The ultimate human mystery may not be anything more than the claims on us of clan and race, which may yet turn out to have the power, because they defy the rational mind, to kill the world.

-Miller, Timebends.
The Angst in Relationships

In 1990s Miller wrote *The Last Yankee* and *Broken Glass*; both the plays focusing on human relationships in the marital context. As in most of Miller's plays, the characters in these plays are caught at crossroads in their lives where they try to find the meaning of their existence while confronted by fear, anxiety and denial; some of them in the verge of losing their mental balance as they look at their lives dissatisfied, disappointed and frustrated.

*The Last Yankee* is set in a state mental hospital where two men come to visit their wives, meet each other in the visiting room. Leroy Hamilton, a freelance carpenter and descendent of Alexander Hamilton; John Frick, a conservative successful businessman; both have their wives staying in the institution, and as they pass time talking to each other we discover that this happens to be the only thing common in both these men. Through their conversations, Miller unravels the two characters layer by layer. Frick is a snobbish, racist and mean-spirited man who has deprived his wife of having children; whereas Leroy is sensitive, thoughtful and caring who has a certain largeness of heart and spirit.

Next we meet the wives, Patricia Hamilton and Karen Frick, and discover that their mental ailments are closely related to their marriages. They seem to have been broken by the unfulfilled needs and aspirations; and as they try to recover, their husbands wait; one patiently, the other not. The two couples share a common problem: instead of looking for a fulfillment in human relationships they seek meaning in life through material possessions. As the two couples interact we find Patricia and Leroy reach a compromise that will help Patricia to
go home soon, whereas the Fricks are still unable to communicate with each other and Karen shows almost no signs of recovery.

Leroy is linked by birth to the great American founder father, Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton, the first Constitutional Lawyer of the country was also the co-writer of the American constitution, the first Secretary of the American Treasury, and one of the earliest thinkers of the materialistic aspects of American thought, who died very early in a duel with his rival Aaron Burr. Leroy is wary of his connections with the big man; and ironically in the play, he is about the same age that Hamilton was when he passed away. Leroy is an independent carpenter who doesn’t care much for the competitive world, most often he undercharges his customers and is contented with whatever he has. He likes to live a simple life without the clutter of too much possessions and drives a second hand old Chevrolet. His banjo is his one priced possession which helps him to take pressure off his life. We don’t find him complaining much about the ordeal that he has to face because of his wife’s depression for twenty long years as against Frick who is disgusted about the same fact.

Frick: ...It’s an awful sensation, though—coming home and there’s nobody there.

Leroy: How’d you like to come home and there’s seven of them there?

Frick: I guess I’m lucky at that.

Leroy: Well, I am too. They’re wonderful kids.

Frick: They still very young?

Leroy: Five to nineteen. But they all pitch in. everything’s clean, house runs like a ship.
Frick: You're lucky to have good children these days. I guess we're both lucky.

Leroy: That's the only way to look at it. Start feeling sorry for yourself, that's when you are in trouble. (452)

Leroy, the last Yankee, clings to the Founding Fathers' beliefs in independence, tolerance, and hard work; which come to the rescue of modern America, represented by his wife. Patricia belongs to a family of Swedish immigrants who believed in the inevitability and necessity of success, like Willy Loman. They too had chased the success myth, fulfilled it to a great extent — one of her brothers had won the All New England Golf Tournament, the other a silver medal in the Olympic Games for pole vault — but it fell short of their expectations.

Patricia: Oh, they're all gone now.

Karen: Moved away?

Patricia: No... dead.

Karen: Oh my. They overstrain?

Patricia: Buzz hung himself on his wife's closet door.

Karen: Oh my!

Patricia: Eight days later Charles shot himself on the tractor.

Karen: Oh my. Did they leave a note or anything?

Patricia: No. But we all knew what it was.

Karen: Can you say?

Patricia: Disappointment. We were all brought up expecting to be wonderful, and ...(breaks off with a shrug) ... just wasn't. (469)
Disappointment is the keynote of Patricia’s life. She had won a beauty pageant when she was nineteen. The rest of her life seems an anticlimax. She is disappointed with Leroy because he refuses to participate in the mad competition that gives meaning to her life. Her retreat to the mental hospital is the equivalent of her brothers’ suicides. Behind the clinical depression that she suffers is that other Depression, which haunts Miller’s characters, for in their own decline they see the failure of the American dream. As Miller said in his 1995 interview with Bigsby about The Last Yankee, “We live in fear of falling, fear of losing status” (Bigsby, Companion, 174). In this play we are not far from the world of the Salesman in which Willy is obsessed with failure because his life fails to match the ‘success myth’ which he believed to be the sole justification for his existence. Similar is the case with Patricia. Bigsby points out, Willy’s real failure, and Patricia’s, is more fundamental. “It is a failure to acknowledge and to offer love, a failure to see that lives are justified and identity affirmed not by material success, by competitive ruthlessness or personal charm, but by exhibiting a commitment to others and to the self built out of something more substantial than mere appearance” (Bigsby, Companion, 175).

Patricia: ... He’s absolutely refused to make any money... It’s just that he’s got really well-to-do relatives and he simply will not accept anyone’s help. I mean you take the Jews, the Italians, Irish – they’ve got their Italian-Americans, Irish-Americans, Hispanic-Americans – they stick together and help each other. But you ever hear of Yankee-Americans? Not on your life. Raise his taxes, rob him blind, the Yankee’ll just sit there all alone getting sadder and sadder. ...

Karen: You have a very beautiful chin.
Patricia: Men with half his ability riding around in big expensive cars and now for the second Easter Sunday in a row his rear end collapsed.

Karen: I think my license must have expired.

Patricia, (a surge of deep anger): I refuse to ride around in a nine-year-old Chevrolet which was bought secondhand in the first place! (463-64)

For Patricia success is measured in terms of material possessions, public reputations and social roles. Leroy, the last Yankee, by contrast, "is somebody who has stepped off the train. He is not running after the brass ring any more. His wife is on the train. She can't see happiness unless it is accomplished by economic success. ... He does not have an unearned income. She feels he has disserved himself and her by failing in that respect" (Bigsby, Companion, 175), Miller explains in his 1995 interview with Bigsby. What is remarkable about Leroy is his hope - he has never stopped hoping for Patricia to get well. It is his sense of hope that keeps him going. Despite Patricia's constant nagging, Leroy retains his self-esteem and a belief in himself. Patricia, in contrast, has spent a life trying not to believe.

What is true about Patricia is also true about Frick. Like Willy Loman he has been busy chasing success all his life, so much so, that he has become blind to the needs of others as well as to a love which would have given him what he lacked. It is Frick who has driven his wife to despair. Leroy and Frick are completely opposite characters. Our first view of the two emphasizes their difference with Leroy sitting quietly and reading, and Frick pacing and is on
edge. The motivating force of Leroy's life is love, though their relatives have offered money to put Patricia in better institutions, she is here because it is close enough for Leroy to visit her; whereas for Frick it is money, though he can afford to send her to better places he refuses to do so to save money. While Leroy is tolerant and patient towards others, Frick is obviously impatient and prejudiced. He thinks that his wife is afraid of the 'Negroes'. Frick is concerned about external appearances. He judges Leroy by his Ivy League dress and keeps patronizing him till he hears that he is a carpenter and that he doesn't care much about his rich lineage.

Frick: Didn't care for Alexander Hamilton?

Leroy: It was something to do with his philosophy. But I never kept up with the whole thing.

Frick, (laughing, shaking his had): Boy, you're quite a character, aren't you. ...

(Leroy is silent, reddening, Frick continues chuckling at him for a moment.)

Leroy: I hope to God your wife is cured, Mr. Frick, I hope she never has to come back here again.

Frick,(sensing hostility): What have I said? ...

Leroy: ... why do you talk like this to a man? One minute my altar is terrific and the next minute I'm some kind of shit bucket. ... I don't mean anything against you personally, I know you're a successful man and more power to you, but this whole type of conversation about my clothes - should I be ashamed I'm a carpenter? I mean everybody's talking “labor, labor,” how much
labor's getting; well if it's so great to be labor how come nobody wants to be it? (458)

"Frick is incapable of clear vision — of himself or of others", says Susan Abbotson (Abbotson, 69). He cannot even recognize his own wife's humanity, for he treats her like a broken down car. He cannot comprehend the causes for her depression — is it the fear of the ‘negroes’ or the lack of children, is it that there was no financial crisis or any trouble for that matter — insensitive Frick can never point a finger at any possible reason:

Frick: It's a mystery — a woman with everything she could possibly want. I don't care what happens to the country, there's nothing could ever hurt her anymore. Suddenly, out of the country, out of nowhere, she's terrified! ... She lost all her optimism. Yours do that? Lose her optimism?

Leroy: Mine was never very optimism. She's Swedish.

Frick: Oh. Mine certainly was. Whatever deal I was in, couldn't wait till I got home to talk about it. Real estate, stock market, always interested. All of a sudden, no interest whatsoever. Might as well be talking to that wall over there — your wife have brothers and sisters?

Leroy: Quite a few, ya.

Frick: Really, I even thought maybe it's that she was an only child, and if she had brothers and sisters to talk to. (452)

Least of all can Frick ever acknowledge that it is his emotional negligence that caused it. He can't even think in those lines. When Patricia points it out, he is uncomfortable:
Patricia: Well I think being positive is the only way.
Frick: That’s just what I tell her...
Patricia: But you have to be careful not to sound so disappointed in her.
Frick: I sound disappointed?
Patricia: In a way, I think. – She’s got to feel treasured, you see.
Frick: I appreciate that, but the woman can stand in one place for half an hour at a time practically without moving.
Patricia: Well that’s the sickness, you see.
Frick: I realise that. But she won’t even go shopping...
Patricia: You see? You’re sounding disappointed in her.
Frick, (angering): I am not disappointed in her! I’m just telling you the situation!
Patricia: Mr. Frick, she’s standing under a mountain a mile high – you’ve got to help her over it. That woman has very big possibilities!...
Frick: Y’know, she made me have a little platform built down the cellar, with a big full-length mirror so she could see herself dance...
Patricia: But do you spend time watching her...
Frick: Well she says not to till she’s good at it...
Patricia: That’s because she’s terrified of your criticism.
Frick: But I haven’t made any criticism.
Patricia: But do you like tap dancing?
Frick: Well I don’t know, I never thought about it one way or another.
Patricia: Well that's the thing, you see. It happens to mean a great deal to her. (482-483)

Finance rules Frick's life. When all the time he looks at his wife as a bad investment, how will he ever have time to appreciate her talents amidst his busy money-making, or rather, money-grabbing schedule? Frick recalls to the mind of the audience the picture of the nineteenth century "Robber Baron"—a figure may be like Ben in *Salesman*. His vision is blinkered by his own self-concern and egotism. Therefore, neither can he see other's points of view nor can he understand them. Frick would have grown during the Depression years in poverty whereas Leroy must have been born in the booming forties in an affluent family. Probably because of this Leroy can be what he is, the self-contented, self-sufficient last Yankee who proclaims, "To me spiritual is whatever makes me forget myself and feel happy to be alive" (480). But for Frick it is all different; he is obsessed with prosperity, partly from having been denied it in his youth. Frick has lived the American dream, and is proud of his rags-to-riches story. He has plenty of money but little happiness. Like Patricia, Frick must learn to love people and use things, instead of loving things and using people.

Karen is the victim of Frick's shortcomings. She doesn't lack anything that money can buy for her in Modern America; but she certainly lacks a human touch. She lacked it ever since her childhood when her mother left them. She lacks it even more now being childless. Frick has time to talk to her about his business, his stocks and real estate and never about herself and her needs. Completely isolated from the human world she takes refuge in the world of her tap dance. "Karen's tap dancing is an attempt to communicate to her self-
absorbed husband, a little like Morse code, but Frick refuses to listen”, says Susan Abbotson (Abbotson, 61). The final outcome is that she lands up in the hospital. Karen is embarrassed of being there too and doesn’t seem to be recovering much:

Karen: I feel ashamed.

Patricia: For heaven’s sake, why? You’ve got a right to be depressed. There’s more people in hospitals because of depression than any other disease.

Karen: Is that true?

Patricia: Of course! Anybody with any sense has got to be depressed in this country. unless you’re really rich, I suppose. Don’t let him shame you, dear. . .

Karen: We’re rich, I think.

Patricia, (quickly interested): ... Really rich?

Karen: He’s got the oil delivery now, and of course he always had the fertilizer and the Chevy dealership, and of course the lumber yard and all. And Isuzus now. (464-465)

Karen’s life and identity has drained away because of her relationship with her husband. Her thinness emphasizes the emaciation of her whole life. Their marriage has been a complete failure in communication because Frick has allowed only a one-way communication. And now when she has broken down, he does not know what to do. A critic points out that she has no children, no function, no confidence, and a great garrulous blob where a husband should be. Miller’s old enemy, American Materialism is the cause of her despair. Patricia plays an important role in helping Karen to cope with her situation. She tries to
instill a kind of faith in herself; reminds her that she is a “person” and therefore has the right to have her likes and dislikes. Though she enjoys Patricia’s supportive company but she finally needs her husband’s support for that is what means everything to her. Till she gets that support she may not recover.

On the other hand, the uncluttered atmosphere of the hospital allows Patricia to reconnect with the true meanings of life. There are few things around to distract her. She is able to touch base with what really matters in life – not things but people. All the wealth and commodities do not matter to her any more. When she objectively looks at Karen’s problem and what she lacks in life Patricia realizes what she has and must treasure. She makes up her mind, “I-must-not-blame-Leroy-anymore” (463), tries not to look at the future too far away and get back home without the aid of the medicines, for she believes now that, “the soul belongs to God, we’re not supposed to be stuffing Valium into His mouth” (462).

There are some critics who feel that though Leroy is portrayed in the play as a perfect figure he too has his faults. He is too isolated from others, which is the root cause of his problem with his wife; she feels they are too separated from the society. Patricia sees Leroy as a failed outcast rather than a rugged outsider. This is what she means when she points out:

Patricia: You are depressed, Leroy! Because you’re scared of people, you really don’t trust anyone, and that’s incidentally why you never made any money. You could have the world on fire but you can’t bear to work with other human being (473).
Society would not, however, regard Leroy as a depressive. He is just feeling sorry for himself and should and will snap out of it, pull himself together. “This is where we are wrong” says Stefan Tai. He adds, “Leroy, as Miller wants to show, is also suffering from depression and it is Leroy’s type of depression which is probably the most common. Yet, it is widely ignored and denied, both by society and the individual sufferers” (Tai). Leroy does need to see Patricia’s insecurities and deal with them rather than calmly wait for her to get over them on her own. So his flaw is one of inaction rather than action. Miller suggests that though both are depressed in their own ways, he is depressed over things from the past or may be present but she is depressed over the future, over things that have not even occurred.

The play as Bigsby sees it “is more concerned with redemption than despair” (Bigsby, Companion, 175). At the end of the play we are offered three possibilities. Patricia leaves the institution with Leroy, healed to a great extent, with the hope that together they can make it. Her twenty-year sleep of the spirit has an echo of Rip Van Winkle’s sleep in the New England hills. She wakes up from her long sleep to discover her real life. Karen does not leave for she still cannot see a true meaning in her life. There is a third possibility suggested by Miller; a patient lies catatonic throughout the play, never really stirring – a rather disturbing alternative. “The PATIENT on the bed remains motionless. A stillness envelops the whole stage, immobility seems eternal. End” (488).

Miller’s final message in the play is what his Thoreauvian hero, Leroy tells Patricia, “We are in this world and you’re going to have to find some way to love it” (480). Only then can one find meaning in this existence; without which
"action is suffering, and suffering is action (Eliot, Cathedral, 32). Patricia has to stop becoming in order to be. Like Maggie in After the Fall Patricia has to realize that she is holding life in her own hands and cease to live provisionally. In searching for their identities in the wrong place Patricia, Karen and Frick have led themselves into despair. The only way to help themselves is by accepting their lot and entering into a life of authentic existence of self; abandoning that of an inauthentic one that sucks them into the materialistic world. "The play is a plea not for resignation but acceptance" concludes Bigsby (Companion, 176).

In Miller's Broken Glass denial is the central theme. Miller says in his Timebends, "If ever any Jews should have melted into the proverbial pot, it was our family. ... I was no sallow Talmud reader ... As it turned out, we were building a fortress of denial that would take two massive onslaughts to crack – the Depression and Hitler's war" (62). In the play he tackles these themes alongside the problem of marital discord. The action of the play takes place in 1938, when the holocaust was at its peak. Miller, presumably, was inspired by T.S. Eliot's Hollow Men, a poem that agonizes over the moral and intellectual decay of the modern man, and the meaninglessness of the human existence:

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass

132
Or rats' feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar (Eliot, *Hollow Men*).

Miller takes us back to November 9, 1938, on *Kristallnacht*.

The “Night of Broken Glass”, triggered by the assassination of German diplomat Ernst vom Rath by Herschel Grynszpan, a German-born Polish Jew. In a coordinated attack on Jewish people and their property, 91 Jews were murdered and 25,000 to 30,000 were arrested and deported to concentration camps. More than 200 synagogues were destroyed and thousands of homes and businesses were ransacked. Kristallnacht also served as a pretext and a means for the wholesale confiscation of firearms from German Jews. While the assassination of Rath served as a pretext for the attacks, Kristallnacht was part of a broader Nazi policy of antisemitism and persecution of the Jews. Kristallnacht was followed by further economic and political persecutions and is viewed by many historians as the beginning of the Final Solution, leading towards the genocide of the Holocaust. (*Kristallnacht*)

Miller’s protagonist, Sylvia Gellburg, a Jewish woman far away in Brooklyn, is horrified at this event, not only because of violence towards people guilty of their race and identities, but also because of the failure of the rest of the world population to protest. Sylvia is affected by an onset of hysterical paralysis as she is under a shock reading about the atrocities on the Jews in Germany. Looking at Sylvia the question in the minds of the audience would be, is it possible that someone should be physically affected by outside events to such a great extent as

NAZIS SMASH, LOOT AND BURN
JEWISH SHOPS AND TEMPLES
UNTIL

All Vienna
Fires and
Jews Are Beaten
From Homes
Jailed

Broken Glass
to get a paralysis of her limbs? Ever since he wrote the play Miller has come across the fact that there was an unusual amount of physical paralysis among Jews in America during the Holocaust, and even a high incidence of blindness among women following the horrors perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Bigsby in this context says in Companion, "Broken Glass is not a docu-drama and Miller does not write thesis plays. Instead he offers an image of that paralysis of the spirit which is a fact of personal lives as much as of national policy." (Bigsby, 178)

As Act I opens we find Philip Gellburg discussing his wife Sylvia’s stroke with Dr. Hyman’s wife, Margaret. While the good humoured Margaret tries her best to be sympathetic to his situation, Philip is sour, unresponsive; at his best he wears a “purse-mouthed grin”. He is impatient waiting for the doctor and Margaret’s unasked-for interest. We find him to be intolerant as he loses his temper every time Margaret mistakes his name for Goldberg. He is ill-tempered with little regard for others feelings. He is proud of his fiercely independent nature for he doesn’t “run with the crowd”, sees “with these eyes, nobody else’s” (497), and “too preoccupied to notice” (491) when somebody nods to him on the street. As against this Sylvia is a “lovely woman” who “has a lot of courage”.

Dr. Harry Hyman is probably a high-man as Miller portrays him, a “handsome man, a determined scientific idealist” who is courteous, kind and well-read. Like Miller, he is a socialist and believes in the demise of religion. As they discuss Sylvia’s health we find Gellburg quite perplexed with the situation of his wife, because along with her stroke, she has also become unnaturally concerned about the persecution of Jews in Germany. A disrelated and irrational man, he thinks
his wife is possessed by a dybbuk, a ghost. Gellburg, who has mixed feelings about his Jewish origin; proud as he is the only Jew ever to head his firm and his son to be the only Jewish captain ever in the army; at the same time critical about the German Jews who “won’t take an ordinary good job. ... it’s got to be pretty high up in the firm or they’re insulted. And they can’t even speak English.” (496); cannot relate to her reactions to the happenings, three thousand miles away, in Germany. Dr. Hyman is able to perceive the temperamental contrast between the couple and probably senses the root of the problem to be elsewhere. His intuition tells, “We get sick in twos and threes and fours, not alone as individuals” (504). The doctor wants Gellburg to accept some responsibility for what has happened to Sylvia.

Dr. Hyman delves deeper into the personal life of the Gellburgs to try and find the reason for Sylvia’s illness so that he may be able to find a remedy.

Hyman: Well, let me tell you my approach; if possible I’d like to keep her out of that whole psychiatry rigmarole. Not that I’m against it, but I think you get further faster, sometimes, with a little commonsense and some plain human sympathy. Can we talk turkey?... We have a strong, healthy woman who has no physical ailment, and suddenly can’t stand on her legs. Why?... I don’t mean to embarrass you ...

Gellburg,(an angry smile): You’re not embarrassing me. – What do you want to know?

Hyman: In these cases there is often a sexual disability. You have relations, I imagine?

Gellburg: Relations? Yes, we have relations.
Hyman: Often?

Gellburg: What's that got to do with it?

Hyman: Sex could be connected. You don't have to answer...

Gellburg: No- no it's all right... I would say it depends – maybe twice, three times a week.

Hyman: Well that's good. ... What about before she collapsed; was that completely out of the blue or ...

Gellburg: I tell you, looking back I wonder if something happened when they started putting all the pictures in the paper. About these Nazi carryings-on. I noticed she started ... staring at them ... in a very peculiar way. And ... I don't know. I think it made her angry or something.

Hyman: At you.

Gellburg: Well ... In general. Personally I don't think they should be publishing those kind of pictures.

Hyman: Why not?

Gellburg: She scares herself to death with them ...and what good does it accomplish! Except maybe put some fancy new ideas into these anti-Semites walking around New York here. (501-2)

As the doctor and Gellburg discuss issues related to their personal life, Miller tries to show us that probably Sylvia's ailment has something to do with their discordant marital relationship; maybe there is "some very deep, hidden part of her mind is directing her to do it." (503); maybe "she's doing it on purpose", "enjoying herself" rather, only to drive home a message to her husband. The doctor sensing the same discord requests Gellburg to be more loving to her.
We find Sylvia in the next scene peering into the newspaper to know more about the German atrocities. Her sister Harriet cannot understand her concerns for the assaults on the German Jews; but for Sylvia these brutally dehumanizing events have a personal bearing on her life.

Sylvia: They are making old men crawl around and clean the sidewalks with toothbrushes.

Harriet: Who is?

Sylvia: In Germany. Old men with beards!

Harriet: So why are you so interested in that? What business of yours is that?

Sylvia: I don't really know. (A slight pause.) Remember Grandpa? His eyeglasses with the bent sidepiece? One of the old men in the paper was his spitting image, he had the same exact glasses with the wire frames. I can't get it out of my mind. On their knees on the sidewalk, two old men. And there's fifteen or twenty people standing in a circle laughing at them scrubbing with toothbrushes. There's three women in the picture; they're holding their coat collars closed, so it must have been cold...

Harriet: Why would they make them scrub with toothbrushes?

Sylvia: To humiliate them, to make fools of them!... How can you be so... (508-509)

Reading between the lines one may decipher that if Sylvia empathizes with the Jews, so far removed from her secured life here in America, it is because in their persecution she finds the reflection of her own doomed marriage.
Gellburg, following Hyman’s suggestions tries to be extra-caring and gets things that Sylvia liked once upon a time, making an effort to cheer her up. He shows her the letter from Jerome, but it fails to make her happy for deep within she blames Gellburg for taking her son away from her. He promises to buy her a new Dodge car, but that doesn’t interest her either; “But aren’t they all black?” (512) like the black suit that he wears all the time. Black, in some sense is a metaphor of the death of their relationship.

When Harriet meets the doctor next, she shares many details about the personal life of the couple like; Gellburg being ashamed of his Jewish origin; the incident when he “hit her with the steak”(519); the violent reaction of Philip when they all were looking at the pornographic pictures; and also that he is impotent. Gellburg seems to be suffering from a deep sense of insecurity, the signs of which is obvious when we hear how he forced Sylvia to give up her promising job, or stares at her when she talks to their guests. When Hyman visits Sylvia he realizes the truth in what Harriet had reported to him. He makes Sylvia open up to him by his warmth and attention. The sensuous scene that follows and Sylvia’s reaction to it confirms that the barren marital relationship is at the root of her physical problems.

As Sylvia becomes increasingly dependent on her doctor Gellburg seethes in jealousy, which is fueled by his own sense of guilt, insecurity and impotence. He accuses Hyman of being erotically attracted to her and complains, “this whole thing is against me”. In one of his visits Sylvia confides in him the dream she had where, “a man catches and pushes me down... And then he starts to cut off my breasts... I see the side of his face... I think it’s Philip” (545). She almost
comes to terms with her conflict at this point of time. She is afraid not of the Nazis, but her husband and she sees herself to be his “Jew”. Miller had once reflected, “The concentration camp is the final expression of human separateness and its ultimate consequence. It is organized abandonment.” (Bigsby, *Companion*, 182). Thus, while using the humiliation of the Jews as a metaphor Miller highlights the breakdown of Philip-Sylvia relationship.

Only when she stands face to face with her real problem can she make up her mind not to go on any further. When Philip tries to dictate terms to her about the choice of her doctor, she bursts out in a “Jewish woman’s tone of voice” (553):

Sylvia: I’m going to say anything I want to.

Gellburg, (weeping): You will kill me…!

Sylvia: What I did with my life! Out of ignorance. Out of not wanting to shame you in front of other people. A whole life. Gave it away like a couple of pennies – I took better care of my shoes.—You want to talk to me about it now? Take me seriously, Philip. What happened? I know it’s all you ever thought about, isn’t that true?...

Gellburg: When you had Jerome …and suddenly you didn’t want to keep the house anymore.

Sylvia: And?—You didn’t want me to go back to the business, so I didn’t. …

Gellburg: You held it against me, having to stay home, you know you did. You’ve probably forgotten, but not a day passed, not a person could come into the house that you didn’t keep saying how wonderful and interesting it used to be for you in business.
You never forgave me, Sylvia. So whenever I ... when I started to touch you I felt that.

Sylvia: You felt what?

Gellburg: That you didn’t want me to be the man here. And then, on top of that when you didn’t want any more children ... everything inside me just dried up. ... I can’t help my thoughts, nobody can... I admit it was a mistake, I tried a hundred times to talk to you, but couldn’t. I kept waiting for myself to change. ...

Sylvia: This is a whole life we’re talking about. (553-55)

Gellburg accepts his responsibility. But the reality proves too strong for him to bear; and while Sylvia stands up on her feet, her husband is down with a stroke. The end is ambiguous, as Sylvia feels grieved as well as triumphant at Gellburge’s fall. Bigsby says in his introduction to Portable that,

The play thus explores our capacity to deny that which we would rather not confront. It is also about men and women who struggle with their own contradictory impulses. In Broken Glass they concern a desperate wish to refuse responsibility for one’s life while insisting on one’s right to respect from others. Denial has driven man and wife apart as it has driven races, societies, and nations. It has alienated people from themselves (xxxvi).

The Gellburgs live at a time when prejudice is not a problem in Europe alone. Miller tells Bigsby in their 1995 Interview, “America is dense with anti-Semitism. Especially in New York” (Companion, 179). They also live at a time when the country was struggling hard to come out of the grip of the Depression.
In Philip’s work front he is constantly humiliated by his gentile boss. He is accused of selling out a company secret to a rival firm, as the competitor happened to be a Jew. The play echoes Willy Loman-Howard Wagner relationship when we witness the big man sniffing the life out of the small man. Though Philip Gellburg is a much more successful man than Willy, that success is devoid of any meaning when his private life is infected with an unbearable irony. He works for a company called Guarantee and Trust, but ironically his job is that of dispossessing people of their property that uproots them from their home and hearth. This in turn would lead to a feeling of hopelessness and alienation. Ironically enough, Philip’s private life has turned out to be one of that kind, his is a home where two people live under the same roof, estranged, alienated. Marriages are disposable in today’s world. But this was not the case in 1930s. Love could shrivel or die as fast as it does today; but the only way out then, in most cases, was resignation. And resignation whether on a personal level or on a political one could only kill.

“Broken Glass is an interesting but disappointing drama, like many of Miller’s later works. It does not have the stamp and authority of his masterpieces but still manages to combine the power of realism with the resonance of metaphor, for which the author was justly famous” (Baker), says John Baker in his Blog.

Miller has created a metaphor in the play: the metaphor of paralysis. It is more the paralysis that seemed to have afflicted the world that stood by and watched starvation and genocide in Africa and ethnic cleansing in Europe. Broken Glass creates a metaphor for that paralysis in the person of Sylvia Gellburg. When Miller wrote the play a war was being waged against the former Yugoslavia. The world was paralyzed then. The play is even more relevant today than it was then.
The world today is under the threat of another ethnic cleansing, much more global in nature. Bigsby's words in Companion would be apt to be quoted at this juncture:

It would be comfortable if Broken Glass could be contained by its historical moment, a time capsule to be opened so that we can for a moment breathe the dank air of another time, wonder at the passions of another age. It would be comfortable, but untrue. Not merely those joined by love still discover what strangers they can become, but, around the world, what we have taken to be the solid foundations of civilization continue to crack and crumble. An event which shook Miller in 1937 was the bombing by the Fascists, of the Spanish town of Guernica. In 1994, people in Sarajevo were blown apart by gunners on a hillside for no better reason than that they could be. As Miller said, even as rehearsals for his play were underway: “they were sitting there blowing the hell out of that town and we’re all sitting here saying ‘tch! tch! isn’t that terrible.’ They blew up sixteen children and did you see anybody pause on this way to lunch? That’s what this play’s about.” That, and much more. (182)

Not long ago, at the dawn of the twentieth century, W.B. Yeats, another sensitive poet, gave expression to his prophetic vision when he said:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity. (Palgrave, 424)

It is art that gives us the glimpse of a situation of the past. It can make a prophecy. It can even offer a counter image, as Miller once said, and warn humanity. It cannot stop the neo-Nazis. Theatre or any art for that matter can reach out to touch people and bring them together. But it is for men to carry forward the message conveyed by art. It is for men to own up responsibility for the world they live in and treat it as one whole, without breaking it into fragments.