Conclusion

Fredric Jameson’s theory of the political unconscious is an eclectic enterprise. Jameson has admittedly synthesized many contemporary critical strands associated with poststructuralism and psychoanalysis. Jameson appreciates many manifestations of the postmodern, but nevertheless argues that it has to be understood as a cultural phenomenon emerging out of late capitalism.

A significant aspect of Jameson’s work is the political adaptation of the Freudian concept of the individual unconscious. Freud’s central importance for Jameson derives from his insight that interpretation is indispensable in any situation where a latent meaning is hidden behind what is open or expressed or manifest.

The psychoanalytical ramifications at different stages in the history of civilizations cannot be exaggerated. Psychoanalytical contours of the social and the historical contexts can enrich the “strong” rewriting of texts as envisaged by Jameson. The America of Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller has witnessed tremendous upheavals on the social patterns,
fostering impressions in the collective psyche, which perpetuate the conflict between the individual and the collective desires.

Religious conflict is another aspect which demands investigation. Williams has derived from his mother and father an uneasy combination of the Puritan and the Cavalier, which helps to account for the thematic conflicts in much of his work. This is a very important aspect that demands serious analysis. The religious conflict in Williams is also a part of the social conflict. There are three interrelated aspects to be taken into consideration here: society, sexuality, and religion.

The preponderance of Christian symbolism even in the first play, The Glass Menagerie establishes religious conflict as an important theme for Williams. Amanda, for example, is depicted as an ogress. She calls her magazine subscribers “Christian martyrs.” She suggests that a certain church is struck by lightning because “the Episcopalians gave card parties”. Tom is a soul wandering for redemption.

In other plays of Williams also there are religious symbols. Mrs. Venable’s image of God is that of the Old Testament. Sebastian has visions of a pagan God and his death is a ritual of sacrifice to that God, who, Sebastian thinks, approves of his homosexuality. This is against the “senile
delinquent” God of western theology. The investigation of the nature of God makes Shannon, an excommunicated priest, a religious outcast in *The Night of Iguana*. Shannon has enacted the role of an ironic Christ in the play. Alma’s predicament is precipitated by the conflict between the Puritan and the Cavalier in *Summer and Smoke*.

In Arthur Miller’s play, *After the Fall*, Quentine’s struggle in his inner mind regarding a past involvement in left-wing politics, and his sense of involvement in the anti-Semitism of the Nazi concentration camps is a case in point. Further, there is an exploration into the puritan and the pagan conflict in *The Crucible* and the anti-Semitism in *Death of a Salesman*.

Another pertinent area that requires in-depth analysis in the plays of both Williams and Miller is the problem of sexual conflict. *A Streetcar Named Desire, Orpheus Descending, Suddenly Last Summer, Sweet Bird of Youth, Death of a Salesman, Crucible and A View from the Bridge* have ample scope for such investigation.

The moulding of Tennessee Williams as a playwright takes shape through associations of the work of a number of literary forebears. Matthew C. Roudane in the Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Tennessee Williams* asserts that
From Hart Crane and D. H. Lawrence he took the imagery of the repressed desires, of an inscribed sexuality that is at once visible and thinly veiled. From O’Neill he inherited the imagery of the tragic, of a sense of personal betrayal born out of characters who seem increasingly unable to communicate with self or the other . . . [Williams] often commented that he was influenced by Brecht, Sartre, Rimbaud, and Van Gogh. From Chekhov, especially, he learned the importance of setting and emblem, replicating the particular milieu of Belle Reve, New Orleans, or St. Louis while simultaneously transforming these localized settings to the level of symbol. (3)

The tortured inner selves of characters are central to the dramatic world of Williams, which take him to highly symbolic enactments on the stage. Williams’s willingness to open up the theatre to more than traditional forms of realism, the then dominant mode of theatrical expression in America, allowed him to create according to Matthew Roudane, “a lyric drama, a poetic theatre”(3). The social responsibility and commitment openly seen in Miller are never seen foregrounded in the plays of Williams.
Arthur Miller’s explorations of form have seldom taken him far from the shades of realism because of his penchant for the everyday world/society outside. It is interesting to note that from the plethora of theatrical experiments germinated in the twentieth century – expressionism, symbolism, surrealism, the absurd, poor-theatre etc. – Miller has borrowed practically nothing. Miller is part of a tradition which descends from Ibsen through Shaw and the playwrights of the 1930s who present characters in conflict with a repressive social environment:

We see a true social reality, which includes both social relationships and absolute personal needs, enforcing a social fact – that of responsibility and consequence. This is still the method of Ibsen in the period named, and the device of climax [in All My Sons] – a concealed letter from Keller’s dead son, who had known of his father’s guilt – is again directly in Ibsen’s terms. (R. Williams 306-307)

Miller’s exploration of familial relationships juxtaposed with the social responsibility of the characters is absent in Williams. According to Neil Carson,

the typical Miller family consists of an ill-educated father, a mother with some cultural aspirations, and two sons. Sisters, grandparents and very young
children hardly ever appear nor are their problems discussed. Furthermore, the families are almost invariably lower middle class. (153)

Whereas Williams does display remarkable dexterity and depth in the portrayal of both men and women, Miller elaborately portrays only the men in the family. The female characters in the plays of Miller are not shown except in their relationships to some man. The struggle in the plays is almost invariably seen from a man’s point of view, and to a large extent women exist outside the arena of confrontations, because they are either too good – Linda, Beatrice, Kate, Elizabeth – or too bad – Abigail and the other girls, and the fiancées of Happy’s colleagues.

Williams addresses the social contradictions less directly than Miller. In the enactments of the struggles, Williams frequently goes symbolic. The familial and the individual struggles stand seemingly aloof from the social/political context. The Depression, the experiences of the War, Nazi Concentration Camps, Capitalism and McCarthyism stand in the settings of Miller. But in Williams, the plots are distanced from the social/political subtext. However, this does not mean that the utterances of Williams turn a cold shoulder to the world out there. Depression and post depression years, Southern
bigotry, greed, mendacity and homosexuality surface in his plays. Jan Balakian observes:

Camino Real (1953) is an allegory about being trapped in a fascist state, Orpheus Descending (1957), a tragic love story set in a racist, brutally materialistic, dying South, and Suddenly Last Summer (1958) is a play in which Williams depicts the destructive nature of the writer and of homosexuality. (67)

When Williams traverses through failure, frustration, decease and the death of the tortured selves of characters, Miller’s work attempts to find justification in hope. Though Miller has looked at the social evils on the face, confronted and questioned them, his plays generally affirm hope and goodness.

The dramatic apparatuses of Williams and Miller are motivated and over determined by the ideological context. The characters, the motifs, and the devices allude to and at the same time express the things forbidden by ideology. Here, however, Williams is rather less overt in the treatment than Miller.
Both Williams and Miller elaborately use the memory technique and the interplay between the past and the present. This is very effective because, it builds and reveals dramatic action that, by its very movement - by its creation, suspension and resolution of tension, its inexorable rush towards tragic confrontation - proves that the past is always present and cannot be ignored, forgotten, or denied.

The alienation, loneliness, frustration, guilt and failure of the characters are enacted by both Williams and Miller. However, Miller also raises the question of social responsibility, commitment and justice.

Lighting, music and décor/setting are used symbolically and dexterously by both Williams and Miller. Realistic modes are often elaborately used by Miller as seen in All My Sons, A Memory of Two Mondays, and A View from the Bridge. He also makes use of the elaborate symbolic effects blended with the realistic mode.

The plays of Williams and Miller have characters who are refugees of the economic system. The high individualism precipitated by the capitalist social system determines their lot by pushing them into the closures of loneliness and often making them outcasts of conventional morality. The
ideologeme of class struggle is one significant factor that overdetermines the predicament of the truncated selves.

The shift from the pre-industrial to the industrial and the new city-based living creates tension in the lives portrayed in the plays of the two playwrights. Industrialisation and urbanisation have brought about drastic changes in the social fabric. These factors inform the plays of both Williams and Miller. Bigsby observes that in an interview Miller has said:

The plays are my auto biography. I can’t write plays that don’t sum up where I am . . . . I’m in all of them. I don’t know how else to go about writing.

(Cambridge Companion to Miller 1)

This is true of Williams as well. The cultural, social and political patterns that punctuate the perspectives of Williams and Miller and the different shades in them account for the differences in patterns seen in the plays produced by them during the two decades – 1940s and 1950s – in America. Williams and Miller lived in a very momentous period in the history of America. This fact has gone into their work, and any effort to rewrite that history and recreate the “subtext” in a “strong” language is not out of place.