Capitalism and Identity in Modern American Drama

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Abstract

The aim of the thesis is, through the analysis of four influential American plays of the twentieth-century, to explore the relationship between capitalism and identity. The discussed plays are similar in that they focus on what might be called a 'crisis of masculinity,' with different reactions from the feminine to that crisis. They trade on the oppositions implicit in that binary: the tension between public and private, bosses and workers, breadwinners and dependents, husbands and wives, parents and children. However, these plays are not interchangeable. Indeed, part of the purpose of this thesis is to situate them within their respective historical contexts through an examination of their form: social expressionism of Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* (1923), domestic realism of Clifford Odets's *Awake and Sing!* (1935), personal expressionism of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949), and new realism of David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1983).

The selected plays integrate with each other in order to depict the individual's vulnerability, insecurity and alienation in American corporate business. I investigate how Rice's play responds to the emerging culture of consumption in America during the 1920s. I show the way in which the play, according to Antonio Gramsci's concept of Americanism, seeks to reveal the human cost, both at work and at home, of maximum industrial efficiency under Taylorism and Fordism. The discussion of Odets's play demonstrates how mass unemployment caused by the Great Depression of the 1930s challenges the traditional structure of the nuclear family: it radically defies the conventional American ideology of self-sufficiency and rugged individualism. The practically emasculating matriarch, the eroded authority of the Marxian and idealist patriarch, who ceases to be a provider, and the disturbed masculinity of the son are tracked. Further, I explore how Miller's play reflects the concepts of other-directness and conformity after World War II. I illustrate how the notion of work dominates and affects the life of the organization man in the home that, in turn, contributes to his anxiety and delusion as well as determines the validity of his values. Finally, the consequences and the requirements of social Darwinism, which takes the form of cutthroat competitiveness to achieve the American Dream in the 1980s, are pinpointed through examining Mamet's play. I argue that the businessman's need to establish and maintain a masculine identity parallels his obsession with success: for him, having means being.

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For my Mother, Father, Wife and Sons,
with Grateful Affection

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Introduction

The aim of the thesis is, through the analysis of some of the most influential American plays of the twentieth-century, to explore the contradictory position of American masculinity under capitalism from the 1920s to the 1980s. The plays chosen – Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* (1923), Clifford Odets's *Awake and Sing!* (1935), Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1983) – are similar in that they all focus on what we might call a 'crisis of masculinity' in no small part produced by the very form of social and economic organisation that has positioned the white male as the representative of American individualism. In all of these plays, the virtues most often associated with masculine authority – self-sufficiency, competitiveness, leadership and, when necessary, ruthlessness – are seen to be undermined by the broader economic and social forces that have also valorised them. Many of the plays, through a combination of focus on labour organisation and domestic relations, explore the erosion or collapse of male authority even as this standard is constantly reinforced as normative. These are plays, then, about work and family, and trade on the oppositions implicit in that binary: the tension between public and private, bosses and workers, breadwinners and dependents, husbands and wives, parents and children.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter I provides an overview of American masculinity, Fordism, the professional-managerial class, Post-Fordsim, Reaganism, alienated labour and unemployment. The four following chapters examine in detail four chronologically arranged plays. Chapter II deals with Rice's *The Adding Machine.*

Chapter III addresses Odets's *Awake and Sing!*. Chapter IV handles *Death of a Salesman*. Finally, Chapter V covers *Glengarry Glen Ross*. These plays are not the only American plays that highlight the theme of work. Other dramas concerned with this theme include Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* (1921), Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* (1928), Elmer Rice's *We, the People* (1933), Clifford Odets's *Waiting for Lefty* (1935) and *Paradise Lost* (1935), Lillian Hellman's *Days to Come* (1936), Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), Arthur Miller's *All my Sons* (1947), Neil Simon's *The Prisoner of Second Avenue* (1971) in addition to David Mamet's *American Buffalo* (1975) and *Speed the Plow* (1988).

However, the four plays included in this thesis are selected according to two criteria. First, there is a close relationship developed between issues of masculine identity in the workplace and in the home. The only exception is *Glengarry Glen Ross* which is intended as a microcosm of modern American business culture. The characters of Mamet's play are so immersed in their business that there is, notably, no sign of their family life on stage. The second criterion is that each of these plays uses dramatic form in a distinctive way to further the themes outlined. Rice draws on the expressionistic techniques while holding on to a form of social realism in order to produce a politically radical drama. Odets's Depression-era play withdraws from the more experimental form and concentrates on domestic realism. Miller's expressionism is less focused on political agitation and employs expressionistic techniques to reveal psychological states. Mamet employs a new kind of realism. It is possible, then, to identify through their formal explorations the plays' attitude toward not just their characters but toward broader social

concerns. Rice's expressionism reveals something of the modernist belief in new forms shattering old political truths; Odets's social realism reflects the more proletarian aesthetic of the 1930s; Miller's psychological expressionism chimes with the fascination with social psychology during the post-war period; and Mamet's hard-boiled verbal sparring speaks to the aggressive individualism of the 1980s.

In all of these plays, the quotidian demands of everyday life are permanently shadowed by the demands of the workplace. In the plays of the 1920s and 1930s, mechanisation and economic recession clearly place power in the hands of the employers and the value of getting and keeping a job produces much of the dramatic energy. While jobs are not scarce in Miller's America, the power of the company to hire and fire remains a disembodied threat. In Mamet's cutthroat real estate business, a brutal Darwinian sensibility disciplines the lives and values of the salesmen. What is striking, then, is that despite the transformations of American economic and social life that have taken place between 1923 and 1983, Rice, Odets, Miller and Mamet have continued to explore the nature and meaning of work in broadly similar ways.

This is not to say that the plays are interchangeable. Indeed, part of the purpose of this thesis is to situate the plays within their respective historical contexts. In "Marxist Literary Theories," Forgacs defines the common premise of all Marxist theories of literature as follows: "literature can only properly understood within a lager framework of social reality." Marxists argue that every theory that studies literary works isolated from society and history will be incapable of explaining the reality of these works. What

characterised Marx's vision of society and history was the stress it put on the socio-economic factor as something crucial in determining the "character" of all societies (167-168). In this thesis, the historical contexts of the plays are fundamental through an examination of their form.

The social expressionism of *The Adding Machine* and the domestic realism of *Awake and Sing!* are examined as an allegory of modern alienation aimed at exposing the alienated condition of workers under the new Fordist regime of the assembly line (Rice's play) and the caprice of bosses only too aware that the survival of families lay in their hands (Odets's play). The deployment of expressionist techniques and structures is continued in *Death of a Salesman*, but this time with a view to elucidating psychological states rather than working more explicitly as a form of politically-motivated social criticism. This shift toward the exploration of the private experience of the individual is explored as symptomatic of the rejection of overtly radical drama during the 1950s, a move that makes Miller's play more sophisticated than its predecessors but also less oppositional. Mamet's play, first performed during the early years of the Reagan Revolution, is well aware of its predecessors and in many ways self-consciously positions itself within the canon of sales-related American drama. As such, it is a self-reflexive play that both reiterates the concerns of the previous works while moving beyond them in its portrayal of the workplace itself as the primary site of social conflict. In Mamet, the tensions between private duties and labour relations have been dissolved in no small part due to the all-encompassing demands of work itself, as well as the successful internalisation of the values of business by the employees. If, in Rice and Odets, and in

different ways in Miller, work is denaturing men and their relationships, in Mamet work is nature.

The originality of the thesis lies in its fresh perspective on major American plays through a synthesis of materials on gender studies, history, sociology, economics, psychology and theatre studies. I argue that some of the most popular and influential plays in the American canon provide a critical commentary on the impact of capitalism on the social organisation of everyday life through the twentieth century. The thesis is a journey spanning sixty years (1923-1983) in American history where the explorer can trace the transformations experienced by ordinary Americans caused by the insecurities produced by a rapidly developing capitalist system. While capitalism constantly reorganises in order to respond to shifting economic circumstances, the effects of theses changes are remarkable constant over time: insecurity at work, anxiety at home; a rhetoric of individualism constantly contradicts the demands for obedience and uniformity at work; relations within the family are perpetually destabilised by pressures to increase efficiency and productivity at work. The cost of both the numbing effect of daily drudgery and the loss of a feasible future is paid by employees in the home: the permanent crisis at work that enables capitalism to maintain power over the worker extends into a crisis in the domestic sphere and often becomes (or is made to seem to be) an existential crisis. By making the individual responsible for his own failure, capitalism succeeds in increasing the alienating factor and pressure under which work is done. The resistance, power and security of American corporate business as a whole are based upon

the vulnerability, powerlessness and insecurity of the employee: the notion of rugged individualism is effectively reinforced even as it is subverted.

To conclude, in Rice's *The Adding Machine*, Odets's *Awake and Sing!*, Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*, there is an integrated critical dramaturgy aimed at illuminating how the identity of the American individual is radically alienated from the others as well as from the self because of the fragmenting impact of capitalism. I analyse this divided self, torn between the demands of fierce competition in the commercial sphere and the requirement of being the family provider, by questioning the crisis of modern American masculinity. Since masculinity, work and redundancy are regarded as the backbone in my discussion of the selected plays, Chapter I deals with issues relating to these three aspects of American culture. In this chapter, I try to find answers to four main questions. What does the concept of masculinity mean in modern America? How did the capitalist workplace change? Why does the workforce feel alienated? What are the domestic consequences of joblessness?

Chapter I

Masculinity, Work and Redundancy

The plays examined in this thesis are largely about men. They are concerned with the ways in which masculinity is constructed and challenged in the workplace and at home. Economic success is often considered the only real measure of what makes a 'real' man and failure at work invariably leads to a breakdown of family life: the traditional patriarchal structure of the household is portrayed as hard to maintain when work goes badly or redundancy looms. The entire social order, it seems, is predicated on the continued ability of the breadwinner to perform in the workplace. When things go wrong at work, wives turn on their husbands, children lose respect for their fathers and the very fabric of everyday life is exposed as a precariously thin weave that can be torn apart in a moment.

One of the reasons so many celebrated American plays of the twentieth century take masculinity and work as their subject is because these issues are integral to the construction of American identity during the country's emergence as an economic powerhouse. The United States has conventionally imagined itself as a nation of robust, practically-minded individuals capable of achieving great success from modest means. The individualism that underpins the myth of the pioneer or self-made man does not leave much room for failure or doubt; failure is easily construed as lack of application and doubt as a self-indulgence that the truly enterprising can ill afford.

What these myths of triumphant self-assertion do not account for is the increasingly corporate nature of American business during the twentieth century. While the responsibility for success remains with the individual worker, the context within which he (the gender distinction is pertinent here) labours became through the course of the century increasingly dominated by seemingly disembodied forms of power and wealth: the individual does not really enjoy a freedom to succeed but is an insignificant participant in a structure that will use him up and spit him out. As Tolson argues, under capitalism "the worker becomes aware ... that his wage, in effect, makes him powerless. In the eyes of his employer, a man is not seen as a human being ... but as a unit in the cost of production.... The bribe of 'freedom' begins to destroy a worker's [sense of self] – in the midst of a confusing world of half-truths in which he can only recognise fragments of himself" (57-58). In *The Adding Machine*, for instance, the dictation of work routine renders Zero, the male protagonist, to have an identity which has become so fused with his job automation that he is unable to know who he is or even to have a separate being.

Plays about men and business have been committed to revealing this fact since at least the 1920s. As I intend to demonstrate throughout this thesis, drama has taken a dim view of American business during times of boom and bust alike. The promise of self-realisation through work has constantly been exposed as a myth that keeps men working but fails, indeed refuses, to deliver. By placing responsibility on the individual, the corporate sphere is able to escape responsibility for the way work is done; instead, the struggle to survive in the workplace becomes a struggle of isolated individuals at the

mercy of forces they can never master or understand. Yet because the male protagonists in the plays know no other world than the one they are participating in, they are incapable of imagining an alternative to the life they are leading. Similarly, since family structure is so bound up with the workplace and is an adjunct to it, the individualism that isolates workers also makes them culpable in the eyes of their families. A crisis at work is simultaneously a crisis at home and a crisis of identity. To fail at work is to fail as an American and as a man.

Masculinity in America

Notions of masculinity in twentieth century America are dominated by the conventions of "aggressiveness, strength, power, and authority, as well as a facility with technology ... and a rejection of anything feminine. The stereotypical man is in charge.... Male fantasy figures, such as Rambo, demonstrate the widespread appeal of male hegemonic identity. This male identity subordinates both other men as well as women to lower status" (Kilduff and Mehra 115). Psychologists Deborah David and Robert Brannon identify four aspects central to the construction of an ideal masculinity: a "relentless repudiation" of what is feminine; an obsession with status and success; a capacity to demonstrate toughness, confidence and self-reliance; and a willingness to be aggressive, violent and an adventurer (xi-xiii). In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, not only are the characters brutal, indifferent and ruthless towards the customers, but they also attack the female attributes in themselves and in the other. Each salesman exerts efforts to win the company competition through the powerful manipulation of clients and, thence, he guarantees overpowering his colleagues.

This model of manhood has not always been the dominant one, as Kimmel demonstrates. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Kimmel argues, the idea of the refined and dutiful "*Genteel Patriarch*" and the hardworking and robust "*Heroic Artisan*" offered other viable modes of masculine identity. By the 1830s, however, according to Kimmel, "*Marketplace Manhood*" overrode these alternatives with its insistence on the growth of capital, authority and social rank. "Neglecting his children and immersing himself in his work, [marketplace man] criticized the Genteel Patriarch as an anachronistic feminized dandy – sweet, but ineffective and outdated, and transform[ed] the Heroic Artisan into a dispossessed proletarian, a wage slave." For Kimmel, "Marketplace Masculinity describes the normative definition of American masculinity. It describes its characteristics – aggression, competition, anxiety" (123-124).

These are the qualities consistently identified and extensively explored by American dramatists who are all too aware of how, as Tolson explains, "definitions of masculinities are bound up with definitions of work" (13). In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, manhood becomes an equivalent to an effective implementation of a sales job. The failure to sell simply means the failure to be male. Since only one is going to win the first prize of the competition, corporate business personified by the owners of a real estate office explicitly proclaims that just one salesman is qualified to be a man. The rest are supposed to be women. Tolson adds:

> Whether it is in terms of physical strength or mechanical expertise, or in terms of ambition and competitiveness, the qualities needed by the successful worker are closely related to those of the successful man. As

> individuals, men are brought up to value work, as an end in itself, and to fix their personal identities around particular occupations of achievement – 'becoming someone' through working, 'making something of yourself,' to be breadwinner for the family and which is threatened by lay-off or redundancy. (13)

In *The Adding Machine*, Zero worships the values of his own work to the extent that he is incapable of enjoying the pleasure of heaven in his afterlife. That is because he applies the rules of his adding figures job to his new status quo where he refuses to enjoy his colleague without marriage: everything is either right or wrong. For him, nothing is in between. Further, in *Awake and Sing!* and *Death of a Salesman*, Ralph and Biff, respectively, leave their families in order to pursuit an independent course of life where they can achieve a lost identity. Each of them attempts to become an individual different form his father.

If aggression and competitiveness became the required characteristics in the world of business, at home, as Franklin explains in *The Changing Definition of Masculinity*, "married men were expected to be *heads of households*.... Men were expected to internalize such a role and to perform in accordance with its prescriptions. This meant that *men* were not expected to ... assume domestic and childcare responsibilities. Instead, men assumed occupational-provider-protector roles somewhat external to the familial system" (107). As such, men have a duty of care in relation to their families but they are also somehow separate from the family, as if the qualities of aggression and competitiveness that allow them to survive at work are unacceptable or alien at home.

This bifurcation of roles will have, as we will see, significant consequences in plays concerned with American business.

The role of provider has a particular value during what Franklin calls the stage of "The Companionate Providing Society" (1920-1965); in other words, consumer culture. In *Men and Society*, Franklin notes that, with mass consumption as "an American family pastime, the definition of a good male provider began to mean that men [needed to] earn enough money to meet their family's [ever]-rising levels of expectations; [it became part of the breadwinner's duty to provide new] cars, home appliances, electrical goods and other modern-day conveniences" (79-80). For Elizabeth Pleck and Joseph Pleck, a good provider was "a husband who paid his bills on time. The man unable to purchase ... goods for his family was deficient as a man" (31). The connection between masculinity and purchasing power within a consumer-driven economy is here made explicit. In *The Adding Machine* and *Death of a Salesman*, Zero and Willy Loman cannot perform the role of a family provider. The former contributes to the nagging nature of his wife since he is unable to make her material demands available. The latter is burdened by the pressures of instalments until the last day of his life.

Despite the social changes that have taken place since the 1960s, Michael Fogarty, Rhona Rapoport and Robert Rapoport conclude, "The quintessence of masculinity is still, in [American] culture, centred on work and on competing successfully in the 'breadwinning' roles" (355). In the 1980s, as illustrated by the businessmen of *Glengarry Glen Ross*, the cutthroat competition to achieve success, which, in turn, sustains the

provider's function, triggers such masculine attributes as competitiveness and self-assurance. Ingham writes, "The breadwinner responsibility is of course a very real one. Men, especially white-collar workers, are wrapped up in their work and find it hard to switch off" (78). This is why, as Weiss points out, "[w]ithout work, the identity of businessman no longer has any basis" (33). Firing or unemployment is the threat that shakes the kernel of Zero's, Myron's (in *Awake and Sing!*), Willy's and the salesmen's mannish existence. Since the basis of male identity is underpinned by achievements at work, it is possible, as Ingham suggests, for work "to mask the unhealthy dependence many men have on their work" (24). What Veblen calls a man's "distaste for futile effort, ..., waste, or incapacity" (16) is, according to the logic of a work-defined masculinity, a repudiation of that which is construed as unmanly.

Yet for many men, work is also or can become "an experience of powerlessness, of interchangeability with others, of redundancy, an experience of humiliation through subordination to authority.... In any case, even if this powerlessness was perceived, men could not rebel, because to rebel is to endanger another crucial patriarchal masculine identity of the breadwinner" (Edley and Wetherell 103). All the manly characters in the four plays of the thesis experience emasculation in the workplace either in the decades of abundance or in the years of depression. The reasons are varied: some of them are the ultimate efficiency sought by the employers (*The Adding Machine*), rarity of jobs (*Awake and Sing!*), disability caused by old age (*Death of a Salesman*) and the Darwinian law (*Glengarry Glen Ross*).

Tolson argues that "men come to work with an ambivalent emotional structure, a subservience to authority and a compulsive need for recognition. At work, they find their masculine expectations simultaneously confirmed (by a masculine culture of work, with patriarchal origins and occupational roots), and denied (by increasing specialization and alienation). In addition to an institutionalized division of labour (with its fragmentation of processes and activities), the worker's own personal life is increasingly split (between 'work' and 'non-work' – or time spent away from the work-place)" (50). This ambivalent or split set of expectations and demands produces fluid and often contradictory spaces of identity that never settle into clearly demarcated roles but instead demand an oscillation from situation to situation (Seidler 116). Telford defines "identity negotiation" as a

> sense-making process: it is a process through which people make their situations accountable to themselves and others. Thinking of each individual as both a target and a perceiver, each participates in negotiating his own identity and those identities that others are to assume. Specifically, as targets, men attempt to verify their own masculinities. Simultaneously, as perceivers, they strive to form accurate impressions of and hypotheses about others and to validate their own expectations. When people bring others to see them as they see themselves, verification effects occur. (135)

With so much emphasis placed upon work as the defining space of masculinity, "gender identification" for boys within the home is troubled by the father's non-existence. The father seems to be a stranger because of his right of legislation and punishment "(the 'authoritarian' father-figure)" and, more importantly, due to the fact

that his "'masculine presence' can only be construed in his physical *absence*" (his apparent detachment from the household issues). He "is an outsider because he goes 'out to work.' The brutality of his 'presence' lies not much in acts of domestic violence, as in a general masculine estrangement, conditioned by the reality of work" (Tolson 24). As the authority of the autonomous male has been eroded by the diminution of individual agency in the capitalist workplace, the inherent contradiction of the patriarch as absent presence in the family has become uncoupled from any notion of meaningful or desirable power. For the child, asserts Tolson, the "father's presence was imposing and experienced with fascination. But in the face of his masculine intrusion, mother was the reference point. How she spoke of father, how she represented him, was crucial" (26). In Odets's *Awake and Sing!*, it is Bessie who intervenes between Ralph and his father owing to the latter's marginal value in the home. It is she who forms his masculine identity while she causes him to violate the respect of the paternal voice.

Edley and Wetherell remark that power relations within traditional families are complex, with women conventionally responsible for managing the domestic sphere. "[T]o the extent that power within the family and in society more generally depends on financial resources and freedom for paid work, until recently most men have enjoyed a more favourable position than most women" (120). Within the conventional patriarchal family unit, any defiance to the status of the breadwinner is a challenge to the manhood of the father. Economic vulnerability under these circumstances is often read as a threat of emasculation as authority in the home is undermined by exposure to the threat of economic redundancy. The ambivalent structure of male identity established by the

hierarchies of the modern workplace and the bifurcation of work- and home-life are therefore intensified by the precariousness of economic circumstances.

"The hegemonic definition of manhood," Kimmel reminds us, "is a man *in* power, a man *with* power and a man *of* power. We equate manhood with being strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control" (125). The characters of the discussed plays are challenged to enjoy this power. Their alternative lot is vulnerability, disappointment, paralysis, unreliability and loss of control. As Telford points out, "Inasmuch as an organization's ideology and cultural forms support hegemonic masculinity, alternative masculinities – masculinities critical to some of its members' self-concepts – may not be verified within the organization.... [S]ubordination of some masculine identities [at odds with the hegemonic form] is inevitable within a hegemonic system" (136). Weak performance, failure to compete, unemployment and retirement are negative functions of hegemonic masculinity that serve to exclude the unproductive from corporate discourse and to unman those who cannot or do not seek to accept the rules of engagement. While economic forces may make full participation in the workforce difficult or impossible, the entrenched imperative to 'win' often remains in place as a means of individualising failure.

Franklin notes that males are expected to be "successful" in ways that go "beyond simply internalizing and acting upon the work ethic. To be successful in America requires men to be 'winners' in competitive work games with other men" (*Changing Definition* 122). In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, the plot of the play revolves around how a single out of

four salesmen can win a Cadillac, while the second prize is a set of steak knives and the others are sacked. Veblen notes that "in any community where an invidious comparison of persons is habitually made, visible success becomes an end sought for its own utility as a basis of esteem. Esteem is gained and dispraise is avoided by putting one's efficiency in evidence" (16). Comparing Zero's efficiency to that of an adding machine, the boss decides to forsake this human being who, as a consequence, loses the rest of his self-worth.

In addition, Edley and Wetherell state that "capitalism creates an inevitable conflict of interest between owners and workers, or between workers and the managers who act as the representatives of owners. Owners, according to Marx, rely on being able to create 'surplus value' from their workers and, in a crude sense, their main motive must be to maximise profits and this surplus value" (99). In *The Adding Machine*, the one-meeting struggle between Zero and his boss ends with the latter's murder. In *Awake and Sing!*, as a direct impact of the Great Depression, employers are keen on saving as much expenses as possible: Myron is working only three days a week and his son is going to have a cut of his salary. In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy's request to have a job inside New York, instead of exhausting travelling, is declined by his boss who also senses that Willy no longer becomes an energetic agent in increasing the profits of the company. The result is that Willy is dismissed.

Moreover, in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, it is the whim of the owners of the real estate office to promote their business position that prompts them to organise a dog-eat-dog

contest whose intense pressure triggers unscrupulous activities on the part of the employees. Veblen argues:

> Modern competition is in large part a process of self-assertion on the basis of ... predatory human nature.... [W]hile ... [self-assertion may be] indispensable to the competitive individual, [it is] not [necessarily and] directly serviceable to the community.... Ferocity and cunning are of no use to the community except in its hostile dealings with other communities; and they are useful to the individual only because there is so large a proportion of the same traits actively present in the human environment to which he is exposed. (171)

In Mamet's play, the salesmen are motivated to rummage around every possible means to survive the Darwinism imposed upon them. They, for instance, resort to slyness, viciousness and exploitative language. Each one of them considers not only the customer but also the colleague to be an enemy to be conquered.

Veblen anticipates the characteristics of the modern American salesman. He highlights them as follows: "The traits which characterise the predatory and subsequent stages of culture, and which indicate the types of man best fitted to survive under the régime of status, are (in their primary expression) ferocity, self-seeking, clannishness and disingenuousness — a free resort to force and fraud" (148). In *White Collar*, Mills asserts that "selling is ... unlimited in scope and ruthless in its choice of technique and manner.... This is a time of venality" (161-162).

This crudely Darwinian model of modern society may not benefit the community, as Veblen claims, but it does serve to justify the ruthlessness of profit-oriented business. "In American society, achievement rarely occurs at the expense of no one else" (Franklin, *Changing Definition* 50); for there to be 'winners' there must also be 'losers.' Competition is integral to the work ethic in its capitalist formulation. Veblen maintains that "the members of a modern industrial community are rivals, each of whom will best attain his individual and immediate advantage if, through an exceptional exemption from scruple, he is able serenely to overreach and injure his fellows when the chance offers" (150). It is here, perhaps, that the bifurcation of masculine identity into work- and domestic- modes is most apparent. The authority and moral leadership expected of the patriarch at home are patently at odds with the 'at-any-costs' unscrupulousness expected in the marketplace. While the conventional strategy of delegating authority within the home to women may free men to pursue a ruthless agenda of acquisition beyond the household, this division of labour is also a cause of the ambivalence at the heart of modern male identity. A 'successful' man can return home triumphant and aloof but any failure of performance at work destabilises the domestic power structure.

The profound inequality between men and women that patriarchal systems of social organisation enforce has been extensively interrogated by generations of feminist historians and scholars. What is also clear is that the secure position of the white male at the top of the social hierarchy is only precariously guaranteed by the patriarchal order. Only sustained performance within the rigidly hierarchical structure of the corporate world is capable of preserving the male employee's position as provider and authority

figure. In the selected plays discussed in this thesis, the crises of authority that male protagonists experience do not emanate from domestic conflict but from the workplace. Home and family offer little or no protection from the damage inflicted by a rapacious business world; indeed, home and family are among the first casualties of any failure at work. The divided position of the traditional breadwinner as in charge of but absent from the home leaves him utterly exposed to the disinterested movements of the market. When problems at work occur, it is not uncommon for the male worker to be blamed by employer and by his family. The radical individualism of American capitalism provides a pathway to success for the enterprising adventurer, but it is a very narrow path and the fall is steep.

The Shifting Capitalist Workplace

Mass production swept away the craft system that had previously given meaning and status to the skilled workforce. Meyer argues that the craft system was based on a hierarchy of skills, with the most skilled workers enjoying high status as a consequence of long training and expertise ("Automobile in American Life" Web). With this status came power, since the skilled workforce held the knowledge of how to produce and assemble the final product. It was said that the "manager's brains were under the workman's cap" because of his accumulated wisdom and long practical experience. For example, auto-body builders enjoyed a largely independent shop-floor culture. Meyer also quotes Joseph Brown, a labour journalist, who states, "The piece workers worked slow or fast as they chose. If they felt like stopping work for a shop-floor conversation, they paid no attention to foremen or straw bosses. It was none of their business. They

decided when to take lunch and for how long to take it". It is clear that skill here is a guarantor of significant freedom in the workplace.

Fordism, according to Aglietta, "marks a new stage in the regulation of capitalism, the regime of intensive accumulation in which the capitalist class seeks overall management of the production of wage-labour by the close articulation of relations of production with the commodity relations in which the wage-earners purchase their means of consumption" (116-117). The development of the assembly line in the United States in the 1920s for the manufacture of consumer goods standardises production and consumption, regulating both the workplace and the marketplace. Fordism, as Aglietta makes clear, mechanized labour, intensified work, created a division between manual and mental labour, and turned scientific progress against the worker. While it took less time to produce goods, workers became fixed in positions that "were rigorously determined by the configuration of the machine system. The individual worker thus lost all control over his work rhythm" (118).

In short, as Braverman notes, under Fordism "the working class is progressively subjected to the capitalist mode of production, and to the successive forms which it takes, *only as the capitalist mode of production conquers and destroys all other forms of the organization of labor, and with them, all alternatives for the working population*" (102-103). While Fordism did provoke a unionisation drive in the early nineteen-tens, Ford managed to sidestep resistance by introducing the $5 day. "This dramatic increase in wages," Braverman argues, "opened up new possibilities for the intensification of labor

within the plants, where workers were now anxious to keep their jobs.... In this move can be seen a second element in the adjustment of workers to increasingly unpopular jobs. Conceding higher relative wages for a shrinking proportion of workers in order to guarantee uninterrupted production was to become ... a widespread feature of corporate labor policy" (103).

The Fordist division between manual and mental labour gave rise to the Professional-Managerial Class (PMC), "salaried mental workers who do not own the means of production and whose major function in the social division of labor may be described broadly as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations.... The boundaries separating it from the ruling class above and the working class below are fuzzy" (Barbara and John Ehrenreich 12-13). Within the workplace itself, then, class divisions were intensified and competition increased among the workforce. At the same time, mass-produced consumer goods reshaped the working class as a mass consumer market. "The net effect of this drive to reorganize and reshape working-class life was," according to Barbara and John Ehrenreich, "the social *atomization* of the working class: the fragmentation of work (and workers) in the productive process, a withdrawal of aspirations from the workplace into private goals, the disruption of indigenous networks of support and mutual aid, the destruction of autonomous working-class culture and its replacement by 'mass culture' defined by the privatized consumption of commodities" (16). It is under these conditions that the PMC emerged as a new class:

> The three key developments — the reorganization of the production process, the emergence of mass institutions of social control and the

> commodity penetration of working-class life — do not simply 'develop;' they require the effort of more or less conscious agents. The expropriation of productive skills requires the intervention of scientific management experts; there must be engineers to inherit the productive lore, managers to supervise the increasingly degraded work process, etc. Similarly, the destruction of autonomous working-class culture requires (and calls forth) the emergence of new culture-producers — from physicians to journalists, teachers, admen and so on. (Barbara and John Ehrenreich 16)

This is the world, of course, of Arthur Miller's Willy Loman.

Schaeffer and Weinstein maintain that the PMC was responsible for three crucial developments in early 20th century American society, each of which "pitted the PMC against the working class" (166). First, science and engineering "were set to work producing technologies which undercut the power of skilled labor ... in an effort to strip from workers their knowledge and control of the production process." Second, the development of the PMC "required the expansion of the public or state sector into working class communities and resulted in the 'emergence of mass institutions of social control.'" Finally, the PMC spearheaded the "commodity penetration of working class life" (166). While the PMC sometimes "align[s] against capitalists with workers, and sometimes against workers with capitalists," Albert and Hahnel explain, it "exists only insofar as the working class was robbed of its own intellectual skills," and the purpose of the PMC is, in effect, "to manipulate the working class to the advantage of capitalists."

The relationship between the PMC and workers is therefore ultimately "antagonistic, however much they may have in common in their opposition to capitalists" (256).

The rise of the PMC signifies the emergence of a new service sector and the increasing management of the consumer sphere. According to Hall, this emerging 'Post-Fordist' mode of organisation is marked by

> a shift to the new 'information technologies'; more flexible, decentralised forms of labour process and work organisation; decline of the old manufacturing base and the growth of the 'sunrise', computer-based industries; the hiving-off or contracting-out of functions and services; a greater emphasis on choice and product differentiation, on marketing, packaging and design, on the 'targeting' of consumers by lifestyle, taste and culture rather than by the Registrar General's categories of social class; a decline in the proportion of the skilled, male, manual working class, the rise of the service and white-collar classes and the 'feminisation' of the workforce. (24)

By the early 1970s, with an increased and volatile global market, firms became increasingly reluctant to invest in long term projects and instead, as Sabel explains, "experimented with flexible forms of organization which permitted rapid shifts in output" (102). Central to the changes taking place in advanced industrial societies, according to Tomaney, are changes "in the organization of work itself, and in the relations between capital and labour" (159).

Post-Fordism, then, is not just a version of Fordism but a successor to, and a break from, Fordism. Flexible machinery, plant and workforce make the workplace a fluid and unstable site which can quickly transform itself or relocate. For the producer, this increases competition and effectiveness; for the worker, this means new forms of anxiety and instability, an inability to rely on a 'job for life,' and the permanent threat of redundancy. "In seizing on the new or recharged sources of flexibility," Jessop argues, "capitalists hope to overcome the alienation and resistance of the mass worker" (258) by making work more engaging, creative and dynamic. At the same time, though, the illusion of autonomy and individual expertise experienced by salesmen like Willy Loman or Mamet's real estate men, is underpinned by profound insecurity. In these plays, Miller anticipates and Mamet confirms that, under Post-Fordism, there are only market solutions on offer to solve personal problems, and these are no solution at all. As Peck and Tickell argue, the politics of neo-liberalism "is the politics of the crisis, a kind of 'jungle law' which tends to break out – along with financial instability, accelerated labour exploitation and the self-destructive dynamic of the unfettered market – when economic growth slows and when social compromises collapse" (281). It is under these conditions that Willy flounders and that Mamet's law of the jungle makes sense.

Just as Rice's *The Adding Machine* captures the loss of agency experienced by the worker under Fordism, so too does Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* reveal the ways in which neo-liberal capitalism during the Regan years continues to generate personal disaster even as it protects its own mechanisms of control. In *Glengarry Glen Ross,* real goods and services have disappeared and sales have become an abstract mode of profit-

making that is unmoored from actual things. The salesmen in the play are selling an idea – no longer the consumerist idea of a 'lifestyle' associated with a car or refrigerator (real objects), but an idea in the sense of an utterly dematerialized phantasm that will never be traceable in the real world. "Perhaps the most significant tendency" of Reagan-era capitalism, writes Mike Davis, was "the remarkable tropism of manufacturing and transportation capital towards high-profit sectors like energy reserves, financial services, real estate, emergent technology, and, above all, defence" (241). One result of this is, Davis goes on, "the considerable strengthening of the principle of financial conglomeration in corporate organization." Capitalism driven by speculation rather than investment not only destroys manufacturing but also eliminates the old system of industrial relations and union clout (244). The consequent reduction of provision in social services at the same time leaves the workforce vulnerable to genuine destitution should redundancy come. The individual is on his own.

Alienated Labour

Capitalist production, Edley and Wetherell explain, "is organised around a series of divisions between home and work, between work and leisure, private life and public life" (101). The sound of capitalism is equal to that of the home in the plays. *The Adding Machine* starts with Zero's flat where his occupational dilemma is presented by his castrating wife, then the play moves to his work location where the climax takes place: Zero kills his boss in return for the latter's efficiency plan. Though the setting of *Awake and Sing!* is only the Bergers' household, speech about work conditions draws a continued attention of the family. In *Death of a Salesman*, the setting varies between

Willy's home, his workplace, his friend's business office and a restaurant where work issues are discussed. Further, Willy's philosophy of how to sell is a dominant feature of family discussion. As for *Glengarry Glen Ross*, it is a pure business play in the sense that, from its beginning to its end, nothing has been raised but salesmanship.

Tolson remarks that the worker "recognizes a generalized feeling of 'Them and Us' [that produces] a gap between the procedures of bureaucratic management and the 'voice of shop-floor'" (76). This is very clear in *The Adding Machine*, where the boss even does not know the name of his employee, though Zero works for the company for twenty-five years. Tolson stresses:

> Capitalism has its own laws of development, which run against the self-images of workers. [While workers may perceive themselves to enjoy a certain autonomy of agency], the mechanization of labour in extensive systems of production deprives the worker of his involvement with the materials [and decision-making] of work. With automation, or semi-automated production, the finished product can no longer be surveyed as a monument to the human labour involved. (57)

For white-collar workers, a similar absence of autonomy is experienced through subjugation to the corporation.

The notion of alienated labour, the product of labour becoming the property of the capitalist, is regarded as the paramount viewpoint for Marx's critical study of the capitalist system (Rupert 70). As Marx writes, "the worker becomes poorer the more

wealth he produces." As the human world becomes devalued, the world of things, on the contrary, increases in value. The products and the worker are turned into commodities themselves: the former come to be seen as somehow alien and separate from their producer. These objects embody the work that has gone into them but the object is experienced as a loss – a loss of power over the object, which seems to have a power independent of its creator. (*Early Writings* 323-324).

Alienation is a reference to the gap between the worker and his labour. As Edley and Wetherell explain:

> Inevitably, the creator loses control of his or her creation as it becomes an object for other people and subject to their independent evaluations and uses: alienation is intensified when the results of one's labour are actually appropriated by others.... Production line work can magnify the experience of alienation even further. Since the worker typically makes only one component, the connection between work on this particular component and the final product may feel mysterious and even more distant. (101-102)

When the object produced is the worker's own personality – as in salesmanship, for example – "one's personality and personal traits," as Mills observes, "become part of the means of production. In this sense, a person instrumentalizes and externalizes intimate features of his person and disposition. In certain white-collar areas, the rise of personality markets has carried self and social alienation to explicit extremes" (225). As we will see, in terms of the alienation experienced by the American worker and represented in

American drama, the effect is similar whether we are dealing with industrial manufacture (Rice and Odets) or white-collar sales (Miller and Mamet).

In all cases, work has estranged the individual from himself, his family and his environment. For instance, as expressed by the technique of *The Adding Machine*, figures dominate Zero's mind both at home and at work. If he leaves routine and automation in the workplace, they follow him on his way home like a shadow. This kind of domination spoils the whole of Zero's life since he no longer becomes a human being but a machine. In a similar way, Willy does not take off the suit of salesmanship when he comes back home. Rather, his business delusions are the force that shapes his behaviour towards his family. As he is a salesman on the road, his salesmanship cloaks his instinct of fatherhood at home.

For Marx, because labour under capitalism is "external" to the worker, that is, no longer becomes a belonging to his "essential being," it is not a life-affirming activity but instead produces misery and unhappiness. It does not build up his intellectual and corporal power. Rather, it humiliates his body and messes up his brain. Under such conditions, the worker only senses like himself "when he is not working.... He is at home when he is not working and not at home when he is working. His labour ... is therefore not the satisfaction of a need but a mere *means* to satisfy needs outside itself; ... [Such work] is a labour of self-sacrifice" (*Early Writings* 326). While the American ideology of successful self-creation through work implies that work will set men free, Marx's view of alienated labour exposes the contradictions at the heart of that ideology and claims that it

is, in fact, labour within the capitalist system that is the major source of the individual's deprivation of freedom.

Furthermore, Marx's concept of alienated labour, conceives Rupert, emphasises the estrangement of workers from each other and of "the individual" from the collective. For the workforce, the process of production is declined to just a way in order to have the requirements for continued existence from the industrialist. As capitalism progressively confines human beings to one partition of labour and to a global market, their relationships, which could be self-aware, supportive and collectively imaginative, instead turn into "individually instrumental" and thus nullify "the sociality" of the production process, in particular, and of human life, in general. In the words of Rupert, "Rather than calling forth the free development of social powers of production and a richness of sensibilities, human needs become an individual vulnerability which can be instrumentally manipulated by others" (71).

In the white-collar promotion system, maintains Mills, people are often separated by "minute gradations of rank," and in the meantime, exposed to a disintegration of skill. Because the person may take hold of "minute distinctions" as basis for occupational position, they run against any "status solidarity" among the employees. This frequently causes rank separation from colleagues and augments rank rivalry. The employees are, hence, increasingly estranged from work. Owing to the struggle for the next title, they come to expect to identify with this advancement. As a result, though they exist at present, they feel that they are not in their real jobs (254).

In *The Fear of Freedom*, Erich Fromm argues that the replacement of counterfeit actions concerning the ability to think, feel and will for genuine ones results ultimately in the exchange of a notional "original self by a pseudo self." While the real self is the creator of brainy performances, the fake self is merely a mediator fulfilling a role in the name of the former. Losing the self and its swap by a sham one expose the human being to a severe condition of feeling insecure and alienated (177). As Berger and Mohr write in the context of industrial labour in the UK:

> [The worker] begins to watch his arm, as if it were being moved by what it is holding instead of by his shoulder. He thinks of water pumping his arm. The moving pieces shift his eyes, the air breathes his lungs. In places liquids ooze out of the machine like the liquid that gathers round a fish's mouth when it has been taken out of the water and has stopped thrashing. He knows that what he is doing is separate from any skill he has.... He has been told that the factory makes washing machines. (99)

Here, the workplace is seen as the real agent, with the individual little more than a resource in the labour process. The worker watches as his body is manipulated by the environment, powerless and bewildered by the process that he is a necessary part of but over which he has no control.

For Fromm, the instrumentalisation of the self increases the need to conform, since the instrumentalising environment is all there is from which to discover an identity: "If I am nothing but what I believe I am supposed to be – who am 'I'?... I have no identity, there is no self excepting the one which is the reflex of what others expect me to be: I am 'as

you desire me'" (*The Fear of Freedom* 219). As Whyte puts it, the extent to which the individual believes himself to be "a conformist" reflects the extent of "spiritual fealty" he has for the organisation. The organisation man quite knows that his job requires a degree of "conformity." Actually, half his power is assigned to discovering the exact prototype to which he conforms (155). At the same time, modern individualism's emphasis on the value of distinctiveness and autonomy means that, despite the will to conform, the individual is also compelled to seek difference. "He desperately clings to the notion of individuality; he wants to be 'different,' and he has no greater recommendation of anything than that 'it is different.'... He conforms to anonymous authorities and adopts a self which is not his" (Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* 220).

According to Fromm, there are two courses open to the individual who would seek to overcome the profound sense of powerlessness and isolation brought about by modern life. The first, which Fromm calls "positive freedom," is a kind of romantic embrace of spontaneous relations and emotions; "he can thus become one again with man, nature and himself, without giving up the independence and integrity of his individual self. The [second] course open to him is ... to give up his freedom and to [close] the gap ... between his individual self and the world" (120-121). This course does not regain individuality but instead yields it up as a form of giving up. It is hard to see quite how Fromm's "positive freedom" is to be achieved. It is a utopian notion of 'authentic' existence which may be desirable but how an alienated individual might achieve this state is unclear. Surrender seems much more likely, though this is also far from being a real choice and, if the all embracing force of a dominating environment is to be taken

seriously, might even be considered as the de facto position of the modern self rather than a willed alternative to it.

In "Americanism and Fordism," Gramsci shows how much the "*capitalist*" intentions of increased "exploitation" and the "policing" of the plant dictate Fordist and Taylorist approaches. On the other hand, he demonstrates how much these approaches "correspond to 'rational' modernizing tendencies which *socialists* might be able to learn from and develop" (276). Veblen also asserts that the method the employee follows in his daily work has an effect on the ways and measures of his thinking. To be familiar with the exceedingly controlled, repetitive and detached manufacturing processes causes his habits of thought to be maddened (214). Gramsci mentions that it was rather simple to "rationalize" manufacture and manual labour by an adroit mixture of power (ruin of trade unions) and temptation (superior pay and social benefits). Accordingly, this can successfully make the whole life of the United States rotate around the process of production: "In America, rationalization has determined the need to elaborate a new type of man suited to the new type of work and productive process" (*Prison Notebooks* 285-286).

This "new type of man" is regulated in every possible way and, as Gramsci points out, "the attempts made by Ford, with the aid of a body of inspectors, to intervene in the private lives of his employees and to control how they spend their wages and how they lived are an indication" of how a notional individual liberty is in fact almost entirely manufactured (304). In a curious way, Ford's social engineering sought to produce a

version of the ascetic protestant self-made man, only this time self-determination is left to Henry Ford. Gramsci explains:

> Someone who works for a wage, with fixed hours, does not have time to dedicate himself to the pursuit of drink or to sport or evade the law. The same observation can be made about sexuality. 'Womanising' demands too much leisure.... It might seem that in this way the sexual function has been mechanized, but in reality [it is] the growth of a new form of sexual union.... It seems clear that the new industrialism wants monogamy: it wants the man as a worker not to squander his nervous energies in the disorderly and stimulating pursuit of occasional sexual satisfaction. The employee who goes to work after a night of 'excess' is no good for his work. The exaltation of passion cannot be reconciled with the timed movements of productive motions connected with the most perfected automatism. (304-305)

Boggs comments that, for Gramsci, the creation of a proficient and submissive labour force necessitated stabilising the sexual relationships in the one-husband-and-wife family. In consequence, the suppressed sexual activity, which is the product of the "nuclear family," runs to confine the worker in a psychological way inside and outside the factory (44).

Gramsci confirms that American industrialists, such as Ford, are not keen on the worker's "humanity." Instead, they want a well-adjusted and skilful workforce since "the human complex (the collective worker) of an enterprise is also a machine which cannot

... be taken to pieces too often and renewed with single new parts" (*Prison Notebooks* 303). Mills maintains that, even at a managerial level, the opportunity to expand and make use of "individual rationality" is frequently shattered by the centrality of decision making and by the official "rationality" demanded by "bureaucracy." Indeed, "rationality" itself as well as the overall outlook and comprehension of its nature are taken away from the office. The middle class employee is greatly directed and "manipulated" by his employer as long as he is not free to plan his own career (226). Like the factory worker, he is undermined by standardisation.

By the 1940s, white-collar work had become the largest growing sector of the labour force. In *The Lonely Crowd*, Riesman affirms that, without doubt, there is a gradual shift in the goals of business as well as the "professional" milieu. At present, it is not the "hardness" of substance that requests skill but rather the "softness" of human beings. The epoch of economic affluence requests "the work of men whose tool is symbolism and whose aim is some observable response from people" (131-132). Galbraith asserts that "it is not necessary to advertise food to hungry people, fuel to cold people or houses to the homeless. No one could make a living doing so. The need and the opportunity to persuade people arise only as people have the income to satisfy relatively unimportant wants, of the urgency of which they are not automatically aware" (97). Indeed, the white-collar employees have to be more skilful than earlier. They have to acquire adequate "social skills" in order to recognise "the wants" of various types of people. "For men of imagination, business offers as many challenges and frontiers as it ever did" (Riesman 135).

Shedding light on the loyalty of the organisation man towards his firm, Whyte says that it is he who desperately desires to "belong." While the submergence of the worker was a reason for his complaining and for his sense of losing autonomy, "the organization man" welcomes it (46-47). Tolson points out that a feeling of "moral justification," which is completely missing on the part of the wage-labourer, encompasses the "professional ideal." As the profession is a long-run committedness, it entails the individual's sincere "identification." Characteristically, it necessitates a feeling of "duty," or "obligation." The regulation of middle-class career is not the "impersonal" regulation of factory production, but it is "*self*-discipline," an internal wish to do a job. This wish is prolonged by a human being's belief in a power superior than himself: "an Empire, the Nation, or at a local level, the 'community', 'civic pride.'" Ethics, which grant self-regard, are what stimulate a better and elevated accomplishment of a human being (82). Mills writes that when he identifies with his company, "the young executive" can occasionally organise his career prospects with it. Therefore, there is identification between his personal future and that of the organisation (244). There is a hypothesis that pervades the occupational life of the organisation man.

As Whyte argues, the hypothesis is basically that the objectives of the person and those of the organisation are deemed to be "one and the same." The organisation man implicitly believes that the organisation will be as concerned with employing his top merits as he is himself. Hence, he trustfully hands his fate to the organisation (129-130). "But lower down the ranks, the identification has more to do with security and prestige than with expectations of success. In either case, of course, such feelings can be exploited

in the interests of business loyalties. That white-collar work requires more mental capacity and less muscular effort than wage work has been a standard, historical basis for prestige claims" (Mills 244-245).

Labour without Work

If modern industrial labour and bureaucratised white-collar work produce a sense of loss of agency and alienation, the dependency on work to provide a living leaves the individual at the mercy of the labour market. With what is left of individual identity predicated on what one does in the way of a job, the prospect of unemployment threatens to utterly ruin any sense of usefulness and place in society. In the plays discussed in this thesis, work is the bedrock of male identity, conferring status in the home and within the wider community. The threat of unemployment, then, functions as a way of completely undercutting the position of men in society. Unemployment is never treated as solely an economic crisis, though it is that, but it is a direct challenge to the dignity of the honourable man: "The wage, which redundancy removes, is much more than an economic 'wager' (the exchange of money for labour-power). Not only in its capacity to purchase, but also in what it *represents* (in the pub, or in the family), the wage symbolizes a man's 'social presence.' If his symbolic power is destroyed, a man's personality is undermined" (Tolson 77-78).

Within the family, unemployment poses a nonstop defiance to the internal power dynamic between the husband as breadwinner and the wife as dependent. Komarovsky presents three cases, each illustrating a particular pattern of change brought about by

unemployment. In the first case, which Komarovsky calls "the *crystallization of an inferior status*," unemployment has merely exposed an already bad marriage where the husband is held in contempt. In the second, "the *breakdown of a more or less coercive control*, ... unemployment has undermined the authority of a ... dominant husband over a subordinate ... wife. [In the third case], unemployment has *weakened the authority of a husband over a loving wife*" (341). What is clear from these scenarios is that unemployment disrupts the established power relations within the family and defies patriarchal authority.

In *Masculinity and Power*, Brittan notes, as a large number of men have been reared to witness themselves as being in charge of "the bread and butter of daily existence," they believe that it is not viable to adjust themselves to see their wives leaving them at home and go to work so that they feed the family. "While unemployment is symptomatic of tensions and strains in capitalist economies, it also mirrors the tensions and strains in gender relations. Not only do unemployed men find it difficult to cope with their 'uselessness,' but they have to come to terms with their wives" (188). In addition, joblessness threatens the male's "gender identity." The female's proposal that her husband should give a hand in the domestic affairs which are, by tradition, considered to be the duty of the wife amplifies the previous risk. Likewise, the female's access into paid work can challenge the husband's capability to be a breadwinner of the family and, as a consequence, can doubt his maleness (Harris and Morris 92).

For Tolson, being without work undermines "[t]he very foundations of masculinity – the identification with father, the patriarchal culture of work, the 'right' to work itself.... [T]he experience of unemployment crystallizes the masculine predicament" (56). Brittan asserts that what concerns men is not only a deterioration of self-esteem, but rather the awareness that they lack the authority to require women's "respect." Their loss of influence in the house causes them to be illegitimate to be "providers" (188). In *The Adding Machine* and *Awake and Sing!*, for instance, it is not only that the concept of male respect is absent, but both Zero and Myron are asked by their wives to take off the cloak of the masculine figure and wear the apron of the kitchen. If this is humiliating in the former play, it is more degrading in the latter owing to the fact that the debasement of the father is being done in front of his son and daughter. It is worth mentioning that the threat of redundancy is existent in the four plays: Zero is fired, Myron has already been unemployed, Willy is sacked and two of the four salesmen are certainly dismissed. The thesis, thus, raises a broader issue: there is a similarly sour taste for both employment and unemployment. While work is seen to be dehumanising and alienating, redundancy is worse than having a terrible job. So, does that conclusion mean that there is no escape? Is man doomed if he works and doomed if he does not work?

To sum up, being a 'real' man depends to a great extent solely upon achievement at work. Career failure regularly results in the collapse of family life. Though the individual is responsible for success, he is increasingly controlled by abstract economic and managerial forces. In twentieth century America, masculinity is a comprehensive concept that necessitates the absence of everything feminine and the presence of such qualities as

aggressiveness, power, self-dependence and fascination with status. The meaning of masculinity is also closely connected to the meaning of work. In the home, the family man assumes roles of breadwinning and protection rather than domestic or childcare duties. Under American mass consumption, purchasing power becomes a determinant of masculinity. If the man fails to make his job confirm his masculine expectations, work leads to his vulnerability and insecurity. While work is the criterion for masculinity, gender identification for the sons are badly affected by the father's rare presence at home. Defiance between the husband and the wife for the role of the breadwinner is considered to be defiance to the manliness of the former. Hegemonic masculinity is undermined by weak performance, failure, redundancy and retirement.

Whereas the craft system provides the skilled worker with status and power, mass production deprives him from these elements through the process of slavery to the machine. Owing to Ford's assembly line, the workforce is intensely mechanised, it loses control over the way in which work is done and the separation between manual and mental labour is set up. On the surface, the $5 day is a financial relief for the worker, however, underneath; it increases work pressure through demanding more obedience and more rationalisation. The Professional-Managerial Class's main job is to reproduce capitalist culture. Its identity as a class located between the ruling and the working classes is blurry. Its appearance gives rise to a new service stratum and enhances managing the consumer orb. The organisation of work as well as the relationships between the capitalists and the workforce becomes changed. Flexibility turns the workplace into a site characterised by fluidity and instability. Under the Reagan

administration, financial uncertainty gives rein to a kind of Darwinian law that exasperates competition and exploitation of labour. Corporate business not only ruins manufacturing but it also puts an end to the old system of industrial relationships and unionism.

The effect of alienation is the same for the factory worker or the white-collar employee. Though the American myth of success indicates that work leads to the freedom of men, Marx argues that, because of the element of alienation, labour under capitalism is the key reason for the male's bondage. The more the individual works, the more he builds up the labour outside himself, the more he loses the sense of being himself. Since the capitalist system is based upon rivalry, men feel estranged from one another as each tries the best to exploit the other. The instrumentalising milieu of capitalism pushes the individual to be a conformist so that he can assume an identity. Taylorism is deemed the extremist model of capitalist overpowering, where the human being is rendered to be an obedient robot by means of rationalisation. Ford's efficiency engineering also aims at creating a new type of worker whose human content receives little or rather no consideration. Likewise, the white-collar employee is exposed to bureaucratic rationality which centrally controls and exploits him till he becomes standardised. Whereas there is a gap between the factory workforce and the capitalist administration, the organisation man not only works at the company but he belongs to it as well.

The threat of unemployment completely ruins the remains of man's identity and puts an end to every glimpse of his social value. In addition to being an economic crisis, redundancy also directly defies the self-worth of the male. Within the household, it explodes the settled power balance between the husband and the wife and challenges the former's authority. Joblessness also provides the female with an opportunity to forsake the respect of the collapsed family man who no longer assumes the role of the breadwinner. As the following chapter, which discusses Rice's *The Adding Machine*, demonstrates, the problems encountered at work put the husband in a very critical situation in the home. In this chapter, I attempt to answer the following questions: how does Rice use dramatic form (expressionism) to highlight the content of the play (the alienation, the conformity and the retrogression of the worker)? How does the division between work and home become increasingly faint? How can the inability of the male to be a provider contribute to creating a shrewish wife who is incapable of separating the dreamy world depicted in Hollywood movies from what is real at home ?

Chapter II

The Adding Machine (1923)

Work Efficiency, Home Insufficiency and Identity Bankruptcy

Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* was produced by the Theatre Guild to run at the Garrick Theatre in New York City on March 19, 1923. In his autobiography, Rice proclaims that it "did attract people who were interested in new techniques.... I had no reason to be dissatisfied. A first-rate production, substantial recognition, a nine-week run: it was all more than could have been reasonably expected" (*Minority Report* 199). Referred to as the "dean of American playwrights," Rice was capable of moving American drama into novel methods of "conveying life" on the stage. Accordingly, he managed to reshape the realistic drama so that it could absorb various "experimental devices" (Miller and Frazer 158). In *The Adding Machine*, Rice makes use of a bundle of expressionistic techniques so that he creates a form, which supports the subject matter of the play. This is explored in the first section of the chapter.

As an expressionistic fable, Rice's play functions as a terrifying warning of what price was being exacted from the labour force in exchange for the high gloss of the new order of modern consumption. It is a fierce satire of what, by the 1920s, was becoming the common experience of millions of American workers caught up in the efficiency drive made possible by Henry Ford's mass production and Frederick Taylor's time-motion studies. Block points out, "It is to the credit of Elmer Rice that he was the first American dramatist to choose, as subject for a play, a typical and unspectacular aspect of the social conflict because he recognized not only its inherent drama but also its tragedy" (216). In

The Adding Machine, human agency is reduced to, literally, zero as the number-crunching machine of American mass production edges out any residual traces of individualising skill or knowledge and replaces these with the brute automation of the mechanised factory system. As we will see, the form and the content of the play integrate with each other in order to present a drama of political protest.

The play is divided into seven scenes. It opens with Mrs. Zero's monologue. While Zero, an office clerk, is silently lying in bed, his wife laughs at the suffocating routine of his dead-end job and doubts his ability to get a raise. In Scene 2, Zero endlessly writes figures in a ledger as directed by his co-worker named Daisy. At the end of the scene, the boss informs Zero that he is to be replaced by an adding machine. Being employed in the store for twenty-five years and having no promotion for seven years, Zero finds it necessary to kill his boss. In Scene 3, the Zero family welcome their robot-like friends whose conformity is exposed. At the end of the scene, Zero is arrested. His trial, which witnesses his hallucination, takes place in Scene 4. After execution, Zero meets a murderer called Shrdlu who describes the Elysian Fields for him. In spite of mutual confession of love with Daisy, who follows in his footsteps, he is incapable of enjoying the place. In Scene 7, Zero keeps on working at a gigantic adding machine. After being humiliated, he is convinced to come back to earth to try another treadmill existence.

What this chapter intends to explore is exactly how *The Adding Machine* responds to the emerging culture of consumption in America during the 1920s and how it seeks to reveal the human cost of maximum industrial efficiency. The play is never less than

direct in its broad assessment of industrial alienation but it is striking, not just because it is such a ferocious rejection of the modern workplace, but also because of the fissures it identifies as opening up inside the institution of the family as a result of Fordist control over every aspect of daily life. The division between work and home becomes increasingly blurred as Rice's oppressed protagonist finds himself sidelined by his boss and then, as a result, by his wife. Economic and status anxieties are portrayed as corrosive of the 'natural' order of things in the home and, as we will see in subsequent discussions of plays by Clifford Odets and Arthur Miller, Rice's view of the distortions produced in the domestic sphere by transformations in the workplace opens up a line of enquiry that will preoccupy American dramatists for years to come.

The 1920s saw American industry move from an emphasis on production to a concern with consumption, largely due to the huge success of the Fordist organisation of factory production. New consumer items, such as the motor-car, radio, refrigerator and telephone, became desirable and affordable for many Americans. Demand for these items helped further stimulate core industries, as Potter points out when he describes the automobile industry as a good example of "block development" that stimulated other sectors of the economy. Car production, for example, generated huge demand for steel, rubber, glass and electrical parts. By the mid-1920s, the automobile industry was, according to Potter, "providing employment for 7 per cent of the total work force and consumed 15 per cent of the total steel output" (37). Everyday life in America was transformed by new products and the American home was reshaped by the introduction of new labour-saving devices. Efficient mass production lay behind the consumer boom

and the changed social relations and lifestyle expectations that came with it. What concerned Rice, however, was the concealed process of dehumanisation that lay behind the shining surfaces of the newly modern America, what mass production did to the meaning of what it meant to 'work,' and how the reconstruction of labour along Fordist lines destroyed the family even as mass consumption made the domestic sphere the site of the new paradise founded on spending power.

While his play *On Trial* (1914) was running in Chicago, Elmer Rice paid a visit to the Ford plant in Detroit. Highlighting the monotonous and tormenting mood of work there, he narrates, "As I watched the cars moving along the belt, each worker performing the same operation over and over, the whole process struck me as inhuman and demoralizing" (*Minority Report* 126-127). This visit was Rice's inspiration for Mr. Zero in *The Adding Machine*. Miller and Frazer mention a potential motive for the visit. Rice "always identified himself with the working people, especially those in grinding, low-paying white-collar jobs, whose displacement by modern technology and exploitation by callous employers created the basis of his greatest successes" (158). As a part of his exploration of working life in America, Rice witnessed troubling scenes in the stockyards. He observes:

> In the canning section, a young man sat beside a vat through which sealed cans of beef stew moved on a belt. Open-eyed and open-mouthed, he watched for air bubbles, snatching out the imperfectly sealed cans, a horrible picture of imbecility. I felt strongly about the stultifying effects of industrialism; that moronic boy personified for me the evils of the

> machine age. Like everyone else, I use, and am served by, innumerable mechanical devices, but I have always disliked them and the system that produces them, on psychological, moral and aesthetic grounds. (*Minority Report* 127)

Rice's hatred of the dehumanising effect of mechanised capitalist production drove his writing of *The Adding Machine*. The image of that youth in the stockyards seemed to be carved in his mind while he was delineating the robot-like characters of the play.

Rice says he captured the vision of *The Adding Machine* one night in 1922. He recalls its birth moment as follows:

> I had an experience which still puzzles and amazes me. One night longer after everyone else had gone to bed, I sat wide-awake ..., trying to concentrate on the marriage play. Suddenly, as though a switch had been turned on or a curtain raised, a new play flashed into my mind.... I saw the whole thing complete: characters, plot, incidents, even the title and some of the dialogue.... I was actually possessed.... I kept at it day after day, scarcely speaking, sometimes leaving in the middle of a meal to hurry to my desk. My family must have thought me demented. In a sense, I was.... I was as close to automatic writing as anything I have known. (*Minority Report* 189)

Though the play is clearly expressionistic in manner, Rice denied any influence from German expressionism on his work. In an interview that took place in 1965, he explained

to Elwood that the play "was a spontaneous thing. I had no experience with German expressionism at that time. In fact, I think the only expressionistic play that had been done in this country was *From Morn to Midnight* [1922], Kaiser's play, which the Theatre Guild, I believe, had done a year or two before. I did not see it.... I didn't read it until after *The Adding Machine* was produced" (3).

Nevertheless, Rice's claim that he helped Dudley Digges[1] understand the character of Zero, by giving him a note in which he mentioned the essence of expressionism, also suggests that he knew more about expressionist techniques than he was prepared to admit. Valgemae notes that, at a private screening in Hollywood in 1919 or 1920, Rice saw the expressionistic German film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. Though he was very impressed by the film, Rice emphasised that he did not have the film in mind while writing *The Adding Machine* (66). While Rice may not have consciously written *The Adding Machine* as an expressionistic play, he is clearly thinking along expressionist lines. Partly, Rice's resistance to explicitly calling his play an expressionist work lies, I think, in a refusal to allow fashion to dictate the form of the work. Instead, he insisted that it was "subject matter" that generated form. In the interview with Elwood, Rice declares:

> You don't start off with a theory.... You have something to say and the subject matter compels the form. You don't begin with a form and then pour something into it, unless you're writing a purely mechanical thing as

[1] Dudley Digges played the role of Mr. Zero in the Theatre Guild's production in 1923.

> I did with my first play, *On Trial*.... [I]f you're doing anything that is really spontaneous, you don't start with a form and say, 'Well, now I'm going to write an expressionistic play,' or 'Now I'm going to write a realistic play.'. (6)

Rice wanted to distinguish his technique in *The Adding Machine* from the forms of his other works of art. The following part of the chapter sheds light on expressionism and shows how and why Rice employs it in the play.

In drama, film, painting and sculpture, Hoffman notes, expressionism demonstrates the artist's discontent with the limitations of naturalism and realism (217). The technique started as "a form of windy neo-romanticism" and flourished to be "a hard-headed, dialectical kind of realism." In 1901, it was first applied by the French painter Julien-Auguste Hervé. In the 1900s, it was usefully used to differentiate between early "impressionistic" painting and "the more energetic individualism of Van Gogh and Matisse." While the former attempted to paint surface reality, the latter persisted in portraying inside visions (Styan 3: 1-2). It is this emphasis on the subjective made visible that becomes important for Rice. As in German expressionist painting, Rice is interested not in "the artist's impressions of nature" but in "his expression of himself" (Valgemae 3-4).

Originally, expressionism in the German theatre was a drama of protest. It was a reaction against "the pre-war authority of the family and community, the rigid lines of the social order and eventually the industrialisation of society and the mechanisation of life.

It was a violent drama of youth against age, freedom against authority.... [I]t glorified the individual and idealized the creative personality" (Styan 3: 3). Lounsberry maintains that German expressionists were caught up in "a political and philosophical movement" in addition to "an aesthetic revolution." Many of them objected to the realists and naturalists since both overestimated scientific progress. The expressionists associated science with industrialisation and technological development, the forms of modern life they were most suspicious of and which they saw as a progressivist smokescreen that concealed real social problems (53).

According to Valgamae, the Swedish dramatist August Strindberg is deemed to be "the real father of German expressionism"; twenty-four of Strindberg's plays were performed more than a thousand times in Germany between 1913 and 1915 (6). "Expressionism had been developed by Strindberg," Gascoigne argues, "as a method of representing states of mind. In his efforts to cut below the surface, he used startling symbols and unrealistic patters of speech, and dispensed with the logical sequence of ... action" (19). Gassner mentions that, in his preface to *The Dream Play* (1902), Strindberg writes that in this play, as in his earlier trilogy *To Damascus*, "Anything may happen; everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist. On an insignificant background of reality, Imagination designs and embroiders novel patters; a medley of memories, experiences, free fantasies, absurdities, and improvisations" (*Directions in Modern Theatre* 118). Strindberg's statement is regarded as capturing the essence of the expressionistic technique and suitably describes the strategy adopted by Rice in *The Adding Machine.*

Concern with expressionism grew in the United States during the 1920s. A "new" American drama with untraditional subject matter and radical techniques was sought to give voice to the dwarfing of man at the hands of uncontrolled forces. An aesthetically built antipathy to the vileness of mechanisation and its disintegration of individualism reinforced the call for renewal (Durham 54). As a consequence, American theatre was ready to absorb the expressionistic spirit. Abbotson has shown how other factors helped the spreading of the new technique: "The growth of the Little Theatre movement in the 1910s and the onset of groups like the Washington Square Players and the Provincetown Players, with their focus on artistic merit rather than box office potential, offered new artistic freedom and possibility" (4). Such freedom was the kernel of this dramatic form. The Washington Square Players produced such works as O'Neill's *In the Zone* (1917) and Rice's *The Home of the Free* (1917). Among the first productions of the Provincetown Players was O'Neill's first play, *Bound East for Cardiff* (1914).

In addition to Rice's *The Adding Machine*, other important American expressionistic dramas include O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* (1920) and *The Hairy Ape* (1922), Kaufman and Connelly's *Beggar on Horseback* (1924), Lawson's *Processional* (1925) and Treadwell's *Machinal* (1928). Lounsberry illustrates that, in *The Emperor Jones*, O'Neill employed "sound effects and symbolic scenes" in order to externalise the ethnic recollections of a modern African American. In *The Hairy Ape*, he again made use of symbols as well as "distorted, grotesque characters and settings" to imply the dissonance between "nature and civilization." In Kaufman and Connelly's crazy and dreamy drama *Beggar on Horseback*, an American capitalist has a phone installed in his chest as his

offensive wife emerges with "a rocking chair stuck to her bottom." In *Processional*, Lawson utilised "crude and garish vaudevillian backdrops; burlesque stereotypes of Jews, African American, and city slickers; brassy saxophone music; and song and dance routine." His objective is to portray ethnic intolerance, xenophobia, class conflict and other social struggles (54).

The expressionist was dissatisfied with the ethos of his society and sought to challenge it. In this sense, expressionism is a form of social criticism. Rabkin argues that it explicitly contributed to the condemnation of modern business morality. He points out that "one of the attractions of expressionism lay in its perennial theme of alienation. Man, brutalized by industrial society, was conceived of as a social victim, with little recourse but to accept his extinction at the hands of forces too vast for him to control" (29-30). In *The Adding Machine*, Rice deals with this rebellious spirit. There is a profound interest in ordinary human life at the heart of the play. Though Zero is a nonentity – not a great man – he is the hero (Krutch 231). Alienated and emasculated, this male protagonist embodies powerlessness and futility in both life and death. The writer sometimes seeks to reflect reality by making use of means that exceed verisimilitude. Rice describes his understanding of expressionism:

> It attempts to go beyond mere representation and to arrive at interpretation. The author attempts not so much to depict events faithfully as to convey to the spectator what seems to be their inner significance. To achieve this end, the dramatist often finds it expedient to depart entirely from objective reality and to employ symbols, condensations and a dozen

> devices which to the conservative must seem arbitrarily fantastic. (*The Living Theatre* 124)

For example, as his name means, Mr. Zero is nothing. However, argues Block, he symbolises many millions who are being rendered in his deplorable condition. In modern American drama, he stands for "the classic portrayal of the ignorant, inhibited, slave-soul produced by capitalist civilization" (216). Valgemae notes that the interest in "inner experience" is the link between expressionism and romanticism. Certain expressionistic features can also be traced to Greek drama, medieval morality plays and Shakespearian theatre (5).

While *The Adding Machine* was in rehearsal, Dudley Digges asked Rice for an interpretation of the character of Mr. Zero. Rice handed him a note in which he summed up the essential difference between realism and expressionism. In a realistic play, Rice explains in his interview with Elwood, the character is perceived from the outside. He is seen "in terms of action and actuality." On the contrary, in an expressionistic play, the writer subdues and even casts away "objective reality and seeks to express the character in terms of his own inner life" (2). Thus, subjectivity is the essence of expressionism as objectivity is the core of realism. However, Durham stresses both the objectivity and subjectivity of the expressionist who searches for providing an abstraction of life and to present its inwardness, as he perceives it. To achieve this end, he retains the surface reality, but changes it in various ways. He not only allows the audiences to see the object, he also makes them see *into* it, to see its essence (40). Rice visually and aurally shows both the objective and subjective reality, as conceived and experienced by Zero. He

underlines the inside weakening and the destructiveness of personal initiative in order to show the debilitating outward effects of mass production: exploitation, low wages and deadly working conditions. According to Gassner, the expressionistic drama mirrors the chaos of the world through "a corresponding anarchy of rapidly shifting elusive scenes," through an exchange of "fantasy and reality" and through actors who are "fantastic either in themselves or in their visions or moods" (*Masters of the Drama* 485-486).

The Adding Machine presents many of the characteristics typical of expressionistic drama: "type characters;" "abstract characters," who exemplify social or psychological forces; "telegraphic dialogue" and "telescopic characterization," where people, who have analogous roles in the hero's life, are identical; "the reinstatement of the soliloquy and the aside; [and] kaleidoscopic dramaturgy," where the audience watches the scenes in a cinematic way: scenes follow each other like a series of snapshots. As a result, the sparseness and distortion of scenery, lighting and sound add force to "both this fluidity and the nightmare quality of the whole effect" (Rabkin 130). In other words, the nightmarish mood of the play is supported by décor: the setting is unrealistic, lights are shady or coloured and sounds are varied. Styan highlights another important aspect: the use of pause and silence, in contrast to speech and held for a long time, adds a dream effect as well (3: 4). Miller and Frazer confirm that, under expressionism, the stage is turned into a "canvas" at the hands of the dramatist for the first time. The subjective interpretation of theme can be restricted by only the author's imagination and the concrete limits of the stage: "Characters can become automatons, their movements and

speech equally mechanical, or they may appear as cartoonlike creatures" (33). Hence, the characters also reinforce the strange nature of the play.

In *The Adding Machine*, Rice makes use of many of these expressionistic devices. Scenes 1 and 4, for example, utilise what Hogan calls "two of the longest and best monologues of the modern drama" (*The Independence* 32). The former, an "astounding fifteen-hundred-word marathon nag" from Mrs. Zero, "constitutes the entire 'dialogue' of the first scene" (Greenfield 42). It is a demonstration of the tyranny and dullness of a wife who whips her husband with the following sentences:

> MRS. ZERO: ... I'd like to know where you'd be without me. An' what have I got to show for it? – slavin' my life away to give you a home. What's in it for me, I'd like to know? But, it's my own fault, I guess. I was a fool for marryin' you. If I'd 'a' had any sense, I'd 'a' known what you were from the start. I wish I had it to do over again, I hope to tell you. You was goin' to do wonders, you was! You wasn't goin' to be a bookkeeper long – oh, no, not you. Wait till you got started – you was goin' to show 'em. There wasn't no job in the store that was too big for you. Well, I've been waitin' – waitin' for you to get started – see? It's been a good long wait too. Twenty-five years! An' I ain't seen nothin' happen. Twenty-five years in the same job. Twenty-five years tomorrow! You're proud of it, ain't you? Twenty-five years in the

> same job an' never missed a day! That's somthin' to be proud of, ain't it? Sittin' for twenty-five years on the same chair, addin' up figures.[2]

It is obvious that Mrs. Zero is unable to bear the stalled social status that is a consequence of her husband's failure to get promoted despite his loyalty to the company. Instead of supporting and consoling him, she becomes an enemy who merely criticises and mocks him.

The frustration in Mrs. Zero's speech, while directed at her husband, also reveals a life of drudgery that has only been bearable because of the promise of escape. Perhaps this promise was merely youthful optimism yet it is precisely this kind of dream of material advancement and domestic contentment that is promoted in the movies that Mrs. Zero enjoys so much. Mrs. Zero is a victim of mass American culture's myth of self-improvement as somehow an entitlement bestowed upon those who work hard and keep their heads down. After twenty-five years, this promise has proven to be false and while Mr. Zero is the target of her anger and frustration, he is not really the cause. Indeed, it is precisely the disjunction between her fantasy life, fuelled by Hollywood movies, of wholesome romantic love and the reality of grinding labour that is the source of her desperation.

Part of the power of Rice's social critique lies in the way he is able to articulate these broader concerns in the speech of ordinary people. He explains that in *The Adding Machine* "The dialogue was unlike any I had written before: an attempt to reproduce

[2] Elmer Rice. *Seven Plays*. New York: Viking Press, 1950. pp. 68-69. All subsequent quotations from the play are cited parenthetically in the text

authentic human speech" (*Minority Report* 191). On one hand, then, Rice is careful to reproduce the rhythms and vocabulary of working people as authentically as possible; on the other, the setting of the play is deliberately twisted by expressionistic devices. This is a realism that is warped and distorted by environment. The setting of the scene is carefully outlined to be expressionistic: "*A small bedroom containing an 'installment plan' bed, dresser, and chairs. An ugly electric-light fixture over the bed with single glaring, naked lamp. One small window with the shade down. The walls are papered with sheets of foolscap covered with columns of figures*" (67). The detail, such as the instalment plan furniture, is intended to combine recognisably downscale objects with the haze of figures on the wallpaper. As Valgemae notes, "before a single word is spoken, Rice has conveyed to the audience the substance of his theme by means of expressionistically distorted visual imagery" (64). The theme is the domination of work over Zero's mind and soul even if he is in the home. In addition to the numbers on the wall, which run through Zero's overloaded brain, Mrs. Zero keeps on pronouncing numbers such as Mrs. Twelve, Mrs. Nine, Mrs. Seven, Mrs. Eight, five thousand a week, twenty-five years, seven years, six years and six months. Numbers have taken over their lives.

Another element that undermines the realism of Mrs. Zero's speech is her husband's silence. Throughout her tirade, Zero remains silent, unmoving and passive. In the text, Rice describes, "Mr. ZERO *is lying on the bed, facing the audience, his head and shoulders visible*" (67). A dream world is recognised: it is as if Mr. Zero were asleep. He has a bad dream where his wife becomes an extra burden in addition to the hard nature of

work. This helps "to contribute irrational elements capable of intensifying the atmosphere of [the scene] ..., and the whole becomes ... a nightmare" (Krutch 231). Zero's silence is significant. First, he is plainly used to such harsh criticism and has become apparently indifferent to it. Second, Rice wants to convey the idea that Zero is emasculated at home as well as at work. Greenfield notes that Zero begins every day submissively listening to his wife while she is relentlessly reminding him of his worthlessness. Unquestionably, her killing remarks are as oppressive and demeaning as the working day itself (42). Here, Greenfield refers to the equal emasculating power personified by the wife and the boss. Third, Zero's silence and passivity are a sign of being so exhausted by the routine of his work that he has no energy even to communicate with his wife. While the setting is expressionistic, the situation is presented as a realistic representation of non-communication between a husband and wife. Immersion in the realm of figures seems to have rendered Mr. Zero dumb. Fourth, his silence indicates his psychological and financial paralysis. He is so chained that he can do nothing to improve his lot.

Consequently, Zero appears to have fallen prey to his domineering wife, though it is not clear whether Mrs. Zero's aggressive criticism is a function of her personality or whether the alienation caused by modern industrial labour has created her anger and dissatisfaction. Hogan comments on the impact of this monologue upon the audience, explaining, "It jolts an audience with a gasp of recognition, for it contains that pervasive, impotent and inarticulate rage against life that rises from [American] culture.... Rice's play catches its audience immediately with ... the shock of recognition" (*The Independence* 33). While the expressionism of the play reveals alienation, then, there is

enough realism in the dialogue to make Rice's world recognisable. Any psychological condition explored by the play is rooted in and caused by the actual conditions experienced by real people.

The repetition throughout the speech does however weaken its realism, or at least renders realistic patterns of speech strange and oppressive. For example, the repetition of "Twenty-five years" (69) makes Zero feel crazy towards his boss, the cause of his wife's frustration. Krutch asserts that the soliloquy "is ostensibly the stenographic report of a 'stream of consciousness' but actually so intensified and formalized that it becomes a fitting introduction to the ... night which follows" (231). Krutch means the night when Zero is arrested for murdering his boss. The repetition also refers to the core process of automation. Zero has to suffer from the automatic performance both at home and at work. The more Mrs. Zero repeats the more of a monster she appears and the more of a sufferer Zero feels.

The second long soliloquy is made by Mr. Zero when he is tried in Scene 4. Before shedding light on the significance of his monologue, it is relevant to comment on the expressionistic setting of the court, which is also deformed: *"A court of justice. Three bare white walls without door or windows except for a slight door in the right wall. At the right is a jury box.... On either side of the jury box stands a uniformed officer. Opposite the jury box is a long, bare oak table piled high with law books. Behind the books ZERO is seated, his face buried in his hands.... [There is a] great empty space in the middle of the courtroom*" (82). Lee Simonson, the setting designer, removed the law

books and table. As a replacement, "the vertical lines of the railing ..., the judge's overly high desk and the windows were at sharp angles and ... distorted" (Dukore 30-31). In the interview with Elwood, Rice comments on the scene, "[E]verything was awry in it. Everything was out of alignment and out of focus. The judge was way, way high up – you could hardly see him and he wore a mask. This was Lee's idea, not mine. As I say, everything was out of alignment and out of scale and out of proportion, crooked" (4). The bareness also adds to the gloomy atmosphere that dominates the play. (See figure 1.)

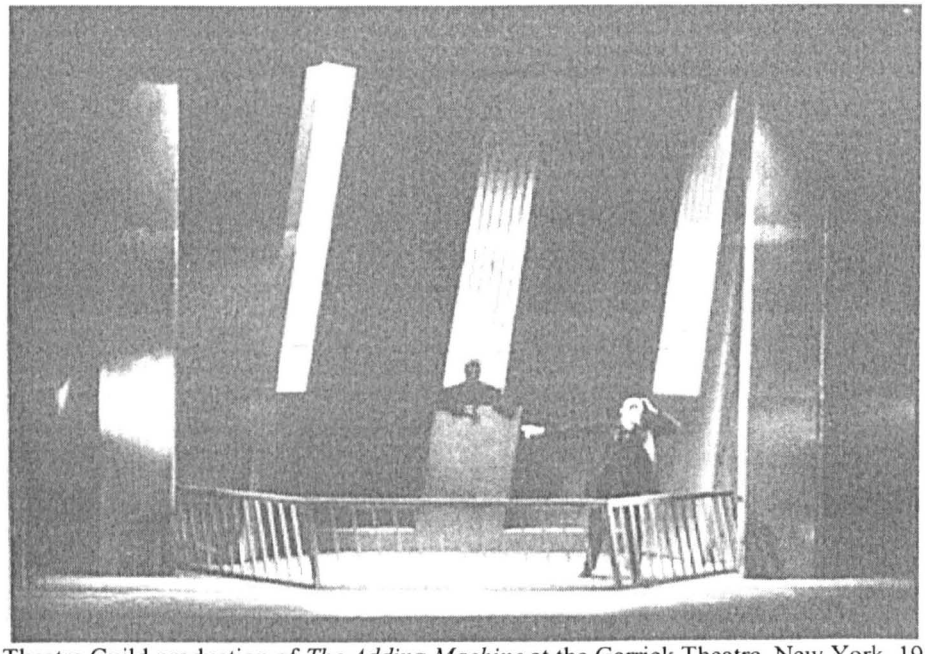

Figure 1. Theatre Guild production of *The Adding Machine* at the Garrick Theatre, New York, 1923. Scene 4. Dudley Digges, as Zero, is tried in the court.

Zero's monologue is expressionistic in the sense that it is a kind of stream-of-consciousness talk to the jury. There are incoherent leaps in his speech: from the confession of his sin, to his dissatisfaction with the lawyers, to his twenty-five years of sincere work at the company, to the reference to work holidays, to his experience with the whore and to baseball. This chaotic mixture of what is relevant and what is irrelevant is an obvious reflection of his psychological and mental disorder. When he mentions

figures, he continues adding them up in an unconscious and hysterical manner (Palmieri 65). Zero compiles sentences like the following:

> ZERO: Sure I killed him.... Sure I killed him.... Red ink nothin'! It was blood, see?... I killed him, see? Right through the heart with the bill file, see?... Them damn figgers! I can't forget them.... Twenty-five years. Never missed a day, and never more'n five minutes late. Look at my time card.... It ain't right to kill a guy, I know that.... That was the only time he ever talked to me. An' when I seen him comin' up to my desk, I didn't know where I got off. A big guy like that comin' up to my desk. I felt like I was chokin' like and all of a sudden I got a kind o' bad taste in my mouth like when you get up in the mornin'.... But there was that girl, see? Six months they gave her. It was a dirty trick tellin' the cops on her like that. I shoudn't 'a' done that. But what was I gonna do? The wife wouldn't let up on me. I hadda do it.... I've seen lots [of women] I'd like to grab..., but I ain't got the nerve.... Pretty soft for them shoe salesmen, I'll say, lookin' at women's legs all day. Them lawyers! They give me a pain, I tell you – a pain!... Do I look like a murderer? Do I? I never did no harm to nobody? Ask the wife.... He canned me after twenty-five years, see?... Suppose you was me, now. Maybe you'd 'a' done the same thing. (82-85)

Zero feels so lost and unbalanced that his speech has lost all logic and rationalisation. Since he has neither present nor future, he becomes immersed in his past. Through his hallucination, Rice indicates that his protagonist has no personal centre. This fact is

confirmed by Mrs. Zero when she attacks him, "You ain't much to be proud of" (69) and "If you was any kind of a man you'd have a decent job by now" (69).

Furthermore, Rice employs the technique of "free association." Hogan elucidates, "[O]ne word or thought sets Zero off in certain channelled tangents and he must by an effort bring himself back to his subject. Usually, a reference to a number sets Zero off on a conditioned-response tabulation of meaningless digits" (*The Independence* 35). For example, when he confesses his guilt, he counts and calculates the number of the jurors as follows: "I killed him, see? ... I want you to get that right – all of you. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve. Twelve of you. Six and six. That makes twelve. I figgered it up often enough. Six and six makes twelve. And five is seventeen. And eight is twenty-five.... Twenty-five years, see? Eight hours a day, exceptin' Sundays" (82). Also, to highlight his occupational record, he says, "Look at my time card if you don't believe me. Eight twenty-seven, eight thirty, eight twenty-nine, eight twenty-seven, eight thirty-two. Eight an' thirty-two's forty an' – Goddam them figgers! I can't forget them" (83).

The aside is another expressionistic device employed in the play. In Scene 2, while working, Zero and Daisy do not look at each other. Keeping their eyes on their tasks, they often think aloud. The following example illustrates the point:

> ZERO: I guess I didn't have the nerve.
>
> DAISY: I'll bet you'd be sorry then you been so mean to me....

ZERO: Nerve! I got as much nerve as anybody. I'm on the level, that's all. I'm a married man and I'm on the level.

DAISY: Anyhow, why ain't I got a right to live?...

ZERO: The time the wife had pneumonia I thought she was goin' to pass out. But she didn't. The doctor's bill was eighty-seven dollars. (*Looking up*) Hey, wait a minute! Didn't you say eighty-seven dollars?

DAISY (*looking up*): What?

ZERO: Was the last you said eighty-seven dollars?

DAISY (*consulting the slip*): Forty-two fifty.

ZERO: Well, I made a mistake. Wait a minute. (*He busies himself with an eraser.*) All right. Shoot.

DAISY: Six dollars. Three fifteen. Two twenty-five. Sixty-five cents. A dollar twenty. You talk to me as if I was dirt.

ZERO: I wonder if I could kill the wife without anybody findin' out. In bed some night. With a pillow. (72)

Merely thinking of his wife at work, like seeing her at home, causes Zero to feel irritated and disturbed. On the other hand, Daisy's hidden longing for him assures him that he still has the nerve, which is seen as a sign of masculinity.

According to Palmieri, work frees Zero's and Daisy's minds to contemplate inner conflicts, because it is undemanding and repetitive (62). However, it would be argued that the pressure and the demanding nature of work are the reason for pushing the two workers into a dreamy world in which they can satisfy their needs and lessen the burden

of their jobs. The harshness of their tasks can be demonstrated. For example, realising that there is a lot of work to do, Zero asks Daisy to speed up. On another occasion, he exclaims, "Hey! Hey! Can't you slow up? What do you think I am – a machine?" (73). The nature of their work means that it has to maintain a monotonous regularity in order to be done effectively. While the workers are free to daydream, they must not allow their thoughts to wander too far or mistakes will be made. While they are not automata, the degree of self-regulation is high and the freedom to dream may only be just enough of a compensation to ensure they keep busy.

Rice's "concept of the deadness and dullness" of these machine-like creatures is created by mixing their inner thoughts and longings with the "surface" reality, which is symbolically deformed, highlighted and stylised. This is an indication of his sympathy for them – for what they are rendered (Durham 42). Dukore says that this scene

> externally represents the inner (thoughts) and the abstract (work as numbering routine).... Repetitions of 'A dollar' contribute to the monotonous existence.... Less evident on the page than in performance is the constant intonation of figures, which denies any life-affirming thoughts the characters may express and which reveals such thoughts to be unfulfillable daydreams of human automata. (30)

The repetition of the word "dollar" is also another reflection of the standardisation of mass production. It refers to the dominance of money: the dollar is the master to which they are slaves.

The setting of the scene is also expressionistic: "*In the middle of the room two tall desks back to back. At one desk on a high stool is* ZERO. *Opposite him at the other desk, also on a high stool, is* DAISY" (70). The length of the desks and the height of the stools are an expression of how the two workers are dwarfed and possessed by routine. In addition, "*Both wear green eyeshades and paper sleeve-protectors*" (70), ensuring a degree of anonymity. The way in which both become ready to leave for home is the same as well: "*[They] remove their eyeshades, and sleeve-protectors and put them on the desks. Then each produces from behind the desk a hat*" (74-75). Durham refers to pantomime as another expressionistic device in the scene:

> Here, through pantomime, is made clear the desolate separation of these two, their failure to communicate – to make the tiny gesture which could achieve union, brotherhood. About to leave, Daisy tries to speak to Zero, but he is busy. Then, he tries to tell her good night, but she is gone. It is too late.... Through inattention, prudery, lack of courage, inertia, they have kept themselves closed up, each in his own private emptiness. (42-43)

The negative impact of being slaves to the routine of work on human relationships is highlighted. Even saying 'goodbye' seems to be irrelevant to the code of work in the age of automation. Greenfield confirms that "the routine of office work lowers man on the evolutionary scale, diminishing his capacity for survival, increasing his vulnerability to attack and destruction and crippling his body-saving instincts as well as his soul-saving instincts. The 'virtue' of work for its own sake and the 'sanctity' of self-denial seem to be killing [Americans]" (43-44).

The end of the scene witnesses the expressionistic climax of the play. Mr. Zero mentions his twenty-five years of service to his boss who does not even know his name – another hint at the loss of human relations at work. Being told that a change is to take place, Zero feels satisfied for a moment, before realising that the change is the installation of adding machines. Zero is redundant, his skilful and knowledgeable mind and fingers are replaced by the keys of an adding machine which, as Zero's boss explains, "do the work in half the time and a high-school girl can operate them" (76). Zero's job has not only been mechanised but what little status there was in his position is mocked by the notion that a high-school girl can now do what once required manly rigour and experience.

The expressionistic depiction of the boss's murder is brilliant. "No realistically staged killing could be as effective as this enactment of what takes place in a human mind driven beyond sanity by a brutal turn of events" (Miller and Frazer 160). In other words, incarnating what goes on inside Zero's mind is more direct than dramatising the murder on stage:

> (*Soft music is heard – the sound of the mechanical player of a distant merry-go-round. The part of the floor upon which the desk and stools are standing begins to revolve very slowly.*)
>
> BOSS: But, of course, in an organization like this, efficiency must be the first consideration –
>
> (*The music becomes gradually louder and the revolutions more rapid.*) (76)

In a telegraphic way, the boss utters only the words that enter Zero's consciousness, making the word 'business' the most prominent.

> BOSS (*barely making himself heard above the increasing volume of sound*): I'm sorry – no other alternative – greatly regret – old employee – efficiency – economy – business – *business* – BUSINESS –
>
> (*His voice is drowned by the music. The platform is revolving rapidly now.* ZERO *and the* BOSS *face each other. They are entirely motionless save for the* BOSS's *jaws, which open and close incessantly. But the words are inaudible. The music swells and swells. To it is added every off stage effect of the theatre: the wind, the waves, the galloping horses, the locomotive whistle, the sleigh bells, the automobile siren, the glass-crash. New Year's Eve, Election Night, Armistice Day, and Mardi Gras. The noise is deafening, maddening, unendurable. Suddenly it culminates in a terrific peal of thunder. For an instant there is a flash of red and then everything is plunged into blackness.*) (76)

This crescendo represents the moment when Zero thrusts a bill file into the boss's heart. Revenge and frustration are Zero's motives for committing the crime. "[B]y taking us inside Zero, Rice gives us a direct experience of his loss of dignity and humanity" (Berkowitz 28).

The subjective element of expressionism is clear in this episode. In his comment on the use of expressionism, Director Philip Moeller writes, "it is *subjective* projection; that is, all the half-understood 'hinterland' thoughts, all the yearnings and unknown

suppressions of the mind, are exposed.... Thus, expressionistically Mr Rice has exposed the minds and souls of his people" (qtd. in Styan 3: 114). The audience can go through Zero's mental torture. For a while, the firing turns Zero's nature upside down. It is the catalyst which transforms Zero the machine into Zero the man. Durham sheds light on the aftermath of his being sacked: "In that incredible moment, he gains a stature he has never had before and will never achieve again. For a moment, he is not an automaton; he is a madman. But he is a man" (43).

Like those of the Zeroes, the names of Zero's friends, who are also white-collar workers, are expressionistic. They are Messrs One through Six and their wives. The names "signify that they have been dehumanized by modern society, that they have lost their individuality and that they are as multitudinous in society as numbers themselves" (Palmieri 63). Even before these peers enter the stage, Rice makes use of an aural device that reinforces the prevalent existence of the absent-present machine. Their knocking is heard as if it were "*a sharp clicking such as is made by the operation of the keys and levers of an adding machine*" (77). These guests are abstract dummies, rather than real human beings. They move like robots. The portrait of their oppressive conformity and standardisation is striking: (See figure 2.)

> (... *Six men and six women file into the room in a double column. The men are all shapes and sizes, but their dress is identical with that of* Zero *in every detail.... The women are all dressed alike too*.....)
>
> MRS. ZERO: (*taking the first woman's hand)*: How de do, Mrs. One
>
> MRS. ONE: How de do, Mrs. Zero.

(MRS. ZERO *repeats this formula with each woman in turn.* ZERO *does the same with the men except that he is silent throughout. The files now separate, each man taking a chair from the right wall and each woman one from the left wall. Each sex forms a circle with the chairs very close together. The men – all except* ZERO – *smoke cigars. The women munch chocolates.*) (78)

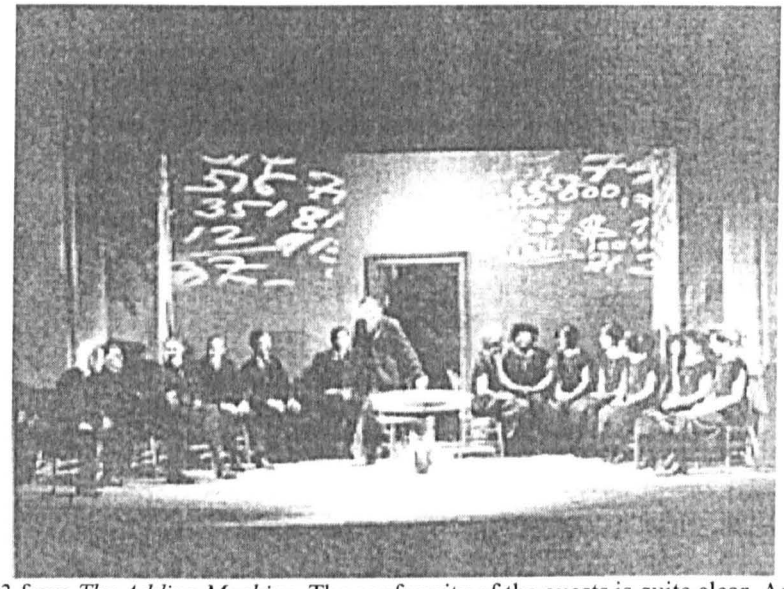

Figure 2. Scene 3 from *The Adding Machine.* The conformity of the guests is quite clear. As indicated by the figures on the wall, Zero is dominated by automation when he is at home.

The friends are an example of telescopic characterisation. Losing individuality, they are like the units of mass production: they are identical and standardised. They also stand for the workers in the factory in front of the assembly line. There is no genuine difference in their uniform or even shape and movement. Sameness dominates their tentative existence. The repetition of dress and the greeting add to the monotonous atmosphere of the party.

Moreover, their conversation starts with clichés, such as "Some rain we're havin'," and "Y' can't always go by the papers" (78). J. Walker pinpoints another kind of conformity:

> If their clothes serve as a badge of their conformity, their conversation testifies to the oath of stultifying likemindedness they have sworn. The women cannot discuss the merits and demerits of lace trim without immediately reconciling contradictory viewpoints into agreement. The men similarly forge a sense of solidarity by defining themselves against a whole host of others, from untruly women, who make too many demands at home, to foreign agitators, who make too many demands at work. (*Expressionism and Modernism* 162)

Accordingly, the friends not only conform to concrete appearances but also to abstract points of view: it is all-inclusive conformity. Among these views are the following: "[W]oman suffrage is the bunk," "Politics is a man's business," and "Woman's place is in the home" (80). The same prejudices involve what follows: "Business conditions are sure bad," because of "Foreign agitators [who] ought be run outa the country," since "America [is] for the Americans" (80).

Rice refers to the expressionism of the last scene: "Marvellously, Simonson filled the whole stage with a huge adding machine. The keys were as big as bar stools. Like a monkey, Dudley Digges was hopping around on them" (Elwood 4). (See figure 3.) The message is very effective and clear. In the age of the machine, man is obliged to offer

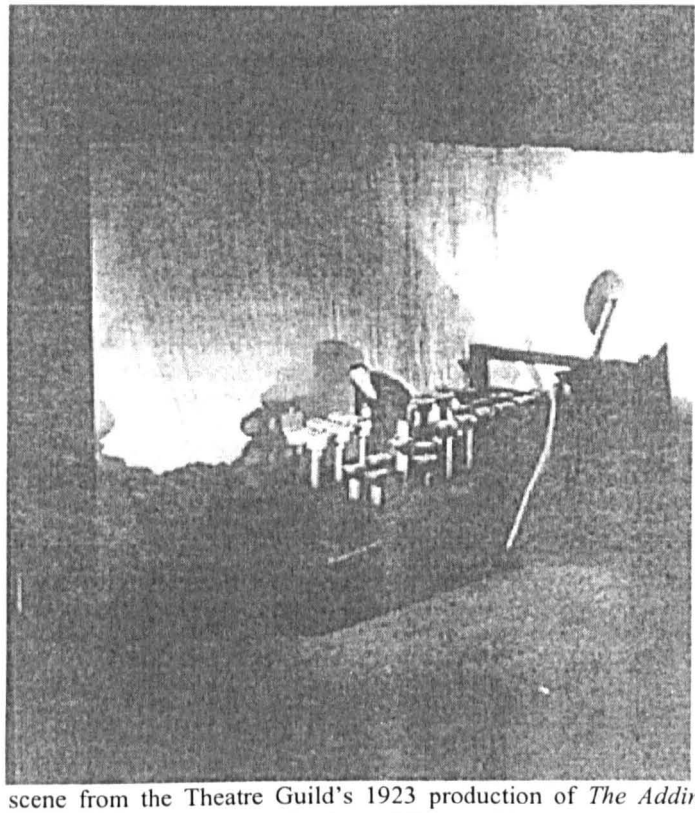

Figure 3. The final scene from the Theatre Guild's 1923 production of *The Adding Machine*. Dudley Digges jumps from key to key on Lee Simonson's giant adding machine.

very little in terms of skill, control and freedom. The machine kills his skill, controls him and deprives him of will. In addition, Rice's stage directions call for "*a strip of white paper-tape [that] flows steadily from the machine as* ZERO *operates. The room is filled with this tape – streamers, festoons, billows of it everywhere. It covers the floor and the furniture, it climbs the walls and chokes the doorways*" (102). Rice wants to objectify the conquest of man by the machine. Valgemae notes, "Zero thus symbolizes man in an ever-increasing mechanical society, void of identity and enslaved by the monster he has created" (67). Now, it is important to show how Rice relates *The Adding Machine* to Fordist mass production and Taylorist time-motion studies in order to accentuate the price the individual has to pay for the cult of maximum industrial efficiency.

As we have seen, Rice wanted his drama to speak to the social concerns of his day. Quoting from *The Saturday Review,* Hogan asserts that Rice believes in the idea that "the dramatist ... does not exist in a vacuum. He is a product of his times, and he is most effective and significant when he expresses and reflects the currents of thoughts and of feeling that prevail in [his] society.... He is the mirror of his times" ("Rice: The Public Life" 439). In attacking the automation of mass production, Rice is not different from his contemporaries such as Eugene O'Neill and John Howard Lawson. What characterises his work is the intensity of this attack, the awareness that personal salvation cannot be attained and the insistence that there is something radically wrong with the ideology of capitalism. As Rice makes clear in the play, it is the system which is to blame. Charles proclaims to Zero: "You can't change the rules – nobody can – they've got it all fixed. It's a rotten system – but what are you going to do about it?" (105). Rice makes Zero a passive victim, a human atom driven by forces much larger than himself. Though his crisis is a personal one, it becomes a crisis of the whole society through the realm of values and ideology.

The combination of realism and expressionism in *The Adding Machine* enables Rice to place the turbulent mind of the individual within a context that is identifiable. Rice's interest in the subjective states of his characters is always linked to social circumstances and political pressures. Zero's turmoil is rendered as a psychological state in part because he has become alienated from his family and co-workers; he and his wife cannot see that they are both constructed from the same debilitating set of circumstances. As such, the characters function as atomised individuals, leaving them with no collective identity to

support them when things go wrong. Zero's response to redundancy, then, while depicted as a psychological breakdown, is not intended to distance the play from social reality but rather to show how a culture of individualism psychologises and pathologises what is in fact a reaction to social inequality and exploitation. Hoffman illuminates:

> Mr. Zero ... can give expression only to the limited variety of his cipherhood. Murdering the Boss is his rebellion; but after the interval of stereotyped bliss that follows the murder, Zero is put back on the track of his routine – again in an exaggerated form.... [T]he soul of Zero is the soul of the small-time worker, whose acts are duplicated a million times, [...] who doesn't grow at all but merely changes his work as mechanical progress dictates. (218-219)

The audience is made to feel dissatisfied with the system which marks Zero's soul as slave-material and which thrives on that slavery.

What causes Zero's predicament to be very horrifying is the idea that he persists in being a desperate and a "stupid cog" in the huge machines of an unfair system (Jerz 28). J. Walker confirms Jerz's opinion. In *Expressionism and Modernism*, She says that the adding machine of the title of the play does not stand for the one which replaces Zero, but for Zero himself. She adds:

> Programmed to perform a set task, Zero is able to do little else, rarely deviating from the script society has handed him on how to live his life. Though he takes furtive pleasure in watching a woman across the

> courtyard undress, he outwardly adheres to conventional moral standards, channeling his voyeuristic desires into watching the films that his shrewish wife demands to see. (157)

This quotation clearly underlines Zero's conformity as well as lack of pride and self-assertion. However, J. Walker, later, writes, "Rice gives us a character who is unable to achieve transcendence – even in death, even when it is freely offered to him and ready for the taking. Refusing to accept the ... code of individual morality that governs the Elysian Fields, Zero prefers to conform to a moral standard that is comfortingly familiar and requires only thoughtless obedience" (158).

Expressing conformity, Zero's guests also sing:

> ALL (*in unison)*: That's it! Damn foreigners! Damn dagoes! Damn Catholics! Damn sheenies! Damn niggers! Jail 'em! Shoot 'em! Hang 'em! Lynch 'em! Burn 'em! (*They all rise.*)
>
> ALL (*sing in unison)*: "My country 'tis of thee,
> Sweet land of liberty!" (81)

The paradox here is that conformity and desire to fit in lead to scapegoating and racism. The more the American individual loves his country, the more he seems to hate outsiders. For him, conformity and racism are two faces of one coin. It appears that he enjoys being conformist to the system to the extent that he wants to deprive other nationalities from sharing this *duty* with him. Ironically, this is the climatic degree of his alienation: as he ceases to belong to himself, he belongs to the country and becomes more alienated. The

guests implicitly declare that they are overpowered by abstract forces which they cannot control. Through their protest, Rice hints at the immense number of immigrants who were competing for the same jobs and who worked in various American firms including the Ford Plant.

Ford played an indispensable role in Americanising immigrant auto-workers. Making it a condition for obtaining the five-dollar day profit, Ford encouraged them to adopt the proper American values. In his "Americanism and Fordism," Gramsci notes that, in America, "rationalization has determined the need to elaborate a new type of man suited to the new type of work and productive process" (279). Meyer maintains that Ford's ultimate objective was to regulate his workers' psychology and morals. Ford also aimed at creating a routinised psychic structure that guaranteed the highest level of efficiency. The procedures followed to sustain this objective included establishing Ford Motor Company's Sociological Department in 1913 and Ford English School in 1914. The department provided the employees with a raft of social benefits. For example, it helped them to live in well-maintained single-family homes instead of their small flats. The department was also responsible for assessing the workers' personal lives and habits in order to judge their eligibility for getting the full five dollars every day. The school not only taught the workers how to speak English, but it also exposed them to American culture and history, as well as instructing them in the importance of virtues such as thrift, cleanliness, good manners and punctuality. This plan "was a unique experiment in the social engineering of immigrant auto-workers to inculcate the personal habits and work discipline suitable for assembly line production. In effect, the standardization of product

required the standardization of labour" ("Automobile in American Life" Web). For Ford, machines and workers are alike. In the 1930s, Meyer goes on, a Ford union activist said to federal investigators, "You see the principle of the Ford plant is like making machines, he attempts to standardize the machines, and so he does with labor". Ford moulds his auto-workers in the American style, as the machine is used to frame the products.

Zero has adopted the lifestyle and values of the office clerk: hard work, punctuality and faithfulness. He has "been workin' hard all day" (68). And he "never missed a day" (69). When Zero says to Daisy, "Hey! Hey! Can't you slow up? What do you think I am – a machine?" (73), he is both denying that he is a machine but also acknowledging that this is what is expected of him. At the same time, he is inadvertently predicting what is to come: his human weakness is to be solved by his mechanical replacement. At this point, though, Zero still believes that his loyalty and diligence are enough to ensure his dignity as a worker. His identity is so bound up with his capacity to sustain repetitive work over a long period that it becomes to an extent a measure of his own estimation of his masculinity. Zero has internalised the cult of efficiency and sees his ability to work fast (though not so fast that he becomes a robot) as a sign of virility:

> DAISY (*reading aloud)*: Three ninety-eight. Forty-two cents. A dollar fifty. A dollar fifty. A dollar twenty-five. Two dollars. Thirty-nine cents. Twenty-seven fifty.
>
> ZERO (*petulantly*): Speed it up a little, cancha?
>
> DASIY: What's the rush? Tomorrer's another day.
>
> ZERO: Aw, you make me sick.

DAISY: An' you make me sicker.

ZERO: Go on. Go on. We're losin' time. (70)

In measuring himself according to the dictates of his job, Zero can only maintain his self-esteem according to the logic of efficiency. While this is not his downfall – the external forces of the mechanised workplace achieves this – it does make him extremely vulnerable since losing his job becomes a more profound loss of what little identity he has.

Refused promotion and then fired, Zero finds out that his values are incapable of sustaining him in his life. It is normal for him to regard his boss as an enemy. So, he rebels against him for the first and last time in his life. In the court, he is agonised by his awareness of being in a false position and, thus, he becomes haunted by the hollowness of all the values he believes in. His desperation is compounded by his clash with other values in the American tradition. These values are symbolised by his boss who advocates mass production, efficiency, in addition to time and money saving. Being sentenced to death, Zero has come to the unbearable realisation that his values are not destined to survive automation. Zero's problem is caused not by a lack of values but rather by the plurality of value-systems operating in a society undergoing rapid change. Rice indicts the commercial ethos of business for the absence of any nourishing values. The only solution he offers Zero is escape – through being executed.

Through the character of Zero, Rice presents a portrayal of the prototype of the alienated white-collar worker. Tolson asserts that the structure of work threatens

masculine identity under capitalism. What is tragically ironical is the idea that men themselves work together to support a capitalist culture of work, which wrecks its own human root as it prospers. Essentially, this is what the experience of alienation means: "the more men and women work for capitalist endeavours, the more the products of their labour and the working environment acquire an *alien* reality" (49). In "Alienated Labor," Marx writes:

> [T]he worker is related to the *product of his labor* as to an *alien* object. For it is clear on this presupposition that the more the worker expends himself in work, the more powerful becomes the alien world of objects which he creates in face of himself, the poorer he becomes in his inner life, and the less he belongs to himself.... The worker puts his life into the object, and his life then belongs no longer to himself but to the object.... The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, assumes an *external* existence, but that it exists independently, *outside* himself, and alien to him, and that it stands opposed to him as an autonomous power. The life which he has given to the object sets itself against him as an alien and hostile force. (95-96)

In *The Adding Machine*, the more Zero expends himself at work, the stronger becomes the alien world of figures which he creates, the poorer he becomes in his inner life and the less he belongs to himself. For Marx, the concept of alienation is based upon the hidden meaning of a determined wage. The worker permits his labouring ability to be exploited beyond the formal value of the wage by selling it in exchange for this wage. "The products of his surplus labour appear to the worker as something he has created

which is then 'objectified' (as a piece of machinery) to be used against him (he is forced to work harder). In personal terms, the commitment of men to their self-realization is destroyed" (Tolson 49-50). Blumberg confirms that the labourer feels alienated because his work is repetitive, routine, fragmented and dull. Additionally, he is just "an appendage to the machine." He works under someone else's authority (299).

Zero, a poor victim of his boss's single-minded commitment to efficiency and business, permits his personality to be moulded and fragmented by the routine of his work. Worse yet, the loss of identity at work, because of his failure to get a promotion, leads to a loss of identity at home. Long before Zero's physical execution, his double-emasculation has brought him to spiritual death. He is temporarily cherished by his daydreams of being promoted, of killing his wife and of stealthily seeking affairs with other women. The impact of *The Adding Machine* on the audience is an appropriate testimony that Rice captures the agony of the American worker at the hands of the machine and its owner.

Zero feels alien even amid the afterlife's joys. His alienation at work stretches to corrupt his senses. "[H]is twenty-five years of adding figures have altered his soul forever.... Even as an immortal being, Zero surrenders to the repression and self-denial he learned in his twenty-five years on the job" (Greenfield 41). His old model of life and his old fears are too strong to allow him the chance to be free. He is no longer able to communicate with human beings. When he leaves Daisy, she laments, "It don't make no difference now. Without him I might as well be alive" (101). This is another premise of

the play, on which Durham comments: "Rice equates life with death: life for the office drudge in twentieth-century America is death. The Success Story has been subverted. Heaven is heaven only to the 'most favored;' to the others, it is hell" (48-49). Though the American worker is physically alive, the demanding nature of work causes his psyche and spirit to be dead. Work no longer ensures worthiness. It becomes associated with worthlessness. In this sense, the success myth, which originally relies on hard work and secures happiness, collapses.

The mechanical world in which Zero is immersed hinders his happiness and enjoyment in heaven. In the Elysian Fields, Zero "is troubled by the very air of serenity which prevails and nature appears beautiful only in relation to the standards of a mechanized world" (Rabkin 244). He is not accustomed to such an environment which lacks the source of his only pleasure: routine and the automatic process of adding figures. The absence of automation makes him lost in the land of nature. Daisy says to him, "Look at the flowers! Ain't they just perfect! Why, you'd think they was artificial, wouldn't you?" (95). Rabkin asserts, "Zero denies the Elysian Fields.... The horror of modern life resides precisely in its denial of the forces of nature, of love and beauty, of sunlight and fresh air and room to breathe and the ability to live one's own life" (246). In short, Zero is doomed in both life and death.

Rice makes a cardinal distinction between the social character of the old entrepreneurial middle class and that of the new, salaried middle class. The contrast between Zero and his boss is important. The boss is a classic symbol of the old,

nineteenth century middle class. His character is inner-directed. He is hard, firm, self-seeking, unprincipled and self-confident. His entrepreneurial words, "But, of course, in an organization like this, efficiency must be the first consideration – ... efficiency – economy – business – *business* – BUSINESS –," (76) incarnate the competitive old middle-class mood and leave Zero as panicky and incapacitated as ever. In this sense, "The Machine, implying 'efficient' standardization of commercial life, was associated with class conflict" (Hoffman 220). The boss "applied the popular catch-phrases of Darwinism, 'the struggle for existence' and 'the survival for the fittest,' to current conditions in American society and used them to justify a situation in which the ruthless succeeded and the weak went to the wall" (Spindler 29). As a capitalist, his world is one where there are still profits to gain and new organisations to set up. As a self-dependant and self-employed character, he does not need to depend upon sociability. His guide to success is his mind and fist: the former stands for his intelligence and the latter his power. In short, his autonomy means that he is not required to please other people. For him, the issues of efficiency, economy and business are what matter. Knowledge is welcome as long as it guarantees efficiency.

'Knowledge' and 'efficiency' call forth the scientific principles of Frederick Taylor. In 1911, Taylor published *The Principles of Scientific Management.* As the title suggests, Taylor believed that the workplace could be rationalised by the application of scientific method. Herein lies the beginning of the end of worker autonomy. Scientific management sought, as D. Jary and J. Jary explain, to govern "the design of jobs which entail the separation of mental from manual labour, subdivisions of tasks, deskilling, close

managerial control, work effort and the incentive of wage payments" (Web). The introduction of the manager shifted authority away from the skilled worker and toward the white-collar 'expert' in efficiency, what Taylor called "the gradual substitution of science for 'rule of thumb' throughout the mechanical arts" (qtd. in Sandrone. Web). This may have increased efficiency but it also effectively disarmed the skilled workforce which was now little more than, Sandrone argues, "mindless cogwheels in a remorseless machine". In *Gramsci's Marxism*, Boggs maintains that Gramsci regards Taylorism as a forerunner of "the most sophisticated" form of capitalist dominance, where efficiency and machine specialisation completely subdue the workers. "Rationalization" weakened their creativity by marking them as compliant robots. It also fractured their tendency to "resist exploitation" (47).

Meyer notes that, in Ford's Highland Park Factory, there was a repetition of simple work processes which resulted in the design of particular purpose machines. Then, work was characterised by duplication, monotony, specialisation, automation and alienation. There was also a decline in the concept of skill since unskilled workers constituted over 55% of Ford's workforce ("Automobile in American Life" Web). As a consequence, traditional social relationships changed. The "deskilled specialists" became the chief occupational group (Meyer, *Five Dollar* 37). Furthermore, the new routinised jobs caused irritation and boredom. Accordingly, rates of absenteeism and labour turnover reached a high level. In fact, there was a separation between the workforce and the decision-makers since Taylor believed that the working class could not undertake a managerial role. The Taylorist factory, as a result, formed an inflexible kind of social

relations whose base is discrimination of expertise which supported class divisions. In this way, Taylorism "produces a gap between manual labour and the 'human content' of work" (Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism" 294).

In *The Adding* Machine, Zero and Daisy are co-workers with clearly defined responsibilities: Daisy reads out figures, Zero writes them down. This is, in many ways, a model of Taylorist task allocation and the Ford assembly line. This "reductionist approach to work dehumanizes the worker. The allocation of work ... is seen as leaving no scope for the individual worker to excel" (Sandrone. Web). Since it is fixed, regulated and repetitive, this kind of work controls the worker and limits his mental abilities. Since there is no way to disobey the routine, rules and regulations, any attempt exerted by him to express himself will augment his slavery: the attempt is deemed to be a rebellion. Therefore, the individual finds it safer to cling to this process of depersonalisation though he is aware of its humiliating impact.

Zero's debasement becomes absolute in the last scene. The scene opens as Zero is working at a celestial adding machine. He "*presses the keys and pulls the lever with mechanical precision*" (102). The precision objectifies the working of a human mind changed into a machine (Valgemae 67). When Zero refuses to quit the operation of the machine, he becomes subjected to a torrent of humiliation:

> CHARLES: You're a failure, Zero, a failure. A waste product. A slave to a contraption of steel and iron. The animal's instincts, but not his strength and skill. The animal's appetites, but not his unashamed indulgence of them.

> True, you move and eat and digest and excrete and reproduce. But any microscopic organism can do as much.... Back you go – back to your sunless groove – the raw material of slums and wars – the ready prey of the first jingo or demagogue or political adventurer who takes the trouble to play upon your ignorance and credulity and provincialism. You poor, spineless, brainless boob – I'm sorry for you! (107)

There is a link, here, between economy and politics. Not only is the individual occupationally retrogressed and, thence, economically vulnerable, but he becomes politically marginal and ineffective as well. As long as he is a silent and, more significantly, mindless worker, he, politically speaking, keeps on being neglected. Zero has lost both his dignity and his identity. The capitalist world causes him to be progressively purposeless. Symbolically and ironically, this kind of man is not fit to live on earth, according to the principle of efficiency, and he cannot stay in heaven. As Giovannetti comments in 1929, "The hero of technical civilization is not a man unchained: he is a man of silence, who can carry his iron chains up to the heavens (qtd. in Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* 306). As he is extremely crippled by the system, he finds himself an everlasting conformist wherever he goes.

Man's enslavement by the machine is captured in this observation by an auto-worker of the time: "The machine that I am on goes at such a terrific speed that I can't help stopping on it in order to keep up with it. The machine is my boss" (Meyer, "Automobile in American Life" Web). This is why Rice says that, "there is nothing as important in life as freedom and that the dominant concern ... should be with the attainment of freedom of

the body and of the mind through liberation from political autocracy [and] economic slavery ...; and the attainment of freedom of the soul through liberation from fear ..., possessiveness and self-delusion" (*Apologia Pro Vita* 3). Rice's statement describes the mood of the 1920s: technological advancement increases the degree of man's exploitation while decreasing the scope of his freedom. It also defines Rice's stand as a radical dramatist. Accordingly, *The Adding Machine* can have two possible meanings. "First, Zero (the average man) is by nature a slave and by necessity will remain one; but such pessimism is uncharacteristic of Rice. Or ... a cataclysmic reversion or change is needed to overturn, not the pattern, but the *dramatis personae* of nature, to force an exchange of position of the masters and the slaves" (Durham 52). Man should not be the slave of the machine, but rather its master.

Work affects the workers not only in the workplace, but also at home. In *The Adding Machine,* Rice explores how the domestic sphere compounds damage done at work. What is disturbing about Rice's play is not just that the workplace is alienating and workers are being replaced by machines but that there is no escape from the drudgery of work at home. Indeed, the lack of mobility at work for Zero exacerbates tensions in the home where a culture of endless accumulation of goods has made a failure to make more money through promotion a threat to family life. Furthermore, the gendered division of labour means that Mrs. Zero is also at the mercy of her husband's economic fortunes and she is equally powerless to change things. While Zero is stuck at work, she is stuck at home. Mrs. Zero's subordinate position in the home is a profound source of frustration for her and all she can do when faced with the stasis of her husband's circumstances at

work is to blame him. As such, Zero becomes for his wife a representative of the paternalistic social order that they are both victims of. As the head of the household, Zero is, in a way, a version of his own boss. According to the hierarchical society in which they find themselves, Mrs. Zero is right to blame Zero for their inability to improve their lot since the power structure of the conventional family makes it Zero's responsibility as breadwinner. While her criticisms of her husband may appear unfair, it is hardly surprising that he bears the brunt of her anger. In many ways, it is Mrs. Zero who articulates the dilemma faced by the couple; Zero is too busy trying to hold on to their only source of income. As Greenfield notes, "Although she is as frustrated by Zero's working life as Zero is himself, she is more powerful than he is and much more aware of what is happening to both of them" (42).

When she reminds Zero that "You was goin' to do wonders, you was! You wasn't goin' to be a bookkeeper long – oh, no, not you" (69), Mrs. Zero recalls an optimism destroyed by years of repetitive labour. The promise of rising through the ranks has never materialised and "days became weeks, the weeks became years, and the years decades – and still Zero is no further than his task of adding figures, and the little slip of a bride has become an ill-tempered, nagging, slovenly woman, bitter in her disillusionments and sharp with her tongue at him who is the cause of them" ("Adding Machine Replaces Poor Zero"). Unlike the wife of a worker who wrote to Ford in 1914 to complain that "The chain system you have is *a slave driver!*" (qtd. in Hounshell 259), Mrs. Zero is unable to locate the source of their problems in the impossible demands of the modern workplace.

Significantly, Rice makes the Zero family have zero children. While the absence of children is not directly remarked upon in the play, the sterility of the couple's life does tend to be reinforced by the fact that there is no next generation in evidence: there is little future here. It is possible that the absence of children in the play is also an indication of lack of sexual fulfilment since, in the memorandum to Dudley Digges, Rice writes that "Perhaps the keynote to Zero is repressed sexuality. Like so many people in America ... he is sex starved" (qtd. in Murphy 150). Just as the twenty-five-year service at the store is meaningless to his boss, the twenty-five-year marriage relationship is barren for Zero and his wife. They feel resentful towards each other and each seeks pleasure beyond the home. Their estrangement as well as their emotional and spiritual separation from each other embody their search for identity and recognition from the larger society. Mrs. Zero finds the romantic and popular movies a compensation for her dull domestic life. Zero enjoys watching his neighbour undress. His other chance for redemption is through Daisy.

Daisy is referred to in the script as "Daisy Diana Dorothea Devore," a human character with a real name. This suggests that she is genuinely different from Zero and Mrs. Zero, who are literally nothing. Unlike Zero, Daisy has not entirely lost her humanity to the machine. Like Mrs. Zero, she loves the movies, which provide her with access to the world of emotions and senses. Unlike Mrs. Zero, however, Daisy does not see in the movie world evidence of what she does not have in the real world. Instead, the movies provide her with a fantasy life that is sufficient unto itself. While working, she says to Zero that "You coulda kissed me if you wanted to.... Them kisses in the movies –

them long ones – right on the mouth –" (74). While Daisy holds out for the possibility that the movies can become real, Mrs. Zero knows that reality can never get close to the fantasy on the screen.

Zero himself does not even have recourse to the fantasy world the female characters access through the movies. Instead, his identity is completely circumscribed by the workplace. As Tolson writes, "To some extent, because [the worker's] identity remains the source of a man's motivation to sell his labour-power – capitalism reinforces patriarchal culture" (56). This is true, yet Zero is a victim of the same patriarchal culture that ostensibly gives him power in the home. Unable to demonstrate a robust masculinity at work, at home the breadwinner role is divested of all its real and symbolic capital. Since neither Zero nor Mrs. Zero is capable of consciously identifying the contradictions that have created their situation, all she can do is satirising her husband's sphere of 'real work':

> MRS. ZERO: I guess you musta had some important business to attend. Like watchin' the scoreboard. Or was two kids havin' a fight an' you was the referee? You sure do have a lot of business to attend to. It's a wonder you have time to come home at all.... Maybe the boss kept you late tonight. Tellin' you what a big noise you are and how the store couldn't 'a' got along if you hadn't been pushin' a pen for twenty-five years. Where's the gold medal he pinned on you?... [D]id you leave it on the seat of the boss's limousine when he brought you home? (77)

Greenfield sees that Mrs. Zero is powerless to target her wrath in any direction but towards Zero (42). Her assault upon her husband's failure as provider in the end provides the catalyst for Zero's fatal attack. Concerned that he will have to admit to his wife that he has been fired, Zero is left with no room to manoeuvre. In court he asks, "Where was I goin' to run to! I wasn't thinkin' about it at all, see? I'll tell you what I was thinkin' about – how I was goin' to break it to the wife about bein' canned" (85).

While the wife here offers a conventional scapegoat for Zero's loss of control, it is a sign of how limited Zero's understanding of their condition is. As Jerz points out, "He does not realize the extent to which he shares his wife's materialism ('If you was any kind of a man you'd have a decent job by now'), which defines and creates their domestic prison. While both reach for fantasies to make their individual lives more bearable, neither entertains the notion that Zero's identity as an individual might come from some arena other than work" (23-24). The demands of work have become so all-consuming that it is impossible to see any viable life beyond the constraints of the present. For Mrs. Zero, domestic drudgery does not even provide the clear cut-off point at the end of the day:

> MRS. ZERO: Tired! Where do you get that tired stuff, anyhow? What about me? Where do I come in? Scrubbin' floors an' cookin' your meals an' washin' your dirty clothes. An' you sittin' on a chair all day, just addin' figgers an' waintin' for five-thirty. There's no five-thirty for me. I don't wait for no whistle. I don't get no vacations neither.... I'd like to know where you'd be

without me. An' what have I got to show for it? – slavin' my life away to give you a home?" (68)

As Zero is a slave at work, Mrs. Zero understands that she is a slave at home. Her own powerlessness is attributed to Zero's lowly occupation and as such they are both slaves to the company inasmuch as she makes it possible for Zero to continue to work:

MRS. ZERO: I've been slavin' away for twenty-five years, makin' a home for you an' nothing; to show for it. If you was any kind of a man you'd have a decent job by now an' I'd be gettin' some comfort out of life – instead of bein' just a slave, washin' pots an' standin' over the hot stove. I've stood it for twenty-five years an' I guess I'll have to stand it twenty-five more. But don't you go startin' nothin' with women – (69).

Mrs. Zero's final reference to her husband's fidelity is perhaps a measure of her vulnerability and confusion. On one hand, her husband is unmanly because he does not have a better job; on the other, he is manly enough to "start" something with another woman. The conventionality of Mrs. Zero's complaints does not diminish the truth of her statement: she has been the invisible support that has enabled Zero to be exploited for twenty-five years and that support has gone unrewarded in much the same way as Zero's loyalty to the company has been ignored.

While Mrs. Zero does not seem to understand how the workplace has reduced her husband to an agentless automaton, she does understand what effect this has had on her.

Indeed, her perception of herself as the concealed facilitator of a patriarchal system is clear:

> MRS. ZERO: I guess I can stay up all night now washin' dishes. You should worry! That's what a man's got a wife for, ain't it? Don't he buy her her clothes an' let her eat with him at the same table? An' all she's gotta do is cook the meals an' do the washin' an' scrub the floor, an' wash the dishes when the company goes. But, believe me, you're goin' to sling a mean dish towel when the company goes tonight! (78)

While Zero declares that "I was a fool to get married.... What a chance has a guy got with a woman tied around his neck?" (73), his wife knows that it is her domestic labour that has kept things together for so long. It is true that Zero's "youthful dreams of getting ahead, of being somebody, have evaporated in the desert of everyday life" (Durham 41), but as we have seen, Mrs. Zero's youthful dreams have also soured. If Mrs. Zero questions the masculinity of her husband, Zero also wonders if it is not the opposite sex that is at the root of his problems: "Talk, talk, talk. Just like all the other women. Women make me sick.... Women make me sick. They're all alike" (70-71). In each case, the blame for the deadening effect of daily drudgery and the lack of a viable future is displaced from the workplace to the domestic sphere.

What is in fact a way of life made possible by the capitalist organisation of labour is instead imagined as a crisis of relations between men and women. Given this displacement, it is no surprise that Zero often fantasises about the death of his wife: "The time the wife had pneumonia I thought she was goin' to pass out. But she didn't," (72)

and "I wonder if I could kill the wife without anybody findin' out. In bed some night. With a pillow" (72). Mrs. Zero has, in fact, ceased to be more than an agent of oppression for Zero, who never refers to her as 'my wife' but always as 'the wife.' Furthermore, despite Mrs. Zero's constant attacks, Zero only addresses three sentences to her throughout the play. Being arrested at the very end of Scene 3, he says to her, "I gotta go with him. You'll have to dry the dishes yourself.... I killed the boss this afternoon" (81). If women "Talk, talk, talk," Zero has nothing to say to his wife beyond this final announcement.

Along with Hollywood movies, Mrs. Zero's frustration is fuelled by an obsession with respectability. "[I]f we listen to the substance of Mrs. Zero's complaints," argues J. Walker, "we hear the echo of a *resentment* that is particular to the American middle class, born of its uncomfortable capitulation to a punitive morality internalized as 'respectability'" ("Bodies" 60). Respectability functions for Mrs. Zero as a domestic form of what we have already seen as the xenophobic aggression of the workers toward those perceived to be a threat to the status quo. It is in defence of respectability that Mrs. Zero reports their disreputable neighbour to the police: "she won't be walkin' around any more nights.... Not in this house, anyhow.... The dirty bum! The idea of her comin' to live in a house with respectable people" (69). The code of respectability is also used to police her husband's behaviour: "Ain't you ever got sense enough to come home on time? Didn't I tell you we're goin' to have a lot o' company tonight?... Didn't I tell you to be home on time? I might as well talk to a stone wall" (77). As a domestic version of the boss, Mrs. Zero demands that Zero follows the same routine of punctuality he is

adhering to in the store. Besides, she sees that it is not respectable that their friends see them while eating, even if this means that she deprives Zero of his meal:

> MRS. ZERO: The company's here already. And we ain't hardly finished supper. (*She rises.*) But I'm goin' to clear off the table whether you're finished or not. If you want your supper, you got a right to be home on time.... Wait a minute! Don't open the door yet. Do you want the company to see all the mess? An' go an' put on a clean collar.... I should think after pushin' a pen for twenty-five years, you'd learn how to do it without getting' ink on your collar." (77-78)

While Palmieri argues that Zero "is obviously a brow-beaten, unsuccessful man, completely under the domination of an overbearing wife" (61), it is also true that Mrs. Zero's deployment of respectability is little more than a different version of the same mechanism of social control that keeps workers in line.

While it is Mrs. Zero who articulates the importance of respectability, Zero has also internalised the values of what is considered acceptable. Zero is unable to enjoy the Elysian Fields: "Here Zero is given ample opportunity to catch up with some of the repressions and suppressed desires of his former life, but he turns his back to them at the last moment for fear of being considered not thoroughly respectable" ("Adding Machine Replaces Poor Zero"). In the afterlife, respectability prevents him from satisfying his sexual desires. "Zero cannot shake the Puritan morality that shaped him on earth and has followed him into heaven. Prurient though he is, he cannot openly act out, or acknowledge, or give free rein to his sexual desires" (Palmieri 67). What is terrifying

here is that, even after being released from the worldly demands of automation, Zero has been shaped by its values to such an extent that he cannot free himself from its moral stranglehold. In the end, he decides to abandon the idea of living with Daisy outside marriage and to leave the Elysian Fields because he objects to existing with drunks, burglars, adulterers and blasphemers. Zero is, asserts Palmieri, "dominated by his ingrained idea of respectability" (68).

Rice's socio-economic focus demonstrates his knowledge of the impact of automation on the American worker. *The Adding Machine* registers the force with which Fordist and Taylorist structuring of the workplace have come to seep into every aspect of life. While American capitalism remained predicated on the masculinist ideal of the rugged individual, the assembly line and time-motion studies served to erode traditional masculine values among the workforce. The myth of social mobility within and beyond the workplace may have functioned as an enabling fantasy for some, but for most workers the reality of rationalised labour was an alienating evacuation of agency. Even as new mass forms of entertainment like the movies provided a screen upon which fantasies of wealth and escape from drudgery could be projected, the workplace itself was becoming increasingly regularised and restrictive. This contradiction between economic and social restriction and the unattainable promise of economic and social improvement is played out in *The Adding Machine* as a bleak domestic drama in which the narrowness of vision experienced by the protagonists exposes the way structural inequality is displaced as domestic dissatisfaction.

The Adding Machine accurately reflects the prevailing anxiety that machine civilisation was dehumanising human beings. Though Rice never fully accepted Marxist theory, his call for social protest made him affiliate with many left-wing causes. With the onset of the Depression, the villain was squarely identified as the owner of the machine, the capitalist. Hence, man's victimisation was perceived as the deliberate action of an exploiting class (Rabkin 247). In this sense, *The Adding Machine* anticipated the revolutionary spirit of the thirties which witnessed such plays as Odets's *Waiting for Lefty* and *Awake and Sing*!, which is the subject of discussion in the following chapter. Moreover, "By bridging the particulars of contemporary American working life with the universal concerns of man's identity and man's dignity, *The Adding Machine* in fact lays critical artistic and philosophical groundwork for some of the most important social dramas of the post-World War II period" (Greenfield 45). The play is a forerunner of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* in addition to Edward Albee's *The American Dream.*

Chapter III

Awake and Sing! (1935)

The Great Depression and the Crisis of the Family

In 1934, Clifford Odets wrote the original version of a play called *I got the Blues.* When he submitted it to the Group Theatre, it was rejected because, as Clurman points out, "The first act was cluttered with some rather Jewish humor and a kind of messy kitchen realism; the last act [was] almost masochistically pessimistic" (119). However, the success of Odets's *Waiting for Lefty!* encouraged the Group to produce the play under the title of *Awake and Sing!* Odets took the new title from the prophet Isaiah —, "*Awake and sing,* ye that dwell in dust" (26:19). Scanlan observes that the two titles "suggest the two dominant moods of the play (and of the Depression era) – frustration and faith. The first two acts of the play dramatize the frustration, while in the short third act decisive and positive choices are made" (185). *Awake and Sing!* opened at the Belasco Theatre on February 19, 1935, and ran for one hundred and thirty seven performances. "Clifford Odets won the favor of the majority of New York critics over night" (Edith Isaacs 50-51). Odets himself declares, "The notices were legendary" ("How a Playwright Triumphs" 75).[1]

Awake and Sing! is about the predicament of the Bergers, a lower-middle-class Jewish family which firmly endeavours "to seize and hold onto newly discovered middle class position and values" (Reynolds 94). Myron, the father, has been a haberdashery clerk for thirty years. Like Rice's Mr. Zero, Myron is, according to Block, "one of the millions

[1] This is a monologue which was originally a dialogue drawn from an interview in Hollywood with Odets. The interviewer was Arthur Wagner of the Department of Theatre at Tulane University. The interview occurred in two days in September 1961, two years before Odets's death.

oppressed by the sense of being a failure" (286). He fails to lift his family above the poverty line. In the descriptive notes that precede the printed text of the play, Odets describes him as "*heartbroken.*"[2] Casting the present away, he lives in the past. Bessie, the mother, is the matriarch. Governed, like Mrs. Zero, by a desire for middle-class respectability, she forces Hennie, her pregnant daughter, to marry innocent Sam Feinschreiber. Ralph, the son, is a clerk in a silk house. Pinched on his sixteen dollars a week salary, he desperately wants "to get to first base" (41). He sways between rebelling against his mother who refuses his marriage to a poor girl called Blanche, despising his father for his marginal emotional and financial existence at home and following the Marxist ideas of Jacob, his grandfather. Hennie, as Odets depicts her, "*is fatalistic about being trapped, but will escape if possible*" (37). At the end of the play, the family facade of unity cannot be sustained: Jacob commits suicide, Hennie elopes with a family friend named Moe and Ralph embraces his grandfather's philosophy and fixes on "organiz[ing] his fellow workers in order to erect a better world for love and labor" (Murray 39).

Odets argues that "the national trauma" of the Great Depression could be dramatised through its impact on a number of characters in a familial setting. He assumes that "the domestic experience, and not the financial statistics or mass movements, *was* the real story of the Depression" (Berkowitz 44). Odets, here, stresses the notion that dramatic form can be employed so that it mirrors the tensions taking place in an American family which is rendered to be a microscopic version of American society as a whole. Through this theatrical convention, Odets intends to attract the attention of his audience towards a

[2] Clifford Odets. *Six Plays of Clifford Odets with a Preface by the Author.* New York: The Modern Library, 1939. p. 37. All subsequent quotations from the play are cited parenthetically in the text.

common issue and then he moves on to exasperate the domestic experience. He presents a gendered reading of the American family, represented by the Bergers, which loses its original identity as a patriarchal institution.

In this chapter, I explain how Odets uses domestic realism to highlight what happens in the home when the scarcity of jobs becomes a threat. In other words, the play demonstrates how mass unemployment defies the traditional patriarchal structure of the family. I also aim to explore how *Awake and Sing!* reflects the changing nature and meaning of work during the Great Depression. The change, according to the play, also plays a vital role in ending the traditional patriarchal family. Further, there is an examination of how, in *Awake and Sing!*, an emerging matriarchal order is seen as a challenge to the masculinity of the male child. The play asks difficult questions about how the Depression has restructured the relationship between work and gender and how this influences the next generation.

The familial and social aspects of *Awake and Sing!* are connected to each other. To an interviewer, Odets insists on the social point: "No special pleading is necessary in a play that says that people should have full and richer lives" (Weales, *Odets the Playwright* 68). Odets also writes, "*All the characters in Awake and Sing! share a fundamental activity: a struggle for life amidst petty conditions*" (37). Every character strives in order to accomplish a different purpose. Bessie fights to protect her family and to keep its respectability intact in front of others. Myron attempts to achieve dreams of success. Jacob seeks to plant the principles of Marxism in Ralph and to encourage him to act

positively. Ralph is in struggle to gain a lost identity and to get rid of inferiority complexes. In the first two lines of the play, he complains, "Where's advancement down the place? Work like crazy! Think they see it? You'd drop dead first" (41). Hennie endeavours to find a happy life of her own. In a world in which "Economics comes down like a ton of coal on the head" (71), observes Herr, "Odets felt a need to give voice to the dispossessed and half-asleep" (75). The conditions that stimulate this struggle are very clear. In *Odets the Playwright*, Weales states, "It is the middle of the Depression; work is scare, dull, badly paid; simple survival is about as exalted a goal as any of the characters can hope to reach" (62).

In *Awake and Sing!*, discussion of the impact of the Depression helps to contextualise the play. Jacob differentiates to Uncle Morty, his son, between dreams of success and the American reality represented by the South:

> JACOB: In my day the propaganda was for God. Now it's for success. A boy don't turn around without having shoved in him he should make success.
>
> MORTY: Pop, you're a comedian, a regular Charlie Chaplin.
>
> JACOB: He dreams all night of fortunes. Why not? Don't it say in the movies he should have a personal steamship, pyjamas for fifty dollars a pair and a toilet like a monument? But, in the morning, he wakes up and for ten dollars he can't fix the teeth. And millions more worse off in the mills of the South – starvation wages. The blood from the workers heart. (71-72)

For Jacob, success has become a religion in modern America. In *The Adding Machine*, we saw how the female characters, in particular, were seduced by the fantasy world of the

movies. Jacob here explains how the movies promise great wealth but how this fantasy covers up the fact of great poverty in America. That is why Cantor maintains that Hollywood aims "to turn life into a cartoon and dissipate the social malaise by suggesting that life is fundamentally ridiculous and animalistic" (*Clifford Odets* 31). By attacking the American system, Jacob may just be providing an alibi for his own failure, but as a criticism of the new mass medium of the movies it is an incisive observation about the manipulation of ordinary people by spectacular images of alluring wealth. Like Odets's *Waiting for Lefty*, *Awake and Sing!* "condemns the economic system which traps the individuals into a treadmill of hopelessness" (Fleischman 129). The system makes the best use of Hollywood so that it enchants as many people as possible.

It is worth mentioning here that Hollywood has a significant role in *Awake and Sing!*. Myron and Ralph often refer to movie stars. Ralph, for example, says, "Who am I — Al Jolson?" (65) and "What do I do — go to night-clubs with Greta Garbo?" (42). The identification with these actors is an indication that Ralph feels hopeless regarding his work conditions and dissatisfied with his own lost identity. He also dreams of Hollywood fascination as a way of forgetting about his own powerlessness. He declares, "I'm flying to Hollywood by plane — that's what I'm doing" (45). The plane is a metaphor for Ralph's romantic hopes. G. Miller observes that "for Odets, the media serve as stimuli for the emotional life of his characters.... Since these images are clearly out of reach, Odets uses the movies and the dreams they perpetuate to suggest that the new generation will progress no further than the old" (37). Ralph's idealism is revealed here. The obsession with Hollywood, in fact, does not help the characters to change their lot. Instead, the

discrepancy between the real and the dream world increases their sense of failure, futility and paralysis. This assumption is confirmed by Jacob's previous speech.

Actually, the Depression was accompanied by a collapse of industry, a fall in working hours, a decline of wages and scarcity of available jobs. Kirkendall observes its impact, when he says:

> It damaged economically and psychologically the very men upon which the economy had become so very dependent. Thus, ... business leaders cut wages, prices, production and employment and refused to invest and loan.... Industrial profits after taxes dropped from $8.3 billion in 1929 to a minus $3.4 billion in 1932.... Private investment in the American economy dropped from $16 billion in 1929 to $900 million in 1932. (8)

The mass unemployment of the Depression radically challenged the conventional American ideology of self-sufficiency and rugged individualism. Where there is no work and where the successful are fired as easily as the unsuccessful, where is the evidence that the strong and ambitious survive? Freidel argues that the boom years of the 1920s enabled the ideology of individualism to flourish; this came to an end in the 1930s (293). However, the legacy of the individualistic creed was that unemployment and poverty were often read as personal rather than systemic failures. Kirkendall notes that, by January 1930, unemployment was estimated at four million. By 1931, it had reached eight million; by the start of 1932, eleven and half million; by the beginning of 1933 fourteen and half million and by March of 1933, more than fifteen million. Long-term unemployment left many people desperate. Some sold fruit or begged for money on the

street corners. They lived in "shanty towns, flophouses, caves, pipes and parks." Some were even pleased to go to jail to secure both food and shelter (9-10).

To oppose Uncle Morty's assumption that there is no suffering under the Depression, Jacob reminds his son of what happens in many parts of the nation:

> MORTY: The country's all right. A duck quacks in every pot!
>
> JACOB: You never heard how they shoot down men and women which ask a better wage? Kentucky 1932?... Pittsburgh, Passaic, Illinois – slavery – it begins where success begins in a competitive system. (72)

Here the ideology of success is what initiates the suffering of the many and calls for a living wage produces the violence of capital as it defends its vested interests. McElvaine argues that the already existing gross economic inequality in the United States was among the causes of the suffering inflicted by the Great Depression. According to the Brookings Institution Study *America's Capacity to Consume*, the income of about twenty four thousand families was equal to that of more than eleven and half million poor and lower-middle-class families. On one hand, the former rich families had income that reached $100.000. On the other hand, seventy-one percent of American families earn under $2500 per annum. In 1929, the income of the five hundred and thirteen richest families reached about $1 million (38). As a result, says Kirkendall, "by 1929, more than 60 percent of the population were below the poverty line" (6). Such a phenomenon also had drastic effects upon American mass consumption. Dulles declares that the misdistribution severely constrained the total purchasing power of the country with reference to the continuous increase of productive power. Whereas a lot of money was

being corporately invested or saved, consumers had very little cash. "This meant that excess funds were being used not only for enlarging the industrial plant beyond effective needs, but for unrestrained speculation in the security markets, while the public lacked the resources to buy ... the expanded output of factory and mill" (339).

Since Odets is concerned with giving voice to a familial response to an economically hard time, he utilises domestic realism. Before showing how he uses it in *Awake and Sing!*, it is important to mention what this genre of realism means and how it has made an appearance in American stage. According to Berkowitz, domestic realism is about not only "recognized people in a recognized world," but it is also about "the personal lives" of these persons. It is either a drama composed of a cast of only family members performed in a sitting room or the "domestic" location expands to include an office and a group of friends. In either case, the topics and incidents are portrayed in "small and localized terms." Such plays are "about love and marriage, or earning a living, or dealing with a family crisis" (3). In this way, the dramatist manages to sustain the sense of the family through domestic realism. Berkowitz adds that domestic drama was not American invention. Through this dramatic mode, Ibsen and Chekhov depicted realistic personae in domestic circumstances in order to deal with "larger social and moral issues" (3).

In American theatre, this tradition began at the advent of the twentieth century at the hands of the Provincetown Players – especially Eugene O'Neill and Susan Glaspell. "It is generally credited with having rescued drama from the 'cheer-the-hero-hiss-the-villain' melodrama that was its antecedent." On account of domestic realism, drama was

"legitimized as a serious literary form" (Schlueter 16). Melodrama was "the *bête noire* of the realist theater critic ... [owing to] its conventional characters, its oversimplified personification of good and evil, its contrived plot, its cultivation of the exotic, its sensationalism in staging, and its overall attempt to make the false seem true" (Murphy 5). Berkowitz argues that by the 1930s, American playwrights discovered that domestic realism was their most efficient means for dealing with broader issues. In other words, they found out that could show the simple episodes in the daily life of ordinary individuals in order to mirror the larger and outsider world. As a result, "the insight becomes more than merely technical. Dramatists discovered that the real story of, say, the Depression was ... in the ways it affected a family in its living room. From there it was a small step to the discoveries of the 1940s and 1950s that purely personal experiences, even those without larger social implications, were valuable and dramatic in themselves" (3). What is paradoxical, here, is that while capitalists displayed little or no regard to the struggles inside the households of their vulnerable employees, this vulnerability was the focus and inspiration for the realist writers.

In the post-World War II era, domestic realism was employed by Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams in their early plays such as *All my Sons* (1947) and *The Glass Menagerie* (1945); by Eugene O'Neill in his *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956); by Lillian Hellman and Lorraine Hansberry in such works as *The Autumn Garden* (1951) and *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) and by Edward Albee in his *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1962). More modern plays of this literary convention include Arthur Miller's *The*

Ride Down Mount Morgan (1991), Edward Albee's *Marriage Play* (1986), Sam Shepard's *Buried Child* (1978) and Beth Henley's *Crimes of the Heart* (1981).

Referring to Odets's domestic realism in *Awake and Sing!*, G. Miller maintains that the characters are regularly confined to one setting, the Bergers' flat. (*Clifford Odets* 34). The flat consists of two rooms described by Odets as follows:

> *These two rooms are typically furnished. There is a curtain between them. A small door off the front room leads to JACOB's room. When his door is open, one sees a picture of SACCO and VANZETTI on the wall and several shelves of books. Stage left of this door presents the entrance to the foyer hall of the apartment. The two other bedrooms of the apartment are off this hall, but not necessarily shown. Stage left of the dinning room presents a swinging door which opens on the kitchen.* (40)

The lives of the characters are contained within the domestic walls, with Jacob's radical credentials on display but partitioned off in a separate room. Cantor comments, "It is clear that a major theme in Odets' plays is that the middle-class family is a social trap which the individual must escape to achieve his human potential as a member of the family of man" (*Clifford Odets* 21). Jacob is entrapped because he loses every job he gets and, as a result, he is provided by Bessie and Morty. Hennie is obliged by her mother's middle-class decorum to be a prisoner in a loveless marriage through which she can eliminate a potential scandal. Similarly, Ralph is always deprived of every attempt to be independent so that he, with his sixteen dollars a week salary, remains within the home. How to get out of this trap is at the core of *Awake and Sing!*.

Through committing suicide, Jacob is the first person to leave the family forever. As a Marxist, Jacob is the antithesis of Bessie, the advocate of middle-class respectability. He warns her that he will never grant her the chance to mould Ralph in her image; he would rather die first. As Murray explains, Jacob commits suicide "in order to provide Ralph with insurance money that will enable the boy to escape the dominance of the family and its mean, necessitous existence, ... to prove his worth by taking, for once in his life, a decisive action ("DO!") and also to expiate the guilt he feels over his acquiescence in Hennie's marriage to Sam" (38). The familial snare in *Awake and Sing!* also stimulates both the children's dissatisfaction with the status quo and their hopes of achieving independent identity. The outcome of mixing these feelings is a sense of disruption. Reviewing Odets's play, Atkinson wrote in *The New York Times*: "The home-life of his Bronx family is volcanic. His characters are drawn in several directions." Hence, the flat is turned into a combat zone in which the frequent arguments between Bessie, on one hand, and Ralph and Hennie, on the other hand, are given voice.

The family and the immediate failed communication between its members are Odets's main concern. Deserting a husband and a son, Hennie seeks freedom with a lover away from the family boundaries. She "is swept along by her passions and decides to ignore the human cost and leave a life founded on lies and hypocrisy in a desperate bid for happiness" (Cantor, "The Family as Theme" 132). As I will show at the end of this chapter, Ralph also determines to abandon the ideology that governs the Berger household and to be a revolutionary. Odets's intention is clear here: he presents the domestically irritating system as an allegory for a wider protest. As Scanlan notes, "he

uses the intolerable family situation as an indicator of the need for social change. The old family must be destroyed along with the failing social and economic system. The family battle is a paradigm for the political battle which needs to be waged" (184-185).

Further, the non-family members, such as Moe, are considered to be family members due to their regular existence in the Bergers' household. (See Figure 4.)

Figure 4. The Group Theatre production of *Awake and Sing!*, New York, 1935. Direction by Harold Clurman, setting by Boris Aronson

G. Miller states that all the characters are so knowledgeable of each other that they are able to predict the other's speech at a given moment: they have heard it all before (*Clifford Odets* 34). For example, Hennie furiously shouts to the face of her mother, "Day in and Day out pestering. Why are you always right and no one else can say a word?" (53), in response to the latter's attempt to summon Dr. Cantor to examine her daughter. However, in the words of Warshow, the characters "have ceased to communicate; each confronts his own unhappiness, using language primarily as an instrument of self-expression and a weapon of defence. It is as if no one really listens to anyone else; each

takes his own line and the significant connections between one speech and another are ... in the heavy emotional climate of the family" (35). Since each character has his own way of life, the audience can witness a war of ideologies in the play. While Bessie violently defends her adoption of middle-class respectability and materialism, Marxist Jacob criticises her for the sake of the survival of the new generation. The household "is full of tensions, frustrations and rivalries. 'Everybody hates, nobody loves,' is the way Jacob characterizes the situation" (Kaplan 584). Hence, language causes the Bergers to abandon rather than approach each other. The only two characters who have the same mentality and communicate well are Ralph and his grandfather. However, Warshow refers to the significant role played by the family atmosphere: it is the umbrella that shadows and temporarily unites the Bergers in spite of the argumentative and self-centred nature of their talk.

According to Herr, "realism in *Awake and Sing!* is not just a style of production but takes full manifestation in the material objects surrounding the Bergers. Food is everywhere in the play" (75). Despite being set during the Depression, the house is well-stocked; clearly this is a household that is not immediately suffering from deprivation. At the same time, the insecurity brought about by the Depression threatens to encroach upon the home at every point. Eating becomes an occasion when the members of the family complain the blues of the Depression. Herr also maintains that, in *Awake and Sing!*, there is a profoundly "ideological" importance attached to home and family because of the concern with "dinnertime." (See figure 5.) For Bessie, the Sunday dinner indicates that

Figure 5. The Berger family is at dinner. The revival of *Awake and Sing!*, The Belasco Theatre, New York, April 17, 2006.

the family is "respectable." Similarly, she employs invitations to the household table to "include or exclude" persons from the family. When Hennie finds out that she is pregnant, the mother announces that the family dinner will be a means to make Sam marry her daughter. On the contrary, the exclusion of Ralph's girlfriend from meals means keeping her out of the family circle (76).

It is worth mentioning that the characters of *Awake and Sing!* cling to a kind of language that realistically shows the effect of the Depression. Their realistic speech contributes to the gloomy and frustrating atmosphere that pervades the play. For instance, they utter many words that carry the meaning of death: "dead," "die," "suicide," "grave," "corpse," "coffin," "buried," "dying day," "knock head off," "kill," and "cutthroat".

These words spread throughout the play: "die" is heard about twelve times and "dead" about ten times. In the first sentence of the play, Ralph complains, "Where's advancement down the place? Work like crazy! ... You'd drop dead first" (41). This opening suggests that the audience is going to watch a struggle, as Odets maintains. Ralph's dissatisfaction, frustration and hope for change are recognised as well. "Die" is used in different contexts and for various purposes: to delineate the extent of deprivation, to indicate impossibility, to mean sacrifice and to express love. The characters resort to the language of death even when they joke:

> MORTY: ... Some day I'll leave you a little nest egg. You like eggs? Ha?
>
> HENNIE: When? When I'm dead and buried?
>
> MORTY: No, when *I'm* dead and buried. Ha, ha, ha. (67)

Though the end of the play is supposed to evoke hope and optimism, Ralph refers to death four times. He says, "Let me die like a dog, if I can't get more from life.... Did Jake die for us to fight about nickels? No! "Awake and sing," he said.... The night he died, I saw it like a thunderbolt! I saw he was dead and I was born!" (100-101). This speech gives him a push towards revolution and change. Jacob's death magnifies Ralph's responsibility as a rebel. It is the force which inspires him to have a better life. In general, the characters of *Awake and Sing*! cling to the language of death because it is the kind of language that copes with the Depression which evokes a language that, in turn, reflects the spiritual, emotional and financial death of the people.

The Great Depression put an immense strain on the familial life. The institution of the family was seriously undermined by the lack of work, money and self-esteem. As we

have already seen in *The Adding Machine*, unemployment destabilises the traditional patriarchal structure of the home and this challenge to the male breadwinner's authority is also present in *Awake and Sing!* McElvaine maintains that mass unemployment resulted in defying the status of the father in the sense that the more vulnerable he was economically, the more he lost dominance at home. Being reliant upon governmental relief signalled a dependency at odds with the rugged individualism of the ideology of individual self-sufficiency and stigmatised many men as somehow unable to provide for their families. To be "on relief" was a disgrace inflicted upon the family as a whole. Furthermore, finding himself at home rather than at work, the father often found himself involved in conventionally female tasks of housework and childcare. Quarrels between him and other members of the family became frequent. In some cases, family poverty meant that the father was required to wear his son's clothes. "A North Dakota farmer says 'They're all we've got now. We take turns wearing'em'" (180-181). In short, the Depression turned the hierarchy of the family upside down.

In *Awake and Sing!*, although this kind of hardship is not yet upon the family, it is an ever-present threat. Bessie observes that "They threw out a family on Dawson Street today. All the furniture on the sidewalk. A fine old woman with grey hair" (43). Their discussion also demonstrates that suicide has become a common reaction to financial adversity:

> MOE: Still jumping off the high buildings like flies – the big shots who lost all their cocoanuts. Pfft !
>
> JACOB: Suicides!

MOE: Plenty can't take it....

MORTY: I saw it happen Monday in my building. My hair stood up how they shovelled him together – like a pancake – a bankrupt manufacturer.

MOE: No brains.

MORTY: Enough ... all over the sidewalk. (60)

The sense of the world falling apart outside the home is clear here. While the Berger family appears to be holding up under the pressures, Morty notes the difficulty of raising a family at present: "To raise a family nowadays you must be a damn fool" (62). The Berger family's situation is grim. It is obvious that, without Ralph's income, they would go hungry. As Warshow notes, the life which the Bergers "established for themselves is not different from the characteristic life of the rest of their society: its primary concerns are economic security and social prestige" (63). Bessie sums up their awkward situation as follows:

BESSIE *(to Morty)*: Ralphie took another cut down the place yesterday.

MORTY: Business is bad....

BESSIE: Do something for Ralphie down there.

MORTY: What can I do? I mentioned it to Glicksman. He told me they squeezed out half the people....

BESSIE: What's gonna be the end? Myron's working only three days a week now.

MYRON: It's conditions.

BESSIE: Hennie's married with a baby ... money just don't come in. I never saw conditions should be so bad.

MORTY: Times'll change.

MOE: The only thing'll change is my underwear. (61)

Moe ironically closes the door to any glimpse of future hope. This is why Rabkin remarks, "The spine of the play is the conviction that the world of the Bergers must be changed if human potentiality is to be realized" (185). One of these changes should be the restoration of the authority of the family man. In fact, Odets argues that the Depression caused the female to become the decision maker in the household.

In *Awake and* Sing*!*, Bessie becomes the head of the Berger family. Mishra asserts, "Favourably for her, the Depression ... provides her an opportunity to assume headship" (75). She tells Hennie, "It's time you already had in your head a serious thought. A girl twenty-six don't grow younger. When I was your age it was already a big family with responsibility" (44). Later, she also asserts to Ralph, "Here I'm not only the mother, but also the father. The first two years I worked in a stocking factory for six dollars while Myron Berger went to law school. If I didn't worry about the family who would?" (95). The struggle between Bessie and Myron lies in her ability to proudly appropriate for herself the masculine traits of courage and competence in earning money as well as a true sense of family responsibility. Unlike Mrs. Zero who is a house wife, Bessie is capable of earning income. This puts her on an equal financial footing with the men and gives her the authority to criticise their inadequacies. Indeed, she is always dubious of Myron's adequacy as a provider and denies that he has a real sense of family responsibility. As Vera-Sanso illustrates, "Self-reliance refers to not being dependent or answerable to others as well as to a strong sense of responsibility as the family provider" (184). Myron has neither the competence nor the courage to face the risks and difficulties of earning an

income. Edley and Wetherell explain that mothering activities and financial independence of the father decide the degree of authority assigned in the home. They write, "Power within families is a complex matter and women clearly can be powerful in certain respects through their mothering activities, but to the extent that power within the family and in society more greatly depends on financial resources and freedom for paid work, then most men are in a more favourable position than most women" (120). The first part of the previous statement applies to Bessie, whereas the second one is *not* applicable to Myron.

Myron is both irresponsible and marginal. He is the opposite of the family man who is "disciplined, economically responsible and who, perhaps above all, embodies a particular kind of authority over women and children in the family" (Collier 202). Without the power of the breadwinner, his position is severely diminished in the household. In *Intimate Fatherhood: A Sociological Analysis*, Dermott defines breadwinning as "the extent to which an important aspect of the good father is to provide financially for his children through engagement with the public world of work" (27). Since Myron is unemployed, there is no way for him to claim this privilege. It is true that Myron's growing inability to fulfil the role of breadwinner within his household has a part to play in making Bessie head the family. This suggests a relationship between unemployment and the changes in the attitudes of the wife. It is also a clear proof of how unemployment affects the dignity of the husband. Redundancy exposes Myron to a painful taste of life. He loses his key arena for achievement, status, power, self-respect and self-sufficiency. Once he feels a lack of these qualities, confusion and apathy become his alternative lot.

Moreover, unemployment challenges Myron's sense of masculinity since men sustain male attitudes and behaviour through work; being at home places Myron under the feminine authority of the household. Thus, his access to Bessie's domain as well as the loss of his own self-esteem aggravate his uncertainty about his proper masculine behaviour. Shuman sheds much light on the present image of this man:

> The sum total of his existence adds up to zero; he has grown so used to frustration that he accepts it as commonplace in his life. Only a miracle can alter Myron's existence, so there is no reason for him not to believe in miracles. Without this hope, life would be utterly meaningless and hopeless to him. Petty gambling, in his life, fills the need which Marxism fills in the lives of Jake and Ralph. ("*Awake and Sing!*" 170)

Shuman refers to the absolute marginalisation of Myron's life. Indeed, Myron's evasion of family responsibilities is immediately replaced by Bessie's progress to control everyone and everything within the home. His sense of crisis towards himself and towards the family is also caused by the erosion of the material and ideological bases of his identity as a father in addition to the evident failure to control or negotiate with Bessie. In other words, with the economic catastrophe dominating the American scene, the loss of self-esteem allied with the paralysis in meeting normal daily family expectations are so substantial that they result in the abnormal breakdown of the patriarchal authority.

Many incidents throughout the play prove the unconventional nature of the Berger family. For instance, when Bessie finds out that Hennie is illegitimately pregnant, Myron

does nothing but cry. By crying, Myron violates the requirements of the male role which, "as personally and socially defined, requires man to appear tough, objective, striving, achieving, unsentimental and emotionally unexpressive" (Jourard 22). This role is more applicable to Bessie than to Myron. In contrast to Myron's behaviour, she appears to be the one who is in control of the situation. She investigates the matter thoroughly:

> BESSIE: A long time you know him? You were sleeping by a girl from the office Saturday nights? You slept good, my lovely lady. You'll go to him ... he'll marry you.
>
> HENNIE: That's what you say.
>
> BESSIE: That's what I say! He'll do it, take MY word he'll do it!
>
> HENNIE: Where?...
>
> BESSIE: What? ... You don't know where he is?
>
> HENNIE: No. (54)

The reader should be reminded that Myron and Jacob passively witness this dialogue. Since Bessie is the decision maker in the family, she decides to marry her pregnant daughter to innocent Sam and, after marriage, to delude him into thinking that the baby is his. It does not matter to her whether the solution is ethical or not as long as it is a shield against the Bergers' disgrace. Weales comments, "Bessie is supposed to be a kind of accidental villainess, the creature of circumstances, who fights the wrong battle—to succeed within the society not to change it—and cripples the family even as she protects them" ("The Group Theatre and its Plays" 80). Like Mrs. Zero, Bessie is produced by circumstances. The conditions that created Bessie's villainy can be classified into general and particular: the Depression and Hennie's pregnancy. She paralyses Ralph by

deforming the development of his own masculinity; she also suffocates Hennie the moment she forces her to marry someone the daughter never loves.

Bessie's strength of character is realised not only by the Bergers but also by the outsiders. When Sam becomes dissatisfied with Hennie's bad behaviour towards him, he goes to the Berger household to complain. As soon as he comes in, the first words he utters are "Where's Mom?" (78). Again, it is Bessie who takes the lead. To calm Sam down, she says, "Take off your coat and hat. Have a seat. Excitement don't help. Myron, make tea.... (MYRON goes.)" (79-80). In a very decisive meeting that concerns the possible termination of a daughter's family life, the father's responsibility is only preparing a hot drink. Myron is coerced to deviate from the normal role of the father as suggested by Collier who writes, "The father's primary role must be, by his work, to generate resources which provide for the support and maintenance of his child and himself, rather than remain at home performing what traditionally is regarded as the mother's role" (196-197). Supporting Collier's point of view, Hill says that "when the father of a family ceases to be in full-time paid work, the balance of the family shifts. He feels he loses both his occupational and his sexual identity. He also comes under pressure to take on a more 'feminine' role: doing the housework" (32). In a third occasion, Myron just opens the door so that Schlosser, the janitor, comes in to speak with Bessie about the dirt her dog makes in the hallway.

Here, it is worth shedding light on two other dwarfed males in the play. Sam Feinschreiber seems to be a duplicate of Myron. In the same way, Hennie finds a model

in the image of her mother. It is Sam, not Hennie, who changes Leon's diapers. Hennie says to him, "Go on home if you're so anxious. A full tub of diapers is waiting," (91) in reply to his worry about the baby who is alone for the whole day with the baby sitter. Another conversion of positions takes place when Sam goes to Bessie to complain. It is highlighted by Jacob when he says, "In my day the daughter came home. Now comes the son-in-law" (78). The other castrated male is Schlosser. Describing him, Odets writes that his "*wife ran away with another man and left him with a young daughter who in turn ran away and joined a burlesque show as a chorus girl. The man suffers rheumatic pains. He has lost his identity twenty years before*" (39). The wife's escape suggests that Schlosser is a failure as a husband and, later, as a father. The purpose of this description is, as Shuman perceives, "to point to the sort of situation which Hennie is creating for her child and husband" (*Clifford Odets* 57). In the end, when Moe tempts Hennie to desert Sam, Schlosser's ghost is summoned. This turns Sam, already a cipher, into another emasculated Schlosser.

Myron's indulgence in the past and his dream of success ("You can buy a ticket for fifty cents and win fortunes.... A butcher on Beck Street won eighty thousand dollars" [43]) reveal him to be of little use as head of the household. He laments the past glorious days of Roosevelt. He also has many references to the past throughout the play. Cantor sheds light on some aspects of this past:

> Myron ... survives by ignoring the facts of the Depression.... Nearly everything Myron says or does harks back to the past: ... his treatment of Hennie as though she were still a little girl ...; his conviction that "people

> aren't the same." He takes solace ... in idly boasting about his two years of law school and his job as a jewellery salesman on the road before he married. Even the weather will launch him on a voyage into yesterday. (*Clifford Odets* 32)

This escape is necessary for Myron because it helps him endure the overwhelming status-quo under the Depression. However, it makes him absent-minded and ready to be led by his wife. Weales comments on his escape through dreaming, "When [Myron] does emerge from the past, it is not to stop in the present but to move on to a moment when luck will carry him into a comfortable future" (*Odets the Playwright* 62). He dreams of winning the lottery one day. So, he keeps entering contests with the faith that "someone's got to win. The government isn't gonna allow everything to be a fake" (87). A last means through which he can achieve survival is the cinema. "For failures like Myron, ..., the movies are a necessary dream factory because they make life bearable" (Cantor, *Clifford Odets* 30). They charge Myron with a phony sense of power which is soon shattered once it is connected with the dark present. However, it is a temporary feeling that lessens the bitter taste of the Depression.

Bessie degrades Myron, relegating him to the status of a mere "*follower*" (37). What is most troubling is that she adheres to this humiliating attitude even in front of others. She regularly embarrasses him and minimises his role as a husband and a father: she always orders him about. During an important argument between Bessie and Ralph about who is eligible to have Jacob's insurance money, Myron hands Bessie the alarm clock before heading for bed. This action is symbolic in the sense that it enhances Bessie's image as

the controller of events. The family might be compared to the clock which Bessie winds as she likes. The action also delineates Myron's trivial role in relation to that of Bessie. After Bessie's leaving to the bedroom, Myron starts to speak about a totally different topic as a declaration that he has nothing to do with the family issues:

> MYRON [addressing Ralph]: I guess I'm no prize bag ...
>
> BESSIE (*from within*): Come to bed, Myron.
>
> MYRON (*tears page off calendar*): Hmmm ... (*Exits to her.*) (96)

How Bessie speaks of Myron and how she deals with him are crucial in building the psychology of the children. Ralph and Hennie drastically lose their regard for him. Their trust in him is demolished. The audience feels shocked while witnessing their attempt to abuse him. Describing the way in which his father obeys his mother's request to go to bed, Ralph says to Moe:

> RALPH: Look at him, draggin' after her like an old shoe.
>
> MOE: Punch drunk. (96)

It is clear that there is no warm relationship between Ralph and his father. Dermott maintains, "The parent-child relationship has financial responsibility as a central component" (26). Being unemployed, Myron gives up that duty which is supposed to wrap him with authority and prestige. What is worse is that Ralph becomes the provider of the family, in general, and of his father, in particular. This, of course, negatively affects his attitude towards Myron. In *The American Man,* Pleck quotes a husband who declares that the most difficult aspect about redundancy is the degradation within the family. It makes the father feel useless to have his dependents bring in money to the

family while he does not provide "a nickel." It is terrible to him, because now "the tables are turned" and he has to ask his child for money (341-342). This is what happens in *Awake and Sing!* at the hands of Ralph. At the end of the play, referring to his father, he declares to Hennie, "When I look at him, I'm sad" (100).

Moreover, Ralph's behaviour indicates that there is a long history of bad feelings towards his father. When Ralph discovers that his parents have deceived Sam, he does not allow Myron to justify the crime. Ralph does not act politely to stop his father. Instead, he shows his contempt for him:

> MYRON (*after a pause*): Let me say something son.
>
> RALPH: Take your hand away! Sit in a corner and wag your tail. Keep on boasting you went to law school for two years.
>
> MYRON: I want to tell you ——
>
> RALPH: You never in your life had a thing to tell me. (84)

Here lies more evidence of Myron's insignificant paternal role. Ralph never feels his father's emotional and spiritual existence at home. Hennie also feels the same. In her first sentence in the play, she satirises her father:

> MYRON: ... merit never goes unrewarded. Teddy Roosevelt used to say ——
>
> HENNIE: It rewarded you —— thirty years a haberdashery clerk! (JACOB laughs.) (41)

As soon as the curtain of Act I is raised, the audience is exposed to the diminution of the father as a moral authority.

Bessie emasculates not only her husband, but also her father. At the start of Act I, while the family is having supper, Jacob's main task at home is revealed:

> BESSIE: You gave the dog eat?
>
> JACOB: I gave the dog eat. (42)

In *Awake and Sing!*, a dog seems to be more important than a father. "Jacob is reduced from father to a child in a role reversal and distortion that has fatal consequences" (Woolf 53). Being dressed to go to a show with Myron and Hennie, Bessie also orders Jacob to "take Tootsie on the roof." (45) The comparison between these two activities denotes what a disgraced life Jacob has. Later, because Bessie does not want to give Jacob the opportunity to interfere in Sam's complaints about Hennie, she utters the same order twice and adds "And you don't let her go under the water tank." (82) The fifth and last time Jacob is ordered to look after Tootsie occurs following a clash between Ralph and his parents after he finds out that they have trapped Sam. Reaching the most extreme point of bitterness, Bessie discharges her wrath upon her father. As Rabkin points out, "Bessie ... is driven to cruel action by the very intensity of her desire to protect her family, to prevent its decay at all costs.... [T]he core of Bessie's being [is that] the family must be preserved" (183). The mother's only motivation is to do as much as possible to defend her kids against harm:

> BESSIE: ... What are you waiting for? I didn't tell you twice already about the dog? You'll stand around with Caruso and make a bughouse. It ain't enough all day long. Fifty times I told you I'll break every record in the house. *(She*

brushes past him, breaks the records, comes out.) ... Now maybe you learned a lesson. *(Pause)*

JACOB *(quietly)*: Bessie, new lessons ... not for an old dog. (84-85)

This is Jacob's last appearance on stage. Shocked and frustrated, he commits suicide. Once he told Bessie, "Some day I'll come out I'll —.... I'll leave the house for good!" (55-56). Hence, Bessie is the chief reason for her father's death. She deserves Jacob's saying, "Tootsie is my favourite lady in the house" (85). In addition, Jacob is the person who "washes dishes" (50) in the home. According to Edley and Wetherell, "Men's experiences and forms of masculinity will be strongly structured by their domestic practices and by their non-participation in domestic work. Masculinity is defined just as powerfully by what men do *not* do, as it is through the ways they *do* labour" (121). According to Edley's and Wetherell's premise, Jacob's obligatory dealing with the domestic chores, instead of the female figures of the play, signifies his lowly position within the hierarchy of the home.

Woolf refers to another reason for Jacob's emasculation at the hands of his daughter. The critic assumes that power is traditionally inherent in the father owing to his major stand as a pious head of the household. However, the character of Bessie mirrors "the secularisation" of the family life of Jewish-Americans. As a representative of Jewish-American households, the Bergers are "secularised" and, subsequently, "the patriarchal figures become impotent or comic or defeated." Religion inspires a moral authority in the father so that it helps him perform roles, such as guidance and punishment, which add to his heading of the family circle. As a result, the lack of religious spirit within the home

contributes to the succeeding transition of authority from the masculine to the feminine (52). This is another indication of the chaos that prevailed in the United States during the Depression era.

Berkowitz illustrates that the Great Depression had "a cataclysmic, end-of-the-world" feature that indicated the failure of the American economic system. This conviction, or even doubt, could result in more serious social and moral hesitation. "Was the American Dream ... being proved invalid?... [I]t was neither accident nor disloyalty that led a generation of young idealists to consider socialism or even Soviet-style communism as an alternative to an apparently dying system" (43-44). In other words, there was a confusion of values. Thence, secularisation and the Depression could be linked to each other. The following dialogue clarifies a religious debate within the Berger family:

> MYRON: People can't believe in God in Russia. The papers tell the truth, they do.
>
> JACOB: So you believe in God ... you got something for it? You! You worked for all the capitalists. You harvest the fruit from your labor? You got God! But the past comforts you? The present smiles on you, yes? It promises you the future something? Did you found a piece of earth where you could live like a human being and die with the sun on your face? Tell me, yes, tell me. I would like to know myself. But on these questions, on this theme – the struggle for existence – you can't make an answer. The answer I see in your face ... the answer is your mouth can't talk. In this dark corner, you sit and you die. But abolish private property! (73)

Jacob believes that religion provides man with neither relief nor security. As Woolf maintains, "[T]he speech contains a view of human experience.... In short, the Depression is the filter through which Odets perceives human experience.... Such a perspective ... characterizes life as defined through fear, insecurity, [and] marginality" (54). Thus, Jacob's loss of his patriarchal voice appears to be connected to his rejection of God. His secular statements evoke the trivialising comments from his daughter and son. As Bessie exclaims, "Noo, go fight City Hall!," Morty degrades his him, "He's Drunk" (73).

Like Myron, Jacob is a man of words not deeds. As Odets describes him, "*He is a sentimental idealist with no power to turn ideal to action*" (38). Jacob runs off to something concrete that symbolises something abstract. He "repeatedly seeks refuge in his records, a refuge tinged with the sadness of a lost idealism" (Herr 77). Generally speaking, in *Awake and Sing!*, the male characters are essentially sentimental idealists who think and dream while the women are portrayed as practical and driven by responsibility toward others. In the opinion of G. Miller, "The dream may be a regression to a past when life was seemingly better, or a vision of a glorious future when the structure of society will be different, or a romantic present perspective" (37). There is a conflict between ideas and rhetoric, at one extreme, and decisions and actions, at the other extreme: the male has ideas but does not act while the female acts because someone has to do something. A contrast between the promised paradise on earth of which Caruso, in one of Jacob's records, sings and the material reality of the Bergers is also obvious. Like Myron's living in the past, these records stimulate dreams that separate the listener

from responsibility and positivity. Jacob confesses his personal failure to Ralph, "Look on me and learn what to do, boychick. Here sits an old man polishing tools.... Look on this failure and see for seventy years he talked, with good ideas but only in the head.... A man who had golden opportunities but drank instead a glass of tea" (77-78).

Further, that Jacob's idealism is represented by records and books refers to the control of materialism over man's life even if he is an idealist. His son tells him, "Without a rich man you don't have a roof over your head. You don't know it?" (72) Herr elucidates, "The physical presence of capitalism is an indisputable fact, for it is invested in the countless physical objects surrounding [the characters]. Thus, Morty and Bessie can point directly to the food on the table as evident that they are well-off, while Jacob can cling only to a vague idealism that is itself invested in material objects" (78). Here, Herr raises a vital issue: which saves man under the Depression, materialism or idealism? According to Uncle Morty and Bessie, such material products as food are more important than dreamy idealism to every American family. This point of view is considered a striking difference between Jacob's ideology, on one hand, and that of his offspring, on the other hand.

Jacob's Marxist points of view are also underestimated by Bessie. This is manifested the moment Jacob desires to do something that prevents Bessie from betraying Sam. (See figure 6.) Since he is nothing in the family, Jacob can do nothing. As Murray stresses, "Dependent on Bessie, sleeping with records and books, stripped of all dignity – Jacob is

a sorry figure" (43). In a verbally violent discussion with his daughter, Jacob is conquered:

JACOB: This is serious?

BESSIE: ... He'll [Sam] come tomorrow night for supper. By Saturday they're engaged.

JACOB: Such a thing you can't do.

BESSIE: Who asked your advice?

JACOB: Such a thing —

BESSIE: Never mind!

Figure 6. From left, Zoë Wanamaker as Bessie, Lauren Ambrose as Hennie, and Ben Gazzara as Jacob in the revival of *Awake and Sing!*, The Belasco Theatre, April 17, 2006.

JACOB: The lowest from the low!

BESSIE: Don't talk! I'm warning you! A man who don't believe in God —— with crazy ideas —

JACOB: So bad I never imagined you could be.

BESSIE: Maybe if you didn't talk so much it wouldn't happen like this. You with your ideas —— I'm a mother. I raise a family they should have respect.

JACOB: Respect? (*Spits.*) Respect! For the neighbour's opinion! You insult me, Bessie!

BESSIE: Go in your room, Papa. Every job he ever had he lost because he's got a big mouth. He opens his mouth and the whole Bronx could fall in. Everybody said it ——

MYRON: Momma, they'll hear you down the dumbwaiter.

BESSIE: A good barber not to hold a job a week.... (55)

Bessie provides the audience with another justification for the emasculation of her father: instead of supporting the family financially, Jacob is a burden. Furthermore, Weales argues, "In this scene, there is a good example of one of Bessie's tactics as a fighter.... She tries to escape Jacob's accusation ("The lowest from the low!"), to climb out of the stench of her decision, [and] to regain respectability by dismissing him as an irresponsible critic" (*Odets the Playwright* 68). Bessie is willing to violate the respect of her father for the sake of keeping her daughter respectable. Pinpointing the shattering impact of Hennie's marriage upon Jacob and Ralph, Shuman writes, "The effect of this marriage is far-reaching: Not only is Hennie to find herself in a situation which she can not endure, but Jake and Ralph are completely nonplused by the basic immorality of what Bessie has done to Hennie and to the likeable, naïve Sam Feinschreiber" ("*Awake and*

Sing!" 171). According to Bessie, talk does not get things done: how useful is Marxism when faced with a scandal or real hunger? "There is nothing of the dreamer about Bessie; her concern is with the here and now" (Shuman, *Clifford Odets* 57). Odets seems to be developing an argument about how ideology responds to present situations.

Like Mrs. Zero, Bessie calls for respectability. She deems it as one of her key responsibilities. G. Miller maintains that "Odets does not propose Bessie as a model, for in her obsession with achieving respectability and success for her children; she has become something of a grotesque" (*Clifford Odets* 43). Bessie's ultimate objective in marrying Hennie off is to be respectable in front of her neighbours. She says, "I'm a mother. I raise a family they should have respect" (55). She always utters such words as "respectable" and "respect." Mishra demonstrates, "Desire for respectability ... is the chief motivating force in [Bessie's] life which impels her to try consistently to put a good face to the world. But the methods she adopts are ... ruthless and embarrassing" (75). Bessie uses verbal violence to maintain respect. When she hears Moe speaking rudely about Hennie, she warns him: "Listen, Axelrod, in my house you don't talk this way. Either have respect or get out" (57). In Act II, Scene 1, she orders her father to pull the shade down after cutting Morty's hair. She declares, "I like my house to look respectable" (59). Bessie is also worried that Ralph may seduce his girlfriend at her house. In the argument with Ralph about Blanche, she tells him, "With me it's one thing – a boy should have respect for his own future" (83). Though Bessie makes use of all means to preserve respect, this respect is unattainable. She succeeds in saving Hennie's honour once. In contrast, at the end of the play, the daughter's honour is offensively

stained: Hennie decides to run off with the man she loves, leaving both her husband and her baby. Ralph begins to question the concept of respect after finding out that his parents have trapped Sam. Their failure to act as role models deserving of respect leads him to mock, "Just have respect? That's the idea?" (84). Not only does Bessie fail to achieve the hoped for respect, but she also causes her children to question her credibility.

Bessie's excessive love for her children turns the normal caring role of a mother into a kind of tyrant. In addition to Myron's bankruptcy of financial resources, her relationship with her children grants her the maximum of moral authority. Yet, her love proves to be hatred since it deprives her children of the right of choice and turns them into paralysed figures. Weales describes the impact of Bessie's excessive extent of love for her children. He states that "she is determined to hold them together, to make them a redoubt in a world at war even if she kills them in the process" (*Odets the Playwright* 65). The more the Depression worsens, the more Bessie loves Ralph and Hennie, and the more the children feel dead. Cantor asserts that "she tightens the trap around Ralph by opposing his love for Blanche and virtually strangles Hennie in a net of deceit. All of her actions are justified in her eyes by her fear of poverty and her sense of family loyalty" (*Clifford Odets* 23). Cantor refers to two crucial qualities of Bessie's identity: her materialism and her obsession with middle class values. Her money-orientated concerns are directed not only toward personal benefit but familial advantage in the first place. Mishra confirms, "Bessie is highly money-minded. She judges everything in terms of financial gain: materialistic consideration has become almost a mania with her which has made her a monster of a woman" (76).

In addition to saving Hennie from a scandal, Bessie's action has a financial motive. According to her, Sam is not poor. She convinces Hennie, "In three years he put enough in the bank, a good living" (55). The mother also rejects Blanche as a suitable match for Ralph because she is not rich enough. Marrying someone needy means that the family will lose Ralph's contribution to the budget. Ralph asserts to his grandfather, "You know Mom's not letting my sixteen bucks out of the house if she can help it. She'd take one look at Blanche and insult her in a minute — a kid who's got nothing" (47). Brenman-Gibson stresses this point: "Bessie insists that her son's financial contribution is more important than his relation to his girl; he must learn that life *is* 'printed on dollar bills.'" (254).

The Berger father figure seems to be an outsider: his presence in the home is neither imposing nor fascinating. With his collapse, Ralph and Hennie descend into a state of chaos. They flounder morally and emotionally, without a source of security that can provide them with enough warmth and guidance. Myron the father has abdicated all rights to respect and identity a long time ago. Bessie the mother forgets – or rather dismisses – some maternal feelings, such as mercy and forgiveness, because she turns herself into half-mother and half-father. Though she holds the family together, she is also the main reason for its disintegration. Bessie is "the antagonist, the force that Hennie and Ralph must defeat, the magnet away from which they must pull" (Weales, *Odets the Playwright* 66). So, a current of revolt against her flows within the children. They feel that they must conquer her authority which belittles them. This justifies Krutch's saying, "Actually, the subject of the play is not this one specific protest and rebellion but the

persistent and many-sided rebellion of human nature against everything which thwarts it" (269). For example, when Bessie insists and orders Myron to call Dr. Cantor to examine Hennie, the latter bursts angrily, "Day in and Day out pestering. Why are you always right and no one else can say a word?" (53).

As for Ralph, there is a tension between him and his mother over two issues. The first is Ralph's desire to marry Blanche. He bases his protest against her upon two points: his intention to be independent and his participation in the income of the family. Both of them are basic elements of his masculinity:

RALPH: You'd cut her throat if you could.

BESSIE: That's right! Before she'd ruin a nice boy's life I would first go to prison. Miss Nobody should step in the picture and I'll stand by with my mouth shut.

RALPH: Miss Nobody! Who am I? Al Jolson?

BESSIE: Fix your tie!

RALPH: I'll take care of my own life.

BESSIE: You'll take care? Excuse my expression, you can't even wipe your nose yet! He'll take care!

RALPH: I been working for years, bringing in money here — putting it in your hand like a kid. All right, I can't get my teeth fixed.... You never in your life bought me a pair of skates even —— things I died for when I was a kid. I don't care about that stuff, see. Only just remember I pay some of the bills around here. (65-66)

Ralph's attempts to assert his identity are apparent. For Bessie, this is a potential risk. It is for the sake of the family that Ralph must be emasculated. She must prevent his marriage and render his intention to leave the home futile. In this way, she guarantees his involvement in the family's income.

The second issue of conflict between Ralph and his mother is Jacob's insurance money. Jacob commits suicide and leaves the insurance, three thousand dollars, in Ralph's name and for his private use. His mother and Uncle Morty plan to take the money for all the members of the family:

> BESSIE: It belongs to the whole family. You'll get your teeth fixed —
>
> RALPH: I'll take care of my own affairs.
>
> BESSIE: A family needs for a rainy day. Times is getting worse. Prospect Avenue, Dawson, Beck Street — every day furniture's on the sidewalk.
>
> RAPLH: Forget it, Mom.
>
> BESSIE: Ralphie, I worked too hard all my years to be treated like dirt.... Here I'm not only the mother, but also the father.... If I didn't worry about the family who would? On the calendar, it's a different place, but here without a dollar you don't look the world in the eye. Talk from now to next year — this is life in America.
>
> RALPH: Then it's wrong. It don't make sense. If life made you this way, then it's wrong!
>
> BESSIE: My foolish boy ....

RALPH: No, I see every house lousy with lies and hate.... Mom. We don't want life printed on dollar bills, Mom!

BESSIE: So go out and change the world if you don't like it.

RALPH: I will! And why? 'Cause life's different in my head. Gimme the earth in two hands. I'm strong. (94-95)

Ralph realises the gap between the real and the ideal. It is evident that he embraces a way of life that is different from the materialism to which his mother adheres. Like his grandfather, he is a Marxist. He no longer surrenders to the surrounding forces, including his mother.

Ralph is unlike Bessie, Myron, Uncle Morty and Moe who "madly scramble for money and power and continue to cherish their own bourgeois attitudes and morals" (Mishra 73). He is the only member of the Bergers who holds the desire for social change. That explains Herr's remark, "The goal of *Awake and Sing!* was to show ... that petty conditions and historical traps can be overcome, that life doesn't have to be printed on dollar bills" (74). Ralph's desire is noticeable in his last speech:

RALPH: Right here in the house! My days won't be for nothing. Let Mom have the dough. I'm twenty-two and kickin'! I'll get along. Did Jake die for us to fight about nickels? No! "Awake and sing," he said. Right here he stood and said it. The night he died, I saw it like a thunderbolt! I saw he was dead and I was born! I swear to God, I'm one week old! I want the whole city to hear it — fresh blood, arms. We got 'em. We're glad we're living. (100-101)

At this stage, the social aspect of the play is closely connected to its familial one. Whether Ralph will be able to carry out his social mission or not depends, to a great extent, upon his own identity.

Ralph's actions throughout the play should be scrutinised in order to judge his ability to execute what he recites. Before his awakening, his main actions are confined to complaining, to putting his salary into his mother's hand "like a kid" (66), to arguing with her concerning his girl and to listening carefully to his grandfather's teachings. Weales makes a comparison between two of Ralph's speeches. He says, Ralph's "last speech is not convincing psychologically or philosophically.... How much more believable he is when he whines, 'It's crazy – all my life I want a pair of black and white shoes and can't get them'" ("The Group Theatre and its Plays" 80). Ralph is fit only to complain and to confess his paralysis. Warshow comments on Ralph's previous complaint, "The young son ... puts into one sentence the history of his frustration" (29).

Ralph always refers to his problematic childhood. He whines, "I never in my life even had a birthday party. Every time I went and cried in the toilet when my birthday came" (46). He also blames his mother, as we have seen, when he complains that she never bought him anything. Aged twenty-two, he still has a childish vision. Those around him reinforce this attitude: they neither recognise nor reward him. Satirising his wish for independence, Bessie says, "You'll take care? Excuse my expression, you can't even wipe your nose yet! He'll take care!" (65). Jacob keeps referring to him as a "boychick" throughout the play. Moe calls him "a nice kid" who needs to "grow up' (70). He even

adds, "Use your brains. Stop acting like a kid who still wets the bed" (70). I would argue that Ralph never transfers from childhood to adulthood. Though he has the outside shape of an adult, underneath he still has the logic and the temper of a child.

Ralph is unable to find his masculine identity in the relationship with his father who seems to be a relative stranger. He is hungry for a source of ideas and an image of his own; he confesses that he has never learnt anything from his father. He discovers a real substitute in his grandfather. In *The New York Times* review, Isherwood writes, "When Ralph folds himself up at his grandfather's feet, it's the only time this aching character looks at home". (See figure 7.)

Figure 7. Pablo Schreiber as Ralph and Ben Gazzara as Jacob in the revival of *Awake and Sing!*, The Belasco Theatre, April 17, 2006.

Deprived from the bosom of his father, this substitution is significant for Ralph's identity. As Ingham points out, "The little boy who is starved of a close relationship with his father has little choice but to turn to other sources to satisfy his need for confirmation of himself as male, to realise his potential male identity" (113). Ralph internalises and models his style of behaviour on the ideas and image of masculinity he picks up from his grandfather. Jacob tells him, "For years, I watched you grow up. Wait! You'll graduate from my university" (45). He warns Ralph not to be a man "with good ideas, but only in the head.... This is why I tell you — DO! Do what is in your head and you carry in yourself a revolution" (78). He asks him to go out and fight "so life won't be printed on dollar bills" (97).

However, Bessie's behaviour towards Jacob, who yields to her, nourishes doubts about his grandfather's masculinity. Ralph also discovers the discrepancy between Jacob's words and deeds when he finds that his books' "pages ain't cut in half of them" (96). Further, casting Myron away as an unfit masculine role model, Bessie searches for another image of masculinity for Ralph to follow. Her target is Uncle Morty in whose steps she hopes Ralph will follow. She says, "Ralph should only be a success like you, Morty. I should only live to see the day when he rides up to the door in a big car with a chauffer and a radio" (66). This exchange illustrates that Bessie's ideal representation of masculinity in the play is not her father or her husband but her brother. Uncle Morty is considered to be a source of moral authority in the home which compensates that of Myron. Nevertheless, Morty's masculinity is not perfect. As Shuman points out, "Though successful, Morty is a victim of the capitalistic system which, in the view of the play,

deprives a man of all personality" (*Clifford Odets* 56). Morty confesses, "Business don't stop for personal life" (89). In the words of Murray, "Morty is only half a man, living completely on the sense level and denying whatever is spiritual in his nature" (44). According to this businessman, "common sense is thicker than love" (65).

Critics differ in their interpretations of Ralph's final speeches. One of which is the following:

> RALPH: Sure, inventory tomorrow. Coletti to Driscoll to Berger — that's how we work. It's a team down the warehouse.... Joe talks pigeons day and night.... Joe razzed me about my girl. Bur he don't know why. I'll tell him. Hell, he might tell me something I don't know. Get teams together all over. Spit on your hands and get to work. And with enough teams together maybe we'll get steam in the warehouse so our fingers don't freeze off. Maybe we'll fix it so life won't be printed on dollar bills. (97)

On one hand, Burt holds that in Ralph's speech, Odets attaches a strong "thematic climax" to the play through a sequence of affirmatively oral "ejaculations" that point to Ralph's conversion to a determined and enthusiastic persona. Burt adds that, in Act III, Ralph's final sentences mouth his "intellectual" change as his unexpected and positively verbal utterances replace his former tentative and bewildered remarks. Reinforced by imageries of resurrection, Ralph's resolution demonstrates his "spiritual awaking" as well (0). Murray hints at another aspect of Ralph's developed personality. He sees that "a sense of respectability" is enhanced on the part of Ralph at the end of the play. When Ralph rejects his grandfather's insurance money which can help him put his dreams into

action, the audience has the clue that the boy has determined, instead, to devote himself to better circumstances in the workplace (38).

On the other hand, Groman considers Ralph's optimism to be false because he turns out to be an ineffectual character who "faces the future without a clear sense of purpose, training, or money" (101). Odets himself says, "When I rewrote the third act of *Awake and Sing!* I built up the boy to a kind of affirmative voice in the end" ("How a Playwright Triumphs" 84). Odets's "a kind of" raises doubts relating to Ralph's power as a revolutionary. Odets goes on to highlight Ralph's disempowerment by his mother. He states, "The boy is always resentful of who and what he is, of his position in the world. And he always wants to get married and he can't, because of, let me call it that economic factor in his mother, who is always very authoritarian, always making decisions for him" (84). Odets's reference to Ralph's indecision again questions the authenticity of his oath. As Bigsby puts it, "the agency for [Ralph's] transformation, the process whereby he will move from perception to action, is unclear" (1: 171). It is true that his revolution is rhetorical. However, there is no guarantee that he will put his rhetoric into practice. Therefore, it is improbable that Ralph will succeed in his new mission as a social reformer. As G. Miller comments, "Ralph's final speech ... is fully consistent with his established tendency to dream and to talk and Odets clearly does not mean it to be taken seriously as an indication that Ralph has changed" (*Clifford Odets* 50). Like his father, Ralph is dreaming. Like his grandfather, he will not turn his idealism into action.

When Ralph wants to behave positively, he espouses what endangers his daughter's family life. Though he did not hear Moe's plot to elope, he applauds the decision and encourages Hennie to do it. I would disagree with Weales, who says, "It is not what Ralph is going to do, but that he has decided to do something – to act positively, to work for revolutionary change – that the audience must accept if he is to be the 'affirmative voice' Odets once called him" (*Odets the Playwright* 73). I would argue that Ralph should realise that it is not a mere matter of doing, but rather what action to do in order to have a better world. Signifying that "people are warped into bitter molds by circumstances beyond their control" (Flexner 297), the escape may lead to a better life for Moe and Hennie. But, it has a catastrophic aftermath upon her family, her husband and her baby. Therefore, Ralph should abort their plan. In this way, he becomes positive and can polish off the dirt, as he wishes. However, Shuman justifies the elopement when he writes, "The point of Hennie's action [and Ralph's support of her] is only that of emphasizing the moral chaos which Odets saw ... as a result of the Depression and, by extension, of the capitalistic system" ("*Awake and Sing!*" 167).

In short, it is difficult to believe Ralph who, immediately after assuming that "I'm strong," (95), receives a call from Blanche. She is waiting for his decision concerning their marriage. Though it is a very significant moment in their relationship, Ralph seems to be speechless: "Hello .... Blanche, I wish ... I don't know what to say .... Yes ... Hello? ... *(Puts phone down.)* She hung upon me ..." (96). His one-liner in the last moment of the play, when he announces "We're glad we're living" (101), is not

convincing. It follows a long stream of dissatisfaction and frustration throughout the whole play. It is a misleading expression produced by a faint voice.

Odets carefully marks out the pressures and the aspirations that put an end to family unity. According to Reynolds, what is overpowered in *Awake and Sing!* is not one member but the family as a whole. The socio-economic circumstances have gathered together to turn Bessie into a dictatorial family 'man.' She causes misery to the lives of her father, her husband and her children when she fervently struggles against these circumstances, so that she shields the family (100-101). The rejection of the conquering conditions, one of which is Bessie, is made visible by the third generation: Ralph intends to fight and Hennie chooses to elope. As Bigsby elucidates, "The constant image is one of flight, escape. They [the characters] look to escape the reality of their situation through marriage, through luck, through a desperate commitment to political or social myths, through a sardonic humour, through self-deceit, or even, most desperately, through suicide" ("*Awake and Sing!* and *Paradise Lost*" 154).

In *Awake and Sing!*, the males seem to behave as if they were "girls," (86) as Moe calls Jacob, Myron and Ralph. Emasculated in the outside world, Myron feels the ground slipping from under his feet within the home as well. Faced with two fragmenting worlds, he becomes a tragic figure. Hence, the play has succeeded in depicting how the Depression terminated the authority of the patriarch who is reduced to the position of a neutered sentimental idealism. In other words, it shows how the sense of responsibility and practicality help the female figure to lead the household when crisis is underway.

Ralph, in addition to losing the father as a role model, has his emerging sense of masculinity erased by his mother. Bessie stands between him and his father, impacting on his vision of the masculine world. The significance of her position is affirmed by her advocacy of middle-class respectability. As Jacob requests, such families as the Bergers should be abolished (55). In the words of Kaplan, "At a time when the individual seemed to be helpless and at the mercy of impersonal and powerful economic forces, the theme of individual dignity and freedom must be reckoned as a criticism of existing conditions and as an American ideal too important to be lost sight of" (585). If the male loses his integrity and identity at the time of mass unemployment under the Great Depression, what will happen when the drought becomes abundance after World War II? The reader will find the answer in the following chapter where I discuss Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*.

Chapter III
Awake and Sing!

Chapter IV

Death of a Salesman (1949)

Personality between Delusion and Reality

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* premiered on Broadway on February 10, 1949 at the Morosco Theatre. The play ran for seven hundred and forty two performances. It won the Antoinette Perry Award, the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize. It is one of the greatest plays ever written by an American writer (Bigsby, "*Death of a Salesman*" 128). The play criticises what was becoming the common experience of a tremendous number of Americans after the Second World War. In the play, the human being has been diminished to a *low* level as conformity to the American system demands ultimate loyalty to the extent that man loses both his identity and his dignity. In 1997, in an interview entitled "*Death of a Salesman* at Fifty," Miller admitted to Kullman that the play was intended to be a criticism of capitalism. He declared that "you wouldn't be writing such straightforward critical work about America after 1950. Indeed, I don't recall a single play that analyzed American capitalism as severely" (624). Through the subtle balance between the expressionistic past and the realistic present, Miller creates a form that dramatises the main theme of the play, which is the mixture of individual psychology and social forces. The play accurately reflects the prevailing anxiety that the abundance of post-war epoch would turn man into a victim of the free market.

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part presents a brief account that provides the reader with a socio-economic context for *Death of a Salesman*. The second part examines the play itself. This chapter aims to explore the way in which *Death of a*

Salesman responds to the culture of mass consumption in America in the post-war period. It also shows how the play reveals the human price paid for maximum conformity. On a parallel level, I argue that the concept of work dominates and affects life in the home which, in turn, contributes to the validity of the values that the American salesman worships. Miller skilfully creates a drama in which the content and the form cooperate to achieve the same objective: *Death of a Salesman* sheds much light on the cost exacted from the organisation man in exchange for the total conformity to his organisation. Therefore, in the last section of the chapter, I explore how Miller achieves integration between the play's content an its form through relating expressionism to the psychology of Willy Loman who says "Selling was the greatest career a man could want,"[1] though its demanding nature causes his breakdown.

The Second World War brought an end to the Great Depression and created the conditions out of which an era of unprecedented affluence could emerge during the post-war years (Wynn 464). Donaldson claims that "World War II was the catalyst [for the post-war boom]. In 1945, wartime workers were about to erupt with money and pent-up urges for consumer products" (123). American factories quickly converted from wartime production to meet consumer demand, producing millions of refrigerators, radios and automobiles. The construction industry also boomed, with five million new homes built between 1945 and 1950 (Boyer 84). While mass consumption provided a certain kind of democracy of opportunity in the sense that many of the new goods were cheap enough for ordinary people to afford, the boom did not serve to spread corporate wealth more

[1] Arthur Miller. *Death of a Salesman: Certain Private Conversations in Two Acts and a Requiem.* London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2000. p. 63. All subsequent quotations from the play are cited parenthetically in the text

evenly. The five hundred largest industrial organisations remained responsible for one-third of all corporate activity, with the top fifty companies enjoying aggregate sales equal to the total of the rest. The profits of the top ten companies gained half the profits of the remaining four hundred and ninety (Dubofsky, Theoharis and Smith 419-420). Nevertheless, the massive rise in "the gross national product" by two hundred and fifty percent between 1945 and 1960 (Chafe 107) could not fail to lift the standard of living for the vast majority of Americans. By 1956, the real wage for the average American was more than fifty percent higher than his in 1929. By 1960, income was thirty-five percent greater than it had been in 1945 (Dubofsky, Theoharis and Smith 426).

From 1952 to 1956, consumer borrowing reached fifty-five percent. By 1959, forty-five percent of American families had less than two hundred American dollars "in liquid assets" (Chafe 138). The more mass consumption became fundamental to the health of the economy, the more the shopping centres and its stores celebrated the family as a consumer unit and paid mounting attention to men as the principal breadwinners and consumers. The enormous development of credit, which these shopping centres promoted, also supported men's increasing involvement in familial purchasing (Cohen. Web). Moreover, the growth of consumption was reinforced by the sanctification of the family and the idealisation of the woman as a mother and homemaker. Large families necessitated big houses equipped with more automatic appliances to simplify "mom's" housework. They purchased more to provide for their children as well. Many one-car families became two-, three-, and in rare examples even four-car households (Dubofsky, Theoharis and Smith 427-428). In *Death of a Salesman,* Willy and Linda Loman have a

"brand new" (27) refrigerator for which they "got one more payment" (56). The play contains references to other consumer goods such as American-type and Swiss cheese, shaving lotion, shoes, stockings, jackets, wire recorders, fountain pens, cigarettes, vacuum cleaners, washing machines in addition to Studebaker and red Chevrolet cars. Because "[T]he refrigerator consumes belts like a goddam maniac" (57), Willy blames his wife, "I told you we should've bought a well-advertised machine.... Whoever heard of a Hastings refrigerator?" (56). Here, the well known is taken to equalise dependability and quality. Unlike Willy, "Charley bought a General Electric and it's twenty years old and it's still good" (56). As Jerz puts it, "The play's obvious social message is an economic lecture about the effects of living on credit" (139). Willy has just finished paying for his car. After the payment of the last instalment of the mortgage, the house will be their own. This occurs at the same day of Willy's Requiem. The agony caused by the continuous burden of the instalment plan is felt as Linda, at the funeral, repeatedly refers wistfully to the sense of freedom paying off all their debts offered. She announces, "First time in thirty-five years we were just about free and clear" (110). A bit later, she mourns, "[*A sob rises in her throat.*] We're free and clear. [*Sobbing more fully, released*] We're free.... We're free...We're free..." (112). Here the founding ideology of American liberty is reiterated in the radically diminished form of freedom from debt.

Advertising was a characteristic of economic prosperity. It mirrored the consumption-oriented nature of the system and measured the growth in production as well. Quality of advertising in many cases became the main or rather the single distinction between companies competing for the market in products like cosmetics, tobacco and soft drinks.

Advertising was essential since it became a positive means that convinced the people of the need to purchase (Degler 174). Dubofsky, Theoharis and Smith assert that advertisers made use of psychological approaches so that they could direct clients to "the psychic" usefulness of such commodities as larger cars, sweet-smelling underarm, stripped toothpaste and Marlboro cigarettes (426). Jerz maintains that as a variety of markets became saturated, manufacturers were obliged to devise new methods "to attract repeat business from established customers" (138). One of these ways was the dependence of the firm on the ability of salesmen to *conquer* the consumers. Chafe observes that the number of white-collar employees exceeded that of blue-collar workers because the service sector boomed for the first time. "The new jobs ... [included] sales personnel ..., telephone operators, government bureaucrats, bank tellers, investment counselors, [and] advertising people. Such jobs testified to the emergence of a new economy focused on the production of services designed to enhance the quality of life, rather than on providing basic necessities" (109-110).

The sociologists concluded that this development led to a very important phenomenon: the disappearance of the unionised worker as an adversary of business. The conflict between the worker and the boss supposedly came to a stop since the well-being of the organisation became the common and ultimate objective of both parties (Dubofsky, Theoharis and Smith 433). In other words, unlike the case in the twenties and the thirties, the owner of the workplace was no longer reckoned to be the enemy. For example, in *Death of a Salesman,* the tape recorder scene symbolises the resemblance between the employer and the employee. Willy Loman follows his wife's advice to ask his boss,

Howard Wagner, for a raise in addition to a job in New York that requires no travelling. When he enters Howard's office, he finds him playing with a wire recorder. Howard plays the recorded voices of his daughter, who is whistling, and his son, who alphabetically recites the capitals of the states. Howard's idolising of his children is similar to that of Willy. This similarity proposes a harmony between the two. However, to tell the truth, it is a phoney similarity that disguises the imbalance of power between the employer and the employee.

Social themes of the 1930s appeared to be of little concern to writers in the post-war period. Degler explains:

> Affluence and anxiety became central themes. The irony ... was that as nations became more powerful, ... individual men felt more helpless than ever. This awareness of the alienation of man from himself and from the mass production society that he has created runs through much of the literature of the time.... Simply because the protagonists ... are aware of their slightness, the emphasis is placed upon their identity or their search for identity. (197-198)

Whereas the theatre of the thirties was often driven by the pressure of economic hardship and political commitment to radical social change, the post-war theatre tended to withdraw from overt political drama and instead focused on the psychological drama of the individual. In American drama written after the war, man was often pictured "as a creature heavily pressed upon by family ties, by broad social forces and by a nagging sense of futility" (Gascoigne 48). While these themes are not that different to those that

concerned Rice and Odets, the emphasis tended to lean toward an investigation of psychological states rather than any overtly political agitation for change. Gascoigne notes that the post-war dramatist considered himself to be within the society he is depicting rather than on the adversarial outside: he holds the same fears and frustrations of his characters or at least he feels sympathetic towards them (49). In the introduction to *Collected Plays*, Miller writes, "I wished to speak of the salesman most precisely as I felt about him" (24). This statement carries two significant implications. Firstly, Miller is in a position where he identifies with Willy Loman who is in conflict with the forces surrounding him. Secondly, Miller considers Willy to be the spokesman of the organisation men who symbolise conformity to salesmanship.

The organisation man became the symbol of the white-collar class during the post-war period, defined by Whyte in the bestselling book of that name as follows: "These people only work for The Organization. The ones I am talking about *belong* to it as well. They are the ones in our middle class, who have left home, spiritually as well as physically, to take the vows of organization life, and it is they, who are the mind and soul of our great self-perpetuating institutions" (3). Willy is a stereotypical organisation man: he is an embodiment of the ethos of the organisation. Salesmanship is the essence of his life since it is a means that helps him cope with the competitively commercialised society and reach security. This salesman has a contract with his company, accordingly, he believes in all the values of business. As Bigsby points out, "This was the age of the loyalty oath.... The language of the state, of the advertising which fuelled the new consumerism,

and of the business corporations ... all celebrated conformity" (*Modern American Drama* 73).

The "white-collar class," the "man in the grey flannel suit," the "organization man" and "the lonely crowd" symbolized the melancholy resulting from the prevailing consensus (Dulles 516). In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman is a conformist to the system. Blumberg observes that "Willy, a poor victim of a single-minded allegiance to false and hollow values of material success, allows what is most uniquely his, his personality, to be molded, transformed and vulgarized in accordance with what he believes others expect of him" ("Work as Alienation" 56). Indeed, one of the most important aspects of Willy's life is his stubborn and futile effort to do what is required from him. He embraces the dominant values of American corporate business and struggles to reach his dreams either legitimately or illegitimately. On the first anniversary of writing *Death of a Salesman*, Miller summarised Willy's tragedy as follows:

> [T]he tragedy of Willy Loman is that he gave his life, or sold it, in order to justify the waste of it. It is the tragedy of a man who did believe that he alone was not meeting the qualifications laid down for mankind by those clean-shaven frontiersmen who inhabit the peaks of broadcasting and advertising offices. From those forests of canned goods high up near the sky, he heard the thundering command to succeed as it ricocheted down the newspaper-lined canyons of his city, hear not a human voice, but a wind of a voice to which no human can reply in kind, expect to stare into the mirror at a failure. ("The 'Salesman' has a Birthday" 150)

The call to conform is so overwhelming that Willy finds it mandatory to lie not only to himself but also to his family. His identity is merged with the realm of salesmanship to the extent that he becomes ignorant of who he is. In 1958, in a symposium moderated by Philip Gelb et al, Miller illustrated, "I was trying in *Salesman* ... to set forth what happens when a man does not have a grip on the forces of life and has no sense of values which will lead him to that kind of a grip; but the implication of it was that there must be such a grasp of those forces – or else we're doomed" (33). Willy does not understand himself – his values, aspirations and capabilities. He keeps adhering to the capitalist values in spite of the fact that he is a failure.

The rejection of self-deception caused by the culture of mass consumption was given voice. Books like David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, William Whyte's *The Organization Man* and Erich Fromm's *Man for Himself* were being read by American students who raised noteworthy queries about their culture. They were also "asking whether they wished to become 'market personalities,' doffing old personalities and putting on new ones" (Chafe 137). Riesman pinpoints a role played by his book, when he writes:

> *The Lonely Crowd* contributed to the snobbish deprecation of business careers, in its discussion of the shift from craft skill to manipulative skill, by underestimating the intellectual component of much work in complex organizations. To move away from physical to conceptual manipulation and away from working with things toward working with people should not have been seen as deterioration. Large corporate business today

> depends much more on ideas and less on brute trial and error than was the case earlier. And *The Lonely Crowd* did point out the greater sensitivity and lower tolerance for exploitation in [American] corporate life. (xviii)

In its registration of the occupational change from the operation of machines and the logging of figures to the manipulation of people, *Death of a Salesman* moves a step beyond *The Adding Machine* which raises issues relating to manual work. As an organisation man, Willy depends upon the attractiveness of his personality as a demonstration of his intellectuality in order to create a need on the part of the customer for the goods he sells. The more he exploits the prospects, the more he goes ahead in his job. Thus, the creativity of ideas rather than the automatic performance becomes a determinant of career achievement.

Whyte argues that although the organisation is almost all-embracing, it must be resisted if the individual is to retain any semblance of autonomy: "There are only a few times in organization life when [the organisation man] can wrench his destiny into his own hands – and if he does not fight then, he will make a surrender that will later mock him" (15). Extreme loyalty to the organisation threatens to convert the individual into another commodity to be sold and bought. In *Man for Himself,* Fromm refers to four types of character orientation: the receptive, the exploitative, the hoarding, as well as the

marketing orientation.[2] The root of the last type is that the person experiences himself as a commodity and conceives his value merely as exchange value. The "personality market" includes different professions such as clerks, salesmen, business executives, doctors, lawyers and artists. All of these are reliant upon the customers' or the employers' acceptance of their personality to be commercially successful. Both the personal and the commodity market have the same standard of evaluation: on the former, personalities are sold; on the latter, commodities. The "personality factor" is always crucial. Business success, according to this argument, is mainly dependent upon the way in which a person offers himself for sale on the market: how attractive a personality he has and how desirable a "package" he is. In order to succeed, it is not enough to be skilful and equipped for doing a specific job. Personality is the crucial ingredient that will enable the most imposing character to win through over the competition. Fromm compares the individual's interest in becoming marketable to that of a commodity like handbags on a counter in a store, as if they were human beings who feel and think. Every handbag would do its best to make itself as "attractive" as possible so that it catches the attention of consumers and to look as luxurious as possible to get a superior cost than that of its

[2] In "the receptive orientation", an individual senses "the source of all good" to be external. He thinks that there is merely one method to acquire what he needs: he collects it from the outer resource. In this orientation, the issue of love is approximately entirely that of "being loved" and not that of "loving." Similar to the receptive orientation, in the exploitive one, the person has the sense that "the source of all good" is external. He must search for all his needs there because he is unable to create anything himself. Nonetheless, the differentiation between these two approaches is that the second kind does not anticipate to get things from the other as "gifts," rather to win them by means of power or trickery. "The hoarding orientation" causes man to have slight belief in everything new he may obtain from the exterior world. Here, safety is built upon "hoarding and saving," while expenditure is considered to be hazardous. He seems as if he were surrounded by a defensive fence. The key purpose is to fetch as much as possible inside this place and to leave as little as possible outside it. Love is fundamentally "a possession;" he does not express love but attempts to receive it by the possession of the "beloved." "The hoarding person" frequently displays a specific type of fidelity to the others and even to reminiscences (Fromm, *Man for Himself* 62-66).

rivals. The bag purchased for the best price would feel "elated," because that would signify that it was the most "valuable" one. On the contrary, the one which failed to be bought would be a target for anxiety and disappointment. In a similar way, post-war man, according to Fromm, experiences himself both as the seller and as the commodity to be sold on the market. In consequence, his self-respect and self-recognition are entirely dependent on how he is perceived by others. If he achieves success, he has a value and feels secure; and vice versa (68-72).

At the end of *Death of a Salesman*, it is not Willy Loman as a man but the image of the Salesman which prevails. Charley, his businessman friend, describes the highs and lows of such an existence: the salesman is "a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back – that's an earthquake" (111). Raymond Williams argues that the societal aspect of the play summarises the theme of "alienation." As he is immersed in selling consumer goods, Willy goes ahead to retail himself. In accordance with this process, the salesman is turned into "a commodity." Similar to other products, it will be inevitable to be discarded one day (*Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* 310). What is significant is not Willy's self-realisation while making use of his own powers, but rather his success in selling them. Therefore, these powers are turned into something distinguished from himself, something to be judged and to be used by the other. The more they are separated from him, the more alienated he becomes. Willy, then, feels insecure and anxious towards his sense of identity and his self-esteem.

Additionally, Willy's life is based upon the necessity of having a persuasive personality "because [as he believes] personality always wins the day" (51). Using Riesman's term, Willy is an "other-directed person." "The frontiers for the other-directed man," Riesman claims, "are people; he is people-minded. Hence both work and pleasure are felt as activities involving people" (126). When Willy manages to persuade people to buy his product, in fact, he succeeds in convincing them of both his personality and the product. Similarly, the failure to sell indicates a failure of personality. Here, the crucial issue is the idea of selling regardless of the benefit of the product. This apparent security is maintained as long as Willy is able to preach the values of selling. Though he complies with the rules of capitalism as he conceives them, Willy, like Mr. Zero in *The Adding Machine,* is still easily dismissed by his boss. This encourages some commentators to confirm that "what Miller intended was an indictment of the American system for ruthlessly discarding its faithful servants. For them, Willy symbolises the failure of the American capitalist ethos, its basic destruction of the humanity of man" (Bierman, Hart and Johnson 268).

In fact, Willy is overwhelmed by the demanding nature of his career. Other factors such as the instalment plan, his frustrating sons and his weakening power also hinder his dreams of economic success. In consequence, he becomes an adjusted and anomic kind of man. Riesman explains:

> [T]he adjusted are those who reflect their society, or their class within the society, with the least distortion.... [T]he anomics include not only those who, in their character, were trained to attend to signals that either are no

> longer given or no longer spell meaning or success. They may also, paradoxically, be those who are overadjusted, who listen too assiduously to the signals from within or without. (287-289)

Willy no longer receives the signals that make him successful. To Linda, he himself complains, "people don't seem to take to me" (28) and "[t]hey seem to laugh at me" (28). Willy becomes inadequate within the rat race of salesmanship, the magic of personality seems to have worn off. This is why he remembers the "good old days" of selling as he says to his boss, "in those days there was personality in it, Howard. There was respect and comradeship, and gratitude in it. Today, it's all cut and dried, and there's no chance for bringing friendship to bear – or personality" (63-64).

Willy sensitively responds to both the reactions of others as well as to his own insecurity, fear and anxiety. This process is done through mixing the present with the past since "utter conformity in behaviour may be purchased by the individual at so high a price as to lead to a character neurosis and anomie: the anomic person tends to sabotage either himself or his society, probably both" (Riesman 242). Once Willy is fired, all business values are taken away from him. Uranga remarks that the "free market" provides little warranty of pecuniary safety and no promise of emotional fulfilment. Willy erroneously concentrates on just one side of the human formation, "the material," because he completely approves well known social values. Accordingly, when his hold on his job becomes fragile, he has nothing at all to stuff his inner hollowness and is faced with his own worthlessness (81-82). Willy's attempt to discover how much he really sees leads him to consider suicide at the end of the play.

Throughout his life, Willy is unable to understand the contradictions in his beliefs. He even ignores the realities of the sales world. Charley endeavours to enlighten him:

> WILLY: Charley, I'm strapped. I'm strapped. I don't know what to do. I was just fired.
>
> CHARLEY: Howard fired you?
>
> WILLY: That snotnose. Imagine that? I named him. I named him Howard.
>
> CHARLEY: Willy, when're you gonna realize that them things don't mean anything? You named him Howard, but you can't sell that. The only thing you got in this world is what you can sell. And the funny thing is that you're a salesman, and you don't know that.
>
> WILLY: I've always tried to think otherwise, I guess. I always felt that if a man was impressive, and well liked, that nothing –
>
> CHARLEY: Why must everybody like you? Who liked J. P. Morgan? Was he impressive? In a Turkish bath he'd look like a butcher. But with his pockets on he was very well liked? (76-77)

In fact, Charley is the one who draws the attention of Willy towards the latter's self-delusion. He is the conscience which corrects things to this old salesman because Willy "never delves into his own psyche for the answers to the questions of who he is and how he can succeed in business; rather he is always looking to society and to successful capitalists" (Carson 83).

Willy admires such people as his father, Bin Loman and Dave Singleman who make success. Through the identity of these figures, he finds a compensation for his cipher state

of being. Willy likes the adventure and economic freedom of his father: a flute salesman of the plains who "[w]ith one gadget ... made more in a week than a man like [Willy] could make in a lifetime" (38). Willy also dreams of equalising the independent accumulation of vast wealth achieved by his brother. He periodically invokes the image of Ben, from whom he hopes to discern the mystery of instant wealth for himself and his sons:

> BEN: William, when I walked into the jungle I was seventeen. When I walked out I was twenty-one. And by God, I was rich.
>
> WILLY: ... was rich! That's the spirit I want to imbue them with. To walk into a jungle. I was right! I was right! I was right! (40-41)

Further, Willy aspires to attain the skill and popularity of Dave Singleman who "put on his green velvet slippers ... and pick up his phone and call the buyers, and without ever leaving his room, at the age of eighty-four, he made his living.... And when he died, hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at his funeral" (63). In stark contrast, at Willy's funeral, only five people turn up, the three members of his family, Charley and his son.

Despite Willy's love for salesmanship, this career does not provide him with the chance of success. Gassner describes him as "a man who gave all his life to a business only to be thrown on the scrap-heap, ... and an American *naïf* bemused by the worship of uncreative success" (233). In rare moments of confession, Willy clarifies his inefficiency as a salesman when he tells Linda that he works ten to twelve hours every day while "[o]ther men ... do it easier" (28). Choudhuri asserts that Willy's "failure is all the more pitiable because in an age of rigid organization he was content to cherish and follow the

declared ideal of the great open society: he was hardworking, he was honest [to the system], he trained his sons to be 'well liked' – and yet everything he touched came to nothing" (69). In some ways then, although Willy claims, or would like to be the organisation man, he is more accurately placed as someone out of his depth in the hard-boiled world of the contemporary corporation and stands instead somewhat nostalgically for the old fashioned, decent, community-oriented public servant. The easygoing persona of the confident salesman is also not exactly true to Willy's nature. In a dialogue with his wife, he admits that he is more insecure than he ought to be:

> WILLY: Figure it out. Work a lifetime to pay off a house. You finally own it, and there's no body to live in it.
>
> LINDA: Well, dear, life is a casting off. It's always that way.
>
> WILLY: No, no, some people – some people accomplish something. (10)

The numerous false beliefs, which formulate the philosophy of work within the Loman household, are in struggle with other conventional familial bonds. In this way, salesmanship delineates the type of relationship among Willy, Linda, Biff and Happy. The control of these commercial values prompts Willy to make a bargain with Biff and to choose the dehumanised action of suicide. This sacrifice is similar to Jacob's suicide in *Awake and Sing!*. It is a forfeit for the sake of the next generation. The price of Willy's new adventure into the unknown world is paid to his son so that he can avoid the confusion of identity caused by the mammoth pressures of the business world. Accordingly, he can achieve success and security: these are the things Willy himself cannot gain. According to Willy, even life and death are converted into a business deal. In return for his death and his son's love, Willy gives life to Biff. As Miller points out,

"When asked what Willy was selling, what was in his bags, I could only reply, "Himself" (*Collected Plays* 29).

In fact, Willy sells himself thrice. First, throughout his occupational career, he sells his soul to his organisation as a sign of loyalty. Even his language is commercial. Bigsby explains that Willy's "conversation is sprinkled with references to consumer products and to the advertisements which recommend them. It is a language curiously detached from his being.... But he feels obliged to deploy it; it is, he thinks, the code that will unlock the life he believes himself to desire" (*Modern American Drama* 73). Second, Willy sells his personality in his dealings with his customers so that he can close business deals. Third, he sells his life for the price of twenty thousand dollars which is the exact amount of his insurance. Spindler sheds light on two major ironies which become in focus when Willy commits suicide. Firstly, it is only after his death that he can own a property. Secondly, because he is a failed and discarded salesman in the "distribution system," he turns out to be a worthy dead instead of being a valueless alive. As he has only ever obtained financial prize at the expense of "self-negation," there is a "perverse logic" in his receipt of the utmost amount of money for his most intense action of "self-negation" (65).

There is a conflict between Willy the salesman and Willy the father. As Bierman, Hart and Johnson elucidate, Willy experiences agony in his endeavour to exist by the guidance of his business morals. Making use of the same business criteria, he is contented to administrate all his dealings, involving those with his wife and his sons. Thus, he is unable to differentiate between "the ethics of business (a little happy cheating now and

then) and the sterner ethics of family life" (268). He devotes himself to prepare Biff and Happy to be winners in the cutthroat business world. Believing in popularity and attractiveness of personality, his advice to them is, "Be liked and you will never want" (25-26). Wilson states that "Willy never tells the boys they need skill or industriousness; indeed, he sedulously encourages them, especially Biff, in cutting corners and relying on personal magnetism to carry the day" (49). He teaches Biff some of the salesmanship values "Don't be so modest.... Walk in with a big laugh. Don't look worried. Start off with a couple of your good stories to lighten things up. It's not what you say, it's how you say it" (51). "One might say he determinedly sells Biff and Happy the bill of goods he has once been sold, infecting the next generation with the vocational pathology whose symptoms bring him down" (Wilson 49). This irresistible desire to have his sons succeed is the fundamental stimulation of his life.

Nevertheless, this obsession is the reason for his tragic anguish at the same time. Willy pays the price for his misguided advice to his sons. Encouraging the early tendency on the part of Biff and Happy to steal makes them broach such misbehaviour in an old age. Biff, thirty-four years old, feels obliged to steal the fountain pen of Bill Oliver who is expected to help him commence a new business life. In this way, Willy "fails to live up to Biff's set standards of a father by committing himself to a false set of social values. Throughout his life, Willy is unaware of the fact that what he really craves is simple fulfilment as a father. His warped vision has confused his ideals of fatherhood with the idea of success in a social sphere" (Zeineddine, "Willy Loman's Illusions" 98).

Like Bessie in *Awake and Sing!,* Willy attempts to possess both Biff and Happy. As Carson comments, the "conflict" between Willy and his sons has a paradoxical nature. What the young men have to fight is not indifference or hostility on the part of their father, but rather a surfeit of love. Even when Biff is thirty-four years old, Willy cannot rid himself of the compulsion to help him (92). It is normal for Willy to ignore Charley's advice to allow Biff the opportunity to set up his own way of life in the west:

> CHARLEY: Let him go.... He won't starve. None of them starve. Forget about him.
>
> WILLY: Then what have I got to remember?
>
> CHARLEY: You take it too hard. To hell with it. When a deposit bottle is broken you don't get your nickel back. (34)

However, Willy's moral authority as the family man is collapsed as a consequence of a sin committed because of business. In other words, business is accused of being a motive for Willy's adultery. This is clear when Willy attempts to justify his infidelity "I get so lonely – especially when business is bad and there's nobody to talk to. I get the feeling that I'll never sell anything again, that I won't make a living for you, or a business, a business for the boys" (29).

Biff knows that his mother is an ideal wife, taking care of everything which concerns the father, the children or the home. This presupposes the reward from the father: he must remain faithful. Yet, Biff conceives, "In his interaction with Linda, [his father] habitually patronizes, demeans, and expresses irritation at her; anything he says, no matter how trivial or self-contradictory, is made to seem more important than anything she says"

(Stanton 133). Biff loses his way when he is seventeen years old. He comes to Boston so that his father can fix a math failure for him but he is shocked to find his father having an illicit affair. Biff's idealised image of his father is destroyed; he condemns Willy as follows:

> BIFF: You – you gave her Mama's stockings! [*His tears break through and he tries 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!" (95)

The core of the moral authority of the father is terribly shaken here by his son's abusive language. Willy's passionate bond with Biff has been changed into a quarrelsome one that always wears away the power and the respect of the father until the few moments prior to the salesman's extreme expression of self-hatred, suicide.

As Savran comments on the consequences of this episode, "Neither Willy nor Biff is able to coax his masculine fantasy into reality insofar as both are, in very different ways, tainted by the feminine. Willy's guilty secret ... is his ruin and threatens both his own masculine self-sufficiency and the very stability and durability of the patrilineal economy" (*Communists, Cowboys and Queers* 40). Willy's purpose with this casual relationship with the woman is to restore a sense of being male enough, a feeling battered by the stiff business world. Nevertheless, as a consequence, his masculine identity loses the remains of an integral component, self-regard. He becomes more vulnerable, tentative

and anxious, especially when he looks into Biff's eyes. Hynes writes that it is "Willy's confusion, his identifying of two needs, [that] overwhelms him. The two synonymous needs are (1) that Biff returns his father's love and (2) that Biff's love takes the particular shape of his accepting Willy's 'dream,' and of thereby vindicating Willy's whole life" (287). In short, as a result of his disillusion with his father, Biff becomes another source of Willy's dissatisfaction and insecurity.

Likewise, since that day, Biff also has felt "mixed up very bad" (17) and has become a victim to "self-loathing" (98). He abandons the example of his father as a salesman: he decides to pursue another way of life. In fact, the moral and spiritual collapse of his model, evoked by his father's infidelity, is Biff's main motive for leaving home. Willy's action hits the basis of his son's masculinity. "Before his fateful visit to Willy's hotel room, Biff had been the incarnation of a charismatic and reckless masculinity: star athlete, captain of the football team, and a man 'too rough with the girls' (31). After his disenchantment, however, Biff flounders and, like his father, turns to fantasy as a way of recouping masculine power" (Savran, *Communists, Cowboys and Queers* 35). Thus, the female, who is supposed to provide Willy with a sense of masculinity, turns the masculine existence of both the father and the son upside down.

Willy is unable to understand that "Biff Loman is lost. In the greatest country in the world a young man – with such personal attractiveness, gets lost" (11). Miller creates the character of Biff to confirm the trap generated by the American dream. Though his

attitudes and behaviour are different from those of his father, Biff strays. Sadly lamenting, he tells his brother:

> BIFF: I don't know what the future is. I don't know – what I'm supposed to want.... I'm thirty-four years old, I oughta be makin' my future.... I've always made a point of not wasting my life, and every time I come back here I know that all I've done is to waste my life.... Maybe I oughta get stuck into something.... I'm like a boy. I'm not married, I'm not in business. (16-17)

In the words of Scanlan, "Biff learns to be himself by rejecting the success ethic, which means rejecting the family structure," (141) because his father is the advocate of such a success. He escapes from the competitive business world by means of wandering in the west, where he has "had twenty or thirty different kinds of job since [he] left home before the war" (16).

Moreover, as indicated by his speech to his younger brother, Biff has an unclear desire for something different. He, nonetheless, is in need of abilities to articulate and crystallise that 'something.' Hynes comments that Biff "takes over because it is he who at last knows himself; because, ironically, it is he who ... manifests tragic potential by driving against all possibility into the brick wall of Willy's dementia, in order to restore Willy's dignity by making him see himself as Biff sees both of them" (287). After stealing the fountain pen from Bill Oliver's office, Biff declares that he has recognised the falsity of both his own life and his father's teachings of him. In the restaurant and before the arrival of his father, he declares to Happy:

> BIFF: ... How the hell did I ever get the idea I was a salesman there? I even believed myself that I'd been a salesman for him! And then he [Bill Oliver] gave me one look and – I realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life had been! We've been talking in a dream for fifteen years. (82)

Though he finds himself to be "nothing," Biff, unlike his father, at least attempts to find out his own identity. Near the end of the play, he confesses to Willy, "Pop, I'm nothing! I'm nothing, Pop. Can't you understand that? There's no spite in it anymore" (105). Despite this confession, Willy is unwilling to accept the truth. Till the last moment of his life, he insists, "That boy – that boy is going to be magnificent!" (106).

Willy Loman cannot realise that finding one's self necessitates both social integration and true psychological insight. Zeineddine maintains that *Death of a Salesman* stresses the killing impact of having no credibility or transparency: "Willy fails to coin the metal in himself and subsequently renounces his real authentic being in favour of a mask.... [He] wears [the mask] of a 'number one' man. [It is] the only means of maintaining an identity in the social masquerade and of eliminating [his] fear of separateness. Masks may be identified with identity.... Willy's life is built on a lie. In fact, it is the idea of a life-lie" ("Willy Loman's Illusions" 94). Willy's mask enhances the domination of a fake self over a real one. He believes that success at work is conditional upon appearances. An example, which shows both his delusion as well as his contradiction, is the statement addressed to Linda, "Oh, I'll knock 'em dead next week. I'll go to Hartford, I'm very well liked in Hartford. You know, the trouble is, Linda, people don't seem to take to me"

(28). Willy lies not only to himself but also to the other. He is even incapable of being loyal to his supportive wife.

In addition, Willy sees that it does not matter, when his sons' academic progress is lower than their physical characteristics. Speaking to Biff and Happy, he argues:

> WILLY: Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, but when he gets out in the business world, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That's why I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets a head. (25)

According to Willy, the appearance of the salesman is more important than the specifications of the commodity he sells. He also applies the notion of 'appearance' to objects as well. He recalls that, one afternoon, he and Biff simonised their old car. The car has such an attractive appearance that the dealer, to whom they sell the car, refuses to believe that there are eighty thousand miles on it.

Willy even deludes himself into thinking that he is a successful salesman. He says to Ben, recalling Uncle Morty in *Awake and Sing!,* that "Business is bad, it's murderous. But not for me, of course" (40). In another occasion, Willy tells Howard Wagner that he has already "averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in commissions" (64), but Howard impatiently denies that percentage. Nonetheless, when Linda asks Willy how much he sells on a trip, he is forced to reduce the amount of his gross sales from "five hundred gross in Providence and seven hundred gross in Boston" (27) to "roughly two

hundred gross on the whole trip" (27). Willy is obliged to tell the truth to Linda because she, using a pencil and paper, calculates the actual commission which will be a basic contribution to the family income. For that reason, there is no way to delude her in that issue.

Moreover, Willy falsely assumes that he can be more successful at salesmanship than carpentry and construction at which he is excellent. In the Requiem, Linda recalls, "He was so wonderful with his hands" (110). Mentioning that he does not know how to do home improvements, Charley praises Willy's experience in installing the ceiling of his living room. All of this suggests that Willy is out of step with the times; his practical abilities are not valued in a world where men no longer have to make or repair things but are expected only to persuade people to buy more. Willy is so fascinated by the nature of salesmanship that he never imagines himself to be a carpenter or a builder since these are no longer occupations with great social status attached. What supports his adherence to the sales world is his speech with his brother in Act II. Ben offers Willy a hazardous but a rewarding chance:

> BEN: Now, look here, William. I've bought timberland in Alaska and I need a man to look after things for me.
>
> WILLY: God, timberland! Me and my boys in those grand outdoors!
>
> BEN: You've a new continent at you doorstep, William. Get out of these cities, they're full of talk and time payments and courts of law. Screw on your fists and you can fight for a fortune up there. (66)

However, affected by Linda, Willy declines the invitation and sticks to his career. In his refusal to use his manual abilities and insistence on pursuing salesmanship, Miller hints at the invasion of this profession as well as the development it represents to American work.

In fact, Linda keeps on maintaining Willy's world of illusions in order to save him from a reality too callous for him to tolerate. She realises that it is her role to sustain him emotionally. She is ready to sacrifice even her own sons so that he feels secure. "In her management of Willy, she embodies the American Dream ideal of the model post-World War II wife, infinitely supportive of her man. She makes no mistakes. She has no flaws in wifely perfection" (Stanton 134). "It is she who has faced with the father the agonies of salesmanship, refrigerators, mortgages, life insurance, exhaustion and withering" (Schneider, "The Oedipal Theme" 82).

Miller describes Linda in the opening stage directions as follows:

> *Most often jovial, she has developed an iron repression of her exceptions to WILLY's behaviour – she more than loves him, she admires him, as though his mercurial nature, his temper, his massive dreams and little cruelties, served her only as sharp reminders of the turbulent longings within him, longings which she shares but lacks the temperament to utter and follow to their end.* (8)

A seemingly selfless wife, Linda shelters and cares for the ageing and unsuccessful Willy Loman. She declares to Biff, "I love him. *(With a threat, but only a threat, of tears.)* He's the dearest man in the world to me, and I won't have anyone making him feel unwanted

and low and blue" (43). She feels that she was born to satisfy, cope with, counsel and make Willy happy. She even helps him take off his shoes and coat (9-10). She is also very interested in his health when she asks him many times to take aspirin and to prepare a sandwich for him (9-12). She has the characteristics of the traditional wife such as selflessness, nurturance and tolerance. However, Linda helps Willy to go inside an inescapable trap.

In the interview with Kullman in 1997, Miller was asked whether the term "co-dependency" applies to Linda or not. He replies:

> Well, yes, it takes two to tango. She regards Willy as being very brittle, very easily destroyed; and she's got to prop him up or he'll collapse. In a way it's like someone who is dealing with a sick person. She's trying to keep bad news away from him lest he be destroyed by it.... At all costs she's got to shield him from the truth. She can insinuate the truth sometimes, but not too obviously. When he says, "You're my foundation and support," that has a double meaning. She's a kind of co-dependent and heroine at the same time. (624)

Not only does Linda support Willy's values, but she also provides him with excuses for his failure. She, thus, nourishes his self-delusions. For instance, when Willy tells her that he feels dissatisfied with the way he is treated by other salesmen, she reassures him, "You're too accommodating, dear" (10). When he complains about how little he sells, she comforts him: "Well, next week you'll do better," (28). When he reports that people seem to laugh at him, she lies, "you're doing wonderful, dear. You're making seventy to

a hundred dollars a week" (28). When he feels worried about the way in which he appears to customers on the road, she again justifies and praises: "You don't talk too much, you're just lively" (28) and "Willy, darling, you're the handsomest man in the world.... To me you are. [*Slight pause.*] The handsomest" (29).

Yet, in another interview with Robert Martin and Richard Meyer in 1976, Miller commented on how much Linda contributes to Willy's destruction: "It's rather inevitable that she be as she is. But I can't imagine that another woman would have made all that much difference to him.... When somebody is destroyed, everybody finally contributes to it. She would have contributed, yes.... She could have done different things maybe, but I'm quite convinced that it would have come out substantially the same anyway" (265). As Roudané observes, she "contributes to the truth-illusion matrix" by supporting Willy's "vital lie" ("*Death of the Salesman*" 70)

From a commercial point of view, Linda is similar to Willy. Miller adds that "she is also sucked into the same mechanism; she's not apart from it. If she were apart from it, she couldn't very well have remained [Willy's] wife for this long" (Martin and Meyer 265-266). Linda measures success according to the materialistic terms of the business-oriented culture. Loyal to the consumer culture, she also defends the purchase of the often-broken Hastings refrigerators because "[t]hey got the biggest ads of any of them!" (27). Otten sheds light on other aspects of her concern with the world of figures. He writes:

> It is Linda who maintains the financial accounts that measure success in the warped vision of the Loman household, who knows precisely how much commission Willy might make in a given sale, who pesters Willy about securing an advance to pay the mortgage, who knows exactly how short they are at any given moment. She is even complicit in urging Willy to compete in his job. (14-15)

As Willy is a salesman on the road, she is an accountant in the home. Since numbers are the core of both professions, she admires not only her work but also that of Willy. She tells Ben that Willy's "got a beautiful job here" (67).

Linda behaves unreservedly when Biff declares that he is going to meet Bill Oliver who will support him in business. She comments, "Isn't that wonderful?" (49). As self-deceived as Willy is, she adds that "Oliver always thought the highest" (51) of Biff. In her verbal addition to Biff's comments relating to Oliver's consideration for him, Linda replies, "He loved you!" (64). What is sarcastic is that Oliver does not even remember Biff later in the play. This episode combined with the theft of the fountain pen leads to the play's climactic confrontation between Biff and Willy. Linda similarly participates in Willy's reconstructions of the past, for example, when she remembers vividly how Biff appeared "in gold" (54) at Ebbets Field. Her own language sometimes mirrors Willy's. For example, she tells Biff to "make a nice impression on him [Oliver], darling. Just don't perspire too much before you see him" (59). She declares to Willy, "You're doing well enough, Willy!... You're well liked, and the boys love you" (67). She says to Ben, "old man Wagner told him [Willy] just the other day that if he keeps it up he'll be a

member of the firm, didn't he Willy?" (67). She also holds up Willy's eighty-four-year old example, Dave Singleman, whose work is to "go into any city, pick up the phone, and he's making his living" (67).

Unlike Mrs. Zero in *The Adding Machine* and Bessie in *Awake and Sing!*, Linda never says anything that disparages Willy as an inadequate breadwinner, though she is aware that Willy "borrows" fifty dollars a week from Charley to make it look like he is still the provider of the family (45). She fervently defends him as an offended and noble victim of many people, including his own offspring. When Biff and Happy prefer sleeping with two whores to having dinner with their father, "she fights like a she-tiger against the sons" (Schneider, "The Oedipal Theme" 82). She attacks them as follows:

> LINDA: ...You see what I'm sitting here and waiting for? And you tell me he has no character? The man who never worked a day but for your benefit. When does he get the medal for that? Is this his reward – to turn around at the age of sixty-three and find his sons, who he loved better than his life, one a philandering bum –
>
> HAPPY: Mom!
>
> LINDA: That's all you are, my baby! *(To Biff.)* And you! What happened to the love you had for him? You were such pals! How you used to talk to him on the phone every night! How lonely he was till he could come home to you! (45)

As McDaniel argues, Linda "can function as a bad mother without earning the audience's wrath but only as a result of her hyper-nurturance toward Willy" (26).

In contrast to Bessie's declaration that she is not only the mother but also the father in the Berger family, the mother in *Death of a Salesman* challenges and threatens the elder son for the sake of the father. Linda says to Biff, "[T]here's no leeway any more. Either he's your father and you pay him that respect, or else you're not to come here" (43). Contrasting what happen to Mr. Zero and Myron, here the most integral aspect of respect is that of the father in the figure of Willy. Later in the play, because of the ingratitude of the two sons, Linda cries in their face, "Get out of my sight! Get out of here!...Get out of here, both of you, and don't come back! ... Get out of here! ... Get out of this house!" (97-99). She is quite ready to sacrifice the instinct of motherhood so that the recognition of the father as the family man is kept intact. Put in another way, Linda attempts to make the identity of Willy in the home fortified by barbed wire where it is hazardous for anyone to approach to offend.

Bigsby comments on the image of Elizabeth Franz, who played the role of Linda Loman in 1999 production in Broadway. He writes that, in the Requiem, she outstretched her arm on Willy's grave, "like a nun prostrating herself before a mystery" (*A Critical Study* 114). (See figure 8.) In a wider context, Linda is the one who provides the plea

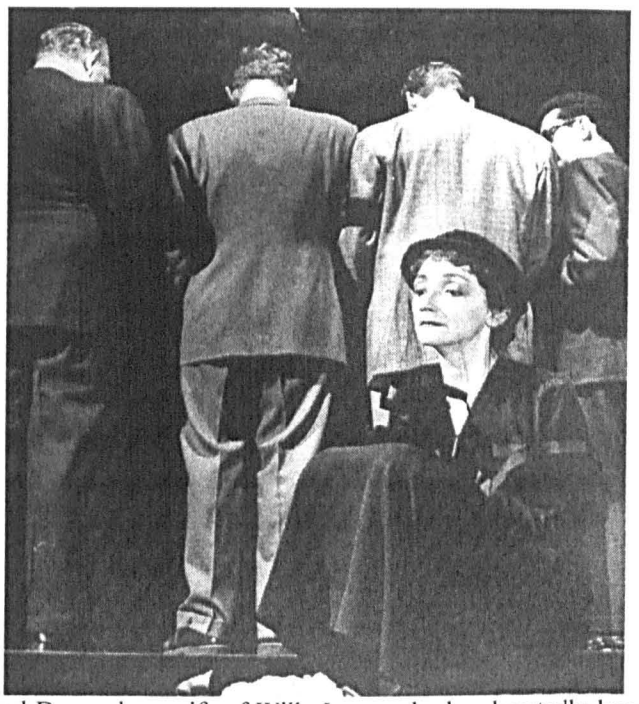

Figure 8. Actress Mildred Dunnock as wife of Willy Loman, broken-heartedly kneeling at his grave after his suicide while his two sons and two friends stand with backs turned in funeral. Scene from the Broadway production of *Death of a Salesman.* New York, 1949. Director is Elia Kazan. Photographer is W. Eugene Smith

for sympathy for Willy as a human being. In her noteworthy speech, she confirms this:

> LINDA: I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper.... 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. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person.... He works for a company thirty-six years this March, opens up unheard-of territories to their trademark, and now in his old age they take his salary away. (44)

Linda, thus, gives voice to Willy's real value and comments on the actual worth beneath his bubble existence. Jacobson contends that "although she proves occasionally capable of dramatic outbursts, she lacks the imagination and strength ... to help Loman define a

new life" (51). Though Linda exerts efforts to save Willy's masculinity in the household, his male identity in the workplace is tainted not only as a direct impact of the nature of salesmanship but partly because of Linda as well. As he is victimising his customers, he is victimised by the system which is supposed to reward him. Accordingly, Willy is turned into a character which is sawn, in an evoking way, into two parts: one lives in reality and the other in illusion. The following and last section of the chapter deals with this aspect of Willy's life through a discussion of the form of the play.

Miller succeeds in integrating the content of *Death of a Salesman* with its form. The play opens with a detailed expressionistic description of the setting. Miller writes in the text of the play, *"We are aware of towering, angular shapes behind it, surrounding it on all sides. Only the blue light of the sky falls upon the house and forestage; the surrounding area shows an angry glow of orange. As more light appears, we see a solid value of apartment houses around the small, fragile-seeming home. An air of the dream clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality"* (7). This panorama underlines the two worlds of the play: the dream world of the past and the real world of the present. The setting remains fixed throughout the whole play. In the text, Miller also elucidates how the forestage between Willy's house and the audience does a double job, "*This forward area serves as the back yard as well as the locale of all Willy's imaginings and of his city scenes. Whenever the action is in the present, the actors observe the imaginary wall-lines, entering the house only through its door at the left. But in the scenes of the past, these boundaries are broken, and characters enter or leave a room by stepping 'through' a wall on to the forestage*" (7).

Miller also utilises lighting in an expressionistic way. "The German expressionists used light to create a strong sense of mood and to isolate characters in a void. By contrasting light and shadow, and by employing extreme side, overhead, and rear lightning angels, they established the nightmarish atmosphere in which many of their plays took place" (Lounsberry 58). In *Death of a Salesman*, at the end of Act I, Biff appears in the mid of "a golden pool of light." This draws the attention of the audience towards one of Willy's past memories: the old salesman remembers one of Biff's baseball matches when the son seems like "Hercules — something like that. And the sun, the sun all around him." In addition to being a means of referring to Willy's recollections, the lighting also hints at the discrepancy between the past and the present. While Biff was a sports star, now his brightness has dwindled as Willy explains, "A star like that, magnificent, can never really fade away!." Thus, a simple means of expressionism can widen the themes of the play: like his father, Biff turns to be a failure owing to external impersonal forces over which he has no control. This enhances the correlation and the integration between the content and form of the play.

Miller also makes an expressionistic use of colour and sound. The outlines of Willy's flat are covered in orange. When Willy remembers something, the flat is spotted by the green of "vanished trees." When Biff and Happy catch two whores and ignore their father, the stage directions show a vivid red. At the end of the play, when Willy madly attempts to cultivate the garden by night, the "blues" of the stage directions at once hints at both the light of the moon and Willy's sense of hopelessness. In the same way, music is stage-managed. The countryside manner of life is embodied by flute music, "telling of

grass and trees and the horizon" (7). Willy alone can hear it when he has dreams of the kind of life he should have had or of the past when his community was still in the countryside. This music is connected with Willy's father who makes flutes. In modern America, it deteriorates to Willy's and Biff's tendency to whistle in lifts and to the industrialised whistle of Howard and his kids as it is made through a tape recorder. The significant Boston hotel scene is associated by a high-pitched trumpet discharge. Willy's resolution to commit suicide is associated with a long-lasting and irritating note which falls down into a collision to stand for the offstage car accident. It is, in the end, adapted to a dead walk as a transition to the Requiem scene (Parker, "Expressionism in *Death*" 68-69).

What is more significant is that Miller utilises expressionism to display Willy's character, values and workings of mind. Dissimilar to Elmer Rice, Miller feels indebted to the Germans. The latter confesses, "I had always been attracted and repelled by the brilliance of German expressionism after World War I, and one aim in *Salesman* was to employ its unique marvellous shorthand for humane, 'felt' characterizations rather than for purposes of demonstration for which the Germans had used it" (*Collected Plays* 39). Miller employs this dramatic technique in order *not* to raise or demonstrate a social issue as the Germans, in general, or Rice, in particular, did. Instead, he uses expressionism to bring a personal dilemma to light. He wants to attract the attention of the public towards a mentally collapsed person who is haunted by forces out of his control. As Raymond Williams maintains, "*Death of a Salesman* is actually a development of expressionism"

which is divided into two types, "personal" and "social" ("The Realism of Arthur Miller" 75).

From the German expressionists, maintains Lounsberry, Miller learns their "quite marvellous shorthand" for showing unseen powers. He manages to widen the expressionistic techniques by applying them to depict "felt" human character while presenting "social types." Willy Loman is a salesman. To this level, Miller makes use of the German "allegorical tradition." However, he also utilises expressionism to present Willy as a particular man. Further, he resolves the hardest difficulty the German expressionists encounter: "how to avoid the purely aberrational while using a subjective approach to reveal and comment on objective reality." Predominantly in its final phases, expressionism is inclined to be connected to "aberrant or nightmare visions." Miller's dexterously balanced expressionism lets him create "a psyche in the process of deterioration, but one that appears to audiences as far more representative than aberrant" (55). In *Collected Plays*, Miller presents an important note on the genesis of the play. He writes, "The first image that occurred to me which was to result in *Death of a Salesman* was of an enormous face to the height of the proscenium arch which would appear and then open up, and we would see the inside of man's head. In fact, *The Inside of His Head* was the first title" (23).

Williams points out that Willy's guilt of failure is not an action which is prone to public process and needs a plot to be clarified. Rather, it is the realisation of a complete life. In view of that, the expressionistic form of the play is not a casual experimentation,

but it is its backbone. In short, Miller's play is a performance of a mind (*Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* 309-310). This technique encourages the spectators to identify themselves with Willy for the full time of the play and to empathise with his plight in a manner that they could not do in reality. It allows them to perceive more than Willy does so that they become able to express criticism of him as well. But the form compels them to do so from within (Parker, "Point of View" 101). Willy's head contains both current events of the present and memories of the past. Lounsberry explains that employing expressionism to display "Ibsenesque cause and effect" is a method whose aim is to reduce the technique's "aberrational taint." For instance, Miller exposes the correlation between Willy's past guilt and present actions. "German expressionism was such a message-centered drama that it was usually organized according to idea, theme, or motif rather than on cause-and-effect relations among incidents. In *Death of a Salesman*, Miller demonstrates that expressionism can be employed in the service of cause and effect" (55). Hence, this dramatic form has been developed at the hands of Miller.

Worsley, Beyer and Gassner consider Willy's restoration of his past to be flashbacks. Commenting on the stage design of the play, Worsley says that Jo Mielziner, the setting designer, brings the audience to the front of the stage for the "flashbacks" into the ideal past when Biff and Happy were kids and loved their father who could hope for himself and for them (225). Beyer asserts that Miller's flashbacks, which took the style of "stream-of-consciousness," reveal the present dilemma concerning Willy's past recollections (229). In addition, Gassner defines the source of the flashbacks. He writes, "I can only note ... approvingly with respect to the flashbacks that each reminiscence

springs from a *tension* in Willy. The reminiscence is not hurled at us as necessary information but presented as a compulsive act on Willy's part" (238). Far from being the product of his own judgement and free will, Willy's conscious thoughts and actions are stimulated by subconscious fears, desires, anxieties, guilt feelings and regressions.

On the other hand, Schneider argues that the play has no flashbacks. He writes that Willy does not return to the past. Rather, "as in hallucination," it is the past which comes back to him. It does not flow "chronologically as in flashback, but *dynamically with the inner logic of his erupting volcanic unconscious.*" In psychoanalysis, this is called "the return of the repressed." In this condition, the mind ruptures when it is invaded by heavily shocking fancies. So, it turns out to be incapable of negotiating with what is real ("Play of Dreams" 252). In providing a justification for Willy's involvement in his past, Schroeder has a different point of view concerning who comes back to whom: Willy doubts he is in part responsible for the failure of both himself and Biff. Nevertheless, he is powerless to bear the straight dealing with this charge. Hence, he moves back to his recollection world partly to encounter the fact which exists there and partly to run away from the aftermath of the past which is exposed by present behaviour (91).

According to Parker, Miller exhibits a subjective record of a past which is warped by Willy's mind. Willy's memories have an added "tension" since they come to his mind concurrently with actions in the present. The form, thus, is more like "a double exposure than a flashback" ("Expressionism in *Death*" 70). Willy's reminiscences and the present episodes are emotionally associated: the former are not recalled immediately but are

triggered by what happens at present. For example, though Willy looks forward to having dinner with Biff and Happy at a restaurant, the two sons desert him there for the sake of two "lousy rotten whores" (98). For him, it is very horrible to find out their complicity. Therefore, he mentally restores a similar past experience that carries the same meaning of infidelity. He remembers his illicit affair with a lusty woman in a hotel in Boston:

[*The WOMAN enters, laughing. WILLY follows her. She is in a black slip; he is buttoning his shirt. Raw, sensuous music accompanies their speech*]

THE WOMAN: Whyn't you have another drink, honey, and stop being so damn self-centred?

WILLY: I'm so lonely.

THE WOMAN: You know you ruined me, Willy?...

WILLY: That's nice of you to say that.

THE WOMAN: Gee, you are self-centred! Why so sad? You are the saddest, self-centredest soul I ever did see-saw. [*She laughs. He kisses her.*]... (91-92)

A second example takes place when Willy comes out of the washroom of the restaurant. A waiter, who cannot get what happens to Willy, finds him on his knees. But, the audience is aware of the reason for Willy's disintegration, when Miller makes Willy relive the scene in Boston hotel. On his knees, Willy shouts, "I gave you an order, Biff!" (95). This creates a powerful effect. Hitting his fist on the floor, he re-enacts the repressed scene of asking Biff to forgive him for his lechery. As Schneider puts it, "Willy hammers at the present on the anvil of the past" ("Play of Dreams" 253). (See Figure 9.)

Figure 9. Lee J. Cobb as Willy Loman being restrained by Arthur Kennedy as Biff and Cameron Mitchell as Happy, while talking nonsense at imaginary characters in the restaurant scene from the Broadway production of *Death of a Salesman*. New York, 1949. Director is Elia Kazan. Photographer is W. Eugene Smith

Miller himself asserts, "There are no flashbacks in this play but only a mobile concurrency of past and present, and this because in his desperation to justify his life Willy Loman has destroyed the boundaries between now and then" (*Collected Plays* 26).

In *Death of a Salesman*, it is Willy's character which is the link between these two tenses. "This is possible because Willy is technically a schizophrenic: overwork, worry, and, particularly, repressed guilt have resulted in a mental breakdown ... where, in Miller's own phrase, time is 'exploded'" (Parker, "Point of View" 100). Miller's motive for merging the present and the past is to show Willy's real manner of thinking. "I wished to create a form," says Miller, "which, in itself as a form, would literally be the process of Willy Loman's way of mind.... As I look at the play now, its form seems the form of a

confession" (*Collected Plays* 23-24). The past is the force that controls Willy's life. It overrules and verifies his present which is diminished to the mere form of an echo. Miller goes on:

> The *Salesman* image was from the beginning absorbed with the concept that nothing in life comes 'next' but that everything exists together and at the same time within us; that there is no past to be 'brought forward' in a human being, but that he is his past at every moment and that the present is merely that which his past is capable of noticing and smelling and reacting to. (23)

Howard's tape recorder has a significant connection to Willy's incapability to resist his past. "When Willy stumbles against [the tape recorder] and sets it accidentally into motion, it precipitates a hysterical breakdown that symbolizes the central theme of the play in Willy's horror at his inability to switch it off – to switch off the recorded past" (Welland 41).

No past reminiscence is permitted to leave the play in a condition of motionlessness. The action, on the whole, develops a footstep further after these occurrences. What is also important is that outbreaks of clashes between the father or the mother, on one hand, and the boys, on the other hand, come before and after such incidents (Gassner 238). The reliving of the Boston hotel whim, for instance, is preceded by a sign of betrayal on the part of Biff and Happy towards their father. It is also followed by Linda's confrontation of the two sons. This leads to a bursting climax. Biff becomes maniacally enraged at his mother's persistent defence of his father. He uncovers his father as a philanderer and a

fake. And the father is about to be stricken by his elder son. Accordingly, the expressionistic technique gives Miller a space to widen the themes of the play, such as infidelity of the father, hoped for togetherness of the family and ingratitude of the sons. In addition, the coexistence of the past and the present in Willy's mind is dramatised with the company of expressionistic elements such as soft lighting, the falling leaves of autumn or the music of a flute. For instance, before the first reliving of the past – when Willy talks to Biff and Happy concerning girls, their red Chevrolet and the importance of being well-liked – Miller paves the way so that the audience is aware that the talk took place years ago. He writes that Biff's and Happy's "*light is out. Well before they have finished speaking, WILLY's form is dimly seen below in the darkened kitchen.... The apartment houses are fading out, and the entire house and surroundings become covered with leaves. Music insinuates itself as the leaves appear*" (21). That structure of the play helps Miller to explore and depict the "friction, collision, and tension between past and present [which] was the heart of the play's particular construction" (Miller, *Collected Plays* 27).

According to Lounsberry, Miller uses expressionism when he creates his characters to be "split" into younger forms of themselves so that they correspond to Willy's reminiscences (59). Furthermore, Ben Loman is a crucial factor in the effective use of this technique. Miller skilfully makes Willy's elder brother appear conspicuously less "real" than the other characters. Ben seems as such because he is not as much a human being as the incarnation of Willy's aspiration for flight and achievement: Willy considers him to be "success incarnate." (32). This assumption is verified by realising that Ben

becomes visible not only in the scenes of the past but also at the end of the play, where he plainly stands for a part of Willy's own mind, to have a discussion with Willy concerning the latter's intention of committing suicide. Added to that, Ben has a more artificial style of speech as well. In the original production of the play, Elia Kazan, the director, made Thomas Chalmers play the role of Ben abnormally, as if the actor were a robot. What is fascinating is that "the stage directions" indicate that Ben always emerges accurately at the time Willy thinks about him. This is untrue of the other characters in the recall episodes. The character of Ben, subsequently, embodies not Ben as he really was, so much as Ben as his figure is distorted in Willy's mind. This tells the unusual essence of expressionism in the play (Parker, "Expressionism in *Death*" 70).

Through the expressionistic techniques used in *Death of a Salesman*, Miller succeeds in dramatising Willy's breakdown as well as his disconnection from reality. Miller also manages to depict the pressure of work, in the form of salesmanship, as eroding the root of human identity and, thus, exposing man's spirit and body to doom. He justifies why the play has left a powerful impact when he writes:

> [I]t set forth unremittingly the picture of a man ... whose situation made clear that at bottom we are alone, valueless, without even the elements of a human person, when once we fail to fit the patterns of efficiency.... In short, the absolute value of the individual human being is believed in only as a secondary value; it stands well below the needs of efficient production. (qtd. in Blumberg, "Work as Alienation" 50-51)

With the context of *Death of a Salesman*, "efficient production" is construed as closing as many business deals as possible. Because he is an other-directed character, Willy depends upon other people's reactions so that he secures his livelihood and his self-esteem. Blumberg regards Willy as "the tragic personification of the other-directed, success seeking new middle-class man of mid 20th century corporate America" ("Sociology and Social Literature" 299). Willy's occupational life reaches its sad end in his unexpected dismissal after having a long history of work doing the same job for the same company. Unlike Mr. Zero, he "does not lose his job to a machine; he loses it because he can no longer compete with his fellow salesmen" (Jerz 137). Like Zero's, his family life reflects the troubles that come across him at work.

Linda amplifies Willy's emasculation by his career by, paradoxically, supporting everything he says or does. Like the wives in the previous plays examined in this thesis, Linda also contributes to the destruction of Willy but in a quite different way. Her support for him is revealed to be killing him. "For many critics, Linda Loman represents Miller's failure to create progressive and helpful female characters; at worst, she reflects the dramatist's sexist attitude, ironically, given the play's intent, in corroboration with the corrosive, masculine-driven, materialist ethos of American culture" (Otten 13). Moreover, Willy is half a father and half a salesman at home. Conformity to the system prompts him to preach the ethics of salesmanship in his household. He is responsible for the dilemma which Biff suffers from.

In addition to the episode of infidelity, Willy intensifies the disparity between reality and dream on the part of his elder son when he keeps on feeding him with the necessity to be a success. As this old salesman feels vulnerable within the corporate business world, he fails to provide Biff with the proper way to achieve this myth. The outcome is a young man who has no sense of his own identity though he seeks to be something. Thence, the play is about a death of a salesman and, at the same time, a death of a father and a resurrection of a son. This element of domesticity is absent in *Glengarry Glen Ross* which is the subject of the following chapter: there is no room for family relations in Mamet's play. The questions I raise, in this chapter, are the following: how does the cutthroat competition of American corporate business corrupt human relationships? How is maintaining a masculine identity closely connected to achieving success? How does Mamet integrate the form of the play (new realism) with its content (vulgarity, obscenity and the dishonesty of the salesmen)?

Chapter IV
Death of a Salesman

Chapter V

Glengarry Glen Ross (1983)

Succeed, Survive; Fail, Feel Fired

Glengarry Glen Ross is one of David Mamet's most successful plays. It had its premiere at the National Theatre in London on September 21, 1983, and it won the Society of West End Theatres Award for Best Play. The play opened in America at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago on January 27, 1984, and it moved to a successful Broadway run at the Golden Theatre in New York in March, 1984. In the same year, it won the Pulitzer Prize, the Drama Critics' Award for Best American Play, a Joseph Dintenfass Award and four Tony Award nominations, including Best Play and Best Director for Gregory Mosher. In 1985, the play won the Dramatists' Guild's Annual Hull-Warriner Award for Best Play. *Glengarry Glen Ross* was dedicated to Harold Pinter, who encouraged Mamet to stage it. The play established Mamet's reputation as a master of uncovering American empty business ethics. Like his other two plays of his business trilogy, *American Buffalo* (1975) and *Speed the Plow* (1988), *Glengarry Glen Ross* depicts how the dictating spirit of capitalism corrupts the American businessman's moral and social behaviour.

This chapter aims to explore how *Glengarry Glen Ross* responded to the cutthroat competition of seeking the American dream in the 1980s and to illustrate how the dream stirred up social Darwinism. It highlights the way in which greed and self-interest in business work against friendship and partnership: in the play, individualism conquers collectivism. Further, I argue that the need of the businessman to establish and maintain a

masculine identity parallels his need to succeed in business: for him, having means being. I also discuss how the ethics of salesmanship cause the spiritual and moral death of the salesman and how the spirit of exploitation invades him, corrupting his senses. Moreover, I explore how Mamet integrates form with content through relating new realism to the characters' language in addition to the plot and settings of the play. As a result, I shed light on the relationship between salesmanship and personal desires, underlining how the former affects the nature of the individual. It is worth mentioning that "David Mamet is a writer interested in studying what man has become as a result of his social surroundings. But unlike the old realists ..., Mamet is less concerned with social issues per se than he is with uncovering how these social concerns have actually taken over and corrupted/destroyed the men and women of that society" (Demastes 67). Here lies the difference between Mamet and, for example, Odets. The behaviour of the salesmen is a reflection of a spiritually and morally lost culture. Finally, I show how Mamet's realism creates a kind of illusionary atmosphere in the play. The chapter, thus, investigates how and why the American salesman loses identity, transparency and security.

Glengarry Glen Ross consists of two acts. Act I is divided into three short scenes set in a Chicago Chinese restaurant. Act II takes place in a real estate office. In the play's "roughly 75 minutes of running time, Mamet has created a small masterpiece, which reveals with extraordinary perspicacity the treachery of the materialistic world [Americans] live in" (Schvey 103). There are seven characters: Richard Roma, John Williamson, James Lingk and detective Baylen are in their early forties; Shelly Levene, Dave Moss and George Aaronow are in their fifties. Roma, Levene, Moss and Aaronow

are salesmen. Amoral behaviour is easily and unconscionably followed by them so that they try to counteract the threats of capitalism as well as satiate their hunger for business success.

At the very beginning of the play, Levene tries to bribe Williamson, the office manager. The aging salesman has become incapable of coping with the cutthroat competition of American business. Therefore, he is willing to behave in whatever way it takes to save his present and future. In Scene 2, to Aaronow, Moss expresses his dissatisfaction with Murray and Mitch, his employers, who treat their employees like machines. In order to ensure his own survival, he tempts Aaronow to break into the office to steal the leads.[1] In Scene 3, Roma uses language not to communicate with Lingk, a customer, but to con him into purchasing worthless land. In Act II, robbery has been committed and is now being investigated by Baylen. An atmosphere of chaos prevails in the play. Levene feels proud of himself as he recites how he has succeeded in deceiving a couple named Bruce and Harriet Nyborg. Lingk comes in to nullify his recent business deal with Roma. As usual, Roma is about to mislead him but is prevented by Williamson's interference. Minutes later, Roma offers partnership with Levene, he then seeks to betray him for the sake of some leads. In the end, Levene is proclaimed as the actual thief and Moss as the mastermind of the burglary.

Mamet based *Glengarry Glen Ross* on his own work experience. After the graduation from college in Vermont, Mamet went to Chicago to work as an actor. Finding out that he had neither skills nor experience, he registered with a temporary employment agency

[1] The leads are the addresses of prospective land buyers.

which sent him out for a two-day job in a Chicagoan real-estate office. The office was selling areas of undeveloped land in Arizona and Florida (Dean, *David Mamet* 195). Mamet recollects the type of his work there:

> The firm advertised on radio and television.... Interested viewers would telephone in for the brochure and their names and numbers were given to me. My job was to call them back, assess their income and sales susceptibility and arrange an appointment with them for one of the office salesmen.... This appointment was called a lead – in the same way that a clue in a criminal case is called a lead, i.e., it may lead to the suspect, the suspect in this case being a prospect. The salesmen would then take their assigned leads and go out on the appointments, which were called sits, i.e., a meeting where one actually sits down with the prospects. (qtd. in Dean, *David Mamet* 195)

In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Levene, Roma, Moss and Aaronow compete with each other to sell useless land to innocent clients such as Lingk. Murray and Mitch, the invisible owners of the company, are representatives of corporate business. They spur a cutthroat competition among these salesmen: the one who achieves the highest profit for the company wins a Cadillac, the runner-up obtains a set of steak knives and the rest will be 'fired.'

The exploitation and intolerance of the system are disclosed by the bizarre choice of the rewards which are meticulously chosen. Elizabeth Klaver regards the Cadillac as an "excess, not as an excess of speed but as an excess of competition, the Cadillac as the

ecstatic prize of American middle-class success" (173). For the successful salesman, a Cadillac car is not just a reward. It has a far-reaching significance. It is an energizer for both the winner and the organisation itself. It is a vehicle that makes the best use of the extraordinary skills of the number-one salesman. It aggrandises organisational money and saves time and efforts for further business deals. Hence, the car is the force which enhances both the growth of the company and the progress of the winning salesman. Moreover, the second rate salesman is more browbeaten than rewarded: for him, success is always in question. "Here, the term *cutthroat* takes on new significance; it is no coincidence that the second prize … is a set of knives. Betrayal is always a possibility, and a metaphorical knife in the back is a likely outcome of a botched deal or error" (Dean, "The Discourse of Anxiety" 47). This prize, thus, is a disguised form of warning for the one who comes second: ranking a step below, he will be ruthlessly pierced by a cook's knife. (See figure 10.) For these salesmen, failure is inconceivable. However, the

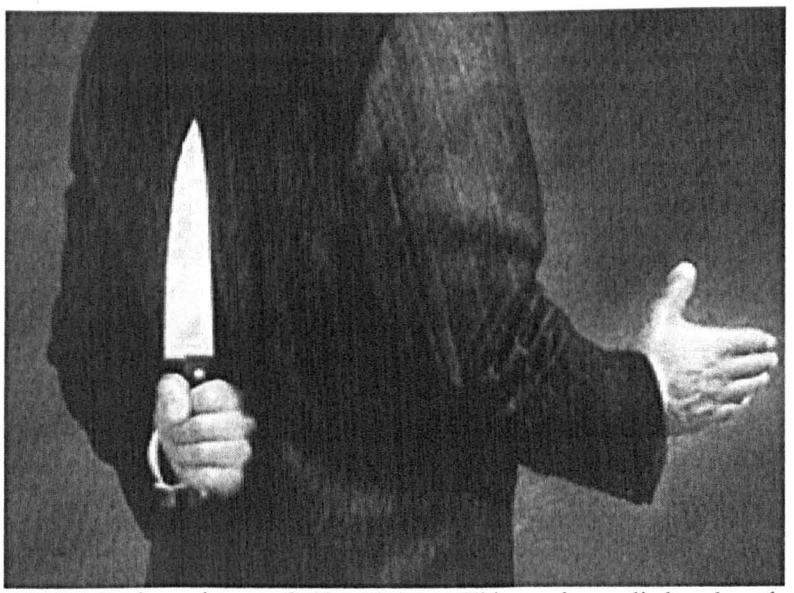

Figure 10. The second prize is a mixture of gift and threat. This can be applied to the salesman's business behaviour: as he welcomes the customers, he intends to conquer them.

fear of failure is exacerbated because "the chances of failing are much greater than those of succeeding, and because failures in a competitive society entail a realistic frustration of needs. They mean not only economic insecurity, but also loss of prestige and all kinds of emotional frustrations" (Horney 285).

The competition is a neat model for a ruthlessly competitive society. Since priority is given to the successful, this is a world in which success breeds success. Dean comments on the competition, "The premise upon which *Glengarry Glen Ross* is based is, in a way, a paradigm of capitalism.... That the successful salesman is given the best leads while the runners-up are forced to accept inferior leads from the 'B' list or are even dismissed underlines the unfairness of a system that penalizes those, who are weak and needy but rewards those, who least need such support" (*David Mamet* 192). The normal response to such a contest is Levene's words, "That's fucked. That's fucked."[2] That is why Schvey maintains, "The true villain of the play (and this accounts for its great success) is the *system,* not the tribe of hustlers who implement it by cheating others out of their hard-earned savings" (106).

Mamet admits to Roudané that his thematic concerns are manifest. They are more an indictment of the system rather than of all the illegal practices of his salesmen: "The play concerns how business corrupts, how the hierarchical business system tends to corrupt. It becomes legitimate for those in power in the business world to act unethically. The effect on the little guy is that he turns to crime. And petty crime goes punished; major crimes go

[2] David Mamet. *Glengarry Glen Ross*. New York: Grove Press, 1983. p. 21. All subsequent quotations from the play are cited parenthetically in the text.

unpunished" ("David Mamet" 178-179). The message of the play, therefore, is not directed to people like Levene, Roma, Moss and Aaronow. It is primarily directed to Mitch and Murray or rather to the system as a whole. In *Kaleidoscope*, Mamet also comments, "The American ethic of business ... never made anybody happy.... So we live in a very, very unhappy country here. I have always considered it to be part of my job to talk about the things that I see, and certainly the most pervasive aspect of America is that we are so damned unhappy over here" (qtd. in Dean, *David Mamet* 191). According to Mamet, the system has to change in order that the people change. On the other hand, Brucher does not wish to acquit Mamet's salesmen, as Mamet does. He argues, "Perceiving the salesmen as creative or even heroic victims of a corrupt system doesn't exonerate them or us. Individuals must reform themselves before society can be reformed" (223).

In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Mamet explores the way in which the American dream leaves no space for human value and identity to be achieved. As Kintz comments on the dream, "This is a dream based not on quality but on quantity: the increase of wealth taking over all questions of value, even the value of human life. As in the publicity images of advertising, anything can be bought and sold" (104). The dream is double-faced. For the employer, it is happy. In contrast, it is a nightmare for the employee. Asked about this myth, David Mamet declares:

> It interests me because the national culture is founded very much on the idea of strive and succeed. Instead of rising with the masses, one should rise from the masses. Your extremity is my opportunity. That's what

> forms the basis of our economic life, and this is what forms the rest of our lives. That American myth: the idea of something out of nothing. And this also affects the spirit of the individual. It's very decisive. One feels one can only succeed at the cost of someone else. Economic life in America is a lottery. Everyone's got an equal chance, but only one guy is going to get to the top. 'The more I have, the less you have'.... That is what Acting President Reagan's whole campaign is about. (Roudané, "David Mamet" 178)

Mamet's words provide the reader with the economic context of *Glengarry Glen Ross*. The concept of cutthroat competition, which is at the heart of the play, is shown to dominate and direct the mentality of the American people in the 1980s. Coping with the status quo necessitates an adjustment in the outlook on the part of the individual towards himself and towards the other. He has to nourish seeds of selfishness, struggle and a kind of enmity inside himself so that he can prevail. As Bigsby states, Mamet "described capitalism as an enabling myth rooted in greed.... Greed breeds resentment and provokes criminality; but the point is that, morally speaking, the criminality is seen by Mamet as implicit in capitalism" (*Modern American Drama* 209).

The struggle inside American business gives space to social Darwinism to affect the individuals. In "Preserving Prosperity," Dahrendorf asserts that there was an obsession with "rampant individualism"[3] among the members of society. They were competing with each other in a brutal way. The strongest was the one who triumphs, or rather the

[3] Dahrendorf defines, "Individualism means that people have no sense of belonging, no sense of commitment, and therefore no reason to observe the law of the values behind it".

one who triumphs was called the strongest, regardless of the merits that had led him to such a victory. Displeased about Gregory Mosher's first production of *Glengarry Glen Ross*, which obviously did not convey the predatory and egoistic attitude of capitalism, Mamet sent him a letter that briefs what the play is really about. Mosher quotes Mamet's words in an interview with Leslie Kane, "Look, this is not a play about love.... This is a play about power. This is a play about guys, who when one guy is down, the other guy doesn't extend a hand to help him back up. This is a play where the guy who's up then kicks the other guy in the balls to make sure that he stays down. That's not what's happening on stage, and you have to find a way to make it happen" ("Interview with Gregory Mosher" 239). The harshness of the business ethics causes the salesmen to absorb the spirit of competition. They are haunted by the American dream, which turns them into machines having no feelings. Their greed makes them indifferent and hostile to one another. Each salesman longs to exercise power over the others. Hence, the world depicted in the play is a Darwinian jungle where survival of the fittest or rather the greediest is the dominant motto. As a result, the personal relationships among them are so fragile that each one feels insecure, alienated and lonely.

In this brutally competitive world, it is extremely difficult to realise a true friendship. Herman points out, "Mamet's obsessive themes are broken relations, the failure to form relations, the impossibility of forming relations, and yet the endless pursuit of these relations" (130). The salesmen are incapable of having genuine intimacy. They are so adherent to the language of personal need and self-serving that they have no access to the words which express their feelings. Language has just one function: to gain an advantage

through cunning and betrayal.[4] Words merely sell: the salesmen sell partnership as simply as land. Zeifman asserts, "There are … no 'partners' in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, nor – given the 'values' of this world – could there be; each salesman is out strictly for himself.... [I]n *Glengarry*, … the Practical Sales Maxim 'ALWAYS BE CLOSING' … applies to *all* relationships" (131). The A B C law of the real estate office is ***A***lways ***B***e ***C***losing. (See figure 11.) In general, every relationship between the salesmen is based on

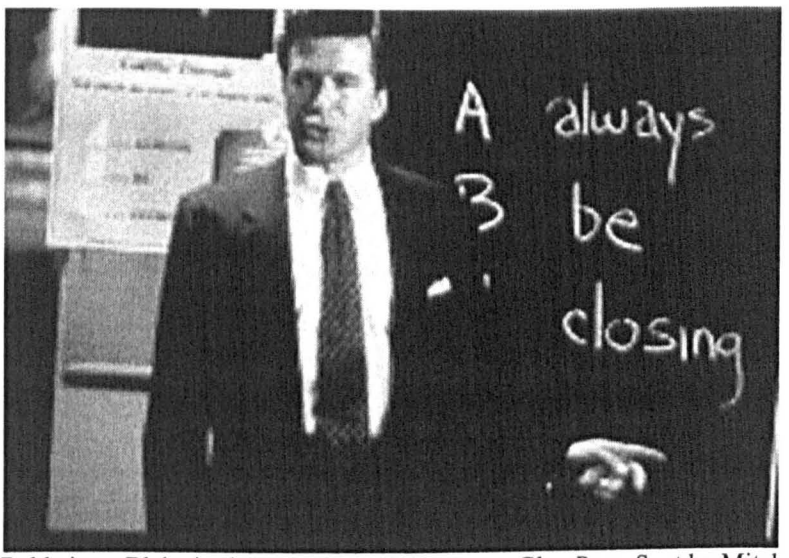

Figure 11. Alec Baldwin as Blake in the 1992 film of *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Sent by Mitch and Murray, he visits the real estate office in order to give the salesmen a zest talk on how to sell well. He also enlists the prizes of the company competition.

only hypocrisy. There is nothing they can share outside the office. They are salesmen, first and foremost. Any attempt to consider them as anything else is a wrong judgement. This is mainly because they are "corrupted by a society, which has made money a value

[4] Gregory Mosher, one of Mamet's best friends, mentions that Mamet is concerned with the issue of faithfulness and loyalty. Mosher remarks, "I think the idea of loyalty is absolutely important to him personally. He is the most loyal person I have ever met. I'm sure that he would literally die for you, and he inspires that feeling in other people. He's loyal about little things; he's loyal about huge things. It's just very important to him" (Kane, "Interview with Gregory Mosher" 238). Mamet realises that it is more effective to portray ill-mannered characters than presenting preachers on the stage. His aim is to make the audience watch the businessman's unethical actions with resentment and, accordingly, to think of reformation.

and exploitation a virtue" (Bigsby, *Modern American Drama* 215). As a consequence, alienation and isolation prevail throughout the play.

It is worth mentioning that, during the 1970s and the 1980s, there was an ideological struggle against the culture of narcissism. This culture was characterised by a torrent of, says Lasch, "competitive individualism, which in its decadence has carried the logic of individualism to the extreme of a war of all against all, the pursuit of happiness to the dead end of a narcissistic preoccupation with the self" (xv). The impossibility of friendship in Mamet's play is on two fronts. Put in another way, there is no friendship between customer and salesman. Similarly, the real estate office itself is void of friends. "*Glengarry Glen Ross* clearly develops [the] separation and isolation of the male characters. Any comfort they might take from each other, any support or friendship, is constantly undercut by the competition they are locked into" (McDonough 88). For example, Roma's attempt to assume camaraderie with Lingk is found out to be an introduction to a nasty business deal with this credulous customer. Roma delivers a manipulative sales talk to Lingk. This talk is initially masked by some philosophy. Represented by Roma, the true selves of these salesmen are seldom seen. They change masks accordingly. What these men do justifies Laing's assumption about the impossible existence of genuine selves. He writes "'A man without a mask' is indeed very rare. One even doubts the possibility of such a man. Everyone in some measure wears a mask, and there are many things we do not put ourselves into fully" (95). Roma makes use of the philosophical mask to trick Lingk. Bigsby confirms that "the salesmen's own fraudulent activities ... in deceiving their customers are regarded simply as good business,

sanctioned by the ethics of a world in which success is a value and closing a deal an achievement" (*Modern American Drama* 215).

Roma begins his talk by referring to the meaning of life through a series of quick questions and answers:

> ROMA: ... What I'm saying what is our life? (*Pause.*) It's looking forward or it's looking back. And that's our life. That's it. Where is the *moment*? (*Pause.*) And what is it that we're afraid of? Loss. What else? (*Pause.*) The *bank* closes...How can I be secure? (*Pause.*) Through amassing wealth beyond all measure? No. And what's beyond all measure? That's a sickness. That's a trap. There is no measure. Only greed. (48-49)

The main aim of Roma's speech is to overpower Lingk and to convince him to buy a useless piece of land. His speech depends upon the power of logic: the human being is troubled by "loss" and adheres to "greed" so that he feels secure. Roma is contradictory: he denounces man's inclination to be greedy, though it is one of his main characteristics. He, then, moves to the idea of "*acting each day* without fear" (49), in spite of the fact that he and his colleagues are always scared of being dismissed. He focuses his attention on motivating Lingk to take a personal action and to chase an "opportunity" such as "Stocks, bonds, objects of art, real estate" (49). When he carefully refers to the subject of "real estate," it is only alongside other things. Roma goes on and on, like a snake that confidently approaches its prey, until Lingk succumbs and offers to buy a piece of land: Lingk is trapped. Hinden remarks, "To pervert intimacy by using friendship as a lure for business is to traduce communal values and represents for Mamet the key to Roma's self-

disgust, his excremental vision of the world. The alternative might be defined as the communal vision, whose power is felt in Mamet's plays by its absence more often than its presence" (37). The main function of language as a means of communication is twisted at the hands of Roma. In the world of this mercurial salesman and his likes, language is degraded to become a means of a cheap type of manipulation.

In a similar way, true friendship never exists between the salesmen themselves. When, in Act II, Levene and Roma are interrupted unexpectedly by Lingk, Roma promptly tells Levene that they have to act out a charade in front of his client. (See figure 12.) Roma

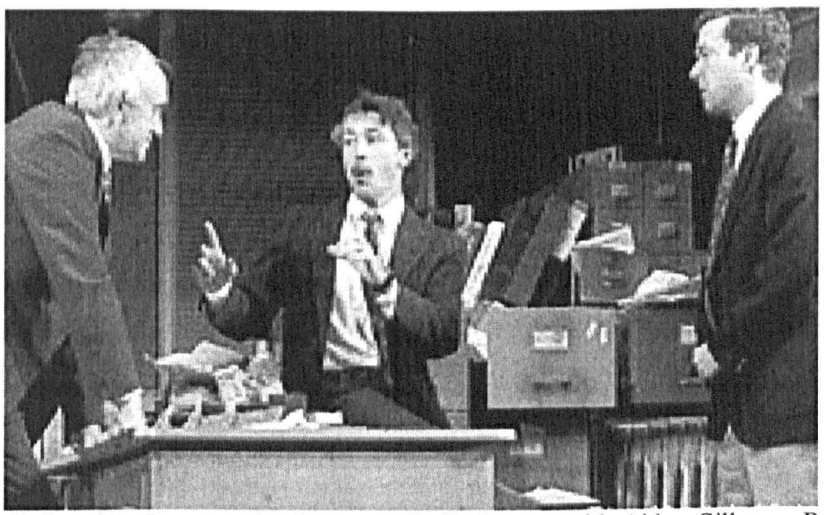

Figure 12. (Left) Jonathan Pryce as the distressed Shelly Levene with Aiden Gillen as Roma and Tom Smith as Lingk in *Glengarry Glen Ross* at London's Apollo Theatre on September 27; officially opening October 10, 2007 and running through January 12, 2008.

says to him, "You're a client. I just sold you five waterfront Glengarry Farms" (78). Mamet's salesmen prove that they are convincing actors:

> ROMA *(Looking up)*: Jim! What are you doing here? Jim Lingk, D. Ray Morton...
>
> LEVENE: Glad to meet you.
>
> ROMA: I just put Jim into Black Greek ..... are you acquainted with ...

LEVENE: No...Black *Creek.* Yes. In *Florida*?

ROMA: Yes.

LINGK: I wanted to *speak* with you about .....

ROMA: Well, we'll do that this weekend.

LINGK: My *wife* told me to look into .....

ROMA: *Beautiful.* Beautiful rolling land. (78-79)

The speed and precision with which Roma directs Levene into action denote that he is, at the same time, an efficient expert at dealing with a probable risk. Kane maintains that "his survival – indeed success – in the world of cutthroat sales is predicated on quick wit and dazzling linguistic dexterity" (*Weasles And Wisemen* 86). Roma and Levene form a temporary and wicked team whose task is to re-lure Lingk. They are experienced enough to know how to read the signs of a possible challenge within the realm of their business: sent by his wife, Lingk comes in order to notify Roma of cancelling his contract. They have to be on standby if they look forward to finalising their deals accurately. It seems that Levene forgets that if Roma succeeds, he himself will fail.

Though Roma and Levene temporarily, and only temporarily, unite to perform a business deal, the same business ultimately keeps them apart. As Bigsby notes, "Friendship is invoked in name but denied in fact; teamwork is proposed as a model but contradicted in action" (*David Mamet* 131). Roma emphasises to Levene that their survival is on the verge of devastation, "We are the members of a dying breed. That's.....that's.....that's why we have to stick together" (105). Roma claims partnership with Levene but it is a false claim. Roudané maintains that "dishonesty

becomes morally acceptable, even professionally attractive. One moment a businessman praises his partner, the next he betrays him. This sense of betrayal forms the kind of spiritual disconnection of the self from the other" (*Public Issues* 45). Soon, in the closing moments of the play, Roma tells Williamson, "Williamson: listen to me: when the *leads* come in...I want my top two off the list. For *me*. My usual two. Anything you give *Levene*...I GET HIS ACTION. My stuff is mine, whatever *he* gets for himself, I'm taking half...My stuff is mine, his stuff is ours" (107). This illustrates Mamet's statement in *Program Notes for Glengarry Glen Ross*, "American capitalism comes down to one thing.... The operative axiom is 'hurrah for me and fuck you.' Anything else is a lie" (qtd. in Dean, *David Mamet* 190). Roma's behaviour also reflects the mood of the 1980s which were marked as the time of the 'Me' generation. "[I]t became fashionable to put the individual first, at the expense of whomever needed to be trampled on to get what was needed. Everyone was interested in profit and few cared how that profit was achieved" (Abbotson 184). In order to be number one, Roma is willing to suspend every human instinct that calls for intimacy.

Cancelling genuine human feelings, such as loyalty and gratitude, Roma proves that his drive for success is the survival of only himself. It is understandable that his greed and egotism overrule his assumption of being a partner of Levene who has just supported him in front of a client. Indeed, Levene's sustainment does not ensure him Roma's credibility. By making Levene aid Roma in one of his dealings, Mamet intensifies the blame directed to the younger salesman and draws a vivid portrayal of the spirit of competitiveness in business. McDonough affirms, "The 'partnership' that Roma is setting

up is completely exploitative because Roma realizes that his success is predicated on the failure of other salesmen" (89). Here, failure means not only the inability of the salesman to convince the customer to buy valueless land, but it is also defined as the success of only one of his colleagues. As a result, like Lingk, Levene becomes a victim of Roma. Separation and isolation are born out of self-indulgence and betrayal. This makes Americans' lives precarious. As Henry argues, "As long as Americans are uninvolved in one another, each stands alone in his vulnerability" (96).

Feelings of jealousy and hatred amalgamate against friendship. In the opening moments of the play, while speaking to Williamson, Levene criticises Roma's capability as a salesman. Levene notes that "he's [Roma] throwing the leads away" (15). In Act II, when Moss is told that Levene has closed a deal that earns the company "Eighty-two thousand dollars" (67), loathing "to hear [Levene's] fucking war stories" (67), he says to Williamson, "Give me some leads. I'm going out" (67). In spite of his professional standing at the top of the contest board, Roma is anxious to know the range of his colleagues' success. Schvey comments on a dialogue between Roma and Aaronow. He writes, "Human feeling is completely absent; when Roma ... asks his less fortunate colleague, Aaronow, 'How are you?' the latter responds politely until he realises that Roma's question had nothing to do with Aaronow's health, but rather his standing in the sales competition for the Cadillac" (105). When Aaronow says,"...I'm fucked on the board...I can't close 'em" (56), Roma feels relieved and self-satisfied. Nonetheless, Roma's invitation of partnership with Levene implies that, even in the dark world of salesmanship, these people need to work together. Optimistically speaking, Roma's

invitation to team with Levene denotes that human nature, at its worst, remains ever the same: there is a need to be good. Bigsby justifies:

> But somewhere, at the very heart of their being, is a sense of need which is the beginning of redemption. Their words may snap ... under the pressure of fear or greed; they may anxiously try to adjust themselves to the shape of myths and fantasies, deny or exploit the desire for companionship. Deep down, however, below the broken rhythms of speech, beyond the failed gestures at contact, is a surviving need for connection. (*Modern American Drama* 236)

The salesman's call for forming teams with the other stresses his feeling of alienation and insecurity in addition to his wish to unite in the face of a humiliating system. In the meantime, it increases his dilemma in the sense that he has to choose either to succeed or to approach the zone of intimacy.

The pressure of the Darwinian law that controls the real estate office causes the excessive anxiety and hesitation of the salesmen throughout the play. This badly affects their pursuit of an autonomous identity since, as Zeineddine claims, "Confusion and indeterminacy are often material constituents of the problem of identity" (*Because it is my Name* 4). The opening dialogue of the play tells much about Levene, who is "the hero-victim of *Glengarry* ... nicknamed Levene the Machine because of his (former) sales prowess" (Cohn, "How Are Things Made Round?" 111). In reality, Levene is no longer 'The Machine'. However, he needs to hear this nickname since it provides him with a sense of identity and distinction in front of the others. His spiritual survival is also

dependent upon this implied popularity. Now, Levene's fortunes are in decline. He feels insecure because he is faced with the threat of dismissal. At the start, he appeals for help from ruthless and apathetic Williamson:

> LEVENE: ...John. John. Look: (*Pause.*) The Glengarry Highland's leads, you're sending Roma out. Fine. He's a good man...He's fine. All I'm saying, you look at the *board*, he's throwing..., he's throwing the leads *away*...all I'm saying, put a *closer* on the job. There's more than one man for the..., put *a proven man out*...and you watch your *dollar* volumes...You start closing them for *fifty* 'stead of *twenty-five.* (15)

Levene's linguistic stumbling reflects psychological and mental incompletion. His repetitions suggest his confused behaviour. They intensify his mood of loss, uneasiness and insecurity. Dean comments on this speech: "It is structured to reflect the salesman's rapid shifts of mood and changing tone, as he strives to convince his boss of his innate worthiness. Of all the speeches in the play, it is perhaps this one that most perfectly demonstrates the discourse of anxiety" ("The Discourse of Anxiety" 49). In this respect, Mamet elicits a realistic speech pattern.

Moss and Aaronow also feel insecure and worried that their sales figures are so low that they will be unable "to get on the board" (29) and subsequently will lose their jobs. The necessity to be on the board, which starkly occupies the salesmen's minds, is the sparkle that ignites their sense of uncertainty. The two co-workers confess that the "pressure's just too great" and that they "fuckin' work too hard" (30). In *The New York Times* review entitled "Real Estate World A Model For Mamet," Gussow reports that

Mamet was informed by his wife's stepfather of an event in which "an old salesman was so terrified about making a presentation that he had a heart attack on the spot, and the new president of the company stepped over his body to leave the room." Put bluntly, salesmanship means no relationship: business is business. Bigsby declares, "Such is the pressure that encourages unscrupulous methods with respect to the clients and ultimately with respect to the company" (*Modern American Drama* 215).

Moss and Aaronow hate the necessity of participating in a competition with their co-workers:

> MOSS: For some fuckin' "Sell ten thousand and you win the steak knives..."
>
> AARONOW: For some *sales* pro...
>
> MOSS: ...sales promotion, "You lose, then we fire your..." No. It's *medieval*... it's wrong. "Or we're going to fire your ass." It's wrong.
>
> AARONOW: Yes.
>
> MOSS: Yes, it is. And you know who's responsible?
>
> AARONOW: Who?
>
> MOSS: You know who it is. It's Mitch. And Murray. 'Cause it doesn't have to be this way. (32-33)

The two colleagues rebel against the way in which they are treated by their bosses. As Adler notes, "Moss ... underscores just how demeaning the salesman's job has become in today's cutthroat wasteland" (105). An implicit condemnation of the competition, which does not recognise human needs, lies in the attack of these salesmen on Mitch and Murray. In general, they desperately comment on salesmanship, which cruelly makes

man kill himself in order to provide his family with life necessities. In the interview with Roudané, Mamet maintains that in "*Glengarry Glen Ross,* it's the Cadillac, the steak knives, or nothing. In this play, it's obvious that these fellows are put in fear for their lives and livelihood.... They have to succeed at the cost of each other" ("David Mamet" 178).

Moreover, the spirit of the competition makes the issue of morals and values negotiable.[5] In the interview with Mathew Roudané, Mamet illuminates:

> As Thorstein Veblen in *Theory of the Leisure Class* says, sharp practice inevitably shades over into fraud. Once someone has no vested interest in behaving in an ethical manner and the only bounds on his behaviour are supposedly his innate sense of fair play, then fair play becomes an outdated concept: 'But wait a second! Why should I control my sense of fair play when the other person may not control his sense of fair play? So hurray for me and to hell with you.' ("David Mamet" 178)

The desire to succeed and the necessity of survival impose immense pressure on the individual to compromise his moral stance. Capitalism tends to establish the supremacy of business interests over all other values even those of science. As Brenner conceives, American scientists were enthused by the competition imposed by the system. They became incapable of being in command of directing their work. They were more interested in "does it work?" and "will it sell?" than "is it true?" and "is it socially

[5] In Mamet's *American Buffalo*, Teach proclaims, "The Whole Entire World. There Is No Law. There Is No Right And Wrong. The World Is Lies. There Is No Friendship. Every Fucking Thing" (103).

desirable?" Through paying no attention to their moral responsibility towards the whole society, they surrendered to the will of the industrialists (27). Each individual had his own measures for judging the principled validity of his business behaviour.

In order to succeed, Moss plans to break into the real estate office or rather tempt someone else to steal the leads. The crime refers to the fact that seeking hidden and illicit activities becomes a solution for the businessman to keep surviving. Roudané sees that "the pursuit of money under the guise of free enterprise becomes a simple excuse to deceive and steal" (*Plays and Playwrights* 369).[6] Both the company's owners and the other salesmen are in a real danger owing to Moss's plot. John Orr cannot absolve Mamet's characters from blame. He confirms that "they embody a fundamental paradox. They are willing players in a game they do not always control or understand, but are also astute inventors of their own moves and rituals" (25). The more they conform to the system, the more they prey on each other. What is also ironic in the play is that stealing the leads is considered to be breaking the law, while the exploitation of the customers is certified as good business.

Aaronow's last words in the play, "Oh, God, I hate this job" (108), express the spiritual death of a salesman. Vorlicky elucidates, "He is a decentered, postmodern everyman who responds only to that which is thrust in front of him; he, himself, exerts no convincing effort to initiate alternative action or ideas. Aaronow's survival, therefore, is

[6] In *American Buffalo*, to Don, Teach defines free enterprise as follows: "The Freedom.... Of the Individual.... To Embark on Any Fucking Course that he sees fit.... In order to secure his honest chance to make a profit.... The country's founded on this, Don. You know this.... Without this we're just savage shitheads in the wilderness.... Sitting around some vicious campfire. (72-73)

closely dependent upon piecing together other's lies.... Aaronow appears painfully conscious of the absence of personal depth in his life" ("Men among the Ruins" 90). Aaronow is aware that his business behaviour does not reflect the core of his true self and that his actions, relating to the real estate office, are fraudulent. He, thence, suffers from self-alienation which is "a *noxious feeling arising when overt actions are detached or inconsistent with underlying conceptions of self.* That is, self-alienation can be viewed as estrangement of the concept world from the daily activities of the individual" (Gergen 87). Aaronow hopes that the destiny of innocent people, like him, who prefer to respect the law, should be better than it is. Roudané asserts, "Aaronow interjects some semblance of moral seriousness into the play.... Throughout, in fact, Aaronow does little more than listen and question" (*Public Issues* 44). Aaronow tries to take moral responsibility so that he can counteract the spreading corruption. Not only does he refuse to implicate himself in the robbery, but he also refuses to report his friend Moss, whom he is sure has planned the theft, to the police. Worster contests that "the quietest (but perhaps most significant) irony of this play is that, in spite of the pervasive insistence on speech as action and power, the refusal to speak is also action and power" (75). According to Worster, Aaronow is more insidious and more powerful than the garrulous Moss because, in his silence, he is refusing to participate in the crime.

Encountering a dilemma, Aaronow stands for many Americans. Mamet himself elucidates:

> Aaronow has some degree of conscience, some awareness. He's troubled. Corruption troubles him. The question he's troubled by is whether his

> inability to succeed in the society in which he's placed is a defect – that is, is he manly or sharp enough? – or if it's, in effect, a positive attribute, which is to say that his conscience prohibits him. So Aaronow is left between these two things, and he's incapable of choosing. This dilemma is, I think, what many of us are facing in this country right now. (Roudané, "David Mamet" 179)

The real problem Aaronow encounters is his failure to choose an answer for the two questions. In other words, he cannot find a solution for his dilemma because business fraud overshadows everything. Chained by the demands of salesmanship, he is conscious of its demoralising influence. He neither escapes from it nor immerses in its wickedness. Vorlicky emphasises, "Despite his inability to become a different kind of subject, Aaronow resists immersion in the institution, in the corrupted manifestations of the [business] ethos. The hapless salesman signals some hope for personal change simply in his passionate urge to understand what is going on around him and thereby to understand his deeper rage" (*Act Like a Man* 56). Aaronow, thus, has a neurotic personality. According to Gordon, this concept refers to the person "who, owing to the circumstances of life in which he finds himself, is subjected to a conflict between two patterns within his self-regarding sentiment, neither of which can gain the ascendancy and suppress the other, nor can they become integrated and so fuse with one another" (49). In Aaronow's case, it is the conflict between two desires: he wants to be good and to survive at the same time. If he chooses one of them, he will lose the other.

Chapter V
Glengarry Glen Ross

Contrary to Aaronow's personal hope for change, Roma's final remark, which immediately follows that of Aaronow, is "I'll be at the restaurant" (108). The message here is that, after Levene's and perhaps Moss's imprisonment, life goes on – business as usual – and "the sordidly deceptive world of [the] real estate hustlers" (McQuade 2468) remains forever. Roma again goes to search for another prey to be manipulated at this place. Bigsby points out, "[D]espite the fact that the planned robbery is carried out, nothing has altered. The same values apply; no one is released from the governing irony. The play thus ends ... where [it] began. Such circularity clearly reflects the production-consumption cycle of capitalism" (*David Mamet* 125). It is as if, at the start of the play, Roma were a new product that has the full power. Along the events of the play, he becomes exhausted and consumed by the continued threats at work. At the end of the play, he turns into an expired and unusable commodity which has to be recycled to regain its charm.

After being recycled, Roma grows to be more greedy and more indignant as long as he is self-interested. "His self-centeredness," Hubert-Leibler writes, "makes him blind to the implication of his behavior, ... incapable of recognising that his egoism will only make him more lonely ... and leave his profound needs for contact and love forever unsatisfied" (568). Despite his mental and linguistic skills, Roma, in the end, is unable to achieve a "core self," "primitive integrity" or "homogenous fortified identity." (Kane, *Weasels And Wisemen* 86). This hints at the tremendous impact of capitalism on the characters. Referring to American corporate business, Adler maintains that "the society that victimizes is composed of individuals who victimize" (106). As the salesmen prey

upon the customers as well as each other, they themselves are suffering at the hands of the capitalists. The process of the double victimisation is on the go as long as the individuals are uncertain and tentative. Savran observes, "At the end of *Glengarry*, the mystery is apparently solved, the thief apprehended. And yet niggling doubts remain: Is anyone else involved? How deep and extensive is the conspiracy? Is anyone *not* guilty?... Is capitalism the reason?" (*In Their Own Words* 134). These suspicions spread as long as crimes are committed because the capitalists keep narrowing the tie around the necks of their employees. If employees are killed in the process, others will replace them and suffer the same lot since capitalism is eternal and expandable.

Unlike Aaronow, Roma adheres to success to the utmost limit. He makes use of every driving force he can gather to gain advantage over his co-workers. As a speaker, he depends on the power of language to create fictions which, in turn, conquer the listener either a prospect or a business mate. Roudané comments on his style saying that "if Levene and Moss radiate a frenetic pursuit of customers, Roma appears soft-edged" (*American Drama Since 1960* 169). Roma is considered to be a typical character of Mamet's business plays. He is a real representative for his colleagues, who are, as Shepherd regards, "experts in deception, superb liars, ... persuasive, ruthless, competitive, [and] disloyal" (qtd. in Dean, *David Mamet* 193). Joe Mantegna, an actor who played Roma's role in the two American premiere productions and who had a close relationship with Mamet, states, "What a sense of power that gave me every night to just go out there and to be able to say: 'I'm the best at what I do here and I'll sell you the Brooklyn Bridge if I have to. I have that power to do this.' There is a lot of positive

mental attitude there" (Kane, "Interview with Joe Mantegna" 257). Roma constantly claims that he is powerful, however, he cannot assume he is secure. Unlike Levene, he has not been given a nickname.

Sam Mendes, who produced the play at the British Donmar Warehouse in London in 21 July 1994, argues that "he's not controllable...because he's too good. You don't give the best salesman a nickname because nicknames are controlling devices to make people feel superior to each other" (Kane, "A Conversation" 251). Since the nickname limits the power and frames the reputation of its owner, it is not suitable for mercurial Roma. McDonough draws the attention towards a key difference between Roma's approach and that of Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman.* She writes:

> Roma gains other characters' confidence or liking only so that he can use them for business ends. Although he knows how to act like an interested and sympathetic friend to both customers and fellow salesmen, ultimately he does not care about their opinions of him except as they serve his purpose of getting 'on the board.' His only desire is to be top salesman, because it is the *position* that gives him power and identity, rather than the admiration of others that Willy Loman desired. (88)

Willy's concept of attractiveness of personality develops into Roma's style of depending on both assuming friendship and adopting a cold-blooded attitude towards others.

Furthermore, Roma's "concept of manhood is precisely that of a 'machine' – sleek, heartless, devoid of conscience, designed simply to make money" (Zeifman 129). He

swears, "It's not a world of men" (105). He regrets that, with the chase done by failure, there is no longer excitement, adventure or meaning in life. To persuade Levene of the necessity of sticking together, he laments, "it's a world of clock watchers, bureaucrats, officeholders...what it is, it's a fucked-up world" (105). He sees that the salesmen are becoming members of "a dying breed" (105) who lack the ingenuity of those of the past.[7] What is paradoxical is that though work pressure is extremely high, the salesmen continue conforming to the system. In this context, the discovery of the robber is very significant in the sense that they, represented by Levene, were born to be only salesmen. Any attempt exerted by them to get rid of the uniform of salesmanship and assume another profession is doomed to be a failure: if a salesman steals, he is caught sooner or later due to the fact that he masters only his own original career. This issue is asserted by Levene when, after being exposed, he explains, "But it *taught* me something. What it taught me, that you've got to get *out* there. Big deal. So I wasn't cut out to be a thief. I was cut out to be a salesman" (101-102). The reason is that these salesmen realise that salesmanship is their means to achieve masculinity.

The Darwinism of salesmanship stimulates the masculine identity of the salesmen since it is the trademark of this system: the strongest or the fittest is the most masculine. Levene tells Williamson, "A man's his job" (75). It is significant that being a man is conditional on doing a job. This process is the essence of the man's identity. Tuttle comments, "Levene ... must ultimately recognize that his acceptance of the proposition

[7] This speech reminds the reader of Willy Loman's remembrance of the "good old days" of selling as he says to his boss, "in those days there was personality in it...There was respect and comradeship, and gratitude in it. Today it's all cut and dried, and there's no chance for bringing friendship to bear – or personality" (63-64).

that 'a man's his job' (75) effectively eliminates his own sense of identity, and with it, morality" (168). Making use of his criterion and observing his present status on the sales board, Levene is not a man at present. As a result, Levene's words are a reflection of his self-betrayal: his statement leads himself into the wrong conviction that he is manly enough. He cannot communicate properly even with himself.

In addition, Levene rebukes Williamson saying that if "you don't have the *balls*" (76) to do the job then "What are you, you're a *secretary*" (77). The salesmen either work hard to escape the image of being women or, in moments of anger and frustration, stick it to those who increase the degree of work pressure. Here, Levene emasculates Williamson since he thinks that the only suitable job for his manager is to be a secretary: a career, broadly speaking, is associated with women. McDonough asserts that "the feminine is allotted a negative position; it is set up as the failure and lack that a man must overcome in order to establish and maintain his identity as a man. But, this construct of male identity remains extremely tenuous and is constantly threatened by the same competition that is supposed to create it" (87). According to McDonough, no male identity is achieved if the female succeeds. Business competition is regarded to be both the creator and the executioner of masculinity. When Williamson intervenes to mess up a deal between Roma and Lingk, he is emasculated again:

> ROMA: You stupid fucking cunt.... You cost me *six thousand dollars*.... And one Cadillac. Where did you learn your *trade*. You stupid fucking *cunt*. You *idiot*. Whoever told you, you could work with *men*? (95-96)

The premise of Levene's and Roma's work/gender philosophy is that being efficient at work means that you are a man. The failure to do so proves that you are not a man. Hamlet's "To be or not to be" can be read as Levenes's and Roma's "To be masculine or not to be."

To be masculine also entails that the salesman must overpower his customers. As Levene boasts, "I'm selling something they don't even *want*" (77). Mamet himself recalls, "[T]he men I was working with could sell cancer....They were amazing. They were a force of nature. These men ... were people who had spent their whole life in sales, always working for a commission, never working for a salary, dependent for their living on their wits, on their ability to charm. They sold themselves"[8] (qtd. in Dean, *David Mamet* 196). On another occasion, he asserts as well, "The men I was working with could sell ... Ice to the Eskimos" (Kane, *Text and Performance* xvi). To entrap his victims, Levene feigns friendship and gives his customers some generous advice:

> LEVENE: "What we have to do is *admit* to yourself that we see that opportunity ... and *take* it. (*Pause.*) And that's it." And we sit there. (*Pause.*)

This is similar to the very same advice that Roma gives to poor Lingk about the importance of seizing opportunities in life. Therefore, the affinity between the peculiar threads of the plots conceived by both Levene and Roma is amazing. The way they approach their victims shows that they are a product of the same school. As Tuttle describes: it is the "Roma-isms" (166).

[8] This is reminiscent of Arthur Miller's response when asked what Willy Loman actually sells; his answer is "Himself" (*Collected Plays* 29).

In America, exploitation was the essence of success: exploitation of freedom, exploitation of co-worker, exploitation of customer and even exploitation of the self where the individual negotiates with his true self so that he can forsake morality. American society, Mamet elaborates in the interview with Roudané, hinges on opportunities. "As Veblen, who's had a big influence on me, says, a lot of business in this country is founded on the idea that if you don't exploit the possible opportunity, not only are you being silly, but in many cases you're being negligent, even legally negligent" ("David Mamet" 179). The individual's capability of exploitation determines the extent to which he is acknowledged by the others: this is the core of one's identity. If you are exploitative enough, you have properly achieved identity and vice versa.

In the following quotation, Mamet shows the relationship between the American dream and exploitation. He asserts, "The American dream has gone bad.... It was basically raping and pillage. The idea was that if you got out there, as long as there was something to exploit – whether it was the wild west, the Negroes, the Irish, the Chinese in California, the gold fields, or the timberland – one had the capacity to get rich. This capitalist dream of wealth turns people against each other" (qtd. in Schvey 89). For Mamet, the American dream has led to a fatal end: it turns Americans against each other in their frenetic pursuit of success. He is of the opinion that people "are finally reaching a point where there is nothing left to exploit.... The dream has nowhere to go so it has to start turning in on itself" (Savran, *In Their Own Words* 133). According to Mamet, the tremendously destructive and exploitative power of the capitalist dream will finally put an end to the system itself.

Mamet presents exploitative businessmen, in the proper sense of the word. Levene exploits his personal skills in order to convince Williamson of giving him the leads. He strives to appear confident and trustworthy. He says, "Our job is to *sell*. I'm the *man* to sell" (19). Levene also uses his linguistic talent to propitiate Williamson, "Give me a lead hotter than that, I'll go in and close it. Give me a chance. That's all I want. I'm going to *get* up on that fucking board and all I want is a chance...I need your help" (22). Thinking of a more convincing method, he finally bribes Williamson:

> LEVENE: I'll give you ten percent. *(Pause.)*
>
> WILLIAMSON: Of what?
>
> LEVENE: Of my end what I close.
>
> WILLIAMSON: And what if you don't close.
>
> LEVENE: I *will* close. (23)

Williamson can indeed be bribed, but only for a very handsome price. What he cares for is not fighting deterioration in the real estate office but his secure commission. On the surface, he pretends to convey the idea that he has no trust in Levene's ability to close deals. But, underneath, he instigates Levene to make a better offer, to increase the percentage of his commission. He also has the complete opportunity to exploit Levene. Roudané notes that, in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, "[t]he option to 'exploit' appears as an inalienable right; the Mamet hero often feels entitled to 'exploit'" (*American Drama Since 1960* 162). Levene is shocked by Williamson's greedy exploitation: "Twenty percent. *(Pause.)*...And fifty bucks a lead" (24). However, he has to accept to avoid dismissal. As Cohn describes, "Williamson is a petty office tyrant" (*New American Dramatists* 166).

Likewise, Moss tries to exploit Aaronow's plight and tempts him to steal the leads:

MOSS: I want to tell you what somebody should do.

AARONOW: What? ...

MOSS: Somebody...

AARONOW: Yes...?

MOSS: Should do something to *them.*

AARONOW: What?

MOSS: Something. To pay them back. *(Pause.)* Someone, someone should hurt them. Murray and Mitch...

AARONOW: (Pause.) How?...

MOSS: Someone should rob the office.

AARONOW: Huh.

MOSS: ...We were, if we were that kind of guys, to knock it off, and *trash* the joint, it looks like robbery, and *take* the fuckin' leads out of the files...go to Jerry Graff.[9] *(Long Pause.)*. (37-38)

Moss smoothly entraps the credulous Aaronow. "A man like Moss resembles a shark – to stop is to die. He – and by implication, his language – must always keep moving, toward a distant and possibly unattainable goal of genuine success" (Dean, "The Discourse of Anxiety" 56). In his efforts to manipulate and persuade, Moss moulds language so that it suits his own end.

[9] Jerry Graff is a rival, who, in turn, rewards the thieves with jobs.

Here, Moss calls Aaronow a partner in crime merely because Aaronow "listened" to the plan. In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, "Relationship, it seems, is a trap, communication a snare and friendship a means of facilitating betrayal" (Bigsby, *David Mamet* 118). In Moss's eyes, Aaronow becomes guilty as if he were the actual thief of the leads. This is certainly the ultimate exploitation of the trust implied in the dialogue between colleagues. Malkin maintains, "*Glengarry Glen Ross* is a study of betrayal. Each dialogue charts a verbal manipulation; nothing can be believed, no fraternity exists not even the proverbial fraternity among thieves" (159). According to Malkin, the criminality of these salesmen reaches beyond that of the thieves. When the robbery is discovered, there is no trust between them:

> ROMA: ... Where were you last night...
>
> AARONOW: Where were you?
>
> ROMA: Where was *I*?
>
> AARONOW: Yes.
>
> ROMA: I was at home, where were *you*?
>
> AARONOW: At home.
>
> ROMA: see ...? Were you the guy who broke in?
>
> AARONOW: Was I?
>
> ROMA: Yes.
>
> AARONOW: No. (60-61)

This is a realistic scene where everyone attempts to throw doubt on the other's innocence so that he escapes accusation.

Glengarry Glen Ross is a new realistic play. New realism made its appearance on the American stage in the 1970s. Mamet employed it in other such plays as *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* (1975) and *Edmond* (1982). Emily Mann's *Still Life* (1980) and *Execution of Justice* (1984) in addition to Richard Nelson's *The Vienna Notes* (1978) and *The Return of Pinocchio* (1982) were written in new realism as well. This dramatic form, says Savran, carried out a biting criticism of "social and psychological homilies." It was a theatre of questions not answers, of argument not assurance. A drama written in new realist technique had a fragmented plot and a disturbed relationship between context and action. The dramatist's purpose was to investigate the link between "cultural breakdown and the disenfranchised subject. Most importantly, however, the 'new realists' question the adequacy of so-called realistic speech by populating their plays with figures unable to express their emotional turmoil or to understand how they are being manipulated, characters robbed of the ability to speak" ("New Realism" 64-65). Either the characters of *Glengarry Glen Ross* are articulate (Roma, Levene and Moss) or inarticulate (Aaronow and Lingk), they are distorted versions of stronger forces: business in the case of the salesmen and the matriarchal figure in Lingk's case.

As Watt describes, *Glengarry Glen Ross* "is what it is, a slice of life that sends you out of the theatre ... just cheerless" (335). The deterioration, gloom and pessimism evoked by the talk and actions of the play never stop affecting the audience. Styan argues that "realism must finally be evaluated, not by the style of a play or a performance, but by the image of truth its audience perceives" (1: 1). The spectators of Mamet's play are haunted by two contradictory attitudes: disgust of what is happening on stage and sympathy for

these tentative victims. They succeed in catching Mamet's "realistic impulse" which is "the desire to reproduce on the stage a piece of life faithfully" (Styan 164). Though illusion is evoked, Mamet's language, characters and setting are an authentic representation of reality.

Mamet's words are so loaded with meanings that it is necessary to define their connotations in order to understand his play. Cohn wonders at how much Mamet's words are charged with meanings:

> For Lingk, talk denotes urgency: "I've got to talk to you" (78).... Ironically, the effusive salesman Roma uses 'talk' to mean 'listen': 'I can't talk now' (82). In Levene's pleas, ... 'talk' is request, which the office manager turns to threat: 'You'll talk to me.' Similarly, the detective's desire to talk to the salesman is a form of coercion: 'Mr. Levene, I think we have to talk' (106). The salesmen are outraged at the way the detective talks to them; Aaronow sputters: 'No one should talk to a man that way' (87). He himself later supplies the synonym of '*mistreat*' (88). ("How Are Things Made Round?" 115)

On the other hand, Mantegna throws light on the playwright's paucity of words. When Leslie Kane asks him if he agrees with the proclamation that finding the correct manner to articulate an utterance in a play written by Mamet is akin to "a treasure hunt" for the artist, Mantegna replies, "Yeah, ... the great thing about David is the way he can say so much with so little. When I start working with David, it's difficult for me to read scripts

sometimes for a long while, because everything else seems so over-written" ("Interview with Joe Mantegna" 254).

The characters are masters of language: they employ it skilfully as if it were a weapon. It is devious and intensified by the disparity between what they say and what they actually intend: this is an adopted strategy that puzzles and ensnares not only the clients but the audience as well. The spectators realise what Roma's manipulation of Lingk is all about in Act I only when this meek person purchases the land in Act II. Moreover, Moss and Aaronow find a difference between "talking" and "speaking" about a robbery. Stinton argues:

> Through his superlative command over language, Mamet can identify the mental processes through which characters move. They sometimes 'hit' a word which they feel will give their conversation the emphasis and meaning they desire.... [T]he two salesmen make a false distinction between talking about a crime and merely speaking about it. In their minds, there is some differentiation between the two.... To 'talk' implies that they are actually planning to do it but to 'speak' means only that they are entertaining the possibility of it being done! (qtd. in Dean, *David Mamet* 201)

The salesmen's ability to deal with language effectively is an expression of the smartness of their mentality. As they distort the ethos of business, they also interpret the meanings of words according to their greedy intentions.

The language of the salesmen is both violent and obscene. Roma cannot preserve his self-control when he learns about the theft. He fires off at Williamson's face:

> ROMA: Oh, *fuck. Fuck.* (*He starts kicking the desk.*) FUCK FUCK FUCK! WILLIAMSON!!! WILLIAMSON!!! (*Goes to the door* Williamson *went into, tries the door, it's locked*) OPEN THE FUCKING...WILLIAMSON.... (53)

The reader can clearly distinguish the division between the smooth sales-talk from the violence of the office language; especially that of Roma. At the end of Act II, Roma and Levene rebuke Williamson for contradicting Roma's story to Lingk:

> ROMA (*To* WILLIAMSON): You stupid fucking cunt...You just cost me *six thousand dollars*...And one Cadillac...What are you going to do about it, asshole. You fucking *shit*.... You stupid fucking *cunt.* You *idiot.* Whoever told you you could work with *men?*...What you're hired for is to *help* us.... *Not* to fuck us up...to help *men* who are going *out* there to try to earn a *living*...You fucking *child*...
>
> LEVENE: You listen to me...your partner *depends* on you...you have to go *with* him and *for* him...or you're shit, you're *shit*, you can't exist alone. (95-98)

In line with the business ethics of Roma and Levene, Williamson is guilty. Contradicting themselves, the two salesmen suppose that the duty of the partner is to be lying, misleading and approving everything which results in strengthening the position of both the colleague and the organisation itself. Perceived as a disbeliever in this task, Williamson is also considered to be a "fucking *shit*," "asshole," "*idiot*" and "fucking

child." In short, the office manager is subject to the worst debasement for violating a so-called *partnership.*

The salesmen know no language other than that which relates to their business world. This kind of language must be abrasive and drained of feelings otherwise it becomes dysfunctional. It is also repetitive and incoherent. Aaronow's expression of anxiety over his career is real:

> AARONOW (to Williamson): I, um, and may...maybe they're in...they're in...you should, John, if we're ins... . (55)

And a little later to Roma:

> AARONOW: I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm fucked on the board. *You.* 'You see how...I... (*Pause.*) I can't...my mind must be in other places. 'Cause I can't do any.... . (56)

Levene is resentful and speaks to Williamson in a bad temper:

> LEVENE: ...I said "ten," you said "no." You said "twenty." I said "fine," I'm not going to fuck with you, how can I beat that, you tell me?...Okay. Okay, We'll...Okay. Fine. We'll...Alright... . (24)

The characters' repetitions and mumblings realistically reflect the extreme sense of insecurity that shakes their life at its depth. In this way, Mamet's language manages to catch the kernel of his themes.

It is worth noting that Mamet's paucity of stage instructions means that they are often limited to a single word, "*Pause*". Pauses are significant as they enable the character to recollect his ideas or give the headstrong listener an opportunity to compromise and agree to the speaker's demands. For example, Levene says, "John ... John ...John. Okay. John. John. Look: (*Pause*)..." (15). His pause is intended to draw Williamson's complete attention to what he is going to ask from him. Further, italic and capitalised words are seductive and influential means. Roma's tricky tactics and stunning intonation are remarkable:

> ROMA: ... God *protect* me. I am powerless, let it not happen to me..." But no to *that.* I say. There's something else. What is it? "If it happens, AS IT MAY for that is not within our powers, I will *deal* with it, just as I do *today* with what draws my concern today." I say *this* is how we must act. I do those things which seem correct to me *today.* (49)

When the language of the play is examined closely, it becomes clear that "the primary purpose of utterance is not to communicate, but to claim power or to withhold it from others" (Worster 73). It is a way of life through which the salesman can dwindle the dwarfing impact of capitalism: as the system overtly belittles him, he stealthily puts the other down. Throughout Moss's careful defense of his plan to steal the leads, Aaronow seems hesitant and restless. He is submissive to Moss who dominates the dialogue: he shortly and elliptically answers Moss's questions. Moss also interrupts this intimidated salesman who is always taking the second place in the dialogue. Moreover, one way in which Levene distinguishes himself from his colleagues and thereby hopes to secure

power over them, is through playing out the triadic conversation of his property sale to Bruce and Harriet Nyborg. (See figure 13.) Exploiting the Nyborgs' presumed desire for

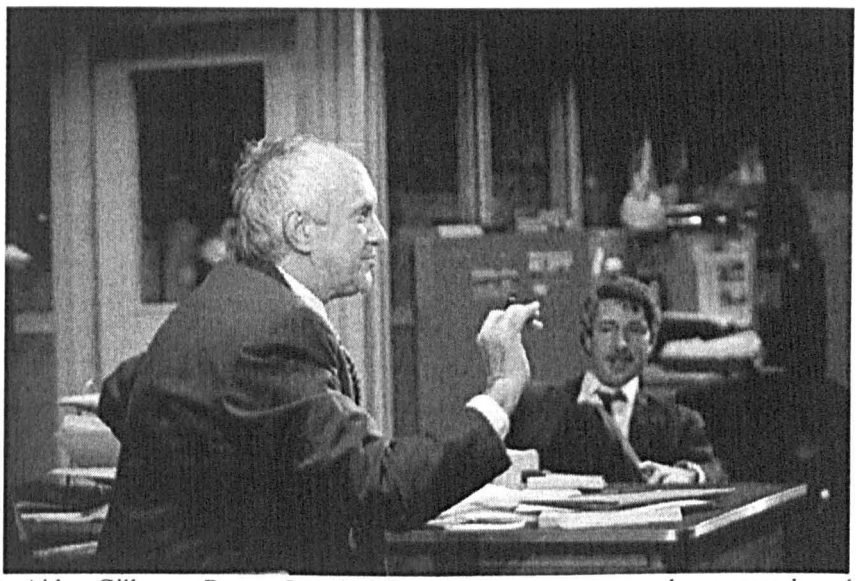

Figure 13. To Aiden Gillen as Roma, Jonathan Pryce as Levene pompously narrates how he makes the Nybors sign a contract with him. This is conducted in Act II in *Glengarry Glen Ross* at London's Apollo Theatre.

ownership, Levene uses language to gain control. Perhaps, none in the play could have been Roma's competitor for competence in verbal agility, hoax and inventiveness than this old businessman. Story-telling is his way towards conquering the listener. Geis observes, "In the world of these hucksters, the ability to maintain one's stories is a survival tactic" (62). This approach makes Levene and his likes sustain life in the system. Consequently, the play derives its strength from the characters' talk.

It is through their talk that the events of the play are developed.[10] Levene says, "Bruce, Harriet...Fuck *me*, believe in your*self*..." (67). According to Levene, it is not logical for

[10] Here lies a crucial difference between Roma and Levene, at one extreme, and Mr. Zero and Willy Loman, at the other extreme. In Mr. Zero's case, there is no room for talk at all: he is a symbol of silent labour. In Willy's case, it is the charm of personality that counts.

an individual who lives in the United States to believe, "This one has so-and-so, and I have nothing..." (68). Not only does the Machine prompt these customers to recoginze the opportunity but he also stimulates them to take it. Hudgins states:

> In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, the beliefs the salesmen express or act out are venal, greedy, immoral in that they sell nearly worthless land to gullible investors.... [T]he salesmen, taking advantage of such investors' dreams, can both make a living and feel powerful as they dupe their marks. We condemn that belief system ... but we are caught up in the wonderful vitality of several of these salesmen, impressed by their talents and tenacity, by their struggle in this world. (199)

Roma is so fascinated by Levene's salesmanship that he flatters him, "That was a great sale, Shelly. *(Pause.)*" (74). Levene does nothing but conquers Bruce and Harriet:

> LEVENE. That's what I'm *saying*. The *old* ways. The *old* ways...convert the motherfucker...*sell* him...*sell* him...*make him sign the check*...I say *fuck* it, we're going to go the whole route. I plat it out eight units. Eighty-two grand. (72)

In *The New York Times* review entitled "Theatre: A Mamet Play, *Glengarry Glen Ross*," Rich reports that Levene keeps "recounting the crude ritual of a contract closing as if it were a grand religious rite." The salesman refers to actually "*selling*" the client, as if the latter were not a human being but a product to be sold and bought. The stress in his speech is in making use of verbal power: the customer must psychologically surrender to sign "the check". Hudgins elucidates that "the play's *epigraph is* "Always Be Closing,"

which, ... is the key to success in this job and is also dehumanizing. The concentration on that bottom line, on 'full-grossing' the customer, on winning the sales competition, on beating the customer into submission produces both ulcers and hypocrisy about one's human relations" (211).

This approach of selling commonly takes place throughout the play: one person tries to make the other do something by employing linguistic force. It is applied to both salesman/salesman and salesman/customer communication. Levene's words express his callousness: it is a matter of life or death for him. He succeeds in convincing his customers to sign a contract for "the whole route," (73) though he is aware that they cannot afford it. His achievement, thence, is built upon their defeat, loss and debasement. Roudané asserts that "Mamet ultimately argues, not merely about external ... corruption – public betrayals – but also about various profound crimes of the heart, crimes producing private tensions: the inability of the individual to communicate honestly ... with the self and the other" (*Public Issues* 46).

In an analogous way, Roma leads the conversation with Lingk. He "utilizes his strategy of not allowing his pathetic victim to speak, his machine-gun sentences ricocheting off the walls" (Dean, "The Discourse of Anxiety" 59). They allow Lingk a little chance to collect his own ideas. Roma seeks to make him reach a point when he can hardly remember the reason for his visit to the real state office:

LINGK: I can't negotiate.

ROMA: What does that mean?

LINGK: That ...

ROMA: ...What, what, *say* it to me ...

LINGK: I...

ROMA: What ...?

LINGK: I...

ROMA: What ...? Say the words.

LINGK: I don't have the *power*. (*Pause.*) I said it.

ROMA: what power?

LINGK: The power to negotiate.

ROMA: To negotiate what? (*Pause.*) To negotiate what?

LINGK: *This.*

ROMA: What, "this" ? (*Pause.*)

LINGK: The deal.

ROMA: The "deal," *forget* the deal. *Forget* the deal, you've got something on you mind, Jim, what is it?

LINGK (*rising*): I can't talk to you, *you* meet my wife, I... (*Pause.*)

ROMA: What? (*Pause.*) What? (*Pause.*) What, Jim: I tell you what, let's get out of here ... let's go get a drink. (91-93)

Lingk's breakdown and estrangement are conceived in Mendes's words when the latter is asked about Lingk's role in the play, "Well, he's us. Isn't he? The audience. I wanted the audience to feel that somebody just walked in ... off the street, and that he's found himself in a play by David Mamet, and he doesn't have the lines. He doesn't have any of the means of expression. He's just, "Shit," you know, "Where am I and why are all these

people watching?" ... He's the *link.* And, he's the heart of the play" (Kane, "A Conversation" 253). Mendes wants to detach Lingk from the dog-eat-dog atmosphere of the play. As a consequence, he stresses both the innocence and meekness of a customer, at one extreme, while highlighting the savageness of American salesmen, at the other extreme. Lingk is the *link* that makes the audience fully aware of the real nature of a group of men *linked* to each other by only their ultimate devotion to their organisation. He is the core of the play because it is he who distinguishes *Glengarry Glen Ross* from *Death of a Salesman* which lacks the communication between salesman and customer. It is he who helps the audience to find out the true face of Richard Roma. It is his appearance in Act II that leads to the climax of the play. Finally, it is Lingk's cheque that acts as the clue to the leads burglar.

Thrown off balance, Lingk keeps apologising to Roma for being cheated. He quits the office in a frantic mood repeating, "Oh, Christ...(*Starts out the door.*) Don't follow me....Oh, Christ. (*Pause. To* Roma) I know I've let you down. I am sorry. For...Forgive...for...I don't know anymore. (*Pause.*) Forgive me" (95). Mendes regards this dialogue as one of the most moving examples in the play. He remarks, "When you see the destruction wrought on him by Roma in the second act and the sheer disinterest in his plight when he leaves, I think it is very moving, very moving, and clearly intended to be, and the fact that he asks for forgiveness is absolutely awful" (Kane "A Conversation" 254). Lingk's request of pardon sheds light on two opposing attitudes: idealism of a customer versus skilful manipualtion carried out by a salesman. Vorlicky confirms, "In confessing to Roma that he has let him down, Lingk reveals his delusion that Roma

actually cares personally for him; conversely, it reveals Roma's success at playacting" (*Act Like a Man* 51-52).

In fact, Lingk's illusion is not the only case in the play. It is argued that Mamet's play about illusion. Stafford observes:

> *Glengarry Glen Ross* may be seen as a work with a more coherent and devastating central idea, and that is the theme of illusion. In this approach, the salesmen are seen as living in an illusionary world, creating a phony reality, and using false appearances as a sales technique so that in the long run they deny their own reality, their client's reality, and the reality of the real world. Ultimately, in such a world, human values are destroyed and nothing means anything, for there is no truth and everything is what one merely says it is. (186)

Here, an atmosphere of mirage spreads: there are no moral law, no successful partnership, no seen women, no family, no visible owners of the company, no valuable land, no money, no valid cheques, no finished deals, no prize and consequently no achieved identity. In other words, what dominates the play is "essentially a chimera" (Dean, *David Mamet* 189).

Mamet's presentation of only the male world in *Glengarry Glen Ross* is an expression of his concern with evoking the theme of masculinity. Being single-gendered, the play portrays a "homosocial" world. According to Sedgwick, "'Homosocial' is a word occasionally used in history and social sciences, where it describes social bonds between

persons of the same sex.... In fact, it is applied to such activities as 'male bonding'" (1). Nevertheless, the male bonding in the real estate office is just an external mask for internally greedy wishes. Zeifman argues that the absence of women in the play is a denotation that the feminine values, such as "compassion, tenderness, and spirituality," threaten the salesman. In business, these characteristics are interpreted as weakness which, in turn, endangers this competitive sphere. In view of that, "toughness, strength, and cunning" become the proper qualities of the American businessman (124-125). It is, for instance, impossible to trace signs of sympathy or kind-heartedness in the character of Roma or Moss. On the contrary, stiffness, potency and deviousness are indispensable components of their being.

Additionally, the Mametian male violently endeavours to deplore or throw out what he assumes as feminine in himself or in the other. McDonough asserts that the theme of "masculine space" in the play relies upon the male's annihilation or segregation of female subjective existence. This process is crucial so that the man feels independent and strong enough. However, it is impossible to exclude feminism in spite of the male's pursuit to marginalise the woman. The salesmen are incapable of sustaining "a separatist male space" owing to their obsession with "a fear of femininity" (71-72). Roma is aware of the fact that if he wants to successfully fulfil his business deal with Lingk, it is necessary to surmount the absent-present influence of Lingk's wife:

> ROMA: ...I want to tell you something. Your life is your own. You have a contract with your wife. You have certain things you do *jointly,* you have a *bond* there...and there are *other* things. Those things are yours. You needn't feel

> *ashamed*, you needn't feel that you're being *untrue*...or that she would abandon you if she knew. This is your life. (93)

Therefore, the only exceptions of the absent women in the play are Mrs. Lingk and Levene's daughter. Even these two females are off stage characters: only referred to by Lingk and Levene.

In her case against Roma, Lingk's wife seeks protection from the district attorney general. Vorlicky remarks that though she does not have the "patriarchal privileges," this lack of social equilibrium of power does not disable her when she encounters "the masculine ego" ("Men among the Ruins" 101). In spite of her absence, Jenny has the authority to emasculate Lingk who appears powerless to negotiate the issue with Roma. Through the faint voice of her husband, she also defies the other male power represented by Richard Roma. Despite Roma's attempt to nullify Jenny's "*prudence*" as "something *women* have" (83), she is the reason for the fall of two more men. Through sending Lingk to cancel the contract, she causes Roma's loss of the prize and leads to the proclamation of Levene as a thief. She reminds the reader of the matriarchal figure of Mrs. Zero in Chapter II and Bessie in Chapter III. In addition, the reference to Levene's daughter evokes the idea that family relationships are debased and turned into a commodity. To get himself out of trouble, Levene twice tries to acquire Williamson's sympathy by appealing for help for his daughter's sake: once to get access to some of the top leads and second to beg Williamson not to report him to the police. Levene's daughter is rendered to be a mere pledge at the hands of her father: she is only mentioned to secure her father's risky

life. Levene struggles to maintain his identity not only as a salesman but also as a father so that he keeps the values attached to the provider in front of his daughter.

Besides, Mamet creates the illusion of a home in the play: the concept of the family is entirely absent. It is as if the United States, as a whole, were turned into a business office. Levene, the only salesman in the play who has a family, resides in a hotel and quits, as he tells Williamson, to bring money from there. When Moss feels enraged due to being interrogated by Baylen, he declares that he is not going home but to Wisconsin. It is Mamet's intention to stress the temporariness and the instability of these people's lives. This distance from home exacerbates the salesmen's psychological and physical alienation. It also intensifies the absence of the sense and feeling of a family – no belonging and no dedication. On the other hand, there is absolute devotion to work.

Decker comments on "the worlding of America in an age of postmodernity." He writes, "Unlike the publicly visible and vocal captains of industry, power in late capitalism seems increasingly disembodied, faceless, [and] anonymous" (148). This power is represented in Mamet's play by Mitch and Murray – anonymous and unseen but powerful and influential. Dorff states that their "absence suggests that the site of power is unseen – somewhere off stage.... Their absence is linked to a ubiquitous criminality that remains invisible" (200). Mendes sees that their absence-presence gives the play universal overtones. He says, "Like all great plays, it resonates far beyond itself.... [I]t's not just a critique of capitalism. It's not just a story of one particular man who can no longer stand the pressure and snaps, or makes an error judgement. It's about the layers

beyond that: the Mitch and Murray who never appear, who control that world, and the people beyond that" (Kane, "A Conversation" 246).

Further, money, Dorff argues, has become less concrete than before. She states that "the model of the sale has changed and now approximates a contemporary version of plastic capitalism, in which credit cards or cheques are exchanged for illusions fostered by the salesmen's storytelling" (198). No deals are done, no prize is presented and no identity is achieved simply because no cheques are valid. The salesmen also do not sell real land. Elizabeth Klaver explains, "In fact, land appears in the play only in the context of real estate contracts, leads, and the swirl of talk and theatricality of the salesmen" (177). Set off against the tough atmosphere in the play, the title sounds seductive. The audience is left with false deals and vague promises. Stafford observes, "The title contains several hidden implications for the play and provides a clue as to the play's underlying intent. While the title is quite musical, ... it stands in ironic contrast to the harshness and violence of the language of the play. Through its musical quality, it conjures up illusions of beautiful places when in reality it ironically denotes worthless or nonexistent land" (186). The value of such a land adds extra emphasis on the salesmen's ability to convince the prospects to purchase. For them, it is not a matter of what to sell but rather how to sell it. Certainly, the best one to do this is Roma. Mantegna says, "One of the sales maxims is 'sell the sizzle, not the steak.' In other words, it's not even important what the thing is; it's why are you buying it? That's why to me *Glengarry* became, as some people said, *The Death of a Salesman* of the nineties or eighties.... This was the ultimate salesman play, I think" (Kane, "Interview with Joe Mantegna" 257).

Glengarry Glen Ross features a vicious world that knows no tolerance. Friendship or rivalry is adopted according to the demands of a situation. Deception is out of control and treachery is carved on every corner of the real estate office. Language enhances, instead of bridging, the communication gap between the salesmen. If they are compared to the beasts of a Darwinian jungle, Roma will have resemblance to more than one: lion, the number-one; fox, the most cunning; and snake, the most oily. Levene is similar to an old lion, which was once the top, or an elephant, which threatens the throne of the king. Moss is both a wolf, violating the innocence of his colleague, and a bee, which keeps buzzing around its victims. Aaronow is innocent like a goat or an antelope. The system masculinises only one salesman, while emasculating the rest. Only one man is evaluated to be qualified to do the job of salesmanship. With the exception of Aaronow's expression of mere hatred to the job, no hopes for redemption are suggested. The hatred can be taken as a prelude for change: hating a dubious job puts the person one step ahead on the right track.

Glengarry Glen Ross registers a development beyond *Death of a Salesman*. Mamet's play explores the relationship between capitalism and American identity through depicting the fierce struggle among four salesmen; the latter does so through shedding light on the dilemma of one salesman. The focus on the theme of business as shown by the setting of the play, the language of the characters and the vanished home adds extra emphasis on the unbridled competition to achieve the success myth. In *Glengarry Glen* Ross, the concept of the cult of personality is relegated to just one element of the salesman's ability to exploit the customer. In addition to personality, the Mametian

salesman has an aggressive nature, cunning language and inventive story-telling. If a comparison is drawn between one of these salesmen, on one hand, and Willy Loman, on the other hand, the former proves to be more convincing to his customer. However, in both cases, the two characters search for identity as well as recognition from the others, either in the office or in the wider business environment. The two concepts are integral to the sense of powerful masculinity the system values above all else.

Chapter V
Glengarry Glen Ross

Conclusion

Either in the decades of boom or the years of depression, the humiliating impact of American capitalism on identity is the same. Elmer Rice, Clifford Odets, Arthur Miller and David Mamet rebel against the system respectively in *The Adding Machine*, *Awake and Sing!*, *Death of a Salesman* and *Glengarry Glen Ross*. They succeed in showing how tentative the existence of the American individual is as they are aware of the potential vulnerability, insecurity and alienation that the corporate business world inflicts on him. Through their works, the audience is drawn to identify with the frustrated and anxious protagonists who seem to speak to the contradictions embedded in the American ideology of individual success. The four dramas discussed here share much in common: each reinforces and adds something crucial to the others. The consequence is a vivid image of the unbalanced relationship between a regulating capitalism and regulated personal identity.

The notion of work in modern American society is a major topic of this thesis. I have traced the development of American work from the dependence on manual skills in the 1920s, typically the operation of factory machinery, to the reliance on manipulative skills in the 1980s whose purpose was the exploitation of other people's dreams. Both the manual worker and the white-collar employee encounter demanding pressures at work. For the former, the division of labour under Ford's assembly line in addition to Taylor's time and motion studies ultimately creates a gap between creativity and labour as well as self and job. For the latter, the involvement in the procedures of office work and the loyalty to the organisation lead to a division of the self into a longed for but already lost

authenticity and the performative 'front' adopted by the salesman. Having a market personality, the individual is turned into a commodity. In both cases, the alienation of the individual comes to the foreground. Instead of an occupation being an enabling process of self-recognition and self-assertion, the American man's labour is again and again portrayed as being possessed by the capitalist. Work, subsequently, causes a perpetual loss of the self. The workforce has a hand in accumulating capital and it enhances the capital-labour relationship to which it is subordinated. In that way, the harder the worker works, the more he estranges himself from himself.

The issue of unemployment during the Great Depression is, of course, linked to the theme of work. Loss of financial power due to unemployment is often interpreted as a threat of emasculation as the authority of the male at home is destabilised. This problematic situation challenges the image of the man as head of the household. Being stuck at home without work only reinforces his sense of inferiority. Further, latent dissimilarities and disagreements between the husband and the wife are exacerbated by unemployment, converting the home context into a battle between sexes.

In analyzing what it means to be a man in modern America, the thesis provides insight on enduring problems caused by the economic system. It directs the reader's attention towards a number of aspects concerning work and family. First, while work is based upon masculine values such as competitiveness and aggressiveness, it hits at the basis of male identity. Second, individual personality is shaped by the challenges one faces in occupational and familial life. Third, through affecting the relationship between husbands

and wives, work is likely to mute the leadership potential of men in the home. The 'crisis of masculinity,' accordingly, is generated when the male feels he is conquered in the workplace in the sense that he no longer controls or negotiates his occupational fate. Though work is supposed to enhance the status of the male as the breadwinner and to sustain his worthiness, the exposure to the permanent anxieties and challenges of a career results in his inability to conduct this role in a sufficient way and, hence, his worthlessness is exposed. The crisis reaches beyond the workplace and insinuates itself into the fabric of family life. At this point, the male experiences another field of struggle: he comes under stress as long as he is required by his wife to provide the household with life necessities. If he fails as a provider, his status and authority are subject to awful collapse. This precipitates a corresponding change in the status of the wife who, in turn, produces a reaction to the man. Thus, it is assumed that the economic circumstances can reshape gender relationships. All the plays portray a tension between men and women. Even in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, whose cast is only men, there is a conflict between Roma and an offstage woman.

The thesis also sheds much light upon the relationship between the individual and the state, represented by its economic system: how is the individual to find a place within the abstract market of American mass consumption. The capitalists are capable of evading responsibility for the way in which work is done by making the individual responsible. What is amazing is that the power of the United States as a nation is built upon the vulnerability, powerlessness and insecurity of the citizen. The warranty of self-recognition through work is turned into a myth which encourages men to work but fails,

or rather refuses, to set them free. Whereas the American myth of success simplifies things, the person learns not only its essence but he is urged to live in the dream of achieving it. If he has enough initiative, the myth promises, then he is capable of being successful. The danger lies in the probability that he will fail. In this case, he is expected to blame no one but himself since there is no room in America for failure. This paralysis simultaneously pushes the individual, who becomes absolutely disappointed, towards the realm of illusion. Every attempt to contact reality, which is connected to the means of achieving the myth, is destined to be frustrated. Now, he concludes that the myth he has learned does not help him. (This is the exact feeling Zero has in the court while he is tried.) Thence, there is a contradiction between the success story and reality: what the people are told to accomplish contradicts what they do in reality.

While the individual worker is responsible for success, the context within which he works becomes more and more dominated by apparently abstract forms of authority. In fact, he does not enjoy any sense of freedom to be a success but he is a trivial participant in a corporate structure that will consume him before throwing him away. If the United States is a big nation built on freedom, where is the freedom of the individual? There is no freedom except that of exploitation: the individual is eligible to have only the freedom of dreaming and anything else is a lie. (In Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*, the salesmen are manufacturing the dream in the real estate office in order to sell it to their customers.) It seems that the American man lives in a world he neither understands nor controls. Being centrally monitored and, consequently, feeling powerless, he is faced with the consequences of his limitations. The male protagonists not only see themselves and but

are also conceived as if they were nonentities even as they seek to assume and secure an 'authentic' masculine identity.

In the plays discussed here, men are struggling against unbearable circumstances brought upon by their own work. Zero's routine turns him into a machine and refuses any chance of promotion to a more meaningful job. Myron's unemployment makes him abandon the present and the future and take refuge in the memories of the merry past. Likewise, Willy's persistent belief in the charm of personality turns him into a phoney. The get-rich-quick pursuit of the four salesmen in *Glengarry Glen Ross* reduces their masculinity, spirituality and morality to a very low level. Firing as a threat is the lot of all the male characters. Zero, Myron, Jacob, Willy, Biff, Levene and Moss are sacked. The prospect of escape from the terrors of the workplace is remote but takes a variety of often extreme forms. Jacob and Willy resort to committing suicide in the end. Hennie elopes with a family friend to another country, leaving her husband and her baby. Ralph decides to leave home and to undertake a social duty. Biff also departs to the west so that he can pursue a different way of life other than salesmanship. Moss attempts to tempt Aaronow to steal the leads from the real estate office and to escape to a competitor.

For Zero, Myron, Jacob, Willy and Levene, escapism from the cruel reality also takes place in the form of constant remembering of the glorious days of the past. Though dreams do not come true, dreaming becomes a power that separates the male protagonists from reality. Whereas he feels powerful in his dreamy world, this dreaming increases his sense of irresponsibility and indifference by creating a discrepancy between facts and

illusion. For men, being dreamers stands in opposition to normative notions of practical maleness where the male has to stick to reality to fulfil his responsibilities. It is worth noting that none of the wives in the plays live in dreams. Mrs. Zero, Bessie and Linda are deemed to be the voices of reason. While the male characters are just dreaming, the wives by contrast feel the full pressure of reality: children's problems, for example, are the paramount obsession of Bessie's life. The women must confront the status quo on a daily basis and in their confrontation they have different reactions to their husbands. While Mrs. Zero and Bessie belittle Zero and Myron, Linda tries to support Willy.

As a clear sign of man's alienation there is a lack of communication, not just between men and women but between men and other men, in *The Adding Machine*, *Awake and Sing!*, *Death of a Salesman* and *Glengarry Glen Ross*. The scope of non-communication widens gradually from one play to the next. In Rice's play, failure of communication is between husband and wife; in Odets's, it enlarges to include the son and the daughter; in Miller's play, it reaches the employer and the employee; finally, in Mamet's, the communication of the salesman with both his colleague and his customer becomes a fake. The characters fail to communicate with each other because they share nothing in common except their extreme, atomised individualism. The male indulges in his struggle with both inner and outer forces. The former is his feeling of uncertainty and the latter is the creator of this feeling, the capitalist. The wife's general attitude is either to criticize the male for his inability to guarantee the availability of life necessities (Mrs. Zero and Bessie) or to find the lost chain in the communication between the father and the son so that the condition of separation is bridged (Linda). Unconvinced by the image of his

father, the son's pursuit is to adopt a different way of life (Ralph and Biff). The daughter's concern is to seek happiness even it is available outside the home or outside the country as a whole (Hennie).

As depicted by the plays, various human relationships are badly affected by the American system. The husband-wife bond is very fragile not only in *The Adding Machine* but also in A*wake and Sing!*. In the former, the marriage is as stagnant as Zero's promotion prospects, while in the latter married life reaches the utmost disintegration. The two dramas are very similar concerning the description of the castrating wife, who is conceived as obtaining her power through the disintegration of male breadwinning power. Both plays seem to demonstrate that the safe and sound place of the male at the top of the social hierarchy is only assured by relentless struggle for ascendancy in the Darwinian American workplace. Only nonstop performance within the inflexibly hierarchical form of the business world is able to protect the male's position as provider and family man. The wife provides little or no shield from the harm exacted by a greedy business sphere. In fact, she is among the first victims of any occupational failure.

The father-son relationship is at risk as well. It is Ralph who debases his irresponsible and indifferent father, even in front of the family friends. In *Death of a Salesman,* signs of filial ingratitude are also clear. Willy wants his superior status to be maintained and the value of salesmanship be acknowledged by his son. Therefore, Biff's growth is affected by Willy's projection of himself. A great deal of his gratitude relies upon whether the world opened up by his father's professional career is successful and secure. Since Willy

is a failure, anxious and; more disturbing for Biff, unfaithful, he receives no gratitude. Moreover, the system causes the destruction of friendship in *Glengarry Glen Ross*. It seems that, in the materialistic world of American business, friendship and business are two parallel lines that never meet. In addition, obscene language hinders and aborts the possibility of establishing social bonds. Violence becomes a means at Mamet's hand to expose America's warped culture. The characters resort to violent actions in order to express their pent-up rage and dissatisfaction. Mamet, thus, describes how the atmosphere of business results in the negative and indifferent attitude of the businessman to personal relationships. Actually, the world depicted in all these plays is in need of compassion and spirituality. In each of them, the audience leaves the performance with a pessimistic feeling triggered by the static communication among the individuals.

The teacher-student paradigm prevails in the four plays. This is aimed to achieve some sort of bond between the characters: one person overpowers the other. In *The Adding Machine*, it is Mrs. Zero who instructs her husband on how to behave in a respectable way. Similarly, in *Awake and Sing!*, Bessie is the advocate of respectability in her household. The relationship between Jacob and Ralph is a typical example of this model. Through the grandfather's teachings, it becomes evident that the American family is the breeding-ground of rebels against the capitalistic system. However, in *Death of a Salesman*, the ultimate objective of instruction is to feed the spirit of conformity to business ethics. Willy is also keen on teaching Biff the way in which he can make the best use of the cult of personality in salesmanship. In Mamet's drama, the treatment of this model is ironic. In other words, in the business world, where values are violated as

shown by the play, there is no teaching in the proper sense of the word. The harmony between Levene and Roma is an indication that each follows the footsteps of the other. They exchange roles as a teacher and a student in their search to satiate their hunger for business success.

In each of the selected plays, there is integration between content and form. Every play makes use of a dramatic form in a distinguishing way so that its themes are highlighted. While presenting a politically radical drama, Rice employs expressionistic techniques. In *The Adding Machine*, there are, for example, expressionistic settings, abstract and telescopic characterisation, long monologues, asides, free association, distorted music and light. Rice's concern with the subjective states of Zero and his wife is connected to socio-political pressures. Zero's havoc is made a psychological state partly because he suffers from alienation. Having no collective identity, he and his wife are unable to realise that they are both formed by the same incapacitating circumstances under the new Fordist regime of the assembly line. Odets's *Awake and Sing!* focuses on domestic realism in order to reflect the malaise generated by the Great Depression. Performed in only a single household setting, the play portrays the struggle of every member of the Berger family to assume a sort of identity against a crushing status quo. Here, domesticity gives voice not only to the characters but to broader social concerns as well. The United States is symbolised by the Bergers' home where it is on the crossroad of Marxism and materialism: it has to choose one of them as a way of life.

Responding to the appeal of social psychology during the post-war period, Miller employs psychological expressionism in *Death of a Salesman*. Unlike *The Adding Machine*, the play reveals psychological and mental states instead of acting more explicitly as a kind of politically-oriented social criticism. This shift is a symptom of the refusal of openly radical drama after World War II. In Miller's play, there is a subjective record of Willy's past through his indulgence in flashbacks. The pressure he is apt to in his work on the road renders him to be a schizophrenic human being. Since Willy believes that his personal attractiveness is the backbone of this career, Miller's aim is to show how personality sustains salesmanship; not vice versa: this career saws the person into two halves, one half lives in the present and the other the past. In *Glengarry Glen Ross,* Mamet uses new realism that articulates the aggressive individualism of the 1980s. Watching a live representation of reality, the audience gets the impression that the real estate office is a microscopic version of modern America. The salesmen deal with their customers using a language which is exploitative, tricky and manipulative. On the other hand, they speak with each other employing obscene, violent and aggressive words. Out of Mamet's realism, an atmosphere of illusion is born in the play. 'No' applies to the following: moral law, successful partnership, visible women, family, owners of the company, valuable land, gained money, valid cheques, closed deals, obtained prize and achieved identity of any salesman.

This thesis has attempted to address the extent to which the American man's identity has been shaped and undermined by the development of capitalism and how realistically and expressionistically this vulnerability has been reflected in four modern American

plays. Here, economic security is often regarded as the sole genuine criterion of acceptable masculinity. The conventional approach of relegating domestic power to the wife may make the husband free to chase a cruel plan of career achievement. However, this division of labour is also a reason for the uncertainty of modern male identity. Failure at work perpetually results in a collapse of familial life: it is difficult to keep the traditional patriarchal structure of the family in place when work conditions are bad or unemployment becomes a destiny. It seems that the whole social order is based upon the constant capacity of the breadwinner to work well. As long as family structure is closely connected to the workplace, the individualism, which causes the isolation of workers, also makes them blameworthy in the opinion of their wives and children. A crisis at work literally means a crisis in the home and a crisis of identity. The individualism of American capitalism offers a passageway, which leads to success for the entrepreneur, but it is a contracted passage and the collapse is abrupt. Job Failure is a failure to be an American and to be a man.

In *The Adding Machine*, *Awake and Sing!*, *Death of a Salesman* and *Glengarry Glen Ross*, the dilemmas and crises of identity, which take place as a result of the alienation of the protagonists from their work, are clearly drawn. What is striking is that these plays, which display a span of sixty years in American economic history, deal with the same problem, though changes take place in American society, in the nature of the family, in the theories of masculinity and in the economic affairs. This analysis prompts the search for an alternative so that the individual might get salvation. It, thus, calls the attention towards an American system with a human heart which renders mercy to those who

create its thriving. The thesis also has its own value when its discussion is connected to the current global depression. The status quo inflicts a real test on conventional notions of manhood, endangers the male's integrity and erodes the basis of his pride.

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