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Arthur Miller's concept of tragedy

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ARTHUR MILLER'S CONCEPT OF TRAGEDY

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English
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In Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Arts

by

Howard James Stark

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

In recent years, Arthur Miller has been the subject of much critical debate. Numerous critics have stated that his plays are not true tragedies because they do not meet the requirements for tragic drama. Several other critics, however, attempting to come to Miller's defense, have stated just the opposite. So far, the situation has not been resolved; and there appears to be little chance that it will, considering the manner in which both Miller's defenders and censors have been approaching the problem. First, they have been brandishing about a term which does not carry the same meaning for each of them. They have been forcing this term, with all its ramifications, upon Miller's plays in order to make some erudite statement about the plays. Each has been attempting to justify his position by comparing Miller's plays and his tragic heroes with plays and heroes that symbolize best his own interpretation of tragedy. This approach is inconsistent, contradictory, and illogical; for it shows that the critics are examining Miller's plays not as literary expressions unique in themselves but by standards which are far too often completely irrelevant to the situation. Also, this approach forces the critics to examine the plays out of context, thereby destroying their relevancy. It is to this

problem that attention must be paid first.

The term "tragedy" has been and still is the crux criticorum of drama.¹ The desire to define this enigmatic term has been taxing the ingenuity of critics for centuries. Eric Bentley, one of the foremost contemporary writers on the problems of the theatre, states in his book The Playwright as Thinker the extreme to which the situation has advanced:

Tragedy is a topic that lures the critic into talking beautiful nonsense. On this subject even more than on others he tends to generalize from a favorite example or merely to play high-minded cadenzas.²

Unfortunately, Bentley's comments are too true. For years critics have been striving to out-do one another in their attempts to solve two major problems. First, they have been trying to arrive at a substantial definition of the term

¹Because of the difficulties encountered when making even a simple definition of the term "tragedy" as it is used generally, the author has not made any attempt to provide a basic definition of the term. Many excellent and conflicting definitions and interpretations of the term are available in countless books by innumerable scholars from all fields of the arts and social sciences. The author will assume a familiarity on the part of the reader with some of these books. Any restrictive or special definitions or interpretations of the term, though, will be dealt with in detail, again assuming background knowledge on the part of the reader which would make any detailed anterior explanation unnecessary for the purpose of cross-reference or comparison and contrast of ideas.

²Eric Bentley, The Playwright as Thinker (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1946), p. 161.

"tragedy" as it applies to drama. Secondly, they have been attempting to establish, based on their definition of "tragedy," a stable generic form for tragic dramas, a form which would set the standards by which all dramas aspiring to be called tragic dramas could be compared. For many years now, critics have been using the tragic dramas of Periclean Greece and Elizabethan England as the opera classica of the genre.³ Many critics have been adhering tenaciously to the idea that a drama must follow the concepts of either a Greek or Elizabethan tragedy if it is to be considered a tragedy in the true sense of the term, their definition of the term. In recent years, this arbitrary restriction has been attacked vehemently by many critics, one of whom is John Gassner. Gassner has stated in his book Theatre at the Crossroads that "there is simply no single true philosophy of tragedy any more than there is a single inviolable tragic form."⁴ Gassner's statement pinpoints the problem:

³From time to time reference will be made to the terms "Greek," "Elizabethan," "Neo-Classical," "German Classical," "modern European," and "modern American tragedy." The author realizes that an adequate understanding of these forms of tragedy is requisite knowledge for any paper dealing with tragic drama. But because a detailed explanation of the concepts and ramifications of these forms is beyond the range and scope of this paper, the author will assume an understanding on the part of the reader of these forms.

⁴John Gassner, Theatre at the Crossroads (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 25.

tragic drama has meant something different in every culture for which the term has had meaning; it has also meant something different, in varying degrees, to the authors who have used it as a means by which to communicate a theme to their audiences.

The primary purpose of a play is to say something, to communicate something from the author to the audience. The author, therefore, uses a form which will best transmit his theme, a form that is intelligent, meaningful, and relevant. Thus, the recalcitrance of certain critics to accept forms and concepts of tragic drama other than those which imitate the Greek or Elizabethan tragedies is illogical in that it presupposes the idea that there have been no changes in philosophical, psychological, theological, or scientific concepts between the Greek and Elizabethan periods or since the Elizabethan period. That society has changed can be proven a posteriori, and the changes need not be enumerated at this time in order to prove the point; and just as society has been changing, so have the art forms manifested by society. It would be unrealistic to think that the various art forms would remain static in a mobile society when they draw upon society for their content. Hence, when an author communicates to his audience through a relevant dramatic form, he is communicating a theme which is based on intellectual concepts contemporary to him and his audience. The changes in form and concept among the various tragedies are evident when one

examines and compares the tragedies of the major periods. For example, the tragic dramas of Periclean Greece were written by men who shared the same beliefs and concepts as their audiences. These dramas were, as William Macneile Dixon states, essentially religious in nature, being concerned with man's moral and philosophical relationship to society and to the eternal laws of the Greek world.⁵ Elizabethan tragic dramas were written by Elizabethans for Elizabethans and incorporated and exemplified the Elizabethan concepts of life. The Elizabethans' approach to drama was secular; that is, they did not view it as having religious import. Even though the Neo-Classisists pledged their allegiance to the Aristotelian view, they instilled in their dramas not Greek but Neo-Classical concepts. The tragedies of Lessing, Goethe, and Schroder were colored by their authors' Teutonic backgrounds. The modern European tragedians of the late nineteenth-century -- Ibsen, Hauptmann, Gorki, and Chekhov-- based their tragedies on situations contemporary with their period and instilled in their tragedies ideas which were direct manifestations of the societal conditions of their period. Modern American playwrights, such as O'Neill, Sherwood, Anderson, Odets, and Miller, have based their tragedies on situations and problems indigenous to their type of

⁵William Macneile Dixon, Tragedy (third edition; London: Edward Arnold and Company, 1929), pp. 23-24.

society. The points of view expressed in these dramas are different from playwright to playwright, pointing up the fact that even playwrights of one period can approach tragic drama in different ways.

The above examples indicate that the ideas expressed and the forms used in the various tragic dramas produced through the centuries have been contingent upon or determined by the concepts prevalent in the societies in which the dramas were written. Thus, the form and content of tragedy have differed from period to period, and this fact is extremely important. H.D.F. Kitto states in Form and Meaning in Drama that "the connexion between the form and the content is so vital that the two may be said to be ultimately identical."⁶ Thus, the dramatic form and intellectual content of, say, a Greek tragedy is one, irreducible unit. One cannot be subtracted from the other without impairing the meaning, the raison d'etre, of the play. The same fact is true of any other tragedy from any other period. Therefore, to say that a modern play is not a tragedy or is a lesser tragedy than a tragedy of another period because it does not follow the form or is concerned with different problems is non sequitur. This basis of comparison does not take into consideration the fact that the form and content of, for example, a Greek

⁶ H.D.F. Kitto, Form and Meaning in Drama (New York: University Paperbacks, Barnes and Noble, 1960), p. v.

tragedy might not be so relevant or meaningful to a modern audience as the form and content of a modern tragedy. This idea by no means precludes or eliminates the possibility that there may be basic similarities between two tragedies from different periods or among several tragedies from several periods; that there are similarities cannot not be denied. The point is that one cannot set up one standard of evaluation, demanding that certain ideas, forms, or concepts appear in a tragedy before it can be acclaimed as a "true tragedy," a spurious designation. What is meaningful or necessary in Shakespearean tragedy might be completely meaningless and unnecessary in modern tragedy. The tragic dramas of each period are unique in that they are representations of that period only. Greek tragedy is Greek tragedy. Elizabethan tragedy is Elizabethan tragedy. Because they are not the same, one cannot say that Greek tragedy is better than Elizabethan tragedy. Each must be judged for what it is and not for what it is not; each must be judged on its own merits. In their provocative and stimulating book Theory of Literature, Rene Wellek and Austin Warren ask whether genres remain fixed. They answer, "presumably not," saying that "with the addition of new works, our categories change."⁷ The obvious deduction

⁷Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (second edition; New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1956), p. 216.

to be made from Wellek and Warren's statement is that genres are established to fit the works of authors; authors do not fit their works to established genres. Therefore, when examining the work of an author, the work itself must be examined in itself and by itself, for it is truly unique. R. P.

Blackmur states in his essay "A Critic's Job of Work" that "any rational approach is valid to literature and may be called critical which fastens at any point upon the work itself."⁸ Wellek and Warren believe that "the natural and sensible starting point for work in literary scholarship is the interpretation and analysis of the works of literature themselves."⁹

Therefore, in order to examine Arthur Miller's plays as examples of tragedy in a scholarly manner, one must start with the works themselves, and one must examine them and analyze them in the light of what they say and how well they say it. They must be examined to see whether their contents are coherent; they must be examined to see if they have meaning and relevancy for those to whom they are directed. But in examining Miller's works, one must take care to avoid a completely subjective approach; for a subjective analysis

⁸ R. P. Blackmur, "A Critic's Job of Work," in Criticism, Mark Schorer, Josephine Miles, and Gordon McKenzie, Editors, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958), pp. 312-13.

⁹ Wellek and Warren, op. cit., p. 127.

is based on personal, emotional responses, and what might be tragic for one person would not necessarily be tragic to another. When examining Miller's works, one must look at them rationally, dispassionately, and objectively. In order to examine an author's works in this manner, one must have a standard, a parallel of comparison by which to judge them. Because a play is created, planned so that it incorporates certain actions and ignores others and states certain beliefs and ideals, one can say that a play is a manifestation of an author's philosophy. Very rarely, though, does an author express his beliefs or philosophy in essays or discussions. Instead, the critic must ferret out an author's beliefs solely through scholarly examination and analysis of the author's work. In this sense, Arthur Miller is an exception. Since 1949, he has written several essays in which he has stated fully and unequivocally his views on tragedy and tragic drama. Now, one can assume that Miller was sincere when he wrote these essays and when he wrote his plays. One can also assume that his plays incorporate his beliefs. Therefore, a logical standard of evaluation would be to compare Miller's plays with his beliefs, his theory of tragedy, in order to see whether they are coherent, artistic manifestations of his philosophy. But in order to avoid becoming involved in a circular argument, one must work slowly and carefully, testing each phase of the problem before going to the next.

Therefore, the task before this paper is twofold.

First, it is to examine Miller's concept of tragedy, the philosophical ideas behind his plays, in order to see whether it is a logical, rational theory, one that is valid in itself. Once it has been determined whether Miller's concept is valid, then the second step can be taken: to analyze his plays in order to see whether they are artistic expressions true to and incorporating the beliefs expounded in his concept of tragedy. In no way does this approach invalidate the idea that the works must be examined by themselves and in themselves, for Miller's theory and his plays should be expressions of the same viewpoint.

CHAPTER II

MILLER'S CONCEPT OF TRAGEDY

Arthur Miller has stated that "tragedy is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly."¹ On the surface, this statement appears to be straightforward and elementary, but such is not the case; for behind it lies a complex pattern of interwoven ideas. In an introductory essay to his play A View from the Bridge, Miller upholds the basic idea behind Greek drama.² In two of his essays, "Tragedy and the Common Man" and his introductory essay to his collected plays, Miller eschews the Aristotelian concept of the tragic hero, substituting, instead, one of his own; the concept of the common man as tragic hero. A cursory reading of

¹ Arthur Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," Theatre Arts, XXXV (March, 1951), 48.

² Miller can be misleading in his casual use of the term "Greek drama." Miller's use of the term "Greek drama" has reference to and implies only the Greek tragedies of the Periclean period. The term "social drama" also has a special meaning for Miller. His contention is that a true "social drama" should have, as a Greek drama had, a social relevancy for all men. Hence, for Miller, "social drama" means "tragic drama." Miller will confuse the issue by occasionally using the term "tragedy" in reference to a play in one sentence and then calling the play a "social drama" in another. The reader will avoid confusion if he will remember that the terms "tragic drama," "social drama," and "tragedy" are synonymous for Miller. The reader should also remember that this author is using Miller's terminology; consequently, he is implying Miller's connotations when he uses these terms, unless otherwise stated.

Miller's ideas in these articles could easily mislead one into thinking that Miller has become engaged in a somewhat paradoxical situation, for how can Miller support the Greek concept of social drama and yet shun the Greek tragic hero?

Isn't the tragic hero too closely entwined in the structure of a tragic drama to be an adjunctive? Would not the entire concept lose its cohesiveness if one part were deleted or replaced by a different part? The seemingly apparent dichotomy within Miller's views dissolves, though, when one recognizes the subtle synthesis which he has fashioned, a synthesis which produces a perfectly coalesced concept of tragedy. Two basic ideas form the nucleus of Miller's concept of tragedy:

(1) "A drama rises in stature and intensity in proportion to the weight of its application to all men,"³ and (2) "the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were."⁴ A thorough investigation of Miller's basic ideas will show that he has formulated a coherent, sensible, and efficacious concept of tragedy in regard to modern drama.

The first point in Miller's thesis is that a social drama "is the drama of the whole man."⁵ Miller means that a

³ Arthur Miller, "On Social Plays," introduction to A View from the Bridge (New York: The Viking Press, 1955), p. 4.

⁴ Arthur Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," loc. cit.

⁵ Miller, "On Social Plays," loc. cit.

social drama should not be just a psychological study of a man or just a sociological study of his role in society; he feels that a true social drama must incorporate a study of both. Nor should a social drama study a problem that is relevant only to one person; a true social drama must be concerned with a problem that has relevancy for all men, for humanity. Miller believes that the basic fault with many modern social dramas is that they leave untouched the great problems facing humanity and concentrate upon the problems facing a single individual. Miller turns to Greek drama in order to illustrate his point. The inherent meaningfulness and relevancy of Greek drama, Miller contends, was due to its concentration on the problems of humanity.⁶ An examination of certain aspects of Greek drama will substantiate Miller's point.

Greek dramas were concerned with ultimate problems: What is Good? What is Evil? How can Man know? By what moral principles can a man guide his life? How can Man improve life? How can a man live a better, fuller, more meaningful life? What powers lie behind and work upon life? H.D.F. Kitto says that "the formative and controlling idea in a Greek play . . . is some religious or philosophical conception."⁷ Kitto goes on to say that the theme depicting a universal law or moral

⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷ H.D.F. Kitto, Form and Meaning in Drama (New York: University Paperbacks, Barnes and Noble, 1960), p. 209.

principle was more important to the Greek authors than were their characters or the story through which the theme was manifested.⁸ One should not be misled into thinking that the Greek playwrights had absolutely no interest in their principal characters, though, for the opposite is truer. When necessary, the Greek playwrights developed their characters fully, not for the sake of pure characterization but as a means to an end: as a way to reach and then heighten the theme. Frank L. Lucas states that the figures in Greek tragedy were "larger than life."⁹ By this phrase, Lucas means that the tragic heroes were purposely characterized so that they stood not for themselves but for humanity. A Greek tragic hero was the symbol for humanity. He was the means by which the Greek playwrights could manifest their themes and make them relevant to the people. If the tragic hero was a man of high rank or noble birth, as was always the case, it was not that the Greeks believed that tragedy befell only those of such rank, but that the Greek playwrights used a person of high rank in order to emphasize significantly the theme they desired to present. Hence, one sees that Oedipus, for the Greeks, was not a play devoted to the psychological problems of a king but was a presentation of a philosophical and moral concept

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Frank L. Lucas, Tragedy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), p. 135.

that was applicable to all men, regardless of their individual rank. Kitto interprets Sophocles as saying

that although Life has been so cruel to
Oedipus, nevertheless it is not a chaos;
and that in his story there is no warrant
for our abandoning allegiance to moral
law and such prudent foresight as we may
have.¹⁰

In this sense, the Greek playwrights were, as William Macneile Dixon classifies them, not so much dramatists as they were "theologians, philosophers, and moralists."¹¹ They examined life in order to show Man's relationship to man and society as indicated by the ultimate laws of the universe. The tragic hero tested the laws, the scheme of life, in order to see whether they were fair and logical, in order to see whether they could be improved, or in order to see whether new and better ones could be found. The tragic hero transgressed the laws in order to emphasize their necessity, in order to illuminate the moral principle behind them. Through the socially significant relationship of the tragic hero to the audience, the Greek playwrights were able to bring intellectual enlightenment to their audiences through an emotional experience. The emotional experience is the exciting of pity and fear in the audience, the qualities which Aristotle thought

¹⁰Kitto, op. cit., p. 235.

¹¹William Macneile Dixon, Tragedy (third edition; London: Edward Arnold and Company, 1929), p. 59.

of as the distinctive mark of tragedy.¹² Aristotle defined these terms as follows: "pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves." Hence, the audience at a Greek tragedy was emotionally aroused by the plight of the tragic hero, a person who stood symbolically for them; the audience was "purged" of its emotional state by the intellectual understanding which was manifested from its emotional state. That is, the pity felt for the hero and the terror felt for themselves gave way to a wave of hope and optimism when the audience discovered the moral or philosophical law which would enable them to live better lives, thus avoiding the errors of the hero. This discovery was the tragic victory. Out of the tragic demise or ruin of the hero came understanding and optimism. The audience was emotionally then intellectually stimulated; it recognized the important law of life which was being presented; it became filled with hope. The audience saw that it could live a better, more meaningful life because it now had a new standard by which to guide itself. The audience's willingness to follow the prescribed moral and philosophical laws is indicative of the structure and beliefs of its society. In fact, Miller makes a strong correlation between the success of Greek tragedy

¹² Aristotle, Poetics, in Criticism, Mark Schorer, Josephine Miles, and Gordon McKenzie, editors (revised edition; New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958), p. 206.

and the type of society in which the Greeks lived.¹³ He makes the point that all individuals in Greek society took an active part in all phases of social life. He states that "they could not imagine the good life excepting that it brought each person into close contact with civic matters."¹⁴ Miller says that in Greek society any event or action affected the whole community, the societal unity of the people. The Greeks believed that a man could not prosper unless his community, his polis, prospered and that the polis could not prosper unless the people prospered. There was a very tight interrelationship: "the individual was at one with his society."¹⁵ Therefore, the Greeks looked upon drama as something which pertained to all men in the society, for nothing in Greek society was as meaningless as individuality for individuality's sake.

One can see, then, the cogency of Miller's statement that "a drama rises in stature and intensity in proportion to the weight of its application to all men" as it applies to Greek drama. Each tragic hero in Greek drama was a symbolic representation of the people, and the ultimate law

¹³ Upon examination, Miller's evaluation of Greek society of the Periclean period appears to be very well investigated. The author feels that numerous quotations supporting Miller's statements would be repetitious in the light of his scholarly approach to the subject matter.

¹⁴ Miller, "On Social Plays," op. cit., p. 2.

¹⁵ Ibid.

which was elucidated through the tragic hero had true meaning for all the people. Greek dramas were applicable to all the Greek people, to society as a whole; they did not concern themselves with situations relevant only to a limited group of people. Equally important, they stressed only matters of great consequence and substance. The theological, philosophical, and moral concepts expressed in them added overwhelmingly to their stature, making them profound allocutions of great meaning and importance to their audiences. The intensity with which the tragic hero engaged himself against the problem which he faced produced the great emotional impact of the drama. The tragic hero's intensity was matched by the emotional and intellectual intensity of the audience as the audience recognized its relationship to the tragic hero. One could say that the end result of Greek tragedy was to provide intellectual awareness and understanding through emotional experience. Arthur Miller considers his dramatic purpose to be basically the same as that of the Greek dramatists: to examine a certain situation in such a manner -- that is, by utilizing the dramatic form or style that will best present this situation -- that a universal moral or philosophical law is presented which will enable society to live a better, more meaningful life. Miller is not saying that he will provide a new "law" for the people; his position is that "I will show you what you

really know but have not had the time, or the disinterestedness, or the insight, or the information to understand consciously."¹⁶ Miller believes that each of his plays "was begun in the belief that it was unveiling a truth already known but unrecognized as such."¹⁷ Miller is trying to bring to his audience through an emotional experience an intellectual awareness about some important moral or philosophical problem. Miller's contention is that modern drama, in order to be socially meaningful, must utilize contemporary theological, philosophical, and moral concepts in the manner in which the Greeks utilized theirs. One must remember, though, that Miller is interested in the way in which the Greeks thought of drama, not in their theological, philosophical, or moral concepts, nor in the manner in which their plays were produced. That modern drama has failed in this respect is one of Miller's assertions.

Miller feels that enlightenment and optimism, the rewards of social drama, have been denied because modern plays have failed to show the people "the right way to live together /Miller's italics/."¹⁸ Miller believes that this failure has been due to modern society's being "so atomized

¹⁶ Arthur Miller, "Introduction," Arthur Miller's Collected Plays (New York: The Viking Press, 1959), p. 11.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Miller, "On Social Plays," op. cit., p. 5.

socially that no character in a play can conceivably stand as our vanguard, as our heroic questioner."¹⁹ Miller feels that modern society has been lacking in unity, the organizational quality that Greek society had. Miller states that modern society has been operating on the principle that a man has value because "he fits into the pattern of efficiency," not because he is a human being.²⁰ Miller contends that society has not been looking for excellence in its members, as the Greeks did; instead, society has been malevolently exhorting its members to do only their own work, to stay happy in their small, ego-centric worlds, and to keep out of trouble by not asking any questions.²⁰ Society, Miller contends, has become a collection of specialists, common integers who function mechanically and without concern for one another. The result is that man has finally come to serve the machines he has built: the mechanical, political, and philosophical machines that grind out pernicious concepts. The situation has become so warped that "the machine must not be stopped, marred, left dirty, or outmoded. Only man can be left marred, stopped, dirty, and left alone."²¹ This situation had not escaped the notice of the dramatists of the 1920's, 1930's and early 1940's, Miller states, but unfortunately they approached the problem in the wrong way. Their dramas did not produce tragic

¹⁹Ibid., p. 8.

²⁰Ibid., p. 10.

²¹Ibid.

figures who could stand symbolically for mankind as did the Greek dramas because their dramas had no one who could question the scheme of things in order to find the right way to live. They looked at man's frustrations and examined them from the point of view of the individual involved; they did not attempt to question the source of man's problems; they did not attempt to see whether there was a universal law involved, and if there was, to bring it to the attention of the people so that they could be enlightened.²² Miller's accusations bring to light a problem that has long been a Gordian knot for dramatists: Does the dramatist have any right to or does he necessarily have to solve the problem he brings to the stage? Does the dramatist's concern end with the presentation of the problem? As for Miller, there can be no question as to the correct, and only, answer. He has stated in his essay "Shadows of the Gods" that

...where a drama will not engage its relevancy for the race, it will halt at pathos, that tempting shield against ultimate dramatic effect, that counterfeited of meaning.²³

As seen, for Miller relevancy means offering a solution, an answer, in the form of presenting a universal moral law.

Miller has good reasons for maintaining this idea.

²² Ibid., p. 5.

²³ Arthur Miller, "Shadows of the Gods," Harper's Magazine, CCXVII (August, 1958), 43.

He feels that the dramatist of today, the post World War II dramatist, as never before in this century, has an opportunity to follow the role of the Greek dramatist. Miller believes that society is changing for the better, that it is uniting. He states that the people are tired of the useless and frustrated lives they have been living and that "ultimate questions are becoming moot again."²⁴ The people are searching for values by which they can guide their lives; they are asserting their right to be a free, recognized part of life. Miller feels that there is a moral renaissance occurring, and out of this moral renaissance will come a new social drama: one that will be Greek in spirit. Miller states that it will be Greek in that it will deal with men not as individuals but as "parts of a whole, a whole that is social, a whole that is Man."²⁵ Miller believes that the new social drama will look deeply into the nature of Man and society as they exist today in order to discover what their needs are. The new social drama will express those needs; it will set forth new ultimate laws by which those needs can be satisfied. Miller feels that the problems that were raised by the Greeks will be raised again. Man will want to know how to live a better life; he will ask questions about Good and Evil, Right and Wrong. Miller believes that it is the task of the

²⁴ Miller, "On Social Plays," op. cit., p. 14.

²⁵ Ibid., P. 15.

new social dramatist to bring to the stage problems that have relevancy for all of society, to amplify those problems in order to test their veracity, and to provide an answer to the questions raised by those problems in the form of a moral or philosophical principle by which the people can guide their lives. The principle, the ultimate law, will be revealed through the tragic victory; that is, the fear and terror produced by the tragic hero's destruction will effect an emotional impact that will culminate in enlightenment, hope, and optimism. The tragic hero, then, is the means by which the universal law is manifested, and Miller believes that this manifestation can best be accomplished by utilizing a tragic hero who has the most relevancy for modern audiences: the common man.

Miller dismisses the idea that only those of high rank are capable of achieving or experiencing tragedy as being archaic and impractical in the light of modern life. He presents his point of view in his essay "Tragedy and the Common Man," saying that

...if the exaltation of tragic action were truly a property of the high-bred character alone, it is inconceivable that the mass of mankind should cherish tragedy above all other forms, let alone be capable of understanding it.²⁶

Miller goes on to say that whenever "the question of tragedy

²⁶ Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," op. cit., 48.

in art is not at issue, we never hesitate to attribute to the well-placed and the exalted the very same mental process as the lowly."²⁷ Miller's argument is logical, for if rank were a correlative of tragedy, then only a select few would be capable of appreciating it, let alone participating in it. The popularity of Greek and Shakespearean tragedy through the centuries with the common people substantiates Miller's argument. The problem, as Miller sees it, is that "there is a legitimate question of stature here, but none of rank, which is often confused with it."²⁸ In this sense, the great heroes of tragic drama --such as Hamlet, Lear, Macbeth, Oedipus, Orestes, and Creon-- are tragic heroes because of the great stature they achieve, not because of their rank or position. It is Miller's contention that any man, regardless of social rank or position, may be called upon to make a decision, to ask a question, to perform an act which would have great meaning and importance for his fellow men. Miller believes that any person who is involved in the great moral issues facing humanity and who is engaged in battle with these issues in order to test their relevancy and efficacy is in a position to achieve tragic stature, and he maintains that "the commonest of men may take on that stature to the extent

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Miller, Collected Plays, op. cit., p. 32.

of his willingness to throw all he has into the contest."²⁹

Miller feels that a man's tragic stature is measured by the type of commitment he makes with life, whether he challenges and faces life or whether he walks away from it; and the intensity with which he faces the meretricious ways of life is indicative of his stature. Hence, the quality that indicates whether or not a man is capable of being a tragic hero is stature. The intensity with which a man acts, according to Miller, is the only true means by which to judge his right to be a tragic hero.³⁰ Thus, the intensity with which a man faces a situation is the prime factor in Miller's concept of tragedy, for it demands that certain definite actions be performed by the tragic hero; actions which are not the property of nor reserved for any special class or select group but which are inherent in every human being. Miller is not saying that every man is a tragic hero; he is saying that any man could be a tragic hero if he reacts to a situation of great importance in such a manner that he passes out of the realm of the ordinary and acquires stature and nobleness through his heroic effort to find truth. Miller believes that any man who keeps his "miseries" and "indignities" to himself, who refuses to stand up and question the scheme of

²⁹ Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," op. cit., 50.

³⁰ Ibid., 48.

things, can never attain tragic stature, regardless of his rank or position. If a man does not care enough to be concerned as to what happens to him, if he lets society lead him unprotestingly in whatever direction it is going, and if he makes no attempt to assert his inherent rights, he is pathetic; for tragedy can stem only from action. Miller feels that society alone cannot be blamed for a man's destruction, for such would indicate that the man was so completely unaware of or indifferent to what was happening to him that his value as a sensitive human being is nil.³¹ Miller's point is that whenever a situation exists in which society is totally and wholly responsible for a man's destruction, then one can conclude that the man refused to act, refused to question, and refused to demand his rights; hence, that man was pathetic. Miller believes that the tragic feeling is produced and a man achieves tragic stature when the man is willing to question the sacrosanct, when he is willing to tear to pieces the accepted status quo in order to discover its faults and point out the truth, and when he is willing to sacrifice his life in order to secure personal dignity for himself.³² Miller contends that as long as a man commits himself to the fullest of his abilities, as long as he commits himself with almost

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., 48, 50, passim.

fanatical insistence, he can achieve tragic stature.³³ In achieving tragic stature, the hero will reveal, Miller feels, the true reason compelling him to act; that is, his "tragic flaw," which Miller contends is "a failing which is not peculiar to grand or elevated characters."³⁴ Miller also believes that a man's "tragic flaw" need be nothing more than "his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of rightful status."³⁵ The amount of awareness on the hero's part as he searches for the truth is an important and crucial part of Miller's theory of tragedy.

Miller believes that the manner in which the hero attacks the problem is not contingent upon the hero's being completely aware of that problem's true nature. In fact, Miller feels that there is a severe limitation as to the amount of awareness that any character can have and that "this very limit serves to complete the tragedy and, indeed, to make it at all possible."³⁶ Miller is saying that if the hero were too aware of the exact nature of the problem, he could go directly to the cause of it, take the necessary

³³ Miller, Collected Plays, op. cit., p. 33.

³⁴ Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," op. cit., 48.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Miller, Collected Plays, op. cit., p. 35.

steps to alleviate it, and prove that the problem was not of great universal significance. There would be nothing to indicate tragedy in such a situation. Conversely, there would be nothing tragic about the hero who was completely unaware. Although this man would be miserable, oppressed, and frustrated, he would also be too unconscious, too passive; he would say, "life is tough, but what can one do about it?" The true tragic hero, Miller believes, is aware up to a point: he knows something is wrong, but what that something is he does not know. Therefore, he searches for the reason, for the truth. He pries; he questions; he acts. He attempts to discover and conquer the evil which is operating against him. And the intensity with which he pursues his quest determines his stature, and he achieves the apex of heroic stature when the intensity of his struggle carries him to his destruction: a destruction which is self-inflicted. Thus, the problem of awareness is inexorably bound to the hero's destruction. Ironically, the hero does not necessarily have to know the true nature of the problem; all that Miller feels is necessary is that there be "sufficient awareness in the hero's career to make the audience supply the rest."³⁷ This idea, though, requires two ideal conditions, both of which, fortunately, Miller believes exist. First, the playwright must construct

³⁷ Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," loc. cit.

his drama in such a manner that the problem is evident to the audience, not hidden nor concealed to the very end. Second, the audience must participate in the events by recognizing the hero as the symbol for society and his problem as theirs; that is, the audience must believe in the drama as a profound expression of a social need. If the audience is aware of the problem, the evil which causes the hero's problem and destruction, then his death will have meaning for them; it will produce the desired effect: the tragic victory. From the emotional impact of the hero's destruction will come, first, pity and terror and, second, enlightenment, hope, and optimism. The tragic victory, then, is the point at which the two basic ideas behind Miller's concept of tragedy synthesize into one well-balanced whole.

To recapitulate briefly, it has been shown that Miller believes that tragedy can flourish in today's society. Because society is interested in the great problems of life, it has shaken off its lethargy and self-indulgence and has become concerned with the relationship between man and men, men and mankind. Miller feels that because society is interested in Man as a whole, it naturally follows that it is interested in finding ways by which to improve Man's conditions in society. Miller believes that true social dramas help society in its quest because they present problems which are concerned with Man as a whole and which endeavor to give

insight into solving the problems. Miller believes that it is the duty of every playwright, when writing social dramas, to present dramas which are concerned with these problems, a duty Miller strives to fulfill in his social dramas. When Miller uses the common man as his tragic hero, he feels that he is selecting the symbol which has the greatest relevancy and meaning for the society for which he is writing. Therefore, when Miller's common man-tragic hero is engaged in battle with an issue of great importance, he is engaged in that battle in the name of society; he is pursuing a quest which has relevancy for all men. Thus, the idea that "a drama rises in stature and intensity in proportion to the weight of its application to all men" is the heart of Miller's concept of tragedy in that it coalesces the common man and the social drama into one efficacious whole. The common man increases in heroic size and stature by the amount of passion and intensity he exerts struggling against a condition which is recognized by society as being relevant to its way of life. Miller states that the tragic hero's destruction in his attempt to find meaning and truth "posits a wrong or an evil in his environment."³⁸ Hence, the hero was destroyed by an evil that is present and active in societal life. With the hero's death, from the emotional impact of seeing a man destroy himself,

³⁸ Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," loc. cit.

from the terror engendered by the knowledge that the tragic hero was the figurehead, the symbol for mankind, the audience, society, takes heart; for it realizes that the tragic hero's death was not a defeat but an "assertion of bravery."³⁹ The tragic hero's death produces a victory, and this victory imports enlightenment, hope, and optimism. Society sees the great evil which is rampant in its midst, but it also sees what steps must be taken in order to rectify its errors so that it can improve life for all mankind. The tragic hero's death brings enlightenment as to what moral laws have been transgressed; society takes hope, is optimistic, because it now knows what steps must be taken in order that it can live a fuller, more meaningful life. Miller firmly believes that "tragedy implies more optimism in its author than does comedy, and that its final result ought to be the reinforcement of the onlooker's brightest opinions of the human animal."⁴⁰ Miller's contention is that an author who fails to produce a meaningful tragic victory, one that implies hope and optimism, has failed to construct a drama that is relevant and meaningful to society as a whole, and has failed to develop a tragic hero; instead, the author has produced a drama which is germane to the frustrations and inabilities of one man: a drama

³⁹ Miller, Collected Plays, op. cit., p. 33.

⁴⁰ Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," op. cit., 50.

which has no significance for society as a whole. Miller believes that without optimism there can be no hope for the future, there cannot be the belief that Man is inherently good; for without this belief, chaos rules. Miller makes the point that the very fact that society has treasured and perpetuated tragic drama indicates that it believes in the perfectibility of man, for the purpose of tragic drama from the time of the Greeks to the present day has been to provide society with moral and philosophical laws by which it can live.⁴¹ Miller strongly contends that modern dramatists have an obligation to society to further the perfectibility of Man by presenting social dramas which are relevant to society as a whole, and that the only way this task can be carried on today is by examining "the heart and spirit of the average man."⁴²

Thus, when Miller says that "tragedy is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly," he is presupposing that society is interested in man as a whole and that each individual man is interested enough in himself to be concerned as to his relationship to the scheme of life. One must keep in mind that Miller is saying "a man's total compulsion"; there can be no half-hearted assault upon the

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

bastion of falseness by the hero: he must make the ultimate assertion, which, ironically, necessitates his destruction. The hero's destruction produces the tragic victory, which, then, is the "consequence" of the hero's complete and desperate zealousness, his intensive struggle to ascertain truth in a situation meaningful and relevant to society.

Thus, Miller's concept of tragedy becomes a cohesive unit: the idea of tragic drama being based on the Greek idea of social drama; the idea of the tragic hero being based on the actions of the man and his relevancy to the society he symbolically represents. In itself, Miller's concept is sound, for it propounds certain ideals and standards which are logical, objective, consistent, and competent. As a theory, Miller's concept of tragedy has merit and deserves respect; but as with any theory of drama, it will always remain an abstract idea until it is tested on the stage and proven to be dramatically sound. If Miller's concept of tragedy is an expression of his beliefs, then the ideas expressed in his plays should be the artistic presentation of these beliefs. The task, then, is to examine his plays in order to see if they meet the demands he makes of them. If they do, then one must agree with him that his plays deserve the right to be called tragedies. One point, though, must be considered first: the dramatic form Miller utilizes in presenting his plays.

Miller has stated that he has "no vested interest in

any one form."⁴³ He explains his reasoning thus:

However important considerations of style and form have been to me, they are only means, tools to pry up the well-worn, "inevitable" surfaces of experience behind which swarm the living thoughts and feelings whose expression is the essential purpose of art.⁴⁴

Form for Miller, then, is only a means by which to express the raison d'etre of the play. Miller looks upon dramatic form as a device by which his theme, his ideas, his philosophy will be presented to the audience in the most meaningful and relevant manner. In selecting the dramatic form for each play, Miller is guided by three thoughts.

First, in an obviously subtle remark, Miller states that "a play, I think, ought to make sense to common-sense people."⁴⁵ Secondly, he feels that a play "must communicate as it proceeds, and it literally has no existence if it must wait until the audience goes home to think about it before it can be appreciated."⁴⁶ Thirdly, he believes that there must be an "organic necessity" to a play's parts.⁴⁷ Therefore, Miller selects a form which is meaningful to his audience because it communicates intelligently with them as it progresses, and

⁴³Miller, Collected Plays, op. cit., p. 21.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 52.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 52.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 8.

this communication is possible because each part of the total form --the speech, imagery, individual characterization, action, symbolism-- is compatible with the other parts; and together these parts make a balanced and integrated whole. Miller believes that the "ultimate justification" for any new form is the "heightened consciousness it creates and makes possible."⁴⁸ Miller feels that by whatever means a play accomplishes its purpose, that means is artistically valid as long as the means in itself is not self-contradictory; that is, as long as the means is a precise, well-grounded unit.

Therefore, if Miller is true to his purpose, the following points should be found in his plays: (1) The plays have relevancy for society as a whole because their themes manifest ultimate moral or philosophical laws which assist society in living a better, more meaningful life. (2) The tragic victory, the means by which the laws are presented, is brought about (3) by the tragic hero, a symbolic representation of society who gains heroic stature through the intensity with which he acts against the evil ways of life in his search for true values by which he can live. (4) The form by which the play is presented is one which best presents the ideas and action to the audience in a meaningful and intelligent manner. On these points, Miller's plays will be examined.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 53.

CHAPTER III

THE MAN WHO HAD ALL THE LUCK

Arthur Miller's first professionally produced play, The Man Who Had All the Luck, is by no definition a tragedy, nor is it a very good play. It is an interesting play because of its seminal qualities. Several of Miller's basic ideas were originally sowed in this play, though they remained uncultivated until his later plays. Also, two additional ideas are presented: the role of the family in relationship to society and the exaltation of man's natural, creative ability. These ideas are present and play an important part in his later plays.

The theme of The Man Who Had All the Luck is Greek in design, being, as George Jean Nathan correctly states it, "one relating to whether man's fate is preordained or whether it rests in his own hands."¹ The play investigates the lives of two men, one an automobile mechanic and the other a would-be baseball player, in order to ascertain Fate's role in shaping their lives. The play eventually substantiates its theme, but the circumlocutory route embarked upon by Miller tends to confuse rather than clarify the issues. At times,

¹George Jean Nathan, Theatre Yearbook, 1944-1945, A Record and Interpretation (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), p. 171.

one is never certain whether it is hard work or luck that brings success. Fortunately, there is really only one conclusion to which the play can come: hard work brings success. If Miller felt that success was granted in a capricious manner, then it would follow that he thinks it foolish to be engaged in gainful employment, for why should one work industriously if no moral or remunerative gain could be derived? Miller's main flaw is that the two men he compares defy logical comparison, a fact he later recognized.² In the original drafts of the play, David, the automobile mechanic, and Amos, the baseball player, were friends; in the final revision, they are brothers. But whatever their relationship, the problem still exists; for David is allowed to test Fate, whereas Amos is forced to submit himself to his father's will, never actually having the opportunity to test Fate or to prove himself. Because Pat, the father, gives all his attention to Amos in his attempt to make him an outstanding baseball player, David is left to provide for himself. Thus, David is in a position to seize upon every opportunity and turn it to his advantage. Amos, however, allows Pat to run his life to the point where he is unable to assert his desires against his father's demands; consequently, he meekly submits to his father's wishes. There is no question

² Arthur Miller, "Introduction," Arthur Miller's Collected Plays (New York: The Viking Press, 1959), p. 15.

of hard work in Amos' case, only one of opportunity, which can be another word for Fate. The idea that hard work brings a man success and prosperity is stated early in the first act when David's friend Shory gives David some advice:

A life isn't like a house that you can lay out on blue paper and say, a brick here on Tuesday and a pipe here on Wednesday. Life is another word for what happens to you. Now you're living; take it, this is your life.³

David reacts enthusiastically to Shory's advice. Throughout the play he operates on the principle that a person cannot wait for something to happen; he must go out and make things happen. Pat, though, makes long range plans for Amos; he builds a little bit at a time. The end result is that opportunity passes them by. In order to have David succeed, Miller resorts to dramaturgic monkey-business: he provides some fortuitous occurrences. For example, when David is unable to repair an expensive automobile, a chance visit by an immigrant German mechanic saves the day. David hires the German, enlarges his shop, and builds a thriving business. When David wants to marry the daughter of a wealthy farmer, the farmer conveniently gets killed in an automobile accident on the very afternoon that he told David that he would never allow him to marry his daughter. Naturally, David marries

³Arthur Miller, The Man Who Had All the Luck, in Cross-Section: A Collection of New American Writing, Edwin Seaver, editor (New York: L.B. Fischer, 1944), p. 489.

Hestor and eventually doubles the farmer's money. No doubt Miller thought of these events as means of comparing the way Fate treated David in contrast to the way it treated Amos. But these happenings are poor examples for two reasons: First, they are too contrived; they lack believability. Second, the idea that Amos would react in the same way as David is false. Miller has delineated Amos as a person who has little initiative, as a person who allows himself to be controlled by others. Amos is not capable of seizing an opportunity and turning it to his own advantage; therefore, the parallel between David and Amos is invalid.

David's success, though, does not bring him complete happiness, or at least Miller does not allow it to. David must undergo a moment of mental anguish before he accepts the idea that his success was due to his ability. As David becomes richer, he also becomes more obsessed with the idea that he is heading toward a great catastrophe. David feels that his luck is going to change, that his success will turn to defeat. In order to meet this challenge, David begins to act recklessly: he invests in poor business ventures, he ignores his established business, and he alienates those of whom he is the fondest. David suffers greatly and needlessly in his attempt to find truth. But at last, he comes to realize that it was he who was responsible for his success. Thus, Miller is able to offer to the audience a universal

concept: hard work brings success as long as one is present at the time when opportunity comes and is able to recognize it and seize it. Of course, the concept can also be stated as "when Fate steps in, take advantage of it." The ambiguity of the play's action and the inconclusiveness of its theme destroy its value. Nevertheless the theme is eventually substantiated because the adjunctive ideas presented by Miller support the notion that a man acquires success only by working diligently and by contributing to his community.

Miller ties success to the family's role in the societal organization. David is successful, but his success enriches not only his own family but others in the community. Amos is not successful, and the blame falls upon his father, Pat. Pat is not concerned about others in the community; his world is his family. He works toward one goal: fame and wealth for his son and prestige for himself. Miller is presenting the Greek idea of the interrelationship between a man and his polis. Whenever David needed help, the members of the community offered assistance at once. Pat never accepted help; in fact, he shunned it, telling the others that he could do what was necessary without them. David and his friends live in a manner that would benefit all. Pat strives for a life that would produce material gains for his family only. Hence, it is really dramaturgical logic, not Fate, which defeats Pat and Amos. David and his

friends live according to the rules of their mid-western polis. If Pat and Amos were to gain success, it would mean that David's way of life, the Greek way, was meaningless, an admission contrary to Miller's beliefs.

Miller's exaltation of man's use of his natural, creative abilities as a way to a good, meaningful life is also tied to his idea of man's achieving success only through participating in community life. David and his friends do physical labor; they work creatively with their hands producing benefits for all. The money David earns from his repair shops is used to establish grain and supply stores. The money from these ventures is used in establishing other community services. Even though David makes money, he operates within the communal code of ethics: nothing he does is designed or undertaken strictly for the purpose of showing a financial profit or exploiting his neighbors. Pat, however, uses Amos as an instrument by which to achieve purely materialistic and therefore false goals. He operates in a manner which in no way enhances the ultimate good of the community.

The major fault with The Man Who Had All the Luck is that Miller was trying to do too many things at once, to present too many ideas. Miller failed because the play lacked the proper internal organization and because there was not a proper foundation for cause and effect. The play tried to

deal with ideas without presenting facts; hence, the ideas became loose and intangible and somewhat ambiguous. Even if the play is a failure, one must credit it with being the father of Miller's later plays, for the moral and philosophical thoughts cultivated in it grew and blossomed into meaningful presentations.

CHAPTER IV

ALL MY SONS

All My Sons, Arthur Miller's second professionally produced play, was unveiled to the public on January 29, 1947. Whereas The Man Who Had All the Luck closed after four performances, All My Sons was a great success, winning the New York Drama Critic's Award for being the best American play of the 1947 season. Unlike his first play, All My Sons is a well-constructed social drama. The play is basically Greek in concept, having for its central thematic idea a moral problem concerning the conflict between self-interest and social responsibility. Miller has stated that his prime objective with All My Sons was to construct a play which would not only be

a play seriously meant for people of common sense, and relevant to both their domestic lives and their daily work, but an experience which widens their awareness of connection

with life past, present, and future.¹ The play was to be constructed in such a manner that it would "bring a man into the direct path of the consequences he has wrought"² by an anti-social action on his part in order that he might see the

¹Arthur Miller, "Introduction," Arthur Miller's Collected Plays (New York: The Viking Press, 1959), pp. 16-17.

²Ibid., p. 17.

great evil of his deed. In constructing the play, Miller stressed heavily the idea of cause and effect, actions and consequences. The idea which Miller is trying to present is that "consequences of actions are as real as the actions themselves."³ Miller is trying to show that one's actions are invariably related to society as a whole, that the consequences of one's private and personal actions can produce effects detrimental to complete strangers. It is evident that in constructing his play Miller was instilling in it the essential characteristics necessary for social drama: (1) the play was to be relevant to society as a whole, (2) the theme was to be an ultimate moral law by which society could improve life, (3) the protagonist's struggle for truth was to be the means by which the (4) tragic victory would be brought about.

Therefore, it would seem that All My Sons would have no difficulty in achieving the designation of "tragic drama." Unfortunately, such is not the case; many critics have objected to Joe Keller's being called a tragic hero. Some critics, such as Harold Clurman, feel that the mother, Kate, is the central figure and deserves recognition as a tragic character. Oddly enough, there is much truth in both views. But Joe Keller is not the tragic hero in the play; and Kate Keller, although deserving of some notice, fails to achieve tragic stature, either. If either of these persons was to be the tragic hero, the play would lose its internal consistency;

³Ibid.

there would be a vast discrepancy between the play's theme and its organic structure. But Miller would not painstakingly construct a drama that would contain an obvious error in its basic structure, for he is too fine a craftsman to be guilty of such illogical behavior. Therefore, Miller must look upon another character as the tragic hero, and the only other character capable of bearing that title is Chris Keller. The idea of Chris Keller as the tragic hero is substantiated when one examines the content and structure of the play as an indivisible whole and as an expression of Miller's concept of tragedy.

All My Sons is the story of a middle-class manufacturer who was accused of selling faulty airplane parts to the government during World War II. At the trial, the manufacturer, Joe Keller, was exonerated; but his partner, Steve Deever, was found guilty and sentenced to prison. Keller's acquittal hinged on the fact that he was home sick on the day that the parts were shipped. His partner stated, though, that Joe gave his approval and instructions to ship the parts. Joe denied this allegation. These events took place before the time of the play and are brought out through the dialogue. The first act of the play begins very slowly, an effect for which Miller purposely strived. Miller explains his reasoning thus:

The first act was made so that even
boredom might threaten, so that when

the first intimation of the crime is dropped a genuine horror might begin to move into the heart of the audience, a horror born of the contrast between the placidity of the civilization on view and the threat to it that a rage of conscience could create.⁴

By drawing out the first act, Miller can slowly weave two problems together. The first concerns Larry's death. Larry, the younger son, was reported missing just after Joe went on trial. The problem is that Chris, the idealistic war hero, who works with Joe in the plant, wants to marry Ann Deever, Larry's old fiance. The mother is very much against the idea; she will not admit that Larry is dead. If Chris and Ann marry, they are proclaiming Larry dead. As Miller is carefully exposing the finer points of this problem, he is subtly introducing the idea that Joe is not so innocent as he appears to be. The matter is brought to a head in the climax of the second act with what Miller calls "the revelation of the full loathsomeness of an anti-social action:"⁵ The discovery of the facts that Joe was responsible for the shipping of the defective parts to the army, that Joe was responsible for the deaths of twenty-one fliers, and that Joe was responsible for the death of his son Larry. From this point the play moves very quickly to its end. The high-principled Chris forces a complete confession from his father,

⁴Ibid., p. 18.

⁵Ibid., p. 17.

who, despondent over the turn of events, commits suicide. As can be seen, the issue of Larry's death is inexorably bound to the question of Joe's guilt; one hinges upon the other. The subtle blending of the two ideas shows the care with which Miller fashioned the drama. As the play progresses in the present, it also investigates and explains the past. In this way no actions or thoughts are introduced unless there is a direct antecedent for them. There is always a direct cause and effect relationship. Not only is this relationship used as the means by which to discover and show guilt but also as the means by which the tragic hero can be recognized and differentiated from the pathetic characters. The tragic hero's actions lead towards the discovery of truth; the actions of Joe and Kate lead towards the suppression of the truth. Chris Keller searches for the causes of certain effects; Joe and Kate attempt to hide the causes.

If the theme of All My Sons is that each person in society is responsible to society as a whole, that no person should act in a manner that would benefit him alone, then Joe Keller is guilty of anti-social behavior. He is guilty of seeking material things that would benefit him alone; he is guilty of acting in a manner detrimental to his fellow men. In defending his actions - Joe can offer no logical reason as to why he shipped the faulty cylinder heads from the plant - Joe tells Chris that he did it for him: "For

you, a business for you."⁶ Joe attempts to blame everyone but himself for his actions. He attempts to blame his family:

KELLER: I don't know what you mean! You wanted money, so I made money. Why must I be forgiven? You wanted money, didn't you?

MOTHER: I didn't want it that way.

KELLER: I didn't want it that way, either! What difference is it what you want? I spoiled the both of you. I should've put him out when he was ten like I was put out, and make him earn his keep. Then he'd know how a buck is made in the world. Forgiven! I could live on a quarter a day myself, but I got a family so I --

MOTHER: Joe, Joe . . . it don't excuse it that you did it for the family.

KELLER: It's got to excuse it!

MOTHER: There's something bigger than the family to him.

KELLER: Nothin' is bigger!⁷

Joe next attempts to justify his actions by blaming society:

KELLER: Who worked for nothin' in the war? When they work for nothin', I'll work for nothin'. Did they ship a gun or a truck outa Detroit before they got their price? Is that clean? It's dollars and cents, nickels and dimes; war and peace, its nickels and dimes, what's clean? Half the Goddam country is gotta go if I go.⁸

⁶ Arthur Miller, All My Sons, in Arthur Miller's Collected Plays, op. cit., p. 115.

⁷ Ibid., p. 120.

⁸ Ibid., p. 125.

Each of Joe's attempts to place the blame elsewhere is refuted by Chris. He refuses to accept Joe's statements that he did it for the family or that his deeds are excusable on the grounds that others were doing it, too. Chris's philosophy is presented in his condemnation of Joe's excuses:

CHRIS: For me! Where do you live, where have you come from? For me! -- I was dying every day and you were killing my boys and you did it for me? What the hell do you think I was thinking of, the Goddam business? Is that as far as your mind can see is the business? What is that, the world--the business? What the hell do you mean, you did it for me? Don't you have a country? Don't you live in the world? What the hell are you? You're not even an animal, no animal kills his own, what are you?⁹

For Chris, the important things are one's country, one's place in the world. Kate realizes Chris's position; she tries to tell Joe that Chris believes in something bigger than the family, but Joe cannot admit that there is something bigger than family unity; for if there is, then he has no excuse for what he had done. By comparing the way Joe acted with the way his soldiers acted, Chris is able to show the good that comes when men work together for one another. Chris says that his men didn't die: "they killed themselves for each other."¹⁰ Their unselfish acts show that they felt

⁹Ibid., p. 116.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 85.

a moral responsibility that was greater than and more important than individual gratification: each man felt that he was responsible for and to all the other men. Chris compares the love and concern shared by his men to the animosity and distrust found in Joe's society of individualists:

CHRIS: This is the land of the great big dogs, you don't love a man here, you eat him!¹¹

Joe's plea that Larry would have understood what he had done when he allowed the defective parts to be shipped is proven false by Larry himself. Joe says that Larry would not have carried on as Chris does:

KELLER: He understood the way the world is made. He listened to me. To him the world had a forty-foot front, it ended at the building line.¹²

But Larry's letter shows that he blamed his father:

CHRIS, reading: How could he have done that? Every day three or four men never came back and he sits there doing business.¹³

Chris is trying to make Joe understand that one cannot excuse one's actions by attempting to place the blame elsewhere; each man must shoulder the responsibility for his acts. He is trying to make him understand that he has a

¹¹Ibid., p. 124.

¹²Ibid., p. 121.

¹³Ibid., p. 126.

responsibility that stretches past his front door, a fact that Larry recognized: "I'm going out on a mission in a few minutes. They'll probably report me missing."¹⁴ Larry committed suicide because he could not live with the knowledge that his father would allow men to die in order to make money. Larry knew that the world did not begin and end at one's property line. Chris emphasizes this idea, and he puts the blame for Larry's death and the deaths of twenty-one pilots directly upon Joe:

CHRIS: Once and for all you can know
there's a universe of people outside
and you're responsible to it, and
unless you know that, you threw away
your son because that's why he died.¹⁵

By presenting the direct and definite relationship between a man's actions and the effects of those actions, All My Sons makes the point that in order for society to live a better, more meaningful life each man must act and work for the good of society as a whole, not selfishly for his own personal gain. Each man must act with the same conscientiousness and consanguinity as did the men of the Greek polis, where "the individual was at one with his society."¹⁶ The play substantiates Miller's premise that

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 126-27.

¹⁶Arthur Miller, "On Social Plays," introduction to A View From the Bridge (New York: The Viking Press, 1955), p. 2. Cf ante, Chapter II, p. 17.

anti-social actions can lead only to the moral destruction of society. If men were to act as Keller acted, society would lose its sense of values; it would revert to the rootlessness and predaceousness of a jungle existence.

Although Keller's actions are sufficient to make him serve as a means by which the theme can be presented, they are not sufficient to make him a tragic hero. Miller thinks of the tragic hero as a person who achieves heroic stature through the intensity and passion with which he faces and questions life. Keller does not face nor question life with any great passion or intensity. In fact, Keller ignores life as much as possible; he is not willing to participate in the activities and functions of society except as they will benefit him directly. Miller says that Keller's difficulty

is not that he cannot tell right from wrong but that his cast of mind cannot admit that he, personally, has any viable connection with his world, his universe, or his society.¹⁷

There is no question that Keller cannot imagine himself as part of society, but there is a doubt about his being able to tell right from wrong. In a sense, Miller is correct when he says Keller can tell right from wrong; the difficulty is that Keller has confused right and wrong. He cannot admit

¹⁷Miller, Collected Plays, op. cit., p. 19.

that he was wrong without admitting guilt: but to admit guilt would be to admit personal responsibility, and Keller refuses to admit that he is personally responsible; therefore, to his way of thinking, his actions are justifiable. But the immorality of his actions throughout the play shows conclusively that Miller did not intend that Keller be too aware of his problem. This lack of awareness on Keller's part serves to heighten the impact of the theme; it also denies to him one of Miller's requirements for the tragic hero: a knowledge that his position in society is being endangered by an evil force. This knowledge cannot be known to Keller, for he himself is the evil force. Throughout the play Keller has lied and cheated. He has faked illness in order to avoid taking responsibility for the decision as whether to ship the cylinder heads or not. From his "sickbed" he told Steve Deever to ship them. At the trial he denied talking to Steve. He allowed his partner to take full blame and go to prison. Does a man with any comprehension of what is morally right or wrong act in such a manner? Keller says later that when Steve gets out of prison he can always have a job at the plant, but not as a partner. Keller justifies his benevolence by saying that a man should not be crucified for one mistake. By saying that he will take Steve back, Keller is giving credence to his lie, for the innocent Keller is forgiving the guilty Deever. By this act, Keller justifies his way of

thinking and shows that he has absolutely no conception of what he has done. He has convinced himself that any measure taken to protect oneself is the accepted way of life.

Joseph Wood Krutch states in The Nation that there is an incompatibility between Miller's story and his logic. Krutch says that

the play is about personal guilt and personal atonement; and it is difficult to see how either can have any meaning if, as the author seems anxious elsewhere to proclaim, men are not what they make themselves but what the "system" makes them.¹⁸

Krutch is only half-correct in his analysis. First, he is wrong when he states that Miller is blaming the system. Miller does not blame the system in this play; in fact, it has been shown that Miller has taken special care to show that Joe Keller, and only Joe Keller, was responsible for the decision and the results of that decision. Nowhere does Miller state that men are the products of a system or that the system makes them what they are. Miller's contention is that men attempt to blame "the system," thereby excusing their inability or reluctance to face the truth. If society or "the system" were responsible for Joe Keller's acts, then society would be so pathetic that there would be no Chris or Larry Kellers, there would be no men who "killed themselves

¹⁸ Joseph Wood Krutch, "Drama," The Nation, CLXIV (February 15, 1947), 193.

for each other." If Krutch's interpretation were correct, then there would be no problem; everyone would say, "the system's to blame; what can I do about it?" Life would continue in a hopeless state. There is no incompatibility between Miller's story and his philosophy; Miller is consistently true to both. Harold Clurman concurs with this view, stating that the theme of the play is that "there can be no evasion of the burden of individual human responsibility."¹⁹ That is, each man must bear the responsibility for his actions and for the results of those actions.

Secondly, Krutch is correct when he says the play is about personal guilt, but he is wrong when he adds personal atonement, for in no manner should Joe Keller's suicide be mistaken for an act of true atonement. The idea that he expiates his sins by killing himself loses value in the light of his previous actions. With the melodramatic presentation of Larry's letter, Joe suddenly becomes aware that he is directly responsible for Larry's death; realizes that Larry thought of the dead pilots as being his sons, too. But does he realize that he has lived a life of deceit, that he has compromised his integrity in order to gain material wealth? Because Chris feels that he should go to jail - Joe agrees to go. Joe goes into the house to get his coat, but,

¹⁹ Harold Clurman, Lies Like Truth (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), p. 66.

instead, he shoots himself. What is the significance or meaning to be found in Joe's death? If Joe could atone for his crimes against humanity by killing himself, then there would be some justification for his suicide. But as a sign of expiation, his death is a futile gesture because it is incompatible with his philosophy and his previous actions. There is another view, though, which appears to interpret his suicide in the right light, one which blends with the overall unity of the play. But before this idea can be presented accurately, the characters and actions of Kate and Chris must be examined.

Miller has stated that in the earlier versions of the play the mother "was in a dominating position."²⁰ In fact, because of the mother's attachment to astrology, the early version of the play was called The Sign of the Archer.²⁰ In the final version of the play, the mother serves as the catalyst between the past and the present, between Joe and Chris. First of all, Kate knows that Joe is guilty, but she is not certain whether Larry has killed himself because of Joe; therefore, in order to protect Joe, she must maintain that Larry is still alive. Throughout the play, Kate must withstand enormous pressures: she must withstand Chris's and Joe's jibes and ridicule about her fanatical belief that Larry

²⁰Miller, Collected Plays, op. cit., p. 20.

is still alive; she must be prepared at all times to defend Joe from any questioning. Kate has the difficult task of trying to run the family as if nothing had happened: she must defend the status quo even though she knows it to be a lie. These actions call for the maximum of effort on her part: she must be subtle, vindictive, demanding, and reticent. In the first act, Kate cryptically hints to Joe that he must never stop believing that Larry will return.²¹ She demands that Ann believe, too.²² At first, the indication is that Kate simply does not want to admit that her son is dead, like any mother under the same circumstances; but with the presentation of the idea that there could be an interconnection between Larry's death and the faulty parts, Kate is adamant in her rejection of such a proposal.²³ As far as Kate is concerned, there must never be any suspicion that there is a connection between the faulty parts and Larry's death. The second act is Kate's tour de force. In this act, Kate almost succeeds in achieving victory. She assumes control of the situation and introduces humor, pathos, and discipline. She calms a hostile George Deever and makes the others dependent upon her words and actions. In fact, Kate's sincerity throughout the beginning of the act is the cause of her trouble. When George

²¹ Miller, All My Sons, op. cit., p. 74.

²² Ibid., p. 78.

²³ Ibid., p. 81.

tells Joe that he looks exactly the same, Kate with honest innocence replies: "He hasn't been laid up in fifteen years."²⁴ Joe must correct her by saying that he was sick with the flu during the war, but the damage has been done. George realizes the full implication of the statement:

GEORGE: You heard her say it, he's never been sick!

MOTHER: He misunderstood me, Chris! Chris looks at her, struck.

GEORGE, to Ann: He simply told your father²⁵ to kill pilots, and covered himself in bed!

George demands that Ann leave with him. Kate, knowing the only salvation for the situation is for Ann to leave and foreseeing such an emergency, tells Chris that she has already packed Ann's bag. Chris becomes enraged: if Ann goes, he goes. Kate is forced to fall back on her seemingly inane explanation as why Chris cannot marry Ann: "She's Larry's girl."²⁶ At this point, the scene is wrought with dramatic irony. Chris, never understanding his mother's motives, insists that his brother is dead. Joe, believing that his wife is acting irrationally comes to Chris's defense. Both Chris and Joe are attacking the person who is trying to protect them. As Chris stubbornly forces the point that it is

²⁴Ibid., p. 111.

²⁵Ibid., p. 112.

²⁶Ibid., p. 113.

time for everyone to recognize that Larry is dead, Kate tells him why Larry cannot be dead:

MOTHER: Your brother's alive, darling, because if he's dead, your father killed him. Do you understand me now? As long as you live, that boy is alive. God does not let a son be killed by his father. Now you know, don't you? Now you see.²⁷

In this brief, passionate moment, the full, dramatic impact of the frenzied situation reaches its climax. The truth which he so diligently sought falls upon the stunned Chris, and what was once a solid, loving family becomes a shattered, disconsolate group. Now, Chris's rage knows no bounds as he turns upon his father:

CHRIS: Then explain it to me. What did you do? Explain it to me or I'll tear you to pieces!²⁸

Chris's reaction to the situation shows Miller's deftness in drawing his tragic hero. Chris does not immediately condemn nor condone; he is too shocked to view the situation with anything but ambivalence. He is enraged that his father is guilty of such malevolent actions, but he is also tormented by the realization that his father is less than the hero he had thought him to be. The veneration in which Chris had always held his father has been shattered and his father shown to be a man guilty of a dreadful crime against humanity.

²⁷Ibid., p. 114.

²⁸Ibid.

Chris's agony is all the more inconsolable because he feels that he, too, has succumbed to the double standard: "I suspected my father and I did nothing about it."²⁹ Chris feels that he has turned out to be like everyone else: "I'm practical now."²⁹ Kate attempts to capitalize on Chris's despondency by telling him that he must be practical now, that nothing will be solved or proven by taking Joe to jail. Kate is attempting to salvage the remnants of the situation by trying to convince Chris that he should do nothing, to allow the status quo to remain unchanged. By her actions, Kate shows herself to be as unethical as Joe. Her range of vision does not stretch beyond the bounds of her family. Although she wants everyone to be practical, she is impractical, her thoughts and actions being devoted to upholding a false proposition. In her heart, Kate knew that Joe was guilty, but she had to be practical in order to preserve her normal life and act as though he were innocent. She had to defend her family's position not only against Chris's idealistic beliefs but Joe's relaxed sense of security. What Kate fights to protect are really the same false standards and ideals that her husband believes to be good. The passion and intensity with which Kate carries on her battle endow her with some heroic stature, but some heroic stature is about all that differentiates Kate from Joe. One must respect her endeavor

²⁹Ibid., p. 123.

to sustain her way of life against all odds, even though that way is wrong. One cannot accept Kate as the tragic hero, though, because she is not interested in finding truth or goodness; she attempts to keep the truth hidden. For Kate, finding the right way to live, and all that such a quest implies, is not as important as finding the most practical way to live.

In the final analysis, only one person can fit the role of tragic hero: Chris Keller. Chris is the only person in the play concerned with the moral implications that surround a man's actions. He is the only one in the play who has any concern for right or wrong. Chris is the means by which the play comes to fruition. Unless he had been willing to pry and needle his way toward the truth, the truth would never have been revealed; and without the unveiling of the truth and the destruction it produces, there would be no tragic victory. Chris's search for truth brings forth the facts that one man's anti-social actions have been responsible for the deaths of twenty-one pilots, the incarceration of an innocent man and the destruction of his family, the death of one of his sons, the disillusionment of his other son, and the dissolution of his own family. Chris's actions have shown the dire results of anti-social behavior. On page fifty-seven, the author of this paper raised the question of the purpose and meaning of Joe's death. As an expression of atonement,

Joe's death is meaningless; it is anticlimatic and does nothing constructive for the play. In fact, Joe's death appears to be no more than an expression of futility and rejection. Joe could not believe that anything was bigger than the family, bigger than the relationship between a father and his son:

KELLER: I'm his father and he's my son,
and if there's something bigger than
that I'll put a bullet in my head!³⁰

When Joe learns that Larry "could kill him" for his acts, already being rejected by Chris, he carries out his original threat. Joe kills himself because his beliefs have been destroyed. If his sons no longer believe that the relationship between a father and his son is the most important thing in the world, then there is no reason to live. Joe might have some understanding that his actions were wrong, but this question does not concern him at the moment. The only important thing to him is that he is no longer Joe "McGuts" Keller to his boys. Larry may have thought of all the dead pilots as being Joe's sons too, but Joe does not commit suicide for that reason. He commits suicide because his son will no longer accept him as a father. If Joe's death in some way added to the meaning of the theme, it would be acceptable; but as it stands, whether Joe lives or

³⁰Ibid., p. 120.

dies makes little or no difference, for Joe's death does not help in producing the tragic victory. Chris must produce the victory by himself; and this he does, effectively too, through his refusal to evade the burden of his responsibilities: finding the truth. In spite of his earlier qualms and ambivalence, Chris succeeds in making the point that one must live in a manner that admits responsibility for others.

Through Chris's actions, which "bring a man into the direct path of the consequences he has wrought," the audience is made aware of the full implications of anti-social deeds; thus, there is enlightenment stemming from emotional acts. The hope and optimism which must come from the tragic victory are there, too. Although Chris is not completely destroyed, there is enough terror produced by his struggle to make the audience pity him. But the audience's pity and fear turns to hope and optimism when it sees that all is not lost. Chris will come back to run the business on a sound ethical basis; he will live a life that is based on moral responsibility, eschewing the temptation of practicality. Chris will receive all the rewards, both spiritual and social, of life; his coming success, implied but not shown in the play, is meant to be an example by which the audience can take heart. It can compare the virtues of life as manifested through the manner in which Chris lives with the evils produce by a life not dedicated to social responsibility.

In comparing All My Sons with the standards set forth by Miller in his concept of tragedy, it becomes apparent that the play fulfills the demands made of it and stands as a tragedy. As a social drama, in Miller's sense of the term, it is dynamic and emotional, relevant and meaningful. Miller has drawn his characters well; he has given them life and purpose. He has placed the moral and ethical behavior of society upon the stage, given it a fair trial, and rendered an honest verdict. Although the theme is one of the oldest known to man -- we are all our brothers keepers-- Miller has renewed the relevancy of its meaning and its importance to modern life.

CHAPTER V

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

On February 10, 1949, Death of a Salesman opened on Broadway. Since that memorable evening, the play and its hero, Willy Loman, have been the subject of much discussion and controversy. They have been interpreted and reinterpreted, attacked and defended, ridiculed and praised. Psychologists, sociologists, economists, and politicians have joined with legitimate literary critics to produce innumerable articles and essays which range in scope from astute analyses to puerile harangues. As can be expected when such a wealth of diverse material exists, the play and its hero have become enveloped in a fog of contradictions. For example, Mary McCarthy says that Willy Loman "commits suicide under sociological pressures."¹ John Gassner, though, states that Willy's suicide stems from purely personal reasons: "the resolve to secure the future of the son in whom he continues to repose high hopes."² Harold Clurman believes that "Willy Loman never acknowledges or learns the error of his way,"³

¹Mary McCarthy, "'Realism' in the American Theatre," Harper's Magazine, CCXXIII (July, 1961), 47.

²John Gassner, Masters of the Drama (third edition, revised and enlarged; New York: Dover Publications, 1954), p. 744.

³Harold Clurman, Lies Like Truth (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), p. 70.

whereas Frederick Lumley says that Willy "suddenly grasps the futility of his own life."⁴ Among other things, Eleanor Clark thinks the play "an ambitious piece of confusionism (sic)"⁵ and finds it "annoying not to know what the salesman sells."⁶ Strangely enough, chorus of critics does agree that Willy Loman is selling himself, and W. David Sievers feels that the play "may prove to be the finest American tragedy thus far in the twentieth century."⁷ The play has been attacked by both the liberal and conservative factions: the Daily Worker thought of it as being decadent and capitalistic, whereas the Catholic War Veterans and the American Legion saw fit to picket it because it was communistic in in tone and detrimental to the American way of life.⁸ Richard J. Foster, believing that Miller "has a very general or very loose and vague theory of tragedy, or perhaps no clear theory at all,"⁹

⁴Frederick E. Lumley, Trends in Twentieth-Century Drama (second edition, revised; London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1960), p. 202.

⁵Eleanor Clark, "Review of Death of a Salesman," Partisan Review, XVI (June, 1949), 632.

⁶Ibid., 634.

⁷W. David Sievers, Freud on Broadway (New York: Hermitage House, 1955), p. 396.

⁸Arthur Miller, "Introduction," Arthur Miller's Collected Plays (New York: Viking Press, 1957), p. 28.

⁹Richard J. Foster, "Confusion and Tragedy: The Failure of Miller's Salesman," in Two Modern American Tragedies, John D. Hurrell, editor (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), p. 82.

finds the play to be neither a "tragedy" nor a "great piece of literature" because it lacks intellectual content and order and because it is too sentimental.¹⁰ William B. Dillingham, though, believes that Miller shows in the play an objective, logical, and well-balanced concept of tragedy.¹¹ Brooks Atkinson states that Death of A Salesman "has stature and insight, awareness of life," and that it is "one of the finest dramas in the whole range of the American theatre."¹² Judging from the inconsistent and contradictory statements concerning the relative merit and status of the play, not to mention Miller's ability and integrity as an artist, one is left somewhat dazed. Is it possible that a play which won both the New York Drama Critics' Award and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama could be so poorly and loosely constructed that its meaning is vague or ambiguous? Is it possible that the intellectual content of the play is so chaotic and abstruse that it is incomprehensible? Or is it possible that the root of the trouble lies not in the play itself but in the methods by which many critics have examined and analyzed it? Aside from those critics who cling steadfastly to the

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 88.

¹¹ William B. Dillingham, "Arthur Miller and the Loss of Conscience," Emory University Quarterly, XVI (Spring, 1960), 40.

¹² Brooks Atkinson, "Review of Death of a Salesman," in Two Modern American Tragedies, op. cit., p. 55.

concept that no drama can rightly be called a tragedy unless it adheres to the form and style of Classical tragedy, and who will not accept the play under any conditions there appears to be a definite point around which the main conflict centers, around which the interpretations and their ramifications revolve. That point is the form and structure of the play. The proper understanding and interpretation of the form and structure of Death of a Salesman, one derived from an analysis of the text, is the key to its meaning. Only after one recognizes and understands the meaning of its unique structural design can one hope to answer correctly the questions raised by and about the play.

Death of a Salesman is an excellent example of Kitto's belief that the "connexion between the form and the content [of a play] is so vital that the two may be said to be ultimately identical."¹³ Contrary to The Man Who Had All the Luck and All My Sons, Death of a Salesman is not constructed in the manner conventional to almost all modern dramas. Instead, it is very much in the manner of the German Epic plays of the post World War I period -- such as Piscator's production of The Good Soldier Schweik and Toller's Masse Mensch and Hoopla, We Live! -- in that dream sequences and reality are interwoven to such an extent that

¹³H.D.F. Kitto, Form and Meaning in Drama (New York: University Paperbacks, Barnes and Noble, 1960), p. v.

one is meaningless without the other, the unity and essence of the play being manifested through the interrelationship of its parts.¹⁴ In commenting on the structure of Death of a Salesman, Miller says that the form of the play and the way the events are materialized "are also the direct reflection of Willy Loman's way of thinking at this moment of his life."¹⁵ In the play, Willy's mind wanders from present events to events of the past, from rationality to illusion, "because in his desperation to justify his life Willy Loman has destroyed the boundaries between then and now."¹⁶ Because there is no distinction at times in Willy's mind between past and present, the play must be constructed in such a manner that it glides harmoniously from present to past and back to present again without any interruption in thought or continuity. The scenes in which actions and thoughts of the past permeate Willy Loman's mind are not to be thought of, as many critics have done, as "flashbacks," for to do so is to misconstrue their purpose and to destroy the carefully constructed framework of the play.

¹⁴For a detailed explanation and analysis of Epic Theatre, the reader is referred to Modcai Gorelik, New Theatres for Old (New York: Samuel French, 1952), pp. 381-399, 407-434.

¹⁵Miller, op. cit., p. 25.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 26.

A "flashback" in drama is an isolated scene which shows actions anterior to the time of the play in order to present a causative idea or fact, one which had direct bearing upon the present situation and which, because of structural problems, cannot be dealt with effectively through the normal process of exposition. For example, the pertinent causative actions in All My Sons are brought out in the dialogue; there is no need to resort to a "flashback" in order to show Joe's actions at the plant or at his trial. But in Elmer Rice's On Trial, the action switches quickly from scenes in the courtroom to scenes which show earlier, related action, scenes which clarify the meaning and purpose of the courtroom scenes.

In his comments on the play, Miller emphasizes the point that there are no "flashbacks," saying that there is a "mobile currency of past and present."¹⁷ The point Miller is making is that if the dream scenes were "flashbacks," then they would do no more than show anterior action and behavior, setting up the situations and events of the past as isolated incidents. The actions and ideas which Rice wished to show were of such a nature that they could not be presented effectively through normal exposition; therefore, Rice had to use the "flashback" in order to give his drama

¹⁷Ibid.

structural coherence, to present in detail the cause and effect relation of the action, and to show the psychological development of his main characters. But the idea of a "mobile currency" between the present and the past offers an altogether different approach to the meaning of the scenes and an entirely different view of Willy Loman's dilemma. In a very illuminating article, Daniel E. Schneider, a practicing psychiatrist, presents a professional point of view by analyzing Willy Loman's behavior. Schneider finds that Willy's present state of mind stems from and is a direct reflection of his involvement with the past; in fact, he characterizes Willy's condition by stating that "in psychiatry we call this 'the return of the repressed.'"¹⁸ W. David Sievers in his book Freud on Broadway elaborates on this idea by saying that "the characters do not return to the past -- rather the repressed past returns subtly to the present."¹⁹ Thus, the fluidity between the past and the present is meant to show that Willy Loman has never been able to disassociate himself from the past. In the play, Miller enters into Willy's mind and displays Willy's thoughts in a kaleidoscopic stream-of-consciousness which plumbs to the depths the reason for Willy's inability to escape his past. If Willy were to return to the

¹⁸ Daniel E. Schneider, M.D., "Play of Dreams," Theatre Arts, XXXIII (October, 1949), 18.

¹⁹ Sievers, op. cit., p. 391.

past, he could return to a period in his life when things were pleasant. He could remain there, and, thus, he could die contentedly. The repressed past always being with Willy, though, shows that the past contains events of such importance that Willy cannot escape nor ignore them; they are the ever present reminders of his guilt. Although Willy tries to repress the past and all its accusing facts, he can never erase the truth. The past lives with Willy because he cannot relinquish it; and he cannot give up the belief that his actions in the past were correct because he would then be destroying his reason for living. The situation is one of subtle irony. Willy cannot return to the past, or the past is not shown in "flashbacks," because the past has never left him; it is an integral part of his present everyday life. Also, Willy tries to repress his thoughts of the past because he sees in them the terrible truth about himself; but, and here lies the great tragic irony of it all, Willy must try to vindicate the past -- even though he knows the falseness of it -- in order to give some meaning to his life.

The most important idea to realize is that Willy does not discover any truth about himself in the play because he has known the truth all along. The critics are correct when they say that awareness comes to Biff toward the end of the play, but they err when they say it does not come to Willy; it does not come to him because he has it already. The only

problem is that he does not want to admit it; he is unable to admit it. A close examination and analysis of the structure and development of the play will substantiate this interpretation. And after the facts are presented in the proper light, as indicated by the text, then the questions pertinent to the play can be asked and correctly answered. These are the important questions to be answered: Is the play a tragedy? If so, how and why? If so, what makes Willy Loman a tragic hero? Does the play have universal social significance? Other questions will arise as the quest progresses and will be dealt with in the proper place and at the proper time.

The opening scene is actually a continuation of the "strange thoughts" which Willy says he had while he was driving toward New England. These thoughts all center around his older son, Biff, a wandering ne'er-do-well, who is at present paying one of his infrequent visits to the family home. Willy explains his thoughts to his ever-faithful, lap-dog like wife Linda in terms that range emotionally from awesomeness to frustration. Willy speaks of the beauty and peace of the country; then he complains of the crowded, smelly neighborhood in which they live. He expresses longing for the old days, days when there was room to breathe and when the competition was not so maddening. He speaks of the difficulty he has selling, but when Linda suggests that he

ask his boss to transfer him to New York, he cries that he is "vital in New England."²⁰ His thoughts return again to his son Biff, showing the turmoil which Biff produces in his mind. Linda remarks later that Willy always gets worse whenever Biff comes home. Willy shouts that "Biff is a lazy bum" in one breath and then states emphatically in the next: "There's one thing about Biff--he's not lazy."²¹ Willy's comments on Biff's status lead him to think of the old Chevy which Biff used to polish, and Willy makes a startling revelation: he thought he was driving that car. Willy's mind becomes engrossed with Biff and the old Chevy, and the repressed past slowly begins flooding his thoughts, bringing out salient facts. But just as Willy begins to speak and relive the past in his mind, Miller shifts the action for a moment to the boys' bedroom, where Biff and Happy are discovered listening to the conversation between Willy and Linda. An important fact to remember is that the scene between Biff and Happy should be thought of as taking place at the same time as the one between Willy and Linda. The physical properties of the stage make it impossible for both scenes to take place simultaneously, but the structure of the play indicates that they are. Another reason for the

²⁰ Arthur Miller, Death of a Salesman, in Arthur Miller's Collected Plays (New York: Viking Press, 1957), p. 132.

²¹ Ibid., p. 134.

presentation of the boys at this point is that Miller can establish characterization in the most logical place. The audience has met a confused and bewildered Willy and his docile and faithful wife. Now they are introduced to the brothers: Biff, who wears a "worn air" and who "seems less self-assured" than his younger, "more confused" brother, Happy, who wears sexuality like a visible color.²² Biff and Happy comment on their father's mental instability and his driving, indicating that they are aware of what has been taking place downstairs. As they talk, the ambivalence and frustration that characterize the conversation between Willy and Linda are repeated. Biff states that at thirty-four he still does not know what he wants to do with himself. Happy complains that he is constantly lowering his ideals because everyone around him is so false, yet he fervently proclaims that he must show everyone that he can make the grade. Happy speaks with disgust of his sexual accomplishments, saying it's like bowling: "I just keep knockin' them over and it doesn't mean anything."²³ But Happy also admits that he "loves" his sexual achievements. In comparison, Biff is very reticent about sex, almost to the point of abstention. Miller has a specific reason for dwelling upon the sexual habits of

²²Ibid., p. 136.

²³Ibid., p. 140.

the boys, and this reason will be more fully dealt with later in the proper place. As the scene progresses, Biff quietly indicates that with a ranch, "I could do the work I like and still be something."²⁴ Biff presses Happy to give up his job and come with him. Happy agrees that it sounds idyllic, but the main question is, "What can you make out there?"²⁵ With the import of these words hanging in the air, the scene ends with a well-constructed transition. As Willy's voice rises from the disjointed mumbling which he began before the boys' scene, Biff and Happy curtail their speech to listen. Thus, the emphasis switches back to Willy and his talk about Biff and the old Chevy, and the play continues as if there had been no interruption, the scene now being in Willy's mind. Naturally, with the movement of the action into Willy's mind, certain non-realistic dramatic techniques must be utilized. Chronological time is disregarded; the past is recalled as it fits the moment. That is, Willy's mind jumps around, recalling the most significant scenes as he thinks of them. The physical limits of the set, which are scrupulously observed during scenes in the present, are ignored, the actors walking through or disregarding walls, furniture, and other scenic properties. Lighting and music to

²⁴Ibid., p. 141.

²⁵Ibid., p. 140.

symbolize mood and to indicate character are used. Because of the dramatic freedom available in this technique, Miller is able to weave the past and the present together with swift-ness and agility, producing an excellent cause and effect relationship and providing substantial insight into Willy's mind. Willy's first words in the dream scene are directed at Biff and are words of praise for the good job Biff did simonizing the old Chevy, "the greatest car ever built." This scene shows Willy in his glory and in his degradation. Biff and Happy, as teenagers, crowd around "Pop," ignoring their friends, for "when Pop comes home they can wait!"²⁶ Willy revels in this attention, laughing off Biff's theft of a football from school and filling them with stories of his importance. Willy tells his boys, "Be liked and you will never want."²⁷ He regales them with the success he has attained because he is liked, because he is "well liked." But the story he tells Linda is different. Willy excuses his poor showing by saying that half the stores were closed for inventory, that people don't seem to take to him, and that they even laugh at him. But Willy's problems are not all due to selling: the refrigerator needs a fan belt; payments are due on the washing machine and vacuum cleaner; he owes money on

²⁶Ibid., p. 147.

²⁷Ibid., p. 146.

repair bills for the "goddam Chevrolet"--"they ought to prohibit the manufacture of that car!"-- and for the roof. As Willy feels the pressure of living weighing him down, Linda, mending stockings as she talks to him, attempts to build up his courage, telling him how much he is loved by the boys, how handsome he is. But the sight of the stockings jars Willy's mind, and he recalls a scene which he has pushed to the back of his mind. This second recollection is a subtle touch by Miller, for it is a dream within a dream. In order to alleviate the nagging frustrations encountered at home, his inability to sell on the road, and the loneliness he feels when in a strange town, Willy has succumbed to a cheap affair with a buyer's secretary. The act is a way by which he can assuage the pains of everyday life and in some manner help himself to believe that he is "liked," for didn't the secretary say that she picked "him"? As this scene quickly passes from his mind, Willy's mood changes. He berates Linda for mending stockings, recalling the new ones he gave her. He turns his rage on Biff, asking why he steals and why he doesn't study? But when Linda says he must do something with Biff, he shouts at her that there is nothing wrong with Biff: "He's got spirit, personality...."²⁸ This sentence, started in the recalled past, is finished in the

²⁸
Ibid., p. 151.

present with Willy sitting alone in the kitchen. And as he sits, he asks himself the same agonizing questions: "Why is he stealing? What did I tell him? I never in my life told him anything but decent things."²⁹ Thus, the dream scene makes a complete return to its point of origin. Willy began by thinking of Biff, thinking happy thoughts; he ended by being angry with him. Willy turns this anger upon himself, asking "Why didn't I go to Alaska with my brother Ben that time."³⁰ Just as the old Chevy and the stockings were symbols which triggered his mind to recall the past, so is brother Ben. Ben was a man whom Willy admired greatly; he was a rugged individualist who walked into the jungle at seventeen and came out rich at twenty-one. As Willy mulls over the success of his brother, his neighbor Charlie enters and suggests a game of cards. As they play, the conversation drifts to Ben, who, Willy tells Charlie, died recently in Africa. With these words the ghostly figure of Ben appears. Ben's appearance allows Miller the opportunity to engage in some clever dialogue exposing the condition of Willy's mind. The conversation between Charlie and Willy is really a three-way conversation, for Willy, drifting into the recalled past, speaks to Ben as well as to Charlie. When Ben questions

²⁹Ibid., p. 152.

³⁰Ibid.

some of Willy's strange replies, Willy becomes confused, not realizing that his mind has been wandering. As usual, Willy attempts to place the blame for his momentary relapse elsewhere by accusing Charlie of cheating. As Charlie leaves through the door in a huff, Willy rushes through the fading scenery to Ben and asks him the great question of life: How does one become a success in business? Throughout the scene, Willy tries to impress Ben with his business accomplishments, with the way he has been raising his sons. He tells Ben that although business is bad for everyone else, he is doing well because he has "contacts." He jokes about Biff's stealing sand and lumber from a construction site, passing it off as a boyhood prank. But Willy's boisterous attempt to be impressive falls flat, for always coming to the surface are his plaintive queries: Am I doing right? How does one succeed? What should I teach my boys? To Willy's questions, Ben repeats his cryptic theme, the individualist's Gregorian chant: "William, when I walked into the jungle, I was seventeen. When I walked out I was twenty-one. And, by God, I was rich."³¹ Willy grasps the words "was rich" and shouts over and over that he was correct in all that he told his sons. Willy feels that Ben's words substantiate all that he has tried to tell his sons: be rich and you will be a success. The scene ends with Willy wandering from the house in order to take a

³¹
Ibid., p. 160.

walk. Willy's departure instigates a three-way conversation among Biff, Happy, and Linda about Willy's mental condition. Biff agrees to stay home and help with the financial problems, and, carried away by the spontaneity of the situation, Biff and Happy decide to go into the sporting goods business. At this point Willy returns, and upon hearing of the new venture, his demeanor becomes as that of old: excited and optimistic. Willy is swept away with the idea that his boys will be doing something again, just as in the old days: the Loman brothers against the world and Willy their guiding light and sage influence. Willy's enthusiasm has no limits; when he learns that Biff is going to try to secure a loan from an old employer, he gives him contradictory advice: be quiet; walk in seriously; don't look worried; walk in with a big laugh. Willy cannot refrain from telling Biff that he has a greatness in him that cannot be held back, and he admonishes Biff to remember that "personality always wins the day."³² Willy retires to dream of Biff's greatness on the football field and of his coming success in business, for Biff's coming success will substantiate all that Willy has told him through the years; it will confirm that he has been right in the way that he has raised him. Thus, the first act ends on a note of optimism, a change from the discouragement and frustration which characterized its beginning and

³²Ibid., p. 169.

middle. But this faint glimmer of false hope soon dies; for in the second act, blow after blow falls upon Willy, destroying his false dreams in a devastating onslaught of truth. An important fact has arisen in the first act, one that has much influence upon Willy's final actions. It is necessary to observe how much importance Willy places upon Biff's success, for Willy's preoccupation with Biff's material achievements is an important clue to his behavior; also, it bears heavily upon the question of his tragic status. This interrelationship is brought to its powerful culmination with the termination of the second act.

As the second act begins, the peacefulness of the situation is soon shattered. Willy leaves the house with high hopes; he is going to secure a transfer to the New York office from his boss and, later, he is going to meet with his sons for dinner, a victory dinner. Willy's meeting with Howard, the son of his old boss and now head of the firm, ends in disaster. Willy asks, pleads, and finally begs for a job in New York, but Howard cannot be bothered with Willy's entreaties, nor will he be influenced by Willy's past record with the firm. For the first time in his life Willy is asking for some consideration from the firm: "I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance! You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away--

a man is not a piece of fruit."³³ But Howard interrupts his preoccupation with a tape-recording of his son's precocious prattling and his wife's inanities long enough to give Willy a lecture on the cold facts of life. Howard's philosophy is the philosophy of the modern business world: "everybody's gotta pull his own weight."³⁴ Willy is not producing; therefore, Willy must go. There is no room in the organization, in the world of business, for a man who cannot be successful in his field. The days of personality which Willy loved and believed in are gone. As Willy stands dazed, realizing that after spending a lifetime working he has nothing, the past with Ben flashes into his mind. Willy sees Ben at this time because his mind has recalled from the repressed past Ben's grave words. In the past, Willy had complained to Ben that nothing was working out, that he did not know what to do.³⁵ Always the realist, Ben told him to "get out of these cities" and go where he could build something concrete with his hands. But the scene shows that Willy did not want to admit that Ben's advice was good. Instead, he tried to make Ben agree that "who you know and the smile on your face" was also a formula for success.³⁶ In reply to Ben's demand that he lay

³³ Ibid., p. 181.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 180.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 183.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 184.

his hand on what he is building, Willy points proudly to Biff, his young "Hercules" for whom three great universities are bidding. Willy's cry is that the "sky's the limit" for Biff because he is building contacts. Willy wanders in a daze, dreaming of Biff's great days on the football field, to the office of his friend Charlie for his weekly "loan." At the office, he meets Bernard, Charlie's son and Biff's boyhood friend. Bernard is the complete opposite in all ways from Biff. As a child, he was a puny, non-athletic bookworm; as an adult, he is a successful lawyer. Bernard symbolizes all that Willy wanted for Biff: a success in business, a happy marriage, children, and an active social life. Willy attempts to parry Bernard's questions about Biff with the old self-assurance and gusto of the past, but his pose breaks down and he asks Bernard: "What's the secret? Why didn't he ever catch on?"³⁷ Willy asks Bernard if it was his own fault that Biff failed; but when Bernard asks Willy what happened in Boston after Biff had flunked math, Willy angrily shouts at him: "What are you trying to do, blame it on me? If a boy lays down is that my fault?"³⁸ The sudden mention of Boston chills Willy's thoughts, for it brings out repressed memories of a horrifying experience. Willy quickly changes the subject, and the tension which he showed visibly subsides,

³⁷ Ibid., p. 188.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 190.

to simmer quietly in the back of his mind. The remembrance of what happened in Boston stays with Willy through his scene with Charlie until he meets with Biff and Happy for dinner. The dinner scene, the dramatic climax of the play, which was to be a victory celebration, turns out to be, as Sievers so aptly terms it, "a magnificently ironic feast of the failures."³⁹ The saloon scene opens with Biff's attempts to stop Happy from "picking-up" two barroom tarts long enough for Biff to explain that he had failed to see his old boss. Biff tells Happy that not only did he fail to get any money, but in his frustration he stole a gold fountain pen. Happy tells Biff that he must not let Willy know that he has failed, that he should tell him that he must go back tomorrow. Biff, though, is unable to keep up the pretense any longer, and he tells Happy that his whole life has been a lie, just one big false dream, that he is a nobody. As soon as Willy comes in, Biff tries to tell him that he has failed. But Willy, anxious to hear good news after his own defeat, will not let Biff tell his story. As the heat of argument rises, Willy tells them that he was fired and that they had better come up with some good news, for he is tired of finding stories to tell. Happy attempts to lie to Willy, but Biff insists on the truth. Suddenly, Willy screams at Biff: "You

³⁹ Sievers, op. cit., p. 393.

had to go and flunk math."⁴⁰ The astonished sons recoil under Willy's wild repetitions of the word math, neither understanding Willy's accusation. As Biff attempts to explain about his actions with Oliver and why he stole the pen, Willy continues to recall the past, bringing from the past the scene in Boston. Miller builds this scene with great artistry. What could easily be a scene of voluble chaos proves to be one of frenetic yet loquacious harmony. Into Willy's agitated mind come the voices of the past: the telephone operator announcing his son, the haunting laugh of a woman. Competing with the past is the horrified Biff, trying to lie to Willy in order to save the situation; but all Willy can do is accuse Biff of "spiting" him. The blow of Biff's failure and the sounds of the past become too much for Willy, and in a moment of panic he rushes to the washroom where he relives the horror of Boston, the moment of his greatest failure. The scene shows that after Biff had failed math, he went to Boston in order to talk to his father, knowing that his great "idol" could talk his math teacher into passing him. But when Biff needed his father most, he found a stranger. Biff went to his father with love and trust, and he found his father committing adultery. The discovery that his father was not the god he had supposed him to be

⁴⁰ Miller, Death of a Salesman, op. cit., p. 200.

shattered Biff's flimsy and shallow little world, leaving him with the harsh realization that his father was a "phony little fake." As Willy is reliving this agonizing catastrophe, Biff rushes from the saloon, followed by Happy and the girls. More bitter irony is added to the scene by Happy's renouncing reply to one of the girls: "No, that's not my father. He's just a guy."⁴¹ Happy's words indicate Willy's state of mind; he no longer feels that he is a father. Deserted by Biff in Boston and now deserted again by Biff and Happy for two "chippies," Willy leaves the saloon in search of a hardware store in order that he may buy some seeds. Willy must plant a new life; and the seeds symbolize a new hope, new sons who will bring a new meaning and purpose to his life. In a deep and far-reaching psychoanalytical interpretation of the saloon scene in his article "Play of Dreams," Daniel E. Schneider compares the meeting to the centuries-old "totemfeast" in which sons and father make peace with one another.⁴² But the fact that peace is not forthcoming and the sons leave him in the bar in order to be with the girls forces Willy, as Schneider interprets the scene, into a "castration-panic," one which symbolizes the breaking of the god-head, the smashing of all authority. Willy is undergoing

⁴¹Ibid., p. 205.

⁴²Schneider, op. cit., 18-21, passim.

the same emotional reaction that Biff underwent in Boston when his image of his father as a god was smashed. Thus, the scene in the saloon and the one in the Boston hotel room are direct comparisons, except that the roles have been reversed. Later, when the boys come home, Linda asks Biff how he could leave his father in that condition; but all Biff can think of is the way Willy left him in Boston. Although the enthusiasm with which one accepts Schneider's views depends greatly upon one's beliefs in the application of psychological profundities, one must credit Schneider with providing a provocative analysis, one which gives authoratative support to Miller's use of sex as a minor leit motiv to indicate frustration. Earlier in the chapter, Happy was described as having an aura of sexuality about him, Biff as having almost none. Yet Happy says that in their youth it was Biff who was the great lover, the one who introduced him to girls. But now, Biff does not share Happy's "disgusted" delight in sexual achievement; he wants to find "somebody with substance" and settle down, somebody like Linda. The pattern that emerges, psychological if you wish, can be traced directly to Willy's influence. Shocked by his father's adulterous ways and reprehensible treatment of Linda, Biff eschews not only his father but women. Schneider makes the point that the basketballs and fountain pen which Biff stole from his old employer are both "castration" symbols standing for the father image and

that the thefts took place after Biff had discovered his father with another woman. The import of these facts is that Biff is not only searching for a father but that he is also searching for a woman like his mother, one to whom he can in some manner alleviate the wrongs done by his father. Happy, though, finds in sex a release from the frustrations of the business world. Happy is not the successful young junior executive that he talks of being; he turns out to be no more than one of two assistants to the assistant to the head buyer. Just as Willy expressed his frustrations through his attempts to achieve satisfaction and importance in illicit sexual affairs, so does Happy. Happy is starting off in life as a carbon copy of his father: a frustrated blow-hard with delusion of grandeur and chimerical thoughts of status and wealth. A second point upon which Happy's actions can be shown to follow Willy's is their status within the family. Both Happy and Willy were younger sons, brothers to very successful and dynamic personalities. Both lived in the shadow and under the spell of these people. Willy respected and admired Ben; Happy basked in the overflow of the adulation heaped upon Biff. But when Ben offered Willy the chance to go to Alaska and work for him, Willy turned it down, preferring to stay in New York and become "successful" at home, thereby showing Ben that he, too, was capable of making it on his own. At the end of the play, Happy refuses Biff's offer to come west with him, preferring instead to stay in

New York and fight the battle that Willy started; only in Happy's case, he is certain he will win it. The importance of and reason for establishing the close parallel between Willy and Happy's always being second best is that this position caused them to over-extend their capabilities, and in Willy's case, it forced him to seek success through Biff. By over-extending their capabilities, both men are creating psychological problems, problems which cause them to act in a manner detrimental and contrary to their best interests. Because Willy has acted in such a manner, and all indications are that Happy will make more of the same mistakes as he progresses, it does not automatically follow that he will end as a tragic figure. Willy Loman becomes a tragic figure through the intensity with which he acted even though he knew his actions to be wrong. A close examination of the final scenes of the play will further clarify this idea.

The next to the last scene opens with Biff and Happy's return from their evening with the girls, the ones Happy procured at the saloon. Willy has already returned home and is busy planting his seeds in the garden by flashlight. As he measures the ground for the proper placement of the seeds, Willy imagines that he is talking to Ben, and the topic of their conversation is suicide. Willy explains his "proposition" to Ben thus: So far in life he has failed "to add up to something," and a man cannot "go out the way he came

in."⁴³ Also, Linda has suffered very much because of him. Therefore, by committing suicide he will provide for his wife and will do something creditable. Ben agrees that the idea has merit, for twenty thousand dollars "is something one can feel with the hand."⁴⁴ Willy dreams of the elegance of his funeral; it will be "massive." All his friends, all the old-timers, will come from all over New England; and then Biff will know, then he will realize that Willy Loman is known, is respected! But when Ben suggests that Biff may think Willy a coward, Willy's demeanor changes from optimism to fearfulness. Willy asks why he can't get back the great times, the comradeship, the good news; "why can't I give him something and not have him hate me?"⁴⁵ Give him what? The twenty thousand dollars? But didn't Willy mean that money for Linda? Willy's revelation that he wants Biff to have the money is compatible with his previous thoughts and is consistent with his previous actions. Willy feels guilty for the manner in which he has treated Linda, but his concern for Linda has always been subsidiary in nature to his desire for Biff's success and happiness. Thus, Willy would like to do something for Linda, but his primary yearning is to prove to Biff that Willy Loman is a "bigshot" and is capable of

⁴³ Miller, op. cit., p. 212.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 213.

doing big things. Therefore, although he attempts to assuage his conscience by saying that he is doing it for Linda, Willy is subconsciously attempting to capture Biff's love; and through Biff's love, he will then be able to recapture the "great times" when he had respect and purpose in life. Thus, when Biff tells Willy he is leaving, Willy shouts at him in anger and panic: "May you rot in hell if you leave this house!"⁴⁶ If Biff leaves, he is closing forever the door to Willy's one chance for success, and Willy knows this all too well. Willy's accusation that Biff is putting a knife into him for spite because he refuses to "take the rap" for Biff's failure is met head on by Biff's denunciating indictment of his father: "We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house! . . . And I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody! That's whose fault it is!"⁴⁷ To Biff have come the realization and understanding that he is a dollar an hour worker who belongs on a ranch where he can do the things he enjoys and not an executive with the business world at his feet. Biff's wrath at this moment subsides; and with an effusive display of emotional tenderness, he begs Willy to release him from all his false dreams and let him go. Willy suddenly realizes that Biff does not spite him, that he loves

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 215.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 216.

him; and to Willy, this knowledge is the most important thing in his life. With Biff's forgiveness and the return of his love, Willy has been reinvested with his fatherhood. After seventeen years, ever since the debacle at Boston in the hotel room, Willy is once again loved by his son; and this potent discovery brings back Willy's old enthusiasm. Overwhelmed by love, Willy cries out ecstatically: "That boy-- that boy is going to be magnificent!"⁴⁸ Willy has no plans to release Biff from all the false dreams; instead, to Willy's spinning mind, Biff's declaration of love is twisted to be a vindication of his intent to commit suicide: "He'll worship me for it."⁴⁹ With the money from Willy's insurance policy, Biff will be a success; once again he will be a leader of men. And not only will Biff be a success, but Willy will have accomplished something, too: "I always knew one way or another we were gonna make it, Biff and I!"⁵⁰ "We, Biff and I," will accomplish something, will be successful. Willy does not say that Biff is going to make alone, or that he is going to make; he says that they both will make, inferring his dependence upon his son's success and reaffirming in his mind that all his beliefs were correct. The great tragic irony in Willy's confused thoughts at this moment

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 218.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 219.

⁵⁰Ibid.

lies in his inability to recognize that success is his if he will only return in a normal manner the love and forgiveness offered by his son. Instead, he carries the tragic implication of his actions to a higher plane by reasserting his belief in and allegiance to the false philosophy that materialistic gain indicates success. He makes the supreme assertion, the ultimate declaration of his convictions by selling his life for his son in order that he may give validity to his existence, in order that he may prove his individuality. Willy Loman goes to his death with the belief that he is establishing his posterity through the success that will come to his son; Willy Loman achieves his personal dignity through the extreme to which he carries his inane belief. One cannot deny Willy Loman stature at this point, either; for a lesser person could not have faced as bravely, as jubilantly, with such temerity, with such anticipation his coming death. Willy's intrepid nature is shown in his final words before he rushes off to catch "The Boat" with Ben. Not concerned for himself, Willy must give Biff his final instructions, instructions which take on a bizarre aspect in that they are a repetition of advice given to Biff long ago before a football game: Biff must play hard because there are important people in the stands, because his future success will depend on the impression he makes. Thus, with mundane matters secured, Willy rushes off to make the biggest sale of his life.

The final scene of the play is the Requiem, and it is in this scene that the entire emotional impact and intellectual content come together, join in a softly vibrant denouement of a man and his story. There are only four people at the funeral: Biff, Happy, Linda, and Charlie. There are no important buyers from out of state; no old-timers with strange license plates; there is no multitude of friends and well-wishers. Willy Loman receives a simple burial, and each person delivers a heartfelt eulogy. But there is something strange about the words spoken at the funeral: not only are they condemnatory as well as commendatory, but there is much truth in the diverse views. Biff states that Willy "had all the wrong dreams," that he did not know who he was. Biff goes on to say that the good days, the times when Willy was the happiest, were the times spent doing physical labor.⁵¹ Charlie agrees that Willy "was a happy man with a batch of cement," and Linda describes him as being "wonderful with his hands."⁵¹ But the idea that he had all the wrong dreams is met vigorously by Charlie's remonstrances. "Nobody dast blame this man," Charlie snaps, for Willy was a salesman, and a salesman has to dream: "it comes with the territory."⁵¹ Happy agrees with Charlie, but for very different reasons. Happy thoroughly believes that Willy "had a good dream." Happy says that Willy had the only dream a man could have: to

⁵¹Ibid., p. 221, passim.

come out number one. Not only does Happy approve of Willy's dream, but he is going to take Willy's place and bring the dream to a happy ending. One thing bothers Linda, though; she cannot understand why Willy committed suicide just when everything seemed to be working out. The four views expressed at the funeral can be summarized thus: Linda is confused; she shows little understanding or knowledge of the entire affair. Happy shows absolutely no understanding, knowledge, or awareness; he is too enmeshed in his father's false dreams to see that they were the cause of Willy's problems. Biff shows awareness; he knows the reason for Willy's failure, but he cannot find sympathy for his father. Of the four, only Charlie shows understanding, awareness, and sympathy. Charlie knows what forced Willy to act as he did; but even though he is aware that Willy was wrong, he has enough understanding to realize that the magnitude of the situation demands that a certain amount of respect be given to Willy. Charlie has one quality that places him in a special position: he has perspective; he can see the situation in its broad aspect. It is important to comprehend the reason for these views being expressed in such a manner at this point in the play. The individual views serve a vital and double purpose: They summarize the individual attitudes of the individual people and they emphasize the universal social significance of the problem through their symbolic connotations; and the carrying over of the main ideas expressed through the play and the

subsequent device of presenting them in four explicit statements make manifest in one final reiteration the intellectual content of the play. The scene in which this presentation takes place repeats the atmosphere of the entire play: confusion, misunderstanding, bombast, and futility. Thus, in a scene of beautifully blending comments and concepts is Willy Loman laid to rest.

Now that the play has been examined in the proper context, by what the text says, it is possible to answer correctly the questions raised previously about its status by examining that which has been set forth. The answers can be gathered by first examining the major views expressed in the play as concepts of values and then relating these concepts to society. From this coalescence should come the answers to the questions on and about the play. Inasmuch as everything in the play revolves around Willy, it is necessary to start with him.

First, does Willy Loman have a standard of values? Willy based his philosophy on the impressions he had received from a chance meeting with one man, an eighty-four year old salesman. At eighty-four, Dave Singleman could sit in his hotel room in his green velvet slippers and make sales over the telephone to all his friends. When Willy saw him in action, he "realized that selling was the greatest career a

man could want."⁵² Dave Singleman had personality; he was known, loved, and respected by people throughout the country. Willy Loman became seduced by this vision; he became mesmerized by the idea that "being well liked" and "having personality" were the keys to success. Thus, Willy became ensnared in a chimerical web, staking his happiness on an ephemeral concept by attempting to weave a durable tapestry of life from the gossamer threads of dreams. It has been shown that even as Willy was teaching his false philosophy to his sons, he was undergoing pangs of doubt himself about its validity. The fact that he questioned his philosophy indicates that the values which he found in it were not the ones he truly believed in. It has been seen that throughout the play Willy was continuously searching, asking if he were right in his beliefs, in what he was teaching his sons. In a symposium with several critics, Miller makes a strong point in a statement to the effect that if Willy had thoroughly believed in all that he was doing, "he would have died contentedly polishing his car on some Sunday afternoon at a ripe old age."⁵³ But Willy was discontent with his beliefs; he found them to be hollow, dissatisfying, and he tried to

⁵²Ibid., p. 180.

⁵³ Richard Gelb, moderator, "A Matter of Hopelessness in Death of a Salesman: A Symposium with Arthur Miller, Richard Watts, John Beaufort, Martin Dworkin, and David W. Thompson," Tulane Drama Review, II (May, 1958), 66.

alleviate his frustrations and loneliness in sexual promiscuity. Throughout his life, Willy searched for one thing: his individuality, his self-expression, the right to be acclaimed successful. Earlier in the chapter, it was stated that awareness comes to Biff but not to Willy because Willy has had it all along.⁵⁴ This idea is true, but a nice distinction must be made. Biff learns for himself that Willy had all the wrong dreams, that Willy really belonged on a farm in the country where he could build things with his hands, where he was not forced to live a lie. Willy himself expresses great belief in the idea that physical labor is the best life: he takes pride in all that he has built; he dreams of building a home in the country where he can work with his tools. In a moment of exasperation, he tells Charlie that "a man who can't handle tools is not a man."⁵⁵ Yet Willy feels that he cannot attain his manhood until he has proven himself a success in business, something which he finds impossible to achieve. Willy admitted to Charlie that he was aware of the falseness of his beliefs. When Charlie told Willy that the things in which he believes do not mean anything, Willy replied: "I've always tried to think otherwise, I guess."⁵⁶ Willy does not say that he

⁵⁴Cf., ante, p. 73.

⁵⁵Miller, op. cit., p. 154.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 192.

thought otherwise but that he "tried to think otherwise."

Willy is saying that he tried to believe in his theory but that he found it to be lacking in the light of practical application. What Biff learns for himself --"with a ranch I could do the work I like and still be something"--Willy fails to learn. He never comes to realize that working with his hands, with his tools, and having the love and respect of his family are the things in which he believes, are the values for which he is searching. A succinct restatement of this point, and then the carrying of the situation to its finality, will show the great importance of this idea to the overall theme. Willy believed that "being well liked" was the key to success. He inculcated his sons and his wife with this belief. Linda, Biff, and Happy believed that which Willy told them, even though Willy showed through his actions that he found his beliefs anything but fulfilling. Willy had one hope, though, the success of his son Biff. But when he destroyed Biff's love and trust, Willy was left with nothing. Therefore, when he discovered that Biff still loved him, he grasped at the one last chance to fulfill himself, to become a success, to be loved. Willy rushed to his death in order that he might leave a legacy to his son, a testament that would show that he had been able to achieve success. In his fanatical desire to prove himself, Willy embraced all the erroneous concepts that he found so vexatiously thwarting in his life. Near the close of the second act, Willy replies vehemently

to Biff's accusation that both he and Biff are "a dime a dozen" by saying: "I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman."⁵⁷ This comment sums up Willy's point very well; it also states an important thematic idea, which will be pointed out later. Willy is an individual, and he tries to prove it by following what he believes is the correct path: achieving success in business. But the manner by which he attempts to reach his goal, the concepts in which he places his trust, are false. This fact Willy realizes and knows all too well. What he never realizes is the knowledge Biff finally attains: be true to yourself and you will be a success. When Willy sells himself in order to assure Biff's success, his brave but futile assertion is the act of a man who has but one last chance to achieve dignity, success, and love; Willy flails out with all his remaining strength and energy, succumbing to his false dreams, in order to achieve his individuality, his fulfillment as a human being. Willy Loman does have a strong sense of values, but he never comes to realize what they are because of the chimerical delusions which cloud his mind. Willy Loman is very much aware of his dilemma, but even so, his life is inexorably bound in such a manner to one goal that in the end he accepts all that he held false in order to vindicate his beliefs. In the final analysis, Willy's great tragedy is that he was

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 217.

unable to give up his false beliefs; he dies maintaining his belief in the idea that material achievement is indicative of success.

The four views expressed in the Requiem complement Willy's concept of values by summarizing symbolically society's concepts of values. These views are expressed through the manner in which each person views Willy's problem. Happy and Willy's employer Howard represent the worst aspect of society. Happy does not show any great love for his father, nor too much concern about his problems. He is too much interested in his own struggle for material gain. Happy shows filial devotion by giving lip service, not by contributing physical or moral support. Happy represents that segment of society which is interested in gaining material wealth for the social benefits it will bring, his goal in life being a fifty thousand dollar home on Long Island. Happy must endorse Willy's beliefs or declare himself to be wrong. If Happy represents the uninterested portion of society, then Howard Wagner stands for the disinterested portion. Howard cannot view Willy as a suffering human being; for Howard, Willy is a faceless salesman; he is an integer in a vast machine. If the part wears out or breaks down, it must be replaced; the questions of personality, feelings, loyalty, friendship, morality, and ethics do not enter into the picture. Howard symbolizes that portion of

society which refuses to recognize its responsibility to mankind. Happy symbolizes that portion of the younger generation which follows blindly the ways of its elders, never questioning the morality of its acts and beliefs. In Happy, one sees the perpetuation of false goals and beliefs.

Linda's role is one of subtle irony. She eloquently demands that "attention must be paid" to Willy, for he is a human being: "He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog."⁵⁸ But Linda never realizes the cause of Willy's problems, and she never realizes that she contributed much to his inevitable downfall. Linda represents that portion of society which although it believes in and upholds the status quo, blames the "system" when life fails to be all that it should. Throughout Willy's career, Linda encouraged him to continue as he was doing. When Willy had the opportunity to go to Alaska with Ben, it was Linda who talked him out of the idea, saying that he was building a future with the company in New York. Linda's fault is that she believed more heartily the dream her husband told her than he did: she never recognized, in her desire to be a "helpmate," that she was forcing Willy more deeply into despair and frustration by insisting that he believe more strongly that everything would work out. Linda never doubts that the Loman family will ultimately triumph; hence, her dazed and confused state at the

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 162.

funeral: "Why did you do it? I search and search and I search, and I can't understand it."⁵⁹ Thus, Linda stands as a detrimental influence in spite of her love and devotion; she defends the "system" and all the falseness it encourages without ever being aware of her deeds.

Biff's function in the play is straightforward. He comes to understand that which Willy never does: a man is a success if he is loved and is doing that which he enjoys. Thus, Biff is the means by which the idea is manifested that a man serves society, his community --his polis-- best by being himself and doing that for which he is best suited. Biff represents that portion of society which recognizes and is willing to accept its role in the societal organization. His comment at the funeral that Willy never knew who he was emphasizes the value Miller places on a person's having psychological insight and social awareness. Biff acquires both these qualities; Willy, Linda, and Happy never do. Hence, Biff's primary value is didactic; through him the audience learns the value of psychological insight and social awareness.

But the views presented by the Loman family and Howard are only one side of the picture. Miller feels that every drama that he writes, and indirectly all that are written, must reflect "a balance of the truth as it exists."⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 222.

⁶⁰ Miller, "Introduction," Collected Plays, op. cit., p. 37.

That is, both sides of any given situation must be presented honestly and objectively. Thus, the roles played by Charlie and Bernard bring to Death of a Salesman an objective balance. Miller is well aware that society is not composed of Willy Lomans entirely, that there are those whose approach to life is calm and rational; and, therefore, these people must be presented in order for the play to be truthful, and to present accurately its thematic content.

Charlie and Bernard are different from Willy and his family only in one way: they are not fanatics about life. Charlie and Willy have many things in common, socially and intellectually, but the one thing that differentiates them is that Charlie is a realist; he has psychological insight and social awareness. Charlie took a great interest in his son's activities, but never to the point of filling his thoughts with fanciful beliefs; consequently, Bernard becomes a successful lawyer through his own initiative. In a tough, competitive business world, Charlie becomes a success by following the belief that hard work and a good product bring business, not how well you are liked. Charlie states that his success is due to his never taking an interest in anything except business, but this statement cannot be taken at face value; for Charlie shows more compassion and understanding than any other person in the play. Although he disagrees with Willy's beliefs and methods, he understands them. Charlie's statement that "no man only needs a little salary"

emphasizes his awareness of a man's need to fulfill himself: in Willy's case, with love and respect. Charlie shows his compassion through his willingness to lend Willy money every week in spite of Willy's refusal to accept a job from him. This act indicates more than compassion, though; it brings out the idea of social responsibility: the idea that a man cannot be thrown away just because he can no longer produce. Thus, Charlie also stands in direct comparison with Howard Wagner, another successful business man. The manner in which Charlie lives, the way he raised his son, and the compassion and understanding he brings to life contrast greatly with the ways of the other characters, thereby showing, symbolically, the difference between the right and wrong ways. Therefore, Charlie's intense statement that nobody "dast blame" Willy is not to be taken as a defense of Willy Loman but as an invocation to the audience for them to scrutinize intensely the reasons for Willy's actions and beliefs and to take steps to alleviate the false conditions that exist: conditions which produce evil and anti-social systems of values.

The problem of values provides for the establishment of Miller's theme, making Death of a Salesman more than the story of Willy Loman, making it an investigation of one of society's unwritten laws. The play tests the "law of success"; it questions the idea that the most important thing in life is material success. Through Willy Loman, his family, and

his associates, Miller examines the pernicious and prejudicial idea that one must be a success in business or he has no right to exist in the societal structure. Miller shows the meretriciousness of this law through Willy Loman. He shows that which happens to a man who believes that the law is true. Although Miller places much of the blame for the sustenance of this belief on society as a whole, he also shows that there are those who recognize the truth, as two of the views expressed in the Requiem show. One nice point which should be recognized is that Miller is not blaming society or the "system" for Willy's actions. Miller's contention is that Willy is responsible for those himself. He accepted a false philosophy of values on his own; no one forced him to make the choice. Not everyone succumbs to the "system." The grounds upon which Miller criticizes and holds society responsible are that it perpetuates a condition which is deleterious and that in doing so it ignores its moral obligation to mankind. The point Miller is making is that every man has the power and the right to choose his own course in life, which is as it should be. But man's ability to make a free choice is greatly impaired by society, which by presenting a false picture through extolling exaggerated and fraudulent ideas, insidiously victimizes man and then callously abandons him.

In Death of a Salesman, Miller has presented a balanced and objective view of modern society. In fact, the problems

discussed in the play have as much universal currency twelve years after they were first produced as they did at the time of their conception, if not more. Today, the quest for status has reached absurd proportions. Status symbols, group designations --the "ins", the "outs"-- and material wealth have become the criteria by which success is measured. Professor Lewis Mumford has stated that American life is "one long retreat from the vitalities and creativities of a self-sustaining environment and active communal life." Mumford feels that "we have fallen in love with the machine, and have treated it as a god."⁶¹ Thus, Miller's play has much relevancy for modern audiences; for it shows that love and happiness, the true symbols of success, can come only from a society that is aware of its responsibilities, from a society in which each individual is valued because he is a human being and not because he is wealthy or "successful." Death of a Salesman has a theme which is relevant and moral, and it presents this theme in an efficacious manner, thereby fulfilling the four-fold requirements demanded by Miller in his dramas.

First, the play has relevancy for society as a whole because its theme presents a moral concept by which society can live a better, more meaningful life. Second, the theme

⁶¹ Lewis Mumford, San Francisco Examiner, January 13, 1962, Section I, p. 6.

is materialized and expressed through the tragic victory, Willy Loman's death, which was, third, produced by the tragic hero's actions. Fourth, these manifestations are incorporated in a dramatic structure which is meaningful and relevant, which exposes the theme of the play in the most effective and artistic manner possible. Thus, the play expresses Miller's concept of tragedy. The hero, a common man, achieves heroic stature through the passion and intensity with which he carries on his battle; his refusal to relinquish his dreams, even through he recognizes their falseness, in order to justify his life produces the tragic victory. Willy's death in his attempt to give credence to his false belief engenders in the audience, society, a feeling of pity and fear. But Willy's last act is not one of futility but bravery. It shows that he is willing to make the ultimate assertion in order to achieve his individuality. The scope of his misspent life offers a clear, sharp picture, one from which society can gain understanding. The idea of hope and optimism is manifested through the characters of Biff, Charlie, and Bernard. The pity and fear generated by Willy's death dissolves, and an atmosphere of hope and optimism appears. Society has been shown the errors of its ways, but it also has been shown the correct way to live, the social way. Biff shows that it is not too late for society to change, in spite of the affirmations made by those like Happy. Charlie shows

the great rewards which one receives by living a socially moral life.

Thus, Miller expresses his concept of tragedy in a subtle interrelationship of acts and concepts, in a drama which, although complex in structure and meaning, preserves its organic unity throughout. The various ideas presented in Death of a Salesman complement one another and produce an emotional and intellectual experience of great magnitude.

CHAPTER VI

THE CRUCIBLE

In the introduction to his Collected Plays, Arthur Miller states that "a play cannot be equated with a political philosophy."¹ By this idea, Miller means that a work of art cannot be a manifestation of an author's political opinions and beliefs and still be an objective, truthful presentation of life. Miller admits that political implications are inherent in a work of art, but he feels strongly that these implications are false and meaningless if they were purposely arranged and included in such a manner that only one view is expressed in a play. In such cases, Miller contends, the author's political views serve no function other than to be propagandistic in nature and purpose. In order for implied political opinions, concepts, or beliefs to be acceptable in a work of art, Miller feels that they must be the resultant of the rational, objective observations of an author, that they must be free from the author's subjective opinions. Of course, Miller's conscientious stand for fair play and impartiality on an author's part is as impractical as it is virtuous, the problem being just how much the author's subconscious subjectivity influences his attempt at objectivity.

¹ Arthur Miller, "Introduction," Arthur Miller's Collected Plays (New York: The Viking Press, 1959), p. 36.

But be that as it may, the psychological ramifications of the problem of an author's psychical distance, his subjective-objective relationship to his material, are not the pertinent matter at hand. The importance of Miller's remarks lies in their relationship to the theme of The Crucible. The Crucible is not an overt expression of its author's political views; it is not an attack upon right-wing conservatism, nor is it a subtle defense of left-of-center radicalism. Any political expressions or views voiced in or by the play stem from and are interpretations of Miller's attempt to set down on paper as a work of art his total, objective perception of "what was in the air" at the time of the writing of the play, 1952. Although he says that he was influenced by "McCarthyism",² Miller is quick to state that the political aspects of the play are secondary to his main theme: "the handing over of conscience to another, be it woman, the state, or a terror, and the realization that with conscience goes the person, the soul immortal, and the 'name'."³ Thus, the attacks upon Miller as a propagandist for Marxian philosophy are completely erroneous, lacking supportable evidence of any nature whatsoever. In fact, if one were to find a political point of view that is consistent throughout his plays, one would have to say that Miller is a believer in

² Ibid., p. 39

³ Ibid., p. 47.

and a strong defender of Capitalism. In All My Sons, Chris Keller states that he will run the business on a sound moral and ethical basis, thereby indicating that there is a virtuous quality in capitalism. In Death of a Salesman, Charlie and Bernard, the symbols of good, are about as capitalistic as anyone can be. It would be strange Marxian propaganda, indeed, for Miller to show two capitalists as exemplars of the proper way by which to live; that is, if he were truly a tool of the left-wing faction. In The Crucible, Miller is attacking any idea, theory, or movement that tends to destroy personal liberty or paralyze freedom of thought and expression. Miller is defending man's right to think, act, and be what he chooses. Richard Watts, Jr., well-known drama critic, admirably and succinctly states Miller's theme in The Crucible. Watts says that the play is "an eloquent statement on the universal subject of the free man's courageous and never-ending fight against mass pressures to make him bow down in conformity."⁴ Thus, Miller's theme is, as in all his previous plays, moral in nature. It investigates the question of good and evil; it examines the manner in which society lives. The Crucible, therefore tends to follow the intellectual pattern of Greek social drama, the style which Miller values highly. And as a social drama, in Miller's sense of the term, it should manifest its theme through a tragic victory, one

⁴Richard Watts, Jr., "Introduction," Arthur Miller, The Crucible (New York: Bantam Books, 1959), p. xii.

brought about by the destruction of the tragic hero. Now, if The Crucible is truly a social drama, it must meet the four-fold requirements established in Miller's concept of tragedy, or else place Miller in the position of being charged with failing to achieve his intentions, thereby casting serious doubt upon the status of the play. Hence, it becomes necessary to make a close explication of the text in order to see whether The Crucible meets the demands made of it. In order to facilitate this explication, it is advantageous to examine three facets of the play at one time: the structure, the theme, and the relevancy of the play to society.

Structurally, The Crucible is very much like All My Sons, both plays utilizing a double plot revealed in the conventional manner. One basic difference is that The Crucible is one of the few modern American dramas to use a four act framework. Aside from that, though, both plays bring out their major ideas through the blending of two separate yet contiguous story lines. The method by which Miller handles his material in The Crucible is done with the same fine craftsmanship as in the earlier play, although in the latter work the parallel structure shows both society in general and the family unit instead of abstractly presenting society through symbolization. Thus, the general references to society in All My Sons are replaced by concrete examples in The Crucible. In depicting society, Miller divides the field

into two forces, the good and the evil, the accused and the accusers. The tie between society in general and the family unit comes in the form of John Proctor, his wife, and his children. Needless to say, because they both eventually are charged with witchcraft, John Proctor and his wife stand as symbols of good. The irony in the situation is that Proctor feels himself to be evil, having committed adultery and thereby breaking one of the commandments by which he guides his moral life. Because of the self-incrimination that he feels, Proctor is hesitant to speak against the fraudulent accusations being raised by the people of Salem against their neighbors. But when his wife is accused by the girl with whom he sinned, Proctor readily comes to court to prove that the accusers and their accusations are not so holy as they are thought to be. Proctor is willing to bring disgrace upon himself and his family in order that a greater truth can be made known: "I have made a bell of my honor! I have rung the doom of my good name."⁵ He knows that although he has broken faith with himself and his family, his sin is not so great as that of society: breaking faith with mankind by making false, pernicious, accusations for dubious reasons and for doubtful gains. Thus, the problems between Proctor and his wife become enmeshed with the problems of the community.

⁵ Arthur Miller, "The Crucible," Arthur Miller's Collected Plays (New York: The Viking Press, 1959), p. 305.

The actions with which Proctor responds when pressed to confess to a lie in order to save his good name endow him with a stature that is heroic. But before examining in detail Proctor's tragic stature, it is necessary to explore the development of the forces of good and evil in order to determine their exact position in the play's structure.

In speaking of the "in the air" influences which germinated the ideas expressed in the play, Miller has said that he was struck by the awesome realization

that so practical and picayune a cause, carried forward by such manifestly ridiculous men, should be capable of paralyzing thought itself, and worse, causing to billow up such persuasive clouds of "mysterious" feelings within people.⁶

Wishing to show the anti-socialness and the terrifying consequences of a surging campaign which divests an individual of his conscience, his name, and his individuality, Miller turned to the Salem witch trials as a means by which to present his theme; for he saw a striking similarity between the causes leading up to and the results of the Salem trials and the rise and effects of "McCarthyism." Thus, the Salem witch trials become the means by which Miller could show the necessity for greater self-awareness, better understanding, and more tolerance on the part of society as a whole in its relationship to its individual members. Hence, the play

⁶ Miller, Collected Plays, op. cit., p. 39.

loses no time in presenting the effects of blind, intolerant, and rapacious acts. At the first sign of strangeness in some of the young girls of the village, the Salem townspeople immediately take up the cry of witchcraft. If there is devilry about, then those who have trafficked with the devil must be made to confess. Reverend Parris, whose daughter is afflicted, is hesitant to say there is witchcraft about because his enemies would make much of the knowledge that his daughter and his niece had been dancing in the woods, dancing without their clothes on. But Parris is encouraged by Thomas Putnam, a man who feels himself to be a power in the village. Putnam tells Parris to "wait for no one to charge you--declare it yourself. You have discovered witchcraft."⁷ The Reverend Hale from Beverly, Massachusetts, arrives in Salem in order to pursue his "bloody fight with the Fiend himself." Hale appears as a precise, supercilious person, one who takes pride in being recognized as a specialist in fighting the Devil's work, a personal crusade for him. Under Hale's relentless interrogation, Parris's Barbados slave, Tituba, confesses to conjuring up the Devil. In a very emotionally chilling scene, Hale wrings from Tituba the information that "the Devil's got him numerous witches" in Salem.⁸ With this revelation, a feverish impetuosity

⁷ Miller, "The Crucible," op. cit., p. 236.

⁸ Ibid., p. 257.

seizes the minds and souls of those present, kindling in their hearts a mixture of impassioned and fanatical enmity toward those against whom they have held a grievance or have been jealous and a self-sanctifying attitude toward their own moral probity. The psychological implications of this scene are illuminating, for they lay bare the fundamental reasons behind the ensuing hysteria. The assembled personages are desirous to find some way of expressing their personal manias, their covetous desires, their hatreds; and what better way could be found than under the guise of morality? Thus, the simple-minded Tituba willingly receives Hale's entreaties to open herself to God by confessing; and she also succumbs to the unrelenting suggestion made by those present. In a trance-like state, mesmerized by the righteousness of the situation, Tituba names those whom she "saw" consorting with the Devil: she names those people suggested by Parris and Putnam and Mrs. Putnam. And the mysticism of the situation inspires the girls to repent; one by one they cry out, following Abigail's lead, hysterically, gleefully, exultantly, naming those good people of the village whom they have seen consorting with the Devil, naming those people who have, by supernatural means, been forcing them to dance for the Devil and write in his book. The estatic cries reach a thundering crescendo and the names of the Devil's disciples reverberate through the room, each name another chip for the glowing fire

raging in the hearts of the righteous. But under the facade of deep penitence erected by the girls lies the same psychological motivation that sparked their elders: revenge and fear of punishment. It is difficult not to see that Tituba's confession supplied the girls with the perfect opportunity to place the blame for their actions elsewhere. Abigail's haughty demeanor when informed that she will be called a witch and whipped is indicative of the lengths to which she will go to avert blame and punishment, and her overbearing personality easily enables her to coerce her friends into following her lead. With a quick, militant movement, the forces for righteousness seize the offensive and establish a court in which to try those accused of witchcraft. Although there are some who "like not the smell of this 'authority,'" they see the difficulty in attempting to prove a saint a fraud.⁹ Also, they see the difficulty in overcoming the court's predilection for the accusers, its biased attitude. Thus, the forces of good are confronted with three societal evils: the accusers, the confessors, and the court. The malignant power held by the accusers can be seen in the manner in which it affects those accused of witchcraft, the confessors. These people confess to crimes not because they are guilty but because a confession brings them redemption. To confess is to become

⁹Ibid., p. 264.

righteous again, is to become a member of the community once again. Thus, the confessers become holy because they were willing to give credence to a lie, because they were willing to turn over their name and conscience to a howling mob. And the absurdity of the situation is further compounded by the illogicity of the position of the court. Deputy Governor Danforth, the chief justice of the court, maintains that because witchcraft is "an invisible crime" and because the witch will not accuse herself, there is no alternative but to rely upon the testimony of the victims.¹⁰ Reverend Parris succinctly presents the ludicrous position held by those in authority when he states that their purpose is "to discover what no one has ever seen."¹¹ There is another factor which operates upon the court and forces it to maintain its position: the idea that authority cannot be disputed. Hence, Danforth is placed in the position of having to defend the accusers and support his actions unreservedly or else admit culpability on the court's part. Therefore, the court cannot pardon or reprieve those who have been accused without questioning the guilt of those already convicted; thus, the court's desire for each person to confess his association with the Devil supports the court's position, the confessor proving that the court is on the side of righteousness striving for the truth.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 297.

¹¹Ibid., p. 300.

The point that Miller is making here is that the insidious effect of mass, false hysteria is that it ensnares those within its grasp and forces them to adhere to an untenable position, destroying in its frantic rush toward disaster all vestiges of truth, legality, freedom, honor, and self-respect. Thus, in the overall structure of the play, the accusers, the confessors, and the representatives of authority stand as the evil force in society, the initiators and the perpetrators of anti-social action. On the side of good, as the spokesmen, stand two somewhat paradoxical characters: John Proctor and Reverend John Hale. The irony in this situation, intended irony, is that Proctor believes himself to be a sinner and Hale is one of the instigators of the proceedings. Hale's position is interesting in that it emphasizes and supports Miller's contention that social and psychological awareness is the key to correct social behavior. Hence, Hale's role in the play is to bring this awareness to the audience, and, therefore, his role should be examined before Proctor's role.

Hale's character upon his arrival in Salem has already been commented on: he is moral, eager, pedantic, and supercilious. He arrived laden with books of his trade, ready to enlighten the people, ready to rip and tear through the souls of the bewitched in order to crush the Devil. Although he believed in the inherent goodness in people, he was aware that the devil could seize the soul of even the most righteous

person. Thus, when Elizabeth Proctor and Rebecca Nurse were arrested on the charge of signing the Devil's book, he told the grieving husbands not to worry; their wives would be acquitted when their true character was shown, for "the court is just." But the overbearing tactics employed by the court in order to substantiate its position and its direct disregard for motions entered into by the defense led Hale to ask if every defense was to be misconstrued as an attack upon the court.¹² For the first time since his arrival in Salem, Hale began to sense the possibility of collusion on the girls' part and duplicity on the court's part. Shaken by the knowledge that the testimony upon which he had condemned seventy-two people may have been false, Hale begged Danforth to postpone the trials until "proof so immaculate no slightest qualm of conscience may doubt it"¹³ can be established. The court's refusal to comply with his desire and its uncompromising support of the prosecuting witnesses' testimony moved Hale to repeat Proctor's cry that "private vengeance" is working through the court and to refuse to participate longer in the trial: "I denounce these proceedings, I quit this court."¹⁴ After a sojourn in the outlying sections of the province for three months, Hale returned to Salem in order to do what he

¹²Ibid., p. 292.

¹³Ibid., p. 297.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 311.

calls "the Devil's work". Hale has returned to Salem in order "to counsel Christians they should belie themselves."¹⁵ Hale's statement indicates the low repute with which he now regards the court and in which he holds himself. He feels that by encouraging men to lie, he is doing the Devil's work; he also feels that the court's willingness to accept lies makes it no more than an instrument of the Devil. Hale's decision to advise the condemned to lie indicates the awesomeness of the situation; for as he says, "damnation's doubled on a minister who counsels men to lie."¹⁵ But Hale is willing to risk damnation in order to prevent wrongful and needless sacrifice; he would rather have the people tell a meaningless lie than give their lives for a meaningless cause. One fact that should not be overlooked is the implied symbolism manifested by Hale's position. His belief that he is doing the Devil's work by counseling understanding, mercy, and humility must be compared with the court's belief that it is doing God's work by hanging those who will not confess to a lie and forgiving those who will profane themselves. Miller has wrought here a subtle transference of values. In reality, it is the court that is doing the Devil's work and Hale who is trying to do God's, although both believe otherwise. Awareness and understanding have come to Hale, and the problem with which he is faced is how to utilize the great

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 319.

knowledge he has discovered. He knows that he cannot change the dogmatic tenets followed by the court, he cannot bring about a change in the court's position; hence, in his great anxiety to act justly, socially, in order to make amends for his earlier acts against the accused, Hale attempts to use his position to counsel the people to confess and save their lives. But Hale fails in this attempt, and rightly so; for even though Miller is using Hale as a projector by which the light of awareness can be radiated, he is not upholding nor advocating Hale's methods. Miller's intention is to show that even the most regenerated beliefs can be harmful if they attempt to combat anti-social actions with more anti-social actions. By counseling the condemned to confess, Hale is furthering the injustice of the situation by encouraging the condemned to discard their final vestige of integrity; in essence, he is telling them to fight a lie with a lie. But this idea is contrary to the end toward which Miller is working: the only effective way to combat a lie, evil, is by the truth, goodness. Therefore, though it is Hale who is the means by which the evil forces in society are exposed, it is John Proctor who shows the correct way to combat them.

John Proctor is willing to die in order to save his name; he is willing to do so because he realizes that to sign his name to a lie is to destroy truth and honor and is to make a mockery of justice by giving in to and supporting

iniquitous authority. Proctor does not arrive at this decision automatically, for he is not so self-sacrificing that he is willing to throw away his life for some chimerical cause. In fact, he is very much tempted to sign a confession and save his life. The predicament he faces is no small one; to sign his name in one quick stroke and be free to go with his wife to their farm and live quietly with their children, or to hold steadfastly to his beliefs and die. For one moment, Proctor was willing to sign, for he is no saint and who is there to judge him?¹⁶ But the court's insistence that he name others who had conspired with the Devil and its plans to make his confession public awaken Proctor to the true reason for the need for his confession: "It is a weighty name; it will strike the village that Proctor confess."¹⁷ If a man of Proctor's status, whose reputation for rational action has made him a leader and very influential, confesses, then many more will follow his lead. If he confesses, then he is supporting the terrible lies and injustices perpetrated by the accusers and the court upon innocent people. Also, because he is respected and trusted by the villagers, his confession will vindicate the court's methods and will jeopardize the lives of other innocent people. Although his desire to live is great, as one would expect it to be, his

¹⁶Ibid., p. 324.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 326.

desire to uphold his moral beliefs is even greater. Proctor will not allow his "name" to be used for false purposes because he then would be handing over his conscience and soul to the forces of evil. To do so would be to blacken the names of those who died rather than confess and would be to sell the honesty and integrity of his friends for a corrupt salvation. Proctor is willing to destroy his good name by confessing to adultery because it is a true confession. He has sinned against God and must do penitence and seek mercy from God alone. God can forgive him for sinning, as he has truthfully confessed his error and is willing to seek salvation; but will God forgive his confessing to a lie? Will he be forgiven by his neighbors and his children? Could he confess and still maintain his honor, his name? And without his name and all that it implies, could he teach his children the proper, social, moral way to live? Although Hale pleads with Proctor, saying that he cannot hang because of "pride" or "vanity," Proctor avers that he can; he can die because he now sees "some shred of goodness in John Proctor." He will "show them honor now, show a stony heart and sink them with it."¹⁸ Hale's supplications to Elizabeth fail, too, for she cries, "He have (sic) his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him."¹⁹ The goodness about which

¹⁸Ibid., p. 328.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 329.

both John and Elizabeth speak is Proctor's honor. Although he might have fallen once in a moment of weakness, he will not destroy his honor, his name, again by sinning against his moral beliefs by confessing a false guilt. By going to his death with his conscience clean, Proctor can die with the knowledge that he has not betrayed his neighbors or his family; he has not given sustenance to a pernicious force bent on destroying through insidious methods the rights and liberty of society. Proctor chooses to die not because he has a "guilt complex," but because he realizes it is the only honorable thing he can do. This understanding is the factor which differentiates Proctor from Hale. Proctor knows that a man cannot surrender to evil and still maintain his honor, still maintain the right to believe that he is a moral being working for the good of his community. Hale, although he believes in truth and justice, cannot condone such action because he misunderstands the issues involved. Hale feels that there is no loss of honor, only a loss of pride and dignity because one is too vain to accept a compromise; and he believes that it is better to lose these qualities than to lose one's life. That which Hale fails to comprehend is that if Proctor saves his life, he is declaring truth and honor dead and is supporting the contention that vanity and deceit are acceptable moral qualities by which a person could guide his life. Hence, by choosing to hang rather than compromise his honor by submitting to unjust authority or

denigrate truth by giving credibility to lies, Proctor shows that a man will endure anything in order to protect and maintain his honor and dignity, his name and individuality.

Thus the rationale which provides the motives for his actions also provides the means through which Proctor rises to a stature of heroic aspect, and from the emotional impact of the great tragic sacrifice made by this heroic person comes the tragic victory: the washing away of pity and terror by enlightenment, hope, and optimism. One must recognize that Proctor's tragic sacrifice is an assertion of bravery, for it shows the great lengths to which a man will go in order to uphold his beliefs. Through Proctor, Miller is showing that man has the basic qualities so necessary for the development and continuance of society. Miller is showing that society must not bow in fear or terror, it must not give vent to covetous ways, and it must not lose its sense of understanding and justice by becoming mesmerized by mass hysteria. In Proctor's stand against the forces of evil, Miller is showing that man is still aware of the need for honor, truth, and justice; and this awareness shows optimism and hope. First, Proctor's death brings enlightenment; society sees the evil which caused his death. From his steadfast refusal to submit to the forces of evil, Proctor shows society the proper way of combatting these forces. Hence, society learns what it must do, how it must act in order to live a more social, a more meaningful life. This

knowledge brings hope and optimism for the future.

Thus, The Crucible fulfills the four major requirements demanded by Miller for social dramas. The play is relevant to society because its theme presents a moral concept pertinent to society's daily life. The theme is manifested through the courageous acts of the tragic hero, a common man who gains heroic stature by steadfastly refusing to relinquish his honor or his individuality, and through the intellectual significance of the tragic victory. These factors are combined in a drama of great emotional force, a drama which grows in stature and intensity as it progresses. The feverish development of the action stimulates and draws attention to the intellectual and moral concepts being presented, and the naturalness of the characters enables society to identify and associate itself with them and their problems, thereby intensifying through the emotional aspects of the play the relevancy and significance of the theme. Because of the forcefulness of the dramatic exposition, the relevancy of the theme, and the efficaciousness of the overall dramatic unity, The Crucible easily meets the standards set forth in Miller's concept of tragedy.

CHAPTER VII

A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE

Disturbed because the critics had paid more attention to the supposed aspects of "McCarthyism" in The Crucible than to the real issues involved in the play, Miller vowed "to separate, openly and without concealment, the action" in his next play from its "generalized significance."¹ Hence, in A View from the Bridge, Miller employed a structural form new for him: the "engaged narrator," a person who was to function much in the same manner as the chorus in classical Greek tragedy. Miller designated as the narrator's task the role of commentator; he was to be not only an integral part of the play, but also the play's spokesman to the audience. Thus, the narrator could comment on the action of the play without actually interrupting it, subtly indicating to the audience the full importance of that which was taking place. Because of Miller's desire to manifest clearly and decisively the thematic meaning of the play, his use of the engaged narrator became a thinly disguised means by which he could direct the audience's attention to those points of the play which he thought important. In spite of the purity of his motive, Miller's action is indefensible, for there is no

¹ Arthur Miller, "Introduction," Arthur Miller's Collected Plays (New York: The Viking Press, 1957), p. 47.

excuse which can assuage the insult to an audience's intelligence of such a device. It is as if Miller were waying, "I doubt that you will understand this play; therefore, I will explain it to you as we go along." Of course, a trenchant observer could always remark that Miller, after examining some of the critical analyses made of his previous plays, was perfectly right in doing as he did. Yet for a playwright of Miller's high caliber to resort to such dramaturgic nonsense is inexcusable, as the critics were quick to point out.

The Broadway production of A View from the Bridge, which opened September 29, 1955, received somewhat less than enthusiastic notices. Eric Bentley thought the play obscured by "a fog of false rhetoric" and said that Miller "would have been well-advised to let the story become Greek by its own poignancy and grandeur and not by choral tips to the audience."² Shepard Traube ended his circumspect critique in The Nation by saying that the acting was great, thereby giving short shrift to the other facets of the play.³ Henry Hewes felt that the hero's death was "unreal," even though it followed the dictates of "traditional tragedy."⁴ Almost all the

²Eric Bentley, "Arthur Miller's New Play," The New Republic, CXXXIII (December 19, 1955), 21.

³Shepard Traube, "Theater," The Nation, CLXXXI (October 22, 1955), 349.

⁴Henry Hewes, "Broadway Postscript," The Saturday Review, XXXVIII (October 15, 1955), 26.

critics damned the play with faint praise, finding fault with the hero, the engaged narrator, and the writing, yet praising its overall forcefulness. One can only deduce that the finer attributes of the play were manifested mainly through the ability of the actors, or at least so the critics were inclined to believe. For someone who had been at odds with the critics over lesser points, Miller accepted the critics' judgments calmly, saying that they were just and correct. For his part, Miller joined the critics by saying that the failure of the play was mainly due to "the reticence of the writing."⁵ He believed that his failure "to explore and exploit" the inevitable happenings in the story made the characters unrealistic and the action weak. At the time these comments were being made, the play was a long one-act; it was the second half of a double bill which had for its curtain raiser a short, pathos-filled comedy --A Memory of Two Mondays-- that received rough treatment from the critics, too. Because of its very nature, A Memory of Two Mondays is not germane to this study; therefore, there is no need to include any discussion of it. When a new production of A View from the Bridge was planned for London, Miller made several "decisive alterations" in structure and characterization. He lengthened the play, extending it to two full acts, and he deepened the psychological aspects, bringing out more

⁵ Miller, op. cit., p. 50.

forcefully the interrelationship of the main character's actions. Thus, when the new production opened on October 11, 1956, the play was almost entirely new. Even though the London production was much more successful than the New York one, many of the basic problems still remained, and once again the play was severely criticized. Richard Findlater's essay "No Time for Tragedy?" is representative of the opinions of the majority of English critics. Findlater applauds Miller's determination "to accomodate the tragic drama to the century of the common man," but he feels that the hero of the play, Eddie Carbone, "is mentally below par," even for a modern, democratic tragedy.⁶ Findlater also criticizes the function of the narrator, saying that the device of the engaged commentator is trite and adds nothing to the play. In a remark that parallels Bentley's ideas, Findlater takes Miller to task for wanting "to make people prove things, instead of just letting them be."⁷ On the whole, though, Findlater, together with critics such as Frederick Lumley and Kenneth Tynan, found the play to be highly emotional and imaginative in range and power and very well acted.

Thus, in both the original and the revised versions, the critics found the same basic faults. Miller admitted that

⁶ Richard Findlater, "No Time for Tragedy?" The Twentieth Century, CLXI (January, 1957), 60.

⁷ Ibid., 62.

there were flaws in the original version, and he attempted to rectify then in the second production. The question arises, then, did he succeed? Unfortunately, the critics say no. They feel that although the revised play is far superior to the original version, it still contains the same basic flaws, the worst of which is the hero's inability to achieve tragic stature. They feel that Eddie Carbone is not a tragic hero, no matter to what lengths Miller goes in his attempt to make him one, and that the oracular dispensations of the engaged narrator tend to inflict upon the play ideas which are completely incongruous. What the critics fail to say is that the narrator's comments seem to refute some of the basic principles set forth by Miller in his concept of tragedy. Hence, two possibilities arise: either the critics are wrong and the play is a well-balanced, cohesive whole which offers a new, for Miller, concept of tragedy or Miller has followed his basic concepts but has failed to produce an effective tragic drama. The task, then, is to examine the play carefully in order to ascertain which of the two ideas is the correct one.

A View from the Bridge is the story of an Italian-American longshoreman and his family --Eddie Carbone, his wife Beatrice, and his niece Catherine-- who live in a run-down section of the Brooklyn waterfront. Although he does not realize it, Eddie has more than avuncular feelings toward

his niece, whom he has raised since she was a small child. The niece returns Eddie's affections, but only in the manner of a devoted and loving daughter. Eddie's wife Beatrice has been aware of the situation for some time, and she has been encouraging Catherine to take a full-time position as a stenographer in order that she may be away from the house as much as possible. Eddie, of course, dislikes the idea; he wants something better for her. Beatrice is also disturbed by Eddie's refusal to let her be a wife to him, and she attributes this to Eddie's subconscious desire for Catherine. Complicating the issue is the arrival of Beatrice's two cousins, illegal immigrants who have come to the country in order to work. Although Eddie is not too happy about having them stay in his house, he accepts his responsibility: "It's an honor" to help one's relatives. The immigrants, Marco and Rodolpho, quickly win the approval of Beatrice and Catherine. Marco, married and the father of three children, works hard in order that he may send his family much-needed money. Rodolpho, young, carefree, and handsome, enjoys spending the money he earns; for he has no family to support. Naturally, Catherine and Rodolpho fall in love. At first, Eddie is content to try to discourage Catherine merely by picking on Rodolpho's faults. Eddie believes that there is something wrong with the boy: "He's a blond guy," "he sings," "he sews," and "he's a cook, too." Eddie takes his problem to Alfieri,

the neighborhood lawyer, who is also the play's narrator. In order to prepare the audience for what has already been established through expository dialogue and action, the narrator informs the audience that there is a "passion" moving into Eddie's body. Alfieri tells Eddie to wish Catherine luck and let her go, for there is nothing Eddie can do. But he tells the audience that he knew what was going to happen; he could see the terrifying end in view. Disturbed by Alfieri's advice to leave well enough alone, Eddie remains quiet for a few days. But the pressure finally becomes too great for him. In an attempt to discredit Rodolpho, Eddie knocks him down in a mock fight; then he kisses him before a horrified Catherine. Once again, Eddie's actions only help solidify the youngsters' love, and they set a wedding date. In desperation, Eddie turns to Alfieri, and this time the narrator gives him and the audience a few choice words of advice that seem to incorporate an odd blending of Deus ex machina with the doctrine of Naturalism:

I'm warning you --the law is nature. The law is only a word for what has a right to happen. When the law is wrong it's because it's unnatural, but in this case it is natural,⁸ and a river will drown you if you buck it now.⁸

Thus, the audience is informed that the laws of nature cannot be thwarted or transcended. The love between Catherine and

⁸ Arthur Miller, "A View from the Bridge," Arthur Miller's Collected Plays (New York: The Viking Press, 1957), p. 424.

Rodolpho is a normal, natural love; Eddie's love for Catherine is not. The natural laws of the universe support Catherine's and Rodolpho's marriage, as do the man-made laws. Hence, the audience learns that it must not go against these laws. Also, Alfieri is warning the audience that it must not go against that which has been decreed by the force or forces that control man's ways; that is, Alfieri, as the chorus, is telling Eddie, representing society, that the ways of the gods are inexorable and that he will bring only harm to himself if he disobeys them. In this case, though, the ways of the gods are the social laws and mores of the society in which Eddie lives. But Eddie fails to heed this advice, too. Consumed with a passion that blinds him to everything but revenge, Eddie reports Marco and Rodolpho to the Immigration Bureau. By this action, Eddie feels that he is protecting Catherine and is asserting his authority in the house. Once again, his niece will give him the attention and love for which he hungers. Even with this act of betrayal, Eddie fails to see that his deeds are motivated by excessive ardor; all he knows is that Rodolpho is stealing "her" from him. Meanwhile, because of the troubled atmosphere in the house, and unknown to Eddie, Marco and Rodolpho have moved upstairs into an apartment with two other illegal immigrants. Thus, when the Immigration Bureau officers arrive, they arrest all four "submarines." As he is being put into the patrol car, and before the

gathering neighbors, Marco spits in Eddie's face and accuses him of informing. Eddie vehemently denies the allegation, but his neighbors turn from him, accepting Marco's statement. To the people of his neighborhood, his class of society, Eddie has become an informer; he has disgraced his family, defiled his name, and dishonored his neighborhood. Hence, it becomes necessary for Eddie to remove the Judas stigma from his name or else lose forever his right to be a member of society. But with Marco in jail, there seems little possibility that Eddie can obtain an apology from him. Fortunately, Miller arranges bail for Marco. Almost immediately Marco and Eddie meet for a showdown -- Eddie seeking an apology and Marco seeking revenge -- and during the ensuing struggle, Marco kills Eddie with Eddie's knife. The play ends with Alfieri attempting to give stature and universality to the final pathos-filled scene by ennobling Eddie with a stature of heroic quality:

Most of the time now we settle for half and I like it better. But the truth is holy, and even as I know how wrong he was, and his death useless, I tremble, for I confess that something perversely pure calls to me from his memory -- not purely good, but himself purely, for he allowed himself to be wholly known and for that I think I will love him more than all my sensible clients. And yet, it is better to settle for half, it must be! And so I mourn him -- I admit it-- with a certain . . . alarm.⁹

⁹Ibid., p. 439.

The major dichotomy in the play appears in the views expressed through Eddie Carbone and those expressed through Alfieri, the narrator. One can see that Eddie is meant to be a tragic hero. He fights desperately for his name, his individuality, his right to belong to his community. Eddie's hamartia, his tragic flaw, is similar to Othello's: he loved not wisely but too well. Driven by his too zealous passion for his niece, Eddie commits an anti-social action, and he dies trying to regain the honor and integrity he lost when committing that act. Incestual love is not the theme of the play; actually, it is no more than the means by which the theme is manifested. The story-plot is, as John Gassner aptly states it, "the tragedy of an informer who betrays a relative to immigration officers out of jealousy."¹⁰ Where one would tend to disagree with Gassner is over his use of the word "tragedy." The theme is that excessive passion, no matter what form it may take, leads one to commit anti-social acts because it destroys one's overall perspective. Thus, the idea that one must have social awareness and psychological insight in order to live a good, moral, meaningful life is brought out; and this idea is the same one that has been brought out in each of Miller's previous dramas. As a tragic hero, Eddie is meant to be pitied by the audience, for it sees

¹⁰ John Gassner, Theatre at the Crossroads (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960), p. 307.

the terrible self-consuming nature of his problem and feels his anguish as he suffers. He is meant to produce terror, too; for the audience realizes that it, too, could be possessed by all-consuming ardor and succumb to irrational and irresponsible thoughts. As a tragic hero, Eddie could fit Miller's preconceived mold. Eddie's actions can produce in the audience some feelings of pity and terror, but the sum produced is very small. Eddie's rantings and ravings as he peregrinates through his waterfront neighborhood remind one of the antics of a water buffalo trapped in quicksand: all bluster and muscle, the total effect doing no more than dragging him further downward. One important factor is missing from Eddie's death: the tragic victory. In no way does his death produce the necessary factors of hope, optimism, and enlightenment. In fact, when Marco kills Eddie with Eddie's own knife, one feels that justice, poetic justice, has been done. Also, there is nothing inherently noble in Eddie's death which would alleviate the terror supposedly produced by his struggle. The fact is that the audience learns absolutely nothing more, in a moral or philosophical sense, than it knew before Eddie died. Perhaps Miller was aware of this fact and attempted to make his point in Alfieri's eulogy. If that is the case, then he did no more than confuse the issue; for where Eddie shows that a man must go all-out in order to justify his honor and integrity, Alfieri says that he should

settle for half. If this idea is the final thought to be impressed upon the audience, then Miller's entire concept of tragedy has changed radically. Chris Keller, Willy Loman, and John Proctor were men who could not settle for half. Is Miller now saying that they were wrong? Is he also saying Eddie Carbone was wrong? In view of the evidence showing Miller's attempt to make Eddie a tragic hero, such an assumption seems illogical. The problem seems to lie in the interpretation of Alfieri's words. Alfieri admires Eddie's attempt to justify himself, to try to regain his individuality. He believes that Eddie's actions show something pure, although one is tempted to describe Eddie's movements as puerile rather than pure. Even though Alfieri says that it is better to settle for half because the consequences are not so great, he does recognize what he calls "truth" and "purity" in a struggle such as Eddie's. He is saying, poorly, that the truth is holy because it helps a person guide his life in a meaningful fashion and because it helps society know the proper way in which to act. He is praising Eddie for having the courage to discover a truth. Therefore, Alfieri's eulogy is actually meant to be an affirmation of the ideas Miller is presenting through Eddie. Thus, in a somewhat roundabout and turbid way, Miller is attempting to ennoble Eddie's deeds by making them heroic in stature. Also, he is criticizing a society which settles for half, even though it recognizes the

evil in doing so. Unfortunately, Miller is trying to force too much meaning into meaningless deeds. Eddie's great quest for his name, his honor, never rises above the level of absurdity. Eddie may feel that he maintains his respect by asserting his masculinity, but the intelligent observer will feel that Eddie is engaging only in childish bravado. It is true that Eddie does suffer, but he appears to suffer within his glands and not within his mind. Eddie suffers as a frustrated child would suffer: he rants, raves, pouts, and sulks. In the end, he strikes out in blind rage. Under these conditions, it is difficult to see Eddie Carbone in the same light as one sees Chris Keller, Willy Loman, and John Proctor.

Although A View from the Bridge may fail as tragic drama because of poor structural unity and weak and sometimes confused writing, it does not fail as exciting drama. It can be called dinosaurian: Huge, powerful, and awkward. Though not heroic by any measure, the characters are emotional and bombastic; they manage to bring a sense of necessity and meaning to their little problem. But without the necessary stature, the play and its hero remain only an adumbration of true tragic drama, and they remain so because they fail to meet the requirements for tragic drama set forth by Miller in his concept of tragedy.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The examination of Miller's concept of tragedy and the analyses of his plays in the preceding chapters have brought out three facts. First, as a theory, Miller's concept of tragedy is rational, logical, and credible. It synthesizes two valid ideas into a meaningful concept, one that has import for mid-Twentieth Century audiences. Miller's blending of the philosophical concepts behind Greek tragedy with the concept of the modern, common man as tragic hero produces a structurally coherent, socially relevant, dramatically workable, and intellectually sound concept of tragedy. Second, in writing his plays, Miller has attempted to follow the beliefs expressed in his concept of tragedy. He has tried to make his plays artistic presentations of those beliefs by expressing the moral and philosophical meanings of the plays in a dramatic, emotional, and relevant manner. It has been seen that in writing his plays, Miller has always striven to produce the utmost in effective, meaningful drama. He has not been afraid to face the important issues of life; he has made strong demands upon his audience, offering them no escape from moral responsibilities. He has always been concerned with and has constructed his plays around problems of universal importance: truth and

deceit, belief and doubt, good and evil. But during the process of analyzing his last play, A View from the Bridge, the third and somewhat disquieting fact appeared. In spite of the validity of his concept of tragedy, and in spite of his attempts to make his plays manifestations of that concept, Miller's intents and accomplishments can be two different things. It has been seen that whereas All My Sons, Death of a Salesman, and The Crucible attain the status of tragic drama, A View from the Bridge does not. Now the question arises that if Miller has painstakingly constructed his dramas to express and conform to his theory, why has he met with both success and failure? Is it possible that there is in his theory a hidden flaw, one that remained latent until the last play? Fortunately, the answer to the last question is no. The answer to the first question is actually an obvious one, and it has nothing to do with the validity of Miller's concept. As a playwright, Miller is not above making mistakes; he is just as capable of writing a poor play as he is of writing a good one. His failure to produce a true tragedy in A View from the Bridge was due to poor writing, to his failure to accomplish that which he had set as his goal. But even in failing, he managed to convey sufficient information to show that he had not deserted or diluted his concept of tragedy. However he has fared, Miller has always been true to his beliefs.

On the first page of the introduction to this paper, mention was made of the dichotomy existing in regard to the status of Miller's plays. Now the author of this paper realizes that his paper will not resolve the problem, nor has that intent been his main purpose. To make a dogmatic pronouncement upon the stature and status of Miller's plays would only fan the flames of controversy to a great temperature, and in the heat of argument nothing can be resolved. This paper has attempted to offer a more realistic way of evaluating Miller's plays, one that is more in tune with the period in which the plays were written. By examining Miller's concept of tragedy in order to understand and interpret its salient points and their finer ramifications, it is possible to obtain a greater awareness and comprehension of the beliefs and practices to which Miller subscribes. By determining whether his personal views are of more than personal significance --that is, whether they have meaning for others and whether they express ideas of universal importance -- it is possible to arrive at a point from which to begin examining Miller's plays. The facts, as presented in chapter two, give every indication that Miller's concept of tragedy is relevant and meaningful in its relationship to modern society. Hence, in essence, it can stand as a touchstone by which to measure and weigh his artistic creations, testing to see whether his plays have a meaningful relationship to the society for which

they were produced. By using this approach, one avoids trying to examine Miller's plays by standards and concepts irrelevant and meaningless to modern society. One never thinks of determining the effectiveness of Shakespearean tragedy by seeing how well it conforms to Greek tragedy. It is just as illogical to judge modern tragedy by Grecian or Shakespearean concepts. Therefore, in order to judge Arthur Miller's plays properly, it is necessary to view them as artistic, literary expressions relative to the time and society for which they were produced and relative to a philosophy which is valid in itself and is meaningful and relevant to its societal age. Because a play, as a work of art, must communicate something of value and genuine worth before it can be considered to have value itself, the play must originally be predicated upon an idea or concept that has value and genuine worth. The author of this paper believes that the examination of Miller's concept of tragedy and the subsequent analyses of Miller's plays show that when Miller is successful in achieving his goal, his plays communicate something of value and genuine worth in an artistic manner; therefore, in their relationship to modern society, Miller's successful plays, in the author's opinion, deserve to be called tragedies.

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