CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Creative artists have quite often depended upon personal experiences, autobiographical details and topical allusions to lend substance to their creative ventures. Miller is not an isolated example of a playwright seeking to embellish his plays with contemporary references. The popularity of a play depends upon its correspondence to situations easily identifiable by the audience. Thus Death of a Salesman and The Crucible could capitalize on audience perceptions that had been clearly prepared to certain incidents and situations. Miller's plays are rooted in the ethos of contemporary America. Seeking to sculpt the image of an individual and continue its development through the corpus of his plays, Miller in each creative exercise placed his protagonist within a predicament that prompted him to act, or respond in a variety of ways. Miller records these reactions vis-a-vis the currents surrounding him in his plays. In this regard he has remarked as follows:

I began writing plays in the midst of what Allan Seager...calls one of the two genuinely national catastrophes in American history-the Great Depression of the thirties. The other was the Civil War. The depression was my book. Years later I could put together what in those days were only feelings, sensations, impressions....The hidden laws of fate lurked not only in the characters of the people but equally if not more imperiously in the world beyond the family parlor....So that by force
of circumstance I came early and unawares to be fascinated by sheer process itself. How things connected. How the native personality of a man was changed by his world."

Distilled from his own experiences, the recurrent motifs in Miller's drama revolve around the Civil War, the depression and its aftermath. The great crash brought to him the realization of an operant inner world of capitalism with its secret laws and systems hidden behind the innocent facade of the outer world, but scheming against the individual as the unrelenting operation of fate and destiny. All My Sons deals with the psychology of people directly or indirectly involved in the War. A Joe Keller who supplies armaments and equipments during the war becomes the central character:

Keller: Those cylinder heads went into the P-40s only. What’s the matter with you? You know Larry never flew a P-40.

Chris: So who flew those P-40s, pigs?

Keller: ...Listen you gotta appreciate what was doin' in that shop in the war. The both of you! It was a mad house. Every half an hour the Major callin' for cylinder heads, they were whippin' us with the telephone. The trucks were hauling them away hot, damn near.2


2. Arthur Miller, Collected Plays, p.82.
And a Chris Keller participates in the action,

Chris: You remember, overseas, I was in command of a company?
Ann: Yeah, sure.

Chris: Well, I lost them.
Ann: How many?
Chris: Just about all. 3

Death of a Salesman struck the timeless chord of Post World War II American preoccupation with success, money, home and family. The playwright’s own experiences in his father’s garment factory and the warehouse served to inspire plays like A Memory, Death of a Salesman and The Price. The cult of success and the toll it claims from the ordinary salesman with unfulfilled aspirations could not have better representation than in Death of a Salesman. Willy Loman ceases to remain an ordinary, insignificant entity but tries to transcend the barriers of ordinariness to become the prototype of the archetypal man shackled in problems of destiny. Living in an advertisement-dominated society where there is a "race to the junkyard" and where consumer goods disintegrate before their instalments are paid, Willy Loman despairs for recognition and foothold:

Linda: Willy, dear. Talk to them again. There’s no reason why you can’t work in New York.

3. Ibid., p.85.

Linda: But you’re sixty years old. They can’t expect you to keep traveling every week.

Willy: I’ll have to send a wire to Portland. I’m supposed to see Brown and Morrison tomorrow at ten o’clock to show the line. Goddammit, I could sell them.4

His dreams are wasted:

Biff: Where’d you go this time, Dad?

Willy: Well, I got on the road, and I went north to Providence. Met the Mayor.

Biff: The Mayor of Providence!

Willy: He was sitting in the hotel lobby.

Biff: What’d he say?

Willy: He said "Morning!" and I said "You got a fine city here, Mayor" and then he had coffee with me.5

and his hurt self-respect reduces his confidence in himself:

Howard: I don’t want you to represent us. I’ve been meaning to tell you for a long time now.

Willy: Howard, are you firing me?

Howard: I think you need a good long rest, Willy.

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4. Ibid., pp.132-133.

5. Ibid., pp.144-145.
Willy: But I gotta earn money, Howard. I'm in no position to_

......

Howard: Where are your sons? Why don't your sons give you a hand?

Willy: I can't throw myself on my sons. I'm not a cripple!  

The Crucible employs the currently contemporary issue of the McCarthy fever and the Salem Trials of Massachusetts. Within this atmosphere of unrest Miller places his protagonist and the problem of his moral dilemma. The entire issue emerges out of a mysterious strife-torn society where a vast majority of misguided people are screaming witchcraft:

Mrs. Putnam: Tituba knows how to speak to the dead, Mr. Parris.

Parris: Goody Ann, it is a formidable sin to conjure up the dead!

Mrs. Putnam: I take it on my soul, but who else may surely tell us what person murdered my babies!

Parris: Woman!

Mrs. Putnam: They were murdered Mr. Parris! And mark this proof! Mark it! Last night my Ruth were ever so close to their little spirits; I know it, sir. For how else is she struck dumb now except some power of darkness would stop her mouth? It is a marvelous sign Mr. Parris!

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6. Ibid., p.182.
Putnam: Don’t you understand it sir? There is a murdering witch among us, bound to keep herself in the dark.  

Similarly the soulless, commercialized world of *A Memory* unites the spirit of the business world of the two earliest major plays. The ethos of the world inhabited by Joe Kellers, or Willy Lomans or John Proctors constitutes the outer space, providing the substance, or subsoil in which the protagonist is made to live and function. It serves the purpose of an extended metaphor allowing freedom of movement to the characters, as well as effective contrast to highlight the rise and fall in the tempo of their existence. Eddie Carbone's primary limitation is his career as longshoreman which inhibits his total personality. This outer drama is essential as it provides the conceptual framework within which the characters function.

However, Miller's preoccupation does not limit itself within the shackles of this external reality. As with other dramatists from Aeschylus through Shakespeare to Ibsen, the playwright seeks to explore an inner dimension dealing with the tragic pattern of existence. Man and his plight have remained essentially the same. The struggles which the characters have been made to face also remain

unchanged. Only the labels of connotations differ. Nemesis, Até, Hamartia, Furies are jargons employed to depict the crisis in the lives of people. The inner drama deals with conflicts inside and outside the psyche of the being. It thus becomes a correlative of the trauma that besets the characters, surfacing as guilt, such as shipping faulty cylinders to the war-front, and shows itself in the hurt experienced by Joe Keller when his beloved son rejects him:

Keller: If you can't get used to it, then throw it away. You hear me? Take every cent and give it to charity, throw it in the sewer, Does that settle it? In the sewer that's all. You think I'm kidding? I'm tellin' you what to do, if it's dirty then burn it. It's your money, that's not my money. I'm a dead man. I'm an old dead man, nothing's mine. Well, talk to me! What do you want to do!

Chris: It's not what I want to do. It's what you want to do.

Keller: What should I want to do? Jail? You want me to go to jail? If you want to me to go, say so! Is that where I belong? Then tell me so!

Willy Loman too had a personal problem. He had the "wrong kind of dreams" and Biff realises in the Requiem, "He never knew who he was." His awesome illusions capsize around him and Linda has to plead to her sons:

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8. Ibid., p.124.
be sweet to him tonight, dear! Be loving to him. Because he’s only a little boat looking for a harbor.  

His ideals which were a projection of his own subconscious mind so penetrate his conscious self that Willy loses perception, and cognizance is forthcoming only when he manages to untangle the web he himself has spun. This disentangling of threads brings awareness.

Victor Franz in *The Price* has to comprehend that everything in the world including human beings is expendable and a price has to be paid at every juncture. Relationships could be compared to used furniture about which there need not be any emotions; and ‘disposable’ is the currently fashionable word. John Proctor and Eddie Carbone have to scream from rooftops that they have names and identities and are willing to sacrifice their lives for them.

Nearly all of Miller’s protagonists, like Shakespeare’s Lear or Hardy’s Michael Henchard, have the ability to extend their inner crisis to a cosmic level; mainly because the Hamartia or tragic flaw within them finds correspondent reciprocation in the colossal forces outside. This extension enhances the tragic effect and exalts the characters who, despite their lowly status and limited

abilities, get elevated to mythical, archetypal proportions, transcending the barriers of their limitations. Granted that the tragedy of Lear and Oedipus was on the macrocosmic universal scale, and the entire world suffered when Lear collapsed, or mourned the tragic waste of Macbeth’s death, but Miller’s characters and their tragedies were no less multidimensional. The microcosmic struggle of a single individual, his suffering in its entirety has an impact that reverberates through the cosmic world also. Despite the death of Willy Loman, Eddie Carbone and their counterparts, the audience reaches for some inner fulfilment by elevating their mental images to heroic proportions.

Miller’s deliberate ploy for imparting a rounded, fully developed status to his protagonist is the exploration of the psyche. The struggle witnessed inside the personality of his characters literally converts it into a battleground, enabling Miller to place his common-man hero alongside an Oedipus or Santiago. Eddie Carbone’s demand is not isolated:

Eddie: Wipin’ the neighborhood with my name like a dirty rag! I want my name Marco. Now gimme my name and we go to the wedding together.

Beatrice and Catherine: Eddie! Eddie, don’t! Eddie?

Eddie: No, Marco knows what’s right from wrong. Tell the people, Marco, tell them what a liar you are!10

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10. Ibid., p.438.
Carbone, relentlessly pursued by forces of destiny which originate in his inner self, suffers because he cannot accept half measures. Though Miller has, from time to time, proposed compromise to his characters, very few accept the choice preferring to suffer in the hell of their own creation. The malaise was not typical to Eddie. Keller, Loman and Proctor had suffered in equal proportions on account of nearly the same crisis.

Miller localises his plays to single individuals and their immediate family. Duly impressed by his own family the playwright struggled for sometime to evolve a dramatic family limited to parents and sons. The ties and bonds between the members is very strong and the potential for intensity within the circle was also felt to be immense. Life within the confines of the family became the arena for individual activity. With the background of a guilt complex carried over from his past the chief character was allowed interaction with the other members of the family. Loyalties, love, improbity, suspicions, scepticism, outright condemnation were some of the emotions with which they experimented. Joe Keller’s entire life is a doubtful gamble in which he was relying on the susceptibility of his wife and his son’s admiration, to pull off a coup de maitre about the biggest blunder of his career. Chris Keller is at loggerheads with his father, refusing forgiveness on account
of his idealistic leanings, and thus denying Joe the right to be human. He relents towards the end with the realization that culpability was a very minor part of his father’s mental make-up.

Similarly Willy Loman’s indiscretions which get unwittingly revealed to Biff, painstakingly follow him throughout his career. Willy’s life is totally an illusion created by him for the benefit of the family. It breaks when Biff unnerves him both emotionally and psychologically with, "Pop you’re a dime a dozen." Elizabeth Proctor’s injunction that "the judge is inside you John," and Catherine’s scream that Eddie "is a rat"... "he belongs in the sewer," or Walter Franz’s recognition of the selfishness in his father and his subsequent warning to brother Victor, "He’s exploited you," are some of the reactions elicited from members of the family close to the protagonist. The tragedy of the hero thus gets intensified when the understanding which he automatically takes for granted is denied and the sons and daughters become the bitterest of critics.

Miller’s heroes are representatives of tensions, concentrated in the single individual spreading to the family, thereby viewed in the context of the universe. The thematic movement of his plays consists in divergence from one focal point. Tension emanates from the person, becoming
a metaphor for the entire humanity. The individual’s struggle becomes an objective correlative for the turmoil affecting the world. This is in contrast to the thought movement in Shakespeare and Aeschylus where there is a convergence of tension in the hero. The main character by virtue of the extra footage endowed to him in the guise of noble blood, kingship or position as a general in the army, becomes the cynosure of all eyes. The actions pertaining to such protagonists are viewed from the point of view of the universe. Denmark becomes an unweeded garden in *Hamlet*, the stallions start to eat their own kind in *Macbeth*, and the catastrophe of Oedipus is visited upon his land. Their fall from Grace is accompanied by waste in their own beings as well as waste around them, releasing dynamic energy into the universe. Miller’s common-man heroes symbolise struggle on a miniscule scale. By providing them with added cognisance he enables them to surmount the limitations of their family, and the contemporary world, bringing their tragedy at par with those of their illustrious predecessors. The family in Miller thus becomes a motif to depict greater truths and awareness. This brings a total regeneration inside the human being. Constituting a recognition of his self-respect, being, and identity, it elevates man from his status of Lo- man, as some critics christen Willy.

The choice of limited canvas and smaller number of
characters has helped Miller to make a greater impact through the medium of his plays. His entire dramaturgy is focussed on the development of a single individual within the purview of the family. Miller’s main intention in his plays is to probe deep into the anima of the individual and determine the forces that prompt him to act in a particular way. He gives his characters the freedom of choice and decision. But the choice functions in an extremely deterministic pattern of decision, consequence and its resultant suffering. The option preferred by the main character functions as nemesis pursuing the human being relentlessly, never allowing him the liberty to escape its consequences. In The Price the two brothers argue out this issue:

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

Victor: A choice, how?

Walter: You wanted a real life. And that’s an expensive thing; it costs.  

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.

12. Ibid., p.92.
Though Victor had exerted his right to select but the option was preordained as, unlike Walter, Victor could not have abandoned his old father despite suspicions of duplicity.

Similarly, in *A View from the Bridge*, Eddie’s decision to report the illegal immigrants to the authorities was determined right from the moment of their entry into the house, before which Eddie had made Beatrice repeat the story of Vinny Bolzano who ‘snitched’ on his own uncle and was consequently punished with exile from the community. Carbone’s distaste for Rodolpho, whom his friends call ‘Paper Doll’, ‘patsy’ ‘Blondie’, is evident in every gesture and reaction. His accusations of Rodolpho are bewildered and unspecific:

Eddie: His brother thinks it’s because he’s got a sense of humor, see—which he’s got—but that ain’t what they’re laughin’. Which they’re not goin’ to come out with it, because they know he’s my relative....But I know what they’re laughin’ at, and when I think of that guy layin’ his hands on her I could mean—it’s eatin’ me out, Mr Alfieri.  

And Alfieri, the lawyer, reading his dark intentions tells the audience:

There are times when you want to spread an alarm, but nothing has happened....It wasn’t as though there was a mystery to unravel. I

could see every step coming, step after step, like a dark figure walking down a hall toward a certain door. I know where he was heading for, I knew where he was going to end.  

The mysterious forces of destiny have made just one option available to Eddie. However, he is deluded into believing that he has freedom of choice.  

The Crucible also abounds in instances where John Proctor has no alternative but to choose the available option. His tragedy has also been determined from the very beginning in which he protects his wife from the charge of witchcraft. Public and private tensions coalesce because the issues at stake are public but the interests involved are purely private. When the normally truthful Mrs. Proctor lies for the sake of her husband the web gets thoroughly enmeshed around both of them. If Proctor had found his release through false testimony he would have betrayed his friend through perfidy. His signed confession was a condemnation for the entire community. As Proctor was hardly a person to resort to such cowardice his death through execution is a pre-ordained fate.  

Joe Keller's nemesis started at the moment he sent the faulty cylinders. But he too was tied by the demands of

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the time and situation and could do nothing other than that. The deterministic nature of the choice that Miller allows his chief characters by its very unrelenting, unyielding temper, forced them into a suffering for which they were not solely responsible. This unprecedented misery provided them with the trapped image. Emotionally, psychologically, biologically the human being is trapped within the prison of these deterministic forces. The human image in Miller's plays is that of a being with responsibility of apparent choice. But this so called decision reciprocates with the potent forces outside his existence to magnify his tragedy, lending it positive gravity.

George Steiner in *The Death of a Tragedy* observes:

Tragic drama tells us that the sphere of reason, order and justice are terribly limited and that no progress in our science or technical resources will enlarge their relevance. Outside and within man is l'autre, the "otherness" of the world. Call it what you will, a hidden or malevolent God, blind fate, the solicitations of hell or the brute fury of our animal blood. It waits for us in ambush at the crossroads. It mocks us and destroys us. In certain rare instances, it leads us after destruction to some incomprehensible repose.  

The question that now arises is that if the individual is not actually responsible for his choice, but has relentlessly been compelled into it without his own

volition, then the suffering which is resultant as part of the consequences of his conscious choice also becomes unpremeditated. However, the human being experiences misery because it is the necessary residue of the tragic experience. There is no doubt about the pathos, intensity and humanness of Miller’s plays.

The pain undergone by Joe Keller, Willy Loman, Proctor and Carbone is unmistakable and undeniable. It may not be earthshaking, but it is an ample test for the resilience, endurance, patience and integrity of the human being. Willy Loman’s encounter and rejection by his sons is one such incident:

Linda: You’re a pair of animals! Not one, not another living soul would have had the cruelty to walk out on that man in a restaurant!

Biff: Is that what he said?

Linda: He didn’t have to say anything. He was so humiliated he nearly limped when he came in.

Happy: But Mom, he had a great time with us.

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Linda: You, You didn’t even go in to see if he was all right!

Biff: (With self loathing) No. Didn’t Didn’t do a damned thing. How do you like that? heh? Left him babbling in a toilet.16

Loman's basic mistake was his impractical, unrealistic success-philosophy to which his personality does not conform. He tries his level best to make his sons fit in the mould but like him they too are unsuccessful. However, realization of failure dawns on Happy and Biff earlier. Consequently, they reject the father-image causing great suffering to Loman. The gulf between aspiration and ability to realise it, so characteristic of an Ibsen protagonist, is central to the predicament of all the suffering characters of Miller.

The brooding, unkempt image of John Proctor is also an evidence of how misery is woven into the fabric of the Miller play. The playwright's explanatory note in The Crucible states:

Proctor walks to her, (Elizabeth) halts. It is as though they stood in a spinning world. It is beyond sorrow, above it. He reaches out his hand, as though toward an embodiment not quite real, and as he touches her, a strange soft sound, half laughter, half amazement comes from his throat. He pats her hand. She covers his hand with hers. And then, weak, he sits.  

Proctor's estrangement from his wife and family and the added indignity of having to suffer public calumny and condemnation makes his tragedy doubly poignant.

17. Ibid., p.321.
The tragedy of Gus's death in *A Memory* is equally effective. In nearly all of Miller's plays the misery of the protagonist is underplayed to such an extent that it enhances the audience's sympathy. The death of Gus, Loman, Proctor, and Keller are reported, for Miller wishes to intensify the experience by keeping it within the bounds of the audience's endurance.

The individual in Miller's world is essentially human, convincing in his struggles, and misery, and efforts to seek recognition, and self-respect. Even the cameos of *A Memory* provide ample insight into the human personality. The Larrys, Tcm Kellys, and Rodolphos are as convincing as the stronger and more subtle characters to whom the playwright gave more attention. Nearly all of them have to shoulder the burden of those responsibilities that are their due. Though the protagonist is permitted choice within a deterministic framework, the immediate cause for his trauma rests with the feeling of guilt that surfaces occasionally. The root of this uneasy conscience lies in the past. Most often it takes the garb of the tide of fate and chance over which the human being has no control. The powerlessness and lack of resistance to these dark forces stem from the fact that the human being having already committed perjury and folly is in no position to retaliate. Willy Loman's indiscretion with the strange woman in the hotel is unfortunately discovered
by Biff and remains till the end of the play the leitmotif of the gulf between father and the son. Willy’s aptitude for misrepresentation also causes turmoil in the family but because the weakness was a recurrent occurrence there was no way in which it could be controlled. Hence Willy heaps up lies to delude himself and others around him. Linda and the sons know about this, but are afraid to confront him for fear of his eventual collapse.

The initial distancing between Elizabeth and John Proctor was on account of John’s little affair with Abigail Williams. Again, yet another Miller hero did not have the moral courage to condemn, and in this case expose the truant girl. He could only bring himself to talk about the shameful episode in his life when his wife is threatened with imprisonment. But it was too late, and Proctor’s confession attains greater significance with reference to the topical situation in Salem. Guilt pursues him as he finds himself helplessly trapped in the prison of his own invention. Release comes at great expense and he chooses to purge his soul through expiation rather than continue life like a scoundrel with no identity or self respect.

The human image in Miller had overtones of the Ibsen, Synge, O’Casey, Hemingway pattern. Miller visualises the individual in a trapped situation, but the forces making
him recumbent are not just those which pursued the Hardy protagonist. The Miller hero is solely responsible for his plight, whether pleasant or unpleasant, on account of his past which entailed some misdemeanour or guilt that he is not able to shed easily, and which constantly interferes in the course of his existence. But the lasting impression of the Miller hero does not conclude with the subject of his death. Because, like Hardy's heroes, Miller also searches for affirmation, assertion and highlights the positivistic aspect of the human personality. Despite the tragic experience of Proctor, Carbone, Loman, and Keller, succumbing to death, the tangible result is their insight and added perception into the human situation. Redemption for them lay in this heightened consciousness. Like Gregory Solomom in The Price the challenge to live life is always available to the individual provided he picks up the cudgels, sheds his lethargy, false illusions, vanity and overweening pride to look forward to a better Monday when, like Bert, he would revisit his friends and try to extricate some of them from their monotonous drab lives, leading them to hope. The lasting impression of Miller's plays lies in this prospect of a better future, which a Loman and a Keller leave for their progeny. Hence life did not end with Carbones and Proctors but continued with the chuckling laughter of an eighty-nine year old Solomon.