CHAPTER II

LOULY AND LONELY: TYRANNY OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

One of the inevitable results of the post-War situation in the American mercantile milieu was the emergence of the salesman as a representative of the American culture. For the growing economy of America, more and more salesmen were needed, and that led to the popularity of the new myths of infinite success. Inevitably, in such commercialized set-up, happiness proved illusive, as the laws of the new system constrained, frustrated and isolated them. With Horatio Alger and Dale Carnegie emerging as the universal ideals, success in all spheres of life came to be measured in terms of money. In the words of Henry Popkin: "Success is a requirement Americans make of life. Because it seems magical, and inexplicable, . . . it can be considered the due of every free citizen, even those with no notable or measurable talents."¹ Hence everyone tried to turn himself into a money-making machine. This tendency debased and dehumanized the sensibility of an average American. It made him mean and wretched, self-centred and ego-centric, shunning all the heroic ideals and aspirations, aesthetic tastes and values. Lust for money corrupted the society and stunted the moral and spiritual growth of the people. They were all victims
of these evil forces because their reckless pursuit of "success ideal" debased their moral standards and degenerated their spirit, thus turning all fine instincts into vulgarity. Thus as Freud had visualized, the price of progress in civilization was paid in "forfeiting happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt."\(^2\)

Aware of the contingency and gratuitousness of his existence, the American salesman found himself trapped in a sordid situation in a world incomprehensible to him. His quest for objective truth being based on illusion, he lost his identity and was swept along by the tide of events. As time seemed to destroy him, he felt that all he had would dissolve into nothingness. That explains the emergence of trapped, defeated, and frustrated anti-heroic protagonist. A misfit or victim, the salesman hero fails miserably because he cannot comprehend the intricate mechanism of modern business world. No wonder, his commitment to the success-oriented society inevitably leads to his catastrophe as his personality is mercilessly bulldozed and he becomes a faceless non-entity.

The modern and contemporary playwrights projected such salesmen as equivalents of tragic heroes by equating search for financial security with the search for identity of a modern man. It meant projecting on the one hand his helpless confrontation with social conventions, and on the other the conflicts it generates in himself. Being the product of a producer-consumer society, he wears no badge of honour; in the commercial world,
the only distinction lies only in making money. In Greek world, the hero could achieve power and distinction by virtue of his noble birth or title or dedicated social service. But in contemporary America, the state does not confer titles; nor does society give cognizance to the superiority of birth or family. In a democratic society, the only distinguishing mark between man and man is financial success. No wonder, Hickmen Lomans and Rubans are only following the business ethos of America.

In the uncertain volatile democratic age when values are changing so fast and establishment of human dignity seems to be so much more difficult, a victim came to replace the hero. The emergence of such anti-hero began with the economic Depression of 1929 and its grim social consequences during the thirties. After the Great War, for the first time man found himself in a challenging situation; the Depression exploded the illusions and rendered him helpless before the chaos of experience. In the post-Depression America, this myth of success led to the cultivation of a money-grabbing spirit and the development of acquisitive tendencies. In a fast-changing society, devoted mainly to money and material prosperity, alienation of individuals was simply inescapable. The post-World War II playwrights realized the futility of "pipe-dreams" and felt the need to confront reality, for there were no alternatives left. "The kind of world a man lives in," says Arthur Miller "determines the kind of man he has got to be - determines his range of
choices and decides when these choices are exhausted and when all routes of escape are closed.\textsuperscript{3}

At the centre of some of the most representative plays of the post-World War II era is the predicament of the lowly salesman in the callous world of commerce. Highlighting this tension between little people and big issues, the plays confirm the belief that little people cannot live up to big standards. Appearing sufficiently small, these people strike all the more anti-heroic. Dramatizing money-success theme O'natal, O'Neill, Miller and Inge strongly felt that the malady of alienation was gripping the entire mankind and that the common people were most seriously afflicted with this "disease of the soul."\textsuperscript{4} Man's materialistic frenzy to surpass others in accumulating money being primarily responsible for this alienation, each man found himself involved in the competitive spirit, and since his limitations were natural, he inevitably suffered.

Of course, loneliness is nothing new in drama but that was a category apart. Speaking about the cosmopolitan nature of that loneliness, Winifred Dusenbury observes that the feeling of loneliness "in mankind is age old and world wide, its causes multifarious. The lonely hero, king Oedipus, the lonely ascetic Jesus Christ, the 'lonely revenger,' Hamlet, and the lonely psychopath, Hedda Gabler - all are examples of the portrayal of loneliness in individual human beings, each character having his own cause for isolation from the rest of mankind."\textsuperscript{5} However, the alienation that the traditional heroes suffered and endured
resulted from the pursuit of noble ideals and metaphysical aspirations. Being inspired by the supernatural forces, they struggled to evolve a new world order for the sublimation of mankind. They endured alienation heroically and suffered for the larger interests of humanity. Their sufferings evoked pity and fear and their fall was glorious. But the alienation of the contemporary protagonists is due to their commercial and ego-centric motives. There being nothing lofty in their aspirations, their alienation stems from personal unfulfillment and thus causes despair and disgust rather than sublimation. Being victims of the socio-economic forces, they live and die a life-in-death. Hence, unlike the great Oedipus, the superhuman Ulysses and Hercules, they are "little men" or "low men" lost in sordid and mundane complexities of the industrialized consumer society of America.

The approach, of course, is sociological, though the characteristic indignation of social protest is rather subdued. Nevertheless, in the final outcome, there is a large measure of human sympathy for the underdog. In the grip of unexpected circumstances and all-too-powerful mercantile forces, these protagonists are unfit for any heroism as they reveal what David Riesman calls "the other-directed individuals" who, living in hope of the approval of their peers, are seldom free of a diffused anxiety lest this approval be withheld. More victims than heroes, they are sightless people groping about in darkness. The struggles and fumblings of these "little" men, their vague quest for identity, their alienation and
failures—all reveal the tyrannical victimization of the post-World War industrial America.

The plays of Eugene O'Neill realistically mirror the mood of anxiety and alienation of the Americans who witnessed the two World Wars. Much more intensely than any other modern British or American playwright, O'Neill's entire career embodies a dramatization of man's quest for identity in the industrial society. His passion to interpret life in terms of struggle against fate and his realistic delineation of the ultimate defeat of all struggle signify the paradoxical nature of his world. Love and greed, jealousy and hatred, power and revenge prompt his protagonists to disaster, but hardly any of them rises to the heroic heights of the Greek heroes. Personal failure in human relationship or professional life, unhappy family life, a sense of homelessness and a fear of isolated existence are the prominent themes of his plays. No wonder his stage is populated by people committed to power, wealth, love or hatred. Almost always their efforts end in disillusionment, bringing home the futility of human efforts in a valueless society.

"His most successful characters are people of rather primitive instincts, misfits, suffering from disease, economic inhibitions, frustrations, from soul-destroying powers which they cannot understand." Yank, Robert, Ebbie, Nina, Lavinia, Hickman, Larry are lost souls struggling to escape from the existential loneliness and despair through dreams and illusions.
For O'Neill the entire Western civilization signifies "the death of the Old God and the failure of science and materialism." He saw the contemporary man divided against himself, living between illusion and agony. Too weak to grapple with the stark realities of an industrial society, his protagonists hide from themselves behind a mask, a mask of success, of love, of guilt, of power, of happiness. While Gorky's characters are great dreamers in search of a solution to the riddles of life, O'Neill's protagonists ask no questions; all they want is flight from reality, and total oblivion. The message of O'Neill's anti-hero is that man should learn to live with illusions - illusions that give him a false dignity and thus help him to escape from alienation and despair. "It is not man as an individual alone that concerns O'Neill; it is man in a social order, tortured, starved, disillusioned, thwarted and driven to disaster by the forces of a system which cares nothing for the general welfare of society."\(^8\)

The protagonists of Anton Chekhov also suffer disillusionment, but they do have an awareness of a sunny joyful future; happiness eludes them, but that cannot stop them from accepting it. O'Neill goes a step forward, and in a remarkable series of plays he has dramatized the self-destructive struggle of man, his metaphysical loneliness and the psychological need to accept dreams and illusions. The other notable American Playwrights - Elmer Rice, Clifford Odets, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams and Edward Albee - are mainly concerned with man as the social animal, and
their vision is mundane. But O'Neill understands the unavoidable dichotomy of the modern man as he always projects the tragic tension of opposites in a personality, his quest for self-realization and illusion about himself. No wonder, his protagonists are "by turns and sometimes simultaneously, monolithic, contradictory, split, fluid, self-contained, and interacting. They are not rationally conceived but felt, and as such, are maelstoms of powerful emotions."  

O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* (1946) was completed during the Second World War, a period of deep depression and general anxiety. Though written in 1939, it was allowed to be staged only in 1946 when it was produced by the Theatre Guild at the Martin Beck Theatre, New York. The play is a mighty achievement of O'Neill as it completely breaks from the early plays in theme, philosophy and characterization. *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1956) "sums up O'Neill's life, while *The Iceman Cometh* (1946) sums up all his life."  

Written under the influence of Nietzsche, Jung and Freud, it has a protagonist who nullifies the philosophy of struggle and accepts the existential reality that there is no way out but death in a mercantile milieu. The sense of ambiguous affirmation, and "an inexplicable mysterious religious faith in life" that had marked the final gestures of Robert in *Beyond The Horizon* (1920), Yank in *The Hairy Ape* (1922), Chris in *Anna Christie* (1921), and Ebbie in *Desire Under The Elms* (1924), are prominently lost in *The Iceman Cometh*. Those earlier "searchers" are bewildered wanderers in a fog of
ignorance and illusion; but their quest for identity does yield a certain dignity of the fighting human spirit. On the contrary, the protagonists in The Iceman Cometh are mere abstractions. Instead of spinning the traditional type of action around a central protagonist, O'Neill has created interesting circles of action. The play is not only a play without a plot, but also one without a hero. It is a group play — a play about a group of lost bums. In fact, here is a stark, existentialistic picture of life, the vision of angst, alienation and nausea. No wonder the theme is the "death that results — the Iceman who comes — when the self-images which keep the characters alive become known to them as mirage." ⁰¹²

The Iceman Cometh does not dramatize the death of a salesman, but it is worth noting that Hickey is another anti-heroic salesman. While Arthur Miller's Willy Loman has dreams that refer to the contemporary society, Hickey's ideals pertain to the problem of human existence. In a way Hickey is "a more complex character than Arthur Miller's Willie Loman, and O'Neill's diagnosis of the spiritual malaise of the twentieth century in more profound than Miller's. Loman is depicted from the outside: he is the victim of a false and wholly external conception of what constitutes success. . . . Hickey is depicted from the inside. He is more successful as a salesman than Loman, but he is the victim of a far more insidious disease." ⁰¹³ Like Willy, Hickey is a braggart gifted with "the salesman's mannerisms of speech, an easy flow of glib, persuasive convincingness;" ⁰¹⁴ but whereas Willy longs to be "well-liked"
although nobody likes him, Hickey "exudes a friendly, generous personality that makes everyone like him on sight" (Iceman, p.618). No wonder, Hickey's arrival is eagerly expected through most of Act I and the play's title could have been "Waiting for Hickey." That he will be coming to Harry Hope's birthday celebration is the common topic of comment and discussion for all the derelicts. Annually, this "successful salesman" has appeared on Harry's birthday, dispensing free drinks and entertaining a party with his crude salesman jokes. His crudest and favourite joke, according to the derelicts, is that he left his wife Evelyn in bed with the iceman. All the bar bums look forward to seeing him and to hearing that joke again for he provides relief from the monotony of existence, "Would that Hickey or Death would come!" (Iceman, p.596) wishes Willie Oban.

Anticipating the tradition of the absurdists, Hickey is an anti-hero, a lost self, one "who is facing extinction." A product of materialistic society, he believes that truth is a saleable commodity. His crusade to cure the sickness of the derelicts living in Harry Hope's "hell-hole" is not an ideal of a messiah but a psychological necessity to seek release from the metaphysical guilt of his haunting crimes. Loved for his kidding humour and for his ability to make people believe "what they wanted to believe about themselves" (Iceman, p.711), Hickey assumes the role of a serious reformer and plays his typical salesman trick to sell salvation from illusion to his friends. He tells them that he "finally had the guts to face
myself and throw overboard the damned lying pipe dream that'd been making me miserable" (Iceman, p. 621), and adroitly preaches that they too must confront and reject their illusions. "I know now, from my experience, they're the things that really poison and ruin a guy's life and keep him from finding any peace (Iceman, p. 622). One by one the derelicts become targets of the pseudo-truth seller's crusade. Paradoxically, the secret of salvation is sold in a state of drowsiness or in a fit of morbidity. "Forget it, if anything I've said sounds too serious, I don't want to be a pain in the neck. Any time you think I'm talking out of turn, just tell me to go chase myself!" (Iceman, p. 624).

The pseudo-messianic identity of O'Neill's anti-hero becomes more apparent during Harry Hope's birthday party. Each, momentarily facing himself for what he is, makes a futile effort to achieve "today" the dream he has been postponing for "tomorrow", only to return defeated and despairing to the "hell-hole". Hickey's philosophy of denial neither brings freedom nor peace with self. In a tragic paradox, what Hickey brings is emptiness, meaninglessness and death. Larry correctly describes Hickey's brand of salvation as "the peace of death" (Iceman, p. 692). Unlike the mythical messiahs, Hickey's salvation cult is cold, dangerous and destructive. "Like much psychiatric theory, Hickey's godless theology seeks 'adjustment' to a meaningless reality, claiming that he who faces his life will find it. Yet if there is no life to be found, Hickey - not unlike Lazarus - becomes Death's Priest."
True to his anti-heroic self, Hickey, thus, plays the role of a salesman of death in the guise of selling life. The derelicts have discovered that they are unable to live in isolation with the reflections of themselves. The rehabilitation Hickey seeks is not possible in a contemporary mercantile society. As an anti-hero, Hickey is misled and misleading; he creates another illusion to destroy the illusions of the derelicts. He is trapped by his own phoney ideals as his struggle to save his pals from illusion ends in despair. No wonder, griped by psychic pressures, he begins to question the calm which he claims lies within his soul. It is Larry who forces him to acknowledge the reality that the peace he espouses has no joy in it, "He's lost his confidence that the peace he's sold us is the real McCoy, and it's made him uneasy about his own" (Iceman, p.703). The quest of the anti-hero for truth turns out to be an ironical parody of the quest of the mythical messiahs.

Hickey's anti-heroism is further revealed in his confessional speech at the end of the play. His own pipe dream, that he loved his wife, Evelyn, collapses. In a lengthy confession he gives vent to his metaphysical guilt, refers over and over to his love for Evelyn claiming that he murdered her to end the misery and suffering her love caused her. But as he concludes his confession, the truth comes out:

I remember I stood by the bed and suddenly I heard myself speaking to her, as if it was something I'd always wanted to say. 'Well, you know what you can do with your pipe dream now, you damned bitch!' (Iceman, p.716)
This confession proves that Hickey's transformation is anti-heroic, his gospel of reform is a sham and his ideal to save his pals is the subtle trick of a typical American salesman. For the first time he comes to his true self as he fears to accept his own doctrine. Confronted with the fact of his hatred for his wife, he crumbles. No wonder, he struggles to evade the truth he has unearthed in his soul and claims insanity: "You know I must have been insane, don't you" (Iceman, p.716). O'Neill completely unmasks Hickey when he adds, "I've been out of my mind... All the time I've been here! You saw I was insane, didn't you" (Iceman, p.717).

The death of the truth of Hickey symbolizes the death of the mercantile society in which the salesman is the most characteristic representative. Hickey's progression through the absurd universe is anti-heroic as his commitment to reality proves phoney. Being a victim of alienation and existential despair, Hickey affirms nihilistic illusions. Hence, contrary to the tragic practice when the heroic protagonists brought redemption, regeneration and spiritual glory by their epical sacrifices, Hickey's death implies moral as well as spiritual nihilism. Indeed, O'Neill's anti-hero only suggests that in a mercantile society pipe dreams are an alternative to death - a paradoxical answer to the dilemma of modern man, "whether life is or is not worth living."

Arthur Miller's plays are a conscious critique of the values and prejudices of the mid-century American society. He has taken
pains, on the one hand, to define the dignity of man in terms of his social ambitions and commitments, and on the other to portray his sense of "displacement", guilt, and ignorance. Talking about "tragic displacement" and cosmic fear, he observed:

The quality in such plays that does shake us, however, derives from the underlying fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this world. Among us today this fear is as strong, and perhaps stronger than it ever was. In fact, it is the common man who knows this fear best.  

The classical drama of Sophocles and Aeschylus traces tragic path of self-discovery by the hero and asserts the sense of human grandeur; Miller's All My Sons (1947), Death of A Salesman (1949), A View From the Bridge (1955), and After The Fall (1963), depict the ignorant, helpless struggle of blindly groping victims who neither understand themselves nor the forces that finally crush them. In the altered social condition, when social and economic pressures are too complex and intricate to be fathomed by these alienated victims, Miller projects their self-destructive assertion as human beings as an equivalent of the tragic discovery of the classical theatre. As Oedipus's ultimate discovery brings an enlightenment, he seeks to redeem his sins by such acts as are invested with moral dignity in the eyes of society and himself. On the contrary, Miller's protagonists are trapped victims. In his own words,

... We were left with, I think, a hero whose enemies were invisible. The victim as victim came to the fore. The story of almost every important American play is how the main character got his corners knocked off.
For Miller, the social context of a dramatic action is of overriding importance and so also the behaviour of his protagonists who are always threatened by economic forces. They assert their human dignity or need for fulfilment in an unwilling society. As Miller himself observes, "A social play, in contrast to a nonsocial or a psychological play, demonstrates the impact of social forces - the class structure, the economy, the system of norms and values, family patterns, etc. - on the raw psychology and lives of the characters, . . ." The paradox of the situation lies in the victim's efforts to project an image of himself which his society rejects although he remains to the end unaware of the reasons for this rejection. The victim is too absorbed in his own world and feelings to care for the forces that are really controlling his activities. Against the large historical perspective, this victim hero is a "small man" who fails to cope with his environment. He is not an individual committed to certain ideals and objectives, but the representative of an American type, - a product of the bourgeois culture. Since these Kellers and Lomans put faith in the business ethics of maximum profit, their personalities are mercilessly dehumanized by the socio-economic forces. As in the case of Willy, their false "ideals" and "dreams" come with "the territory," for the forces of culture compel a salesman to dream. Their problems are inevitably rooted in the American milieu:

... for a salesman, there is no rock bottom to the life. He don't put a bolt to a nut, he don't tell you the law or give you medicine. He's a man
way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back - that's an earthquake.21

Being conformists, they are staunch advocates of the law of success. They worship at the altar of the false god of personality and lay a lot of emphasis on personal attractiveness and charm:

Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want. (Salesman, p. 146)

Willy Loman in Death of A Salesman represents the general ethos of the commercialized and dehumanized America. No wonder he is seen as bankrupt of all original ideas, and with his mind and sensibility totally stultified. With a view to escaping from alienation, frustration and guilt, he assumes the role of an irresponsible "road tramp" prostituting with whores. Miller has dramatized here the dehumanized personality of a salesman whose quest for the secret of success is an ironic parody of the heroic quest for great ideals of the traditional hero. Willy is a "low-man" suffering from a complex of being unappreciated - a victim rather than a hero in the traditional sense. Indeed, as Thornton Wilder has put it, "Americans can find in environment no confirmation of their identity. They cannot say, as can the Europeans, 'I am I because my fellow citizens know me, and hence they suffer loneliness.'"22 Willy is a fragment self, a lost creature of the wasteland, who cannot pause in his journey for "ego-identification and say, confidently 'This is I'."23
Through his victim hero, Miller not only placed on trial the moral values of his protagonist but also a society that by competition compels its individuals to forsake native talents in favour of achieving material success at the price of human dignity and grandeur. Willy might have been a "superb craftsman, but he is forced by the demands of a mechanized world to run in search of the Will-'O-the-wisp financial wealth." Unfortunately, Willy believes that higher standard of living means more comfort, more respect, higher status and greater happiness. He lives in an illusion that a man who is materially well off is "well-liked," and that the consequence of failing to attain prominence and to transform society into a home are loneliness, frustration and ultimately despair.

Willy's alienation, however, is perhaps more excruciating than any Marx could have imagined. Business civilization tells Willy that selling is a task as whole and complex as that of any artisan, but the products of Willy's labor are never concrete and observable.

Miller dramatizes in Willy the commitments of a salesman to these false ideals and values, his longings and disappointments and the inhuman attitude of the business world which crushes him mercilessly. The assumption that prominence brings affection and privilege frequently has led Willy to boast or lie about himself. His sons, Happy and Biff, refer to these symptoms of self-deception as "the old humor, the old confidence" (Salesman, p.157). Miller has realistically portrayed the sense of inadequacy in Loman's life as well as his idealised attitude towards bourgeois society that he never understood. Willy strikes the audience as animal trapped in a rigid social structure, a "small man" without any heroic virtue, intellect
or wisdom. He represents the average lower middle class American belonging to the "travelling salesman tradition." His father, too, was a salesman:

And we'd stop in the towns and sell the flutes that he'd made on the way. Great inventor, Father. With one gadget he made more than a man like you would make in a lifetime. 

(Salesman, p.157)

Willy's ideal, however, is Dave Singleman and he suffers because he fails to equal the latter's prominence. This failure causes confusion in his mind so much so that often he starts doubting his own integrity. He knows he is failing and battles against a physical weakness and against a time when things grow meaningless that once had a lot of meaning. His heroism lies in his incompetence to comprehend the American culture, in which illusions take the place of dreams, and fantasy substitutes reality. Willy's job as a salesman gets crushed in the relentless operations of capitalism. Apart from loneliness and disappointment on the road when business is bad and there's nobody to talk to, there is the overriding fear that he will never sell anything again. If he can sell nothing else, he must sell himself, his own personality. No wonder Miller once observed: "And when asked what Willy was selling, what was in his bags, I could only reply, Himself!" ^26 What is more, all his life, Willy was caught in a race with the junkyard. "I just finished paying for the car and it's on its last legs. The refrigerator consumes belts like a goddam maniac" (Salesman, p.174).
Willy's heroic struggle is against insurance premiums, instalment payments, car repairs, mortgages and not against gods or social order. Even when he makes seventy dollars, he has to find one hundred and twenty dollars more to pay instalments. Willy's quest is for material comforts and social status as he devotes himself to material supremacy and resources. He is so much obsessed with material comforts that he ignores the difference between originality and initiative. He encourages his sons to steal so that the front stoop of the Loman house, which Biff claims to contain "more of him" than his career as a salesman, is built with the stolen materials. Willy's mania of material goods and his blind adherence to the cult of personality has been summed up by Morris Friedman:

... all Willy Loman wants is the middle-class apothecary of success: a mortgage paid off, a car clear of debt, a properly working modern refrigerator, and occasional mistress, sons 'well liked' if uneducated and aimless. Willy Loman is Babbit twenty years later.27

This modern Babbit is physically exhausted, morally degenerate and spiritually bankrupt - unlike the heroes of the past. As his self is disintegrated, he admits to his sons that he hasn't a story left in his head. Rebuffed by economic forces, discarded by the world of his employer where "business is business," the anti-hero seeks spiritual nourishment in his fantasies. To protect the remnants of his dignity and importance, he caves into his own world. He confesses to Ben, "A man can't go out the way he came in, Ben, a man has got to add up to something" (Salesman, p.212). Willy has no aesthetic sensibility;
his mind is vulgar and mean. Contrary to the Greek heroes, he thinks that all valuable things in life - honour, recognition, dignity, sense of prominence, peace and contentment - are purchasable commodities. With twenty thousand dollars, the family, he feels, would buy dignity and opportunity, dreams and security. To explain the root cause of Willy's frustration, Miller observed:

Had Willy been unaware of his separation from values that endure he would have died contentedly while polishing his car, probably on a Sunday afternoon with the ball game coming over the radio. 28

As action progresses, the play reveals the gradual disintegration of the consciousness of this anti-hero. Miller makes an increasing use of situations in which past and present, dream and reality coexist as in a montage. Act II frequently uses the device of flash-back to bring home the sense of confusion in Willy's mind. These nostalgic scenes confine themselves to the past and serve as explanatory episodes. The two "dream" sequences in Act II—the dialogue between Ben and Willy following the scene of Howard Wagner's office, and the scene at the restaurant when Young Bernard informs Linda of Biff's failure in the examination - not only underline the contrasted reality of the actual situations that precede them, but also reveal the loss of the protagonist's self. The episode recollected just after Wagner fires Willy Loman describes the way Willy had declined. The episode concerning Biff's failure in Maths confirms Willy that he is deliberately destroying himself.
The scenes in which reality and fantasy intermingle reveal the total disarray of Willy's mind for whom all sequence of time and space has been dissolved. Willy understands neither himself nor the world; he simply passes his life as a victim of the economic forces which enmesh him and ultimately annihilate him. Willy's whole life is an interesting study in irony: his faith in the success myth is the root cause of his failure: he loves his children, but fails to keep them together; he loves Linda and yet is unfaithful to her; he projects himself as a master salesman but nobody respects him.

The twin values tied to a double image of himself as a salesman and as a father receive a shock in the crucial scene between Willy and Biff in the Boston hotel room. From this moment, Willy begins to realise his own hollowness and the insight grows and torments him over the succeeding years. Willy's failure as a father comes to haunt him, but his reaction is not one of simple despair. His commitment to his set of values is so absolute that he is, in the face of the truth, incapable of admitting his failure. This is the source of the deep-seated conflict in the play. Through his anti-hero, Miller thus explores the futility and failure of the economic values which victimize the modern man. Indeed, the fall of Willy is the fall of the entire economic system:

The death of Arthur Miller's Salesman is symbolic of the breakdown of the whole concept of salesman-ship inherent in our society. . . . When the audience weeps at Death of A Salesman, it is not so much over the fate of Willy Loman - Miller's pathetic hero - but over the millions of such men who are our brothers, uncles, cousins, neighbors.29
Willy never realizes his error. To the very end he is a devout believer in the ideology that destroys him. Throughout his life, Willy hunts the secret of his failure and wants to know the right path. His labours are unheroic; he aims at financial social success in vain. It is a pity that Linda too endorses Willy. To quote Guerin Bliquez:

To acquiesce in all of Willy's weakness is to be a failure as a wife and a mother and to share in the responsibility of her husband's fall.

The tragedy with Willy is that he cannot walk away from his relationship with his son Biff which broke down when Biff found his father with a woman in Boston hotel room. From that point Biff could never see Willy as anything but "a phoney little fake." When Biff loses faith, so does Willy. The disillusionment is brisk and brutal and Willy desperately tries the rest of his life to rehabilitate himself in Biff's eyes. Biff too is lost, as if he could never grow beyond the seventeen year old who flunked maths. "I'm like a boy," says he, "I'm not married, I'm not in business, I just - I'm like a boy" (Salesman, p.139). If Willy thinks Biff sees him only as a fake, Biff is convinced that to Willy he is only a failure: "Everything I say there's a twist of mockery on his face. I can't get near him" (Salesman, p.139). For seventeen years Willy has been tearing himself apart over this deadend relationship. His consciousness that he could not do anything for Biff inevitably leads to Willy's suicide. But before Willy dies, Biff tries to make him face the truth, but in vain:
BIFF: Pop! I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you!

WILLY: I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!

(Salesman, p.217).

Being an anti-hero, Willy lives in illusions and dies in illusions. Still sticking to his dream of greatness, Willy imagines the size of his funeral: "They'll come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire!—That boy will be thunder-struck" (Salesman, p.213). But the funeral is attended only by the family, Charley, and Bernard. Willy dies as he had lived. Now, is this a tragic fate? At least Miller himself claimed Willy to be a perfect "tragic hero" of the modern times. According to him:

. . . the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were. On the face of it this ought to be obvious in the light of modern psychiatry, which bases its analysis upon classic formulations, such as Oedipus and Orestes complexes which were enacted by royal beings but which apply to everyone in similar emotional situations. 31

Miller's claim has been challenged by critic after critic. For Eleanor Clark, "the play is not tragedy at all but an ambitious piece of confusionism. . . ." 32 John Gassner calls Willy Loman a hero of low tragedy" who is to "be pitied but who is not tragic because he lacks 'enlightenment'." 33 There is also a tendency to treat Willy Loman without regard for his American content and to measure Death of A Salesman against the classical or Elizabethan drama. This naturally implies Willy's appearing too inadequate as a protagonist. His lack of stature,
his commonplace narrow and self-centred view of reality, his obvious character defects diminish the scope of action and the possibility of tragic universality. 34

Now, Willy is not at all tragic; at certain moments he becomes pathetic but never does he rise to tragic grandeur. His predicament is that he does not know why his life has disintegrated. He shoulders all the blame and all the guilt, but that because he does not know! A knowledge of the social forces might have saved him. It would at least have given him an objective awareness, and that might have forestalled or even averted his ultimate catastrophe. Henry Popkin aptly remarked that Miller's so-called "tragic characters" lack tragic heroism: "In their language, their culture, their incapacity for comprehending their fates - these people possess little imagination. His people ... sit and wait for the voice of doom." 35

Willy's choice is not an error of judgement - so characteristic of the tragic heroes; instead, his choice is deterministic. Being a victim of the tyranny of American dream, he fails to realize his situation. Willy has no individuality, no awareness, no enlightenment of Hamlet or Oedipus. He does not struggle for understanding; nor has he courage enough to confront the most crucial situation. He lacks insight and is given to dreams and fantasies. His fall does not evoke cathartic emotions. John V. Hagopian does not regard Willy even as the main character of the play:
By these criteria the main figure of Death of A Salesman is not Willy, whose understanding and values change not one bit from the beginning to the end; it is Biff Loman, who is seeking to "find himself" and does so in making an anguished choice between clear-cut alternatives—continued drifting or redeeming himself, achieving vitality at the sacrifice of his father and his father's values.36

This is, of course, too scathing a piece of criticism to be acceptable. Willy does emerge prominently in the play though he remains confused as the forces that crush him are incomprehensible to him. According to the playwright, Willy has broken a law without whose protection the modern man cannot exist or survive—"the law which says that a failure in society and in business has no right to live."37 Thus Willy too dies but it is not a tragic end. Willy emerges as a 'modern' victim—protagonist crushed by socio-economic forces. To quote J. Herbert Muller, "as a study of a little man succumbing to his environment, rather than a great man destroyed by his greatness, it is characteristically modern."38

William Inge probably was the first American playwright who endeavoured seriously to explore the sociological and moral problems of Midwestern American society. Like Willa Cather, Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson, Inge dramatizes the fears and oppressions of his protagonists who seek sexual gratification to escape from the alienation and loneliness of the contemporary industrial society. In each of his four major plays—Come Back, Little Sheba (1950); Picnic (1953), Bus Stop (1955), and The Dark At The Top of The Stairs (1957)—Inge projects the sense
of insecurity and consciousness of failure in a fast-changing society. Devoted mainly to money and material prosperity, isolation of Rubin, Bo, Hal or Cherie is almost inescapable. Their quest for hope and fulfillment inevitably leads them to what Brooks Atkinson calls "the illusiveness of human experience." Their struggle to overcome this illusiveness and to escape from their loneliness through sex leads to their emasculation.

Inge's The Dark At The Top of The Stairs is also a play about a salesman victimized by the socio-economic forces. The play is "culled" from the playwright's "memories of childhood lived in a widely prosperous oil boom town of the twenties." The protagonist Rubin Flood is a "road character" selling harnesses. His life on the road and the effect of his absence upon his "men-taming" wife Cora, form the central texture of the play. Equipped with bulging biceps and enormous sexual potency, he is another Willy Loman - a lowly and lonely victim of new bourgeois culture. Obsessed with the problem of earning livelihood, he can make Muskogee driving at night, be on the job in the morning, and finish there by noon so as to get on to Chickasha, making it a point to be back home by Saturday. His wife, Cora Flood, keeps wishing he wouldn't leave again.

CORA: I wish you were home more, Rubin
RUBIN: I gotta make a livin'
CORA: Other men make a living without travelling all over the country selling harness.
RUBIN: The way other men make a livin' is their business. I gotta make mine the best way I know how...
Like Willy who is tired to death when he appears in the first scene, Rubin is fear-ridden and burdened with economic worries. "I was lonely, I was terribly lonely," Willy says to Biff in explaining the presence of woman "buyer" in his hotel room. To Linda he says "On the road - on the road I want to grab you sometimes and just kiss the life on to 'you' 'cause I get so lonely" (Salesman, p.149). Rubin Flood too feels depressed and isolated like Willy Loman, "I dunno what to think of things now, Cora. I'm a stranger in the very land I was born in" (Dark, p.101). He had had only "six years a schoolin' 'cause that's all the Old Man thought I'd ever need" (Dark, p.100). But the things have changed and technological advancement has mechanized the society. The consequent transition of the Midwest from a "frontier" to a money-culture it is that victimizes Rubin. The emergence of the new socio-economic set-up has left him bewildered:

Now look at things. School buildin's, churches, fine stores, movie theatres, a country club. Men becomin' millionaires overnight, drivin' down the street in big limousiness, goin' out to the country club and gettin' drunk, acting like they was the lords of creation. . . .

(Dark, pp.100-101).

In quest of economic security which is threatened by the modern technological advancement, Rubin has to struggle for existence. Since the world of Rubin is a world of fear and uncertainty, the dramatist highlights the forces which crush the people in the growing mercantile society. In Inge's own words:
I guess the theme of the play is fear, the personal fear with which each man lives in a world that does not want to recognize fear. . . .
The Dark may represent any number of things to any number of people. To me it represented the fear of the future.41

Rubin is afflicted by this metaphysical fear as he knows that it will be very hard for him to survive in the changed social set-up; the revolution in tastes, habits and values of the people is going to hit his economic security. No wonder, like Willy, Rubin becomes a victim of the commercial forces and loses his job:

RUBIN : I lost my job.
COR : What?
RUBIN : I said I lost my job.
COR : Rubin! You've always sold more harness for the company than any of the other salesmen
RUBIN : Yah. The on'y trouble is, no one's buyin' it. People are buyin' automobiles. Harness salesmen are . . . things of the past.

(Dark, p.98).

Thirty-six years old and still looking for a job, Rubin is haunted by "the terrors of growing up, the unknown fears which taking adult responsibilities entail."42 The economic worries grip his consciousness and debase his sensibility. Instead of facing the "terrors" heroically he allows himself to degenerate: "I am sacred. I don't know how I'll make out. I . . . I'm scared" (Dark, p.100).

Rubin is defeated by the economic forces because he lacks force of character of the great heroes. Externally, being a Midwestern Cowboy like Hal and Bo, he is still robust. His selling of saddlery itself symbolizes his old physical virility.
But internally he is a "spent-up guy," a restless and lost soul scared of the impending doom of economic crisis. Like Willy Loman, Rubin is seen grappling in vain with life and its problems. He feels guilty in his heart for he has not made "too much" and is a failure in life. "Best known for his realistic evocations of smalltown people whose problems were the universal ones connected with the disappointment of dreams, love and work," Inge has realistically portrayed the victimization of Rubin. Like Willy, Rubin is so rooted in the salesman's illusions that he refuses to give up salesmanship. In vain does Cora plead, "Rubin Flood, now that You've lost one travelling job, I'm not going to let you take another" (Dark, p.98). Perhaps one of the reasons why he prefers a career on the road is that it gives him opportunity to prove his male virility. And that makes him again a chip off the Willy-block.

What's more, as in the case of Willy, the code of "road life" helps him escape from the paternal responsibilities. Of course, there is a difference between the two. The problem with Willy was that he had "false ideals" and "values"; the problem with Rubin is that he lacks balance, discipline, and a sense of responsibility towards his two grown-up children. He is impulsive and passionate, lewd and adulterous, uncouth and resolute. An Oklahoma pioneer in his youth, he was first seen by his wife, "riding down the street on a shiny black horse like a picture of sin" (Dark, p.25). He had such an irresistible appeal that he impregnated her immediately. However, Robert Brustein feels that "his rambunctious masculinity hides a need
for solace and comfort." Rubin finds this "solace and comfort* in "a bootleg whisky" or in the company of "Werpel sisters" of Ponca City. Biff's discovery of Willy with a woman in Boston hotel leads to his estrangement; similarly, Cora's smacking the truth about Rubin crystallizes the alienation of Rubin

CORAL: There's probably a woman like her in every town you visit. That's why you want to get out of town, to go frisking over the country like a young stallion. (Dark, p.30).

Like Willy, Rubin lives in the world of illusions and fails to grow in love. He does not share his anxiety with his wife, Cora. Like Doc and Lola, Rubin and Cora live in isolated, unsatisfactory worlds. Rubin's world revolves round selling harness and "Werpel sisters,"; Cora's world revolves round Reenie, her teenaged daughter, and Sonny, her nine year old son. Cora cannot endure loneliness for her husband's frequent absence from home makes her very unhappy: "I envy women who have their husbands with them all the time. I never have anyone to take me any place. I live like a widow" (Dark, p.5). Of course, her real concern are the children:

CORAL: Rubin! It's not just myself I'm thinking of. It's the children. We have a daughter sixteen years old now. Do you realize that? Yes. Reenie's sixteen. And Sonny's ten. Sometimes they act like they didn't have a father. (Dark, p.5).

Rubin is so much burdened with economic worries that losing his balance, he becomes quick-tempered, haughty and arrogant.
He lacks heroic strength to overpower the "fear" which is consuming his sensibilities. Instead of facing the reality, and shouldering the family responsibilities, he sticks to his ideals even after seventeen years of marriage; trying to escape from his domestic responsibilities into "the road life."

CORA: May be you don't have money to buy your daughter a new dress, but it seems you have money to take Mavis Pruitt to dinner whenever you're over there, and to a movie afterwards, and give her presents.

RUBIN: I've known Mavis. . . . Pruitt ever since I was a boy! What harm is there if I take her to a movie?

CORA: You're always too tired to take me to a movie when you come home.

RUBIN: Life's different on the road. (Dark, p.28).

Like Willy, Rubin is guilt-ridden, and his guilt intensifies his fear. It seems the fear is inside his heart: it is psychological and real, internal and external. Rubin's personality is shattered as he finds himself enveloped in the fear of losing Cora's love as well as his job. The consciousness of his failures and fear of impending unemployment makes him all the more arrogant, brutish, jealous and desperate. His raising hell in the house and slapping Cora are expressions of his disturbed state of mind. He is a sightless protagonist, a misfit, a "victim" of "impersonal fear." Like Willy, he lacks intellectual acumen, mental preparedness and heroic spirit to confront the impersonal forces that crush his identity. He impresses us but not as an individual, for he loses his individuality at the end when he "surrenders his cowboy boots" and accepts the refined code of Cora: "I love ya. Yo're a good woman and I couldn't git along without you. . . .
you're clean, and dainty. Give a man a feeling of decency . . .
and order . . . and respect" (Dark, p.102). In his "sweet
fulfilment of conjugal love," the hero loses his "image of
maleness." To quote Robert Brustein, "He must give up his
aggressiveness, his promiscuity, his bravado, his contempt for
soft virtues and his narcissistic pride in his body and attainments,
and admit that he is lost in the world and needs help."^45

Rubin, thus, ends up as a victim of the commercial forces—
like Willy Loman. He is certainly not a heroic character, but
only a representative of the defeated salesmen of the mercantile
America. Here is the progression of loneliness in a basically
sociable man. "One must, in all honesty, admit that the bulk
of the damage in the Flood family has been done and that it is
probably too late for any panacea to take any effect."^46 Rubin's
material ambition in a competitive society his cowboy individuality,
and his reckless road morals, are the stereotypes of mid-century
American culture of which he is a victim. The force of his
victimization lies in the fruitless struggle to achieve something
tangible and to force his personality on Cora, but his inevitable
failure and the dramatization of his emasculation highlights the
loss of heroic self in the contemporary American culture.

To conclude, the post-War socio-economic forces were so
powerful that the contemporary man finds himself too weak to
encounter them. He does not possess the invincible spirit of
Ulysses, the endurance of Prometheus and the courage of Achilles
to face a certain situation. The American dream was born largely
of material aspirations. The highly technological civilization of America inspired expectation of material prosperity, but the promise remained largely unfulfilled for millions, for whom the dream of money-success has been reduced to an inglorious fantasy. If a man succeeds society admires his abilities, if he fails he should not expect any sympathy. Illusions of success, wealth, social recognition are a reality in American society, more real than in the established European societies. The post-War American playwrights project the frustration and sense of loneliness of their protagonists who struggle in vain for wealth and success. Hickey, Willy Loman, and Rubin Flood exemplify the predicament of man today in ruthlessly possessive society. Reality being too terrifying for these lowly and lonely protagonists, they prefer to live in illusions instead of facing the external forces like the great heroes of the past. That makes them more victims than heroes. Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller and William Inge have projected the spiritual isolation of men and women as a common phenomenon in an industrial society. The sense of alienation of such an anti-hero is not the product of special personal circumstances, as we find in a Greek or Elizabethan character, but a common condition of life in the dynamic American society which demands conformity and frowns on individuality and heroism.
Notes


3 Richard K. Barksdale, "Social Background In the Plays of Arthur Miller and Williams," CLA Journal, 6, No. 3 (March 1963), 165.

4 Ernest Dimnet, "The Case For And Against Loneliness," American Magazine, 190 (July 1930), 33.


21 Arthur Miller, Death of a Salesman: Collected Plays (New York: The Viking Press, 1957), pp.221-22. Subsequent page numbers refer to this edition and are incorporated in the text with the title abbreviated as Salesman.


26 "Introduction to the Collected Plays," The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller, p.141.


30 "Linda's Role in Death of A Salesman," Modern Drama, 10, No.4 (February 1968), 384.


36 "Arthur Miller: The Salesman's Two Cases," Modern Drama, 6, No. 2 (September 1963), 118.

37 Arthur Miller, "Introduction," to Collected Plays, p. 35.


40 William Inge, The Dark At the Top of the Stairs (New York: Random House, 1958), p. 5. All subsequent page numbers refer to this edition and are incorporated in the text, with the title abbreviated as Dark.

41 Ibid., p. 1.


43 Marilyn Mitchell, "The Teacher As Outsider In the Works of William Inge," The Midwest Quarterly, 17, No. 4 (Summer 1976), 385.


45 Ibid., p. 56.