CHAPTER - III

EARLY PLAYS [ 1947 - 1955 ]

- All My Sons (1947)
- Death of a Salesman (1949)
- The Crucible (1953)
- A View from the Bridge (1955)
CHAPTER - III

ALL MY SONS (1947)

I

Arthur Miller's first theatrical success on Broadway is *All My Sons*. It is a full-length family drama, comprising three acts. The play was opened at Broadway's Coronet Theatre on January 29, 1947 in a production directed by Elia Kazan. Not surprisingly, the play was an immediate success on the stage. It ran 328 performances, winning the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award and the Donaldson Award. It has thus established the thirty-two year old Miller as the most promising of America's playwrights. The success of the play constitutes an important chapter in its author's life and is a significant landmark in the development of his dramatic career on the Broadway.

As a matter of fact, *All My Sons* is predominantly a drama of social responsibility. According to Miller, the story of the play is based on a true incident concerning a family from the Middle West which had been destroyed when the daughter reported her father to the authorities for selling faulty machinery to the Army during the war.¹ It is a well-made play in the manner of Henrik Ibsen.

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¹ C.P., p. 17.
In the play the conflict between Joe Keller and his son Chris arises from the difference between their degrees of commitment to society. Chris feels his responsibility towards the whole of humanity, but his father feels it only towards the family. As Miller himself comments on Joe's narrow vision in life:

Joe's trouble is that his cast of mind cannot admit that he personally has any viable connection with his world, his universe or his society.²

Robert Hogan observes that the theme of *All My Sons* is that of morality versus money. The action focuses on Chris's attempt to find the truth of his father's guilt and fix responsibility on him. The theme of the play also seems likely to remain pertinent for American society. It is a model of structural craftsmanship.³ Neil Carson views that the design of the play is the confrontation of a man with all of the consequences of his actions. In his confrontation Joe Keller is unable to face trial and imprisonment and he finally kills himself. The dramatist's primary concern in the play is the conflict of social values.⁴

According to Robert Warnock, Miller's observation of civilian life during the time of war provides him with material for his first

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successful play *All My Sons*. It presents the actual case of selling
defective cylinder heads to the Army to save one's business and one's
family from ruin. In the son's awakening to his father's guilt, Miller has
embodied his favourite theme — the moral responsibility of the
individual to society and not simply to his family.\(^5\) Of course, Joe
Keller, the protagonist of the play, lacks this moral responsibility in him.
He cannot see the world outside of himself — that is, his society beyond
his family. He is conscious of his material values only. That is why he
could sell the cracked cylinder heads for airplanes and thus betray his
own nation when it is at war. His lack of moral responsibility turns out
to be the main cause of the death of young American pilots.

II

The action of the play takes place in the Keller backyard. It is a
typically American setting with trees and a lawn. There is a sheltered
cove in which Joe Keller relaxes with the Sunday paper. He has good
relationships with his neighbours on both sides - Jim and Sue Bayliss,
and Frank and Lydia Lubey. They feel free to share the paper or to chat
with each other. The first act gradually prepares the characters for the

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catastrophe that will follow. It teases its audience with sour notes that disturb the normal atmosphere of the Keller-family. The second Act offers an effective balance of bitterness and sweetness, of anxiety and relief. The third Act opens with the contemplative Kate rocking on the porch chair in moonlight. She is waiting for her son Chris to return. The dramatic development of the action goes on till the end of the play when Keller commits suicide with an awakening of his social consciousness.

Joe Keller is a small factory owner who manufactures wartime airplane cylinders for the military. He has resumed his comfortable middle-class life following a brief prison term. On a day when Keller was absent, Steeve Deever, his subordinate and next-door neighbour, discovers hairline cracks in the cylinders. Keller orders him by phone to conceal them. In a position of wartime responsibility, Joe had allowed 120 cracked engine-heads to be sold from his factory. But the faulty equipment caused several military planes to crash, killing twenty-one young pilots. Subsequently Keller forces his partner Deever to take the blame for the mishap.

Keller lives now with his wife Kate and younger son Chris. But Larry, the older son who was a pilot in the war, was reported "missing in action" three and one-half years earlier. Kate waits for Larry's homecoming as she failed to accept his death. However, the climax of the play comes with the revelation that Larry had actually committed
suicide in a flight. On the day of his death, he sent his girlfriend, Ann Deever, a letter explaining his shame and his suicidal plan. Ann kept the letter undisclosed and showed it to the Kellers only when the family was expecting to make themselves free from the ghost of Larry. The letter precipitates Keller’s confession and his decision to shoot himself in self-humiliation and expiation. Indeed when all the hidden secrets are exposed, Keller comes to realise that those pilots were “all my sons”, and he finally commits suicide. Thus the play presents Miller’s theme of individual responsibility for even the unforeseen consequences of one’s actions.

_All My Sons_ is not a play about war. It is rather a play about social relationships and about the myopic vision of a selfish businessman who failed to see his identity as a responsible citizen and recognise his moral and social responsibility. The play demands of the reader an awareness of the devious condition of human motivation and understanding. This is the way in which a man’s best qualities may be involved in his worst actions and cheapest ideas. The play indeed defines the characteristics of Miller’s theatre which won him recognition in the later years. The play can also be seen as an important milestone in the growth of his tragic art.

III

Miller as a serious artist was interested in the fundamental problems of contemporary life. Of these, the problem of guilt is perhaps the most intricate for dramatic purposes. The state of guilt helps the dramatist to enlighten his views on the psychological, moral and mythical aspects of life. Because of this, Miller gives special attention to the idea of human guilt. Each of his plays has been constructed to expose a pattern of guilt, to find out who the guilty person is and to show the wages of guilt. All of his heroes in the plays manifest a deep sense of guilt.

The theme of *All My Sons*, says Miller, “is the question of actions and consequences,” which is also a question of human guilt and tragic punishment. The purpose of the play, according to Miller, was “to bring a man into the direct path of the consequences he had wrought.” The main line of action proceeds from the guilt of Joe, an uneducated, self-made businessman for whom there was nothing greater than the family. In the play, Joe Keller gradually emerges as a criminal. He has been directly responsible for the death of twenty-one young pilots. The

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7. C.P., p. 20.
8. C.P., p. 18.
horror of this deed is brought home to the audience by the discovery that Keller’s elder son was a pilot who lost his life in action. This is the emotional centre of interest, and most of the plot is concerned with this past crime of the father and its consequences for himself and his family.⁹

At the centre of the play there is a hidden crime, that may in Ibsen’s phrase be termed as the “fatal secret.” Joe Keller committed a social crime for which he had escaped responsibility. His fault, according to Miller and Chris, is that he does not recognize any loyalty to society at large. Joe’s shortness of vision, however, is the consequence of his lack of awareness of his social identity.¹⁰ Miller also sees the crime of Joe Keller as

having roots in a certain relationship of the individual to society, and to a certain indoctrination he embodies .... ¹¹

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The problem of guilt is a central concern in Miller's plays, but what is significant in *All My Sons* is that this element is dramatized with the use of Edenic symbols of the garden and the apple-tree. When the play starts, the tree has been cut down by the fierce storm of the previous night. Its upper trunk and branches lie toppled beside it. Only the broken stump remains. Thus, the symbol of the broken tree becomes, in Miller's hands, a rich metaphor suggesting the death of Chris's innocence and the beginning of a new life of understanding and responsibility for him. Again, in archetypal terms, the broken apple-tree represents the confirmation of Larry's death or his 'expulsion' from the family garden, as a result of the guilt and criminal scheming of his father.

Joe Keller, the millionaire, has submerged his guilt in social and economic success. Almost throughout the play, his guilt remains private behind the facade of responsibility and success. In his attempt to justify his crime, Keller makes an appeal on hypothetical grounds:

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\begin{align*}
\text{did they ship a gun or a truck outa Detroit before they got their price?} \\
\text{Is that clean? It's dollars and cents, nickels and dimes; war and peace, it's nickels and dimes, what's clean?}^{12}
\end{align*}
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It is clearly an important part of Miller's design in the play that Keller's crime must be seen as a profoundly human one. Of course, Joe Keller is guilty of an anti-social crime. For him there is no society, and there never has been one. As such, "the business" is "the world" for Joe. His commitments and allegiances do not extend beyond its boundaries. He is engaged only to his family, more precisely to his sons. Miller, while explaining the didactic design of his play, wrote:

The fortress which 'All My Sons' lays siege to is the fortress of unrelatedness.14

'Unrelatedness' is an important word which describes Joe's malady, the mainspring of his anti-social crime. Joe acted within the boundary of his family based philosophy of life. It is evident from his own words when he says, "For you, Kate, for both of you, that's all I ever lived for ...." (C.P. p. 121). His guilt was quite in conformity with his inauthentic and unexamined mode of life of which he was not conscious until the strange turn of events in the play drive him towards its realisation.


Keller's final vision of his guilt is pressed upon him by Chris. In a moment of hectic confrontation with his father Chris questions:

Chris: I want to know what you did, now what did you do? You had a hundred and twenty cracked engine heads, now what did you do?

Keller: 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? Sixty-one years old you don't get another chance, do ya?

Chris God in heaven, what kind of a man are you? Kids were hanging in the air by those heads. You knew that?

Only towards the conclusion of the play Joe sees and admits his guilt. The moment of confrontation comes to him (Joe) somewhat suddenly when he stands face to face with his hidden guilt. At the heart of Miller's work, there is an insistence that the individual has to acknowledge responsibility for his past actions and that the past can make legitimate demands on the present. Thus, only when tragedy affects him directly Keller seems to share his sympathy with the suffering of others and recognizes his connection with the rest of humanity. He promises to "put a bullet in (his) head ... if there's something bigger" (C.P. p.120) than the family because he cannot bear having Chris disappointed. In a sense these are the words of a man who

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cries desperately for his lost identity. However, Joe Keller, like Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*, dies in his wrong belief. In this way, the action of the play unfolds and reaches its climax through the presentation of the theme of individual guilt and punishment. As will be seen subsequently too, Miller’s regular practice in his plays is to confront the dead levels of banality with the heights and depths of guilt and to draw from this strange encounter a liberal parable of hidden evil and social responsibility”.

In *All My Sons*, Miller projects the problem of father-son relationship through the conflict between the father and his sons as well as through their mutual love which they find difficult to realise unless each of them had come to see his true identity by coming to recognise his guilt and responsibility. In the play, the sons of Joe Keller maintain an attitude which is quite opposed to that of their father. Chris wants to find out the hidden truth about the faulty engines his father had supplied to the army, while Joe wants to avoid his responsibility. In the meantime, the other son Larry considers his father guilty and dies as a kind of expiation. This is evident from his letter to Ann. He condemn
the crime of his father when he writes:

My dear Ann: It is impossible to put down the things I feel. But I've got to
tell you something ... I don't know how to tell you what I feel ... I can't
face anybody ... I'm going out on a mission in a few minutes. They 'll
probably report me missing. If they do, I want you to know that you mustn't
wait for me. I tell you, Ann, if I had him there now I could kill him”.

The two sons of Joe Keller thus become young rebels against
their own father who is a product of contemporary money-ethos. The
revolt of a son against his father is at the centre of both All My Sons and
Death of a Salesman. In each play, a son painfully discovers his
father's weakness and dishonesty. Miller identifies this conflict with
parental authority as the starting point of the sons' lives as individuals:

Be it Tolstoy, Dostoevski, Hemingway, You or I, we are formed in this
world when we are sons and daughters and the first truths we
know throw us into conflict with our fathers and mothers.

The theme develops simultaneously with the rise of tension and
development of character. The conflict between the father and his son
has been caused by an ethical disparity. Joe keller cares little for public
approval or disapproval of his action and does everything to call for his
son's admiration. For him nothing is more important than his family. It

is evident in his own words, "my only accomplishment is my son" (CP., p.97).

The father and son conflict in the play is a variation of the conflict between the familial and the social. The family serves as a "symbolic cell" of the social structure, and the conflicts within the family represent larger social conflicts. Benjamin Nelson has rightly observed:

The thematic image of All My Sons is a circle within a circle, the inner depicting the family unit 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.\(^{19}\)

In fact, the tragic tension in the play arises through the central conflict between the familial and the social. The theme of father and son relationship is recurrent in most of Miller's major plays. In an interview by Richard I. Evans, he answered:

Each of my plays deals with an extreme conflict in an ordinary person .... I don't regard my characters as persons in the way you (Evans) are thinking. They're images and effects on me, the hidden and veiled reactions to the world.... They are a set of conflicting relationships on the stage.\(^{20}\)


The confrontation between the father and the son actually springs from Chris's awareness of responsibility to others and his father's lack of it. As Miller recalls:

As the play progressed, the conflict between Joe and his son Chris passed the astrology to the wall until its mysticism gave way to psychology.²¹

This confrontation is, indeed, the backbone of the play. We have an idea of this conflict from the beginning of the play for Chris's character is the exact antithesis of his father's character. Chris is, of course, an idealist who swears full allegiance to society. He tells his father:

I don't know why it is, but everytime I reach out for something I want, I have to pull back because other people will suffer.²²

Chris's deep concern for others has been polarized against his father's myopic vision. In fact, "the business" does not inspire him (Chris). Joe Keller himself aptly sums up Chris's as well as Larry's moral character in a moment of anger when he says:

.... if Larry was alive he wouldn't act like this. He understood the way the world is made. He listened to me. This one (Chris), everything bothers him. You make a deal, overcharge two cents, and his hair falls out. He don't understand money.²³

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²¹ C.P., p. 20.
²² C.P., p. 69.
²³ C.F., p. 121.
Chris virtually serves as a foil to his father. The playwright has admiringly set Joe's limited vision against Chris's egalitarian vision. A realization dawnded upon him (Chris) when he was in command of a company during the war. He tells Ann:

They didn't die; they killed themselves for each other ... Everything was being destroyed, see, but it seemed to me that one new thing was made. A kind of responsibility. Man for Man.24

When Chris returns home from the war, he finds it all different. He feels ashamed of living. He does not want to open the bankbook nor drive the car, nor see the new refrigerator. For him, it is "really loot and there's blood on it" (C.F., p. 85). Through a number of speeches here and there, he seriously attacks his father. Sometimes, at the highest pitch of his emotion, he turns violently against him. In a mood of fury, he asks Joe:

Where do you live, where have you come from? ... what is that, the world - the business? What the hell do you mean, you did it for me? ... Don't you live in the world? ... You're not even an animal, no animal kills his own, what are you? What must I do to you? I ought to tear the tongue out of your mouth, what must I do?25

The hard and biting questions are challenges to Joe's identity, his social integrity. The tragic irony of the play is revealed when Joe Keller's hopes are opposed by his own sons, for whose welfare and prosperity he had been tirelessly working. As such, both his sons, whom he loved more than all the world, become the agents of his punishment. Larry's deliberate suicide is a kind of revenge upon his father.

Chris is a man whose sense of relatedness and responsibility to others makes his father's guilt totally contemptible to him. While Joe cannot see beyond his family's dining-room table, Chris feels a sense of unity with the world. Each realises his identity in his own way in terms of the values each cherishes. In the character of Chris, Miller seems to have been charmed by a figure - a maturing individual (a New-man) who proclaims, in abstract terms, the interdependence of all men. The agony of Chris is a dominating feature of the play.

The treatment of the theme of father-son relationship in *All My Sons* not only reveals this aspect of conflict between the father and the son, but also deals with the affection they have for each other in spite


of their antagonism. According to William J. Newman:

The relationship of the American father and son and of both to the American family in the American situation provides Miller, not with his themes, but with the raw material of tensions and conflicts between human beings. 28

In the play, we see that Chris, after all, is attached to his parents, and his love for his father is reciprocally intense. Keller, in fact, has worked all his life for his sons. With Larry gone, his hopes rest completely in Chris. “I’m thinking of Chris,” says Keller. His need to leave his life’s effort as a legacy to his son anticipates a similarly intense and false desire in Miller’s central character Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman. With Keller, Chris’s participation in the family business is all that keeps the older man from being a murderer. Joe Keller expresses Miller’s idea of the father-son relationship when he exclaims, “I’m his father and he’s my son. Nothing is bigger than that” (C.P. p. 120). Chris is heir to his parents’ principles and morality, yet, being an honest man and an idealist, he can believe only in the purity of his father’s behaviour. 29 He thinks his father is “a great guy.” He promises his mother that he will “protect” them against George Deever’s attacks. However, Chris’s devotion to his father is based on his assumption that “the man is innocent.”


He could not love a guilty father, not out of moral fastidiousness but out of self-love. Chris knows things which Joe cannot know, and yet he remains his father's son.

Chris's love and affection for his father suddenly gives in to a feeling of repentence and remorse when he realises the hidden self of his father was so different from his image as a father whom he passionately loved:

... but I thought you were better, I never saw you as a man. I saw you as my father. I can't look at you this way, I can't look at myself.

Obviously, the son had not seen the true identity of his father. At the end of the play, a heartfelt cry arising out of a son's love for his father, is heard. When Chris sees his father at the critical moment of the latter's suicide, he shouts (almost crying):

Mother, I didn't mean to.

The more aware mother who might have seen and known her husband better tries to console her son. Feeling a sense of intense frustration and helplessness of her son Chris, she pacifies him thus:

Don't dear. Don't take it on yourself.

Forget now. Live.

32. C.P., p. 127.
33. Ibid.
The situation here shows the mother’s identity as a greater human being than her husband or either of her sons. She displays a benevolent attitude toward her son, Chris, who has truly suffered a deep mental anguish. But the mother does not go through any identity crisis on this account. She reconciles herself to the situation before or after Joe’s death.

A tragic aspect of the play emerges out of an inner conflict between the affection and loyalty Chris had for his father, and his concept of justice and universal brotherhood which the father strongly opposed. Herein lies the importance of this theme of human conflict. What then gives Chris his distinct identity is the image of himself he establishes in the process. His love of Joe as his father must ultimately give way to his recognition of Joe as a social fraud or criminal; the conflict between personal love and social justice must get resolved through recognition of justice as a higher value; the limited familial father-son relationship must become subordinate to the wider, societal ideal of universal love and brotherhood.

Miller was an avid, militant, eager and articulate defender of the “social play.” A social play, in his views, 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; and, finally, addresses itself to the question, "how are we to live?" in a social and humanistic sense. Expressing his basic attitude toward the role of social forces in drama, Miller observed:

... society is inside man and man is inside society, and you cannot even create a truthfully drawn psychological entity on the stage until you understand his social relations and their power to make him what he is and to prevent him from being what he is not ...

Work alienation is actually a sub-theme in Miller's overall treatment of the alienation of contemporary man from his community or the relatedness to others. According to him, it is the tragedy of the industrial world that the fundamental idea of community has faded, weakened, and the humanistic links between man and man have been severely disjointed. Miller thinks this theme of the struggle between "family relations" and "social relations" as a real concern of all great plays. In sociology, it is, again, a struggle between community and social values. Miller asks:

How may a man make of the outside world a home? How and in what ways must he struggle, what must he strive to change and overcome within himself and outside himself? ...


It is not surprising that in his writings Miller has often stressed the importance of work as a factor in shaping the lives and personalities of his characters. In *All My Sons*, the guilty consciousness of the wartime profiteer is interpreted in terms of sociological categories of work alienation. In a brilliant study of the realistic social vision in Miller's tragedies, Raymond Williams has observed that Joe Keller's consciousness of alienation is essentially derived from the false values of his society. Joe’s ideology was, in one sense, created for him by the callous business world of which he was a part.

Joe Keller, a central figure in the play, has a narrow moral perspective. He is not a selfish, disagreeable or greedy industrialist. But he is really an ignorant, good-natured and kindly fool whose love for his wife and family is genuine and unselfish. Yet, he is deeply anti-social, alienated both from his work and from the larger society around him. Keller's alienation is the consequence of a fundamental deficiency in his character. This weakness constitutes a serious tragic flaw bringing about his ultimate fall. Miller, in his most explicit statement of his belief in the importance of work to men, has remarked:

... what do these people do for a living? When do they work? I remember asking the same questions about the few plays I saw.


The sense of alienation from society has created in Joe a self-image within his mind which makes him unaware and uncaring of his social identity or relatedness to his society outside his family. Miller's plays often seem to treat, directly or indirectly, the theme of work-alienation. As Blumberg remarks:

This type of alienation, dramatically presented in *All My Sons*, represents an anti-social closing-off of responsibility, an emphatic rejection of *Gemeinschaft* relationships, of community, of unrelatedness or feelings of solidarity with others in society.39

It is not surprising, then, that the arena of work, of job, of career, becomes a central focus for Miller, and that within the purview of this arena, he attempted to dramatize the malaise and alienation of contemporary man. Joe Keller's character as portrayed in *All My Sons* is a glaring example of this kind.

Does one have a social identity if one had all the success and all the wealth? This might also have been at the back of Joe Keller's mind because of the ethos of the society. The problem of money-ethos and sense of morality is another important feature of *All My Sons*. Society

is ruled by material values alone. The answer that the play gives to this question is in the affirmation that money and success do not go hand in hand with moral values. According to Robert Hogan, Miller’s attempt in the play is

   to give to an individual man, from the workings of society, his reason for existence, his personal significance and his morality.  

In fact, Miller’s achievement as a major modern playwright is the result of his deep concern with social problems and moral responsibility. The impact of the Depression made Miller conscious of the debilitating force of society on the individual. It taught him that the capitalistic order of society was inherently weak and that it was this order which prompted the money-ethos. The defects of the capitalistic order and the lamentable effect of the money-ethos are noticeable in All My Sons. Joe Keller is money-oriented and it makes him sell faulty engines for the air force and ultimately makes him commit suicide.

In plays which belong to the first half of Miller’s career, society is basically seen to be an image-making machine and the individual or the main character in the plays, is made either to accept or militantly disown the false images which society forces upon him. In All My Sons, Joe

Keller, like Willy Loman, is a pathetic victim of the ethos of American capitalism. Likewise, Joe’s values are derived from his social environment and that his crime had its roots in the individualistic morality of American capitalism. Expressing his view of the social condition, Miller says:

Joe Keller is arraigned by his son for a willfully unethical use of his economic position; and this ... bespeaks an assumption that the norm of capitalist behaviour is ethical or at least can be an assumption no Marxist can hold.41

In All My Sons, Joe Keller’s amoral individualism is set against a different sort of morality. In fact, the playwright has presented a disillusioned and somewhat self-righteous youngman who possesses a sense of revolt against the unethical influence of the prevalent social values. George, who has suffered from his father’s disgrace, is also a frustrated dreamer. The grim business scandal involving his father reveals to him something of the inhuman operations of the profit-seeking business world. The burden of this accusation is echoed in some of Chris’s moralistic speeches, especially in his extended outburst in Act III where he characterizes the American society as a lawless “jungle”. George, Larry and Chris brought something positive out of the war — an idea of solidarity and human brotherhood.

In the play, Miller uses the heroic ideal of the American soldier as a frame of reference in judging and condemning certain features of civilian morality. It is not merely the guilty conscience of a small manufacturer which is presented for trial. By extension and implication, the very belief-structure of the whole society is exposed and ridiculed. Larry’s suicide was, no doubt, a token gesture of protest hurled in the face of a society which puts self-interest and efficiency above an elementary conception of human responsibility and an acute sense of morality. The attitudes and experiences of Jim, George and Larry reinforce the standpoint of Chris who articulates towards the end of the play with much didactic eloquence the message of universal brotherhood. As Chris says:

You can be better? Once and for all you can know there’s a universe of people outside and you’re responsible to it....

In All My Sons, Miller has tried to establish the communal context from which his examination of individual morality springs. Joe Keller has adopted an unethical profit-making practice in his business during the war to protect the economic basis of the family. However, his corruption turns his son against him and destroys the family.

42. C.P., p. 126.
In Miller's plays, the problem of identity is a paramount theme which emerges out of the other themes such as guilt and punishment, father-son conflict, morality and responsibility, money-ethos, etc. It is evident that Joe Keller, Willy Loman, John Proctor, and Eddie Carbone are alike who are really caught up in the problem of identity and their deaths are caused by their lack of self-understanding. In every case this blindness is in a large measure due to their failure to resolve the question of identity at an earlier and more appropriate time in life.

In fact, each of Miller's early plays from *All My Sons* to *A View from the Bridge*, is a judgement of a man's failure to maintain a viable connection with his surrounding world because he does not know himself or his own identity. The playwright makes this very clear in his introduction to *The Collected Plays* where he comments on Joe Keller's failure in *All My Sons* as follows:

Joe Keller's trouble, in a word, is not that he cannot tell right from wrong, but that his cast of mind cannot admit that he, personally has any viable connection with his world, his universe, or his society.\(^{43}\)

His roles as husband and father are of great importance to him, and yet he fails miserably in both. He wants to love and be loved, but he is incapable of either giving or receiving love. He is always haunted by

\(^{43}\) C.P., p. 19.
aspirations toward a joy in life that his humdrum spirit is quite unable to realize. Joe fails to maintain his role within the established social structure while struggling for his good 'name'. For Miller, the crucial need of his male characters is to recognize that radical change is possible — not so much restructuring society as by modifying one's approach to life. There is a crucial need for an identity which can be embraced with pride and can also be defined by actions wilfully undertaken. It is the same need which unmakes the apparently confident world of Joe Keller. He fondly pursues a limited, family-centred dream. The tragedy occurs when he blindly adheres to this dream and fails to recognize his place in society — that is, his social identity. Joe forgets that he is an integral part of the society he lives in. He thinks that he can prosper unmindful of what happens to others. He betrays his neighbour Steve Deever which amounts to betrayal of his community in the larger social context. In his myopic vision, Joe is genuinely unable to foresee the public consequences of his private act. In a sense, he has made a wrong approach to life. He has always believed in the family as an autonomous entity and as the highest

principle. He cannot see beyond his sons and his own family. He claims:

Nothing's 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. 45

As a dramatist, Miller concentrates on a single subject - the struggle of the individual attempting to gain his "rightful" position in his society and in his family. His main characters are always motivated by an obsession to justify themselves. They fix their identities through radical acts of ego-assertion. Fanatical self-assertion is to be disfavoured. According to Miller, it may bring an individual into violent opposition with his society. In All My Sons, Joe Keller adopts a popular standard but becomes estranged from both family and society because of his uncompromising self-will. The "identity" he moulds within the intimate bounds of his family must be tried in an inhospitable world. Yet Joe Keller does not show any awareness of other people as separate identities.

Miller's central characters in his plays are involved in a voyage of discovery of their identity in a post-lapsarian world devoid of all significance, all values. And even though they meet their doom, they frequently acquire an awareness that makes the actions of their lives worthwhile. The awareness is of their own frailty, the imperfection of

45. C.P., p. 120.
the world around them and the futility of existence in the make-believe world of innocence, love and truth.\textsuperscript{46} For Joe there is no society and “the business” is “the world”. While defending himself against his past crime to his son Chris he repeatedly says:

\begin{quote}
You’re a boy, what could I do ! I’m in business, a man is in business... You’re out of business; you got a process, the process don’t work you’re out of business ...\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

Thus, it shows the overwhelming emphasis of Keller on business. It has also an impact on his self identity to become a successful businessman at all costs whatever the result may be. His world is bounded by the picket fence that encloses the suburban backyard in which the play takes place. His commitments and allegiances do not extend beyond its boundaries. He is an engaged man, but not to man or to men, only to his family and more precisely to his sons. When he is revealed to his son as corrupt, he gives out a painful cry:

\begin{quote}
Nothin’ is bigger ... (desperately, lost). For you, Kate, for both of you, that’s all I ever lived for.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{46} Alma Ram,(ed), \textit{Perspectives on Arthur Miller}, op. cit., pp.4-5.
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{C.P.}, p. 115.
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{C.P.}, pp.120-21.
To Joe, a father is a father and a son is a son. He in fact, did that
holding that belief all along when he shipped out the faulty plane parts:
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? Sixty-one years old you don't get another chance, do ya? 49

In All My Sons, we see that the private guilt of the individual is
matched against the larger social evil. Social pressures from the outside
world work upon Joe Keller and make him do what he does. He is a
product of that society ruled by the ethics of success. His mind and
psychology are shaped and distorted by the capitalistic economic
system. The chief motivating force behind his shortsightedness is the
success-code of the society which he thoughtlessly follows. Anticipating
Willy Loman Joe Keller goes to his death deluded. He dies in the name
of his delusion. Joe Keller sees his self-identity in his son Chris to
whom he keeps his father-image and all his hopes. He tells Chris:

I want a clean start for you, Chris. I want a new sign over the plant -
Christopher Keller, Incorporated.... I'm going to build you a house,
stone, with a driveway from the road. I want you to spread out, Chris.
I want you to use what I made for you. 50

49. C.P., p. 115.
50. C.P., p. 87.
In the beginning of the Second Act we can mark how Keller justifies his action in the eyes of his son Chris. As he tells Ann:

I want you to understand me. I'm thinking of Chris. See ... this is what I mean. You get older, you want to feel that you - accomplished something. My only accomplishment is my son. I ain't brainy. That's all I accomplished. 51

Hence, he kills himself so that Chris need not kill himself again. Thus, within the structure of a family drama, Miller raises larger social issues and significant questions of man's problem of identity, choice, responsibility, justice and morality. The play leaps out of the family structure and deals with man's place and his role in society which can be summed up in Miller's own words: "how men ought to live." Above all, All My Sons is a study of morality in the contemporary American money-ethos. Joe Keller is a little man with a limited vision caught in the web of the values of a society which is given to worshipping worldly success. The respect which he craves for is not so much his own as his society's, and the self which he seeks for must be endorsed by his neighbours who constitute the outer world, the society. Joe does not possess this awareness and so he meets with his tragic doom at the end. The attitudes and experiences of Jim, George and

51. C.P., pp. 96-97
Larry reinforce the message of universal fraternity outside the society.

As Chris tells his mother:

\[
\text{You can be better? Once and for all you can know there's a universe of people outside and you're responsible to it.}^{52}
\]

Obviously Chris reinforces the idea of the need for maintaining one's identity vis-a-vis his society and the world. One cannot keep on living with a sort of narrow limited conception of the self-image alienated from the world outside, the larger society. To realise and adjust one's identity is to realise and adjust one's values within the scale of the universal values. The psychological need of the protagonist to uphold his image in the society to which he belongs is reinforced and the same need re-emerges with a redoubled vigour in Miller's next most important and acclaimed dramatic work *Death of a Salesman*, which will be examined in the pages that follow.

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52. C.P., p.126.
DEATH OF A SALESMAN (1949)

I

The play had two most significant productions. The original was opened at the Morosco Theatre in New York City on February 10, 1949 and it was directed by Elia Kazan. The second production of the play on Broadway on March 29, 1984 was directed by Michael Rudman. It also had its first London production on July 28, 1949 directed by Elia Kazan. Besides, Arthur Miller himself produced the play on May 7, 1983 in Beijing, China. In 1965, the play was a major success in France. Most of the reviewers described Death of a Salesman as Kazan’s greatest achievement in his direction. Harold Clurman cited the production as “an example of real theatre: meaning and means unified by fine purpose”.¹ The play won for the author the prestigious New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize. It struck at the heart of the post-World War II American preoccupation with success and money, home and family. The play has been described as a great success of the American stage, and ran on Broadway for 742 performances. To many viewers, it seemed to be a most meaningful and moving statement made about American life upon the stage, and it is still generally considered as Miller’s masterpiece. Since the production of the play, Miller came to be regarded as a serious American playwright.

Each new play by Miller has always been a surprise when it is related to what had preceded. It is evident in his next and most successful play, *Death of a Salesman*. In both the plays - *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* - Miller refers to the archetypal Edenic situation. He focuses attention on the father, the mythical symbol of authority and makes him the source of guilt. Moreover, his idea of the individual's identity as a person of integrity responsible to society also extends to *Death of a Salesman*. The writing of this play marked a significant development in Miller's artistic career. It also marks a shift from his emphasis on "what ought to be" to "what is".  

In *All My Sons*, Miller's first important play, the protagonist's fall from dignity comes about in the style of Ibsen. He now focuses on depicting one character's attempt to recall facts from his memory. The past thus portrayed in *Death of a Salesman* is bounded on all sides by the mind and imagination of Willy Loman. It marks an advance on Miller's earlier works in terms of its technical sophistication.

Originally entitled, *The Inside of His Head*, the play features a protagonist who can no longer distinguish between memory, imagination, reality and desire. It is, in one sense, a modern tragedy in

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which the main character is preoccupied with maintaining an illusion of success in business and society. It is also one of the successful attempts made at writing a tragedy in the twentieth century, a tragedy with "an unheroic hero."\(^3\) Now widely known and admired, this play is perhaps a fine example in modern literature of the tragedy of a self-glorifying man duped "by the false values of contemporary society."\(^4\) Willy Loman's values are the values of contemporary American society. His downfall may be attributed to his personal failure and to the failure of the values themselves. Willy's death is the "death of an ideology, the death of a set of values by which salesman lives and which no longer function in our present society."\(^5\) The *Death of a Salesman* is a drama of American life, of the deficient American dream of money success. The theme of the collapse of the great American dream is presented through the tragedy of Willy Loman who fails to realise his dream of identity as a successful salesman entirely contented.

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The *Death of a Salesman* is the story of an ageing salesman who lives in a materialistic society. The play begins with Willy Loman returning from an aborted sales trip to New England. When he first enters, it is found that there is something wrong with him. He cannot drive steadily. He seems exhausted and fatigued as he tells his wife Linda, "I'm tired to the death ... I couldn't make it. I just couldn't make it, Linda" (C.P., p.131). The scene between their sons Biff and Happy in their bedroom sounds a contrast to the scene between Willy and Linda in the kitchen. This shows that Willy is nearing a nervous break-down. The real action of the play takes place in the several reveries that consume Willy at critical moments. In his reveries, the set becomes imaginary, with Willy recreating moments that took place in the Loman home, backyard and in a hotel room in Boston. It brings in his brother Ben and the woman with whom he had an affair.

Willy slips into the past whenever he is confronted with a serious crisis which he is unable to solve. He represents the culture of the business world. As such, he constantly injects the same into his sons' mind. He advises his son Biff that "the man who makes an appearance in the business world, ... is the man who gets ahead" (C.P., p. 146). Inspite of his idea of Biff as a man of spirit and personality, there is an
estrangement between the father and the son. Willy cannot remain in
conversation with Biff for a moment without a quarrel. As against the
views of his father Biff is more likely to “find himself” by working on a
farm than working in business. Yet none of the sons understands the
crisis of their old father. Only Linda knows Willy’s dilemma and she
warns Biff:

Willy Loman never made a lot of money ... He’s not the finest
character that ever lived. But he’s a human being, and a terrible thing
is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He’s not to be
allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog... The man is
exhausted.6

The first Act ends on a note of hope and encouragement as Willy and
Linda decide that in the morning he will ask Howard Wagner for a
transfer to New York. Willy says, “First thing in the morning.
Everything’ll be all right” (C.P., p.171).

As the action progresses, it moves towards its climax in two
specific scenes -- the one in Howard’s office and the other in Boston.
The second Act starts with Willy holding great expectations for himself
and his sons. His new optimism is reflected in his cheerful suggestion
of buying a place in the country where he will raise vegetables. He

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confidently tells Linda:

You wait, kid, before it's all over we're gonna get a little place out in the country and I'll raise some vegetables, a couple of chickens...\(^7\)

In his anticipation that he will get an advance from Howard, he exclaims, "I will never get behind a wheel the rest of my life" (\textit{C.P.}, p. 175). Willy is still struggling as a salesman and he is trying to regain his lost image i.e. his identity. The crucial scene with Howard epitomises his whole struggle on the social level. He tells his employer:

I put thirty four years into this farm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance! You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away -- a man is not a piece of fruit.\(^8\)

The whole struggle of Willy for survival reveals the anguish and suffering of his heart. But the callousness of industrial society cuts right across Willy's dream world. Howard is more interested in the recorded voices of his son, daughter and wife than in Willy's talks. Against his hopes, Howard immediately fires Willy, "I don't want you to represent us, I've been meaning to tell you for long time now" (\textit{C.P.}, p.182).

\(^7\) \textit{C.P.}, p. 174.  
\(^8\) \textit{C.P.}, p. 181.
The action builds up to its dramatic climax in the Boston scene. Willy meets his two sons, Biff and Happy, in the restaurant in Boston. Biff discovers his father with a half-clothed woman in a room of the Boston hotel and thus his faith in his father is shattered. He leaves crying and calls Willy, "You phoney little fake" (C.P., p 208). Willy feels guilty and thinks that Biff hates him for it. He struggles desperately to get back his image as a loving and responsible father. The tragic tension reaches its climax in the last scene of the play when Biff makes a determined attempt to make his father face the "facts". He tells Willy, "We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house" (C.P., p.216). The moment of tragic awareness is reached when Willy discovers that he is loved by Biff. He finds his existence and his fatherhood restored to him. He finally decides to sacrifice his life for Biff's success. So, in one last attempt to help his son, Willy deliberately crashes his car to end his life so that Biff might start his new life with the insurance money. Thus the play ends with Willy’s sacrifice of life for the supreme passion of love.

The structure of the play shows Miller’s initial departure from severe realism. It is only when time past and time present coalesce that the moment of decision is reached. The Death of a Salesman is a criticism of the moral and social standards of contemporary America.
And it also presents Willy as a victim of the deterioration of the "American Dream," the belief in a totally free individualism. Eleanor Clark views it as "an attack on Capitalism." Harold Clurman, further, remarks that the death of Miller's Salesman is "symbolic of the breakdown of the whole concept of salesmanship inherent in our society." Willy Loman is the travelling salesman who dreams of material success through being "well-liked," corrupts everything he touches and meets with failure on every front. The entire action is confined to the last one day of the salesman's life. As shown in all the plays of Miller's first period (including *All My Sons*), the central conflict in *Death of a Salesman* really grows out of a crisis of identity. This problem is more or less related with the other important themes in the play. In short, the main significance of the play lies in its analysis of American value system. Miller tries to expose the truth about men and women, their existence, their society, their vision and also the values that govern their conduct and outlook on life.

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The *Death of a Salesman* which established Miller as a leading contemporary dramatist, projects the ideal of American industrial society which was distorted by the agonising effects of the Great Depression. The value of the play lies in the fact that it states its themes with penetrating clarity in our era of troubled complacency.\(^{11}\) The dramatist gives us a true picture of living America. He disapproves of contemporary American ethos for its characteristic valuelessness and makes an indirect plea for the evocation of values. The play is a challenge to Americanism inasmuch as it challenges the validity of the materialistic idea of success. In fact, the play criticises the social system which generates dreams and delusions and drives Willy Loman to sacrifice himself upon the altar of competitive economy with which he is unable to keep pace. Primarily the play deals with the myth of success in America. Willy Loman's fidelity to the great American dream of success is the very heart of the conflict in the drama.

Willy wants success, but the meaning of that need extends beyond the accumulation of wealth, security, goods, and status. His dreams may be false, but they are also interlinked with the American

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dream. Miller, in an interview, remarked that "the trouble with Willy Loman is that he has tremendously powerful ideals."12 Willy's idea of success in life is intimately confined to the welfare and well-being of his own family. He views success as a necessary consequence of making friendships, influencing people, being impressive, being persuasive and being "well-liked" (C.P., p. 146). Willy's dream occupies half the play. Absorbed in dilating on his dream sequences, Willy cannot differentiate between truth and fantasy, or between the present and the past. In the words of C.W.E Bigsby:

This play is concerned with highlighting the absurdity of a society which frenetically pursues the goals of dream and illusion in preference to confronting a reality which is cold and unattractive.13

The entire play is built around the point of view of Willy Loman, and in one sense Willy's mind is itself the stage. By so doing, his individuality is distinctively defined. When the play starts the life's struggle is behind him; he has exhausted or emptied himself through long years of futile search for personal success. As Robert Hogan


rightly remarks:

Willy is the modern man who has accepted wholeheartedly the twentieth century version of the American dream.\textsuperscript{14}

The success myth is not concealed under the surface of the action; it is used by the playwright for building the plot structure, in portraying the hero and in arranging the events of the action. Willy is shaped by a society that believes in the myth of success. As such he is both the agent and the representative of that society. It has offered him a set of values and an objective, and Willy has committed himself to those values and objective. In so accepting, he becomes the 'salesman.' His true identity as a salesman can be traced back to his father when he asks his brother Ben:

Willy: Ben! Please tell about Dad. I want my boys to hear. I want them to know the kind of stock they spring from. All I remember is a man with a big beard and I was in Mamma's lap, sitting around a fire, and some kind of high music.

Ben: His flute. He played the flute.

Willy: Sure, the flute, that's right!

Ben: Father was a very great and a very wild-hearted man, we would start in Boston, and he'd toss the whole family into the wagon, and then he'd drive the team right across the country; through Ohio, and Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and all the Western states. 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 in a week than a man like you could make in a lifetime.

\textsuperscript{14} Robert Hogan, \textit{Arthur Miller}, op.cit., p. 21.
Willy: That's just the way I'm bringing them up, Ben - rugged, well-liked, all around.\textsuperscript{15}

The extract clearly shows that Willy traces his own identity not only to the image of his father but also that of his sons.

Willy cannot define himself in any other terms. So, he insists in his debate with Charley that he has "a job," and that he is the "New England man" even after he has been fired by Howard. The society portrayed in \textit{Death of a Salesman} is clearly a visualisation of the American Dream. Willy thinks that his son Biff must succeed in "the greatest country in the world," because he is "a young man with such personal attractiveness" (\textit{C.P.}, p. 134).

The salesman motif as well as the idea of success is, in its essence, an American motif. Willy himself is a highly ambitious salesman who wants to be on top of the world. All through his life he has been struggling to push up his sales. He envies the great success of his brother Ben whom Willy calls a real romantic image of success. He originates from an idealised past and exemplifies another type of American dream which is chiefly embodied in Willy. Ben is the ruthless

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{C.P.}, p. 157.
baron of industry, who succeeds by following the law of the 'jungle'. He symbolises the American dream of success in the adventurous exploration of undiscovered territories laden with gold and diamonds. Uncle Ben possesses the precious key to success. He confesses his success story thus:

When I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. And by God I was rich.\(^{16}\)

Ben seems less "real" than the others because he is not so much a person as the embodiment of Willy's desire for escape and success. Willy, indeed, calls him "success incarnate." Willy's tragedy consists in his belief in an empty dream. The pursuit of this dream of success has distorted his vision and flawed his concept of morality.\(^{17}\)

In fact, the money-ethos and the materialistic ideal of success in American society are suggested through Ben, who went into the forest and came out rich. This ideal of success is also represented by Dave Singleman, the eighty-four year old successful salesman. For Willy, "selling was the greatest career a man could want." (C.P., p. 180) As a consequence, the salesman-image has certainly had a decisive impact on Willy's life. His idea of the dream of success (as a salesman) is hinted

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at in his estimate of the old Dave-Singleman, who died "the death of a salesman, in his green velvet slippers in the smoker of New York, New Haven and Hartford, going into Boston." (C.P., p.180). In his idea of a salesman, Willy has adopted the business polity of Singleman and he desires to become what Singleman was. In fact, Willy views his true identity as a salesman after the image of Dave Singleman who died successfully in his life. As Willy tells Howard Wagner, his young master:

And old Dave, he'd go up to his room, y'understand, put on green velvet slippers - I'll never forget - 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. And when I saw that, I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want. 'Cause what could be more satisfying than to be able to go, at the age of eighty four, into twenty or thirty different cities, and pick up a phone, and be remembered and loved and helped by so many different people?  

Biff too is Willy's idea of success which, at last, turns into a failure.

Willy wanted to impart the success ideals of Ben and the old Singleman to his sons to make the name 'Loman' live forever. Any average man belonging to the middle class residing in any country or

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region cherishes such a dream, and wants to give a good education to his children and ensure a successful life them. Willy’s commitment to the success myth certainly influenced the education of his sons. Even if he could not achieve success in his lifetime yet he might still look forward to its achievement by his sons which would perhaps vindicate his life-struggle. They have been brought up to respect the success ideology, and their success will consist in vindicating the salesman’s ideals. Throughout his life, Willy’s ceaseless effort is toward projecting an inflated image of himself to impress upon his sons. There is no doubt a wide gap between his ambition and its non-fulfilment. Willy dreams of his son Biff being not a mortal but “Like a young god Hercules -- something like that. And the sun, the sun all around him” (C.P., p.171). But the reality turns out to be the opposite of his dreams. His dream is just the opposite of the practical reality. Biff finally proves to be an utter failure while Bernard whom Willy considered a “pest” and an “anaemic,” proves to be a success. Biff confesses his failure though at a late stage, and realises that his father had wrong ideas. As he says:

Pop, I’m nothing ! I’m nothing, Pop. Can’t you understand that ?
There’s no spite in it any more. I’m just what I am, that’s all.20

Again, in the Requiem while commenting on Willy's 'phony dream' Biff says:

He had the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong...
He never knew who he was.21

Like any parent and businessman in this transitional phase, Willy Loman's fault is that he is unable to move with the prevailing situation around him. He is a victim of two enemies: time and his fanaticism. His brother Ben warns him to adjust himself to the changed circumstances. He says, "Time, William, time! ..The boat. We'll be late" (C.P., p.219) Yet, unable to cope with reality and incapable of compromises, Willy takes his life so tragically. His guilt is that he is not true to himself and he fails to discern his own identity. Alan S. Downer has rightly observed that

he has deliberately chosen the wrong goal, and as a consequence, has ever imperfectly known himself.22

Willy's readiness to die for the sake of his dream affirms the fact that he could never awaken himself to the fact of man's vulnerability. He wanted to keep up the show by taking resort to false dreaming. Though himself an "average man," he wishes to be ahead of Charley and

22. Alan S. Downer, Recent American Drama, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1961, p. 35.
Bernard, and even forces his sons to make wrong choices. His thinking becomes cloudy till it leads him to self-destruction. Allan Lewis has pointed out that

Willy Loman, the most convinced devotee of success and the likeable personality, to whom all human values are saleable, awakens to the emptiness of his dreams.\(^{23}\)

In fact, Willy’s failure shows that man’s sense of identity is in a state of crisis because he has become severely a commodity in the American business milieu. Biff tells Willy that people like them sell ‘a dime a dozen,’ (C.P., p. 217). This is, of course, a bitter reflection on the vanity of man in contemporary American ethos. Morris Freedman has aptly observed that

*Death of a Salesman* is an account of the disintegration of an American family ... the husband suffers from a peculiarly deluding form of the American dream.\(^{24}\)

The success myth has so bugged and deluded his mind that he has lost his identity as an individual and as a social person.


The play, on the whole, vividly describes the myth of America whose dreams and illusions lead to Willy's ruin as a salesman, husband, father and his ultimately as a man. As Richard Watts succinctly observes:

Willy Loman's real tragedy was not his failure in business or his discovery of the arrival of old age, but his surrender to false ideas of success. 25

In fact, Willy, the hero of the play, becomes the embodiment of typicality. He carries his status in his name of Willy, meaning the low man. Furthermore, the salesman is the most representative member of a commercial society. In a sense, when the salesman dies, this society too dies. Every kind of evidence points to the symbolic reading of the salesman's role. At its core, the Death of a Salesman is a play about the destructive nature of dreams which delude the contemporary man into thinking of himself as a non-entity, as a nameless individual and as one who faces or is passing through a crisis of identity, and frantically struggles to regain that identity.

The problem of father-son relationship that recurs in Miller's plays also appears in Death of a Salesman as a prominent theme. The play is, indeed, built around the relationship between Willy and his son Biff. Here, the relationship between father and son is a crucial one

because it focuses on the question of inherited values and assumptions and dramatises deferred hopes and ideals. Besides, it also highlights the contrast between youthful aspirations and subsequent compromises and frustrations. C.W.E. Bigsby has rightly observed that

the son's identity depends on creating a boundary between himself and his father, on perceiving himself outside the social lines which had defined the father's world. 26

As a matter of fact, the substance of Miller's plays is based on a particular American experience. In each of his plays, the central situation centres around the child - father relationship in which the growing child is inclined to assert his identity by breaking loose from the family or engaging himself in conflict with parents. The conflict between the child and the father takes place in terms of the wider world where the child attempts to assert his identity by throwing away the protective care which the father used to provide to safeguard him and the family. 27

In so far as the family relationship among its members is concerned the Death of a Salesman is a symbol for the wider context of

contemporary American ethos. The Loman family represents the microcosm of the American society and also the modern world. The family presents a picture of tensions and strained relations. Neil Carson says:

... the work concentrates on family relationships and especially on the conflicts between parents and sons.\(^{28}\)

The boys Biff and Happy are inclined to side with their mother in the family quarrels. The quarrels arising out of the relationship between Biff and Willy annoy Willy’s wife, Linda. As for instance, she, at one stage, tells her son Biff:

You’ve got to make up your mind now, ... Either he’s your father and you pay him that respect, or else you’re not to come here (the family house in New York).\(^{29}\)

It clearly shows that Linda’s desire is to restore peace in the family, even if it means keeping the father and the son away from each other to avoid family feuds. Biff is completely disillusioned with his father and He is not even prepared to forgive him. He remarks, “He (Willy) had the

\(^{28}\) Neil Carson, "Death of a Salesman," \textit{Arthur Miller}, op.cit., p. 49.

\(^{29}\) C.P., p.162.
wrong dreams. All, all, wrong." (C.P., p. 221). Thus, the reference to illusion and the atmosphere of tension in the Loman family are significant in that they affect their society too as the family is a part of the society.

Willy is a son as well as a father. Insecure from childhood, when his father abandoned the family, he always felt "kind of temporary" (C.P., p. 159) about himself. Thus, he is over-supportive of his older son, Biff. Willy's problems as a father have been inherited, and so they must be inherited by his sons too. As Neil Carson points out, his problems are

a direct result of his own deprivation as a son, and it is part of the richness of Death of a Salesman that its perspective encompasses three generations. 30

In fact, Willy's failure to come to terms with his own father cripples him as a father in his turn. Deprived of affection as a child, he smothered his own sons with love, and oppresses them with the nakedness of his hopes for their success. With his full confidence and hopes Willy encourages his two sons, Biff and Happy, with new inspirations. He

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says:

Lick the world! You guys together could absolutely lick the civilized world... I see great things for you kids, I think your troubles are over. But remember, start big and you'll end big.\(^{31}\)

Thus, distortion of sense of family is one of the implications as described in *Death of a Salesman*. Willy Loman pursues - the false, spurious values of a commercialized society by which he believes he can advance the position of his family's well-being as he conceives it.\(^{32}\)

The sense of identity of the protagonist Loman is dependent upon his strong devotion to his family. If the family feeling is disturbed the father looks like a lost man, a man without identity. The theme of father-son relationship in *Death of a Salesman* can be interpreted as a sort of mental conflict in a maturing son who begins sensing the moral failure and even the general fallibility of his father. This, in one sense, is the resentment of a son against his father. Willy Loman and his two sons, Biff and Happy, do not suggest that the Loman family is a homogeneous family. Willy and Biff are particularly antagonistic towards each other.

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The intensity of this antagonism is indicated when Howard asks Willy a pertinent question:

Where are your sons? Why don't your sons give you a (helping) hand? \(^{33}\)

Another striking contrast between Willy and his sons is about their relationship with ladies. To Willy, the adultery which he commits in Boston is a kind of moral guilt and hence socially unapprovable. On the contrary, Happy and Biff are products of the permissive society and do not take sex to be a taboo. They talk between themselves freely about their affairs with girls.

But, this family conflict between father and son has larger social implications. Willy represents the culture of the business world. He constantly tries to inject the same into his sons' minds as well. Happy turns out to be a carbon copy of his father. But, Biff, being a football player, represents a more athletic, healthy and primitive culture. The conflict between Willy and Biff is not a usual kind of conflict between the father and the upcoming and maturing son. It is actually a conflict between two cultures — the urban and commercial culture on the one
hand and the pastoral and agrarian culture on the other. The *Death of Sal Modelo*, Miller's most important play, thus, repeats that archetypal plot in which a son also tries to develop his identity along the lines of his father, accepting some things, rejecting many other things he finds repugnant. Here the son looks to his father for moral direction, but finds corruption instead, and severs the bond of mutual respect. Harold Clurman fittingly remarks:

> the shock which shatters Miller's dramatic cosmos always begins with the father's inability to enact the role of moral authority the son assigns to him... Each bears a heavy burden of responsibility to the other. Both may be innocent, but both suffer guilt.\(^\text{34}\)

Thus the problem of identity arises as the father fails to enact the moral authority reposed in him by the family members, particularly his sons.

Miller uses the father-son conflict as the emotional nucleus of the play. The most important and significant aspect of this theme is reflected in the Boston episode. In fact, the hotel-room scene in Boston, which is at the root of the estrangement and conflict between Biff and his father, marks a significant turn of events within the structure of the

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play. The hotel scene, according to Bernard F. Dukore, clearly reveals Willy's guilt and the effects of its discovery on Biff, the answer revolves around the nature of the relationship between father and son, which is the central theme.35

This episode makes an adverse impact on the mind of Biff as it gives him a glimpse of the total make-up of Willy's personality. The ideal father - image in Biff's mind is completely shattered after the Boston scene. He discovers the moral and sexual transgression of Willy when he notices a half-naked woman coming out of his (Willy's) bathroom. Biff's idol of his father turns into the image of 'a phoney little fake.' (C.P., p.208) He sees the affair of Willy's adultery as a betrayal of Linda, the family and the home. The image of the husband and father is now broken when Willy gives the Woman "Mama's Stockings." (C.P., p. 208). But, at the height of his desperate feeling, Biff cries to his father:

Don't touch me, you - liar! ... You fake!

You phony little fake! You fake! \(^{36}\)


It signifies that Biff hates his father for his adultery. Willy does not understand Biff's resentment and thus, misconstrues it as his son's disapproval.

The tragic tension of the confrontation of father and son reaches its climax in the last scene of the play. Biff makes a determined attempt to make his father face the truth. He tells Willy:

There'll be no pity for you... No pity! You're going to hear the truth - what you are and what I am! ... We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house! 37

Willy is no longer both salesman and father. He is now "the man." As such, the identity supplied by economic and familial society "is stripped away and the issue is joined at rock bottom." 38 After the breach of trust, the father's sense of loss of respect in the son's eyes continues to haunt him and keep the conflict with his son alive in his mind. As Biff remarks:

he thinks I've been spiting him all these years and it's eating him up. 39

The father, on the other hand, as outraged as the son, wrongly reasserts his ethical authority. They run into tempers and, finally, Biff breaks
down, crying bitterly. He tells his father:

Pop, I'm nothing! I'm nothing, Pop. Can't you understand that? There's no spite in it any more. I'm just what I'm, that's all... Will you let me go, for Christ's sake? Will you take that phony dream and turn it before something happens?  

Then Willy makes a surprising remark as he says "Isn't that -- isn't that remarkable? Biff - he likes me!" (C.P., p. 218). The moment of tragic awakening comes when Willy discovers that Biff still loves him despite the former's failure. Both undergo a crisis of self-knowledge, and yet Willy Loman, unlike Joe Keller, refuses to admit failure. He continues unchecked his obsessive desire to attain personal fulfilment by molding his loyal and worthy son. On the other hand, he commits suicide not simply as an escape from shame but as a last attempt to re-establish his own self-confidence and identity, and his family's integrity. He cries in his last speech:

I always knew one way or another we were gonna make it,

Biff and I! That boy is going to be magnificent.  

Willy Loman's greatest and most immediate failure is not his failure to sell but his failure to realise his true identity as an individual, as a father and as a husband. Due to this failure which he wants to hide he does not want to surrender his moral authority as the father and as

41. C. P., p. 219.
the head of the family on which his sense of identity rests. As such, the
two principal characters in this play each desiring but thwarting the
other's well-being, comprise the two poles of an irreconcilable gap
between them. Thus, the play can be studied as a psychological drama
with strong Freudian colouring. In this play, the action is mainly
concentrated on family relationships and especially on the conflict
between father and sons which is essentially a conflict arising from their
maintaining individual identities. But their sense of identity is not based
on their moral values alone.

Miller's moral vision includes a sense of reality. Thematically,
the *Death of a Salesman* deals with the tension between the private
inner world of the protagonist and the world of external reality. Its
principal structural characteristic consists in the integration of dramatic
realism and expressionism. The original title of the play "The Inside of
His Head" is meaningful. Willy Loman is the product of a world which
is devoid of a sense of values. The central energy in *Death of a
Salesman* is derived from an exploration of a particular aspect of
twentieth century technological culture in which illusions take the place
of dreams and fantasy is substituted for reality.
The play evidences Miller’s remarkable grasp of contemporary life and issues. It penetrates the mythology of America whose illusions lead to Willy’s ruin as salesman, husband, father and his ultimate ruin as a man.42

The playwright, with his remarkable artistic perception, points out the hold of illusion on the minds of individuals and its disastrous consequences. In fact, one may not be very far from the truth if one describes the play as a dramatic exercise in tracing the roots of illusion to American culture. Willy Loman suffers from the flaw of living in illusions. His perception of the future of his sons is clouded by illusions. This is expressed in the following words of Willy:

Lick the world: you guys together could absolutely lick the civilized world.43

Indeed, Willy’s dreams about Biff’s career indicate the extent to which his thinking is coloured by these illusions. Abe Laufe has rightly observed that:

Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman, which is also the tragedy of an individual doomed by the world of illusion he has created, arouses a more active audience reaction.44

42. Atma Rana, (ed), Perspectives on Arthur Miller, op.cit., p. 60.
43. C.P., p. 168.
In the play, the conflicting inner selves that make up Willy Loman's many-sided personality clash with his experience of the outer world. The fantasies he indulges in defile his vision and distort his experiences of the world around him. As the action of the play develops, the connection between Willy's inner world and external reality grows increasingly weak and drives him to his suicide. This is the ultimate consequence of self-deception. He struggles to impose his fantasies upon the reality which consistently thwarts his ambitions and will. Willy's mind is filled with the conflict between his dreams and actuality, on the level of his personal existence. This conflict is objectified in the action through the conflict between fantasy and realism. It becomes a part of the dramatic structure. It is primarily from Willy's psychological perspective that the play's dramatic action derives its meaning. The actual events enacted in his presence provoke his recollections and fantasies which constitute the play's imaginative content. The significance of each of the episodes and the structure of the plot are determined by the rhythmic alternations between actuality and the protagonist's mental responses to them. His ideal self-image and the reality of his actual behaviour and circumstances are the poles of his inner existence. His dramatic interactions with the other characters of the play are also based on these two poles of the action. When reality becomes unbearable and disturbing Willy takes refuge in his world of recollections of the past and fantasies in which he fulfills his aspirations. "The set in Arthur Miller's play furnishes," says
Edward Murray, "a flexible medium in which to enact the process of Willy Loman’s way of mind."  

Willy’s ideal self-image is as fragmented as his real personality. His attention is frequently absorbed in an inner dialogue with a number of characters. His sons and friend Charley belong to the immediate and concrete reality whereas the other three figures - his father, brother Ben and Old Dave Singleman – come alive in his inner world. In fact, the characters that live through Willy’s imagination are the fruit and inspiration of this inner existence. They provide a focus for the clash of illusion and reality in both Willy himself and the other characters of the play. The former, three characters – Biff, Happy and Charley – function in the real world as embodiments of the ideal types in Willy’s consciousness. Indeed, the functions of all the principal characters of the play are determined by the operations of Willy’s mind, tempered by reality and illusory dreams. As a matter of fact, Willy’s memories bring together some of the contradictions between ideals and actualities that characterised this era (the era of the 1930’s) in the United States - contradiction between moral purity and self-indulgence, ‘rugged’ independence and sentimental gregariousness, grand optimism and nagging insecurity, noble generosity and petty vulgarity.

The sequence of the two episodes (the Boston Woman, and the restaurant scene), focuses on sexual relations. Thus, sexual infidelity can be traced to the conflict between illusion and reality. Critics have seen that the stage directions in the theatre signal and reinforce the recurrent visual and auditory effects. The scenic view of foliage and trees, and the sound of the flute or of soft music emphasise Willy's rural longings. The pulsating music and loud sounds are considered as accompanying Willy's erotic and savage "jungle" moods. The play is rich in ironies at every level. The overall impact of these auditory effects is immediately felt in the characters. Brooks Atkinson observed:

they (Willy and Biff) live in a world of golden illusion and they found on reality in the end.\footnote{47}

Willy's alternations between dreams and reality are plotted structurally in terms of a rhythmic development. As the plot of the play progresses, Willy's fantasies gradually assert their sway over his active moods. In his false make-believe he foretells about his funeral to Ben:

that funeral will be massive! They will come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire!.. that boy will be thunder struck, Ben, because he never realized - I am known! Rhode Island,

New York, New Jersey - I am known, Ben, and he'll see it with his eyes once and for all. He'll see what I am, Ben! He's in for a shock, that boy!48

This occurs in response to his frustration and failure to reinstate control over his circumstances in the real world. His conflicts within himself and with the external world are dramatically manipulated at various formal levels. The plot is structured according to these conflicting levels. The focus of the unifying rhythm of Death of a Salesman is the theme of the protagonist's loss of control over himself in the world which overwhelms him with its own unbearable pressures.

The authority of Death of a Salesman can be located in its masterful visualization of Willy's longing and failure to realise the object of his longing, culminating in his self-defeat. The only course left to him to recover his sanity and self-dignity so essential to establishing his identity is suicide. Willy, of course, lives and dies in illusion. The irony of his illusion at the end is crushing as he dies with the pleasant discovery that Biff really loved him and his suicide was an act of love for his son. In his illusion he thinks Biff would benefit to the extent of twenty thousand dollars, but he died with the illusion that

48. C.P., p. 213.
twenty thousand dollars would help Biff make himself and re-establish his family. Thus by his suicide Willy has at last paid a heavy price to affirm his identity.

The *Death of a Salesman* is a critical reflection on modern civilization. Miller tries to probe not only the hidden truths of an individual's experience but also the basic reality of the civilization and culture of which the individual is a part. The play presents existence of man as an individual vis-a-vis the society. Willy is an individual who is a part of the American society. As seen in the play from the very beginning the individual protagonist is doomed. In fact, his tragedy is interlinked with the socio-economic problems of the land. Some people think that the play is Miller's propaganda for socialism and capitalism. It is true that during his early life Miller expressed disturbing views on the established American capitalistic society. Besides, his plays seem often to consider, directly or indirectly, the theme of work-alienation.

Of course, one of the recurring themes in Miller's plays is the struggle for realization of primary values. Willy's world is dominated by secondary values, and is marked by isolation and privatization of life. The individual is alienated from his fellows. The clash between "family relations" and "social relations," as Miller calls them, finds its
most powerful dramatic expression in *Death of a Salesman* in Willy’s confrontation with his young boss, Howard. Being alienated, Willy, at last, exposes and ridicules the invincible doctrine of economic efficiency. In fact, this sort of work-alienation leads to a feeling of one’s self respect being lowered and also to a feeling of one’s self-hatred at one’s failure to achieve material success.

It is also possible to view the revolt against current civilization in *Death of a Salesman* from the socio-economic angle in terms of the conflict between socialism and capitalism. The *Death of a Salesman*, according to Neil Carson, is

> an indictment of the American capitalist system which values machines higher than man. The central scene takes place in Howard’s office where Willy’s pleading for his job and involving his human connection with Howard is cruelly juxtaposed with Howard’s indifferent insistence that ‘business is business’ ...

In Miller’s own view as expressed in his famous essay, “*Tragedy and the Common Man*,” Willy’s fall is 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 emphasises,

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particularly in the second part, the evils of the social and economic system. Besides, Miller was aware that the Depression had exposed the weaknesses of the capitalist system. He saw the Depression as a consequence of the failure of capitalism. The Depression had actually brought home to Miller a compassionate understanding of the sense of insecurity of man trapped within the faulty capitalist economic system.

In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman is a product as well as a victim of this kind of social system - the system of capitalism. He loses his job when he is old and exhausted. Howard, the callous capitalist 'fires' him. In fact, Willy's interview with his employer brings out his protest against capitalism. It is clearly evident in his desperate protest to Howard. As he shockingly complains:

I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance! You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away...  

It is interesting to note that Willy can no longer tolerate himself when his identity is challenged. Consequently, he takes up a bold step by way of a strong protest to safeguard his dignity and honour as a true salesman. His protest against exploitation enables him to restore his
dignity in our eyes though it does not completely make him free from blame of personal responsibility for his failure. Willy, in a passionate metaphorical statement, further, remarks that 'a man is not a piece of fruit'. (CP., p. 181) This can be interpreted to imply the exploitation of Willy the common man by his capitalist employer. It clearly shows that man is destroyed when he becomes just a part of a static system. The system of capitalism is, thus, the source of Willy's dreams and also an instrument of the destruction of all his delusions. In fact, Willy Loman is a real victim of the evil economic system. Thus, in *Death of a Salesman*, Miller shows the insidious impact of the modern industrialized culture and civilization, and commercialization of life on individual human beings so much so that they feel their very identity or survival at stake.

Since drama is an important aesthetic medium for the reflection of life it is not strange that American playwrights have focused on the problem of loneliness in a number of important plays. In these plays, the feeling of psychological isolation from human relationships becomes an important part of the theme. In fact, modern American playwrights have presented economic and social failures in their plays. Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is a fine example in this respect. The play illustrates the effect of defeat upon one person and upon all those around him. Willy's only aim in life is to be not just "liked" but "well-liked." He cannot answer the question of 'who he is' due to his failure
in the economic world. As a consequence, he has a sense of temporariness about himself. His sense of loneliness is well expressed in his remark, "I still feel - kind of temporary about myself" (C.P., p. 159). Willy's loneliness results partly from his inability to understand the moral principles.

In *Death of a Salesman*, the situation in which a father is separated from his sons, a mother from both sons and father in trying to mediate between them is basic to the play. According to Winifred L. Dusenbury, the incidents, through the technique of flash-backs, reveal the deleterious effect upon the family relationship of the false ideals which Willy holds and instills in his sons.51

The play is so constructed as to begin with Willy's state of isolation in the first scene and his suicide, in the last. The situation itself is not dramatic, but the revelation of the causes for it is highly dramatic and thought-provoking.

Of course, many of these revelatory incidents are plays in miniature with a rising action and climax of their own. The climactic scene of the series, the scene that reveals the cause of the separation of Biff and Willy, comes unexpectedly in a restaurant washroom, where

Willy relives the Boston hotel scene in which Biff finds him with a woman to whom he gives silk stockings of his wife. In fact, the remembered scene is hardly more sordid than the present one for Willy's two sons, Biff and Happy, have gone off with two common women, and left the sick man alone in the washroom with no thought of his welfare. Willy's lonesomeness has, thus, reached its peak in this scene.

The above themes ultimately culminate in the problem of values and identity in *Death of a Salesman*. In fact, the crisis of identity, according to Miller, is a vital problem in modern life. In the play, Willy tries to find his real identity, however unconscious he may be of it. He errs in finding out his real identity through dreams, which are nothing but ideals for him. He searches his identity in the image of the great salesman, Singleman. Yet, Willy fails to comprehend his identity as a man. He, further, attempts to know his personal identity in the image of the great adventurer, Ben, who became rich quickly. It may also be pointed out that Willy seeks his own identity even in the image of his own son, Biff, who shines as a great football player. Commenting on the play's motif of quest for values Miller, in an interview, remarked:

... in 'Death of a Salesman', we are shown a man who dies for the want of some positive, viable human value, the play implies -- and it could not have been written without the author's consciousness that the audience did believe something different. In other words, by showing what happens where there are no values, I, at least, assume
that the audience will be compelled and propelled toward a more intense quest for the values that are missing.  

In fact, Willy has nothing to fall back upon. He has four countries in his mind embodying three standards of values -- New England, Alaska, Africa, and New York. New England is associated with his dream of success and pleasure in his fancy. But, it is also associated with the adultery which he committed and signifies a moral laxity. In Willy's world of illusion, Alaska and Africa symbolise the ideal of materialistic success and becoming quick rich, as his brother Ben had become. New York is again a great centre of industrialization, commercialization of life, and an apathy towards life. This is a city where the Loman family is "boxed in" (C.P., p. 134) in their apartment, in spite of their dreams of "the great outdoors" and plans of visiting New England. The play is thus a bitter and harsh comment on contemporary American ethos characterised by the predominance of commercialism in life. It is an indirect and implicit plea for the evocation of values. In fact, Willy's search for values is presented through the expressionistic technique employed by the dramatist. However, all the three sources of values available to Willy do not provide him an opportunity to shed his "wrong dreams" and come to grips with the reality. As a matter of fact, Willy, who is lost in the commercialised world and society around him, is a doomed conformist.

Miller indirectly suggests the need for paying heed to one's conscience which could guide the individual in critical moments of decision-making. In the case of Willy, the individual conscience does not assert itself and so the possibility of his comprehending private truth does not arise. Biff at least makes a discovery of each one of them being a blank -- he discovers his own nothingness, the nothingness of Willy, and the nothingness of the people around them. Yet making the discovery is important for without their awareness man fails to have a foothold in the world of reality. Willy is doomed because he loses his grip on the forces of life and does not have a sense of values.

In *Death of a Salesman* Willy is unsure of his identity because of all the complexities, confusion, turmoils, and contradictions in his mind. There is no denying the fact that Willy's statement directly furnishes an illustration of what he thinks and aspires for. He seeks to establish his own identity, but fails to do so. He wants to become what the great salesman, Singleman was. So, he tells Howard:

> And when I saw that, I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want. 'Cause what could be more satisfying than to be able to go, at the age of eighty-four, into twenty or thirty different cities, and pick up a phone, and be remembered and loved and helped by so many different people?""
The above remark shows that for Willy, the identity of successful salesman meant fulfilling one's aspirations, ambition and dream; and making a place in the heart of men and being remembered, loved and helped. The question of identity implies more than what he thinks of. He is never on the road of conscious quest for self-knowledge because he lacks the vision of self-awareness. Rather he seeks his identity in different ways - sometimes in Biff, a hero of the football field, sometimes in both Biff and Happy in licking the world, sometimes in Singleman in becoming a successful salesman. However, his quest for values and self-identity does not lead him anywhere because of his lack of awareness of reality. Moreover, all these symbolic features through which Willy seeks his identity signify formal materialistic advancement and are not related to any sense of values which humanity should cherish.

The question of identity clearly implies that the protagonist must present an image of himself both as an individual and in terms of relationship with others. The majority of Miller's plays clearly show man's relation to his family and to society, his reason for existence, his personal significance, and his morality. As Robert Hogan aptly observes:

Like even the great tragic figures of Sophocles and Shakespeare, Miller's Willy is both an individual and a broadly relevant type. Perhaps Willy's universal quality stems, paradoxically, from his well-developed individuality.  

Clearly, the low stature of Willy is manifest in Linda's remark that Willy is not a great man. A little later she adds that "A small man can be just as exhausted as a great man." (C.P., p. 163) She pleads that Willy should not be allowed to die like "an old dog" (C.P., p. 162) and that "attention" must be paid to him. The basic assumption in Linda's appeal is that Willy is, after all, a distinctly identifiable human being. Thus, it is clear that the problem of identity is one of the most important issues in Death of a Salesman. Willy is completely oblivious of the real sense of identity and is lost in his self-delusion. He ineptly thinks that his identity meant being "well-liked" and having "contacts" with influential persons.

Willy's quest for values and identity is doomed to fail from the very beginning because he tries to seek his identity in things which do not constitute the real and complete identity of an individual. That is why there is a lingering desire somewhere in the mind of Willy that he needs a little peace of mind. He makes, as he thinks, some kind of sacrifice for the future security of his family by committing suicide. However, even his volunteered suicide does not suggest that by doing so, he will be able to concretise his view of his identity. He remains, in this regard, as unaware at the end of the play as he is at the beginning. As for illustration, Biff repeatedly says in the Requiem scene that Willy did not know himself. Thus, Miller's concern with man's quest for
identity is made clear by the fact that at least Biff makes a self-discovery by the end of the play. He comes to understand that he is nothing, that he is "a dime, a dozen." (C.P., p. 217) This understanding comes to Biff through his attempt to meet Oliver and the irrational act of his bringing the pen from Oliver's office, but this discovery is expressed by him in the realistic environment of the restaurant and the home. He tells his father straightaway:

    Let's hold on to the facts tonight, Pop. We're not going to get anywhere bullin' around. I am a shipping clerk.\(^{55}\)

The significance of Biff's remark about his father, "He (Willy) had the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong."(C.P., p. 221) consists in its showing that there is a gap between the kind of identity he thinks he has created in the mind of the society and the image that society actually has of him. This gap is well marked in the life of Willy. Of course, Willy never gives up his attempt to find out his real identity as a salesman. This may be illustrated in his most touching visualisation of his own funeral scene:

    Ben, that funeral will be massive! ... and he'll see it with his (Biff's) eyes once and for all. He'll see what I am, Ben!\(^{56}\)

\(^{55}\) C.P., p. 198.
\(^{56}\) C.P., p. 213.
Moreover, the question of identity is also involved in the final argument between Willy and Biff:

Biff: Pop! I'm a dime, a dozen and so are you!

Willy (turning on him now in an uncontrolled outburst):

I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman,
and you are Biff Loman!^57

Like the Duchess of Malfi in Webster's play, Willy Loman knows that he is dying but he is not ready to accept the defeat of his high dream of success. He believes in his ideal image of a successful salesman. In fact, this is Willy's final assertion of his dignity. It is also his defiant reply to all the insults and assaults showered upon his personal worth, his identity. As we see in the play, he does not consider himself to be anybody other than himself. He will not accept that he is worthless. As Gassner points out,

While Willy brings both social and personal meanness in the play, he also brings personal stature and heroism to it.^58

However, in spite of all his attempts to explore his own identity, he fails to achieve it because of his lack of self-awareness. Moreover, Biff also remarks that Willy never knew who he was. In fact, Willy's

^57. C.P., p. 217.
failure to achieve or maintain his identity is at least one sure reason why he must precipitate the catastrophe of his suicide. By committing the frightening act he gives a definite direction and purpose to his otherwise futile existence of make-believe success and prosperity. His suicide does not only mark an end to the disastrous and unreal life he had been living, but also puts a final stamp on his determination to make a break with the false past and provide for a more secure and meaningful existence of Linda and Biff and Happy. He has not let his family after all starve to death. But he has, no doubt, paid a high price for making the future secure for them and in the process imparted a high moral significance to what might otherwise be generally regarded as a cowardly and unmanly act. He has established his identity if not as a successful salesman but certainly as a well-meaning father and husband whose filial emotions were not submerged by the commercialised culture of the capitalist society. Willy Loman lived and died in an attempt to uphold the heroic identity of a successful man.

The protagonist's bewilderment caused by the conflicting values and his determined attempt to steer clear of them, to assert his personal ideals and image in his society -- the quest for identity theme -- re-emerges in Miller's next play, *The Crucible*. Of course, the situation in that play is different but, as may be seen in the play, the dramatist's essential concern with the question of identity persists yet in a new guise.
THE CRUCIBLE [1953]

I

The Crucible is a major play by Miller in which the problem of identity finds a more extended treatment both in terms of theme and action and plot and character. The Crucible is a powerful dramatisation of the notorious witch-trials of Salem. The play deals with a shameful period in American history when fanaticism was at its worst leading to witch-hunts. It was created in the wake of "McCarthyism" in America, when many suspected communists were tortured and jailed in the flush of a misguided wave of patriotism.

The word 'McCarthyism' originated with the American senator Joseph McCarthy who used his Congressional privilege to investigate conduct of people in public life. All those who had any links with the Communists felt a sense of insecurity about their position and their public image. Later on, the act of hunting out of Communists in the United States came to be popularly known as 'McCarthyism.' Thus, it caused a kind of hysteria in contemporary America during the 1950s. In February 1950 McCarthy addressed the Ohio Country Women's Republican Club in Wheeling, West Virginia. In his speech, he claimed to have "in his hand" a list of two-hundred-and-five known Communists
in the State Department. Gradually the panic of the McCarthyite hysteria spread throughout the country. The "threat of Communism from within" became a serious concern in national politics and in American attitudes. Thus McCarthyism was in the air. Miller too considered the matter to be a personal threat. He remarked:

It was a fact that the political objective, knowledgeable campaign from the far Right, was capable of creating not only a terror but a new subjective reality, a veritable mystique which was gradually assuming even a holy resonance ... It was as though the whole country had been born anew ... Astounded, I watched men pass me by without a nod whom I had known rather well for years, ... and yet that all they knew was terror.

The McCarthyite hysteria has a parallel with the witch-hunt in 1692 in Salem where the witchcraft was a mass-hysteria. Miller consciously draws the parallel in The Crucible. McCarthyism provides Miller with a contemporary parallel to the actual historical events of the 17th century Salem witch-hunting. In the play it seems that the playwright through historical context probes into the American attitude towards the Law. Scholars like Philip Walker view the play as a

“dramatic allegory concerning McCarthyism.” Louis Harap also sees the similarity between McCarthyism and Salem witch-hunt and says that “the affinity of McCarthyism with the Salem witch-hunt was obvious enough and it provides the playwright an occasion for The Crucible.” As a matter of fact, this parallelism has an impact on Miller’s treatment of the historical record. We see that the play relates to contemporary McCarthyite hysteria and also reconstructs the Salem witch trials of 1692.

The Crucible is important from the point of view of this dissertation that Miller is preoccupied with the individuals’ problem of identity in this as in other plays. In this play too the question of identity emerges because the protagonist’s honour is at stake when he is confronted with the social forces accusing him of adultery. The society is not liberal enough and in its usual conservative mode is out to destroy him for a private sin which clearly reminds one of the private sins of Arthur Dimmesdale in Hawthorne’s A Scarlet Letter. Miller thus explores the problem of identity through the protagonist’s desire to socially uphold his honour and dignity in a moment of crisis.


The Crucible was opened on Broadway on January 22, 1953 at the Martin Beck Theatre in New York City. The performance was directed by Jed Harris. It won the Antoinette Perry Award and the Donaldson Award, and had altogether 197 performances. When The Crucible opened on Broadway in 1953 most reviewers hailed it. Louis Shaeffer observed that the play was "a play of granite and force," "of substantial size and genuine distinction." In 1954 the play had its first English production directed by Warren Jenkins and the reviewers admired its theatre fitness. Two years later, critics again responded to its powerful success and it seemed to be more impressive than before. According to Kenneth Tynan, the play demonstrates its emotional power and impresses "not as an anti-McCarthyite tract but as a devouring study in mass hysteria." The play had its next important production in London in 1965. In 1972 it had its revival in America and proved to be a major production. By 1980, Bill Bryden again revived the play in London. David Scott Kastan found it as "a rending exploration of a community possessed by the demons of superstition, malice and fear." According to B.A. Young, it was "certainly the best (play) Arthur Miller wrote,

possibly the best American play of this century." The leading producers of the play included Laurence Olivier and Bill Bryden of the National Theatre. On Bill Bryden's 1980 production of *The Crucible*, B.A. Young remarked that it "makes the most of the succession of climaxes that follow one another with increasing force." Thus, it may be noted that the play has become popular as shown by the frequency of its subsequent stage performances.

Miller was profoundly disturbed by the prevailing McCarthyism which upheld a "kind of interior mechanism of confession and forgiveness of sins." This meant to him that "conscience was no longer a private matter but one of state administration." In fact, the close parallel between McCarthyism and the Salem witch-hunt provided the occasion for *The Crucible*. But to Miller the play had a larger meaning - assertion of the primacy of the individual conscience as against conformity enforced by state and public sanctions. The social element in the play is not limited to the political parallel of McCarthyism with witch-hunting, but extends much beyond it. It involves to the question of the individual's integrity vis-a-vis organised challenges by socio-political forces.

9. Ibid.
The play is a bold attempt by a contemporary playwright to make use of the trial ritual and the attitudes that surround it. Miller consciously uses the historical events to investigate the American attitude toward the law. While the play is based on historical records of a seventeenth century incident in colonial Salem, the purpose of the drama seems to be to draw attention to the parallel in contemporary events. When McCarthyism was in the air, it had all the qualities of the Salem witch-hunt. Miller consciously draws the parallel and his play is an effort to deal with what was "in the air." According to him, the real meaning of the play is not simply an attack on McCarthyism, but a treatment of the perennial conflict between individual conscience and civil society -- "the handing over of conscience to another and the realization that with conscience goes the person, the soul immortal, and the 'Name'."11 In any event, there is a parallel between what happened in Salem under the Puritan theocracy and what happened in Washington under the patriotic fervor of anti-communism. This parallel had its impact on Miller's treatment of the historical record. In a broader perspective, it can be assumed that the myth of the law and the ritual of the trial shape the structure of the play and help in determining its ultimate dramatic meaning.

11. C.F., p. 47
The dialogue has a suitable seventeenth century flavor. The action runs chronologically within the setting so that the realistic progression fits in with the logic of the trial formula and the historical event. But the playwright adds to this perspective another dimension -- a consciousness of the significance of these events to present-day democracy. The “good people” in the cast of characters have attitudes which reflect contemporary ideals rather than the historical Puritan outlook. This is one important reason for the play’s success and repeated performances in many parts of the world. It will probably remain in the lively repertory of world drama for it deals with a problem that is universally recurrent and relevant to contemporary society. In spite of its topical references the play has the elements of a genuine tragedy and this has been proved by its continued popularity even decades after the era of “McCarthyism.” The protagonist of the play is John Proctor, a farmer in his middle thirties. He is physically strong, intelligent and even-tempered. Like the Puritan society of Salem in the seventeenth century the society of Proctor’s time is a close-knit society with strong beliefs and rigid rules. The society makes its dominance felt in the daily life of its members. Yet John Proctor manages to keep his sense of dignity and honour. He refuses to follow all the rules laid down by his community, if he finds them excessive and superfluous. He carries out a struggle against the degrading forces in his environment and bravely dies in an attempt to preserve his identity as a man of integrity.
The Crucible has for its background the supposed outbreak of
witchcraft in Salem in 1692 and the ascertaining of the identities of the
people who were responsible for indulging in witchcraft and inviting
the witch-hunt. The first Act begins with the establishment of a strong
and suspenseful situation. A group of girls play at summoning the
devils with Tituba, a black servant. One of them is Betty, the daughter
of the Reverend Parris. She is afflicted by the witches. Reverend Hale,
a specialist in diabolical possession is summoned to testify to the
allegation that she was one of those who indulged in witchcraft. As the
play begins, most of the main characters like John Proctor, the
protagonist, Abigail Williams, the prime accusers of the hysteria,
Rebecca Nurse, a saintly woman, Thomas Putnam and Ann Putnam,
Giles Corey, Rev. Parris and Rev. Hale are introduced as the important
people of the village.

Miller, in the play, makes it clear that the "good people" of the
village like Giles Corey, Rebecca Nurse and Rev. Hale are associated
with Proctor. On the other hand, the "bad people" as represented by the
Putnams, Rev. Parris and Cheever are associated with Abigail who is the
centre of all antagonisms. Proctor is a farmer in his middle thirties who
has "a sharp and biting way with hypocrites" (C.P., p. 239). He is respected and feared in his community and has a "quiet confidence and an unexpressed hidden force" (C.P., p. 239) in him. He dislikes the imposition of authority and says "I like not the smell of this authority" (C.P., p. 246). Yet he is also "a sinner not only against the moral fashion of the time, but against his own vision of decent conduct" (C.P., p. 239). In the play, all evil is centred upon Abigail. She is a strikingly beautiful girl, "an orphan, with an endless capacity for dissembling" (C.P., p. 230). Her desire for Proctor is manifest in the play. Proctor's sin is that in a weak moment of passion he yields to lechery with Abigail, the embodiment of evil in the play. He makes it clear to her that their intimacy was long past as he pleads, "Abby, I never give you hope to wait for me. You 'll put it out of mind. I 'll not be comin' for you more" (C.P., p. 240). But Abigail refuses to believe him and says, "I have a sense for heat, John, and yours has drawn me to my window, and I have seen you looking up, burning in your loneliness" (C.P., pp. 240-41). Proctor deeply repents of his sin of adultery and tries to make amends for it.

In the ensuing hysteria the girls consider accusation as their best defense. After its quiet beginning, the first Act ends with Tituba, Abigail and Betty becoming hysterical. They all accuse other women in order to protect themselves. Rev. Hale's cross-examination of Tituba
and Abigail shows the ample evidence to justify the accusation.

Hale: Who came to you with the Devil? ...
Tinuba: And I look — and there was Goody Good. Aye, Sir, and Goody Osburn.
Hale: Take courage, you must give us all their names. (Abigail rises, staring as though inspired, and cries out.)
Abigail: I danced for the Devil; I saw him; ... I saw Sarah Good with the Devil! I saw Goody Osburn with the Devil! I saw Bridget Bishop with the Devil! 12

Act II of the play is of special significance for providing the Court scene. Here the character is equated with identity. With the development of the action the court performs its function to establish the true character of the accused persons. Characters like Elizabeth Proctor, Mary Warren, Giles Corey, Herrick and Cheever appear in the scene. The main action focuses on Proctor, Elizabeth and Mary Warren. Elizabeth is by nature unemotional and impersonal. She relies on the "evidence" and the letter of the Law. She thus symbolises the

judiciary. She gives her comment on the court in Salem:

Aye, it is a proper court they have now. They've sent four judges out of Boston, ... weighty magistrates of the General Court, and at the head sits the Deputy Governor of the Province.13

Proctor's adultery with Abigail known to his wife Elizabeth throws into doubt his identity as a man of integrity and a dependable husband and so becomes the cause of estrangement between the couple. He tries his best to please her in various ways. But the barrier that exists between them can never be fully removed. He resents his wife's cold and silent disapproval and bursts out once, "you forget nothin' and forgive nothin'. Learn charity, woman" (C.P., p. 265). The following dialogue reveals some of their conjugal affairs:

Proctor: If the girl's a saint now, I think it is not easy to prove she's fraud, and the town gone so silly. She told it to me in a room alone - 1 have no proof for it.

Elizabeth: You were alone with her?

Proctor (Stubbornly): For a moment alone, aye.

Elizabeth: Why, then, it is not as you told me.

Proctor (his anger rising): For a moment, I say. The others come in soon after.

Elizabeth (quietly - she has suddenly lost her faith in him):

Do as you wish, then ...14

13. C.P., p. 263.
As the action develops, the intensity of the evil act of accusation reaches its climactic point with implicating Elizabeth's name in the matter. She already learns from Mary Warren that Abigail has accused her in the court. Her information is now confirmed with the arrival of Herrick and Cheever who come to arrest her under court warrant. In her extremity she pleads with her husband, "Then go and tell her (Abigail) she's a whore. Whatever promise she may sense -- break it, John, break it" (C.P., p. 270). Proctor is deeply attached to his wife and children as Joe Keller and Willy Loman are to their wives and sons. In his anger he even snatches the warrant out of Cheever's hands and warns him to go away. He asks Rev. Hale, "Will you see her taken?" (C.P., p. 281). When Elizabeth decides to go to the court, he lovingly tells her, "I will bring you home. I will bring you soon.... I will fall like an ocean on that court! Fear nothing, Elizabeth" (C.P., pp. 281-82). He cannot see her 'chained' in his presence. So he cries, "Herrick! Herrick, don't chain her! Damn you, man, you will not chain her! Off with them! I'll not have it! I will not have her chained!" (C.P., p. 282). Thus Elizabeth's arrest surely points to the trial scene of the court in the subsequent Acts.

Ultimately the last two Acts are fully covered with court trials which bring the action of the play towards its climax. All the accused and the accusers are present. Judge Danforth and Judge Hathorne represent the authority. Rev. Hale and Rev. Parris are also there with
them. In the trial it is seen that Danforth is mainly concerned with Abigail whereas Rev. Hale is mostly concerned with Proctor. The judges follow the prescription of the law faithfully and impartially. As Danforth remarks, “This is the highest court of the supreme government of this province” (C.P., p. 287). Act three begins with various investigations and interrogations about the accused persons including Elizabeth, Martha Corey and Rebecca Nurse. Proctor, Giles and Francis attend the court to plead for their wives. Proctor tries his best to get his wife acquitted of the charge against her. He brings Mary Warren to tell the truth before the judges. In a last bid to save his wife against Abigail’s false accusations, he confesses his lechery with the girl. His ongoing dialogue with Danforth bears testimony to it:

Proctor (trembling, his life collapsing about him):

I have known her, Sir, I have known her.

Danforth: You - you are a lecher?

Proctor: A man will not cast away his good name.

You surely know that.

Danforth: In - in what time? In what place?

Proctor: She thinks to dance with me on my wife’s grave!...

But it is a whore’s vengeance, and you must see it. I set myself entirely in your hands.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{15} C.P., pp. 304-05.
Again, in a bid to expose Abigail’s vengeance, he further says:

Proctor: I have made a bell of my honor! I have rung the doom of my good name - you will believe me. Mr. Danforth! My wife is innocent, except she knew a whore when she saw one!

Danforth: Your wife, you say, is an honest woman.

Proctor: In her life, sir, she have never lied, - my wife cannot lie.\(^{16}\)

Danforth seeks confirmation from Elizabeth and asks her, “To your own knowledge, has John Proctor ever committed the crime of lechery? Answer my question! Is your husband a lecher!” (C.P., p. 307). Elizabeth in good faith tells a lie and faintly says, “No, sir” (C.P., p. 307). The irony here is that her lie is accepted as truth like all other lies. Danforth says, “She spoke nothing of lechery, and this man has lied!” (C.P., p. 307).

The most striking feature of this trial scene is that once his identity has become questionable he cannot free himself of the stigma attached to his name. Instead of being freed Proctor is arrested and imprisoned. Mary Warren who gives testimony in Proctor’s favour a minute earlier goes against him and accuses him, “You’re the Devil’s man!” (C.P., p. 310). Proctor’s faith in God is shattered as he cries,

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\(^{16}\) C.P., p. 305.
“I say — I say — God is dead!” (C.P., p. 311). He laughs madly and says:

A fire, a fire is burning! I hear the boot of Lucifer, I see his filthy place! 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 that this be fraud — God damn our kind especially, and we will burn, we will burn together. 17

At last, Danforth orders Proctor to be jailed. Rev. Hale who sees the truth cannot tolerate such an unjust decision of Danforth and he suddenly leaves the court. He even condemns the proceedings, “I denounce these proceedings, I quit this court!” (C.P., p. 311). The voice of reason is thus submerged and lost amidst the din of lies. Now it is Proctor alone who has to decide his own fate — whether to sign the confession or to die for his good name.

The last Act resolves the dilemma. The tragic intensity of the play reaches its highest peak in this very Act. It is perfectly clear to Danforth that the girls’ testimony is manipulated. But Danforth despite his knowledge of the gross injustice done to Proctor still persists on hanging more innocent people. He considers that he must do it in order

17. C.P., p. 311.
to justify the unjust hangings effected earlier. He confidently remarks:

Now hear me, and beguile yourselves no more. I will not receive a single plea for pardon or postponement. Them that will not confess will hang. Twelve are already executed; the names of those seven are given out, and the village expects to see them die in the morning. Postponement now speaks a floundering on my part; reprieve or pardon must cast doubt upon the guilt of them that died till now.  

Ultimately Proctor takes his final decision to die. He refuses to compromise in order to maintain his good name which is his identity. He prefers death to living without his social image. He cries with his ‘whole soul’:

Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! ...

How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!  

*The Crucible* may well be called a “social play” since it analyses a public phenomenon with historical precedent and current actuality. But it focuses on the “subjective reality” of that phenomenon. It cannot be judged merely for its literal accuracy or the political aptness of its topical allusions. The structure of the play is based on a court trial 

18. C.P., p. 318
19. C.P., p. 328
with its paraphernalia of lawyers, judges, courtroom, prosecutors and witnesses. The presentation of the court scene in Act III in which the alleged witches are to be tried is made strikingly realistic. Proctor's conflict with the fanatic elements in his society reaches its culmination in the trial scene. He is dominated by reason and self-respect and is seen fighting the irrational forces of society.

Like the rock at Salem, The Crucible has endured beyond the immediate events of its own time. If it was originally seen as a political allegory, it is now seen by contemporary audiences as a distinguished American play by an equally distinguished American playwright. As one of the most frequently produced plays in the American theatre, The Crucible stands alone as one that interprets and defines the cultural and historical background of American society. Focusing primarily upon the story of John Proctor, one of the nineteen who were hanged, Miller, in The Crucible, recalls the past of contemporary society and reminds it of its irrational belief in the existence of the Devil and the reality of witchcraft. Thus, the play mainly deals with the suffering of the people struggling to uphold their integrity and honour in face of a corruption of values in society and its judicial system.
In Miller's plays, the protagonist's mental make-up is as much responsible as the society itself for the destruction of each of its members. He tries to portray the influence of society in the shaping of the ideals and attitudes of the individuals. One of the major themes of *The Crucible* is the conflict between the public authority and the individual who resents the unjust demands and restrictions imposed on him by the former. In this play Miller explores the nature of relationship between the individual and the society (authority) more closely than in any other play. A vital problem dramatized here is that of human integrity. The essential issue is, whether or not an individual should surrender his reasoning and sense of judgement to social pressures. In the new kind of social drama like *The Crucible* "it is not enough any more to know that one is at the mercy of social pressures; it is necessary to understand that such a sealed fate cannot be accepted." 21 The pity is that most people do not stand up against these threats and pressures of the society but surrender their judgement and their conscience. There must needs be a man who might offer resistance to these evils. John Proctor, in *The Crucible* is one such man who does not sacrifice his conscience and as such, truly merits recognition for his outstanding sense of responsibility. Miller's own statement in this context is

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pertinent:

Above all, above all horrors, I saw accepted the notion that conscience was no longer a private matter but one of state administration. I saw men handing conscience to other men and thanking other men for the opportunity of doing so.22

The witch-hunting is only a personification of the forces of disintegration which the playwright has tried to unveil in the play. It represents the web of social evil which the protagonist is called upon to challenge and it ultimately leads to destruction. Thus the central conflict which brings about the tragedy is between the individual and the forces of authority. The very opening scene, introduces us to the nature of evil unfolded by the action. Reverend Parris' daughter Betty is sick. He discusses with Abigail Williams and Susanna Walcott about the cause of his daughter's sickness. Thus we see that the issue of witchcraft causing mass hysteria is foreshadowed at the very beginning of the play. Proctor himself says, "The road past my house is a pilgrimage to Salem all morning. The town's mumbling witchcraft" (C.P., p. 240). The hero's task is to encounter and overcome evil. There is sickness and disease, mistrust and malice, pretence and calumny. The elements of treachery, deception and lies further suggest that The Crucible presents a world which is both "fair" and "foul". Due to general perversion and corruption the individuals have lost their conscience and

become unscrupulous and are given to avenging themselves of old hatreds and enmities. In his commentary preceding the play Miller himself refers to it:

Long held hatreds could now be openly expressed, and vengeance taken, despite the Bible’s charitable injunctions...  

Understandably, the guidance offered by the scripture has been thrown to the winds by the people inhabiting this world.

The seeds of destruction that eventually sprout forth into the final catastrophe lie buried in the tainted nobility of Proctor’s character. His sin is that in a weak moment of passion he yields to the lascivious adultery with Abigail Williams who is actually an embodiment of evil in the play. Proctor’s private sin or evil is matched against the larger social evil in the world outside. The outside evil is represented partly by Abigail Williams, but mainly by the socio-religious forces embodied in Deputy Governor Danforth, Judge Hawthorne and Reverend Parris. Miller skilfully interweaves the personal and social worlds by juxtaposing the realistic and the non-realistic portions of the action. What appears in the beginning as merely Proctor’s private sin of adultery with Abigail actually puts the whole Salem community in turmoil. Proctor’s sin leads to a mass hysteria of false accusations,

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and many innocent people are drawn into the vortex of social controversy and crushed. Elizabeth Proctor is one who is a victim of false accusation. She has been accused by Abigail Williams for sending spirit to her.

Thus, under a false accusation Proctor's innocent wife Elizabeth has been imprisoned. We also see that Rebecca Nurse and Martha Corey are already in the jail. Like Elizabeth, they are also innocent victims under wrong charges against them. Rebecca is charged "for the marvellous and supernatural murder of Goody Putnam's babies" (C.P., p.277), whereas Martha has been charged for bewitching Walcott's pig with her books. Even Proctor himself has been accused by Mary Warren before Danforth when she charges, "You're the Devil's man!" (C.P., p.310). He is moreover dissatisfied with the system of law as prevalent in the community. As he argues:

Is the accuser always holy now? Were they born this morning as clean as God's fingers? I'll tell you what's walking Salem -- vengeance is walking Salem. We are what we always were in Salem, but now the little crazy children are jangling the keys of the kingdom, and common vengeance writes the law!²⁴

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²⁴ C.P., p. 281.
In fact, Miller, "by placing man into the vortex of social forces", has brought "tragedy closer to life's reality and it would be more fair to call it real tragedy, rather than hybrid or bourgeois tragedy." In the play, Proctor's private act of sin leads to social turmoil. Truth and justice are completely subverted. Miller provides the finest blend of realism and expressionism in the form of socio-religious forces that threaten to destroy the individual. The ensuing conflict is no longer a clash between two individuals, but a conflict between the individual and the authority.

Proctor, in The Crucible, revolts against institutionalized authority. He boldly says, "I like not the smell of this authority." (C.P., p.247). His heroic struggle against an unjust social order evokes human interest in the struggle itself and imparts an element of universality to the theme of his struggle to establish his identity in the process. He tries his best to keep away from the terrible hysteria that rocks his community but is dragged right into the vortex of it. But at the end he realizes that his honour is all he has and that he would rather die than part with this precious possession. So he goes to the gallows like a saint. Thus, directly and indirectly society imposes its evil pressure on Proctor to commit an unpardonable crime. But his final decision, which is his

own — the decision of refusing to confess — ensures Proctor the coveted position of a great tragic protagonist. Thus, the play's emphasis shifts from its original social context to a more fundamental questions confronting mankind, questions relating to individual freedom, justice, integrity, conscience, responsibility to others, etc. An individual who firmly believes in human dignity and honour, who believes in man's right to freedom and in the system of real justice is one who understands what the identity of an individual means. The Crucible, thus powerfully deals with these issues pertaining to an individual's identity. The problem arises when these issues are suppressed or challenged.

Another striking feature of the play connected with the theme of identity is the theme of loneliness. The protagonists of all of Miller's plays are lonely men, in spite of their being deeply attached to their families and also being very much a part of their own societies. Joe Keller (All My Sons), Willy Loman (Death of a Salesman) and John Proctor (The Crucible) are all lonely human beings feeling isolated from their intimate family members. Their decisions and actions are their own and their tragedy is brought about partly by themselves and partly by their social environment. A sense of loss of meaning in life can usually be seen in Miller's heroes as the result of a disturbance or severance of
existing relationships, producing a sense of loneliness in them. The same is the condition of Proctor in Miller’s *The Crucible*. All these protagonists experience a sense of alienation from their families or society because they play a role in which they find themselves alone. They fight their own battles to establish their image of honour and dignity in their society. Hence they are alone in their struggles to achieve a goal which is honoured by the society. They fight to the last and wilfully die to achieve that place of honour in their society.

Proctor’s adultery with Abigail is known to his wife Elizabeth and it is the cause of the estrangement between them. The breach in their relations is never fully repaired. He resents his wife’s cold and silent disapproval and bursts out once: “You forget nothin’ and forgive nothin’. Learn charity, woman” (*C.P.*, p.265). His deep attachment to his wife and children in the same manner as Joe Keller and Willy Loman are, is suspect. When Abigail bitterly calls Elizabeth a “sickly wife” (*C.P.*, p.241) he cannot remain silent and shouts angrily, “You ‘ll speak nothin’ of Elizabeth!” (*C.P.*, p. 241). Even though he is conscious of the fact that he had been dishonest and licentious in the past, he cannot bear with his wife doubting his present honesty. His wife’s suspicion causes an emotional break in his personality and so makes him even more lonely. In prison too Proctor stays aloof, alone and silent. It is evident in his own remark as he says, “I hear nothin’,
where I am kept’ (C.P., p. 322). His first decision to confess to a crime he never committed and his final decision to die for his ‘name’ are both his own lonely decisions. As Eric Mottram observes, “it is the loneliness of his (Miller’s) heroes which produces their measures of cathartic response in the audience ...”26 Thus, we see that John Proctor, the protagonist of the play, is a lonely being and his tragedy is linked to his loneliness and feeling of guilt.

The tragic worlds of the great dramatists are not identical and their depiction of man’s environment too differs. Thus the theme of evil in man’s environment is treated in different ways by the playwrights. Evil as something inescapable, irreparable, and destructive has been the theme of tragedy from Greek to modern times. Evil can manifest itself in various forms like vengeance, over-ambition, pride, lust, jealousy and rebellion. In fact, the problem of evil is a recurrent theme in Miller’s plays. In his “Introduction” to The Collected Plays, Miller speaks of his conviction that “evil is not a mistake but a fact in itself ... I believe merely that from whatever cause, a dedication to evil, not mistaking it for good, but knowing it as evil and loving it as evil, is possible in human beings who appear agreeable and normal.”27


27. C.P., p. 44.
*The Crucible* also examines the theme of evil as something that corrupts man, influences his actions and clouds his judgment. As we find in the play, there are three aspects of evil — absolute evil in the medieval Christian sense which is seen in the belief in Satan and witchcraft, the evil in modern society as the playwright sees it in movements such as "McCarthyism," and the evil traits present in individuals as seen in characters like Abigail, the Putnams, Rev. Parris and the judges. The Devil is seen to have become a palpable reality for the Salem people. Witchcraft was familiar to them and they knew that some practised it in the secrecy of the night. In fact, people always talk of sickness, spirits, witchcraft and the Devil in their discourses. Proctor also senses the spread of witchcraft in the town. He tells Abigail, "The road past my house is a pilgrimage to Salem all morning. The town's mumbling witchcraft" (*C.P.*, p. 240). There is, then, the second form of manifestation of evil also that is evil as a social dilemma. When the sanity of a community is entirely in question, when justice is delayed or denied to its individual members, there is some sense of general loss felt by individuals. Each man tries to save his individuality or identity. It is this evil, which sweeps over or dominates the entire society, that Miller tries to highlight through *The Crucible*. The treatment of evil as a part and parcel of human nature is yet another form of manifestation in the play. Evil as we see it in the characters of Abigail, the Putnams and the judges can be explained only in terms of human depravity. As the play begins, we can grasp the evil nature in Abigail who is considered to be
the leader of troublemakers. The following dialogue makes it clear:

Betty: You drank blood, Abby! You didn’t tell him that!
Abigail: Betty, you never say that again! You will never --
Betty: You did, you did! You drank a charm to kill
John Proctor’s wife! You drank a charm to kill Goody Proctor! 28

This evil trait in Abigail goes deeper and explodes later in the play when
Elizabeth Proctor is arrested and imprisoned as a result of her
(Abigail’s) false accusation.

The Putnams make use of the prevalent circumstances to further
their own interests. The cold-hearted and calculated campaign against
all of their neighbours is mainly aimed at eliminating all of them so that
they can annex the neighbours’ properties to their own. Miller himself
comments on Thomas Putnam and he says:

Thomas Putnam felt that his own name and the honor of his family had
been smirched by the village, and he meant to right matters however
he could... So it is not surprising to find that so many accusations
against people are in the handwriting of Thomas Putnam, or that his
name is so often found as a witness corroborating the supernatural
testimony. 29

29. C.P., pp. 234-35.
He is always greedy and owns a vindictive nature. He makes plans to add his neighbour's boundary to his land. For this he even challenges Proctor and Giles Corey. We also get more evil aspects of human nature in the mental make-up of the judges and Rev. Parris. Judge Hawthorne is delineated as a fanatic and a spiteful man. Greed and pettiness characterise Rev Parris. Thus, all the unsavoury evil aspects of human nature such as pettiness, malice, vindictiveness, duplicity, greed and prejudice are presented in the characters of the play.

One can also see that the theme of individual, personal guilt receives an emphatic treatment in Miller's drama. The individual seeking to realise his identity is yet conscious of its presence within himself. \textit{The Crucible} too brings to the fore the problem of the guilt consciousness of an individual in a social context. Proctor's sense of guilt is an essential component of his personality and is important to any understanding of him as a dramatic character. As Miller points out, the witch-hunt was "a long overdue opportunity for everyone so inclined to express publicly his guilt and sins under the cover of accusations against the victims."\textsuperscript{30} The society demands of the individual a confession of his abiding sense of personal guilt. By doing so he would be assured of some kind of freedom from sin. People not only want others to be

\textsuperscript{30} C.P., p. 229.
guilty, they want also their own guilt recognized even as they fear the consequence of guilt. In the play, Proctor’s guilt of adultery links to his innocence of witchcraft. His tragic dilemma is whether or not to share martyrdom with Rebecca Nurse and Martha Corey, especially in the context of his own guilt consciousness of having committed adultery with Abigail. In his moral dilemma he tells Elizabeth:

I cannot mount the gibbet like a saint. It is a fraud. I am not that man. My honesty is broke, Elizabeth I am no good man. Nothing’s spoiled by giving them this lie that were not rotten long before.  

The motivations and the action which issue forth from them in relation to the guilt or innocence of the individuals and of the community are subjects of investigation. In fact, the trial-formula is an investigation supported by facts and motives to establish who is innocent and who is guilty.

The guilty minded Proctor himself has to face the facts and be ashamed of his adultery. His puritan background will not let him be at ease. Haunted by his guilt he can never forgive himself because he has fallen in his own eyes. His wife is right when she tells him “I do not judge you. The magistrate sits in your heart that judges you.” (C.P., p. 265). In Proctor’s own eyes, his honesty is a question mark because of

31. C.P., p. 322.
his adultery with Abigail, the prime accuser and he is confused about his own moral status when he signs the false confession. At this point it is worth arguing whether a man who has fallen in his own eyes as a result of awareness of his sin (adultery) can claim to have a moral courage which must necessarily go with social identity. It is possible to concede that Proctor cannot overcome his sense of guilt because he does not openly confess it. Privately he tells Abigail that their intimacy was a thing of the past and he would not have any private relations with her, but then Abigail would not also let him be free of her. His own wife Elizabeth cannot forgive him and be charitable. Proctor's sense of guilt must therefore persist. With it the sense of identity crisis also persists. Obviously, the play emphasises that the realisation of moral integrity is integral to the realisation of one's identity or social image.

*The Crucible* also deals with the theme of betrayal. It has been portrayed as individual's flouting the accepted norms of behaviour in a small social set-up like the family or a bigger one like the community. Two different aspects of the theme of betrayal are discussed in *The Crucible*, namely, the infidelity in marital relationship and the betrayal of one's own conscience. Proctor does not work against the interests of his society. His remark "This society will not be a bag to swing around your head, Mr. Putnam" (*C.P.*, p. 244) shows his loyalty to the society for which he exists. On the other hand, his efforts are directed to saving the sanity of his hysterical society. But, he too acts disloyally twice:
once when he betrays the trust of his wife by indulging in adultery, and later when he betrays his own conscience by signing the false confession. The moment Elizabeth knows of his adultery with Abigail, she loses her trust in him. She is not satisfied with his lecherous behaviour and thus it causes a breach in their marital relationship. Disturbed by the discovery she distances herself from him: "Do as you wish, then" (C.P., p. 264). Proctor is aware of his failure and tries to make amends by offering an apologetic affront:

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\text{Spare me! You forget nothin' and forgive nothin'. Learn charity, woman ... I have not moved from there to there without I think to please you, and still an everlasting funeral marches round your heart. I cannot speak but I am doubted, every moment judged for lies, as though I come into a court when I come into this house!}^{32}
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He is overtaken by his sense of guilt at every action of him. His home is not his home. It appears like a court where he is attacked and exposed for his shameless act. His conscience is heavy and he feels he must clear his conscience, his name of that stain. He admits he had made a false confession to Danforth: "No, no. I have signed it. You have seen me. It is done!" (C.P., p. 327). He almost barters his "name" for his life but by correcting himself when it is still not too late: Proctor protects his dignity.

32. C.P., p. 265.
In the play, Miller emphasises the themes of evil and betrayal in the first climax and the grandeur of human beings in the second. The evil in society and in the minds of the fanatics is underscored in the first part of the action of the play. The “crying out” scene, which is the highest point of the first climax, stresses the absolute evil in the minds of Abigail and her friends, and the fanatic judges, who condemn innocent people to the gallows. Proctor cannot tolerate living in hypocrisy and wearing the garb of holiness that Abigail would want him to do. Seizing her hair, he names her as a ‘whore’ who had enticed him into the adulterous physical contact with her. When Abigail cries out “Oh, Heavenly, Father, take away this shadow!” (C.P., p. 304), Proctor is unable to bear with her hypocrisy. In a roaring voice, he shouts, “How do you call Heaven! Whore! Whore!” (C.P., p. 304). Thereafter he admits his adultery with the girl. As he (‘trembling, his life collapsing about him’) tells the judges, “I have known her, sir. I have known her” (C.P., p. 304). He discloses that Abigail wanted Elizabeth no more alive so that she might live with him thereafter. He pleads with the judges to see her action as a “whore’s vengeance” (C.P., p. 305). Proctor does not object to Danforth’s questioning Elizabeth about his adultery believing that the truth would come out because Elizabeth would never lie. By a dramatic irony and contrary to his expectation, Elizabeth lies for the first time in her life because she wants to save her husband’s honour. But her well-intentioned lie brings disastrous results. Thus, Proctor’s guilt of adultery with Abigail, the
idea of evil and betrayal, all play an important role in bringing about the tragic end of the protagonist. The whole drama thus veers round the question of saving one’s name in the eyes of society — that is, preserving one’s identity in the society to which one belongs. According to Bigsby, “The crucial need” for Miller’s heroes “is always for an identity which can be embraced with pride, defined by actions wilfully undertaken and realities, confidently engaged.”

John Proctor, is a self-aware character who struggles to assert his identity and worth as an individual in the context of public terror and finds himself subjected to a tormenting process of facing his guilty past. A clean social image can be re-established only through this purificatory process of confronting with the inner guilty self. From the very beginning Proctor wants to stay away from all trouble and like Joe Keller tries to confine himself to his house, family and farm. But his offense of adultery which he tries to suppress makes him morally culpable. It is this offense, which brings disaster and tragedy to the


34. Schlueter and Flanagan, Arthur Miller, op.cit., p. 68.
entire family. Even though he is aware that his loyalty to his family will
not save him yet he resolves to defend and save his innocent wife. He
fights back the fanatics in the courtroom, and incurs their wrath. Yet he
cannot suppress the pangs of conscience as a result of his past act of
adultery. Consequently he signs a false confession. By not first
admitting a mistake he had committed, Proctor becomes disloyal not
only to his own conscience but also to his friends who prefer death to
betraying their conscience as Proctor does. The real climax is reached
near the end of the play as the hero commits to his own conscience. He
tears the confession to shreds and decides not to stoop before the
whims of a bunch of fanatics. He keeps his commitments to his
conscience and to his friends, and mounts the gallows in the hope of
maintaining his 'name' for being truthful and honest. Though clearly a
respected man in the community Proctor's moral code derives from his
own conscience. For him, the ultimate value is preserving the voice of
one's own conscience.

Proctor is a prototype of Miller's contemporary hero who is
willing to lay down his life if need be to preserve his honour and
dignity, two essential constituents of his identity. He is a man of
extraordinary moral courage. By contrast with those who too readily
compromise and by parallel with Rebecca Nurse, who refuses to do so,
Proctor becomes one of the few who survive the crucible. He is a
common man but he is capable of uncommon moral strength. He
endorses values which even his neighbours cannot uphold. He does not permit public exhibition of his confession. Instead he prefers to die so as to spare the public humiliation of his sons in the event of his being publicly dishonoured. Therefore, he does not want his confession to be made public. He says:

I have confessed myself. Is there no good penitence but it be public? God does not need my name nailed upon the Church! God sees my name: God knows how black my sins are! It is enough.\(^{35}\)

As he sees through the designs of his judges, he warns them:

You will not use me! I am no Sarah Good or Tituba. I am John Proctor! You will not use me! It is no part of salvation that you should use me.\(^{36}\)

For Proctor, a name is a man's public self and to bring dishonour to his name is to bring social death to himself and his sons. In the play as he fights to preserve the respect for the integrity of the individual, he frequently refers to the symbolic importance of names. When he confesses to lechery, he tells Danforth:

I have made a bell of my honour!
I have rung the doom of my good name.\(^{37}\)

\(^{35}\) C.P., p. 327.
\(^{36}\) Ibid.
\(^{37}\) C.P., p. 305.
When asked to explain why his wife lies to protect him from the guilt of lechery, Proctor replies:

She only thought to save my name.  

Obviously, as *The Crucible* indicates, there is an extreme need to preserve one's honour and dignity which one's *name* implies. The *name* itself symbolises one's identity. It is a unique distinction which any self-respecting individual in society possesses. Any attempt by antagonists to sully one's name or honour implies a direct assault on one's identity. The protagonist Proctor is thus like Joe Keller or Willy Loman who is ready to stake even his life to protect his name, his honour, and, ultimately, his identity. Any complacency in resisting any bid to damage one's name cannot be tolerated. The protagonist whether sinning, sinful or aware of his past sin is yet fully prepared to vindicate his honour and dignity. To him society is important as long as it respects his personal image but it is treated as an evil that can be countered if the individual feels his identity is questioned.

The question of one's honour is an integral part of one's identity. In the play Reverend Parris is worried for his "good name" and "character" which he needs to win in the community of Salem. Once his daughter Betty appears to be under a witch's spell, he fears

for his reputation and power for the simple reason that his house may be claimed to be devil-haunted. With this fear he charges Abigail:

Parris: Now look you, child, your punishment will come in its time. But if you trafficked with spirits in the forest I must know it now, for surely my enemies will, and they will ruin me with it.... Abigail, do you understand that I have many enemies?

Abigail: I have heard of it, uncle.

Parris: There is a faction that is sworn to drive me from my pulpit. Do you understand that?

Abigail: I think so, sir.

Parris: Now then, in the midst of such disruption, my own house-hold is discovered to be the very center of some obscene practice.39

Thus, we see that Parris is afraid that his self-image and honour in the community may be lost. This is, no doubt, an issue of his identity.

Besides, the genuineness of his desire for maintaining his "good respect" and "character" is easily discernible when he forces Abigail

to say the truth about Betty's illness. As he claims:

Now, tell me true, Abigail. And I pray you feel the weight of truth upon you, for now my ministry's at stake, my ministry and perhaps your cousin's life... I have fought here three long years to bend these stiff-necked people to me, and now, just now when some good respect is rising for me in the parish, you compromise my very character.40

The play affirms the commonplace truth that the integrity or identity of an individual lies in one's good name. Possessing integrity helps in establishing one's name and imparts meaning to one's life. This is true of Abigail too. When Parris asks her the reason for her being discharged from Goody Proctor's service, she cries (in a temper) to her uncle:

My name is good in the village!
I will not have it said my name is soiled!
Goody Proctor is a gossiping liar!41

In her speech, it may be noted that even this young girl Abigail is anxious to preserve her good name. She believes that her self-image or identity surely lies in her name itself. Hence, she cannot bear any

41. Ibid.
challenge to her name under any circumstances. Because in her name she sees her identity.

The sense of nobility and honour are also present in the character of Rebecca Nurse. She has already earned her own reputation in the community. Everybody gives due respect to her for her sanctity and noble character. She is a woman who does not like to be damned with a lie of confession. In the trial scene of the last Act, Danforth forces her to confess with Proctor. But she refuses only because she wants to keep her social-image intact. The following dialogue witnesses it:

Danforth: Now, woman, you surely see it profit nothin' to keep this conspiracy any further. Will you confess yourself with him (Proctor) ? I say, will you confess yourself, Goody Nurse?

Rebecca: Why, it is a lie, it is a lie ; how may I damn myself?
I cannot, I cannot.42

Her own words clearly reflect her sense of identity. She considers that Danforth's pressure to let her confess is an attack on her dignity and honour. That is why she refuses to confess herself in keeping with her noble saintly character and image in her society.

The last scene (the trial scene) of the play is, again, a moving recognition of mutual love, respect and charity. Above all, the main

42 C.P., p. 325.
focus is fully on Proctor's integrity. The identity crisis arises here
because he almost hands over his "name" to his enemies by his false
"confession." As the play moves towards the end, we see that he
confesses to regain his life but he will not accuse others. As he remarks,
"I cannot judge another, I have no tongue for it" (C.P., p. 326). Till the
last minute, he is in search of saving his public or social-image, his own
identity. His anguished cry "God in heaven, what is John Proctor, what
John is Proctor?" (C.P., p. 324) is ample evidence of his confusion. In
the meantime, he realises that his own confession will be used as an
instrument against them. So, he tears it up well in time. His act of
tearing the confession at such a crucial moment has a vital significance
as it relates to the question of his identity. Because he knows that if he
puts his name to it he will never find himself again. To him preserving
one's identity is more precious than survival without one's honour and
dignity. So he makes a strong proclamation of his total integrity. This is
clearly evident in his climactic words when he boldly challenges Judge
Danforth:

Danforth: Mr Proctor, I must have good and legal proof that you --
Proctor: You are the high court, your word is good enough!
Tell them I confessed myself; say Proctor broke his knees
and wept like a woman; say what you will, but my name
cannot --

Danforth: Then explain to me, Mr. Proctor, why you will not let --
Proctor (with a cry of his whole soul):

Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my
life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not
worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live
without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my
name!  

In fact, in this piercing cry of the protagonist may be seen his
vehement protest at any attempt to damage his name or public image. He
would even prefer death to living without his name in which lies his
real identity. He wants to die with his good name. He cannot control
himself when the question of his identity is attacked. He finds no
alternative but to fight bravely against it in order to save his self-image
or identity in society. Further, at the end of the play Proctor refuses to
compromise with the authority in order to maintain his rightful image in
society. For him, dying on the rop is preferable to living without his
social-image. In his attempt to strengthen his integrity he finally tells the
judges:

You have made your magic now, for now I do think I see some shred
of goodness in John Proctor. Not enough to weave a banner with, but
white enough to keep it from such dogs.
(Turning to his wife Elizabeth, he continues):
Give them no tear! Tears please them!
Show honor now, show a stony heart and
sink them with it!  

44. C.P., p. 328.
Miller himself stresses the need for the immense value of one's conscience in order to maintain one's dignity and honour in life. In his 'Introduction' to the *Collected Plays* he remarks:

I believe that on the night of its (*The Crucible*) opening, it inspired a part of its audience with an unsettling fear and partisanship, which, again, was the handing over of conscience to another, be it woman, the state, or a terror, and the realization that with conscience goes the person, the soul immortal, and the "name".45

His own words, thus, reveal that a man's real identity can be maintained through his own 'conscience.' In the play when we examine Proctor's life, it is clearly seen that in the last few moments of his life he is under no delusion. He is completely aware of himself and his actions. He is fully committed to his own conscience which prevents him from compromising with the authority. That is why he ultimately goes to death with no compromise at all. His decision to die for the sake of his unsullied "name" is unquestionable to a noble hero like him. Though he is executed for a sin (the witchcraft) he never commits, he firmly maintains his self-image by sacrificing his life. He really keeps his integrity as he goes to death with his conscience (without compromising). This gives him the noble status of a tragic hero.

45. C.P., p. 47.
Thus, it can be assessed that the play on the whole concerns with individual values and moral integrity, specially with his quest for personal identity against the temptation of easy compromise.

Clearly, the theme of the problem of identity has begun to appear as central to Miller's concern as a dramatist. Each of these plays suggests that a conflict continuously goes on in the mind of the characters on the fear of losing one's personal 'name', or social identity, due to certain intransigent circumstances. At the most climactic moment a distinction is made between losing one's soul and losing one's name. As The Crucible demonstrates, the protagonist clearly decides in favour of losing his soul rather than his name. This is a testimony to the significance that the dramatist attaches to the problem of identity as it poses itself to each sensitive thinking individual. The emphasis on the protagonist's intense desire to save his "name" even at the expense of losing his life finds a yet stronger reflection in Miller's next play, A View from the Bridge.
A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE [1955]

I

*View from the Bridge* is another tragic drama by Arthur Miller. It is one of his full-length family dramas and is also the last of his early plays. The play marks a turning point in Miller's dramatic career as a playwright in that it was his last tragic play after which he did not do any dramatic composition for a period of nine years. It is a drama of the immigrant seeking to establish his identity in the new world of the uneducated and to assert his national identity in the midst of confusion between moral law and federal law. Miller's first version of *View from the Bridge* was originally published as a one-Act verse-drama in 1955 and had its New York premiere on September 28, 1955. It was revised as a two-Act tragedy in prose and produced in London in October, 1956. The two-Act version was first published in 1957 and was included in Miller's *Collected Plays* which appeared in the same year. The play had enjoyed a number of revivals, including a long run in 1965 off-Broadway. It also had a stellar-cast production on Broadway in 1983. With this play Miller, whose work had already commanded great respect, shows further development in his human insight and theatrical skill.
The setting of the play is the Red Hook Section of Brooklyn. *A View from the Bridge* is not a private drama. In fact, the play is usually categorized as a "Social Play." It is set in contemporary Brooklyn and centres upon the plight of a longshoreman who is torn between his loyalty to the traditional code of honour followed by his community and the blind force of his psychological obsession. Here, Miller probes the soul of a betrayer, uncovering the sources of his anti-social crime. It is, in fact, a tragedy on the pattern of Greek classical plays. Drawing our attention to the outline of the story in the Preface to the play, Miller says:

> When I heard the tale first it seemed to me that it must be some re-enactment of a Greek myth which was ringing a long buried bell in my own subconscious mind.¹

Robert Hogan aptly observed that the play seems to be "an attempt to utilize the austere technique of Sophocles in a modern setting."²

As a matter of fact, in *A View from the Bridge*, Alfieri, a wise neighbourhood lawyer of Italian ancestry, is the "engaged narrator" of the story. It can be pointed out that the use of the narrator in the play

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¹ Arthur Miller, "Preface", to *A View from the Bridge*, *Theatre Arts* 50 (September, 1956), 31.
further helps to mark an aesthetic distance between the audience and the stage. M.W. Steinberg believes that *A View from the Bridge* "is the most classical of Miller's tragedies. The use of the engaged narrator or chorus to underline the 'generalized significance' of the play and the depiction of the hero as a man almost possessed, driven beyond the ultimate bond of caution to destruction by an overwhelming force, strongly remind us of Greek Tragedy." The "fatal violation of an ancient law" is presented in the play in naturalistic language within an expressionistic set. It is Alfieri, an emigrant Sicilian lawyer, who sees, helplessly, the inevitability of Eddie's defeat, and sees two types of law in conflict -- the ancient pre-Greek law or the natural law, and the state law as represented by the Immigration Bureau. Thus, considering the line of social criticism in *A View from the Bridge*, it is easy to discern that the play deals, at least on the surface level, with the problem of illegal immigration into America by immigrants of different national identities.

The main story of the play centres around the life of Eddie Carbone, an Italian longshoreman, living in America and working in the dock near the Brooklyn Bridge. His wife, Beatrice, invites her niece Catherine, whom she calls Katie, to their home to live with them. Alfieri is the lawyer who views the whole scene from a distance. Eddie volunteers to take the responsibility of looking after Katie as his daughter. As Catherine grows up, she presents problems to Eddie. Eddie, very

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strangely, tries to exercise control over her. He checks her when she wears a low skirt and high heels and when she waves to Louis, a neighbour. He is shocked to know that she wants to work outside and support his family.

Meanwhile, the cousins of Beatrice — Marco and Rodolfo — arrive in the family at Beatrice’s invitation. They do not possess proper documents for entry into America and their immigration is, therefore, illegal. Eddie protects them by giving shelter in his house. As the time passes, he learns that Katie is getting closer to Rodolfo. He is jealous of her and tries to stop her though she does not care for his advice. Beatrice also does not pay much heed to Eddie’s babblings and encourages Katie to go out with Rodolfo. Eddie suffers from an extreme sense of loneliness and is left outside the family as a condemned person. He fights and shouts but no one listens to him. In the end, when all his hopes are dashed to the ground and when he feels that all his control over Katie is lost, he goes to the Immigration Office and informs the officials about the illegal guests at his home. Marco challenges him. A fight ensues between them. In the fight, Eddie is killed and he dies in the lap of his wife, Beatrice.

Miller’s characters function more commonly as fathers, sons, husbands, or wives in a family setting rather than as citizens in society. However, the protagonist of *A View from the Bridge* acts in a specific
social milieu that awakens his sense of guilt and personal dignity. The amusing treatment of the protagonist’s trial throws light on important issues raised by the tragedy. A View from the Bridge is a grim tragedy. At times, the play assumes mythical dimensions. It chokes the emotions of the reader or audience, infuses in them a sense of insecurity and fear but induces in them a craving for a kind of order, reformation or metamorphosis. The play is undoubtedly a deep and disturbing tragedy. Like his earlier plays, A View from the Bridge, presents a picture of the “good society,” which stands in the background of the hero’s trials and choices. Of all the social plays belonging to the first period of his artistic career, A View from the Bridge may be considered as Miller’s most self-conscious “tragic” drama. It is marked by the playwright’s ambition to attain the height of a classical tragedy. The protagonist is presented as an individual who is in direct conflict with social forces. One major distinction between A View from the Bridge and the earlier plays of Miller is the motive of illicit sex and violence which pervades the atmosphere of the play. Leonard Moss has rightly pointed out that for the first time in the play, “sexual desire and jealousy become the dominant components” of Miller’s dramatic reality, and so the protagonist who is vaguely in quest of realisation of his identity flounders and meets with a tragic end.

III

One of the important aspects of *A View from the Bridge* is the study of the protagonist’s attempt to use the identity issue as a cover for an intriguing psychological phenomenon of guilt and jealousy. This theme is related with the formation and development of Eddie Carbone’s character and his entire behaviour. From the very beginning of the play, Eddie’s extreme possessiveness suggests his passionate desire for the niece that he will not acknowledge. Alfieri himself comments on Eddie’s behaviour, “His eyes were like tunnels; any first thought was that he had committed a crime, but soon I saw it was only a passion that had moved into his body, like a stranger.” (C.P., p.406). Miller takes interest in the dramatic exploration of the disastrous consequences of this invisible and irresistible passion. According to him, it is

a passion which, despite its contradicting self-interest of the individual it inhabits, despite every kind of warning, despite even its destruction of the moral beliefs of the individual, proceeds to magnify its power over him until it destroys him.6

One can also easily discern Eddie's extreme possessiveness which ultimately results in his jealousy for his niece Katie. He wants to keep her under his own control though she attains her adulthood. It is interesting to see that his wife Beatrice complains to him once, “I don’t understand you; she’s seventeen years old, you gonna keep her in the house all her life?” (C.P., p. 386) and “when are you going to leave her alone?” (C.P., p. 404). He never expects to let her go far from him. Truly speaking, his secret desire is to let her be for him alone. That is why he feels ‘strangely nervous’ when she simply informs him of her getting a job in a big plumbing company. He is rather unwilling to accept it and surprisingly asks her, “where’s the job? What company? Look, did I ask you for money?” (C.P., pp.384-85). He really feels that Katie has an inclination towards Rodolpho who loves her too. The situation actually leads him to express his pangs of emotion in the form of a complaint to Alfieri, as he puts it against Rodolpho:

> What can I do? I'm a patsy, what can a patsy do? I worked like a dog twenty years so a punk could have her, so that's what I done ... I give him my house to sleep! I take the blankets off my bed for him, and he takes and puts his dirty filthy hands on her like a goddam thief! He's stealing from me! ⁷

These are all nothing but the reflections of his own extreme possessiveness and his unrevealed passionate desire for Katie.

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⁷ C.P., pp. 409-10.
In fact, *A View from the Bridge* is a play about passion but which is curiously drained of passion. It is concerned with the implicit contract between people. Yet, I would like to argue, that the play is also related to the individual's desperate need to maintain his own good opinion of himself. In making Eddie Carbone a victim of passion which he can neither articulate nor acknowledge, Miller absolves him (Eddie) of ultimate responsibility for his own actions. Eddie acts under a compulsion which alienates him from himself. He watches his own betrayal with a kind of detached horror. Unable to act he wishes to see himself as the unwilling victim of the gods. It is a central irony of the play that in some sense Miller concedes this consolation by closing off Eddie's own self-perception. To defend his honour, he destroys the meaning of honour. Eddie, in fact, creates a fiction which will relieve him of responsibility but it is not a conscious invention. The play, according to C.W.E. Bigsby, becomes in effect

a psychological study of an individual who displaces his sexual passion into a concern with honour and family responsibility.  

With the entry of Rodolpho, Eddie feels threatened because he will soon begin to lay his hands on Eddie's niece Catherine. His relationship with Catherine becomes questionable because of its incestuous undertone. Hence, Eddie cannot dare declare his passion for her

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openly. Considering it as confidential and secret, he goes to Alfieri for his advice and asks, "I'm talking to you confidential, ain't I? I mean it don't go no place but here. Because I don't like to say this about anybody. Even my wife I didn't exactly say this" (C.P., p. 407). But Alfieri rightly advises to overcome his thoughts and to forget about Katie. As he explains:

Yes, but these things have to end, Eddie, that's all. The child has to grow up and go away, and the man has to learn to forget. Because after all, Eddie - what other way can it end? Let her go. That's my advice. You did your job, now it's her life; wish her luck, and let her go... Because there's no law, Eddie, make up your mind to it; the law is not interested in this... She wants to get married, Eddie. She can't marry you, Can she? I gave you my advice Eddie, that's it.9

Thus trapped, Eddie does not know the way out of his dilemma. He cannot give vent to his forcibly suppressed feelings. The mental stress gives rise to his neurosis.

Eddie is a neurotic character. He is not satisfied with gratifying his impulses symbolically and fantastically, but he wants to be an actor on the stage of life, and his disturbed behaviour affects those with whom he lives — Catherine, Beatrice, Marco and Rodolpho. Eddie's unacceptable impulse, as a neurotic character, is his love for his niece, who is much junior to him in age. This creates tension in him. He has

not even visited his wife for the last three months for which Beatrice
complains:

When am I gonna be a wife again, Eddie?
... It's almost three months you don't feel good;
they are only here a couple of weeks. It's three months,
You don't like me, heh?^{10}

Eddie is, thus, suspected by his wife, Beatrice. In her suspicion she
warns her niece Catherine:

I told you fifty times already, you can't act the way you act. You still
walk around in front of him in your slip - Well you can't do it. Or like
you sit on the edge of the bathtub talkin' to him when he's shavin' in
his underwear ... but you're a grown woman and you're in the same
home with a grown man.^{11}

Gradually he begins to realise that he has no place in this world and in
his family. He thinks that his whole life is at stake. Hence, he starts
showing signs of neurotic behaviour. As the play progresses, Eddie
who is sincere and honest, all of a sudden becomes sinister, dishonest
and revengeful. As such he either indulges in fantasies or betrays
symptoms of neurosis. Miller has, indeed, presented Eddie's story as a
"hard outline of a human dilemma,"^{12} and has chosen it in order to
explore the emotional conflict more deeply.

^{10} C.F., p. 399.
^{11} C.F., p. 405.
^{12} C.F., p. 50.
Eddie undergoes a mental struggle because of the socially condemnable impulse of his secret fondness for his niece which gives rise to his neurotic behaviour. He engages himself in a scuffle with Rodolfo. Macro tries to eliminate him (Eddie) by throwing a chair over his head. The incident provides a striking theatrical moment. Eddie becomes tense because of the pressure of unconscious forces on his mind vis-a-vis his inability to realise the obnoxity of his suppressed wish. It is this tension that makes him in the process turn out to be a different person altogether. His anger, heartache, despondency and anguish towards Katie, Beatrice, Marco and Rodolfo are a clear reflection of this emotional upset. And he fights with Marco to bring about his own destruction.

The self-destructive behaviour can be interpreted even by the ordinary psychologist as a result of the unconscious feeling of guilt which has for a long time remained suppressed. Moreover, his unconscious motivation is responsible for the kind of change of behaviour subsequently exhibited by him. When judged from this angle, Eddie's behaviour may be called irrational. As he has brought up little Katie in his house under his fatherly care, he should have no moral right to entertain a secret desire to seduce her. Being himself a married man, he has no right to betray his wife especially when her loyalty to him is never questioned. Further, he has no right to defy the moral law of the Italian endogamous community. But, Eddie entertains
unacceptable impulses, defies moral code and betrays an incestuous desire. He surely overlooks and even betrays his wife and goes to the extreme of outraging her sentiments and loyalty to him by going against her cousins. In a sense, he becomes morally insane and neurotic. He never attempts to take the life of Rodolpho, but challenges Marco in the end. This neurotic behaviour, on the other hand, may be attributed to his sense of guilt.

Eddie's indulgence in sinful thought drives him to the extreme of having Rodolpho and Marco committed to the prison. Indeed, Eddie attempts to relieve himself of the guilt-complex by repeating such small acts of revenge. One might ask whether the play shows any concern, through its protagonist Eddie, with the problem of identity. Yes, the protagonist, after he has betrayed the signs of a guilt-ridden, neurotic individual, begins to get worried about establishing his credentials as a law-abiding American. He feels he had lost his 'name' after being accused of harbouring jealousy towards the illegal immigrants in his own house and a secret sinful desire for Catherine whom he had brought up like his own daughter. Having lost his 'name' in the eyes of his community seriously hurts his self-respect and he takes the unwarranted defiance of his position as a challenge to his greater dignity and to his real identity as a law-abiding American citizen.
Again, in *A View from the Bridge*, the feeling of jealousy also seems to be a major element in the character of Eddie. He suffers from an inferiority complex. In the play, Eddie's inferiority complex lies behind his feeling of childlessness, the feeling that he had failed to give his wife a child. In other words, it is more or less related to the question of his identity as a father. Like all Americans he should have also established the family with his own children. But as we see in the play he is a failure in this respect. With this inferiority complex in him, Eddie is naturally jealous of those who are apparently more successful than he is, and which creates in him a deep sense of inferiority. He begins to have this feeling shortly after the arrival of Marco and Rodolfo, who act as catalysts to his hidden feeling of jealousy. Moreover, he also experiences difficulty in accepting his responsibility as a father and protector on a realistic level. As a guardian, Eddie does not favour Katie's moving out freely.

In the play we see that there is a choice of upholding and maintaining one's identity within the community as its loyal and trustworthy member against the thought of upholding and maintaining one's identity as an American citizen. Eddie certainly prefers the latter. So in the ultimate analysis the action of the play gives rise to a larger conflict, the conflict of choice between social identity and national identity. And it is of momentous importance to see what kind of choice or decision he finally takes to resolve the crisis he faces no matter what
price he has to pay for the decision he finally takes. And on that count Eddie cannot be held to be guilty or neurotic. He makes a right resolution on a higher legal and moral plane. Alongside fear and possessiveness manifest in his behaviour. Eddie displays also his trait of selfishness. He is in a low key and bears emotional pangs in silence. To use the words of Paul Hauck:

It is the rare jealous or possessive person who suffers emotional pangs in silence. Most jealous persons register their grievances loudly and clearly. They scream at their partners, scratch them around, and hassle them shamelessly.\(^\text{13}\)

Eddie too wants to register his grievances loudly and clearly, but whenever he makes an effort to do so, he is rebuffed and even rebuked by both Beatrice and Katie with the result that he begins to harbour ill-will against both of them.

In view of the foregoing considerations, it may be stated that *A View from the Bridge* is a tragedy of a neurotic character Eddie who is afflicted with a sense of guilt and shame and jealousy. Eddie’s dilemma embodies the “hellish agonies of guilt, and of struggles with his guilt and desire.”\(^\text{14}\) The play, in fact, may be seen as an intriguing

\(^{13}\) Paul Hauck, *Jealousy*, New Delhi, 1983, p. 29; as also quoted in *Perspectives on Arthur Miller,* (ed.), Atma Ram, op.cit., p. 106.

psychological study that shows the self-destructiveness of an inflexible, passionate individual. According to Neil Carson, Miller focuses on the point of intersection between the inner and outer worlds. He is quintessentially an explorer of the shadowy region between pride and guilt.\(^\text{15}\) Eddie, in *A View from the Bridge* is prone to his darkness more than any other character in Miller’s plays. His behaviour gives evidence of his suffering from neurosis, guilt and jealousy. The theme of neurosis, guilt and jealousy really provides an illuminating force for a better understanding of the dramatic reality and the drama of conflict between the community or moral law (which Eddie defies) and the federal law (which he supports).

Miller’s *A View from the Bridge* (1955) apparently shows a departure from his practice as a social dramatist. It is not a social play in the same manner as *All My Sons* (1947) and *Death of a Salesman* (1949). It is evident that social forces in the form of economic or political pressures are no longer present in *A View from the Bridge*. Instead, we find the presence of a greater emphasis on psycho-sexual forces and tragic violence in the play. There is a clear shift from the societal to the personal and from the external to the internal causes of the catastrophe. The internal or psychological conflict in the mind of Eddie as a result of his suppressed, incestuous motives for Catherine,

precipitates social crisis and intensifies his own suffering, and ultimately brings about his tragic end. Eddie's subjective and objective existence have been fully dramatized. It adds to the intense emotion of the sexual theme in the play. In fact, Eddie is the most inarticulate character among Miller's protagonists. He is an uneducated dock-labourer who is unable to comprehend the nature of his suffering. He can neither explain nor overcome the inexplicable fascination for his niece, Catherine. As Henry Popkin observed, at the centre of the play there is a character who is not only troubled and guilty, but "sick." He further, observed:

The root and symptom of his (Miller's) heroes' disorders (as in *A View from the Bridge*) is illicit sexual-activity.16

In *A View from the Bridge*, Miller has provided the Freudian psycho-sexual motivation to bring about the desired change. In place of the father-son relationship the uncle-niece relationship is in the centre. Eddie's excessive demand for his niece's loyalty creates the suspicion of his emotional weakness for her. The emphasis on his possessiveness suggests the presence of an incestuous desire in him which he does not or cannot openly acknowledge for fear of losing his social identity and becoming an outcast. Catherine could be contaminated by the world's wickedness. The thought of her being subjected to another man's

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authority is intolerable to Eddie. Miller himself is particularly interested in the destructiveness of this inadmissible but overwhelming passion for sexual jealousy as shown in the character of Eddie. The play's psychological centre of reality is embodied in Eddie's obsession. In the course of the development of the action of the play Eddie has actually become enamoured of Catherine and he cannot bear to think of separating from her in the event of her marrying Rodolpho or anyone else. He practically interferes in her personal life when he indicates his unhappiness at her wearing short skirts and "clacking high heels," and calls her walking "wavy", or marks her chats with Louis, and making a plan to get herself a job. As he warns Catherine:

Now don't aggravate me, Katie, you are walking 'wavy! I don't like the looks they 're given' you in the candy store, And with them new high heels on the sidewalk - clack, clack, clack. The heads are turnin', like windmills.

In course of the sequential development of the play, Eddie's jealousy increases when Rodolpho becomes quite intimate with Katie. It is at this point that Eddie's tyrannical concern for her welfare, and his nervous sexual feeling takes the form of bullying and teasing Rodolpho. It may be pointed out that the guilt, associated with a desire for

18. C.F., p. 381.
Catherine, or fear of losing her to a rival, depresses Eddie's sexual potency. The beginning of the sex-rivalry in the play is conveyed entirely through Eddie's ominous silences and through the meaningful expression of his sullen dialogue. His subsequent responses reveal the depth of his mental disturbance. He pleads ignorance and tries to accuse Rodolpho of putting "his dirty filthy hands on her (Catherine) like a goddam thief" (C.P., p. 410). In fact, Eddie's hostility toward Rodolpho can be easily discerned. He impulsively tries to display it to his niece by violently kissing Rodolpho before her as the stage direction indicates:

Rodolpho flies at him in attack. Eddie pins his arms, laughing, and suddenly kisses him.\textsuperscript{19} (stage direction)

It is no doubt a gross act, and suggests exploitation of a new dimension of homo-sexuality by Miller. The stage direction which follows this violent sequence reads:

They (Eddie and Rodolpho) are like animals that have torn at one another and broken up without a decision.\textsuperscript{20} (stage direction)

The animal imagery underlines the frustration of the suppressed lust for flesh which gives rise to the violence and determines the tragic movement of the action.

\textsuperscript{19} C.P., p. 422.
\textsuperscript{20} C.P., p. 423.
In *A View from the Bridge*, Miller has presented Eddie's inarticulate life quite successfully. Eddie is really obsessed and has no notion of the complexity of love and social understanding. The irrationality of his accusations, which could have no impact other than the alienation of Catherine, indicates the intensity of the longshoreman's desperation. However, his obsessive love for his niece never ends and he always asks Alfieri "What do I do?" (C.P., p.424). In his response Alfieri finally warns him:

> This is my last word, Eddie, take it or not, that's your business. Morally and legally you have no rights, you cannot stop it; she is a free agent ... You won't have a friend in the world, Eddie! Even those who understand will turn against you, even the ones who feel the same will despise you! Put it out of your mind! Eddie!²¹

Of course, shame and hopelessness drive Eddie to a still more irrational deed. Instead of protecting his family's integrity, he destroys it. Eddie violates the Sicilian code of honour operative in his social world. He eventually becomes an informer to the immigration authorities. As a matter of fact, Eddie's betrayal points to the intensity of his passion for Catherine. Thus, in the play the problem of incestuous desire is dramatised as a conflict between the community law and the state law. In a sense, the real tragic conflict in *A View from the Bridge* is the outcome of the incestuous love and sexual disloyalty of the protagonist.

²¹ C.P., p. 424.
In *A View from the Bridge*, Miller adds a new theme of personal versus community conflicts. As a matter of fact, the real theme of the play is established in the underlying dramatic conflict between individual actions and social ethics. Eddie is placed squarely in a social context and he is to be judged by the standards and social code of that world which he inhabits. The horror and monstrosity of his anti-social act can justly be appreciated only if it is measured in the light of that community's background. Miller says:

> The mind of Eddie Carbone is not comprehensible apart from its relation to his neighbourhood, his fellow workers, his social situation. His self-esteem depends upon their estimate of him, and his value is created largely by his fidelity to the code of his culture.22

That exactly means that Eddie's identity is dependent upon his recognition by his society. In fact, an excess of love for the niece makes Eddie irrational and blind, and he even breaks the vital law of community life which determines his existence in society. As such, the conflict between personal conscience and community codes has become a prominent theme in the play. The hidden incestuous love of Eddie for Catherine precipitates a social crisis, intensifies his own suffering and enhances the tragic effect of the play.

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Of course, in the eyes of the Longshoremen community, Eddie's informing amounts to a betrayal of the "polis." The irony here is that Eddie suffers for violating a wrong social code which demands that he remain silent though it would obviously imply his becoming an accomplice in the crime of protecting the illegal immigrants. In transgressing against the community, he violates the ethics of a "polis." In so doing, the hero crumbles under the pressure of this social transgression. Eddie's desperate act has, indeed, threatened the very life of the community. As for instance, Catherine who had been sympathetic to him so far turns against him. She calls him 'a rat' and says:

He belongs in the sewer! He bites people when they sleep! He comes when nobody's looking and poisons decent people. In the garbage he belongs!  

Eddie has to face a social-boycott. Communal law condemns Eddie to shame and to death, but the impulse for violating that law has little to do with the conflict between it and federal law. Eddie and his family have always endorsed subcultural law.

As regards the conflict between personal conscience and community ethics, it can be asserted that ironically, Marco is as dissatisfied with the law as Eddie himself. Eddie seeks the help of law
to prevent Catherine from marrying someone who "ain't right." When it fails he turns to the act of informing. In the meantime, Marco too wants Eddie punished for degrading his brother, robbing his children, mocking his work. In his anger he complains Alfieri, "He degraded my brother. My blood. He robbed my children, he mocks my work. I work to come here, mister!" (C.P., p.434). Learning that there is no law for that sort of retaliation, he turns to Sicilian law, and revenges on his word to Alfieri and ultimately kills Eddie. In fact, as the instrument of Eddie's death, Marco symbolically affirms a moral law that Alfieri's law ignores. Interestingly enough, both Marco and Eddie receive warnings from Alfieri, but both of them reject his advice.

In *A View from the Bridge*, Miller creates a balance between internal process and external causality and allows the audience to participate in a process of maintaining that balance. It is, thus, that this theme of the problem of punishment and justice, arising out of the conflict between personal conscience and community ethics, becomes an important factor in the whole thematic development of the play. Likewise, for Eddie the question of meeting the threat to his authority in his own house posed by Rodolpho and Beatrice and Catherine is of vital importance. It is a matter of threat to his social identity. Threatened by a stranger relative in his own house he fears loss of his social image. He therefore takes Rodolpho's threat seriously and contrives to use
his power to defeat Rodolfo even though it means sacrificing himself too to get back his "name."

The problem of identity is an important subject matter for Miller. In *A View from the Bridge*, the dramatist lays emphasis on the relationship between man's self-identity and his image in society. The other themes of the play as discussed in the foregoing pages ultimately lead to this major issue. In fact, the crisis of identity, according to Miller, is a distinctive feature of modern life. As Gerald Weales remarks:

> the most profitable way of looking at his (Miller's) work is through his heroes and through the concern of each, however inarticulate, with his identity — his name, as both John Proctor and Eddie Carbone call it.24

Miller's central theme, according to C.W.E. Bigsby, is

> the problem of relating one's deeds to one's conception of oneself. The echoic insistence on identity, the endlessly repeated demands to sustain one's name in the face of flux and in the teeth of personal betrayal, suggests a Platonic sense of self which must be maintained.25

In fact, the heroes of Miller's plays are creatures tossed by confusion. They are people groping about in darkness. In the eyes of Miller, the tragic dimension is shaped from their struggles and fumblings, their desperate and vague search for self-identity, and the exploration of their 'bad luck.' All his heroes ultimately clamour for their self-identity. As for instance, John Proctor, in *The Crucible*, cries, 'How may I live without my name?' (C.P., p.322) and tears up his confession. Willy Loman, in *Death of a Salesman*, again cries out, 'I am not a dime a dozen. I am Willy Loman.' (C.P., p.217). Joe Keller, in *All My Sons*, commits suicide only to save his name. Similarly, in *A View from the Bridge*, too, Eddie Carbone puts all his weight on protecting his name and maintaining his identity.

At the centre of the play is a protagonist who shows a desperate concern for his personal identity, and thereby for his "name." He also dies crying out for his name. Of course, the "name" theme in *A View from the Bridge*, certainly reminds one of Miller's earlier dramas the protagonists of which struggle for preserving their good name even at the cost of their lives. In the course of its dramatic action, Marco, the symbol of justice, is found spitting publicly into Eddie's face and that besmirches Eddie's self-esteem as well as his social-image. As the action of the play develops the tension of rivalry between Marco and

Eddie grows higher and higher. The stage direction clearly highlights it:
Marco is face to face with Eddie, a strained tension gripping his eyes and jaw, his neck stiff, the chair raised like a weapon over Eddie’s head — and he transforms what might appear like a glare of warning into a smile of triumph, and Eddie’s grin vanishes as he absorbs his look. (stage direction)  

This growing tension begins to turn into action as the play moves towards its climax. Marco spits into Eddie’s face. As the stage direction further emphasises the point:

Marco suddenly breaks from the group and dashes into the room and faces Eddie, Beatrice and First Officer rush in as Marco spits into Eddie’s face (stage direction)

Thus when his self-respect is hurt, Eddie, with an ‘enraged cry’ lunges for Marco, “Oh, you mother’s — ! I’ll kill you for that, you son of a bitch!” (C.P., p. 432). Eddie makes an all-out bid to finish Marco which recoils back on him. No doubt, Eddie is trounced in the climactic duel between the two but this fight is a determined attempt by Eddie to recover his lost social standing. He makes a heroic struggle to acquaint himself in the eyes of the larger America than the one he defies. Thus the concern with self-identity deepens as Eddie focuses his anger not on his niece and Rodolpho, but on Marco since he is the one

27. C.P., pp. 431-32.
who publicly soiled his name. When Beatrice asks him what more he wants, Eddie replies:

I want my name! Marco's got my name! ... he's gonna give it back to me in front of this neighbourhood, or we have it out.28

The conflict arises from the hero's efforts to project an image of himself which is in contrast to what the society expects of him to be. The society rejects him for violating its moral codes. Upto the end he remains unaware of the reasons for rejection. He is too much absorbed in his own world and feelings to care for forces that pressurise him to conform to the social expectations. The tragic vision that emerges out of Miller's theatre is associated with the dramatisation of the abstraction of human values in conflict with the social ethics. In fact, Eddie Carbone's emotional outburst during his climactic scuffle with Marco reveals moral concern of all his social plays:

Wipin' the neighbourhood with my name like a dirty rag! I want my name, Marco ... Now gimme my name.29

In fact, Eddie, Proctor and Loman share this preoccupation. The latter two are similarly shocked into the awareness of their personal identity as they stand face to face with their final doom. As Gerald Weales has

pointed out:

Playwrights have always been better at telling men how to die than how to live. A dramatist in opposition is always more comfortable than one in affirmation.\(^{30}\)

To Eddie, identity or self-esteem becomes more important than even personal survival. He lays down his life in order that his name remains unsullied before his own eyes. For Eddie, the name has a double significance. In the first place, it is a mark of identification and connection with others; secondly, it is a symbol of personal integrity vis-a-vis one’s society. Eddie is greatly sensitive to the issue of protecting his name as illustrated by the following exchange between Marco and Eddie:

Marco (Calling near the door outside): Eddie Carbone!
Eddie (as though flinging his challenge): Yeah, Marco!
Eddie Carbone! Eddie Carbone!
Eddie Carbone!\(^{31}\)

Here, Eddie repeats his own name in a self-dramatizing manner in order to emphasise his concern over the wrongdoing of Marco in making an

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\(^{31}\) C.P., p. 438.
assault on his public image. Commenting on the protagonist's deep concern over the issue of his personal honour and dignity, Miller says:

He (Eddie) is ready to lay down his life ... to secure one thing ... his sense of personal dignity ... his rightful position in society.\textsuperscript{32}

Like Miller's other tragic heroes Eddie cannot make a compromise on such a vital issue as self-esteem. It is no wonder that his life comes to a tragic end in the effort to regain his self-esteem and social reputation.

Miller's entire approach to the theme of his hero's crisis of identity further reveals a difference between \textit{A View from the Bridge} and the earlier plays. Miller here deliberately chooses to turn away from social morality and enter the heroic world of classical tragedy. Eddie, a worker, indistinguishable from his neighbourhood, depends for his good name first on the community he belongs to and subsequently, when he finds he cannot uphold the social mores and obligations of the community, on the larger American society which is expected to stand by him in upholding the federal law of the land. His final words "I want my name" (C.P., p. 437) is, in fact, the heartbreaking cry of a man whose self-esteem depends entirely on society. As long as Eddie accepts

the rules and prejudices of his society, an Italian neighbourhood in Brooklyn, he lives comfortably but as soon as he violates these obligations he must perish. As such, it can be observed that the theme that recurs in all his plays — the relationship between a man’s frantic effort to preserve his identity and the role that the society demands of him — is a major one in *A View from the Bridge*.

Miller has thus advanced his treatment and discussion of the quintessential problem of identity in *A View from the Bridge*. The treatment of this problem imparts to Miller’s plays a great significance because of the ubiquitous nature of the problem each modern man confronts. In one form or another, Miller takes up the theme of identity in subsequent plays as well. We may now turn to the next play *After the Fall* in which he presents the issue of identity from a new angle.