

ARTHUR MILLER:
A WRITER OF TRAGEDY

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The purpose of this study is to prove that Arthur Miller, American playwright, accomplishes his stated aim--the creation of drama similar in purpose and spirit to that of the classical Greeks. This thesis goes a step beyond Miller's statement to maintain that Miller, while achieving his goal, uses the same austere general form that the Greeks employed. Since Miller mentions only one critic of Greek drama by name, H. D. F. Kitto, in his frequent references to the social drama of the Greeks, Professor Kitto's analyses and interpretations of the classical plays are used as the major source for the material on the Greek drama.

Chapter I reviews briefly the tragic visions and dramatic practices of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. The study reveals that the three Greek writers reflected the spirit of their time: independence of mind, intense and ever-present social responsibility, and complete confidence in the nobility of man and his intellectual ability to impose order and meaning in the universe through the application of moral and ethical principles. Firmly based on reality, all of their plays are concerned with the question: How is man to live? The unity of the plays does not necessarily revolve around a single tragic hero; the unity lies in the tragic idea behind the play. The similarity in the general form used by the three dramatists results from the consistent placement of emphasis on the idea or tragic view behind the play. Although the general form of the plays is the same with all three artists, the structural form and characterization varies with each dramatist according to the needs of his particular tragic vision of life; in fact, the individual artist may alter his structure and characterization from play to play. From the

evidence presented by Professor Kitto, it is possible to conclude that there is no such thing as a "typical Greek play."

Chapter II summarizes the views and opinions concerning drama which Arthur Miller has expressed in essays, newspaper articles, lectures, and introductions, and the resulting dramatic theory is compared with the conclusions regarding the Greeks' theories presented in Chapter I. The similarity in theories is marked. The purpose or spirit with which all four artists create is the same--constructive. The action of the plot in the foreground of their social drama or tragedy is always subordinate to the action in the divine background where law, justice, and order reign. Their realistic drama is religious in that it is based on moral and ethical principles, and each artist's ultimate concern is with the question, How is man to live? The form a play assumes is determined by its creator's particular tragic vision, and the form varies from play to play to present best the governing idea. None of the four dramatists follows a rigid structural pattern or pre-set formula for characterization, but the general form used by all four is the same. Each artist presents Man, the "tragic hero," whose distinguishing characteristic is his intensity of purpose, in a dire situation where he is faced with a moral choice. The outcome of his choice is nearly always fatal.

Chapter III, a consideration of Miller's drama in the light of his theory, reveals that the form which his tragic vision forges is the same one forged by the Greeks; suffering can yield wisdom. In each of his realistic dramas, Miller pulls into view some problems and fears of contemporary man, examines them against a background of humane values in the light of controlled reason, and reveals to man his share of the guilt for the creation of these problems and urges him to assume his share of the responsibility for their abolishment. Miller's protagonists are portrayed not as helpless victims of a hostile environment but as victims of themselves and the values by which

they have elected to live. Each of Miller's plays, as do those of the Greeks, reaffirms the necessity of obeying the fundamental laws of humanity.

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INTRODUCTION

Arthur Miller, an internationally-known and acclaimed American playwright who has written much concerning the theories underlying his plays, admits that no one theory of tragedy can encompass the complexities of real life. Nevertheless, he feels that the fundamental nature of our theater is still the same that it was in ancient Greece. Miller's essay "On Social Plays," prefacing the 1955 edition of A View from the Bridge, says that for the Greeks a drama created for public performance had to be "social"; a play to them was by definition "a dramatic consideration of the way men ought to live." And it is to this concept of the drama Miller turns.

All of his work is social, for it deals ultimately with the question: How can a man find a home for himself in the world? Miller says man can find a home for himself, whatever kind of world he lives in, as long as he finds a set of values which bring him the peace of mind of self-acceptance. For Miller these values are the time-honored ones of personal integrity and love and understanding of one's fellow-man.

Arthur Miller's plays have been the subject of controversy ever since Death of a Salesman. Opposed to Miller's belief that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings are are the many who feel that the tragic mode is archaic either because of a paucity of heroes or because of the disbelief engendered by science in the humanity of man.¹ Henry Popkin states that each of Miller's "attempted tragedies" merely confirms the belief that little people can't live up to big standards.² Eric Bentley censures Miller for mixing genres:

¹Arthur Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," The New York Times (February 27, 1949), sec. II, p. 1.

²Henry Popkin, "Arthur Miller: The Strange Encounter," Sewanee Review, LXVIII (Winter 1960), 37.

The "tragedy" destroys the social drama; the social drama keeps the "tragedy" from having a fully tragic stature. By this last remark I mean that the theme of this social drama /Death of a Salesman/, as of most others, is the little man as victim. Man is here too little and too passive to play the tragic hero.³

Bentley's castigation is echoed by Mary McCarthy's opinion that "Parents, children, and neighbors are cut-out figures, types, ... it strives to be tragedy and becomes instead confused and hortatory."⁴ In the same vein, Eleanor Clark comments: "... not tragedy at all but an ambitious piece of confusionism, ... put across by purely technical skills not unlike those of a magician or an acrobat."⁵ George Jean Nathan, who concedes the possibility of the common man's tragedy, requires it to be "lifted above itself with the deceptive jewels of the English speech" or "it can be no more in the temple of dramatic art than the pathetic picture of a lovable idiot lifting his small voice against the hurricane of the world."⁶ Nathan does not feel that the "inarticulate mindless protagonists" Miller creates can be considered tragic.⁷ Dennis Welland counters with the remark that Miller's language is well suited to his plays "since he /Miller/ is not trying to write tragedy, anyway."⁸

In the minority are those few who acknowledge that Miller has achieved something out of the ordinary. Joseph Wood Krutch, who in 1929 announced the death of tragedy,⁹ considers Miller's

³Eric Bentley, In Search of Theater (1953), p. 85.

⁴Charles Edward Aughtry (ed.), Landmarks in Modern Drama (1963), p. 597.

⁵Ibid.

⁶George Jean Nathan, The Magic Mirror: Selected Writings on the Theatre by G. J. Nathan, ed. T. Q. Curtiss (1960), p.250.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Dennis Welland, Arthur Miller (1961), p. 119.

⁹Joseph Wood Krutch, The Modern Temper (1929).

Death of a Salesman the "most poignant statement of man as he must face himself to have come out of our theater. ... the play is certainly more than detached 'scientific naturalism.'"¹⁰ O'Hara and Bro label Miller's work "modern" tragedy.¹¹

With few exceptions, the criticism centers on what Miller fails to do rather than on what he does. Each critic would seem to have his own particular definition of tragedy, and to delight in pointing out where Miller's drama misses the marks pre-set by him, the critic.

This thesis attempts to prove that Arthur Miller is an intelligent dramatic artist who knows what he wants to do and how to go about doing it and that he accomplishes his stated aim--to create drama similar in purpose and spirit to that of the classical Greeks. This thesis goes a step beyond Miller's statement to maintain that Miller, while achieving his goal, uses the same austere structural forms that the Greeks employed. The proposition will be discussed as follows:

1. Chapter I will be concerned with a representation of the views of life behind the work of the Greek dramatists. A reference in one of Arthur Miller's essays on drama to H. D. F. Kitto's The Greeks,¹² a history of the ancient civilization, led to the discovery of a significant resemblance between Miller's statements concerning the purpose of his drama and his dramatic theories and those of the great Greek dramatists as presented by Professor Kitto in his analyses of their work. The similarity in theories seems too consistent and too marked to be mere coincidence; therefore, it does not seem unduly presumptuous to assume that Miller is familiar and agrees with Kitto's interpretation of the drama of the Greeks. Thus Kitto will be

¹⁰Joseph Wood Krutch, "Modernism" in Modern Drama: A Definition and an Estimate (1953), p. 328.

¹¹Frank Hurbert O'Hara and Margueritte Harmon Bro, Invitation to the Theater (1951), p. 13.

¹²Arthur Miller, "On Social Plays," A View from the Bridge (1955), p. 3.

used as the major source in the discussion of the Greek drama.

2. Chapter II will be an effort to consolidate Miller's many commentaries into one general theory which will be compared with the Greeks' theories as they are interpreted and set forth by Kitto.

3. Chapter III will be a consideration of Miller's drama in the light of his theory.

This thesis will propose and defend the following points:

1. that Arthur Miller possesses, as did Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, tragic vision--a view of life stemming from an intuitive belief in an ultimate order or unity and justice and the conviction that understanding of life's seeming chaos and evil can be obtained through reason.

2. that Miller's drama is religious in that it seeks answers to the same question asked by the Greeks, which is the basis of all the religions of the world: How is man, a social animal, to live to achieve the greatest happiness?

3. that the main focus of Miller's drama, as was that of the Greeks, is on the divine background and on Man's relationship with the gods.

4. that the structure of Miller's drama varies, as did that of the Greeks, from play to play to present in the best way the controlling idea.

5. that there is no such thing as a "typical Greek play."

6. that if a character possesses intensity of purpose, he cannot be ruled out as a possible "tragic hero." Miller believes, as did the Greeks, that every man has within him a divine spark or a certain unpredictable unknown quantity with which to direct his destiny.

It is the belief of this writer that much of the misunderstanding concerning Miller's work stems from the critics rather than from its creator, and the intent of this research is to strengthen to some degree Arthur Miller's right to be designated as a writer of "genuine tragedy."

CHAPTER I

PHILOSOPHIES AND DRAMATIC PRACTICES OF THE GREEKS

In this chapter, the varying views and dramatic practices of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides will be discussed with H. D. F. Kitto's theories and analyses used as the principal authority. Since these dramatists were very much men of their times and since their art is a reflection of their view of the age in which they lived, a brief historical review seems in order.

Among the great civilizations of the ancient world, the career of Greece was so brief (c. 700-c. 400 B. C.) that it seemed meteoric in comparison to the almost uninterrupted four-thousand-year reign of Egypt's civilization. As everyone knows, the few meteors which are occasionally seen usually appear as a few seconds of transient brilliance in the black of night, then vanish forever; but, once in a great while, there is a meteor large enough to reach the earth, and its subsequent explosion leaves a permanent reminder on the surface of the world. The Greek civilization was such a meteor. The course of its arc proved to be the dividing line between East and West, and the imprint left by its impact became the map which charted the course of Western thought throughout the ensuing centuries. It was not so much the physical size of this civilization which determined the force of impact as it was the size of the minds and spirit of its people.

The Greeks believed in intellectual freedom, and they used this freedom to free man's spirit. Today, this freedom and independence of thought does not sound particularly startling since it is the foundation of Western culture, but in the ancient world it was a complete denial of all the beliefs of other civilizations.

It is generally accepted that prehistoric man recognized the existence of unseen forces or spirits over which he had no control and which he attempted to cajole. The bisons and wolves which he drew with such consummate artistry in dark

caves during the Old Stone Age seem to have been part of a ceremony whose purpose was to insure good hunting. This art work was sometimes signed with the print of a hand with one or more joints missing. Historians Hillyer and Huey surmise that some particular Cro-Magnon, a little brighter than his brothers, proved his courage and leadership qualities by self-mutilation, thereby setting himself apart as the official wooer of the unknown.¹ He could easily have been the forerunner of the "witch doctor" and eventually the priest who dictated policy in all the ancient civilizations with the exception of Greece.

Until the arrival of the Greeks, all races had groveled, cringed, and prostrated themselves before the unknown forces. The local chieftains and priests, self-appointed representatives or interpreters of these forces, later named gods, became practically synonymous with the gods. The gods and their human agents were tyrants whose authority could not be questioned, who had to be obeyed at all costs, and whose evil tantrums must be placated by a constant series of self-abasements and mortifications of the flesh lest greater evils befall the people who had incurred their displeasure. The wealth and power of the governors were all that mattered; the individual common man meant nothing, and nothing was cheaper or more expendable than human life.

Kings soon claimed descent from the gods themselves, but the real power remained with the priests. The priests were the intellectuals, and they early took full advantage of the axiom, Knowledge is Power. Man's instinctive recoil from death and his ever-present hope of a happier and a more leisurely and secure life in another world made him the easy prey of the materialistic and sophisticated priesthood. The priests shrouded the entryway of the spiritual world with mystery, mystery only they had the knowledge to penetrate; and, as with

¹V. M. Hillyer and E. G. Huey, The Ancient World: Pre-history-500 B. C. (1966), p. 14.

most dictatorships, it was to their advantage to keep the people in complete ignorance. Fear, superstition, and magic, the miasma which always arises from ignorance, pervaded the mind of man and paralyzed his will. The enticing world of the spirit took decided precedence over the world of the mind, man's thoughts dwelt on means of attaining it, and life in the here and now became meaningless.

The Greeks' attitude toward life was the complete reverse of the one just described. They loved life and sought ways of making it even more enjoyable rather than seeking means of escape from it. These people never did anything by halves. Versatile, realistic, quick-witted, and unburdened by convictions, they boldly approached Nature and discovered that many of her secrets were solvable and her ways predictable. They accepted nothing as fact unless it made good sense. Whenever the Greeks put their brains to any given task, they never relinquished their attack until a conclusion which satisfied their almost insatiable intellectual curiosity had been reached. This same determined, adventurous, and courageous spirit enabled the Greeks to withstand the mighty armaments of the Persian Empire for twenty years and to emerge as the Athenian Empire.

The Greeks bestowed upon the world something entirely new --a profound faith in the dignity of man. Direct and out-spoken, they displayed an almost divine arrogance in their independence of mind. Every man, they felt, had within him a divine spark, a soul, which, properly kindled and controlled by the mind, could reach the heights of excellence. Quietly assuming themselves to be the beginning and end of all creation, they decided the sensible thing to do was to figure out how man could best realize the greatest happiness from life.²

²The facts for the foregoing discussion were drawn from Chapters I-VIII of H. W. Van Loon's The Arts (1939); Hillyer and Huey's The Ancient World; Edith Hamilton's The Greek Way (1964); and N. G. L. Hammond's "Greek Civilization," Encyclopaedia Britannica (1961), X, 768-769.

The philosophy of life evolved by the ancient Greeks is presented by Aristotle in his Nichomachean Ethics. Happiness or well-being, the true aim of life, is to be found only in complete self-realization, in full participation in the activities proper to a human being. Man must have a function which distinguishes him from other beings. Since man is the only rational animal, the true function of man must be activity which follows or implies a rational principle. The function of the good man is to perform in a great and noble manner activities involving reason: happiness may be found only in activity of soul in accordance with virtue. Virtue, as defined by Aristotle, is a kind of mean; it aims at what is intermediate. The good life requires moderation, staying close to the mean, in those spheres of activity in which reason must cooperate with the appetites and passions. Man must always aim at the golden mean which lies between the extremes of too little and too much, at the courage which is the mean between the extremes of cowardice and rashness, at the proper pride which lies between abject humility and vanity, and so on. Important exceptions are such passions as spite, shamelessness, and envy and such actions as adultery, theft, and murder, which are always considered as vices.³

This philosophy of reason, moderation, and moral responsibility affected every facet of life, both private and public. The Greeks felt that what was good for the individual would be an even higher good for the state whose governing bodies would legislate what the people could or could not do. Statesmen such as Solon and Clisthenes directed the establishment of reforms with emphasis on law, justice, and individual responsibility. Each citizen had the right to protest or approve legislation. If any of the elected directors of state proved unsatisfactory to the people, the citizens had the

³Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, trans. W. D. Ross, The Works of Aristotle, ed. W. D. Ross, II, 339-436.

right to ostracize them, and the people exercised this right. Such direct participation in the affairs of state strengthened each citizen's sense of integrity and his personal and social responsibility. The Greek thought first as a citizen, secondly as an individual. The city-state of Athens became the world's first democracy, a government by the people, for the people, and of the people.

As the city-state of Athens gradually became the center of existence for the Greeks during this age of great intellectual and emotional power, men carried moral principles to their logical conclusion in architecture, sculpture, politics, and drama. Respect for "unwritten laws" of moral and religious restraint, which Aristotle later recorded, gave true balance and proportion to their society and their art.

For the Greeks, the world of the spirit and the world of the mind were one and the same. They had no formal religion. Athena and her fellow gods were not mere abstractions but the representation of accepted principles which demanded of their worshippers the highest standards in loyalty and nobility. They represented the divine for which all men long, the state of happiness and excellence for which the race of mortals labors. The Greeks had a perception of the divine and the excellent, and their longing to realize it was great enough to create one of the most remarkable and brilliant periods in history.

High on the list of unsurpassed treasures left by this civilization are the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, who are still considered as three of the four great tragic dramatists of the world. The tragic drama these Greeks created is a genre found only in Western thought. The Eastern mind has accepted stoically man's existence within a universe that appeared to it meaningless, but the Greeks tried to find an order in the seeming haphazardness of the universe. Professor Richard Sewall points out that the characteristic most striking in the writer of tragedy is a brooding, anxious,

"tragic" search for meaning.⁴

Actually, "tragedy" as such is only a concept; it does not exist except as an abstraction. Only tragic plays exist, and they originate in the mind--in the minds of the creators possessing the "tragic vision."⁵ The Greek dramatists wrenched for the first time a meaning or kind of understanding from the human situation, from the seemingly inexplicable and endless suffering of mankind.

According to Oscar Mandel:

The human situation which lies at the root of tragic art is ... simple, perpetual, and (when it makes itself felt) awesome. The situation is not simply that human effort fails, but that failure lies implicit in the effort....

Death with its inevitable victory over effort is ... the first tragic fact. The second tragic fact is a socio-psychological one: the very act of living in the society of others brings with it--unavoidably, "naturally"--friction, hate, misery. The tragic purpose is the desire, or rather the need, to live among one's kind.⁶

The form which Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides forged from the human situation is that from the ineluctable pain and suffering of man can come knowledge: man, instead of remaining passive and resigned to a meaningless chaos of a cruel world, can take action. The Greeks were men who believed in action; Professor Sewall says the writing of tragedy is an artist's way of taking action, or defying destiny.⁷

The idea of nobility, Krutch avers, is inseparable from the idea of tragedy, which cannot exist without it. If tragedy is not Aristotle's "imitation of noble actions," it is certainly a representation of actions considered by the Greeks to be noble, and herein lies its essential nature, since no man can

⁴Richard B. Sewall, The Vision of Tragedy (1959), p. 163.

⁵H. D. F. Kitto, Form and Meaning in Drama: A Study of Six Greek Plays and of Hamlet (1959), p. 220.

⁶Oscar Mandel, A Definition of Tragedy (1961), p. 23.

⁷Sewall, Vision, p. 5.

conceive it unless he is capable of believing in the greatness and importance of man.

The action in tragedy is usually, if not always, calamitous, because it is only in calamity that the human spirit has the opportunity to reveal itself triumphant over the outward universe which fails to conquer it; but this calamity in tragedy is only a means to an end, and the essential thing which distinguishes real tragedy is the fact that the artist has found himself capable of considering and of making the audience consider that his people and their actions have that amplitude and importance which make them noble. Tragedy arose in Periclean Greece where a people fully aware of the calamities of life were nevertheless serenely confident of the greatness of man, whose mighty passions and supreme fortitude are revealed when one of these calamities overtakes him.

Tragedy is not an expression of despair, but an expression of the means by which men save themselves from it. It is a profession of faith, and a kind of religion, a way of looking at life by virtue of which it is robbed of its pain. The sturdy soul of the tragic author seizes upon suffering and uses it only as a means by which joy may be wrung out of existence, but he is able to do so only because of his belief in the greatness of human nature and because, though he has lost the child's faith in life, he has not lost his far more important faith in human nature.

Since the Tragic Spirit is in reality the product of a religious faith in the greatness of man, it serves, of course, to perform the function of religion--to make life tolerable for those who participate in it. It purges the souls of those who might otherwise despair, it makes endurable the realization that the events of the outward world do not always correspond with the desires of the heart, and thus, in its own particular way, it does what all religions do, for it gives

a rationality, a meaning, and a justification to the universe.⁸

The myths and gods which form the background for the Greek dramas were not created as a religion, but as an explanation of something in nature. Myths are early science, the result of men's first trying to explain what they saw around them. Religion is there, too, but not in the usual sense associated with it.⁹ People usually associate religion with ideas of personal piety, devotionism, dogmatics, liturgiology, and stained-glass windows. Kitto says that for the Greeks, the word "religion" covered a much greater area. The ancient Greeks did not make a distinction between the "religious" and the "secular." Awe and reverence for the Divine can be understood, and this the normal Greek could feel strongly. What is difficult to realize is that this should have been combined, quite naturally, with hard thinking about political or social problems which, to many people has little to do with being "religious," with worship, with seeking holiness. The problem of justice, of crime and punishment, which is at the heart of the Oresteia, may seem to be the concern of moral or political philosophy, and these are weekday occupations. But the Greeks invented neither sociology nor Sunday; "religion" was coterminous with life itself. The Greeks went to the theater neither as passionate theologians nor as ardent worshippers, but as serious people ready to contemplate serious matters, and accepting that all truly serious matters, good or bad, are intertwined with the theoi.¹⁰

The Greeks could write comedy as well as tragedy, as evidenced by their satyric dramas and by Euripides' later plays,

⁸ Krutch, The Modern Temper, pp. 83-87.

⁹ Edith Hamilton, Mythology (1942), p. 20.

¹⁰ Kitto, Poesis: Structure and Thought (1966), pp. 68-70.

but, according to Kitto, they did not mix the two. Greek tragedy deals seriously and consciously with serious things; the idea that life comprises the comic as well as the tragic, the small and simple as well as the great is irrelevant.¹¹

The lyrical Thespian or pre-Aeschylean tragedy with the single actor was peculiarly fitted to convey one kind of tragic situation, that in which the hero, irrespective of his character, irrespective of what he may do, as he looks into the chasm that must engulf him, is isolated before some awful gulf in the universe. The simple form of Thespian tragedy was fitted to the tragic idea that no issue is free from disaster. Sometimes there is almost no characterization. Why should there be? The hero's tragedy turns on no hamartia; it is not even remotely based on his character. Be he what he will, he is lost. All it is necessary to know is that he should be morally and intellectually big enough to realize to the full what has come upon him and to see the dilemma in which he and his people are placed. The drama of this particular form lies not in movement of plot but in the constantly increasing tension.¹²

Aeschylus, by introducing the second actor, enabled the plot to move, and then the true dramatic thrill arose out of this movement. The solitary hero remains, but instead of the hero's being someone caught inextricably, he now becomes a force reacting to the movement of the situation; consequently, he must be more fully characterized. Aeschylean or Old Tragedy is tragedy of character, a single character; and it relates this character closely and significantly to every movement in the situation.¹³

Gerald Else, who does not consider Thespian drama tragic, gives Aeschylus sole credit for creating tragedy as we understand it.

¹¹Kitto, Form and Meaning, p. 229.

¹²Kitto, Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study (1961)

¹³Ibid., p. 44.

stand it; that is, as tragic drama. Aeschylus took the pathos, the suffering and death of mankind, which Thespis had put at the center of tragedy, and the lamentations of the chorus over them, and imposed meaning. He was the kind of man who could not accept anything unless it made sense, unless it could be understood as flowing from certain events or conditions and issuing in others. The attempt to understand the world causally --whether it be the physical world or that of the spirit--necessarily leads outward in all directions. In Aeschylus' case it led to a projection outward, backward, forward and upward from the pathos, in the three dimensions of time, space, and relationship to God. The whole development of his drama was motivated and guided not by technical considerations but by an increasingly bold and complex intuition of the meaning of life. He was a bold and imaginative experimenter. He, like the great statesman before him, Solon, saw Law and Reason, not as distant God-like forms, but as the "cement that holds the body politic together." Both recognized that inner balance which has remained the life principle of free societies ever since, between freedom and responsibility, consent and authority, the morally autonomous individual and the demands of society. All relationships should be governed by justice.¹⁴

The outward mark of Old Tragedy is the use of two actors and the chorus. By many, the addition of the second actor is considered to be the first step toward the completion of the perfect form. Kitto, however, maintains Aeschylus' form was complete. Aeschylus added only one actor, not because he was conservative and cautious (no dramatist has been bolder) nor because his technique was not yet equal to managing three actors, but because his tragic conceptions demanded this form and not the other. He introduced the second actor, not as an antagonist to the first, but to enable the plot to move longitudinally in action as well as vertically in tension. This movement of

¹⁴Gerald Else, The Origin and Early Form of Greek Tragedy (1965), pp. 35-83.

plot seems not to have been contrived merely for dramatic reasons, for the sake of making drama more lifelike. The tragic implications of the second actor are more important than the dramatic ones. Since the situation moves, the hero must be of a certain kind; he must--if we are to have tragedy--be of such a moral constitution as to oppose himself to this movement, not to conform to it. In other words, the moving plot was designed to display and test moral character, to give room for moral choice and for its results.¹⁵ Aeschylus, Kitto asserts, is not involved, and does not wish to involve his audience, in anything but the realization of his theme in dramatic form; he disregards collateral facts and consequences just as he disregards personal relationships. Aeschylus is neither dramatizing a story nor making drama about individuals of a certain kind in a certain situation. He is writing about man and the gods and certain verities of the human universe. If it is the mark of the great tragic poet that he renders visible and memorable certain basic truths or conceptions, whether they be old or new, then it is not easy to think of a dramatist who did this more imaginatively and powerfully, nor with more control than Aeschylus. In him, thought and the dramatic image of thought became the same thing. Aeschylus does not speak in conceptual terms; what he thought or felt he represents through his chosen dramatic imagery. He concludes the Oresteia by making his idea visible and incarnate in the conflict and its reconciliation between the older and the younger gods. Kitto stresses that this is not Allegory. The allegorist thinks in conceptual terms; the Greek dramatist, whether he has thought in abstract terms or not, sees and expresses his thought in his dramatic structure; the two are indivisible. Whether Aeschylus began thinking out the Oresteia from a sense of the tragic wastefulness of the long chain of bloodshed, or from a picture of a king returning triumphantly from a stupid war to be murdered by his wife and

¹⁵Kitto, Greek Tragedy, pp. 31-33.

supplanted by her paramour, or from thoughts about Orestes, caught in an intolerable situation where he must either commit an atrocious crime or lose all honor and self-respect; or whether he began with reflections on violence, crime, vengeance, and the bearing of all this on the well-being of the city which he was proud to have served as a soldier, is not known. But the Oresteia obviously did not stem from some primitive theological doctrine about Zeus.¹⁶

The Aeschylean Zeus, says Kitto, is the Zeus who "opened the road for man to become wise." Aeschylus' Zeus established the law that out of suffering comes understanding. (This law, incidentally, does not refer to a particular person in the trilogy. The reference can only be a universal one.) The fruit of this law is that "Justice, rooted in holiness, governed by reason, defended by awe of its august protectors," rather than blind retribution, shall lead man out of chaos.¹⁷

The Zeus of Aeschylus does not move in the mysterious way of the God of Sophocles; he is direct, and when he hits, he hits straight and hard. The tragic form of Sophocles, especially as interpreted by Aristotle, implies clash of character, converging lines of intrigue, surprise, and "happiness" passing into "unhappiness." Aeschylus could not work like this; his religious philosophy could not be expressed through this form. That Zeus will punish the sinner is certain; the only surprise possible is the swiftness and completeness of the punishment; the only movement possible is from foreboding to fulfillment.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 108-109. The Zeus Aeschylus creates in Prometheus Bound, however, seems more akin to the primitive Aeus of Thespis than to the Zeus of Justice and Reason in the Oresteia.

¹⁷ Kitto, Form and Meaning, p. 86.

¹⁸ Kitto, Greek Tragedy, pp. 39-40.

Aeschylus is considered by some scholars to be the most religious of the dramatists. He is said to have exalted Zeus. Kitto puts it another way: "Aeschylus asserts ... there is a supreme power; that is to say, there is a unity in things, some direction in events, which implies a supreme power; and this he identifies with Zeus."¹⁹ Aeschylus, in an age of poetry, was grappling with certain realities; realities of life here and now; which very soon fell within the province of the philosophers. Serious poetry died when intuitive thinking gave place to intellectual analysis. Aeschylus was contemplating the world as it is, with its problems and apparent contradictions, sometimes finding their solution, sometimes not, but always in the faith that there is an ultimate unity which might as well be called Zeus.²⁰

Religious drama exists on two levels, not one, and understanding comes when it is seen that the real focus is the divine background, not the Tragic Hero, and the real Tragic Hero is humanity itself.²¹ Aeschylus' drama, as is Sophocles' and Euripides', as will be seen later, is religious in the sense that it is constructive. It deals with the eternal question: How is man to live? The particular action is universalized by the interweaving with it the agency of the gods, but Kitto points out that these Greek gods usually prefigure the sort of thing that does happen rather than what man thinks ought to happen. When the spectators see terrible things happening in the plays, they understand, as they cannot always do in life, why these catastrophes happened; or, if not so much as that, at least they see that they have not happened by chance without any significant cause. The plays present a Universe that is coherent, even though it may not be completely understandable.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 25.

²⁰Kitto, Poesis, pp. 70-71.

²¹Kitto, Form and Meaning, p. 231.

Pity and Fear are present in abundance, but they are transcended by Awe and Understanding; Pity and Fear are in themselves emotions too personal to be the ultimate explanation of religious drama. It is Awe and Understanding that give true catharsis.²²

An identifying characteristic of all Greek tragic drama is that it never admits anything which does not directly contribute to the tragic idea. It has to the full the austerity and logic of every other classical art, and it will use neither characterization nor anything else needlessly.²³ Character drawing for its own sake is not necessarily a dramatic virtue. Some have complained that Aeschylus' agents have no character; that they are only abstractions. Kitto says Aeschylus furnishes all the characterization the situation demands; any more would have been only an irrelevance.²⁴ The Greek dramatist uses only one focus. The action plays within a strictly defined area of brilliant illumination; not on the flat, because there is perspective; but the perspective works only in depth, and reveals the gods. The artist's mind is a fixed light: outside this area of illumination there is a darkness which nothing tempts one to explore, for it conceals nothing which is of concern.²⁵

Sophocles, whose plays Aristotle used as models while formulating his definition of tragedy, believed as if by instinct, Kitto thinks, that the universe was not chaotic and irrational. He felt there was a certain balance, a rhythm, or pattern in human affairs and in the universe: every action had a natural recoil, each cause created an effect. For every injustice there was a recoil, not necessarily justice as modern man thinks

²² Ibid., p. 225.

²³ Kitto, Greek Tragedy, p. 25.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

²⁵ Kitto, Form and Meaning, p. 225.

of it, but definitely a reaction. If life seems chaotic, it is because man is unable to see the whole pattern. But sometimes when life for a moment becomes dramatic, he can see enough pattern to give him faith that there is meaning in the whole.²⁶

Every detail in the Tyrannus is contrived in order to enforce the idea of Sophocles' faith in this underlying rhythmical pattern; that is why it is true to say that the perfection of his form implies a world order. Whether this order is beneficent, Sophocles does not say.²⁷ The rhythm of cause and effect beats below the rhythm of purpose, suffering, and perception which is so strong in his plays. The pattern of every peripety is the same and serves to reinforce the pattern of the main plot and to advance the level of understanding. Apparently, it is this harmonious fusion of rhythms that Aristotle is stressing when he compares a well-constructed plot to a "living creature."

Kitto suggests that this conception of an underlying Law explains the prominence, in Sophocles' work, of prophecy, oracles, and omens. Whether Sophocles himself believed literally in oracles is unimportant. What is of concern is that in his plays prophets can prophesy for the same reason that astronomers can prophesy: law prevails. A prophecy is not a special and arbitrary decree; it is a prediction made by a god who, unlike men, knows all the facts and can therefore see in advance how the situation must necessarily work out. If life were capricious, then not even a god could prophesy.²⁸

Much difficulty has resulted, thinks Kitto, from trying to analyze Sophocles' plays from the moral point of view--from trying to explain the plays when they fail to supply a hamartia (hamartia interpreted as meaning a moral flaw or weakness),

²⁶Kitto, Greek Tragedy, p. 141.

²⁷Ibid., p. 142.

²⁸Kitto, Form and Meaning, p. 76.

and from trying to explain them when they fail to conform to Aristotle's structural outlines for a "good" play. Kitto maintains that Sophocles, who was a great artist, had something more important to do even than to make beautiful plays, namely to express as directly as his medium allowed certain tragic ideas which sprang out of a certain view of life.²⁹

Many Greeks, like many moderns, thought Sophocles was a moral teacher. No doubt he was, incidentally. No dramatist, states Kitto, especially the Greek who was so consciously a citizen, can be indifferent to morality. His material, the thoughts and actions of men, is essentially moral and intellectual, and he must be honest with his material. But the material will not explain the form of the work. It is something deeper that does this, something apprehensive, not dogmatic--it is the artist's tragic vision.³⁰

All tragedy is concerned with the problem of evil, the existence of suffering, sometimes merited, often seemingly unmerited. It is the latter which is most unfathomable. D. D. Raphael writes that the great tragedians do not inscribe evil under a prepared rubric. Sometimes they are groping their way to an explanation. Sometimes they seem to be denying that there is an explanation. Mostly, however, they are concerned simply to present the phenomenon of evil vividly before us, stamping it with a great question-mark and leaving us to answer the questions as we can--if we can. Metaphysicians who already have their answer distort the position of the tragic dramatist, whose first business is to express the disturbing character of the existence of evil, not to explain it away.³¹

²⁹Kitto, Greek Tragedy, p. 116.

³⁰Ibid., p. vi.

³¹D. D. Raphael, The Paradox of Tragedy (1960), p. 24.

The most purely tragic of tragic situations is that in which the protagonist falls into an awful dilemma through no deficiency of character or judgment, through no moral flaw: where there is a total divorce of suffering from guilt and responsibility.³² Antigone is such a protagonist. Thus some critics and philosophers being more loyal to Aristotle than to the dramatist have duly found hamartia in Antigone.

Plays which present such a situation are disturbing to people. Aristotle found them shocking: "A good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery ... The first situation is not fear-inspiring or piteous, but simply odious to us."³³ Mandel wonders whether Aristotle's doctrine of the not preeminently virtuous hero does not hang more than it should on his ethical theories, and not enough on pure observation of the plays he had before him.³⁴

The fact remains that the Greek dramatists, even Sophocles, were willing on occasion to portray the undoing of flawless heroes, if need be to the scandal of the moralist.

Throughout Sophocles' work are the two related ideas of Dike, a natural human justice--not poetic justice--and of a rhythm or pattern in human affairs. In Antigone, Sophocles is doing a great deal more than presenting humanistic drama complete with vivid character contrasts and personal, ethical, and political conflicts: Sophocles is incorporating all these into a religious drama in which the will of the gods is paralleled by the will of Antigone. To look for a Tragic Flaw in Antigone, Kitto feels, is setting one's sights too low. Antigone, out of love, loyalty, humaneness, and religion defies all the strength of the King. Usually the law of the land (Creon) and the Dike of the gods are, if not identical, at least harmonious, but in

³²Kitto, Greek Tragedy, p. 10.

³³Aristotle, On Poetics, trans. Ingram Bywater, The Works of Aristotle, II, 1452b.7357. Great Books of the Western World (1952), IX.

³⁴Mandel, Definition of Tragedy, p. 110.

this case they are not.³⁵

Through Haemon, Sophocles presents what the ordinary citizen thinks of Antigone: she deserves not punishment but a crown of gold for preventing her brother's body from being eaten by savage dogs and birds. But nothing moves Creon: neither Antigone's appeal to the laws of Zeus and the nether gods, nor Haemon's implied appeal to his own love for Antigone and his explicit appeal that Creon listen to the moderation and to the common judgment of Thebes. Creon, although he is fundamentally honest, is so stupid that to the one appeal he retorts, "While I am alive no woman shall rule," and to the other, "Am I to be taught by a mere boy?"

The typical Aeschylean chorus stands at some distance from the action, brooding over it, illuminating it for the audience. Sophocles often used it as a "fellow-actor," as Aristotle pointed out. In the Antigone, the chorus represents the citizens of Thebes, and, being used as an actor, it is often made to share the limitations of other actors; it sees the fundamental issue no more clearly than Creon himself. Sophocles regularly used the chorus as a vehicle for his dramatic irony. His chorus's comments on the current action are often more revealing for being directed to the wrong person.

Throughout the play, which is a series of conflicts--Antigone with Ismeme, Creon with the Watchman, Creon with Antigone, Creon with Haemon, Creon with Teiresias--Antigone's motives

³⁵Kitto, Form and Meaning, p. 154. Kitto's explanation of the double burial is reasonable and makes this wider implication possible. He thinks Sophocles intended us to realize that the light layer of dust which had made the body of Polyneices safe from the birds and animals, was from a supernatural agent. When the Watchman disturbed the dust, the body was no longer immune. The Watchman's peculiar behavior is not intended as comedy, but as evidence of his fear for his life--he has little confidence that his story, which he cannot understand himself, will be accepted by Creon, or that he will meet with common justice at Creon's hands. Form and Meaning, pp. 152-155.

are instinctive and humane: she will not have her brother's body torn and eaten by animals. She is not automatically obeying a law of Zeus. The religious and the human or instinctive motives are not sharply distinguished by Sophocles; indeed, they are fused--and for a very good reason: he saw no distinction between them; the fundamental laws of humanity and the Dike of the gods are the same thing for Sophocles. Hence Antigone's motives and those of the gods are parallel, and Creon, in conflict with the gods, is necessarily the center of the play. His lack of understanding and humanity bring him into conflict with another great power, Eros-Aphrodite. Eros is another great force of the cosmos whom Creon thinks his sole decree can override. In fact, the disasters that overwhelm him come directly from this, that his son is in love with Antigone and has been made desperate by Creon's treatment of her and of himself.

Historians have tried to deduce Sophocles' judgment on contemporary Athenian politics from this play: Is Creon a portrait of Pericles or of some other political leader of the time? Sophocles gives us, not a particular judgment, but a universal philosophy. Sophocles was an astute public figure much interested in his society, but he was first and foremost a great artist. In this play he does say a great deal indeed about the state and statecraft, a statecraft which will try to pursue a traitor beyond the grave and will also threaten to kill a young man's lover before his eyes. What Sophocles is saying in Antigone is very like what he says in Ajax: there are certain ultimates in human life which must be respected, and will be respected, because they are "divine." From short-sighted calculation (which in this case is Creon's honest but narrow statecraft) man may offend against them. If he does, they will recoil upon him, not by the operation of any supernatural power (for the tragic poets' gods are not supernatural), but through the natural reactions of people who are big enough, or des-

perate enough, to follow their own instincts and ideals. Life has its own unbreakable laws, and in it, only half-hidden, are terrible forces. These man must always respect. The saving virtue is "understanding," with reverence towards the gods, which implies reverence towards the ultimate claims of humanity.³⁶

The often asked question, Who is the tragic hero in the Antigone, Antigone or Creon? can be resolved by the evidence presented. The tragic hero, as Mandel emphasizes, is not necessarily a single person. A protagonist can be a group or even a whole nation, even when the author imposes on the mass some leader who gives the narrative or play a focus. Frequently, too, a work contains two or more distinct tragic figures.³⁷ Antigone is a good case in point.

Euripides, Aristotle said, was the "most tragic" of the dramatists "even if his execution be faulty in every other point."³⁸ The Medea, among the finest of Euripides' tragedies and the most popular of his plays today, is censored twice in The Poetics. Again, it is the critic who comes up short, according to Kitto, not the artist. The Medea does not fit the mold of Sophoclean tragedy, which Aristotle has elevated to the "best," because Euripides' tragic idea was different from Sophocles'.

Medea is indeed a tragic figure, as Kitto proceeds to show, but she is no Aristotelian tragic heroine. She is possessed of a passionate nature, quite uncontrolled in love and hate; this makes her dramatic, but it is not Aristotelian hamartia (a fatal flaw or weakness in an otherwise good person): it is the whole woman. As she betrayed her father and murdered her brother in her first love for Jason, so in Corinth, when be-

³⁶This discussion of Antigone is from Chapter V of Kitto's Form and Meaning, pp. 138-168.

³⁷Mandel, Definition, p. 107.

³⁸Aristotle, Poetics, 1453a [257]

trayed and insulted by Jason, she thinks first of revenge, not the comparatively honest revenge of killing Jason, but one that shall bring down in ruin Jason, his new bride, his children, his whole house. That they are her children too is unfortunate, but not enough to deter her from her plan; she has her struggle with her maternal feelings, but the decisive thought is that to be laughed at by enemies is not to be borne. She is tragic in that her passions are stronger than her reason. She is drawn with such vigor and directness, everything that she says and does springs so immediately from her dominant motive that she is eminently dramatic; nevertheless she is no tragic hero as we have hitherto understood the term; she is too extreme, too simple. The characterization is concentrated in the one overmastering passion, and the situation is manipulated to stimulate this passion to the uttermost. It is not melodrama, for Medea, though extreme, is true, and her character and deeds leave the spectators with something more than the mere excitement of a strong story. It is tragic. The tragedy of a heroine like Medea is that such a character should exist at all. She is bound to be a torment to herself and to others: that is why Euripides shows her blazing her way through life leaving wreckage behind her; that is why the sufferings of others are not to be glossed over. That she herself suffers is a great and no doubt a necessary part of the drama, but it is not the point of the tragedy, which is that passion can be stronger than reason, and so can be a most destructive agent--destructive to the children, Glauce, Creon, Jason, and to Medea's peace--but not to her life; in short, destructive to society at large.

Euripides had to describe Glauce's death horribly or enfeeble his theme; the sufferings of Medea's victims are as much a part of the tragedy as those of Medea herself, possibly a greater part. The catharsis of Glauce's horror comes when it is felt that she, and all the others, are the victims of an almost external force. "Love," the chorus sings, "when it comes

in too great strength, has never brought good renown or virtue to mortals." Medea is drawn starkly as the strongest possible impersonation of this force; balance of character is necessarily denied her, and this means that we cannot lose ourselves in sympathy with her as we do with Oedipus. Euripides is not asking us to sympathize with her, but to understand her, to understand that such things are, that Medeas and Jasons exist. He asks us to feel terror when we hear of what her passion leads her to do, pity for all who are broken, tragic enlightenment when we see that all are the victims of a primitive force.

Euripides, like most Greeks, is a rationalist in that he believes reason, not belief or formula or magic, to be the guide to life; but he sees, too, that man has in him, besides reason, non-rational emotions which are necessary but which may run wild, thwarting his reason and bringing calamity. For in the last analysis Euripides' tragic hero is mankind. Some natural passion breaks its bounds, and the penalty has to be paid, either by the sinner or by those around him or by both. Within this dramatic cosmos the hamartia is concentrated in one or two people; they, Medea and Jason, are hamartia and not necessarily anything else at all; that is why they are so extreme and so unrelieved. The results of the hamartia fall on the group; perhaps on the sinners, perhaps not; for though Medea suffers here, Menelaus and Orestes in the Andromache get off scot-free.

The great difference between Euripides' and Sophocles' approach to tragedy is that Sophocles concentrates into one hero what Euripides splits up prismatically among a group. In Sophocles it is the hero himself who represents Man; he is strong and weak; he, and no one else (except incidentally), pays for his weakness. It is this concentration of the tragic idea into the one hero that influenced Aristotle's definition of tragedy: it is because Euripides analyses his tragedy into the tragedy of society instead of synthesizing it in the trag-

edy of a representative hero, "like ourselves," that he does not need these virtues. Medea, for all her tremendous driving-force and sharply accentuated character, is actually a tragic victim, as those around her are victims, of her disastrous temperament. Medea is not a tragedy of character--one in which a certain kind of person in a certain situation inevitably falls. Euripides is presenting his tragic conception that the passions and unreason to which humanity is subject are its greatest scourge. The situation is nothing but the setting for the outburst of unreason. What matters is not that the situation must be convincing and illuminating, not even that the heroine must be convincing as a person; but that her passion must be, in however extreme a form, a fundamental and familiar one.

The ending of the Medea which has bothered many other critics besides Aristotle, Kitto considers a master stroke by Euripides. The Sun, one of the most elemental things in the universe, sends a chariot to rescue the murderess. How better could Euripides have made his point that although reason must be the guide, the primitive forces in the universe are not reasonable, asks Kitto. There may be a Zeus, a Mind, in the universe; but there are other powers too, and these we may worship in vain. Through the dramatic representational imagery, a glimpse is given of the existence in the universe of forces that can be neither understood nor controlled--only participated in.³⁹

The chorus, which is such an integral part of Aeschylus' and Sophocles' plays, was sometimes an embarrassment to Euripides. It was retained, however, not because it was a sacred institution, but for the reason that in general it was an instrument which exactly suited the sort of drama which the poets

³⁹The discussion of the Medea was taken from Kitto's Greek Tragedy, pp. 194-200.

wanted to write. The chorus and masks and ritual were used for purely theatrical reason; classical drama wished to avoid drawing attention to purely individual traits and transient moods or emotions. The idea that the chorus was traditional dramatic apparatus which dictated the form of the tragic drama is one which Kitto refuses to entertain. On the contrary, the dramatists invented and molded the form because it enabled them to do exactly what they wanted to do: not to represent life in all its dynamic variety, but to present their conception of the principles or forces that operate in life.⁴⁰

In summary, it is possible to say that all three dramatists, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, reflect to a high degree the spirit of their time: love of life and action, courage, insatiable curiosity, independence of mind, intense and ever-present social responsibility, and complete confidence in the nobility of man and his intellectual ability to impose order and meaning in the universe through the application of moral and ethical principles.

The spirit of their drama is religious--not necessarily in the sense of being pious, but of trying to see the world of gods and men as one, and of expressing in the traditional Greek way all that is permanent in it as gods. An air of foreboding permeates the plays, which are serious, direct, unswerving in their course toward the inevitable catastrophe.

The whole basis of serious Greek tragedy is reality; tragic or universal reality takes precedence over theatrical reality. The essence of the whole thing, from Aeschylus' Suppliants to the Troades, Euripides' last true tragedy, is that in real tragedy real persons in a real situation act and suffer in a real way. Medea's chariot is no exception to this principle; it is not a mere accessory, and it is miraculous; but it is used symbolically, a pointer to an even higher reality. Greek

⁴⁰Kitto, Form and Meaning, pp. 219-220.

tragedy is always in immediate contact with the conditions and problems of life. Firmly based on realities, all the plays are concerned with the question: How is man to live?

The unity of the Greek plays does not necessarily revolve around a single, dominant tragic hero; the unity lies in the tragic idea behind the play. The similarity in general form lies in the placement of emphasis. The real focus for all the plays lies not in one or several characters, but in the divine background where Divine activity represents the framework of inexorable law or of inherent natural forces. It neither controls human activity and suffering nor renders them merely pathetic, but is, rather, a generalized statement about them. The divine background holds up the system of co-ordinates of action and reaction against which we are to read the significance of what the human actors do and suffer. The gods are a controlling element in the plays, but not in what the actors do and suffer: that is entirely their own affair. The reason for saying that the divine element controls the play is this: the dramatist did not allow the human actors to do or suffer anything which does not have significance when it is read against the co-ordinates. Characterization and intricacy of plot were held to the minimum necessary for communicating whatever it was the artist was saying. But the "truth to life" was restricted (for sound artistic reasons) to what made immediate sense when the audience correlated it, as it instinctively would, says Kitto, with the universal co-ordinates in the background.⁴¹

One thing is constant: the assertion of a world-order, symbolized by the presence or activity of the gods. Sometimes, as in the Oresteia and Prometheus Bound, the poet shows this order in evolution. Sophocles shows it in operation. In Euripides, it is often presented by implication rather than directly: it consists of a due balance of forces, such as, for example, the Rational and the Irrational. Euripides is "the

⁴¹Kitto, Greek Tragedy.

most tragic" of the dramatists because in his drama this balance, or order, seems the most unattainable.

A play may contain one or more tragic figures. A character is a tragic hero, rather than a pathetic victim, when his fate is the direct and inevitable outcome of his own particular purpose or drive in the particular situation presented. The tragic figure's outstanding trait is his almost fanatical pursuit of his chosen goal, despite warnings and advice from others. Unflinching resolution is the quality which lifts him above the average man, and his defiance of reason and moderation is the cause of his inevitable fall. The tragic hero is a victim of himself and his own intensity of purpose.

The conclusions that this brief survey of Greek tragedy allows are (1) that the spirit in which the plays are written and the general form of the plays is the same with all three artists, (2) that the basic structural form and characterization development varies with each dramatist according to the needs of his particular tragic vision of life; in fact, the individual artist may alter his structure from play to play, and (3) that there is no such thing as a "typical Greek play."

In addition, the study incidentally uncovers a major weakness in Aristotle's definition of tragedy. His obvious preference for Sophocles' plays, particularly the Tyrannus, led him to some very "unscientific" conclusions concerning Greek tragedy. A large part of his treatise is concerned with the structural form and characterization of Oedipus Rex, which he describes as "best," but which fails to fit the majority of the Greek tragedies. Since the Poetics is practically synonymous with classical tragedy in the minds of most people, his bias has been perpetuated through the years and has compounded the confusion and difficulty of defining tragedy and hamartia.

CHAPTER II

PHILOSOPHY AND DRAMATIC THEORIES OF ARTHUR MILLER

Arthur Miller, an established American dramatist whose work has met with even more acclaim abroad than at home, has written and lectured extensively concerning his work, modern drama in general, and the future of the theater. This chapter will present a composite of his many views and theories and compare it with those exemplified in the plays of the three Greeks. Although Miller has said he does not consciously set out to "write tragedy ... but to show the truth,"¹ his frequently stated desire to create social drama in the Greek sense, his restless search for values, and his defense of the common man's capability of being a "tragic hero" are obvious affirmations of his purpose--to write tragedy in the twentieth century.

In the present age, however, Miller's views and purposes are almost as out of step with current trends of thought as were those of the Greeks in 700 B. C., for the arc of Western man's free thought and spirit has almost closed into a minuscule circle during the past few decades. During the Golden Age of Pericles, man's thought turned outward toward community and state, but the Peloponnesian War, plague, and defeat caused loss of faith in the gods of the three great dramatists and the rise of a new philosophy. Rationalistic and agnostic, it stated that natural law indicates might is right. The divine right of city-state was severely shaken, and the individual became all-important.² During the Renaissance, man's fast-growing confidence in himself and his own abilities gave rise to a new era. No longer was man's thought turned outward toward community or state: the age of individualism had arrived. Writers, reflecting the spirit of their times, became more and

¹Arthur Miller, Arthur Miller's Collected Plays with an Introduction (1963), p. 31.

²R. G. Jebb et al., "Attic Literature," Encyclopaedia Britannica (1961), X, 835-836.

more interested in the character, motives and actions of the single "hero" in tragedy, and the divine background disappeared. They were concerned with men rather than with Man and the Gods. Emotion and imagination soon held full sway.

Gradually, however, a note of uncertainty could be detected. The philosophies of Marx, Freud, and Darwin made steady inroads on the worth of the "individual," and by the 1940's, the ego was floundering, as it still is, in the strong currents of sociological, psychological, and biological doctrines. As Krutch points out, there is one factor these hypotheses seem to have in common, and that is taking man's fate out of his own hands, assuring him that he cannot do the supremely important things for himself, but, by way of compensation, letting him know he cannot be blamed for anything which happens to him. Each theory is discouraging in the sense that it denies man the power to control radically his destiny, soothing in the sense that it assures him he is, at least, not to blame.³ But with the acceptance of these is the loss of belief in the reality of the ego, and most important, a complete break with the moralistic past.

In an essay, "The Tragic Fallacy," written in 1925, Krutch questions the possibility of tragic vision in modern man: "The tragic solution of the problem of existence, the reconciliation to life by means of the tragic spirit is ... now only a fiction surviving in art."⁴

Men such as Kenneth Rowe⁵ and Louis Bredvold⁶ protest Krutch's remark. They feel that even if the universe, in its balance

³Krutch, "Modernism" in Modern Drama, pp. 79-87.

⁴Krutch, The Modern Temper (1929), p. 87.

⁵Kenneth Rowe, A Theater in Your Head (1960), pp. 145-47.

⁶Louis Bredvold, "The Modern Temper and Tragic Drama," Tragedy: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. Laurence Mechel and Richard B. Sewall (1963), pp. 332-40.

of forces, or perhaps even in blind interplay of forces, is seen as hostile to man, then that is so much the greater challenge to the writers.

Much writing has been done since Krutch made his statement, but little has been done to refute it; in fact, most of the recent literature and drama substantiates his comment which wrote off the possibility of modern tragedy. Writers have either sought escape through the medium of verse or folk drama, psychological character studies, and "slices of life," or they have dwelled despairingly on the complete meaninglessness of existence. This present-day meaninglessness is even more treacherous than that of the Eastern philosophers since modern man is offered no haven in the next world. The paradox of the present era is that the same tremendous accomplishments in the areas of science, economics, and industrialization which have brought man immeasurable power and wealth are fast reducing him to little more than a robot. Krutch divides the thinking men of today into three categories: (1) the majority who accept the fact that man is a machine and are bending their efforts toward perfecting it to the highest possible degree; (2) a smaller group who find satisfaction in formal religious creeds; and (3) the third and last group, made up of a few people, who, although accepting the deterministic findings of the scientists to a degree, reserve the right to exercise freedom of mind and will and who maintain that problems of morality exist.⁷ Arthur Miller belongs to the third group.

Arthur Miller is an intellectual (even his most adverse critics grant him this) whose independent mind and spirit and deep faith in man's humanity have caused him to accept the challenge of identifying the evils besetting modern man's ego and of casting them out. By his taking action and fighting against evil in the form of accepting moral responsibility, acting up-

⁷Krutch, The Measure of Man: On Freedom, Human Values, Survival and the Modern Temper, (1954), p. 252.

on it, and recognizing the relatedness of all men, Miller thinks man can restore faith in himself and his ability to direct his own destiny. The size of the task he has set for himself is commented upon by Kenneth Tynan: "In our sophisticated age, it takes tremendous courage to keep faith with this kind of love for the bruised individual soul and its life of 'quiet desperation.'"⁸ But lack of courage is not one of Arthur Miller's shortcomings.

Miller's firm belief that life has meaning is the keystone of his dramatic theories, just as it was with the Greeks. During an interview with Henry Brandon, he said:

A play is made by sensing how the forces in life simulate ignorance, and the job of the playwright is to set free the concealed irony, the deadly joke. I have never been able to understand why one is insensitive because one looks beyond the individual to society for certain causations and certain hopes. ... the writer's job is to stimulate--to ask questions, not to provide solutions.... Chekhov was tortured by his inability to settle on solutions--he accused himself of deceiving his public because he could not tell them what they must do. His plays are great, not because they do not give answers, but because they strive so mightily to discover them.⁹

The attitude which Miller finds so commendable in Chekhov characterizes the Greeks' writing as well as his own. He feels drama and its production should represent a well-defined expression of profound social needs, needs which transcend any particular form of society or any particular moment. Opposed to the prevalent opinion that "any attempt to prove something in a play is somehow unfair and certainly inartistic, if not gauche, more particularly if what is being proved happens to be in any overt way of social moment,"¹⁰ Miller says that

⁸Kenneth Tynan, "American Blues: The Plays of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams," Encounter, II (May 1954), 17.

⁹Henry Brandon, "The State of the Theatre: A Conversation with Arthur Miller," Harper's, CCI (November 1960), 64-65.

¹⁰Miller, Plays, p. 3.

... no playwright can be praised for his high seriousness and at the same time be praised for not trying to teach ... the debatable question is never whether a play ought to teach but whether it is art, and in this connection the basic criterion ... is the passion with which the teaching is made.¹¹

Like the Greek writers of tragedy, Miller wants to create a kind of union between the actors and audience. He wants to create plays meant to become part of the lives of the audience --plays seriously meant for people of common sense, and relevant to both their domestic lives and their daily work, plays which widen people's "awareness of connection--the filaments to the past and the future which lie concealed in 'life.'"¹²

Recently Miller made a recording of selected readings from two of his plays, Death of a Salesman and The Crucible. He prefaced the plays with the following remark:

From the mists that always conceal the causes of human events, the Greek playwright and his audience sought to pluck a plan, a moral and ethical principle, mysteriously at work upon human beings and their society, and the protagonist exemplified the working out of the concealed principle.... The ultimate purpose of these early plays was to illuminate the relation between mortal man and immortal timeless social and moral law....¹³

A similar purpose lies behind every word Arthur Miller utters, whether it is in a play, short story, essay, or interview. He attempts again and again to give to individual man within the social and moral law his reason for existence, his personal significance, and his morality. The metaphor he uses frequently when discussing his work, "the fish is in the water

¹¹ Ibid., p. 13.

¹² Ibid., p. 14.

¹³ Miller, "Arthur Miller Speaks on and Reads from The Crucible and Death of a Salesman." A Spoken Arts, Inc. recording.

and the water is in the fish,"¹⁴ is given existence in his work. He is dedicated to the theory that society is inside man and man is inside society, and he feels a truthfully drawn psychological entity can never be created on the stage unless man's social relations and their power to make him what he is and to prevent him from being what he is not are shown. Miller feels that most people can only conceive of man as a private entity with his social relations as something thrown at him--something "affecting" him only when he is conscious of society. He urges men to "leave the subtly perverse comfort of pathos" and try to see into the universal dimension. Then, he feels, man's terror will be for himself. Seeing only the pathetic is the refusal or inability to discover and face ultimate relevancy for the race; it is therefore a shield against ultimate dramatic effect.¹⁵ Miller's plays are intended to be "revelations of process and the operations of ethics, of social laws of action no less powerful in their effects upon individuals than any tribal law administered by gods with names."¹⁶

To Miller and the Greeks, social drama and tragedy are synonymous. For them social drama is drama of the whole man. It seeks to "deal with /man's/ differences from others, not per se, but toward the end that, if only through drama, we may know how much the same we are,"¹⁷ and one of the unseen goals toward which Miller strives is the "discovery and its proof that we are made and yet are more than what made us."¹⁸ Miller detects

¹⁴Miller, "Shadows of the Gods," Harper's, CCXVII (August 1958), p. 39.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 39-41.

¹⁶Miller, Plays, p. 32.

¹⁷Miller, "On Social Plays," introduction to A View from the Bridge (1955), p. 7.

¹⁸Miller, Plays, p. 55.

the same divine spark in man that the Greeks first noted eons ago and which the scientists have yet to put into a test tube.

Idea is all important to Miller.¹⁹ He is as one with the Greeks in that he never writes a word for the sake of form, but makes the form "give and stretch and contract for the sake of the thing to be said."²⁰ Miller's work, which is firmly grounded in realism, requires that the realistic portrayal of a man's actions in a given situation depict not only why he does, or why he nearly does not do a certain thing, but "why he cannot simply walk away and say to hell with it."²¹ This stems from his belief that if one knows enough about any human being, one can discover some conflict or challenge, major or minor, which he cannot walk away from or turn his back on. The usual structure of his plays is designed to discover and clarify such a conflict. "By seeking the relatedness of all things by isolating their unrelatedness,"²² and by showing the rising pressure of factual and psychological conflict gradually crushing the protagonist into Karl Jaspers' "boundary-situation,"²³ man at the limits of his sovereignty, the "why" of the "tragic hero's" choice is revealed. Idea, in Miller's plays, is the generalized meaning of that discovery applied to men other than the hero.²⁴

Social drama for Miller, as for the Greeks, must do more than analyze and arraign the social network of relationships. Miller is seeking a world in which blame can be laid. He demands of himself "a kind of truthfulness that is larger than

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

²¹ Ibid., p. 7.

²² Ibid., p. 29

²³ Sewall, Vision of Tragedy, p. 5.

²⁴ Miller, Plays, p. 7.

the mere imitation of life," and he searches relentlessly for "responsibility and guilt for this world we cannot quite believe we made."²⁵

Miller says it is not enough to know one is at the mercy of social pressures; it is necessary to understand that such a sealed fate cannot be accepted. It is necessary to know that the values of commerce, values which were despised as necessary but less than noble in the long past, are now not merely dominant everywhere but claimed as positive moral goodness itself. Man must learn to ask not how profitable or efficient something is but how will it affect human beings. For Miller, the "man" dealt with in social drama, his psychology and characterization, should be more than an end in itself but should once again be part of a whole, a whole that is social, a whole that is Man.²⁶ Miller's drama, like the Greeks', asks the same questions, the largest questions: Where are we going together? How are we to live to achieve the greatest happiness? For like every act man commits, the drama, for Miller, is a "struggle against man's mortality, and the meaning is the ultimate reward for having lived."²⁷

The deep moral uneasiness among us, the vast sense of being only tenuously joined to the rest of our fellows, is caused in Miller's view, by the fact that a person in today's society has value as he fits into the pattern of efficiency, and for that alone. Our society is so complex, each person being so specialized an integer, that the moment any individual is dramatically characterized and set forth as a "tragic" hero, the common sense of the audience reduces him to the size of a complainer, a misfit. When a man is driven to question the moral

²⁵Miller, "The Salesman Has a Birthday," The New York Times (February 5, 1950), sec. II, p. 3.

²⁶Miller, "On Social Plays," pp. 12-15.

²⁷Ibid., p. 15.

chaos in which we live, he ends up in our estimate as a possibly commendable but definitely odd fellow, and probably as a compulsively driven neurotic. In place of a social aim which called an all-around excellence--physical, intellectual, and moral--the ultimate good, we have set up a goal which can best be characterized as "happiness"--namely, staying out of trouble.²⁸

Miller is quite outspoken in his attacks on the present state of the theater. He feels that most modern plays, which began as an attempt to analyze the self in the world, are ending as a device to exclude the world. Thus self-pity and sentimentality and sexual sensationalism rush in: "It is an anti-dramatic drama, and it reflects the viewpoint of a great many people who seem to feel that that is the way life is today."²⁹ He says that the characters of most current plays retreat into self-preoccupation and give little hint that there is a society outside themselves. Miller feels the true social drama must recognize that man has both a subjective and an objective existence, that he belongs not only to himself and his family, but to the world beyond.³⁰

Robert Hogan says that Miller has been called the "humorless conscience of his race."³¹ This is a rather unfounded remark. In many of his short stories and essays, Miller displays delightful and ready wit, sometimes gentle, sometimes penetrating. That there is little humor in his drama is intentional. He, as were the Greeks, is writing seriously and somberly about serious matters. He wishes to do nothing to destroy the ever-increasing sense of forboding and pending judgment which he

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 7-10.

²⁹ Brandon, "State of the Theatre," pp. 66-67.

³⁰ Miller, "Social Plays," p. 7.

³¹ Robert Hogan, Arthur Miller (1964), p. 8.

achieves so masterfully in his drama. Henry Popkin compares Miller's plays to courts of law in which the dramatist, acting as prosecutor, argues cases, proves points, finds out who is guilty and asks the death penalty.³² Punishment is imposed either directly or indirectly by the victim himself.

Behind all of Miller's plays is the sublime idea of a higher unseen law that rules the destinies of men. As was the Greeks', Miller's real focus is on the activity in the divine background. His preoccupation with an ultimate Justice and Law is evidenced by his use of a lawyer or a trial-like situation in an increasingly prominent way in every play except A Memory of Two Mondays. (This particular play, which Miller termed a "pathetic comedy," was not intended to be tragedy, although there is a tragic hero in it.) Welland feels that the lawyer is a symbol of Miller's belief in the rightness of law, order, and moral justice in more than a professional sense.³³

Unlike most contemporary thinkers, Miller recognizes the existence of absolute evil "not as a mistake but as a fact in itself."³⁴ But Miller's plays are not intended to be spectacles of evil; they are his views of the constant and inevitable relation between good and evil, a dramatic representation of a law of values.³⁵ The values he reaffirms in his quests for a better life are the basic laws of humanity--the natural and humane laws of the Greeks.

The sense of universal unity and order which emerges from Miller's plays, despite his infrequent use of orthodox linear development of plot, arises from the same rhythm that characterizes Sophocles' work. Sophocles' theory of "action and re-action" is very similar to Miller's theory that "the consequences

³²Popkin, "Arthur Miller: The Strange Encounter," p. 36.

³³Welland, Arthur Miller, p. 100.

³⁴Miller, Plays, p. 44.

³⁵Ibid., p. 31.

of actions, which are seldom taken into consideration at the time of the action, are as real and as inevitable as the action itself."³⁶ Each of the two dramatists shows the disaster which results when an anti-social act, an act opposed to the basic laws of humanity is committed. Miller ties "man's sense of unrelatedness"³⁷ closely to his theory of "actions and consequences" and is another of the directions from which he approaches the question of man's moral responsibility to the society in which he lives.

Miller's work, just as the Greeks' was, is firmly grounded in conventional realism. John Gassner observes that in most criticism, dramatic realism has been considered to be the polar opposite of classicism. Usually, this contrast is so presented by contemporary critics as to suggest that the modern realistic theater has lacked nobility or has failed to endow man with tragic stature. Anti-realists have sought refuge in folk drama, verse drama, symbolism, expressionism, and surrealism.³⁸

Miller defends realism on the grounds that the approach to drama should be organic. Drama should not be looked at first and foremost from literary perspectives merely because it uses words, verbal rhythm, and poetic image. These can be its most memorable parts, but they are not inevitable accompaniments of drama. It is the nature of the questions asked and answered, rather than the language used--whether verse, ordinary slang, or colorless prose--that determines whether the style is realistic or non-realistic.³⁹ "That a play is written prosaically does not make it a realistic play," he cautions, "and that the speech is heightened and intensified by imagery does

³⁶ Ibid., p. 18.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

³⁸ John Gassner, Form and Idea in Modern Theatre (1956), p. 86.

³⁹ Miller, Plays, pp. 4-5.

not set it to one side of realism necessarily. The underlying poem of a play I take to be the organic necessity of its parts. I find in the arbitrary not poetry but indulgence."⁴⁰

As the Greeks did, Miller uses realism as a base, but he expands it with an imposition of various forms in order to speak more directly, even more abruptly and nakedly of what has moved him behind the visible façades of life. He believes that a play should make sense to common-sense people.⁴¹ Miller defines and uses Expressionism as a form which "manifestly seeks to dramatize the conflict of either social, religious, or moral forces per se." He finds that the Greeks and the Expressionists are alike in their effort "to present the hidden forces." The hallmarks of Expressionism--dream states and the employment of symbolic characters--are very much present in Death of a Salesman and After the Fall, but underlying both plays is a strong frame of realism.⁴²

By whatever means it is accomplished, for Miller and the Greeks, the prime business of a play is to arouse the passions of its audience so that by the route of passion may be opened up new relationships between a man and men, and between men and Man. Drama is akin to the other inventions of man in that it ought to help man to know more, and not merely to spend his feelings. The ultimate justification for a genuine new form is the new and heightened consciousness it creates and makes possible--a consciousness of causation in the light of known but hitherto inexplicable effects.⁴³

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 8.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 52.

⁴²Miller, "The Family in Modern Drama," Atlantic, CLXXXVII (April 1956), p. 37.

⁴³Miller, Plays, p. 53.

Gassner supports Miller's views by his own contention that realism has the essential character of a modern classicism. Its world is one of objectivity, reason, order, and responsibility--the responsibility of the individual to his fellow-man and the responsibility of the artist to his society. The aspects of modern realism most apt to be considered unclassical --the readiness to define as neurosis that which earlier ages explained as fate or will, all the belittlement of the individual that psychiatry and sociology have insinuated into dramatic art--are not intrinsic to dramatic form. "Classicism should not be confused with the defense of convention, but with the preservation of the values of civilization," Gassner emphasizes. Dramatic realism has classical qualities because it embodies a responsible view of theater. In all classical art, the work stands in some fundamental relation to its age. But it does not follow that the classical writer feels invariably obliged to endorse the life of his times. Nor is the playwright committed to the glorification of commonplaces or to the sedulous support of the values of the unimaginative, the smug, or the self-interested. The true classicist, as described by Gassner, is devoted to ideal values, not to adulterated ones. Gassner feels that Miller achieves in his plays the same forensic development of his subject that earmarks classical drama. What values shall a man live by? is the question that is the argument or issue that gives Miller's works, as well as the Greeks', their particular direction or flow of action. And in the drama, the movement is the form to an even greater degree than is the formal structure, asserts Gassner.⁴⁴

Miller, in his own defense of realism, reaffirms Gassner's view that for many the idea of realism has become wedded to the idea that man is at best the sum of forces working upon him and of given psychological forces within him. For Miller, de-

⁴⁴Gassner, Form and Idea, pp. 86-89.

terminism, whether it is based on the iron necessities of economics or on psychoanalytic theory seen as a closed circle, is a contradiction of the idea of drama itself as drama has come down to us in its fullest developments. The idea of the hero, let alone the mere protagonist, is incompatible with a drama whose bounds are set in advance by the concept of an unbreakable trap. The history of man, reminds Miller, is a ceaseless process of overthrowing one determinism to make way for another more faithful to life's changing relationships. And it is a process incinivable without the existence of the will of man. His will is as much a fact as his defeat:

Any determinism, even the most scientific, is only that stasis, that seemingly endless pause, before the application of man's will administering a new insight into causation. Man's will does in fact posit itself as real not only because it is devoutly to be wished, but because, however closely he is measured and systematically accounted for, he is more than the sum of his stimuli and is unpredictable beyond a certain point.⁴⁵

Among the most frequently heard adverse criticisms of Miller's drama are that his characterizations are poorly-developed "cut-out figures or types," and that his plays are too cold and aloof. Such charges are probably true if his work is compared with most modern drama, but if his work is considered as tragedy, an attempt to present the moral truth of a situation, the criticism loses validity.

Willy Loman and Maggie are certainly proofs of his ability to create warm living individuals. In fact, Dennis Welland quotes Miller as having said that one of his main problems is to keep his natural "ability to create pathos at will under control";⁴⁶ but he uses this talent only when it is necessary to further the main idea behind the play. In Death of a Salesman, he is portraying man's relations with other mortal men; the dilemma arises from private and psychological causation; therefore, characterization, as in the Tyrannus, is important.

⁴⁵Miller, Plays, pp. 54-55.

⁴⁶Welland, Miller, p. 49.

In The Crucible, so often called austere and cold, he is dealing with outside forces. It mattered less who a man was than what his attitude was toward the outbreak of public hysteria. If he showed some skepticism toward the godliness of the witchcraft prosecutions, he found himself facing disaster regardless of whether he was rich or poor, introvert or extrovert, old or young. Here, as was Aeschylus, Miller is concerned with men in their more public function. He keeps private life to a minimum to dramatize a fate that was not a clash of individuals but of social and ethical issues by which every man is torn.⁴⁷

In defense of his protagonists who are said to be too little, too stupid, and too inarticulate to achieve the stature of "tragic heroes," Miller has this to say:

I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing--his sense of person dignity. In all the great tragedies, the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his rightful position in his society.... In the sense of having been initiated by the hero himself, the tale always reveals what has been called his "tragic flaw," a failing that is not peculiar to grand or elevated character. Nor is it necessarily a weakness. The flaw, or crack in the character, is really nothing--and need be nothing, but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status. Only the passive, only those who accept their lot without active retaliation, are "flawless." Most of us are in that category.⁴⁸

Richard Sewall indicates in one of his footnotes in The Vision of Tragedy that Miller, by stressing only intensity of purpose on the part of the protagonist, is meeting only the first phase of the requirements that a true "tragic" hero should fulfill. Sewall insists that the hero himself must achieve a greater awareness or knowledge by means of his suffering in

⁴⁷ Miller, preface to Recorded Arts recording.

⁴⁸ Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," pp. 1,3.

order to be called genuinely "tragic."⁴⁹

Miller rebuts Sewall's argument:

... it seems to me that there is of necessity a severe limitation of self-awareness in any character, even the most knowing, which serves to define him as a character, and more, that this very limit serves to complete the tragedy and, indeed, to make it at all possible.... Had Oedipus ... been more conscious and more aware of the forces at work upon him he must surely have said that he was not really to blame.... But he is conscious only up to a point at which guilt begins.... I think that the point is whether there is a sufficient awareness in the hero's career to make the audience supply the rest....⁵⁰

To the charge that the common man is too little to be a "tragic hero," Miller answers:

So long as the hero may be said to have had alternatives of a magnitude to have materially changed the course of his life, it seems to me that in this respect at least, he cannot be debarred from the heroic role. The hero's stature is determined by the issues engaged in his career, for instance, the survival of the race, the relationships of man to God--the questions, ... whose answers define humanity and the right way to live so that the world is a home, instead of a battleground or a fog in which disembodied spirits pass each other in an endless twilight.⁵¹

When the question of tragedy in art is not at issue, we never hesitate to attribute to the well-placed and exalted the very same mental processes as the lowly. ...if the exaltation of tragic action were truly a property of high-bred character alone, it is inconceivable that the mass of mankind should cherish tragedy above all other forms let alone be capable of understanding it. ... I believe the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were.⁵²

⁴⁹ Sewall, Vision of Tragedy, p. 160. Sewall's conclusion appears to be an example of the "individualizing" influence imposed by the thought of the Romantic period which Professor John Jones notes in his Aristotle and Greek Tragedy (1962), pp. 12-16. Jones, unlike Kitto, feels that the change of emphasis in the Poetics from the tragic action of the entire play to the action of one particular "tragic hero" lies with Aristotle's translators rather than with the philosopher himself.

⁵⁰ Miller, Plays, p. 35.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 32.

⁵² Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," p. 1.

Miller says that it does not matter whether the hero falls from a great height or a small one, whether he is highly conscious or only dimly aware of what is happening, whether his pride brings the fall or an unseen pattern written behind the clouds; if the intensity, the human passion to surpass his given bounds, the fanatic insistence upon his self-conceived role--if these are not present there can only be an outline of tragedy.⁵³ "Intensity," fanatic," and "extremist" are the words Professor Kitto and Oscar Mandel use frequently in their analyses of the Greeks' protagonists--not "awareness" or "self-knowledge." Miller's intent, like that of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, is to give to the onlookers a momentary glimpse of mortal man from the vantage point of Mount Olympus.

Another misconception regarding the Greek tragedies concerns the language of the plays. Although language, as such, has little actual bearing on what constitutes tragedy, as presented by Kitto and others, the matter deserves attention here since several critics have employed Miller's use of everyday language and the "well-worn cliché" as grounds for dismissing the possibility of his work's achieving tragic stature. Edith Hamilton, the internationally recognized Greek scholar, says that the plain, direct, matter-of-fact writing of the original Greek plays, a style in keeping with the ancient Athenians' approach to all their art, has been changed by translators into elaborate diction set off by every adornment imagination could devise. Scholars, apparently seeking to relieve the bareness of the original lines, have lost much of the realistic beauty the Greeks saw in common things and which they stated with such clarity and simplicity.⁵⁴

⁵³ Miller, Plays, p. 33.

⁵⁴ Edith Hamilton, The Greek Way, pp. 46-47.

As has already been stated, Miller's approach to drama is organic, and the underlying poem of a play for him is the organic necessity of its parts. His dramas are about average, middle-class people with everyday problems; he keeps his dialogue simple and realistic in keeping with the nature of his characters. For Miller's characters to speak of Red Grange, Babe Ruth, Edison, or Goodrich is probably no more ordinary than for Sophocles' characters to mention Zeus or Aphrodite. Homer's epics were as familiar to the Greeks as the newspaper is to Americans. Miller's ability to achieve, at times, an almost poetic lyricism without stepping out of the bounds of prosaic speech has occasioned one critic, Kenneth Tynan, to name him one of the two greatest writers of prose living today.⁵⁵ Even George Jean Nathan admits that "something of a poetic tinge" issues, once in a while, from Miller's simple, unpretentious prose.⁵⁶

A brief summary of the evidence presented shows that Arthur Miller believes that life has meaning and that every man possesses a spark of the divine. He senses an ultimate unity in all things and feels that man, by locating, identifying, and taking courageous action against the seemingly inevitable evil in life, can move another step toward achieving the highest goal--happiness in life for himself and his fellow-man. Reason, justice, moral, and social responsibility are the constants to be used in inducing order from chaos. This philosophy or view of life is Sewall's "tragic vision," a requisite for the writer of tragedy--a requisite which the three Greek dramatists also possessed.

Since the vision of the artist determines the spirit, general form and content (which Kitto says are indivisible) of his

⁵⁵Tynan, "American Blues," p. 13. Tennessee Williams is the other prose writer Tynan praises.

⁵⁶Nathan, The Magic Mirror, p. 243.

work, it is not surprising that Miller's dramatic theories are markedly similar to those which Professor Kitto elicited from his analyses of the Greeks' dramas.

A comparison of Miller's dramatic theories with the dramatic theories of the Greeks presented in the preceding chapter makes the following conclusions possible:

(1) that the spirit or purpose with which all four artists create is the same as is the general form. The action of the plot in the foreground of social drama or tragedy is always subordinate to the action in the divine background where law, justice, and order reign. Their realistic drama is religious in that it is based on moral and ethical principles, and each artist's ultimate concern is with the question, How is man to live?

(2) that the form each play assumes is determined by its creator's particular tragic vision, and the form varies from play to play to present best the governing idea.

(3) that none of the dramatists follows a rigid structural pattern or pre-set formula for characterization, but the form in general is the same. Each artist presents Man, the "tragic hero," whose distinguishing characteristic is intensity of purpose, in a dire situation where he is faced with a moral choice. The outcome of his choice is nearly always fatal.

CHAPTER III

ARTHUR MILLER'S SOCIAL PLAYS

The comparison has been made between Arthur Miller's and the Greeks' dramatic theories, and a decided similarity in spirit, purpose, and form has been noted. The concern of this chapter will be to observe Miller's theories at work in his drama and to decide whether or not he achieves his stated aim, "to create social drama in the Greek sense," as well as his unstated goal, to write classical tragedy in the twentieth century.

That Miller should turn to drama was natural. In the introduction to his collection of short stories, he wrote:

... as a schoolboy I was first taken with books in proportion to the amount of dialogue a quick flip of the pages revealed. It was for the sake of the dialogue, I supposed, that the rest of the book was written; certainly it was for the dialogue that the book was read. This was when the author, I thought, stopped chattering and got out of the way; his own comment was like opinion as opposed to fact.¹

After graduation from the University of Michigan in 1938, Miller returned to New York, his birthplace, to work with the Federal Theatre Project in its last months. The years between 1938 and 1944 were hardship years during which Miller's work activities were many and varied. They were, however, valuable to the future playwright. His experiences as a worker in a box factory and at the Brooklyn Navy Yard contributed to his deep love and understanding of the common man. His experience in writing for radio served as a kind of artistic discipline. David Sievers has attributed Miller's mastery of the flashback and stream-of-consciousness techniques, which give fluidity and depth to his work, to his background in radio.² The

¹Miller, I Don't Need You Anymore (1967), p. xii.

²W. D. Sievers, Freud on Broadway: A History of Psychoanalysis and the American Drama (1955), p. 347.

intrinsic merit of the few of Miller's radio scripts which have been published is not enormous, but as Hogan notes, they show a freshness fairly rare for radio; they help refute the notion that Miller has no sense of humor; and they touch on the central preoccupation of Miller's mature work in the years to come,³ for instance, the concern with the loss of one's name. "The Pussycat and the Expert Plumber Who Was a Man" (1941) is a delightful fantasy about a talking cat who blackmails some influential politicians into letting him run for governor. At one point Tom the cat remarks, "... the thing a man fears the most next to death is the loss of his good name."⁴ This concern is precisely what bedevils John Proctor at the end of The Crucible and Eddie Carbone at the end of A View from the Bridge. For Miller's characters, a person's name seems to convey all that a person stands for--both his personal and public image of his integrity. It is impossible to recall a single play in which this idea is not presented: Chris's reluctance to have his name put up over the family business in All My Sons; Willy's obsession with name brands and his "Call out the name Willy Loman and see what happens! Big Shot!" and "I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!"; John Proctor's agonized plea of "How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!"; Quentin's cry of anguish in After the Fall, "And the name--yes, the name! In whose name do you ever turn your back--but in your own! In Quentin's name. Always in your own blood-covered name ... " and so on. This recurrent emphasis is undoubtedly used by Miller to hammer home his belief that a man's image is a fusion of the opinions of the individual and the society in which he lives.

³Hogan, Miller, p. 8.

⁴Arthur Miller, "The Pussycat Who Was a Man," printed in 100 Non-Royalty Radio Plays (1941), compiled by William Kozlenko, pp. 20-30.

By 1944, Miller had made enough of a name for himself in radio work to be asked by a movie producer to visit army camps to gather material for him to use in a film to be entitled The Story of GI Joe. The results, published in a book of rather superficial reporting⁵ titled Situation Normal, contains the following statement by Miller:

It is terrible to me that everything is so personal; I mean that never in any of these calculations about the soldier can I honestly bring in the socio-political context of this war. I can't seem to find men who betray a social responsibility as a reason for doing or not doing anything.⁶

Miller comes to grips again with this problem of the responsibility of the individual in the socio-political context of war in his latest play, Incident at Vichy (1955) in which he shows how the heroic action of an individual who is finally convinced of his social responsibility can inspire and lead lesser men to heights hitherto thought impossible.

In this same year, 1944, Miller, who did not relish writing radio scripts, wrote a play for the legitimate theater. The Man Who Had All the Luck lasted for four performances on Broadway. The play gives the impression of being almost a student exercise--too many irrelevant characters, too loosely-structured a plot, and too theatrical a situation, but its emphasis on moral responsibility is the same emphasis which is the strength of his later work.⁷

Focus, a competently constructed novel, was published the following year, but any reviewer of the time who failed to forecast from the novel the emergence of a major dramatist cannot be blamed.⁸ It is, however, a dramatist's novel, relying less

⁵Hogan, Miller, p. 11.

⁶Arthur Miller, Situation Normal, p. 97.

⁷Hogan, Miller, p. 12.

⁸Welland, Miller, p. 14.

on narrative and description than on characterization, dialogue, and a succession of situations rising in a crescendo to a climax. The little description is atmospheric rather than visual, and commentary is reduced to a minimum and restricted to the non-emotive statement of a generalized truth. Focus is the story of a New York office worker whose Jewish appearance makes him the victim of an anti-Semitism with which he has some sympathy, and the story's concern is with the process by which Newman brings into focus his own views and his own insights. His own prejudice is symbolized by his reluctance to acquire the new spectacles that his failing eyesight demands; when he is forced into buying them, it is the spectacles that accentuate his Jewish appearance and precipitate his victimization by a world that he can at least see more clearly. The theme of Focus is the same theme which runs through all of Miller's work: How may a man make of the outside world a home?

In addition to the writing of two books and his radio work, Miller was at this time at work on another play. Profiting by the obvious structural flaws in The Man Who Had All the Luck, he produced in 1947 an almost perfect example of a "well-made" play. All My Sons appeared on Broadway January 29, and overnight Miller's name became well-known. The critics were almost unanimous in their praise of Miller's dramatic technique, but they were rather puzzled by how the play should be categorized. Finally they settled for "an Ibsen-like social drama" as the best label for this serious play, a complete contrast to the usual musical or war drama so popular during the war years. The thought did occur to one or two that Miller might be attempting to write tragedy, but the idea was treated lightly, considered highly improbable, and it was discarded by most critics.

The protagonist of All My Sons,⁹ Joe Keller, is an ignorant

⁹Unless otherwise noted, all references to Miller's plays are to Collected Plays with an Introduction (1963), hereinafter referred to as Plays.

small-time manufacturer, who made his fortune during the war turning out airplane engines. Devoted to his family, he is more interested in making money for them than in his responsibility toward others. The opening curtain reveals a family as happy as any living on false hope. A flier son has been missing for three years, and the myth of their son's possible return is merely the means his parents have chosen to protect themselves from facing the real cause of his death. This, it is soon learned, is the profiteer father himself, a little man who, after selling defective engines to the government, lied his way out of jail by putting the blame on an underling, a lifetime friend and next-door neighbor. Joe was faced with a moral choice similar to Agamemnon's, and he decided, as did Agamemnon, to sacrifice a loved one for the sake of a career, and he offended the same gods. As the play unfolds and the full iniquity of the father's conduct is revealed, disaster ensues. Chris, the idealistic son and agent of the gods, forces the awakening of Joe's conscience to the full consequences of his action. There is nothing Joe can do to ameliorate the damage he has done, the needless death of a number of pilots and the suicide of his elder son; but Miller, by having Chris judge and condemn his beloved father, is saying that every man has an obligation to the world in which he lives. If it is ignored, there is little left other than "a jungle existence ... no matter how high our buildings soar."¹⁰

The critics who compare All My Sons to Ibsen's social plays actually need to go farther back. The important resemblance between Ibsen's and Miller's work is their Greek insistence on cumulative structure and significant theme: this combination reveals the inevitable consequences of past deeds.

All My Sons begins almost immediately before the climax. Most of the story has occurred before the curtain rises and

¹⁰Miller, Plays, p. 19.

is revealed by exposition subtly interwoven with the current action. Precisely the same structure may be found in Oedipus Rex; the revelation of a criminal whose crime was committed years earlier is the crux of the play's action. However, in Miller's play the Oedipus character is split in two--Joe is the criminal and Chris is the detective who tracks down the guilty party and reveals his crime. As in Oedipus Rex, the real plot emerges from the current action like a ghost from the past. Miller handles the two-level plot consummately, and there is a suspenseful tension as the relationship between past and present becomes ever clearer. The current or false plot deals with a love affair. Chris has asked his missing brother's fiancée to visit his home because he intends to marry her. However, Chris's mother refuses to believe that Larry really died in battle, and much of the play's first two acts is an attempt to convince her, so that Chris and Ann may marry. Finally Ann reluctantly shows the last letter she had received from Larry, a letter dated the same day he was listed as missing. The letter revealed his intentions to commit suicide because of his father's crime, and there is a collision of the two plots. Joe stands revealed for what he really is--not the affable family man but a menace to society. Hogan, in his discussion of the play, speaks of its economy as being "Greek-like."¹¹ All the characters, even the minor ones, have an integral relation to the theme. No characters are introduced merely to illustrate or to facilitate the mechanics of the plot. Another point which emphasizes the play's closeness to traditional austere tragedy is that it is a family tragedy in which the father, a man of importance, falls from power to ignominy. The lives of the entire family are blighted by his crime as in the Agamemnon, the Tyrannus, and the Medea.

¹¹Hogan, Miller, p. 18.

Two years later, 1949, Miller's Death of a Salesman met with such acclaim it became evident that his earlier triumph was no mere happy instance of right timing. Through a seemingly miraculous synthesis of impressionism and realism, Miller achieves a mobile concurrency of past and present in a revelation of the abrupt and unforeseen yet logical effects resulting from ordinary and accepted actions. He examines Willy Loman, a little man sentenced to discover his smallness rather than a big man undone by his greatness, at the moment of catastrophe welding this moment of doom to all the crucial instances of Willy's past life. Nostalgia and memory are presented on stage but with no past tense of speech, no species of narrator, nor any sudden creaking change of scene. What clues there are are so woven into the lines that Willy's thirtieth year is viewed as naturally as his sixty-third and last.

In the flash-back scenes, Miller shows how Willy has cheated the characters of his two children; how he has refused to recognize Biff's psychopathic compulsion to steal and has insisted that the only thing of importance was "selling" oneself; how he mocked Charley, his neighbor, and Charley's son; how he betrayed his wife and what that meant to his son. Interspersed with these scenes are the events of Willy's last day. He is fired, he is humiliated by a job offer from Charley, and his grand scheme for his boys falls through. To see the play is to witness the complete disintegration of Willy's mind and world. But Willy still struggles, refusing to admit defeat. Strengthened by the discovery that Biff still loves him, he rushes to his death. With the twenty thousand dollars from the insurance company, Biff will have a stake with which to complete the dream.

Much of the discussion which greeted Miller's new play centered around its ending. Is not Willy's suicide an admission of defeat and despair, thus ending just another drama of pathos? If this is supposed to be tragedy, where is the ca-

tharsis? Such was the nature of the questions asked by the critics. Some viewers found the requiem scene to be an unnecessary appendage; they said it merely weakened the power of the main action.¹²

The last complaint has often been made of Sophocles' Ajax and others of his plays as well as of some of Euripides' which end in a similar manner. Kitto says critics call them "broken-back" tragedies and rate them below Oedipus Rex. Some critics have even gone so far as to conjecture that the endings were "tacked on" to enable the plays to fill a certain time interval pre-set by the judges of the Dionysian dramatic competition. That artists such as Sophocles and Euripides would deliberately sabotage a serious piece of their work for the sake of a contest ruling is beyond Kitto's belief. He, who, like Arthur Miller, maintains that content determines form, thinks the requiems are dramatic devices deliberately used for a specific purpose--the purpose of fusing the separate levels of understanding heretofore achieved in the play into one basic universal truth.¹³

It is the contention of this writer that Miller used the requiem in Death of a Salesman for the same purpose. This conclusion was prompted by the strong resemblance between Ajax and Death of a Salesman. In Ajax, the wise and temperate Odysseus had attained everything that the headstrong and ambitious Ajax desired. Exactly the same situation existed with Charley and Willy. Neither Ajax nor Willy could understand why Odysseus and Charley succeeded and they did not. Ajax and Willy each felt suicide was the only noble way out. When others in the plays questioned the good of the action taken by the "tragic heroes," Charley's "nobody dast blame this man" paraphrases

¹²Kappo Phelan, review of Death of a Salesman, The Commonwealth, XXXIX (March 4, 1949), 521.

¹³Kitto, Greek Tragedy, pp. 120-131.

Odysseus's "When a brave man is dead, 'tis not right to do him scathe--." ¹⁴The resemblance continues in the actions of the other characters. Happy, as obtuse and self-centered as Menelaus, is incapable of thinking beyond himself; Linda, who, like Teucer, Ajax's brother, loves without judging and is moderate in all things, is bewildered by those who do not follow a similar course; Biff achieves insight as does Sophocles' chorus; but the catharsis lies with Charley and Odysseus. They had understood and accepted as fact the driving intensity, an intensity so great as to approach fanaticism, which is the most outstanding personality trait both protagonists display in the pursuit of their separate goals. Neither Odysseus nor Charley was surprised by the outcome. Both have respect and admiration for the tremendous courage of the "tragic" two who "could not settle for half"; yet they knew that it is the wise that the gods cherish and that the laws of the gods prevail. In a life of ceaseless change, one must be, not rigid, but flexible; one must shun excessive pride and must practice forbearance toward injuries. The laws of the gods must prevail over transient human passions, or all suffer. Needless to say, neither Willy nor Ajax could have been cited for forbearance; each sought to impose his pattern on life, each wanted things to bend to his will, and neither was notable for his consideration of others.

Most of the critics who write off the possibility of Death of a Salesman's being a tragedy are those who require the tragic action--purpose, suffering, perception--to be embodied in a single dominant character. As the Greeks demonstrated, there is no set rule. It is strictly up to the playwright to decide

¹⁴The translations of the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides are by G. M. Cookson, Sir Richard C. Jebb, and Benjamin Bickley Rogers, respectively. Great Books of the Western World (1952), V.

how to present his material to achieve the greatest understanding of the all-important idea or view of life by the audience.

Whether or not Willy actually achieves insight into himself, as Miller maintains that he does, is not important to the case in point. Biff does, and the audience does, but not always the insight or knowledge Miller was trying to impart. As he ruefully remarked, "Probably the most succinct reaction to the play was voiced by a man who, on leaving the theater, said, 'I always said that New England territory was no damned good.'"¹⁵

Human values are not salable. This is one of the lessons Miller teaches in this indictment of a commercially-oriented world. Miller believed he was writing optimistically: most of his audience considered the play to be a statement of pessimism and despair. Willy, the low man on the totem pole, an Everyman and yet a well-developed personality, sells. It does not matter what particular article he carries in his suitcase; it could be anything. What Willy is really trying to sell is himself. Our present society feels it must sell to survive. Everything has a price tag. Willy's story points up how commercialism has tarnished the national morality. A basic tolerance for dishonesty, which Willy is unaware of, permeates his actions, and this dishonesty is reflected in the lives of his sons. This tolerance is displayed by the words of the barkeeper and the two call girls as well; but Miller used the scene in the bar for an additional reason. The floozies' and the barkeep's concern for Willy's welfare when his sons leave him behind displays Miller's firm belief in the strength of man's humanity. Willy's death symbolizes the death of a commercialized society, its futility and its meaninglessness. The two sons, who seem to be an extension of Willy, survive. Happy,

¹⁵Miller, Plays, p. 28.

that side of Willy which can define "success" only in terms of money, competition, and being "well-liked," is too ordinary to hold anyone's interest; we already know he will never amount to anything worthwhile. Biff, the side of Willy which questioned sometimes the worth of these values and which loved doing physical things in the out-of-doors, is more inspiring of hope. If the self-awareness Biff experiences can prove to be an impetus toward greater self-realization and happiness rather than resignation to mediocrity, then the play is an "optimistic" one as Miller maintains that it is.

As has already been said, Willy is really selling himself. He was never a very good salesman, but, so long as he was physically fit, he covered his incompetence from himself by talking loudly to his sons about the principles of success and by constantly reassuring himself that he was "liked." Unfortunately, Willy's product wears out, becomes outmoded and must be discarded. Willy, a product of an earlier age in which friendship and loyalty were "realities," is too old to adjust to the rapidly changing "world of efficiency." His protest to Howard, "You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away--a man is not a piece of fruit!", makes little impression. Howard, as Willy has been before him, is a little man too involved in his own personal life to understand what is happening to Willy. Charley, a successful salesman who has realistically relied more on honesty and business acumen than on sentimentality, is the only person who has understood Willy all along. He loves him, accepts him for what he is without judging him, and offers both money and a job to help him. Willy rejects the job offer. Accepting it would be a denial of everything he has believed in. It is not money alone that Willy needs, but the sense of belonging, of identification with what to him has been meaningful. Willy's self-discovery is all the more devastating because it is only half clear. To be sure, he had a staggering glimpse of that hour in his past when his

own infidelity had killed his son's confidence in himself, but Willy could not see behind his philandering to his need for companionship and fun on his futile sales trips. Accustomed to building himself up in his own esteem, the false figure of himself was more real to him than reality, and the deflating of the figure of himself shattered the fine balance of sanity that is any man's personal adjustment to the facts of his universe. His tragedy is that he could not make his dream world come true, and he could not live without his dreams--a predicament of mankind, born to stand on the earth and reach for the stars. Miller intended Willy's suicide to be a threat, a warning, but also a regarding for battle. The dignity of Willy's tragedy rests partly in his innocence, his almost childlike unawareness that he has defeated himself.

The surface level of Death of a Salesman deals with Willy's search for the reason Biff has never become a business success. On the deeper level, Willy's quest ends, just as the quest of Oedipus ended; Willy finds himself to be the culprit and the cause of all the trouble. Linda and Charley, symbols of such values as love, trust, and restraint in their relations with their fellow-men, are wise enough to realize that Willy's quest can be a fatal one, and they urge him to desist. Charley tells Willy to forget about Biff: "To hell with it. When a deposit bottle is broken you don't get your nickel back." When Biff tells his father that he's leaving and that he won't write any more, Linda agrees, "I think that's the best way, dear."

But Willy cannot let go that easily. Haunted by a growing awareness of his own failure, it is through Biff, a part of him, that he, unconsciously perhaps, intends to complete his dream. Biff's assertion of his own freedom and his escape from his father's gods shock Willy into facing the awesome chasm reality opens before him. Biff frantically attempts to save his father with his anguished appeal, "Will you take that phony dream and burn it before something happens?" and "Pop, I'm nothing! I'm nothing, Pop. Can't you understand that? I'm

just what I am, that's all." But Willy attempts to save himself and his gods by turning a deaf ear. All he senses is that Biff still loves him, and that has given him new courage.

The relentless pressure that "Be a success or you have no right to live," the law of Willy's god,¹⁶ exerts is evidenced by Willy's growing claustrophobia. He asks for windows, already open, to be raised because the air is close. In his car, he imagines he opens the windshield and feels the warm air; he admires the rural landscape and yearns for the simple out-of-door pleasures of earlier years. He complains of being boxed in by the over-shadowing apartment buildings all around him. His pitiable attempt by flashlight to plant his garden is a poignant reminder of the futility of trying to deal with the complexities of modern living without some degree of flexibility.

Miller does not present Willy as the totally helpless victim of commercialism. Willy had a choice. Uncle Ben, the shadowy symbol of the ruthlessness of big business but also of individualism, had offered him an opportunity in Alaska. At least five separate occupations are mentioned at which Willy might have been successful: carpentry, masonry, farming, plumbing, and lumbering. Willy spurned them all. For him, honor and glory could only be attained on the field of Selling. His final desperate action, an attempt to prove his immortality and to justify his life, is a sale: he sells himself for twenty thousand dollars.

In an article which appeared in The New York Times a year after the play opened, Miller wrote:

To me the tragedy of Willy Loman is that he gave his life, or sold it, in order to justify the waste of it. It is the tragedy of a man who believed that he alone was not meeting the qualifications laid down for mankind by those clean-shaven

¹⁶Miller, Plays, pp. 35-36.

frontiersmen who inhabit the peaks of broadcasting and advertising offices. From those forests of canned goods high up near the sky, he heard the thundering command to succeed as it ricocheted down the newspaper-lined canyons of his city, heard not a human voice, but a wind of a voice to which no human can reply in kind, except to stare in the mirror at a failure.¹⁷

Miller is urging man to forsake these lesser gods of Wall Street and Pine, Madison Avenue, and Park Avenue and return to the wise, just, and humane gods of Olympus before all the Willys of the world are destroyed or destroy themselves.

Death of a Salesman, in spite of its serious nature, has had tremendous box-office appeal for all ages. The young identify with Biff, mothers and wives with Linda, and astute business men with Charley; but it is with Willy and his soul-destroying loneliness that the older members of the audience find kinship. Another of the results of man's advance in science has been an ever-increasing number of "elder citizens." An affliction from which many of them suffer and for which medicine has no remedy is loneliness, the first problem of man that God recognized. Arthur Miller subtly conveys the depression which accompanies the too-often felt sense of uselessness experienced by the elderly. Unable to adapt to the rapidly changing values of an over-populated world, the older person frequently feels isolated--unneeded or unwanted. But Miller does more than this. Through Charley, he demonstrates that the older person, by being flexible and reasonable, can adjust successfully to the strength and progress of the new world without giving up his faith in the fundamental laws of humanity.¹⁸

¹⁷Miller, "Salesman Has a Birthday," p. 3.

¹⁸Although a number of studies of Death of a Salesman were read prior to the writing of this one, they did not change noticeably my original interpretation of the play; consequently, it is difficult to give credit for particular statements to individual authors. Aside from Miller's own explanations and comments, the analyses considered most knowledgeable and unbiased are those of Dennis Welland, Robert Hogan, Henry Popkin, Allan Lesis, G. C. Weales, and O'Hara and Bro.

Miller, discouraged by the failure of the majority of his audience (apparently mesmerized by the same credo to which Willy succumbed) to see the alternatives offered Willy, resolved to present Good and Evil so plainly in his next play, The Crucible, that there could be no ambiguity concerning his lesson.¹⁹

Only a few works, states D. D. Raphael, have been bold enough to arraign the universe by demonstrating that the virtuous purpose of a virtuous man can by its own nature inevitably lead to the man's annihilation. He finds Arthur Miller's The Crucible (1953) a fine example of such.²⁰

★ (The Crucible is an exploration of the nature of human goodness and human evil, of how evil grows from things like envy and sexual frustration, aided by socially conditioned attitudes such as bigotry and superstition.) (The spread of this evil brings suffering and death to innocent and even to saintly people. But the evil also brings out, in a man who is no saint, goodness that might otherwise have remained merely potential.] ★

Although a strong play, The Crucible was not warmly received. Miller's recognition of Evil as a fact in itself, not as something to be explained and dismissed by sociological and psychological theories, did not make for a comfortable atmosphere in the theater. Its setting, the Salem witchcraft trials, brought to mind all too vividly the current headlines dealing with the McCarthy hearings and the knowledge that Miller had had to appear for questioning. Arthur Miller suffered the fate of many an artist who tries to "enunciate ideas which are already in the air";²¹ the author, rather than the work, comes under attack. An example of this is Kenneth Tynan's comment:

There is too much rage and hate in The Crucible. On the right side morally, socially and politically, it is the artistic equiv-

¹⁹Miller, Plays, pp. 38-45.

²⁰D. D. Raphael, The Paradox of Tragedy (1960), p. 113.

²¹Miller, Plays, p. 9.

alent of a closed shop ... It suggests a sensibility blunted by the insistence of an outraged conscience ... too over simplified for a mind as subtle as Miller's.²²

Miller's reply to criticism in this vein was that if he were to rewrite the play, he would accentuate this evil still more. He continues:

I believe merely that, from whatever cause, a dedication to evil, not mistaking it for good, but knowing it as evil and loving it as evil, is possible in human beings who appear agreeable and normal. I think now that one of the hidden weaknesses of our whole approach to dramatic psychology is our inability to face this fact--to conceive, in effect, of Iago.²³

Dennis Welland in his presentation of Arthur Miller writes:

In American literature, probably more than in any other, there have always been influences at work to minimise [sic] the fact of evil. At the extreme there is the Emersonian Transcendentalism optimistically asserting that "Good is positive, Evil is merely privative, not absolute: it is like cold, which is the privation of heat...."

Part of the superiority of Melville and James over Hawthorne lies in their ability to conceive of evil where he thinks only in terms of sin, and Faulkner's superiority over many of his contemporaries is in part attributable to his awareness of evil where they see psychological maladjustment and environmental deprivation.²⁴

Professor Richard Sewall, incidentally, uses works of Melville, Faulkner, and Hawthorne to illustrate his theories in The Vision of Tragedy. He feels these three American writers captured in some ways the elusive essence of genuine tragedy. ~~Miller's~~ Miller's plays, particularly The Crucible, are sometimes accused of being moralistic, didactic, and cold. They are moral or religious. The question behind the dramatic creations of each of these artists is the same: How is Man to live? [Their ultimate purpose is not to create appealing and forgiveable characters but to show the relativity of all things.] The will

²²Tynan, "American Blues," p. 14.

²³Miller, Plays, p. 44.

²⁴Welland, Miller, pp. 83-84.

of the gods, the divine laws of the universe, must prevail, or we shall all perish. Gerald Weales' complaint of too little psychological explanation of Abigail²⁵ is out of order. Miller is showing that Abigails exist, just as Euripides' Medeas exist; he is not in this particular play concerned with why they exist.

In All My Sons and Death of a Salesman, Joe Keller and Willy Loman round ready-made societal images and laws to attach themselves to and both became victims of the attachment. Society is not nearly so passive in The Crucible. Salem tries to force John Proctor to accept a particular image of himself, but he chooses to die. } *↓ of public position man in confessing*

Although there are occasional voices in the earlier plays --the neighbors in All My Sons and the bartender in Death of a Salesman, for example--who speak for society, Miller operates for the most part on the assumption that his audience knows and shares the ideas that work on the Keller and the Lomans. He cannot be that certain in The Crucible. Whether his Salem is accepted as historical or as an analogy for the United States in the early 1950's, he realizes the need to create a mood of mass hysteria in which guilt and confession become public virtues. For this reason, Proctor is not so intensively drawn as the protagonists of the earlier plays; Miller is more concerned with the forces at work on Proctor } *from point* --not just those forces embodied in his accusers, the court, and the town, but those of the gods. (See page 45.) }

In "A Modest Proposal for Pacification of the Public Temper," a satirical essay published in The Nation on a rather significant date, July 3, 1954, Miller makes it quite clear that the America of that moment, like the Salem of his play, was going in for a kind of group therapy that demanded each man's guilt.²⁶ Weales considers Miller's resurrection of the

²⁵Gerald Weales, American Drama Since World War II (1952), p. 11.

²⁶Miller, "A Modest Proposal," The Nation, CLXXIX (July 3, 1954), 5-8.

political situation of Salem valuable because it is quite obvious that Miller's involvement with the McCarthy hearings dictated his treatment of his material. The villainous Danforth, the ambitious Parris, the greedy Putnam, the envious Abigail, each of whom uses the cryings-out to his own advantage, show that Miller was plainly intent on questioning the sincerity of accusers and investigators in general, but it is John Proctor who shows most clearly Miller's attitude. His hero might have been another Willy Loman or Joe Keller, an accepter rather than a defier of society, and his play would have had just as much --perhaps more--propaganda value. There is such a character in the play--the Reverend John Hale, the witch expert, who breaks under the strain of the trials.²⁷ Although Hale is a much more interesting character than Proctor, it is Proctor's play. It is through Proctor that the laws of the gods are seen in action. That he is considered an "unbelievable" character by many is indicative of the present-day's confusion in values.

When Arthur Miller appeared before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in June 1956, Mary McCarthy was impressed by the dignity in his refusal to give names, in his willingness to describe his past without apologizing for it, in his simple, "I accept my life." Ironically, not even Elizabeth's "He have his goodness now" can make Proctor's dignity convincing. The simplicity of the real situation is impossible on stage.²⁸

Weales feels the weakness of the play lies with Miller's need to push Proctor to his heroic end which, consequently, causes Miller to bring to The Crucible too many of the trappings of the standard romantic play; the plot turns on that moment in court when Elizabeth, who has never lied before, lies out of love of her husband and condemns him by that act. There is

²⁷Weales, American Drama, pp. 10, 12.

²⁸Mary McCarthy, "Naming Names: The Arthur Miller Case," Encounter, VIII (May 1957), 24.

excitement enough in the scene to hold an audience, but the attention that the use of such a sentimental mechanism demands is quite different from that required by John Proctor's struggle of conscience.²⁹

Proctor in open court confesses to adultery with Abigail Williams, thus casting away his "good name," in an effort to prove the motive behind Abigail's false charges against his wife. Later, in order to save his own life, he signs a false confession of having been victimized by witches and of having consorted with the devil. At this time he can rationalize that one sin against society comes to look like another; he has already lost his name. In the last act, however, Elizabeth absolves him of the sin of adultery, gives him back the name he lost in court, and clears the way for him to reject the false confession and to give him back his life: "How may I live without my name?" But living a life bought with a lie, the false confession, and everyone else's knowing it to be a lie, would have been intolerable for John, who had never before taken refuge in pretense or hypocrisy. His god, as was Antigone's, is one in whom Reason and Justice are supreme, and whose laws are the divine laws of humanity.

Eddie Carbone in A View from the Bridge (1955) also dies crying out for his name, but his situation is the reverse of John Proctor's. When Eddie asks Marco to "gimme my name," he is asking for a lie that will let him live and, failing that, for death.

Red Hook, an Italian slum near the Brooklyn Bridge, is the setting for the play. It is a microcosm of ancient Sicily in the midst of the world's greatest metropolis. Most of its inhabitants recognize to some degree the laws of civilized America, but three thousand years of distrust for the law lies behind them. For them, the "law has not been a friendly idea

²⁹Weales, American Drama, p. 11.

since the Greeks were beaten." This is the information that Alfieri, an Italian lawyer who practices in Red Hook, imparts to his listeners at the opening of the play. Alfieri is a combination of the Aeschylean, Sophoclean, and Euripidean choruses. He is Sophoclean in that he moves in and out of the play serving alternately as a character and commentator; he is Aeschylean and Euripidean in that he is the aware and omniscient narrator who broods over and illuminates the action for the audience. A native-born Italian who came to America at twenty-five to practice law, Alfieri has an understanding of and a sympathy for these people. He has deliberately selected this world for his practice despite his wife's complaints that it lacks elegance and glamor. It is through Alfieri's eyes, his god's view from the bridge which spans the two worlds, that Miller views Eddie Carbone. Eddie, an ignorant longshoreman, accepts the rules and prejudices of his small society in which no one "settles for half" and dies because he violates them.

A View from the Bridge relates the consequences of Eddie's inadmissible guilt and illicit, almost incestuous desire for his wife's niece, a girl he has reared from childhood. In his attempt to forestall the marriage of the seventeen-year-old Catherine to an illegal immigrant, Rodolpho, Eddie first hints that Rodolpho is self-seeking and wants an American bride in order to obtain papers, and secondly, insinuates that the handsome and versatile young man is a homosexual. No one believed his intimations except possibly Eddie himself. Eddie has to believe them. Sick with passion, Eddie twice approaches Alfieri hoping to find help through legal recourse. Alfieri tells him that even if his suspicions were true, there is no law against Catherine's marrying an immigrant or a homosexual. Rather than admit the unthinkable, his desire for the girl, and by will power control it, Eddie takes the only alternative --informing the police that Rodolpho and his brother Marco are "submarines." This, the betrayal of a fellow Italian, a blood

relative of his wife, he finds even more despicable. He dies at the hands of Rodolpho's brother Marco, his accuser, denying his guilt and demanding his name and honor.

Miller's dramatic descent from the austere tragic writers of Athens is nowhere more evident than in this particular play. He uses a typical Euripidean situation: man consumed by primitive extremes of passion; the reasoned law, justice, and moderation presented by the choric Alfieri; and the unrelieved starkness of the plot. Like Medea, Eddie is the tragic victim of an uncontrollable passion which not only destroys him but those around him as well. Such excess of passion, as the chorus in Medea sings, "has never brought good renown or virtue to mortals."

The attempt to show man struggling to be at one with society has been basic to all of Miller's work up through A View from the Bridge, but "The Misfits,"³⁰ a short story appearing in Esquire in 1957, proved to be a portent of a change in his ideology. Prior to 1957, Miller had postulated that men do need the respect of their neighbors. It was this need that made John Proctor retract his lie and Eddie Carbone insist upon his. In "The Misfits," Miller's disillusionment with social idealism is evidenced by his characters' rejection of materialistic values in their search for freedom and honor, thus reducing themselves to "misfits."

How much of this change was occasioned by the change in his personal life can only be conjectured, but it seems reasonable to assume that the dissolution of his first marriage which had lasted for fifteen years and had given him two children, and his remarriage within a matter of days to the highly-publicized screen actress and international "sex symbol," Marilyn Monroe, had some weight in the matter. Hogan commented that the match appeared to the public as shocking and as newsworthy

³⁰Miller, "The Misfits," Esquire, XXXVIII (October 1957), 158-166.

as it would have been had Einstein married Gypsy Rose Lee.³¹ If one may judge by the heroines of his short stories written later and by a Life article entitled "My Wife Marilyn," Miller found in Miss Monroe a mixture of the innocence of the very young and the mortality of the very old.³² That Miller was desperately searching for innocence in an effort to forestall his growing disillusionment is understandable. Several of Miller's plays, none of which had ever humored the public, had been attacked by organizations of the far right for their alleged Communist leanings (the same plays had run into trouble in Russia because of their alleged capitalist leanings), but his trouble with his own government began when the State Department in 1954 refused him a passport "as a person believed to be supporting the Communist movement." Consequently, he was unable to attend the Brussels opening of one of his plays, The Crucible. In 1956, Miller appeared before the House Committee on Un-American Activities and answered fully and frankly all questions about himself, but he steadfastly refused to give information concerning anyone else.³³

Mary McCarthy, while not always complimentary in regard to Arthur Miller's dramatic techniques, has, nevertheless, enormous respect for the author as a man. She writes that the question before the congressional hearing was not a question of betraying specific people, people who had already been denounced, so his testimony could hardly have done them any further harm, but of accepting the principle of betrayal as a norm of good citizenship. As a leading figure, Miller was being asked to set the example for civil obedience. The whole purport of such a hearing reduces private conscience to niggling absurdity;³⁴ and

³¹Hogan, Miller, p. 36.

³²Miller, "My Wife Marilyn," Life, XXXV (December 22, 1953), 147.

³³Hogan, Miller, p. 36.

³⁴McCarthy, "Naming Names," p. 25.

Miller's conviction of the right and obligation of man to uphold his own conscience, particularly in times of turmoil, is demonstrated in The Crucible.

During the next few years, Miller's troubles with the government were ultimately settled and the contempt citation was reversed, but his marriage kept him in the limelight. Miller, more sensitive to the public temper than the average man, retreated from drama into the more private realm of the short story and the essay. He wrote much, published little, and became increasingly involved in his wife's career. "The Misfits," the tersely-written yet poignant short story dealing with two cowboys and an ex-army pilot who reject the indignity of "working for wages," was rewritten, first as a novel, then as a film script for his wife. It was finally re-published under the same name in 1961 as a cinema-novel, a new medium.

Roslyn, the woman who is only mentioned in the short story, becomes a central character in the novel. She is portrayed as a very appealing "misfit" who has never really belonged to anyone or anything, and who believes--until she suddenly and dramatically finds out otherwise--that "all there really is is what happens next."³⁵ Gay, the older cowboy who has rejected his old life after finding his wife in the arms of his best friend, senses in Roslyn an almost obsessive fear of death, an expression of the instinctive death wish. He tries to comfort and reassure her: "Dyin's as natural as livin'; man who's too afraid to die is too afraid to live, far as I've seen. So there's nothing to do but forget it, that's all. Seems to me."³⁶

Gay's stoic attitude toward death is quite Greek. According to Van Loon the Greeks did not like death. They violently resented it as an interruption of a happy life, but since nobody could very well hope to escape from this unpleasant inevi-

³⁵Miller, The Misfits (1961), p. 79.

³⁶Ibid., p. 75.

tability, it had to be accepted as gracefully as possible.³⁷ Positive action in this life, not morbid preoccupation with the inevitable, is the rule for Miller as it was with the Greeks.

Gay succeeds in giving Roslyn a belief in the value of herself as an individual, not as an instrument of pleasure for others; and her childlike openness and acceptance of life gives back to Gay his faith in love and humanity. The two, as well as Perce, the younger cowboy, decide to return to the mainstream of the life which they had earlier rejected. This ending, so unlike that of the short story in which the "misfit" is seen as a slowly vanishing breed, is more probably attributable to Miller's belief that he had refound man's lost innocence in Miss Monroe than to his following the romantic dictates of Hollywood. Arthur Miller is no placater, but he does seem to have found a middle ground for his protagonists; they are allowed to "settle for half."

In January, 1964, the Lincoln Center Repertory Company inaugurated its initial season with Arthur Miller's first play in nine years, After the Fall. The pessimistic view of society expressed in "The Misfits" had not been an anomaly; it had gained a firm foothold. The purists, who had so ill concealed their dislike of his work and who at times castigated the dramatist personally in their commentaries, were delighted to see Miller expressing doubt and despair. The critics' controversy which had begun after Death of a Salesman soared to new heights. Richard Gilman's review of the new play was so venomous it descended to the ridiculous.³⁸ Leslie Hanscom, a friend of Miller's who had attended all of the rehearsals with him, reviewed the drama for Newsweek and was "unhappy to see him [Miller] under

³⁷Van Loon, The Arts, p. 103.

³⁸Richard Gilman, "Still Falling," Commonweal, LXXIX (February 14, 1964), 600-601.

the delusion that he has transcended the personal."³⁹ On the other side, Howard Taubman of The New York Times found After the Fall to be a "masterpiece, ... Miller's maturest."⁴⁰ Hogan calls it a "brilliant accomplishment" technically and a play which "could give a vital impetus and a new direction to the modern drama."⁴¹

After the Fall is a brooding, sensitive, compelling, and incomplete play, a turn to the theme of lust and loss of faith, as in so much of the contemporary art that Miller has condemned. Nine years of absence from the theater and two tortured marriages that ended in divorce, plus changes in the world situation had evidently deprived Miller of his previous assurance that collective drives can eliminate social ills and the disease of the spirit. In this play he does not look so much toward "social or political ideas as the creators of violence but more into the nature of the human being himself."⁴²

The play, which Henry Hewes describes as a "three-hour non-stop ordeal," examines one disappointed man's right to hope in a world where incredible horror and violence keep cropping up to make one suspect the progress of the human race.⁴³ Quentin,⁴⁴

³⁹Leslie Hanscom, "'After the Fall': Arthur Miller's Return," Newsweek, LIII (February 3, 1964), 49.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 51.

⁴¹Hogan, Miller, p. 44.

⁴²Miller, foreword to After the Fall, Saturday Evening Post edition (February 10, 1964).

⁴³Henry Hewes, review for Saturday Review, XXXXVII (February 15, 1964), 35.

⁴⁴The rather unusual name, Quentin, and the striking similarity of Miller's Quentin to Faulkner's Quentin in Absalom, Absalom! seems too great to be accidental. That both these great writers share a common goal can be substantiated by comparing Faulkner's "Speech of Acceptance, Nobel Prize for Literature" with Miller's "Introduction" to Collected Plays. (Faulkner is the only modern American writer whom Sewall cites as having captured the essence of classical tragedy.)

a lawyer and the central character of the play, has as his opening lines: "Hello! God, it's good to see you again!" They could very well have been punctuated, "Hello, God. It's good to see you again!"--for the words are addressed to an invisible Listener in the front rows beyond the edge of the stage. The Listener may be God, a psychiatrist, or the audience. The play is a trial of man by his own conscience after his loss of intellectual innocence--after his Fall. The action takes place in the mind, thought, and memory of Quentin, a solitary Aeschylean hero contemplating his destiny.

Many of the adverse comments center around the charge of formlessness. This is indeed strange, for Miller has been condemned by the same critics for adhering too severely to the Ibsen technique of the well-made play. What Miller is doing is adapting his form to the contents of the play. By suggesting the way a man thinks, Miller is able to probe in detail and in depth Quentin's life. The play unfolds not by logical progression, but seemingly at random. Quentin shies away from certain thoughts, proceeds by association, doubles back upon his own thoughts, and yet there is no feeling of random repetition, but of an ever-increasing significance. Hogan notes that one of the devices holding the play together is the irony of the stray thoughts that flit momentarily across Quentin's mind.⁴⁵ Using his Greek insistence and feel for structure and point, Miller arranges the Expressionistic situation into a kind of order: the solitary hero with a chorus for explanation and ironic comment.

A central theme of Miller's earlier work, like the Greeks, has been that "we ought to be struggling for a world in which it will be possible to lay blame," but now he writes of Quentin: "His desperation is too serious, too deadly to permit him to blame others."⁴⁶ Up until "The Misfits," Miller seems to have

⁴⁵Hogan, Miller, p. 43.

⁴⁶Foreward to Post edition.

had a very definite idea where the line should be drawn between good and bad. The "bads" are vividly dramatized: lack of social responsibility, worship of money and success, loss of conscience, vengeance, ungoverned passion which excludes reason, and the debilitating effect of considering oneself a victim. The "goods" are more nebulous, but they are there in the background subtly interwoven: honesty, loyalty to self and brother, love, honor, integrity, freedom, justice. In other words, those qualities which help to distinguish man as human. Now in After the Fall the pessimism which hovered over "The Misfits" becomes fully voiced. No longer is Miller convinced that he knows what the right way of life is. Quentin has within him a number of nagging conflicts that are universally felt in our time. He says he began life with the presumption that one is moving toward some elevation where he would receive a verdict concerning his life, that there were injustices for him to correct, good and bad people for him to judge, and fixed principles to be placed ahead of natural and selfish impulses: "I think now that my disaster really began when I looked up one day--and the bench was empty. No judge in sight. And all that remained was the endless argument with oneself--this pointless litigation of existence before an empty bench."⁴⁷ Looking back on this period, Quentin bitterly remarks, "Not to see one's own evil--there's power! And rightness, too!--so kill conscience. Kill it."⁴⁸

This evil, his own, Quentin uncovers by re-examining his true feelings about his parents, his shattered political religion, his two broken marriages, and a friend's suicide. He sees the failure of love both in his own country and in the world. Almost every person in the play betrays love. The picture of "the individual scrambling over the corpses of love is shown again and again in the play."⁴⁹ In retrospect Quentin sees

⁴⁷ Miller, After the Fall (1955), Bantam edition, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁹ Hogan, Miller, p. 41.

that total love and total innocence are impossible, and that total marriage can be a way of forcing two separate people into betrayal, hate, and virtual murder. He sees the majority of men reconciling themselves to a life of insincerity and fake innocence.

In the light of this triple condemnation of society, the family, and the individual, it is apparent that Miller feels the inadequacy of the view of his earlier work. If this condemnation were the entire theme of After the Fall, Hogan says the play would be one of the blackest of our time.⁵⁰ However, the purpose of the play is not negation but Quentin's attempt to decide whether to enter a third marriage--this time with Holga, a German girl who has reconciled herself with--but not absolved herself of--the guilt she feels for the atrocities at Auschwitz.

Maggie, the character who created the greatest unfavorable reaction from the critics because of her resemblance to Miller's second wife, Marilyn Monroe, is used, writes Miller, to portray the human animal's unwillingness or inability to discover in himself the seeds of his own destruction. Maggie most perfectly exemplifies the self-destructiveness which finally comes when one views oneself as pure victim. The suicide of Quentin's friend Lou exposes the inability of a man to live with the mixture of good and evil in his own nature. Quentin is not exculpated. Miller contends that one of the play's major points is that there is not and cannot truly be a divestment of guilt. But there can be--and if life is to be lived, there must be--a recognition of the individual's part in the evil he sees and abhors. Quentin is not seeking to justify himself. Actually he is in search of his responsibility and he finds it. Miller does not intend for the play to be either an apology or an arraignment of others; quite simply, overtly and clearly it is

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 42.

a statement of commitment to one's own actions.⁵¹ It is always the same struggle: to perceive somehow one's own complicity with evil is a horror not to be borne--Oedipus gouged his eyes. And yet through suffering both Oedipus and Quentin obtain wisdom. It is much more reassuring to see the world in terms of totally innocent victims and totally evil instigators of the monstrous violence seen all about one. At all costs, innocence must be preserved. But Miller says the perfection of innocence is madness. The insane drift through life truly innocent, unable to see into themselves at all. Quentin tries to open Maggie's eyes to her own complicity with her destruction; it is an act of love, for it requires that he open himself to his own complicity if his accusations are to carry any weight.⁵²

Holga, who talks Quentin into seeing Mozart's The Magic Flute, brings the breath of hope into the play. At the end, the audience knows that Quentin is taking up his life again and will try a third marriage. The fairy story of Mozart's opera serves to underscore the almost static plot. Here in brief is Mozart's treatment of the tale in his opera as described in letters to his wife:

Papageno is half-man, half-bird, bird catcher. All he wants from life is a dear little wife just like himself, plenty of good rich food, plenty of wine, and a complete lack of responsibilities.... The world, in my view, is a place uncommonly like Vienna. It is full of busy stupid, bustling people who think of nothing but filling their bellies, getting rich, and enjoying themselves.... A place, in fact, full of Papagenos and Papagenas. Ask them why they live--? And what for--? They don't know. What is worse, they don't care. Yet there must be something more to life than eating, drinking, and begetting children. There must be some purpose. Man, after all, is capable of self-sacrifice, of devotion to an ideal, of heroic suffering. Even a Papageno, once his emotions are aroused, will risk his life to save a child.... If a fairy-story can

⁵¹Miller, "With Respect for her Agony; But with Love," Life, CVI (February 7, 1964), 66.

⁵²Ibid.

express some truth about the hidden forces of human nature, why should not a fairy opera express an even greater truth about the hidden forces of the human soul? ... The gods have decreed that Tamino and Pamina shall become man and wife--but only on condition that they triumph over the ordeals which every seeker after truth and wisdom must face.... The lovers accompanied by Papagano successfully overcome the ordeals and are welcomed into the temple of light.... Sarastro /Wisdom/enthroned in glory, greets the two young lovers who have at last conquered all obstacles and won the right to share in the highest and noblest forms of happiness...⁵³

After the Fall has not answered the problems that have bedeviled Miller and his world, but he has discovered that the questions worth asking are more complex than he earlier knew. Allan Lewis says that Miller, instead of imposing solutions, follows the scientific Principle of Indeterminacy; the playwright, observing despair, has likewise changed it, if only by raising it to our common consciousness. Like the Greeks, Miller surrounds his despair with an evocation of a better life, and if he does not know how to attain it specifically, he has the courage to go on seeking. At least, he has changed both himself and the audience by recognizing the problem. In After the Fall, Miller exposes his own anxiety as a revelation of mutual suffering with other men. He no longer feels he has a solution to the enigma of existence beyond question. Writing about conviction has brought Arthur Miller close to the loss of conviction, but he does have a humility before the vastness of the problems of life and the courage to keep seeking solutions. It is difficult to understand why some critics take an almost gleeful delight in condemning Miller for seeking moral values and have high praise and admiration for those who tear them down.⁵⁴

⁵³Eric Crozier, The Magic Flute: Mozart's Opera and How It Was Written (1965), pp. 14-56.

⁵⁴Allan Lewis, The Contemporary Theatre: The Significant Playwrights of Our Time (1962), p. 46.

Lewis points out that Miller's retreat from social causation into the intensely personal, making human nature responsible for evil and violence, is a failure to live up to his promise of relating man to the forces that surround him. Quentin, the contemporary man, remains Arthur Miller. In another sense, however, the play does rise beyond the personal, for the American man today is disturbed by inability to love or by the conflict between love and career.⁵⁵

Miller, apparently, does not feel at home with women. Only in After the Fall, in which five women add to Quentin's sense of confusion and helplessness, do women play major roles. Miller seems on much firmer ground in his male-centered dramas, and in Incident at Vichy, his most recent play, he uses an all male cast. Simultaneously, he seems to have regained his sense of direction and sureness of purpose. That he does not understand women completely does not mean that he censures them. Popkin and others have implied that Miller is Puritanical and considers sex as Evil.⁵⁶ This generalization is misleading. Miller condemns sex when it becomes an all-consuming passion to the exclusion of all else and illicit sex when it is a disruptive force to society, when, as in his family-centered dramas, it helps destroy the family unit.

Incident at Vichy⁵⁷ opened in December 1964 as the second play of the second season of the Lincoln Center Repertory Theatre and the second play by Arthur Miller to be presented in one year. Its theme is a reassuring sign of Miller's return to issues beyond the self. The strength of the play lies in its statement that the few who assume responsibility and act upon it can alter the course of history; they can assert the dignity of man.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 44.

⁵⁶Popkin, "Arthur Miller: The Strange Encounter," p. 57.

⁵⁷Arthur Miller, Incident at Vichy (1957), Bantam edition.

The one-act drama takes place in a detention room in Vichy, France, during the German occupation. A group of suspected Jews has been rounded up and is awaiting interrogation. The situation is typical of dramas in which men face a common danger and respond according to their different codes of self-preservation. The physical action consists of waiting and discussion of the situation while the victims, one by one, are called into the next room for interrogation, either to be found guilty of being a Jew or to be given a white slip which permits the bearer to pass the guards and return to the outside world. Lewis says that Miller fails to sustain the sense of terror present in the first few minutes by becoming completely involved in the dialectics of debate, that "drama becomes discussion."⁵⁸ Henry Hewes calls the play a "searching dramatic essay."⁵⁹ In defense of Miller, it may be said that forensic development of subject is one of the earmarks of classical drama. (See page 43.) And Henry James's "dramatization of consciousness" was not an entirely new technique. The Greeks had used it before James, and Miller is continuing the use of it.

The men in the detention room represent society, for they are from all social levels and occupational groups: the peasant, the worker, the aristocrat; the painter, the actor, the businessman, the military officer, the doctor, the landowner. As each considers with terror the best method to avert his own personal catastrophe, the problem imperceptibly moves to a consideration of what the group can do, and then by suggestion to the more universal sphere of How is man to live? How is man to live in a world of violence, bloodshed, cruelty, and brutality, a chaotic world of distorted mind and spirit? How is it possible that man with his much vaunted modern civilization and culture can stoop to immoral and depraved conduct unworthy

⁵⁸Lewis, Contemporary Theatre, p. 52.

⁵⁹Henry Hewes, review for Saturday Review, XXXXVII (December 19, 1964), 24.

of the dignity of man? The play is an attempt to answer these two questions.

It is perhaps significant for an interpretation of the play that of the nine men detained, three have some connection with the arts: the painter, an actor, and an amateur musician and patron of the arts, Von Berg, the Austrian Prince and patron of the arts, attempts to explain the German brutality by claiming that Nazism is an outburst of vulgarity, a lack of refinement. This remark brings forth a hoot of derision from the communist electrician who wants to know if the Prince left Austria because of the table manners. Von Berg answers:

Table manners, yes; and their adoration of dreadful art; and grocery clerks in uniform telling the orchestra what music it may not play. Vulgarity can be enough to send a man out of his country, yes, I think so.⁶⁰

Can 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?⁶¹

The actor has already asked himself this question with relation to his own problem. How, he wonders, can the Germans possibly torture him, subject him, a fellow human being, to every indignity and pain a maniacal brain is capable of inventing? It is unbelievable, impossible. The Germans have patronized the theater, have come to see him, have applauded his actor's art. How can they now persecute him? But the unbelievable is true. He therefore answers Von Berg's question by maintaining with a truth that the Prince is forced to accept that "no audience is as sensitive to the smallest nuance of a performance; they sit in a theatre with respect, like in a church. And nobody listens /sic/ to music like a German. Don't you think so? It's a passion with them."⁶²

⁶⁰ Miller, Incident at Vichy, p. 37.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 38.

⁶² Ibid.

These passages are significant for several reasons. They would seem to be a negation of Miller's former contention that a true love and appreciation of the arts brings about communication and understanding among people. In 1961, for instance, Miller expressed the belief that culture could play an important role in improving America's international relations. He said that both American exported movies and American tourists abroad too often display opulence (in other words suggest vulgarity in taste), and, by harping on what they have, declare a want of spirituality, a want of human feeling, a want of sympathy in the end. The rest of the world feels that the American's relative wealth insulates him, particularly from the stubborn problem of the meaning of existence, a meaning which must transcend the material. Miller said the American attitude toward culture needs to be revolutionized, and then, in return, America will gain the understanding of others.⁶³ Miller, as has been previously stated, believes, too, that the drama should be religious and serve as an instructor of man by exhibiting to him positive assertive action, the dignity of the individual, and the nobility of man.

In these opinions Miller shows himself to be a devotee of Greek ideas and ideals. The Greeks did not believe in an exclusive specialization; they wished to educate the whole man: a trained mind for right reason, athletic prowess for a healthy body, the dance for grace of movement, and music for refinement of the senses and gentleness of feeling. Art was never intended by the Greeks to form an insulation for the individual or to be stuck into its own little pigeonhole to be taken out occasionally for enjoyment. It was intended to be a part of the daily experience of the individual, making its contribution to him as a human being.

⁶³Arthur Miller, "The Playwright and the Atomic World," Tulane Drama Review, V (June 1961), 3-20.

That Miller has not negated his theory of the importance of the arts in developing human spirituality, feeling, and sympathy is perhaps suggested in the actor's statement that music for the Germans is a passion. The Greeks believed that the passions, emotions, feelings should be held in check by the intellect, thus keeping their due proportion. A true appreciation of the arts involves the intellect; a passion for an art suggests a delight carried to an extreme. Von Berg is convinced by the actor's reasoning because, in the Greek sense, he is still blind. Although his aesthetic sense is developed and he is thus a man who has a deep feeling of sympathy for his fellow-man, he is not yet a whole man: "Actually, I'm essentially a musician ... and politics has never ..." ⁶⁴

It is significant also that Von Berg, the aristocrat and patron of the arts, is the protagonist. He learns wisdom, not from his own suffering but from the suffering of others. Under the tutelage of Leduc, the Doctor of Psychiatry, a science devoted to making the mind whole and healthy, he becomes aware of his responsibility for what has happened, aware that although catastrophe is inevitable, he must act. Sympathy and understanding are not enough. When the Prince, who knows he will be released, offers friendship and sympathy, to his amazement he is rebuffed and accused of latent prejudice and complicity. Von Berg denies both and tells Leduc he had even thought of suicide as a protest against the Nazi monstrosity. Leduc answers:

It's not your guilt I want, it's your responsibility--that might have helped. Yes, if you had understood that Baron Kessler [a beloved cousin of Von Berg and a notorious Nazi] was in part, in some part, in some small and frightful part--doing your will. You might have done something then, with your standing, and your name and your decency, aside from shooting yourself! ⁶⁵

⁶⁴Miller, Incident at Vichy, p. 39.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 107.

Von Berg is horrified at the heretofore unrealized truth of the statement. Then he is called into the inner office, leaving only Leduc in the detention room. A few minutes later, he comes out with a white pass in his hand. He passes Leduc on his way out, then suddenly turns back and presses the pass into Leduc's hand. With an angry whisper, motioning him out, "Take it! Go!" The aristocrat sacrifices himself to save the doctor whose life is of more value than his, for the doctor is capable of actively fighting the Nazis. Von Berg has been right that there is vulgarity in the moral sphere as well as in manners and in aesthetic taste. He has been, through his shirking of responsibility and action, in a sense guilty of the former. His final sacrificial act denotes the aristocrat to have become the perfect gentleman: nobility of birth, with all that term connotes of refinement in manners and taste, and nobility of character.

Far from denying his theory of the mission of art, Miller has in Incident at Vichy merely placed art in its proper perspective in the total experience of man.

A noticeable change is, however, apparent in Miller's last two plays. His tragic heroes are not average men like Willy Loman, John Proctor, and Eddie Carbone. Quentin is an intellectual and Von Berg is of the nobility. Whether Miller has lost all hope of "little people's living up to big standards" and now relies on a "few decent individuals of integrity to stand between us and the end of everything"⁶⁶ remains to be seen.

That there are contradictions in his work in his restless search for truth, Miller is well aware, but he is not embarrassed by them or apologetic concerning them. He states his defense thus:

... a writer of any worth creates out of his total perception,

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 53.

the vaster part of which is subjective and not within his intellectual control.... The very impulse to write, I think, springs from an inner chaos crying for order, for meaning, and that meaning must be discovered in the process of writing or the work lies dead as it is finished.⁶⁷

Arthur Miller believes, as did the Greeks, (1) that life has meaning, (2) that not everything in life should be accepted as fixed and inevitable and that there exists an effective freedom of choice which resides in man himself, and (3) that if he is to use this freedom actually to move the world, if he is not merely to be moved by it, he must have some point outside the world of the physically and mentally determined on which to rest his lever. Krutch says that that fulcrum cannot be anything except "values" deliberately chosen. Thus, however limited human freedom may be, the freedom, if it exists at all, is unique, and, given a lever with which to operate, there is no guessing how powerful a force the free man may exert.⁶⁸

Belief in the reality of values and in man's ability to recognize and to establish them is, for Miller, a sine qua non for any world which is to remain what has previously been thought of as human. Other necessary things include intelligence and knowledge, and knowledge includes much that is known about science and technology. But neglect of the values can cause man to fail, failing even to the point of coming sometimes to doubt, as Quentin does in After the Fall, that we are good enough to survive or that our problems are solvable.

⁶⁷Miller, Plays, p. 37.

⁶⁸Krutch, Measure of Man, pp. 252-257.

Arthur Miller is not, as many of his critics make him out to be, an outmoded social idealist of the Thirties; he is an extremely honest, courageous, and intelligent artist very much aware of the disorder in both the spiritual and sociological spheres of the present era, an era unsurpassed in material wealth and achievement. The sense of doom in his work arises from the same divine background as does the feeling of foreboding in the dramas of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides; and it conveys the same knowledge; man must not defy the laws of the gods--defiance only leads to chaos--and his only hope of survival lies with his observance of the powerful and unbreakable ancient laws of humanity.

The form which Miller's vision forges for his drama is the same one forged by the Greeks; suffering can yield wisdom. Through the medium of powerful realistic drama, Miller (1) pulls into full view the problems and fears of Man, (2) examines them against a background of humane values in the cool light of controlled reason, and (3) shows man his share of the guilt for the creation of these problems and urges him to assume his share of the responsibility for their abolishment.

Miller is no mystic or romanticist; he is a serious, compassionate artist who, by the presentation of things as they are, ferrets the truth from a situation. He has no set panacea or sovereign remedy for man's ills; but, knowing that mankind's needs and desires are still basically the same as they were in Athens 500 B. C., he feels the same principles which helped bring about the Golden Age of Pericles can be applied today to help achieve universal unity and order in our rapidly shrinking world.⁶⁹

⁶⁹Miller, "Social Plays," pp. 1-15.

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