CHAPTER VII

THE PRICE

The Price is another play in which Miller employs his recurrent theme of conflict in the family spilling over to embrace the entire human existence. Between it and A View Miller wrote The Misfits (1961), After the Fall (1965), and Incident at Vichy (1965). The Misfits was scripted when Miller was married to the celebrated actress Marilyn Monroe, and even included her as the heroine of the film. After the Fall was written after Monroe’s death. But both the plays have been specifically noted for their autobiographical parallels. Technically the three plays differed from the earlier ones, though thematically, here too Miller pursued his preoccupation with exploring human relationships.

The Price appeared in 1967. Its minimal characters, tensions, conflicts and human relationships are strikingly reminiscent of the two early major plays. Thematically its links date back to The Man Who Had All the Luck where Miller has introduced the subject of choice, decision and moral obligation. The playwright’s dramatic family, which was born in All My Sons, accompanied by three more couples to serve as contrasts, gets reduced in Death of a Salesman in terms of number, but intensifies from the view of conflicts. In The Price it becomes further concentrated
with the father being an absent participant because of his death. However, his image acts as a catalyst surfacing from time to time to either mitigate the guilt of the main characters, or trigger a series of reactions to heighten the existent tension.

The deceased Mr. Franz was a prosperous businessman hit hard by the Depression of 1936, that left in its wake considerable economic instability. His flamboyant and wealth-loving wife whose musical aspirations had been thwarted by marriage, adds to his woes by denying him support. Instead, she rejects him in his misery by vomiting, ....All over his arms. His hands. Just kept on vomiting, like thirty-five years coming up. And he sat there. Stinking like a sewer. And a look came onto his face. I'd never seen a man look like that. He was sitting there, letting it dry on his hands.  

Later she dies. Their two sons, Victor and Walter, are left with the decision to support the father or leave him at the Welfare Home. Walter the more materialistic and worldly of the two, prefers to continue his science studies as he aspires to become a doctor. As a consequence he declares his intentions to the family, and walks out on them maintaining minimum contact. Victor the simpler, more responsible elder

son cannot take such callousness in his stride and chooses to stay behind, leave his studies (though he was better as a student), enlists in the Force and looks after the old father. Very obviously Walter is more successful. Victor supports his small family and his father on rationed remittances. Before this job Victor had been flitting from one temporary occupation to another subsisting by literally relying on the leavings inside garbage cans. The experience had left an indelible mark on Victor’s psyche, but on this was superimposed the image of the father sitting with his head bent, in his overstuffed chair, surrounded by the weighty cumbersome furniture that served as trophy of his past triumphs.

The two brothers meet after a gap of almost twenty-eight years which included the death of the father, the divorce and nervous breakdown of Walter, and the impending retirement of Victor. The reason for assembling after this protracted period was the disposal of furniture stored in the attic of the house where their father spent his last few years. By virtue of the dilapidated condition of the building the authorities were pulling it down, thus forcing a situation between the two which had been postponed for sixteen years.

Victor had obtained the services of a registered appraiser to estimate the value of the stored furniture. He
had also tried to contact Walter considering it his moral duty to inform him as the joint owner. Esther the wife, seems to be related to Miller’s long list of heroines from Kate Keller, through Beatrice Carbone, to Holga of After the Fall. Walter and Victor also appear as maturer and more experienced versions of Biff and Happy Loman. The appraiser Gregory Solomon was an eighty year old Jew with an eventful and interesting life. He had gone through three marriages and very nearly closed shop when Victor approached him. Hence, he was very surprised that his number still existed in the telephone directory. Solomon by his very sage presence brings to mind the senior Franz. Temperamentally dissimilar, the agelessness, shrewd dealings, and capacity to convince in the Jew resemble Victor’s father, whose image looms large over the furniture strewn attic. Though absent he seems to live on in the arguments prompting the brothers to interact.

Guilt was Miller’s preoccupation. The foregoing analysis of the major plays have dealt in detail with the reasons and compulsions of these preoccupations.²

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² In an article printed in the Twentieth Century Literature, 16 (No.1. 1970), pp.16-25, C.W.E. Bigsby observes: As a Jew who had survived and indeed suffered little inconvenience he felt an ill defined sense of guilt. This guilt appears throughout his work in a sublimated form...To many critics he seems to be consciously avoiding specifically Jewish characters,
experiences and subconscious pressures have often engaged the pen of creative writers. In the present play guilt appears under the guise of deception and lies, originating from Franz Senior and continuing to Walter who also commits the reprehensible act of deserting the family. Victor’s father revels and wallows in destitution. His bent posture indicates the pleasure he derives from helplessness. Not wishing to exert himself he succumbs to the pressures of economic instability, creating for himself a romantic world of an abandoned forlorn, distraught old man. His bereft image gets reinforced by the circumstances of his wife’s apathetic attitude which gets perpetuated in Walter. Consequently, as he sat in his favourite chair in the attic, his mind was selfishly, coolly, manipulating those members of his family who either did not have the courage to abandon him or loved him enough to care for and support him in his hour of need. The acquisitive, exploiting, deceitful attitude of the father becomes the central motif of this play.

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while continuing to use a Jewish idiom...Only with After the Fall his painfully autobiographical work, do we discover the real source of this guilt as Quentin, Miller’s protagonist, confesses to feeling the "guilt of the survivor". To be a Jew and to have survived is to be inexplicably favoured and hence to be a hostage to the past....In a sense The Price could scarcely have been written before After the Fall had successfully laid some of Miller’s more persistent personal ghosts. Only now could he create a character such as Solomon."
The play is very compact, the conversation tight with layers of meaning through the use of innuendos. One marked difference from the earlier plays is the length of the speeches which often become as cumbersome as the furniture. But each character is human, whether miserable or bewildered, or in search of identity. Miller himself in the Production Note pleads for Walter:

> From entrance to exit, Walter is attempting to put into action what he has learned about himself, and sympathy will be evoked for him in proportion to the openness, the depth of need, the intimations of suffering with which the role is played.

The action of the play opens in an uncongenial, dusty room that was soon to be demolished. The only light that is allowed to enter this drab and dingy place filters through the soot covered window and skylight. The pieces of furniture present are antique, and archaic, lending the impression of age to the atmosphere. Time seems to be arrested within the dark confines of the room which provides the arena for the gladiatorial combat between Victor and Walter both of whom are in search of some meaning in their existence. The chair dominates the set. As a contrast to the germanic heaviness of this melee is an ornate, chipped, delicate harp. These two articles symbolically stand for the absent parents whose presence is implied through representation. In addition to this, Victor also chances to
see his fencing foil, an instrument that brought him many a success in the past, but now serves the symbolic purpose of dramatically echoing the verbal battles between the two brothers. The first act primarily deals with the soul-searchings of Victor, ably aided by Solomon and Esther. Esther, though not interested in the collection, notices the period value stating,

Maybe it’s that it always used to seem so pretentious to me, and kind of bourgeois. But it does have a certain character. I think some of it’s in style again.³

Victor Franz the police officer and the protagonist of The Price, appears devoid of expression on entry. But this studied stance slowly transforms itself into genuine interest as he glances from piece to piece, impressed by the austere stillness and aura emanating from the room. Each article holds memories and Victor reminiscences, deeply immersed in the ethos of the past. Esther finds him enjoying himself over the Laughing Record a keepsake of the past. The self righteous, morally correct wife enquires about Walter and though Victor sounds apologetic on his behalf, he cannot restrain the inherent

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hurt that stemmed from Walter’s absolute lack of reciprocation. He sounds confident of picking a bargain on the furniture items but his wife knows better from past experiences and hence is not so sure of his abilities:

Esther: But you’re going to have to bargain, you know. You can’t just take what they say...

Victor: (with an edge of protest) I can bargain; don’t worry, I’m not giving it away.

Esther: Because they expect to bargain.

Victor: Don’t get depressed already, will you? We didn’t even start. I intend to bargain, I know the score with these guys.4

Life with Victor has not been particularly easy for Esther, and she seems to hunger for happiness that money can buy. They have scrimped and scrounged for so long that Esther constantly suffers from the complex of the underprivileged. This is specially so when she compares their lives with the Walters:

Esther: I don’t know why you keep putting it like charity. There’s such a thing as a moral debt Vic, you made his whole career possible. What law said that only he could study medicine?

Victor: Esther, please let’s not get back on that, will you?

4. Ibid., p.10.
Esther: I’m not back on anything-you were even the better student. That’s a real debt, and he ought to be made to face it. He could never have finished medical school if you hadn’t taken care of Pop.

The past is a potent factor and encroaches on the present to such an extent that time ceases to matter. Esther’s miseries and frustrations were on account of her husband’s thwarted ambitions for which she squarely blames the other two. The prospect of his retirement and the limitations it would impose upon him have driven her to depression and alcohol though she was not a habitual drinker. She realizes the lack of ambition in her husband and nags him to continue the studies he left to pursue his career. For her he is still young because the concept of age is relative. Considering the fact that he may live another twenty years, Esther believes that Victor has time to restart despite his fifty-four years. Confused and bewildered by his lack of response she says:

You want me to pretend everything is great? I’m bewildered and I’m going to act bewildered!

Like Willy Loman before him Victor Franz has also not been totally honest with his wife. He does not lie, only omits to speak,

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6. Ibid., p.17.
Esther: ...I don’t know where in hell I am, Victor! I’ll do anything if I know why, but all these years we’ve been saying, once we get the pension we’re going to start to live.

Later she confesses:

Esther: I did everything wrong! I swear, I think if I demanded more it would have helped you more.

Victor: That’s not true. You’ve been a terrific wife-

Esther: I don’t think so. But the security meant so much to you I tried to fit into that; but I was wrong....It’s that everything was always temporary with us. It’s like we never were anything; we were always about-to-be.

Lack of security, temporary respites, long patches of time marked by instability, dissatisfaction with the job, paucity of money have been the Franz couple’s bane and curse. Esther has been correct in her estimate of Victor’s lack of drive and desire to acquire money. He has been a man of very little aspirations. If at all they were present, his early childhood experiences have thwarted them, killing something inside Victor. Despite all this the notion of retirement petrifies him. The decision is indisputable, a reality and truth which is unalterable, and the prospect of its resultant aimlessness, added to futile efforts to save a

7. Ibid., p.18.
8. Ibid.
disintegrating marriage, is daunting. Yet the whole programme of the furniture sale acquires an air of unreality. This disbelief results from the perspective of time that suddenly strikes him:

Victor: Well, like when I walked in here before....This whole thing- it hit me like some kind of craziness. Piling up all this stuff here like it was made of gold. I brought up every stick;.... That whole way I was with him it's inconceivable to me now.

Esth: Well... you loved him.

Victor: I know, but it's all words. What was he? A busted businessman like thousands of others, and I acted like some kind of a mountain crashed. I tell you the truth, every now and then the whole thing is like a story somebody told me.

Esther also insists that it was some sort of charade, a "masquerade" "play acting." Both Victor and Esther are unsure about the veracity of this act in their lives. The policeman, like his predecessors Willy Loman, John Proctor and Eddie Carbone, has been searching for moorings, roots, a cause for life and existence. His past action prompted by feelings for his father has reared its head questioning him about its accountability. He is plagued by doubts regarding the loyalty or disloyalty of this action.

with reference to his personal interests. In the background the stark contrast of his dreary life is provided by the worldly wise, prosperous younger brother, who was getting rewarded by Fate for absolutely no sacrifices. His conversation with Esther only bewilders the readers. Still Victor is in the habit of grinding his teeth during sleep, probably realising subconsciously that his life had been a failure. However, his conscious mind is not ready to accept it:

Victor: I'll be frank with you, kid- I look at my life and the whole thing is incomprehensible to me. I know all the reasons and all the reasons and all the reasons, and it ends up—nothing.  

It is with the desire to clear the web of lies, deceit, secrecy that Victor has returned to this room, which is still permeated with his father's presence and the penetrating sound of his mother's harp, to arrive at certain conclusions. He wishes to become aware of the purpose of his existence, and the validity of his own so called decision to sacrifice his entire youth. The selling, the bargain, and the price, are therefore not restricted to the disposal of furniture but become an extended metaphor for Victor's own life. He has to search for meanings in his life. Esther

10. Ibid., p.23.
tries to help him by peering deep into the recesses of the misrepresentations, and hypocrisy that had made their lives unreal. But the comprehension had to be Victor's. It becomes noticeable that even though he is not in business both Esther and Victor do not trust anyone easily. They are sceptical and suspicious of being hoodwinked, as this is the lesson the past has taught them. Solomon the old Jew instructs them:

Solomon: Let me give you a piece of advice— it's not that you can't believe nothing, that's not so hard— it's that you still got to believe it. That's hard. And if you can't do that, my friend— you're a dead man! 11

His logic becomes extremely practical a while later,

People don't live like this no more. This stuff is from another world. So I'm trying to give you a modern viewpoint. Because the price of used furniture is nothing but a viewpoint, and if you wouldn't understand the viewpoint is impossible to understand the price. 12

Miller had, from the time he wrote All My Sons, been striving for some definition to this particular relationship between the individual and the soulless consumer society that acted like an impersonal force of destiny compelling human beings to either compromise or be totally quashed by its massive propellers. He understood its

11. Ibid., p.37.
12. Ibid., p.38.
power and unrelenting inexorability. America being a rapidly developing industrial nation, the playwright could not ignore its existence. But in play after play Miller has pitted his protagonist against these forces, in a variety of situations and tried to delve into the nature of this relationship between society and the individual. It is in The Price that he has finally managed to derive some meaning. Solomon explains that used furniture is like jaded human relationships, which get categorized into modern and old according to the mind that sees and interprets it. The price extracted by a particular relationship and the toll taken from the individual depends largely on the viewpoint, because the attitude of the mind defines the boundaries in a given situation. The manner of evaluating or recognition of worth rests upon the degree to which it matters to the person concerned. The conversation between Victor and Solomon further explains the situation:

Victor: ...every time you open your mouth the price seems to go down.

Solomon: My boy, the price didn't change since I walked in.13

Gregory Solomon is one such individual for whom the viewpoint as well as the assessed price do not change very easily. He himself is its life-like representation.

13. Ibid., p.39.
Being old he has already wound up the business but despite age, Solomon feels fit to carry on. He cannot resist the challenge of again estimating, thus proving his mettle primarily because Solomon has not kneeled before time and age. He still carries his boiled egg, orange and the Hershay bar, enjoys the regular nap and declares himself healthy enough to counter any attack on his capabilities. Solomon is a fighter who does not lose easily. Nearly ninety, straight backed with an air of massiveness, he has perfected the way of leaning on the cane without appearing weak. Gregory is past the age when clothes and general appearance matter. Hence his hat and dress are unkempt, worn out, shapeless, askew, wrinkled and baggy.

Solomon enters the attic with his worn-out leather portfolio. Despite the tell-tale cough he appears shrewd, and astute, possessing the knack of impressing customers with the right kind of compliments. He is intelligent enough to attribute good sense to his opponent in business and appreciative of wisdom in customers. Regarding Esther, Solomon's opinion is:

Solomon: I like her, she's suspicious.

Victor: (laughing in surprise) What do you mean by that?
Solomon: Well, a girl who believes everything, how you gonna trust her! 14

In a discreetly subtle way he extracts information about the Franz family. The estimate is completed only after careful examination of the furniture and judgement about its value taking care not to appear too enthusiastic about the deal; yet appreciative of certain choice pieces like the harp. He subtly undervalues most of them, finally declaring that emotions should not cloud judgement in such issues, because used furniture loses value. His strategy is to convince Victor to sell only some of the pieces. However, if cornered he displays readiness to buy the lot, but cheaply. Gregory Solomon has had a colourful life. He has been an actor, an acrobat, and got discharged from the British Navy reaching the stage in his career when he has no desire to cheat. But he is nobody’s fool and wants to pick up a bargain. The basic difference between him and Victor’s father lies in their respective attitudes to life. When Franz surrenders to destiny without making the least effort to reassert himself, Solomon is ready to start life afresh at the age of eighty nine:

Solomon: He must’ve been some sporty guy....And from all this he could go so broke?

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14. Ibid., p.27.

Solomon: You don’t say. And he couldn’t make a comeback?

Victor: Well some men don’t bounce, you know.

Solomon: Hm! so what did he do?


This was one variety of reaction. It entailed a total surrender without any desire to fight back signifying listless, helpless, abject breakdown:

Victor: Well, my mother died around the same time. I guess that didn’t help. Some men just don’t bounce, that’s all.  

The second type of attitude finds exhibition in Solomon himself:

Solomon: Listen I can tell you bounces. I went busted 1932; then 1923, they also knocked me out; the panic of 1904, 1898....But to lay down like that....

Victor: Well, you’re different. He believed in it.

Solomon: What he believed?

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15. Ibid., pp.44-45.
16. Ibid.
Victor: The system, the whole thing. He thought it was his fault, I guess.17

And Gregory sums up his own life with,

You see, all my life I was a terrible fighter- you could never take nothing from me; I pushed, I pulled, I struggled in six different countries, I nearly got killed a couple times, and it’s...It’s like now I’m sitting here talking to you and I tell you it’s a dream, it’s a dream!18

Solomon has been introduced as a counterpoint to the father image in Victor’s mind, because the appraiser symbolises a healthier, and more daring attitude which is the opposite of Franz Senior. This enables Victor to judge his father in perspective shorn of all emotional sentimentality that had been clouding his judgement and suffocating their relationship. His entire effort is devoted to a rediscovery of his self as a being. Victor had made a conscious choice but is still not sure whether it was for the right reasons. His presence in the attic helps him to re-enact the past with its implications and betrayals. In addition to this, Miller supplies him with a viewpoint that helps the contrast between the past truths and the present realities. The couple has to wake up from the unreality of

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17. Ibid., p.45.
18. Ibid., p.47.
dreams to the hard, practical undeniable reality. In the process Victor is made to reorganise the disturbed strands of his temporary existence. As Solomon observes:

My boy, you don’t know the psychology! If it wouldn’t break there is no more possibilities. For instance, you take this table....You can’t move it. A man sits down to such a table he knows not only he’s married, he’s got to stay married there is no more possibilities....
What is the keyword today? Disposable!19

Solomon’s philosophy has been that of struggle and triumph, never caring or relenting. Victor believes in choice, decision and its consequences:

I know what you’re talking about. But it’s not a dream-it’s that you’ve got to make decisions before you know what’s involved, but you’re stuck with the results anyway. Like I was very good in science- I loved it. But I had to drop out to feed the old man. And I figured I’d go on the Force temporarily, just to get us through the Depression, and then go back to school. But the war came, we had the kid, and you turn around and you’ve racked up fifteen years on the pension. And what you started out to do is a million miles away....But it’s like you were saying, it’s impossible to know what’s important. We always agreed, we stay out of the rat race and live our own life. That was important.20

Victor cannot desist and has to perforce step into the rat race. It is like the "crap" swept out of the window

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19. Ibid., p.40.
20. Ibid., p.47.
that returns through the door, because money is the all important requirement without which one cannot live. So if Esther wants money it is no mortal sin. Hence Solomon again enquires:

Solomon: What’re you got against money?

Victor: Nothing. I just didn’t want to lay down my life for it. But I think I laid it down another way, and I’m not even sure any more what I was trying to accomplish. I look back now, and all I can see is a long, brainless walk in the street.21

This has direct bearing on the tussle between the two brothers in the second act. After all these years Victor feels that his sacrifice was wasted and he is unsure of the justice of his decision. Cheated out of respect also Victor sees the fruitlessness of the entire effort:

Victor: ...the few times he’d come around, the expression on the old man’s face- you’d think God walked in. The respect, you know what I mean? The respect! and why not? Why not?22

The gleam of respect in the old man’s eyes could be attributed to the realization that the younger son had the courage and conviction to uphold his decision, making his life a success. He had rebelled and triumphed. This was

22. Ibid.
something Victor could never do because by keeping his father company he was reasserting the values of failure for which Franz stood. But Victor had always been principled, never filching his family, and on the day of the sale also he does not agree to Solomon’s pursuasions about keeping the actual price of the transaction a secret.

The first act is a contrast between Solomon and Victor. The younger Franz makes his appearance towards the end of the act. His brother’s reaction to his entry is instinctive. The voice becomes high pitched, Victor suddenly appears boyish and flushed at not being able to restrain his feelings. He simultaneously experiences a near alarm at the treachery to himself. Though genuinely happy Victor feels guilty to the past. Act II is more volatile because it is a confrontation between the two brothers. Both aim at a better understanding of their own self. They also realise each other’s indispensability. The quest is overshadowed by the image of the father who had emotionally blackmailed the elder son and grudgingly respected the younger son. The action is continuous as Victor becomes identified with the father, having started to resemble him:

Walter: I suppose you know- you’ve gotten to look a great deal like Dad.

Victor: I do?

Walter: It’s very striking. And your voice is very much like his.
Victor: I know. It has that sound to me, sometimes.23

Victor Franz in this respect can be seen as an extension of the father, but his attitude to life differs, and he is in a quandary to discover this basic difference. He thus wishes to be aware of the right reasons for his choice. After a separation of twenty-eight years, the desire to converse is compulsive. The information about Walter’s divorce from Dorothy, his nervous breakdown is disclosed. But the breakdown of one marriage is announced when the continuity of the other is reinforced by Esther’s entry with Victor’s suit.

Esther Franz is stand-offish, critical and a slightly petulant kind. Life’s adversities have taken their toll on this lady and she is more sensitive to Victor’s hurt than he himself is. She had failed to comprehend the complexities of life. The transaction in the attic did not meet with her approval:

There’s just something so damned rotten about it. I can’t help it; it always was. The whole thing is infuriating.24

Probably the ethics of the sale deterred her. Though not interested in anything Esther was aware of the

23. Ibid., p.58.
24. Ibid., p.8.
value and antiquity of the stored articles. She had always been miserable because of shortage of money, as it did not allow her family to do what they were happy to do. Further cause of unhappiness lay in her aimlessness. Being at a loose end, with her son fruitfully involved in higher studies, Esther does not have any preoccupation. It leads her to the occasional drink and prompts the nagging attitude she so often adopted when the couple were together:

Victor: You’re an intelligent, capable woman, and you can’t lay around all day. Even something part-time, it would give you a place to go.

Esther: I don’t need a place to go. I’m not quite used to Richard not being there, that’s all.

Victor: He’s gone, kid. He’s a grown man; you’ve got to do something with yourself.

Esther: I can’t go to the same place day after day. I never could and I never will. 25

This was yet another situation in which the child had left the parents. However, though the estrangement was equally painful for the parents, this son had not abandoned them but left with their consent. Consequently the couple does not have any bitterness but only pride in the boy’s achievements. Richard’s departure is in sharp contrast to

his uncle’s, whose presence in the attic that day was as much of a surprise to his relatives as to himself. Walter’s behaviour and conversation prompt Esther to revise her opinion declaring "he’s human, he laughs." Victor who had still not woken out of the stupor of amazement agrees with most of what his wife says. But the bitterness of the past twenty odd years cannot be erased so easily. Though Victor notices certain positive changes also he still desires to measure Walter against the gauge that existed in his mind:

Victor: Esther, I’ve been calling him all week; doesn’t even bother to come to the phone, walks in here and smiles and I’m supposed to fall into his arms? I can’t behave as though nothing ever happened and you’re not going to either! Now just take it easy, we’re not dying of hunger.

Esther: I don’t understand what you think you’re upholding.

Victor: Where have you been?!!

Esther: But he’s doing exactly what you thought he should do! What do you want?

Victor: Certain things have happened, haven’t they? I can’t turn around this fast, kid. He’s only been here ten minutes, I’ve got twenty-eight years to shake off my back.26

and like Linda cajoling Willy, Esther explains:

He’s obviously making a gesture, why can’t you open yourself a little? My mother was

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26. Ibid., p.70.
Walter Franz is a disciple of the success cult. He paid obeisance at its altar for a lifetime, only realizing that success does not encourage happiness, and is envious of anything that becomes ascendant. Walter with his Rolls Royce, nursing homes, and residences, realizes too late the penalty he had to pay. His married life lay in shambles primarily because he could not give time to Dorothy, and instead suspected her of having male friends. His daughter too is not very close to him. Before long Walter collapses, suffering from a nervous breakdown which incapacitates him for several months. It is during this illness that he gets the opportunity to reassess his life and fix his priorities, realizing that his success fanaticism had converted him into a money making machine. With his father dead, and his emotional life in turmoil he compares himself to his lesser endowed brother discovering with envy that Victor is still happy. Walter comes back on the day of the sale to wipe his slate clean of all the notions and accusations piled up against him since his father’s lifetime. He wishes to regain respect, and companionship. Walter revisits the attic for a

27. Ibid., p.71.
catharsis, a purge to exorcise the ghost of the past and find new answers to issues confounding his mind.

With money in surplus Walter is not interested in that aspect of the sale. However, he does interfere when Solomon proposes a low estimate. As the Jew refused to raise the price Walter suggests that the entire collection be donated and a tax rebate of twelve thousand dollars taken in return. This money if split between the two brothers would definitely be more than the pittance agreed to earlier. Victor is unwilling to accept it, despite assurances about its legality. He feels a commitment to the old appraiser who had been on the verge of making total payment before Walter’s entry. In his typically cautious manner Victor struggles over the decision as there are too many doubts in his mind. Further he does not want to be beholden to the brother who had clearly forsaken them earlier in their hour of need. Victor understood the gesture as Walter’s first attempt at wiping the guilt of the past. He had lived so long with his bitterness that it was difficult for him to resolve their differences. Nature, temperament and training prompt him to question his brother’s motives:

Victor: Strange guy!
Esther: Why?
Victor: Well, to walk in that way-as though nothing ever happened.
Esther: Why not? What can be done about it.

Victor: I feel I have to say something.

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Victor: I’m not going to take the money unless I talk to him.

Esther: You can’t bear the thought that he’s decent. That’s all it is, dear, I’m sorry, I have to say it.

Victor: (without raising his voice) I can’t bear that he’s decent!

Despite inertia Victor feels a compulsion to settle old scores, and Walter understanding the need to square matters makes a second offer to assuage his sense of guilt. He now agrees to give the sum total of the tax rebate amounting to twelve thousand dollars to his elder brother whose initial impression that Walter’s efforts were totally focused on buying his guilty past becomes reinforced. Victor smells bribe and being an honest officer retains reservations. Walter astutely comprehends that propositions of money were not sufficient to allay his sibling’s suspicions. He now employs emotions demanding sympathy and understanding. Opening old wounds, he convinces his brother that his gesture was not motivated by selfish ends:

Walter: It all happens so gradually. You start out wanting to be the best, and there’s no question that you do

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28. Ibid., pp.77-78.
need a certain fanaticism; there’s so much to know and so little time. Until you’ve eliminated everything extraneous—including people. And of course the time comes when you realize that you haven’t merely been specializing in something—something has been specializing in you. You become a kind of instrument, an instrument that cuts money out of people, or fame out of the world. And it finally makes you stupid. Power can do that. You get to think that because you can frighten people they love you. Even that you love them—And the whole thing comes down to fear.\(^{29}\)

For once Walter has bared his soul and confessed with compunction. But he is simultaneously asking Victor for understanding. He gives his brother credit for achieving something he was unable to, on account of the fact that he too like his father had made a surrender. In his case it was not failure, but the citadel of success which extracted its own brand of payment by isolating him from all relationships, leaving him lonely, forlorn, miserable and too shaken to enjoy its fruits. Having arrived at these vital and painful discoveries Walter assumes his brother to be happier:

Walter: You see, it never dawned on me until I got sick— that you’d made a choice.

Victor: A choice, how?

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29. Ibid., p.82.
Walter: You wanted a real life. And that's an expensive thing; it costs.

Walter had struggled for a "concept of himself." He had foolishly taken up dangerous challenges just to prove his judgement correct, thus pulling off the impossible. In this maze he had been able to have a glimpse of some of the insecurities faced by his father, who had been totally blighted by the Economic System of the day. Comparing their lives he finds his brother a winner. Again sensing Victor's desire to retain his identity and not be swayed by pursuasive arguments he makes a third offer. Knowing Victor's weakness for science and education he encourages him into a job as scientific officer. The affair could be easily settled because Walter himself was chairman of the committee. Victor's answer is an enigmatic, "I'm not sure I know what you want Walter."

At Esther's shocked disbelief he explains,

Victor: Why is it unfair? We're talking about some pretty big steps here. Not that I don't appreciate it, Walter, but certain things have happened, haven't they? It just seems odd to suddenly be talking about_

Walter: I'd hoped we could take one step at a time, that's all. It's very

30. Ibid., p.83.
complicated between us, I think, and it seemed to me we might just try to ... Though both Esther and Walter cannot view the justice of the situation, the fact remains that Victor does not stand a chance as a scientific officer. In all fairness to him, he realizes it and refuses it. Victor had from the very beginning been representing certain principles. He has adhered to them despite occasional bouts of scepticism and insecurities:

Walter: Why do you keep asking what it's about? I have been perfectly open with you, Victor!

Victor: I don't think you have.  

Victor's commitment lay with "There used to be a man in that chair staring into space. Don't you remember that?" "Who the hell was supposed and to keep him alive, Walter!"

Walter: Why did anybody have to? He wasn't sick. He was perfectly fit to work.

Victor: Work? In 1936? With no skill, no money?

Walter: Then he could have gone on welfare! Who was he, some exiled royalty? What did a hundred and fifty million other people do in 1936. He'd have survived Victor. God, you must know that by now.  

31. Ibid., p.88.

32. Ibid., p.89.

33. Ibid., p.91.
Walter had seen through his father’s mask and concluded that his elder brother was being exploited by him. Whether Victor realized and agreed with this viewpoint was entirely his own outlook. His first step in awareness comes when he declares,

Victor: Let’s get one thing straight, Walter—I am nobody’s victim.

Walter: But that’s exactly what I’ve tried to tell you. I’m not trying to condescend.

Victor: Of course, you are. Would you be saying any of this if I’d made a pile of money somewhere? I’m sorry, Walter, I can’t take that. I made no choice; the icebox was empty and the man was sitting there with his mouth open....Just because you want things a certain way doesn’t make them that way. 34

Walter next provides more proof of the father’s duplicity. He informs them that Franz had refused his repentant offer of five hundred dollars:

....when I called here he told me you’d joined the Force. And I said he mustn’t permit you to do a thing like that. I said— you had a fine mind and with a little luck you could amount to something in science. That it was a terrible waste. Etcetra. And his answer was "Victor wants to help me. I can’t stop him." 35

34. Ibid., p.92.
35. Ibid., p.95.
He explains his position in an anguished tone:

...You all seemed to need each other more, Vic- more than I needed them. I was never able to feel your kind of...faith in him; that...confidence. His selfishness- which was perfectly normal was always obvious to me, but you never seemed to notice it. To the point where I used to blame myself for lack of feeling.\(^{36}\)

Even though his nebulous fears are crystallizing into facts Victor can still not shed his cherished convictions. He defends his father with,

Victor: You didn’t give me the money because you didn’t want to.

Walter: It’s that simple.

Victor: That’s what it comes to. doesn’t it? Not that you had any obligation, but if you want to help somebody, you do it, if you don’t you don’t. Well, why is that so astonishing? We do what we want to do.\(^{37}\)

This is one of the lessons he learns from practical experience. His second awareness is,

You can’t walk in with one splash and wash out twenty-eight years. There’s a price people pay. I’ve paid it, it’s all gone, I haven’t got it any more. Just like you paid, didn’t you? You’ve got no wife, you’ve lost your family. You’re rattling around all over the place?\(^{38}\)

\(^{36}\) Ibid., p.96.

\(^{37}\) Ibid. p.97.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., p.98.
We don’t need to be saved, Walter! I’ve done a job that has to be done and I think I’ve done it straight. You talk about being out of the rat race, in my opinion, you’re in it as deep as you ever were. Maybe more.39

The knowledge of his father’s betrayal comes as no surprise to him because he acknowledges "I don’t know what I knew." But with Esther calling his father a cold, calculating, cheap manipulator, and his brother branding him with selfish exploitation, Victor has to find a way out of the maze of recriminations. He has to face a final showdown with his conscience when he remembers the ‘meaningless’ empty laugh of his father. This laugh is as inane as the laughter with which the play begins. Victor had either to accept it at face value or probe deeper so as to restore the remnants of his own and his father’s dignity by this last saving grace:

Victor: One day you’re head of the house, at the head of the table, and suddenly you’re shit. Overnight. And I tried to figure out that laugh- How could he be holding out on me when he loved me?

Esther: Loved...

Victor: He loved me, Esther! He just didn’t want to end up on the grass. It’s not that you don’t love somebody, it’s that you’ve got to survive.40

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid., 107.
In frustration Walter lashes at Victor:

Walter: And you? You never had any hatred for me? Never a wish to see me destroyed? To destroy me, to destroy me with this saintly self-sacrifice, this mockery of sacrifice? What will you give me, Victor?

Victor: I don’t have it to give to you. Not any more. And you don’t have it to give me. And there’s nothing to give- I see that now. I just didn’t want him to end up on the grass. And he didn’t. That’s all it was, and I don’t need anything more. I couldn’t work with you, Walter. I can’t. I don’t trust you.

Walter: Vengeance. Down to the end. He is sacrificing his life to vengeance.

Esther: Nothing was sacrificed.41

In The Price Miller expounds two points of view both of which emanate from the person of Franz Senior. One of the attitudes is presented by the police officer who personifies the meek, abject side of his father’s personality. Walter on the other hand stands for his enterprising, shrewd, successful aspect. The dramatist employs Solomon to represent a third angle against which the other two are compared. Solomon’s discourse about

41. Ibid., p.112.
'viewpoint' and expendibility, enables Victor to gauge the extent of his sacrifice, and to measure his gain and loss employing it as a reference point. Earlier his efforts met with failure because he had not been able to extricate himself from its emotional undercurrents. Victor's comprehension now centres around the knowledge that he was always free to leave his father. It was not merely choice and decision that held him but a deeper need, a bond that refused to break despite the suspicion of his father's duplicity. Walter's perception begins from the very moment he decides to surrender to an involuntary impulse and visit the attic. Figuratively, he is the wayward child returning to the fold, neutralizing his act of betrayal by coming back to the father substitute whom he sees in Victor. His desire to atone gets subtly shelved by his sibling. But Walter departs from the attic with the assumption that having tried to do his best for his once abandoned family, he need not carry guilt like the albatross around his neck.

The awareness in Victor extends to embrace Esther and though the situation between the two brothers reaches a stalemate with the conflict unresolved, Walter manages his purge with the declaration that he would no longer be ashamed, and Victor reasserts his values with the acceptance of the total sum of money from the appraiser. The play terminates significantly on the one individual who is
without tensions, for whom life has been uncomplicated and who looks forward like Bert to a better future. Thus the recurrent motifs of guilt, burden on conscience, need for atonement and above all materialistic strands interwoven into human relationships are handled in the present play also with deft artistry. The resultant human image reinforces the affirmative picture witnessed in the earlier plays.