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Trauma and Paralysis in Arthur Miller's Plays

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Zásady pro vypracování

Bakakálářská práce se zaměří na téma traumatu a paralýzy ve vybraných hrách Arthura Millera (doporučeno: *After the Fall*, *Broken Glass, Ressurection Blues)*. V teoretické části stduentka vysvětlí dobové fenomény a společensko-kulturní aluze, s nimiž Miller ve svých hrách pracuje. Rovněž zasadí dramatickou tvorbu A. Millera do kontextu americké moderní divadelní tvorby. Praktická část se bude soustředit na komparaci traumatu a paralýzi ve vybraných hrách. Finální výběr divadelních her bude stanoven po dohodě se školitelem.

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ANNOTATION

This bachelor's thesis explores the representation of trauma and paralysis in three selected plays by Arthur Miller (*After the Fall*, *Broken Glass*, and *Resurrection Blues*). Drawing on literary trauma theory, the study investigates how these concepts are expressed through dramatic structure, character development, and language. Particular attention is given to the personal, collective, and cultural dimensions of trauma and paralysis, as well as their impact on identity, interpersonal relationships, and ethical agency. The analytical part of the thesis is preceded by a theoretical section that defines the key terms and places the plays within their broader historical and cultural context.

KEYWORDS

Trauma, paralysis, Arthur Miller, American drama, Jews

NÁZEV

Trauma a paralýza ve vybraných hrách Arthura Millera

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá vyobrazením traumatu a paralýzy ve třech vybraných hrách Arthura Millera (*After the Fall*, *Broken Glass* a *Resurrection Blues*). Na základě literární teorie traumatu zkoumá, jak jsou tyto koncepty vyjádřeny prostřednictvím dramatické struktury, výstavby postav a jazyka. Zvláštní pozornost je věnována osobní, kolektivní a kulturní rovině traumatu a paralýzy, stejně jako jejich dopadu na identitu, mezilidské vztahy a etické jednání. Analytické části předchází teoretická kapitola, která definuje klíčové pojmy a zasazuje zkoumané hry do širšího historického a kulturního kontextu.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Trauma, paralýza, Arthur Miller, americké drama, Židé

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Introduction

Arthur Miller is regarded as one of the most significant playwrights of the 20th century, whose work deeply reflects the ethical, psychological, and social tensions of the modern era. While his early plays, such as *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible*, focus primarily on questions of individual responsibility and the American Dream, his later works are marked by a more introspective tone and a deeper engagement with existential and cultural trauma. These later plays often introduce motifs of emotional numbness, moral indecision, and psychosomatic immobility, which may be understood as symptoms of a broader social and historical crisis.

This bachelor's thesis explores the themes of trauma and paralysis in three of Miller's late plays: *After the Fall* (1964), *Broken Glass* (1994), and *Resurrection Blues* (2002). Through these texts, the playwright examines how individuals and societies respond to painful experiences, guilt, or the loss of meaning, and how these responses affect their ability to act, communicate, and reflect upon their own past. Emphasis is placed not only on personal and psychosomatic dimensions of trauma and paralysis, but also on their collective and cultural manifestations. The analysed cases often reveal a connection between the psychological state of the characters and the broader historical or ideological context.

The thesis is divided into four main chapters, each addressing a specific aspect of the topic. The first chapter defines the concepts of trauma and paralysis, distinguishing between their various types, including personal, collective and cultural trauma, as well as psychosomatic, emotional, ethical, relational, linguistic and cultural paralysis. It further outlines the literary development of these motifs, especially in 20th-century American drama, and traces changes in both thematic focus and formal treatment. The second chapter provides historical and cultural background for the three selected plays and discusses the development of Miller's dramatic approach in response to the sociopolitical climate in which these works were written. It also considers the playwright's personal development and his response to contemporary events.

The third chapter focuses on the depiction of trauma in the selected plays, analysing both the personal experiences of the characters and their entanglement with collective and cultural contexts. It explores how Miller portrays characters struggling with loss, repressed memory, or the inability to cope with the past, and how these struggles influence their psychological state and interpersonal relationships. The fourth chapter investigates the motif of paralysis, showing how this experience is reflected in relationships, character language, dramatic structure, and

symbolic representation. It addresses ethical inertia, emotional withdrawal, and cultural stagnation as recurring responses to moral or ideological disruption.

The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate how Arthur Miller, through his complex dramatic form and symbolic structures, thematises the impossibility of movement, whether physical, ethical, or emotional, and thereby exposes a deeper crisis of modern identity. The analysis of the selected plays seeks to uncover the links between literary form, historical awareness, and the psychological experience of loss and guilt.

1 Trauma and Paralysis

The term trauma comes from a Greek word meaning "a wound, a hurt; a defeat".[1] Caruth, a leading theorist in Trauma Studies, expands on this information, saying that trauma is "a wound inflicted not on the body but on the mind."[2] Christa Schönfelder, a scholar specialising in trauma theory and literature, asserts that the history of trauma is difficult to describe given the complexity of the historiography of psychiatry. People's awareness of this topic has alternately increased and decreased over the years. Interest has often been reawakened during significant milestones in human history. These include the beginning of industrialisation, the First World War, the Second World War and the Holocaust.[3]

Over the years, the term trauma has come to be used not only in medicine and psychology but also in literature and cultural studies, and its meaning has thus expanded and become more elusive.[4] Judith Herman, a prominent psychiatrist, defined trauma as a condition that stems from powerlessness, where individuals are made defenceless by an overpowering force. It disrupts the normal mechanisms that provide people with a sense of control, connection, and purpose. Traumatic events stand out as extraordinary. They surpass the usual human ability to adapt to life's challenges, often involving dangers to one's life, physical safety, or a direct experience with violence and mortality. Such events trigger catastrophic reactions, marked by profound fear, helplessness, a loss of autonomy, and a sense of imminent destruction.[5]

Herman further develops this idea by arguing that trauma causes a long-term disruption of psychological and physiological functions, with the individual remaining in a state of increased alertness even after the danger has passed. The most common symptoms include hyperarousal, which includes being easily startled, irritability, and insomnia. Trauma victims are also prone to re-experiencing the traumatic event, which occurs in the form of flashbacks or nightmares and disrupts normal life. Another manifestation is dissociation, where the individual escapes into a state of alienation from self or reality, often associated with depersonalisation and derealisation. The emotional impact includes depression, anxiety, paralysis and suicidal thoughts, with many sufferers feeling that they have lost part of their identity. Trauma can also

[1] "Trauma," Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed November 25, 2024, https://www.etymonline.com/word/trauma
[2] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 3.
[3] Christa Schönfelder, *Wounds and Words: Childhood and Family Trauma in Romantic and Postmodern Fiction*, (Transcript Verlag, 2013), 27–43.
[4] Schönfelder, *Wounds and Words,* 28.
[5] Judith L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 33.

cause physical and cognitive difficulties, such as amnesia or dullness of the senses.[6] Ron Eyerman, a prominent sociologist, labels these reactions, along with repression, as the way the mind defends itself against hurtful memories. He regards this phase of forgetting as a period of latency during which the individual can exhibit normal behaviour while the effects of the trauma are temporarily hidden. The latency period may last for varying periods of time, days or even years, but subsequently, the trauma manifests itself through nightmares or other symptoms mentioned above.[7]

Examples of situations that can lead to trauma include natural disasters, physical, psychological or sexual violence, serious illnesses, car accidents, or personal loss.[8] Trauma can therefore result from prolonged hardship or a sudden shock, from ongoing abuse or a single devastating event. Regardless of its source, its effects are similar and demand focus. It transforms brief moments of distress into lasting psychological states. The mind fixates on the event, replaying it in thoughts and dreams, turning an event into an enduring condition.[9]

The above information mainly describes personal trauma, but more types are known. Eyerman expands on this topic in his work *Social Theory and Trauma* and divides trauma into personal, collective and cultural. Schönfelder also uses this division and suggests that individual trauma is deeply intertwined with broader societal or collective factors, emphasizing that personal experiences are influenced by and contribute to larger political, social, or cultural contexts.[10]

Trauma, whether experienced individually or collectively, disrupts the normal flow of life and identity. On a societal level, it exposes underlying issues and can reshape group dynamics. It has the potential to both unify and divide, strengthening old group bonds or creating new ones, while also alienating some individuals. This dual tendency reflects how trauma can bring people together while simultaneously driving them apart.[11]

An influential American sociologist, Kai Erickson, uses the terms “centripetal” and “centrifugal” to describe how trauma affects relationships within groups. By centripetal tendencies he means that trauma can pull individuals closer to their group or community,

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[6] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 35–50.
[7] Ron Eyerman, “Social Theory and Trauma,” *Acta Sociologica* 56, no. 1 (February 2013): 42.
[8] Inga Truskauskaite-Kuneviciene et al., “Does Trauma Shape Identity? Exploring the Links Between Lifetime Trauma Exposure and Identity Status in Emerging Adulthood,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 11, (September 2020): 3.
[9] Kai Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble: Explorations in Disaster, Trauma, and Community* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 230.
[10] Schönfelder, *Wounds and Words*, 39.
[11] Eyerman, “Social Theory,” 43.

fostering solidarity and a sense of shared purpose or identity. By centrifugal tendencies he means that at the same time, trauma can alienate individuals from their community, pushing them away due to feelings of isolation, mistrust, or a loss of connection.[12]

Collective trauma represents the shared psychological and emotional impact of a traumatic event on society, which is deeply embedded in the collective memory of a group. This memory is not a mere record of past events, but a dynamic process of reinterpretation of its meaning depending on current social conditions. Unlike individual memory, collective trauma persists across generations and forms the basis of a collective identity that transcends the physical lives of individuals in the group. Collective trauma plays a key role in shaping meaning for affected groups. It serves as a tool to mitigate existential threats and strengthen group identity and unity. It connects individuals to a collective whose existence transcends individual life and creates a sense of a transgenerational collective self. This feeling is reinforced by cultural traditions and teachings that refer to the threat to the group and support its preservation. These traditions reinforce the motivation to incorporate trauma into a symbolic framework, making trauma the epicentre of group identity and the primary filter through which group members perceive their social environment. While it allows for the alleviation of existential fears, it also prevents the "closing of the door" on the past, making trauma a permanent source of meaning and identity. The process of reinterpreting it involves a search for values, efficacy and a new understanding of reality, which allows not only to understand the past but also to shape the present and influence the future direction of society. Examples of traumatic events that can trigger collective trauma include wars, the Holocaust, terrorist attacks, natural disasters and slavery.[13]

Collective trauma may evolve into cultural trauma. As claimed by Neil J. Smelser, a prominent sociologist known for his work on this type of trauma, "A cultural trauma refers to an invasive and overwhelming event that is believed to undermine or overwhelm one or several essential ingredients of a culture or the culture as a whole."[14] He also says that, unlike collective trauma, cultural traumas are socially mediated processes. Because of this, certain historical events can be considered both collective and cultural traumas. Smelser cites the Great Depression as an

[12] Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble*, 232.
[13] Gilad Hirschberger, "Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9, (August 2018): 1-3.
[14] Neil J. Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 2004), 38.

example of such an event, as it caused adverse social consequences and a crisis for the culture of capitalism.[15]

Jeffrey C. Alexander, a leading sociologist in the field of cultural trauma, claims that a historical event can become traumatic before, during, or after its occurrence. He agrees that cultural trauma is a social construct and mentions the concept of an "imagined traumatic event," which he defines as an incident of intense trauma that has acquired the status of cultural trauma but actually never happened. These events most often take place at the national level, and an example given is Hitler's claim that a Jewish conspiracy caused Germany to lose the First World War.[16] According to Smelser, more vulnerable societies, such as those affected by war or economic decline, have a tendency to perceive events as traumatic compared to more stable societies. In order for an event to develop into a cultural trauma, it must meet certain criteria. It must be retained in memory, perceived as a threat to something fundamental to society (e.g., values or identities), and associated with strong negative emotions such as shame, guilt, or resentment. As an example of this reasoning, Smelser cites the comparison of slavery with the usurpation of the land from Native Americans and their mass murder. While slavery meets all of the aforementioned conditions, the case of Native Americans, despite its elements of genocide, does not, and therefore cannot currently qualify as cultural trauma. The status of trauma may also not be eternal. Examples given are the assassinations of kings, which, while they were cultural traumas for a given society years later, are no longer perceived as such today.[17]

While Smelser emphasises a set of cognitive and emotional conditions necessary for the recognition of an event as cultural trauma, other scholars have expanded this conceptual framework by incorporating structural and societal dimensions. One such perspective is offered by Angela Onwuachi-Willig, a prominent legal scholar and expert in critical race theory, who argues that cultural trauma can arise not only from the violation of some norm but also from a commonly expected negative event. Three key elements are required for this to happen. Firstly, there must be a long-term pattern of repeated wrongs that causes the subordinate group to expect only regular but traumatic harm. Secondly, the event must be outrageous or unique enough to attract widespread media interest and awareness not only of the subordinate group but also of the wider public. Finally, there must be a public debate about the significance of these injustices,

[15] Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma," 37–38.
[16] Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 8–9.
[17] Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma," 36.

often through governmental or legal recognition of the disregard of a subordinate group. This process leads to the creation of a narrative of cultural trauma, as public acknowledgement of discrimination recreates the perception of the subordinate group that its rights are not respected, resulting in a deepening sense of powerlessness, tension and suffering. To support her argument, the author examines how the African American community responded to the acquittal of John William Milam and Roy Bryant, who were tried for murdering 14-year-old Emmett Till in Mississippi in 1955. She explains that the verdict did not shock the community; instead, it confirmed their expectations. This reaction was shaped by a long history of courts failing to punish white men for violence against African Americans, especially in the South. Using evidence from newspaper articles, FBI reports, and personal narratives, the author argues that the trauma African Americans experienced came not from surprise, but from the legal system's repeated exclusion of them from full citizenship and justice. Even though the outcome was expected, it still caused deep cultural and collective trauma by officially reinforcing racial violence.[18]

Alexander perceives cultural trauma as a scientific concept that links new connections between events and enables societies to identify and accept responsibility for human suffering. The construction of cultural trauma strengthens solidarity between collectives by linking their suffering to that of others. Expanding the sense of belonging, where societies recognise the suffering of others as their own, strengthens solidarity and enables a moral stance. Conversely, refusal to acknowledge the suffering of others leads not only to the diffusion of self-responsibility but also to the blame for one's own suffering being shifted to others. This refusal disrupts the process of creating shared trauma and weakens solidarity, isolating the suffering groups.[19]

This perspective complements broader understandings of trauma explored in this chapter, which has distinguished between personal, collective, and cultural trauma. While personal trauma is rooted in individual experience and internal psychic processes, collective and cultural trauma operate on a social level and emerge from historical injustices, political violence, or structural inequalities. All three forms, however, share the capacity to disrupt fundamental aspects of human functioning, including memory, identity, ethical judgment, and social connection.

[18] Angela Onwuachi-Willig, "The Trauma of the Routine: Lessons on Cultural Trauma from the Emmett Till Verdict," *Sociological Theory* 34, no. 4 (December 2016): 336–337.
[19] Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 1.

As the next chapter will explore, the effects of trauma are not limited to the domains of cognition or emotion. They often result in a broader sense of stagnation or blockage that influences individuals and communities alike. Whether manifesting in disrupted moral judgment, fractured relationships, or cultural silence, this state of immobility can be understood as one of trauma's most persistent and multifaceted consequences.

1.1 Paralysis as a Consequence of Trauma

Building on the previous discussion, this chapter focuses on paralysis as one of the most telling manifestations of trauma's enduring impact. While commonly associated with physical immobility, paralysis in both psychological and literary discourse serves as a metaphor for various forms of disrupted functioning, including emotional, relational, ethical, linguistic, and cultural dimensions. Such states of immobilisation frequently emerge in the wake of unresolved trauma, internal conflict, or repressed guilt. To examine how these experiences shape human life on both personal and collective levels, the following typology introduces six interrelated forms of paralysis: psychosomatic, emotional, ethical, relational, linguistic, and cultural, each of which offers a distinct lens on the deep entanglement between trauma and loss of agency.

The first form, psychosomatic paralysis, describes a condition in which intense psychological stress or trauma manifests as involuntary motor or sensory impairment, despite no detectable neurological or organic cause. According to clinical studies on conversion disorders, such paralysis often takes the form of limb weakness or "give-way" phenomena, affecting nearly half of patients with these presentations.[20] Trauma researcher Bessel van der Kolk observes that overwhelming psychological experiences frequently become embodied, disrupting normal physiological regulation through mechanisms such as freeze or shutdown responses. These somatic manifestations are not imagined or voluntary; rather, they reflect the body's attempt to manage unbearable inner distress when emotions cannot be expressed or integrated.[21]

From the body's response, the impact of trauma also extends to the affective sphere in the form of emotional paralysis, which can be understood as a trauma-related condition in which individuals experience significant reductions in emotional responsiveness. Emotional numbing is a prominent symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder and involves diminished capacity to feel both negative and positive emotions. This emotional blunting often emerges as a

[20] Carolyn E. Wilshire and Tony Ward, "Psychogenic Explanations of Physical Illness: Time to Examine the Evidence," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 11, no. 5 (2016): 606–619.
[21] Bessel A. Van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, and Lars Weisaeth, *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society* (New York: Guilford, 1996), 13-14.

psychological defence mechanism, one that protects the individual from overwhelming affect, but simultaneously impairs interpersonal relationships and overall emotional functioning. The authors emphasize that emotional paralysis of this kind is not simply a lack of feeling, but an active, trauma-induced disruption of emotional processing.[22]

Beyond the emotional domain, trauma may also interfere with an individual's moral agency, resulting in what can be termed ethical paralysis, which refers to a state of moral immobility in which the individual cannot make a decision or act in accordance with their conscience, especially when confronted with intense guilt, conflicting obligations, or the fear of causing harm. This condition resonates with the moral dilemmas described by philosopher Lisa Tessman, who explores what she terms "impossible moral demands." In such situations, individuals may find themselves in a position where every available option results in a violation of some deeply held value, leading not only to moral failure but also to a psychological experience of being stuck or immobilized. Ethical paralysis, therefore, does not arise from apathy or ignorance, but from an overwhelming awareness of moral consequences that renders meaningful action nearly impossible.[23]

The consequences of trauma can also become evident in the sphere of interpersonal relationships, particularly in what is known as relational paralysis, which refers to a state in which individuals become emotionally or behaviourally immobilized within their close relationships, even when they consciously desire connection. In the aftermath of trauma, emotional attunement and responsiveness between partners may become disrupted, making relational interaction increasingly difficult. Survivors often withdraw, appear distant, or disengage, not due to indifference, but because trauma has impaired their capacity to feel safe within emotional intimacy. In such cases, individuals may become locked in cycles of silence, mistrust, or inaction, unable to shift the dynamic or express their needs. This paralysis is not a matter of choice, but rather a form of emotional impasse: a condition shaped by unresolved distress, in which the fear of vulnerability overrides the desire for connection. As a result, close relationships may deteriorate not through the absence of care, but through an enduring inability to engage.[24]

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[22] Debra Kaminer and Gillian Eagle, "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Other Trauma Syndromes," In *Traumatic Stress in South Africa* (Wits University Press, 2010), 29-43.
[23] Lisa Tessman, *Moral Failure: On the Impossible Demands of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 16–22.
[24] Suzanne B. Phillips, "Two's Company, Three's Not a Crowd: A Relational Approach to Couple Intervention After Trauma." *Group* 32, no. 3 (2008): 191–206.

Another layer of paralysis emerges at the level of language and narrative in what is termed linguistic paralysis, which is the inability to express traumatic experiences through language. According to trauma theorist Cathy Caruth, traumatic memory often resists narration because it overwhelms the structures of representation and comprehension.[25] In dramatic literature, this form of paralysis frequently appears through silence, fragmented speech, or failed communication between characters, where language no longer functions as a reliable means of expression, but becomes a space of rupture, misunderstanding, or absence.[26]

Finally, the effects of trauma can become entrenched within broader social structures, leading to cultural and collective paralysis, which refers to a condition in which societies or communities, confronted with historical trauma, become unable or unwilling to recognize past suffering, assume moral responsibility, or reconstruct shared frameworks of meaning. When the trauma of one group is ignored or denied by others, the result is not only a refusal of empathy, but also the erosion of moral orientation. According to sociologist Jeffrey C. Alexander, such denial leads to the restriction of solidarity and the isolation of the affected group, as societies displace responsibility for harm and project their own guilt onto others. This failure to engage in a collective process of trauma recognition may result in a form of cultural paralysis, in which the ability to respond ethically and constructively to suffering is suspended.[27]

These six forms of paralysis illustrate how the effects of trauma extend beyond individual psychology and become embedded in relationships, ethical behaviour, language, and cultural memory. In the following subchapter, attention will shift to how trauma and paralysis have been interpreted and represented in literature, particularly in the context of modern drama.

1.2 Trauma and Paralysis in Literature

After introducing the concept of trauma and distinguishing between its different types, as well as forms of paralysis, this subchapter focuses on their representation in literature. Traumatic experience often disrupts an individual's ability to articulate what they have gone through. Such events can profoundly alter a person’s perception of normality and predictability, while simultaneously threatening the coherence of life itself, even though the individual may outwardly continue to function within everyday routines. The challenge, then, lies in finding

[25] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 5-8.
[26] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 69–73.
[27] Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” 1.

language and expression for experiences that penetrate the deep structures of human meaning and existence.[28]

Yet stories of trauma and its consequences have been written in great number. Eyerman explains this literary abundance: "Though form is important, literary texts can also perform a therapeutic function for writer as well as reader."[29] By this, he suggests that writing about intense emotions may help authors process what is otherwise unbearable. For readers, such texts foster understanding through empathy. Literature thus becomes a medium for expressing and sharing experiences that are often unspeakable or psychologically inaccessible.[30]

As Schönfelder points out, trauma fiction can take on various forms depending on whether it emphasises the personal, social, or political dimensions of trauma. Regardless of focus, literature provides a space to engage with trauma alongside psychological or historical perspectives. These texts often expose a fundamental paradox: they seek to express something that resists articulation. In this way, trauma literature continually explores the boundaries of narrative and language, wavering between the possibility and impossibility of representing what has been endured.[31]

Alongside trauma, the theme of paralysis has also become a powerful literary motif. Often functioning as a symptom of trauma, paralysis may appear as physical immobility, emotional suppression, moral indecision, or communicative breakdown. It can reflect a character's inability to act, speak, or connect, mirroring inner fragmentation or the pressure of overwhelming external forces. In modern literature, paralysis frequently serves as both a literal condition and a metaphor for existential or societal impasse.[32] For example, James Joyce famously used the term "paralysis" in *Dubliners* to denote the spiritual stagnation of early 20th-century Ireland, a motif later expanded in dramatic literature.[33] In post-war American theatre, playwrights explored how psychological trauma, cultural displacement, and political oppression manifest in the inability of characters to move forward emotionally, ethically, or socially.[34] Theatrical representations often emphasise this stasis through gesture, silence, spatial

[28] M. J. Larabee, S. Weine, and P. Woollcott, "The Wordless Nothing': Narratives of Trauma and Extremity." *Human Studies* 26, no. 3 (2003): 353–354.
[29] Eyerman, "Social Theory," 49.
[30] Eyerman, "Social Theory," 49.
[31] Schönfelder, *Wounds and Words*, 30.
[32] Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 6–10.
[33] James Joyce, *Dubliners* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), xvi–xviii.
[34] Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction,* 6-10.

isolation, or fragmented dialogue. Paralysis thus becomes a dramaturgical technique through which unspoken trauma is made visible.[35]

In the context of American literature, particularly post-war drama, trauma and paralysis emerged as central motifs. Playwrights such as Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, and Lorraine Hansberry explored the psychological and moral aftermath of historical events and personal loss. Williams portrayed characters immobilized by emotional breakdown and unprocessed grief, while Albee's figures frequently grappled with existential inertia and relational dysfunction.[36] Hansberry addressed racial and collective trauma, showing how systemic injustice and social exclusion can produce not only anger but also profound moral and social stasis.[37] Across these works, paralysis often serves as a metaphor for the inability to act, speak, or recover, demonstrating how trauma undermines the very foundations of agency and coherence in human experience.

These literary explorations of trauma and paralysis laid the groundwork for numerous post-war playwrights, among whom Arthur Miller stands out for his nuanced engagement with both individual suffering and collective responsibility. His work not only reflects these psychological and ethical tensions, but also reinterprets them through a distinctly American lens, making him a central figure in the dramatic articulation of trauma and paralysis.

[35] Christopher Bigsby, *Modern American Drama, 1945–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 191-193.
[36] Bigsby, *Modern American Drama*, 42, 129.
[37] Bigsby, *Modern American Drama*, 267-281.

2 Arthur Miller

Arthur Miller (1915–2005) is widely regarded as one of the most influential American playwrights of the twentieth century. Born in Harlem, New York, to Polish-Jewish immigrant parents, Miller grew up during the Great Depression, an experience that deeply informed his sensitivity to economic injustice and moral crisis. His family's sudden loss of financial stability in the 1930s exposed him early on to the vulnerabilities of the American Dream, a theme that would recur throughout his dramatic work.[38] Miller's Jewish background, though not always overtly addressed in his early plays, played an increasingly important role in his later works, particularly as he began to grapple more directly with questions of identity, persecution, and inherited trauma.[39] According to Susan C. W. Abbotson, Miller's evolving engagement with Jewish themes was in part a response to the atrocities of the Holocaust and the persistence of antisemitism in both Europe and the United States.[40]

Miller's career began in earnest during the 1940s, but his critical reputation was solidified with the premiere of *Death of a Salesman* in 1949, a play that earned him the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. In the decades that followed, Miller maintained a strong public presence not only as a dramatist but also as a moral and political commentator. His confrontation with the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1956, where he refused to name alleged communist sympathisers, became a defining moment in his life and public image.[41] As Christopher Bigsby notes, this refusal reflected Miller's broader commitment to personal integrity and his concern with the ethical responsibilities of the individual in times of social conformity and political fear.[42]

Throughout his career, Miller remained interested in the tensions between private conscience and public ideology. His plays frequently address the psychological consequences of guilt, shame, and repression, often set against the backdrop of historical or political upheaval.[43] While many of his contemporaries explored similar themes through realism or social critique, Miller gradually moved toward more introspective and symbolic forms of dramaturgy. This shift allowed him to explore the complexities of memory, identity, and perception in increasingly

[38] Susan C. W. Abbotson, *Critical Companion to Arthur Miller: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* (New York: Facts On File, 2007), 3-4.
[39] Christopher Bigsby, *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 4-5.
[40] Abbotson, *Critical Companion*, 7.
[41] Abbotson, *Critical Companion*, 11-14.
[42] Bigsby, *Arthur Miller*, 244.
[43] Bigsby, *Arthur Miller*, 98-99.

experimental ways. As noted by Bigsby, his later work often rejects linear narrative and stable settings in favour of fragmented structures that reflect inner conflict and temporal dislocation.[44]

Miller's identity as a secular Jew in mid-century America also informed his engagement with themes of belonging, cultural marginality, and moral survival. He was acutely aware of the precarious position of Jews in both American and global contexts, especially after World War II. His plays occasionally engage directly with antisemitism, though more often they explore it obliquely through characters who struggle with internalised prejudice or disconnection from their heritage.[45] Hasia Diner observes that for many American Jewish writers of Miller's generation, assimilation was both a social necessity and a psychological burden, leading to recurring tensions between cultural memory and personal ambition.[46] Miller's work often reflects this duality, portraying characters caught between inherited histories and contemporary pressures.

Beyond his thematic concerns, Miller was also a prominent voice in the broader cultural discourse on human rights, artistic freedom, and historical responsibility. He served as president of PEN International and remained active in global debates about censorship, oppression, and the role of the artist in society.[47] His writings, both dramatic and essayistic, consistently advocate for the importance of critical reflection in the face of authoritarianism and moral complacency. As Alan Wald argues, Miller's legacy lies not only in his dramatic innovations but also in his sustained attempt to articulate a vision of ethical engagement that bridges personal experience with collective history.[48] These personal and historical tensions coalesced in *After the Fall*, a play that marked a striking departure from Miller's earlier dramaturgical style.

2.1 After the Fall – Overview of Time Period and Setting

Arthur Miller's *After the Fall*, written in 1963 and premiered in 1964 at Lincoln Center in New York, marks a departure from his earlier realist works and introduces a more abstract dramatic form. The production was directed by Elia Kazan, an influential American theatre and film director known for his collaboration with prominent playwrights. The play is set entirely within

[44] Bigsby, *Arthur Miller*, 124-135.
[45] Abbotson, *Critical Companion*, 416-417.
[46] Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 223-225.
[47] Abbotson, *Critical Companion*, 446-447.
[48] Alan M. Wald, *Trinity of Passion: The Literary Left and the Antifascist Crusade* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 224–235.

the internal consciousness of its protagonist, Quentin, and is structured around his recollections, perceptions, and emotional responses. This unconventional framing removes the drama from any fixed geographical or chronological setting and instead creates a fluid mental space governed by memory and introspection.[49]

The spatial design of the play reflects this inward orientation. The stage is deliberately abstract, often described as sparse and non-naturalistic. Key elements include asymmetrical furniture and a central scenic motif, a watchtower associated with a concentration camp. These features contribute to a setting that resists conventional realism and allows for the fluid coexistence of multiple temporal moments.[50] As noted by theatre scholar Brenda Murphy, the set design encourages an interpretive focus on psychological experience rather than physical environment.[51]

Temporally, *After the Fall* moves beyond chronological continuity. Scenes unfold in an associative order, with past and present appearing without clear boundaries or transitions. This formal approach aligns with the play's broader use of memory as the primary organising principle. Rather than presenting discrete, time-bound events, the narrative structure is shaped by recollection and internal response. This approach is described as a fundamental innovation in Miller's work, one that shifts attention from external social conflicts to internal psychological processes.[52]

The historical context in which *After the Fall* was written contributes significantly to its formal and thematic architecture. The early 1960s in the United States were marked by intense cultural and political anxieties. The legacy of the Great Depression, the atrocities of the Holocaust, and the domestic tensions of the Cold War, particularly the investigations of the House Un-American Activities Committee, shaped public discourse and personal identity.[53] Although the play does not directly reference specific historical events, it reflects a broader cultural climate in which traditional frameworks of moral authority, including religious, political, and legal institutions, were being questioned or had lost legitimacy. The absence of a fixed dramatic setting or temporal framework supports the play's engagement with these diffuse and

[49] Janet N. Balakian, "The Holocaust, the Depression, and McCarthyism: Miller in the Sixties," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller*, ed. Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 116-120.
[50] Balakian, "The Holocaust, the Depression, and McCarthyism," 116-122.
[51] Brenda Murphy, "On Arthur Miller" in *Critical Insights: Arthur Miller*, ed. Brenda Miller (Pasadena: Salem Press, 2011), 6.
[52] Balakian, "The Holocaust, the Depression, and McCarthyism," 116-120.
[53] Balakian, "The Holocaust, the Depression, and McCarthyism," 115-118.

destabilising cultural forces. As Alice Griffin argues, Miller's rejection of conventional space and time allows *After the Fall* to function as a dramatic environment where historical rupture and personal recollection coexist, without clear boundaries between the two.[54]

2.2 Broken Glass – Overview of Time Period and Historical Context

Arthur Miller's *Broken Glass*, written in 1994, is set in Brooklyn, New York, in November 1938. This moment situates the play within a historically charged context marked by the rise of fascism in Europe and the growing tension within American society regarding its response to international antisemitism. The immediate historical reference of the play is the Kristallnacht pogrom, which took place in Nazi Germany on the nights of November 9–10, 1938, when hundreds of synagogues were burned, thousands of Jewish businesses were destroyed, and approximately 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to concentration camps.[55]

Although the events of Kristallnacht occurred in Europe, their effects reverberated across the Atlantic. As American historian Deborah E. Lipstadt notes, American newspapers reported on the violence, but public and political reactions in the United States were often muted.[56] During the late 1930s, the United States was still recovering from the Great Depression, and isolationist sentiment was strong. According to historian Leonard Dinnerstein, antisemitic attitudes were present not only in fringe groups but also within mainstream American society, limiting public empathy and reducing political will to intervene.[57] These conditions form the cultural backdrop against which Miller situates *Broken Glass*, highlighting the psychological and emotional consequences of distant violence on American Jews.

The narrative centres on Sylvia Gellburg, a middle-aged Jewish woman who suddenly becomes paralysed after reading newspaper reports about Kristallnacht. Her husband, Philip Gellburg, is a legal assistant working for a non-Jewish real estate firm, while Dr. Harry Hyman, her physician, becomes increasingly involved in the couple's private life.[58] The confined setting of the Gellburgs' home and the surrounding neighbourhood reflect the complex experience of Jewish Americans during this period. While the Jewish community in

[54] Alice Griffin, *Understanding Arthur Miller* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 114-116.
[55] Christopher Bigsby, *Arthur Miller: 1962-2005* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 417-420.
[56] Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933–1945* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 114–120.
[57] Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 116–127.
[58] Bigsby, *Arthur Miller*, 391-394.

New York was among the most established and politically active in the United States, it was not immune to fear, assimilation pressure, or internalised prejudice. Dinnerstein observes that American Jews in the 1930s often faced a double bind: they were expected to assimilate into mainstream American culture while also grappling with the news of escalating violence in Europe, which raised questions about solidarity, identity, and survival.[59]

The domestic setting of the play aligns with Miller's broader dramatic strategy of linking the political with the personal. In *Broken Glass*, this is particularly evident in how the household becomes a space where historical anxiety is internalised and embodied. The timing of the play, coinciding with Kristallnacht, signals the incursion of historical trauma into everyday life. According to Christopher Bigsby, this intrusion of history into the domestic sphere forms a crucial element of the play's structure, emphasising the porous boundary between the political world and individual consciousness.[60]

2.3 Resurrection Blues – Overview of Time Period and Historical Context

Arthur Miller's *Resurrection Blues*, completed in 2002, is set in an unnamed Latin American country governed by a military regime and concerns the imminent execution of an alleged rebel. In the published version of the play, Miller leaves the setting deliberately undefined, both in terms of geography and chronology, in order to highlight the broader ideological and ethical implications of the narrative. The script explicitly avoids naming the country or the historical moment, and Miller himself describes the play as "set in a faraway country", signalling a degree of universality.[61]

The political and social context evoked in the play recalls historical patterns found in several Latin American countries during the Cold War, particularly between the 1950s and 1980s. According to American historian Greg Grandin, this period saw repeated instances of authoritarianism, political violence, and U.S.-backed military coups in countries such as Chile, Argentina, and Guatemala.[62] These regimes were characterised by ideological extremism, censorship, economic dependency, and large-scale human rights violations. Another American historian, Thomas Wright, similarly emphasises that disappearances, repression of political

[59] Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America*, 124-127.
[60] Bigsby, *Arthur Miller*, 391-396.
[61] Jeffrey D. Mason, "On Arthur Miller" in *Critical Insights: Arthur Miller*, ed. Brenda Miller (Pasadena: Salem Press, 2011), 297-305.
[62] Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 4–15.

opposition, and extrajudicial killings were typical practices under such governments.[63] As Grandin and Wright both show, the environment Miller constructs in the play reflects patterns of systemic oppression and foreign intervention that marked real-world regimes in the region during the second half of the twentieth century.

Although the play was written at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it draws on the lingering effects of Cold War geopolitics and the global tension between democratic rhetoric and authoritarian control. American journalist William Blum argues that U.S. foreign policy in Latin America routinely privileged strategic interests over human rights, contributing to the establishment and survival of repressive regimes. Blum's analysis of Cold War-era foreign policy illustrates the extent to which military regimes supported by external powers shaped sociopolitical conditions closely resembling those in Miller's fictional country.[64]

The plot centres on General Felix Barriaux, the ruling dictator, who faces public and international scrutiny after ordering the crucifixion of a man believed by some to be a messianic figure. Other key characters include Charles, Felix's idealistic cousin and former revolutionary; Jeannine, Charles's daughter; and Emily Shapiro, an American television producer sent to broadcast the execution. These figures represent conflicting ideological positions—military power, liberal reform, religious belief, and media cynicism—and serve to illustrate the tensions between faith, politics, and commodification [65]

The play also addresses the growing role of globalised media and commercial interests in shaping political narratives. As John Tulloch discusses in his study of television and drama, late twentieth-century media increasingly blurred the lines between entertainment and political reporting, commodifying suffering and transforming ideological conflict into spectacle. This reflects what Tulloch identifies as a broader cultural trend in late twentieth-century media, where political and ethical issues are reframed as consumable spectacle.[66]

Richard Brucher argues that Miller uses this media-driven execution plot to expose the complicity of modern institutions in the theatricalization of violence.[67] According to

[63] Thomas C. Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America: Chile, Argentina, and International Human Rights* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 3–23.
[64] William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2003), 201–215.
[65] Abbotson, *Critical Companion*, 296-299.
[66] John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado, *Television Drama: Agency, Audience and Myth* (London: Routledge, 1983), 120-130.
[67] Richard Brucher, "Progress and Parody in 'Resurrection Blues,'" *The Arthur Miller Journal* 8, no. 1 (2013): 69–84.

Christopher Bigsby, this structural and ideological indeterminacy is central to the play's effect, allowing Miller to universalise the ethical questions it raises and critique the institutional forces that shape individual conscience across different contexts.[68]

The preceding overview of *After the Fall*, *Broken Glass*, and *Resurrection Blues* has demonstrated how Arthur Miller situates his characters within historically and politically charged environments that shape their psychological, moral, and social realities. Across different temporal and geographical settings, these plays reflect Miller's sustained interest in the ethical pressures exerted by larger social structures on the individual. The dramaturgical strategies he employs, including fragmented timelines, non-realist settings, and symbolic design, allow historical events to intrude upon private life, often manifesting as internal conflict or psychosomatic response. These contextual foundations provide a necessary framework for the subsequent analysis, which will explore how Miller dramatises the interconnected phenomena of trauma and paralysis, and how these conditions reflect the tensions between memory, identity, and responsibility in a complex moral landscape.

[68] Bigsby, *Arthur Miller*, 421-425.

3 Representation of Trauma

3.1 After the Fall – Personal Trauma as an Introspective Fall

Arthur Miller's *After the Fall* offers an introspective depiction of trauma rooted in personal memory, guilt, and moral uncertainty. Rather than presenting a linear narrative, the play unfolds within the fragmented inner world of the protagonist, Quentin. Through a structure based on retrospection and associative movement, Miller examines how unresolved personal trauma shapes a person's perception of the past and capacity for ethical clarity.

The title *After the Fall* signals the thematic framework through which Quentin's psychological conflict is developed. The phrase may be interpreted as an allusion to the biblical fall from grace, suggesting a loss of innocence, moral collapse, and a state of spiritual exile. In Quentin's case, the "fall" is not a singular event, but a cumulative reckoning with past failures, particularly his inability to emotionally connect with his first wife, Louise, and his complex relationship with Maggie, a younger woman whose vulnerability he could not fully acknowledge. The play traces his attempt to reassemble fragments of memory into a coherent moral narrative.

Miller reinforces this internal focus through a note at the beginning of the play, which states that "the action takes place in the mind, thought, and memory of Quentin."[69] From the outset, the audience is made aware that the dramatic space represents not external reality but Quentin's subjective recollection. This structure enables Miller to explore trauma not as a single disruptive event, but as an ongoing internal process. Christopher Bigsby notes that the play's form emerges from this mental and emotional activity. Its scenes are shaped by memory, unfolding through fragments and recurring impressions rather than following conventional chronology.[70]

British theatre scholar Alison Forsyth further argues that the play enacts what she terms the "trauma of articulation." According to her, *After the Fall* does not simply depict trauma thematically, but structurally expresses the difficulty of articulating it. The instability of the timeline, the repetition of images, and sudden tonal shifts reflect a mind struggling to represent experiences that resist coherent narration.[71] In this way, Miller's dramaturgy parallels what

[69] Arthur Miller, "After the Fall," in *The Penguin Arthur Miller: Collected Plays* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2015), 503.
[70] Bigsby, *Arthur Miller,* 229.
[71] Alison Forsyth, "The Trauma of Articulation: Holocaust Representation in 'After the Fall' and 'Broken Glass.'" *The Arthur Miller Journal* 3, no. 2 (2008): 49.

trauma theorists identify as the disjunction between the traumatic event and the subject's ability to process or speak it.

The physical design of the stage reinforces the introspective nature of the play. The space is sparse and abstract, filled with undefined, disproportionate pieces of furniture and dominated by a looming tower. As Forsyth explains, the set does not represent a realistic environment, but a fragmented psychological landscape, where memory, trauma, and moral failure are projected into space.[72] The absence of physical realism allows multiple temporalities to coexist and highlights the emotional logic of recollection over linear progression.

This fragmentation is illustrated in a scene where Quentin sits with Maggie and tries, unsuccessfully, to establish a meaningful connection. Their dialogue is brief and disconnected:

> QUENTIN: Lots of funny things go on, don't they?
>
> MAGGIE: Well, he probably figured I would like a dog. Whereas I would if I had a way to keep it, but I don't even have a refrigerator.
>
> QUENTIN: Yes. That must be it. I guess he thought you had a refrigerator.
>
> *(She shrugs. Pause. He looks at her as she watches for the bus. He has no more to say.)*
>
> LOUISE, *appearing*: You don't talk to any woman, not like a woman! You think reading your brief is talking to me?
>
> *(She exits. In tension Quentin leans forward, arms resting on his knees. He looks at Maggie again.)*
>
> QUENTIN, *with an effort*: What do you do?[73]

The layering of voices and abrupt interruptions demonstrates the fluidity of memory and the lack of clear boundaries between past events and current reflection. Characters from different times and relationships appear in close succession, suggesting that the recollection is not chronological but psychological. Miller does not distinguish between actual events and remembered impressions, instead allowing the fragmented nature of memory to determine the structure of the drama.

Quentin's relationship with Maggie is particularly significant in this context. Her character, often interpreted as a fictional counterpart to Marilyn Monroe, becomes a central site of memory and regret. Quentin confesses: "I am bewildered by the death of love. And my

[72] Forsyth, "The Trauma of Articulation," 49.
[73] Miller, "After the Fall," 535.

responsibility for it."[74] This line captures his emotional disorientation and the persistent tension between guilt and affection. Miller presents a man who is neither entirely guilty nor entirely innocent but suspended in a space of moral ambiguity.

One of the most revealing moments in the play occurs when Quentin compares his life to a courtroom:

> For many years I looked at life like a case at law… But underlying it all, I see now, there was a presumption… And all that remained was the endless argument with oneself, this pointless litigation of existence before an empty bench… Which, of course, is another way of saying despair.[75]

This passage encapsulates a major theme of the play: the search for moral judgment in a world where traditional sources of authority — religious, social, even interpersonal — have been lost or rendered meaningless. Quentin is left to judge himself, but the criteria are unstable, and the process leads only to further doubt. His internal courtroom becomes a space where trauma continues to reverberate, unchecked by external guidance or closure.

Through its non-linear structure, symbolic scenography, and emphasis on ethical introspection, *After the Fall* portrays trauma as a persistent and disorienting presence in memory. The play does not offer resolution or redemption but captures the complexities of self-assessment and the difficulty of achieving moral clarity when one is entangled in the unresolved past. Miller does not present trauma as something that can be easily judged or resolved. Instead, he frames it as a state of consciousness that continues to shape identity, memory, and perception long after the event itself has passed.

3.2 Broken Glass – Collective Trauma and Fragmented Identity

Arthur Miller's *Broken Glass* explores how a historical event, Kristallnacht in Nazi Germany, can affect individuals far removed from its geographical and temporal setting, both emotionally and physically. Sylvia Gellburg, a Jewish woman living in Brooklyn in 1938, suddenly becomes paralysed after reading about the violence against Jews in Europe. Her doctors are unable to identify any physiological cause. The play suggests that her condition is not somatic but psychological, a reaction to the fear, helplessness, and inherited anxiety she experiences as a Jewish person witnessing the rise of antisemitism from afar.

[74] Miller, "After the Fall," 549.
[75] Miller, "After the Fall," 505.

The title *Broken Glass* immediately introduces a symbolic layer of meaning that reflects both historical and emotional fracture. On one level, it refers to Kristallnacht, the "Night of Broken Glass," when Jewish homes, synagogues, and businesses were shattered in a coordinated act of anti-Jewish violence. Although this event does not occur on stage, it functions as a haunting presence that crosses both space and time. The trauma seems to travel across the ocean and lodge itself in Sylvia's body, demonstrating how events of collective violence can penetrate the domestic sphere and manifest as psychological distress. Miller thereby underscores the transnational and transhistorical dimension of trauma. It does not remain confined to its point of origin but reverberates through those who identify emotionally, culturally, or historically with its victims.

Dr. Hyman, Sylvia's physician, begins to suspect that her symptoms are linked to something beyond the physical. He notes, "I just get the feeling sometimes that she *knows* something that… It's like she's connected to some... some wire that goes half around the world, some truth that other people are blind to."[76] Sylvia appears to absorb a trauma others refuse to acknowledge, namely, the growing threat to Jewish lives. Her paralysis can be read as the psychosomatic consequence of a trauma that has no viable outlet. Powerless to intervene and emotionally unsupported by her surroundings, especially by her husband, Sylvia's body becomes the site where suppressed historical anxiety takes physical form.

Philip Gellburg, her husband, is also affected by the sociopolitical tensions of the time, though his response is opposed. He takes pride in being the only Jew employed at his firm and frequently articulates views that border on internalised antisemitism. His behaviour reflects a significant inner conflict regarding his cultural and religious identity. Rather than affirming his connection to the Jewish community, he attempts to assimilate into the dominant, non-Jewish culture, even at the cost of self-denial. According to Christopher Bigsby, Philip's attempt to disassociate from his cultural identity results in profound psychological unease, which in turn contributes to the erosion of his marriage. What remains of his relationship with Sylvia is, in Bigsby's view, a kind of staged intimacy, an emotional performance masking the absence of real connection.[77] His fractured identity isolates him both socially and intimately, eroding the foundation of his personal life.

[76] Arthur Miller, "Broken Glass," in *The Penguin Arthur Miller: Collected Plays* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2015), 1160.
[77] Bigsby, *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study*, 391.

This dynamic is further exemplified in their emotionally strained marriage. When Dr. Hyman advises Philip, "I'd like you to give her a lot of loving. Can you? It's important now,"[78] the implication is clear. The emotional connection might help Sylvia heal. Yet Philip seems incapable of such intimacy, suggesting a deeper emotional dysfunction. Sylvia's paralysis can thus be understood not only as a personal psychological response to historical trauma but also as an embodied symptom of the emotional distance and unresolved tension within the marriage. As Terry Otten, a literary scholar specialising in American drama and religious identity, argues, Philip's emotional repression and alienation stem from a deep internal denial of his Jewish identity, which reflects a broader cultural conflict among American Jews.[79] They are caught between the pressures of assimilation, the weight of inherited memory, and the psychological toll of cultural self-erasure. This interpretation links the couple's broken relationship to a broader social and historical context, where personal struggles are closely connected to larger collective experiences.

Philip's final breakdown at the end of the play, when he suffers a heart attack and cries out, "God almighty, Sylvia forgive me!",[80] can be seen as the result of long-suppressed emotional and psychological tension. Earlier in the play, he is portrayed as emotionally distant and conflicted about his Jewish identity. However, this moment suggests a break in the image he has built of himself. What seems to bring him to this point is not a sudden change, but rather the gradual build-up of ignored truths: the reality of Sylvia's suffering, the emptiness of their emotional connection, and possibly a delayed awareness of the history and identity he has tried to avoid. When he realises that he cannot help Sylvia through control or denial, Philip is forced to face his own helplessness, both as a husband and as a man struggling to belong. His collapse might be understood not only as a physical crisis but also as a final, honest reaction that emerges when language and social roles are no longer sufficient. In this way, the ending does not offer a clear resolution. Instead, it reveals the emotional cost of repression, disconnection, and the refusal to truly engage with oneself, with another person, and with a difficult historical reality.

In *Broken Glass*, trauma is not merely an individual psychological event. It is part of a larger historical and cultural continuum. Miller demonstrates that trauma, when denied or repressed, does not vanish. It finds other routes of expression, often through the body or through relational breakdown. Sylvia and Philip represent two diverging responses to trauma. Sylvia internalises

[78] Miller, "Broken Glass," 1130.
[79] Terry Otten, "Coming to Roots Again: Tragic Rhythm in Arthur Miller's Broken Glass," in *Critical Insights: Arthur Miller* (Pasadena: Salem Press, 2011), 289.
[80] Miller, "Broken Glass," 1185.

it so deeply that it paralyses her, while Philip distances himself from it until it consumes him. Through these characters, Miller illustrates how personal identity is shaped, and sometimes fractured, by collective history.

3.3 Resurrection Blues – Spectacle, Repression, and the Absence of Mourning

Arthur Miller's *Resurrection Blues* differs significantly in tone and structure from his earlier, more introspective plays, yet it also contains a strong undercurrent of trauma.[81] Set in an unnamed Latin American country ruled by a military dictatorship, the play revolves around the impending crucifixion of a political prisoner who may or may not be the second coming of Christ. Although this man never appears on stage, the possibility of his execution becomes the central moral and psychological tension for the other characters. Miller shifts the focus from the victim himself to those who observe, rationalise, or attempt to profit from the spectacle, raising difficult questions about complicity, belief, and the ways in which trauma is displaced or repressed by a society in crisis.

The trauma in *Resurrection Blues* is therefore not situated in a specific act of violence, but in the anticipation of it, in the unbearable idea that such violence is both imminent and normalised. Characters such as Jeanine and Emily express emotional disquiet, yet their distress is often pushed aside by political cynicism or philosophical detachment. This trivialization of suffering is made disturbingly clear in the following scene, which reveals just how deeply violence has been absorbed into the symbolic and economic fabric of society:

> STANLEY: A lot of the folks – they don't say it out loud, but they're hoping their village will be picked.
> JEANINE: Picked?
> STANLEY: For the crucifixion.
> HENRI, *grips his head*: Oh my god! – why!
> STANLEY: Well – like you know the honor of it and … well, the ah … property values.[82]

According to Bigsby, the play transforms the idea of crucifixion into a media event, revealing how moral horror is neutralised when aestheticized or commodified.[83] In this context, trauma emerges from the failure to acknowledge suffering or to engage in meaningful mourning. The prisoner becomes a screen for projection of fear, faith, and frustration, but remains

[81] Bigsby, *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study*, 421
[82] Arthur Miller, "Resurrection Blues," in *The Penguin Arthur Miller: Collected Plays* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2015), 1280.
[83] Bigsby, *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study*, 432-433.

fundamentally unknowable. What unfolds on stage is less a portrait of individual suffering than an exposure of collective and cultural trauma: a society so deeply saturated with violence and spectacle that it has lost the ability to respond to suffering with sincerity, ritual, or grief.

The title *Resurrection Blues* offers a complex metaphorical entry point into the play's traumatic landscape. On the surface, "resurrection" suggests hope, redemption, or the continuation of belief, whereas "blues" evokes sorrow, disillusionment, and emotional exhaustion. The juxtaposition points to a spiritual and cultural ambivalence: even the idea of resurrection, traditionally understood as healing or transcendence, is infected by despair. The play presents a world in which traditional symbols seem to have lost their meaning, and language often fails to provide stable ethical grounding. The trauma of *Resurrection Blues* may thus lie not in what happens, but in what can no longer be said or felt with conviction.

The silence surrounding the prisoner is symptomatic of a broader failure of representation. His voice is absent; his pain is imagined only through the reactions of others. Jeanine responds with emotional urgency and moral clarity, expressing genuine horror at the idea of a public crucifixion. Her outrage, however, is isolated and often dismissed as sentimentalism or youthful idealism. In contrast, General Felix employs a rationalising discourse: he frames the execution as a matter of political necessity and national stability, downplaying its ethical implications in favour of maintaining order. His logic is coldly utilitarian and reveals a profound desensitisation to violence. Meanwhile, the television producers, particularly Skip, exemplify a different form of avoidance through commercialisation. They reframe the crucifixion as a unique media opportunity, discussing camera angles and emotional impact in terms of audience ratings. In his conversation with Emily, Skip excitedly proclaims: "Emily dear, you know I adore you. Have I ever steered you wrong? This is a door to possibly Hollywood. There's never been anything remotely like this in the history of television."[84] This line reflects a total collapse of moral awareness, in which the potential for fame and novelty outweighs any consideration of human suffering. For Skip, the crucifixion is not a political or ethical crisis but rather a once-in-a-lifetime chance to make history in the entertainment industry. Although these responses differ in tone and intention, they all ultimately serve to distract from the underlying traumatic reality: the prospect of a politically sanctioned execution. None of the characters confront this event directly. The viewer is left to question whether anyone in the play is truly capable of

[84] Miller, "Resurrection Blues," 1244.

mourning, or whether mourning has been entirely replaced by spectacle. As a result, the play invites reflection on a society that has lost the capacity for an authentic ethical response.

Building on these various forms of avoidance and moral displacement, *Resurrection Blues* does not portray trauma through graphic violence or emotional confession, but rather through absence, evasion, and silence. The characters exist in a world where action has become performance and where belief itself is subject to irony and doubt. The potential crucifixion is not simply a political act; it becomes a test of meaning itself. As the play circles back to its central ethical tension, we are once again faced with the troubling possibility that no one is truly able to process trauma or to mourn.

3.4 Comparison of Analysed Aspects

Arthur Miller's later plays often return to the theme of trauma, although each does so in a different way. *After the Fall* (1964), *Broken Glass* (1994), and *Resurrection Blues* (2002) each show how trauma affects people, but they present it through different situations and characters. In *After the Fall*, trauma is personal and inward-looking. In *Broken Glass*, it comes from history and enters the private lives of individuals. *Resurrection Blues* shows a broader form of trauma that is cultural, political, and shaped by the fear of what might happen.

Comparing these three plays helps us understand how Miller approached trauma as something complex and changeable. In each play, trauma shapes identity and influences how people see the world and themselves. In some cases, it emerges from guilt and memory. In others, it is inherited or experienced indirectly. It can also take the form of a public event that is turned into a spectacle. Even though these plays are very different, they all show how trauma does not simply go away. It stays present, affecting relationships, speech, and ethical decisions.

In *After the Fall*, trauma comes from Quentin's memories. He looks back at past relationships and feels regret and confusion. The hurt is not caused by one event, but by feelings that never went away. Quentin tries to understand what he did wrong, especially in his relationship with Maggie, and whether he acted with love or guilt. His trauma is quiet and inward, without direct connection to historical events. In *Broken Glass*, trauma enters through history. Sylvia's reaction to Kristallnacht, even though it happened far away, affects her physically. Her body becomes the place where cultural fear and emotional pain come together. Philip, by contrast, avoids that pain by distancing himself from his identity, which leads to emotional detachment and isolation. In *Resurrection Blues*, trauma is harder to locate. There is no single victim on stage, only a society preparing for a possible execution. What is traumatic is the way people

treat this event, perceiving it as something normal, useful, or even entertaining. Some characters are disturbed by it, others ignore it, and some try to turn it into television.

These different versions of trauma are also shown through the style and setting of each play. *After the Fall* takes place in Quentin's mind. The scenes follow his memories rather than real time, and the stage is abstract and empty, like a mental space. In *Broken Glass*, the setting looks more realistic, but the outside world breaks into the home. Sylvia's body reacts to what she sees in the news, and her paralysis makes that pain visible. *Resurrection Blues* moves even further from realism. It is set in an unnamed country, where the possible crucifixion becomes a strange media event. The way people talk about it, as if it were part of a show, makes the pain harder to recognise. In this world, trauma is not something people talk about deeply. Instead, it becomes something to manage, explain away, or use.

The characters show how trauma can appear in very different ways. Quentin suffers because of his memory and guilt. He cannot tell if he acted out of love or fear, and his whole identity is shaped by this confusion. Sylvia is overwhelmed by what she reads about Kristallnacht. She reacts physically, not with words, and becomes paralysed. Philip, her husband, acts like the trauma has nothing to do with him, but this denial isolates him. In *Resurrection Blues*, no one reacts fully. Jeanine feels something is deeply wrong, but others see her as naive. The general thinks the execution is necessary, and the producers think it is an opportunity. Together, these characters demonstrate how various forms of avoidance lead to emotional silence.

Across all three plays, language proves to be a fragile tool in the face of trauma. In *After the Fall*, Quentin's attempts at self-understanding are filtered through metaphor, hesitation, and fragmented narration, underscoring how memory resists stable articulation. In *Broken Glass*, Sylvia's body speaks where words fail, and Philip's emotional detachment manifests in his inability to offer love or acknowledgement. In *Resurrection Blues*, the absence of the prisoner's voice and the evasive, often absurd discourse of other characters reveal a world where moral clarity has been replaced by spectacle and performance. In each case, trauma unsettles not only identity and relationships, but also the capacity to name what is happening — or to respond meaningfully.

Taken together, *After the Fall*, *Broken Glass*, and *Resurrection Blues* reveal the breadth of Miller's engagement with trauma, not as a fixed category, but as a dynamic and evolving dramatic concern. Each play explores a different aspect of what trauma can mean: inner rupture, inherited memory, or collective moral failure. Though the forms, settings, and tones vary, they

are united by a shared attention to fragmentation, ethical uncertainty, and the limits of language. In Miller's vision, trauma resists containment. It crosses borders between individuals and communities, past and present, private and political, leaving its imprints not only in memory but in silence, performance, and the very structures of dramatic form.

4 Representation of Paralysis

4.1 After the Fall – Paralysis and Ethical Inertia

Arthur Miller's *After the Fall* explores paralysis not through physical incapacity but as an internalised psychological and ethical condition. The protagonist, Quentin, navigates a landscape of memory rather than external action, and his inability to move forward morally, emotionally, and narratively appears to form the play's central depiction of paralysis. While subchapter 3.1 focused on the structural portrayal of trauma and its fragmented narrative, this section examines Quentin's emotional withdrawal and ethical hesitation as manifestations of a more sustained psychological stasis.

Throughout the play, Quentin often seems to rationalise rather than confront his past. In a conversation with his first wife Louise, for instance, he avoids emotional openness, even when she offers a tentative moment of vulnerability by acknowledging his courage:

> LOUISE, *with great difficulty*: I—I've always been proud you took Lou's case. *He picks up sheets and pillow, stands waiting.* It was—courageous. *She stands there, empty-handed, not fully looking at him.*
>
> QUENTIN: I'm glad you feel that way. *But he makes no move either. The seconds are ticking by. Neither can let down his demand for apology, or grace. With difficulty*: And that you told me. Thanks.
>
> LOUISE: But—you are honest, that way. I've often told you.
>
> QUENTIN: Recently?
> LOUISE: Good night.[85]

This emotionally stunted exchange might be read as a mutual unwillingness or inability to break through the psychological distance between them. Quentin's words remain polite and self-contained, yet they carry no real emotional charge. He acknowledges what she says without reciprocating its emotional weight. As with many moments in the play, this encounter could be interpreted as revealing Quentin's ethical inertia: a failure to engage in the kind of emotional

[85] Miller, "After the Fall," 546.

responsiveness that might lead to resolution or understanding, even when the situation appears to demand it.

A similar retreat from emotional presence emerges in his dialogue with Maggie. When she challenges his emotional neglect, Quentin deflects her pain with a rehearsed list of his past efforts:

> QUENTIN: Maggie, I've sat beside you in darkened rooms for days and weeks at a time, and my office looking high and low for me—
> MAGGIE: No, you lost patience with me.
> QUENTIN, *after a slight pause*: That's right, yes.[86]

Once again, Quentin's words centre on action, not emotion. His tone is flat, and his phrasing sounds more like a justification than a heartfelt reflection. This might suggest that his emotional detachment has become a protective strategy, language as defence rather than connection. He speaks, but his speech fails to resonate affectively. His paralysis lies not in silence but in a kind of emotionally evacuated speech.

This theme is further complicated by Quentin's stated moral code: "You tell the truth, even against yourself."[87] The line suggests a personal commitment to integrity, even at the cost of comfort. Yet, he often stops short of the kind of radical honesty the line implies. He reveals, but withholds; he analyses, but rarely surrenders. This dissonance between declared principle and lived behaviour arguably reflects a deeper form of ethical paralysis, one in which self-awareness is not matched by corresponding action.

Quentin's stagnation also seems not to be limited to moments of dialogue; it is also embedded in the form and structure of the play. As previously discussed, the fragmented timeline and fluid movement between past and present may reflect a consciousness caught in repetition. Rather than progressing toward growth or clarity, Quentin's memory loops around the same unresolved episodes, which could be seen as a reflection of his inability to reach ethical closure. The structure of the play does not offer catharsis or insight; instead, it keeps Quentin and the audience in a state of suspension.

British theatre scholar Alison Forsyth observes that *After the Fall* resists the traditional narrative arc that would move toward revelation or resolution.[88] The play remains suspended in

[86] Miller, "After the Fall," 579.
[87] Miller, "After the Fall," 557.
[88] Forsyth, "The Trauma of Articulation," 42-43.

contradiction and ambivalence. This dramaturgical decision might be read as mirroring Quentin's inner landscape: even as he probes the past, he seems unable or unwilling to draw firm conclusions. Reflection does not yield clarity but more conflict. Forsyth's reading thus helps us understand Quentin's paralysis as not merely emotional, but also narrative.

This condition is further reflected in the play's abstract scenography, which can also be interpreted as a visual metaphor for arrested movement. The undefined and disconnected objects on stage offer no clear spatial logic, and the looming tower that overshadows the action suggests an inescapable pressure that symbolically reinforces the character's emotional immobility. Where traditional settings might facilitate movement through space and time, Miller's scenography seems to deny Quentin that possibility, reinforcing the sense that he is psychologically trapped.

In conclusion, *After the Fall* portrays paralysis not as a dramatic event but as a condition of being. Quentin's moral reasoning hovers between competing impulses; his emotional gestures are partial, tentative, or withheld; and the structure of the play prevents narrative closure. He is not incapable of reflection; on the contrary, he reflects deeply, yet reflection never coalesces into transformation. It is possible to view his paralysis as an existential stance: a way of being that remains caught between insight and action, responsibility and avoidance. Through this portrayal, Miller invites reflection on the long duration of guilt and the difficulty of ethical movement when the self is fractured by memory and doubt.

4.2 Broken Glass – Psychosomatic and Relational Paralysis

Arthur Miller's *Broken Glass* offers one of the most explicit depictions of paralysis in his dramatic oeuvre. Here, paralysis manifests not merely as a metaphor but as a literal psychosomatic condition. Sylvia Gellburg's sudden inability to walk, absent any physiological cause, serves as the central image through which the play explores emotional repression, relational dysfunction, and the psychic weight of collective historical trauma. While subchapter 3.2 examined these themes through the lens of trauma, this section considers how paralysis functions not only as a symptom but also as a structure: governing bodies, relationships, and even cultural memory.

At the most literal level, Sylvia's physical immobility can be interpreted as a psychosomatic response to historical trauma. Her body reacts not to personal injury but to news of Kristallnacht, a violent event that occurred an ocean away. This dislocation between the site of violence and the site of suffering signals what might be termed cultural or transhistorical

paralysis. Rather than reacting to a localised personal trauma, Sylvia internalises a broader historical anxiety. Her physical condition seems to symbolise the psychological toll of empathic identification with the Jewish victims of Nazi violence. As a result, her paralysis may be seen as a form of cultural paralysis, in which suppressed fears and inherited memory surface through bodily dysfunction when verbal or emotional expression is no longer possible.

This psychosomatic reading is further complicated by the emotional and communicative impasse in Sylvia's marriage. Her husband Philip appears incapable of offering genuine intimacy, and their conversations are frequently marked by defensiveness, silence, and misrecognition. In one revealing exchange, Sylvia confronts him over what he told Dr. Hyman:

> SYLVIA. You told him we had relations?
>
> GELLBURG (*beginning to weep*). Don't, Sylvia...
>
> SYLVIA. You little liar! — You want him to think I'm crazy? Is that it? *(Now she breaks into weeping*.)
>
> GELLBURG. No! It just . . . it came out, I didn't know what I was saying!
>
> SYLVIA. That I forgot we had relations?! Phillip?
>
> GELLBURG. Stop that! Don't say any more.
>
> SYLVIA. I'm going to say anything I want to.
>
> GELLBURG (*weeping*). You will kill me...![89]

The scene lays bare the volatile and dysfunctional dynamic between them. Sylvia's accusation and Philip's evasive, emotionally charged reaction suggest not only a collapse of trust but also a profound inability to sustain open communication. His emotional detachment, coupled with moments of desperation and avoidance, may be read as a form of relational paralysis: an incapacity to maintain or even attempt genuine emotional connection. In this light, Sylvia's psychosomatic paralysis can also be interpreted as a bodily manifestation of emotional abandonment and communicative failure.

Philip's inner conflict deepens this dynamic. As the only Jewish employee at his firm, he often voices discomfort with his identity, sometimes expressing sentiments that verge on internalised antisemitism. He seeks approval from the dominant culture, distancing himself from his Jewish heritage in a bid for social assimilation. One illustrative moment occurs during a conversation with Margaret, where he sharply corrects her for mistaking his surname:

[89] Miller, "Broken Glass," 1172.

MARGARET. Can't help it, my whole family does it. I'm originally from Minnesota. It's nice to meet you finally, Mr Goldberg.

GELLBURG. It's Gellburg, not Goldberg.

MARGARET. Oh, I'm sorry.

GELLBURG. G-e--l-b-u-r-g. It's the only one in the phone book

MARGARET. It does sound like Goldberg.

GELLBURG. But it's not, it's Gellberg.[90]

His insistence on distinguishing himself from a more stereotypically Jewish surname suggests a desire to distance himself from Jewish identity. This behaviour, as Susan Abbotson notes, reflects a deep crisis of identity, in which cultural allegiance clashes with the desire for acceptance.[91] Philip's rigid emotional posture and difficulty in expressing vulnerability may thus be read as manifestations of cultural self-denial, an effort to suppress a part of himself that he associates with social marginalisation.

By contrast, Sylvia identifies strongly with the European Jews under threat. In a particularly poignant moment, she recalls a photograph from the newspaper, describing: "But when I saw that picture in the Times — with those two old men on their knees in the street... I swear, I almost heard that crowd laughing, and ridiculing them."[92] Her description fuses personal memory with collective trauma, suggesting a deep psychic permeability. She further observes, "But nobody really wants to talk about it. Phillip never even wants to talk about being Jewish, except — you know — to joke about it sometimes the way people do."[93] Through Sylvia, the play collapses the distance between public catastrophe and private distress. The image of broken glass becomes not only a symbol of political violence but also of emotional and psychic shattering. In this way, Miller frames Sylvia's condition as more than personal illness: it becomes an embodied response to the broader climate of denial and detachment in the face of historical injustice.

Scholar Enoch Brater has observed that Miller's later plays frequently blur the boundary between historical and personal realms.[94] In *Broken Glass*, Sylvia's paralysis exemplifies this fusion. Her body becomes the site where history takes shape, not through reenactment but

[90] Miller, "Broken Glass," 1120.
[91] Abbotson, *Critical Companion,* 90-91.
[92] Miller, "Broken Glass," 1151.
[93] Miller, "Broken Glass," 1151.
[94] Enoch Brater, "Introduction," in *A Student Handbook to the Plays of Arthur Miller,* ed. by Enoch Brater (New York: Bloomsburry, 2013), 9.

through affective embodiment. The paralysis is not passive but charged: it may be seen as a kind of protest against the minimisation of Jewish suffering by those around her, including her husband. From this vantage, she might be seen as the only character who truly allows herself to be affected by history, refusing the safety of detachment.

Still, Miller avoids idealising Sylvia's condition. Her paralysis isolates her and leaves her vulnerable. Philip, too, is ultimately consumed by his own emotional and ethical inertia. His eventual collapse, marked by a heart attack and physical deterioration, may be interpreted as his body's reckoning with years of repressed identity conflict and emotional disconnection. Though he pleads for forgiveness and recognition, his realisation comes too late to offer meaningful change.

Taken together, *Broken Glass* offers a multifaceted representation of paralysis: psychosomatic, relational, and cultural. It suggests that the inability to move or speak freely is not merely an individual affliction but a consequence of deeper historical and emotional impasses. The characters' bodily and emotional stasis reflects a broader paralysis in identity, memory, and connection. Miller does not depict this condition as redemptive, but rather as symptomatic of a fractured world, where speech fails, action is deferred, and the self bears the imprint of inherited trauma.

4.3 Resurrection Blues – Psychosomatic, Ethical, and Collective Paralysis

Arthur Miller's *Resurrection Blues* represents a unique treatment of paralysis in his dramatic canon. Unlike the deeply personal and psychologically interior paralysis explored in *After the Fall* or the psychosomatic and relational paralysis in *Broken Glass*, this later play locates paralysis at the level of society itself. Set in an unnamed Latin American country under authoritarian rule, the play explores the intersection of political repression, commodified spectacle, and moral confusion. What emerges is a portrayal of a society that is emotionally, ethically, and culturally paralysed, unable to respond meaningfully to suffering or injustice. The impending crucifixion of a man who may or may not be divine becomes not just a test of belief, but a reflection of the collective incapacity to act ethically, love truthfully, or speak sincerely.

At the cultural level, paralysis is suggested by the nation's numbing to violence. Characters repeatedly normalise the idea of crucifixion, not out of cruelty but through a kind of civic exhaustion. When Stanley explains that villagers hope their town will be chosen for the crucifixion because property values might increase, he does not appear to be joking. This indicates a society in which the spectacular has replaced the sacred, and where communal ethics

have been supplanted by economic opportunism. The culture itself is caught in a kind of collective paralysis, unable to mourn, reflect, or act without irony. As Susan Abbotson notes in her *Student Companion to Arthur Miller*, the play suggests a society unable to make moral distinctions, where the surreal replaces the spiritual.[95]

This collective stasis is echoed in the ethical paralysis of individual characters. General Felix, for example, justifies the crucifixion as necessary for national stability, even as he privately expresses uncertainty. His rationalisations function as moral anaesthesia, permitting him to sidestep the implications of state-sponsored violence. In one telling exchange, when his cousin Henri reminds him that people keep candles lit before the prisoner's photograph "like a saint," Felix responds curtly: “This saint’s gunmen have shot up three police stations and killed two officers and wounded five more in the past two months.”[96] Although Henri counters that “they say he personally had nothing to do with the violence,”[97] Felix refuses to acknowledge this possibility. His rhetoric reduces a complex moral situation to a simplistic justification for state action. Rather than confronting the horror of executing a potentially innocent man, Felix falls back on military logic and personal grievance, thereby embodying a paralysis of conscience in which power preservation overrides the imperative to act justly.

The ethical failure is reinforced by Skip and Emily, the American television producers. Skip, in particular, approaches the crucifixion as a media opportunity, discussing camera angles and broadcast rights with no apparent awareness of the event's spiritual or political gravity. In one moment, he insists, “We’re only photographing it, we’re not doing it, for God’s sake!”[98] This line encapsulates his moral detachment and his attempt to distance himself from ethical accountability. His language is marked by promotional clichés and is void of emotional or ethical depth. Rather than confronting the significance of their complicity, Skip draws a sharp but false line between observation and participation. Emily, although more reflective, often remains passive, caught between professional duty and personal discomfort, exemplifying how ethical paralysis may arise not only from cynicism but also from inaction cloaked in ambivalence.

Jeanine’s condition, while the result of a physical injury (a broken spine sustained during a suicide attempt) can be understood as symbolically resonant with other forms of paralysis

[95] Abbotson, *Critical Companion*, 294-295.
[96] Miller, “Resurrection Blues,” 1233.
[97] Miller, “Resurrection Blues,” 1233.
[98] Miller, “Resurrection Blues,” 1244.

present in the play. Though her immobility is not psychosomatic, her physical confinement underscores a deeper emotional and ethical impasse. She often expresses a clear moral perspective, particularly regarding the potential crucifixion, but she lacks the ability to act upon it. This tension becomes especially evident in a confrontation with her father, Henri:

> JEANINE. Oh Papa, why do you go on caring so much when you know you will never act? You'll never stand up to these murderers!
>
> HENRI. Act how? Who do I join? How can you go on repeating that political nonsense? There is no politics anymore, Jeanine — if you weren't so tough-minded you'd admit it! There is nothing, my dear, nothing but one's family, if one can call that a faith.[99]

This exchange reveals Jeanine's growing frustration with her father's inability to move from concern to action. Her physical stillness mirrors the emotional paralysis of those around her, while her moral clarity sets her apart from their descent into cynicism and passivity. In this way, Jeanine is not a figure of psychosomatic dysfunction but rather an emblem of moral urgency, held back by the inaction and hopelessness surrounding her. As Christopher Bigsby observes, *Resurrection Blues* charts a collapse of public and private values, portraying a world in which ideology fails and characters are left suspended between moral outrage and helplessness.[100]

Relational paralysis also permeates the play. Characters speak past one another, failing to communicate across ideological or emotional divides. Conversations frequently break down into avoidance, repetition, or silence. This failure is especially pronounced in the dynamic between Felix and Jeanine. In one exchange, Felix resists Jeanine's demand for public transparency:

> FELIX: Excuse me, dear—I can't do that unless he agrees in advance to disarm his people...
>
> JEANINE: He personally has not armed anybody...
>
> FELIX, composure rattling: Now look, dear...
>
> JEANINE: Don't call me dear! —Why can't you make that announcement?
>
> FELIX: They have tons of hidden arms, goddamit![101]

This scene exemplifies their inability to engage in sincere or constructive dialogue. Felix hides behind official rhetoric, while Jeanine rejects his condescension, pushing for moral clarity. The communication collapses into defensiveness and hostility, highlighting the breakdown of

[99] Miller, "Resurrection Blues," 1274.
[100] Bigsby, *Arthur Miller*, 427.
[101] Miller, "Resurrection Blues," 1277.

intergenerational trust and ethical recognition. Their failed exchange embodies the emotional disconnection and fragmentation that characterise the society at large.

Perhaps the most profound form of paralysis in *Resurrection Blues* is linguistic. The man at the centre of the play, the prisoner, never speaks and is never seen. His silence becomes the ultimate metaphor for spiritual and moral paralysis: in a world oversaturated with speech, debate, and spin, true meaning withdraws. The characters speak endlessly, but their words rarely touch on the real or the sacred. In this way, Miller crafts a world in which language has become ornamental, failing to mediate between truth and power, or between self and other.

Taken together, the various expressions of paralysis in *Resurrection Blues* create a picture of a world that finds it difficult to act sincerely or with purpose. Miller shows that when systems of belief collapse and words lose their connection to meaning, both individual and shared ability to act begin to weaken. This kind of paralysis does not affect just one person but is spread across a divided society, where people become emotionally distant and uncertain about how to respond to moral challenges. In this setting, the crucifixion, whether real or symbolic, becomes a powerful image of a culture stuck in place and failing to respond ethically.

4.4 Comparison of Analysed Aspects

Arthur Miller's late plays *After the Fall*, *Broken Glass*, and *Resurrection Blues* each offer distinct yet thematically resonant portrayals of paralysis. Though differing in genre, tone, and setting, all three explore how paralysis functions not merely as a metaphor for psychological blockage but as a multifaceted condition, manifesting through the body, language, relationships, and cultural institutions. What emerges is a complex map of human and societal stasis, in which moral and emotional engagement is inhibited by guilt, trauma, repression, and ideological collapse.

In *Broken Glass*, psychosomatic paralysis appears most explicitly through Sylvia Gellburg's sudden loss of the ability to walk. Her immobility reflects both personal distress and transhistorical trauma, as her body registers the violence of Kristallnacht despite geographic and temporal distance. Although Jeanine in *Resurrection Blues* is physically paralysed due to an accident rather than psychological causes, her immobility becomes a visual counterpart to the surrounding moral stagnation. In *After the Fall*, no one suffers from literal paralysis, yet Quentin's mental looping through the past suggests a psychic rigidity that echoes these bodily conditions; his mind, like Sylvia's body, cannot move forward.

Miller's characters frequently find themselves unable to communicate with honesty or intimacy. Quentin's exchanges with both Louise and Maggie in *After the Fall* are marked by guardedness and deflection, mirroring his emotional detachment. In *Broken Glass*, Sylvia and Philip's marriage disintegrates under the weight of unspoken resentment and cultural dissonance, resulting in a failure of emotional reciprocity. Similarly, in *Resurrection Blues*, relationships are impaired by ideological rifts: Henri and his daughter Jeanine are locked in confrontation, their conversations punctuated by evasion, defensiveness, and mutual incomprehension. Across all three plays, relational paralysis arises when ethical and emotional engagement is replaced by fear, cynicism, or silence.

All three works also explore how individuals hesitate or fail to act in morally urgent situations. In *After the Fall*, Quentin reflects on his past but cannot transform his reflection into an ethical resolution. In *Broken Glass*, Philip is paralysed by internalised shame and cultural denial, unable to provide the emotional support Sylvia needs. *Resurrection Blues* elevates this ethical inaction to a national scale: political leaders like Felix rationalise state violence, while others, such as Henri, voice concern yet remain immobilised by hopelessness. Here, paralysis becomes the default ethical posture in a world where belief falters and moral clarity is elusive.

The breakdown of meaningful language pervades Miller's late work. Quentin's articulate self-analysis in *After the Fall* masks an inability to connect emotionally. In *Broken Glass*, Philip's denial of Jewish identity erodes his ability to communicate with Sylvia about their shared cultural legacy. And in *Resurrection Blues*, language is distorted by media jargon, propaganda, and ironic detachment. The prisoner's silence, never broken throughout the play, becomes the most potent expression of a world in which words have lost their moral force. Miller thereby presents a world bereft of shared values, where language falters in its ability to restore coherence or inspire meaningful action.

Together, these plays suggest that paralysis is not simply a condition afflicting individuals but a pervasive consequence of modern disillusionment. Whether expressed through psychosomatic illness, emotional disconnection, moral hesitation, or cultural fragmentation, Miller's characters often find themselves caught between insight and impotence. His late dramas do not resolve these tensions but expose them as defining features of a fractured ethical landscape. Through this lens, paralysis becomes a tragic emblem of modernity: the inability to move, speak, or act in a world where the foundations of meaning have become uncertain.

Conclusion

This bachelor's thesis focused on the depiction of trauma and paralysis in three selected plays by Arthur Miller: *After the Fall*, *Broken Glass*, and *Resurrection Blues*. The aim was to explore how Miller dramatises various forms of personal, collective, and cultural burden and how these experiences affect his characters' actions, language, and relationships. In Miller's plays, trauma and paralysis are portrayed not only as thematic elements but also as structural components of dramatic form and tools for deeper societal and existential reflection.

The theoretical section established the interpretative framework for the subsequent analysis. The first chapter defined the concepts of trauma and paralysis, distinguishing their various types, such as personal, collective, and cultural trauma, as well as psychosomatic, emotional, ethical, relational, linguistic, and cultural paralysis. It also provided an overview of the literary development of these motifs, particularly in twentieth-century American drama. The second chapter presented the historical and cultural background of the three analysed plays and outlined Miller's authorial development in the context of contemporary social events. Together, these chapters laid the foundation for the analytical part.

The analytical section consisted of two chapters. The third chapter focused on the theme of trauma. In *After the Fall*, trauma is depicted as a deeply introspective process reflecting guilt and moral failure. *Broken Glass* presents a picture of psychosomatic paralysis as an expression of internal tension and collective fear within the Jewish community in the shadow of European antisemitism. In *Resurrection Blues*, trauma manifests in the society's inability to confront violence, which becomes a normalised part of everyday life. Miller conveys these themes not only through content but also through formal techniques, such as interrupted or unfinished dialogues, moments of silence, disrupted chronology, or visual symbols.

The fourth chapter elaborated on various forms of paralysis. In *After the Fall*, this includes emotional and ethical stagnation of the protagonists; in *Broken Glass*, a combination of psychosomatic symptoms and relational immobility between the Gellburgs; and in *Resurrection Blues*, the collective inability of society to respond to impending brutality. In all cases, paralysis functions not merely as a symptom but as a dramatic device expressing deeper societal or existential crises. Miller employs elements such as static scenography, repetitive rhetorical patterns, and evasive responses to underscore the characters' stagnation and isolation.

Miller's late plays reveal that trauma and paralysis are phenomena that extend beyond individual experience and are deeply rooted in broader cultural and historical contexts.

Dramatic devices such as silence, fragmented dialogue, or symbolic scenography help capture the state of immobility and emotional numbness that prevents characters from engaging in meaningful action. These plays highlight the tension between memory and forgetting, responsibility and resignation.

The findings of this thesis may offer insights into Miller's dramatic work, particularly in its later phase, where the plays increasingly address universal questions of human existence, morality, and identity. The analysis of the selected plays further engages with ongoing literary-critical discussions on the representation of trauma and paralysis in drama, suggesting that these motifs function not only thematically but also as structural elements of dramatic composition.

In conclusion, the issues of trauma and paralysis, as thematised by Miller, remain relevant in today's world, which faces new forms of crisis, violence, and uncertainty. Miller's plays offer not only a portrayal of a fractured world but also a challenge to understand it through introspection, empathy, and responsibility.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na analýzu vyobrazení dvou úzce propojených fenoménů, konkrétně traumatu a paralýzy, v tvorbě Arthura Millera, a to v jeho třech pozdních dramatech *After the Fall* (1964), *Broken Glass* (1994) a *Resurrection Blues* (2002). Cílem práce je ukázat, jak Miller dramatizuje tělesné, psychické i kulturní formy znehybnění a jakými prostředky reflektuje osobní i kolektivní zkušenosti utrpení, ztráty a viny. Tato tematika je sledována nejen na obsahové úrovni, ale také prostřednictvím formálních a strukturálních aspektů dramatické tvorby, například prostřednictvím narativní fragmentace, ticha, symbolických prvků nebo proměnlivého rytmu dialogu.

Výzkumný rámec práce je ukotven v teorii literárního traumatu, která se zaměřuje na reprezentaci těch zkušeností, jež narušují normální chápání reality a času, a jejichž důsledkem je často nemožnost úplného jazykového vyjádření. Zvláštní pozornost je věnována pojmům osobního, kolektivního a kulturního traumatu a také paralýze jako symptomu i metaforickému konstruktu, který odráží nemožnost jednání, komunikace či etické orientace.

Práce je rozdělena do čtyř hlavních kapitol. První dvě tvoří teoretický základ, který představuje klíčové pojmy a kontexty, čímž připravují půdu pro následnou analytickou část. První kapitola se podrobně zabývá definicí traumatu a paralýzy, přičemž rozlišuje jejich různé typy – konkrétně osobní, kolektivní a kulturní trauma a dále psychosomatickou, emocionální, etickou, vztahovou, jazykovou a kulturní paralýzu. Kapitola zároveň sleduje vývoj těchto motivů v literatuře, zejména v americkém dramatu 20. století, a popisuje, jak se tematika ztráty, nehybnosti a narušené identity měnila v návaznosti na společenské a estetické proměny. Druhá kapitola poskytuje historický a kulturní rámec tří analyzovaných her a zároveň sleduje proměnu Millerova dramatického stylu ve vztahu k dobovému kontextu. Vedle vývoje americké společnosti reflektuje také Millerův osobní život, jenž se promítl do jeho dramatické tvorby. Zmíněny jsou zásadní události, které ovlivnily jednotlivá dramata jako například holokaust a mccarthismus v *After the Fall*, křišťálová noc a antisemitismus v *Broken Glass*, nebo odkaz na diktaturu, mediální manipulaci a morální apatii společnosti v *Resurrection Blues*.

Třetí kapitola se zaměřuje na vyobrazení traumatu ve vybraných hrách a ukazuje, jak Miller prostřednictvím různorodých formálních prostředků dramatizuje osobní, kolektivní i kulturní rozměry utrpení. Každá ze tří analyzovaných her prezentuje trauma specifickým způsobem: *After the Fall* zkoumá introspektivní rovinu osobního selhání a přeživší viny, kterou zprostředkovává skrze Quentinovy retrospektivní monology a rozbitou dramatickou strukturu.

Trauma prostupuje celou hrou a formuje vztahy mezi postavami, přičemž vrcholí v momentě, kdy Quentin není schopen čelit vlastním vzpomínkám a emocionálně selhává při pokusu o smíření se svou minulostí. Tímto způsobem Miller tematizuje nejen bolest ztráty, ale i nemožnost kontinuálního vyprávění jako symptom traumatizovaného vědomí. *Broken Glass* představuje kulturní trauma spojené s antisemitismem, které se manifestuje skrze psychosomatické symptomy postavy Sylvie. Její tělesná paralýza, lékařsky nevysvětlitelná, je výrazem hluboce zakořeněné psychické zátěže a zároveň reakcí na narušené mezilidské vztahy. Sylviin stav se stává tělesným nosičem potlačeného strachu, viny a identity, přičemž se kulturní dědictví a úzkost promítají jak do dialogu, tak do strukturální dynamiky hry. Napětí mezi manželi Gellburgovými, plné mlčení, nedorozumění a obranných reakcí, podtrhuje nemožnost komunikace jako důsledek traumatu. *Resurrection Blues* reflektuje kolektivní otupělost vůči násilí a ztrátu schopnosti morální orientace. Trauma zde nepramení pouze z konkrétní události, ale z celospolečenské pasivity a neschopnosti reagovat na ohrožení etických hodnot. Postavy jako Henri, Jeanine či Skip ztělesňují různé strategie vyhýbání se odpovědnosti. Henri osciluje mezi morálním pobouřením a pasivitou, Jeanine vyjadřuje zoufalou touhu po změně, která však zůstává nevyslyšena, a Skip zneužívá trauma jako komoditu, čímž poukazuje na jeho trivializaci v mediální sféře. Analýza ukazuje, že trauma v Millerových hrách není pouze tematickým prvkem, ale strukturálním principem, který zasahuje do kompozice dialogu, časové osy a charakterové výstavby.

Čtvrtá kapitola se věnuje zobrazení paralýzy, která v Millerově dramatu nabývá mnoha podob. V *After the Fall* se jedná o morální nehybnost Quentina, jenž není schopen jednat ani navázat hlubší citový vztah bez introspektivní úzkosti. Jeho vnitřní rozpolcenost se promítá do rysů dramatu v podobě fragmentovaných dialogů, opakování a přerušovaných scén, jež odrážejí přerývanou povahu jeho myšlenkových pochodů a citové neukotvenosti. V jedné ze scén se například ztrácí v rozporuplných vzpomínkách na své dvě manželky, aniž by nalezl směr či rozhodnutí, čímž je tematizována jeho etická i emoční paralýza. Hra *Broken Glass* přináší komplexní obraz psychosomatické i vztahové paralýzy. Sylviina neschopnost chůze je zde nejen somatickým projevem úzkosti vyvolané zprávami o pogromech v nacistickém Německu, ale i důsledkem dlouhodobého emocionálního zanedbání v rámci manželského soužití. Její stav, který se vymyká lékařskému vysvětlení, posiluje symbolickou dimenzi paralýzy jako reakci na kulturní i osobní trauma. Philipova vnitřní rozpolcenost, oscilující mezi židovskou identitou a touhou po společenské akceptaci, spolu s jeho defenzivním a rigidním chováním, ilustruje jak kulturní, tak etickou nehybnost. V *Resurrection Blues* se paralýza rozšiřuje do satirického

obrazu celé společnosti, která se tváří v tvář hrozbě veřejné popravy uchyluje k estetizaci násilí, racionalizaci nebo ironickému distancování. Postavy zde volí mlčení, únik či cynický odstup místo morální akce. Výrazným příkladem je generál Felix, jehož pragmaticky formulované a chladně racionalizované důvody pro vykonání popravy odhalují hlubší etické selhání a neschopnost empatie. Miller využívá dramatické prostředky jako je stagnující a opakující se dialog, významné ticho a symbolicky nabitý prostor, které zachycují emocionální a morální zablokování postav. Scény, v nichž se postavy odkazují na minulé události bez schopnosti je plně artikulovat, ukazují, jak paralýza zasahuje i do jazykového a narativního rámce hry. Tato dramatická strategie zdůrazňuje, že paralýza není pouze výsledkem individuální krize, ale strukturálním projevem společenského i kulturního úpadku, který Miller důsledně tematizuje v celé své pozdní tvorbě.

Společně tyto analýzy ukazují, že trauma a paralýza nejsou v Millerových hrách pouze námětem, ale určují i způsob, jakým je příběh vyprávěn. Miller skrze dramatickou formu, například přerušovaný dialog, ticho nebo rozpad klasické dramatické struktury, tematizuje nemožnost jednání a vyrovnání se se ztrátou. Dále využívá i symbolické kulisy a rytmus jazykových výměn, aby vyjádřil hlubší vrstvy psychologické a etické nehybnosti. V jeho hrách se často objevuje stagnace v mezilidské komunikaci a vnitřní ticho postav, které místo otevřeného vyjádření volí únik nebo mlčení. Tím jeho dramatická díla poskytují nejen psychologický vhled, ale také kritickou reflexi kulturních a historických podmínek moderní existence, čímž propojují individuální zkušenost s kolektivní pamětí a společenským kontextem.

Závěrem lze říci, že práce ukázala komplexnost, s jakou Miller zpracovává tematiku traumatu a paralýzy, a zároveň potvrdila, že jeho pozdní dramata jsou bohatým materiálem pro zkoumání vztahu mezi formou a obsahem. Znehybnění se v Millerových hrách profiluje jako ústřední dramatický princip, prostřednictvím něhož autor otevírá otázky lidského utrpení a viny v kontextu 20. století.

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