CHAPTER - IV

LATER PLAYS [ 1964 - 1980 ]

- After the Fall (1964)
- Incident at Vichy (1964)
- The Price (1968)
- The American Clock (1980)
AFTER THE FALL [1964]

I

After a long absence from the New York stage of about nine years, *After the Fall* was Miller's first contribution to the Lincoln Centre Repertory Theatre in 1964. The play, directed by Elia Kazan, was the year's opening production of the Theatre. Besides, it was the most successful play of the Lincoln Repertory season. It was first performed on 23 January, 1964 at the ANTA - Washington Square Theatre, New York City. It offers profiles of modern humanity and its guilt of individual and collective failures. The play is a realistic one with scenes rearranged in time and space. About the success of the play Allan Lewis remarks:

The play does arise beyond the personal, for the American man today is disturbed by inability to love or the conflict between love and career.¹

In fact, the play shows us a vantage point from which we may examine the man and his work. It is a bridge from which we may look backward to his (Miller's) starting point and forward to his last dramatic composition.

In his Foreword to *After the Fall* Miller speaks of Eve's tasting of the forbidden fruit as the end of paradise and innocence and as the beginning of this-worldly consciousness and choice, the two essential hallmarks of man's identity. For him the modern equivalent of the fall from paradise is the experience of the trapped individuals in the German concentration camp. Everyone in the play bears the guilt. "This play," as Miller states in the Foreword, "is a trial; the trial of a man by his own conscience, his own values, his own deeds. The Listener (an unseen character addressed by Quentin, the protagonist), who to some will be a psychoanalyst, to others God, is Quentin himself turned at the edge of the abyss to look at his experience, his nature and his time."\(^2\) As a matter of fact, Miller places a character on the stage and gives him the opportunity of dispassionately examining his identity and motives, and also explaining him to a Listener through a monologue that lasts the whole length of the play. Quentin conducts this review of his past through a dialogue with an unseen Listener. He struggles for self-understanding and self-acceptance, two new and important variations on the essential theme of the problem of identity that the protagonists of Miller's plays are concerned with in their (dramatic) careers.

Leonard Moss considers *After the Fall* the most introspective of all Miller's plays. It assumes the form of an interior dialogue purported

\[^2\] Arthur Miller, "Foreword to 'After the Fall'" in *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller*, (ed.), Robert A. Martin, op. cit., p. 257.
to lead to the protagonist's self-discovery. The process is accomplished without the aid of a psychiatrist.\textsuperscript{3} One might recall some of Miller's important observations on the play. He states that "this play is not 'about' something; hopefully, it is something. Primarily it is a way of looking at man and his human nature as the only source of the violence which has nearly destroyed the human race. It is a view which does not look toward social or political ideas as the creators of violence, but into the nature of human being himself."\textsuperscript{4} While working on the play, he further says: "I am trying to define what a human being should be, how he can survive in today's society without having to appear to be a different person from what he basically is."\textsuperscript{5}

A View from the Bridge (1955) is the last family play by Miller. It relies on a character for a protagonist who can hardly need the requirements of a protagonist for dramatic conflict. Yet in his later plays — After the Fall (1964), Incident At Vichy (1964) and The Price (1968) — Miller slightly turns away from the usual family comprising mother, father and sons. None of the fathers in these later plays commits any such act as may disturb the peace of his family. They are

\textsuperscript{3} Leonard Moss, Arthur Miller, op. cit., p. 79.

\textsuperscript{4} "Arthur Miller's Foreword, After the Fall", Saturday Evening Post, CC XXXVII (Feb. 1,1964), 32.

\textsuperscript{5} Quoted in Kenneth Allsop, "A Conversation with Arthur Miller", Encounter, XIII (July, 1959), 59.
no doubt guilty. But it is only because of their economic failures. They appear almost as secondary figures when remembered by their sons. Thus, in these later plays, we can easily discern a change in the dramatic career of the playwright himself. For the first time in his career Miller does not lead his characters to the seat of judgement. In each of these plays after *The Misfits* (a screen play and so not discussed in this dissertation), he is primarily concerned with the implications of otherness at the levels of both private and public experience. This concern leads Miller to deal with those conflicts which are inherent in our conscience. This is, indeed, the essential feature of all Miller's plays beginning with *After the Fall*. It is the drama of someone who knows and understands himself -- that is, is conscious of his identity, of his unique relationship to other people. Another striking point is that nearly all of the protagonists of his first period struggled unsuccessfully to discover who they were. In his later plays, Miller is mainly concerned with the impact his protagonists have had on others, and their (protagonists') capacity to accept their full responsibility for what they had or had not done. In his earlier plays, these protagonists ultimately meet with death. But until the very end they believe in man's ultimate triumph and confidence that human dignity will be upheld. *After the Fall* no longer offers any such reassurances. Yet the theme of the play is a re-evaluation of hope. Every incident that happens in the play is an attempt to discover the basis of that hope and to understand its source. The protagonist of the play wants to revive that hope.
We see that at the end of the play Quentin himself cries resolutely to Holga, "That woman (Maggie) hopes! ... That's why I wake each morning like a boy -- even now, even now! -- I swear to you, I could love this world again!"  

_After the Fall_ alludes to the biblical garden of Eden and the resultant fall of man after his seduction by Eve to taste of the fruit of knowledge. The playwright seeks expiation of his guilt by relating it to the problem of original sin. Quentin, the protagonist of the play is, no doubt, a prototype of Miller himself. Commenting on Quentin's way of life Allan Lewis says that "Every intimate detail of his (Quentin's) life, particularly his relationships with women, is thrust on stage, and the ordeal ends with the need to continue the agonized quest". Miller tries to counterbalance the death impulses of Maggie with Quentin's thirst for life, and Quentin's innocent complicity in murder with personal guilt for all crimes against humanity. The play is altogether a memory play. It covers an important period of Quentin's life right from his

---

6. Arthur Miller, _After the Fall_, Penguin Books, London, Cox & Wyman Ltd., 1968, p. 120; Subsequently the play is referred to as _AF_, followed by page numbers.


8. Ibid., p. 36.
childhood experiences till the failure of his two marriages. He informs the Listener "A life, after all, is evidence, and I have two divorces in my safe-deposit box" (AF., p.13). The use of narrative technique in the form of interior monologue makes the play more complex and more psychological than his other plays. The play, in a way, exposes Miller's own anxiety of sharing with the suffering of other men.

Miller acknowledges the use of his autobiographical details in the play. As he himself explains, "The writer who wants to describe life must describe his own experiences".9 The artist creates his biography through his work even though the events of his life serve to shape him. When asked in what way his plays were related to the events of his life, Miller simply replied, "In a sense all my plays are autobiographical".10 In After the Fall, one can see that the central character has much in common with the personal life of the dramatist. Both are born about the same time. In the text, Quentin is placed "in his forties" (AF., p.12) in 1964. Like Miller's father, Quentin's foreign-born father also lost a large business during the Depression for which he (father) is blamed. In both family histories, we see that there is an elder brother (as Quentin's brother Dan) to help the father in re-establishing the lost business. Above all, what is more interesting is the parallel between Miller's conjugal life and the protagonist's marital career. Like Miller Quentin

met his first wife Louise when both were college students. Like Mary Grace Slattery (Miller's first wife), Louise was a quiet, introspective type of woman. Both marriages end in divorce. Quentin's fiancée Holga, a foreign professional woman, suggests Miller's present wife Ingeborg Morath, a Swiss photographer. Despite Miller's protest, his second wife Marilyn Monroe greatly resembles Maggie, the second wife of the protagonist. One can detect a close similarity between the two women. They experienced the same unpleasant childhood. Their sexual attractiveness helped both to rise to high positions in becoming popular entertaining figures. Each woman found it extremely difficult to work with others. Getting to know that people had taken them as a "joke" they were greatly frustrated and jumped signed work-contracts. At last, they ended their lives by consuming an overdose of sleeping pills.

Thus, one can have enough evidence in support of the play's autobiographical character. It may, however, be pointed out that in these parallels Miller probably hoped to focus on his theme of the disintegration and subsequent reintegration of self-confidence. A distinguishing feature of After the Fall is that it is the first of Miller's plays where the main emphasis is almost entirely personal. Besides, it is also the first Miller play in which the largest part of the dramatic action is devoted to dealing with marital relationships.
II

*After the Fall* clearly underlines Miller’s condemnation of social and moral weaknesses. He rejects the so-called passive good because it contributes to the evil. The play’s protagonist Quentin’s self-introspection helps him to regain his sanity in the end. The entire action takes place in “the mind, thought and memory”\(^{11}\) of Quentin. Characters appear and disappear as in the mind. The memories are actually acted out on stage like Willy Loman’s dream in *Death of a Salesman*. As the play opens, Quentin addresses a “Listener” and informs him of his second wife Maggie’s and his mother’s death. He further tells him (Listener) that he is planning to get married to Holga, the German girl. Whenever Quentin mentions of a character, the character in question appears on the stage. The action of the play deals with Quentin’s journey to self-awareness and his decision to marry Holga. As such, all the episodes are related to his past life. His struggle to come to terms with his present life is traced to his unhappy family experiences in the past.

The whole play enacts a continuous revelation of the past events. After each of these episodes from his past Quentin becomes conscious of a certain aspect of his life and also of the nature of humanity.

---

\(^{11}\) *AF*, p. 11.
For instance, after Quentin remembers his mother's death, he knows that his father was able to live a normal life after the death of his beloved wife. Similarly, after his visit to the blasted stone tower of a German concentration camp where he witnesses the crimes of the Nazis against the Jews his faith in his own innocence is also shattered.

When Quentin thinks of betrayal, insincerity and cruelty, the incidents from his past which reflect these traits of human nature are enacted one by one. Each event from the past helps to clarify a previously unknown detail of personal life. As the play progresses, various relationships, like the relationship between Quentin and his friends, between husband and wife, etc. indicate a gradual change in his view of human nature culminating in a revolutionary change. Quentin finally gains a new knowledge of himself and of humanity in general. At the end of the play he significantly remarks:

No, not love; I loved them all, all! And gave them willing to failure and to death that I might live, as they gave me and gave each other, with a word, a look, a trick, a truth, a lie — and all in love! ... To know, and even happily, that we meet unblest, not in some garden of wax fruit and painted trees that lie of Eden, but after, after the Fall, after many, many deaths. Is the knowing all? And the wish to kill is never killed, but with some gift of courage one may look into its face when it appears, and with a stroke of love — as to an idiot in the house — forgive it again and again ... forever.\(^{12}\)

---

12. AF, pp. 119-20.
Quentin now learns that man is basically a sinful creature, selfish and cruel. He understands that evil is inherent in human nature and all men are equally responsible for the evil in the world. He also realises that the only way to continue living is to bear with the evil within us as we bear with 'an idiot' in the house. Thus, the play ends on a note of hope to live on by trying to forgive one's own nature. Quentin takes his final decision to continue his life with hope for the future and marry Holga.

It is interesting to note that the majority of Miller's plays are designed like court trials. Obviously, present in such scenes are the lawyer or such symbols of law and order machinery as the policemen, or such representatives of truth, justice and morality as the judges. Similarly, in *After the Fall*, the protagonist Quentin, a lawyer, reviews his past life in front of an unseen Listener. As the playwright himself admits, the trial in the play is a one-man trial where the prosecutor, defence lawyer and the judge are all compounded in the person of Quentin. He tells the Listener:

> You know, more and more I think that for many years I looked at life like a case at law, a series of proofs ... And all that remained was the endless argument with one self — this pointless litigation of existence before an empty bench.¹³

In the play, we see that Quentin not only defends his actions but also judges them in the light of his new knowledge.

---

The episodes in the play are well arranged and reinforce the main theme. The intensity and tension in the action increases with the re-enactment of each of the episodes from Quentin’s past. Miller continues to reveal new facts throughout the play till Quentin realises that all human beings are potentially “dangerous” (AF., p. 120) creatures. Unlike the pattern of dual climax in other plays, After the Fall has a single climax. In this play, one can see that the protagonist Quentin has a growing self-awareness and takes decision to live with hope for the future. Thus Quentin’s self awareness and his decision to live with hope marks the high point of the action. There is no fall in the life of the protagonist. The climactic point of the action is reached towards the very end of the play when Quentin remembers how he had actually tried to kill his second wife Maggie, and how he had really wanted her to die despite his deep love of her. He finally realises that man is no doubt a dangerous creature. It is also worth noting here that Quentin is the first Miller hero who does not die. Instead he decides to compromise in order to live for he comprehends the human condition well.

As is well known, dramatic action in any play arises out of some conflict or clash of opposed individuals or interests or passions. Such a dramatic action is not manifest in the play. Likewise Quentin experiences an intense, internal conflict and does not show it outside himself. In fact, the whole structure of the play aims to bring out the
various conflicting relationships in the life of Quentin. The emphasis on the internalisation of the action is evident from the manner in which a particular aspect of his life is built up with the help of his memory. He suffers a lot with revelation of each of his past incidents. He understands both his own nature and the nature of the humanity in general only through his internal conflicts.

That Miller uses symbols, as a part of his structural design of his plays can also be illustrated from *After the Fall*. In the opening scene of the play, the blasted stone tower of a German concentration camp dominates the setting. Its look-out windows are designed to appear like "eyes" which are blind and dark when the play opens. This image is used throughout the play to symbolise the extreme of human depravity. Whenever Quentin remembers an incident from his past relating to a basic tendency in man towards cruelty and betrayal this tower looms large and dangerous.

According to C.W.E. Bigsby, the play is Miller's effort to relate personal and public betrayals. It is intended also to account for those failures of private and social morality of which the manifest evidence is to be found in the depression, the holocaust and the persecutions of 1950's America.\(^4\) It may be possible to concede that "*After the Fall* is

a signal step in the evolution of Arthur Miller as man and artist.\textsuperscript{15} Quentin as seen in the play is quite different from Miller's other protagonists because of his increasing awareness not only of himself but also of the whole human kind. In this sense, he is more matured than his counterparts in other plays. Miller had not written anything for the stage for a decade. He broke his long silence with \textit{After the Fall}, but the play soon after its staging became one of the most controversial of his plays.

\textbf{III}

The tendency to evil and betrayal may be regarded as two important characteristics of man's essential nature and identity -- that is, of course, taking an essentialist view of man's identity. The problem of evil and betrayal is an invariably recurrent theme of Miller's plays. In his "Introduction" to the \textit{Collected Plays}, he observed:

\begin{quote}
Evil is not a mistake but a fact in itself... I believe merely that, from whatever causes 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.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

In his plays, Miller depicts evil as something which corrupts man, influences his actions and also clouds his judgement. Evil, as one sees it, can manifest itself in various forms like vengeance, over ambition,

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{C.P.}, p. 44.
pride, lust, jealousy, rebellion, etc. Miller deals with various aspects of the problem of evil in each of his plays. His later plays show the protagonist confronting with the dark and irrational forces of evil. It is remarkable that Miller develops the moralistic aspect of his concern with man’s problem of identity and so attains an intellectual maturity during the very years of his long break in his association with the theatre.

A detailed study of his plays, it may be observed reveals that there is a gradual change in his outlook regarding the treatment of concept of evil. This is particularly true of his later plays. It is evident that his early plays only hint at the inherent evil in the individual but lay a major responsibility for the presence of evil in the individual on the society itself. But in his later play, After the Fall, he puts the blame elsewhere.

In All My Sons, the main line of action proceeds from the evil deeds of Joe Keller, an uneducated and self-made businessman for whom there is nothing greater in the world than his family. He turns out to be a criminal for having caused the death of twenty-one young pilots. Instead of repenting of his evil act, he submerges his guilt in social and economic success that he had achieved through that act. In fact, he is the prototype of the average American who is hell-bent on achieving success, on becoming socially acceptable and also on
enhancing the welfare of his family. As we see in the play Joe Keller's committing an anti-social crime is mainly influenced by the society he lives in. His tragedy is the result of wrong values and beliefs which are nurtured in him by a materialistic society. In Joe's character the playwright hints at the inherent evil and hatred in human nature.

In *Death of a Salesman* too, Miller successfully brings out the evils of the materialistic society. In the play, Willy Loman is seen only as a victim of the phoney American dream. The success dream is no doubt inculcated in him by his society. Miller views society as a force inside man and as the very force that surrounds him. He sees it as man's "birth place and burial ground, promise and threat" (C.P., p. 30). According to him, the callousness of the society towards its unsuccessful members like Willy is an evil. Winfred L. Dusenbury observes that "Personal failure is especially painful in America because personal success is the universally recognised goal of its people."17 Willy wants to be "well-liked." His belief in such superficial values and commitment to the success dream become the cause of his tragic end.

Similarly, John Proctor in *The Crucible* is a product of the Puritan society governed by rigid rules and strong beliefs. He feels terribly guilty and ashamed of his adultery with Abigail Williams, his

---

prime accuser. He can never forgive himself because he has fallen low in his own eyes. He is confused about his own moral status following the signing of a false confession. Thus, directly or indirectly, society had imposed its evil desires and pressure on Proctor to commit an unpardonable crime. Besides, it may also be observed that evil as a part and parcel of human nature is present in the characters of Abigail, the Putnam, and the judges by way of their human depravity.

*À View from the Bridge* also depicts a closely knit and rigid society with its own distinct set of rules. Eddie Carbone, the protagonist, is a product of this social set up as Joe Keller and Willy Loman are products of their society. In Miller’s view, Eddie is to be seen “as a creature of his environment as well as an exception to it”(*C.P.*, p. 52). In a way, it may be said that the peculiar set up of his society is the cause of his downfall. He acts according to the unwritten law of his society when he gives shelter to the illegal immigrants Marco and Rodolfo. In fact, he too had violated the immigration regulations when he extended them protection in his own house. He acts against the law of his own community. He thus commits the worst crime he could have committed — that of “informing” the Immigration Office. He finally realises that he cannot live without the good will and approval of his society. So when he is accused of treachery in front of his friends, he assaults Marco, who had damaged his social prestige, to recover it and in the process dies. Thus, the tragedy of the protagonists
of Miller's early plays -- Joe Keller, Willy Loman, John Proctor and Eddie Carbone -- occurs as a result of their own mental make-up and the strong influence of their societies on them. It may also be pointed out that Miller has so far made it a point to divide the responsibility for his protagonist's fall between the society and the protagonists themselves. With this view in the background it may now be useful to examine how the playwright deals with the problem of evil in his later plays.

However, Miller, in his later plays, beginning with After the Fall makes a deviation in his earlier view by portraying evil as fundamental to human nature. The external evil in society becomes a reflection or continuation of the internal evil in man. As such, unlike the earlier plays the major responsibility for the presence of evil in the individual is not fixed on the society. As pointed out in the foregoing pages After the Fall marks a turning point in the trend of thought of the playwright. One can easily point to the shift in the dramatist's point of view. In the play, Quentin, the protagonist goes through certain important events of his past and evaluates them before an unseen judge. While reviewing his past actions, he accepts the suffering that he has to go through and finally attains self-awareness. He acquires a better knowledge of himself and the world around him. He fully understands that evil is inherent in human nature and all human beings are equally responsible for all the deeds of evil within and around them. In the play, Miller, for the
first time, unveils a viewpoint which implies that man is the origin of all evils. He also notes that all human beings are born after the "Fall."

Quentin's remark makes it clear, as he says:

That underneath we're all profoundly friends! I can't believe this world; all this hatred isn't real to me! ... so the truth, after all, may merely be murderous! The truth killed Lou, destroyed Mickey ... A workable lie? But that comes from a clear conscience! Or a dead one. Not to see one's own evil -- there's power! And rightness too! 18

Besides, this inherent evil in human beings is also focused on in Quentin's argument with Maggie, his second wife. He tells her:

Maggie, we were both born of many errors; a human being has to forgive himself! Neither of us is innocent. What more do you want? 19

In his self-realisation Quentin finally confirms that the external evil in society is the continuation of our own internal evil. He also knows that he is not an exception to it. Addressing the Listener towards the end of the play, Quentin says:

And I am not alone, and no man lives who would not rather be the sole survivor of this place than all its finest victims! What is the cure? Who can be innocent again on this mountain of skulls? My brothers died here (he looks from the tower down at the fallen Maggie) but my brothers built this place; our hearts have cut these stones! 20

18. AF, p. 67.
20. AF, p. 119.
Quentin further realises that it is impossible to radically change the inherent human nature. Hence, the only way to continue living is to forgive evil within us again and again as we forgive “an idiot in the house” (*AF.*, p. 120). Thus by knowing the truth and accepting it he finally takes his decision to live with hope for the future. His last words to the Listener at the end of the play reveal the truth. As he utters:

*I swear to you, I could love the world again! Is the knowing all? To know and even happily, that we meet unblessed ... after the fall, after many, many deaths. Is the knowing all? And the wish to kill is never killed, but with some gift of courage one may look into its face when it appears, and with a stroke of love -- as to an idiot in the house -- forgive it; again and again ... for ever*.

Again, the idea of betrayal is another essential element which runs through all the plays of Miller though he treats the theme of betrayal differently in his later plays. A brief discussion of it in some of Miller’s earlier plays will inevitably reveal the change in the dramatist’s point of view compared to the point of view held by him earlier. In his early plays Miller depicts betrayal as an act of disloyalty to the accepted norms of behaviour within a small social unit like family or community. This betrayal results in treachery and breach of faith among the individuals in their relationships. In *All My Sons*, Joe Keller cannot see

21. *AF.*, p. 120.
anything beyond his selfish interests. He is a violator of the trust placed in him by his community. As we see in the play, his selfishness manifest in his myopic vision increases the deceitfulness of his actions and character. He betrays his friend and business partner Deever as he accuses him (Deever) of being responsible for the cause of the death of the young American pilots. He does not think that shipping of cracked cylinder heads for fighter planes was actually a crime against his fellowmen and society. But he commits this crime without hesitation and puts the blame on his friend Deever. At last, he loses his son’s love and admiration and becomes lonely and frustrated. His relationship with his family and other members in society seems to suffer a breach. Because of this unpardonable social crime, his life comes to a tragic end.

The theme of betrayal is unambiguously present in Death of a Salesman too. But in that play betrayal is seen mostly in the context of personal relationships. Willy Loman’s infidelity to Linda is a most striking act of disloyalty to his wife. It may be seen as a contrast to Linda’s utmost devotion to and love for him. Willy is always guided by his guilty conscience of becoming a “well-liked” salesman. By this wrong belief he not only wrecks his life but also the lives of his sons. Besides, his guilt of adultery with a woman in the Boston hotel is another example of his betrayal of his sons and his wife. As such they become more and more antagonistic towards each other. Ultimately Willy
becomes quite lonely as he is ruined as a salesman, as a husband, as a father and as a man. In a way it may be interpreted as a sign of disintegration of their relationship.

*The Crucible* also underlines this theme of betrayal characteristic of human tendency to evil, and a trait of man's identity as a sinful creature. However, it is interesting to note that in the play, one may discern two different aspects of betrayal -- the disloyalty in personal relationships and the treason to one's own conscience. The first kind is the betrayal within marital relationship. In the play, John Proctor, the protagonist, betrays his wife Elizabeth Proctor by an act of adultery with Abigail Williams. Elizabeth complains to him for this betrayal. Finally it results in estrangement between the husband and the wife. Again, we can see another treason in Proctor's loss of faith in his own conscience. He almost barters his "name," that is, his identity for his life as he signs a false confession. It signifies that he betrays himself. But he soon strives to recover his spoiled dignity by correcting it before it is too late.

In *A View from the Bridge* too, betrayal no doubt plays an important role in the tragedy of Eddie Carbone. The play shows ample evidence of this breach of faith. Eddie entertains unacceptable impulses. He takes interest in incestuous love with Catherine, his niece. As such, he defies the moral law of the Sicilian community and thus betrays his wife Beatrice. Besides, when his hidden love for the girl has
no meaning, he informs about the two illegal immigrants Marco and Rodolfo to the immigration authorities. This is again an act of betrayal. It shows his disloyalty to the sacred code of his society. Thus Eddie's act of betrayal causes his loneliness and the disintegration of his relationship with others. It finally leads to his tragic end. That the treatment of this theme of betrayal exposes the moral identity (nature) of the protagonist is once again clear from the later plays beginning with *After the Fall*.

It is no doubt a fact that Miller's later plays show a significant change in his point of view. Unlike the early plays, *After the Fall* certainly marks a logical development of his views on evil, betrayal and human dignity. The play shows a turning point in his career as a dramatist. Quentin, the protagonist, is shown to be the most matured character as compared to his counterparts in other plays. Through his self-examination and re-evaluation of his past he finally realises that man is the root cause of all evil traits in humanity. It proves the validity of social evil as the extension of individual evil. From his experience Quentin also knows that tendency to duplicity is also inherent in human nature. As such, though betrayal is not directly an act of disloyalty, yet it is seen as a natural trait of the sinful human nature. He also learns that all human relationships are fraught with treachery and dishonesty. Therefore the tendency to betray is considered to be a dormant element despite an element of sincerity in human relationships of deep love.
between husband and wife, between child and parents, and between friends. A mild instance of it is that in his childhood Quentin was betrayed by his parents when they sent him for a walk with the maid so that they could go away on a holiday. But the child feels hurt and in his agony cries out:

They sent me out for a walk with the maid. When I came back the house was empty. God, why is betrayal the only truth that sticks? I adored that woman. It's monstrous I can't mourn her! 22

Besides, the inherent human tendency to betray is also visible in Quentin’s mother when she thinks of divorcing her husband following his failure in business. She angrily remarks:

You mean you saw everything going down and you throw good money after bad? Are you some kind of a moron? I should have run the day I met you ... I should have run for my life! 23

Again, when his mother calls her husband an “idiot,” Quentin himself asks the Listener, “But why is the world so treacherous?” (AF., p. 29). In the play, we can also observe that the seed of betrayal between friends germinates in Mickey, a friend of Quentin. The following dialogue reveals the significance of the fact.

Mickey: You may not be my friend anymore.
Quentin (— a terror rising in him): Why?
Mickey: I’m going to tell the truth.

22. AF., p. 84.
23. AF., p. 29.
Quentin: How do you mean?
Mickey: I'm -- going to name names.
Quentin (incredulously): Why?
Mickey: They want the names, and they mean
to destroy anyone who ... 24

Later Lou charges Mickey for his treacherous motive towards his friend. As he says, "Mickey, you are telling me for your own prosperity. If you use my name I will be dismissed. You will ruin me. You will destroy my career" (AF, p.44). It is evident that Quentin's friends betray one another for their own self-interest.

Late in the first Act Quentin laments, "How few are the days that hold the mind in place, like a tapestry hanging on four or five hooks." (AF, p.50). In fact, the hooks are an essential element of his own memory and imply the moments of betrayal. He remembers walking out of his father's business when the old man needs him most. In the beginning of the play, he tells the Listener, "Well, I have walked away from what passes for an important career ..." (AF, p. 12). His father even scolds him angrily as he says, "What are you, a stranger? What are you!" (AF, p. 75). He also remembers his relief at the suicide of his friend Lou for whom he pleaded an unpopular legal case. He says, "It

24. AF, p. 41.
just was. I don't know why. I didn't dare know why! ... I felt now that my danger had spilled out on the subway track! So it is not bizarre to me" (AF., p. 65). Further Quentin's infidelity to his first wife Louise may also be considered as his betrayal to her. She ('in full possession of her mind') desperately pleads, "It's all it's been about the last three years. You don't want me" (AF., p. 63). In the play, one can also observe the sign of disintegration in the marital relationships of different characters. There is infidelity and dishonesty in their relationship as husbands and wives. All the women in the play call their husbands 'idiot'. Quentin himself declares, "A life, after all, is evidence, and I have two divorces in my safe-deposit box" (AF., p. 13). Later he says, "These goddamned women have injured me" (AF., p. 15). Yet as he looks back he realises the failure of his marriages.

In the earlier plays the protagonists have by and large been concerned with preserving, protecting or recovering the lost identity which obviously implies that they want to defend their social image if it was sullied. The protagonists indicate a strong desire to look honourable and dignified in the midst of the society they live in. By implication, they claim to be respected by society of which they took care as long as possible. But when their social image or identity is endangered by any external challenges to their personal interests they at once run to safety under the protection of some superior law. In some
trying-situations then the question of identity, of defending one's name in society, is of utmost importance to these protagonists.

Subsequently, particularly in After the Fall, Miller moves on to a higher plane of reality, which in fact gives a new twist to his point of view. The protagonist reaches out to attain a higher understanding of the nature of his identity through self-awareness. Instead of simply trying to protect his social identity as a dignified or honourable member of the society the protagonist now tries to acquire a deeper understanding of himself as man, and of his nature in terms of universal human nature, and views the problem of guilt in himself in terms of the problem of sin and guilt in man's mind right from the time of the Fall from paradise. He arrives at a new understanding of his identity which consists in his recognition of himself as a sinful human being, his nature having been corrupted by the original sin and persistence of the taint of inherent guilt throughout the succeeding generations of man.

As a consequence of the recognition of the innate sinfulfulness of man, of the corruption of human nature, of the presence of evil in human behaviour and human relationships, the problem of identity dominates any treatment and discussion of the subject in the play. The protagonist is now seen as not merely as an individual with a distinct awareness of his identity trying to attain or struggling for a unique position in society or the world at large but also as an individual with an
inherent tendency to evil manifested in his tendency to betrayal in human relationships, inflicting cruelty upon fellow beings and in his extreme selfishness, etc.

In the play, the monstrous terror of human torture in the concentration camp is clearly expressed when Holga vividly describes it to Quentin. She says:

This is the room where they tortured them... The door to the left leads into the chamber where their teeth were extracted for gold, the drain in the floor carried off the blood. At times, instead of shooting, they were individually strangled to death. The barracks on the right were the bordello where women...²⁵

Obviously, the brutality of the crimes committed by the Nazis against the Jews may be seen as an example of human depravity in the world. The fact is that in the concentration camp one could be killed "for no reason" and they did not even ask one's name. The real terror is that one dies anonymously. In fact, it evidences the extreme of human wickedness and evil. Quentin now realises that in his own heart, "the wish to kill is never killed" (AF., p. 120). Through his knowledge of the past, Quentin learns about himself and about society.

²⁵. AF., p. 21.
Miller believes that man is an existentialist being. The first act of humanity is the choice before him. The play *After the Fall* is concerned with this problem of choice in one's life. In order to make a choice, it is necessary to know oneself. As an existentialist, Miller tries to search for an answer to the fundamental question -- 'how are we to live?' He finds that the feelings of love, comfort and security are not found in society. In his essay, "The Family in Modern Drama," Miller himself remarks:

> How must man struggle and what must he try to overcome within himself and outside himself ... to find the safety, the surroundings of love, the ease of soul, the sense of identity and honour which evidently all men have connected in their memories with the idea of family.\(^{26}\)

The existential condition of man in *After the Fall*, has a link with the influence of the American absurd plays. As C.W.E. Biggsby observes that during the years of his silence "Miller's vision had been tempered by the cold pessimism of the absurd."\(^{27}\) He finds in Miller's later works a meaningful attempt to move away from the basic premises of the theatre of social questions towards a private vision of metaphysical anguish.\(^{28}\)

---


28. Ibid., p. 27.
In *After the Fall*, Miller attempts to present the condition of humanity. He exposes the debased humanity of our time. Yet it is true that he has faith in the capacity of man to survive the worst possible circumstance. This is clearly seen in the character of Quentin who boldly says, "And I wanted to face the worst thing I could imagine -- that I could not love" (*AF*, p. 116). He also believes in the survival of man. As such, he warns Maggie to drop her suicidal attempt so that she may exist. He confidently tells her:

> But no pill can make us innocent. Throw them in the sea, throw death in the sea and all your innocence. Do the hardest thing of all -- see your own hatred and live."^{29}

Quentin's faith in life is also seen when he talks to the Listener about Felice, "She made me wonder how much I believe in life" (*AF*, p. 15). In fact, Quentin knows his true identity and so he keeps faith in his life. He prepares himself to live on with a hope for the future. His idea of hope for the future can easily be marked when he tells Maggie, "A future. And I've been carrying it around all my life, like a vase that must never be dropped" (*AF*, p.86). This is, in a sense, sufficient indication of Miller's faith in the survival of man. His criticism of contemporary man and civilisation brings along with it an acceptance of life. In the play, Quentin through his self-examination of past life gains

---

a new awareness about himself and humanity in general. He not only defends his actions but judges them too in the light of his new knowledge. Thus, at the cost of his past failures, he accepts his life and decides to compromise with it. He finally learns that “we are very dangerous!” (AF., p. 120). He also confirms that “we meet unblessed ... after the Fall, after many, many deaths” (AF., p. 120). Expressing his self-awareness about the basic human condition, he tells the Listener:

And the wish to kill is never killed, but with some gift of courage one may look into its face when it appears, and with a stroke of love -- as to an idiot in the house -- forgive it, again and again ... for ever?30

With this faith in his life, Quentin now hopes to continue his living with Holga’s love. The stage direction, at the end of the play, shows it clearly:

And with his life following him he climbs towards Holga, who raises her arm as though seeing him, and with great love....(Stage direction).31

The play thus evidences the playwright’s idea of existentialism. His faith in life and the survival of man are manifest in Quentin’s character. We have seen that Quentin with his new knowledge compromises with his own life, and thus decides to exist with Holga. The play indeed ends on a note of hope for the future.

30.  AF., p. 120.
31.  AF., p. 121.
Miller amalgamates the significant theme of the dignity of the individual with his social themes. This theme repeats itself in all his major plays. Neil Carson observes that "Miller is more like a painter who works always from the same model. He does not so much create other people in his plays as divide himself up into a number of personae." 32 We have seen that the other themes in the play are more or less important as they cannot be isolated from the study of this paramount theme of the problem of identity. It is no doubt true that one’s act of evil, guilt and betrayal naturally affects a man’s personal honour, dignity and his identity. Man’s failure to achieve or maintain his sense of personal integrity may spring from an evil in his social environment. We may now examine how Miller has treated the theme of identity in *After the Fall*.

It is quite interesting to note that none of Miller’s heroes dies after this play. It seems that he no longer believe in man’s heroism or nobility as man himself is the root cause of all evils and betrayals. Thus thematically the play marks a turning point and a definite development in the playwright’s concepts. Consequently, Miller has treated the theme of identity in a different way in *After the Fall*. As such, our discussion on the theme conditionally necessitates us to have

a thorough examination of Quentin's past actions and experiences that ultimately lead him to his sanity -- his self-awareness.

The play is not only an extension of the themes found in Miller's previous plays, but it is a reaffirmation of those themes through a reversal. Miller's continuous feeling of the past is central to his development as a playwright. It is evident from a comparison between the past set forth in *After the Fall* and that of the early play *All My Sons*. We find that in his early play (*All My Sons*), there is a single and indisputable causal event guarded by Joe Keller. But in *After the Fall*, the past is a myriad and fragmented world of memories. The causal events are yet to be discovered, interpreted and evaluated. The central action of the play is the process by which Quentin investigates the remembered past. He constructs and reconstructs the causal sequences that enable him to understand and control his present. The focus of the play is on the process of exploration. In the play, Quentin undertakes a quest in self-exploration during which he asks a number of questions.

In his own view Miller feels that the moral world today is disintegrating. His confident vision of the coherences of the social world seems to have collapsed. He even thinks that society itself has lost its real definition. *After the Fall* dramatises this through Quentin's introspection of his past events. C.W.E. Bigsby observes that in *After the Fall* Miller attempts to trace public and private failure to their roots
in human character. It is also his attempt to discover the basis on which human life can continue after the holocaust has revealed the extent of human depravity. The play presents the unfortunate condition of a man who suddenly realises that he lives in a world where he finds no justice, rational conduct and moral behaviour. It is a world which really needs to find some justification for survival, some function and identity.  

Unlike the other protagonists of Miller’s early plays, Quentin in *After the Fall*, seeks his own identity in his self-analysis of the past actions in his life. It is noticeable that the main emphasis in the play is entirely personal and the largest part of the action concerns itself with marital relationships. Quentin has come to the middle point of his life and brings himself to trial. The evidence of the trial is provided by the testimony of his memory. He seems to be “hung up” (*AF*, p. 13) like many people in our time. As seen in the play, the main symptom of Quentin’s mental illness is loss of faith in self and in others.

Quentin’s own affairs prove exceptionally disappointing. In his youth, we see him as a man who has been ‘admired’, ‘honored’, ‘blessed’, ‘loved’, and ‘adored’. His own family -- the mother in particular -- dedicates him to great accomplishments. His mother tells

---

him, "I saw a star when you were born -- a light, a light in the world" \((AF, p. 117)\). Even his brother Dan says, "wherever you are, this family's behind you! \((AF, p. 76)\). Yet he himself wonders if he had "lived in good faith." It is true that he is a bit cold to his women. He admits his own nature and tells Louise, his first wife, "Well, I -- I'm not very demonstrative, I guess" \((AF, p.48)\). It is evident in the play that his coldness drives Louise to psychotherapy and his second wife Maggie to suicide. Even his attitude towards his mother is ambiguous. Despite his deep love for her, he confesses "I can't even mourn my own mother. It's monstrous ... I don't seem to know how to grieve for her" \((AF, p.16)\). In his bewilderment, he further says, "I am bewildered by the death of love. And my responsibility for it" \((AF, p. 72)\).

While examining his self, Quentin asks, "But where is Quentin ?... do you know who I am ? ... I can't find myself" \((AF, pp. 76, 89, 111)\). His target now is to "stop impersonating", to "live in good faith" with his guts, to go "disguised no more", and to "show what Quentin, Quentin, Quentin ... is!" \((AF, pp.90-91)\). His self-analysis follows a traditional pattern of psychoanalytic treatment. He has been frustrated by maladjustment in his personal relations. He seeks to understand the nature and origin of that maladjustment. Quentin reviews significant events in his childhood and in his adult life, and finally he perceives the cause of his inadequacies as well as the cure for them. His confusion has its roots in his youth. He seems to have been impressed early with
the instability of family relations. He remembers his childhood when he was betrayed by his parents. Recalling the event, he says, “They sent me for a walk with the maid. When I came back the house was empty for a week. God, Why is betrayal the only truth that stinks” (AF, p.84). He also remembers the day when his father went bankrupt for which his mother cursed her husband’s incompetence. She confesses to her young son the bitterness she knew as a bride and gives him a harsh advice, “When you grow up, I hope you learn how to disappoint people. Especially women” (AF, p.25). Her remark makes a lasting impact on the young Quentin’s later life. These experiences force Quentin to learn that the secret enemy of a man’s self-respect and dignity is his moral weakness.

We have seen that Miller’s characters especially in his early plays have tended to focus the meaning of their lives on their names which they shouted out with despair, pride or pathos. But in After the Fall, the playwright presents Quentin to restore a sense of control and to reassert a notion of moral responsibility. His main problem in the play is that he lives in a more complex world in which one’s life has less meaning in one’s good name. There is no external validation of one’s behaviour or identity. The situation in such a world necessitates the individual to be an accomplice in all acts of evil and betrayal within himself and the world around him. As such, Quentin also becomes an accomplice now and shares his responsibility for all the wrongs he had done or had not
done. Keeping his views on and sharing his responsibility for the inhuman torture in the Nazi concentration camp, he utters:

And I am not alone, and no man lives who would not rather be the sole survivor of this place than all its finest victims! What is the cure? Who can be innocent again on this mountain of skulls? I tell you what I know! My brothers died here but my brothers built this place; our hearts have cut these stones!  

Thus he realises that public cruelties have the same root as private ones. So he thinks that there can be no innocence as we are born after the Fall. Quentin affirms that social evil is just an extension of the individual evil. Thus all human relationships are fraught with treachery and dishonesty. In fact, he attempts to arrive at a constructive solution to his troubles. After reviewing his past actions he now gains his self-awareness and a new knowledge about humanity. He learns that “we are very dangerous ... And the wish to kill is never killed” (AF, p. 120). Through his self-realisation and self-acceptance, he knows his true identity, that is, his moral identity.

The concept of identity is deepened as it is related to a deeply moral level. And the moral level is what truly defines a sensitive, self-aware and conscious individual human being. There it would be appropriate for any truly moral human being to accept his own failure, weaknesses, evil, etc. etc. which essentially are deep rooted in him. As a mark of his identity he admits his own evil human nature and asks

34. AF, p. 119.
Maggie, "Do you know any more who I am? Aside from my name? I'm all the evil in the world, aren't I? All the betrayal, the broken hopes, the murderous revenge?" (AF., p.111). It clearly shows that he does not see his identity in his name alone. He further tells her, "I was like all the others who'd betrayed you (Maggie), and I could never be trusted again" (AF., p.115). Thus Miller shows a different treatment of the theme of identity in his *After the Fall*. In the play, he seems to have come to the inescapable conclusion that there is nothing heroic or noble about the fallen human existence. This may perhaps be responsible for Quentin's lack of commitment to anything at the end of the play. It also seems that perhaps Miller has shifted the emphasis from the fundamental dignity of man to the fundamental ambiguity of man for he comes to see the concept of identity from the moral plane.

However, it is interesting to note that Miller still continues projection of the name theme in some of the minor characters in the play with the exception of Quentin. It reflects the dignity and integrity of the individual character. As for instance, Lou, a friend of Quentin, is worried about his self-image when his friend Mickey threatens to name him (Lou) before the House UnAmerican Activities Committee. Like Miller's other protagonists (except Quentin), Lou thinks that his personal dignity lies only in his name. It is his self identity. So he takes Mickey's remark seriously and says:

*Let me understand -- you are asking my permission to name me? You may not mention my name. (He begins physically shaking.) And if you*
do it, Mickey, you are selling me for your own prosperity. If you use my name I will be dismissed. You will ruin me. You will destroy my career.35

It clearly shows that Lou is afraid of losing his career, i.e. his identity, if Mickey gives his name to the Committee. For him his name values above everything else, even above money. So he tells Mickey, "No -- your eleven-room apartment, your automobile, your money are not worth this" (AF., p. 44). Early in the play, even Quentin himself seems to have been aware of his self-image when he defends Lou's case. As he remarks, "I really don't want to be known as a Red lawyer, and I really don't want the newspapers to eat me alive...") (AF., p.49).

Again, the sense of loss of one's dignity may also be seen in the character of Maggie, a woman who always dreams of more dollars than anything else. She is proud of her sexual-attractiveness. She later becomes a 'joke' to others. She admits that "I'm a joke that brings in money" (AF., p.99). But Quentin views it as a damage to her dignity. So he tells her, "It's not the money they take, it's the dignity they destroy. You're not a piece of meat; you seem to think you owe people whatever they demand!" (AF., p.90). He further feels that "she was chewed and

---

35. AF., p. 44.
spat out by a long line of grinning men! Her name floating in the stench of locker-rooms and parlour-car cigar smoke!” (AF., p.89). Maggie establishes her identity by reminding herself with the remark “I know who I am. I’m Quentin’s friend!” (AF., pp.79-80). Yet it is only on the verge of her suicidal death that she comes to her real consciousness. She says, “I’m not a good wife,” (AF., p.101). Knowing her true role as a wife, she says “Oh, I’m going to be a good wife, Quentin” (AF., p.99).

However, on the whole After the Fall is not a play that deals with the name theme as a major issue. Here the hero tries to know his identity through his recollections and self-analysis of the past. Thus the play marks a turning point in the dramatic career of Miller. It is no denying the fact that he brings in his previous themes in the play, but in a different way. Unlike his earlier plays, in After the Fall, the protagonist, Quentin, does not die to preserve his good ‘name.’ Instead, he goes through his past events and gains his self-awareness and a new knowledge about himself and the world around him. As he knows well about the basic human condition, he wants to continue his living with hope for the future. By identity Miller does not only seem to imply a (protagonist’s) desire to seek a place of honour and dignity in the society and the world but, as is revealed by After the Fall, he also tries to emphasise that knowing one’s true identity is knowing one’s innate sinfulfulness as a human being. To have an awareness of this “the wish to kill” in man is a recognition of the doctrine of original sin and innate
sinfulness. Therefore Miller's concept of identity is both social and moral. The protagonists' desire "to know who I am" is fundamentally a recognition that the question of knowing one's self or of one's identity is dealt with on both the social and moral plane by the dramatist. *After the Fall* in particular bears testimony to it. The play thus marks a real progression in Miller's attitudes. In the next section, Miller's next play, *Incident At Vichy* receives further treatment.
INCIDENT AT VICHY [1964]

I

*Incident At Vichy*, a one-Act play, is the next important play of Miller's later life after *After the Fall*. The play was directed by Harold Clurman and had its premiere production at the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Centre on December 3, 1964. The play was no doubt not as successful as Miller's other major plays. However from the point of view of this thesis, the play is important as it deals primarily with the paramount theme of the problem of identity -- the Jewish identity in particular. The whole action of the play takes place at 'a place of detention' at Vichy in France in 1942, where the interrogation and identity check of the detained persons is done to identify the Jews suspected of being anti-Nazi subversives. In *Incident At Vichy* Miller follows the classic model of unity of time and place.

When compared to *After the Fall*, *Incident At Vichy* may seem to be a smaller play in many ways. But it surely reveals the next stage in Miller's development of his new theme -- our personal responsibility for our murderous nature. In *After the Fall*, Miller discusses the theme of universal guilt. Quentin, the protagonist in the play, does not die because of his new awareness about the cruel behaviour as integral to mankind's existence. He accepts the responsibility for the past deeds and hopes to make a success of his future life by forgiving the cruel
monster within him again and again. This theme is further developed in Miller's *Incident At Vichy*. Yet one can say that this theme of "responsibility" encompasses the larger theme of the sense of responsibility on the part of the human beings of a nobler cast of mind toward others who for one reason or another do not enjoy the privilege of being regarded as distinguished, honourable and dignified citizens. Obviously, the issue of identity is manifest in the contrast between those sections or races who are honourable and dignified with others whose individuality, character or status have made their identity as responsible citizens questionable and suspicious.

Usually, playwrights deal with recurring human phenomenon or merely with biographical and historical details. They view their material from a subjective perspective or avoid psychological penetration into the minds of their characters. In *Incident At Vichy* Miller invariably turns for his subject to the recurrent phenomenon of humanity, even though he refers to an actual happening. Historical reference in the play increases the authenticity and objectivity of his treatment of human nature. Miller is not primarily interested in the reactions of specific Jews to anti-Semitism in France during World War II.\(^1\) His vision in the play extends to a judgement of human nature not as helpless occupant

---

of an arbitrary world in which there is nothing to be done, but as heir to a moral depravity that demands action and accountability from everyone.²

The title *Incident At Vichy* points to an un-American setting and the play is meant to be a morality play that could take place anywhere. The German concentration camp-tower that intrudes upon Quentin's personal memories in *After the Fall* becomes a suggestive presence in *Incident At Vichy* as the modern corruption of humankind locates itself more insistently in the Nazi experience. Miller's argument on the universal guilt of human depravity and sense of complicity in *After the Fall* still continues to be a prominent issue in *Incident At Vichy*. In the play he moves from the private landscape of Quentin's mind to the historical location of Vichy in France, with the same conclusion of the existentialist idea of humankind. The play certainly records the suspicions, the misgivings, the self-assurances and the delusions of the Jews who know their identity papers are false but refuse to believe in the death camp.

---

II

Miller attributes the factual basis of *Incident At Vichy* to a story he heard from a friend. Based on that story the play dramatises a daily occurrence in 1942 France -- the systematic rounding up of suspected Jews and other undesirables by the Vichy government guided by German racial-laws. The action is set in a detention office in Vichy, France, 1942. It is a kind of ante-room to hell. Those who find themselves there are suspected of being Jews or in one case, a gypsy. The detained suspects are classified into the 'innocent' and the 'guilty.' The innocent people are given a white pass which is the emblem of their racial purity and the guilty persons are sent on towards their death.

On a particular morning a group of French Jews have been confined into a detention centre and lined up on a bench for identification of their Jewishness. Among the Jews are an actor, a painter, a bearded old Jew who is speechless throughout, a wealthy businessman whose identity is uncertain, a small boy and an electrician. As they wait to be summoned individually into the inner interrogation room where the "identity check" takes place, they discuss the reason for their arrest. They create the illusion of their significance as a defence, replacing despair with hope. They argue among themselves about human nature, guilt and responsibility. The obvious oppressors in
*Incident At Vichy* are the single-armed Guard, the German Major and the Professor, an expert in racial anthropology.

The central action of the play centres around Von Berg, an Austrian Prince who offers to sacrifice his life for the Jewish doctor, Leduc. In the process of identity check, aside from Marchand, the businessman who is given a white pass, each of the prisoners there is sent off in turn until only Von Berg and Leduc remain on the bench outside. These two fellows become the play's central characters, each in his own way, a hero of the occasion. In the last minutes of the play the existential issue is joined between the two remaining detainees — the liberal Viennese Prince Von Berg and the Jewish psychiatrist Leduc. Expressing Miller's own viewpoint, Leduc says:

> Man has accepted his own nature; that he is not reasonable, that he is full of murder, that his ideals are only the little tax he pays for the right to hate and kill with a clear conscience.\(^3\)

Von Berg dissents from this dark view and offers Leduc his friendship. As he replies:

> There are ideals, Doctor, of another kind. There are people who would find it easier to die than stain one finger with his murder. They

---

exist, I swear it to you. People for whom everything is not permitted, foolish people and ineffectual, but they do exist and will not dishonor their tradition. I ask your friendship.4

Assuring Von Berg Leduc replies that his psychoanalytic experience with gentiles had demonstrated to him that none of them was free from “a dislike if not hatred for the Jews”(IV., p.288). He tells Von Berg, “It’s not your guilt that I want, it’s your responsibility -- that might have helped... You might have done something then, with your standing, and your name and your decency”(IV., p.289). Von Berg strongly denies that he is anti-Semitic in any sense. He is then called in for inspection and soon emerges. The climax of the play reaches when he suddenly gives Leduc his white pass and asks him (Leduc) to leave the place. Leduc weakly protests as he feels humbled by the magnanimous act of Von Berg in giving him the white pass. He accepts the pass and obediently sneaks out of the room hurriedly lest the Captain and the Professor capture him and seize his white pass. The Prince’s act enables him to walk out into freedom and the Prince himself will pay his own sacrifice for the mercy shown to Leduc. Thus Von Berg successfully makes the ultimate existential choice to prove his

4. IV., p. 288.
own faith in humanity and vindicate his statement that he was not anti-Semitic and did not support the idea of racial identity. In the play’s final scene Von Berg confronts the cultivated German Major, as the stage direction evidences:

Von Berg turns and faces (the Major) ... The moment lengthens, and lengthens yet ... They stand there, forever incomprehensible to one another, looking into each other’s eyes.⁵

In a new departure for Miller, the play renders the nobility and magnanimity of Von Berg and his moral victory. By sacrificing his life for the Jewish doctor Leduc, Von Berg’s noble sacrifice for humanity underlines the dramatist’s view that the idea of racial identity may not be a healthy view in contrast with the nobler idea of men as human beings with an identity which is not limited by any racial or parochial concerns.

III

However, clearly Miller is preoccupied with the problem of Jewish identity in the plays belonging to the second period of his artistic career. It mostly results from the radical realignment of values that took place during the period of his silence (1955-64). In his later plays beginning with After the Fall and Incident At Vichy Miller moves

⁵. W., p. 291.
beyond melodrama and sentimental family tragedy to engage the metaphysical life of the modern man. *After the Fall* is the first of Miller's plays to address itself directly to the nature of the Jewish experience. It is followed by *Incident At Vichy* that manifestly includes Jewish characters and deals with their racial identity. In an interview in 1978 Miller himself stated:

I became far more aware of what Jewishness meant to me. I quite honestly hadn't any such sensation earlier on. It probably was suppressed by the fact that we lived in a country with a lot of anti-Semitism ... And what that does to somebody is to suppress his identity in a way ... I think the establishment of a new Jewish state probably meant a lot to me. It meant the establishment of an identity that I would never live to have.⁶

*Incident At Vichy* is more pointedly existentialist than any of his plays. The Nazi persecution of the Jews is at the centre of the play. Miller remarked that he was fascinated by the Nazi era because it marked a turning point in man's perception of human nature. Over a half-dozen characters in the play are there by virtue of their Jewish identity. The play in fact deals with the problems arising from Jewish identity when seen in an anti-Jewish environment. However, it is worth

noting that Miller gives a new twist to his treatment of the problem of identity in *Incident At Vichy*. The question of identity is not pursued at the individual level, but at the level of a whole race, the Jews, which struggles to preserve its distinctive identity and not become extinct.

Threatened by the Nazis, a group of French Jews together with a few non-Jews find themselves in the waiting room of a Nazi office at Vichy in France in 1942. They are lined up on a bench waiting their turn for identity check. They have been captured because of their Jewishness. As the stage direction shows, they are "in attitudes expressive of their personalities and functions, frozen there like members of a small orchestra at the moment before they begin to play." (*IV*, p. 245). They deny the desperation of circumstance, replacing despair with hope. It appears that "they do not know one another and sitting like people thrown together in a public place, mutually curious but self-occupied. However, they are anxious and frightened and tend to make themselves small and unobtrusive" (*IV*, p. 245).

The real condition of the identity problem faced by the suspected Jews is well reflected in the words of Prince Von Berg when he asks them, "Have you all been arrested for being Jewish?" (*IV*, p. 256). His words give a definite clue to the thematic core of the action of the play. It may be observed that each of the captives jealously defends his professional identity. As for instance, Ferrand, the cafe boss, does not
risk his own life to save others. He defends his inaction while talking to the Waiter who seeks his help, "What can I do? I told you fifty times to get out of this city?" (IV., p. 267). The captive Marchand, the businessman, sits far removed from communication with his fellow prisoners as if he is guarding his propriety. He is not nervous. On the contrary, he seems confident that he will surely be released. Bayard, an electrician captive, defends the socialist cause, as he remarks, "Class interest makes history, not individuals" (IV., p. 266). He has faith in the future; and the future is socialist" (IV., p. 264). Giving vent to his socialist turn of mind he tells Leduc:

You think a man can ever be himself in this society? When millions go hungry and a few live like kings, and whole races are slaves to the stock market -- how can you be yourself in such a world? I put in ten hours a day for a few francs, I see people who never bend their backs and they own the planet.  

Leduc has seen the death trains and prepares himself for deportation. Addressing the fellow captives in the waiting room he warns, "I warn you, don't believe anything they tell you -- I heard they're working Jews to death in the Polish camps" (IV., p. 257). Lebeau, an artist, shows as if he feels guilty for being a Jew. When Leduc asks, "You feel guilty, then ... For being a Jew, perhaps?", he

7. IV., p. 265.
reaffirms the consciousness of his Jewish identity, “I’m not ashamed of being a Jew” (IV., p. 277). Monceau, the actor is practical minded and says that one ought to play a role that suits the circumstances. One ought not to look like a victim. In his belief, as he says, “I go on the assumption that if I obey the law with dignity I will live in peace” (IV., p. 279). The old Jew’s unbroken silence culminating in an explosion of feathers adequately symbolises the absence of solidarity. He voices his concern for preserving the Jewish identity though he is quite aware that insistence on it could only mean the death camp for them. Of course, these different viewpoints and attitudes of the suspected Jews are nothing but responses to the problem of victimisation that they face for their racial identity.

The Prince Von Berg and the psychiatrist Leduc take prominent parts in the futile debates about human nature, guilt and responsibility, and so they become the central characters in the play. Von Berg is a member of the Austrian nobility, a man whose cousin is deeply involved with the Nazis. He himself admits that “cultivated people become Nazis” (IV., p. 260) although he confesses that Nazism to him was not an ideology and a capitalist conspiracy but an “outburst of vulgarity” (IV., p. 259). He considers that “vulgarity” is the supreme sin. In fact Von Berg’s views seem to strike the keynote of the play’s as well as Miller’s argument that the question of racial identity when stretched to its limits could easily mean the death-trap or the gas
chamber of the "furnaces" for the Jewish enemy at the hands of the mighty Nazi dictator. The "furnaces" are believable simply because they are "so inconceivably vile" (IV., p. 269). The Nazis have the power "to do the inconceivable; it paralyzes the rest of us" (IV., p. 269). Referring to their vulgar nature Von Berg further says:

They are poets, they are striving for a new nobility, the nobility of the totally vulgar ... Their motives are musical, and people are merely sounds they play ... What one used to conceive a human being to be will have no room on this earth.⁸

The saner among the Nazis, Von Berg, admits their inhumanity and the possible disappearance and extinction of true human beings upon this earth.

Again Leduc, the psychiatrist, is a character who represents a voice of reason and protest in the play. Like Quentin in After the Fall he believes in the hopelessness of human nature. His view is that all men are guilty. As he pleads:

I am only angry that I should have been born before the day when man has accepted his own nature; that he is not reasonable, that he is full of murder, that his ideals are only the little tax he pays for the right to hate and kill with a clear conscience.⁹

---

⁸ IV., p. 270.
⁹ IV., p. 287.
But Von Berg refutes this view. For him "There are ideals ... There are people who would find it easier to die than stain one finger with this murder. They exist ... People for whom everything is not permitted, foolish people and ineffectual, but they do exist and will not dishonour their tradition" (IV., p. 288). In the play Miller leaves Von Berg and Leduc in a state of cynicism and despair. Leduc confronts the German Major to prove his claim to be "different" by releasing them (the captives). He poses a moral challenge to the mighty oppressor's inhuman attitude to merciless atrocities against the persecuted, desperate Jewish community. The following exchange between the Major and Leduc evidences the fact:

Major: Why do you deserve to live more than I do?
Leduc: Because I am incapable of doing what you are doing.
I am better for the world than you.
Major: And then what? Then what?
Leduc: I will remember a decent German, an honourable German.
I will love you as long as I live? Will anyone do that now? ...
Major: There are no persons any more, don't you see that?
There will never be persons again. What do I care if you
love me? ... What am I, a dog that I must be loved? You --
(turning to all of them) -- goddamned Jews? 10

Leduc believes that every gentile is anti-Semite. As he claims, "I have never analyzed a gentile who did not have, somewhere hidden in

his mind, a dislike if not a hatred for the Jews" (IV., p. 288). No doubt the noble Von Berg, being himself a gentile, refuses to agree with Leduc's view. But Leduc presents a well-argued rejoinder in support of his view. He gives the definition of "Jew" which in turn seems to be the message of the play. He tells Von Berg:

> Until you know it is true of you you will destroy whatever truth can come of this atrocity . . . Jew is only the name we give to that stranger, that agony we cannot feel, that death we look at like a cold abstraction. Each man has his Jew; it is the other. And the Jews have their Jews. And now . . . you must see that you have yours -- the man whose death leaves you relieved that you are not him, despite your decency. And that is why there is nothing and will be nothing -- until you face your own complicity with this . . . your own humanity.\(^{11}\)

Leduc's remark reminds us of the guilt of Quentin who had also relieved of responsibility and love by the death of his friends and relatives. In the last moment of the play both Von Berg and Leduc sincerely acknowledge each other's true understanding of their respective responsibilities. They are finally left with a vision of pointless suffering that "can never have a meaning" and "will be repeated again and again forever . . . Because it cannot be shared. It is total, absolute, waste" (IV., p. 285). Referring to the inhuman and brutal drift of the

---

\(^{11}\) IV., p. 288.
Nazi mind, Leduc remarks, "I know the violence inside these people's heads. It's difficult to listen to amelioration, even if it's well-meant" (IV., p. 285). Von Berg (with an overtone of closeness to Leduc) finally comes round Leduc's viewpoint. As he says, "You understand now why I left Vienna. They can make death seductive. It is their worst sin" (IV., p. 285).

In Incident At Vichy, Von Berg is shown to be capable of the noble act of courage and love. He gives up his freedom -- his own life precisely this kind of exceptional capacity of a noble mind to rise above the petty human level of thinking that all of the dramas in the theatre's history have celebrated as the seret of man's greatness. In its essence the play shows that responsibility is not just a question of personal relationships, but a quality of the mind that must also extend to the world for amelioration and affirmation of whole humankind. The most interesting and perhaps the most significant realisation of the play's theme emerges at the very end when Von Berg comes out of the Nazi office and risks his own life by giving his own pass of clearance from suspicion to the Jewish doctor Leduc who was sure of being put in the "furnace." Prince Von Berg clearly upholds ideals which he cannot imagine. He asks the cardinal question of the play and which is also a cardinal question of our time, "But what is left if one gives up one's ideals? What is there? ... And yet can one wish for a world without ideals?" (IV., pp. 285-86). The answer to his last questin (which
Quentin also asks at the end of *After the Fall*, "What can ever save us?" (IV, p. 289) is not another attempt to live, but personal sacrifice of life, a kind of suicide to save another man's life, a martyrdom. The climax of the play is an act of courage and love within the context of nihilism.

The ending of *Incident At Vichy* reveals that otherness is an ambiguous reality. Without it there can be no promises, and hence no love. At the same time its very existence calls forth the murder which each of us carries within ourselves. What was implied by the projection of the concentration camp in *After the Fall* becomes the main setting and foreground of the action of *Incident At Vichy* for it primarily deals with the problem of Jewish identity. Miller confesses that he is fascinated by the Nazi era because it constituted a turning point in man's perception of human nature and exploits this insight for his dramatic purpose of showing that too much consciousness of identity aspect militates against the broader socialist concept of a classless, identity-less society. Identity or the ideal of preservation of identity which implies one's name and dignity, can be possible in the civilized and cultured world, not in a world characterized by vulgarity.

---


Another striking feature of *Incident At Vichy* is that the 'name' theme which is Miller's main concern in his early plays, re-emerges in the play though in a lesser degree. It gives an emphasis on the fundamental dignity of man and runs like a thread through the destinies of the protagonists. They want to preserve their "good name" -- their identity even at the cost of their precious lives. In *Incident At Vichy*, Von Berg is the central character who is a nobleman -- an Austrian Prince. He wants to honour one's name and family "whatever that means" (*IV.,* p. 259). When Leduc asks him "But is your title on your papers?" (*IV.,* p. 258), Von Berg replies with his sense of nobility:

> It is not a "title", it is my name, my family. Just as you have a name, and a family. And you are not inclined to dishonour them, I presume ... I have a certain ... standing. My name is a thousand years old, and they know the danger if someone like me is perhaps ... not vulgar enough.\(^{15}\)

It is indeed a true indication of his regard for his good name -- his dignity and identity. Again in the last moment of the play when Leduc claims "I have never analyzed a gentile who did not have ... a dislike if not a hatred for the Jews" (*IV.,* p. 288), Von Berg denies it absolutely.

---

\(^{15}\) *IV.,* p. 259.
despite the fact that he himself is a gentile. He makes the point clear and boldly replies:

I deny that absolutely. I have never in my life said a word against your people. Is that your implication? That I have something to do with this monstrousness! I have put a pistol to my head! To my head! 16

It clearly shows that Von Berg is ready even for his suicide when his true sense of nobility -- his personal honour and identity -- is challenged. Leduc knows the Prince's noble nature and tells him:

I understand it ... You might have done something then, with your standing, and your name and your decency, aside from shooting yourself! 17

Von Berg, at last gives his 'pass' — his freedom, his life — to Leduc and enables him to escape. It proves that he has done a noble act of sacrifice for the human kind because of his consciousness of his own background — his name and decency which constitute his identity. It is his moral victory.

A number of critics have given their different views on Miller's inclusive condemnation in *Incident At Vichy*. In his essay, "Arthur

Miller and the Fallacy of Profundity" Philip Rahv observes:

Responsibility cannot be other than specific; if all are responsible
none are responsible. It is simply not true that we are all responsible
for the Nazi horrors... The argument from human nature in general is
insubstantial because it is so exceedingly vague, explaining
everything and nothing at the same time.18

Julius Novick considers the play as a moral lecture. He observes,
"Miller does not really want to write plays any more; he wants to talk to
us directly."19 Most recent critics like Dennis Welland complain that the
play is static, and it has too many coincidences.20 According to C.W.E.
Bigsby, the story seems to signify that the essence of the play is not the
heroism of the gentile nor the suffering of the Jew, but the inhumanity
and want of solidarity of both. He observes that it is immensely
difficult to be human mainly because we cannot detect our own hostility
in our own actions.21 As Harold Bloom remarks, what is perceptible in
this new play is not immature subjectivity but an overstrain of
intellectual capacity on the part of the playwright. The play is basically a

January 14, 1965), pp.3-4; as it is also quoted in Schlueter and Flanagan's Arthur Miller,
op.cit., pp.105-06.
19. Julius Novick, "Incident At Vichy," Nation, (December 12, 1964), p. 504; as it is also
quoted in Schlueter and Flanagan's Arthur Miller, op.cit., p.106.
discussion piece which is purely a melodramatic contrivance. He further remarks that the thesis of the play is our total responsibility for the evil deeds we do. These evil deeds inevitably contribute to the greater evil that destroys humanity.\textsuperscript{22} Obviously, the emphasis is on the recognition of the important realisation that by narrowing down their interests the people have ignored their more human outlook and surrendered their essential human identity.

However, *Incident At Vichy* despite all its criticisms deserves to be regarded as an important play of Miller's later period as it works out the conflicting dimensions of the identity issue involved in the problem of Jewish identity. Moreover, the playwright discusses the problem on a higher level in this play in particular. As pointed out in the foregoing pages the action is set in a detention office at Vichy where all the suspected Jews and non-Jews (like Prince Von Berg) are detained for identity - check to separate out and to brand the Jewish captives. In short, the whole action of the play centres around this paramount theme of the problem of identity. As we see in the play, all the Jews face death in gas chambers or in concentration camps, once their racial identity is clearly established. Von Berg is the only one who is certain to escape

from the camp. He thinks Nazism and its atrocities on the Jews as vulgar. He is unhappy at the thought that he would be the only survivor of the lot.

During his conversation with Leduc, Von Berg learns that “Each man has his Jew; it is the other. And the Jews have their Jews” (IV., p. 288). He realises that such a death-trap even the most decent human being would feel relief at the thought that it was not he but somebody else who was going to suffer. He also understands that man’s complicity with evil is universal and that he is no exception, yet he rises above the lot of such selfish human beings who nurture such thoughts by upholding at his exceptional ideals. He proves that there are people who would rather die than be passive accomplices in carrying out the type of atrocities committed by the Nazis. Von Berg’s sacrifice is therefore of much greater significance as he is boldly prepared to face danger not for any crime of his own but for the crimes of his fellow-beings. His final decision to sacrifice his own life to save a Jewish captive is a protest of a noble soul against the injustices and the inhumanity of his fellow-Nazis that has largely affected their personal integrity and identity. Thus it may be seen that the group identity that is, the racial identity of the Jews, is smashed by external forces. We may now examine how and in what manner Miller analyses this theme of identity in his next play, *The Price.*
THE PRICE [1968]

After the composition and staging of the *Incident At Vichy* in 1964 Arthur Miller took nearly four years to embark on his next dramatic composition, *The Price* in 1968. The central problem of identity with which he had been concerned in the earlier plays was still uppermost in his mind but then it did not find appropriate reflection or exposition in the later play. The development of this theme therefore apparently somewhat receded into the background in the major body of the play. However the problem seems to have re-emerged and begun occupying his attention at the advanced stage of the action of the play in Act II.

*The Price* belongs to the later period of Miller’s artistic career. The play was opened on Broadway in February 1968 with great success. It was first presented in England at the Duke of York Theatre, London, on 4 March 1968. It had 425 performances altogether. The play was revised on Broadway in April, 1979. Again a revival of the play was opened on Broadway in January, 1985.

The play received mixed reviews partially because it focuses on a situation and on characters removed from the issues that were confronting the nation. As for instance, Walter Kerr spoke of the play’s
"obvious thinness" but also of an "astonishing droll" new face of Miller.\(^1\) Clive Barnes described an audience that had been "deeply moved" by "good theater," but it was not "very serious theater."\(^2\) According to Harold Clurman, "The power of *The Price* ... is that whether we stand with Victor or with Walter -- an issue crucial to all our lives."\(^3\) Again Martin Gottfried, in his New York revival of *The Price*, calls the play "self imitation" as it "only aggravated (Miller's) sense of loss and bewilderment".\(^4\) In fact the play continues the playwright's dialogue with the family and with the past. It brings together the themes and concerns of Miller's earlier work -- guilt, moral debt, self-delusion, success, choice and consequence, and conflicting moral principle.

*The Price* takes place in the attic of a Manhattan brownstone house. It is mainly the story of two Franz brothers -- Victor and Walter. They meet here after sixteen years of estrangement in order to dispose of some old furniture of their parents to Solomon, an old junk dealer. They had parted in anger quite earlier during the Depression over the

care of their sick and bankrupt father. They had really gone to different paths according to their own choices and viewpoints. They face the past through conversation about their separate lives. *The Price* is the play in which Miller sets brother against brother.

The play consists essentially of the confrontation of the two brothers who meet after long sixteen years of their separation. In the play the crisis emerges from a meeting between the brothers. Both of them are at a crucial stage in their own lives. Their participation in the bargaining with Solomon brings back memories of their past relations and mutual analyses of each other’s motives in making decisions about their futures. In fact both Victor and Walter, the two central figures in the play have been characterised as individuals having separate identities of their own. As shown in the play Victor is a conventional type of man who adopts traditional life style unlike his brother. So he has always an adherence to his father and shows his loyalty and faith to him. He himself is committed to his father and his family. Victor thinks his father is financially unsound and helpless due to the stock-market crash. Hence he drops his plan for college education and sacrifices his own career as a police patrolman only for the sake of his broken father. He considers it a moral responsibility for him as a son. It seems that love and moral responsibility had motivated Victor earlier in his life. He cannot walk out of the family as his brother did. Walter, on the other hand, is a selfish and egocentric man who can forget
everything and everyone to his drive for success. He wants to establish his true identity as an eminent surgeon. By so doing he can achieve a good recognition in his society as a successful person. For this he has made his own choice to leave home and pursue his medical degree. He has fixed the responsibility for support and care of their father to Victor. As he tells his brother, “Vic, we were both running from the same thing. I thought I wanted to be tops, but what it was untouchable. I ended in a swamp of success and bankbooks, you on civil service.”

The play mainly focuses on the confrontation between the two brothers who try to defend and justify themselves through their different approaches. As they confront each other through their past, they seem to discover the truth that each of them represents a different aspect of the same dilemma. Miller himself puts it very clearly in his production note to the play, where he writes:

As the world now operates, the qualities of both brothers are necessary to it; surely their respective psychologies and moral values conflict at the heart of the social dilemma. The production must therefore withhold judgement in favour of presenting both men in all their humanity and from their viewpoints. Actually each has merely proved to the other what the other has known but dared not face. At the end, demanding of one another what was forfeited to time, each is left touching the structure of his life.

Subsequently the play is referred to as The Price followed by page numbers.
As we see in the play, the conflict between the brothers is not primarily one of present tensions, but of the incompatible visions by which they have structured their mutual past. The intensity of the action of the play increases in Act II where Victor and Walter strongly argue with and react to each other in their self-defense till they ultimately part with one another without any agreement and moral reconciliation. As the play progresses we could see Victor's strong sense of dedication and commitment to his father in his rejection of Walter's remark, "Victor, my five hundred dollars was not what kept you from your degree! You could have left Pop and gone right on -- he was perfectly fit" (The Price, p. 82). He denies Walter's charge against their father and argues:

We were eating garbage here, buster! ... And perfectly fit! What about the inside of his head? The man was ashamed to go into the street! ... How can you say that to me? I could have left him with your five dollars a month? I'm sorry, you can't brainwash me -- if you got a hook in your mouth don't try to stick it into mine ... I didn't invent my life ... You had a responsibility here and you walked out on it..."

What Victor reacts to here is that his brother Walter lacks compassion and care for their old father and the family because of which he had walked out of the family leaving the whole responsibility to the former. When Victor learns later that his father was not financially unsound,
he continues to justify his life by recreating the past. He however remains adamant on defending his father. As he says, "what does that change? I know I’m talking like a fool, but what does that change? He (father) couldn’t believe in anybody anymore, and it was unbearable to me! (The Price, p. 88). But Walter has a different viewpoint. As he tells Victor, "You all seemed to need each other more, Vic—more than I needed them. I was never able to feel your kind of ... faith in him; that ... confidence. His selfishness — which was perfectly normal — was always obvious to me, but you never seemed to notice it" (The Price, pp.79-80). When Esther says, "You seem altogether different I", he admits himself and says, "I think I am, Esther. I live differently, I think differently"(The Price, p. 68).

After his hospitalisation, Walter feels he has gained a new insight into his brother’s mind. He feels that his own breakdown occurred following a period of social pressures and obligations. He says, "It all happens so gradually ... You become a kind of instrument, an instrument that cuts money out of people, or fame out of the world" (The Price, p. 69). But Victor’s version of the past is quite different from his brother. For him, Walter deserted the family and refused to help his brother with money. As he reacts and says, "You didn’t give me the money because you didn’t want to."(The Price, p. 80).

As a matter of fact the two brothers in The Price represent profoundly different approaches to life — approaches which not only
co-exist in the world but which constitute the basis of most individual lives. The significance of the truth underlies Walter’s remark, “We invent ourselves, Vic, to wipe out what we know. You invent a life of self-sacrifice, a life of duty, but what never existed here cannot be upheld ... we’re brothers. It was only two seemingly different roads out of the same trap. It’s almost as though we’re like two halves of the same guy. As though we can’t quite move ahead — alone” (The Price, pp.90-91).

In a curious way both brothers are trying to buy their way out of the family. Walter has felt all along that there was no love between father and sons in the family. Walter raises the issue when he says:

Were we really brought up to believe in one another? We were brought up to succeed, ... was there even any love here? ... What was unbearable is not that it all fell apart, it was that there was never anything here ... It’s that there was no love in this house. There was no loyalty. There was nothing here but a straight financial arrangement. That’s what was unbearable.

But Victor, who is committed to his family denies the insinuation and on the contrary, insists that there was. This argument and counter-argument notwithstanding, later in the play, Walter explains how his breakdown had led him to a new way of life. However to make amends now, he offers his brother a hospital job. But Victor sees that gesture differently as a relentless self-justification of his brother and turns down the offer.

8. The Price, pp. 89-90.
Clearly, Walter has been trying to win over his brother’s trust but Victor views the offer as a let-down of his individuality or personal dignity, and hence a question of conflict in their respective identities is implicit in the situation. Wherever the question of identity conflict arises he concerned try to maintain their honour and dignity because neither of the two would like to look smaller in the eyes of the other. As Victor says, “I couldn’t work with you, Walter, I can’t. I don’t trust you” (The Price, p. 92). Walter also assesses his brother’s rejection of the offer as vengeance. He tells Esther, “He is sacrificing his life to vengeance” (The Price, p. 92). He ultimately becomes furious and cries out, “You made those choices, Victor! And that’s what you have to face!” (The Price, p. 91). Before he leaves the place, he warns Victor:

But your failure does not give you moral authority! Not with me! ...
(Moving towards the door, he points at the centre chair.) He was smarter than all of us -- he saw what you wanted and he gave it to you! ... You will never, never again make me ashamed!

This obviously is a conflict of the psychologies of the two brothers who cannot come to a mutually acceptable compromise on the basic premise. As Miller himself has commented in the foregoing quotation, “their respective psychologies and moral values conflict at the heart of the social dilemma”¹⁰ (cf. fn. 6). Once the mutual trust between the two

---

10.  The Price, p. 95.
brothers is lost, each would like to hold on to his identity and reaffirm it as and when necessary. The intensity and depth of this moral dilemma cannot be understood by any immediate relative also who is an outsider to the situation. Victor's wife, Esther cannot be blamed when seeing her own difficult pecuniary situation at home. She nags Victor to accept Walter's offer of a hospital job. Meanwhile, in a state of conflict the job offer is viewed from different angles, it could be an indirect way of inflicting vengeance by Victor and it could also imply making him ultimately reconciled to what had happened in the past, and he even looked upon as a challenge to Victor's honour and dignity.

In The Price both actions and their consequences, both causes and their effects, are relegated to the past. As for instance, Victor's decision to drop out of college has had its results in his unfulfilling and financially unrewarding career as a policeman. Similarly, Walter's decision to leave home and pursue his medical degree has also shown its eventual consequences in attaining his financial soundness as an eminent doctor although it is accompanied by divorce and nervous breakdown. In a sense it may be said that each brother has paid the price for his own choice. As Victor says:

Walter, I haven't got the education, what are you talking about? You can't walk in with one splash and wash out twenty-eight years.

There's a price people pay. I've paid it, it's all gone, I haven't got it
Thus in the play Miller has tried to analyse the problem of identity-consciousness as the reason for their professional choices. The confrontation between the two brothers clearly shows their distinct identities as individuals who have different viewpoints and attitudes, and have chosen different paths of life. Victor has been portrayed as a self-sacrificing man who had sacrificed his career as a policeman for the responsibility and care of his father. On the other hand, his brother Walter has been characterised as a selfish one whose chief interest lay in pursuing his career and establishing himself as a famous doctor. For achieving his goal he could make any kind of sacrifice. This is how the playwright, through character analysis, attempts to develop the identity theme of the play.

At the end Walter and Victor simply part company for they are unable to face their past or each other with more than a minimum of understanding and forgiveness. One can also find existential ambiguities in the relations of the two brothers. When they part, Walter is wrapped in his expensive camel-haired coat and Victor is wearing his gun belt and cop's jacket. Their uniforms are as different and irreconcilable as their moral positions. Each serves as visual symbol of

personal choice. The negotiation of the brothers concludes without any agreement as they have nothing to give one another. Each brother adheres to his understanding of the past and each sticks to his viewpoint and the way he can maintain his personal honour and dignity in his own eyes and in the eyes of the society and the world at large.

It is true that the problem of identity does not receive an adequate attention of the dramatist in respect of its development and analysis in The Price. However it can be said that the problem has been somewhat marginalised but it is more strongly and vigorously reaffirmed. That the issue of identity still haunts the dramatist's mind and commands his attention in one way or another may be seen in the attention he gives it in his next last dramatic work, The American Clock, wherein the problem of identity is presented from a new angle.
THE AMERICAN CLOCK [1980]

I

Miller's next important play The American Clock was presented on stage in 1980. It is his most recent and last full-length play in two Acts. The play was first produced at the Harold Clurman Theatre in New York City. It was opened at the Spoleto Festival's Dockside Theatre in Charleston, South Carolina, on 24 May 1980, and was directed by Dan Sullivan. It was again staged at the Biltmore Theatre in New York on November 20, 1980 under the direction of Vivian Matalon. Then the play moved to the Mechanic Theatre in Baltimore. In 1987, The American Clock found homes in London on the stages of the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company. It was first published in the U.S.A. in 1982 by Dramatists Play Service Inc., and in Great Britan in 1983 as a Methuen Paperback by Methuen London Ltd.

Among Miller's later plays, The Price is a character-centred play in the Ibsen tradition, and The American Clock is a kind of family-based social play Miller had been writing in different guises over the years. An interesting coincidence lies in the fact that both plays deal with the same material of the Depression tragedy which the playwright had previously used on a number of occasions. These plays make statements about society and social problems in a painstakingly straight-forward manner. The American Clock really serves to
demonstrate the strong gravitational pull of realism on Miller’s artistic bent and work. With this play the playwright has obviously chosen to return to the traditional dramatic form. *The American Clock* is in some respects a curious play. In a sense it is the manifestation of different aspects and attitudes, and even the style of the nineteen thirties’ drama. According to C.W.E. Bigsby, the play makes epic pretensions, trying in some way to capture the mood of an entire society.¹

Critics have given their different views on the play. As for instance, Jack Kroll remarks in his *Newsweek* review, "*The American Clock* never finds an effective dramatic shape: it’s part play, part chronicle, but mostly it’s Miller’s last evocation of the images and people that have haunted him more than any others in his life."² Referring to the broad dramatic canvas of Miller, Frank Rich observes that the play is an attempt "to tell the story of an entire generation against a background as large as the United States’ map."³ Douglas Watt views that "*The American Clock* trying to tick away the past simply doesn’t work. The parts don’t mesh."⁴

² Jack Kroll, "After the Fall", *Newsweek*, December 1, 1980, p. 84.
Miller himself has called the play "a mural for the theater," as it uses a documentary approach of many short scenes to suggest the political and social atmosphere of the Depression years. He further says that it is a story of the United States talking to itself.\(^5\) Set in the great Depression of nineteen thirties and forties, it is an attempt to turn back "the American Clock .... in search of those feelings that once ruled our lives and were stolen from us all by time."\(^6\) Miller's continuing exploration of the family extends into *The American Clock*. In fact the play continues his attempts to psychoanalyse America and to trace the origins of emotional trauma of its people. It identifies capitalism itself as a source of the terrifying amorality prevailing in the country. As Miller thinks, the ideological certainty has disappeared. In the play he offers brief portraits of petty officials anxious to capitalise on the situation. But, for the most part, he seems more concerned with offering a portrait of an America bewildered by the collapse of the success dream they used to have.


II

For Miller, the Depression is a central experience. Not only has it shaped his own imagination and defined the terms of his own engagement with American values, but it is one of the few experiences genuinely shared by all Americans. The whole of America is made the setting of the play. As the stage direction says, “An impression of a surrounding vastness should be given, as though the whole country were really the setting ... The background can be ... an impression of the United States’ geography.”7 In The American Clock, his most recent and a full-length family-based play, Miller has presented an American family in association with a number of characters who were all caught in the Depression. They are shown in the play to represent various aspects of American social life. The reaction of the people to the Depression is dramatised through their homely dialogues.

The focus of the play gradually narrows to one family — the Baums — living in Brooklyn. Baum’s family, as shown in this play, consists of three members — Moe Baum, his wife Rose and son Lee. The story of the play is a familiar one. Moe Baum, the father, loses everything in the economic crash following the Depression and he goes


Subsequently the play is referred to as AC., followed by page numbers within parentheses.
into a decline in his life. In the meantime, his wife Rose, although a woman of courage and endurance, is driven toward a nervous breakdown by their economic losses though she can hardly understand the intricacies of stock trading. Their son Lee, the play’s narrator, ranks the Great Depression as one of the two national disasters — the Depression and the Civil War. It really touched everyone in the country. The play in fact tells us about the many-sided experiences that Moe Baum and his family passed through.

The usual routine of domesticity and warmth of the family is very well presented in the play. Their deep hardship and suffering, their acute sense of want and scarcity are effectively brought home in the native humour of the family members. Baum’s son Lee cannot pursue higher studies due to pecuniary problems of the family. Since the dramatist’s basic concern is to reflect the Depression effects on various strata of American society, the calamitous effect on agriculture too is underlined. The agriculturists have been subjected to various experiences of unbearable uncertainty in their lives compelling them even to auction their farms. They were forced to seek employment elsewhere in order to earn their daily bread. Lee, a central figure in the play, is an example. He has been served a notice by his own father that he would no longer be accommodated in his house if he failed to make separate provisions for himself outside the family house. This is how he earns a relief job provided by the government of the U.S.A.
Despite the most depressing situations the Americans landed in following the depression, they had not yet given up their usual optimism of the country recovering from the evil effects of the national economic disaster. The play expresses the American family’s hope that an ideal order would ultimately emerge from the chaos and anarchy of the Depression. The characters pass through various stages of uncertainty, misery and have hallucinations of various kinds in their day-to-day life. Moe Baum and his family are found to the locus of the dramatist’s eyes. Several European systems — Marxism, socialism, dictatorship, democracy (elections), capitalism, etc. are focused upon to underline the evils inflicted upon the members of the society by each of those political systems.

_The American Clock_ is not the history of the Depression. History differs from literature. While history uses knowledge to record what has happened, literature uses imagination to restructure what has happened according to the inner laws of order, harmony and purpose. Lee remarks:

Things that had always seemed fixed and frozen forever were melting, slipping away. One man alone began to seem like a ridiculous idea.  

His contention here is that the values of life that existed before the onslaught of the Depression have gradually disappeared, and man as a species has been reduced to an idea.

---

As a matter of fact the clock is not only a symbol of American society; it is also a symbol of the perpetual movement and flow of time into eternity. The American life is a continuous process of the human activity and energy moving towards its realisation of an ideal order and harmony. To the Americans, life itself assumes the dimension of a ceaseless struggle towards the attainment of that state in which mankind may experience total harmony and peace without losing the sense of their distinctive identity. The Depression experiences of the people in The American Clock are a thing of the past and their present should be one of struggle to reconstruct the ideal past. The last part of the play holds out an assurance and hope that the Americans may not experience the turmoil of the Depression again. As Robertson says:

Interviewers always ask the same two questions -- could it happen again, is the first. I cannot get myself to believe that we would allow the whole economy to disintegrate again, but of course there is no limit to human stupidity. The second question is whether it was really Roosevelt who saved the country...9

Thus the play ends on a note of hope of the people who are optimistic believers in the American clock that the clock would never stop. Their optimism is reinforced by the symbolism of light in the stage direction, "... bright light flashes over the cloud-covered continent in the background ..."10 Obviously, the play focuses on the issue of American national identity.

9. AC, p. 81.
10. Ibid.
III

The American Clock is, no doubt, a family based social play by Miller. His continuing exploration of the family certainly extends into the play. It is his most recent and last full-length drama. The play deals with the same material of the Depression as it was previously used in his first successful play All My Sons (1947) and subsequent other plays too. It makes statements about society and social problems faced by the people, and also tries in some way to capture the mood of an entire society. The play has, as its setting, the Great Depression of the nineteen thirties. In this latest play Miller's concern is to highlight the shattering impact of the Depression on various strata of American life and society and on the personal honour, psychology and identity of its people.

In Miller's plays the focus is always on larger issues such as man's ultimate status in society, a search for stable human relationships and an attempt to synthesize human dignity with social needs and challenges. In his "On Social Plays," Miller himself remarks, "From what fiat, from what ultimate source are we to derive a standard of values that will create in man a respect for himself, a real voice in the fate of his society, and above all, an aim for his life ..." In a typical Miller play, what arouses our emotion is not always the spectacle of

death but the sense of loss and waste, of grief and suffering. The tragic effect is achieved not by the death of the hero but by a serious presentation of a moment of crisis leading to suffering and disintegration of his personality. In his plays there is a fine blending of the social and the psychological elements. In fact a typical Miller play is usually as much concerned with the social milieu as with the character, as much with the territory as with its inhabitants. In his plays an understanding of the social factors or pressures is very important to an understanding of the action and behaviour of his characters. It finally leads to an understanding of the meaning of his plays. The ultimate power which operates in the dramatic world of Miller may be described in terms of the whole system or social order of which the individual characters form an integral part.

Of course, a play by Miller generally opens on a note of disturbance and slight agitation. As soon as the curtain rises our attention is drawn to some kind of extraordinary behaviour of the character. As for instance, in *After the Fall* Quentin enters the stage faced with an awareness of his own pointless existence. In *The Crucible* the play opens with a scene of sickness. Similarly, in *The American Clock* too, Lee Baum, a central figure in the play, enters and faces the audience with a sore note of the impact of national disasters —
the Civil War and the Great Depression. As he remarks:

There have been only two American disasters that were truly national. Not the first or second World Wars, Vietnam or even the Revolution. Only the Civil War and the Great Depression touched nearly everyone wherever they lived and whatever their social class. Personally, I believe that deep down we are still afraid that suddenly, without warning, it may all fall apart again. And that this fear, in ways we are rarely conscious of, still underlies every... 12

In the play the present contains the past while that past holds the clue to an understanding of the present. It is a familiar process in Miller's plays. In The American Clock he continues his attempts to psychoanalyse the mind of characters of the post-depression situation in America and to trace the origins of the emotional shock of its people. He seems to be concerned with offering a portrait of America bewildered by the collapse of the dream of their success. The central situation of the play centres around an American family -- the Baums, in association with a number of characters who were all caught in the Depression catastrophe. The collapse of their upper-middle-class life shows the disintegration of American social life at large. What is somewhat unusual, around thirty-five characters take part in the play. But it may be observed that the play has only a few main characters -- namely, Moe Baum, Rose, Lee -- all members of the Baum family, and

Robertson. The rest are minor figures. All the characters however represent various aspects of American social life. They include financiers, farmers, a shoe-shine man, a prostitute, a seaman, an auctioneer, people at the relief office, and so on.

In a sense it seems that the different cross sections of American society are involved so as to show the grim effects of the disaster that has touched everyone in the country. The characters pass through stages of tormenting uncertainty, misery and various kinds of hallucination in their day-to-day lives. They personally experience an acute sense of loss and grief which in turn reduces in them a sense of loss of personal honour and identity in their social life. In fact the Depression of the nineteen thirties was a crucial factor of Miller's formative years. It was not the financial stress alone that shook the foundations of American life at that time, but it was also an emotional collapse. As Robertson, a corporate leader, claims, "Sorry, but I don't think that kind of collapse is really possible again. And I don't mean only the stock market. I mean the emotional collapse ..." (AC., p. 1).

Miller in the play once again returns to his familiar family theme of a father, mother and son. The father and son relationship re-emerges in the play differently. Moe Baum's family represents the symbol of American society at large. Its fears, anxieties and all forms of hallucinations are those of the members of the American society.
Lee, a central figure in the play, makes a critical analysis of the system:

I keep trying to find the holes in Marxism but I can't. I just read an article where the salaries of twelve executives in the tobacco business were more than thirty thousand tobacco farmers made. That's why this happened -- the workers never made enough to buy back what they produced. The boom of the twenties was a gigantic fake. The rich have simply looted the people.\(^\text{13}\)

He concludes the analysis with his own prediction "There is going to be a revolution, Mama ..." (AC, p. 46). Again in the course of a dialogue between Joe and Isabel, Joe remarks, "You see, it's Marxism -- says that all our relationships are basically ruled by money" (AC, p. 48). Later Edie, a comic strip writer, holds warm discussions on several systems with Lee Baum. As they discuss:

Edie: You can't have justice under capitalism, so the implications are terrific.

Lee: You're beautiful when you talk about politics, you know that?

Edie: I don't understand how a person who knows Marxism can hold aloof from the struggle ...

\(^\text{13}\) AC, p. 46.

Lee: Tell me the truth. You really think this country can go socialist?

Edie: We're living in the middle of the greatest leap in class consciousness that's ever happened. Hundreds of people are joining the Party every week!

Lee: ... They're building unions and that's good, but inside their heads it's full of fascism.
Edie: I believe in the Soviet Union. I believe in the victory of the working class here and everywhere, and I believe in the peace that will come to the world when the people take power.\(^\text{14}\)

The play underlines the adverse effect of the economic depression in the agricultural sector. The farmers have been subjected to various experience of uncertainty in their lives. They are compelled by circumstances to auction their farms. But in order to survive they have to seek employment elsewhere. Henry Taylor, an Iowa farmer who has been a victim of this disaster, is a glaring example. He fails to repay the bank loans and as such all his properties have been auctioned for only one dollar. As Judge Bradley remarks, "We are on the verge of anarchy in Iowa, and that is not going to help anybody... Mr. Taylor has failed to pay what he owes on his equipment, and some of his cattle... The National Bank has the right to collect on its loans"\(^{(AC,\, p.\, 26)}\). Thus Henry helplessly moves east in search of labour. As he tells Rose Baum, "How de do, ma'am my name is Taylor and I'm just passing by, wondering if you folks have any work around the place ..."\(^{(AC,\, p.\, 29)}\). Lee feels that values of life after the Depression have been disappearing fast.

\(^{14}\) AC, pp. 63-65.
The American Clock also reminds us of the Bolshevik Revolution and the fall of the Czartist regime in Russia. Another striking feature of the play is the problem of unemployment faced by the Americans during the Depression. It has rendered thousands of people homeless and hungry. Moe Baum's son Lee voices his deep concern for the unfortunate victims. As he says:

I don't understand how people are managing to live; a great many banks are boarded up. And there hasn't been rain for months; even the sky dried out. Every town is full of men sitting on the sidewalks with their backs against the storefronts. Just looking at you, or asleep. It's like a magic spell... I've passed fields of corn rotting on the stalks unsold, and sheriffs guarding them while on the roads people fall down from hunger.  

Lee is also concerned over the helplessness of the numberous unemployed labourers. He tells his father, "Well, there's sixteen million unemployed. They haven't got jobs for everybody" (AC., p. 54). He also summons Karl Marx's philosophy of socialism. But Miller in this play very intelligently satirises the Marxist paraphernalia of communism. Edie, a comic strip writer, advises Lee to embrace Marxism. But Lee dismisses her advice and would rather prefer to be a 'sportswriter.' When Edie asks him why he does not join the Party, Lee answers, "... I guess I don't want to ruin my chances; I want to be a sportswriter" (AC., p. 64).

15. AC., p. 46.
Another amusing incident in the play is that Lee’s newly purchased bike has been stolen. The dramatic irony of this peculiar incident exposes the extreme suffering of the people. The scene also highlights the economic collapse in the country, as Lee tells his mother, Rose, “Remember I emptied my bank account for the bike? The bank has just been closed by the government! It’s broke. There’s a whole mob of people yelling where’s their money! ... There is no more money in the bank!” (AC., p. 23). When Lee asks Rose “What about Papa’s business! Can’t he? ...”, she replies, “He put too much capital in the market, dear — it made more there than in his business. So now ... it’s not there anymore” (AC., pp.23-24). It surely indicates Moe’s bankruptcy in his business. In fact most of the characters in the play often talk of loan, money, etc. For instance, Rose even mortgages her precious diamond bracelet to Mr. Slanders to obtain a loan. As she says:

Rose : This is my diamond bracelet. And this is Mr. Slander’s card and address. He’s expecting you; just give it to him and he’ll give you a receipt.

Lee : Is he going to fix it?

Rose : No, dear. It’s a pawnshop ...

Lee : ... What’s a pawnshop?

Rose : Where you leave something temporarily and they lend you money on it, with interest. I’m going to leave it the rest of the month, till the market goes up again ... we’re getting a nice loan on it.\footnote{AC., p. 17.}

This is important in view of the fact that it manifests an acute sense of want and scarcity in the Baum family. Besides, Rose, at the beginning of
the second Act, cries out herself, "I must stop getting so stupid. I don't see anything. I don't hear anything except money, money, money ..." (AC., p. 42).

As seen in the play, the only means for the survival of the people is to get a job anyhow. So they are anxiously looking for jobs here and there. For instance, Baum's son Lee cannot pursue higher studies due to specific problems of the family and he is compelled to seek a job in order to assist his parents. He has been served a notice even by his own father to arrange his own accommodation for himself outside the family house. Lee's remark shows the evidence when he tells his father, "You refuse to let me live in the house. We don't get along" (AC., p. 54).

Roosevelt's radio broadcast in the play, appealing to the people to show fortitude in tiding over their present crisis caused by the Depression, has a close link with the development of the play:

But the rush of modern civilisation itself has raised for us new difficulties ... We are poor indeed if this nation cannot afford to lift from every recess of American life the dark fear of the unemployed that they are needed in the world. We cannot afford to accumulate a deficit in the books of human fortitude. 17

Old Baum's reaction to the broadcast is noteworthy. He would like the American President declare himself a dictator so that the United

---

17. AC., p. 53.
States of America might be saved from the perils of the Depression. He even prays for Roosevelt's success and says, "Oh, dear God, give our new President the strength and the wisdom ... give Mr. Roosevelt the way to help us ... Oh, my God, help our dear country ... and the people! ..." (AC., p. 78). Baum's reaction is noteworthy for the simple reason that the very political identity of the Americans who believe in democracy has been shaken to its roots. The lines stress once again that Miller is surely giving the problem of identity a new dimension and examines the very psyche of the Americans whose strong belief in their political identity as an outstanding democracy in the world has been shattered at its very foundation by such natural calamities as the Civil War and the economic depression of 1929.

Miller's plot is concise and compact. There is a beginning but there is no end to the plot in The American Clock. Like the clock itself, the plot in this play is developed to a perpetual motion of the human struggle. In the very beginning of the play, Lee observes, "But there were people who could not pull out because they believed. And with all their hearts. For them the clock would never strike midnight, the dance and the music could never stop..." (AC., p. 2). Americans believe in adventure and struggle, and always crave for the exploitation of new dimensions of life. They are never satisfied with what has been already achieved; they are ready to go beyond it. As Edie remarks, "Now doesn't matter. The future matters!" (AC., p. 65). Rose also tells her
son Lee, "But why can’t there be something new!" (AC., p.4). They still believe in their dream of success. Lee himself says, "And so, like most people, I waited with that crazy kind of expectation that comes when there is no hope, waited for the dream to come back from wherever it had gone to hide" (AC., p. 41).

Miller has a perfect grip over characterisation. Rose’s character as a wife and as a mother both appeal to us. She encourages her husband as well as her son when the male figures are weakened. She gives them new strength and hope. Her husband Moe is also a victim of the economic crash, and she shows her sympathy and loyalty to him. She tells her father, "I don’t want Moe to get aggravated, Papa. He might try to start a new business, so he’s nervous ... I don’t want him to get mad, Papa!" (AC., pp.22-23). It reminds us of Linda’s role in Death of a Salesman, when she lovingly remarks about her husband, "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" (Death of a Salesman, p.162). Again she (Rose) acts in a similar manner when her son Lee feels uncertainty in his attempt to get a job and she encourages him, "Boy. Don’t be frightened darling — you’re going to be wonderful!" (AC., p. 36). It recalls Quentin’s mother in After the Fall, when she says, "I saw a star when you were born — a light, a light in the world" (After the Fall, p. 117).
The similarity in attitude of both Rose (in *The American Clock*) and Linda (in *Death of a Salesman*) is impressive and instructive. Both the characters display a rare geniality and nobility of temperament and integrity which characterise their identities as genuine human beings capable of understanding and sympathising with the limitations of man. Obviously, the point to be noted here is the human identity of the characters which the respective plays attempt to focus on.

What further strikes one in the play is the total, precise and realistic characters who often talk of ‘stockmarket’, urbanisation, unemployment and exploitation of the poor by the rich. As a matter of fact they never miss sight of the overgrowing size of capitalism even at the cost of stark poverty in American society during the Depression.

The use of the technique of offstage, spotlight and dimlights, piano music with songs, occasional direct appeals to the audience, etc. are some of the distinctive features which suit appropriately to the occasion in the play. Here action is replaced by discussions among the characters in their usual native humour. Indeed *The American Clock* is a modern play in which important discussions on various aspects of social life rather than actions and incidents are prominent. The people do not give up their hopes and aspirations for a better future despite the disasters that crushed them. The play ends on the note of an indulgent hope with Rose uttering the single word “Sing”
that signifies her hope for success. The stage directions reaffirm her optimistic vision when the “bright light flashes over the cloud-covered continent in the background” (AC., p. 81). It seems to signify that the Americans may not experience the turmoil of the Depression again.

It is no doubt a fact that in *The American Clock* the problem of identity re-emerges in a new form and in a new situation. This is perhaps because the playwright’s main concern in the play is basically to portray and visualize the hard impact of the Depression catastrophe on American social life. Above all, the play needs to be a part of the study as it is the most recent and the last dramatic composition of the playwright which yet gives the discussion of identity a politico-economic dimension. When examined as a whole, it may however be observed that the play seems to be an indication of “the fragility of personal identity and the social contract and, on the other, of the necessity to reaffirm the substance and significance of that identity and that contract.” In the play the characters pass through various stages of uncertainty and misery because of the Depression. It seems that they are more concerned with the question of their survival than anything else. In such a period of crisis it is no wonder that the American belief in their distinctive identity as the members of a society governed by free economy and sense of freedom should also receive a rude shock when there is the economic shump for the country and the world.

Above all, what is most important in the play is not the death or suicide of an individual, but the hard struggle of the people towards the fulfilment of an ideal society that will enable them to exhibit their true identity at the social and the political level. All the people are collectively responsible in the whole process of the play. Every person contributes his or her might to the development and progress of the nation. The perpetual movement of the clock is most appropriately in tune with the progressive struggle of the American people in the play. The success of the play lies in the playwright’s sincere effort to reshape imaginatively the whole human experience of the Depression in order to achieve an ideal order and harmony and give the nation back a sense of its distinctive political identity. Since the dramatist has imaginatively reconstructed the Depression scene and the bitter experiences associated with it, the play might as well serve as a warning to the American people to be on guard against the forces that caused the economic depression but also against such forces as militate against its distinctive identity as a nation which gives its citizens a place of pride, honour and dignity in the eyes of the world. Thus in The American Clock Miller has examined and analysed the problem of identity on a large intensive scale and makes the play to unfold the idea of American national identity. It is obvious that the question of identity here is neither the identity of an individual nor the identity of a particular race but the identity of a whole nation — the United States of America.