Chapter II

Erasure of Identity

The existence of man is the basis of all ideas, ideologies and philosophies. Existence precedes essence. Sartre has explained this concept in *Existentialism and Humanism* : “We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world - and defines himself afterwards .... Man simply is” (28). Existentialism has originally emerged as a revolt against materialism. Existential philosophers consider human beings as essentially evil and every individual carries within him/her the archetypal original sin. They strongly believe that evil is imprinted in their unconscious psyche and gets transferred from one generation to other as a ‘racial guilt’. They blame the knowledge gained through the study of sciences as the sources of all evil. They urge man to liberate himself from these clutches so that he can comprehend the ultimate purpose of his existence. Since modern man is too much preoccupied with all the sophisticated material comforts offered by the sciences he remains spiritually void. He deliberately avoids thinking about the futility of his life and withdraws into an illusionary world. He feels secure in the self-created idealistic world. When some internal/ external factors shatter his illusions, he is exposed to face the crude realities of life. He struggles pathetically and finally ends up as a ruined creature. Inspite of his tragic downfall his struggle itself like that of Sisyphus’ provides meaning for his existence and valuable lessons for others.

Miller’s characters suffer from identity crisis which is caused by several factors. His characters have to face the reality and are caught up in conflicting situations. They
are actually incapable of facing the threats to their very identity. Right from Joe, through Loman, Proctor to Eddie, one can see that they remain failures to face the harsh reality. They become estranged men in society. They are not able to establish themselves in their family, community and society. They become rootless and unanchored men due to frustration on their psyche. They have to undergo a psychological stress. It may happen at three levels in their lives as Corrigan in “An Introduction”: The Achievement of 
Arthur Miller observes that “Dr. Erikson postulates the idea that in the lives of most people there are normally three periods of psychological crisis: the crisis of Identity, the crisis of Generativity, and the crisis of Integrity. These crises he maintains generally occur in youth, middle age, and old age respectively although there is something overlapping and the pattern does vary slightly from individual to individual” (2). Further, Corrigan avers:

The central conflict in all of the plays in Miller’s first period (The Man Who Had All the Luck – 1944, All My Sons – 1947, Death of a Salesman – 1949, An Enemy of the People – 1950, The Crucible – 1953, A Memory of Two Mondays – 1955, A View from the Bridge – 1955) grows out of a crisis of identity. Each of the protagonists in these plays is suddenly confronted with a situation which he is incapable of meeting and which eventually puts his name in jeopardy. In the ensuing struggle, it becomes clear that he does not know what his name really is; finally his inability to answer the question “Who am I?” produces calamity and his ultimate downfall. Strange as it may sound, Joe Keller, Willy Loman, John Proctor, and Eddie Carbone and alike, caught up in a
problem of identity that is normally characteristic of youth (one is almost
tempted to say adolescence) and their deaths are caused by their lack of
self-understanding. In every case, this blindness is in large measure due to
their failure to have resolved the question of identity at an earlier and
more appropriate time in life. Miller presents this crisis as a conflict
between the uncomprehending self and a solid social or economic
structure – the family, the community, the system. The drama emerges
either when the protagonist breaks his connection with society or when
unexpected pressures reveal that such a connection has in fact never even
existed. Miller sees the need for such a connection as absolute, and the
failure to achieve and / or maintain it is bound to result in catastrophe.

(2-3)

Miller’s plays are concerned not only with an individual’s identity but also with the
causes and hindrances of individual identity like social, moral, religious and political
factors. The identity crisis in an individual is the result of the clash between the past and
the present. It becomes a counter-attack to American presumptions. Christopher Bigsby
in Arthur Miller : A Critical Study points out that “In Miller’s case, however, nearly
seventy years as a writer had seen a succession of plays that served to define the moral,
social and political realities of twentieth and then twenty-first century life” (1). Further,
he says: “His concern with the past and its connection with the present, the basis of a
moral logic which tied action to consequence, had always seemed a counter-current to
American Presumptions” (1).

Miller’s first really accomplished work is the play Sons, which is produced on
January 24, 1947. The play establishes Miller as a dramatist of much promise and is given the ‘Drama Critics Circle Award’ as the best American play. It is a strong well-made play whose technique insists upon comparison with the realistic plays of Ibsen. The structure of the play is identical with *Oedipus Rex*. Hogan in *Arthur Miller* says:

One may find precisely, the same structure in *Oedipus Rex*; in Sophocles’ play, as in Miller’s, the revelation of a criminal whose crime has occured years earlier is the crux of the present action. However, in Miller’s play the Oedipus character is split in two – one half being the father and criminal and the other half son and detective. (17)

In *Sons*, what is still worse to Joe is that his hopes are frustrated by his own sons for whom he works. Larry, as a result of the ignominy, feels on the account of his father’s culpability and kills himself. Chris turns violently against him when he discovers the reality. Joe is ironically destroyed by his own weapons. Both his sons, whom he love more than the entire world, become the instruments of his punishment. Larry’s deliberate suicide is a mode of revenge upon his father. In a frank confession before his death, Larry writes to Ann; “I can’t express myself. I can’t tell you how I feel – I can’t bear to live any more... Every day three or four men never come back and he sits there doing business” (*AMS* : 126). In the end, Joe goes inside and shoots himself. His ultimate suicide is an act of self-purification. It is a way of coming to terms with himself, his family and his society. He is not a victim of the society.

In *Sons*, the confrontation between the father and the son actually springs from Chris’ awareness of responsibility to others and his father’s lack of it. Chris’ character is
exactly an antithesis of his father’s character. He is an idealist whose entire allegiance is to the society. He tells his father: “I don’t know why it is, but every time I reach out for something I want, I have to pull back because other people will suffer” (AMS: 68). Chris’ concern for others has been polarized against the father’s lack of concern for others. “The business” he says, “the business doesn’t inspire me” (AMS: 69). He stands in direct contrast to his father. Joe himself sums up Chris’ moral character in a moment of anger when he says: “Everything bothers him you make a deal, overcharge two cents, and his hair falls out. He don’t understand money?” (AMS: 121). Thus, Chris virtually serves as a foil to his father. Set against Joe’s myopic vision is Chris’s egalitarian vision. He tells Ann that a realization has damned upon him when he is in command of a company during the war. He says:

It’d been raining several days and this kid came to me and gave me his last pair of dry socks. Put them in my pocket. That’s only a little thing – bal... that’s the kind of guys I had. They didn’t die; they killed themselves for each other. I mean that exactly; a little selfish and they’d’ve been here today. And I got an idea watching them go down. Everything was being destroyed, see, but it seemed to me that one new thing was made. A kind of responsibility, Man for man (AMS: 85).

But afterwards when he comes home from the war, he finds it all different. He feels ashamed “to be alive, to open the bank book, to drive the new car, to see the new refrigerator” because he feels it is “really loot and there’s blood on it” (AMS: 85). The revelation of his father’s guilt comes as a shock to him. He says: “I know you’re no worse than most men, but I thought you were better. I never saw you as a man. I saw you
as my father (Almost breakingly); I can’t look at you this way, I can’t look at myself!” (AMS : 125). He lacerates his father. He suggests that human civilization is retreating into a jungle of existence. He says bitterly:

This is the land of the great big dogs. You don’t love a man here, you eat him! That’s the principle; the only one we live by – it just happened to kill a few people that time, that’s all. The world is that way, how can I take it out on him? What sense does that make? This is a zoo, a zoo! (AMS : 124)

The identity crisis in Sons results in a conflict. The central conflict in the play is between familial and social obligations. It is as observed by Nelson in Arthur Miller : The Portrait of a Playwright:

The thematic image of All My Sons is a circle within a circle, the inner depicting the family and the outer representing society, and the movement of the drama is concentric with the two circles revolving in parallel orbits until they ultimately coalesce. (81)

The play depicts that man cannot disown his society for his family. Joe does that. He isolates himself from others and thinks that his family can prosper at the expense of the society. He does not see beyond his sons and his own family. In Sons, what he says about his dead son, Larry, is actually true of himself. He says: “To him the world had a forty-foot front. It ended at the building line” (AMS : 121). He is a dreamer. He identifies everything with a dream. He holds himself blindly to that dream. He fails to recognize his place in the society. He has no viable connection with his world, his universe or his society. He is neither malignant nor villainous. He is myopic. He is
unable to forge the public consequences of a private act. He is a stolid and an
unintellectual businessman. He is also “an uneducated man for whom there is still
wonder in many commonly known things” (AMS : 59).

When the play opens, Joe is seen reading a newspaper but he says: “I don’t read
the news part any more. It’s interesting in the want ads” (AMS : 59). A few minutes
later, he reads – “Wanted – old dictionaries. High prices paid,” and says, “Now what’s a
man going to do with an old dictionary?” (AMS : 60). Joe further says: “I don’t know,
everybody’s getting goddam education in this country... It’s a tragedy : you stand on the
street today and spit, you are going to hit a college man” (AMS : 96). He is an
unimaginative and unuttered man. Just as Loman in Salesman is an unsuccessful
salesman and Eddie in Bridge is a longshoreman, Joe is an unenlightened mind. He acts
very selfishly without caring for the public consequences of his action. He also acts
under a kind of fear-psychosis generated by the socio-economic pressures. The fear of
losing his business and then becoming a failure looms large in his mind. It makes him
feel an identity crisis. It is evident in his conversation with his son:

Joe: I’m in business, a man is in business a hundred and twenty
cracked. You’re out of business; you got a process, the process
don’t work you’re out of business : ... they close you up, they tear
up your contracts, what the hell’s it to them? You lay forty years
into a business and they knock you out in five minutes, what could
I do, let them take forty years, let them take my life away? (AMS :
115)
It is also identical with Loman’s speech in *Salesman* where he implores Howard Wagner, his employer, for a job. He says:

Loman: I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I cannot put my insurance! You can’t eat the orange and throw the peel away – a man is not a piece of fruit. (DS : 181)

Joe’s identity is thwarted under the heavy pressure of a success-oriented, cut-throat competitive society. He is afraid of reporting the defect or holding the supply of airplane engines because that will ruin his business and consequently the future of his son. He tells his son:

Chris, I did it for you, it was a chance and I took it for you. I’m sixty one years old, when would I have another chance to make something for you? (AMS : 115)

An excess of love for his son makes Joe succumb to the socio-economic pressures of the society. The only motive in him is to provide a substantial future to his son based on wealth. He tells Chris: “What the hell did I work for? That’s only for you, Chris, the whole shooting match is for you” (AMS : 69). Joe is called upon to identify himself as a father on the one hand and as a citizen on the other hand. But his one-sidedness and disproportionate allegiance to his family make him ignore his identity as a citizen. In fact, Joe is a father and a citizen. He cannot take the citizen side seriously. He becomes less of a father and is destroyed his own children. It shows that individual identity is not just a matter of personal relationships but it must also be extended to the world at large. Throughout the play, he cannot identify himself with any images other than filial or
familial ones. It is evident in the following conversation:

Mother : There’s something bigger than the family to him (Chris)

Joe : Nothing is bigger!

Mother : There is to him.

Joe : There’s nothing he could do that I wouldn’t forgive him. Because he is my son. Because I’m his father and he’s my son... Nothing is bigger than that... I’m his father and he’s my son, and if there’s something bigger than that I’ll put a bullet in my head (AMS : 120)

In the end, when he is made to identify that there is something bigger than the family, that those who are killed “are all my sons”, he puts a bullet in his head.

In one of the radio plays called Grandpa and the Statue, Miller focuses upon the same question whether man is an island or not. It demonstrates the same theme that man needs society. Grandpa Monagham refuses to contribute money for the pedestal of the statue of liberty. The play shows how he comes to realize that his decision is wrong. He realizes that he must be an integral part of the society in which he lives. Sons deals with the identical theme in a more serious manner. Joe also thinks that he can prosper while others perish. He betrays his neighbour, Deever, in the same manner as Eddie betrays his wife’s relations in Bridge. His betrayal is even more grave and heinous because he betrays not only his neighbour but also the national war. On the social level it amounts to the betrayal of one’s own community.

Miller’s Sons is not a powerful tragedy of a man who identifies himself with the
society. Hence, it can be called a play of social responsibility; yet, Miller is able to transform it to a tragedy. The play has powerful scenes of confrontation and symbolic details. It is an important play after the failure of *Luck* on the Broadway. It paves way for another play *Salesman*. The emphasis is on social realism; yet it can be called a tragedy. M.W. Steinberg in “Arthur Miller and the idea of Modern Tragedy” points out that “It is most simply and clearly in the tradition of the social problem plays of Ibsen, Shaw and Galsworthy” (340). Steinberg assigns it as “a social allegory in which the characters are mere illustrations of the forces working in a selfish, materialistic society which respects economic success as it flaunts the underlying moral law” (340). Similarly Alan A. Stambusky in “Arthur Miller : Aristotelian Canons in the Twentieth Century Drama” says: “From the overall tone of *All My Sons*, Miller seems more concerned with advocating a thesis or some moral lesson than he is with portraying significant actions of characters in relation to one another which makes for truly tragic drama” (95). It is a social play. Sidney Kingsley’s *Ten Million Ghosts* (1936) dealing with munition makers can be called its forerunner. But unlike *Ten Million Ghosts, Sons* is not a play about war. It is much less an anti-war play. It is a play about social relationships and the myopic vision of a selfish businessman who fails to identify his social responsibility. It is not merely a tale of crime and punishment. It is a play about confrontation and commitment in the vein of resultant identity and its crisis. In fact, it is as Miller in “Introduction” to *Arthur Miller’s Collected Plays* says:

The crime in *All My Sons* is not one that is about to be committed but one that has long since been committed. There is no question of its consequences being a meliorated by anything. Chris Keller or his father
can do; the damage has been done irreparably. The stakes remaining are purely the conscience of Joe Keller and its awakening to the evil he has done. (18)

In this play, Joe works his way to prosperity through unscrupulous and dishonest means. Although he lacks the sensitive consciousness, he does not suffer from the qualms of guilty conscience. He does recognize the full horror of his deed and cannot escape its tragic consequences.

In *Sons*, the private guilt of the individual is matched against the larger social evil. Social pressures from the outside world work upon Joe and make him do what he does. To highlight the identity crisis, Miller strikes a subtle balance between individual responsibility and social pressures. In it, he shows the enormous pressure of circumstances and the individual act of choice. It is as Nelson in *Arthur Miller: The Portrait of a Playwright* says that in the whole process Keller “berates society for its stultification of the individual but he also scores the man who is a threat to the society” (116).

*Sons*, is a distorted version of the tragedy of a man, Joe, due to identity crisis with the society. Joe is not able to see beyond his family. He cannot see that a larger world exists beyond his small family. He jeopardizes the safety and security of the society at large. Bhatia in *Arthur Miller: Social Drama as Tragedy* points out that,

Paradoxically his myopic vision is a gift of the same society against which he errs because it is based on the ethics of success. He is a product of the society, and also its enemy. His mind and psychology are shaped and
distorted by the capitalistic economic system and the chief motivating force behind his shortsightedness is the success-code of the society which he thoughtlessly follows. The myth of success and its counterpart the fear of failure, compel him to do what he does. He knows that a failure in society cannot survive, so, in order to survive in the world of competition, he takes recourse to dishonest means. The important thing from the view point of tragedy is that he lives on to realize his error. In the end, he realizes that he acted wrongly and was not acted simply upon. (33)

The social aspect of the problem, the play Sons deals with has been more sharply defined than in other plays. The central event of the play is a businessman’s evasion of responsibility during war time which leads to the death of twenty-one pilots. But the treatment of the social theme is not so naive. Its socialness does not reside in the play. It deals with the crime of selling defective materials to a nation at war. The crime is seen as having roots in a certain relationship of the individual to society. It can mean a jungle of existence. No man can be an island unto himself. In this sense, alienation can be meaningful – socially meaningful. It is his social problem that makes Miller not to concentrate heavily on the structure of the play. Commenting on the structure of Sons, Hogan in Arthur Miller says:

This structure is difficult to handle, for the playwright must explain rather than dramatize most of the action, and the great bulk of exposition always threatens to dissipate the dramatic impact of the play. There are probably three chief ways to combat this threat: by the evocative beauty of the dialogue, by irony, and by an adroit blending of current action with
explanation of past action. In his *Oedipus Rex*, Sophocles superbly managed all three ways. In his social plays, Ibsen lacked poetry, but his permeating irony largely compensated for the realistic flatness of his style, and he did blend his past and present action with incomparable adroitness. In *All My Sons*, Miller handles his plot consummately, but he notably lacks both the poetry and the irony. Nevertheless, structure alone can carry a play very far, and Miller’s play, because of its structure, remains absorbing theater. (17)

However, the irony of the situation is that when Joe feels happy while amassing wealth by selling defective engines, Chris feels guilty for his new happiness. In the war, he has led men to their deaths. He is a survivor or who feels the guilt of the survivor. Beyond that, he can see no connection between the sacrifices of war and the way of life it is supposed to preserve. However, Bigsby in *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* avers:

- Indeed, no one in this play is without culpability, without cruelty, without guilt. Kate’s obsession with one son’s fate makes her act with a callous disregard for the future of the other. Ann and George act in some degree out of guilt for the callousness with which they have treated their father. Even Joe Keller’s suicide is, in part, an act of self-justification and ‘a counterblow to his wife and son’. Reminding us that the Chinese reportedly hang themselves in the doorways of the people who have offended them, and that many suicides are motivated by a desire to accuse or leave a residue of guilt, Miller sees Joe as lying before the wife and son he had invoked as justification for his actions, their own culpability.
Certainly Chris would feel a burden of guilt to the end of his life, in part because [...] he really knew [...] that he should not have participated in the business without clearing this up earlier on. (89)

Joe knows he is guilty. He has to preserve the idea of his innocence. Kate knows, on some level, that her son is dead. Kate has to sustain the idea that he has survived. Chris knows, or suspects on some level, that his father is suppressing the truth. He knows that he makes him deny it to others. This, then, is in part a play about repression. It is about the compromises effected by individuals. It is to negotiate between private needs and public obligations. Keller is not the only character to substitute the story of his life for his life. They all construct fictions that enable them to justify themselves. In Sons, besides making a conscious use of the Edenic images of the pastoral garden and the apple tree, as in Salesman, Miller reverses the archetypal Edenic situation by focusing attention on the father, the mythical symbol of authority, by making him the source of guilt. In doing so, Miller depicts a modern attitude which regards the element of hereditary guilt - the guilt of being imperfect - as unjust. The fathers seek in these plays as the highest aim of their lives, the affection and approval of their sons. It is the ultimate judgment of the sons, Chris and Biff, which becomes the touchstone of the fathers’ lives and experience. It is ironical that both the fathers, Joe and Loman, have to make their peace, with themselves and their sons, through death which is a kind of spiritual and symbolic ‘expulsion’ from the self-appointed goals of ambition and self-righteousness.

In the Edenic story of the “Fall,” the act of disobedience brings out a conflict, in terms of order and disorder, rational and irrational, in which self-recognition is won only by destroying the order. In Miller’s plays the same dilemma is depicted, but it is the sons
who represent the forces of order; the fathers symbolize either a chaotic, dog-eat-dog system (Joe) or an irrational and illusory code of existence (Loman). And because Joe and Loman attempt to emerge, at least towards the end of their lives, from their irrational worlds to some understanding of order and reality, Miller is sympathetic towards them. Like Linda, who feels that attention must be paid to Loman, Miller seems to be saying that men like Joe and Loman are not to be judged harshly. Their ‘guilt’ is not absolute in an imperfect world. It should be viewed sympathetically. The plays are about men and their desperate efforts to save money for their sons’ future. Commenting on Sons, Bigsby in Arthur Miller: A Critical Study admits that the play “is about a man who places survival above value, self above the group, pragmatism above the ideal, loyalty to family above responsibility to society. It is also, however, about loss, loss of a sense of common humanity” (80). Further, Bigsby elaborates:

But this is not primarily a play about crime. It is about a man’s failure to understand the terms of the social contract. They may not be people whose actions are determined by religious convictions but when Kate Keller observes that ‘certain things have to be, and certain God, so certain things can never happen’ things can never be. That’s why there’s, she expresses Miller’s essentially secular conviction that there are certain values, whose breach threatens the structure of existence. (83-84)

The reversal of fortune or peripeteia is seen in the disintegration of the hero’s psyche. Loman is living only a posthumous existence. The pressure of his failure is so great, that he is bound to destroy himself. He is not victimized or killed by a ruthless society. The pressure of his own failure is so great on his mind that it erupts like a volcano and
propels him towards suicide. Dan Vogel in *The Three Masks of American Tragedy* says that “It is not what the society demands that make the action, it is what Willy thinks it demands, and that is the unpreventable element that is all-powerful motivation of his tragedy as it was for Oedipus in his situation” (93-94). Esther Merle Jackson in “Death of a Salesman: Tragic Myth” also points out that,

Like the traditional hero, Loman begins his long season of agony. In his decent, however, there is the familiar tragic paradox; for as he moves toward inevitable destruction, he acquires that knowledge, that sense of reconciliation, which allows him to conceive a redemptive plan for his house. (65)

It is evident in the scene in which Loman sells himself to Howard. He sells himself; rather he under-sells himself. He starts with ‘sixty five dollars a week”, then lowers it to “fifty dollars a week”, and finally comes down to “forty dollars a week” (*DS* : 179-81).

When the play *Salesman* opens, Loman’s dreams have been shattered. When Willy appears on the scene / stage, there is some kind of maladjustment in his psyche and actions. He cannot drive steadily. He stops at the green light and moves while it is red. He seems exhausted and fatigued. He openly admits to Linda that “I (he) am (is) tired to the death... I couldn’t make it. I just couldn’t make it, Linda” (*DS* : 131).

Loman’s identity as a father is a failure. In the play, the conflict takes between the father and the son. The familial struggle between the two has larger social implications. He represents the culture of the business world. He constantly tries to inject the same into his son’s mind as well. Happy seems to be a carbon copy of his father. Biff, on the other
hand, is a football player and represents a more athletic, healthy and primitive culture. He finds life on a farm to be more attractive. He likes to whistle in the elevator or take his shirt off and swim in the middle of the day. In other words, Biff likes everything opposite to Loman’s practices. The conflict between Loman and Biff is actually not between the father and the son, but it is between two cultures – the urban and commercial cultures on the one hand and the pastoral and the agrarian on the other. The hollowness and falsehood of the former is revealed to Biff when he discovers his father, whom he has always looked upon as an ideal, with a half-naked woman in a room of the Boston hotel. Biff calls his father a “false, phony little fake” (DS : 208). Thereafter, they never trust each other. Biff knows the reality about his father. Loman also knows that Biff knows his secret. He feels guilty and thinks that Biff hates him for it. Hence, hostility develops between them. Linda seems to observe the rift between them when she watches Loman as she says:

When you write you’re coming, he’s all smiles and talks about the futures and ... he’s just so wonderful. And then the close you seem to come, the more shaky he gets, and then, by the time you get here, he’s arguing and he seems angry at you... Why are you so hateful to each other? Why is that? (DS : 161)

Loman struggles desperately to identify himself as a father. In the end, he discovers that he is loved by Biff. In “Introduction” to Plays, Miller observes that ‘In this, he is given his existence, his fatherhood, for which he has always striven and which until now he could not achieve” (34). Loman is translated into a father, for whom the love and success of his favourite son, Biff, is a paramount necessity. He has been made into a dramatically
charged father-hero. He becomes a heroic figure in an active pursuit of father–son ideal. The discovery proves too much for Loman as he decides to sacrifice his life for Biff’s success. He calls upon his brother, Ben, who continues flitting through his memories as an incarnation of success. He kills himself in a road-accident. Loman’s final suicide is an act of self-assertion and triumph because it is not motivated by cowardice or despair. Jackson in “Death of a Salesman: Tragic Myth” says that “Loman’s suicide like Oedipus’ self-blinding or Antigone’s self-murder is obviously intended as a gesture of hero’s victory over circumstances. It is an act of love, intended to redeem his house” (75). It makes Loman identify himself as a total failure both as a father and as a salesman. His is a tragic end. He becomes a victim of the cut-throat society. Commenting on Loman’s identity, Brian Parker in “Point of View in Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman” says:

Obviously, *Death of a Salesman* is a criticism of the moral and social standards of contemporary America, not merely a record of the particular plight of one man. And, also obviously, it presents Willy as a victim of the deterioration of the ‘American dream,’ the belief in untrammelled individualism. The word ‘dream’ is a key word, recurring frequently in the play; and the deterioration of American individualism is traced through the Loman generations in a descending scale, from the Whitman-like exuberance of Willy’s father, through Ben, Willy himself, to the empty predatoriness of Happy, who is, he admits, compulsively competitive in sex and business for no reason at all. The ideal of self-dependence has become the vicious competition of the modern business community, of which Willy, as a salesman, is the lowest common denominator. Miller has explained
Willy’s surname as standing for "low man on the totem pole," the bottom of the heap; and interestingly, Willy’s ideal, the old salesman in green slippers, is called "Dave Singleman". The two names contrast Willy’s actual exploitation and the dignified independence to which he aspired. (102)

Hence, it can be said that in Miller’s Salesman, the identity of its hero Loman is not only a common place and mediocre hero but also a victim of the materialistic society. Commenting on Loman’s defeat in identifying himself as a rich and successful salesman, Parker identifies three main alternatives in Salesman in “Point of View in Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman”, where he says:

The futile philosophy of Willy Loman is opposed by three main alternatives in Death of a Salesman: the pioneering adventurousness of Ben, the sensible practicality of Charlie, and the loyalty of Linda—to list them in order of progressive importance, the values represented by Ben need not detain us very long. Their inadequacy is apparent. Miller’s work, as a whole, does reflect a certain admiration for the pioneer virtues of courage and self-reliance but this is matched by an awareness that such attitudes are dangerous in modern society: the aggressiveness which is admirable in combatting raw nature becomes immoral when, turned against one’s fellow men. It is the latter, critical attitude which predominates in Miller’s picture of Ben, who advises Biff: ‘Never fight fair with a stranger, boy, You’ll never get out of the jungle that way.’ Clearly, if Willy had gone with Ben to Alaska, he might have been a richer, but he would not have been a better man. (104)
Loman as a paltry little man is done to earth by a cruel society. However, Charley, the next door neighbor lives luxuriously in the same economic system. Social pressures do play a part in moulding the identity of Loman, but Loman the individual, is responsible for his failure. He is a failure as a salesman. He is a man whose illusions have made him incapable of coping with the realities of life. The society in which he lives and the social forces that work upon him have spawned these illusions in him but he is not just a passive victim of a hostile system. He is active throughout but is swollen by self-conceit. Based on the argument Raymond Williams in “Realism and Contemporary Novels” says:

Neither element, neither the society nor the individual, is there as a priority. The society is not a background against which the personal relationships are studied, nor are the individuals merely illustrations of aspects of the play of life. Every aspect of personal life is radically affected by the quality of general life, yet the general life is seen at its most important in completely personal terms. (210-11)

Loman is an appropriate image of humanity retreating from reality and desperately trying to place its faith in appearance and outworn clichés. He is an example of the American Dream. Like Joe of *Sons*, Loman thinks that his son, Biff will prosper and must succeed in “the greatest country in the world” because he is “a young man with such personal attractiveness” (*DS* : 134). Loman has always laid too much score by the appearances which ultimately become the cause of his undoing. He tells his sons:

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Loman : Bernard can get the best pass marks, Y’ understand, but when he gets out in the business world, Y’ understands you are going to be five times ahead of him, That’s why I thank Almighty God.
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You’re both built like Adonises. 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. (DS: 146)

Loman is identified with three different phrases, namely, “his mercurial nature”, “his massive dreams”, and “the turbulent longings within him” (DS: 131). He has massive dreams both about himself and his son, Biff. He has a strong conviction that “Someday I will have my business, and I’ll never have to leave home any more” (DS: 144). He lives on sensations and has to create sensations about himself. He becomes a salesman on being inspired by a sight of Dave Singleman who at the age of eighty-four, “Put on his green velvet slippers, and pick up his phone and call the buyers and without ever leaving his room, at the age of eighty-four, he made his living” (DS: 180). Throughout the play, Loman tries to project an inflated image of himself in a bid to impress his sons. He tells them ‘I can park my car in any street in New England, and the cops protect it like their own” (DS: 145). Loman is also capable of self-deception. It is evident in the scene in which he tells his sons that the Mayor of the providence had coffee with him in a hotel lobby.

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 a hotel lobby.
Biff : What did he say?
Willy : He said, ‘Morning’. And I said ‘You got a fine city here, Mayor’.
And then he had coffee with me. (DS : 144-45)

It suggests Loman’s dreams and the exact reality. In other words, it is as Willy as he has liked himself to be and Loman as he is. In fact, the anguish of Loman springs from his pose of bigness *vis-a-vis* the reality that he is a small man - a low brow man. He deceives himself by telling big stories to his sons but the reality is as he confesses to Linda. “You know, the trouble is, Linda, people don’t seem to talk to me... They seem to laugh at me” (DS : 148). Loman assumes that he is a big shot but soon realizes his own defeat and real position. His trouble is that he can never live with reality. He finds reality unbearable and wants to dwell in a dream world of imaginary success. It is evident in his assumption that Bernard is a failure but in fact is a successful businessman. He considers him as a pest and an anaemic. In fact, he realizes his own identity when he says : “Figure it out, work a lifetime to pay off a house. You finally own it and there’s nobody to live in it” (DS : 133). It turns out to be an irony when Linda cries over the grave of Loman:

    Willy dear, I can’t cry. Why did you do it? I search and search and I search, and I can’t understand it. Willy, I made the last payment on the house today, today, dear, and there’ll be nobody home. (DS: 222)

Loman, the actual, becomes an image. So that only commenting on Loman’s identity as tarnished between the actual and the image, Weales in “Arthur Miller’s Shifting Image of Man” says:

    The distance between the actual Willy and the Willy as an image is so great when the play opens that he can no longer lie to himself with conviction; what the play gives us is the final disintegration of a man who has never even approached his idea of what by rights he ought to
have been. His ideal may have been the old salesman, who at the age of eighty-four could, through the strength of personality, sit in a hotel room and command buyers; but his model is that American mythic figure, the traveling salesman of the dirty joke. (133)

Willy shares his culture’s conviction that personality is a matter of mannerism. He develops a style that is compounded of falseness. His act however, is as much for himself as it is for his customers. The play shows that from the beginning of his career Willy has lied about the size of his sales, the warmth of his reception, and the number of his friends. He occasionally doubts himself, but usually he rationalizes his failure. His continuing self-delusion and his occasional self-awareness serve the same purpose. They keep him from questioning the assumptions that lie beneath his failure and his pretense of success. Loman becomes a drastic failure. His dreams are not fulfilled. He is cast away and lost in his society. He has become a mere shadow. He has not confronted the reality; rather the reality has made him to be a shadowy figure. His death has not brought anything to the family. He becomes a nowhere man with no anchorage in his society. *Salesman* is as much about the public as the private world. This is a false distinction. Loman has absorbed the values of his society. He is a salesman; the epitome of a society built on social performance and wedded to the idea of a transforming future. Loman is a man who wishes his reality to come into line with his hopes. He is a man desperate to leave his mark on the world through his own endeavours and through those of his children. But to turn back to *Salesman*, Miller enhances the psychological factors in Loman’s character so that the surfacing of guilt is more complex. Loman is a more complex character than Joe, although both represent the guilt that is vested in authority. Loman’s guilt has two
sources. One is the failure of his ‘success’ dream. Over a long life of illusions, Loman makes one false move after another in pursuit of easy success. This is indicated by his stories of bigness as also by his smiling acceptance of all the little vices, like thieving and lying, which ruin the careers of his two sons, Biff and Happy. His illusion of success consists of a simple formula: talk big, have an aggressive personality and the whole continent will be at your doorstep. As his wife knows too well, his pose of bigness is a fraud. In reality, he is a small, insignificant man and he knows it. For years, the realization has dawned on him that being mediocre; he is superfluous, like an orange peel, in a highly competitive society. He is a fake and yet he keeps up the pose till the end. This is the first cause of his inner anguish, his restlessness and his guilt. The second and perhaps the more painful cause of his guilt is his feeling that he has failed his children. Throughout his life he has encouraged the notion in Biff’s mind that he (Biff) is number one, an all-American hero, who can lick the world with his little finger. But, as he sees, his son goes down in the world over the years, his burden and his responsibility in his son’s failure become almost unbearable.

This, however, need not detract one from the fact that society is also, to a very large extent, responsible for his failure. If one were to take seriously Miller’s views expressed in his famous essay "Tragedy and the Common Man", Loman’s fall would be entirely due to the hostile and manipulative economic system in which he lives. Even the false dreams of success and bigness would be products popularized and encouraged by the same economic system. That is why the play emphasizes, particularly in the second part, the harshness of the social and economic system. Loman’s interview with his employer brings out his protest that he is not to be treated as an orange peel which is
thrown away after it is eaten. His protest against exploitation does restore his dignity but does not completely absolve him of personal responsibility in his failure.

Miller also introduces the additional factor of the “pastoral” which forms a recurring contrast in Loman’s mind with the immediate environment of big industry and capitalistic encroachment. This contract is sharpened by the stage devices of an expressionistic set showing Loman’s house dwarfed in by high-rise buildings and the playing of a recurring pastoral type of music. The “pastoral” in his mind symbolizes an unattainable peace that once belonged to a better life in an Edenic America. That is why he laments its loss: "The grass don’t grow any more, you can’t raise a carrot in the backyard: .. " and this lament continues into a reminiscence of two beautiful elm trees with swings and hammocks on them. The strange melody that accompanies Willy’s dreams is one of "grass and trees and the horizon" (DS : 130). Such dreams of Loman are full of talk about lilacs and wisteria and peonies and daffodils. In view of his inner awareness of the futile Horatio Alger dream of success, which also provides escape from reality, the Arcadian dream with its suggested possibilities creates a sense of melancholy and loss. This dream emphasizes his ‘fall’ as it also highlights the contradiction in his character in as much as he holds this view of a pastoral life as a source of great comfort to himself while regarding the same idea in Biff’s desire of a farm life in Texas as a symbol of failure. But above all, Loman’s life is a study in ‘failure’, (in a personal as well as worldly sense) and the consequent guilt. His grand self-illusions and big talk do not stop his gradual realization that he is a flop and a big zero. The essential point again is that because he is a weak bum, he cannot be condemned.

The last significant scene in Loman’s life is the one in which he takes a flashlight,
hoe and seeds, and begins to plant the ‘garden’ at night. He has gained his moment of truth. After having acknowledged his ‘fall,’ he has decided on death through which he hopes to achieve his wife’s economic security (by his insurance policy) and sons’ affection and his own self-respect. Death is his redemption and ‘expulsion’ from the perverted garden, the Darwinian jungle. The beginning of a garden at this crucial moment, besides being a last act of defiance against the stiffing encroachment of urbanization and industry, is symbolic of Loman’s advance into an area of peace and innocence which had always been suggested to him by the ‘garden’ images. However, the irony is that he cannot become a gardener. He is a frustrated and defeated salesman.

Commenting on Loman as a salesman, Bigsby in *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* says:

> A salesman is a middleman. He is a means serving something beyond himself, an agent whose function is a factor of his own lost freedom. He is involved in transactions and the risk is that such transactions will begin to define his life that the market which shapes his dreams and that of others, and in which he is implicated, will deprive him of the dignity he seeks and the significance for which he yearns. (107)

He becomes a tragic figure as he is defeated in all directions. His is a modern tragedy which arouses pity and pathos. Commenting on the tragic nature of Loman and Proctor, Hogan in *Arthur Miller* elaborates:

> Two points connect this situation with the tradition of austere tragedy. First, an individual is pushed to definition, forced to irreclaimable and self-destructive action. That self-destruction is, paradoxically, an affirmation of morality, for it asserts that belief is more important than
life. Second, the individual discovers his need to choose, and his agony comes from his awareness. Reason, said Milton, is but choosing, and Proctor’s awareness of choice is the choice of a reasoning man. That last point indicates the distance between Proctor’s tragedy and Willy Loman’s. Willy’s is a kind of passive, uncomprehending, mute, brute suffering. Whatever peace Willy attains by his death is the peace of oblivion, but whatever peace Proctor attains is the peace of knowledge. Willy’s is a pathetic tragedy, Proctor’s an austere one. Willy’s story arouses pity, Proctor’s suffering, Willy’s death is a lament for the destruction of values, Proctor’s a paean to its creation. And finally, Willy’s is the story of man’s failure, and Proctor’s the story of man’s triumph. (30)

Loman’s death culminates everything. He fails to understand himself and his society and more particularly his own sons. He is out and out a dreamer, who dreams about the impossible future. He wants to become a big man but he ends as a buffoon, a comic figure. His is a defeated life. He chooses death, as he is not able to face the stark reality which becomes unbearable for him. He is tired of his own life and of his existence. As a father, he fails to establish himself as a successful role model to his sons which makes him lose his very purpose in life. He is no longer loved by his employer, his customers, his neighbours and, particularly his sons. He desperately tries to make his suicide appear purely accidental for two reasons: first, to help the family to get the insurance money and second, to win the sympathy of his family, especially his sons. He, the ever-roaming nomad, lies unwantly. His is not a classical tragedy but effected by his own castrated
images and hopes where nothing is possible. Commenting on Loman’s death, Bigsby in *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* says:

> He cannot live in a world not energized by the imagination. He goes gently into the night precisely because his death is drained of the tragic, no matter what Miller may have chosen to believe. He dies in trope. He dies radiant with unexamined optimism, almost an absurd hero finding meaning in his conspiracy with death, purpose in the purposeless. He never does close the gap between what he wishes to be and what he is.

(118)

The play *Salesman* is an attack on capitalism. It is also a symbolic act of the breakdown of the whole concept of salesmanship. Thomas E. Porter in *Myth and Modern American Drama* regards the play as “the story of the failure of the success myth” (131). It can also be considered a pertinent comment on the values of modern American society. It is also considered as a valid and frightening attack on social system. Herbert J. Muller in *The Spirits of Tragedy* estimates that the play is a tale of “a little man succumbing to his environment, rather than a greater man destroyed through his greatness” (272). R.K. Gupta also in “Death of a Salesman and Miller’s Concept of Tragedy” says that “Willy is not only common socially, he is also common intellectually and spiritually [...] Divested of his pseudo-poetic fancies, he is a paltry man who has lived for and among paltry things and has developed paltry values and standards” (12). Jackson in *Death of a Salesman: Tragic Myth* also says that the play is “the most nearly mature myth about human suffering in an industrial age” (64). In the image of the salesman, Miller has brought into the theatre “a figure who is, in our age, a kind of hero – a ritual representative of an
industrial society” (64).

Proctor, like Stockman of An Enemy of the People, revolts against institutionalized authority. He says: “I like not the smell of this authority” (Crucible: 247). His heroic struggle against an unjust social order breeds human interest in the problem. The theme shows how organized government machinery curbs the freedom of the individual and ruthlessly tries to subvert the individual’s right of dissent and protest. Proctor is a man of tragic potentials. Bhatia in Arthur Miller: Social Drama as Tragedy points out that “The seeds of destruction that eventually sprout forth in the final catastrophe lie buried in the fainted nobility of his character” (61). He is a farmer in his mid-thirties who has a sharp and biting way with hypocrites. His sin is that in a weak moment of passion he yields to the lascivious machinations of Abigail Williams who is actually an embodiment of evil in the play. But he feels deeply remorseful about it and endeavours to make amends for it. In the whole process, he is destroyed. His private sin or evil is matched against the larger social evil in the world outside. The outside evil is represented by Abigail but mainly by the socio-religious forces embodied in Deputy Governor, Danforth, Judge Hawthorne and Reverend Parris. It is, in fact, the triangular conflict among John Proctor, Abigail Williams, and Elizabeth Proctor. In his “Introduction” to Plays Miller writes:

I doubt I shall ever have tempted the agony by actually writing a play on the subject had I not come upon a single fact. It was that Abigail Williams, the prime mover of the Salem hysteria... had a short time earlier been the house servant of the Proctors and now was crying out Elizabeth Proctor as a witch... her apparent desire to convict Elizabeth and save
In this play, Miller skillfully interweaves the personal and the social worlds by juxtaposing the realistic and non-realistic modes. Proctor’s private sin actually sets the whole community in commotion. Proctor’s sin leads to a mass hysteria of false accusations; many innocent people are drawn into the vortex of false accusations and of social forces and get crushed. Proctor’s private act of sin leads to social turmoil. Truth and justice are completely subverted. Miller provides the blend of realism and expressionism in the form of socio-religious forces that threaten to destroy the individuals. In fact, the ensuing conflict is no longer a clash between two individuals; rather it is a conflict between the individual and the authority. The family-complex is gradually replaced by the family social complex. Commenting on Crucible, Bigsby in Arthur Miller: A Critical Study says:

The Crucible is a play about the seductive nature of power and for pubescent girls that seductiveness is perhaps not unconnected with a confused sexuality. These were people who chose not to enquire into their own motives. They submitted to the irrational with a kind of perverse pleasure, a pleasure not entirely drained of sexual content. They dealt, after all, with exposure, with stripping souls bare, with provoking and hearing confessions of an erotic forthrightness which no other occasion or circumstance would permit. The judges saw young women cry out in a kind of orgasmic ecstasy. They witnessed men and women of position, intelligence and property rendered into their power by the confessions of those who recalled abuses and assaults revealed to them only in a
Crucible is generally thought a sound work but a lesser one than Salesman. It is a strong play. Its conclusion has much of the force of tragedy. It has not only the permeating compassion of Salesman but also there is much dramatic power to Proctor’s death than there is to Loman’s. Its impact stems from being really a triumph. One cannot pity a man who triumphs. Loman’s death is a failure and his suicide is only a gesture of defeat. Comparing Salesman and Crucible, Hogan in Arthur Miller writes:

The Crucible is really a more dramatic play than Death of a Salesman. The earlier play attempted to construct a plot about Willy’s losing his job, and Biff’s attempting to gain one, but these strands of plot were only a frame on which to hang the exposition of a man’s whole life. The plots of Death of a Salesman are not the center of the play, but in The Crucible the action is the play’s very basis, its consuming center. One watches Death of a Salesman to discover what a man is like, but one watches The Crucible to discover what a man does. Death of a Salesman is a tour de force that succeeds despite its slim action because its real center is the accumulation of enough significant detail to suggest a man. In the life of John Proctor, one single action is decisive, dominating, and totally pertinent, and this action, this moment of decision and commitment, is that climax toward which every incident in the play tends. Death of a Salesman is not traditionally dramatic, at least in the Aristotelian sense that the center of a drama is an action. The Crucible is so dramatic, and the centrality of its plot explains its greater strength. (27-28)
Miller in his commentary to the play writes:

Long held hatreds could now be openly expressed, and vengeance taken, despite *The Bible*’s charitable injunctions [...] one could cry witch against one’s neighbour and feel perfectly justified in the bargain – old scores could be settled once plane of heavenly combat between Lucifer and the Lord, suspicious and the envy of the miserable toward the happy could and did burst out in the general revenge. (*Arthur Miller’s Collected Plays*: 229)

Miller’s *Crucible* reminds one of *Oedipus Rex*. The potent signs of disharmony in the state match the horror and terror of the plague-stricken Thebes in Sophocles’ play. In such a chaotic and disorderly world, Hale realizes that it is a folly to be wise. He admonishes practical wisdom and asks Proctor to prevail upon her husband for speaking a lie. He says to her:

> Life, woman, life is God’s most precious gift; no principle, however glorious, may justify the taking of it. I beg you, woman, prevail upon your husband to confess. Let him give his lie. Quail not before God’s judgement in this, for it may well be God damns a liar less than he that throws his life away for pride. (*AMCP*: 320)

Hale knows that he is not a saint or a martyr. He admits: “I cannot mount the gibbel like a saint. It is a fraud. I am not that man. My honesty is broken, Elizabeth; I am not good man. Nothing is spoiled by giving them that lie that were not rotten long before” (*AMCP*: 322). He prefers to live by telling a lie that is not a lie rather lie for a truth that is not the
truth. He knows that he is a sinner. He also knows the futility of dying for a sin which he has never committed. He tells Elizabeth: I’d have you see some honesty in it. Let them that never lie, die now to keep their souls. It is a pretense for me, a vanity that will not blind God nor keep my children out of the wind. (AMCP : 323). He knows that his sacrifice will go waste. So, he finally decides to sign the document of recantation.

Irony, which is an important aspect of tragedy, is used as a weapon in Crucible. It augments its tragic impulse. In an interview with Henry Brandon, Miller said: “A play is made by sensing how the forces in life simulate ignorance – you set free the concealed irony, the deadliest jokes” (64). Irony is all pervasive in Crucible. It contributes in substantial measure the tragic impact. Irony, in tragedy, usually involves a tension between the statement and the meaning, appearance and reality, and aspiration and achievement. In Crucible, it works both on the level of character and action. Irony is evident in the character of Proctor, who has the reputation of being the wisest and the sanest of all the people in Salem. He fights in order to rescue others from injustice, but commits the sin of adultery with Abigail which sparks off the whole of tragedy. Another character, besides Proctor, is Mr. Hale, who comes as a learned theologian to Salem in order to rescue its people but ultimately ends up by saying:

I came into this village like a bridegroom to his beloved, bearing gifts of high religion; the very crowns of holy law I brought, and what I touched with my bright confidence, it died; and where I turned the eye of my great faith, blood flowed up. Beware, Goody Proctor-cleave to no faith when faith brings blood. (AMCP : 320)
Similar to that of irony in character portrayal, irony of situation has also been handled by Miller effectively. The knowledge of the spectators is juxtaposed with the ignorance of the characters. Irony springs into surface when lies are extolled and believed in and the truth is brutally set aside. Theocracy becomes a force and the wisdom of the churchmen remains a folly. In the play, a group of pretentious girls led by a vice and lascivious strumpet is able to deceive and hoodwink the entire wisdom of the court. Irony makes law a hollow myth. People are convicted and killed on such flimsy charges as are listed against Giles Corey’s wife. Giles says:

The blood mongrel Walcott charge her. Y’see, he buy a pig died soon after. So he came dancing in for his money back. So my Martha, she says to him, ‘Walcott, if you’ve not the wit to feed a pig properly, you will not live to own many’; she says. Now he goes to court and claims that from that day to this he cannot keep a pig alive for more than four weeks because my Martha bewitch them with her looks. (*AMCP* : 277)

The irony in the words of Danforth is also remarkable:

This is a sharp time, now a precise time we live no longer in the dusky afternoon when evil mixed itself with good and befuddled the world. Now, by God’s grace, the shining sun is up. (*AMCP* : 293)

It exposes Danforth’s belief and the reality. Its best example is found when Elizabeth tells Proctor how Abbey is being venerated as a saint. She remarks:

The town is gone wild, I think ... Abigail brings the other girls into the court, and where she walks the crowd will part like the sea for Israel! And
The irony makes Abigail to be compared to Moses. It reveals the extent to which evil is rampant in the world of *Crucible*. Even the judges are deceived and confounded. They disbelieve what they see and believe what they do not see. It is clearly evident when Parris says: “We are here your honour, precisely to discover what no one has ever seen” (*AMCP*: 300). Proctor brings Mary Warren to confess the truth. She also makes a deposition that she has never seen any spirits and that they all have been pretending. The irony is heightened when Proctor feels exasperated and in the last bid to save his wife from Abbey’s false implications. He confesses lechery with Abbey. Proctor confesses: “I have known her, Sir, I have known her” (*AMCP*: 304). Danforth cannot believe what he says and as a result he asks Proctor: “You – you are a lecher?” Proctor replies: “A man will not cast away his good name. You surely know that”. And in a bit to expose Abbey’s vengeance, Proctor says:

I have made a hell of my honor! I have rung the doom of my good name – you’ll believe me Mr. Danforth! My wife is innocent except she knew a whore when she was one! (*AMCP*: 305)

The irony is again at work when a confirmation is sought from Elizabeth, who, in Proctor’s own words, cannot lie. Danforth asks Proctor to turn his back and question Elizabeth: “Look at me! To your own knowledge, has John Proctor ever committed the crime of lechery?... Answer my question! Is your husband a lecher?” (*AMCP*: 307). Without knowing that Proctor has already confessed, Elizabeth, in good faith, tells a lie
and faintly says “No, Sir.” Like all the lies told by others before her, her lie is also accepted as truth. Even, Mr. Hale, who by now seems to serve as a veiled commentator on the action, says: “Excellently, it is a natural lie to tell; I beg you stop now before another is condemned! I may shut my conscience to it no more – private vengeance is working through this testimony (AMCP : 307). The voice of reason is thus submerged and lost in an orgy of lies. Mary Warren, who gives testimony in favour of Proctor a minute ago, finding his balance going against him, shifts back and points at Proctor saying: “You’re the Devil’s man” (AMCP : 310). Proctor’s faith in God is completely shattered when he proclaims: “I say – I say, God is dead” (AMCP : 311). He laughs madly and says:

A fire, a fire is burning! I hear the boot of Lucifer, I see his filthy face!
And it is my face and yours Danforth! For them that quail to bring men out of ignorance, as I have quailed, and as you quail now when you know in all your black hearts this be fraud – God damn our kind especially, and we will burn, we will burn together! (AMCP : 311)

It reveals the agony of Proctor. It is also a symbol of those dark, mysterious and inscrutable forces which play a vital role in human life. However, it is clear to Danforth that the testimony of the girls is fraudulent. Parris also informs him about Abbey’s breaking into his strong box and decamping with thirty one pounds. But Danforth, even though he sees the gross justice involved, persists on hanging more innocent people because reprieve or pardon will cast doubt upon the guilt of them that has died till now. The irony is highlighted when Hale says:
Excellency, there are orphans wandering from house to house; abandoned cattle bellow on the high road, the stink of rotting crops hangs everywhere and no man knows when the harlot’s cry will end his life. (AMCP : 319)

In Bridge, Eddie hopes that he is no longer old when viewed against the social context. He is a creature of his environment. Eddie also has an obsession. His obsession is with his wife’s young niece. In his obsession for her, Eddie becomes irrational and breaks the code of social ethics, thereby putting his own existence in jeopardy. He is too possessive about her that he cannot bear somebody even looking at her. He says: “I don’t like the looks they’re giving you in the candy store” (AVB : 381). He does not approve of Catherine’s idea of doing a job. When she is offended, he flatters her like a lover: “With your hair that way, you look like a Madonna. You know that? You’re the Madonna type” (AVB : 386). He becomes jealous when Rodolfo becomes too intimate with her. Even his wife, Beatrice, grudges Eddie’s growing frigidity towards her and complains about her position as a wife to Eddie. She even cautions Catherine against Eddie’s growing obsession with her. She says to Catherine: “It’s wonderful for a whole family to love each other but you’re a grown woman and you’re in the same house with a grown man” (AVB : 405). She asks Catherine not to sit on the bathtub and talk to Eddie while he is shaving in his underwear. Alfieri also warns Eddie:

Eddie, I want you to listen to me. You know, sometimes god mixes up the people. We all love somebody, the wife - the kids - every man’s got somebody that he loves, heh? But sometimes... there’s too much. You know? There’s too much and it goes where it must not. A man works hard, he brings up a child, sometimes it’s a niece, sometimes even a daughter,
and he never realizes it, but through the years – there is too much love for
the daughter, there’s too much love for the niece. Do you understand what
I’m saying to you? (AVB : 409)

Eddie, who is partly aware of the truth contained in Alfieri’s speech, pleads ignorance
and self-piteously tries to accuse Rodolpho for putting his dirty and filthy hands on her.
Alfieri recognizes the danger in Eddie’s blind and passionate drift towards the inevitable.
The narrator admits:

I knew where he was leading her, I knew where he was going to end. And
I sat here many afternoons asking myself why, being an intelligent man, I
was so powerless to stop it. I even went to a certain old lady in the
neighbourhood, a very wise old woman, and I told her, and she only
nodded, and said, ‘pray for him...’ And so I waited here’ (AVB : 410)

Commenting on Eddie’s identity in Bridge, Gerald Weales in “Arthur Miller’s Shifting
Image of Man” observes:

Eddie Carbone in A View from the Bridge also dies crying out for his
name, but he is asking for a lie that will let him live or, failing that, for
death. Eddie is like Joe Keller and Willy Loman in that he accepts the
rules of his society, an Italian neighborhood in Brooklyn, but he dies
because he violates them. Miller wants us to believe that Eddie informs
on Rodolfo, an illegal immigrant, because he is driven by a passion as
powerful and as impersonal as fate. The interesting thing about Eddie is
not the passion that pushes him, but his refusal to recognize it for what
it is. He gets rid of Rodolpho not so much out of jealousy, but because the boy’s presence nags at him, almost forces him to put a label on his incestuous love for his niece and his homosexual attraction to the boy himself. It is almost as though he becomes an informer to keep from wearing some name still more terrible to him. He cannot live under the lesser label either so he moves into battle with the avenging brother Marco, demanding, "Gimme my name." (135)

In Bridge, Eddie fails to understand himself. He has a conflict within himself. As far as the conflict is concerned there is a two-fold conflict in him. One is the internal, purely psychological conflict in the mind of Eddie regarding his hidden incestuous love for Catherine. However, it is not pronounced in the play as Eddie, unlike Quentin, is not an intellectual hero. However, there are strong indications in the play that Eddie does partly understand those hidden forces. He feels nervous and guilty at times when Beatrice or Alfieri talk about it. The other conflict in Eddie is more external in nature. It is a conflict between Eddie on the one hand and the moves or principles of that society in which he lives. It is a conflict between individual conscience and social obligations. The psychosexual drives inside man and the social code of the world outside him both work as uncontrolled pressures under which Eddie crumbles. The hidden incestuous love of Eddie for Catherine precipitates social crisis, intensifies his own sufferings and enhances the tragic effect of the play Bridge.

In a way, After the Fall continues the theme of the injustice of man being forever on trial for his imperfection. This time, however, out of the complex Edenic myth, Miller focuses attention on the archetypal man-woman relationship. The role of God, of
constant judging of Adam, is transferred primarily to woman and society in general. Quentin emerging from a stable family situation finds that staying with the family will keep him a moral adolescent forever. He has to grow. But having been exposed to evil and imperfection in his own family, Quentin feels guilty for others’ shortcomings. So Quentin is a study in the inalienable relationship between man and his guilt. Early in the play, Quentin confesses to the listener to have lived in selfishness and self-righteousness. Also, both his wives, Louise and Maggy, accuse him of being a harsh judge of their behaviour. But having come to the recognition and the consequent anguish that there is no divine or ethical sanction for his self-righteousness in his pointless litigation of existence before an empty bench, he attempts to establish relationship at a more realistic level. In his deep and intense relationship with Louise and Maggy, Quentin becomes acutely aware that judgment, if at all it comes, must come from within and from a recognition of one’s own shortcomings rather than of others. Having learned this, Quentin expects others to follow his example. He pleads with Louise and Maggy to feel a little guilt about their own selfishness. But this does not work and Quentin is alone with his guilt.

It has been emphasized that, Quentin’s self-knowledge of his own egotism, cruelty and evil, are the causes of his guilt. This emphasis tends to be exaggerated because it converts Quentin’s dilemma into a stereotype, religious confrontation between evil and good. The causes of Quentin’s guilt are more complex. His guilt starts with his mother’s demanding expectation that because he is born under a star, he ought to be someone special. The economic collapse of his family shows him early in life that man usually carries more responsibility on his shoulders than he can bear. The sense
of failure is inevitable. With regard to his two wives, Quentin feels guilty that love has
died. With his snake-skin jacket and guitar, he desires to sing his way through life.
Perhaps this is the fulfillment of his quest, only if everyone would leave him alone.

Fall is a play full of accusations. It is threaded through with a sense of potentially
debilitating guilt. It takes place within the mind of a man. He is stunned by a sudden
awareness of his complicity with a world he has thought he has the right to judge. He
discovers only the roots of faithlessness, cruelty and denial in himself. He is not able to
defend his innocence. He allows others to voice their accusations, while understanding
that their own cruelties stem from the same desire to stand justified, to deny blame and
responsibility. He has been in the service of nothing more than success. He is aware of
the fragility of his moral commitments. He becomes the defense and prosecuting
attorney, presenting the evidence of his own failures, his own moral dubiety, but also the
failures of a culture and a world in which some fundamental principles seem no longer
operative. The problem in Miller’s Fall as in Bridge is not only psychological but also
social in its impact. Quentin’s traumatic childhood experience and the relationship
between his parents play a vital role and give him early lessons in human betrayal and
selfishness. Later, its impact is reflected in Quentin’s own relationships with his two
wives. Corrigan in “An Introduction” : The Achievement of Arthur Miller says that
The Misfits “is not concerned with identity” (5). Further, he gives reasons for it. He
details:

Gay, the chief protagonist, always knows who he is, and the intrusion of
Roslyn into his life does not make him question his identity; rather, her
presence comes to make him conscious of an absence, an emptiness, in his
existence. Guido is certainly not a character with self-knowledge; in fact, he has numerous blind spots. But his blindness about himself is not central to the action, and the situation never forces him to question his identity. Even the younger Perce, whose age, psychological condition, and family situation are rooted in an identity crisis, does not play this kind of role in the drama. If anything, his very presence points up the fact that this is not what the play is about. Roslyn is a much more complex character. While she is a woman whose life has forbidden her to forsake her loneliness, she also has the childlike innocence and trust of one who exists before the fall. She has no sense of herself at all, or perhaps it is more accurate to say that, like a child, she is an emerging self who has yet to have a consciousness of her own identity. Thus, in a way, all of these are new Miller characters, whose very natures preclude the crisis of identity from becoming a dramatic element. (6)

The same attitude is repeated in Miller’s later play **The Price** (1968). Two brothers, Victor and Walter engage in a ruthless analysis of their father long after he is dead. Victor, a police sergeant on the point of retirement, learns that his father has exploited and used him and has made him sacrifice his education to support the old man. The truth is that the father has got enough money of his own, and can afford to send Victor to college. But he does not do that. Unlike Joe Keller’s decided guilt in **Sons**, the father’s guilt in **The Price** is not fully established. Walter, the elder son, is shown as guilty of selfishness, and Victor is envious and blames others for his own failure. Miller’s attitude seems to have grown since **Sons**. Guilt, weakness and failure are universal. Victor,
Walter and their father are all victims of a rat race. Corrigan in “An Introduction”: The Achievement of Arthur Miller says:

Though the dominant tone of the theatre in the mid-twentieth century is despair, Miller continually demands more: he seeks a theatre in which an adult who wants to live can find plays that will heighten his awareness of what living in our times involves. Miller’s own sense of involvement with modern man’s struggle to be himself is revealed in his own growth as an artist and has made him one of the modern theatre’s most compelling and important spokesmen. (22)

Miller thus widens the meaning of the ‘fall’ to include universal failure, selfishness and guilt. Even the titles of Miller’s plays are highly self-explanatory. They serve as expositions to his plays. They are highly subtle as they all explicate the themes in nutshells. This can be noted in Sons, and Salesman. In Sons, Joe lives, lies and dies for the sake of his sons. Loman in Salesman also struggles and dies for the sake of his sons.

The titles of plays like Crucible and Bridge contain images which stand as complex symbols of identity. The synonyms for the word Crucible are: ‘A place, time, or situation characterized by the confluence of powerful intellectual, social, economic, or political forces’ and ‘A severe test, as of patience or belief; a trial’ reveal the crux of the play. Proctor in Crucible, who tries to bring in positive changes in an unfair society, ironically falls a victim to his own flaw/weakness. Miller’s Fall also signifies the tragic fall of Quentin which is effected both by his parents and his two wives. The symbol ‘Bridge’, which stands for unity and connectivity, is used as a complete contrast in this play. In Bridge Eddie’s extreme possessiveness, betrayal and incestuous love break the peace
and unity both in his family and in society.

Hence, it is understood that Miller’s characters seek identity in a society which fails to give them their solid identity. They uniformly fall - Joe, Loman and Proctor - for the same cause. Theirs is a modern tragedy. They are not able to leave their identity amidst people with whom they live and among whom they love. They are not able to confront reality. They remain as total failures as they fail to comprehend the reality. They are blinded by the darkness and ugliness of the society. When reality becomes too much for them, they create their own illusionary worlds. Ultimately they also realize the vanity and futility of their existence in such a world where they end up as failures.

Thus Miller has effectively presented the identity crisis of his characters. As a result of their psychological maladjustment with the society they are made to perish and ultimately are doomed to live a life of solitude. They have failed to make compromises in life. The result is total alienation and isolation. And as a result, they are driven to the madness to kill themselves. It may be taken as the result of socio-economic system, which ostracizes man in his own existence. Inevitably, Miller’s characters suffer from social pressures, and familial feuds. They are not able to assert their identity. They become misfits, wanderers, lonely individuals who are battered and beaten up in the fragmented world. They remain as solitary birds.