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DIGNITY IN ARTHUR MILLER'S DRAMA

By

Frederick William Gilliard, Jr.

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

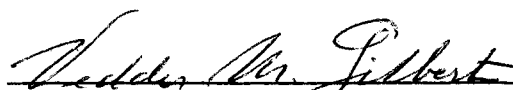
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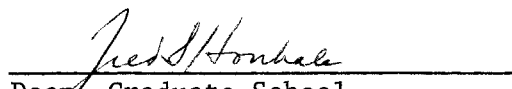
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## Introduction

Arthur Miller's published canon, relatively small when compared with the large number of plays that comprise the output of other prominent contemporary dramatists, has never suffered from a lack of attention. Excepting the failure, A Memory of Two Mondays, Miller's dramas, beginning with All My Sons and ending with Incident at Vichy, have provoked a variety of responses from the American theater public, who, sometimes, praise his efforts and, othertimes, condemn them. Two early plays, Death of a Salesman and The Crucible, first served notice of their author's powers, and, perhaps, Miller's reputation presently rests on these two works; but, his other dramas, A View From the Bridge and After the Fall, form an integral and respected part of the playwright's contribution to the theater. In short, all of the seven plays that make up Miller's canon cannot be labeled as successful dramatic ventures, but, in one way or another, his compositions for the stage have ultimately received many commentaries from critics and audiences.

An analysis of Miller's success is not an impossible task, for it is quite obvious that within his creations lay certain sensational factors that attract the public's interest. For instance, Joe Keller, the central figure of All My Sons, once sold, at a profit, defective war materials to

the American Army, and these faulty parts were the eventual causes of accidents that destroyed the lives of twenty-one pilots; after viewing this drama, several critics felt that Miller was attacking the wartime activities of capitalists, and so, the play flourished not because of its merits but because of its matter. Death of a Salesman did not fare much better than All My Sons, for, again, some reviewers were fascinated with the economics of the play, or they speculated about Willy Loman's possibilities as a modern tragic figure. Written during the era of McCarthyism, The Crucible interested many spectators because of the parallels between the Salem witch hunt and the American purge of communists. More recently, audiences became involved in speculations about the similarity between Maggie, a character in After the Fall, and Marilyn Monroe, Miller's former wife, who committed suicide. Of course, Incident at Vichy, with its revival of German atrocities, also deeply disturbed many audiences who were offended because Miller brought up an unwanted part of man's past. Thus, the theater public has generally found that Miller's plays usually contain some controversial element that lends itself to speculation.

In an introduction to his collected plays, Miller freely admits that he often chooses controversial topics as the subject matter of his dramas, but, nowhere, does the playwright state that he is interested only in the sen-

sational. Unfortunately, in too many instances critics and audiences have dwelled exclusively on the striking aspects of Miller's works, and this concentration has neglected, if not damaged, other facets of the plays. Of course, it has been a misfortune that The Crucible and After the Fall were written so as to parallel current happenings, for this proximity naturally lent itself to exploitation; and quite understandably, it was not difficult for people to see the relationship of World War II and the plays, All My Sons and Incident at Vichy. However, had The Crucible been produced many years after the advent of McCarthyism, the public's original reactions to it might have been different. A little time and distance might also have altered the opinions of After the Fall and Incident at Vichy, and, perhaps, greater justice would have been meted out to the playwright and his plays had his works been examined within a perspective that excluded sensational relationships.

If Miller's dramas are examined within a perspective that excludes the sensational, the underlying essence of his canon appears to be the portrayal of man in search of dignity. Attempting to justify Willy Loman as a tragic figure, Miller once wrote:

From Orestes to Hamlet, Medea to Macbeth, the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his "rightful" position in his society.

Sometimes he is one who has been displaced

from it, sometimes one who seeks to attain it for the first time, but the fateful wound from which the inevitable events spiral is the wound of indignity, and its dominant force is indignation.<sup>1</sup>

Although this statement is part of Miller's defense of Willy Loman, its application cannot be confined to Death of a Salesman, for every major figure in Miller's works is involved in a struggle for dignity. In All My Sons, Joe Keller seeks to dignify himself by claiming that he committed crime for the sake of the family business; in The Crucible, John Proctor regains dignity by refusing to cooperate with the witch hunters; throughout A View From the Bridge, Eddie Carbone struggles for a position in his household, and his efforts to protect his name reflect a concern for dignity; Quentin, the central figure of After the Fall, finds life and marriage a maze of indignities, but he decides to remarry and profit from his mistakes; and in Incident at Vichy, Prince Von Berg's personal sacrifice is made after a realization about the nature of dignity. Thus, Miller's dramas, revolve around people who are in search of dignity.

This search for dignity in Miller dramas is primarily of a two-fold nature, and neither part operates independently of the other. On the one hand, the search for dignity is a man's attempt to gain or maintain what might be called a respected position in society; and all too often the

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," New York Times (Feb. 27, 1942) Sec. 2, pp. 1,3.



search is hampered from within the character himself or by some external force. On the other hand, the search for dignity involves the dignity or lack of it, that exists in the relationships among man; of course, this is essentially concerned with how men respect the rights of other men. In all of Miller's dramas, his characters and their search for dignity are embroiled in a conflict that contains either, or both of these aspects of dignity, and quite often they die in quest of their rightful position. Unfortunately, as is true of Willy Loman and Eddie Carbone, not all of Miller's characters are pursuing dignity within a proper perspective, and so part of the search for dignity is established through a dramatization that points out the negative approaches that some men take in seeking their goals. However, from first to last, the plays of Miller examine the lives of individuals who try to establish their rightful place or the rightful place of others in society.

In struggling for dignity, Miller's characters do not face tasks that affect national interests, but, rather, they meet situations that directly influence their own lives. No kingdoms are at stake in the plays of Miller, and no character's choice changes the course of history. However, the fact that no kingdoms are at stake in no way detracts from the struggle for dignity, but it does reflect the composition of the modern world, for, today, no

man can determine the destiny of a nation. Obviously, then, the men and women in Miller's plays are contemporary creatures who are forced to cope with a contemporary world, but, in essence, their struggle for dignity is a conflict as old as antiquity, and though they be something less than Hamlet, they are still human beings in search of what the Prince of Denmark died for.

What makes the search for dignity most difficult for contemporary man is that there are really relatively few ways that he can atone for indignity, and thus regain dignity. This situation is clearly portrayed in Miller's works, for by far, it seems that most of Miller's characters resolve their difficulties by death. Perhaps the absence of absolution is part of the Puritan heritage that the citizens of Massachusetts bequeathed to America, but wherever it came from it is an unpleasant alternative. Medieval man had recourse in the confessional and penance, but modern man, moving away from such devices, has found it somewhat impossible to substitute an appropriate panacea. However, it must be noted that the Miller seems to undergo a softening of the harsh means of atonement, for by his last plays, the dramatist offers life not death to those who have violated dignity.

Miller is quite aware of contemporary man's problems, and the dramatist, to a certain extent, constructs his plays in such a manner that they will give man a better under-

standing of himself and others. Writing about his plays, Miller noted:

Each of these plays, in varying degrees, was begun in the belief that it was unveiling a truth already known but unrecognized as such. My concept of the audience is of a public each member of which is carrying about with him what he thinks is an anxiety, or hope, or a preoccupation which is his alone and isolates him from mankind; and in this respect at least the function of a play is to reveal him to himself so that he may touch others by virtue of the revelation of his mutuality with them.<sup>2</sup>

In essence, then, Miller views the theater as a place where truths are revealed, and individual man, by seeing these truths, understands better himself and his fellow man. Indeed, such a concept of the theater and its function is in keeping with the thought of a dramatist whose canon is a portrayal of man and his efforts to live with himself and others.

Although Miller's plays are constantly probing the nature of dignity, his dramas are not monotonous repetitions of each other. Rather, his works are continually experimental in form and technique, and each composition examines yet another aspect of the search for dignity. Also, if After the Fall is excluded, Miller's canon begins with a complex style and ends with a simple style. Thus, Miller has avoided the pitfall of needless repetition, and his style has evolved into a clear, simple

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<sup>2</sup>Arthur Miller, Arthur Miller's Collected Plays (New York, 1963), p. 11.

form.

Oddly, though Miller's canon is quite involved with the search for dignity, little or nothing has been written about the significance of this aspect of the dramatist's work. A host of reviewers, including Eleanor Clark, Richard Watts, Jr., Richard J. Foster and many others, have offered their opinions about the economics and the tragic implications in Miller's plays, but not one of them has actually developed a study that completely analyzes Miller's concern for dignity. Many noted critics have also neglected this aspect of Miller's dramas. Dennis Welland's study, *Arthur Miller*, now somewhat outdated because of additions to the dramatist's canon, concentrates on the technical development rather than the dramatic phase of Miller's works. John Gassner and Joseph Wood Krutch have also studied Miller's plays, but they are primarily concerned with concepts of modern tragedy and the social implications in the playwright's compositions. Sociologists and psychologists have added new dimensions to the studies of Miller's works, but, in one way or another, these men also neglect the importance of dignity. Thus, in general, scholars have not devoted attention to Miller's consistent preoccupation with dignity.

Undoubtedly, there are many reasons why scholars have not studied the importance of dignity in Miller's plays. Perhaps, the very smallness of Miller's canon has caused

some scholars to overlook his works, and, more than likely, until Miller is finished writing, major studies of his drama will not be forthcoming. However, although no major work has been done on this topic and although it may be some time before scholars will completely turn to Miller's canon, it must be realized that the search for dignity plays a significant role in this American playwright's compositions for the stage. Perhaps, it is not the greatest aspect of his drama, but, in many ways it is a prelude to a better understanding of the other aspects of Miller's dramatic efforts.

## Chapter I

### All My Sons

Somewhat disturbed by the failure of his early play-writing efforts, Arthur Miller, in 1947, abandoned his attempts to dramatize the wonder of life and adopted a philosophy of drama that concentrated on an expression of causes and effects. Miller's rejection of his early dramatic formula was based on the supposition that wonder simply did not make sense to common sense people; in the introduction to his collected plays, the dramatist wrote:

But wonder had betrayed me and the only other course I had was the one I took--to seek cause and effect, hard actions, facts, the geometry of relationships, and to hold back any tendency to express an idea in itself unless it was literally forced out of a character's mouth.<sup>1</sup>

All My Sons, the first play written under the auspices of the dramatist's revised thinking, achieved immediate theatrical success, for a variety of reasons, and Miller was hailed as a bright star in the sky of American Drama; and yet, despite the wide acceptance of play and playwright, probably more harm than good came out of the reception that greeted Miller's play.

In responding to All My Sons many audiences lauded the sense of the drama, but such applause was gained at

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<sup>1</sup>Plays, p. 15.

great expense. Certainly, Miller's cause and effect technique proved successful in providing for spectators a working knowledge of relationships. However, such provisions had forced the play into a vacuum that seemed too contrived, too rigid; while the play was well received because of its tight structural qualities, the playwright, in his concentration on a factual presentation, sacrificed the naturalness of life by going to the extreme of creating a play that was too believable, too documented. The creation of extreme credibility perhaps exemplified itself best in the play's climax, accomplished through the use of a letter. Somehow, although the letter provided a final proof of guilt, its employment gave the play an air of artificiality. Thus, while seemingly more convincing than the wonder in life, Miller's cause and effect technique was quite superficial and probably not worth the artist's efforts nor the audiences praises.

Even though the sense of All My Sons attracted much attention, for the most part, it was a secondary factor in the publicity that was given to the play. Perhaps the sensational nature of the drama's subject matter, the story of Joe Keller's wartime business crimes, stirred up the greatest controversy about Miller's work; undoubtedly the appearance of the drama was quite emotionally timely, for it was presented to American audiences who had only recently experienced the effects of world con-

flict. In the course of an evening in the theater, many spectators must have spent many agonizing moments reflecting on Joe Keller's heinous sin of selling defective war materials to the military. Many parents who had lost their sons because of the war and many sons who had served their country probably were horrified by the coldly materialistic mind of Joe Keller who sent American fliers to death in order that his business might survive.

Because Joe Keller, a treacherous businessman, was associated with American wartime capitalism, the play prompted some emotional commentaries about the dramatist's political views. Many theater-goers felt that Miller thoroughly abused the American economic system, and, naturally, several cries arose that the playwright's political sentiments leaned heavily left, a position somewhat questionable during an era when the rising threat of International Communism was beginning to sow distrust in Americans; ultimately this distrust grew into a hysterical movement epitomized by Senator Joseph McCarthy's investigations, that ruthlessly probed the lives of many American citizens, among them Miller, about political affiliations. Of course, when All My Sons first appeared on the stage, the reaction against the red menace was only infantile, but, nevertheless, Miller and his play were exposed to unwarranted criticism; while such criticisms afforded free publicity, dramatic perspective was



sabotaged by emotional involvement.

In effect, All My Sons succeeded with audiences, but their emotional responses were really somewhat shy of the drama's true meaning. In the introduction to his collected plays, Miller freely admitted that his dramas were involved with contemporary ideas, but at the same time, the playwright suggested that he regarded the theater as something more valuable than a place to air current events.

These plays, in one sense, are my response to what was "in the air", they are one man's way of saying to his fellow men, "This is what you see every day or think or feel;...My concept of the audience is of a public each member of which is carrying about with him what he thinks is an anxiety, or a hope, or a preoccupation which is his alone and isolates him from mankind; and in this respect at least the function of a play is to reveal him to himself so that he may touch others by virtue of the revelation of his mutuality with them.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, while All My Sons is involved with what is "in the air," its ultimate purpose is to give man a better understanding of himself, and in this respect, those audiences, who recognized only the sensational element of the play, contributed to its popularity but failed to comprehend the full meaning of the drama.

With the passage of time, it has become somewhat easier to analyze All My Sons, for any play out of its time can be examined much more objectively. However, if an honest effort is made to dissect the meaning of All My

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<sup>2</sup>Plays, p. 11.

Sons, the sensational aspects of the drama must be momentarily disregarded and Miller's work must be considered from a perspective that encompasses the play's human associations in relation to values; from such a dramatic perspective, it appears that the major conflict in the play is the clash between a practical businesslike attitude about life and idealistic approach to living that refuses to yield to materialistic necessity; intrinsically wound into this conflict, through effective characterization and symbolism, is the great dramatic theme: man's search for dignity. Indeed, Miller's purpose in writing All My Sons is as old as antiquity and as new as mass murder.

Through contrasting characterizations, Miller has posed the conditions of man without dignity and man searching for dignity. Among the major figures, Joe Keller perhaps represents the first condition, for he, though not insidiously evil, stands responsible for the sale of defective war materials and the twenty-one lives destroyed because of his treachery; but by perjuring himself, Joe accused his business associate, Steve Cheever, of the production of the materials, and consequently Steve was convicted and jailed while Joe was relieved of any criminal responsibility. Of course, Joe justifies his actions by claiming that he was motivated by a desire to protect his family's interests, particularly the business; in a

quarrel with Chris, the father pleads:

KELLER: (their movements now are those of subtle pursuit and escape. Keller keeps a step out of Chris's range as he talks) You're a boy, a man is in business; a hundred and twenty cracked, you're out of business; you got a process, the process don't work you're out of business; you don't know how to operate, your stuff is no good; they close you up, they tear up your contracts, what the hell's it to them? You lay forty years into a business and they knock you out in five minutes, what could I do, let them take forty years, let them take my life away?<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, it is difficult for Joe to realize anything greater than his business, and it is even more difficult for him to accept the responsibility for the dead fliers; however, in a materialistic society, and certainly Miller is commenting on the American philosophy of success at any price, Joe's crime has great magnitude, for although he actually committed the wrong, his peers and colleagues conditioned and prepared him for such a dastardly act. Here then lies the greatest agonizing realization, the recognition that Joe Keller's crime exists not as an independent action but as part of a greater whole. In a defensive move in Act III, Joe belligerently shouts:

"Who worked for nothing in that war? When they work for nothin', I'll work for nothin'. Did they ship a gun or truck outa Detroit before they got their price? Is that clean? It's dollars and cents, nickels and dimes, war and peace, it's nickels and dimes, what's clean? Half the Goddam country is gotta go if I go !<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, in the play's concluding scene, Joe per-

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<sup>3</sup>Plays, p. 115.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

ceives that dignity rests on something more solid than a business, and his suicide is an admission of a lack of dignity and an attempt to gain it.

Ironically, Chris Keller, an intricate part of the family unit that Joe sought to preserve, eventually leads his father to a recognition of guilt. Having been a leader during the war, Chris personally experienced the dignity of comradeship, and obviously the young man places success in business far below relations between men; in a short encounter between father and son, Chris definitely rejects Joe's business in favor of dignity.

KELLER: You mean--(Goes to him.) Tell me something, you mean you'd leave the business?

CHRIS: Yes. On this I would.

KELLER: (after a pause) Well...you don't want to think like that.<sup>5</sup>

Chris's threat, while it shocks and torments Joe, is not simply based on his disenchantment with business, for by "this", Chris refers to his intention to wed Ann Cheever, the fiancée of Larry Keller who was killed in the war. Weddings do not usually strike notes of horror in any home, but to the Keller household the joining of Chris and Ann could only mean one thing, the admission that Larry really was dead; and such an admission would be disastrous to Kate Keller because she firmly believes that as long as Larry is still alive, Joe is not a criminal. Thus, to

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<sup>5</sup>Plays, p. 69.

Joe, Chris represents, in a sense, a conscience, for the young man awakens his father to the idea that there is something more valuable than the family business, and such an awakening ultimately secures the return of dignity to the Keller home.

In terms of meaningful characterizations, Kate Keller's position lies somewhere between that of her husband and son. Joe is somewhat insensitive to his lack of dignity, and Chris struggles to gain a better hold on it, but the mother, while conscious of her husband's guilt, degrades herself by living under the illusion that Larry lives and Joe is not guilty. A perennial headache and frequent nightmares offer testimony that her illusion is far from convincing, and when she vainly resorts to astrology to establish belief in Larry's life, it becomes quite obvious that the woman is distressed. A conversation between Kate and Ann presents further evidence of the mother's sad condition:

MOTHER: And you? You--(shakes her head negatively)--you go out much? (slight pause)

ANN: (delicately) You mean am I still waiting for him?

MOTHER: Well, no. I don't expect you to wait for him but--

ANN: (kindly) But that's what you mean, isn't it?

MOTHER: Well,...yes.

ANN: Well, I'm not, Kate.

MOTHER: (faintly) You're not?

ANN: Isn't it ridiculous? You don't really imagine he's --?

MOTHER: I know dear, but don't say it's ridiculous, because the papers were full of it; I don't know about New York, but there was half a page about a man missing even longer than Larry, and he turned up from Burma.<sup>6</sup>

Kate's futile effort to attach significance to the young lady's unmarried state ends in the blinding realization that Ann does not believe that Larry is alive, but undaunted, Kate turns about and affirms her position by commenting about the return of a man from Burma. Truly, Kate Keller's life is an agonizing series of countless painful illusions.

As a major characterization, Ann Cheever's function in All My Sons is quite important. For one thing, she reminds Joe and Kate of past indignities, because it is Ann's father whom Joe's perjury sent to prison; Ann also boosts Chris's efforts to assert his dignity, and of course, by assisting Chris she certainly adds to her own prospects. Furthermore, besides serving as a reminder of the past, Ann actively foreshadows the future. Ann's blunt conversation with Kate about Larry is one of the many preparations for Kates ultimate realization of Larry's death; and the young woman's attitude toward her father also strikes a note of things to come:

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<sup>6</sup>Plays, p.77.

ANN: (a little shamed, but determined) No, I've never written to him. Neither has my brother. (to Chris) Say, do you feel this way, too?

CHRIS: He murdered twenty-one pilots.

KELLER: What the hell kinda talk is that?

MOTHER: That's not a thing to say about a man.

ANN: What else can you say? When they took him away I followed him, went to him every visiting day. I was crying all the time. Until the news came about Larry. Then I realized. It's wrong to pity a man like that. Father or no father, there's only one way to look at him. He knowingly shipped out parts that would crash an airplane. And how do you know Larry wasn't one of them?<sup>7</sup>

Because of the closeness of the Cheever and Keller families and because of the relationship between Ann and Chris, Ann's statement must have sounded like a death warrant to Joe Keller, for if someone as close as Ann could be so dispassionate about a father, a son could also be the same way. Thus, Ann, while aligned with the search for dignity serves as a catalyst in the play.

Two minor characters, Dr. Jim Bayliss and his wife, Sue, lend further support through contrasting characterizations to the conflict involved in the search for dignity in All My Sons. Bayliss, a friend of Chris, would prefer a career in medical research instead of being a general practitioner, but materialistic necessities dictate otherwise. His wife in a chat with Ann suggests why her husband cannot participate in research:

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<sup>7</sup>Plays, p. 81.

SUE: Jim's a successful doctor. But he's got an idea he'd like to do medical research. Discover things. You see?

ANN: Well, isn't that good?

SUE: Research pays twenty-five dollars a week minus laundering the hair shirt. You've got to give up your life to go into it.

ANN: How does Chris--

SUE: (with growing feeling) Chris makes people want to be better than it's possible to be. He does that to people.

ANN: Is that bad?<sup>8</sup>

The Bayliss conflict thickens the plot by illustrating the idea that materialism is not confined to the older generation. Furthermore, as a female characterization, Sue adds another dimension to the role of women in All My Sons, for by accepting materialism at the expense of her husband's wish to fulfill his dignity through research, Sue places herself in a position that is quite opposed to the other female roles in the play. It must be noted that Sue comments about the respect that her husband has for Chris. Such respect, coming from a man who wishes to abandon the quest for material good, certainly leads to the deduction that Chris is within the realm of the dignified; Sue's resentment of Chris negatively adds to Chris's position in relation to dignity. Thus, as minor characterizations, the Baylisses substantially support the drama's purpose.

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<sup>8</sup>Plays, p. 93.



While the various characterizations that Miller has created effectively portray the search for dignity, the dramatist has reinforced this theme by using a symbol, a shattered apple tree, in several crucial points in the play. Planted by the Kellers as a memorial to Larry, the tree looms in their backyard as a testimonial to the disturbed condition of the Keller home; robbed by a storm of its past resplendent stateliness, the downed sapling lies strewn about the ground with only a cracked stump as evidence of former glory; and Joe Keller's dignity, destroyed because he broke with his fellow man, lies torn asunder, bringing sorrow to the lives of those about him; still clinging to its branches, the tree's fruit is soon to be spoiled as will Joe Keller's decayed life be spoiled.

In the stage directions to Act I, the tree first appears and its condition can be described as wanting dignity; and within the play's opening scene, it becomes subtly obvious that Joe Keller also wants dignity. Making small talk with a neighbor, Frank Libey, Joe reveals what part of a newspaper interests him:

KELLER: (indicating the sections beside him)  
Want the paper?

FRANK: What's the difference, it's all bad news.  
What's today's calamity?

KELLER: I don't know, I don't read the news part anymore. It's more interesting in the want ads.

FRANK: Why, you trying to buy something?

KELLER: No, I'm just interested. To see what people want, y'know?<sup>9</sup>

Joe's interest in the want ads is unconsciously linked to a self-realization that his major value, the business, lacks some of the luster that he attaches to it; although his ultimate realization occurs after a gradual process, the fact that as early as the first act there is a symbolic link between Joe and the tree signifies the dramatist's emphasis on the importance of the tree.

It is extremely important to remember the connection between Joe Keller and the tree, for without this reminder of Joe's past, he would be unbelievable as a criminal. As one critic remarks:

Joe himself is perhaps too pleasant for the part he has to play. His betrayal of his partner seems out of key with his simple geniality and warmth of nature. As with most of Miller's characters, there is no vice in him, only littleness and his own form of myopia.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the real horror of Joe Keller is that a man of his pleasant nature could commit such a crime, but in any event, with the tree as a symbol, it is difficult to forget Joe's capacity for wrong.

In terms of Chris' role, the symbolism also works rather effectively. Perhaps, the stage directions for

<sup>9</sup>Plays, p. 59.

<sup>10</sup>Dennis Welland, Arthur Miller (New York, 1961), p. 37.

the second act of All My Sons best explains the relationship between Chris, the tree and dignity.

On the rise, Chris is discovered sawing the broken-off tree, leaving stump standing alone. He is dressed in good pants, white shoes, but without a shirt. He disappears with tree up the alley when Mother appears on porch.<sup>11</sup>

It is quite fitting for Chris to haul away the symbol of his father's indignities, for the son's involvement in Joe's final act is substantial; because Joe's guilt is laid bare in Act II, the timing of Chris' disposal is excellent. Thus, Miller has skillfully employed symbolism as a means of reinforcing the characterization of Chris.

Kate Keller's symbolic association with the tree rounds out her characterization. Kate's first comment about the shattered tree suggests her satisfaction with its sad state:

MOTHER: (looking around preoccupiedly at yard)  
She'll be right out. (moves) That wind did  
some job on this place. (of the tree) So  
much for that, thank God.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, Kate's pleasure in the downed tree is prompted by a feeling that as a memorial, the tree was hastily planted; and the tree's demise convinces her that some force has felled the tree as a foreshadowing of Larry's return. However, her pleasurable response to the shattered tree must not be interpreted as a condemnation of

<sup>11</sup>Plays, p. 90.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

husband; rather, it must be understood as a part of her own mistaken belief that there is a distinction between the death of a son and the deaths of a twenty-one anonymous fliers. Thus, Kate can live with her husband's guilt, and though she is tormented by her knowledge, life remains liveable as long as the illusion remains that Larry is alive.

Although Miller has effectively portrayed through characterization man's involvement with dignity and although he has reinforced his characterizations with symbolism, an analysis of the play cannot stop with these two ideas. The characterization and symbolism must be compounded and then analyzed in relation to the timeless nature of man's dignity; such a process must consider the past, present and future status of the Keller household. To omit this analysis is to omit the true meaning of All My Sons.

By ignoring his past crime, Joe Keller has forced his family into several awkward positions. His wife cannot cope with her present distressed life, and Chris finds that the future holds few happy moments if deception continues to be the practice within the Keller home. Even though Joe blustered his way through his trial and was acquitted, he stands accused of crime; and although he plays cards with his neighbors and is liked by them, he remains a criminal; just because he plays games

with a youngster, he has not compensated for the deaths of twenty-one youngsters; while he does not seem to be the murdering type, he is a murderer.

The last scene of All My Sons fully illustrates the involvement of time and dignity. After reading Larry's last letter, Joe recognizes the magnitude of his past crimes:

KELLER: (looking at letter in his hand) Then what is this if it isn't telling me? Sure, he was my son. But I think to him they were all my sons. And I guess they were, I guess they were. I'll be right down. (exits into house)<sup>13</sup>

Actually, Joe has been sentenced by the living, Chris, and the dead, Larry. The timelessness of this conviction is all too obvious, and shortly, Joe, unable to face the future, commits suicide, thereby establishing his acceptance of guilt and freeing his family from further indignity. In a sense, Joe has finally realized the idea behind Chris' last statement:

CHRIS: You can be better! 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.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, within the closing scene Miller has reaffirmed the timeless responsibility that exists among men, and those who violate this responsibility must eventually be prepared to suffer the consequences of their unwarranted actions.

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<sup>13</sup>Plays, p.126.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

If All My Sons is examined in terms of characterization, symbolism and dignity, it becomes increasingly evident that Miller's play is much more than an attempt at a well-made play or a dramatic reproduction of sensational matter. Certainly, the sensational aspects of the drama must be considered, but from an overall perspective, they constitute only part of the dramatist's intention. What is important in All My Sons is the analysis of man's dignity.

## Chapter II

### Death of a Salesman

With All My Sons already recognized as a success, Arthur Miller renewed his playwriting efforts and in 1949, he presented Death of a Salesman, destined to earn him a respected place in legitimate theater. Almost immediately, playwright and play captured the attention of America's theater public, and within a short span of time, world-wide audiences attended performances of Miller's highly moving drama. Of course the reactions to his work were extremely varied; and they ranged from howling condemnations to sincere reverences. The dramatist later recorded some of the comments about his play:

In America, even as it was being cannoaded as a piece of Communist propaganda two of the largest manufacturing corporations in the country invited me to address their sales organizations in conventions assembled, while the road company was here and there picketed by the Catholic War Veterans and the American Legion. It made only a fair impression in London, but in the area of the Norwegian Arctic Circle fishermen whose only contact with civilization was the radio and the occasional visit of the government boat insisted on seeing it night after night--the same few people--believing it to be some kind of religious rite.<sup>1</sup>

With such dramatic receptions, it took no time at all for the play to acquire a reputation that placed it high in the repertoire of modern drama.

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<sup>1</sup>Plays, p. 28.

Because Miller's major figure in Death of a Salesman was a member of the selling profession, many unusual responses came from sales groups and about these groups he wrote:

One organization of salesmen raised me up nearly to patron-sainthood, and another, a national sales managers' group, complained that the difficulty of recruiting salesmen was directly traceable to the play.<sup>2</sup>

Though he tried, the dramatist could not convince his audiences that he had no particular bonds with salesmen, and many people preferred to remain firm in their belief that the play was a commentary on the sales profession.

Somewhat more spectacular than the criticism of the sales profession was the antagonism generated against what was considered the leftist element in Death of a Salesman. Undoubtedly, many spectators of the play recognized that Miller's major character, Willy Loman, suffered defeat at the hand of a capitalistic system, and, consequently, many patriotic objections were voiced, indignantly protesting Miller's work. In an article for a prominent magazine, Eleanor Clark, a distinguished reviewer, expressed her dissatisfaction with the scheme of events in Death of a Salesman.

It is, of course, the capitalist system that has done Willy in; the scene in which he is brutally fired after some forty years with the firm comes straight from the party line literature of the

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<sup>2</sup>Plays, p. 28.



"thirties", and the idea emerges lucidly enough through all the confused motivations of the play that it is our particular form of money economy that has bred the absurdly false ideals of both father and sons.<sup>3</sup>

Eleanor Clark was only one of a large number of malcontents who expressed their displeasure with Miller's work, but, perhaps, the full wrath of that displeasure did not materialize until it became involved with the red scare during the early fifties.

In literary circles, Death of a Salesman provoked repercussions that centered around a debate about the play's possibilities as a modern tragedy. Willy Loman's qualifications as a tragic hero became the subject of a lively discussion, and to a certain extent, the literary world divided itself into opposing camps, who either favored Willy as a tragic figure or dismissed him as nothing more than a pitiable human being; the latter group insisted that Willy had none of the external characteristics of classical tragic figures, and the former contended that external prerequisites fell short as a measurement of tragedy. On and on the controversy raged in an endless engagement that was only slightly meaningful as a contribution to a better understanding of the total meaning of Death of a Salesman. The notoriety of this literary quarrel, plus the publicity given to some of

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<sup>3</sup>Eleanor Clark, "Review of Death of a Salesman," Partisan Review, XVI (June, 1949), pp. 631-35.

the other aspects of this play, brought sudden fame to Death of a Salesman, but the true essence or meaning of the drama remained relatively obscure during all of the titanic struggles.

To comprehend the full meaning of Miller's Death of a Salesman, it is necessary to analyze the various characterizations that the dramatist has created; and when these characterizations are compared and contrasted with one another, it becomes evident that Miller's play merits attention for reasons other than its involvement with sensationalism, or literary struggles. Perhaps the character who should be examined first is Willy Loman, victimized by the very system for which he sacrificed himself. Too often, Willy Loman has been dismissed as merely a pitiable creature, and, thus, the true essence of his position has consequently been overlooked. Of course, to contend that the salesman is a veritable figure of strength is quite ridiculous, but Willy cannot be viewed as an insipid fool blindly floundering on his way to destruction. Willy always remains sensitive to the world about him, and though he lacks the capacity to cope with certain problems, he is a human being, aware of his shortcomings.

To further understand Willy, it is necessary to visualize him as a remnant of the American success myth, a holdover from an era when life was simpler and com-

petition less rugged. In a sense, there is a Horatio Alger atmosphere about Willy and his dreams, for he constantly yearns for the big promotion, the get-rich-quick scheme of success. Really, Willy longs for the days when a man's personality, not his ability, brought him fame and fortune; he remembers the epoch when athletes were revered and eggheads were mocked; the salesman recalls the days when a man who worked with his hands was respected; in short, his life is bound up with attitudes that are not necessarily evil, but certainly they do not form the basis for a practical approach to life. Time and time again Willy's ideas are brought out in his speeches. For instance, lecturing his sons, Willy comments:

WILLY: That's just what I mean. Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, but when he gets out in the business world, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That's why I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead.<sup>4</sup>

In a later conversation with Biff and Happy, Willy stresses another aspect of his beliefs:

WILLY: Bigger than Uncle Charley ! Because Charley is not liked. He's liked, but he's not--well liked.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, these two quotes illustrate part of Willy's image of the successful man, and although there is ostensibly

<sup>4</sup>Plays, p. 146.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

nothing wrong with a belief in this image, it is rather artificial approach to life, for it is not based on any firm or permanent values.

The inadequacy of Willy's values is illustrated by the failure of the goods that the salesman purchased while adhering to his value system. While in his dream world, Willy often recalls the family car, a Chevrolet that once was shiny and attractive; but, in reality, this car is nothing but a worry for the salesman because it never seems to be operating. Another possession that fails Willy is a refrigerator, and, discussing finances with Linda, his wife, he asks:

WILLY: What do we owe?

LINDA: Well, on the first there's sixteen dollars on the refrigerator--

WILLY: Why sixteen?

LINDA: Well, the fan belt broke, so it was a dollar eighty.

WILLY: But it's brand new.

LINDA: Well, the man said that's the way it is. Till they work themselves in, y'know.

(They move through the wall-line into the kitchen.)

WILLY: I hope we didn't get stuck on that machine.

LINDA: They got the biggest ads of any of them.<sup>6</sup>

There is something quite superficial about the Loman me-

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<sup>6</sup>Plays, p. 148.

thod of purchasing, for Willy and Linda are not necessarily interested in quality but in the bigness of ads or the shininess of an exterior surface; but, most unfortunately, Willy's attitudes about material goods parallel his perspective of life, and, perhaps, this regrettable situation is most evident when the salesman remembers Biff's bigness in a football uniform and the shininess of his helmet. It will suffice to say that Willy's possessions fail because he unwisely chooses them, but, his economic decisions are only part of a greater whole that spans the salesman's entire philosophy of life.

Although the failure of his material possessions are meaningfully related to Willy's values, perhaps an even stronger proof of the inadequacy of his beliefs emerges from the unhappy situation of Biff Loman. It seems that Willy's oldest son, endowed with athletic skills and handsome looks, falls somewhat sort of expectations. Willy angrily expresses his disenchantment with Biff in a conversation with Linda:

WILLY: How can he find himself on a farm? Is that a life? A farmhand? In the beginning, when he was young, I thought, well, young man, it's good for him to tramp around, take a lot of different jobs. But it's more than ten years now and he has yet to make thirty-five dollars a week!

LINDA: He's finding himself, Willy.

WILLY: Not finding yourself at the age of thirty-four is a disgrace!<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Plays, p. 134.

Willy's frustrations certainly are immense for the very goods that he purchases turn against him, and much more disappointing is Biff's dismal showing. Thus, Miller has established a firm relationship between failure and Willy's values.

Consciously and unconsciously, Willy recognized the inadequacy of his values, and the salesman's frequent contradictory statements offer evidence of his confused situation. To combat reality and its failures Willy constantly lapses into dreams about the past, and this maladjustment cements his position as a man who cannot cope with his present state of being. Willy's dreams are not merely fond rememberances, but they fulfill a need for a man who once had a little and now has nothing. Interestingly enough, he recalls little moments of triumph; Biff's football exploits remain in his dreams; neighborhood idolizations of Biff also bring pleasant memories to the salesman; and the father also recollects the worship that his sons once paid him. Willy's dreams are actually a psychological substitute for reality, a reality that tells him he is a failure, that his sons are failures and that their dreams are failures. Sadly enough, the dream world of the salesman eventually becomes a necessity, for without it Willy finds life unbearable and contemplates suicide.

A second characterization to consider in Death of

a Salesman is Biff Loman, once the pride of the family but now a vagrant. According to Willy, Biff has all the necessary prerequisites for success but the young man refuses to fulfill his father's expectations. Not only does Biff make no gestures toward success, but generally he becomes embroiled in violent quarrels with the older man. Much has been written about this father-son conflict, and many critics have attempted to parallel this conflict with the violent upheaval of the American family; endeavors of such a nature are possibly valuable, but the underlying motives for the conflict between Willy and Biff are of utmost significance. At first glance it appears that Biff resents his father because the salesman once engaged in an immoral affair with a woman; and such an idea is acceptable but only as a contributing factor to Biff's disenchantment with his father, for the young man's disillusionment extends far beyond his father's immorality to a disbelief in Willy's way of life. In a number of instances Biff makes known his feelings about the father's ideas. In Act II, the son furiously shouts:

BIFF: I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you. You were never anything but a hard-working drummer who landed in the ash can like all the rest of them! I'm one dollar an hour, Willy! I tried seven states and I couldn't raise it. A buck an hour! Do you gather my meaning: I'm not bringing home any prizes any more, and you're going to

stop waiting for me to bring them home.<sup>8</sup>

The requiem to the play perhaps contains Biff's strongest indictment of Willy's beliefs:

CHARLEY: Yeah. He was a happy man with a batch of cement.

LINDA: He was so wonderful with his hands.

BIFF: He had the wrong dreams. All, all wrong.<sup>9</sup>

Actually, Willy's immorality revealed the hypocrisy of the man, and Biff, putting things together, ultimately realized that if the man was phony, his ideals were also worthless. Thus, Biff deserted the Loman home not because of a father's adultery, but because of a need to have something of value.

Biff's search for something of value began in his youth. At first, as a young boy, he pilfered lumber, and later, while in high school, he resorted to the theft of basketballs. Willy, aware of his son's thievery, never seriously admonished him, and in fact, the father perhaps encouraged the boy's thefts. Growing into manhood, Biff continued his kleptomania, and eventually he was imprisoned for stealing a suit of clothes. Even after returning home, Biff, while waiting for a job interview, stole a fountain pen from the desk of the interviewer. Obviously there exists a strong relationship between Biff's kleptomania and his desire for something of value,

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<sup>8</sup>Plays, p. 217.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 221.



for even as a youth, and later as a man, he found little of worth in Willy's dreams or in the Loman home.

Happy Loman, Willy's youngest son, is another characterization which plays a meaningful part in the quest to understand Miller's Death of a Salesman. Because he has never really tasted the bitterness of defeat, Happy remains confident of the future, but even he has moments of doubt about his goals in life. Speaking to Biff, Happy states:

HAPPY: I don't know what the hell I'm workin' for. Sometimes I sit in my apartment all alone. And I think of the rent I'm paying. And it's crazy. But then, it's what I always wanted. My own apartment, a car, and plenty of women. And still, goddammit, I'm lonely.<sup>10</sup>

According to Willy's specification, Happy also has all the requirements for success, but though this second son has acquired a position, a car, women and money, he cannot escape the feeling that there is a void in his life. It should be noted that Happy, like Biff, chooses not to live with his parents, but even separation cannot offer respite, for the father's way of life has become ingrained in him. However, Happy shuts out unpleasant thoughts and compensates for the emptiness of his life by seeking fulfillment through sexual conquests. In a bedtime chat with Biff, Happy narrates part of his sex life:

HAPPY:...You're gonna call me a bastard when I tell

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<sup>10</sup>Plays, p. 139.

you this. That girl Charlotte I was with tonight is engaged to be married in five weeks.

BIFF: No kiddin !

HAPPY: Sure, the guy's in line for the vice-presidency of the store. I don't know what gets into me, maybe I just have an overdeveloped sense of competition or something, but I went and ruined her, and furthermore I can't get rid of her. And he's the third executive I've done that to. Isn't that a crummy characteristic? And to top it all, I go to their weddings!<sup>11</sup>

Happy's sensual nature manifests itself in still another way. In the latter part of Act II, Happy proposes that he and Biff form the Loman Brothers, a sporting goods corporation, whose advertising would be gained through athletic exhibitions that Happy and Biff would stage.

Somehow , such a proposal, coming from Happy, seems to be quite natural, for the exhibition would require physical prowess, and the younger brother excels in such pastimes. Thus, Happy's victories in bed and his pride in a masculine physique compensate for some of the emptiness and worthlessness of a life that he inherited from his father.

While the Loman men are characterized by confusion and maladjustments, Charley and his son, Bernard, close neighbors of Willy, appear to be stable, well-adjusted individuals. Perhaps Charley is not, as Willy says, "well-liked," but nevertheless, he operates a flourishing business and has few material wants. Charley's friend-

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<sup>11</sup>Plays, p. 140-41.

ship with Willy costs the businessman dearly, for he constantly loans the salesman money to meet debts; and in the light of this capitalist's generous treatment of a useless salesman, Eleanor Clark's statement about Miller's attack on capitalism loses some of its poignancy; furthermore, Charley even goes so far as to offer the salesman work, but Willy, contending that he has a good job, refuses to accept another opportunity; perhaps the most remarkable thing about his relationship with Willy is Charley's capacity to tolerate the arrogant, insipid nature of Willy, who constantly treats his neighbor as some sort of failure. Thus, although Charley does not have Willy's prerequisites for success, he achieves worthwhile goals, whereas the salesman loses his life.

Charley's son, Bernard, also appears to be a solid individual, unlike his peers, Biff and Happy. Never a football star nor a popular youth, Bernard, frail and bookish in his boyhood, was considerably inadequate and, according to Willy, supposedly doomed to failure in the business world; yet, Bernard eventually completes law school and practices before the Supreme Court of the United States, while Biff and Happy work at ranching and clerking. Ironically, Bernard's good fortunes even extend to athletics, for in a conversation with Charley, Willy learns that the young man plays an acceptable game of tennis. In a number of other ways, Bernard contrasts

sharply with Biff and Happy: for instance, Bernard does not have to resort to stealing to gain something of value; and he never tries to assert his masculinity through feats of physical strength or amorous conquests. With a quiet dignified manner, Bernard is succeeding in making his way to the top of his profession.

Two other characterizations, Linda Loman and Ben Loman, deserve some consideration. Linda, a hard-working housewife, believes in her husband until his death, and even then, she cannot understand why Willy gave up his dreams; in the requiem she moans:

LINDA: Forgive me, dear, I can't cry. I don't know what it is, but I can't cry. I don't understand it. Why did you ever do that? Help me, Willy, I can't cry. It seems to me that you're just on another trip. I keep expecting you. Willy, dear, I can't cry. Why did you do it? I search and search and I search, and I can't understand it, Willy. I made the last payment on the house today. Today, dear. And there'll be nobody home.<sup>12</sup>

Linda's devotion to her husband and his beliefs is complete, for she fails to realize that Willy had any reason to commit suicide, and, thus, she finds it difficult to cry for a man who had everything to live for. Truly, she is a pathetic creature, thoroughly engrossed in the beliefs of her husband.

Appearing only in the dreams of Willy, Ben Loman's characterization works in two specific ways. On the one

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<sup>12</sup>Plays, p. 222.

hand, he portrays a get-rich quick scheme, for his fortunes were supposedly earned wither in Africa or Alaska by adventuring. Such a life is geared to success that is earned through luck not work, and in this respect, Ben's adventures are as foolish as Willy's beliefs in the power of personality. On the other hand, by constantly reminding Willy of his failures, Ben serves as a conscience for the salesman. It is Ben who tells Willy that things could be better, and it is Ben who scoffs at Willy's endeavors. Thus, Ben serves as a haunting reminder of success attained and success lost.

If the various characterizations in Miller's Death of a Salesman are divided into two groups, one group consisting of the Lomans and the other group consisting of Charley and Bernard, much dramatic perspective can be gained. Excluding Linda who is somewhat oblivious to the true nature of the difficulty that faces her family, the Lomans represent men who have lost their way in life. Of course Willy substitutes dreams for reality, Biff seeks value through kleptomania and Happy seeks fulfillment through sex, but their substitutions and compensations are completely inadequate. Deep within themselves, these men search for an identity that they can respect, and the very fact that they substitute and compensate in their present life conclusively points to realizations of self-inadequacy. Willy admits that other men scoff

at him and respect Charley, and even though the salesman often bitterly attacks the businessman, he realizes Charley's superiority.

Charley's superiority is not necessarily a mental or physical advantage, but it is an advantage gained because of an attitude toward life. Unlike his neighbor, Charley differentiates between superficial values and permanent values; and so, he had Bernard study while in high school and make good grades instead of competing in athletics. Ultimately, the young man accomplished something of value though he lacked physical prowess. Thus, Charley and Bernard acquired value systems that were worthwhile, and consequently, they were able to respect these systems and themselves.

Obviously, the Lomans find life intolerable and take refuge in maladjustments because they cannot live with their values and themselves. In more precise terms, the Lomans do not respect themselves and realize that they have no dignity; and so, they take refuge in athletic skills and animal magnetism. However, because of the fleeting nature of these alternatives, the Lomans have nothing of permanence, and this condition forces them to search for a respectable position. Unfortunately, they become maladjusted in their efforts to obtain respectability, but their situation reflects that of men searching for dignity.

To reinforce these characters in search of dignity, Miller employs symbolism, in the form of flute music heard throughout the drama. The stage directions for Act I set the tone for part of the meaning of the music: "A melody is heard played upon a flute. It is small and fine; telling of grass and trees and the horizon."<sup>13</sup> These directions suggest an association with a pastoral scene, a scene of simplicity and quiet dignity; perhaps the horizon denotes a certain limitlessness about this life. As the play unfolds, Ben remembers that he and Willy were fathered by a man who made and sold flutes as he traveled across the continent. Thus, this symbol should be associated with a simple, uninhibited way of life, a past life.

Operating in conjunction with the flute music is another symbol, seed-planting. Willy's efforts to raise vegetables usually end in failure, and the very ground around his home seems to sterile; however, it was not always this way, for in the distant past, mighty trees flourished around the Loman's home and grass and vegetables grew in abundance. Now, the trees are gone, replaced by cement structures, and the grass and vegetables no longer grow; indeed, the seed-planting symbol tells a sad story about horticulture, but the symbol extends far beyond such an application. Generally speaking,

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<sup>13</sup>Plays, p. 130.

the symbol should be associated with the barrenness or emptiness of the Loman life. That is to say, Willy has never reaped any benefits from his life because the ground upon which he sowed his seeds was not productive; Biff and Happy, the fruits of another sowing, fail to prosper because they find no nourishment in the soil of Willy's dreams. Thus, while the flute music tells of the past, when a man lived simply and provided for his family, Willy's failure to cultivate his plants suggests the sterility and indignity of his failures in rearing a family and properly providing for it.

In his dream world, Willy longs for the past when his horizons were not clouded and limited by the pressures of modern business. Willy just cannot cope with the practices of the contemporary world, and, in fact, he is somewhat intimidated by it; Willy's fear is portrayed quite clearly in Act II, shortly before his boss, Howard, fires him. Alone in Howard's office, Willy mumbles to himself:

WILLY: Pull myself together! What the hell did I say to him? My God I was yelling at him! How could I! (Willy breaks off, staring at the light, which occupies the chair, animating it. He approaches this chair, standing across the desk from it.) Frank, Frank, don't you remember what you told me that time? How you put your hand on my shoulder and Frank... (he leans on the desk and as he speaks the dead man's name he accidentally switches on the recorder, and instantly)

HOWARD'S SON: "...of New York is Albany. The capital of Ohio is Cincinnatti, the capital of



Rhode Island is..." (the recitation continues.)

WILLY: (Leaping away with fright, shouting) Ha!  
Howard! Howard! Howard!<sup>14</sup>

Willy's reaction to the tape recorder indicates the salesman's fright of the modern world, a world that has no place for a man like him.

The contemporary nature of Willy Loman's plight merits attention at this point, for it has a relevance of untold magnitude. Miller sets Willy's story in "out time", approximately 1949. About this time, the rural to urban shift had reached its peak in America, and many Americans had left their farms in search of opportunities; consequently, huge urban developments changed the horizons of many cities, leaving in their wake cement structures where once stately trees had stood. Then, too, automation made its appearance, and many mediocre people found themselves unfit to compete in a society geared to a super speed. The speed and complexities of such a life undoubtedly altered the pattern of many lives, changing many individuals into sadly distorted remnants of human beings. Willy Loman was one of these torn human beings who yearned for an earlier era when living was much simpler. Thus, it is more than obvious that Willy Loman is not a salesman but a contemporary man, perhaps an "Everyman."

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<sup>14</sup>Plays, p. 181.

As an "Everyman," Willy Loman's story is one repeated often in a society, where athletes are yet treated with reverence, undoubtedly, mothers and fathers still expound the necessity of that elusive state, popularity, for which countless sons and daughters vie, each one caught up by the malignant growth of the pace; and "egg-head" yet remains a pejorative designation for those few youths who pursue academics rather than the other alternatives of campus life; and yet, there is something old about Willy's plight, for he is one of the many who down through the age have fought for their "rightful position" and lost.

Quite obviously, Willy's confused struggle for dignity prevails as the essence of Miller's Death of a Salesman. Although the salesman's life is replete with fantasies, the strength of his convictions is overwhelming enough to drive him to suicide. However, his suicide is not prompted by despair, but it is urged on by the realization that at the fatal moment, he will have finally achieved his own version of success; by dying, Willy does not admit defeat, but he rejoices in his first triumph. Perhaps his dreams were foolish and perhaps his sacrifice was unnecessary, but Willy Loman knew no other way to gain what he and others spend their lives searching for.

## Chapter III

### The Crucible

The early 1950's were a trying period for Americans, for this was a time of suspicion and distrust. Motivated by a fear of international communism's threat to the United States' internal security, many citizens demanded that the American government take action to rid itself of the red threat; and, consequently, a movement, epitomized by Senator Joseph McCarthy's investigation; swept the country in search of betrayers. As this quest marched across the continent, sometimes attacking both guilty and innocent, its spirit shifted from fear to hysteria, and, indeed, the land was almost torn assunder by the fury of the pursuit. Rent helpless, unfortunately, were several individuals who had had only minimal contact with Marxist ideology, but far greater was the punishment inflicted on what might be called the national conscience.

Generally, what prompted the anti-communist campaign was the detection of soviet agents in governmental posts, but such a discovery was bare justification for the episode that influenced the thinking of a nation. In some instances, life became quite intolerable for people who were haunted by past mistakes, and ultimately, lives and careers were wrecked by the investigation. It mat-

tered not that many of the accused had transgressed because of a loss of faith in the American system during the depression; all that mattered was that they had sinned and investigated they would be.

Fortunately, many Americans were somewhat less than impressed with the national frame of mind, and these people voiced their objections in numerous fashions. By then a distinguished playwright, Arthur Miller, under suspicion because he supposedly leaned toward Marxism, felt obliged to parry the spirit of the day. In 1954, the State Department refused Miller a passport on the grounds that he was a suspected sympathizer with the communist movement, and the dramatist, justifiably incensed by such an insult, replied to his accusers in the July issue of Nation with an article, "A MOdest Proposal for Pacification of the Public Temper." In the Swift-like essay, the dramatist suggested that young men, upon reaching eighteen, should then be compelled to offer themselves for Patriotic Arrest, and for every two years thereafter. While serving their time, the prisoners would be classed as one of three types of traitors. The first classification would be that of Conceptual Traitor (anyone who had participated in conversations "not positively conducive to the defense of the Nation against the enemy," or had "failed to demonstrate in a lively, visible or audible resentment" against such conversations.) A

second class was that of Action Traitor (anyone who had participated in meetings forbidden by the Attorney General.) A third classification was composed of Unclassified Citizens (anyone who had been committed to an insane asylum, anyone who was not a registered borrower in a public library, any veterans of the War Between the States, and most children.)<sup>1</sup> Ironically, the State Department's refusal of a passport to Miller prevented him from attending the Brussels opening of The Crucible, a play generally regarded as the most scathing attack upon the hysteria of the McCarthy era.

Telling of the horrors of the Salem witch hunts of 1692 and 1693, The Crucible is a powerful narration about an immortal theme; writing about this play, Richard Watts, Jr. commented:

The basic issues of emotional terrorism and the endless struggle between the rights of free men and man's efforts to destroy them under the guise of defending decency and right-mindedness being still with us, "The Crucible," unhampered by distracting topical questions, stands forth as 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.<sup>2</sup>

However, The Crucible was not Miller's first attempt to dramatize the "never-ending fight against mass pressures,"

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur Miller, "A Modest Proposal for Pacification of the Public Temper," The Nation (New York, July 3, '56), p.5-8.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Watts, Jr., "Introduction," The Crucible, (New York, 1963), p.XIII.

for the two dramas that preceded The Crucible were directly involved with such a theme, and Miller's adaptation in 1951 of Henrik Ibsen's An Enemy of the People illustrates his concern with the pressures of society. Dr. Stockman's discovery that Kirsten Springs, the subsistence of the local community, contain harmful substances evokes terrifying response from most of the community, and the good man's life is almost destroyed by the rule of the majority who have little or no respect for the individual.

Unfortunately, although Miller's thought had been moving toward a portrayal of mass pressures on individual consciences, the early fifties were not the time for any objective commentaries about public hysteria; and when The Crucible appeared on the stage, its reception was far from that which an essentially good play should have received. Even Miller's most faithful supporters were somewhat embarrassed by the contemporary nature of the play; and of course, the reactions from right-wing crusaders were something more than a passive interest. Nevertheless, audiences attended the performances of this drama, and though they might have been embarrassed or irritated by what they saw, these theater-goers gave the play a taste of success.

This taste of success that Miller's drama experienced was well-deserved, but because of the sensational

nature of the play's subject matter, success was gained in a fraudulent manner. If audiences had considered Miller's theme, as earlier expressed by Mr. Watts, as something more than a contemporary critique of McCarthyism, perhaps they would have realized the full value of The Crucible. Of course, it would have been pointless, even ridiculous, to insist that there were no political undertones in The Crucible, for they obviously existed for all to read, see and feel. However, by setting the play in the seventeenth century, Miller indicated a desire to express the timelessness of the individual's struggle against conformity; in other words, the factors behind the rise of McCarthyism are, in a sense, eternal, and in seventeenth-century Salem, a theocracy tried to force its will on the individuals as twentieth-century anti-communists tried to force their will on individuals.

If the political undertones of The Crucible are placed in perspective, it becomes easier to analyze the play, and undoubtedly any analysis should begin and eventually end, with John Proctor. Most striking about Proctor is his strength, inhibited perhaps by feelings of guilt about an adulterous affair with a former servant, but, nevertheless, the farmer towers above the other figures in this drama. Even the clergy of Salem, with whom Proctor is at odds, respect him, and several of Salem's leading citizens look to Proctor for leadership; yet,

the cold impassionate temperment of Elizabeth Proctor, always reminding her husband of his adultery with Abigail Williams, weakens John Proctor's strength, making him endecisive and compliant. Describing John Proctor, Miller writes:

But as we shall see, the steady manner he displays does not spring from an untroubled soul. He is a sinner, a sinner not only against the moral fashion of the time, but against his own vision of decent conduct...These people had no ritual for the washing away of sins. It is another trait we inherited from them, and it has helped to discipline us as well as to breed hypocrisy among us. Proctor, respected and even feared in Salem, has come to regard himself as a kind of fraud.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, John Proctor is a curious mixture of strength and weakness, but beneath the man's servile attitude toward his wife, lurks the might of a lion.

Because of his affair with Abigail Williams, John Proctor cannot respect himself, and, thus, his sense of personal dignity has been vanquished. He practically cowers in the presence of his wife whom he regards as the epitome of virtue, and even though the farmer constantly attempts to please Elizabeth, it is quite difficult for him to forget his past; also, not the most forgiving person, Elizabeth frequently reminds her spouse of his transgressions, thereby adding to his woes. Arguing with Elizabeth, John Proctor comments on her behavior:

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<sup>3</sup>Arthur Miller, The Crucible(New York, 1963), p.18.



PROCTOR: Spare me! You forget nothin' and forgive nothin'. Learn charity, woman. I have gone tiptoe in the house all seven month since she is gone. I have not moved from there to there without I think to please you, and still an everlasting funeral marches round your heart. I cannot speak but I am doubted, every moment judged for lies, as though I come into a court when I come into this house.<sup>4</sup>

The venomous words of the husband reflect the anguish of a troubled man whose life and dignity have suffered immensely, and, indeed, such suffering can only be noted when the wound has been healed by the repossession of dignity. Although John Proctor regards himself as a fraud because of infidelity, his dignity is not regained by attempts to re-establish marital fidelity. Rather, the farmer reincarnates himself by finally refusing to cooperate with the Salem witch-hunters, despite their hold on his life; and by asserting his individuality in face of hopeless odds, fully cognizant of the consequences, Proctor recovers his lost dignity, and once again his wife respects him. Sadly enough, the husband's new found dignity is tested, and proved solid, at the expense of his life.

About the struggle for individuality in Salem, Miller wrote:

But all organization is and must be grounded on the idea of exclusion and prohibition, just as two objects cannot occupy the same space. Evidently the time came in New England when the repressions of order were heavier than seemed warranted by the dangers against which the order was organized. The

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<sup>4</sup>Crucible, p. 52.

witch-hunt was a perverse manifestation of the panic which set in among all classes when the balance began to turn toward greater individual freedom.<sup>5</sup>

With these words, Miller established the conflict in The Crucible, and when this passage is examined in relation to John Proctor, the farmer's dilemma becomes something more than a husband-wife conflict. Indeed, almost thoroughly opposed to the theocracy of Salem, Proctor embodies the movement against the dominating forces of the community. Of course, an innate part of his problem is based on a lack of sympathy with the church and clergy of Salem. In one instance, Proctor rebelled at the golden candlesticks that Reverend Parris had purchased for his congregation, and in another instance, arguing with a fellow parishoner and Reverend Parris, he revealed his dissatisfactions with the clergy:

PROCTOR: I have trouble enough without I come five miles to hear him preach only hellfire and bloody damnation. Take it to heart, Mr. Parris. There are many other who stay away from church these days because you hardly ever mention God anymore.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps a more shocking illustration of Proctor's attitude occurs within the same argument:

PARRIS: (in a fury) What, are we Quakers? We are not Quakers here yet, Mr. Proctor, and you may tell that to your followers!

PROCTOR: My followers!

PARRIS: (Now he's out with it) There is a party

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<sup>5</sup>Crucible, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

in this church. I am not blind; there is a faction and a party.

PROCTOR: Against you?

PUTNAM: Against him and all authority!

PROCTOR: Why, then I must find it and join it.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, John Proctor is at odds with the clergy of Salem, and in a sense the farmer's discountment with hellfire and damnation leads him to further troubles.

John Proctor's difficulties with the clergy really begin when he learns from Marry Warren, a servant of the Proctors, that Elizabeth's name has been mentioned in the witchcraft proceedings. Although he will not admit it, the husband realizes that such an accusation, brought up by Abigail Williams, is an attempt by the former servant to destroy Elizabeth in order that the younger woman might later replace the wife. Certainly, Elizabeth rests free from blame, but, unfortunately, suspicions about her begin to appear. Reverend Hall, called to Salem because of his knowledge of witchcraft, investigates the Proctor home and finds much to dislike. He chides the Proctors about their negligent attitude toward church; and he questions them about their failure to have their youngest son baptized; then too, this visitor is slightly shocked to learn John Proctor does not know all of the Ten Commandments; but what most dismays the minister is

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<sup>7</sup>Crucible, p. 28.

the Proctor's disbelief in witches. This last discovery certainly confounds the minister, and ironically, shortly after this revelation, Elizabeth Proctor is formally accused of witch-craft and led away to jail.

The jailing of his wife enrages John Proctor, and he almost strangles Mary Warren in an attempt to make her confess the deception being practiced in the court proceedings. Bringing Mary to Salem, Proctor confronts the judges of the court, and he openly states that his single objective is to free his wife. However, Judge Danforth informs the farmer that Elizabeth is pregnant, and this creates a difficult situation.

PROCTOR: But if she say she is pregnant, then she must be. That woman will never lie, Mr. Danforth.

DANFORTH: She will not?

PROCTOR: Never, sir, never.

DANFORTH: We have thought it too convenient to be credited. However, if I should tell you now that I will let her be kept another month; and if she begin to show her natural signs, you shall have her living yet another year until she is delivered-- what say you to that? (John Proctor is struck silent.) Come now. You say your only purpose is to save your wife. Good, then, she is saved at least this year, and a year is long. What say you, sir? It is done now. (In conflict, Proctor glances at Frances and Giles.) Will you drop this charge?

PROCTOR: I----I think I cannot.

DANFORTH: (Now an imperceptible hardness in his voice.) Then your purpose is somewhat larger.

PARRIS: He's come to overthrow this court, Your Honor!<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Crucible, p. 88.

Proctor's hesitation to drop the charge reveals his true nature, for he refuses to desert his friends, Francis Nurse and Giles Corey, whose wives have also been imprisoned for witchcraft. Shortly after this incident, Proctor, following an unsuccessful attempt to have Mary Warren confess her treachery and that of her friends, is also jailed and accused of conspiring with the forces of darkness.

Proctor's assault upon the legality of the court firmly sets him in opposition to Salem's leaders who, for the most part, actually represent the forces of evil or mass conformity. Abigail Williams, the leader of the young girls who cry out in the court the names of the supposed witches, passionately desires John Proctor, and the young woman intends to gain the object of her passions no matter what the cost. Thomas Putnam, another Salem citizen who honors the witchcraft trials, also can be grouped within the forces of evil. Putnam's greed for land is so strong that he willingly participates in the accusation against his neighbors in order that he might eventually acquire their properties. Certainly the greatest evil force within Salem is the theocratic court itself. To challenge the legality of the court is to challenge the authority of those clerics behind such a proceeding, and in a sense, any successful challenge would break the court; thus, John Proctor poses as a threat not only to

the court but to a way of living, and such a menace cannot be tolerated if the theocracy is to prevail.

Though they accuse him, the judges try to seduce John Proctor into a confession, and to a certain extent, the farmer succumbs to their wiles; however, he refuses to condemn anyone other than himself, and this action annoys Judge Danforth in particular. Reverends Hale and Parris convince Judge Danforth that Proctor's admission of guilt is a great service:

HALE: (quickly to Danforth) Excellency, it is enough he confesses himself. Let him sign it, let him sign it.

PARRIS: (Feverishly) It is a great service sir. It is a weighty name; it will strike the village that Proctor confess. I beg you, let him sign it. The sun is up, Excellency!<sup>9</sup>

Literally, "The sun is up," and figuratively, "The sun is up," lighting up the places of darkness, and as for John Proctor, shortly after signing his name and confessing to witchcraft, he tears up his confession refusing to be part of the proceeding. In his last remarks, the farmer loudly proclaims the indignity of his confession and reclaims his dignity:

PROCTOR: I have confessed myself! Is there no good penitence but it be public? God does not need my name nailed upon the church! God sees my name; God knows how black my sins are! It is enough!<sup>10</sup>

No persuasive speeches can convince him that he must

<sup>9</sup>Crucible, pp. 135-36.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

rescind his actions, and after a magnificent climactical commentary, John Proctor goes to be hanged:

PROCTOR: (his eyes full of tears) I can. And there's your first marvel, that I can. You have made your magic now, for now I do think I see some shred of goodness in John Proctor. Not enough to weave a banner with, but white enough to keep it from dogs. (Elizabeth, in a burst of terror, rushes to him and weeps against his hand.) Give them no tear! Tears pleasure them! Show honor now, show a stony heart and sink them with it! (He has lifted her and kisses her now with great passion.)<sup>11</sup>

Thus, John Proctor, by one magnificent act, reclaims the respect of his wife and reclaims his self-respect; truly, with the ending of this play, he becomes a noble creature, ready to defy authority and ready to die for his beliefs. To contemplate the power of the evil forces that overwhelmed Salem and took John Proctor's life is quite frightening and difficult, but, perhaps, Dennis Welland best sums up the dramatic impact of The Crucible:

The very considerable dramatic power of The Crucible derives from its revelation as a mounting tide of evil gaining, in an entire society, an ascendancy quite disproportionate to the evil of any individual member of that society. What is so horrifying is to watch the testimony of honest men bouncing like an india-rubber ball off the high wall of disbelief that other men have built around themselves, not from ingrained evil, but from over-zealousness, and a purblind confidence in their own judgement.<sup>12</sup>

Because of the vast distance in time between the witchcraft trials and the present age, it is sometimes difficult for modern audiences to fully grasp the spirit of

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<sup>11</sup>Crucible., p. 138.

<sup>12</sup>Welland, p. 84.

Salem, but it must be remembered that many people of the 17th. century believed in witches and other companions of the forces of darkness. Cotten Mather, one of the more famous religious leaders of this era, violently defended the trials of witches, and in a work, The Wonders of the Invisible World, this preacher recounted the trial of Bridget Bishop, accused of conspiring with Satan. Of this woman the minister wrote:

She was Indicted for Bewitching of several persons in the Neighborhood, the Indictment being drawn up, according to the Form in such Cases usual. And pleading, Not Guilty, there were brought in several persons who had long undergone many kinds of Miseries, which were preternaturally inflicted, and generally ascribed unto an horrible Witchcraft. There was little Occasion to prove the Witchcraft; it being Evident and Notorious to all Beholders.<sup>13</sup>

There is something dreadfully sinister in the presumption that the accused woman was guilty, and perhaps this illustration brings out more clearly the hideous magnitude of the witchcraft trials. It seems inconceivable that Americans could ever treat their fellow Americans in such a fashion, and, yet, if anyone looked about himself during the staging of The Crucible, it was horrible evident that man's cruelty to man did not end with the witchcraft trials.

Quite obviously, something appeared to be dreadful, sinister in America during the early fifties, and Miller's

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<sup>13</sup>The Literature of the United States (Chicago, 1957) p. 73.



The Crucible more than adequately portrayed the spirit of witch-hunters, past and present; and although this play did embarrass and infuriate audiences, detracting from the true purpose of the drama, perhaps it is good to remember and associate the horrors of The Crucible and the horrors of McCarthyism. If such an association is made, future outbreaks of a similar nature might be avoided, and the true meanings of plays may possible become the themes of conversations rather than the sensational elements of a drama.

Today, twelve years or so removed from McCarthyism, it is somewhat easier to define the meaning of The Crucible without feeling the pressure of the era in which the drama was first presented. Indeed John Proctor's struggle can be rightfully viewed as a man seeking to regain his dignity, instead of a man as a pawn in an attack on super-patriotism; and the spirit of Salem can be regarded as a reoccurring element in American society rather than a phenomena of the early fifties. Perhaps the time is not yet ripe for acceptance of The Crucible in these terms, but everyday America moves closer to the respect that is due it. As Watts writes:

It represents quite a victory for Mr. Miller that his play should grow in stature with the passing of time. For it is now clear that The Crucible was another victim of a sinister epoch in our history. It isn't that the play has improved, but that the atmosphere around it has. It was judged as a kind of political pamphlet for the stage, when it

was actually a work of dramatic art all the time. When Mr. Miller felt that it was underrated on the occasion of its first presentation, he was partially to blame by being so frank about its editorial viewpoint, but he was right about its quality.<sup>14</sup>

Daily, Watts' observation becomes truth, for The Crucible becomes more acceptable as each new day passes.

Ultimately, one day, The Crucible may be given second place in Miller's canon, with only Death of a Salesman superseding its quality; and this place will be well-deserved because thematically and structurally, the play achieves excellence. Of the theme, enough has already been said, but a remark on the play's structure is in order. With only a few exceptions, Miller's skillful manipulation of a large cast, so necessary to achieve the effect of a community, deserves high praise, for the dramatist has succeeded in portraying the total involvement of Salem. Then too, although the community is skillfully worked into the drama, Miller never lets his audience lose sight of the individual's struggle, for with no reservations whatsoever, John Proctor stands far and above any and all other characterizations in The Crucible. Certain elements may confront Proctor and their might undoubtedly is strong, but they are only part of a force that the farmer meets and overcomes. Even Elizabeth Proctor, though she has tremendous influence on her hus-

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<sup>14</sup>Watts, p. X.

band's life, comes nowhere near the width and breadth of John Proctor. In short, Miller has successfully constructed his play in such a fashion that the masses serve almost as a chorus, but the individuality of a single man remains as the focal point of this drama; and certainly it is most fitting that John Proctor holds the center of attention, for truly he is a mighty figure in a great drama, that at once encompasses the past and present, the finite and infinite, the dignity and indignity of man.

## Chapter IV

### A Memory of Two Mondays

### A View From the Bridge

Approximately two years expired between the first production of The Crucible and Miller's next dramatic presentation, but in 1955, the playwright released, as a double bill, two one-act dramas, A Memory of Two Mondays and A View From the Bridge, to New York theater. Neither play received wide acceptance and within a short time both works failed rather miserably; according to Miller, in one review A Memory of Two Mondays was dismissed so thoroughly that it was not even mentioned as having been played. Oddly enough, A View From the Bridge, after some revisions, succeeded on the London stage and then in Paris, where it ran for almost two years; however, a recent New York production of this drama did not persuade American audiences that it deserved any more merit than has already been accorded. Nevertheless, although both plays met disaster, they deserved some consideration because of the part each played in Miller's involvement with dignity.

About A Memory of Two Mondays little was written, except magazine passages noting that the play suffered

financial setbacks; and, yet, despite such poor responses, the drama merited a better fate, for as a commentary on man's lack of concern for fellow beings, the play expressed a significant theme of considerable interest to mankind. Describing his work, Miller wrote:

A Memory of Two Mondays is a pathetic comedy; a boy works among people for a couple of years, shares their troubles, their victories, their hopes, and when it is time for him to be on his way he expects some memorable moment, some signs from them that he has been among them, that he has touched them and been touched by them. In the sea of routine that swells around them they barely note his departure.<sup>1</sup>

Undoubtedly, a certain sadness prevailed when Bert, the boy referred to, discovered that he meant little more than nothing to his co-workers, and many audiences capitalized upon this melancholic realization and charged that the play was "cold" and "impersonal." However, such charges did not fully consider Bert's determination to better himself by attending college if his plans had been considered, the accusations of "cold" and "impersonal" would have had little relevance to the drama's stature. Thus, in many instances vague interpretations of the play detracted from the significance of Miller's theme, and, possibly, in the final analysis, these faulty interpretations cost the play its rightful respect, something it never attained.

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<sup>1</sup>Plays, p. 49.

In order to give A Memory of Two Mondays proper deference, it must be examined as a work of art and not merely classified in terms of cliches. A good point of departure for an examination of this drama begins with what might be called the "absence of evil" in this work. No past crimes haunt the people who toil in the parts shop; no theocratic movement compels anyone to yield to pressures. The drunkenness of Kenneth and Tom sometimes disturbs the sad pretense at joviality in the shop, but the menace of the bottle falls short as an imposing threat; even though the play hints of adultery, somehow, this sin seems to be rather remotely wicked. In short, no recognizable evil force appears to exist in A Memory of Two Mondays.

Perhaps the "absence of evil" is most noticed in the affairs of Bert. This young boy, barely eighteen by the second Monday, leaves his place of employment somewhat disturbed because he has not left any imprint on his colleagues, but however sad his parting may be, no malice marks the occasion. Of Bert, Dennis Welland writes:

Bert does nothing to further such action as the play has; nothing is done to him in any violent sense; he is exposed to experience in a way that is at once lifelike and artistically satisfying in a Chekhovian manner.<sup>2</sup>

Though no evil wrongdoing takes place in A Memory

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<sup>2</sup>Welland, p. 96.

of Two Mondays, in a sense there is a communication void that is neither good nor malignant, and within this void lies the meaning of the drama. Having never experienced bitterness and defeat, Bert, the youngest member of the parts shop establishment, feels deeply the lack of true contact among the workers whose lives are self-centered and full of hopelessness; but, through drink and other destructions, Bert's fellow workers disguise their conditions and aimlessly plod onward to nowhere. Some of the younger men in the shop find solace in wanton sensual affairs, but such activity does not satiate their desires; Patricia, a pretty woman who works in the shop, does not fare any better than her male counterparts, for after an affair with Larry, she begins to eye the nearby house of prostitution. Thus, without true direction, the people in A Memory of Two Mondays wander listlessly about engrossed in their own situations and incapable of any real relationships with other beings.

An outstanding illustration of the lack of communication in this play is the relationship between Gus and his wife. Before her death, Gus treated his wife quite inconsiderately, staying away from home on "binges and orgies"; however, after she passed away, he slowly sunk into debauchery and death, moaning the loss of her. Appropriately, it is Bert who expressed complete surprise at the actions of Gus:

BERT: (Glancing at the toilet door) Gee, I never would've thought Gus liked his wife, would you?

TOM: (studying a letter goes out)

JERRY: (looking up and out the window) Jesus!

BERT: (not attending to Jerry) I thought he always hated his wife.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, Gus and his wife must have had a pitiful life together, for obviously he died not realizing how much she meant to him.

Somehow, the failure of communication in this play seems worse than a direct confrontation with a baneful force of heinous magnitude. No crime has been committed by anyone in A Memory of Two Mondays, but anguish results from lack of relationships dignified by meaningful communications. The lives of Gus and his wife were unfulfilled because of the husband's failure to become intimately involved with his wife. Kenneth's attempts to communicate through poetry ultimately met futility for no one listened to him, and, eventually, he forgot the lines he once repeated without hesitation; and, for the most part, the other characters in this play, excluding Bert, communicate in terms of trite generalities, baseball facts and gross obscenities. Even the one vestige of authority, Raymond, frowns upon Bert's efforts to better himself by reading, and, of course, few of the

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<sup>3</sup>Plays, p. 365.



workers share Bert's interest in the newspaper's reporting of the rise of Hitler; and in view of Hitler's subsequent impact upon world affairs, the shop's personages look ever so weak because of their failure to take the time to understand the actions of other human beings. Were it not for the boyish determination of Bert, the play would be almost horrifying.

An attempt to define the reasons for the lack of dignified communication in A Memory of Two Mondays would involve an elongated psychological study, but, in simplified terms, the underlying source of trouble is that despair has overcome many of the workers in the parts shop. Undoubtedly, a drab outside existence compounded with the unexciting and futureless toil in the shop has greatly contributed to the hopeless attitudes of these people who have nothing to look for but futility. An analogy between the window washing episode and the workers' despairing attitudes is quite appropriate. Early in the play, Kenneth, complaining about the shop's dirty windows decides to clean them and let in sunshine and the outside world. Later, through the clean windows, one of the young men in the shop discovers that a house of prostitution is the immediate neighbor of the parts shop. The futility of this incident seems to characterize the lives of those who work within the realm of the shop.

In the final analysis, in A Memory of Two Mondays,

Miller's talents are directed toward the portrayal of people who are completely without any sense of dignity. These individuals care not for themselves; they show no concern for fellow beings. Above all, none of them recognize anything greater than their own, little frustrating situation. Curiously enough, their lives have not been drastically altered by criminal or wicked forces, and, undoubtedly, within this realization lies the essence of A Memory of Two Mondays; for man does not only lose dignity by partaking of treachery, and he does not regain it by defying the authority of an all-powerful theocracy. Instead, a man's respect for himself and others can be slowly siphoned away by the little frustrations of everyday life; however, this process is as destructive as any other potent evil force. Bert's dissatisfaction with his fellow workers and his decision to attend college reflect the movement of man toward dignity, but such means are hardly equal to John Proctor's sacrifice. Yet, this drama of a search for dignity cannot be underscored because it does not involve the treachery of a Joe Keller or the magnificence of a John Proctor, for in its own perspective, A Memory of Two Mondays, is a dramatization of contemporary man and his problems. The characters may be dullards, the hero may be a boy, but, the issue at stake is Miller's perennial examination of man in search of dignity.

Opening on the same night with A Memory of Two Mondays, A View From the Bridge did not receive any tremendous critical acclaim but, instead, it was greeted with failure. As a one-act production, the drama's style bordered on a telegraphic flow of action and probably many spectators found this manner of presentation objectionable; and so, Miller's second half of the double met disaster. However, not content to desert this play, the dramatist revised it, and, eventually, A View From the Bridge was successfully staged overseas in London and Paris. The nature of Miller's revisions accounted for the drama's ultimate success, and describing these revisions, Miller wrote:

In general, then, I think it can be said that by the addition of significant psychological and behavioral detail the play became not only more human, warmer and less remote, but also a clearer statement.<sup>4</sup>

Deceptively simple, Miller's statement embodies the essence of his revisions, and it was the revised play that finally achieved some attention.

Of course, even with revisions, A View From the Bridge never realized the success of the dramatist's earlier works. Neither political nor economical attacks were leveled at the drama, as had been done to The Crucible and Death of a Salesman; and as far as containing anything

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<sup>4</sup>Arthur Miller, A View From the Bridge (New York, 1961), p. X.

quite as sensational as the wartime crime of Joe Keller, A View From the Bridge offered nothing. Certainly, within the play there were hints of homosexuality and incest, but, perhaps because these elements never fully materialized, the theater public failed to exploit them. Thus, for the first time, a major play by Miller was not subjected to sensational accusations, but success was not any easier to attain, despite the absence of sensationalism; however, with or without success A View From the Bridge was representative of Miller's dramatic efforts to explore man's search for dignity.

Essentially, there are two codes of living, Italian and longshoremen, represented in A View From the Bridge, and when these systems come into conflict, the ultimate source of discontent arises because of a concern for dignity. A total representation of these codes is not presented, but one particular aspect of these systems is considered, and this is the attitude concerning illegal immigrants. Eddie Carbone, of immigrant stock, works on the American docks as a longshoreman, but he remains fully cognizant, and adheres to, the stringent beliefs about the protection of illegal immigrants or "submarines." In a conversation among Catherine, Eddie and Beatrice, the wrath that falls on anyone who informs on illegitimate entrants is brought out:

CATHERINE: The kid snitched?

EDDIE: On his own uncle!

CATHERINE: What, was he crazy?

EDDIE: He was crazy after, I tell you that boy.

BEATRICE: Oh, it was terrible. He has five brothers and the old father. And they grabbed him in the kitchen and pulled him down the stairs--three flights his head was bouncin like a coconut. And they spit on him in the street, his own father and his brothers. The whole neighborhood was cryin.<sup>5</sup>

Obviously, the treatment of betrayers does not diminish because of family ties, and justice seems to be meted out quite severely.

Perhaps the best word to describe the justice that the Italian family dealt to its wayward member is ruthless, but their first concern was the protection of the family name. A transgression such as the one committed by the boy, detracted from the family image that ranked far and above any personal aspirations and motivations; wisely, Miller included in his drama Italian nationals whose heritage is rich with concern for family names. However, as was the case of the youngster who informed on his uncle and as was the case with Eddie Carbone, sometimes family honor receives only secondary attention.

In one way, the codes of the Italian and longshoremen appear strikingly similar, and this similarity is the willingness of both groups to use violence. The beating of the young Italian boy and Eddie Carbone's readiness

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<sup>5</sup>Bridge, p. 21.

to use a knife on Marco illustrates this point. However, here the similarity ends and the differences become the major concern. In Eddie's world, no strong ties exist, particularly family ties, and he observes a responsibility to himself and no one else. His wife, Beatrice, tries to reach him several times, but the longshoreman only persists in gruffly maintaining a distance between himself and his spouse. On one occasion, Beatrice chides him for not fulfilling his sexual role as a husband, but he refuses to accept any advice or criticism from her. Eddie's visits to Alfieri also exemplify his determination to consider nothing but his own chosen path. Although the lawyer advises him not to take action against Rodolpho, the longshoreman, with no basis for his claims, persists in challenging the young man's rights as a human being. In essence, Eddie, unlike those who follow the Italian's code, answers to no one but himself and really feels no obligations to anyone but himself.

In between the Italian and longshoremen codes stands the law, represented by Alfieri who also traces his heritage to Italy. However, as a controlling influence, the law seems rather helpless, for it cannot deter Marco's challenge to Eddie; unfortunately, neither Eddie or Marco have recourse in the law, though both men consult Alfieri who advises them that they have no claims under the law. Yet, though the law seems helpless, Alfieri,

as a lawyer, does present a positive moral code that is superior to the codes of the Italian and the longshoremen.

According to the law, Eddie Carbone has no case against Rodolpho whom the longshoreman accuses of homosexuality and fraud. In an effort to destroy the young Italian, Eddie constantly mocks Rodolpho's high pitched singing voice, and he also vaguely suggests that the young man's skills of sewing and cooking border on the effeminate. Of course, in the rough and rugged world of the longshoreman, men do not normally do the things that Rodolpho does, but, rather, they engage in more masculine pursuits. Eventually Eddie realizes that his slur campaign is having no effect on Catherine's feelings for Rodolpho, and he shifts his tactics and engages the youth in a mock boxing lesson, designed to embarrass Rodolpho's physical prowess; however, this effort is frustrated by Marco whose strength is superior to that of the longshoreman. Finally, realizing that he cannot legally or illegally stop Rodolpho from winning Catherine's affections, Eddie, violating the code that protects "submarines", informs the immigration authorities of the alien status of his relative.

To comprehend Eddie's treachery, he must be understood as a man who has an unnatural possessive affection for his niece, Catherine. In an attempt to insure the near-

ness of Catherine, the longshoreman adopts an overprotective attitude that manifest itself in several ways. Early in the play, Eddie creates quite a scene when told that Catherine would like to accept a job, and only the strongest persuasion, mixed with his passionate concern for her schooling, finally convinces him that she should be allowed to work away from home. Eddie's disposition toward Catherine's admirers also reflects his overprotective concern, for as Beatrice once observed, he never did care for any of the girl's boyfriends. However, undoubtedly the clearest example of the longshoreman's fondness for his niece is his obvious hatred for Rodolpho who steals Catherine's affections; and confronted with the possibility of losing her to the young Italian, Eddie betrays himself, his wife, his niece and guests.

Although he has betrayed everyone, Eddie cannot conceive of any wrong but that which he figures has been done to him. Beatrice, who has long known of her husband's desires for Catherine, and who still loves him even after his treachery, makes every effort to cope with his confused state, but he merely treats her advances with contempt and replies to her criticisms by suggesting that she treat him with respect. Catherine and Rodolpho, who have suffered greatly because of Eddie, are ever willing to offer him friendship, even after his betrayal of Rodolpho, but because Eddie thinks



that Rodolpho has robbed him of Catherine and Marco has robbed him of his good name, he refuses to accept any peace offerings from the young couple.

As the drama moves toward its conclusion, Eddie's interest in the protection of his name grows, and his hatred for Marco who publically accused the longshoreman of informing also grows. In a family argument, he shouts:

EDDIE: I want my name! He didn't take my name! He's only a punk. Marco's got my name--(to Rodolpho) and you can run tell him, kid, that he's gonna give it back to me in front of the neighborhood, or we have it out. (Hoisting up his pants) Come on, where is he? Take me to him.<sup>6</sup>

Shortly, with malice in his heart, Eddie goes out into the street to fight Marco, and in the struggle the longshoreman falls on his own knife, ending his futile endeavor to regain his name.

With Eddie's death the clash in this play comes to an end, and, in a sense, there is a restitution of justice, for Marco, the representative of a code of life that extends far beyond personal interests, has triumphed over a man who only sought to satisfy his own wants. This conclusion illustrates the idea that man's duty cannot be limited to himself, but, rather, at times a unit greater than the self must be recognized and respected. However, Eddie Carbone's error was not

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<sup>6</sup>Bridge, p. 109.

that he refused to recognize a greater unit than himself, for he thoroughly believed in the justice of the Italian code; but, his desires, when carried to the extreme, forced him into a position that inevitably was destined for malfortune, for Eddie could not compromise. Closing the play, Alfieri's thoughts linger on a man who died for what he wanted:

ALFIERI: Most of the time now we settle for half and 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...And yet, it is better to settle for half, it must be. And so I mourn him--I admit it--with a certain...alarm.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, A View From the Bridge is an intense statement of a man in quest of dignity, and, assuredly, in this perspective it rests within the tradition of Miller's canon.

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<sup>7</sup>Bridge, pp. 112-13.

## Chapter V

### After the Fall

First staged in 1964 Arthur Miller's After the Fall was greeted with many condemnations, for reviewers and audiences saw in this work an intimate representation of the dramatist's life. A number of critics concluded that the unhappy childhood of Quentin, the central figure of this drama, reflected the tormented youth of Miller; and, of course, Quentin's marital adventures with Maggie, so the reviewers said, were actually incidents taken from the playwright's marriage to Marilyn Monroe; then, too, Quentin's defense of a friend, who had a communist past, brought out cries that Quentin's sympathy mirrored Miller's past flirtations with Marxism; furthermore, according to several critics, Elia Kazan, the director of After the Fall, was actually the prototype of Quentin's friend, Mickey, who determined to testify before a committee that was investigating communists. Thus, in view of what audiences thought to be striking similarities between the play and Miller's life, it was felt by many people that Miller had merely written, in poor taste, an autobiographical account of his past, but such a critical attitude is neither just nor profound, for the play goes far beyond the mere confines

of its author's life.

To Miller, the theater is a place to express what is "in the air", and, surely, those critics who chastise Miller for alleged autobiographical incidents in After the Fall would not insist that his personal life was the sole concern of the American public. In the introduction to his collected plays, Miller writes:

These plays, in one sense, are my response to what was "in the air," they are one man's way of saying to his fellow men, "This is what you see everyday, or think or feel; now 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,"<sup>1</sup>

Assuming that this concept of the theater prevails throughout Miller's works it is difficult to accuse him of writing a purely autobiographical play, for, obviously, his concern is with currents of thought that are not confined to himself. That he shares an interest in marital situations is undoubtedly true, but that he uses After the Fall to reveal only his marital difficulties is certainly false. In order to do justice to After the Fall, Miller's work must be examined as something more comprehensive than a diary of his life.

To separate the artist from his work is a tedious task, but such a separation must be brought about if the play is to have a profound meaning. Undoubtedly, the troubles that bewilder Quentin can be paralleled with

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<sup>1</sup>Plays, p. 11.

several incidents that have disturbed Miller's peace, but the magnitude of the lawyer's problem extends far beyond the private life of the dramatist; for in essence it can be related to the lives of all married people, who experience the dignity and indignity that occurs during the course of a relationship. In a large sense, then, this play reflects modern man's family problems, particularly the husband-wife relationship, and certainly such a dramatic experience concerns more than one man's life.

Almost everything, from the struggle between Quentin's parents to the marital problems that he and his friends face, seems to revolve around the indignity that is perpetrated in a married state. Most noteworthy is the fact that Quentin's mind is ever aware of marital difficulties, and his major dilemma is whether he should marry Holga. However, employing flashbacks, Miller first gives his audiences a picture of Quentin's earliest confrontation with indignity, and, clearly, it is his mother who figures in his childhood remembrances of indignity. On the one hand, Quentin's mother illustrates indignity that is indirect, for she concentrates her wrath on her husband, but on the other hand, she directly assaulted Quentin's dignity by once abandoning the youngster while she and the rest of the family went to the beach. Throughout the play, Quentin's

mother, appearing in the flashbacks, serves as a reminder of past indignity, and by association, she serves a harbinger of future indignity.

Quentin's knowledge of his mother's cruelties caused him much anguish during childhood, but her effect did not cease to haunt him as he became a man, and even after she died, he felt her influence for in other women he noticed her vicious traits. At first glance, it appears that Quentin blames his mother for much of his woes, and, it also seems that to a large extent it is women who have ruined Quentin's life; but this is not so, for After the Fall is about Quentin's attainment of maturity, and within this process he discovers that it is futile to try to establish the blame for failure. In fact as he develops, he considers the proposition that no one is guilty, and once, he advised a female client, Felice, that neither she nor her husband were to blame for their failing marriage. This attitude about guiltlessness lingers with Quentin for a time, but as he experiences life he discovers that it is far from the truth.

Quentin's incessant efforts to determine the nature of guilt are intrinsically linked with the search for dignity, for if he can establish his innocence, Quentin will also be able to establish dignity, or a lack of indignity, for those who are innocent have not caused indig-

nity. However, after two marriages, many friendships and the experience of his law profession, Quentin, through his relationship with Holga, wonders about the nature of guilt and innocence:

QUENTIN: Shall we lay it all to mothers? Aren't there mothers who keep dissatisfaction hidden to the grave, and so not split the faith of sons until they go in guilt for what they did not do? And I'll go further---here's the final bafflement for me---is it altogether good to be not guilty for what another does?<sup>2</sup>

Ultimately, Quentin finds the answers to these questions, but his learning process is a painful experience for him and others.

Quentin's wives are part of his ultimate realization about guilt and innocence, and so it is best to analyze him and their relations with the lawyer. With his first wife, Louise, Quentin never reached a true understanding, and, consequently, though they lived together, they were not actually married. Of course, Louise had a rather cold and demanding nature, but it was not entirely her fault that their marriage fell apart. Quentin, though he did not necessarily realize it at the time, shared much of the responsibility for the dissolving of their marriage's ties, for by not making a real effort to communicate with Louise, he endangered their relationship. Curiously enough, during his second marriage, Quentin strived to encourage his wife, for he had

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<sup>2</sup>Arthur Miller, After the Fall, (New York, 1964)p.43.

learned something from his first marriage, but somehow this marriage also failed. In any number of ways, Quentin tried to take an active part in Maggie's life, and to an extent she bettered herself under his tutoring, but eventually her past, with its guilt, becomes too much for her, and she ultimately destroys her marriage and herself. Ironically, then, Quentin, though he took an intensive interest in Maggie, found that marriage was still an unbearable situation and he left her to do whatever she desired.

Besides the influence of women in his life, another influence that leads to Quentin's maturity is his friendship with Lou and Mickey. These two associates of Quentin were affiliated with the communist movement in the United States, and their concern with guilt and innocence and its bearing on a man's dignity has quite an effect on Quentin's final realization about life. Lou, a bit weaker than Mickey, defends his past with a certain misguided determination that has been encouraged by his wife who has some of the characteristics of a shrew. Unlike Lou, Mickey tires of the deception that he practices because of his part, and finally he decides to give an investigating committee the names of his former fellow party members. Mickey's decision frightens Lou, who fears exposure, but to Mickey such an action is the only possible solution that will give him self-respect. Un-



fortunately, Lou commits suicide because of Mickey's decision, and Quentin, though he respects his friend's action, chooses to terminate their friendship. However, his involvement with Lou and Mickey taught him much about the effects of guilt and man's attempt to preserve himself, and this knowledge has a significant impact upon his later decisions.

Distraught by his relations with women and confused by the actions of his male companions, Quentin more or less arrives at the conclusion that people do not understand one another and that the truth is often destructive. In trying to reconcile this incongruity of life and put it within a liveable framework, Quentin asks himself:

QUENTIN: Then how do you live? A workable lie? But that comes from a clear conscience! Or a dead one. Not to see one's own evil--there's power! And rightness too!--so kill conscience. Kill it...<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, to the lawyer the option of living by a workable lie is closed, for he has seen the effects of such an approach on Lou, and Quentin has no clear conscience because he is constantly reminded of his part in other's lives. There remains to him the alternative of destroying his conscience, but this is really no alternative for his entire maturation process has been keyed to a

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<sup>3</sup>Fall, p. 86.

recognition of truth.

What Quentin is puzzled about is how a man can successfully live with others and not destroy them or himself. Guilt and innocence are part of the process that leads him ever on in an attempt to find a situation, where man can respect himself and not harm others at the same time; for it is decidedly difficult for a person to maintain a personal sense of dignity in some situations, and thus a man must be able to consider others as well as himself. From his first two wives, though he treated the second differently from the first, Quentin learned the importance of a respect for others; and from Mickey and Lou and others he gradually came to a realization about man's need to respect himself in spite of the consequence. Of course, for the most part he has learned the importance of dignity through a negative learning process; but, nevertheless, he has profited from his mistakes and the errors of others, and his knowledge is enough to let him risk a third marriage.

Although another man in Quentin's position might easily succumb to despair, the lawyer does not become depressed, for in Holga he sees hope for a ~~better~~ life. However, this rejuvenation is not an innocent or painless beginning, for it is based upon guilt and death; and yet Quentin goes forward to meet his fate under-

standing that:

QUENTIN: To know, and even happily, that we meet unblest; not in some garden of wax fruit and painted trees, that be of Eden, but after, after the Fall, after many many deaths. Is the knowing all? And the wish to kill is never killed, but with some gift of courage one may look into its face when it appears, and with a stroke of love ...forgive it...<sup>4</sup>

It is as Adam and Eve that Quentin and Holga leave paradise to begin a life of pleasure and pain, life and death, truth and dignity.

In retrospect, Miller's After the Fall seems to suggest that complete innocence, no matter what the circumstance, does not really exist, for indirectly involved because of the play's title is the concept of original sin and mankind's subsequent guilt because of it. Certainly, after the first fall, a large measure of blame was directed toward the first woman, but Adam was not entirely free from blame; and applying this principle to the marital situations with Miller's dramas, none of the marriage partners can be regarded as totally innocent of transgression, though it is sometimes difficult to determine who bears the lesser or greater share of indignities.

In After the Fall Miller also is possibly suggesting the ideas that total love can be very disastrous. Realizing that there was some validity to Louise's com-

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<sup>4</sup>Fall, p. 63.

ment about his lack of concern for women, Quentin reversed his tactics with Maggie and intensified his interest in her; but to his distress the more entangled he became with Maggie, the more demanding she became, and finally recognizing that he was losing his personal identity because of the completeness of Maggie's demands, Quentin separated himself from her before she included him in her doom. Thus, through his second marriage, Quentin came to the understanding that the cost of total love is self-sacrifice, and at such a price the essence of man, his dignity, becomes cheapened.

Certainly, for the most part, After the Fall revolves around marital relations, but it must be recognized as something more profound than a commentary on contemporary marriage. Essentially, the reasons why many of the relationships malfunction can be traced to indignities that deny the basic rights of human beings within the marriage situation. However, Miller places his play on a greater level than that of failing marriages but including references to a prominent indignity of the present century. Holga, a German citizen during the Nazi era, constantly suffers feelings of guilt though she had nothing to do with the extermination of the Jewish people. Whenever she and Quentin visit the war's landmarks, particularly the German concentration camp, her remorse becomes tearfully evident as she weeps because of man's

inhumanities to man. Quentin also identifies with the camp, and his thoughts while visiting the infamous place are brought out in the following passage:

QUENTIN: I think I expected it to be more unfamiliar. I never thought the stones would look so ordinary. And the view from here is rather pastoral. Why do I know something here?<sup>5</sup>

To Quentin, the concentration camp did not conform to his image of such a place, for more than likely, the lawyer expected it to be a hideous construction, set in fierce surroundings; but, instead, the camp, where many indignities had occurred, appeared almost ordinary, almost pastoral. Indeed, Quentin recognizes that indignity does not necessarily don a hateful garb, but greater than this is his feeling that the place is not unknown to him. This unexpected familiarity suggests Quentin's part in the timeless nature of indignity, for in a sense every man shares in the evils that men practice.

Holga, more than anyone else in the play, brings out this concept of universal guilt for the Nazi atrocities, but she also mentions another major indignity, the atomic bombing of Japan, that occurred during the Twentieth century. Certainly many non-warring people died in the bombing of Japan, and, undoubtedly, if Miller had developed this aspect of the drama, the person who released the bombs would not be the only guilty

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<sup>5</sup>Fall, p. 21.

party who was responsible for the thousands of deaths. On the same theme, it should also be noted that Lou and Mickey were victimized by the indignities that were practiced during the McCarthy era in America. It would be folly to accuse the Senator from Wisconsin as the only responsible person for the sorrows that filled the lives of many Americans, for many Americans, at least in spirit, were openly sympathetic to the practices of McCarthy and his cohorts. Thus, there are a number of mass indignities that Miller has introduced into After the Fall, and these brutalities gave his play universal overtones.

Although there are particular and universal indignities present in Miller's After the Fall, the dramatist, at this point in his career, seems to have relaxed the harsher concepts that originally governed his character's attempt to gain or regain dignity. However, this is not to say that he has become more lenient in his attitude about dignity, but in After the Fall Quentin, a man guilty of universal and particular indignities, does not die because of his transgressions. Rather, he is allowed to live and profit from learning is quite unlike the solutions that confronted Joe Keller, Willy Loman, John Proctor, and Eddie Carbone, for these earlier Miller characters all died in their searches for dignity. At this point in Miller's career as a dramatist, it is quite obvious, then, that he is moving away from a purgation

process that involves death.

This movement away from purification by death is certainly a reflection of Miller's changing attitude about the nature of guilt in relation to a man's dignity. Somehow, this shift is good, for the complexity of modern society makes it difficult to assign to anyone the responsibility for a particular indignity. Of course, Miller is not advocating that indignities be overlooked, but he does not insist that man's guilt constantly disturb his peace of mind, ultimately driving him to despair. Man, as do Quentin and Holga, must understand his part in the private and public indignities of the world, and after this realization, he must profit and go forth to try again; for it is not only the depraved, who are responsible for mass murder, but it is every man, who inhabits this planet.

In essence, then, Quentin and Holga's willingness to try again represent Miller's effort to tell his fellow man, through the theater, that death is no longer the means of salvation. Also, he seems to be saying that no earthly paradise, without indignity, exists, nor will one ever exist, but he urges man to go forth and live not die. Indeed, Quentin and Holga, after the fall, go forth as Miller's prototypes of what the rest of humanity, the guilt ridden, the defilers of dignity, should do in an effort to make the world more livable, less miserable.

## Chapter VI

### Incident at Vichy

Arthur Miller's most recent play, Incident at Vichy, was first staged at the Lincoln REpertoire Center late in the fall of 1964. Telling about a Nazi investigation of people suspected of being Jewish, the drama received only token praise from critics and audiences, who generally disliked Miller's work because of its sermonizing insights into mankind's guilt. Reviewing Incident at Vichy, Robert Brustein noted:

Although all the characters have names, professions and little dramas, it soon becomes clear that they are not so much private men as public speakers, each with a symbolic role: a Humanist, a Marxist, a Coward, an Artist, a Businessman, an Aristocrat, etc. By the time the group has dwindled to a Jewish psychiatrist (the Humanist) and an Austrian Prince (the Aristocrat) arguing over the nature of racial prejudice, it has become clear that Mr. Miller has given us not so much a play as another solemn sermon on Human Responsibility.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, Brustein's review did not necessarily reflect the complete consensus of the play, but, generally, sooner or later most reviewers, without subtlety, suggested that the playwright was yet in that frame of mind during which After the Fall had been written. Thus, haunted and annoyed by the implications that poured from Miller's

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Brustein, "Muddy Track at Lincoln Center," New Republic, 69:86 (Dec. 14, 1964).



study of guilt, critics and audiences found Incident at Vichy most unattractive, despite the fact that it was worthy of attention as a dramatic production.

Undoubtedly, many of the objections to Miller's examination of guilt came about because of his play's subject matter. Nazi wartime crimes, practiced on anyone of Jewish descent, later disturbed many people, who learned of the hideous depths to which fellow human beings had sunk. However, although such concern was indeed an expression that not all men were inhumane, for the most part, the heritage of Nazism, after its demise, remained as an epoch that mankind sought to forget. Miller, by once again bringing to focus the horrors of a sad era, reopened a chapter in man's history that everyone wished he had left untouched. Of course, Miller was not the first playwright to broach the subject of Nazi brutality, but, actually, he was one of the few major American dramatists who had attempted, until that time, to portray the sufferings of the Jewish people; and so, perhaps Incident at Vichy attracted more attention because of the respected position its author held in the American theater, but Miller's stature in no way diminished his critics' opinions that the play dealt with material that should have been left alone.

To have insisted that Incident at Vichy approached proportions of dramatic greatness would have seemed fool-

ish to any astute observers of the drama, but, quite imprudent was the theater public's rejection of the play because it dwelt on guilt. Quite understandably, many human beings had tried to suppress the heinous aspects of the Nazi's treatment of the Jews, and, certainly, no one wanted to consider the possibility of any personal guilt for the maltreatment of his fellow man; but Miller reminded everyone of the past, and his drama, by dissecting the nature of guilt, offended many persons who considered themselves innocent of any injustices that the Nazis had practiced on the Jewish people. Consequently, because it probed guilt, Incident at Vichy received an unfavorable reception from theater goers, who failed to grasp any significances, except that they had been disturbed by Miller's portrayal of one of the misbegotten events of history.

Sadly enough, those theater goers who downgraded Incident at Vichy because of its inquiry into guilt did a great disservice to themselves and the play, for although Miller's subject matter was rather sordid, the dramatist's attempt to explore guilt deserved far greater merit than was accorded it. Reviewing Incident at Vichy, a critic Time wrote:

Everyone would like to erase or explain the tragedies of history, but tragedy is by nature inexplicable, unavoidable and irreversible. Arthur Miller proposes that the living atone for the dead. But universal guilt, like universal love, is an

abstraction.<sup>2</sup>

Guilt, as the reviewer wrote and as so many people realized, endured as an abstraction, and, as such, few people considered the possibility that they could have shared the responsibility for Nazi crimes. However, if the critics and the public had paused to reflect a moment, they might have realized that it was not Miller's intention to make anyone feel guilty or to atone for the past.

Brustein's assertion that the characters of Incident at Vichy are public speakers need not be disputed, for, quite obviously, Miller has created men who represent the various aspects of society. A painter, an electrician, a businessman, an actor, a doctor and an aristocrat are some of the people who make up the group that the Nazis seek to investigate; and within this group are several nationalities, notably, French and Austrian. However, although these men have particular occupations and nationalities, and although they are all under suspicion, at no time is any particular man singled out as the person responsible for the situation. As individuals, the accused stand free from blame and even their captors, the Germans, are never really exposed as the responsible party.

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<sup>2</sup>"Guilt Unlimited", Time, 84:73, (Dec. 11, 1964).

It would seem that if Miller were seeking to establish responsibility for war crimes, his most likely choice would be the Germans, but in Incident at Vichy the playwright does not lay blame on them. Of the Germans in the play, only two, Professor Hoffman and the Major, are actually complete characterizations who can be analyzed. Professor Hoffman's task, revolting as it is, suits him perfectly, for he is obviously a rather sick person; and though he certainly enjoys his work, it is difficult to accuse a mentally disturbed person of any crime. A disabled veteran, the Major, rebels because of the investigation, but, after being threatened, he complies; and it also takes a great quantity of alcohol to put him into the mood to pursue his tasks. Without threats and without drinks, the Major would certainly not fulfill his role, and so, he cannot be convicted of responsibility for criminal acts. Thus, the Germans are such that it is clear that Miller does not actually point at the Germans and insist that they be held responsible for the inhumanities practiced on the Jews.

As far as suggestions about the guilt of non-Germans, there is nothing in Incident at Vichy that singles out any particular people or persons. Certainly, a selfish desire for survival prevails among the suspects, and some of them even plot an escape; but, in itself, self-preservation does not suffice as evidence

that these creatures were particularly responsible for the events of the time. Perhaps more worthy of comment is the indifference that guides the attitudes of some of the suspects, for such an outlook reflects the deep loss that injustices were permitted to occur. Thus, although most of the characters in Incident at Vichy express a natural desire for survival, and although in some instances an indifferent attitude prevails over the relationships, nowhere is any person or nation accused of crime.

In discussing reasons for their arrests, the prisoners raise some interesting points about guilt:

MONCEAU: In my opinion you're hysterical...War is war, but you still have to keep a certain sense of proportion. I mean Germans are still people.

LEDUC: I don't speak this way because they're Germans.

BAYARD: It's that they're fascists.

LEDUC: Excuse me, no. It's exactly because they are people that I speak this way.

BAYARD: I don't agree with that.<sup>3</sup>

Monceau, somewhat of a coward, refuses to believe that people, because they are people, could possibly commit crimes against fellow beings. Bayard, a communist, paradoxically concludes that the fascists are to blame for everything, but he refuses to accept the idea that people

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<sup>3</sup>Arthur Miller, Incident at Vichy, (New York, 1965), pp. 19-20.

could be responsible. Leduc, a psychologist and a Jew, is the only captive, who, from the beginning of detention, realized the horrible conclusion that all men are responsible for inhumanity; however, unlike the German Major who shouts, "There will never be persons again,"<sup>4</sup> Leduc turns to others for help, in an attempt to save himself.

Prince Von Berg, to whom Leduc ultimately turns for assistance, is an Austrian aristocrat who rejects Nazism because it appears to be vulgar; in fact he left Austria because he found the Nazis completely tasteless. However, in an illuminating conversation with Monceau, the prince learns that an appreciation of the fine arts does not necessarily guarantee humanitarian ideals:

VON BERG: ...Even people with respect for art go about hounding Jews? Making a prison of Europe, pushing themselves forward as a race of policemen and brutes? Is that possible for artistic people?

MONCEAU: I'd like to agree with you, Prince Von Berg, but I have to say that the German audiences ---I've played there---no audience is as sensitive to the smallest nuance of a performance; they sit in the theater with respect, like in a church. And nobody listens to music like a German. Don't you think so? It's a passion with them.<sup>5</sup>

For Monceau's observations, the Prince has no reply but a realization that man's highest achievements, the arts, have no bearing on human relationships.

After establishing that it is within the power of

<sup>4</sup>Vichy, p. 54

<sup>5</sup>Vichy, p.24.

civilized men to kill, and having eliminated any particular responsibility for Nazi war crimes, Miller, in Incident at Vichy, takes these ideas as premises and develops an interesting conclusion. It is Leduc who finally says:

LEDUC: ...And Jew is only the name we give to that stranger, that agony we cannot feel, that death we look at like a cold abstraction. Each man has his Jew; it is the other. And the Jews have their Jews.<sup>6</sup>

With these lines, possibly the only great lines in Incident at Vichy, Miller's theme becomes more substantial than a mere revived guilt for war crimes. Eventually, he suggests that everyone has a share in the responsibility for the treatment of Jews. However, this sharing of responsibility should not be confined to the Jewish situation, for, early in the play, Monceau brought to attention the universality of injustice.

MONCEAU: The Russians condemn the middle class, the English have condemned the Indians, Africans, and anybody else they could lay their hands on, the French, the Italians...every nation has condemned somebody because of his race, including the Americans and what they do to Negroes.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, every man, everywhere, has some guilt for injustices.

Although the realization of universal guilt is undoubtedly of major significance in Incident at Vichy, Miller carries his thoughts beyond this point to greater

<sup>6</sup>Vichy, p. 66.

<sup>7</sup>Vichy, p. 51.

heights. Shocked by Leduc's statement's about mankind's guilt, the prince eventually recognized the truth of the doctor's ideas, but rather than despairing, he makes an effort to assist Leduc's escape. Certainly, by saving Leduc, the prince will probably meet the fate previously determined for the Jewish doctor, but Von Berg's action does not necessarily imply that Miller wants the living to atone for the dead; rather, the dramatist seems to be offering his thoughts about the way mankind can profit from the indignities suffered by the Jews and others.

Until his decision to help Leduc, Von Berg remained, at the least, unconsciously aware of the true nature of the crimes of his fellow man. His annoyance with the German vulgarisms had been strong enough to force his departure from Austria, but such inconvenience was only the result of his own displeasure; and so, unschooled in the horrors of the world about him and somewhat protected because of royal birth, he wandered until the police picked him up for interrogation. Once involved in the investigation, Von Berg learned of reality, and his choice to aid Leduc reflects the mind of an individual who has realized a man's plight and resolved to be of assistance; unlike Monceau, who never wanted to believe the truth, the prince finally accepted it and tried to change the course of events.



Of course, Leduc's escape is gained at great expense, possibly Von Berg's life, and some reviewers have suggested that this is a high cost. However, the essence of the situation is that Von Berg, perhaps for the first time in his life, considers the nature of dignity. All the pomp and splendor of his aristocratic heritage never truly gave him an understanding of man, but when he sacrificed himself in order that another might live, he dignified himself beyond compare. Then too, Von Berg's sacrifice preserves Leduc's life, and hopefully, he will live long enough to see the nature of man change. Thus, though the prince makes the supreme sacrifice, it gives him a sense of dignity and offers Leduc a chance to live with the hope of a better world.

It appears, then, that in Incident at Vichy Miller lays stress not so much on the establishment of guilt but on man's capacity to accept and to learn from it. The various types of government that are mentioned in this play failed to make a better world because, somehow, the people under these systems lost interest in their fellow man. Certainly, England survived despite its treatment of the Indians, and though the Negroes' lot was rather unbearable, America prospered, but survival and prosperity do not guarantee justice and dignity. By including Bayard, a communist, Miller, in a sense, foretells the nature of things to come unless men profit from

the past. Quite obviously, Bayard's hopes for a perfect world through socialism have not matured, for the world situation has not improved since international communism made its appearance; however, this failure cannot be misconstrued as an attack on communism, but, rather, it must be understood as a prophesy about the ultimate fate of any system that neglects to recognize the value of human beings. A future world, one that has not learned from its predecessor, will have little success though its practices may never exactly mirror the actions of Nazi Germany.

Ultimately, this play's subject matter, which disturbed so many people, is of inconsequential significance, for Miller's drama transcends the bounds of contemporary events. In its essence, Incident at Vichy accuses no one of crimes, but it makes an impassioned plea to men to become less inclined to indignity and more inclined to dignity. Miller asks not that men offer themselves as did Prince Von Berg, but he does request that men avoid the pitfalls of the past, for a nation's prosperity, a nation's culture and a nation's theater, including Incident at Vichy, cannot substitute for a dignified relationship between men. Prince Von Berg's hopes and Leduc's dreams will only materialize when men understand themselves and others, but until such a time, every Jew, every man will be guilty and all will suffer. Un-

doubtedly, in view of the climax, it is Miller's hope that all men will be equal to Prince Von Berg's final thoughts, and unless men do, the history of mankind will be an endless repetition of Incident at Vichy.

Clearly, although critics and reviewers resented the sermonizing effect of Incident at Vichy, Miller's drama exists as something more than an attempt to revive contemporary guilt complexes. As an examination of guilt complexes. As an examination of guilt and the dignified reaction that Prince Von Berg has to it, this drama legitimately and logically falls within Miller's canon, which is largely comprised of inquiries into the nature of dignity; and yet, though this theme may seem to be a perennial part of the dramatist's work, in Incident at Vichy, he has examined it in a new light and, perhaps, proposed something of a solution to man's search for dignity. Thus, with its shortcomings, Incident at Vichy can be regarded as a respectable part of Miller's canon.

## Conclusion

To examine truthfully Arthur Miller's plays is to examine them from a perspective that encompasses the search for dignity and the nature of contemporary society, for it is not enough to be aware of the search for dignity, unless it is understood in a relationship with the intellectual climate of the time. Much of the criticism that has been written about Miller makes reference to him as a social dramatist, and, undoubtedly, the subject matter of his works bears out the correctness of such commentary; for within Miller's canon are dramas that express some of the twentieth century's unique problems that range from wartime criminality to mass murder. Of course, to a certain extent many of the problems that Miller portrays had their roots in previous eras of man's history, but in essence the present century provided the fertilizer, which enabled these issues to bloom. Thus, a synthesis of the search for dignity and contemporary society provides a means to ascertain the significance of Miller's concern for dignity.

Although there have certainly been many positive changes advanced during the twentieth century, a number of unfortunate developments have caused modern man considerable anguish. It would be most difficult, if not

impossible, to pinpoint exactly those factors that have brought mankind his greatest woe, and possibly, it would be equally difficult to establish definitely those factors that brought man happiness. For instance, the rise of industry certainly enlarged man's capacity to produce what he needs, but, at the same time, industry drew people to the cities and this movement created untold problems. It appears, then, that this century's achievements have been the sire of some of man's most regrettable manifestations, for though not directly responsible, some of man's accomplishments have been the author of his greatest indignities. However, not all of these changes have been the result of technological advance, for in many instances it has been modern man's changing attitudes that have made life an intolerable experience. A mere change in emphasis on what is desirable has often done nothing but confuse those who cannot so readily adjust to breaks from traditional ways of living. Thus, the general confusion of the time has often contributed to the particular dilemmas of man.

What has made life for modern man quite difficult is that this changing society often confuses his idea of the way things should be. Consequently, at times he may make the wrong choice because of a lack of understanding of the complexity of his society. However, to make matters worse, once a man has transgressed, knowingly or

unknowingly, he finds it almost impossible to reconcile himself with the system that he has offended; herein lies the crux of Miller's early dramas, for he portrays those men who cannot make ample retribution for their actions, and their only alternative is restitution by death. In Miller's early works his characters all face situations that are involved with matters of dignity, and ultimately, they lose their lives in search of dignity. Joe Keller is the first of these early Miller characters, and he committed suicide after realizing the heinous magnitude of his crime. Unlike Joe Keller, Willy Loman never fully recognizes the nature of his indignity, but Willy does die for a cause, the wrong cause, that he accepted; in a sense, then, Willy Loman serves as a life that was lost in quest of a negative concept of dignity. Thus, within his first two plays, Miller powerfully presents pictures of men who had erred and gave their lives to regain and gain the dignity that they needed to be acceptable to society.

John Proctor, the central figure of Miller's third play, The Crucible, is a perfect example of a man who had lost his self-respect and dignity by an affair with a servant; being a Puritan, Proctor had no way of absolving his sin, and so he was constantly tormented by feelings of guilt. Ultimately, because of his guilt and wish to be absolved, John Proctor dies for his convictions and proves himself a dignified human being. However, The

Crucible is more than an attack on a religious community, for it remains as a fine statement of the pressures that society imposes to control a man's thinking; be these pressures direct or indirect, their main purpose is to destroy the dignity of man by taking away his reasoning faculties, and in these respects The Crucible seems remarkably similar to 1984. It should also be noted that although The Crucible deals with community pressures, as do All My Sons and Death of a Salesman, it moves far beyond the family conflicts around which the two early plays had been constructed. The Crucible is a community affair, and John Proctor's actions have consequences that affect a unit much larger than a family. Obviously, then, John Proctor remains with the pattern of men who must die in order to gain what they consider their dignity, but The Crucible begins to reflect Miller's movement toward something of greater concern than the family.

Miller's early plays, then, present men of varying intelligences and stature, but they all are similar in that they search for dignity and die in quest of it. Then, too, all of these works are concerned with social problems; for Joe Keller is a man who victimized others during a war; Willy Loman's fate is determined to an extent by the rise of big business; and the hysteria that condemned John Proctor can be likened to the mood of

the hunt for communists during the days of McCarthy. However, of central importance is the relationship of the search for dignity and these social problems, and, furthermore, the way in which these characters in these plays ultimately try to gain dignity is of importance.

Miller's middle plays, A Memory of Two Mondays and A View From the Bridge, are other examples of the dramatist's exploration of dignity and social problems. A Memory of Two Mondays is undoubtedly the simplest play that Miller has yet written; Miller's first two works were essentially developed around a cause and effect relationship that reflected the influence of Ibsen; The Crucible, however, represents a departure from the cause and effect technique, for it seems to be based upon a development that is rather episodic, almost Strindbergian, in nature; but A Memory of Two Mondays is almost formless. It is not only the form of the play that is simple, but its plot also appears to be the essence of simplicity. No conflict heightens the drama of Bert's maturation, and no one dies in quest of his dignity. In fact, there is no central characters in the play. Nevertheless, A Memory of Two Mondays falls within Miller's examination of dignity.

Although no visible evil force moves throughout the parts shop, there is an existential aspect of this play that is as deadly as any of the deaths suffered by



earlier Miller characters. Excluding Bert, the workers in the shop face each day with no awareness of life, and in essence, they are merely going through the motions of living but they are not alive. Such an existence robs a man of his dignity as well as any crime or infringement on his rights, for one does not have to do evil in order to lose dignity. Thus, in a subtle way, Miller in this drama suggests that these characters are also without dignity.

As far as being a social commentary, A Memory of Two Mondays is just that for it is a reflection of a society whose people have lost their awareness of life. Such a situation is not impossible in a country where ideas and values are confused beyond understanding. Indeed, A Memory of Two Mondays, simple though it seems, stands as a shocking statement of how men can degenerate into an undignified state. Only Bert, the youngest and least inexperienced of the shop workers, truly sense the sorry condition of his fellow workers, but though the play may be depressing, it brings a ray of hope to man, for Bert leaves this place of sadness to search for better things.

A View From the Bridge, the second of Miller's middle plays, is somewhat more complex in form than its predecessor for it is rather episodic in development. However, in this play Miller returns to a plot that in-

volves a conflict, which finally leads to the death of Eddie Carbone, who sought what he considered his rightful place in the family. Again, as in the early plays, Eddie tries to gain his dignity, and to him the only possible solution is through a life or death struggle, ultimately, he loses to a force that represents a greater unit, the neighborhood, than himself.

Curiously enough, even the law could not help or stop Eddie from his actions. This sense of helplessness, as far as the law is concerned, appears in several of Miller's plays, and it is worthy of comment, for it is directly related to the helplessness that his characters felt when they have no place to turn to in order to make restitution; George Cheever is a lawyer and the son of the man whom Joe Keller sent to prison, but George works for the law that set Joe free and convicted his father. In The Crucible, it is a perversion of the law that convicts John Proctor and his friends; and of course, to Quentin, a lawyer, the law at times seems most inadequate. Furthermore, when Willy Loman turns to Charley's son, Bernard, for assistance, the young man really has no answers. Thus, the helplessness of the law contributes to the plight that faces Miller's characters.

Miller's middle plays, then, are somewhat experimental in form and idea, but they remain within the tradition of the search for dignity and its relationship

with contemporary society. Of course, it is somewhat difficult to define the nature of the social problem in A Memory of Two Mondays, but in A View From the Bridge the dramatist is again dealing with the problems of the family in modern society; then too, with this play Miller brings in the conflict between a European way of life that is centered around the family name as opposed to Eddie Carbone who is interested in himself. Thus, the middle plays have a definite place in the Miller canon, and their position is important, though they were his least successful works.

In his later plays, After the Fall and Incident at Vichy, Miller once again varies his style. After the Fall is in effect a throwback to Death of a Salesman, for the cause and effect relationship is ever so evident. However, most striking about After the Fall is the departure from death as a means of atonement as a way to gain dignity. Although he has a share in the indignities of the world, Quentin does not pay for his guilt by death, but, rather, he moves on to another life, and, hopefully, it will be more prosperous than the one before. Indeed, his share in personal and public indignities has been a profitable experience for him, and he may become a successful human being. Thus, with this play, Miller has begun to move away from death as a means of atonement and dignification.

In terms of the search for dignity and its relation with social problems, After the Fall is one of Miller's most powerful statements about contemporary society. Undoubtedly, the major issue of the play revolves around marital discord, and this is most pertinent to a country whose divorce rate is rapidly climbing. Whether Miller writes from personal experience or whether he writes from hearsay is not of significance, for the contemporary nature of his subject matter is private and public. However, though the nature of marital difficulties is of paramount importance in this play, it is by no means the only social aspect of the drama. Through Holga and her sense of personal guilt, Miller clearly deals with what has been called the German question, or the responsibility for the death of the Jews. Furthermore, it is Holga who brings up the Atomic bombing of Japan, and certainly this reference contains some insinuation about society. Lastly, the issue of McCarthyism also appears in After the Fall, and its indignities are part of a large congressional record. Thus, when the search for dignity and social problems are compounded, it is apparent that After the Fall is a powerful statement about the nature of contemporary society.

Incident at Vichy, the most of Miller's later plays, clearly returns to a simpler developmental form. Again, the structure of the play is episodic rather than a cause

and effect relationship, but the application of this play is perhaps more universal than any of its predecessors. Concerned entirely with Nazi Germany's ruthless purge of the Jewish people, Incident at Vichy is a horrifying reminder of one of the twentieth-century's greatest problems, the mass murder of the Jews. Though people may try to forget this aspect of World War II, it remains an unforgettable momento of man's capacity to destroy his fellow man, and as such this play must forever merit the attention of those, who would avoid a reoccurrence of infamy.

Somehow, though this play tells of the greatest indignity of the century, it follows After the Fall in that Miller does not seem to be pointing a finger of accusation at anyone in particular, but, ultimately, it is clear that everyone in general is guilty of the war atrocities. However, Miller does not ask that everyone shed giant tears of remorse; nor does he want everyone to destroy himself. Rather he seems to want mankind to recognize the horrors of the past by trying to work for a better future. More deaths will not undo previous deaths, but perhaps knowledge of past actions will prevent future deaths. It is Prince Von Berg who makes a sacrifice for a fellow man, but his sacrifice is that another might live and profit. Death is not longer the means of restitution, but life, life with knowledge of man's good and bad capac-

ities, is what the essence of Incident at Vichy is.

It is apparent, then, that there is in Miller's canon a change of attitude as to how man aims to grip with dignity. In his early plays, the dramatist's characters resorted to death in order that they might gain or regain dignity; but by the later plays, the dramatist's attitude has shifted away from a means of death to a means of life. Such a development is certainly the mark of a playwright whose thoughts seem to be reflecting an attitude that is more understanding, not less demanding, more contemplative, less denotative.

In view of the search for dignity and its relation with contemporary society, it is evident that Miller's idea that his plays should make man "less alone" is consistent with his canon. Certainly, his plays have not unveiled any new problems, but Miller's presentation of what is "in the air" can give an audience, or a man, a greater understanding of himself; consequently, such an understanding might improve his relations with others. To Miller the theater is a serious business, and its functions are not confined to the mere reproduction of sensationalisms, but it must be concerned with what concerns man. Of course, few admit that they are Willy Loman, and fewer admit that they are John Proctor; but in each one of these and other Miller characters is something of importance to someone, and it is the dramatist's

purpose to reach that someone.

In essence, Miller is exploring the nature of some of the difficulties that confront contemporary man. Certainly his canon is by no means a complete catalog of the endless experiences of man, but it is one dramatist's attempt to offer his thoughts to a theater public. Certainly he is not alone in his efforts, and certainly there have been many who, at different times, approached similar problems, for the nature of his dignity is of endless concern to man. He may be a man of lowly means; he may be a man of kingly means. But if he be a man, he will be concerned with dignity. Sometimes the nature of the situation, wherein his dignity is concerned, may appear trite, and then, such a situation might concern affairs of state. It matters not if he be in quest of his dignity.

It is true, however, that for the most part the characters in Miller's plays are commonplace. No Hamlets, no Macbeths bedeck the dramas of Miller. Yet, though they be mean, Miller's characters are mighty in their attempt to gain what Hamlet ultimately died for. A commoner, in spirit, is no less dignified than a king, for the only difference is the external appearances of the latter. Underneath all men, be they king or commoner, be they of the Renaissance or the twentieth century, want their rightful position. The quest of all men has been the quest of Arthur Miller's canon, and this, then, has been the legacy so that his fellow man might be "less alone."

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