Chapter 1

Theatre as a Socially Symbolic Act

Aesthetic productions are symbolic acts that provide formal solutions to unresolvable social contradictions. The individual narrative, or the individual formal structure, is to be grasped as the imaginary resolution of a real contradiction in society. Aligning with Claude Levi-Strauss’s reading of the unique facial decorations of the Caduveo Indians, Jameson asserts the symbolic enactment of the social within the formal and the aesthetic. Levi-Strauss in his book, *Tristes Tropiques*, argues:

We must therefore interpret the graphic art of Caduveo women, and explain its mysterious charm as well as its apparently gratuitous form, as the fantasy production of a society seeking passionately to give symbolic expression to the institution it might have had in reality, had not interest and superstition stood in the way. (179-180)

Thus the aesthetic act presupposes ideological function as well as formal solution.

The aesthetic act invents its own context from the social, which is a semic complex of the ideologemes and modes of
production, and projects a private or collective narrative fantasy. However, during the process it undergoes a transformation to perpetuate the illusion of the dissociation between the text it has created and the social context.

The symbolic act is a symptomatic act also. It hides within it the reverberations of the modes of production and the relations of production. By means of radical historicizing and reconstructing of the text one can unearth the submerged and the repressed, and assert the relationship between ideology and the cultural text. This restructuring takes account of the disparate currents and cross currents of relations and modes of production that have precipitated the form of the symbolic act. The dynamics of production informs form. The artistic form, in turn, functions ideologically. It is a structure which results from, and is a response/resistance to, the inadequacies and preponderances in the society, its constraints, contradictions and unresolvability. The American context in the first half of the twentieth century which forms the subtext of the world of Williams and Miller has to be reconstructed to understand how far the symbolic and the symptomatic punctuate the theatre.

The American writer, in the middle of the twentieth century, has his hand full in trying to understand, describe and then make credible much of American
reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally, it is even a kind of embarrassment to one’s own meager imagination. (Roth 120)

Faced with the challenge of building a theatrical language capable of connoting the distinctive American consciousness, Williams engages himself in the formulation of a dramaturgy for his theatre. Williams published, as a preface to The Glass Menagerie, an expressionist-oriented manifesto:

When a play employs unconventional techniques, it is not, or certainly shouldn’t be, trying to escape responsibility of dealing with reality, or should be attempting to find a closer approach, a more penetrating and vivid expression of things as they are. The straight realistic play with its genuine frigidaire and authentic ice cubes, its characters that speak exactly as its audience speaks, corresponds to the academic landscape and has the same virtue of photographic likeness. Everyone should know nowadays the unimportance of the photographic in art; that truth, life or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent or suggest, in essence, only through transformation, through changing into other forms than those which were merely present
in appearance. These remarks are not meant as a preface only to this particular play. They have to do with a conception of a new plastic theatre, which must take the place of the exhausted theatre of realistic conventions if the theatre is to resume vitality as a part of our culture. (229)

Here, "plastic theatre" is proposed by Williams as an alternative to the already existing realistic modes. To see plastic theatre only as a form that works romantic, delicate, sweet impressions so as to fill the vacuum by expressing the fantasies, is to overlook its other significant aspects. Williams, in spite of all his indebtedness to masters like Stanislavsky, Brecht, Elia Kazan and Ervin Piscator, has adhered to a form that can project the semic complex of his "essence." The dramatic becomes a socially symbolic act with all its outward pretensions of having replaced the collective with a private narrative fantasy. In plays such as The Purification and The Milk Train Doesn`t Stop Here Anymore, he fuses the elements of traditional American music, dance, recitation and mime. Moreover he projects these symbolic structures against a background, borrowing components from American painting, architecture, sculpture and the cinema.
Williams uses myriad devices, literary and non-literary, in the plays. He uses music to support and highlight the sentiment; employs lighting that is at once symbolic and assertive of relationships; projects images on a screen to strengthen the overall effect of a particular scene. Roger Boxill contends that A pirate ship, a magazine cover, or the gentleman caller waving good-bye, are pictures that undermine the pathos of the play like farcical moments in Chekhov. (67-68)

The new dramatic apparatus has been motivated or over-determined by a more properly ideological motif. The characters, motifs, and devices - all allude to and at the same time repress the things forbidden by ideology. Within what is repressed by ideology, Williams uncovers a pattern that works in three stages - the first is the introduction of the protagonist, followed by the second stage of confrontation with the value system in which the protagonist fails on account of many forces and institutions; and the third and final stage seals the fate of the protagonist. This basic pattern also is symptomatic of social causality, and the devices in the plastic theatre possess symbolic levels which enact and unveil the pattern.

It is in his introduction to The Glass Menagerie that Williams elaborates the details of this form. Like Brecht, he
employs a screen as the symbol of consciousness. His use of the screen for the projection of “memory” differs, however, from the Brechtian employment of the same device for the formulation of political and social ideographs.

Each scene contains a particular point (or several), which is structurally the most important. In an episodic play, such as this, the basic structure or narrative line may be obscured from the audience; the effect may seem fragmentary rather than architectural. . . . The legend or image upon the screen will strengthen the effect of what is merely illusion in the writing and allow the primary point to be made more simply and lightly than if the entire responsibility were on the spoken lines. Aside from this structural value, I think the screen will have a definite emotional appeal, less definable but just as important. (230)

Apart from these, Williams also manipulates music and lighting.

Another extra-literary accent in this play is provided by the use of music. A single recurring tune, “The Glass Menagerie,” is used to give emotional emphasis to suitable passages. This tune is like circus music,
not when you are in the ground or in the immediate vicinity of the parade, but when you are at some distance and very likely thinking of something else. It seems under those circumstances to continue almost interminably and it weaves in and out of your preoccupied consciousness; then it is the lightest, most delicate music in the world and perhaps the saddest. . . . Between each episode it returns as reference to the emotions, nostalgia, which is the first condition of the play. It is principally LAURA’s music and therefore comes out most clearly when the play focuses upon her and lovely fragility of glass which is her image.

The Lighting

The lighting of the play is not realistic. In keeping with the atmosphere of memory, the stage is dim. Shafts of light are focused on selected areas or actors, sometimes in contradistinction to what is the apparent centre. For instance, in the quarrel scene between TOM and AMANDA, in which LAURA has no active part, the clearest pool of light is on her figure. (230-231)

There are frequent projections of images and titles, which support particular moods and scenes. For instance, in the fourth
scene which barely runs to seven pages in print, different images are projected on the screen seven times, and “legends” appear twice.

*A Streetcar Named Desire* has the “varsouviana” music to accompany Blanche’s loneliness and sorrow. It also echoes the guilt she bears for the suicide of her husband. The music of the “blue piano” frequently creeps in. The hot trumpet and drums accompany Stanley’s assertive moments. Lurid reflections appear on the walls around Blanche in Scene X when Stanley tries to rape her. The shadows are of a grotesque and menacing form. However in the last scene, the “Varsouviana” accompanies the lurid reflections that appear on the walls with odd, sinuous shapes. The “Varsouviana,” weirdly distorted, is accompanied by the cries and noises of the jungle when the doctor comes to take her to the asylum. The deafening noise of streetcars renders an adequate power to the world of Stanley.

The set of *Orpheus Descending* represents a non-realistic dry-goods store and part of a confectionery, which is “shadowy” and “poetic” as are the inner dimensions of the play. The mandolin plays a vital role in the Lady’s life. Her sweet days in the past have the accompaniment of mandolin. The primitive music or percussion evokes the primitive – threatening and shocking to the modern – as NEGRO moves on the stage.
Val’s wild and fantastic image harmonized with purity and beauty gets the accompaniment of “Heavenly Grass.” The song introduces Val and appears and disappears with him. The guitar, to Val, is his life’s companion and he sings the song softly and sweetly when he plays on the guitar. The “Lady’s Love Song” is played on guitar whenever Val and the Lady are in a romantic mood. Towards the end, as Val is threatened with lynching, the music played is “Dog Howl Blues.”

Arthur Miller’s plays seem to deal overtly with the ideological patterns, and hence they have been classified as “social” or “political.” Compared to the works of Williams, Miller’s works, especially All My Sons and Death of a Salesman are politically eloquent. The other three plays, namely, The Crucible, A Memory of Two Mondays and A View from the Bridge are less politically overt, and hence tend to be “symbolic.” Miller’s words in the introduction to the collection, Miller Plays: One, point to this aspect:

The first two plays in this book were written and performed with the intention of answering as many of the common questions as possible. The Crucible, A Memory of Two Mondays, and A View from the Bridge were not so designed and to this extent they are a departure from realism. (5)
All my Sons and Death of a Salesman build up resistance to the repression by ideology. The formal strategy employed is specified by Miller:

The play begins in an atmosphere of undisturbed normality . . . it was designed to be slow. It was made so that even boredom might threaten, so that when the first intimation of the crime is dropped a genuine horror might begin to move into the heart of the audience, a horror born of the contrast between the placidity of the civilization on view and the threat to it that a rage of conscience could create. (18)

However, the repression by ideology forces up patterns which soften the tirade against society. Eleanor Clark’s comment is significant in this regard:

Immediately after every crack the playwright withdraws behind an air of pseudo universality, and hurries to present some cruelty or misfortune due either to Willy’s own weakness, as when he refuses his friend’s offer of a job after he has been fired. (qtd. in Welland 39)

In this context it is also pertinent to consider that Miller is a socially conscious writer. The dramatic forms in All My Sons
and *Death of a Salesman* manifest an obvious critique of the social environment.

For one thing, where no doubt exists in the hearts of the people, a play cannot create doubt; where no desire to believe exists, a play cannot create a belief. . . . These plays in one sense, are my responses to what was “in the air,” they are one man’s way of saying to his fellowmen. *(Miller Plays: One 11)*

This is the pretext for the texts. The socially symbolic acts become formal solutions which are shared by the social consciousness.

Much has been made of the rather “clinical” nature of Miller’s work. Neil Carson’s words cast light on this aspect:

The plays are full of references to judges, courts, lawyers, briefs, and the format of many dramas resembles that of a trial or a court of enquiry. This often seems to reflect a judicial view of life on the part of the author, a view that not only tends to see all issues in terms of right and wrong, guilt or innocence, but also assumes that it is easy to see the difference between the two. *(121)*
The trial mode is highly significant, and this is brought into the domestic fold. The relationship between the individual and the society, the domestic and the social, the private and the public are examined, analysed and redefined. All the stages of the trial are used: the prosecution, the enquiry, the witness, the evidence, and the conviction.

The trial mode enacted in All My Sons is in fact a re-enactment of an earlier trial conducted in a court of law which is a social institution. Joe Keller gets acquitted in that trial, though he has a role in the crime. The social aspect of his crime and acquittal is a contradiction which takes a formal re-enactment in the trial in the domestic fold. George is the prosecutor, Ann is the witness, the letter from Larry is the evidence, and Chris conducts the enquiry and does the cross examination. The last part of the trial has immense semantic value as Keller’s casuistry loses ground, ultimately leading to his acceptance of his social and moral responsibility, “Sure, he was my son. I think to him they were all my sons. And I guess they were, I guess they were.” (126)

The enactment of the social within the formal gets a different treatment in Death of a Salesman. Miller’s words in his introduction to the play are illuminating:
It came from structural images. The play’s eye was to revolve from within Willy’s head, sweeping endlessly in all directions like a light on the sea, and nothing that formed in the distant mist was to be left uninvestigated . . . . There were two undulating lines in mind, one above the other, the past webbed to the present moving on together in him and sometimes openly joined and once, finally, collecting in the showdown which defined in his eyes at least. (30)

The basis of the play is a series of events that happen to sixty-year old Willy Loman in the space of a few hours. This is interwoven with events of the past or fantasies outside time which sometimes overlap with the present. In the theatre, the different places and times inside Willy’s head are present on the stage together. The kitchen at the centre stage, the bedrooms, the towering buildings “that box in the goddam neighbourhood,” Willy Loman at sixty and a younger Willy with his sons are there to give a fluid presence of the past and the present. The horror in the spectacle of a man losing consciousness of his immediate surroundings is self-revealing. His conversations with unseen persons illustrate this. The fantasies and the mobility between the past and the present form the basis of the symbolic negotiations of the central character.
with the social. The concentration and the thrust are on the diverse factors that make Willy choose/reject. In the present, the individual is “walled in and walled out.” On the other hand, in the past, it is a smooth gliding flow without any walls to limit or threaten.

The play begins and ends in one basic setting, the Loman house. The surfacing of the past clarifies the present dilemma in terms of the past with its warmth, security and happiness. Musical bridges between the scenes dovetail them neatly together. Each sequence in the past moves the focus deeper into Willy’s consciousness and leads finally to the scene involving Biff’s discovery of Willy’s adultery.

The memory/dream pattern effects an evaluation of the present, with its harrowing realities against the past with its hope, happiness and expansiveness. The contrast between the past and the present, every now and then effects a covert trial pattern which ultimately exposes the guilt/crime of the society as well as the guilt/crime of Willy. The presence of all elements on the stage, including the “inside of his head” presupposes a final analysis and a final judgement, enacted in a covert trial mode.

The trial mode is elaborately used in The Crucible too to expose the rottenness of the society of the New Salem. The plot
evolves, reaches the crisis and ends through trial patterns. The interrogation at the beginning of the play by Rev. Parris and Rev. Hale, the interrogation that takes place in Proctor’s house, the trial proper in the court of Judge Danforth, and the interrogation towards the end of the play in prison are metaphors of the unscripted social act.

The interrogation at the beginning of the play breaks into the social facades, and gives a glimpse into the diseased nature of the society:

Abigail: Uncle, we did dance; let you tell them I confessed it – and I’ll be whipped if I must be. But they are speakin’ of witch craft. Betty’s not witched. . . .

Parris: Now look you child, your punishment will come in its time. But if you tricked with the spirits in the forest I must know it now, for surely my enemies will, and they will ruin me with it. . . .

Abigail: It were sport uncle!

Parris: I cannot blink what I saw, Abigail; for my enemies will not blink it. I saw a dress lying on the grass . . . Abigail, I have fought here long three years to bend these stiff necked people to me, and
now, just now when some good respect is rising for me in the parish, you compromise my very character. (232)

The power struggle, property feuds, superstition, and malice get revealed further with the arrival of the Putnams.

Mrs. Putnam: How high did she fly, how high?

Parris: No, no, she never flew -

Mrs. Putnam, very pleased with it: Why, it’s sure she did. Mr. Collins saw her goin’ over Ingersoll’s barn, and come down light as bird, he says! (233)

The playwright has given extensive notes in order to fix the background of the social situation and the characters in it. Putnam’s portrayal ingeniously mixes race for power, property and the enormous share of malice:

Thomas Putnam was the eldest son of the richest man in the village. He had fought the Indians at Narraganset, and was deeply interested in parish affairs. He undoubtedly felt it poor payment that the village should so blatantly disregard his candidate for one of its more important offices, . . . another reason to believe him a deeply embittered man was his attempt to break his father’s will, which left a disproportionate amount to a step mother. As with every other public
cause in which he tried to force his way, he failed in this.

So it is not surprising to find that so many accusations against people are in the hand writing of Thomas Putnam, or that his name is so often found as a witness corroborating the supernatural testimony, or that his daughter led the crying out at the most opportune junctures of the trials. . . . (234-235)

The resistance to the forces led by Parris and Putnam gets manifested in Proctor’s words to them in the first scene itself when he retorts to Putnam saying, “we vote by name in the society, not by acreage” (245). The formal pattern of the trial mode continues in the second Act. Proctor cannot comprehend the reason behind the stamping of Rebecca Nurse as a witch.

Hale: This is strange time, mister. No man may longer doubt the powers of the dark are gathered in the monstrous attack upon this village. There is too much evidence now to deny it.

Proctor, evading: I have no knowledge in that line. But it is hard to think so pious a woman be secretly a devil’s bitch after seventy years of such good prayer.
Hale: ... I thought, sir, to put some questions as to the Christian character of this house, if you’ll permit me ... in the book of record that Mrs. Parris keeps, I note that you are rarely in the church on Sabbath Day. ... 

Proctor: Mr. Hale, I never knew I must account to that man for I come to church or stay at home. My wife were sick this winter. (272)

Proctor’s resistance to the interference of authority in personal matters infuriates the theocratic regime. His name also is included in the list of those charged with witchcraft. Proctor speaks out to Rev. Hale when his wife Elizabeth is also charged, and a warrant has been issued to this effect.

Proctor: if she is innocent! Why do you never wonder if Parris be innocent, or Abigail? Is the accuser always holy now? Were they born this morning as clean as god’s fingers? I’ll tell you what’s walking Salem — vengeance is walking Salem. We are what we always were in Salem, but now the little crazy children are jangling the keys of the kingdom, and common vengeance writes the law! This warrant’s vengeance! I’ll not give my wife to vengeance! (281)
The third Act is the trial proper. The hidden rottenness of the Salem society is brought out through the horrible safety valve of the mounting witch-hunt. Judge Danforth, the Deputy Governor of the Province is in charge of the court which proceeds against innocent people with vehemence and bigotry. The testimonials to the good characters of Rebecca, Elizabeth and Martha, signed by ninety nine local citizens of standing, are produced. But to the horror of the three petitioners, warrants for the arrest of all of them were issued under suspicion of working against the court. Even Rev. Hale understands the gross injustice involved in it, and his words are highly ironic and significant: "Is every defence an attack upon the court? Can no one - ?" (292). Giles comes forward with a written accusation against Putnam that the latter has asked his daughter into incriminating a farmer, Jacobs, in order that Putnam may buy the land that will be forfeited from heretics. But having seen the trouble brought on others helping him already, Giles refuses to reveal the name of his informant and is himself arrested for contempt of court. Hale tries in vain to secure decency and fairness, but one after the other, all avenues are closed to him.

Danforth enunciates the principle that only a witch and her victim may be witnesses to witchcraft, and, as the witch cannot
be expected to accuse herself, the court can only rely on the victim’s word. Once this is accepted, the accused must confess or hang – no amount of denial, or testimony from others can avail. The ending of this trial is highly symbolic. Proctor and Hale cry their judgement on the proceedings:

Hale, starting across to the door: I denounce these proceedings!

Proctor: You are pulling heaven down and raising up a whore!

Hale: I denounce these proceedings, I quit this court! He slams the door to the outside behind him.

Danforth, calling to him in a fury: Mr. Hale! Mr. Hale! (311)

The interrogation in the last part of the play is for obtaining confessions so as to avoid hanging. Hale knows that the people are innocent, and hence compels them to confessions of witchcraft. As a priest, he is aware of the irony involved in it:

Hale: Goody Proctor, I have gone these three months like our Lord into the wilderness. I have sought a Christian way, for damnation’s doubled on a minister who counsels men to lie. (319)
The scene of John Proctor’s confession/lying is at once tragic, farcical and symptomatic. Though he is prepared to lie that he has practised witchcraft, his integrity of character does not allow him to lie about others. Goaded into fury, Proctor signs the confession to his own guilt, but finally refuses to hand the paper over, tears it to pieces and retracts his confession, saying, “I have three children – how may I teach them to walk like man in the world, and I sold my friend?” (326).

On the formal level Memory of Two Mondays salvages its relation and resistance to the social contradiction. Kenneth’s outburst against the crammed, closed and spooky work place evokes the debasement of the society without:

Kenneth, irritated: Larry, don’t you suppose a word might be passed to Mr. Eagle about the dust? It’s raining dust from the ceiling!

Gus: what the hell Mr. Eagle gonna do about the dust?

Kenneth: Why, he’s supposed to be a brilliant man, isn’t he? Dartmouth College graduate and all? I’ve been five and half months in this country, and I never sneezed so much in my entire life before. (344)

The playwright’s notes for the setting of the play specify that “the place must seem dirty and unmanageably chaotic” (332). Dirt
and dust, here, are manifestations of the sordid and dark patterns outside. It is set at the back of a large loft in an industrial section of New York.

The two basic structures are the long packing table which curves upstage at the left, and the factory type windows which reach from floor to ceiling and are encrusted with the hard dirt of years. (332)

Towards the middle of the play there is a turn of events with the cleaning of the windows after many years by Kenneth, the admirer of love poetry and revolution.

Kenneth: Bert? How would you feel about washing these windows - you and I - once and for all? Let a little of God’s light in this place?

Bert: Okay, come on! Let’s do a little everyday; couple of months it’ll be clean! Gee! Look at the Sun!

Kenneth: Hey, look down there!

See the old man sitting in a chair?

And roses all over the fence!

Oh! That’s a lovely backyard!

A rag in hand, Bert mounts the table; they make one slow swipe of the window before them and instantly all
the windows around the stage burst into the yellow light of summer that floods into the room.

Bert: Boy, they’ve got a tree!

And all those cats!

Kenneth: It’ll be nice to watch the seasons pass. That pretty up there now, a real summer sky and a little white cloud goin’ over? I can just see autumn comi’ in and the leaves falling on the gray days. You’ve got to have a sky to look at! (356-57)

It is a symbolic and ironic way of opening the wonder and glory of nature and life to a world of social Darwinism and laisser-faire.

Contrast is another formal device employed dexterously by Miller in the play to expose the shocking want of finer values in the American society of the times. The casual conversation between Bert and Raymond, the manager offers a spectrum of scornful irony.

Bert: Just reading about Hitler.

Raymond: Who’s that?

Bert: He took over the German government last week.
Raymond, nodding, uninterested: Listen, I want you to sweep up that excelsior lying around the freight elevator. (333)

To Raymond anything that does not give profit is not news. The drabness of civilization gets exposed now and then in the play:

Raymond: This the same book you been reading?

Bert: Well, it’s pretty long, and I fell asleep right after supper.

Raymond, turning the book up: “War and Peace”?

Bert: Yeah, he’s supposed to be a great writer.

Raymond: What do you get out of a book like that?

Bert: Well, it’s – it’s literature.

Raymond, nodding, mystified: Be sure to open those crates of axles that came in Saturday, will you? (334)

The fixity of scene from the beginning of the play till the end is a formal device used to reinforce the reification. The ending of the play is ironic in this regard because “nothing happened” and “nothing changed” in the warehouse. The work, the nature of the work, the place of work, the insufficiency of wages, the attitude of the bosses and the workers are still the
same as they were at the beginning. The static and the placid in the play ironically parody these in the social. The narration at the end of the play recapitulates this. Though Bert is leaving, nobody has the time or inclination to say a few good words:

Willy takes the order and goes, and when Bert turns back to Kenneth he is wrapping again. So Bert moves away from the table. Jerry enters, leaves, and Jim enters, drops goods on the table, and leaves. Larry enters with a container of coffee, goes to the order hook, and checks through the orders . . . Patricia enters and crosses past Bert, looking at through the windows. It is as though Bert wished it could stop for a moment, and as each person enters he looks expectantly, but nothing much happens. (376)

Memory technique is used in A View from the Bridge. Alferi, a lawyer in his fifties is the narrator. Alferi represents the secular and moral law which are rejected by Eddy. Alferi himself is an Italian immigrant who came to America twenty five years back. This aspect is significant as the plot of the play deals with the contradictions in the issue of immigrants from Italy - legal and illegal. A life of dire necessity is delineated as a background to the enactment of clash of wills and excruciating
hunger. Alferi can be considered as the device of chorus, an all pervasive narrator, witness and judge.

Alferi: This is the slum that faces the bay on the seaward side of Brooklyn Bridge. This is the gullet of New York swallowing the tonnage of the world. And now we are quite civilized, quite American . . . my wife has warned me, so have my friends; they tell me the people in the neighbourhood lack elegance, glamour. After all, who have I dealt with in my life? Longshore men and their wives, and fathers and grandfathers, compensation cases, evictions. . . . (379)

The irony in branding immigrants "legal" or "illegal" is obvious in Alferi’s introductory narration itself: "Oh, there were many here who were justly shot by unjust men. Justice is very important here" (379). The larger frame work of the struggle between individual’s dire necessities and the legal enforcement is symptomatic of the social outside. The extreme penury of the “illegal” immigrants is exposed in Beatrice’s warning to her cousins, Marco and Rudolpho:

Beatrice: I just hope you ain’t gonna do like some of them around here. They’re here twenty five years, some men, and they didn’t get enough to go back twice. (412)
However, the social and the political are defamiliarised deviously by foregrounding the sexual obsession and guilt of Eddie. Though Eddie’s breakdown is sexual, it leads to a sin against his ethnic community when, in the terror of his complicated jealousy, Eddie betrays Marco and Rudolpho, the “illegal” immigrants to the external law.

Alferi poses as an objective narrator, narrating his memories of other people, which are basically personal. This involves a formal contradiction which is related to the social contradiction outside. The continued presence of the law in the total framework is achieved by the chorus-like presence of Alferi, who is a lawyer and by the frequent remarks of the characters on law and police. The all-pervading threat of being “picked” is juxtaposed with the happenings related to Eddie and Catherine within the domestic plane. This dichotomy determines the crisis of the play with Eddie’s betrayal of the “illegal” immigrants. Marco’s pathetic yet angry remarks when caught by the officials of the Bureau reinforce this dichotomy. Marco spits on Eddie’s face and says:

Marco: That one! He killed my children! That one stole the food from my children. . . . In my country he would be dead now. He would not live this long. (433)
Marco brings and enforces the value of his country on Eddie. Marco does this as if it is a ritual in the last scene. He comes to Eddie’s apartment and kills him by saying just one word, “Anima-a-l” (439). This is a symbolic formal solution to the beastliness of the American society in the segregation of “legal” and “illegal” immigrants. The symbolic trial mode in the scene, though less apparent than the trial mode in *The Crucible*, gives out the final verdict through the words of Marco.

The worlds of Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller are marked by many factors that have left traces in their structuring into symbolic acts. The American situation covering the four decades from the 1930s to the end of the 1960s present asphyxiating conditions of reified existence - social fragmentation, Taylorisation, division of labour, alienation of labour, labour unrest, and commodification. Those were the years of hope and frustration, progress and turmoil, black extremism, minority militancy, and white backlash. There was war already in Spain, imminent in Europe, and the World Wars. The McCarthy era witnessed illogical persecutions, which many believe, culminated in the exaggerated fiasco called the Vietnam War. That technology and industrialization did not guarantee peace and prosperity, happiness and harmony is a valid ground where Williams and Miller enact the drama of lost lives and ever
flickering hopes, inadequacy and illusions, failures of love and conflicts of goals and responsibilities.

Technological change, enhanced mobility by railroad and ships, and the new individual ethos combined to rupture the bonds that tied each individual to a family, a community, a kinship network, or a geographical location. The competitive life is a lonely one, and its satisfactions are very short-lived, for each race leads only to a new one. In the past, in American society, there were many oases in which one could take refuge from the potent, crushing economic system. The family was the most important among them. The prevalent spirit was infested by competition and individualism. The individual who used to work in smaller firms with lower turnover in which the relationships were more enduring and less impersonal, later came to work under excruciating conditions, in larger firms where the individuals were none other than mere “hands,” working long hours, for unbelievably low wages, under nauseating and deplorable sanitary conditions, and often exposed to hazards to one’s own life.

The individual’s life was marked by alienation and loneliness. The conditions were exacting, and the individual was sure to fail. Stricken with anxiety and morbidity, the individual displays withdrawal symptoms, seeks more and more
privacy and thus gets more and more alienated. “The lack of intervention on the part of trade unions aggravated the situation. It was mainly on account of the notorious suppression tactics used by industrialists like Andrew Carnegie” (R. Steen 212). Immigration was yet another cause that prevented the development of trade unions. Trade unions found their sharpest of all weapons - strikes - ineffective, as there were fresh immigrants arriving every year in search of work. The employers imported some of them and there never was a real threat of labour shortage. Moreover being of different nationalities the immigrants failed to unite or, in some other cases, the natives despised them. Consequently their presence tended to depress wages and working conditions.

Even after the Gilded Age, the birth and establishment of many millionaires, the high increase in production of raw materials like copper, iron, aluminium, oil and electricity, the increase of railroad and train-cars, the individual remained more and more lonely, depressed, and alienated. The coal deposits of Pennsylvania, the oil of Texas and Oklahoma, the iron ore of Michigan, and the copper of Montana could not bring about a happy, comfortable life for the individual. (Slater 72)
The primary cause for the deplorable life situation is the low degree of power exercised by the government, and, as a consequence of this, the welfare measures to secure and ensure justice and comfort to all were not carried out. The function of politics was not to get in the way of business by imposing restraints on it or passing too many laws. By erecting tariffs against the goods of foreign competitors the government tried to protect business. The politicians granted the businessmen certain gifts – the concessions to mine copper, or drill for oil on government territory, or gifts of land to railroads to open up in the West. Politics was held in low esteem and people of ability and probity loathed to enter it. This opened the door to a good deal of corrupt practice. The ordinary citizen felt that his own vote counted for very little by comparison with the influence exerted by great business companies.

The post-war boom was succeeded by a wave of strikes, involving more than four million workers. This and the anti-communist drive led to a wave of arrests and persecutions. Even though the unemployed millions had weathered many bleak winters as a result of the slumping of the economy in one of the worst depressions in American history, welfare measures were hardly coming. Three more decades passed before
America saw welfare measures for social justice. The Social Security Act of 1935 was important because it marked the great beginning in the schemes of Social Insurance and public assistance. . . . The 1940s and 1950s saw considerable improvement in this direction. (Slater 93)

The societal paradigm of William’s The Glass Menagerie presents the changing economic and social modes. The fragile, isolated Wingfield family symptomatizes the alienation and loneliness of the American situation. The dramatic apparatus, at first, keeps the family on realms which are “dim and poetic.” The audience sees the “grim rear wall of the Wingfield tenement.” The slow drifting of the souls within it is like roving around places, deserted and desolate. There is Tom Wingfield to monitor this inward journey, leading the way to the other characters - his sister, his mother, and the photograph of his “runaway” father. The social foci are ideologically manipulated, manoeuvred, and get repressed by shifting the visual angle to the personal realm of the fragile, inadequate lives of the individuals in the family. Tom’s words as narrator - “I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion” (234) - illustrate this dexterity of the aesthetic act. Here, the play swerves to wade through the realms of memory and nostalgia.
Tom is a poet. He has lost his job in the warehouse for writing poems on the lid of a shoebox.

Not long after that I was fired for writing a poem on the lid of a shoe-box. I left Saint Louis. I descended the steps of this fire-escape for a last time and followed from then on, in my father’s footsteps, attempting to find in motion what was lost in space – I travelled around a great deal. The cities swept about me like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly coloured but torn away from the branches. (313)

Leaving his crippled, invalid sister and sharp-tongued mother to the mercy/cruelty of the world, he resorts to lonely wanderings that are away from warehouses. He frequents movie houses. However this escapism took him nowhere but in front of the glass windows with glass figures, which reminded him of his deserted and “lost” kin. Here the wheel comes full circle. The collection of glass figures that Laura nurses and fondles dearly, mark the inescapable circle that encloses her isolated, lonely life. The short-lived contact she had established with Jim O’Connor had been prematurely snapped. Though Amanda’s predicament is different, the difference does not make her less “lost.” The vivacious lady had to “put up a solitary battle all these years” (258).
Tom’s failure can be ascribed to his reserved and poetic nature. But Jim, who is a promising lad at the school, also fails and ends up in the same warehouse.

In high school Jim was a hero. He had tremendous Irish good nature and vitality with the scrubbed and polished look of white chinaware. He seemed to move in a continual spot light. He was a star in basketball, captain of the debating club, president of the senior class and the glee club and he sang the male lead in the annual light operas. He was always running or bounding never just walking. . . . He was shooting with such velocity through his adolescence that you would logically expect him to arrive at nothing short of the White House by the time he was thirty. (273)

But six years after he left school, he was holding a job in the warehouse that was not any better than Tom’s. Jim too is disappointed with what he has achieved.

The human dilemma entailed in A Streetcar Named Desire allegorizes the ideological signals in a similar fashion. Alvin B. Kernan in his essay, “Truth and Dramatic Mode in Streetcar” sees the individual as pitted against the changing economic and social modes.
When Blanche first arrives in the “Elysian Fields,” she points outside the window and says, “Out there I suppose is the ghoul haunted woodland of weir!” Her sister, Stella, replies “NO, honey, these are the L&N tracks.” This is the basic problem which has kept the modern theatre boiling: is the modern world best described as a ghoul-haunted woodland or a neutrally denominated something like the ’L&N tracks’? (10)

The breakup of Belle Reve, the deaths of the family members one after the other during the war years, the suicide of her young husband, Allan - all these contribute to the desolate life of Blanche. Being more and more lonely, the young widow sought distraction in fleeting intimacies among the soldiers of a nearby camp. Soon the medical and funeral bills begin to lay claim for Belle Reve; and in the end Blanche loses her house.

Blanche, having lost her youth, her husband, her inheritance, her home, her employment and nearly all her family, arrives in New Orleans to stay with her sister because she has nowhere else to go.

Blanche is terribly lonely even after coming to New Orleans. She tries to win her sister away from Stanley: “I want to be near you, got to be with somebody, I can’t be alone!”
(124). Scene V is illustrative of this loneliness, agony and insecurity.

I have run for protection, Stella, from under one leaky roof - because it was storm - all storm, and I was caught in the centre. . . . But I’m scared now awfully scared. I don’t know how much longer I can turn the trick. It isn’t enough to be soft. You’ve got to be soft and attractive. And I - I’m fading now! (169)

Blanche’s short vocation as a schoolteacher is a very deficient one with a meagre salary she gets. At her sister’s, Blanche shows her purse to Stella when she feels that the latter is mocking her for her writing a letter to Shep Hunt Leigh. Blanche says:

Don’t laugh at me Stella! Please, don’t - I want you to look at the contents of my purse! Here’s what’s in it! (She snatches her purse open) Sixty-five measly cents in coin of the realm! (160-161)

Valentine Xavier in Orpheus Descending is an itinerant folk singer. Wearing his snake-skin jacket and carrying his guitar, Val comes on his thirtieth birthday to a small town in rural Mississippi, where he manages to get a job as a shoe salesman in
a general store. He had done many odd jobs before he reached the town. Yet he had not achieved any success. Val too is an alienated individual with his strange outlook of “earning to live that day.” This is a way of protest against the social moment. He is not eager to get a place in the line of people who are considered successful by the dominant “world view.” When he reaches the town during his lonely ramblings, he acquainted himself with the Lady of the store.

While in The Glass Menagerie, the isolated, alienated ones drift away aimlessly and get lost in the end, in Orpheus Descending, the symbolic pattern undergoes a change. Val begins to love and remain with Lady Torrance who has been bought and married by Jabe, the murderer of her father. The union of the two “lost souls,” Val and the Lady, borders on the framework of union and regeneration. Williams’s ritualistic pattern remains unchanged at the end of the play.

Ownership is the basis of American ideology. Mrs. Venable is a rich person who can manipulate things in such a way that everything comes to her advantage. Mrs. Venable is a rich heiress and by virtue of this, she tries to bribe Dr. Cuckrowicz, align Catherine’s mother and brother, and makes Catherine remain an invalid all her life. Her unhealthy physical nature, as that of Jabe in Orpheus, is symptomatic of the
squalor and disease of the world. However, as in the case of *The Glass Menagerie* or *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the dramaturgy creates an illusion that the focus is on the private rather than on the collective. It becomes a prestigious matter of the Venable family’s pride to silence the hideous story of Sebastian’s death told by his companion Catherine. The trait of the dominant ideology -- of subjecting and (ab)using others -- is seen in the plot.

Chance Wayne, in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, like Val of *Orpheus Descending*, has passed through many stages in life; doing odd jobs at random. He is a promising young man of a poor family who loses himself in the rat race of commercialism. He acts as a stud to a rich woman Minnie for getting financial assistance to his romance with the rich Heavenly. This is symptomatic of a social disease. Consequently Heavenly contracts a disease, which plays havoc in her life and ultimately leads to ovariactomy. At last, when Chance comes to his hometown St. Cloud, as a gigolo to Alexandra Del Lago, an ex-show woman and movie star, he finds that his home-town, has changed for the worse. He has spent many years to make up a good fortune in order to marry his lover Heavenly, the daughter of Boss Finley, the great business tycoon. The social milieu of an industrial capitalist society,
where state control is absent, and the capitalist defines “law” and “order,” is seen here:

She hasn’t been seen much lately, but still has influence, power, and money — money that can open all doors, that I’ve knocked at all these years till my knuckles are bloody. (75)

The conceptual framework of *Sweet Bird of Youth* reiterates the typical Williamsian drama of disillusion, subsequent loss of the struggle due to inadequacy, and the dominating presence of money and muscle power defeating the struggle. Alexandra tells Chance about a young man who is enterprising and ambitious:

I saw him in Monte Carlo not too long ago. He was with a woman of seventy, and his eyes looked older than hers . . . he wasn’t much older than you are now. Not long after that he drove his Alfa Romeo or Ferrari off the Grand Corniche accidentally? — Broke his skull like an eggshell. I wonder what they found in it? Old, despaired of ambitions, little treacheries possibly even little attempts at blackmail that didn’t quite come off, of really great charm and sweetness. (102)

Chance was a very promising young man before he left St. Cloud. At seventeen, he had put on, directed, and played the
leading role in a play that won the state drama contest. Williams experiments with the old pattern seen in *The Glass Menagerie* and *Orpheus Descending*. Here, Chance, unlike Tom or Val, is a brilliant, handsome and promising, blue-eyed boy of all, but that too, in William’s philosophical framework, does not create any difference. Boss Finley manages the show and Chance can only wait and play accordingly. Despite his good name, beauty, youth and the popularity he once enjoyed, he too is doomed to lose in the end.

Another facet of the pattern under discussion is conspicuous in the character of Heavenly. While barely fifteen she is buoyed up to win many performances, but soon loses herself in the love tangle with Chance. The venereal disease that seals her fate does her undoing.

The plays of Arthur Miller often critique the existing dominant ideology. Consequently, in the dramaturgy of Miller symbolic patterns are juxtaposed with the real. Arthur Miller’s *All My Sons* probes into the realm which is one of the centres of perpetration of the capitalist ideology – the home of the Kellers. At curtain rise the spectators are opened to a secluded atmosphere, hinting that the lives are protected, walled in, away from any harm. The closely planted poplars which stand like a high wall add to the seclusion. This is highly symbolic. On
the one hand, the Kellers have bought seclusion from others as they have gone up the social ladder. On the other, as they have failed in the social relations, the interactions with the society outside have been cut off. This ambivalence is significant to the issues discussed in the play. The stage direction further moves along these lines.

The house is two stories high and has seven rooms. It would have cost perhaps fifteen thousand in the early twenties when it was built. Now it is nicely painted, looks tight and comfortable; and the yard is green with sod, here and there plants whose season is gone.

(58)

The expressions “tight” and “comfortable” used to describe the house can be contrasted with the expressions “the yard is green with sod” and “plants whose season is gone” that are used to describe the outside. This contrast is symptomatic as the Kellers are falling apart, losing their past artificially constructed glory, which gets symbolically enacted as the play starts. “The four-foot-high stump of a slender apple tree whose upper trunk and branches lie toppled beside it, fruit still clinging to its branches”(58) portends crisis, precipitated by competition, money motif, utility and business. This has
problematised the relationship between the individual and the society.

Joe Keller the aircraft engine manufacturer, who supplies faulty cylinder heads to the Army Air force in wartime, is the central character of the play. Keller, the industrialist has made a great fortune during the war, on government contract. When a batch of urgently needed cylinder heads develops cracks, he orders the cracks to be patched up. He knows that if the cylinder heads are not supplied in time, he may lose the contract which will ruin his business which he has built up for the sake of his two sons, Chris and Larry. Soon the newspapers give a vivid account of the horrifying tales of the death of the pilots. Keller throws the blame on his partner Steve who is arrested and jailed.

Keller’s son Larry, employed in the Air Force, comes to know about the crime of his father, and shouldering the moral responsibility of his father’s deed, undertakes a suicidal flight and dies.

Keller is a capitalist led by competition mania in a cut-throat work of business, and a cynical profiteer who deliberately reduces the margin of safety in order to increase the margin of profit. He is unable to visualize the public consequences of what is for him a private act.
Keller’s words to Chris show how he is conditioned and conducted by the social role assigned to him.

You want me to go to jail? . . . I’ll tell you why you can’t say it. Because you know I don’t belong there. Because you know! *With growing emphasis and passion, and a persistent tone of desperation:*

Who worked for nothing in that war? When they work for nothin’, I’ll work for nothin’. Did they ship a gun or a truck out of Detroit before they got their price? Is that clean? It’s dollars and cents, nickels and dimes, What’s clean? Half the goddam country is gotta go if I go! That’s why you can’t tell me. (124-125)

But the guilt makes him a recluse and a lonely figure. Keller’s alienation is different from that of the characters in the plays of Williams. There is no material inadequacy in the suburban house of Keller. He has risen from rags to riches by sheer smartness. Starting as a factory hand, he built up an engineering business in forty years.

After winning his side in the court, Keller makes a splendid come back to his house. Released from jail, he walks down the street, with a smile on his lips. The neighbours who yelled “murderer” at him are easily won over with his
generosity. They play poker with him and live on his money. His neighbours are not convinced of his innocence, but they respect him for his smartness. In keeping with the standards of the society, he equates honour and success with keeping appearances and money.

But the smothering pangs of guilt make him alienated. Even the self-fed excuse that Larry never flew P-40s does not alleviate his trauma. His failure in the public/social realm makes him a wreck in the private/individual plane. Raymond Williams argues that

. . . it is with alienation both in a social action and in a personality that Miller is ultimately concerned. The true social reality - the needs and destinies of other persons - is meant to break down this alienated consciousness, of significant and continuing relationships, in this man and in his society. (307-308)

Chris is disillusioned with the social facades, and feels that everybody is engaged in a rat race. He is an idealist and a lover of books and human beings. He will, if possible, make an attempt, however limited in scope, to abate men's misery. In his battalion he has been known as "Mother McKeller." He believes that individuals must be prepared to sacrifice themselves for
the sake of the community, and he himself is willing to make such a sacrifice. At the war-front he has discovered that his men are prepared to lay down their lives for a great principle. Their martyrdom has illuminated his mind, and now he expects to find fraternity and cooperation reigning supreme in the post-war world. However, Chris finds that to the post-war society in America, the noble ideas that motivate the heroes in war are nothing but mere saw dust. His words to Ann show the depth of his despair and show how alienated he is.

And when I came home it was incredible. I - there was no meaning in it here; the whole thing to them was a kind of a - bus accident. I went to work with Dad, and that rat race again. I felt - what you said - ashamed somehow. Because nobody was changed at all. It seemed to make suckers out of a lot of guys. (85)

Larry can be seen as an alienated figure through his letters. Many of his friends (pilots) have died, and from the newspapers he gathers that his father is responsible for that. He feels alienated in his circle. After sometime, he decides to take up moral responsibility for his father’s crime.

Yesterday they flew in a load of papers from the States and I read about Dad and your father being convicted. I can’t express myself. I can’t tell you
how I feel – I can’t bear to live anymore. . . . Everyday three or four men never come back and he sits back there doing business. . . . I don’t know how to tell you what I feel. . . . I can’t face anybody. . . . I am going out on a mission in a few minutes. They’ll probably report me missing. (125-126)

Kate, the wife of Keller and mother of Chris and Larry, is also a lonely figure. She is in her fifties and is a good housewife and loving mother. In her relationship to others/society she is different from Keller. She is a mother to the whole neighbourhood, for she can overwhelm everyone with her enduring love and compassion. When George arrives with a will to destroy Joe Keller, Kate drains George’s spirits with her love. It is Kate’s formidable capacity for love that makes her hug the illusion that her elder son Larry is still alive though he has been reported missing three years ago.

Kate will not tolerate any hint about Larry’s death. She keeps his room spic and span and even brushes his shoes every day, expecting him to turn up sooner or later. Her illusion and her dreams show that she is alienated from her husband and the others because these stem from her knowledge that Keller is responsible for the death of Larry.
Your brother is alive, darling, because if he is dead, your father killed him. Do you understand me now? As long as you live, that boy is alive. God does not let a son be killed by his father. Now you see, don’t you? Now you see. (114)

Here, the unresolvable contradictions in the life of Kate get transformed into strange behavioural patterns that are symbolic.

Ann Deever, daughter of Keller’s partner Steve is sensible and clear-sighted. Ann’s sense of humanity and justice is offended when she realizes the enormity of her father’s crime. She has refused to meet her father since his conviction. Since Larry has written to her about his plight, Ann knows that Larry is no more. Years after, she finds a new friendship in Chris. She is relieved and happy now, though until then Ann was very lonely. She tells Kate about this when the latter opposes the relationship between Ann and Chris. She gives the letter from Larry to Kate though she knows that the contents of the letter would break the gossamer-thin strands of illusion the old woman has been clinging on to.

Ann: He wrote it to me just before he. . . . I’m not trying to hurt you, Kate. You are making me do this,
now remember you’re – Remember. I’ve been so lonely, Kate. . . . I can’t leave here alone again. (122)

These words show how terribly lonely Ann was in those trying times of the post-war situation.

George, Ann’s brother, rants and raves because he has felt all “alone in a dog-eat-dog world” (123). He feels that all those who have made profit in the war should be tried. His plight becomes pathetic when he is disowned by his sister. If Ann cannot leave Keller’s house alone, it is paradoxical that George has to leave Keller’s house alone, as Ann refused to go with him.

As in All My Sons, the aesthetic act manoeuvres the unresolvable social contradictions by shifting the focus to the domestic folds in Death of a Salesman. The patterns in the formal plane can be seen at the beginning of the play itself. The difficulties in making the outside world a home are evoked by the setting itself. The spectator sees a solid vault of apartment houses around the small fragile looking home of the Lomans.

Before us is salesman’s house. We are aware of towering, angular shapes behind it, surrounding it on all sides. (7)
The individual is pitted against the crass commercialism around. The contrast is between the sensitive and the insensitive; between the niche of goodness (home) and the cold, indifferent iron and concrete of angular shapes outside.

Willy: The way they boxed us in here. Bricks and windows, windows and bricks. . . . The street is lined with cars. There’s not a breath of fresh air in the neighbourhood. The grass don’t grow anymore, you can’t raise a carrot in the backyard. They should’ve had a law against apartment houses. Remember those two beautiful elm trees out there? . . . they should’ve arrested the builder for cutting those down. They massacred the neighbourhood. (12)

Miller employs “contrast” as a conscious device in presenting the dream/fantasy of Willy:

Willy: . . . More and more I think of those days, Linda. This time of year was lilac and wisteria. And then the peonies would come out, and the daffodils. What a fragrance in this room! (12)

On the one hand the contrast is between the freshness and serenity of the past and the choking present. On the other the
city/industrial rat race is contrasted with the simple/agrarian solitude:

Willy: There’s more people! That’s what’s ruining this country! Population is getting out of control. The competition is maddening! Smell and stink from the apartment house! And another one on the other side.

(12)

The homely and the private images symbolically assert resistance to the existing ideology of crass commercialism. This is done by placing the kitchen at the centre of the stage. In a burst of agrarian escapism at night Willy goes out with a flash light to sow the seeds that he has somehow never found time to plant before:

Nothing brings out more effectively the pathetic ineffectuality and bewilderment and littleness of the man than this scene, and the setting gives an added dimension to this otherwise petulant explosion, ”where the hell is that seed? You can’t see nothing out here. They boxed in the whole goddam neighbourhood.”

(Carson 58)

Willy’s dreams and fantasies can be considered as substitutes to survive. They are formal solutions to the
predicament of Willy. Biff’s agrarian dream also looks forward to openmess and vastness of nature which is contrasted with the choking industrial cities.

Biff: Sure, maybe we could buy a ranch, raise cattle, use your muscles. Men built like we are should be working out in the open. (17)

The threatening pressures of the outside world will intensify the fragility of that home throughout the play, until eventually they destroy it completely. The point is made by Linda’s last words as the play ends:

I made the last payment on the house today. Today dear. And there will be nobody home. [A sob rises in her throat] We’re free and clear. [Sobbing more fully, released] we’re free. (112)

The dream, the fantasy and the obsession with the past function as symbolic substitutes to survive. This is hinted at the opening of the play itself: “an air of dream clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality” (7). A rejection and a critique of industrial, capitalist dominant ideology are effected by the first two sentences of the stage direction itself. “A melody is heard, played upon the flute. It is small
The curtain rises” (7). The central character and his predicament are enacted with this tune on flute: “From the right, Willy Loman, the salesman, enters, carrying two large sample cases. The flute plays on” (8).

The first entry of the central character with two large sample cases which weigh him down is significant. So long, life has weighed him down. He is exhausted, fatigued, and almost ruined. In his opening speech he tells his wife that he is tired and out of control. This opening conversation between Willy and Linda places the problems symbolically:

Willy: I am tired to the death. (The flute has faded away. He sits on the bed beside her, a little numb.) I couldn’t make it, I just couldn’t make it, Linda. . . . I suddenly couldn’t drive anymore. The car kept going on off to the shoulder, y’know? Linda: Oh, maybe it was the steering again. I don’t think Angelo knows the stude baker. Willy: No, it’s me, it’s me. Suddenly I realised I’m goin’ sixty miles an hour and I don’t remember the last five minutes. I’m — I can’t seem to — keep my mind to it.

Linda: May be it’s your glasses. You never went for your new glasses.
Willy: No, I see everything. I came back ten miles an hour. It took me nearly four hours from Yonkers. (8-9)

This is a metaphorical way of presentation, because Willy Loman has lost control of not only his car, but his whole life itself. This is symptomatic of the failure, frustration, alienation, loneliness and dejection precipitated by the societal patterns.

Another significant feature of the play is the dexterous manifestation of the internal life of Willy Loman.

This subtle exploration of Willy’s subjective life has led many critics to approach the play as a psychological drama with strong Freudian colouring. According to this interpretation, the work concentrates on family relationships and especially on the conflicts between fathers and sons. (Carson 49)

However there is no denying the fact that the work is a study of a once happy family torn to pieces by forces outside its comprehension. “The American Dream” envisages a society in which success through his own efforts is still as available to the ordinary man as it was in the expansive, pioneering days of the nineteenth century (52). Willy’s failure and dream/fantasy are precipitated by the socio-economic system. Willy has a belief in his own concept of success. He has spent his life
attempting to instil these values into his sons. He has preached the gospel of salesmanship – a brash personality, a ready smile, a fast joke, and a glittering appearance – as the key to fame and fortune. As a travelling salesman, he has worked for the Wagner firm for thirty four years. But when he is old he is fired. Willy is shocked and frustrated. With all his mercurial nature, his temper, his massive dreams and little cruelties, Willy Loman is a failure in life. He becomes lonely and suffers from a sense of economic and social insecurity. He is alienated not only from the world, but from his family also. He fails not only as a salesman by inviting the displeasure of his boss who dismisses him when, in fact, he needs help, but also as a father.

Willy also suffers from a sense of inadequacy and inferiority.

Figure it out. Work a life time to pay off a house. You finally own it, and there is nobody to live in it.

(Death 10)

He often tries to talk about something he is not sure about. In the play, several times he hints at his sense of insecurity, of haunting loneliness and of ravaging emptiness:
. . . you know, the trouble is, Linda, people don’t seem to talk to me. . . . I know it when I walk in. they seem to laugh at me. . . . I don’t know the reason for it, but they just pass me by. I’m not noticed. (28)

Later, in the same scene, he becomes vocal about his plight:

‘cause I get so lonely – especially when business is bad and there’s nobody to talk to. I get the feeling that I’ll never sell anything again, that I won’t make a living for you, or a business, a business for the boys. (29)

Though Willy has turned sixty, and is exhausted, the company still shuttles him across the country. His words to Linda are both ironic and pathetic: “They don’t need me in New York. I’m the New England man. I’m vital in New England.” (10)

According to Raymond Williams, Willy’s act of killing himself for the insurance money is significant because

The social figure sums up the theme of alienation, for this is a man who from selling things has passed to selling himself, and has become, in effect, a commodity which like other commodities will at a
certain point be economically discarded. (Drama from Ibsen 310)

His expectations about Biff, the elder son, also get shattered. He is terribly frustrated not only with Biff, but with his country also. He tells Linda when he comes to understand that Biff has come back without earning anything these years:

Biff Loman is lost. In the greatest country in the world, a young man with such - personal attractiveness, gets lost. And such a hard worker. There is one thing about Biff - he is not lazy. (Death 11)

These words show how loneliness and alienation become Biff’s lot. Once he was a star football player in high school with several awards to his credit. There was a time when he was bursting with energy and enthusiasm, when girls were mad after him and paid for him when he was the captain of the college football team. Now everything is gone, he is reduced to a shadow of his past self. He does not know much about his future. He tells Happy:

I’ve had twenty or thirty different kinds of job since I left home before the war, and it always turns out
the same. I just realized it lately. . . . I’m not getting anywhere. What the hell am I doing, playing around with horses, twenty eight dollars a week! I’m thirty four years old, I oughta be makin’ my future. (16-17)

Biff’s predicament is a result of the maddening world of competition, of boredom of the daily routine, of the very ordinariness of life, of menial labour and scant rewards. However, here also the aesthetic act covers the causes and zeroes in on one single cause: the traumatic experience of meeting his father in a hotel as a “phoney little fake.” This subtext also functions to effect the evasion from the censor by projecting Willy’s doom as a consequence of his own inherent weaknesses – his misplaced faith in him as well as in the power of attractiveness.

Happy, Willy’s younger son, works in a department store and has his own apartment in another area of the city. “Happy is tall, powerfully made. Sexuality is like a visible colour on him, or a scent many women have discovered”(14). As the name suggests, there is a brightness in him but that is superficial. He wants to smooth over all unpleasantness instead of facing it. He claims that he is the assistant buyer, but he is one of the two assistants to the assistant. Such deception comes from the
lack he encounters in his life. His despair finds expression when he opens his heart to Biff:

That’s what I dream about Biff. Sometimes I want to just rip my clothes off in the middle of the store, and outbox that goddam merchandise manager. I can outbox, outrun, and outfit anybody in that store, and I have to take orders from these common, petty sons-of-bitches till I can’t stand anymore . . . everybody around me is so false that I’m lowering my ideals. (18)

The despair and alienation that Happy faces makes him react in strange ways. He devotes his energies to chasing girls. However, all along Happy too, like his brother, like many in the society, remains lonely and lost. “I don’t know what the hell I’m working for, sometimes I sit in my apartment – all alone” (17).

Linda is a devoted wife and mother – devoted to make the whole family pull on and save it from falling apart. However, despite her earnest efforts, she loses her grip over things slowly. Even while she is desperately trying to support and hold everybody together, her lot, ironically, is that of a lonely struggler. This is what makes Happy to utter the following
remark about his mother: “What a woman! They broke the mould when they made her!” (52).

The Crucible enacts the individual’s struggle in an evil social system in a theocratic community. The colony named Salem was founded in 1626 and managed by an authoritarian and repressive local government. The leaders had no opinion of democracy, and insisted on a rigidly puritan faith within the confines of the congregational church. The courts are constituted on very dubious principles, for in the theocratic colony, professional lawyers are not permitted to practice and there is a dangerous ignorance of legal procedure. The Salem tragedy took place in 1692 in which many were charged with the crime/sin of having established communion with the Devil and, consequently were hanged to death. Miller’s notes in the play throw light on the Salem trials:

Their fathers had, of course, been persecuted in England. So now they and their church found it necessary to deny any other sect its freedom, lest their New Jerusalem be defiled and corrupted by wrong ways and deceitful ideas. (227)

Miller is making a statement on American liberties here. Proctor is a lonely character who stands alienated both from the society and his wife Elizabeth. He is a strong and upright farmer, eager
to conduct himself according to the principles of reason and justice. He does not like “the smell of authority” (246). He has no fear to speak out his convictions on any subject whether it is to the minister Rev. Parris or Danforth, the judge. In the presence of Hale he lashes out at both Putnam and Parris. To the question why he absented himself from the church on Sabbath he spits fire:

I have trouble enough without I come five mile to hear him preach only hellfire and bloody damnation. Take it to heart, Mr. Parris. There are many others who stay away from church these days because you hardly ever mention god any more. (245)

Proctor leads the opposition to the witch-hunt until he himself is accused. His robust common sense appears as religious scepticism. His tactless expressions of scorn for the whole tale of witchcraft offend Judge Danforth who takes the affair seriously. Despite his desire to expose Abigail, his shame at his own past relationship with her deters him from confessing it until he can no longer avoid it. While Danforth considers that “the entire contention of the state in these trials is that the voice of Heaven is speaking through the children” (289), Proctor knows that Abigail has “endless capacity for dissembling” and that she is a consummate actress, able to coax
the other girls into her trap and carry them with her in simulated hysteria. Quick-witted and ruthless, she seizes every opportunity of power and safety for herself. Proctor’s indignant response to this in the court becomes a kind of contempt of court:

Proctor (laughs insanely, then): A fire, a fire is burning! I hear the boot of Lucifer, I see his filthy face! And it is my face, and yours Danforth! For them that quail to bring mess out of ignorance, as I have quailed, and as you quail now when you know in all your block hearts that this must be fraud – God damns our kind especially, and we will burn, we will burn together! (311)

Salem is a society in which corruption has reached a point of breakdown. The affair of the witches merely provokes and gives scope to an already evolved explosive situation. It is a rigorously disciplined society, in which most of the actions are regulated by the theocratic government as patterns of public caution and concern. Individuals are beginning to chafe under the repressions. This is obvious in the escapades of the girls at the beginning of the play, fascinated by Tituba’s magic and the forbidden excitement of dancing in the woods. It also shows in Proctor’s private discussions on whether or not he will
attend the church, have his child baptized, and plough on Sundays. All these are activities that the state claimed the right to regulate. The lots of the upright and pious Rebecca and Martha are to become alienated in the witch-hunt ridden society.

The playwright’s remarks on *A Memory of two Mondays* imply the reified existence of the characters in the shipping room of an auto-parts warehouse.

... a boy works among people for a couple of years, shares their troubles, their victories, their hopes, and when it is time for him to be on his way he expects some memorable moments, some sign from them that he has been among them. In the sea of routine that swells around them they barely note his departure. It is kind of letter to that subculture where the sinews of the economy are rooted, that Africa of our society from whose interior only the sketchiest messages ever reach our literature or our stage. (*Miller Plays: One* 49)

In the crammed and cluttered space many “nameless,” less significant people struggle to make both ends meet, and to find meaning in life. The nature of the work is simple. The men take orders off the hook, go out into the “bin-lined alleys,” fill the orders, bring the merchandise back to the table where these
are packed and address slips pasted on. The whole scene builds up an indictment of the industrial and profit making enterprises. The working conditions are deplorable, often unhygienic and the workers are underpaid. The words of the characters give a shocking picture of the abysmal negligence and criminal disregard on the part of the bosses, Raymond and Eagle.

Kenneth: . . . and by the way, if you care to bend down, Gus - indicating under the scale platform - there’s more mice than ever under here. Gus, without turning: Leave them mice alone. (342)

In winter Agnes wears sheets of brown paper for leggings (362), and in the scorching heat of summer Kenneth cuts a hole in his shoe for “a breath of air” for the toe (343). Towards the end of the play Gus gives vent to his indignation:

Gus: I don’t give one Goddam for Eagle? Why he don’t make one more toilet? . . . Toilet! That’s right? Have one toilet for so many people? . . . Why them - goddam mice nobody does nothing? . . . Twenty-two years them goddam mice! That’s very bad, Raymond, so much mice! (364)

In summer the place is like a furnace, and in winter it is biting cold. But the workers have to go on like this for ever
without complaining, without a hike in the salary. Reification, alienation and loneliness are writ large on their faces. The words of Gus towards the end of the play are symptomatic:

Gus, swaying, to Bert: Twenty-two years I was here.

Bert: I know.

Gus: Them mice was here before you was born . . . when Mr. Eagle was in high school I was already here. When there Winton Six I was here. When was Minerva car I was her . . . I was here first day Raymond come.

(370)

Kenneth, the immigrant worker from Ireland, despite his seemingly pleasant nature, also is a dejected man. “Monday” becomes a symbol of the beginning of a full week long torture and hence Mondays are painful too. Extreme form of utilitarianism practised by the landlady chokes him with disgust which leads to poetic outpourings:

She’s not giving me the heat I’m entitled to. Eleven dollars a week room and board,

And all she puts in the bag is a lousy pork sandwich,

The same every day and no surprises.
Is that right? Is that right now?

How’s a man to live,

Freezing all day in this palace of dust

And night comes with one window and a bed

And the streets full of strangers

And not one of them’s read a book thorough,

Or seen a poem from beginning to end

Or knows a song worth singing.

Oh, this is an ice-cold city, Mother,

And Roosevelt’s not making it warmer, somehow.

He sits on the table, holding his head.

And here’s another grand Monday! (358-359)

The life in the warehouse is so dull and miserable that every worker curses the Mondays. The callous, indifference of and the ruthless, exploitation by Eagle relate the life within to the patterns outside.

Bert, the youngest worker is anguished about the insufficient life, though he toils hard and dreams for a future. Out of the fifteen pounds he gets each month, he saves twelve so
that he can join a college and study further. In spite of his ambition and good hope, he too is a lonely figure, an isolated drifting vessel:

Bert: There’s something so terrible here! There always was, and I don’t know what. Gus, and Agnes, and Tommy and Larry, Jim and Patricia - why does it make me so sad to see them every - morning? It’s like the subway; Every day I see the same people getting on and the same people getting off, And all that happens is that they get older. God! Sometimes it scares me; like all of us in the world were riding back and forth across a great big room, form wall to wall and back again, And no end ever! Just no end! (358)

The managers of industries and factories too are drudging. Due to the heaviness of responsibilities and eagerness to satisfy the bosses, Raymond has “developed a stoop on him.” He is afraid to be kind and is afraid of his conscience. The extreme level of drudging keeps Raymond away from the everyday world. His words, in the last part of the play, show that he too is a victim of alienation and reification, “Brother! It’s a circus around here. Every Monday morning” (365).

The immanent emphasis of A View from the Bridge is on the personal plane, though the crisis is related to the intense
relationships of an insecure and partially illegal group. The play is set in a Brooklyn waterfront slum, with “personal ties” back to Italy, receiving unauthorized immigrants and hiding them within its own fierce loyalties. The play begins with Eddie’s warm reception of his wife Beatrice’s cousins, the “illegal” immigrants who steal into America. Extreme poverty and penury make them seek fortune in the new found world. To Beatrice’s questions of apprehension, Eddie answers with utmost loyalty to the unfortunate fortune seekers:

Eddie: It’s an honour, B. I mean it. I was just thinkin’ before; comin’ home, suppose my father didn’t come to this country, and I was starvin’ like them over there . . . and I had people in America could help me a couple of months? The man would be honoured to lend me a place to sleep. (383)

However, Eddie’s initial enthusiasm vanes as he finds Rudolpho getting attached to Eddie’s niece, Catherine. The conflict between his ethnic loyalty and his infatuation for Catherine makes him a lonely, alienated figure. Eddie has worked hard for years to bring up Catherine. Eddie admits this to Alferi, the narrator:

Eddie, with a helpless but ironic gesture: What can I do? I worked like a dog twenty years so a punk would
have her, so that’s what I done. I mean, in the worst times, in the worst, when there wasn’t a ship comin’ in the harbour, I didn’t stand around lookin’ for relief – I hustled. When there was empty piers in Brooklyn I went to Hoboken, Staten Islands, the west side, Jersey, all over – because I made a promise. I took out of my own mouth to give to her. I walked hungry plenty days in this city! And now I gotta sit in my own house and look at a son-of-a-bitch punk like that – which he came out of nowhere! I give him my house to sleep! I take the blankets off my bed for him, and he takes and puts his dirty filthy hands on her like a goddam thief. (409-410)

Eddie’s alienation becomes intense when his relationship with Beatrice starts falling apart.

Eddie: B; he’s taking her for a ride!

Beatrice: All right, that’s her ride. What’re you gonna stand over her till she’s forty? Eddie, I want you to cut it now, you hear me? I don’t like it! (399)

When, after initial hesitations, Catherine stands steadfast on her decision to marry Rudolpho, Eddie becomes a thoroughly miserable man.
Beatrice’s cousin Marco is another alienated character. The hunger and disease of his children have thrown him into the dangerous position of an illegal migrant worker, living stealthily among long shore men, in a part of New York near Brooklyn Bridge. He talks little but works very hard to earn his family’s living. Living under the mercy of the long shore men has made him a dejected man. In the end, he feels miserable when he is shipped back to Italy.

The issue of immigrants in America is not a new one. Since the seventeenth century immigrants from all countries of Europe, and later from many countries across the globe have reached the shore of America in search of fortune. However, the twentieth century witnessed the introduction of strict legal measures to check the flow of immigrants. This is paradoxical and unjust in essence. Basically, all the Americans are immigrants or descendents of immigrants who migrated to the new world to earn and make a living. What moral right do these immigrants and descendents of immigrants have to check or curtail fresh immigrants to America is a question covertly debated in the play. One ground for hunting down fresh immigrants is that earlier, already settled immigrants have made laws. The question of moral right pops up here also. This social contradiction stands as a subtext in the plot of A View from the Bridge.
Marco’s plight is a foil for Rudolpho’s fortune. Rudolpho can become a legal immigrant by marrying Catherine, an American born. Marco’s willingness to work does not entitle him for such a privilege.

Marco; his anger rising: he degraded my brother. My blood. He robbed my children, he mocks my work. I work to come here. . . . There’s no law for that? Where is the law for that? I don’t understand this country.

(434)

The repressed tirades against the society become important motifs in the allegorical patterns of plays. There are many instances of protests disguised as melodramatic forms such as violence, sex, intoxication, insanity, castration, lynching, cannibalism, witch-hunt, suicide, and spoilt occasion.

The course of events climaxing on a spoilt occasion serves the purpose of consolidating the total impact into one spot where the protagonist stands withered, disposed of, overpowered and/or destroyed. Such motifs secure cleavages for the lonely and unprotected in the laden armor of technological schizophrenia and bulldozing conventional morality to express their anger or disillusionment. Thus these motifs too contribute to the formal “solutions” to “the unresolvable social contradictions.”
In the plays of Williams, spoilt occasions are manifestations of the battle between social structures and human feelings. Roger Boxill’s remarks are worth mentioning in this regard.

It defines the essential Williams conditions that of a sensitive creature who has no home in an alien world. That is why evictions, banishments, or the loss of a cherished place of refuge—threatened or actual—are so frequent in Williams’s plays (Streetcar, Orpheus, Cat, Kingdom of Earth, Gnadiges Fraulein, This Property is Condemned). They are a theatrical metaphor of alienation. The lost home may not always be a real one, like the ancestral estate of the Du Bois family. In fact, more often it is simply the beautiful dream for which Belle Reve is primarily a symbol. (26)

Thus the spoilt occasion serves a shock effect. Birthdays and Easter celebrations are spoiled to expose the societal contradictions. The Glass Menagerie has such a metaphorical pattern. The gentleman caller comes to Laura as a Saviour; everything, to Laura, began to look bright and warm; she loved Jim O’Connor and he instills the confidence she badly needs; but all of a sudden the brightness dims in the new horizon, “for nowadays the world is lit by lightning” (313). So he asks her to
blow out that candle too. The contrast between the candle light and lightening to dispel darkness is metaphorically significant. The feeble and the violent are juxtaposed to get the desired effect. After having described the social background at the outset of the play, Tom’s invoking of violence is a violent motif.

In Spain there was revolution. Here there was only shouting and confusion. In Spain there was Guernica. Here, there were disturbances of labour, sometimes pretty violent, in otherwise peaceful cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Saint Louis. . . . (235)

It gets all the more symptomatic in Scene V:

In Spain there was Guernica! But here there was only hot swing music and liquor, dance halls, bars, and movies, and sex that hung in the gloom like a chandelier and flooded the world with brief deceptive rainbows. . . . All the world was waiting for bombardments! (265)

War holds an unconscious attraction because it offers a final explosive release from the tension that afflicts people, and aggression in less extreme forms provides similar outlet.
Stanley’s violence and raping of Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire* also have symbolic underpinnings. Blanche is already a pathetic creature and the rape and violence brings about her total destruction. This scene is contrasted with the next scene where the deranged Blanche is taken to an asylum by a doctor and a nurse. Blanche is under the belief that she is being taken to Shep Huntleigh, her saviour, real or imaginary. The spoilt occasion is the birthday, where the celebration scene gains importance because it is in this scene that Blanche’s fate is sealed. She is all prepared to celebrate it as a last resort. But it is spoiled rudely and a return ticket to a place where she is not welcome is thrust into her hands. Blanche’s sexual escapades and drinking also are loaded metaphors of protest, disease and escape.

The hapless individual subjected to unproportioned violence recurs in *Orpheus Descending*. Violence has many perpetrators in the social scene. Valentine Xavier who brings spiritual light and “fertility” to the town has been lynched. Val is tarnished by corruption, yet is uncorrupted, as his guitar and snake skin jacket, badges of purity in art and nature, clearly indicate. He looks back to the days before he became a male prostitute. The “barren” Lady Torrance becomes pregnant by him. Her husband, throughout the play, is in his death-bed. Orpheus is “punished”
by the “diseased Jabe” and Easter night is the setting for it. The lynching and the killing of Torrance and her unborn child are juxtaposed with Easter, the festival of Resurrection. For Lady Torrance also there is the spoilt occasion. She is eager to open the confectionery in memory of her father on that day in which he was burned to death by Jabe and “others.” Her high hopes are trampled upon, and with the unborn child in her womb she is killed. Violence and its patterns become symbolic in Williams. Vee Talbott, the painter and religious visionary finds in Val Xavier an understanding, spiritual person. But, their relationship is misunderstood by Vee’s husband and others. This situation also is highly symbolic. Val’s words, “You made some beauty out of this dark country with these two, soft, woman hands” (292) can be contrasted with the violence they are subjected to then and there.

In Suddenly Last Summer cannibalism is used to ambush social facades and evils. Sebastian Venable, the forty year old son of Mrs. Venable during his wanderings is eaten alive by a gang of beech urchins in a far away land. This shocking incident is revealed through many visions of Catherine Holly. Sebastian’s mother, an affluent, manipulating woman bribes the doctor, to cut off the scandalous story from Catherine’s brain. Insanity recurs here also. Catherine Holly is a witness to the
cannibalizing of Sebastian and this shock caused mental derangement. Thus insanity is made to appear as a consequence, not as a tool. Violence comes from Mrs. Venable also. She tries to align Catherine’s mother and brother to herself so that she can do lobotomy on Catherine. In Lion’s View State Asylum, it is the State that cuts off the unwanted and the unbecoming. George asks Catherine:

So you’ve GOT to stop tell in that story about what you saw happened to cousin Sebastian in Cabeze de Lobo even if what it couldn’t be TRUE! You got to drop it, sister, you can’t tell such a story to civilized people in a civilized up-to-date country! (381)

These words have to be contrasted with that of the doctor’s: “I can’t guarantee that a lobotomy would stop her babbling!” (367). The irony implied in the impending violence is all the more significant when Catherine’s own brother asks her to forget the “story.”

The “mentally deranged” Catherine’s words, as she is the main attention gatherer in the play, are to be taken in this light.

But, mother, I didn’t invent it. I know it’s a hideous story but it’s a true story of our time and the world
we live in and what did truly happen to cousin Sebastian in Cabeza de Lobo. . . . (82)

Catherine’s words expose the shifts and breaks in the repression by ideology.

Sex, violence, intoxication and castration camouflage the plot of *Sweet Bird of Youth*. Chance is no more a sweet bird of youth. He resorts to pills and other modes of intoxication. This life of Chance is contrasted with the brilliant, promising Chance of St. Cloud, before his sexual (mis)deed with Heavenly. Boss Finley and his gang allegorize violence and corruption at many levels. It is against this powerful and mammoth establishment that Chance - the once youthful and pure of heart, now felled by the same social and economic set up - is called upon to put a fight that he was sure to lose. If Chance is guilty of being a male prostitute, his punishers are no less guilty of the same offence. Chance’s status as a beach boy and gigolo has castrated him. The living conditions have already castrated him, and he has become an invalid. The princess also is a partner in suffering. Her words to Chance reveal this. Yet she leaves him in the crisis.

The threat of violence looms large in this play. The many castrations, threatened or actual and the inescapable human predicament are metaphorical of the social contradictions.
Williams’s stage direction at this juncture is a pointer to this.

. . . in this area it is very important that Chance’s attitude should be self-recognition, but not self-pity — a sort of deathbed dignity and honesty apparent in it. In both Chance and the Princess, we should return to be huddling-together of the lost, but not with sentiment, which is false, but with whatever is truthful in the moments when people share doom, face firing squads together. Because the princess is really equally doomed. She can’t turn back the clock that is equally relentless to them both. . . . The PRINCESS makes this instinctive admission to herself when she sits down by CHANCE on the bed facing the audience. Both are faced with castration, and in her heart she knows it. They sit side by side on the bed like two passengers on a train sharing a bench. (109)

Once again Easter/Resurrection is suggested and spoiled. Chance comes to Saint Cloud at the time of Easter. The play begins late in the morning on the Easter day and ends that same night.

However, in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, the most allegorical of all is the figure that has not been discussed at length by the
critics of the play - the figure of Heckler. As his name implies, he is a person who puts up a vain and lone fight against corruption. During the struggle he risks his life. Yet his relative status as a minor character is conspicuous indeed. Art has such ways of polemicizing against the real though the dominant ideology restricts it.

It is through relationship to the empirical that works of art salvage, albeit in neutralized fashion, something that once upon a time was literally a shared experience of all mankind. (Adorno 8)

Similar patterns appear in the works of Miller. There is no denying the fact that All my Sons raises the question of social responsibility of any individual. The plot of the play resists the callous neglect of the social role of the individual. It is the resistance that structures a catch 22 situation in the play, wherein the mother holds fast on to an internally constructed belief that her son Larry is alive. Keller’s contention that he has only done what any other businessman in his position would have done is countered symbolically by this belief of Kate. She has uncanny experiences, for she dreams of Larry flying over the house and crying out to her, before the apple tree planted in memory of him breaks. Her insight tells her that Larry’s death is connected with Keller’s crime of supplying faulty cylinder
heads to the air force which resulted in the crash of many aircrafts and the death of a number of pilots. Yet she does not like to believe that Keller is responsible for Larry’s death. So she hugs this illusion to protect Keller from the sin of causing his own son’s death. However, ultimately, the illusion should break. Her anguished words to Anne in Act I show the crux of the catch 22 situation:

Ann: why does your heart tell you he is alive?

Mother: Because he has to be.

Ann: But why, Kate?

Mother, going to her: Because certain things have to be, and certain things can never be . . . that’s why there is god. Otherwise anything could happen. But there’s god, so certain things can never happen. (78)

In Act II the situation develops into a crisis and a breaking point when Kate divulges the horror to Chris:

Mother: your brother is alive, darling, because if he is dead, your father killed him. Do you understand me now? As long as you live, that boy is alive. God does not let a son be killed by his father. (114)
This crisis in the play is a repressed tirade against the society which attaches too much importance to money.

Suicides in the plot are also symbolically enacted to critique the socio economic system. Larry takes the suicidal flight to protest against his father, which in essence, is against the American value system where dollars and nickels are the criteria of greatness. Keller’s suicide is a symbolic way of accepting the need for values. It is Larry’s letter that clears Keller’s vision. If Larry considered the dead pilots his own brothers, and ended his life to make amends for his father’s crime that all the dead/killed were Keller’s sons, and having killed them, he has no right to live. He puts a bullet in his head, recognising the individual’s personal involvement in society. Crime against society, intentional or inadvertent, must be exposed and punished.

Interrogation is another device adopted in order to question the society. The interrogation of Keller by George, and later by Chris, is significant in this regard as it arraigns the accepted value system of capitalist America.

Disease is also symptomatic of such social environment. Though apparently not important to the plot, the words of Jim in Act III are highly relevant in this regard. The diseases of individuals indirectly evoke the social disease:
Jim, tiredly: some had a head ache and thought he was dying. Slight pause. Half of my patients are quite mad. Nobody realizes how many people are walking around loose, and they’re cracked as coconuts. Money. Money – money – money – money. You say it long enough it doesn’t mean anything . . . Oh, how I’d love to be around when that happens! (117)

In *Death of a Salesman*, the social and political context reinforces the suicide of Willy as amounting to a critique of American values. Miller reveals the metaphorical and symptomatic expressions of suicide:

The image of a suicide is so mixed in motive as to be unfathomable and yet demanding statement. Revenge was in it and a power of love, a victory in that it would bequeath a fortune to the living and a flight from emptiness. With it an image of peace at the final curtain, the peace that is between wars, the peace leaving the issues above ground and viable yet.

*(Miller Plays: One 30)*

There is a spoilt occasion in the play, which functions as a device to show failure in a competitive world. Biff and Happy are to meet Willy at a restaurant for a happy dinner together. Biff tells Happy that even after waiting for six hours, he does
not get a chance to talk to Bill Oliver for a minute, and Oliver does not even recognize him. When Willy arrives from his employer, he too has no good news to tell him. Willy plunges into his past wherein the disastrous episode in the hotel room in Massachusetts absorbs his thoughts. He is seen in the company of a tart by Biff. This incident has been instrumental in ruining Biff. By the time Willy wakes up from his thoughts, Biff and Happy are gone away with call girls. There was no dinner. The promiscuity of Happy is both a diversion from harsh realities and a mode of resistance to them. He resents having to work under men who are his inferiors, and he revenges himself by seducing their fiancés:

Happy: Sure, the guy’s is in line for the vice-presiding of the store. I didn’t know what gets into me, may be I just have an overdeveloped sense of competition or something, but I went and ruined her, furthermore I can’t get rid of her. And he is the third executive I’ve done that to. Isn’t that a crummy characteristic? And to top it all, I go to their weddings. (19)

In *The Crucible* the courting of death instead of lies by Proctor and others, the witch-hunt, and the escapades of the
girls can be considered as repressed tirades against the social structure.

In the strictly built up puritanical society of New Salem there is no chance of enjoyment. In the notes to the play, Miller says:

Their creed forbade anything resembling a theatre or “vain enjoyment.” They did not celebrate Christmas, and a holiday from work meant only that they must concentrate even more upon prayer. (226)

The shock of Rev. Parris, and later of Hale, when they hear that the girls are dancing in the wood is significant.

Parris, pressed, turning on her: And what shall I say to them? That my daughter and my niece I discovered dancing like heathens in the forest? (231)

Or later,

Hale, to Parris: Now, sir, what were your first warning of this strangeness?

Parris: why, sir, - I discovered her - indicating Abigail - and my niece and ten or twelve of the other girls, dancing in the forest last night.

Hale, surprised: You permit dancing?
Parris: No, no, it were secret. (252)

Such escapades are instances of the return of the repressed. Abigail’s words to Proctor show how natural and exciting the event is to the girls in the company of Tituba who sings and chants Barbados songs.

Proctor: The road past my house is a pilgrimage to Salem all morning. The town’s mumbling witch craft.

Abigail: Oh, posh! We were dancing in the woods last night, and my uncle leaped in on us. She took fright, is all. (240)

Ironically, Proctor treats the witchcraft episode as a joke at this stage – just naughtiness on the part of Abigail and the younger girls.

However witch-hunt has greater dimensions. The witch-hunt provides and encourages the excitement which ordinary life denies, and at the same time allows revenge against those who refuse to conform to the dictates of the society. Another facet of the Salem society which is stressed, is the amount of envy, covetousness, grudging going on beneath the Christian surface. The words of the playwright in the notes point to this direction:
[The witch-hunt] was also, and as importantly a long overdone opportunity for every one so inclined to express publicly his guilt and sins, under the cover of accusations against the victims. It suddenly became possible - and patriotic and holy - for a man to say that Martha Corey had come into his bedroom at night, and that, while his wife was sleeping at his side, Martha laid herself down on his chest and “nearly suffocated him”. Of course it was her spirit only, but his satisfaction at confessing himself was no lighter than if it had been Martha herself. One could not ordinarily speak such things in public.

Long held hatreds of neighbours could now be openly expressed, and vengeance taken, despite the Bible’s charitable injunctions. Land-lust which had been expressed before by constant bickering over boundaries and deeds, could not be elevated to the arena of morality; one could cry witch against one’s neighbour and feel perfectly justified in the bargain. Old scores could be settled on a plane of heavenly combat between Lucifer and the Lord; suspicious and the envy of the miserable toward the happy could and did burst out in the general revenge. (229)
Witch-hunt in the play critiques the social fabric where, above all, there is a straightforward and unrelieved dedication to evil displayed by the judges and prosecutors, the guardians of justice.

Intoxication, promiscuity, disease and death are symptomatic codes in *A Memory of Two Mondays*. Tomy’s alcoholism has made him a wreck and invalid. He too is a product of the insensible factory culture. Everybody in the warehouse struggles hard to save Tomy from being fired out of the job on the day of the inspection by the boss, Mr. Eagle:

Kenneth to Larry: Ah, you can’t blame the poor fellow, sixteen years of his life in this place.

Larry: You said it.

Kenneth: There’s a good deal of monotony connected with the life, isn’t it? . . . oh, there must be a terrible lot of Monday mornings in sixteen years. And no philosophical idea at all, y’know, to pass the time? (347)

Gus is an alcoholic who leads a bohemian life in spite of his great love for his ailing wife. Every weekend Gus and Jim squander all the money they have in the company of girls. With the death of his wife he is a broken man. His action of
squandering the insurance money, yelling at the bosses, distributing his money to all and his death are significant in this regard.

Violence, betrayal and spoilt occasion get manifested in *A View from the Bridge* as modes of resistance to social parochialism. The special feature of this play is the concentration of these elements around a single cause – Eddie’s strong infatuation for Catherine. Eddie resorts to muscle power and intimidation to retain his monopoly over Catherine. These tactics are analogous to the tactics of a society which is built on social Darwinism. When Eddie feels that Rudolpho’s better qualities have attracted Catherine, he cannot tolerate the idea of losing Catherine:

Eddie, to Beatrice: He’s lucky, believe me. Slight pause. He looks away, then to Beatrice. That’s why the waterfront is no place for him. They stop dancing. Rudolpho turns off phonograph. I mean like me – I can’t cook, I can’t sing, I can’t make dresses, so I’m on the waterfront. (415)

While doing this he is getting jealous and forces Rudolpho to fight with him, pretending that he is trying to teach Rudolpho a lesson. In fact, Eddie is desperately trying to prove with his muscle power he is superior to Rudolpho. The sardonic bouts of
Eddie get checkmated by Marco as the latter takes a chair and raises it like a weapon over Eddie’s head. There is a glare of warning and a smile of triumph in Marco’s face and Eddie’s grin vanishes as he absorbs the look. This stage marks the bringing of violence in the play which culminates in the ritualistic enactment of the primal scene of social Darwinism, the killing of Eddie by Marco. However, Eddie’s attempts fail in retaining Catherine under his possession. This fact prompts him to the betrayal of his ethnic kith and kin to the officials of the Immigration Bureau. The subsequent arrest of Marco and Rudolpho has the effect of pulling a veil of gloom over the marriage of Catherine. The great occasion is spoilt by the crooked ways of Eddie to retain his prized possession.

Love for the bruised individual links the seemingly disparate symbolic enactments produced by Williams and Miller. In this regard, Kenneth Tynan’s observation draws attention to the role of theatre in society, especially in the American context:

It takes courage in a sophisticated age to keep faith with this kind of love, and their refusal to compromise has led both Miller and Williams into embarrassing pseudo-simplicities. (35)