Chapter 3

Drama as History

A strong rewriting of drama involves a restructuring of a prior historical or ideological subtext. Dramatic works, as socially symbolic acts, are episodes in history because they salvage the struggles of the past for the present. In the last horizon of the political interpretation, the “aesthetic acts” have to be treated as episodes in a “vast unfinished plot.” These symbolic acts are considered as integral parts of the great narrative story - history - with its facts reaching back to primitive times, and to the immediate past. It is by “finding” the works under discussion in the historical framework that the political interpretation becomes complete. Proper placing, and relating of the structurization of the individual works to diachronic history makes the objective of historicization evoked by Jameson a reality. The ideologemes and the social contradictions call for the fantastic, formal “solutions” adumbrated in different phases and stages in history.

Since its discovery in the fifteenth century, America had open to the gaze and guess of Renaissance Europe. With the arrival of the first settlers from Europe a kind of agrarian
democracy burgeoned, effecting further territorial expansion and greater immigration from different countries of Europe.

The explorers and settlers found not a virgin land, but a populated one. Yet they brought their cultural baggage with them. They came to the New World with European issues, values and historical awareness and these came to be projected on to America, especially in the case of the English settlements in North America. They brought Europe’s ideologies and technologies.

On the English and European models of governance, religion, law, art, and literature, the Americans improvised, and gave shapes to systems which could successfully work in the new environment. However, there had been contradiction basically between the freedom of opportunity and the presence of the Negro slave, in the War of Independence, which ultimately burst out in the Civil War. Though America had long been regarded as a land of opportunity, until mid-nineteenth century it remained economically an underdeveloped country. The dramatic rise of American industry in the latter half of the century transformed the nation, and opened up new exciting possibilities. Temperly and Bradbury give an insight into the manner in which America rose to economic power and independence through industrialization:
By 1900 her [America’s] manufacturing output exceeded that of her two principal rivals, Britain and Germany combined. This astonishing achievement, together with the associated growth of massive cities and new transportation systems, owed much to factors of scale, the immense natural resources of the continent, to labour problems leading to capital-intensive industrialization, and to the tradition of practical know-how and invention for which Americans had long been famous. Much of the basic technology was European. Americans had not invented machine technology any more than they had invented democracy. But in their wholesale application of it, their willingness to innovate and invest, and the sheer speed of their rise to economic and industrial pre-eminence combined to capture the world’s attention.

(10)

The most significant are the conditions that changed with the shift from pre-industrial to industrial social milieu with the changes in the structure of family and the status of women. Some of the changes in the societal fabric are caused by the spurt of immigration, the reception of the immigrants by the settlers, and the resistance to the immigrants by the early
settlers, especially by the WASP communities (White Anglo Saxon Puritans). The greater thrust in this analysis is to the following factors - the condition of women as determined by patriarchy, the morality of the new world notorious for its double standards, the resistance modes of the hippies, the related and all pervading ethnic conflicts.

In pre-industrial society, the work place was largely the household and its premises. Reproductive roles were, therefore, congruent with social and economic roles. Children were considered members of the work force and were seen as economic assets. Such a social system encouraged the integration of family members into common economic activities. The segregation along sex and age lines that characterizes middle class family in modern society had not yet appeared. As long as the household functioned as a workshop as well as a family home, there could be no clear separation between family life and work life. Even though pre-industrial families contained large numbers of children, women invested relatively less time in motherhood than women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The pre-industrial social patterns get manifested in Miller’s The Crucible as the play deals directly with the events that take place at the end of the seventeenth century in Salem. Proctor, Francis and Giles are farmers who work hard and make
their living. Proctor, after a day’s work in the farm tells his wife: “this farm’s a continent when you go foot by foot droppin’ seeds in it” (262). They enjoy their life, living in proximity.

Proctor: It’s winter in here yet. On Sunday let you come with me, and we’ll walk in the farm together; I never see such a load of flowers on the earth. With good feeling he goes and looks up at the sky through the open doorway. Lilacs have a purple smell. Lilac is the smell of night fall, I think. Massachusetts is a beauty in the spring! (262)

This, however, does not mean that their life is always rosy and sunny. They have problems in farming and agriculture. They depend on the weather conditions. Rev. Parris complains about the lack of firewood in the winter:

Parris: Where is my wood? My contract provides I be supplied with all my firewood. I am waiting since November for a stick, and even in November I had to show my frost bitten hands like some London beggar? (245)

During the winter, Proctor cannot go to church on Sabbath because his wife is sick. There are problems within and without that keep Proctor from going to church. He believes that the man
who gives sermons does not have any godly grace in him. Miller’s words describe the pre-industrial social life in Salem:

When a new farm house was built, friends assembled to “raise the roof,” and there would be special foods cooked and probably some potent cider passed around. There was a good supply of ne’er-do-wells in Salem, who dallied at the shovel board in Bridget Bishop’s tavern. Probably more than the creed, hard work kept the morals of the place from spoiling, for the people were forced to fight the land like heroes for every grain of corn, and no man had very much time for fooling around. (226)

The heavy dependence on farm and land causes disputes between neighbours often leading to litigation. This aspect is a crucial one in The Crucible because land disputes and avarice to possess others’ land are among the important factors that lead to the charge of witchcraft and the subsequent witch-hunt.

The integration of family and work allows for an intensive labour-sharing between husbands and wives and between parents and children. As long as the family is the production unit, housework is inseparable from domestic industries or agricultural work and is valued, therefore, for its economic contribution.
Industrialization and urbanization in nineteenth and twentieth century America wrought drastic changes in traditional family patterns. The Glass Menagerie and A Streetcar Named Desire exemplify this transformation. Tom’s father, and later Tom himself work away from home and, as a result of this, they feel the absence of proper communication and emotional bondage with the other members of the family. Stanley also works away from home. He has his friends, his games, his wife, and he develops a behavioural pattern where his authority in the household is more important than emotional bonds.

Industrialization led to the increase in urban population. Regarding the steep rise in urban population, Brian Lee and Robert Reinders state:

Attendant on the growth of industry was the expansion of urban centers. The urban population grew from 14,130,000 in 1880 to 41,999,000 in 1910 . . . and the census indicated that the urban population exceeded the rural population. . . . In the period 1880-1910, thousands of sleepy little townships, with their few services for the surrounding agricultural population, were transformed into “cities.” (178-179)

The living conditions in A Streetcar Named Desire and Death of a Salesman capture the shift from the rural to the urban and
the resultant conflicts. The bulk of the native and foreign-born that moved into the cities after 1880, according to Lee and Reinders, came from rural and village backgrounds:

They were a pre-industrial folk who brought into industrial society ways of work and other habits and values not associated with industrial necessities and the industrial ethos. (182)

Industrialization imposed on the immigrant and native Americans of rural backgrounds a novel discipline which required conformity and routinized behavior rare in rural society. The conflict between Stanley and Blanche in A Streetcar Named Desire, and the struggles of Willy Loman and Biff Loman in Death of a Salesman are cases in point. The wage system separates the individual from ritual duties and obligations. Factories and mills require regularized, clock-based attendance, and a repetitious and constant work pattern. Whereas Willy and Biff fail in internalizing the new values, Stanley in A Streetcar Named Desire is successful in assimilating the new values and norms.

In the rural mind, accommodation is interwoven with land, and without land the family cannot act as a unit with regard to the rest of the community. In the city, dwellings are separated from land. The tenement block brings about changes in life
patterns. According to Lee and Reinders, “two thirds of all housing was tenant occupied. In 1900... in New York 87.9 percent and in Washington 74.9 percent of all housing units were rented” (183).

The choking, inadequate lives in The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, Death of a Salesman, A Memory of Two Mondays and A View from the Bridge are related to the above social conditions. The agrarian past often follows those who have come to the cities. Amanda’s recurring thoughts about the Blue Mountains in The Glass Menagerie, Blanche’s nostalgia about the Plantations in A Streetcar Named Desire, and Willy’s memories about the happy past and the planting of the seed in the congested courtyard in Death of a Salesman appeal to the collective memory of people who have lost, or are dispossessed. Their children also bemoan the lost innocence of a rural past. Chance in Sweet Bird of Youth, Biff in Death of a Salesman and Kenneth in A Memory of Two Mondays fondle the memories of past/lost rural life. A yearning for the past seems simpler, morally surer, more pastoral and less troubled.

Industrialization has ideologically effected modern military also. Chris and Larry in All My Sons work in the armed forces away from home. This has led to the formation of a vacuum in the family of Kellers, in the bonds between parents and
children. In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy is a travelling salesman who is always away from home and whose absence has created much damage to the family. Biff and Happy too work away, creating a discord in the emotional bond within the family. The tension between the father and the children in *Death of a Salesman* germinates, to a large extent, from these conditions in the family. All the workers in *A Memory of Two Mondays* are away from their families, except Bert and Larry. Their emotional paradigm is structured chiefly by this aspect. The emotional vacuum gets manifested in the character of Gus whose attitude to life, manners, and outlook are determined largely by his lack of communication with and inability to be near his ailing wife. He regrets to have been away drinking and having a merry time with prostitutes while his wife is dying. When his wife dies he decides to put an end to the “circus” at the warehouse, ultimately ending his life. His extreme frustration determines his bohemian and ruffian-like behaviour to all around, though he essentially is good at heart, which is evident in his treatment of Tommy and Bert. When Tommy, owing to drunkenness, faces the threat of being fired from the job, Gus stands with him, supporting him. The scattering of family in the industrial, urban, social scenario accounts for the plight of the characters in the warehouse. Eddie, in *A View from the Bridge*, is the only provider for the family. He works hard from morning to evening,
and during the period of lay off he wanders far and wide in search of work.

Industrialization broke down the great extended family of the past, uprooted traditional kin-groups, and destroyed the organic interdependence between the family and the community. However, in early industrial communities in the nineteenth century, the family continued to function as a work unit. Relatives acted as agents for recruitment, migration, and settlement for industrial work. Pre-industrial family patterns and values were carried over into the new industrial system, providing important continuities between rural and industrial society.

Industrialization, however, did effect major changes in family functions, which, in turn, had an important consequence on gender roles. Through a process of differentiation, the family gradually surrendered functions previously concentrated within it, to other social institutions. The new systematized work schedule led to the segregation of husbands from wives and fathers from children in the course of their work-day. In the middle class families, house-work lost its economic and productive value. However, in trying to assess the significance of the changes brought about by industrialization in the family, one must recognize the fact that these changes were gradual, and
they varied significantly from class to class. Talking about the status of women in the early part of the twentieth century, Jacqueline Fear and Helen McNeil state:

Though more single women now worked and became an important reserve force in the economy, most married women gave their energy to home making which became professionalized in the twenties, especially for the middle class. (210)

The Glass Menagerie has many factors that are part of the above historical change in social institutions. The job of Amanda’s husband as a travelling telephone man separates the husband from wife, and father from children, as the wife and children are in the rural Mississippi. After having settled in St. Louis, the Wingfields have some tough time even before Tom’s father forsakes them. As in the case of all middle class families, Amanda does not go out for work, nor does Laura. They depend on the salary of Tom. However, Amanda manages to eke out something by working as a subscription agent. Stella in A Streetcar Named Desire and her neighbours also do not go to work. They look after their children and do the work at home only. Their men go out for work and support the family. This separation between working male and women at home is significant in the lives presented in both the plays.
It never occurs to the characters of the plays of Miller that women also can go out and work. Kate and Anne in *All My Sons*, Linda in *Death of a Salesman*, the female family members of the male workers in the warehouse in *A Memory of Two Mondays*, and Beatrice in *A View from the Bridge* do not ever think of going out, work, and earn for the family. More than earning, working enhances the personality of women and redefines the power patterns.

Working class single women, as a matter of fact, go to work outside home also. But in Williams we do not come across them, as he is pre-occupied with middle class life. Women in *Orpheus Descending* - Mrs. Torrance, Dolly Beulah, and Vee - also do not go out for work. Their husbands support them. Agnes and Patricia in *A View from the Bridge* do go out to work.

The break-up of the family in the first few decades of the twentieth century became stronger than ever before. It was appalling as there had been no state-sponsored welfare measures. The Wall Street crash and the Depression pushed the American psyche into the depths of despair. The New Deal was envisaged by Franklin Roosevelt in an attempt to save the nation from falling apart. The words of Ralph Willet and John White disclose the strategies evolved by Roosevelt:
After closing all banks for four days, and placing an embargo on the export of gold, silver and currency to protect US reserves, Roosevelt called the 73rd Congress into special session on 9 March 1933. From then until 16 June – the first Hundred Days of the New Deal – it enacted a mass of complex and sometimes inconsistent legislation at high speed. (223)

The Emergency Banking Act (1933) authorized the regulated reopening of banks. The National Industrial Recovery Act (1933) tried to revive industrial and business activity and The National Recovery Act tried to stabilize prices, spread employment, raise wages and provide emergency relief through the Public Works Administration. The three Agricultural Adjustment Acts (1933, 1936, and 1938) were attempts to maintain farm prices by artificially induced scarcity. The Social Security Act (1935) was a notable welfare measure, providing for a system of old-age retirement payments and fixed-period unemployment compensation (224-225).

Despite all these efforts, the American society of the 30s, 40s, and 50s fell far short of the concept of the welfare state – which is evident in the plays of Williams and Miller – and the lives of the masses often encountered excruciating situations.
In the period preceding the welfare state and public assistance, the strong relationships among kin were particularly valuable in providing support to individuals and families, during critical life situations. The predicament of Laura and Amanda when Tom leaves them; the deranged, lonely, miserable life of Blanche after the loss of Belle Reve; the life of Lady Torrance after Jabe becomes bed ridden; the breakup of the family of Val and his situation as an orphan; Chance’s predicament as well as his mother’s after Chance’s departure from St. Cloud - all point to this aspect in the social fabric. No kith and kin come to their assistance, nor does the state.

Another typical illustration is *Death of a Salesman*. Even at the age of sixty three, Willy is not given a desk job; instead he is forced to travel far and wide in order to sell for his company, despite the fact that Willy has become thoroughly worn out, haggard and exhausted. Linda desperately tries to vindicate him to their sons:

He used to be able to make six, seven calls a day in Boston. Now he takes his valises out of the car and puts them back and takes them out again and he’s exhausted. Instead of walking he talks now. He drives seven hundred miles, and and when he gets there no one knows him anymore, no one welcomes him. And what goes
through a man’s mind, driving seven hundred miles home without having earned a cent? Why shouldn’t he talk to himself? Why? When he has to go to Charley and borrow fifty dollars a week and pretend to me that it’s his pay? How long can that go on? How long? You see what I’m sitting here and waiting for? (45)

But neither kith or kin, nor the state comes to rescue the Lomans’ ship from wrecking. In a welfare state Willy would be leading a retired life with pension to support him and the family. Instead, old Willy is wandering crazily and desperately to earn enough to pay just the insurance money. Linda is the only character who heroically tries to hold things together. On such occasions, the pre-industrial society could have offered help. But owing to the scattering of relations precipitated by industrialization Ben is the only blood relation who visits them. It is characterized by irony because Ben’s visit is just a fragment of imagination or illusion of Willy. Fantasizing help coming from an illusory character is fabrication of a mind which craves for protection and security.

In All My Sons also nobody comes to help the Kellers, nor do they go out to help any other family relations. Each family stands as a closed-in isolated unit, cut off from the society. In the play this estrangement makes it easy for Keller to commit
a crime to society, without the pangs of conscience. At the same
time, this isolation denies the Kellers any psychological
support from the others. The State also plays no role in the
affairs of the Kellers except that of policing.

The state’s role reduced to policing decides the plot of A
View from the Bridge too. In the laissez-faire society the State
intervenes only in very limited areas. At the beginning of the
play itself the presence of the State officials is shown as
threatening:

__________________________
Eddie: This is the United States Government you’re
playin’ with now, this is the Immigration Bureau. If
you said it you knew it, if you didn’t say it, you
didn’t know it. (388)

The free hand given to the capitalists creates the
traumatic working conditions in A Memory of Two Mondays. Even
those who have worked in the warehouse for twenty to thirty
years do not have a decent salary or pension. The situation
would have been better had they been in a welfare state. Though
the welfare legislations began to appear in the 30s, for two
more decades the state assistance was not enough.

The new transportation system expanded industrial and
commercial facilities, and provided increased employment
opportunity for women. But despite all this, a majority of married women did not assume gainful employment, because ideological barriers placed women’s domestic and work roles in conflict.

The ideology of domesticity also began to influence working class and immigrant families during the early decades of the twentieth century. As immigrants became “Americanized,” particularly in the second generation, they internalized the values of domesticity and began to view women’s work outside home as demeaning, or as compromising for the husband and dangerous for the children. Married women entered the labour force only when driven by economic necessity. In A Streetcar Named Desire, Stanley is a newly Americanized immigrant from Poland, who has immense pride in being an American. He is the only earning member in the house, as is Pablo, Steve and Mitch. The condition of women in Orpheus Descending and Suddenly Last Summer (with the exception of affluent Mrs. Venable) is not different.

The ideological codes that allot traditional gender roles inform the work of Miller also. In All My Sons, Kate Keller is a housewife and a loving mother. She is shown as a mother to the whole neighborhood, for she can overwhelm every one with her tender love. When George arrives with his eyes shooting sparks
at Joe Keller, Kate drains his spirits with her love. She caresses him, makes a fuss about his health and tempts him to drink his favorite grape juice. She is a “good” housewife in the family. Kate is portrayed as having a formidable capacity for love that makes her hug the illusion that her elder son Larry is still alive. She keeps his room spick and span and even brushes his shoes everyday, expecting him to turn up sooner or later. Though her insight tells her that Larry’s death is connected with Joe Keller’s crime, she does not like to believe that he is responsible for Larry’s death. Like a typical “good” housewife, she does not question her husband about the crime.

Linda Loman’s portrayal in Death of a Salesman is on similar lines. She is an understanding housewife and a loving mother. She does not go out to work even when the family is, financially, in dire straits. But Linda genuinely loves and respects her husband, supports him when he is weak and encourages him when he is drooping. Linda’s argument with her two sons in favour of Willy is a proof to show that the character is conceived as a traditional and conventional housewife:

I don’t say he’s a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the news paper. He’s not the finest character that ever lived. But
he’s a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He’s not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person. (44)

She does not lose her temper even when her husband is angry. Linda is drawn as a loving and caring mother to Biff and Happy. Happy’s praise to Linda projects the male fantasy about “ideal” housewife and mother: “What a woman! They broke the mould when they made her!” (52).

In A Memory of Two Mondays there are women who go out to work. Patricia has broken out of the traditional mould. She is the “new” woman, working, earning, spending, partying, and “enjoying” life. Agnes is middle aged, somewhere between the “traditional” and the “new.” She works and earns her living; but does not enjoy the life style of Patricia, perhaps owing to her upbringing in the “traditional” society. Apart from these two, the wives and the mothers of all the male workers in the warehouse, though not present on the stage, are of the “traditional” type.

Beatrice is another house-wife-character in Miller’s A View from the Bridge, framed in the patriarchal format. She is relegated to the domestic fold. Though her financial position is
not good, Beatrice is not supposed to go out to work and earn. In fact the ideological barrier has a role in Eddie’s attitude also in preventing Catherine from going to work.

In the industrial and post-industrial society, family becomes the only retreat and this becomes very taxing. In the pre-industrialist society, communities offer consolation. Laura, Amanda, Tom, Blanche and Stella - all depend heavily on family. But family has not developed a substitute mechanism to support all and solve the problems of all.

Kate, Chris, Ann and Joe of All My Sons; Linda, Biff, Happy and Willy of Death of a Salesman; Larry, Gus, Kenneth, Patricia, Agnes and Tommy of A Memory of Two Mondays; Eddie, Beatrice, Catherine, and Marco in A View from the Bridge - all alike depend heavily on the family as a unique place of consolation and regeneration.

Towards the fifties and sixties and on to the seventies the social fabric changed again. Generally the young people were against marriage, and against family as a social institution with its familiar sex roles - woman as wife, mother, and the one who did childbearing and rearing; man as husband, father, bread winner and head of the family. There were external manifestations of protest such as men growing beards and long hair, and women going about without bras. According to Fear and
McNeil, the emergence of the “new youth,” and “new woman” were significant features in the American society after the Depression.

The new woman audaciously flaunted her bobbed hair, hiked skirt, cigarettes and boot-leg. By sheer force of violence she established the feminine right to equal representation in such hitherto masculine fields of endeavor as smoking and drinking, swearing, petting and disturbing the community peace. (210)

The young men and women rejected the control of the “traditional” and “orthodox,” and showed off themselves as “liberated” and “sexually aggressive.”

The growth of a “counter culture” was a significant aspect in the American society during and after the Depression years, in the 40s and 50s which reached a chaotic climax in the last part of the 60s with the Vietnam War. The hippyism, the Beat movement, the racial struggles that had occurred in many places and the popularity of activists like James Dean or Elvis Presley as symbols of revolt showed the presence of a “counter culture” infused with the spirit of protest from those who abhorred the culture of materialism. Daniel Snowman and Malcolm Bradbury state:
The counter culture included both “soft” and “hard” elements . . . hippies who talked of love and revolutionaries who spoke of the overthrow of the society, some who were “turned on” by the gentleness of the Beatles, and others who preferred the progressive snarl of the Rolling Stones. But through all these and other contradictions ran a single line, for the counter culture in all its manifestations was imaginative rather than intellectual, expressive rather than analytical, interested in trying new types of experience rather than improving old ones. Its language was scatological and apocalyptic and its politics radical. (280)

Though “official” America tried to function just as it always had, the “counter culture” of the hippies, yippies, political activists, angry blacks and alienated youngsters tried to shock the society by ostentatiously making love or consuming illegal drugs in public, or men wearing their hair unconventionally long or women their skirts unconventionally short. The wanderer characters of Williams especially that of Val and Carol in Orpheus Descending bear ample testimony to this. The escapades of Biff and Happy in Death of a Salesman, the drunken revelry of Gus and Jim in A Memory of Two Mondays,
the naked dance and conjuring of Abigail and the girls in the woods in *The Crucible* also exemplify this.

America is immigrant’s land. Since the seventeenth century immigrants have been pouring in. In *Leaves of Grass* Walt Whitman says: “Here’s not merely a nation, but a teeming of nations” (371). In over 350 years close to fifty million men, women and children have entered the United States as immigrants. R.A. Burchell and Eric Homberger think that the history of American immigration can be divided into four periods:

From Jamestown to the Revolution; from the Revolution to 1896; from 1896 to 1921; and from 1921 to the present day. In the first period, the immigrants came mainly from Great Britain and Ireland, with a sizeable eighteenth century German contingent. In the second, the composition remained roughly as it had been, but with the addition of Scandinavians and a higher proportion of the Irish and the Germans. In the third period, the majority of immigrants arrived from southern and eastern Europe. In all three periods immigration went virtually unrestricted, though not unregulated; since 1921 the United States has imposed an annual limit on the numbers permitted to enter. Between 1820 and 1971 around seventy lakhs of Germans
and around sixty lakhs of Italians have migrated to America. (128)

The attempt to accommodate within a single nation these disparate, often mutually hostile newcomers, with their own national and ethnic habits and loyalties, has always been a great enterprise and challenge to growing America. Most immigrants found it hard to assimilate the public values of the new society. The experience of leaving the mother land, migration and settling in a new alien space were a great ordeal for most of the immigrants. The hostility from the early settlers reinforced the troubles. America thereby found itself blessed with an unusual number of energetic, mobile, ambitious, daring and optimistic persons. But America also gained the rootless, the unscrupulous and those who value money over relationships. This perhaps accounts for the violence and cruelty of Americans, which started with the systematic killings of the Indians in the seventeenth century, through the killings and persecutions of blacks, the violence against the radicals and hippies, the Vietnam War and the atom bomb in Japan. In the nineteenth century, “culture” and “morality” were white-centred. But slowly by the turn of the twentieth century immigrants from far and wide entered the country desperately trying to make a
living. Israel Zangwill describes this situation in one of his plays:

There she lies, the great melting pot. Listen! Can’t you hear the roaring and the bubbling? There gapes her mouth \([points \ to \ the \ east]\), the harbor where a thousand mammoth feeders come from the ends of the world to pour in their human freight. Ah! What a stirring and seething! Celt and Latin, Slav and Teuton, Greek and Syrian, black and yellow. . . .

(184-185)

According to R.A. Burchell and Eric Homberger, the early settlers with their dominant position tried to make the new immigrant give up his/her cultural differences and accept the necessity of what has been called “Anglo-conformity”(135). Such a process created tension and violence, the forms of which could be seen in the plays of Williams and Miller. The years of violence seen so frequently show how easy it is for a wealthy and respectable WASP community to descend to the level of a lynching mob. The violence against blacks and “outsiders” have to be taken into consideration to understand the violent, lynching, castrating, hypocrite champions of morality in Orpheus Descending and Sweet Bird of Youth. Jabe and his coarse friends have burnt alive Mrs. Torrance’s father. They mete and dole the
moral issues with chain-gang dogs, lynch and burn alive Val Xavier. Similarly Boss Finley and his gang champion the purity of white women, castrate and kill Negroes who violate the chastity of white women. The “new world” of the urban industrial world also has the same old cultural and moral values. Stanley is the representative of this morality.

Many of the characters in *A Memory of Two Mondays* are “recent” settlers, who still have their links and flavours of their mother country. They are being Americanized slowly. Similarly, Eddie in *A View from the Bridge* is a character who has been Americanized and is proud of it. Marco and Rudolpho are illegal immigrants since America has developed laws to restrict the influx of immigrants. However by 1970 the picture has changed a lot with the increase in Governmental control and power.

Patriarchy is to be grasped as the sedimentation and the virulent survival of forms of alienation specific to the oldest mode of production of human history, with its division of labour between men and women, and its division of power between youth and old. In the American context, even in the post-industrial framework, the division of labour existed. In *The Glass Menagerie* Tom’s work and Amanda’s additional effort for an income illustrate this. In *A Streetcar Named Desire* also these
virulent sign systems operate at different levels. The rejection and branding of Blanche as “other” and “bad” by the old culture adherents represented by Stanley and his men point in this direction. In A View from the Bridge Eddie’s utter distrust of and disregard for Rudolpho, the illegal immigrant and his objection to Catherine’s marriage to Rudolpho are other instances of this. The patriarchal power structures crush the “outsiders” or the “potential dangers” like Val, Carol and Mrs. Torrance in Orpheus Descending. In Sweet Bird of Youth it plays havoc in St. Cloud under the pretext of protecting white women’s chastity and decency.

In the suburban living pattern, during the industrial and post-industrial period, husbands go to the city and participate in the pleasure of “modern” life while their wives are assigned the task of acting out the conventional roles of “traditional housewives.” The patriarchal double standards allow Willy in Death of a Salesman to go to different places as a salesman, and when feeling “terribly lonely” (95), he spends the nights with prostitutes. In spite of Linda being faithful to Willy, it does not occur to him that he should requite her loyalty. Here, the loneliness of Willy is foregrounded to the extent of Linda’s loneliness being blacked out. Often it happens that men go out to work, leaving women at home. Here, men take part in the
affairs of the world, have communication with the world, and enjoy “out there.”

The domesticated wife is a good woman and the undomesticated woman is “not clean enough,” and is a prostitute. If Biff and Happy consider their mother as a housewife and as a great woman, they consider other women as “the other sort,” expendable. Both of them, especially Happy, have frequent encounters with girls. Boss Finley seems to exaggerate the purity of his daughter while he has Lucy as a paid concubine. It is precisely this double standard of the patriarchal system that is being contested in the 50s and 60s by radical activists and the women’s liberation movements.

Till the end of the 50s and 60s the society has attempted to resist sexual behaviour in the young. After this, the restraints are rather less. The fact that the young no longer adhere to the sexual norms arouses anger in the elders, though the elders have secret sexual deviances. Biff and Happy in Death of a Salesman belong to the young generation which exercises no restraint in sexual pursuits. But to them, Willy, who belongs to the old generation, is a “phony little fake” (95).

The dramatic scene in A Memory of Two Mondays shows how freely the characters including women go about with their sexual escapades. Sexuality is no longer a taboo in the society in the
1940s. But the rigid rules for the young exist in the “recently” Americanized Italian immigrants, as seen dictated by Eddie in A View from the Bridge:

It ain’t so free here either, Rudolpho, like you think. I seen green horns sometimes get into trouble that way - they think just because a girl don’t go around with a shawl over her head that she ain’t strict, y’know? Girls don’t have to wear black dress to be strict. (412)

Both in the rural and urban areas this ambivalence persists. In the rural and suburban areas the “sexual outcasts” are punished violently. Lynching and castration are rife. Violence that recurs in Williams has to be seen in this light. Ideology represses the discourse against sexual repression. Hence Val and Chance are to be presented as having committed sexual sins before they are punished violently.

The discussion on the signs of repression by ideology in Williams stumbles upon the blanked-out black history and racial issues in the plays. The “sensitive” Broadway audience can hardly accommodate the ethnic and racial issues, and thus these get misrepresented or unrepresented. More than that, in Williams, who is a white puritan southerner, it is not surprising that the discourse is absent. When it is present, it
comes out as misrepresented or under-represented and as (over)determined by ideology. The two factors involved in this discussion are the absence of black voices and characters, and the peripherality of them when portrayed.

The importance of the historicity of the question evoked here cannot be exaggerated. It was in 1619 that a Dutch man-of-war brought twenty “niggers” in to English America. The unsuitability of the climate and the greater skill and experience required to farm in northern latitudes prevented the northern colonies from importing slaves. In the South, however, the warm climate and the large plantations, which were devoted to one single crop, tobacco, made slave owning possible and profitable. This activated the greatest organized and compulsory immigration in history. Virginia and the South grew to regard slavery as not merely natural, but also necessary as they had relied more and more on slave labour to work in their farms and plantations. The planter lived in his “big house” surrounded by his Negro slaves in their cluster of rudely built cabins. It was in 1960 that a band of refugees from France, Huguenotes, settled along the Pamlico River, thus contributing a new settlement to the varied races of British America. Blanche traces her ancestry to these Huguenots (Parks 137).
In the eighteenth century, America became independent from British rule. Slowly under the able leadership of Washington, the Confederation and the Union were formed. Many accessions and small-scale wars followed. Black slaves were imported uninterruptedly. According to Parks, there were about three and a half million slaves in the South in 1860 in an area where there were only five and a half million whites (152).

The Northerners wanted the abolition of slavery whereas the South wanted its expansion. However, the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe intensified the anti-slavery movement. Parks has observed that Southerners argued that the slave’s lot was a happy one, that the Negro was in any case fit only for menial work, and that the slave was better off on a plantation where he was fed, clothed and housed than he had been as a savage in Africa. But often on the big plantations, the Negro was regarded as a machine, to be used while he lasted, and then thrown aside. The discipline was hard and often brutal and the Negro had the risk of being separated from wife or children and sold off, like cattle, to an unknown master (Parks 160).

At a time when most of the country was moving towards industrialism and democracy, the South still based its way of life on agriculture and aristocracy. It was a rural, almost
feudal society marked by the virtues and faults of such a society. It prized arts and learning, and despised the dollar and stock market. Amanda recollects the life in Blue Mountains and Blanche asserts arts and literature as noble virtues. Val and Chance are artists. Tom is a poet. All these blessings belong to the South; but at its worst, the South has its lynching and lashing.

Soon the slavery question gained momentum and the Civil War began. It ended with the proclamation of the abolition of slavery. The war left the South a wreck. More than losses of men, money or materials, to the South defeat meant the end of a way of life. It was not merely that slavery was abolished, never to return, but rather that a whole tradition and culture had fallen in and could never be restored as before. Parkes observes that

\[\text{the Radical’s Reconstruction added woe to wound on account of the incompetence and dishonesty of the people who undertook Reconstruction. The Radicals, supported by Northern troops, piled taxation and debt on to the already crippled Southern economy until at last they produced the inevitable hateful reaction.} \]
Foiled at the polls, the Southern whites took to extra legal methods by organizing themselves into secret armed bands - the “Ku Klux Klan,” Regulators, etc. - and terrorized the Negroes and intimidated them, until, by 1877, the Democrats recovered control(163).

The return of the Democrats, who were Southerners, to power marked the beginning of yet another struggle between the whites and the blacks. Segregation, which was an attempt by white Southerners to separate the races in every sphere of life and to achieve supremacy over the blacks, was introduced and practised vehemently. Segregation became common in Southern states after the end of Reconstruction. It was to reverse the advances made by blacks during the period of Reconstruction that segregation emerged as a practice. In Southern states, whites created much local level legislation. Boards with the inscriptions, “for whites only” and “colored” appeared everywhere. According to Parkes,

To protest against segregation, the blacks formed The National Afro American League in 1890. Many other associations and movements started - The Niagra Movement in 1905 and The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. In 1910 the National Urban League was created to help blacks
move to urban, industrial life. The NAACP struggled hard to win battles against many evil practices that retarded the development of blacks. The victories achieved by NAACP included the one against disenfranchisement in 1915, and residential segregation in 1917. (171)

_A Streetcar Named Desire_ shows whites and blacks residing in adjacent apartments in the same building. However, it is astonishing that lynching and persecution still continue. Even in the 1920s and 1930s, despite the hard struggle, NAACP failed to have lynching outlawed by the US Congress.

During the First World War blacks got recruited in the army. But leader posts were denied to them. Blacks began to migrate northwards to take advantage of job openings in Northern cities created by war. Slowly blacks in both South and North became urbanized. According to Bigsby and Thomson,

In 1890, about 85% of all Southern blacks lived in rural areas, but by 1960 the percentage decreased to about 42%. In the North about 95% of all blacks lived in urban areas in 1960. The urbanization of blacks was motivated partly by the threats of lynching and other persecutions in the rural areas, and partly due to
their desire to get employed in factories and other industrial firms. (155)

During the Depression years blacks showed a tendency for militancy. Roosevelt’s Social Security Act of 1935 was very significant in both its comprehensive attempt for welfare legislation and in its upholding of individual’s rights. It had sympathetic approach to minorities and blacks.

Blacks demanded better treatment during the time of the Second World War. They questioned the practice of blacks being kept away from leader posts in the Army. Many marches and demonstrations were held which led to the creation of the Federal Fair Employment Practices Committee, FEPC. In 1942 the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was founded to challenge segregation in public lodgings. During the war, black newspapers campaigned for a double “v,” victories over both fascism in Europe and racism at home.

After the Second World War, in 1948, president Harry Truman was committed to a domestic civil rights policy favouring voting rights and equal employment, but the U.S. Congress rejected his proposals. Then in 1955, with the Montgomery bus boycott began the Civil Rights Movement, which ended with the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
The absence of this history in Williams is the loaded question here. The production span of his plays under discussion covers the powerful Civil Rights struggle of the Blacks, which ended only in 1965. The plays rarely probe into black life or struggles.

George W. Crandell has analyzed the misrepresentation and miscegenation in Williams’s plays:

Audience and readers familiar with the plays of Tennessee Williams recognize immediately in the voice, the inflection, and the idiom of characters such as Amanda Wingfield, Blanche Dubois and Big Daddy, a language variety that distinguishes the South from other regions of the United States. What is no less obvious, but seldom noted, is the apparent absence of African American voices from this otherwise realistically depicted discourse community. (337)

Many of the plays of Williams are set in the South. The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, Orpheus Descending, Suddenly Last Summer and Sweet Bird of Youth are all set in the South, in rural or urban areas. The Negro slave and the South are inseparable. It is only in terms of the slave and slavery that the creation, existence and demise of the Old South are to be understood. It is a strange contradiction that many of the
leaders of the American Revolution, including Washington and Jefferson, were slave owners. Black characters do not appear in The Glass Menagerie and Suddenly Last Summer. They have marginal spectral presence in Orpheus Descending, Sweet Bird of Youth and A Streetcar Named Desire.

The dexterously camouflaged black presence in Williams is over-determined by ideology. A current of black conflict is always there under the plot presenting white characters. Moreover the blacks are presented as silly and degraded. There is an attempt at totalization.

The Glass Menagerie has neither any black character, nor any black presence. That there is no scope for black presence in the play is no satisfactory argument. The opening scene begins with Tom’s introductory speech, which at length sets the background and the setting of the play. The moment and milieu of the America of the 30s are evoked, but even there, black militancy and black rising are not even mentioned. It gets blacked out in the ellipsis:

In Spain there was revolution here 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)
Art is not so much an innocent uttering as a politically motivated enactment. There is a sense in which all art is political or propagandistic because it reflects some vision of the world. Even works, which on the surface appear to have nothing to do with politics, can carry a strong political message.

Even art presumably dealing solely with the individual psyche has political ramifications and makes a silent statement about the relative importance of the individual versus class or social reality. (Chase 70)

In The Glass Menagerie that came out in 1944 the black is equal to a servant and a menial. Amanda tells Laura that the former would serve her and Laura need not get up. “You be the Lady this time and I’ll be the darkey” (237).

In Suddenly Last Summer also, where there are no black characters, the starved children who attack Sebastian and cannibalize him are presented as if they are blacks. The intricate array of signs clearly connotes black as bestial and disgusting. The array of expressions – “black mouths” (415), “black hands,” “beggars,” “black fists,” “gobbling noises,” “frightful grins,” “sick of the country,” “spoils the whole country,” “oompa! oompa!” (417), “the band of naked children” (421) – equates black with ugliness and bestiality. The scene of
cannibalizing is a mise-en-scène of “white” and “black,” putting the black as terrifying, destroying, stalking and cannibalizing the white. Along with the “black” signs a profusion of “white” signs course through the terrible scene of cannibalizing: “white blazing day in Cabeza de Lobo” (414), “a blazing hot white one,” “Sebastian was white as the weather,” “a spotless white silk shantung suit,” “white silk tie,” “White shoes,” “white silk handkerchief,” “white pills,” “the hot white wind from the sea” (415), “white blaze of the sand-beach” (417), “It was all white outside,” “white hot” (419), “Blazing white hot, not blazing white” (420), “a huge white bore,” “It was white and turned the sky and everything under the sky white with it,” “white street,” “the blazing street’ (422), “a white wall,” “white-paper-wrapped,” and “blazing white wall” (422). It is the white who are pounced upon by black, torn away, dismembered and cannibalized.

A Streetcar Named Desire witnesses the masked and virtual conflict between the white and the black. The polka music of “Negro entertainers” is played in the background, when the aristocratic and sensitive Blanche is raped. The coloured woman who talks to Eunice in the first scene has no name. Blanche does not get a coloured girl to change the sheets of the bedridden at Belle Reve. George W. Crandell observes that
in *Streetcar* he replaces this (black) image, ascribing to a “white” character (Stanley Kowalski) the features of the racial other. He thereby obscures and confuses the boundaries between ethnic and racial groups. . . . (339)

Again,

. . . the racialized discourse spoken by Stella & Blanche serves to define Stanley as the other, a sexual, cultural, and by implication, racial alien. The specific comparison of Stanley to an ape is a means by which Blanche implicitly links him to the black population. (343)

The image of the black - bestial, big, strong and having a great sexual desire - is used to portray Stanley, to equate him as the racial other. Blanche’s words echo the picture of the beast-like black representation in nineteenth century America:

   **BLANCHE:** He acts like an animal, has an animal’s habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There’s even something - sub-human - something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something ape-like about him, like one of those pictures I’ve seen in anthropological studies! Thousands and thousands of
years have passed him right by, and there he is - Stanley Kowalski - Survivor of the Stone Age! Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle! (Streetcar 163)

“Bestial,” “inarticulate,” “slavish,” “crooked,” and “apish” (231) blacks intruding into the white affairs appear in Orpheus Descending. Beulah contemptuously tells Dolly:

Why, now you just walk a couple of feet off the highway and whistle three times like a jay bird and a nigger pops out of a bush with a bottle of corn! (231)

Or again, the terrible words of Jabe about the Lady’s father: “Papa Romano made a bad mistake. He sold liquor to niggers. The mystic crew took action” (232). They burn his orchard, along with him.

The Conjure Man is portrayed as representing the whole black community. The inarticulate sounds and the barking sounds produced by him are the only ways of communication. He is presented as black, ugly, crooked, mean, greedy and unscrupulous. More such images are there in the play: “Niggers” are brought to help Jabe in resetting the shoe-department (249), “A Negro helps pulling a truck back on the pavement” (268), a “coloured boy” delivers the valentine to Val (268), and Carol
protests against “the gradual massacre of the coloured majority in the country.” When “cotton crop failed slow starvation was the lot of them”(251). These odd pictures of blacks present their plight. There are the portrayals of beating and lynching, and run-away convicts being torn to pieces by chain-gang dogs, which Williams manoeuvres against the white outsider, and thus manipulates and blacks out the fact that the real threat was to the black because all these modes of persecution were invented to persecute blacks before, during and after slavery. It is not unjustifiable if the presence of the Conjure Man is termed as political on the stage in 1957, when Civil Rights Movement was at its peak.

A Negro CONJURE MAN has entered the store. His tattered garments are fantastically bedizened with many talismans and good-luck charms of shell and bone and feather. (239)

These words in the stage direction convey the politics of the dominant ideology. The Conjure man’s presence always terrifies the (white) women present:

The CONJURE MAN advances with a soft, rapid, toothless mumble of words that sound like wind in dry grass. . . .
Phrases of primitive music or percussion as Negro moves into light. (239)

or later,

LADY turns away with a gasp, with a gesture of refusal. The NEGRO nods, then throws back his turkey neck, utters a series of sharp barking sounds that rise to a sustained cry of great intensity and wilderness. The cry produces a violent reaction in the building. LADY does not move but she catches her breath. DOG and PEEVEE run down the stairs with ad libs and bustle the NEGRO out of the store, ignoring LADY, as their wives call “PEE VEE!” and “DWAG!” outside on the walk. (327)

The Conjure Man appears in the last scene also. He accepts the bribe of a gold ring in return of the snake-skin jacket left by Val. The play ends with the following stage direction, in which the black represents the pseudo, the cruel and the dishonest: “Silence. The NEGRO looks up with a secret smile as the curtain falls slowly” (342).

The transference, as in Orpheus Descending, of the Ku Klux Klan way of persecution to the white “outsider” is a method of simplification by totalization, which is operated by ideology. The scourge of the bigotry is unleashed only to contain the
persecuted persona of the white “outsider.” The plight of the black has been relegated to the bottom in Williams’s story of the white Southerner who is a wanderer-protagonist.

Boss: . . . I’m relying a great deal on this campaign to bring in young voters for the crusade I’m leading. I’m all that stands between the South and the black days of Reconstruction. (66)

Again,

Boss: A lot of people approve of taking violent action against corrupters. And on all of them that want to adulterate the pure white blood of the South. (67)

Or,

SCOTTY: Well, they picked out a nigger at random and castrated the bastard to show they mean business about white women’s protection in this state. (80)

Yet again, a bigot’s mission is given by God Himself.

Boss: And what is this mission? I have told you before, but I will tell you again. To shield from pollution a blood that I think is not only sacred to me, but sacred to Him. (95)
Towards the end of the play Boss vehemently defends his position.

Boss: As you all know I had no part in a certain operation on a young black gentleman. I call that incident a deplorable thing . . . I understand the emotions that lay behind it. The passion to protect by this violent emotion something that we hold sacred: Our purity of our own blood. But I had no part in, and I did not condone the operation performed on the unfortunate coloured gentleman caught prowling the midnight street of our capital city. (96)

Miller’s plays under discussion are set in different places, yet in All My Sons, Death of a Salesman, and A View from the Bridge black characters are conspicuously absent. In The Crucible Tituba, who is victimized for witchcraft, is the sole black character. The White Anglo Saxon Puritan’s ambivalent antagonism towards the black community surfaces in The Crucible. The black slaves are servants in the white households. The dehumanizing treatment meted out to them and the contempt towards them get revealed in Abigail’s words to Parris, when she explains why she left the job of a servant at the Proctors:

Abigail: She hates me, uncle, she must, for I would not be her slave.
Parris: She may be. And yet it has troubled me that you are now seven month out of their service, and in all this time no other family has ever called for your service.

Abigail: They want slaves, not such as I. Let them send to Barbados for that. I will not black my face for any of them! (232)

Here, the expressions “slave,” “black,” and “Barbados” enter the discourse evoking extreme contempt and disregard. Tituba, the only black character in the play, is from Barbados as a slave servant in the household of Parris. As a loving servant she has a good rapport with the children of the locality, partly because the stern puritan regime is very strict towards children. The author’s notes in the play to describe Parris are significant in this regard:

He regarded them as young adults, and until this strange crisis he, like the rest of Salem, never conceived that the children were anything but thankful for being permitted to walk straight, eyes slightly lowered, arms at the sides, and mouths shut until bidden to speak. (225)
Tituba, with her Barbados songs and dances stands bewitchingly attractive to the children. The time they spend in their company presumably offers them a release of their pent up energy and enthusiasm and an escape to a fantastic world of songs, dances, “wild” gestures and conjuring. The girls including Parris’s daughter Betty often have such secret occasions of revelry in the company of Tituba. The veil of extreme secrecy is essential because, if found by the elders they would be punished as their creed has forbidden such vain pleasures.

When Parris finds it out, the whole harmless practice suddenly becomes ominous and devilish to the society. The irony lies in the fact that Tituba, being a black slave, and belonging to an alien culture becomes synonymous with the Devil. The cry of witchcraft begins here. Two attitudes of the WASP community are operational in the witch-hunt: the black as belonging to Hell and the Devil; and the alien culture as evil. The inability to understand other cultures makes them fanatically hostile, and brand such cultures as the other and evil. This attitude is significant in the witch-hunt of the era of McCarthyism also.

A critique of the dominant structures is possible when the fact that Tituba, the only black character, becomes the first victim of the witch-hunt. The fact that Tituba’s hanging is not mentioned in the play when the characters talk about the
injustice involved in persecuting and hanging of innocent and upright persons shows how far the subject is informed and repressed by ideology. The debates on the correctness of the victimization of the white people recur in the play, where as victimization of blacks gets blacked out.

In All My Sons, Chris, the idealist makes a detailed probe into the unjust and cruel practices of the society in which he lives. However, the repressive codes of the dominant ideology achieve a thorough black out of black presence in the play, though the play is set in the 1940s when the black struggles started to choke the American society. Surprisingly there are no black characters in the spectrum of All My Sons, Death of a Salesman, A View from the Bridge, and A Memory of Two Mondays, nor a reference to them.

The hegemonic culture lends necessarily to perpetuate only a single voice – the voice of the dominant. In this framework, according to Jameson, the reconstruction of the so-called popular cultures also must take place. Such reconstruction involves “a reaffirmation of the existence of marginalized or oppositional cultures” (PU 86). There should be an effective “reaudition” of oppositional voices of black or ethnic cultures.