medium of language.

The relationship between literature and ideology is yet another topic of contention. In the novels selected for the study, the protagonists/antagonists commit murders induced by their ideologies. It is natural to interrogate whether literature suffers because of its treatment of ideology, or ideology as a philosophical construct suffers because of its treatment in literature. But the answer to this question is simple. Neither of them suffers because of its treatment in the other’s field. The treatment of an ideology like the Marxist ideology or the Communist ideology in literature lowers the value neither of ideology nor of literature; instead, it exalts the quality of both. An ideology, when properly incorporated in a work of art, highlights the literary qualities in it and elevates it to a
philosophical level. Similarly, when a literary work of art artistically employs an ideology in it, it makes the ideology popular and enhances its philosophical reach. Both ideology and literature elevate each other mutually when they are fused together in a work of art.

Richard Wright’s *Native Son* is a classic example of a novel, which treats an ideology and becomes an artistic success. Here, Wright expresses his Marxist ideology through Boris Max, Bigger Thomas’s defence lawyer from the Communist party. Despite its Communist ideological propaganda, the novel proves to be a great success. Though some critics like Margolies attribute the Communist ideological propaganda of Wright to the artificial structure of Book III (115), they appreciate the plot-structure of the novel. Wright’s interest in propagandising his Communist ideology through his mouthpiece Max, makes Book III very long and monotonous. Margolies, commenting on the un-proportionate structure of the novel, says: “The whole of Book III seems out of key with the first two-thirds of the novel” (113).

Robert Bone endorses this view saying that the novel is “seriously flawed” and that “in Book III Wright has allowed his statement as a Communist to overwhelm his statement as an artist” (23). Bone complains that the plot in *Native Son* dissolves into improbability as fictional events are manipulated to score propaganda points: “Characterization descends to caricature, and Bigger alone persuades us of his authenticity” (23).
As the critics complain, the novel may have flaws in its un-proportionate plot structure or caricaturing the characters owing to the novelist's propaganda of his ideology. Despite these shortcomings in structure and characterization, the novel becomes an artistic success solely because of its treatment of ideology.

*Native Son* is narrated from the point of view of Bigger Thomas, an illiterate and inarticulate black boy. “Wright had to discover a means of communicating the thoughts and feelings Bigger is unable to express” (Margolies 106). At times Wright frankly interprets Bigger's thoughts and feelings for his readers, but on other occasions he reveals them “in terse sentence rhythms, in objectified images of Bigger's environment” (Margolies 106). Wright reveals for Bigger, the way the streets look to him, the feel of the sleet and snow against his skin, the sounds of a rat rustling in the darkness of a vacated tenement, etc. The entire novel is presented from Bigger's point of view and the reader identifies himself with the violent emotions and behaviour of the illiterate black boy. From his very first act in the novel, the act of killing a rat and throwing it on his sister, Vera, to frighten her, till the end when he faces the electric chair for his murder of Mary Dalton, we see every episode in the novel from Bigger's point of view.

A sensitive reader may feel disturbed and distressed when he reads the scenes in which Bigger's life is in peril. For instance, in the murder
scene, where he is left alone in Mary Dalton’s room terrified with the fear of being identified by Mrs. Dalton, we ourselves feel like a duck in the thunderstorm. Similarly, when Bigger is trapped and dragged by the foot on the top of a snow-covered building, we empathise with him. And we are totally moved by his pathetic condition and his last words before facing the electric chair when he requests his lawyer, Max to tell his mother not to worry about his death: “I’m all right, Mr. Max. Just go and tell Ma I was all right and not to worry none, see? Tell her I was all right and wasn’t crying none[...]” (392). Margolies commenting on the readers’ empathizing with Bigger and the success of the novel observes: “Wright’s success goes beyond the shock of reader recognition with its subsequent implications of shared guilt and social responsibility” (106).

The novel is recounted from the point of view of its murderer-protagonist, Bigger Thomas, a black youth. Bigger justifies his murder of Mary as an act of revenge on the white. The narrative voice of the novelist also supports and justifies Bigger’s murder as evidenced in the following passage:

He felt that his murder of her was more than amply justified by the fear and shame she had made him feel. It seemed that her actions had evoked fear and shame in him…

It was not Mary he was reacting to when he felt that fear and shame. Mary had served to set off his emotions,
emotions conditioned by many Marys. And now that he had killed Mary he felt a lessening of tension in his muscles....

(108-09)

Later, in the trial scene, Bigger’s defence lawyer, Boris Max, also justifies Bigger’s murder of Mary as the outcome of his fear and hate for the white oppressors. He adds that Bigger has been forced to live in the ghetto, ostracized from the white society; as a result, he becomes violent by nature, and murder has become his life and culture. Max argues:

   Looked at from the outside, maybe it was murder; yes. But to him it was not murder. If it was murder, what was the motive? ... there was no motive...What Bigger Thomas did early that Sunday morning in the Dalton home and what he did that Sunday night in that empty building was but a tiny aspect of what he had been doing all his life long! He was living, only as he knew how, and as we have forced him to live. (366)

This passage is a classic example of the novelist’s justification of the two murders committed by his protagonist. In fact, the whole of Book III, ‘Fate’, bears evidence to the novelist’s propaganda of his Marxist ideology through his spokesman, Boris Max, the Communist lawyer.

Wright employs a number of images, figures and symbols supporting Bigger’s violent acts. “The important figures include the cross,
whiteness, blindness, the ghetto and the city, the jungle, the beast” (Felgar 99). He uses the cross symbol signifying Christianity several times in the novel. To underline Bigger’s rejection of his mother’s otherworldly Christianity, Wright has Bigger tear off the crucifix around his neck and throw it out of his prison cell. According to Felgar, the way Bigger is surrounded by policemen at the time of his capture, with men holding his arm out, suggests an implication of the cross, he says, “Bigger himself is being crucified by the society which produced him” (Felgar 99). Wright, by his use of ‘cross’ imagery, portrays Bigger like a Christ figure and approves of his murder as a consequent result of the white’s victimization.

Wright reiterates the blindness motif in the novel to justify Bigger’s act of murder. According to Felgar, “Everyone in the novel is literally or figuratively sightless” (100). The State Attorney, Buckley’s sight is obfuscated by virulent racism; Mrs. Dalton’s blindness is actual and iconic; and “Daltonism itself is a form of color blindness” (100). No one in the book, except Jan, sees Bigger as an individual endowed with feelings and emotions. Wright, through the blindness motif, has Bigger revolt against the blind white race that has treated him as a nonentity and an invisible man.

Wright employs unusually and extensively the presiding metaphor of lawless jungle, portraying Bigger and his black race as beasts, with a view to supporting his murder as a natural response from a treacherous
beast in a dangerous situation. The Thomas family "lives like pigs" (15); Bigger's friend Jack says that if Bigger goes to a movie, the white people will think that "a gorilla broke loose from the zoo and put on a tuxedo" (33); Buckley, the State Attorney, calls him a "half human black ape", a "black lizard" (373), a "black mad dog", a "rapacious beast", a "treacherous beast", a "coiled rattler", a "worthless ape", and a "demented savage" (374, 376-78). Throughout *Native Son* there is pervasive imagery from the kingdom of the beast, comparing Bigger to a black ape and a tiger stalking its white prey. Wright employs this bestial imagery to describe Bigger Thomas so as to justify his murder of Mary as a natural reaction of a beast that lives in the jungle. Violence is the only way of existence and it is the law of the jungle. To be free, Bigger must, like a beast in the jungle, kill before he is killed, for in the kingdom of the beast, the only law is self-preservation. Thus Wright, through his successful employment of the 'beast imagery', not only justifies but also supports Bigger's act of the murder of Mary (Felgar 99).

Bigger's murder of Mary is presented aesthetically without evoking any feeling of awe or terror in the reader. He smothers Mary unwittingly by pressing a pillow tightly against her face to stop her drunken murmurs. The murder scene is so artistically presented that the reader comes to know about Mary's death only when Bigger himself realizes that she is dead. But, Bigger's acts of dismantling Mary's body, stuffing it in a
trunk, and then pushing it into the fireplace are presented weirdly. Wright delineates the act of murder graphically.

*Native Son* has strong autobiographical elements combined with the biography of a black boy, Robert Nixon, who, accused of rape and murder, was sentenced to death. Analysing the autobiographical elements in the novel Kinnamon comments that most of the experiences of Bigger Thomas in *Native Son* are the experiences of his creator, Richard Wright (Wright: Critical Essays 87). Kinnamon draws a parallel between the experiences of Bigger Thomas and his creator: Like Bigger who works in the Daltons, Wright worked for the Bibbs family in Jackson; like Mary Dalton, the Bibbses’ pretty young daughter was kind; and again like Mary, she reprimanded Wright when on one occasion he chanced upon her in her bedroom while she was dressing (Wright: Critical Essays 88). The conditions of the slums of the South side house so vividly portrayed in *Native Son* had been the daily reality of a decade of Wright’s life. To endorse his view, Kinnamon quotes Glicksberg’s observation that “Richard Wright is Bigger Thomas—one part of him anyway” and that “Bigger Thomas is what Richard Wright, had circumstances worked out differently, might have become” (*Emergence of Wright* 119). Similarly, the sociological concepts and the Marxist theories expressed through Bigger’s lawyer, Boris Max, are Wright’s own ideas.
Wright, in “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born” talks about the biographies of different types of revolutionary black boys that go into the making of Bigger’s character. Since the novel is an amalgamation of Wright’s own personal experiences and the real story of some of the black boys of his time, he endorses every action of the protagonist in the novel. So he approves of Bigger’s murder of Mary and justifies it through his spokesman, Max, as an act of ‘fear and shame’.

Wright, apart from giving vent to his Marxist ideology through his mouthpiece, Boris Max, incorporates the racial ideology of his black protagonist, Bigger and makes the novel successful. Here, by enunciating these ideologies, the novelist and his protagonist achieve their goals—Wright propagandises his Communist ideology through the lawyer, Max, and Bigger partially realizes his racial ideology through his murder by drawing the attention of the white race to the evil consequences of their oppression. It is made clear that the incorporation of ideology in the novel affects neither its aesthetic value nor its literary merits; instead it embellishes the work of art.

As a work of art, *An American Dream* cannot be condemned for the protagonist’s employment of murder as a weapon in realizing his American dream ideology of power. The treatment and the justification of murder in this novel in no way affect the aesthetic experience of the readers. Viewing the novel from an ethical perspective will mar its
aesthetic value because ethics and murder cannot go hand in hand. But on the other hand, an aesthetic approach to the novel helps the reader appreciate the artistic execution of the murder and elevates the literary credence of the novel to a higher plane.

Hardwick charges that An American Dream "is a fantasy of vengeful murder, callous copulations and an assortment of dull cruelties" (145), yet it is successful as a work of art. Gutman, commenting on the merits of the novel, says that the novel explores new areas of both sensibility and style and that it is "a vision of contemporary America." To him it is a combination of "romance, allegory, satire, dream, vision, and glorified pop art" (95). The story lies somewhere between reportage and fancy fusing both the actual and the imaginative actions of the protagonist. Leeds appreciates the novel for its structure that is "reminiscent of the classical unities" (125).

The entire action of the novel takes place within a twenty-four hour period, in Manhattan, and much pertinent action is related in retrospective flashbacks. Leeds commenting on the protagonist, Rojack, says that he moves constantly through the city, facing one confrontation after another and compares his experiences to those of the protagonists of Samson Agonistes or Prometheus Unbound. He further says that the novel, because of its significant Christian overtones, is analogous to The Pilgrim's Progress. Critics like Solotaroff regard the novel "a relatively
conventional allegory” and “a morality play acted out in the heated theatre of Rojack” (170). These critical responses on the symbology, plot, characterization, allegory and imagery of *An American Dream* bear evidence to the novel’s artistic success.

The entire novel is narrated by its protagonist, Stephen Richards Rojack, in the first person narrative and every action in the novel is seen only from his point of view. Rojack’s heroism in war, his marriage to Deborah, daughter of a fabulously wealthy and politically influential Kelly, his dreams of becoming a Senator one day, the failure of his married life and Deborah’s separation from him, his frustrated dreams of becoming a politician, his visit to Deborah’s apartment resulting in her taunts and physical attack, his strangling her and throwing her body down out the window from the tenth storey, his enquiry by the police and his confrontation with Deborah’s powerful father are all presented from the narrator, Rojack’s point of view. Consequently, his narrative voice justifies his murder of his wife as an act of defence from her murderous attack, when he confesses: “I was afraid of her. She was not incapable of murdering me” (33). He justifies his murder saying that his contacts with her made him evil and murderous (43) and that his murder is an act of both destruction of evil and liberating himself from her devilish hold. Gutman, endorsing this view, comments that Rojack murders Deborah, “ostensibly, as an act of liberation” (106).
Mailer has Rojack use imagery, metaphor and symbols abundantly either to support or to justify Rojack's murder of Deborah. Rojack repeatedly uses beast imagery to describe the smell and behaviour of Deborah in order to present his murder more reasonable and more justifiable. He refers to Deborah as a "Carnivore in a Zoo" (30), a "wild boar in full rut" (34), "a caged animal" (41), "a snake guarding the cave which opened to the treasure" (41), "a great bitch", and "a lioness" (16). He adds, "Deborah had gotten her hooks into me, eight years ago..." (16-17).

Kaufmann, commenting on the use of animal imagery in the novel, says that it is "a gallery of human transformed into beasts, a kind of modern beast-epic" (42) and that the "characters, as metamorphosized by Rojack, resemble a medieval bestiary" (41). Besides the animal imagery, Rojack uses the image of 'devil' to refer to her. He calls her 'the Devil's daughter,' and his marriage to her "a devil's contract" (18). Shago Martin, endorsing this view tells Rojack that in insulting Deborah he is "spitting in the face of the Devil" (189).

Rojack uses the metaphors of good and evil throughout the novel and substantiates Deborah's evil nature implying the justification of his murder. Besides these images, Mailer, in justifying the murder, has Rojack use the imagery of cardinal's holy service with reference to his murder of Deborah. In this regard Hardwick rightly observes: "Rojack
puts his shirt after the murder ‘with the devotion of a cardinal fixing his hat”’ (149).

As in Native Son, the murder scene in An American Dream can be viewed from the aesthetic point of view. The murder of Deborah occurs accidentally and unexpectedly as the outcome of the quarrel between Rojack and his disloyal and estranged wife, Deborah, when he visits her. When she attempts to bump against his stomach with her head, he strangles her. The whole murder scene is viewed through the artistic eyes of the scholarly murderer, Rojack, who compares the act of strangling Deborah to the act of opening the door of heaven:

...I felt my arm tightening about her neck. My eyes were closed. I had the mental image I was pushing with my shoulder against an enormous door which would give inch by inch to the effort...I released the pressure on her throat, and the door I had been opening began to close. But I had had a view of what was on the other side of the door, and heaven was there, some quiver of jewelled cities shining in the glow of a tropical dusk... . (38)

Also Rojack aesthetically compares the act of murder to sexual intercourse and therefore Gutman says that “the most explicit connection between sex and murder occurs when Rojack kills his wife” (108). Gutman further observes, “Rojack is in an orgy of violence first
fantasizing a rare heaven within the female body, then forcing his way in, driving, impelled by spasms; pressure and desire build up as he imagines himself ejaculating in an unprotected woman” (108).

Like Wright’s Native Son, Mailer’s An American Dream also has strong autobiographical elements. The novelist often identifies himself with his protagonist, Richards Rojack, whom he uses as his mouthpiece in expressing his concepts of love, sex and ethics. Gutman, making a comparison between the novelist and his protagonist, says that “in many ways, Mailer and Rojack are similar” (121). Both are intellectual celebrities, both share similar beliefs about the nature of human psyche, “both attack their wives and both must thereafter navigate their way through that fearful territory where psychosis makes its home” (121). Analysing the autobiographical elements in the novel, Solotaroff also makes an exhaustive comparison between the lives of the novelist and his protagonist: Both were Harvard graduates; both were television celebrities; and both had suicidal temptation (130-34). An analysis of the novel makes it explicit that Mailer identifies himself with his protagonist, Richards Rojack in his work An American Dream. Whatever Rojack speaks justifying his murder of Deborah can rightly be taken as the words of the novelist. Thus Mailer, through his use of imagery, symbols and metaphors, justifies Rojack’s murder of Deborah.
Like *Native Son* and *An American Dream*, John Cheever's *Falconer* treats the theme of the accidental murder of its protagonist, Richards Rojack, and its consequences. However *Falconer* differs from these novels in its structure, style and treatment of the murder theme. As a work of art, *Falconer* is in no way affected by its treatment either of fratricide or of the familial ideology of its protagonist; instead, the treatment of such aspects only elevates the aesthetic value of a work of art.

As a work of art *Falconer* has a well-structured plot, photographic characterization and lyrical language. The novel begins with Ezekiel Farragut, a forty-eight-year old professor’s arrival at the prison, ‘Falconer’ and ends with his miraculous escape from his prison-life. Farragut’s drug-addiction, his brother Eben’s cruelty, his father’s irresponsibility, his mother’s lovelessness, his wife’s disloyalty, his murder of his brother, and all other details about his life are presented as flashbacks by Farragut in prison. Gardner comments that the novel, structurally is “a set of Browningesque monologues by prisoners, guards, and passing strangers, along with a few dialogues, some funny ... some chilling” (81). Despite his criticism of the “obscene and profane language” of the novel, Waldeland praises the “passages of lyrical-celebration—of nature, sunlight, and remembered love—mostly in Farragut’s recollections or in letters” (131). Cheever commends the characterization in the novel; he depicts the characters of the prisoners like Chicken Number Two, Jody,
Cuckold and others with a few descriptive passages. For instance, he effectively portrays the character of Chicken Number Two in a few lines:

Chicken Number Two talked about his brilliant career as a jewel thief in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles ... there was in his talk a refrain. When he talked about his career he did not detail his successes. He spoke mostly about his charm. "The reason I was so great was my charm. I was very charming. Everybody knew I had class. And willingness, I had willingness. I give the impression of a very willing person. Anybody asks me to get anything, I give them the impression that I'll try. Get me the Niagara Falls, they say. Get me the Empire State Building. Yes sir, I always say, yes sir, I'll try. I got class." (32)

Thus, despite its treatment of the so-called profane theme of fratricide, Falconer is successful as a work of art.

Falconer is narrated from the point of view of its protagonist, Professor Ezekiel Farragut. So glimpses of Farragut's past are presented through his long monologues spoken to one or the other of his fellow-prisoners in Falconer. Only from his long narrative monologues do we come to know everything about him—his unhappy married life with his cruel wife, Marcia; his irresponsible father's dislike for him; his mechanical mother's lack of love for him; his treacherous brother, Eben's
murderous attempts to kill him; his interest in the welfare of Eben’s family that results in his attack of Eben; his trial and his imprisonment in Falconer; his sufferings in the prison with his fellow prisoners; his homosexual relationship with a young prisoner Jody who escapes from the prison; his care for Chicken Number Two when he falls ill; and finally, his escape from the prison through the death sack. Gardner, commenting on the point of view, says that “we get only glimpses” of the novel “mostly from Farragut’s point of view” (83).

Cheever’s narrative voice justifies Farragut’s murder of Eben by presenting the latter as a murderous villain who attempted to dispose of Farragut thrice; it implies its support for Farragut by calling Eben’s wife “a liar”: “Then Farragut struck his brother with a fire iron. The widow testified that Farragut had struck his brother eighteen to twenty times, but she was a liar…” (198). Cheever’s narrative voice, thus, by supporting and justifying Farragut’s act of murder, makes us sympathize with the murderer, rather than with the victim.

Cheever uses the images like the prison, bird, a man sharing his crusts with birds, and hawks or falcons throughout the novel, supporting his protagonist, Farragut’s point of view. The name of the prison, ‘Falconer’, suggests a particularly oppressive species of bird that humans imprison and then train to destroy others of its kind at great distances. The falconer image thus shows the natural destructive impulse of the bird and
justifies Farragut's final act of escape from the place. Though the recurring bird-image shows Farragut's yearning for freedom of movement, it does not justify his act of murder or his act of escape.

As in An American Dream, the murder scene in Falconer is also presented artistically, without creating any sense of horror or panic. Farragut narrates the murder scene to his friends in the prison and later, Cheever supplements it succinctly enhancing the aesthetic appeal of the novel.

Falconer is presented from the point of view of its protagonist, Farragut, and it has rich autobiographical overtones. Farragut's narrative voice can be treated as the voice of the novelist himself. Waldeland, drawing a parallel between the lives of Cheever and Farragut, says that Farragut's life echoes the life of Cheever (128). They have many things in common—both of them are drug addicts, both of them are hospitalised, both of them are confined to a recovery centre and both of them visit prison. While Farragut enters Falconer as a convict, Cheever visited the prison, Sing Sing to teach novel writing to the prisoners. Commenting on the autobiographical elements in the novel, Meanor says: "Cheever has combined his two most painful autobiographical crises into the novel's climactic scene" (171). Like Farragut's brother Eben, Cheever's elder brother Fred was also cruel; similarly, Farragut's father inviting the abortionist to dinner is only a literary presentation of the fact that
Cheever’s father invited an abortionist for a dinner to get him aborted in his mother’s womb. The autobiographical elements in the novel, thus, make Cheever not only identify himself with the protagonist, Farragut, but also justify his act of murder. Since Cheever himself, like Farragut, experienced the agony of fraternal ingratitude, his authorial voice supports and justifies his protagonist, Farragut’s act of murder. Here the protagonist’s point of view merges with that of its creator. Real life experiences are fictionalised and this treatment adds an aesthetic dimension to the theme of murder.

Like the other novels, Valerie Miner’s *Murder in the English Department* also treats the theme of murder and ideology, and still is a good read on account of its narrative aesthetics. The treatment of the theme of a professor’s attempt to molest his female student and the student’s murder of her professor in her attempt to protect herself from being raped may appear to be ethically profane. But examined from the aesthetic point of view, *Murder in the English Department*, despite its treatment of such themes as attempted rape and murder, is successful as a work of art.

The novel is actually an expression of its protagonist, Nan Weaver’s feminist ideology and her protest against the sexists and male chauvinists like professor Angus Murchie. Considering herself as the patron and saviour of the women-students of the University of California,
Nan Weaver runs a Sexual Harassment Campaign to protect the interest of the women in the university. So, when she comes to know about Murchie's sexual advances to the research student, Marjorie Adams, and her murder of Murchie, Nan comes to her student's rescue and undergoes the ordeal of trial and imprisonment for her sake. Valerie Miner's treatment of such a feminist character as Professor Nan Weaver and her incorporation of her feminist ideology in her fiction in no way affect the literary standard of the novel. In fact, the incorporation of such an ideology in the novel elevates its aesthetic credence and draws more appreciation from the readers than it would have otherwise been, without the treatment of the ideology.

The novel has a classic theme of crime and punishment. It has a simple plot structure of Marjorie Adams, a research graduate's murder of her professor, her escape, and her final confession of her crime leading to her imprisonment and her release. Miner's delineation of characters is life-like. The characters like Professor Nan Weaver, Professor Angus Murchie, Professor Matt and the victim-turned-murderer, Marjorie Adams have verisimilitude. Miner's use of language is very flexible, precise and beautiful. She knows the art of presenting even a gruesome murder in a less gothic and more aesthetic manner and the following passage from the murder scene bears evidence to this:
Nan could still hear Murchie’s laughter and Marjorie’s softer voice. They would be leaving out for Matt’s party soon, she told herself and settled into work. She was contentedly absorbed in Lessing’s landscapes... She tried to concentrate. But the voice of Marjorie Adams was no longer dulcet.

‘No, no,’ the young woman was almost shouting. It was Marjorie Adams, wasn’t it? The voice sounded strained. Hard to place.

Nan got up and walked over to her wall. She stood stiffly, as if the tension might help her hear. Their voices were quieter now....

‘You bastard. You dirty bastard,’ she heard distinctly.

Shocked at the language—so unlike Marjorie—She knew something terrible was happening. Nan imagined her being attacked. Marjorie writhing on the blue Persian rug, Murchie on top of her, like an elephant mauling a flamingo... By the time she reached Murchie’s door, all was silent. (43)

The actual act of murder is not described in detail as it is described in the other murder mysteries. The reader can see only the stabbed Murchie struggling for life, Nan’s attempts to save his life and his pathetic death. Hence, Valerie Miner has Nan Weaver narrate the murder scene in a less awesome and more aesthetic manner.
The whole novel is presented in third person narrative and the reader views every action only from the point of view of its protagonist, Professor Nan Weaver. Her feminist point of view, therefore, strongly supports Marjorie's murder of Murchie. For instance, when she learns that Marjorie has murdered Murchie, she decides to save her at any cost; so, she wipes off the blood-stained letter opener and packs up Marjorie's Cashmere scarf in order to efface evidences. Besides endorsing Marjorie's act, Nan justifies her murder of Murchie as an act of self-defence. Thus Nan's concealment of the fact about the murder and her resolution to bear the cross for Marjorie's sake obviously show that from her point of view the murder is justified.

Nan uses several derogatory images to refer to Murchie's evil nature and notoriety implying her justification of the murder. She says that Murchie has been a "constant irritant," "a corrosive termite," "an annoying fly" and an "unknown tumor" (47) and that his death gives her a "curious relief" (47). Moreover, the narrative voice of the novelist justifies the murder, pointing out to Murchie's recent sexual advances to his female students: "In recent years he had grown more vitriolic in putting down his female colleagues and more reckless in attempting to bed down his female students" (25).

The novel is rich in its autobiographical elements. Both the novelist, Valerie Miner and her protagonist, Nan Weaver have many
similarities in their life and profession. Both of them are professors in universities; both of them love and are loved by their students; and both are feminists—Nan has her Sexual Harassment Campaign and Valerie Miner has her Feminist writings. Since Miner shares most of the experiences of her protagonist, Nan Weaver, she identifies herself with Nan Weaver, and uses her as her mouthpiece in expressing her feminist views. Hence, Nan's justification of Murchie's murder can be taken as the justification of the novelist, Valerie Miner herself. Miner's narrative, language, use of imagery and choice of words through her spokeswoman Nan Weaver, bear evidence to her justification of whatever is going on in the novel. First hand experience has thus lent credibility to the narrative style.

While *Native Son*, *An American Dream*, *Falconer* and *Murder in the English Department* treat the unpredmetted murders of their protagonists, *An American Tragedy*, *Lolita* and *The President's Daughter* treat the premeditated and pre-planned murders of their protagonists. Just as the treatment of the accidental and unpredmetted murders does not affect the literary and aesthetic value of the novels as discussed above, the treatment of premeditated and well-schemed murders of the protagonists also does not afflict the literary credence of the novels.

Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* is a classic example of a novel being great and successful despite its treatment of the protagonist's
materialistic ideology and premeditated murder. Through the story of crime and punishment of Clyde Griffiths, Dreiser exposes the evils of American Materialism, which has produced ambitious and immoral youth like Clyde. Pizer, commenting on An American Tragedy says that Dreiser's "purpose in writing the novel had not been to exploit the fictional possibilities of a particular sensational crime but rather to express an archetypal American Dilemma" (203). Thus the treatment of the crime-story of Clyde in the novel has a social purpose—to highlight the evils of American materialism.

In fact, the handling of such a materialistic ideology in a satirical manner adds more value to the novel. According to Hussman, Jr., the novel "represents an artistic achievement of the most impressive dimensions" (126). Speaking about the novelist's social concern, Hussman adds: "In the crime that society calls murder, he [Dreiser] found the irreducible equation with which to work through the problem of the self versus society" (127). The incorporation of murder and ideology in literature exposes the social evils that are responsible for criminal activities and in a sense serves as a deterrent to criminality in public life.

As a work of art An American Tragedy is very successful, and so Frohock calls it a "literary monument" (31). The novel has a classical plot structure dividing itself into three books. Each book has a different setting and narrates up to a particular point of time in Clyde Griffith's life; Book
One tells about Clyde’s childhood poverty, his job as a bellhop in a luxurious hotel, his car accident and his flight to New York; Book Two presents his love affair with Roberta Alden, his ambition to marry a wealthy and beautiful Sondra Finchley, his plans to get rid of Roberta and his drowning her in the deep waters of Big Bittern; Book Three dramatizes in three segments, his capture, trial and execution. All the three books are also segments of the underlying ironic theme and form.

According to Pizer, “Dreiser uses the technique of indirect discourse in *An American Tragedy*” (285). Despite complaining that the novel has a faulty language and a mediocre style (258-59), Shafer appreciates the artistry of the novelist saying that “the novel also has excellences which its author had not previously achieved, and which are seldom to be found save in works of a serious and mature artistry” (265). The novel marks a really notable advance in technique. It has a simple plot structure, lucid language and distinctive characterization that are typical Dreiserian.

As in the case of *Native Son, An American Dream* and *Falconer*, *An American Tragedy* is also presented from the point of view of its protagonist. Though the novel has “conventional” third-person biographical form in its narration, every incident in the novel is viewed only through Clyde’s eyes. Beginning from the first scene in which he suffers with his poor street preaching parents, till the last scene, where he faces the electric chair, every episode is presented only from Clyde’s point
of view. The reader, therefore, identifies himself with Clyde and shares the vicissitudes of his life. This is achieved through the novelist's narrative skill.

Dreiser, despite employing Clyde's point of view, "uses the technique of indirect discourse" in the novel (Pizer 285). He uses philosophical asides and comments directly on his character's inadequacies. He says that Clyde, lacks "mental clarity and inner directing application" (174), has an "immature and really psychically unilluminated mind" (194) and is "naturally selfish" (304). So Dreiser comments on the character of Clyde, highlighting his moral weakness. At times there is a clash between the narrative voice of Dreiser and the voice of Clyde. However, Clyde's point of view in the novel justifies his murder of Roberta as an act of sacrificing his love for the sake of his American Dream ideology.

The novel employs a number of symbols and metaphors in justifying Clyde's act of murder. Clyde finds in Sondra a "clear path" and a "marvellous future" (578) and in the poor Roberta Alden "an obstacle to wealth and return to poverty" (Pizer 233). So, he wants to remove the impediment by getting rid of Roberta. To justify his act of murder on his way to marrying the wealthy Sondra Finchley, Clyde cites the examples of poor boys like him marrying rich girls like Sondra to become wealthy. So, Dreiser asks, "what harm, he now asked himself, was there in a poor
youth like himself aspiring to such heights? Other youths as poor as himself had married girls as rich as Sondra” (344). Thus these lines endorse Clyde’s justification of his murder of Roberta.

Dreiser’s narrative voice together with Clyde’s point of view presents the murder in an aesthetic manner. Though the scene of the boat capsizing and Roberta’s drowning are presented in a weird manner with the unearthly cry of the “weir weir bird” in the background, it is perhaps one of the best murder scenes in the whole of the American literature. The scene evokes Aristotelian “pity and terror” in the minds of the readers and purges their emotions.

In An American Tragedy, Dreiser combines both the biographical and the autobiographical elements. In Clyde Griffith’s story, Dreiser adopts the Chestern Gillette case of 1906. Gillete, a poor youth had drowned his pregnant girlfriend, Grace Brown, to clear his path to acceptance in his wealthy uncle’s social circle and to make possible his bid to win Harriet Benedict, the daughter of a society lawyer (Hussman, Jr. 127). Commenting on the autobiographical elements in the novel, Hussman says that Dreiser “drew heavily from his own early experiences” (127). Since the novel has strong autobiographical elements in it, Dreiser, to some extent, identifies himself with his protagonist, Clyde Griffiths, and as a result, at times, his narrative voice is in total harmony with that of the point of view. But the moralist in Dreiser does
not totally approve of everything that Clyde Griffith does. For instance, he disapproves of some of Clyde's cruel acts like his attempt to abort the child in Roberta's womb and desert her and his drowning her in the lake. The very purpose of Dreiser's using Clyde's story is to expose the vanity and futility of the American materialism, which reduces man to the level of animals, ignoring the real values of life, like love, mercy, loyalty, truthfulness, humility and simplicity.

While the other novels of the present study treat the theme of murder and still remain successful as works of art, Nabokov's Lolita treats the theme of love tinged with sexual perversion, and murder, and still has the ingredients to make it artistically palpable. Lolita narrates the story of passionate love of a sexual pervert, Humbert Humbert, for a thirteen-year-old nymphet, Lolita, and his murder of a more perverted Clare Quilty for the sake of love. Despite its treatment of a middle-aged-man's perverted love for a thirteen-year-old girl, and murder, Lolita is an excellent work of art. The treatment of an erotic love-story and murder in the novel in no way deprecate its literary value. Amis gives his testimony on the greatness of Lolita when he says: "Few books published in this country since the King James Bible can have set up more eager expectation than 'Lolita'" (Amis 102). It is, therefore, evident that the treatment of sexual perversion and murder in Lolita, only adds to its aesthetic value. It reveals through the character of Humbert that abnormal carnal pleasure is not a
healthy sign of a normal man but at the same time, such abnormality is replaced with true love.

Similarly, the novelist’s treatment of the protagonist, Humbert Humbert’s ‘love ideology’ in the novel does not depreciate its literary value. Just as the treatment of the theme of love in Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet and Antony and Cleopatra enhances their literary value, the handling of Humbert’s love ideology in Lolita heightens its aesthetic standard. Just as the incorporation of love-ideology in a literary work does not affect its literary values, the literary work that treats love-ideology in it does not affect the philosophical values of ideology. That is, both ideology and literature elevate the values of each other when treated together.

As a literary work of art, Lolita is highly successful. According to Walter Allen, the novel is “told with sparkling brilliance” (107). It is a memoir narrated by its protagonist, Humbert Humbert, explaining his love for Lolita and justifying his murder of Quilty. It has a simple plot of Humbert’s perverted but true love for the nymphet, Lolita, her abduction by Clare Quilty and his revenge on Quilty. It has such a flawless and innovative style that Amis comments: “Style, a personal style, a distinguished style, usually turns out in practice to mean his idiosyncratic noise-level in the writing, with plenty of rumble and vow from imagery, syntax and diction: Donne, Pater, Virginia Woolf” (104) The
characterization is so vivid and photographic that one can see not only the outside but also the inside of the characters. The following passage in which Humbert describes Lolita in his diary bears testimony to Nabokov’s skill in character delineation:

From vantage point (bathroom window) saw Dolores [Lolita] taking things off a clothes line in the applegreen light behind the house. Strolled out. She wore a plaid shirt, blue jeans and sneakers. Every movement she made in the dappled sun plucked at the most secret and sensitive chord of my abject body... Marvellous skin—oh, marvellous: tender and tanned, not the least blemish...God, what agony, that silky shimmer above her temple grading in to birght brown hair. And the little bone twitching at the side of her dust-powdered ankle. “The McCoo girl? Ginny McCoo? Oh, she’s a fright. And mean. And lame. Nearly died of polio.” Ping. The glistening tracery of down on her forearm.... (44-45)

This photographic portrayal of Lolita makes Amis comment thus: “The only success of the book is the portrait of Lolita herself. I have rarely seen the external ambience of a character so marvellously realized, and yet there is seldom more than the necessary undertone of sensuality...” (106). The novel also combines elements like “pun, allusion, neologism, alliteration, cynghanedd, apostrophe, parenthesis,”
and "rhetorical question" (Amis 104). The narrative technique, characterisation, plot and the lucid language of Lolita are so outstanding that they compensate its obscenity of theme.

Humbert’s purpose in writing a memoir on Lolita "is to explain and perhaps justify his own criminal acts" (Maddox, Necrophilia in Lolita 362). Since the entire novel is narrated from Humbert’s point of view, with the primary purpose of justifying his own criminal sexual conduct with Lolita and his murder of Clare Quilty, the point of view justifies each of Humbert’s acts. “He is evidently trying the best he can to ‘explain’ himself to his judges and to prove that he is not really guilty of any crime” (167). There are a number of overt statements in the novel to show Humbert’s justification of his murder. For instance, he says: “I insist upon proving that I am not, and never was, and never could be, a brutal scoundrel” (138). Humbert, further, resorts to self-justification for his perverted love for the thirteen-year-old Lolita, referring to historical facts and classical writers:

Marriage and cohabitation before the age of puberty are still not uncommon in certain East Indian provinces. Lepcha old men of eighty copulate with girls of eight, and nobody minds. After all Dante fell madly in love with his Beatrice when she was nine... And when Petrarch fell madly in love with his Laureen, she was a fair-haired nymphet of twelve... . (21-22)
Thus, Humbert’s line of reasoning justifies his love for Lolita which is neither a perversion nor a crime but natural, for he says, “I have but followed nature” (142).

Humbert justifies his murder of Clare Quilty as an act of revenge for having spoiled his happy love life with Lolita. While killing Quilty, Humbert tells him the reason for killing him: he ‘cheated’ Humbert. Besides Humbert’s justification, the novelist’s narrative voice also justifies the murder through the voice of Quilty’s guests, who, on learning about Quilty’s death, praise Humbert for having killed him. One of them tells Humbert “Good for you” (306) and another says: “somebody ought to have done it long ago” (306). Nabokov’s narrative voice, along with Humbert’s point of view justifies Humbert’s acts of sexual perversion and murder.

Humbert’s murder of Clare Quilty is so aesthetically presented that the scene evokes our laughter instead of fear or horror. When Humbert finds Quilty sitting in his bar-adorned kitchen of his castle, the drunken Quilty mistakes him first, for a man from the telephone company and then for a foreign literary agent. Humbert reveals the fact that he has come to kill him for having kidnapped his beloved Lolita. He casually explains to Quilty the reason for murdering him, in a long poem, and then fills Quilty’s body with bullets. The manner in which Humbert reads his poem at the moment of murder, the way he chases Quilty from room to room
and finally, the way he shoots him after chess-like sparring, provide the readers mirthful laughter and aesthetic pleasure. All this collectively present a comic cameo.

*Lolita* has very few elements of autobiography. In its lack of any strong autobiographical elements, it differs from the other novels of our study. Though Humbert’s point of view and his narrative voice are, to some extent, those of Nabokov’s, the novelist does not identify himself with his protagonist totally. Nabokov has some similarities with Humbert—both are European émigrés in the United States, both are on the move without settling in any particular place and both are writers. But Nabokov does not share any of Humbert’s experiences as a sexual pervert and a murderer.

Nabokov does not identify himself with his creation, Humbert; but he is very sympathetic towards Humbert and often approves of the justifications of the narrative voice. Despite Humbert’s sexual perversion and his murder of Quilty, Nabokov sympathises with Humbert’s pathetic condition and shows that Humbert is better than the pornographer, Clare Quilty, in sacrificing his life for the sake of his love for Lolita. Fowler, commenting on the novelist’s sympathetic treatment of Humbert, says that Nabokov’s aim in the novel is “to give his narrator complete moral purgation” (153). Fowler believes that Humbert’s acts of sexual
perversion and murder purify his soul by taking him through the purgatorio of imprisonment, preparing him for the paradiso.

Jack Higgins's The President's Daughter narrates the story of Judas, a Jewish terrorist leader's acts of murder and kidnap in his attempt to found a threat-free Jewish nation, Israel. Judas wants to protect his race from the constant threat of the Muslim countries by getting the Nemesis signed by the President of America. In his attempt to get it signed, he kidnaps the President's daughter, Marie de Brissac and uses her as a bargaining counter. Though he does not kill Marie, he kills a number of other people like the Muslim terrorists, for the sake of his Jewish Nation. Despite its treatment of such themes as kidnap and murder, the novel is successful both as a literary work of art and as a popular novel. Similarly, its treatment of Judas's racialist ideology does not belittle its aesthetic luminosity. In fact, the incorporation of such a philosophical construct as the racial ideology in a literary work, only enhances its aesthetic value.

The President's Daughter has a well-structured plot, life-like characters, lucid dialogue and gripping narrative. It treats the simple story of kidnap and rescue, presenting the Muslim terrorists' victimization of the Jews, and the Jews' attempts to liberate their nation. The novel is a sizzling thriller that keeps the pages flying.

The President's Daughter differs from the other novels of our study in its point of view. In the other select novels, the protagonists commit
murders, and present the narrative from their points of view; whereas, in
The President’s Daughter, the anti-hero, Judas, commits the murders and
the point of view of the novel is against him. The novel is presented in
third person narrative and the reader views every action from the point of
view of its protagonist, Jake Cazalet, who is against the unlawful and
atrocious acts of Judas. Hence, the point of view neither approves of, nor
justifies Judas’s acts of murder. Since Cazalet, the war-hero and President
of America, himself becomes a victim of Judas’s kidnap drama, he seeks
the help of the British operative, Sean Dillon, and the FBI agent, Blake
Johnson, to destroy Judas. So his point of view is out and out against
Judas. Each of Cazalet’s attempts to rescue his daughter bears evidence to
the point of view’s disapproval and condemnation of Judas’s violent acts.

Even the narrative voice of Jack Higgins, which often comments on
the events of the novel, nowhere justifies Judas’s ideological murders in
the novel. The very tone in which the novelist’s narrative voice reports
Judas’s murder of the Muslim terrorist, Hakim and his wives bears strong
evidence to its disapproval of Judas’s murders. Hence, Higgins has Sean
Dillon speak for him when he reports Judas’s murder of Hakim: “They not
only stiffed Hakim and his two goons, they also killed the caretaker and
his wife and the daughter” (77). The novel evidences many such passages
reflecting the narrative voice’s disapproval of Judas’s violent acts.
Though Judas commits seven murders in the course of the novel, most of the murders are merely reported and not described in detail. The only murder that is directly presented in the novel is that of Judas’s murder of the Jailor of the Wandsworth prison; but even this murder is not presented in detail. Judas’s attempted murder of Sean Dillon and Marie de Brissac are presented artistically, though with a streak of gothic touch. The novel, despite its treatment of a series of murders, remains unaffected in its aesthetic excellence.

The President’s Daughter differs from the other novels of our study and strikes semblance to Lolita in not having any strong autobiographical element in it. It is a fictional work based on some of the historical facts like, the Jewish victimization by the Muslim countries like Iran, Iraq and Syria, the Muslim terrorists’ attack of the Jews, and the Jews’ struggle for survival in these oppressive countries. Higgins makes use of some of the historical events like the Vietnam War of 1967 and the Yom Kippur War of 1973 in the novel and presents both his protagonist, Jack Cazalet, the President of America and the anti-hero, Judas, as Colonels who served in both these wars.

In addition to examining the aesthetic presentation of murder in the select novels, the present chapter attempted to prove after detailed analysis that the treatment of murder or ideology in a literary work does not affect the literary credence of the work of art; instead it enhances its
aesthetic value. After examining the narrative point of view of the novels under study, the chapter has shown that the narrative voices of most of these novels approve and a few of them do not approve of the act of murder of their murderer-protagonists. Besides analysing the novelists' use of imagery justifying or condemning the murderer-protagonists acts, the chapter has probed into the novelists' employment of biographical or autobiographical elements in the novels to show that literature is only a reflection of life. This chapter has also made a study of the imagery, language, narrative style and characterization in these novels to demonstrate their contribution in enhancing the aesthetic experience of the reader.