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“Sartreism” in Late Modern American Theatre from New Historicist Lenses: Arthur Miller’s *After the Fall* (1964)

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Dedication

To my family, especially those who understood my silence long before my voice.

To Luna, my lovely cat, your purring is the sweetest melody to my ears.

"Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get''

Forest Gump

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Abstract

This dissertation explores how Sartreism reflects the psychological, moral, and ideological anxieties of postwar America through a new historicist reading of Arthur Miller's *After the Fall* (1964). In the aftermath of World War II and amid Cold War tensions, American society experienced political paranoia, moral disorientation, and cultural fragmentation. This study examines how Miller dramatises these tensions through characters facing existential crises. Combining Sartre's existentialism with new historicist methods, the dissertation situates the play's dilemmas within their socio-political context, showing how Miller's characters are shaped by historical and ideological forces. The play's fragmented structure and its blending of memory and trauma reflect Sartre's theatre of situations and align with new historicism's focus on ideology and discourse. The work is divided into two chapters. Chapter one lays the theoretical foundation, outlining Sartre's philosophy and its influence on postwar American theatre, alongside key concepts of new historicism and its application to theatre. Chapter two offers a close reading of *After the Fall*, analysing how its characters embody existential conflict and mirror broader societal shifts. The analysis shows that the play transcends autobiography to become a cultural text expressing the moral contradictions of its time. Through its synthesis of existentialist thought and historicist critique, this study highlights how theatre articulates the human search for meaning in an unstable world.

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General Introduction

The Second World War made a profound turning point in global consciousness. It ushered in an era of existential uncertainty, ideological conflict, and rapid sociocultural transformation. In the United States, the postwar years were characterised by contradictory currents: unprecedented economic prosperity coexisted with Cold War paranoia, civil rights struggles, and widespread moral anxiety. These tensions reshaped the American psyche and cultural output, particularly in literature and theatre. Artists grappled with the fragmentation of meaning and the decline of traditional values. In this context, existentialism, especially the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, offered a compelling framework for articulating the crises of identity, freedom, and responsibility that defined the age.

This dissertation investigates how Sartreism, with its emphasis on human freedom, authenticity, and moral accountability, resonates within the context of late modern American theatre. Using Arthur Miller's *After the Fall* (1964) as a primary case study; the research applies new historicist methods to examine the interplay between existentialist thought and the ideological landscape of mid-twentieth-century America. Sartre's philosophy serves not only as a theoretical lens but also as a guide to understanding the moral and psychological dilemmas faced by individuals navigating a politically charged, socially fragmented, and emotionally alienating world.

By merging Sartrean existentialism with new historicist criticism, the research positions *After the Fall* as a theatrical space where personal and collective histories intersect. Through a close reading of Miller's characters and structure, the analysis demonstrates how the play reflects postwar anxieties and dramatises the human struggle to create meaning in an indifferent world. Furthermore, the approach reveals how theatre is both a cultural product and a site of resistance, where suppressed discourses, subjective memory, and ethical dilemmas are staged and interrogated. Therefore, the study raises following questions:

1. How does Sartreism mirror the anxieties of postwar America?

2. In what ways does *After the Fall* manifest the struggle of characters between personal freedom and historical determinism?

3. To what extent does *After the Fall* reflect the societal shifts in the 1960s?

This reading builds on Sartre's concepts of subjectivity and becoming (*Being and Nothingness*, 1956), Greenblatt's notion of cultural energy and fragmented discourse (*Shakespearian Negotiations*, 1988), and Foucault's theories of discourse and historiography (*The Archaeology of Knowledge,* 1972).

The work is organised into two chapters. The first one covers the theoretical framework underpinning this analysis. This chapter serves to provide a concise overview of Sartre's existential philosophy, an outline of new historicism, and an illustration of both in the context of American theatre. The second chapter presents a critical analysis of *After the Fall,* integrating both the philosophical framework and the interdisciplinary approach.

Chapter I: Sartreism, Modern American Theatre, and New Historicism

1.1 Introduction

The Second World War dramatically altered people's perception of the world, especially among those who endured its horrors. Questions concerning the self and existence became central to the human experience as twentieth-century individuals grappled with a widespread existential crisis. Existentialist ideas resonated deeply with modern consciousness, particularly the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, whose writings explored freedom, responsibility, and the human condition. Sartre's existentialism had a profound impact on post-war art and literature, including American theatre, where playwrights engaged with his ideas to reflect and critique the crises facing American society. Within this context, New Historicism offers valuable perspectives, as it emphasises the interplay between literary texts and their historical moments. It provides a framework for understanding how Sartre’s philosophy was not only adopted but also reshaped within the socio-political climate of mid-twentieth-century America.

1.2 Sartreism and Existentialism

Existentialism is as old as humanity itself. Its very nature has led philosophers throughout history to speculate on it and attempt to understand its implications. In the modern era, this line of thought found a powerful voice in Jean-Paul Sartre. As one of the most influential existentialist thinkers of the twentieth century, Sartre played a pivotal role in shaping the direction and impact of the movement in contemporary thought.

1.2.1 Definition and History of Existentialism

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that focuses on individual freedom, choice, and existence. It often emphasises the absurdity of life, the isolation of the self, and the responsibility that comes with human freedom. The existentialist view holds that individuals must find their own meaning in an indifferent or even hostile universe. The term 'existentialism'

was first used by the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel in 1943, but it was Jean-Paul Sartre who popularised the movement and defined it in a secular context during his famous 1946 lecture *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (Sartre, 1946; Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2023).

The roots of existentialism can be traced back to the writings of Blaise Pascal (1623-1662). In his *Pensées* (1670), Pascal explored existential themes, emphasising the necessity of belief in God for human well-being. His famous *Wager* argument reflects this notion. It suggests that faith in God is a rational choice given the uncertainty of the afterlife. However, existentialism's evolution took a more distinct turn with Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), who is often considered the father of the movement. Kierkegaard focused on the individual's relationship with God, emphasising the "leap of faith" as a necessary act in confronting existential uncertainty. His ideas regarding the tension between faith and reason laid the foundations for existentialism and influenced Christian existentialists like Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2023).

In contrast, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) rejected religious values. This marked a pivotal moment in existential thought. Nietzsche's assertion that "God is dead" signalled a world devoid of divine order, where individuals must create their own meaning. His concept of the Übermensch (Overman) represents a person who transcends traditional moralities to assert their own existence, a theme central to existentialism. Nietzsche's philosophy also introduced the idea of nihilism which refers to the rejection of inherent meaning in life. This idea profoundly impacted later existentialists (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2023).

In the twentieth century, particularly after World War II, Europe was in the midst of a profound crisis, both intellectually and socially. Traditional values were questioned, and many turned to existentialism as a means of confronting the uncertainty of the modern world.

Intellectuals and artists responded to this crisis by exploring themes of alienation, freedom, anxiety, and the absurdity of existence, all central to existential thought. The movement reached its peak with philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus whose works articulated the existentialist focus on individual freedom, responsibility, and the search for authenticity. (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2023).

1.2.2 Core Principles of Sartre's Existentialist Philosophy

Sartre's existentialism is grounded in the principle that existence precedes essence. It asserts that human beings are radically free in a world devoid of any preordained nature or inherent purpose. This freedom entails that individuals are solely responsible for constructing their identities through conscious choices and actions. Crucially, Sartre contends that individual decisions extend beyond personal significance; when one chooses, one does so on behalf of all humanity, thereby endorsing a vision of universal values. In this sense, each act becomes a moral statement applicable to humankind. Moreover, Sartre underscores the inextricable link between freedom and responsibility, arguing that the burden of absolute freedom necessarily entails full accountability for one's actions and their broader implications. (Sartre, 1946/2007).

1.2.2.1 Freedom

Sartre's views on freedom are central to his existentialist philosophy. For him, freedom is not merely a human attribute. It is the very foundation of human existence. Sartre famously asserts that human beings are "condemned to be free." He means that once thrown into existence, individuals are entirely responsible for their actions, in the absence of any divine plan or objective moral framework to guide them. This radical freedom is both liberating and deeply burdensome. Sartre argues that self-deception functions as a defence mechanism through which individuals attempt to escape the anxiety provoked by the weight of freedom. He conceptualises this avoidance strategy as bad faith (mauvaise foi), whereby a person denies

their own freedom by assuming fixed roles or surrendering to external expectations. As he writes in *Being and Nothingness*, "What never vary are the necessities of being free, of total choice of oneself" (1943, p. 70). In other words, even conforming to societal norms or refraining from decision-making are themselves expressions of one's freedom. There is no escape from it. Every act, even passive submission, is an individual choice and bears responsibility.

Sartre also critiques Descartes' formulation of the Cogito, which begins with an abstract, detached subject the "I" that thinks but exists separately from the world. In contrast, Sartre insists that human beings are not defined by a pre-given nature but must define themselves through action. In *Existentialism Is a Humanism (1946)*, he reinterprets the Cogito by asserting that consciousness is not a static, isolated thinking activity but a dynamic mode of being that of "being-for-others" and "being-in-the-world." For Sartre, the Cogito does not merely affirm thinking; it affirms responsibility. It marks the awareness of one's own existence and the necessity of choosing and self-defining in a contingent, uncertain world (Sartre, 1943/1956; Sartre, 1946/2007).

1.2.2.2 Responsibility

In Sartrean thought, absolute freedom necessitates full responsibility. Sartre famously claims, *"Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does"* (Sartre, 1946/2007, p. 34). This responsibility stems from the individual's freedom of choice, which reflects not only personal values but also a vision for humanity. By making choices, each person sets an example of what humankind ought to be, thus becoming a model for others. With this freedom comes existential anguish, as individuals bear the burden of a freedom they did not choose initially. In a world devoid of divine authority, universal morals, or an essential human nature, individuals must confront the weight of self-

definition. Sartre further explores this concept through his idea of bad faith. He illustrates this with the example of a waiter who, in over-identifying with his role, behaves mechanically and limits his identity to the societal function he performs. By doing so, the waiter avoids authentic self-definition and the responsibility of freedom (Sartre, 1943/1956, p59-60). Sartre argues that such individuals, living in bad faith, lead inauthentic lives (Sartre, 1943/1956; Sartre, 1946/2007).

1.2.2.3 Authenticity

For Sartre, authenticity is achieved when individuals recognise and embrace their freedom to define themselves, rather than succumbing to external pressures or societal expectations. Sartre famously states that human beings are not born with predetermined purposes or meanings but must create their essence through their actions and choices (Sartre, 1946/2007). Authenticity, in this sense, is not simply being true to oneself but also involves actively shaping one's own identity in a world that offers no inherent guidelines for meaning.

Individuals in bad faith deny their fundamental freedom and responsibility, often by blaming external factors for their choices (Sartre, 1943/1956). Sartre argues that bad faith is a defence mechanism against the anxiety and anguish that come with the realisation of one's freedom. For example, a person might claim that they have no choice but to adhere to societal norms or live according to the expectations of others. In doing so, they avoid confronting their ability to make authentic choices. Sartre views bad faith as a denial of the existential truth that humans are free and must take responsibility for their actions (Sartre, 1943/1956).

In contrast, good faith involves embracing one's freedom and responsibility without self-deception. A person acting in good faith accepts the responsibility for creating their own values and meaning in life. Rather than deferring to external authorities or society. One consciously acts in a way that reflects their true self and desires. While Sartre's philosophy does not suggest

that humans can ever be completely free of anxiety, the act of living authentically involves making decisions that align with one's true values, even in the face of uncertainty (Sartre, 1946/2007).

Sartre's views on authenticity are inextricably linked to his ideas on freedom and responsibility. For Sartre, freedom is not merely the ability to choose among options; it is the fundamental condition of human existence. Individuals are free to define themselves through their actions, but with that freedom comes the heavy responsibility of choice. Authenticity, therefore, is not simply about making any choice but about making choices that reflect one's true self, without the influence of societal norms or expectations. Sartre insists that individuals must confront the discomfort of freedom and take responsibility for their decisions, rather than retreating into the comforting but inauthentic refuge of bad faith (Sartre, 1943/1956).

Sartre acknowledges that human beings are always in relation to others, and this relationship shapes one's sense of self. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre discusses the concept of the look, which refers to the way in which a person perceives and objectifies others. While one cannot escape the influence of others, Sartre argues that living authentically requires to assert one's own identity, independent of the judgments or expectations of others. Thus, authenticity involves a balance between recognizing the influence of others and asserting one's freedom to define oneself (Sartre, 1943/1956; Sartre, 1946/2007).

Sartre's philosophy of authenticity is built upon the idea that individuals are radically free and must take responsibility for their choices. In contrast to bad faith, which involves self-deception and the rejection of freedom, good faith requires the individual to embrace their freedom and make choices that reflect their authentic self. Authentic living, for Sartre, is not about following prescribed societal roles but about confronting the anxiety of freedom and choosing to live in a way that aligns with one's true values. Sartre's existentialism challenges

individuals to live authentically, recognizing that they are the architects of their own lives and that authenticity requires accepting the full responsibility of their subjective freedom (Sartre, 1943/1956; Sartre 1946/2007).

1.2.2.4 Subjectivity

In Sartre's existential framework, subjectivity is not a fixed essence but an ongoing process of self-creation. Unlike inanimate objects that simply exist, human beings, as beings-for-itself, are defined by their capacity for self-reflection and choice. This subjectivity is the very core of being human. Through their conscious awareness, individuals continually define and redefine who they are. Sartre posits that human existence is fundamentally characterised by an active engagement with the world. It is a constant negotiation between inner freedom and the external conditions individuals encounter. In this sense, subjectivity is inherently tied to radical freedom; it empowers them to transcend predefined roles and societal expectations, yet it also burdens them with the responsibility of crafting their own identity. For Sartre, then, the essence of human existence lies in this dynamic interplay. Thus, subjectivity becomes both the source of individuals' liberation and the arena in which they confront the weight of their own choices (Sartre, 1946/2007).

In Sartrean existentialism, subjectivity is vital to the concept of authenticity. For Sartre, authenticity involves embracing one's freedom and responsibility to define oneself, rather than conforming to societal norms or external expectations. Since individuals are fundamentally free, they cannot avoid the responsibility of making choices that shape their identity and meaning in life. Subjectivity is the lens through which they experience this freedom and make their choices (Sartre, 1946/2007).

However, subjectivity can also lead to bad faith. In such cases, individuals fail to live authentically by retreating from the truth of their subjectivity, often rationalizing their

avoidance of genuine choice. This evasion of responsibility and self-deception serves as a significant barrier to achieving an authentic existence (Sartre, 1943/1956; Sartre, 1946/2007).

To live authentically, according to Sartre, one must fully accept their subjectivity and the freedom it entails. This includes recognising that every decision made is a reflection of one's own chosen identity. By embracing this freedom and responsibility, individuals can overcome bad faith and lead a life aligned with their values and self-definition. (Sartre, 1946/2007).

1.2.2.5 Alienation

In Sartre's existential framework, alienation is not merely an abstract concept but a lived experience that profoundly affects human existence. Sartre contends that alienation arises from the tension between the self as an autonomous subject (being-for-itself) and the external forces that objectify and constrain that subject (being-for-others). One of the key mechanisms through which alienation operates is the look of the other. When individuals become aware of being seen, they risk reducing themselves to an object defined by external perceptions, rather than as an autonomous, self-determining subject. This objectification leads to a form of existential estrangement, where one feels disconnected from one's own freedom and authentic identity. Moreover, this state of alienation reinforces bad faith, as individuals may adopt false identities or deny their freedom in an attempt to escape the anxiety provoked by the responsibility of self-definition. Alienation, thus, becomes both a consequence and a perpetuator of inauthentic living, for individuals continuously struggle to reconcile their inner subjectivity with the imposed expectations of society. Sartre's exploration of alienation in *Being and Nothingness* (1943/1956) punctuates that such estrangement is inevitable in a world where humans are condemned to absolute freedom. Yet, it also points to the possibility of liberation through the conscious acceptance of one's responsibility to define oneself. Ultimately, alienation in Sartrean thought encapsulates the paradox of human existence. It is a profound sense of

isolation arising from the very freedom that holds the potential for authentic self-creation (Sartre, 1943/ 1956).

Sartre's philosophical views reflected the issues of his time and the human condition. His ideas transcended philosophy and extended to shape cultural expressions in the theatrical realm. In the wake of postwar uncertainty, Sartreism was relatable in examining and articulating personal and collective crises. American dramatists sought to capture the moral and existential complexities of modern life.

1.3 Sartreism and Late Modern American Theatre

Sartrean existentialism had a significant influence on postwar American theatre, as it engaged with ideas that mirrored the societal anxieties and individual struggles prevalent in mid-twentieth-century America. American playwrights absorbed and reinterpreted Sartre's philosophical principles to address moral, political, and psychological conflicts within their cultural context. Through this engagement, they not only challenged established conventions and dominant ideologies but also experimented with new dramatic structures and characterizations that reflected existential concerns.

1.3.1 Sartre's Influence on American Playwrights

Sartre's views captured contemporary realities. Playwrights americanised existentialism to critique American society. Mathew Roudané (1996) observes: "American dramatists adapted European existentialism to reflect local anxieties rooted less in metaphysics than in moral paralysis and cultural fragmentation" (p. 9). American existentialism differed from its European ancestor in focus. It concentrated on practical concerns more than abstract philosophy. Artists reinterpreted existential ideas to mirror the American experience and mindset.

In the wake of World War II, moral ambiguity and the disintegration of fixed values shook American ideals. Conformity substituted the spirit of individualism, and material gain became a symbol of success. In response to these societal pressures, the "fragmentation of the self into multiple roles offered a possible refuge" (Bigsby, 2000, p. 6). This inner conflict resulted in a sense of alienation and disillusionment. The growing divide between national ideals, mass culture, and personal lived experience contributed to a broader cultural fragmentation. While dominant narratives often promoted unity and prosperity, many individuals found themselves excluded from these ideals. Mass media projected an idealised image of American life, one that masked deeper anxieties and overlooked personal and collective struggles. This contradiction gave rise to a feeling of alienation, a disconnection between what people were told to believe and what they experienced day to day. As a result, many artists and thinkers began to question the meaning of truth, identity, and belonging in a society that no longer reflected their realities. (Bigsby, 2000).

Therefore, theatre became a powerful space to represent these local anxieties. American dramatists, drawing on Sartre's vision of character development and the creation of dramatic situations, shaped works that highlighted the moral and existential conflicts of individuals within the constraints of specific environments. In Sartre's *Théâtre de situations*, characters are often trapped in moral or existential dilemmas shaped by their circumstances. According to Sartre, this is crucial: *"There is freedom only in a situation, and there is a situation only through freedom… there can be a free for-itself only as engaged in a resisting world"* (/1943/1956, p. 489). Thus, the purpose of this type of theatre is to provoke reflection and challenge passive entertainment. The audience is expected to critically engage with plays. In other words, the dramatic situation and the characters become mirrors that confront the audience with questions about freedom, ethics, choice, and responsibility (Steele, 1983; Poklemba,2006; Levy, 2017; Keshtan & Zamani, 2022).

These theoretical foundations greatly influenced a generation of postwar American playwrights, who moved away from traditional realism. Many experimented with unconventional forms of theatre. Playwrights like Edward Albee and Sam Shepard portrayed the complexities of the human condition through fragmented narratives, absurdist elements, and intense character studies. Others such as Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams continued to explore psychological realism. In addition, African American playwrights, including Lorraine Hansberry and Amiri Baraka, challenged and reshaped the American theatrical landscape. Through both realistic and experimental forms, they addressed racial identity, social injustice, and the multifaceted struggles of African Americans in a postwar context.

For instance, in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* (1959), Jerry is fragmented and unpredictable. He defines his character by his cryptic monologue and erratic behaviour. Jerry keeps both the audience and Peter, the other character, in a constant state of uncertainty. In doing so, Albee defied conventional psychological realism and destabilised the audience's expectations of coherence and motivation (Gussow, 1997: Bigsby, 2005).

Likewise, the dramatic situations persisted by postwar playwrights departed from linear, cause-effect structures. In *A Streetcar Named Desire (1947),* Tennessee Williams constructed a confined and volatile space. The apartment setting becomes a pressure chamber. The emotional and psychological tension continually escalate as the characters' flaws, traumas, and illusions collide. The dramatic situation is marked by instability and rupture rather than development and resolution, presenting Williams' resistance of conventional narrative closure (Roudané, 1997).

Also, in Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman (1964),* dialogue and interaction radically shifted from conventional narrative styles. Language is not used as a means of communication, but instrumentalised to provoke, manipulate, and destroy. The verbal exchange between Clay and Lula becomes a psychological battleground. The dialogue is confrontational and loaded with

political and racial tension. It functions as a weapon more than a tool for mutual understanding (Neal, 1968).

In *After the Fall* (1964), the case study of this research, Arthur Miller merges memory, introspection, and historical context to explore themes of guilt, responsibility, and the burden of choice.

Sartre's theoretical principles offered American playwrights a framework to confront postwar tensions through dramatic form and character development. these ideas were reshaped to reflect the complexities of their cultural and historical context. In doing so, existential concerns became deeply embedded in the texture of the American theatre both in structure and thematic direction.

1.3.2 Existential Themes in Postwar American Theatre

Building on Sartre's influence, American dramatists extended and reimagined existential thought to voice their own cultural anxieties and philosophical concerns. Through drama, they captured the moral uncertainty of the postwar period. Existential themes, therefore, became a powerful lens through which writers interrogated alienation, freedom, the disintegration of values.

1.3.2.1 Freedom and Responsibility

Sartre's existential philosophy insists on the principle of absolute freedom. Put simply, individuals are free to define themselves through their actions. At the same time, freedom is inseparable from the burden of responsibility (Sartre, 1943/1956). In postwar American theatre, the tension between individual freedom and the weight of moral responsibility was a fundamental theme. This notion is thoughtfully presented in *The Zoo Story (1959).* Edward Albee's character Jerry symbolises the existential struggle between freedom and its

consequences. Jerry challenges societal norms and reflects the difficulty of exercising freedom in a restrictive world. His disruptive actions embody Sartre's idea that unbounded freedom can lead to alienation and moral conflict. Moreover, Albee illustrates the complexities of individual agency and the cost of true freedom through Jerry's confrontations with Peter. *The Zoo Story* dramatises the idea that freedom is both a gift and a curse (Sartre, 1943/1956; Albee, 1981; Bigsby, 2005).

1.3.2.2 Alienation and Absurdity

Alienation is a central theme in existential thought. Sartre and other existentialists argued that modern individuals often experience alienation from themselves, society, and the world (Sartre, 1943/ 1956). In Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire (1947),* Blanche DuBois desperately attempts to escape the brutal realities of her life through illusions. Her search for salvation in love reveals a deep existential void. Williams portrays Blanche as an emotionally and psychologically fragmented character. She cannot reconcile her internal desires with an external, indifferent world. Her struggle represents Sartre's notion of life's inherent absurdity and lack of meaning. The play's final scene challenges the audience to confront the absurdity of the human condition. Blanche is taken to an insane asylum while a poker game continues (Williams, 1947; Sartre, 1943/1956; Bigsby, 2005).

1.3.2.3 Bad Faith (mauvaise foi)

Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman (1964)* compellingly explores the theme of bad faith. The dialogue is a battlefield for power and identity. Lula conforms to her role as a white woman and rejects Clay's humanity. She treats him as a mere object. Clay, on the other hand, passively responds to her and eventually outbursts. The two characters reflect bad faith and authenticity. Lula denies her authentic self and perpetuates an oppressive system. In contrast, Clay struggles to break free from the false roles imposed on him by society and Lula to reclaim his

authenticity. Baraka's representation of existential themes reflects both a universal human condition and the critical situation of African Americans in 1960s (Baraka, 2001; Neal,1968).

1.3.2.4 Authenticity and Moral Confrontation

In many postwar plays, authenticity emerged as a critical theme. This is evident in how characters strive to affirm their existence. In a world that often threatens their individuality, true self-definition becomes a matter of internal struggle. In the aforementioned plays, characters constantly confront the challenge of asserting their genuine selves. The postwar American stage became a space for individuals to navigate the tension between societal roles and personal identity. Characters like Jerry in *The Zoo Story* (1959) and Clay in *Dutchman* (1964) not only struggle with external forces but also with their own understanding of themselves in a fragmented and subjective world. Through these dilemmas, their moral confrontations become existential. In the American context, playwrights employed existential themes to examine broader societal dynamics (Albee, 1981; Baraka, 2001; Neal, 1968).

Sartre's existentialism left a notable mark on postwar American theatre. It inspired dramatists to explore existential themes that reflected the realities of modern America. Moreover, his ideas influenced both structural approaches and characterisation. This philosophical engagement laid the groundwork for more nuanced interpretations of the human condition, often shaped by the socio-historical realities of the time.

1.4 New Historicism: A Theoretical Framework

The relationship between literature and history is inherently complex, as each continuously influences and shapes the other. New historicism, an interdisciplinary critical approach, is particularly concerned with this dynamic interaction. It aims to study literary texts within the broader context of the cultural, social, political, and historical forces that surround them. This multifaceted perspective proves valuable for modern American theatre analysis in the postwar

era. It allows for a nuanced understanding of how plays reflect and respond to their historical moment.

1.4.1 Origins and Key Concepts of New Historicism

In the 1980s, new historicism emerged as a critical response to both formalist and traditional historicist approaches to literature. It challenges the idea of literature as autonomous object. Instead, it presents it as a cultural artefact read in a dynamic and ideologically charged historical context (Greenblatt, 2005). New historicism emphasises that texts must be studied within the complex webs of power, discourse, and ideology that determine the historical period in which they were written (Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000).

New historicism assumes that history is not a linear narrative of facts. It is, in fact, a complex, discursive field like literature itself. It is heavily influenced by poststructuralist theory, the work of Michel Foucault in precise. His rejection of absolute truths and his emphasis on how knowledge and power systems produce, and shape social norms became essential to new historicist methods (Foucault, 1972). This way, literary texts are no longer considered purely aesthetic and artistic but also cultural products involved in networks of power and ideology.

In addition, new historicism shares common grounds with cultural materialism, particularly its emphasis on ideology and power dynamics. However, this latter leans towards Marxist analysis and political critique. It is interested in issues of class, economics, and agency in a way that new historicism favours Foucauldian nuance (Sinfield, 1992). While cultural materialism often stresses on resistance and social transformation, new historicism focuses on the ways dissent is absorbed or suppressed by dominant ideologies.

Also, to better understand new historicism, it is worth contrasting it with other major critical theories. Traditional historicism, for example, often regards history as neutral and helpful to objectively analyse literature. In opposition, new historicism views history and literature as forms of representation that ideologies of their time shape (Greenblatt, 1980; Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000). Moreover, formalism and structuralism favour textual autonomy and formal analysis over historical and ideological context (Belsey, 1996; Eagleton, 1983). New historicism challenges this view and insists on the interaction between text and context (Veeser, 1989; Greenblatt, 2005).

Furthermore, new historicism abandons economic determinism that Marxist literary criticism overstresses. The Marxist approach privileges materialism over the ideological superstructure. New historicism sees ideology, power, and culture as diffuse and mutually constitutive. Under Foucault's influence, more than Marx, new historicists concentrate on analysing micro- mechanisms of power rather than overfocusing on class struggles (Brannigan, 1998).

The conceptual foundation of new historicism is built on a number of key principles. The concept of subversion and containment is one of the most prominent concepts. Stephen Greenblatt, the father founder of the approach, introduced this concept to explain how literary texts may contain elements of ideological resistance and simultaneously neutralise them by reabsorbing them into the dominant discourse. This process reflects the paradoxical nature of literature as both a tool of power and its critique (Greenblatt, 2005).

Thick description, borrowed from Clifford Geertz (1973), is another central methodology that new historicists use for analysis. It emphasises scrutinous and contextual readings of both literary and non-literary texts. Through this practice, researchers reconstruct the cultural moment of the production of a text. This allows for a good understanding of the ideological frameworks that literature takes part in (Greenblatt, 2005).

A key feature of new historicism is its interest in the interconnectedness of literary and non-literary texts. Non-literary text (like legal documents, travel diaries, sermons, personal letters…) are examined to show how distinct forms of discourse reflect and reproduce the same cultural logics. As Montrose (1989) argues, new historicist critics acknowledge the textual nature of history itself and recognise that both literature and historical documents are shaped by discursive forces. Literature, in this sense, is a unit within the immense network of social texts (Greenblatt, 2005; Veeser, 1989; Montrose as cited in Veeser, 1989).

New historicism also pays attention to the marginal and supressed voices in history and literature. It focuses on how dominant narratives silence and exclude these voices. Critics investigates how ideological power operate through both inclusion and omission. Foucault (1978) observes: "We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes,' 'represses,' 'censors,' 'abstracts,' 'masks,' 'conceals.' In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth." (p. 194) Hence, power not only silences or excludes but also produces truths and categories through which certain voices become marginalised. From this perspective, New Historicism aligns with poststructuralism's rejection of objectivity and historical determinism. Ultimately, history is always mediated through language, power, and perspective (Greenblatt, 1980; Montrose as cited in Veeser 1989; Veeser, 1989).

Likewise, Stephen Greenblatt's notion of the circulation of social energy (1988) captures "the textuality of history and the historicity of texts". According to Greenblatt, literature and history are networks of cultural exchanges that produce and redistribute experiences that constitute both individual subjectivity and collective ideology. This way, critics approach texts not as static in meaning and passive but as participants in shaping social realities (Veenstra, 1995).

Despite its valuable insights, new historicism has been criticised for some limitations that challenge its objectivity and methodological transparency. Its tendency towards relativism may result in the rejection of the possibility of objective historical truth. This rejection may result in a destabilisation of meaning, and all interpretations become equally valid. It has also been critiqued for its anecdotal use of historical evidence. Additionally, critics argue that the selective inclusion of non-literary texts can sometimes result in over-interpretation or the imposition of meaning rather than its discovery. Plus, the emphasis on power dynamics has led to accusations that the approach tends to reduce literature to mere reflections of ideology and discourse. Thus, aesthetic value and authorial agency are reduced (Veeser, 1989; Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000). Consequently, though the method provides a rich contextual analysis, it may overshadow the literary qualities and the creative intentions of the work itself.

In fact, new historicism is an interdisciplinary approach that challenges rigid boundaries between literature and history, text and context, and fact and fiction. It redefines literary criticism as an act of cultural analysis. It recognises literature as an active agent in the social construction of meaning, identity, and authority.

1.4.2 Applying New Historicism to Theatre Analysis

New historicism offers a compelling approach to theatrical analysis. The interplay between texts and their cultural and sociopolitical contexts provides different perspectives. Dramatic texts are treated as cultural artefacts deeply related to the historical, political, and social conditions of their production and reception. The methodology also reveals how the plays both reflect and contest the ideological discourses of their time. So, theatre is not only an autonomous artistic product, but a cultural expression shaped by and shaping its time. (Greenblatt, 1980; Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000).

In *The Zoo Story (1959),* Edward Albee crafts an encounter between two characters of starkly different social positions. This draws attention to the alienation and class tensions prevalent in American society during the Cold War era. A new historicist analysis of the play positions Jerry's existential angst and aggressive need for connection within broader concerns of postwar disillusionment and urban isolation. Jerry's monologue and erratic behaviour mirror the individual's struggle to assert meaning in a society increasingly defined by conformity and capitalist detachment.

Albee uses dramatic disruption to reveal how power circulates in seemingly neutral public spaces. The park bench becomes a site of confrontation and revelation. Though Peter neither initiates nor desires the encounter, he is left with significant psychological and ethical implications after Jerry's death. He is forced to hold a knife as Jerry impales himself. As a result, Peter symbolises the apolitical middle class, distanced from the socio-political struggles of marginalised individuals. His inaction reveals how passive existence or non-intervention by dominant groups can perpetuate socially harmful norms (Albee, 1981; Greenblatt, 1980; Savran, 1992; Bigsby, 2000).

Similarly, *A Streetcar Named Desire (1947)* by Tennessee Williams is ripe for new historicist interpretation. The conflict between Blanche Du Bois and Stanley Kowalski centres the shift in gender dynamics, class anxieties, and cultural transitions in postwar America. It capsulises the triumph of a new, more pragmatic American ethos over the decaying Southern aristocracy.

Blanche's convictions are rooted in old South ideals which decay in the face of modern economic and social realities. Stanley, in contrast, represents postwar America which is grounded in pragmatism and masculinity. Stella symbolises a third category. She is a reflection of the transitional role of women in this era. Her choice to remain with Stanley, despite his

violence, can be translated as a reflection of the domestic ideals promoted at that time. The characters capture the anxieties surrounding female identity and the cultural regression that reasserted traditional gender roles. The play reflects the idea that identity is historically and ideologically constructed (Williams, 1947; Greenblatt, 2005; Belsey, 1996; PMT Education (n.d.); Oklopcic, 2008; Abouzarjomehri, 2018).

Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman (1964)* can be also interpreted through new historicist framework. The work interrogates race relations during the civil rights movement. The subway setting is a microcosm of the American society. Clay and Lula destroy the myth of racial progress and liberal tolerance.

Baraka's play engages with historical discourse to challenge the audience to confront uncomfortable truths about systemic oppression. The explosive dialogue and abrupt violence disrupt traditional narrative forms. This aesthetic strategy, according to Greenblatt, works to subvert orthodox representations of power. Lula suggests the whites' assumptions and stereotypes about black masculinity. On the other side, Clay's behaviour defies the racist stereotype of the hypersexual black man. It also exposes the white anxiety of black autonomy. Clay is an educated black man in a suit threatens the white gaze that objectifies African Americans. Lula, as a defensive mechanism, mocks his attempt at assimilation implying that black civility is artificial. The two characters manifest a binarism that reflects a social division.

At the end of the play, Lula's murder of Clay and her search of another black victim symbolises a cycle of white manipulation and racial violence. Also, the indifferent reaction of white passengers and the silence of the black ones reveals both a social complicity of the former ones and the systemic oppression of the latter. In addition, the play's end expresses the fear of black empowerment. In fact, Dutchman is a mirror of racial tensions and ideological struggles during the 1960s (Baraka, 2001; Dollimore & Sinfield, 1985; Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000).

The common thing between these texts from new historicist perspective is their exploration of existential dilemma deeply rooted in historical contexts. The characters grapple with issues of freedom, isolation, identity, and power. These struggles emerge as reactions to sociocultural forces. These characters are not only individuals dealing with internal conflicts but also subjects shaped by ideological and material conditions. They reflect Foucault's notion of subjectivity as shaped by historical forces (Foucault, 1972).

Thus, the integration of new historicist methodology with existential analysis enriches the study of postwar American drama. It illuminates how plays articulate the conflict between personal freedom and historical determinism and highlights the complex relationship between the individual and society in mid twentieth century America.

1.5 Conclusion

Existentialism is a recurring theme in literature due to its profound engagement with the complexities of the human condition. In postwar American theatre, existential concerns became a means to address both individual and collective anxieties. The trauma of the second world war disrupted long-held moral certainties and ushered in a shift in human consciousness. Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy, with its emphasis on personal and moral responsibility, found strong resonance among American playwrights who interpreted his ideas through characters and conflicts rooted in their cultural and political realities. As such, existential themes emerged not merely as abstract philosophical reactions, but as a tool to critique societal norms. In this context, new historicism offers a valuable framework for exploring how Sartrean thought was not only reflected in these works but shaped by the American socio-political landscape. The following chapter applies this perspective to close reading of Arthur Miller's *After the Fall (1964)*, where the interplay of historical forces and existential tensions takes centre stage.

Chapter II: Sartreism in *After the Fall*

2.1 Introduction

Arthur Miller's *After the Fall (1964)* is a deeply introspective drama that interweaves, guilt, and moral ambiguity to examine history's psychological repercussions. Set against the height of Cold War tensions, the play recounts historical events not as isolated facts but as emotional and ideological forces that shape individual identity. As such, it becomes a nexus of historical and existential crises, revealing how personal experience and collective memory intersect to form the moral and psychological dilemmas of postwar American society.

2.2 *After the Fall:* A Time of Crisis and Challenge

Questioning the meaning of life is a natural and important process for understanding oneself. It is often in moments of personal uncertainty or emotional unrest that individuals begin to reflect on their existence. However, in the context of political and social instability or periods of abrupt change, this questioning becomes more than personal, it becomes collective and urgent.

2.2.1 The Quest of Meaning in an Era of Political and Social Upheaval

Miller's play reflected the post-Second World War era in America. It was a period that was marked by pervasive political paranoia and ideological control, namely shaped by the Cold War and McCarthyism. The widespread fear of communism conquered public and private life. The result was suspicion, censorship, and repression of dissent.

Lou and Mickey, based on Miller's real-life acquaintances: poet Louis Untermeyer and director Elia Kazan, symbolise two opposing facets of ideological containment. Lou refuses to comply with the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) by naming others, and as a result, loses everything and ultimately commits suicide. In contrast, Mickey testifies before the HUAC and retains his professional standing. Together, the two characters personify the

oppressive mechanisms that sought to regulate political beliefs and personal morality during the Cold War. Lou's resistance reflects the culture of fear that stifled freedom of thought and expression through ideological surveillance and enforcement. When Mickey urges him to testify, Lou retorts: "... it astounds me that you can speak of truth and justice in relation to that gang of cheap publicity hounds! Not one syllable will they get from me! Not one word from my lips!" (Miller,2009. Act I, p. 46) Mickey, on the other hand, embodies the spirit of conformity that pervaded the nation. Their conflict captures the socio-political tensions of the Truman Doctrine era and the HUAC hearings, which targeted artists, intellectuals, and educators suspected of subversive affiliations.

Moreover, Miller's decision to revisit earlier historical traumas such as the Great Depression and the Holocaust within the play serves as a critique of the present moment. In an interview, about *Incident at Vichy,* with Barbara Gelb in The New York Times (1964), Miller pointed out: "The occasion of the play is the occupation of France but it's about today. It concerns the question of insight – of seeing in ourselves the capacity for collaboration with the evil one condemns." (Cited in Balakian; 2005 p. 126).

Miller considered all forms of evil and social injustice stem from a collective complicity. While America witnessed economic prosperity and international prominence, moral crises prevailed from unresolved traumas of its past and denial of its present. In this sense, the depression is an allusion to a moral crisis rather than a financial one. The Holocaust is a symbol of the fall of modern man in a secular chaotic world. The play shed light on how contemporary struggles with identity, justice, and responsibility intersected with historical and political anxieties, and surfaced in interpersonal relations.

From a Sartrean viewpoint, the characters' anguish reflects the existential burden of freedom within a complicated historical context. External pressures force the characters to confront the uncomfortable truths about responsibility, guilt, and bad faith.

In addition, these dynamics can be understood as part of a broader ideological discourse. In Foucauldian tradition, omission or silence are strategic suppressions. The absence of direct reference to major contemporary events central to the 1960s like the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the feminist movement can be viewed as an illusion to a social and national attitude. Omission, in this context, provides a criticism of a social energy, as Greenblatt terms it, of the time: systemic oppression and violation of human rights.

From these perspectives, the play reflects the cultural moment in which the historicity of *After the Fall* is expressed through individual subjectivity. Miller consistently shows an interest in how personal actions carry public weight. His focus on the private lives of his characters dramatises the quest for meaning in a politically complex era, where guilt, betrayal, and denial burden the moral self. In doing so, *After the Fall* engages directly with the societal shifts of the 1960s, an era marked by ideological conformity, civil unrest, and cultural fragmentation. It illustrates how personal crises function as mirrors of collective anxieties, thereby addressing the second research question.

2.2.2. Fear of Loss of Identity and the Sense of Fragmentation

The Cold War era fostered political repression and a deep psychological disruption. In After *the Fall,* identity crisis extends beyond Quentin's personal torment to encompass the rest of the characters. Each of them bears the scars of historical and ideological pressures. The play demonstrates the search for self-definition, and how it is undermined by the dissonance between America's professed values and its political practices.

Quentin's relationships with women, and his own ethical commitments, are profoundly shaped by the early trauma of betrayal linked to his mother. This foundational rupture imprints on his psyche a dual sense of guilt and mistrust that haunts his adult life. His failure to reconcile with his past locks him into a pattern of bad faith and self-denial. His moral paralysis results from a refusal to assume the anguish of choice. Quentin's repetitive emotional failures and his complicity in ethically ambiguous decisions during the McCarthy era manifest the evasion of the burden of freedom and responsibly. As he expressed, "I think now that my disaster really began when I looked up one day—and the bench was empty. No judge in sight. And all that remained was the endless argument with oneself—this pointless litigation of existence before an empty bench." (Miller, 2009. Act I, p.10). Quentin's inner conflict is deeply existential and intersects with the broader American struggle with memory, betrayal, and ideological commitment in the Cold war period. Just as Quentin fails to confront his mother's betrayal, postwar America fails to confront the betrayal embedded in its democratic ideals, particularly in its suppression of dissent, racial inequality, and historical amnesia. His romantic relationships are shaped by this disorientation. With Louis, he performs moral duty but remains emotionally distant. His relationship with Maggie is characterised by emotional chaos, however he retreats in fear and timidity. As for Holga, he seeks redemption through reason and shared ethics. Yet, he hesitates to fully trust love. This reflects Quentin's deeper ambivalence about truth, loyalty, and freedom. Even his courtroom work, ostensibly principled, is stained by doubt. He questions whether he betrayed others to protect himself.

Quentin's entrapment in memory and guilt ultimately exposes the existential condition of the modern self that navigates the tension between authenticity and historical obligation. Miller thus crafts a protagonist whose fractured subjectivity is not only psychological but also cultural.

Quentin's professional decision to defend Lou, a teacher accused of communist affiliation, carries both existential and ideological weight. As he confesses to Louise:

> there is a basic concession made by his tone of admitted bewilderment: I tell you the truth, Louise, I don't think I feel very sure of myself anymore. I'm glad I took on Lou, but it only hit me lately that no respectable lawyer would touch him. It's like some unseen web of connection between people is simply not there. And I always relied on it, somehow; I never quite believed that people could be so easily disposed of. And it's larger than the political question. I think it's got me a little scared. (Miller, 2009. Act I, p.46)

On the surface, the case reflects moral courage, but the play complicates this view. Quentin himself questions whether he took the case out of conviction or guilt. This way, Lou projects Quentin's inner crisis. He struggles to see Lou as a full subject rather than a means of self-redemption. Quentin's ambivalence mirrors the ideological uncertainty of postwar American liberals. Many intellectuals were torn between protecting civil liberties and maintaining national image in the Cold War. Quentin's defence symbolises a political act and a private torturing. It also suggests a paradox of public ethics and private guilt. This lack of coherence renders him a fragmented moral actor. Thus, Lou is a symbol of Cold War persecution and the existential struggle to act freely without self-deception.

Holga is a character that brings an air of stability and reason to the play. She offers Quentin a sense of peace that he failed to find in his past relationships. Yet, beneath her mature attitude lies a quiet struggle with fragmentation rooted deeply in her German identity and historical inheritance. Holga embodies the burden of collective guilt. She wrestles with the moral shame of a nation reckoned with atrocity. Her inherited cultural identity is charged with the ideological weight of Nazism, moral suspicion, and historical consciousness. This sense of complicity leads Holga to live with deliberate caution. She represents moral clarity and self-

awareness in comparison with the other characters. Still, she reflects an existential fragmentation, as a moral being, resulting from historical shame.

Holga's fragmentation is not rooted in personal betrayal, as Quentin, but in a national collapse and ethical witnessing. Her identity is shaped by historical trauma, and she learns to face her past, accepts her guilt, and moves on.

Holga's presence in Quentin's life marks a profound shift. Unlike his previous conflicting relationships, she confronts him with his personal and historical failures. She teaches him that memory is not an alibi, but a responsibility, and that one should have the courage to face the past without distortion.

Maggie, on the other hand, experiences a different form of fragmentation. Her identity is bifurcated between her role as a public figure and the private woman craving attention. Her exaggerated sensitivity suggests a profound self-isolation. She portrays a lack of self-respect and self-esteem, allows others to objectify her, and ultimately moves towards self-destruction. In her first encounter with Quentin, a man harasses her and attempts to force her to leave with him. Quentin intervenes and asks, "That happen to you very often?", to which she replies, "factually: Pretty often" (Miller, 2009. Act I, p. 53-55). This exchange reveals the extent to which she has become accustomed to such treatment, highlighting her emotional detachment and vulnerability. Moreover, Maggie's character suggests a dual self that Americans experienced during the postwar period: self-image and social image. She also echoes the postwar contradictions. She reflects a society committed to surface ideals while supressing psychological trauma. Maggie's downfall is symbol of a culture invested in images of happiness and success than the inner lives of its people. Her suicide act is not an endpoint in the narrative, but an existential abandonment.

Louise, Quentin's first wife, goes through identity crisis as her femininity is wounded. Her relationship with Quentin takes a turn after his confession of resisting his desire to sleep with a woman he met as a compliment (Miller, 2009. Act I, p. 64-65). Louise's sense of fragmentation grows as she invests time and energy in a desperate relationship that ends up with the inevitable divorce. Louise mirrors the cultural script that idealised the self-sacrificing wife who upholds the nuclear family at all costs. With the rise of Suburban and urban middle class, marriage became not only a personal commitment but a public symbol of national order and moral superiority in the Cold War era. Women embodied domestic stability. In *After the Fall,* Miller exposes this fragile façade. The continuity of Louise and Quentin's marriage echoes the way urban American life in the 1950s maintained an external image of prosperity and moral certainty while supressing underlying tensions: racial injustice, psychological repression, and gendered dissatisfaction. Louise's situation indicates the internal cost of containment culture. She internalises her struggle before finally opts for psychoanalysis.

In fact, the characters' crises reveal existential conditions that root in personal and collective moral failures. They cast innocence while everyone is guilty and responsible for their own choices. Innocence, in this context, mirrors the national myth of the American innocence in comparison to the rest of the world. It also alludes that no one was innocent after the Second World War. America sustained itself on illusion. *After the Fall* replicates this through individual psychology and historical moments, reflecting fragmentation as a condition that resulted from Cold War's atmosphere of suspicion and ideological control. It was a time in which citizens doubted themselves and their surroundings under the threat of denunciation. Fragmentation was also a consequence of existential void. Characters are drawn in denial and guilt. It is a catalyst that propels both characters and audiences towards deeper reflections about living authentically in a fractured world. The existential fragmentation experienced by the

characters illustrates the deeper postwar cultural anxiety, thus answering the main research question.

Moreover, the fragmented structure of the play mirrors Quentin's fractured consciousness. In an interview Miller (1964) explained: "It's the biggest sweep of embrace that I've ever taken .... It involves a new form". He described the structure of the play as "… a continuous stream of meaning… And the movement expands from meaning to meaning, openly . . . The way a mind would go in quest of a meaning…" (Cited in Balakian, 1997 p.120). Written in the form of disjointed, non-linear memories rather than a conventional plot, the narrative reflects how human beings are not defined by fixed essence but by a continuous process of becoming. It puts the characters in existential and moral situations that challenge individuals to make choices in the middle of intense ideological pressure and historical determinism. The theatre of situations in *After the Fall* serves to represent existential situations and recount history.

The structure also critiques the very notion of historical coherence. Instead of a unified American account, Miller crafts a protagonist grappling with moral ambiguity and ideological failure. The story does not uncover a linear moral lesson but a palimpsest of contradictions, omissions, and fragments of personal memory and political trauma, reflecting a social energy. The narrative signals that truth, both personal and historical, is always partial, contrasted, and contested.

In this sense, fragmentation captures the psycho-political landscape of the 60s America and prefigures the broader philosophical and cultural environment.

2.3 Postwar American Philosophy and Culture in *After the Fall*

In the wake of WWII, existentialist thought found unexpected resonance in a society navigating the paradox of triumph and trauma. While the United States emerged as a global

power, the national consciousness wondered with questions of meaning, freedom, and moral accountability. Amidst economic prosperity and domestic stability, many Americans questioned foundational values. This moral unrest found fertile ground in American theatre. It captured the contradiction between public optimism and private unease, marking the tension between collective ideology and individual experience. In this context, existential philosophy, especially Sartrean views, became highly relevant. As Cold War intensified ideological conformity, the American stage became a space for exploring the limits of freedom and the burden of choice in a society that claimed to be free.

2.3.1 Existentialism and the American Mindset

Mid-century America was prosperous yet hunted by the spectre of political, cultural, and moral anxiety. Though American society promoted ideals of progress and stability, individuals increasingly struggled with feelings of alienation, emptiness, and fragmentation. The pressure to conform to suburban ideals, consumerism, and political loyalty clashed with the individual's need for authenticity.

This internal conflict was not only psychological but deeply cultural. Sartre's definition of existence challenged the American tendency to define the self through institutional roles (the patriotic citizen, the family provider, the suburban housewife, the productive worker…). Postwar American existentialism, thus, took a different shape than its European counterpart. It emphasised less on metaphysical despair and more on the moral ambiguities of agency, and responsibility within a system that cherished freedom and enforced conformity.

In *After the Fall,* this philosophical crisis is embodied in Quentin's fractured psyche and his relationship with the other characters. He is torn between public morality and personal guilt. This theme echoes throughout the play, where characters search for meaning, exposing psychological and ethical dilemmas of a culture caught between ideological triumph and existential dislocation.

2.3.1.1 Freedom vs. Responsibility

The link between freedom and responsibility in Sartrean existentialism lies in the fact that radical freedom entails full responsibility. The view that freedom is burdensome requires individuals to accept the full consequences of their actions. In Sartre's terms, freedom is the unavoidable condition of being, and evading it is form of self-deception and denial: bad faith.

In *After the Fall*, Arthur Miller dramatises this burden through a cast of characters who, differ in their psychological makeup, and collectively embody the postwar American struggle with moral accountability. Quentin, who represents existential guilt and paralysis, is overwhelmed with past betrayals, emotional detachment, and moral hesitation. His parents, especially his emotional dependence on his mother, contribute to his early moral disorientation. His mother's betrayal becomes a formative wound, as he continually recalls it without resolution. This deferral of blame transforms to a defence mechanism, bad faith in Sartre's words, as he attributes his inability to love or act courageously to past trauma. Quentin's incapacity to act parallels the wider cultural paralysis. In the shadows of WWII and amid the Cold War, Quentin's obsessive introspections and moral paralysis reflects a society struggling to define morality and face the burden of responsibility. As Alan Nadel notes, the American stage during this period was "a contested site where private conscience collided with public ideology" (1995, p.43). Miller's play, though written in the1960s, remains rooted in the unresolved moral crises of the previous decades, using Quentin's internal conflict to stage the cultural legacy of postwar disillusionment.

This existential crisis is not exclusive to Quentin. Other characters in the play also reflect evasions of responsibility through social roles or ideological conformity. Mickey, for instance, denies his freedom by hiding behind roles and systemic expectations. He represents the justification of moral compromise through institutional loyalty. He echoes the Cold War culture of loyalty tests and ideological containment. He personifies the sacrifice of ethical

responsibility for political survival. Louise, also, reflects another more subdued form of existential evasion. She suffers from emotional disintegration while clinging to the image of marital stability. She embodies the societal model of domestic loyalty through her endurance of a failing marriage, mirroring the suppression of the responsibility of confronting emotional truth.

On the other hand, Lou and Holga represent more authentic responses to existential responsibility. Lou is the idealist teacher whose integrity is tested under social and political pressures. His tragic end illustrates the cost of pursuing authenticity and maintaining faith in moral clarity. Holga embraces the idea of living consciously. Her moral clarity is the result of facing the horrors of her national past without disowning responsibility. She functions not only as a refuge for Quentin. Her presence in his life initiates a turn toward authenticity, not by saving him, but by demanding that he confronts his past without excuses. Holga is a representation of the existential courage to face history and live honestly within it.

By contrast, Maggie symbolises the complete evasion from freedom and responsibility, as she blames others for her life choices. Her dependence on external validation suggests an unauthentic sense of self. Her tragic end indicates an escape from responsibility and self-confrontation.

The play exposes the postwar American paradox, in which a culture celebrates liberty in rhetoric and enforces ideological conformity in practice. Miller engages with Sartre's existential problem of freedom, giving form to the struggle between individual autonomy and historical determinism, which the second research question investigates.

After the Fall, through its ensemble of morally conflicted characters, illustrates the idea that true freedom requires painful self-confrontation. It also suggests that responsibility, rather

than comfort, is the ethical price of autonomy. This existential responsibility, however, often meets resistance in the form of self-deception and avoidance: bad faith.

2.3.1.2 Bad Faith and the Search for Authenticity

One of the most compelling ideas in Sartre's existentialist philosophy is the concept of bad faith (mauvaise foi), which refers to how individuals deny their freedom by performing fixed roles, expectations, or excuses. Bad faith is the consequence of inauthentic choices. *After the Fall* presents a network of characters who oscillate between these two existential conditions to varying degrees. Their failures and ethical dilemmas reflect broader social anxieties about freedom, conformity, and moral agency in postwar America.

Quentin's tendency to narrate his past for justification is one of the most explicit representations of bad faith. It marks a continuous retreat from responsibility. He shifts to blame others and ignore his complicity and his actions or inaction. He substitutes reflection for action and remains trapped in an unauthentic state as he does not confess that he is accountable, at least partially, of the failure of his relationships and professional decisions. The way he calls back memories makes him appear as a victim rather than a participant. His failures are not a symptom of trauma alone. They are a form of moral convenience, in which indecision masks complicity. In avoiding action, Quentin preserves innocence at the cost of authenticity.

Maggie illustrates bad faith in a visceral manner. She mirrors Sartre's idea of being-for-others. She internalises the gaze of others that she cannot distinguish between performance and identity. She attempts to find meaning in material: drugs, alcohol, and sex, reflecting consumerism culture and acting in bad faith. Her inability to create a stable, authentic sense of self leads her to despair, dependency on others, and ultimately self-destruction.

Louise also participates in bad faith by upholding the appearance of a functioning marriage. Despite Quentin's emotional neglect, her loyalty persists, suggesting a preference for social conformity over personal authenticity. It is after psychoanalysis, which became a fashion

in the 60s, that she faces the discomfort of change, embraces independence and a sense of self-confidence.

Mickey conforms to institutional expectations at the expense of personal morality. His attempt to give excuses for his actions to the people around him signifies bad faith and a sense of internal doubt. He rationalises his actions as necessary, neglecting his own agency for professional credibility's sake. Mickey represents the mid-century American ideal of the well-adjusted citizen. However, in fulfilling his duty, he compromises ethical integrity.

Quentin's mother, though less developed, is a powerful symbol of betrayal and emotional manipulation. She conditions Quentin's perception of love as binding and controlling rather than liberating. Her own denial of emotional responsibility teaches Quentin to distrust intimacy and to view vulnerability as dangerous. She represents a form of generational bad faith through her transmission of fixed moral expectations disguised as love.

Holga is the face of authenticity. She was a witness of the Nazi moral collapse. She carries both personal responsibility and collective guilt. Her lack of illusion, emotional maturity, and directness reflect good faith. When she tells Quentin that "I think one must finally take one's life in one's arms." (Miller, 2009, p.28), she expresses conscious commitment to living authentically. Holga also represents moral confrontation, refusing to evade history or diminish its weight through abstraction or denial.

In addition, Miller's fragmented structure reinforces the existential dilemma. The play is a set of emotional and moral fragments, ruptures, and illusions. It is a reflection of the disintegration of authentic selfhood amid existential struggle and historical determinism. Characters swing between roles, recollections, accusations, justifications, and guilt. The theatre of situation in *After the Fall* is manifested in the moral confrontations of the characters and their struggle to escape the comfort of bad faith and step to confront freedom.

In doing so, Miller offers not just a personal story of loss, guilt, and regret, but also a broader cultural critique of postwar American internal politics and identity. Through Sartrean existentialism, the characters' crises become ethical dramas of authenticity. In fact, the play does not only reflect an internal evasion from freedom and responsibility, but also examines how subjectivity is externally shaped, particularly through one's relation to others.

2.3.1.3 Sartre's Concept of 'The Look' and Its Influence

The look (le regard) is one of the most psychologically critical concepts in Sartre's existentialism. It refers to the individual's awareness of being seen by others. This process objectifies the person's subjectivity. It reveals the mediation between being-for-itself and being-for-others. It reflects how individuals want both autonomy and recognition. Its relational and existential nature compromises freedom and introduces alienation. The gaze of others creates a tension, imposing a fixed identity. *After the Fall* manifests this concept in direct interactions between the characters, and the narrative structure that revolves around memory, judgment, and self-perception.

Quentin, as the central consciousness of the paly, lives almost in retrospection. His repeated recall of past encounters suggests an internalised gaze. He watches himself through the eyes of the others, particularly the women in his life. Quentin's paralysis stems from his refusal to break from this gaze.

Maggie is a clear subject of the look. Her life and self-perception are shaped by the gaze of others. She allows men to treat her as a mere sex object. She mistakes Quentin timidity to flirt with her, as every man she meets does, as respect and idolises him. Maggie's existence is being-for-others. Her crisis is not only emotional, but she also has no internal reference for her being. This is reflected in her monologue, "… But on the train back there was your picture, right on the seat looking up at me. And I said, I know who I am! I'm Quentin's friend!" (Miller,

2009. Act II, p. 81). Her subjectivity is surrendered to the other in her search for external validation.

Louise reflects a quieter form of objectification. She lives according to the image of the loyal wife. She sustains appearances at the cost of emotional reality. Her self-worth is tied to social roles and expectations, rather than a self-directed identity. Her dialogues with Quentin suggest a frustration of his gaze.

For Mickey, the gaze is political. He performs ideological conformity in a period of institutional scrutiny. His moral choices reveal the quiet force of ideological surveillance in Cold War America. On the contrary, Lou's moral choices contradict the government's political and ideological orientations. He is an object of sour criticism and a source of governmental troubles for the people around him. Lou's awareness of his situation and how others perceive him results in his alienation and anxiety and ultimately, he ends his life.

Holga maintains a sense of internal coherence. Her actions are grounded in reflection rather than performance. She is aware of being observed by her past, history, and Quintin himself. Still, she does not allow the external gaze to define her. Holga reflects an authentic resistance to the objectifying gaze. She represents the state of being-for-itself.

After the Fall reveals how identity is shaped, fractured, and sometimes destroyed by the external gaze. Miller's characters are embodiments of Sartre's claim that authenticity requires confronting not only how others perceive an individual, but also how deeply one depends on that gaze to define oneself.

After the Fall captures the American mindset during the postwar era, illustrating how the socio-political climate contributed to widening the moral gap and deepening existential crises for the individual. Amid such conflict, long-held moral standards are brought into question.

2.3.2 The Questioning of American Values and Sartre's Influence

In *After the Fall*, Miller interrogates the moral fabric of postwar American society and exposes the dissonance between national ideals and lived realities. The play reveals how American values, individuality, justice, freedom, and moral clarity, are not universal truths but historically contingent constructs often used to obscure contradictions and silence dissent. This existential questioning becomes a powerful theatrical device that reflects the inner and outer crises facing the mid-twentieth-century America.

Sartre's beliefs about existence fundamentally subverts the notion of fixed identities: national, personal, or moral. Humans are in a continuous process of defining who they are. Miller channels this existential doubt into a broader cultural critique. He inquires what happens to a society built on essentialist ideas, such as the belief in American exceptionalism, when it faces historical and ethical collapse. In the play, characters confront this rupture through the disintegration of their relationships, ideals, and self-conceptions. The collapse of personal narratives mirrors the fall of collective myths.

Quentin's memories point to the political silence during the McCarthy era, a moment when the American ideal of freedom was distorted into ideological surveillance. Also, his guilt over Lou's trial reflects a society that punished moral ambiguity and rewarded conformity. His failure to act abdicates his ethical agency. In Sartrean terms, individual actions carry universal implications. Therefore, Quentin's failure is both emotional and ethical. His moral paralysis, in this situation, becomes a metaphor for a nation unable to reconcile its triumphs with its betrayals.

Moreover, this critique extends beyond Cold War politics. Maggie's portrayal as a woman, who performs happiness while internally collapsing; offers a powerful commentary on postwar domestic ideals. She embodies a cultural moment in which success was equated with visibility and identity with public affirmation, echoing the domestic propaganda of the 1950s.

Maggie reflects what Foucault describes as the suppression of inconvenient truths, as her identity is shaped by external surveillance and societal expectations. This aligns with Sartre's notion of *bad faith*, which is dramatised through her desperate need for love and validation. Her dependence on external affirmation functions as a defence against the anxiety of freedom. Ultimately, her suicide becomes a final rejection of an inauthentic life lived under the gaze of others.

The myth of the American family, which flourished in the postwar years, is unsettled. Quentin's marriage to Louise reveals the emptiness behind suburban respectability. Their relationship is emotionally distant and preserved out of duty rather than conviction. In this way, Miller provides a criticism of the ideal of the nuclear family as a moral foundation. From Sartrean angle, this passive endurance and inaction reflect a choice and therefore carries responsibility.

Mickey exhibits systemic loyalty and a denial of moral freedom, symbolising conformity and collectivism. His actions reflect postwar America's tendency to externalise morality by placing it in law, institutions, and social roles, rather than locating it within individual responsibility. Holga, by contrast, represents a form of existential individualism; she commits to a self-definition grounded in moral awareness. She embodies the refusal to simplify history, offering a counter-narrative to Cold War optimism. Her integrity lies in her rejection of illusions and inherited guilt. Miller contrasts her with Quentin. While she chooses to act in the face of history, he remains trapped in self-analysis, unable to commit to transformation. Holga thus, exemplifies existential courage and authenticity for the other characters.

The play stages not only the political ideology, but also the very myths and realities that have defined the American identity. Miller intertwined personal fragmentation with cultural critique and showed that the search for authenticity is not merely psychological, but historical

as well. The characters are not isolated figures. They are shaped by discourse, ideology, and historical background. Their dialogues and actions reflect what Foucault describes as the "regimes of truth"[1]. The play stages not only the political ideology, but also the very myths and realities that have defined the American identity altering the individual's subjectivity.

2.4. Subjectivity in *After the Fall*: A Necessity in the Midst of Sociocultural and Historical Crises

Subjectivity is a fundamental aspect of Sartre's philosophy, as he views existence as a subjective experience. For Sartre, the self is not a fixed identity, but a fluid process shaped by experience, choice, and reflection. In *After the Fall,* Arthur Miller weave subjectivity into the play, turning Quentin's inner world into a fragmented stage where personal memory and collective history clash. In doing so, Miller enacts a dramaturgical form of Sartrean subjectivity, revealing how the self is never isolated from its environment.

Sartre's emphasis on conscious self-definition in a resisting indifferent world is dramatised through Quentin's struggle to construct a cohesive self from the fragments of guilt, love, betrayal, and silence. The play questions whether true subjectivity can survive in a society dominated by ideology, social expectations, and institutional pressure. The question is both individual and political. The work explores how identity is shaped by cultural narratives, surveillance, and the suppression of dissent. In postwar America, individuals like Quentin live within a system that encourages conformity. His guilt is not just about Maggie or Lou, but about having internalised that system's rules.

Other characters, too, embody the tension between authentic subjectivity and imposed identity. Louise, the dutiful wife, performs a social role and avoids emotional truth. She

[1] The "regimes of truth" is a concept introduced by the philosopher Foucault to describe how certain societal structure, discourses, and practices define what is true or false. Regimes are linked to power relation, and is historically and socially specific.

survives by adhering to expectations. Louise's subjectivity is one of containment. On the other hand, Maggie's fractured subjectivity is entirely shaped by external validation. Her tragedy illustrates how fully being-for-others, and the lack of self-awareness leads to existential collapse.

In contrast, Holga is a presentation of responsible subjectivity. As a German, she does not deny history nor seek to excuse it. She accepts the past but refuses to be defined by it. She is the sound of Sartrean call to authenticity. Quentin, through her calm insistence, confronts his choices and begins to consider matters from angles he has never taken into account. Holga's subjectivity is not rooted in victimhood or denial but in self-recognition and ethical action. She demonstrates the possibility to live with integrity even in the wake of devastation.

Miller uses these contrasts to ask whether a coherent static subject can still exist in a fragmented society. Postwar America left little room for inner ambiguity. Its emphasis on image, conformity, and political clarity created a rigid culture and one dimensional intersubjectivity that threatened individual identity. Thus, the collision between individual identity and mass culture had a direct impact on subjectivity and autonomy.

Furthermore, the resistance of linearity presents memory as a deeply subjective process rather than a random or factual retrieval. The process is highly selective, distorted, and emotionally charged. Miller unfolds Quentin's individual identity not through narrative progression but through emotional recursion. Each memory acts as a confrontation of Quentin's own life choices.

Quentin's final gesture towards self-acceptance suggests that subjectivity remains possible as a choice to live forward. In a world shattered by war, ideology, guilt and complicity, Miller offers a Sartrean insight in which true freedom lies in the courage to accept oneself as imperfect, responsible, and perpetually becoming.

2.5 Conclusion

After the Fall is a work that dramatises the complexity of moral and existential dilemmas in postwar America. It explores the psychological cost of historical trauma and the ongoing struggle to live authentically in a world shaped by ideological conflict. Quentin's journey mirrors a broader cultural condition in which freedom is rhetorically celebrated yet existentially evaded. The play becomes an existential echo of a world devoid of inherent meaning, where personal agency is strained by guilt, memory, and historical burden. Sartreism, in this context, resonates deeply with an era marked by moral ambiguity and the pressures of historical determinism, offering a framework through which to understand both individual paralysis and the potential for ethical clarity.

General Conclusion

Postwar American society was marked by rapid transformations, political, cultural, and psychological, that generated widespread anxiety, fragmentation, and ideological uncertainty. These shifts were not confined to surface-level social change but deeply impacted individual subjectivity, moral reasoning, and artistic expression. Literature and theatre became essential spaces for exploring the consequences of historical trauma, personal responsibility, and existential despair. This dissertation has explored these themes by drawing on Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy and New Historicist theory to examine how Arthur Miller's *After the Fall* (1964) captures and critiques the moral, political, and psychological tensions of mid-twentieth-century America.

The central research question of this dissertation, how Sartreism mirrors the anxieties of postwar America, has been explored through a twofold methodology: first by grounding Sartrean existentialism in its historical and philosophical context, and second by applying this lens, alongside new historicism, to a close reading of *After the Fall*. In doing so, the work has demonstrated that existentialism was not simply a European response to global crisis, but a framework that American playwrights adapted and internalised to articulate their own moral and cultural dislocations in a rapidly changing society. Miller's play offers a compelling dramatisation of existential responsibility, guilt, authenticity, and subjectivity, against a backdrop of Cold War paranoia, political disillusionment, and personal trauma.

The second sub-question, the ways in which *After the Fall* manifests the struggle between personal freedom and historical determinism, was answered by examining the existential trajectories of the play's characters. Quentin, the central figure, embodies the Sartrean subject in crisis: burdened by guilt, frozen by moral indecision, and haunted by a past he both remembers and resists. His journey through memory is a metaphorical descent into the self: a process of confronting the consequences of freedom and the inescapability of responsibility.

The third sub-question, how *After the Fall* reflects the societal shift in the 1960s, was addressed through a new historicist reading of the play's engagement with broader cultural narratives. The Cold War, McCarthyism, the Holocaust, and the lingering memory of the Great Depression formed a shadow-text that informed the psychological and ideological crises depicted in *After the Fall*. Miller's focus on the interior lives of his characters, particularly their guilt, repression, and fragmentation reflected a wider cultural climate in which postwar prosperity was haunted by ethical uncertainty, suppressed dissent, and ideological conformity. In this light, the play serves as both a product of its time and a critical commentary on it. Miller's omissions of issues such as racial injustice, Vietnam, and the feminist movement, can be interpreted, through new historicist lenses, as reflective of dominant discursive limits or cultural blind spots.

In answering these research questions, the dissertation has revealed that *After the Fall* is a richly layered theatrical work that dramatises the very heart of Sartrean existentialism within the textures of American cultural history. The use of memory, fragmentation, and moral questioning makes the play an ideal site for examining how personal and political narratives intertwine. By applying both existential and new historicist methodologies, the study has offered a nuanced and original reading that highlights the ideological entanglements of postwar American theatre and the moral paradoxes of individual agency.

In terms of scholarly contribution, this dissertation underscores the value of an interdisciplinary approach to literary analysis. It demonstrates how combining philosophical and historicist frameworks can illuminate the ethical depth and cultural relevance of dramatic texts. While studies of *After the Fall* have often focused on its autobiographical or political aspects, this work offers a fresh interpretation that situates the play within a broader philosophical tradition and a nuanced historical context. By doing so, it contributes to ongoing

discussions in literary studies about the intersections of personal identity, cultural memory, and political discourse.

In conclusion, Arthur Miller's *After the Fall* is a theatrical manifestation of postwar existential anxiety, filtered through a deeply American lens. It gives voice to a generation grappling with the burdens of freedom, the complexity of guilt, and the instability of meaning. Through its fragmented structure and morally conflicted characters, the play resonates with Sartre's view of existence as a project of becoming, always contingent, always accountable. At the same time, it echoes the insights of new historicism in exposing how personal drama is never separate from historical discourse. In this interplay, *After the Fall* becomes both a mirror and a critique of its age, a work that, in dramatising the individual's fall, illuminates the moral and cultural fractures of an entire era.

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Appendices

Appendix A: A Brief Biography of Arthur Miller

Arthur Asher Miller (1915–2005) was an American essayist, screenwriter, and playwright. He was born to Polish Jewish immigrants and grew up during the Great Depression. Miller's origins and upbringing had a strong impact on his writing and shaped his sense of morality. Early in his life, he worked different jobs to support himself. After enrolling at the University of Michigan, he began writing plays and gained recognition for his talent. His experiences during this time helped form the themes and characters that would later appear in his major works (Abbotson, 2007 p.3-6).

After *All My Sons* (1947), Miller achieved major success. In 1949, he published his masterpiece *Death of a Salesman*, which earned him a Pulitzer Prize and other accolades. The play brought him national and international recognition. It explored themes like failure, disillusionment, and the pressures of the American Dream. Moreover, the success of *Death of a Salesman* secured Miller's place as one of the leading voices in American theatre (Abbotson, 2007 p 9-11).

In 1953, Miller wrote *The Crucible*, a play set during the Salem witch trials. Although it dealt with historical events, it was also a response to the political climate of the time, especially the Red Scare and McCarthyism. Through *The Crucible*, Miller criticised the dangers of mass hysteria, false accusations, and the abuse of power. The play faced mixed reviews at first but later became one of his most studied and performed works (Abbotson, 2007 p 12-13).

In 1955, Miller wrote *A View from the Bridge*, a play set in an Italian American neighbourhood near the Brooklyn docks. The story focuses on Eddie Carbone, a longshoreman whose feelings for his niece lead to jealousy, betrayal, and tragedy. The play explores themes like immigration, masculinity, and personal honour. Although the original one-act version had

a modest reception, Miller later revised it into a two-act version, which gained more critical attention and lasting impact (Abbotson, 2007 p 14).

Miller's personal life often attracted public attention. In 1956, he married actress Marilyn Monroe, which brought him even more into the spotlight. Their relationship was troubled, and they divorced in 1961. After Monroe's death, Miller wrote *After the Fall* (1964), a deeply personal play that many believe was inspired by their marriage. The play received mixed to harsh reviews upon its release. Many critics focused on the portrayal of Maggie, seeing her as a direct representation of Monroe, and found the work overly confessional. Some called it discomforting and accused it of bad taste, while others praised Miller for his honesty and for turning personal pain into a universal message. Despite the divided reception, the play has been revived several times and is now seen by some scholars as one of Miller's boldest and most experimental works (Abbotson, 2007 p 199-201).

In his later years, Miller continued to write plays, essays, and short stories. Some of his later works include *The Price* (1968), *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan* (1991), and *Broken Glass* (1994). Although these plays did not receive the same level of attention as his earlier works, they still explored important themes like guilt, memory, and identity. Miller remained active in the theatre world until his death in 2005. Today, he is remembered as one of America's greatest playwrights. His works are widely studied and performed, and his influence on modern drama continues to be felt. (Abbotson, 2007 p 14-15, 347-348).

Appendix B: *After the Fall* (1964) Synopsis

Arthur Miller's *After the Fall* (1964) is a memory play that follows the psychological and emotional journey of Quentin, a New York lawyer reflecting on his life, relationships, and moral choices. The play is divided into two acts and unfolds in a fragmented, non-linear setting that represents Quentin's internal mindscape. Through a series of recalled episodes, the

audience witnesses how past experiences, both personal and political, continue to shape his present (Abbotson, 2007 p.25-26).

The play opens with Quentin addressing an unseen "Listener." He has recently left his job and lost his second wife, Maggie, followed shortly by the death of his mother. He also speaks about Holga, a German woman he met while abroad, who is now coming to America. As he contemplates whether he is ready for a third marriage, Quentin begins revisiting memories from different periods of his life (Abbotson, 2007 p.25).

Quentin recalls his childhood, beginning with the strained relationship between his parents. His mother, Rose, is portrayed as emotionally intense and manipulative, while his father, Ike, is seen as weak and financially broken after the stock market crash. Quentin also remembers his brother, Dan, who gave up his future to help support the family and who remains a quiet but moral presence in his life (Abbotson, p.25-26).

As Quentin reflects on his early adulthood, he revisits moments with Louise, his first wife. Their relationship started with mutual respect but gradually became emotionally distant. During this period, Quentin engages in an affair with Felice, a client who turns to him for legal and emotional help. These memories reveal his pattern of withdrawing from emotionally demanding relationships (Abbotson, 2007 p.26-27).

Quentin also recalls his political past during the Red Scare, particularly his friendships with Lou and Mickey. Lou refuses to cooperate with the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), even at the cost of his career and life. Mickey, on the other hand, chooses to inform on others to save his position. The moral conflict between loyalty, self-preservation, and justice becomes a central theme for Quentin, who feels guilty for not taking a firmer stance (Abbotson, 2007 p. 27).

Later in the act, Quentin meets Maggie, a young and insecure woman working as a receptionist. As she gains fame as a singer, their relationship deepens. Quentin tries to support her emotionally and professionally, but her growing reliance on alcohol and drugs creates tension. Maggie's rising success is paralleled by her increasing instability. The act ends as Quentin's memories of Maggie intensify, hinting at her emotional unraveling (Abbotson, 2007 p. 27-28).

The second act opens immediately after the first, with Quentin lighting a cigarette and pr.eparing to confront his most painful memories, especially those involving Maggie. He reflects on the later years of their marriage, marked by constant conflict, emotional neediness, and his own inability to help her heal (Abbotson, 2007 p. 28).

Maggie, now more dependent and paranoid, accuses Quentin of betrayal and emotional abandonment. She reveals childhood trauma and fear of being unloved, which Quentin struggles to respond to. He sees in her echoes of his own mother: demanding, vulnerable, and manipulative. While Quentin initially tries to be her savior, he also resents the burden and begins to detach emotionally (Abbotson, 2007 p. 28-29).

Maggie's mental health deteriorates further, and she eventually dies by suicide. Although her death happens offstage, its impact shapes the entire act. Quentin begins to question his role in her downfall. This leads him back to earlier betrayals and losses, including Lou's suicide and his own emotional withdrawal from Louise and Dan (Abbotson, 2007 p.29-30).

Holga reappears toward the end of the act. She challenges Quentin to accept that guilt is part of being human and that no one is entirely innocent. Her quiet strength and moral clarity help him understand that he cannot save others unless he is honest with himself. By facing his past, Quentin starts to find a sense of personal truth (Abbotson, 2007 p. 30-31).

The play ends not with resolution, but with emotional clarity. Quentin turns toward Holga, acknowledging that although he cannot erase the past, he can move forward with greater self-awareness and a willingness to accept life as it is, with all its imperfections (Abbotson, 2007 p. 32).