

PREFACE

In the curricular structure introduced by this University for students of Post Graduate degree programme, the opportunity to pursue Post Graduate course in any subject introduced by this University is equally available to all learners. Instead of being guided by any presumption about ability level, it would perhaps stand to reason if receptivity of a learner is judged in the course of the learning process. That would be entirely in keeping with the objectives of open education which does not believe in artificial differentiation.

Keeping this in view, study materials of the Post Graduate level in different subjects are being prepared on the basis of a well laid-out syllabus. The course structure combines the best elements in the approved syllabi of Central and State Universities in respective subjects. It has been so designed as to be upgradable with the addition of new information as well as results of fresh thinking and analysis.

The accepted methodology of distance education has been followed in the preparation of these study materials. Co-operation in every form of experienced scholars is indispensable for a work of this kind. We, therefore, owe an enormous debt of gratitude to everyone whose tireless efforts went into the writing, editing and devising of a proper lay-out of the materials. Practically speaking, their role amounts to an involvement in 'invisible teaching'. For, whoever makes use of these study materials would virtually derive the benefit of learning under their collective care without each being seen by the other.

The more a learner would seriously pursue these study materials, the easier it will be for him or her to reach out to larger horizons of a subject. Care has also been taken to make the language lucid and presentation attractive so that they may be rated as quality self-learning materials. If anything remains still obscure or difficult to follow, arrangements are there to come to terms with them through the counselling sessions regularly available at the network of study centres set up by the University.

Needless to add, a great deal of these efforts is still experimental-in fact, pioneering in certain areas. Naturally, there is every possibility of some lapse or deficiency here and there. However, these do admit of rectification and further improvement in due course. On the whole, therefore, these study materials are expected to evoke wider appreciation the more they receive serious attention of all concerned.

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6th Reprint : November, 2017

বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় মঞ্জুরি কমিশনের দূরশি(১) ব্যুরোর বিধি অনুযায়ী মুদ্রিত।
Printed in accordance with the regulations of the Distance Education
Bureau of the University Grants Commission.

POST GRADUATE : ENGLISH
[PG : ENG.]

Paper - VI
Modules – 4

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**Netaji Subhas
Open University**

**Post Graduate Course in English
PG - English - 6**

Module IV

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Unit 1 □ *Mourning Becomes Electra* : Eugene O' Neill

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1.1 □ Introduction

The American Critic, Louis Untermeyer introduces Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) in his *The Britanica Library of Great American Writing* (Volume II) by referring to Sinclair Lewis who accepted his 1930 Nobel Prize with the following words that startled the audience :

Had you chosen Eugene O'Neill, who had done nothing much is American drama save to transform it utterly in ten or twelve year, from a false world of neat and competent trickery to a world of splendour and fear and greatness, you would have been reminded that he has done something far worse than scoffing - he has seen life as not to be neatly arranged in the study of a scholar, but as a terrifying, magnificent, and often quite horrible thing, akin to the tornado, the earthquake, the devastating fire. (p. 1382)

The above comment underlines the nature of O'Neill's creative genius which, despite Lewis's 'half-modest, half-satirical speech.' cannot hide. His genius was of a tragic nature and as a creative artist he broke new grounds. He was the son of an actor father and had been familiar with the performance of plays right from his early days. The spirit of drama was in his blood. And the experience of misfortune, accidents and deaths that he went through made him naturally prone to depression in his private life. The lack of a

spiritual centre in contemporary life further intensified his personal angst. This is reflected in most of his plays. His heroes are often labelled as "haunted heroes" who are driven inexorably by Nemesis or Fate. Contemporary theatrical conventions and props failed to impress him and he was in search of a more intense form which might offer him scope to express his vision of life. Classical myths and forms provided him a more effective vehicle. As Egil Tornqvist points out, to O'Neill, Greek tragedy which was enacted in theatres that were temples too, represented highest example of art and religion. "To recreate the Greek spirit was the goal he set for himself. The mystical, Dionysian experience of being part of the Life Force that Nietzsche found communicated in the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles, O'Neill hoped to impart, through his plays, to a modern audience." Tornqvist mentions in this context O'Neill's comment made in 1929: "What has influenced my plays the most is my knowledge of the drama of all time - particularly Greek tragedy." Scholars have dwelt at length to trace the influence on him of other writers and of those who belong to other fields of study, particularly philosophy and psychology. We shall only mention here the names of Nietzsche and Ibsen who had a profound influence on him. Strindberg too was his favourite playwright. He himself said that Strindberg "first gave me that vision of what modern drama could be, and inspired me with the urge to write for the theatre."

1.2 □ O'Neills Life and Works

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill was born on 16 October, 1888 in New York City. He was the second son of the renowned romantic actor James O'Neill and Ella Quinlan O'Neill. His childhood was spent in touring the country with his father's theatre company. Naturally his formal education was affected. He was sent to Mount Saint Vincent Academy, a boarding school in New York City, and to Betts Academy in Stamford, Connecticut. He went to Princeton University for a year. He married Kathleen Jenkins in 1900. He went on a gold prospecting trip to Honduras. His son Eugene Gladstone O'Neill, Jr. was born in 1910. In 1912 he attempted suicide and in the same year was divorced from Kathleen. He became an actor and then a newspaper reporter for the New London *Telegraph*. He also went to the sea for two years and earned the "Able Seaman" certificate. He suffered from tuberculosis and

spent six months in the Gaylord Farm Sanatorium in Connecticut. He utilized this period by reading books, mainly plays and wrote his first one-act plays. In 1914 he joined George Pierce Baker's drama classes at Harvard. His association with non-commercial theatre groups paved the way for writing and production of his experimental plays. In 1918 he married Agnes Boulton. Next year his son Shane O'Neill and in 1926 his daughter Oona O'Neill were born. He encountered a series of tragedies in his life that had profound impact on him. He witnessed the slow death of his father who had suffered a stroke and had intestinal cancer. Stephen A. Black, in his well-documented article 'Celebrant of loss' : Eugene O'Neill 1888 - 1953 observes that during the last years of his father, "father and son became close in an increasingly collegial way. From March to August 1920 Eugene grieved deeply while watching his father die slowly and painfully, spending many hours and days at his father's bedside when James was unconscious or barely lucid" (p. 4). Black also mentions the effect of Eugene's discovery that "his mother had become a morphine addict at his birth, he himself being the unwitting cause of her addiction. It was a discovery not unlike the discovery be one Oedipus that is celebrated in two plays by Sophocles; in one play Sophocles imagined the process of discovery, and in the other, the consequences of the discovery" (pp. 5-6). A sense of guilt overwhelmed him as "he grew up sharing the family assumption that they would all have been better had he not been born." (p.6). He witnessed the deaths of his mother in 1922, that of his brother James O'Neill Jr. in 1923, and later of his son Eugene O'Neill, Jr. in 1950. It is not difficult to imagine why death and bereavement figures so prominently in his plays. *Mourning Becomes Electra*, which he completed in 1931, is, as the title indicates, clearly a play of mourning. The instances of death and decay mentioned above had the impact on the writing of this playwright. As has been pointed out by critics, the plays, particularly those written after 1920, were concerned with death and bereavement in some way or other, so much so that he has been called as a "celebrant of loss" most of whose characters "struggle unsuccessfully to let their dead be dead and to live their own lives without feeling haunted" (Black, p. 5). This great dramatist of death and mourning breathed his last in a Boston hotel room on 27 November, 1953. Black reports that shortly before his death O'Neill said to his wife Carlotta, "God damn it, I knew it! Born in a hotel room and dying in a hotel room." This sums up the feeling of a person who all along felt unhoused and unsettled.

O'Neill was a prolific writer and his plays won widespread recognition. The National Institute of Arts and Letters awarded him a gold medal for drama and Yale University awarded him a D. Litt. He won the Pulitzer Prize for drama thrice. He reached the pinnacle of success with the winning of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1936. His plays have been extensively translated in most of the languages of the world.

Some of O'Neill's well-known plays are :

Beyond the Horizon (1920)

The Emperor Jones (1921)

The Hairy Ape (1922)

Desire under the Elms (1925)

Mourning Becomes Electra (1931)

The Iceman Cometh (1946)

1.3 □ American Theatre and Eugene O'Neill

Eugene O'Neill and his parents were directly associated with the dramatic tradition of his country. As we have already noted, his father was a well-known actor of his time and his family members toured the country along with his company. Eugene himself participated in performance of some plays. He observed the conventions of plays, play acting and the systems within which plays were acted. In a highly competitive age all these were undergoing changes. His own plays were the results of his reactions to the theatrical conventions of his time. His career, as asserted by Watermeier, "was impacted by theatre's expansionist tendencies and the prevailing tensions between the forces of tradition and those of change" (p. 33). It is therefore necessary to examine here the conventions followed over the decades in order to contextualize *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

During the nineteenth century, from the 1820s to mid-1870s, American theatre was based on the "stock and star system." Resident stock companies of the cities presented mostly traditional plays and occasionally one new play or two on a repertory and rotational basis. There was not much scope for new experimental plays. And the success of the system depended very much on the stars. People associated with this system were usually very committed.

This system began to change with the entrance of the business-minded monopoly-oriented people who employed stars who would fit the new plays with popular appeal. The stock system gradually waned. This new system is described by Daniel J. Watermeier in the following way:

Since new plays were usually more expensive to mount than revivals of old plays, to recoup their investment [...] managers would run a production continuously night after night, rather than rotating it with other productions. A run of one hundred continuous performances soon, became the benchmark for a commercially successful production. Stock was also affected by the rise of the "combination," a theatrical company organized to tour a single popular play, or a small repertoire of plays, featuring a prominent star, or, occasionally stars. Combination companies travelled with their own stock of scenery, properties and costumes, and a cadre of at least essential support personnel. They were essentially travelling long-runs.

This was facilitated by a fast growing railroad system, particularly by the laying of the transcontinental railway line in the late 1860s.

The commercially oriented theatre soon faced discontent from some aesthetic minded players, producers and new theatre groups. New Theatre was established in 1909 by a consortium of businessmen, Little Theatre (1912) and Booth Theatre (1913) by Winthrop Ames, a very energetic young director from Boston. Amateur theatre groups collectively called "Little Theatres" began to surface in the 1920s and they were inspired by European examples and projected experimental plays on a non-profit basis. One may mention the names of Provincetown Players and Washington Square Players in this connection because they played important roles in projecting the plays of Eugene O'Neill.

David Belasco introduced realism in an intense form. He used "solid three-dimensional scenic units, actual objects, and costumes that, depending on the play, were historically or contemporaneously accurate. He was a pioneer in the use of electrical lighting to create moods and naturalistic effects. He eliminated the traditional and distracting footlights and developed a system of overhead, diffused lighting that stimulated natural-looking sunsets and sunrises or strikingly lit interiors" (Watermeier 42). This trend of realism was reinforced by the new interest in the psychological realism.

American journal and newspaper, p. critics were also conservative in taste at the turn of the century and new experimental plays did not usually

receive good reviews. By 1920s things changed a lot and the new critics in the media were more open to receive plays written by new playwrights like O'Neill.

1.4 □ *Mourning Becomes Electra* : Synopsis

O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* is a trilogy consisting of "Homecoming," "The Hunted," and "The Haunted." The first one is a play in five acts, while the second and the third are in five acts and four acts respectively. The action of the plays is set in 1865-1866. The titles of the plays are indicative of the nature of the theme they deal with. The classical orientation of the trilogy is also indicated by its title.

Homecoming

Act I

"Homecoming" opens in the years following the end of Civil War in America. The backdrop is the affluent Mannon House in New England. From the very beginning a sinister, brooding, secretive atmosphere seems to pervade the house. The house is described as "an incongruous white mask" fixed to the house to conceal its ugliness. In subsequent pages the house is described as "a temple of hatred" built by its owner as a tribute to Hatred. The play opens with the appearance on the scene of Lavinia, the daughter of Ezra Mannon, a pillar of New England society. He was the Brigadier General in the Civil War, a Mayor and a judge. He is the prosperous owner of several ships and is highly esteemed in the community of New England. The war is at an end and Ezra Mannon is about to return home. Hence the title "Homecoming". From the very first lines an atmosphere of intrigue, hatred and venomous feelings permeates the atmosphere. The relationship between mother Christine Mannon and daughter Lavinia is tainted by the venom of mutual distrust and dislike. Lavinia is deeply disturbed by the information she has received regarding her mother's illicit relationship with Captain Adam Brant. Acting on a hunch she pursues her mother to New York where she comes upon the lovers' tryst. Here she learns that Mr. Brant who had seemed attentive to her is in fact her mother's lover. His apparent interest in her was a calculated ruse of Christine to throw her daughter off the scent, as Lavinia's suspicion might have been aroused.

Act II

Maddened by her mother's infidelity, Lavinia confronts her mother with the truth. She threatens to tell her father of her discovery when he arrives home. She asks her mother to give up her lover or face the consequence of her act. Christine, trapped, seems to relent and to submit to her daughter's wishes. She realizes that if her daughter carries out her threat her husband would never divorce her but would only disgrace and disown her. He would also rob her lover of his profession by using his immense influence. Thus the marriage which was already in shambles would grow into an intolerable bondage which they could never shake off. Mollified by her mother's apparent compliance, Lavinia leaves. As soon as she leaves, her mother summons her lover and informs him of the facts. They confer together. They realize that now that the relationship has been discovered, they will have to part ways. Christine has been forced into a corner. She now schemes to do away with her husband. She asks Adam to procure poison. Adam at first objects but Christine cleverly plays on Adam's feelings for his mother who was wronged by the Mannon family. She goads him on until he agrees to her plan.

Act III

Ezra Mannon, the master of the house, returns home. The Civil War is over. Christine Mannon enquires about her son Orin who was also in the war and has not returned home. Her husband informs her that her son had a head wound and he is now convalescing in a hospital. The wound is not a grave one, however, and hopefully, he will return home shortly. Lavinia steers the conversation to the subject of Captain Adam Brant who has been calling on Christine Mannon. Ezra who had already had a hint of this visit in her letters to her father is at once suspicious and angry. Lavinia further informs him that he is quite a lady's man and his presence will cause gossip in the town. Sensing a brewing trouble, Christine asks her daughter to leave.

Ezra Mannon bares his heart to his wife. He confesses that in the war with death all around him, death had lost all significance and seemed hollow and meaningless. Soon his thought had turned to life, specially his life with Christine. He senses that throughout their marriage, there had been an invisible and inflexible barrier between them that prevented all communication. She seems to love her son Orin with the possessiveness in proportion to the dislike and hatred towards her daughter and her husband. He wants to break

down the barrier and to truly love her. At this revelation Christine becomes uneasy but not the less resolved to carry out her grim purpose.

Act IV

It is now almost daybreak. Christine who has been unable to sleep furtively leaves her bed. Her husband too is awake. It is as if he feels the premonition of his death. He confesses "something in me was waiting for something to happen." He then accuses his wife of waiting for his death to set her free. He realizes that she does not care for him. To this Christine retorts that he is responsible for the barrier between them, that he has been cold and uncaring all these years. A sudden confession of love cannot undo the wasted years. She then changes her tone to one of deliberate and brutal frankness. She admits that she loves Captain Brant who is the illegitimate son of her husband's father's brother. This infuriates Ezra and he rises threateningly but falls back in pain, exclaiming that he has a heart attack and demands his medicine. She hands him the poison which he swallows. He soon realizes that it is not his medicine. He calls out for his daughter Lavinia who hurries into the room. Ezra with his dying breath gasps out that "she is guilty - not medicine." He then dies. Lavinia who distrusts her mother and knows of her illicit affair suspects that she has been responsible for the heart attack. She demands to know what her father meant by his last words. All this while Christine has been hiding the box of poison in her hand. Overcome by her daughter's accusation she faints down. The box falls on to the carpet. Lavinia who kneels down to attend her mother discovers the box. Her worst suspicion is confirmed. She knows that her father has been poisoned.

The Hunted

Act I

Ezra Mannon is dead and after the funeral neighbours call on Mrs. Mannon and her daughter. Hazel and Peter Niles, friends of her son Orin, sympathise over her bereavement. Christine, since her husband's death, has a haggard, careworn appearance. It is as if the secret burden of guilt she carries and her daughter's continuous silent indictment and hostility is wearing her away,

and gnawing at her very existence. She pleads with Hazel Niles to help her foil Lavinia's plans. She is afraid that Lavinia who has great influence over her brother will cause an estrangement, between mother and son, and ostensibly she solicits Hazel's help to prevent a possible break-up between her son and Hazel who are childhood friends. In reality it is an admission of Christine's fear that Lavinia will harden her son's heart against, her mother. In a moment of weakness she yearns for the innocence and goodness she has lost, and she senses these lost qualities in Hazel Niles. Soon her son arrives home. To Orin the spectral appearance of the house bathed in moonlight suggests a tomb. Lavinia takes his words literally saying it is indeed a tomb with death in the house. Orin is irritated at this. He has had a surfeit of death and gloom and does not want to brood over death but wants to think about life. He then questions Lavinia about Adam Brant. Lavinia had hinted at the impropriety of Brand's presence in her letter to Orin. Like his father he grows suspicious. Lavinia warns her brother to be on his guard about their mother. She is aware of close attachment and asks him not to believe their mother's protestations of love. Orin who loves his mother reacts sharply and says that Lavinia is paranoid. Orin leaves the room. Left alone, Christine, is overcome by Lavinia's silent hostility, for Lavinia has not uttered her suspicion about her mother but has been following her every move. Goaded beyond endurance Christine tries to elicit some response, but she is silently rebuffed and condemned.

Act II

Hazel and Peter Niles sit conversing about the sad changes in the Mannon household. Orin arrives with his mother. He instinctively senses some change in his mother and his sister, and says as much. He is torn between his love for his mother and a growing suspicion of Adam which was carefully planted in him by his sister. He is, by turns, devoted to and distrustful of his mother. Christine is on the defensive. She tries to instil in him doubts about the mental health of her daughter. She charges Lavinia with an unnatural obsession with her dead father. She fears that Lavinia is trying to poison her brother's mind. Christine is in desperation. Repelled by her daughter, afraid that his beloved's life is in danger (Orin threatens to kill Adam if he should meet him) and fearful of losing her son's love, Christine is truly 'hunted', Hounded by the relentless hatred of her vindictive daughter she is in danger of losing

everything she loves. She pleads with her daughter to forebear, which appeal however falls on deaf ears.

Act III

Lavinia's warning to Orin to beware of their mother has taken an unshakable root in his mind. He is aware that a change for the worse has taken place in the house but so far these fears have been unfounded, based only on insinuations and dark hints from sister. He ironically looks at his father's picture and remarks that "his father was like the statue of a dead man looking over the head of life without a sign of recognition, cutting it dead for the impropriety of living." His sister overhears this sardonic remark and chides him with disrespect for their dead father. Orin replies that during the war death has come to lose all meaning for him. Lavinia tries to alter his mood. She wants to talk about Christine. At first Orin refuses to listen, calling her suspicion the ravings of an abnormal mind. Lavinia swears that she is of sound mind and that she has definite proof of their mother's infamy and openly accuses her of murder. She produces the empty box containing the poison, but Orin replies that their father had always sided with his sister and against mother and himself. Desperate to convince him, Lavinia tauntingly says that Orin will allow their mother's lover to escape. At this Orin's suspicion is reawakened. Lavinia promises that they will catch the lovers red-handed.

Christine suspects that her children are now intent on hurting her and her lover. Desperate and with her back against the wall, she is the very embodiment of guilt, a lost soul in torment.

Act IV

This act opens on a clipper ship on a wharf in East Boston. Captain Adam Brant, the commander of the ship, is on board. Christine appears on the scene to warn him that his life is in danger. She tells him that her son and daughter are away and she has taken advantage of their absence to talk to him and informs him that Lavinia has found the box of poison, and that maddened by the knowledge, Orin will try to kill him. They must flee. Adam promises to give up his ship "The Flying Trades" and board another ship. She urges Adam to escape together before Lavinia can act. They are unaware that both Lavinia and Orin are hiding nearby, listening to their conversation. Orin now

comes out and follows Adam and shoots him dead. Together the brother and sister ransack the apartment to make it look like a burglary. They then leave the scene of the crime,

ActV

Christine, unaware of the event that have followed her meeting with Adam, is alone at home. She is in a pitiable state of fear and guilt and entreats Hazel Nile to keep her company. Hazel agrees to stay the night and leaves the place to get permission from her parents. Lavinia and Orin arrive and Orin immediately blurts out the truth. Christine, stunned by her grief at the news of Adam's death, is paralysed and shocked. Orin who truly loves his mother still has vestiges of enderness for her. He believes that his mother has killed their father under the influence of Adam who plotted the whole affair. Christine silently condemns her daughter, as she guesses that Lavinia was in love with Adam and this is her revenge. Unable to bear the accusing look, Lavinia departs. Christine's world has been utterly destroyed. Bereft of her last solace, love for Adam, she shoots herself. When Orin hears the shot and discovers his mother's body, he is grief-stricken. He blames himself for the death of his mother and calls himself a murderer. Afraid that their part will be revealed by Orin, Lavinia commands their servant to tell the family doctor that their mother, unhinged by grief at her husband's death, has committed suicide.

The Haunted

Act I Scene I

Some time has elapsed. The Mannon House has been empty for a year. As Lavinia and Orin had left the country to travel abroad, the house is the target of much gossip. Rumour has it that the house is haunted. In the beginning of the act a local character named Abner Small had boasted that he was not afraid to stay until dark in the Mannon House. Others lay a wager that he should stay there until dark. If he leaves the house before dark he will lose the wager and had to pay ten dollars. Abner enters the house. The others stand conversing. Very shortly he rushes out of the house, gasping out that he has seen the ghost of Ezra. At this point Peter and Hazel Niles approach

the house. They have just received a telegram from Orin and Lavinia that they are returning from their trip abroad. Peter and Hazel wish to make arrangement to make the house comfortable for the wary travellers. They proceed to open windows and light fires. Orin and Lavinia arrive home. Marked changes are noticeable in Lavinia. Formerly angular and stiff, she has now put on weight. She dresses in green like her mother. There is a womanly attractiveness in her. She now physically resembles her mother. There is a touch of irony here, for Christine now seems to be reincarnated in her daughter. Lavinia tries to coax her brother indoors. He too has changed. He is haggard and lean and carries himself like an automaton. It is as if vital spark of life has left his body which is now merely an empty shell. He is strangely reluctant to enter the house and looks around him in dread. Lavinia has to exercise all her powers of persuasion to elicit some response from him, She tries in her brisk matter-of-fact way to exercise the ghost that haunts him. Orin has to make a great effort to obey his sister. The strain of past horrors is clearly telling on him. He is in a state of great shock.

Act I Scene II

Lavinia and Orin are both trying to come to terms with the changed condition in the Mannon House. Lavinia now so closely resembles her mother that it evokes strange reactions from others. Orin is the first to notice this transformation. He has retreated into himself and lays the burden of guilt for the death of Adam and his mother. He still believes in his mother's innocence. He feels that her mother, under the undue influence of Adam Brant, had committed the sin. Lavinia sharply dispels such notions, saying that her mother was a murderess who met her just deserts. Orin, she says, must free himself of any sense of guilt. But the murders of Christine and Adam, specially Christine, weigh heavily on Orin. While they converse, Peter and Hazel Nile come in. Peter, like Orin, is amazed by the physical transformation in Lavinia. It is more than a physical change. Her very nature, formerly so puritanical, has become more emotional, passionate and almost uninhibited. Brother and sister seem to have changed places. Orin, so much like his mother, has grown into a Mannon, harsh, husbanding and austere, while Lavinia is now like her mother. Orin speaks disapprovingly of the permissive ways of the Pacific Island where they had stayed for a month. There is an underlying menace in his voice as he speaks of the Pacific island. Peter urges Lavinia to marry him

but Lavinia declines as she thinks Orin is far from being well. She cannot rest until Orin is free from the demon which haunts him.

Act II

Orin Mannon is confined to a room with the windows closed and the door locked from within. He is engaged in writing the true history of the Mannons till the present day. Lavinia is not aware of what he is doing. She pleads with him to leave his unhealthy preoccupation and go outdoors. Orin replies that as guilty creatures they have renounced the right to face the daylight. Darkness of the soul is theirs and thus the dark is fitting for condemned creatures like them. Orin threatens Lavinia that if she ever feels tempted to marry Peter he will place the history in Peter's hands. Orin has gone sinister and threatening. He bluntly tells Lavinia that her opinion of their mother's death being an act of justice was nonsense. Her death was the outcome of the jealous vindictiveness of Lavinia's thwarted love for Adam Brant. Driven beyond endurance by Orin's threat, Lavinia asks him to take care. Orin mockingly questions if that is a threat to his life. He says he is well aware of his danger and it is she who had better watch out or else the dark skeletons in the Mannon cupboard would come out, Orin is oblivious to Lavinia's distress and merely repeats that he wants to be left alone to complete his unfinished task.

Act III

Lavinia is in a state of excruciating mental pain. She keeps thinking about her last conversation with Orin when he challenged her to kill him. Thoughts of Orin's death pass through her mind bringing an unconscious feeling of relief. She is instantly repentant and prays for composure. Their gardener Setli summons Lavinia to attend to some household problem. She leaves. Peter and Hazel Niles enter talking. They discuss Orin's strange behaviour. He hardly ever comes outdoors and Lavinia sticks to him closely, never allowing him to have a moment together, specially with Hazel. Orin comes in carrying the envelope containing the confession and hands it to Hazel. He makes her promise to have it in safe keeping, not to read it unless Lavinia were to marry Peter or in case of his own death. Hazel is shocked by Orin's insistence that Lavinia must not marry Peter. He says that this is part of her punishment. He cannot marry Hazel either, for the only love he feels now is the love of

guilt. Orin encouraged by Hazel's sympathetic tone is on the brink of confession but draws back at the last moment Hazel tells him that she knows that he had quarrelled with his mother before her death and that this has made him feel responsible. Orin appreciates Lavinia's cunning (Lavinia earlier told this to Hazel) and merely repeats that Hazel should keep the envelope safely locked. He pleads with Hazel to take him away from this evil house for he fears something terrible is going to happen if he stays here. Hazel invites him to their home. Orin bitterly replies that Lavinia will not allow him to be out of her sight. Just then Lavinia arrives. She immediately senses that something is amiss. Hazel says that she has invited Orin to their house. Lavinia declines the offer. Angered by this Hazel says that Orin is old enough to know his own mind. Lavinia snubs her. Hazel now unwittingly reveals the envelope she is holding, Orin tries to warn her and asks her to leave. Hazel tries to edge past Lavinia who realises that Orin must have given her the writing. She appeals to Orin's sense of honour to the Mannon loyalty and in desperation asks him to get back the envelope for her sake. In return she promises to do whatever he wants, including not marrying Peter. Orin is now in a morbid state of mind and confesses that ties of guilt bind them close together and he loves her. He hints at an incestuous relationship because he feels that it is the only way she can be made to feel her guilt and not leave him. He begs her to confess and find peace. By now Lavinia's mind is also unhinged by the tensions she has been passing through and the dread of Orin's revelation of their guilt. She is near a breaking-point. She tauntingly adds that Orin will kill himself and that he is not a coward. This shaft strikes home. He confuses Lavinia with his dead mother. It is as if Christine is speaking through Lavinia. He wildly raves that this is the only way to find forgiveness for his guilt. In this state of mind he goes out. Lavinia waits for the worst. Soon a shot is heard. Lavinia quickly locks the envelope in a drawer and leaves the room.

Act IV

Orin is dead. He has committed suicide. Lavinia is alone in the house. She tries to put on a cheerful air. She has made up his mind to marry Peter and turn her back on grief and live life on her own terms. Hazel drops in to talk to Lavinia and tells her that Orin's death is no accident. She then pleads with Lavinia not to marry Peter and thereby to ruin his life. Hazel leaves and

Peter enters. He is dejected and depressed. Lavinia urges him to marry her immediately. Peter is shocked at the proposal since they were passing through, a period of mourning. He is suspicious and asks if the envelope contained anything damning to prevent their marriage. Lavinia says that the dead are coming between her and her happiness. Now Lavinia pleads for her not to wait for marriage but love her for her sake: "Want me, take me, Adam." She immediately realises that she has uttered the name of Adam. Now Peter is extremely suspicious and asks her if there is any truth in Orin's hints about her relationship with a Pacific islander whom Lavinia had admired. Lavinia now feels that her relationship with Peter must end and thus replies that her relationship with the islander was purely physical. Peter, shocked, refuses to have anything to do with her. Seth comes in, singing his favourite Shenandoah tune. Lavinia says grimly that she is bound to the Mannon dead. Seth requests her to leave the house but she replies that she will not go Orin's and Christine's way, She will punish herself. She will cut herself off from all living beings, nor see the light of day again. She will live indoors, surrounded by dead Mannons until her own death. Lavinia finally enters a room to wait for her doom.

1.5 □ Main Characters in the Play

The main characters in the play correspond to those in Greek myth and plays. They are moved by intense passion, motivation, and urge for revenge. A sense of determinism seems to work relentlessly in the play. A brief introduction to the major characters of the play is given below.

Lavinia : Lavinia is the daughter of Ezra Mannon and Christine. She is the protagonist of the play and is the "Electra" of the title. Like Electra, she helps her brother Orin to murder their mother's lover Adam Brant and goads her mother to commit suicide. She has great manipulative power and influences her brother to achieve her own goals of revenge and retribution. She is in fact the agent of retribution. Right from the beginning she has an obsessive attraction for her father and informs him of the developments in the Mannon household when he is away in the Civil War. She, like her father, is puritanical in the beginning but registers changes in her character when she comes back from abroad. She in fact is the custodian of the interests not only of his father but the entire Mannon family. In the end also she is the only custodian of the

Mannon House which houses many memories, not all of which are cherishable. She is therefore the agent of repression of the memories. She hates her mother who not only possesses her father but also Adam Brant who falsely shows his love for her. When she discovers this she plans for her revenge. She therefore not only moves away from her mother but also replaces her. Physically she looks like her mother after her death. She is her mother's double. After her return from abroad she becomes more permissive. Instead of wearing black which she used to wear earlier, she now is dressed in green. This change is worthy to be noted because her mother is dead now and she is ready to take up her role.

Orin Mannon : Orin is the son of Ezra and Christine and brother of Lavinia. He plays the role of Orestes of Aeschylus. His absence from the Mannon House was most intensely felt by his mother with whom he was obsessively in love. His return from the Civil War sparked a series of incidents in which he is made to be involved by the manipulative skill of his sister. His jealousy is carefully aroused by Lavinia and he kills his mother's lover Adam Brant whom he considers to be a rival. He suffers from guilt and ultimately kills himself. He is intelligent enough to see through the cunning of his sister but himself is a helpless victim to jealousy and an urge for revenge. In his paranoid state he considers Lavinia to be his mother and acts according to her instigation. After his return from abroad he too is a changed person and resembles the members of the Mannon family.

Christine Mannon : Christine is the wife of Ezra Mannon, and mother of Lavinia and Orin. She has a striking physique. She is capable of taking decisions. In the play she plays the role of the Greek character Clytemnestra. During her husband's absence she takes a lover (Adam Brant) and kills her husband when he returns from war. She is absolutely possessive of her son and admits that she would not have taken a lover if her son did not join war. Adam is thus a substitute for her son. She wears green which suggests envy and jealousy. She is full of vitality and life force, The paleness of her face is considered to be a mask which hides her duplicity and indicates her repression of her passion.

Ezra Mannon : Ezra Mannon is the symbol of law and patriarchy. After his return from the Civil War he is seen in the dress of a judge, enforcing the puritanical law. He belongs to the influential Mannon family and wields considerable power. Although he is a broken down husband, he is still

important in the symbolic form. His imagination of himself as a statue of a great man standing in a square speaks of his projection in the trilogy in a symbolic form. His influence in the house is felt even in his absence and even after his death he has been evoked again and again.

In the play he is the counterpart of Agamemnon. Ezra returns from the Civil War to be murdered by his wife with the help of Adam Brant.

Adam Brant : Adam Brant is the counterpart of Aegisthus of the Greek tragedy. He is the lover of Christine. He is full of romantic sensuousness and sensuality. He is an illegitimate child of the Mannon family and comes back to take revenge in his own way. He takes away Ezra's wife from him and fakes love for Lavinia who soon discovers the nature of his relationship with her mother; In a way Christine appears to him as a mother substitute. Christine too says that she would not have been involved in a love affair if Orin had not joined the Civil War.

1.6 □ The Title of the Play : *Mourning Becomes Electra*

The title of the play manifests the influence of Greek myth and classical Greek drama on the play and the playwright. These have structured the story of the trilogy and influenced the dominant tone of the play. O'Neill was an admirer of the classical Greek drama and was greatly influenced by the content and style of these. In the present play we find several elements including the use of determinism, employment of Fate, use of some form of Chorus and so on. "What has influenced my plays the most," he said in 1929, "is my knowledge of the drama of all time - particularly Greek tragedy." Tragedy, he believed, "is the meaning of life - and the hope. The noblest is eternally the most tragic. The people who succeed and do not push on to a greater failure are the spiritual middle classes."

The title of O'Neill's trilogy refers to Electra who, in Greek mythology, was the daughter of Agamemnon, the son of Atreus, the king of Mycenae, and Clytemnestra. The couple's other children were Iphigenia and Orestes. Agamemnon sacrificed Iphigenia in order to win favourable winds during the Trojan war. After a ten-year siege Troy was ravaged and Agamemnon returned with Priam's daughter Cassandra as a prize. However, after their return home, they were murdered by Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus

who then seized power. Orestes, helped by Electra, killed his mother and her lover. Electra's hate for her mother and her relentless desire for revenge is the subject-matter of the dramas of Greek dramatists like Euripides, Sophocles and Aeschylus. O'Neill's play is particularly structured on the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus.

A reading of the play clearly establishes a close parallel between the Greek story and that of O'Neill. O'Neill's interest is obviously in Lavinia (Electra) who replicates Electra's role. She avenges the murder of her father Ezra Mannon (Agamemnon) who, like his Greek counterpart, returns from a war - American Civil War. Ezra is murdered by his wife Christine (Clytemnestra) who has, like her Greek counterpart, a lover in Adam Brant (Aegisthus). One can also note close resemblance between the names of the Greek characters and those of O'Neill. Here we shall not make any attempt to elaborate the points of resemblance because one can read the synopsis given in this study material and gather story elements from there. And of course a first-hand acquaintance with O'Neill's trilogy is necessary.

The point which needs to be emphasised here is that O'Neill has located a contemporary story of American society within the structure of the Greek tragedy. By doing this he underscores the continuing relevance of the tragic events. The tales of passion and guilt happen even these days and Fate follows lives of human beings like a relentless force. The ancestral guilt of the Mannon family ultimately nails Ezra and the pictures of his ancestors are a constant reminder of their presence in the lives of the inhabitants of the house. The extra-marital relationship of Christine leads to murders. As a result of the continuing surveillance of Lavinia and the psychological pressure exerted by her, the fact of the murder develops into a guilt complex in her. Orin, a brother-turned-son character, is driven by jealousy but is also a helpless creature in the hands of Fate. The deterministic force of the Greek tragedy is clearly present in *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

In the end Lavinia locks herself in the Mannon House that houses memories of the past. She survives deaths, murders and suicides. She entombs herself in the house. Mourning, in the end, becomes Lavinia (Electra).

1.7 □ *Mourning Becomes Electra*: A Psychoanalytical Play

Critics have noted the impact of psychoanalysis on O'Neill's plays. *Mourning Becomes Electra* also lends itself to such interpretations. But O'Neill himself did not admit of any conscious effort to infuse such a meaning in his plays. He felt that any sensitive writer can have an intuitive understanding of the mindscape of his or her characters. He asserts:

There is no conscious use of psychoanalytical material in any of my plays. All of them could easily have been written by a dramatist who had never heard of the Freudian theory and was simply guided by an intuitive psychological insight into human beings and their life-impulsions that is as old as Greek drama. [...] I have only read two books of Freud's, "Totem and Taboo" and "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." The book that interested me the most of all those of the Freudian school is Jung's "Psychology of the Unconscious" which I read many years ago. If I have been influenced unconsciously it must have been by this book more than any other psychological work.

The above statement establishes that O'Neill had a good understanding of the psychoanalytical perspectives which may have been unconsciously projected on his characters and on the overall structure of the stories.

One notes that the trilogy *Mourning Becomes Electra* is structured, besides the myth of Electra, by the Oedipus myth. Oedipus was the son of Laius. It was predicted that Laius would be killed by his son and hence Oedipus was abandoned on the Mount Cithaeron. He was found by a shepherd and raised by Polybus. Hearing about the oracle he left Corinth and accidentally killed his father as a result of a hot argument with him, without having the knowledge of the identity of the killed. This myth was developed into "Oedipus Complex" by Freud. This Oedipus Complex contends that the child has an instinctive, incestuous desire for the parent of the opposite sex. Both the son and the daughter have as his or her love object of the mother. The father is for the male child the rival who is supposed to threaten him with castration. By this threat against incest the father becomes a figure of the law. The male child then overcomes the Oedipal desire and identifies with the father. The girl child, on the contrary, realises a sense of castration of both herself and her mother, and leaves the mother for the father with the hope of bearing his child that would compensate for her lack. The girl will be a

mother in her mother's place. This turning away from the mother, according to Freud, "is accompanied by hostility; the attachment to the mother ends in hate. A hate of that kind may become very striking and may last all through life." Even the synopsis of O'Neill's play establishes the existence of some aspects of this complex in the play.

One finds manifestations of this complex in O'Neill's trilogy. Lavinia's hate for her mother and affiliation to her father can be amply demonstrated. She takes revenge on her mother for murdering her father. In the end she has a striking resemblance with her mother, now dead, and even wears a green dress like her mother. She identifies herself with her mother only after her death and replaces her in the Freudian pattern. She is now not only the only 'mother' figure but also is in possession of the Mannon House which is the symbol of patriarchy and rule of the law. Her 'lack' seems to be compensated now: Similarly, Orin's love for his mother is also clearly perceptible. The story bears this out. He kills Adam who is perceived as a rival. He dreams of "Blessed Island" which has clear sexual connotations. He tells his mother, "The breaking of the waves was your voice. The sky was the same colour as your eyes. The warm sand was like your skin. The whole island was you." One has the feeling that the island is also equated with Mother Nature with all her fertile and recuperative power! Christine similarly has an obsessive love of and possessiveness for her son and asserts that she would not have a lover if Orin did not join the war.

Lavinia and Orin are thus re-incarnated as Christine and Ezra respectively and substitute the mother and the father.

1.8 □ Questions

1. Discuss the significance of the title of O'Neill's trilogy *Mourning Becomes Electra*.
2. Critically analyse how Greek myth and classical Greek drama structure the plot and characterisation of the trilogy.
3. O'Neill adopts a Greek theme that is relevant for a contemporary American society. Do you agree with this view? Elaborate your arguments.
4. Do you think that O'Neill's trilogy was influenced by Freud and other psychoanalysts? Give your opinion, citing examples from the text.
5. Consider the role and significance of the Civil War as a backdrop in the trilogy.
6. Who is the protagonist of the trilogy? Analyse this person's character.
7. Analyse the character of Ezra Mannon and show how his importance is felt even in his absence.
8. Analyse the character of Christine Mannon.
9. Analyse O'Neill's trilogy as a tragedy of death and mourning.
10. Critically analyse the mother-daughter relationship as presented in the trilogy.
11. Describe the Mannon House and analyse its role in the trilogy.
12. Critically analyse the role of Fate in the trilogy.
13. What is the role of the Blessed Island in the trilogy? How do the major characters respond to idea of the Blessed Island?
14. What are the functions of the minor characters in the trilogy? Give your own opinion by analysing the text.

1.9 □ Recommended Reading

Berlin, Normand, *Eugene O'Neill*. New York : St. Martin's Press, 1988.

Black, Stephen A. *Eugene O'Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

Houchin, John H, ed. *The Critical Response to Eugene O'Neill*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993.

Manheim, Michael (ed). *The Cambridge Companion to Eugene O'Neill* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. (References to the articles by Egil Tornqvist, Daniel J. Watermeier and Stephen A. Black are from this volume).

Martine, James J (ed). *Critical Essays on Eugene O'Neill*. Boston: G.K.Hall, 1984.

Unit 2 □ *Death of a Salesman* : Arthur Miller

Structure :

- 2.0 The Background**
- 2.1 About the Dramatist: Life and Works**
- 2.2 Theme and Structure**
- 2.3 The Story**
- 2.4 Father-Son Relationship**
- 2.5 Questions**
- 2.6 Select Bibliography**

2.0 □ Background

American drama after the Second World War continued many of the themes and preoccupations of the drama of the 1920's, whose great architect was Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953). Indeed, in both Miller and Tennessee Williams, who is his contemporary, the shadow of O'Neill is clearly discernible, in the emphasis on family themes, and in locating destiny within the family situation. O'Neill was also extremely experimental with theatre technique, using masks, ghosts, and forms of expressionism, that continue in Miller's dramaturgy.

The fiction of the Second World War was deeply affected by changes in the human viewpoint, and drama of this period, specially, faithfully reflected this condition. A loss of faith in life itself, cynicism about human values, a failure to achieve personal identity and individuality seemed dwarfed by the truly massive power of nonhuman things. In every genre of literature was depicted facets of humanity scarred by war.

Following the patriotic absorption of World War II, American theatre continued to thrive for a time, but after the 1960s Broadway was increasingly given over to glossy spectacles, a condition resulting from high production costs and the competition of movies and television. Eugene O'Neill, Maxwell Anderson, Lillian Hellman and other established playwrights continued as forceful presence into the 1950s and beyond, while American theatre was

energised from abroad by the theatre of the absurd created by Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet and others. The immediate postwar period was marked also by the rise of two American playwrights of uncommon genius. Tennessee Williams earned great acclaim with rich, moody drama set in the South, notably *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Arthur Miller contributed to the postwar stage, one of America's greatest plays *Death of a Salesman* (1949), a moving study of the 'Tragedy' of the Common man.

Miller's play *The Crucible* (p.4) focuses on the excesses of the McCarthy era or what is popularly known as McCarthyism. John McCarthy was a US senator of the 1950's, who suspected Communist infiltration into America, and conducted hearing after hearing at Washington, of suspected Communists. Regarding these hearings Miller commented, "the main point of these hearings as in seventeenth century Salem, was that the accused make public confession, damn his confederates as well as his Devil Master, and guarantee his sterling new allegiance by breaking disgusting old vows-whereupon her was let loose to rejoin the society of extremely decent people." *The Crucible* (1953), which centralizes the Salem witch hunt of the 1600's, thus has its political analogue in Miller's own time, and its hero John Proctor, allows himself to be executed rather than sign away, his own and his children's respect. Both playwrights significantly diminished in their contributions after the 1960s. Among younger dramatists, for many years only Edward Albee seemed to approach the power and intensity of Miller or Williams.

2.1 □ About the Dramatist: Life and Works

Arthur Miller was born and raised till he was a teenager on the upper East Side of Manhattan, attending school in Harlem. He came from a very ordinary middle-class family, with a German ancestry and Jewish practices followed at home. His father was a manufacturer of ladies coats and his mother a teacher. In 1928, the family moved to Brooklyn, and suffered tremendously in the hard times of the depression there. Miller graduated from high school in 1932, but since he was more interested in athletics than studies, his grade were too poor for admission into college. After a series of jobs, that he acquired and left very quickly, he settled down to a daily grind in an automobile parts warehouse. He evokes this period in loving detail in a one-act play *A Memory of Two Mondays*. This work provides a fine introduction to the milieu

that produced his determination to write. Finally accepted to the University of Michigan in 1914, he began writing in earnest, won two undergraduate Hopewood Awards for his plays and met Mary Slattery, who later became the first of his three wives. Graduating in 1938, he went to New York, wrote briefly for the Federal Theatre Project and was soon employed at the Brooklyn Navy Yard while writing plays for radio.

Miller's first Broadway play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (1944) failed after four performances, but three years later he was back with a substantial success in *All My Sons* (1947), a drama based on the guilt arising from a shipment of faulty aeroplane parts in World War II. This play and *Death of a Salesman* (1949) which appeared next, established Miller as a master of family dramas rarrying strong social implications. In *The Crucible* (1953) Miller continued his social analysis, finding in the witchcraft trials of colonial Massachusetts an analogue for the increasingly restrictive environment of cold war America.

After *The Crucible*, Miller's work seemed for some years less successful, and his personal life more troubled. In ironic confirmation of the ideas expressed in *the Crucible*, he was accused of left wing sympathies, denied a passport to the Belgian opening of the play and brought under the scrutiny of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. In 1956, his first marriage ended in divorce, and Miller married the glamorous actress Marilyn Monroe, from whom he was divorced in 1961. Within this period, his major work was limited to *A View from the Bridge* and *A Memory of Two Mondays*, first produced and published together, in 1955, a *Collected Plays*(1957) and the screenplay for the film *The Misfits*(1961).

In 1962 he married the photographer Inge Morath, with whom he later collaborated in producing several books of photographers and essays.

After the fall and *Incident at Vichy*, both produced in 1964, brought him back to Broadway after a long absence and restored his position among American dramatists. *The Price* (1968), *The Creation of the World and Other Business* (1972) and *The Archbishop's Ceiling* (1976) are testaments to Miller's concern and dedication to the specific Theatre of ideas.

Timebends : A life (1987) is a memoir and a significant pointer to his plays, that are mostly autobiographical. Social consciousness, like Ibsens', forms the bedrock of Miller's plays.

His only novel, *Focus* (1945) appears inadequate in technique and style, but carries a profound message. In it, a Gentile confronts anti-Semitism, and

has a truly traumatic experience. Miller's abiding sense of the individual's needs to come to terms with personal responsibilities, while bravely confronting the world's injustice. This sense finds constant reflections in Miller's writings, and his essay, 'Our Guilt for the World's Evil stresses upon our discovery of ourselves in relationship to evil.

He frequently structures his plays to reveal psychological crisis through expressionistic techniques that undercut the otherwise surface realism of his plays. His preoccupation with ordinary lives and the profundity of their beings, makes him a major force among the twentieth century masters of the theatre.

Apart from his major dramatic and fictional works cited earlier, Miller also wrote stories. A collection of stories are put together in *I Don't Need you Any More* (1967). His non-fiction account of wartime army camps is recorded in *Situation Normal* (1944). Books in collaboration with his third wife Inge Morath include *In Russia*(1969), *In the Country* (1977) and *Chinese Encounters*(1979) Robert A Martin edited *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller* (1978), while Harold Clurman edited *The Portable Arthur Miller* in 1971.

2.2 □ Theme and Structure

Death of a Salesman represents a successful attempt to blend themes of social and personal tragedy within a dramatic framework. The story of Willy Loman, a salesman is also the story of false values sustained by every agency of publicity and advertisement in the American, indeed, the global life . Willy Loman accepts at face value the overpublicized ideals of material success and blatant optimism. This is the root of his tragedy. This is the root of his tragedy. This downfall and final defeat highlight not only the failure of the man, but also the failure of an entire society and a blatantly capitalistic mode of life. The playwright's ability to project the story of his tragic, lower-middle class hero, into the common experience of so many Americans who sustain themselves with illusions and ignore realities, makes this play one of the most significant in the American Theatre.

The socio-psychological factors bring about death and senseless destruction. The Human mind and the subconscious play major roles in shaping the story

Willy Loman. The protagonist, is a megalomaniac plagued with a guilt complex. He takes upon himself the flaws and failures of his sons, specially Biff, his favourite.

Ominous forebodings relating to the protagonist's tragic end are there from the play's onset. The play records the tragic failure of human aspiration, within factors of social, cultural and economic determinism. The Death of the Salesman marks the death of hope, faith and success within contemporary America. Miller's play in that respect, shares the despair that not only characterizes William's drama, but was sounded much earlier in O'Neill. European drama of the time also reflects a similar spirit of pessimism and despair.

Death of a Salesman had stunned audience at its very first staging in Philadelphia. As Terry Hodgson had emotionally remarked-people stood up, put on their coats, sat down again then someone clapped, and the house came down! It was a play that was so disturbing, that it made a tremendous impact. To this day it has not lost its universal message.

As one examines or encounters the play one needs to look at the semantic significations of a name like Willy Loman. Like the characters of Ben Jonson's comedies, whose prevailing humours are indicated in their names, Loman's name indicates his status as 'everyman,' a low man, as opposed to the grandeur of the tragic hero, who not only enjoys exalted social status, but is also gifted with a virility of being, that justifies his being called a hero. Miller's naming of his protagonist, also gestures towards the democratic foundations of his dramatic aesthetic which seeks to find dramatic material in the life of the common man. The "death" in the *Death of a Salesman*, however, ties some of the aesthetic implications of the play with the death motif in classical tragedy, emphasizing man's proclivity towards death, destruction and self-annihilation. Although, destiny in this play is generally figured in social forces that compel a human being to exert himself beyond endurable limits, nonetheless, somewhere a sense of individual responsibility is implied.

The technique of psychic projection that is so intense in *Macbeth*, is often encountered in Miller's plays particularly in *Death of a Salesman*, Dreams often merge into the world of reality, and characters are profoundly swayed by them. The character of Ben, Willy's dead brother in *Death of a Salesman* has no concrete place in the play, yet his words are prophetic. Therefore a different register of reality is created than the concretely visible or sensuously apprehensible. Although, realistic at the core, Miller works effectively through

dreams, hallucinations and epiphanies. The 'jungle' Ben talks about is the relentless, dynamic world of success that Willy has ensnared himself in. The present and the past coningle, Ben is a memory figure who hovers over his brother Willy and Charley playing cards. The present reality and past actuality one simultaneously represented.

Willy: Jim awfully tired Ben.

Charley : Good, keep playing, you'll sleep better. Did you call me Ben?

Willy: That's funny. For a second there you reminded me of my brother Ben.

In a very significant manner, an intimate interior monologue has been juxtaposed with an ordinary bit of dialogue. The same unnerving conversation goes on later with the dead Ben talking about their dead mother, Ben is the illusory realm of the past that is constantly impinging on the present. He is Willy's personal haunting fantasy.

2.3 □ The Story

When Willy Loman came home on the same day he had left on a trip through his New England territory, his wife Linda perceived that he was near breaking point. He had lately began to talk to himself about the past. He had that day, driven off the road, quite a few times, unaware of what he was doing, These incidents attest to state of emotional imbalance in Willy, a caving in to psychological pressures and traumas. This movement marks a point of crisis W's life, which is apparent to his wife, but not to Loman himself.

He had come home in fear. At sixty-three, he had given all his life to the company. He told himself they would just have to make a place for him in the New York home office. He had become weary of his hectic life-travelling all week and, driving futile miles had become too much for him.

Willy had two grown sons - Biff and Happy. Biff was his real favourite, though Happy was more settled and successful. Biff was going on in years-thirty four years old and still to find his moorings. He had been the greatest football player his school had ever known. The game in Ebbets Field had shown him up as a hero, and three colleges offered him scholarship. Biff had refused all three. He wanted his life roguing around the West, never making more than twenty eight dollars a week. His attitude was inexplicable.

In the next two days, Willy found his life-story unfurling before him.

Present reality mingled with yesterday's half-forgotten episodes. The broken pictures revealed the story of Willy Loman-Salesman.

Willy's mistake was not to follow Ben to Alaska or was it Africa? Willy was a salesman, and on weeks he averaged two hundred dollars. However a more prudent estimate was that he earned \$70 a week. To make the grade, Willy stayed on in New York. Ben however went into the jungles a pauper and four years later he came back from the diamond mines a very rich man.

Both Willy's sons were well-liked. Charley's son, Bernard, was not as popular. Bernard was awed by Biff's popularity as a sports hero and had begged to carry his shoulder-pads at Ebbet's field. Biff's pilfering of a football from the school, and whole case of them from the sporting goods store where he worked, worried Willy only a little, and he waved the problem aside, saying the boy did not mean any harm. He even laughed when his sons stole some lumber from a construction yard. Saying that no one would miss it, they used it to make the front stoop.

The day at Ebbets' field was a crucial day in Biff's life. Willy had left for Boston after the game, He was with a woman when Biff burst in upon them. Biff had failed in mathematics and could not avail one of the scholarships unless Willy talked to the teacher and got him to change the grade. Willy was ready to leave for New York at once, but when Biff saw the woman in a compromising state with his father, he left in a state of trauma. Things were never the same afterward.

Happy, the other son, was always eclipsed Biff. Happy, like Biff, was magnificently built and very handsome, and believed that there was not a woman in the world he could not have. An assistant merchandizing manager, he would be manager someday, a big man. So would Biff, if only he was given time to find himself.

On the day Willy returned home, he dreamed his biggest dreams. Part of the play's pathos derives from the dreams that Willy dreams. They are excessive, far beyond the practical reaches of his abilities. Perhaps, there is an element of tragic hubris in such dreams. It is perhaps in the nature of Willy's reach, that the tragic flaw of his character can be located. Like Marlowe's Faustus, and like Macbeth, Willy Loman is an "overreacher." Social pressures notwithstanding, the deleterious effects of the American Dream conceded, there is still something archetypal about Willy's desire. It is a desire that does not acknowledge or does not accede to limitations.

He loved Biff overwhelmingly and dreamt how Biff would get a loan from the owner of the sporting goods store and set up himself and his brother in business. Willy planned to approach young Howard Wagner, his boss's son, and demand to be given a place in the New York office. They would celebrate that night at dinner. Biff and Happy would give Willy a night on the town to celebrate their mutual success.

But Biff failed to acquire the loan, for the man who was appreciative of Biff now did not even recognize him. To get even in a childish manner, Biff stole a fountain pen and ran down eleven flights with it. When Howard heard Willy's request, he told him to turn in his samples and retire. Willy, shocked, realized that he was being asked to leave. He went to Charley for more money, for he had been borrowing from Charley since he had been put on straight commission months ago. Bernard was in Charley's office. He was on his way to plead a case before the Supreme Court. Willy could not understand it. Charley had never done for his son what Willy had for his. When offered a job, Willy waves it away saying that he was a brilliant salesman, who would show the world his worth someday. Willy, pathetically hopeful, stumbles in to the dinner they had planned, a failure himself, but hoping for good news about Biff. Hearing of Biff's failure, he was completely broken. Happy picked up two girls of easy virtue and he and Biff left, without a thought for their shattered father.

When they finally came home, their mother Linda ordered them out of the house by morning. She was afraid because Willy had tried to kill himself once before. Giving vent to his anger and sense of defeat, Biff cursed Willy for a fool and a dreamer. He forced himself and Willy to acknowledge that Biff had been only a clerk in that store, not a salesman; that Biff had been jailed in Kansas city for stealing; that Happy was not an assistant manager but a clerk and a philandering, immoral rogue, and that Willy had never been a success and never would be. Then Biff began to weep inconsolably, and it dawned on Willy that his son really loved him. Left alone when the others went upstairs, Willy began to see the dead Ben again, to tell him his plan. Willy had twenty thousand in insurance. Biff would be benefitted by that money and become 'magnificent' again.

Willy hatched a terrible plan, ran out to his car and drove crazily away. He died in accident.

At the funeral, there were no crowds of tearful admirers, only Linda, their two sons and the faithful friend Charley. Charley tried to tell Biff about his

misunderstood father - of how a salesman had to dream, that without dreams he was nothing, when the dreams were gone, a salesman was finished. Sobbing quietly, Linda- the everconstant, patient wife, stoops to put flowers on the grave of Willy. The hopes, aspirations and dreams and dreams of an archetypal American were symbolically buried with him. The deep moral vein, that runs through Miller's works, is very prominent here. What is that moral? This moral vein is the excessive preoccupation with material culture that is one of the inevitable aspects of "dreaming" within a capitalist culture. Miller, who had leftist sympathies, records emphatically in this play, his fear and anxiety over the gradual destruction of the individual in the mad pursuit for material success and accomplishment. Miller seems to be indicating in the style of the medieval morality plays, whose central character was "Everyman", that obsessive dreams of financial success, or to envisage one's worth in terms of bank balances, would surely lead to perdition and death, both physical and spiritual.

2.4 □ Father-Son Relationship

Family bonds are explored minutely in this remarkable play. Willy Loman, the salesman, has the notion that personal attractiveness and being popular were keys to success. He was deeply impressed by the successful career of Dave Singleman-his role model. The false values he cherished drew him into a vortex of illusions and a false life. The over-ambitious Willy has false notions about himself, but he is just a mediocre person. Miller epitomises contemporary American values in Willy Loman.

The discovery of Willy's extramarital liaison destroys the bond of affection between father and son. Biff's impressionable, adolescent mind is devastated in the face of the harsh reality. There is loss of warmth, and consequent alienation between father and son. The repulsion that takes root in Biff's mind destroys both of them. The disclosure of liaison is a tragic event that evokes pathos and bring about absolute ruin in the family. It underscores Willy's common and average humanity, in contrast to the heroic in himself, that Willy always liked to stress. Biff idolised his father and believed earlier, that Willy could achieve anything . He pleads with his father to have the teacher change his failed grade:

Biff: Would you talk to him Pop? You know the way you could talk.

Willy: your'on. We will drive right back.

Biff: Oh Dad, gnod work ! I'm sure he'll change it for you."

All the trust and affection of the son changes into amazement and hatred when he sees a whore in his father's room. All Willy's lame excuses are of no avail. Biff relinquishes his dreams of rising in chosen field, for he sees his father as a traitor. He has just witnessed his father giving the whore his mother's stocking:

Biff: Dad

Willy: She is nothing to me, Biff. I was lonely, I was terribly lonely.

Biff: You...you gave her Mama's stockings ! (His tears break through and he rises to go)

Willy: (Grabbing for Biff) I gave you an order!

Biff: Don't touch me, you...liar !

Willy: Apologize for that !

Biff: You fake ! You phony little fake ! you fake !

As Biff, weeping copiously leaves, Willy sinks to his knees in despair. The icon of success has been pulled off the pedestal, the marble statue has revealed its ugly feet of clay. The family man is exposed as a crass philanderer. Biff totally abandons his education, leaves one job after another and is yet unsettled in career and life at the ripe age of thirty four. This play too follows tragic structure in its incorporation of Aristotelian anagnorisis (recognition) and peripeteia (reversal). Biff recognizes his father for what he is and the event leads to reversal of Willy's hopes. Willy is aghast to realise that he is the prime cause of his son's failure. Despised by his sons, Biff and Happy, Willy realises that he is a complete failure in life. When Biff fails to get a loan for business, he and his brother leave the restaurant with their girls, leaving their father (whom they had invited) totally humiliated. The sons even disown him, an old and broken man, before their girls. Willy in a rush of guilt, relives his shameful encounter with the whore in Boston in the past, and behaves as a demented man. In fact, his pain is felt by his wife, Linda, who rebukes her sons hurting their old father.

Willy finally succeeds in committing suicide, even smashing up his car so that his son could get the insurance money, and rehabilitate himself. Even in death, the salesman sells himself. His funeral is attended, not by the multitudes who thronged to Dave Singleman's funeral, but only by his immediate family.

The dreamer, the husband, the father- in all these roles Willy had thought to succeed but failed miserably. Consequently the whole question of the American Dream is problematized. The father is haunted by the fact that he cannot be a role-model for his loving, but straying sons; the salesman is appalled that, being old, he can neither travel long distances, nor lift the heavy sample cases, The husband is haunted by the memories of his unsavoury past when he had committed adultery with a whore in a Boston hotel room. The confidence and the power of youth have left him, and he finds himself a helpless old man, but still a dreamer. Willy is a victim of the false values of society, as well as his own false illusions.

2.5 □ Questions

1. Comment on the incident at the restaurant. What is its significance in the play?
2. Consider Miller's depiction of a whole generation caught in web of delusion. How far does he succeed in his expose?
3. Miller is ironic and sympathetic at the same time, Do you agree?
4. Comment on the parent-child relationship in the play.
5. Consider Arthur Miller as one of the greatest of American dramatists, with reference to *Death of a Salesman*.
6. Of what significance are dreams in this play?
7. *Death of a Salesman* is an intense psychological study of people caught up helplessly in a vortex of incidents. Do you agree?
8. Critically comment on the following characters in the play-
a) Linda, b) Happy, c) Biff, d) Willy e) Uncle Ben
9. Analyse *Death of a Salesman* as a tragedy. What is archetypal in this play?

2.6 □ Select Bibliography

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