THE FUNCTIONS OF DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

IN DEATH OF A SALESMAN

A THESIS

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By

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PREFACE

Certain branches of scientific literary criticism have not advanced significantly in some two thousand years since Aristotle wrote his Poetics. Consequently, one result of the abundant critical activity carried on during recent centuries has been to consolidate his position as, one might say, the leader in the science. This is in many ways to the good, but one of its stultifying effects has been to give the dignity of aesthetic canon to statements which Aristotle himself may have intended as no more than scientific descriptions of the art forms prevalent in his society.

The particular Aristotelian-inspired concept which concerns us here has been held as tenet throughout Western drama up to the present time, despite recent disputations of it. It springs from Aristotle's description of the tragic figure as "highly renowned and prosperous" and "above the common level." The contemporary playwright Arthur Miller, whose work is the subject of this study, seems to be the most important current challenger of this traditional conception of the tragic hero, and it is quite possible that the weight of his drama puts his disputation

among the most significant thus far.

Neither a summary nor an evaluation of Miller's work is intended here. Rather, what purports to be simply an examination is made of Miller's basic dramatic theory and the particular form of Death of a Salesman--his most unconventional use of dramatic technique, which is at the same time the closest structural articulation of his theory. However, because such a restriction of subject necessarily obviates wider areas of study, an appendix which briefly indicates some of the literary influences upon Miller's work has been added.

By these means it may be discovered whether or not Miller has worked with a new conception of the tragic hero or tried to adapt the traditional one, and whether the dramatic form which springs most directly from his theory does in fact permit tragic scope.

This study has been disciplined by the direction of C. Carroll Hollis, present head of the University English Department. Its writer is also indebted to Professors Clyde P. Craine and Robert J. Kearns, S. J., who have made detailed suggestions as to its final form.

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CHAPTER I

ARTHUR MILLER'S THEORY OF TRAGEDY

Of Arthur Miller's five important plays Death of a Salesman, which is the most distinctive in form, has been most highly reputed. Brooks Atkinson, probably the best-known theatre critic in America, calls it a generally accepted tragic masterpiece.[1] However, there are several equally prominent and authoritative observers of the contemporary drama who believe that, significant as it may be, Salesman has not quite the stature of tragedy.

Professor Alan S. Downer, in his scholarly survey of twentieth-century American plays, makes the judgment: "For Americans, and for societies similarly organized, Death of a Salesman is tragedy. For other societies it is a lesser thing, a case history, perhaps."[2] His remark implies a socio-economic bias which no student can deny is present in this or any other of Miller's works--be it

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1 Foreword to New Voices in the American Theatre (New York, Modern Library, 1955), p. viii.

2 Fifty Years of American Drama 1900-1950 (Chicago, Regnery, 1951), p. 75.

a novel, short story, essay, or play. At the same time, it seems to point at the playwright's reverence for social and economic laws as limiting the scope of his drama. In this play a traveling salesman is the so-called hero of the action in which his near-insanity and eventual suicide seem to result from failure in his business. Can the break-up of an incompetent salesman be tragedy?

Before consideration of the tragic claims of this play, its relationship to Miller's aesthetic theory had best be ascertained by examination of his basic dramatic beliefs. Much of the playwright's theory is a development of his interest in man as a moral power. He conceives of tragedy primarily as a means of enlightenment, calling particular attention to the force of social causation in it. He re-interprets the Aristotelian tragic hero in the light of man's changed position in modern society.

A COMMITMENT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Of primary importance in the theory of Miller's tragedy is the fact that every play of his is literally built on his concern with a man's "commitment." He maintains that there is no human being who does not at least once during his lifetime give himself so thoroughly to some certain value, conflict, or challenge that he cannot bear to disengage himself from it. The instant of self-

dedication, to Miller, is "that moment when . . . a man differentiates himself from every other man, that moment when out of a sky full of stars he focuses on one star." For him as playwright the symbolic value of a character is determined by the nature of the man's commitment, and he uses dramatic form to the end that the character's involvement be discovered and clarified. The less capable a man is of renouncing his commitment, Miller believes, the closer he approaches a tragic existence.[3]

Actually, Miller's drama does not focus on the commitment for its own sake or for whatever dramatic value may lie in it. Rather, the man's engagement and its inevitable consequences are intended by their cause-and-effect relationship to make the audience aware of an invisible order in the world where previously there may have seemed to be none. It was Harold Clurman, the New York director and former leader of the Group Theatre movement, who first described Miller as a moralist,[4] and the playwright's subsequent statements of dramatic intention have proved him correct. Miller takes the end of drama to be the creation of a higher consciousness in the audience, a

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3 "Introduction," Arthur Miller's Collected Plays (New York, Viking, 1957), p. 7.

4 "Theatre: Attention!" NR, CXX (Feb. 28, 1949), p. 27.

heightened awareness of causation in the light of known but heretofore inexplicable effects.[5] It is to this purpose that he searches out a man's commitment, the central choice which puts him in his particular relationship to men and things.

In the same review of Death of a Salesman, Clurman characterized Miller's talent as being for "a kind of humanistic jurisprudence: he sticks to the facts of the case."[6] The playwright, apparently taking up Clurman's statement, has gone on to describe drama as being, in one sense, "a species of jurisprudence." Some part of a play, he says, must take the prosecutor's role, something else the defense, and the entirety must engage the Law.[7] He proceeds to try his man before an audience for transgression of an accepted social, moral, or economic code.

However, the awe which Miller sets out to provoke lies not so much in the commitment as in its unavoidable consequences. These visibly demonstrate for his audience the workings of the inner laws of the world. For him there is a compelling wonder in the fact that the consequences of an action are as real as the action itself;[8]

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5 "Introduction," p. 53.

6 Clurman, p. 27.

7 "Introduction," pp. 24-25.

8 Ibid., p. 18.

therefore the moral world which his plays insist upon is a world not as concerned with right and wrong as with cause and effect--what he calls "process" or "how things connect." His plays say, in effect, that an invisible order in the world becomes recognizable when a man brings into being the issue of a choice he has made.

Tragic enlightenment. It is this creation of a higher consciousness in the audience that Miller takes to be the distinguishing property of tragedy. Any drama which does not illuminate the ethical, in his opinion, can reach no higher than pathos:

> Let me put it this way. When Mr. B., while walking down the street, is struck on the head by a falling piano, the newspapers call this a tragedy. In fact, of course, this is only the pathetic end of Mr. B. Not only because of the accidental nature of the death; that is elementary. It is pathetic because it merely arouses our feelings of sympathy, sadness, and possibly of identification. . . .
>
> To my mind the essential difference, and the precise difference, between tragedy and pathos is that tragedy brings us not only sadness, sympathy, identification and even fear; it also, unlike pathos, brings us knowledge or enlightenment.
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> But what sort of knowledge? In the largest sense, it is knowledge pertaining to the right way of living in the world. The manner of Mr. B.'s death was not such as to illustrate any principle of living. In short, there was no illumination of the ethical in it.[9]

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9 "On the Nature of Tragedy," Death of a Salesman (Decca Records, DX-102).

Miller recalls having realized at the outset of work on his first important play, All My Sons, that what he had written up to that time--as well as almost every play he had ever seen--had been written for theatrical production "when it should have been written as a kind of testimony whose relevance far surpassed theatrics."[10] His testimony is of the inner laws of reality: what he calls the "invisible world of cause and effect, mysterious, full of surprises, implacable in its course."[11]

Miller conceives of any great writer as a "destroyer of chaos, a man privy to the councils of the hidden gods who administer the hidden laws that bind us all and destroy us if we do not know them."[12] Tragedy, to him, is in this sense a means--"the most perfect means we have of showing us who and what we are, and what we must be--or strive to become."[13]

Social causation. Together with his belief in an invisible order of things Miller holds the equally strong conviction that social and economic laws are part of its workings. He formed both of these assurances during the

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10 "Introduction," pp. 17-18.

11 "The Shadows of the Gods," Harper's, CCXVII (August, 1958), 37.

12 Ibid.

13 "On the Nature of Tragedy."

economic depression of the 'thirties, which impressed him then as "a reality which had been secretly accumulating its climax according to its hidden laws to explode illusion at the proper time." Afterwards he found himself thinking differently about the characters whom he met in books or saw on the stage. What do these people do for a living? he wondered. Where do they work? As he puts it, this is what he had been forced to realize:

> The hidden laws of fate lurked not only in the characters of people, but equally if not more imperiously in the world beyond the family parlor. Out there were the big gods, the ones whose disfavor could turn a proud and prosperous and dignified man into a frightened shell of a man whatever he thought of himself and whatever he decided or didn't decide to do.[14]

His conviction of an inner reality working according to its own hidden laws has led Miller to take up the defense of "social" plays. Every great drama, he believes, is "social" in the true meaning of the word. Despite the term's unpleasant connotations, which are due to its historically recent association with theatrical attacks upon the evils of society, the right conception of a social play seems to him to be the widest dramatic concept available to us thus far. He maintains that during the Greek classical period a drama presented for public performance

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14 "The Shadows of the Gods," p. 36.

had to be "social": to the Greek a play was by definition a dramatic consideration of the way men ought to live together.[15]

"Society" Miller conceives of as "a power and mystery of custom . . . inside the man and surrounding him, as the fish is in the sea and the sea inside the fish, his birthplace and burial ground, promise and threat."[16] He emphatically told a group of fellow playwrights, ". . . you cannot even create a truthfully drawn psychological entity on the stage until you understand his social relations and their power to make him what he is and to prevent him from being what he is not."[17]

This, however, is not to say that he would limit personal causation in the drama. On the contrary, he discredits the representation of any forces--be they social, economic, or psychological--which makes them seem to determine completely the characters' actions. He believes that realism has become caught up in the idea that man is the sum of external forces working upon him and psychological forces within him.[18] "Yet," he says, "an innate value,

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15 "On Social Plays," A View from the Bridge (New York, Viking, 1955), p. 1.

16 "Introduction," p. 30.

17 "The Shadows of the Gods," p. 39.

18 The extreme type of realism described here is commonly termed "naturalism" but, for whatever reason, Miller avoids the word.

an innate will, does in fact posit itself as real . . . because, however systematically accounted for, he is more than the sum of his stimuli and is unpredictable beyond a certain point." He maintains that, like a history, a drama which stops at the point of conditioning fails to reflect reality.[19]

Miller speaks for "an organic aesthetic," which he describes as "a tracking of impulse and causation from the individual to the world and back again."[20] A drama has stature and intensity in proportion to the weight of its application to all men, he says, and it gains this weight by dealing with the whole man, neither his subjective nor his social life alone.[21] Any play which fails either to realize the complete personalities of its characters or to engage its relevancy for the race he believes will issue not in tragedy but pathos, which he regards as opposed to dramatic effect.

THE TRAGIC HERO'S PRIDE

In order to rise above the merely pathetic, then, Miller believes that the hero of tragedy must be a wholly

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19 "Introduction," p. 54.

20 "The Shadows of the Gods," p. 43.

21 "On Social Plays," p. 4.

and intensely realized human being with all of the forces brought to bear upon him which do in real life influence a man in his position. Beyond this, he specifies that the hero must have a pride which approaches fanaticism--Miller's interpretation of what is traditionally known as the "tragic flaw." The flaw in the character, he says, "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." From this point of view, only those who accept their lot without active retaliation are "flawless"; and most people, he adds, are in that category. The tragic hero, unlike most of us, is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure his sense of personal dignity.[22] His pride is such that he will dare to break the known social law, the accepted mores of his people, to test and discover his and the law's necessity.[23] In this respect, Miller conceives of what Aristotle called hybris (the pride) and hamartia (the tragic flaw) of the tragic hero as one. His flaw, Miller says in effect, is pride.

The hero's social, intellectual, and moral rank

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22 "Tragedy and the Common Man," TA, XXXV (March, 1951), 48.

23 "On Social Plays," p. 8.

Miller considers in no way as relevant as the intensity with which he makes his commitment. Admittedly, he says, if a character were shown on the stage who went through ordinary actions and then was suddenly revealed to be the president of the United States, his actions immediately would assume a much greater magnitude and have possibilities of much greater meaning than if he were a neighborhood store-owner. However, as Miller goes on to say:

> . . . his stature as a hero is not so utterly dependent upon his rank that the corner grocer cannot outdistance him as a tragic figure--provided, of course, that the grocer's career engages the issues of, for instance, the survival of the race, the relationships of man to God--the questions, in short, whose answers define humanity and the right way to live . . .[24]

From Miller's point of view, then, the stature of a tragedy depends upon the scope of the law questioned by the hero. But the intensity with which he makes his challenge is also important.

As Miller sees it, what makes a character tragic--regardless of the man's personal traits, his awareness of what is happening to him, or his relative guilt in his own catastrophe--is the concentration of his emotion on the fixed point of his commitment:

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24 "Introduction," p. 32.

> It matters not at all whether a modern play concerns itself with a grocer or a president if the intensity of the hero's commitment to his course is less than the maximum possible. It matters not at all 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 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 but no living thing.[25]

Again, pride is the dominant force which he finds in the tragic figure.

Heroic stature. Consummate pride is Arthur Miller's measure of the hero's stature. Here he differs from a quite common belief in Aristotle's statement that a tragic hero should fall from the heights. Miller denies this Aristotelian convention--that the hero must be "widely renowned and prosperous" and "above the common level"--on the grounds that its originator lived in a slave society. "When a vast number of people are divested of alternatives, as slaves are," he says, "it is rather inevitable that one will not be able to imagine drama, let alone tragedy, as being possible for any but the higher ranks of society." He claims that social rank was a mere prerequisite for heroic stature in Greek times, for then only a

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25 "Introduction," p. 33.

person of wealth and distinction could have had open to him alternatives of sufficient magnitude to change materially the course of his life.[26] A modern man faced with weighty alternatives is, on the other hand, not necessarily above the common social level.

Miller claims that what strikes the spectators of a tragedy when they see its hero shake his world to its foundations is their own underlying fear of being displaced, of having their chosen images of themselves torn from them. He believes that in modern times it is the ordinary man who has most experience of this fear.[27] Consequently he chooses for his tragic hero a common man who is uncommonly devoted to his commitment.

Consciousness in the hero. Miller also would reinterpret the established Aristotelian tradition that the hero of tragedy should be conscious of his fall--a convention which Shakespearean tragedy entrenched by making its central figures not only aware of their situations but, in most cases, poetically articulate concerning their destinies, weaknesses, and mistakes.

"Complete consciousness," Miller insists, "is possible only in a play about forces, like Prometheus, but not

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26 "Introduction," p. 32.

27 "Tragedy and the Common Man," p. 48.

in a play about people." In his opinion, the hero need have only sufficient awareness of his situation to call up a surpassing degree of it in the audience. To prove maximum awareness unnecessary he cites Oedipus Rex:

> 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 for having cohabited with his mother since neither he nor anyone else knew she was his mother. He must surely decide to divorce her, provide for their children, firmly resolve to investigate the family background of his next wife . . . But he is conscious only up to a point, the point at which guilt begins. Now he is inconsolable and must tear out his eyes.[28]

It is enough, Miller believes, that the hero know how he has diverged from what is lawful--in what way he is guilty; he need not even have had conscious reasons for his transgression.

Some dramatic criticism seems to equate the hero's ability to verbalize his situation with his consciousness of it, which is, as Miller says, quite another thing.[29] A certain intellectual quickness in the hero and brilliance in his use of language are commonplace in poetic drama, but their being required of the ordinary man when he is the central figure of a prose tragedy may not be artistically correct.

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28 "Introduction," p. 35.

29 Ibid.

As with the hero's degree of consciousness, Miller believes that the amount of personal guilt in his destruction need not be great so long as he is wholly committed to whatever it is that causes him to break the law. Both Willy Loman in Miller's Death of a Salesman and Eddie Carbone in his more recent A View from the Bridge are men passionately dedicated to things which they will not consciously admit. If a protagonist's devotion to his course is obvious enough, Miller leaves hidden even the law which brings on the catastrophe. Under such circumstances both the hero and the audience still can perceive the workings of an unseen order in the ineluctable consequences which his commitment brings upon him.[30]

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30 Miller's testimony to this moral order is discussed as the major achievement of Death of a Salesman in Chapter V, pp. 38-44.

CHAPTER II

DRAMATIC STRUCTURE IN *DEATH OF A SALESMAN*

Though it is like Miller's other plays in its concern with its hero's commitment, *Death of a Salesman* stands still closer to his dramatic theory. This is because of its structure. The very form of the play--the irregular process of mind through which Willy Loman suffers during the last day of his life--is itself a result of the salesman's commitment to an unrealistic image of himself. As a consequence of pursuing for so many years the counterfeit dignity embodied in his idea of success, Willy now finds the truth about himself overwhelming in its accumulated force. As Miller puts it, he is "literally at that terrible moment when the voice of the past is no longer distant but quite as loud as the voice of the present." For this reason the structure of the play is a "mobile concurrency" of past and present, fantasy and biography.

In constructing this play Miller was absorbed by the concept that "nothing in life happens 'next' but that everything exists together and at the same time within us." There is no past to be "brought forward" in a human

being, the playwright says, but he is his past at every moment[1] and his present is "merely that which his past is capable of noticing and smelling and reacting to." Because his salesman-hero is in a peculiar psychological state which exactly exemplifies this relationship between past and present, Miller sought "a form which, in itself as a form, would literally be the process of Willy Loman's way of mind."[2]

When he combined expressionism with realism to create this form, he made an innovation in dramatic techniques. In his own belief, Salesman "broke the bonds of a long tradition of realism." Even as it did so, however, the play's approach was kept "consistently and rigorously subjective" so that it would not depart from its basically realistic style.[3]

REALISM AS DRAMATIC METHOD

As Miller sees it, realism is one of the two basic approaches to characterization found in all Western drama. He describes it as being designed to portray man in his relations with his fellow men rather than--as is heroic

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1 Ibsen's influence on this point of Miller's theory is discussed in the appendix, pp. 45-46.

2 "Introduction," pp. 23-24.

3 Ibid., p. 39.

characterization--his relationship to social and moral law. Whereas the heroic figure, Miller says, is primarily an exemplar of a moral or ethical principle at work upon men--as is true of the main figure in early Greek plays--the realistic character is created through the details of "his turns of speech, his peculiarities of dress, his personal habits--in other words, through those things that make him unique." His identity rests not so much on what he stands for as who he is. Rather than his career, the detail of his motives is emphasized. Miller believes that a playwright chooses this style when he decides that the private or family aspects of his hero's life, rather than the social or symbolic side, will predominate in a play. His own approach, he says, has varied from the realistic to the heroic in accordance with the relative proportion of psychological--as opposed to social--causation in each of his dramas.[4]

Miller remarks on the different treatment of time called for in each of these two basic styles. For heroic characterization a dramatist must compact time so as to emphasize "an element of existence which in life is not visible or ordinarily felt with equivalent power"--its symbolic meaning. Like a prosecuting attorney, he fastens

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4 Arthur Miller speaking on and reading from The Crucible and Death of a Salesman (Spoken Arts Records, Distinguished Playwright Series, 704), side 1.

only on those actions of the hero which are germane to the construction of his symbol. (Miller believes this to be the reason for the Greeks' imposition of the unity of time upon their drama--not that it was arbitrary but rather "a concomitant of the preponderant Greek interest in the fate and career of the hero rather than his private characteristics.") For a realistic style, on the other hand, a playwright creates a semblance of hours, months, and years during which the details shown are not clearly and avowedly germane to the play's symbolic meaning.[5]

In the light of Miller's distinctions between these two dramatic styles, the study of Death of a Salesman becomes more complex. Although he claims for the play a basic realism, it breaks the rules which he himself has set down for the realistic approach. As will be seen, Salesman does make a symbol of its hero; and Miller himself admits that its treatment of time "explodes the watch and the calendar." This dualism of technique results from his use of expressionistic elements to complement the psychological realism of the play.

EXPRESSIONIST TECHNIQUES

Before Willy Loman has been on stage for ten minutes the audience knows any number of realistic details about

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5 "Introduction," pp. 5-6.

his life: his age, his sales territory, what he likes to eat late at night, the car he drives, the neighborhood in which he lives, how he has been troubled with mind-wandering, his disappointment with his sons, etc. But the ensuing quarter-hour of the play gives another sort of detail: the exact progression of a memory which forces itself upon him at a particular moment that evening. In an easy change from the kitchen of his home to the forestage, he relives what happened almost twenty years ago when he had returned from a sales trip to be wildly greeted by his sons, then in their teens.

Miller introduces Salesman's expressionistic touches gradually. First there is the skeletal setting of the Loman home, then a flute leitmotiv for Willy, non-realistic lighting suggestive of the trees which formerly surrounded his home, free movement in time and space between one stage area and another, musical themes representing others of the important characters, and the stylized characterization of Willy's rich brother Ben. Episodes which have only a psychological reality are acted. At times memory crowds upon memory in his distracted mind: his thoughts shift from one incident to another, then back to the first.

But even as the play breaks the time and space limits of conventional realism, it opens to a greater psychological reality. It plays the agonies of Willy's collapse

against the pleasures and sorrows of his recollections, as John Mason Brown has observed:

> Mr. Miller is interested in more than the life and fate of his central character. His scene seems to be Willy Loman's mind and heart no less than his home. What we see might just as well be what Willy Loman thinks, feels, fears, or remembers as what we see him doing. This gives the play a double and successful exposure in time. It makes possible the constant fusion of what has been and what is. It also enables it to achieve a greater reality by having been freed from the fetters of realism.[6]

Miller, who claims to have been both attracted and repelled by the work of some unspecified post-World War I German expressionists, wanted to use their "marvelous shorthand" to deepen "humane, 'felt' characterizations" rather than create the highly stylized figures typical of expressionist plays. In Salesman he consciously used expressionist elements as such but always toward the making of a subjective truth, in the hope that his audience would not be touched by the coldness and objectivity of the technique.[7]

Perhaps Salesman's combination of theatrical styles was suggested to Miller by the work of Thornton Wilder. At any rate, he says of Wilder's Our Town what is perhaps equally true of others of his plays: that it opens a way

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6 Still Seeing Things (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1950), p. 200.

7 "Introduction," p. 39.

toward "the dramatization of the larger truths of existence while using the common materials of life."[8] Our Town is an essentially abstract play, however, and combines dramatic techniques for an emphasis opposite to that of Salesman. Where Wilder uses realistic touches to support the basic symbolism of his play, Miller creates a primarily realistic drama enforced by expressionistic elements.

It should be noted here that even as Salesman's form closely articulates Miller's concern with commitment and consequences, it is true to Willy Loman's psychology only during the period of his final breakdown. On the impossibility of grafting it onto a character whose psychology it does not reflect, Miller comments that it would be false to a more integrated personality to pretend that the past and present could be "so openly and vocally intertwined in his mind." For this reason Miller believes that borrowings of the form had to fail. He himself has not used it again.[9]

The playwright explains that Salesman has "no flashbacks"--a technique which he disdains as "an easy way to elicit anterior information in a play"--but rather is "a mobile concurrency of past and present . . . because in

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8 "The Family in Modern Drama," AM, CXCVII (April, 1956), 39.

9 "Introduction," p. 26.

his desperation to justify his life Willy Loman has destroyed the boundaries between now and then . . ."[10] As one reviewer observed, this form succeeds in overcoming the technical difficulties involved in presenting nostalgia on the stage:

> In an introspective age, if retrospection cannot be dramatized, i.e., acted, there is no excuse for the theater at all. Mr. Miller has accomplished it. He employs no past tense of speech; he employs no species of scene, nor any prismatic set of light clues.[11]

This technique also heightens the basic irony of the play by showing in related episodes of Willy's life the conflict between what Miller calls "the previously assumed and believed-in results of ordinary and accepted actions" and "their abrupt and unforeseen--but apparently logical--effects."[12]

Yet even as they give support to the psychological reality of his burdened mind, Salesman's expressionistic elements by their very nature work toward making Willy Loman a symbol.

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10 "Introduction," p. 26.

11 Kappo Phelan, "Death of a Salesman," Commonweal, XLIX (1949), 520.

12 "Introduction," p. 26.

CHAPTER III

WILLY LOMAN AS SYMBOL

Miller makes clear his belief in the innate symbolism of all serious drama. Every dramatic approach--including realism--he contends "must finally arrive at a meaning symbolic of the underlying action it has set forth." He admits that the idea of a symbol is not ordinarily associated with realism but insists that differences between dramatic techniques lie only in the various methods by which symbols are created.

To prove his point, Miller refers to the extreme realism of Ibsen's social plays. "After all," he asks, "at the time he wrote A Doll's House how many Norwegian or European women had slammed the door upon their hypocritical relations with their husbands?" Ibsen did not simply "report" life, Miller explains, but projected through his personal interpretation of common events what he saw as their concealed significance for society. In dramatic terms, what he did was create a symbol.[1]

The obvious inference from Miller's above-mentioned

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1 "The Family in Modern Drama," p. 35.

remarks is that Willy Loman means more than what he is. Grant that and we come to the question which has been argued since Salesman was first produced in 1949: Just what does Willy represent? Is his tragedy occupational or personal? Does he fail merely as salesman or also as human being?

THE SALESMAN AND PATHOS

If it were proved that Willy is essentially only a misfit salesman, the play by that very fact could be dismissed as pathos. As Miller himself states, the concept of the human being as something completely at the mercy of the various forces which besiege him--"a dumb animal moving through a preconstructed maze toward his inevitable sleep"--can never reach beyond the pathetic. "Tragedy comes when we are in the presence of a man who has missed accomplishing his joy," he says. "But the joy must be there, the promise of the right way of life must be there." Otherwise pathos reigns, creating an essentially untrue picture of man.[2]

Obviously Miller conceives of Willy as being committed to the law of business, which the play clearly presents as a suspect "good." But is Willy portrayed as helpless under its power? Usually the critical debate as to whether or

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2 "On the Nature of Tragedy."

not he is purely a victim of the competitive economic system subsides when the character of his helpful, sane, moderately successful neighbor Charley--who is also a salesman--is brought up. At the "requiem" Charley tries to make excuses for Willy on the grounds of his occupation: "A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory." But Charley's remarks in that scene, though they remain among the most quotable in the play, are given the lie by his own life.

Referring to Salesman as "some sort of pluralism," Joseph Wood Krutch insists that even while the play seems to be social determinism it is primarily "a study of the effects of moral weakness and irresponsibility." Willy is a victim of society, Krutch admits; but he is also a fool:

> He accepted an essentially vulgar and debased as well as a false system of values. He himself says, and the audience seems to be expected to believe him, that he might have led a happy life if he had followed his own bent and become, for example, a carpenter, instead of submitting to the prejudice which makes a salesman more respectable than a man who works with his hands. His tragic guilt--and it is his, not society's--was, in this view, a very old-fashioned one. He was not true to himself. Thus the moral of the play becomes a classical moral and must necessarily presume both the existence of the classical ego and the power to make a choice.[3]

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3 "Modernism" in Modern Drama (Ithaca, Cornell U. P., 1953), p. 125.

Gassner, who also sees the dichotomy of causation in the play, agrees that Miller has placed Willy's personal responsibility foremost:

> There is nothing in the play to indicate that Willy's choice of a career as a salesman was a social or economic necessity rather than truly a necessity of his nature or of his illusions, granted the existence of a milieu favorable to the latter. The dichotomy of Miller's presentation of Willy's plight is undoubtedly in the play. It is not necessarily a virtue, for it causes some confusion in our attitude toward Willy and in our perception of his situation. Yet the dichotomy is not necessarily as egregious a flaw in Death of a Salesman as some critics claim. The dichotomy is actually present in the life and destiny that Miller's Willy exemplifies.[4]

Krutch's reference to "pluralism" in the play helps to clarify Willy's dual position as victim and fool; but because Miller believes realism--the play's predominant stage technique--best suited to a portrayal of the private, family aspects of life, it seems that Willy's role as self-deluded man should take pre-eminence over his role as business failure. In fact, most reputable critics have concluded personal causation to be foremost in his destruction. More than sales competition, it is his delusion which puts him "way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine"; and the psychological condition

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4 The Theatre in Our Times (New York, Crown, 1954), p. 348.

resultant from his exaggerated pride is what causes him finally to lose his job.

Simply as a business failure, he perhaps would appear tragic only to those acquainted with strongly competitive economic systems. There is reasonable doubt, however, that the play could be considered a tragedy by anyone who overlooked Willy's more important failure as human being. When his personal responsibility for refusing to estimate himself sincerely is ignored, he becomes merely a victim of the American cant about success--a pathetic figure exploited by a society which has led him to expect more than it can give him.

TRAGEDY AND THE HUMAN BEING

Everything we know about Willy, however--and we do reach deep and intimate knowledge of him--points to the fact that he is, above all, a self-made dupe. His stated reasons for deciding that "selling was the greatest career a man could want," for instance, show him to have been an impossible dreamer from the beginning. When Miller is asked what Willy sells, he can only reply, "Himself";[5] in the very notion of Willy as salesman he sees an ironic symbolism, for the man obviously has been trying to purchase self-respect by expending it.

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5 "Introduction," p. 28.

But Willy's psychological state manifests the fact that reality can be stretched only so far. Miller says of him that it was never entirely possible for him to face the truth, and he cannot quite bring himself to do it even now, when he desperately wants to find some meaning to his life. To the playwright, what makes Willy heroic and tragic rather than simply foolish is this last agonized awareness of being in a false position. So constantly haunted by the hollowness of what he had believed in, "so aware . . . that he must somehow be filled in his spirit or fly apart," Willy gives his life to assert his significance.[6]

If this inflexible ideal is the source of Willy's tragic qualities, it also gives him his essential symbolic value. What Miller believes to be the basic impetus of any tragic hero--the supreme importance of his self-respect even when he must lie to himself to preserve it--is, structurally and otherwise, the main concern of this particular play. Probably every tragic hero is in some sense a symbol; but few take on that added meaning in as neat a dramatic structure as Salesman's, where the form of the play both reveals and results from his distortion of truth.

Salesman is primarily a study of the break-up of an ideal rather than of a man, however inevitably Willy's collapse will follow the disintegration of his self-image.

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6 "Introduction," pp. 34-35.

His existence has come to depend upon this conviction that he is his ideal--an indispensable, independent businessman greatly admired by his two successful sons. Symbolically speaking, he has become his delusion.

The play, says Louis Untermeyer, is "the dramatization of everyman's wish-fulfillment, his blind desire to succeed, even to conquer the world."[7] Herein lies a necessary breaking of the laws of reality by all men: their construction of the tenuous ideals of themselves which truth by its very nature has to destroy. Willy, who will give up his life rather than his chosen image of himself, symbolizes the fool in each of us.[8] By that very fact, he must go the way of the tragic hero.

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7 "About the Play," Death of a Salesman (Decca Records, DX-102).

8 The influence upon Miller of Dostoevski, whose preoccupation with the character of the "holy fool" may come to mind here, is discussed in the appendix, pp. 46-49.

CHAPTER IV

WILLY AS TRAGIC HERO

It is precisely because Willy has committed himself to a delusion that he departs from the traditional characteristics of a tragic hero. Even in a discussion of his personal qualities, however, the dramatic form of the play demands consideration; the fact that its structure is the process of his mind stands fundamental to an analysis of his stature as protagonist. For Willy's stage presence cannot be presumed to equal his characterization, as it would in a more conventional form of drama. He does not merely appear in the events on stage: much of the dramatic action occurs in his mind.[1]

His rich brother Ben, for instance, is less a person exterior to Willy than his alter ego, a personification of

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1 Miller has noted steps in the creation of Salesman which show his structural intention: The first image which occurred to him was of "an enormous face the height of the proscenium arch which would appear and then open up, and we would see the inside of a man's head." (Introduction," p. 23.) He planned it that "The play's eye was to revolve from within Willy's head, sweeping endlessly in all directions like a light on the sea, and nothing that formed in the distant mist was to be left uninvestigated." (p. 30.)

his dream of easy wealth. Just as Willy symbolizes the universal fool, his brother stands for the dream which dominates him. Throughout the play the audience catches glimpses of Willy's vision as it is personified in the stylized character of his brother. But Ben's dramatic function as Willy's dream-symbol, though it would seem obvious, has yet to be widely understood--as the still-recurring critical demand for increased insight in Willy shows.

Ben's is the only predominantly abstract characterization in Salesman. That in him Miller combined the two dramatic styles in a ratio opposite to that of the rest of the play indicates his distinctive symbolic function in the action. He is the only important character not physically present to Willy during the last day of his life, and so, like the rest of his brother's past, is on stage only as he exists psychologically to Willy. But he is the first person to whom Willy in his present distress applies to know "What's the answer?"; and in the end, as one critic explains, it is Ben's answer which Willy accepts:

> Ben "walked into the jungle and three years later came out with a million"; Ben shot off to Alaska to "get in on the ground floor"; Ben was never afraid of new territories, new faces, new smiles. In the end, Ben's last territory--Death--earns Willy Loman's family $20,000 insurance money, and a chance for them

> finally to accomplish his dream: a dream of which they have never been capable, in which they also can only be buried: the old "million" dream.[2]

Although Ben is in fact dead, the force of which he is a symbol exerts enough influence upon Willy to draw him to suicide.

TRAGIC INSIGHT

Out of a seemingly superficial understanding of Ben's symbolic function grows the prolonged critical demand for increased insight in Willy. Gassner, finding "a failure of tragic art" in the play, complains that not only does Willy never arrive at tragic insight but he even rejects that of his son Biff. Answering his own objection, however, the critic goes on to say:

> But could he have arrived at this insight, which amounts to realizing his (and Biff's) littleness, without losing the heroism--confused and morally intellectually limited though it be!--that gives him some stature? Willy, as characterized by Miller, is constitutionally incapable of giving up his dream. That is his tragedy.[3]

Since Ben--who symbolizes for his brother the unscrupulous accrual of wealth--is seen by the audience as exerting the

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2 Phelan, p. 520.

3 Gassner, p. 348.

pressure of Willy's dream, there seems to be no question of lack of audience-insight into Willy's motives. The complaint is rather that, as Biff says, Willy "never knew who he was" and, in fact, deliberately refused to recognize himself.

In the traditional theatre, increase of consciousness in the audience is implemented directly by the hero's awareness of his problem. Consideration of this play, however, forces a question as to whether insight in the hero is a dramatic end in itself or only insofar as it helps create awareness in the audience. Salesman all but denies self-knowledge to its hero, but its structural resources allow its audience detailed insight into even the lower levels of his mind.

Moreover, the very movement of Willy's attention--a frantic veering from present to past, memory to dream--reveals an intense consciousness in him which, though not very well articulated, is obviously the cause of his agony. Miller sees in Willy an "overly intensified" awareness that the life he has made is without inner meaning. If he really had been unaware of his separation from enduring values, Miller says, he would have died contentedly, perhaps while polishing his car on a Sunday afternoon while the ball game was coming over the radio:

> But he was agonized by his awareness of being in a false position, so constantly haunted by the hollowness of all he had placed his faith in, so aware, in short, that he must somehow be filled in his spirit or fly apart, that he staked his very life on the ultimate assertion.[4]

Miller agrees that if Willy had been able to know that he was "as much the victim of his beliefs as their defeated exemplar," he would have been a more conscious hero. But a necessary limitation of self-awareness in Willy, as in any other character, seems to Miller to be what defines him as a character; and he believes that it is this very limit which completes--and more than that, makes possible--the man's tragedy.[5]

ELOQUENT LANGUAGE

Related to the critical requirement of insight in the hero is the demand for brilliance in his use of language. Willy speaks a type of Brooklynese which Krutch, for example, judges "serves its purpose as well as the dialogue of a Dreiser novel, but . . . is also almost as undistinguished, as unpoetic, as unmemorable, and as unquotable."[6]

By his choice of realism as the basic style of this

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4 "Introduction," pp. 34-35.

5 Ibid., p. 35.

6 "Drama," Nation, CLXVIII (1949), 284.

drama, Miller had to more or less limit his characters to the type of speech generally used by people in their situation. It does not follow, however, that they were thereby kept from eloquence. As one reviewer remarks, Salesman fuses "the American language, the American scene, the Brooklyn accent, the Bronx cheer, all the muck and melancholy joke of our petty-class life" which he describes as having been "taken, shaken, rearranged, revitalized and somehow rehallowed into the stuff of a compelling, surging quasi-poetry."[7] Another critic believes that no other playwright in the theatre understands better than Miller "how to combine the poverty-stricken imagery, the broken rhythms and mindless repetitions, and the interminable cliches of illiterate speech into something that has a certain harsh and grotesque elegance."[8]

Miller, as we have seen, is primarily a moralist; and so the play can claim to be poetry "not of the senses or of the soul but of ethical conscience," as Clurman remarks, ". . . its style . . . like a clean accounting on the books of a wise but severe sage."[9] In composing it, Miller had made the resolution "not to write an unmeant word for the sake of the form but to make the form give

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7 Gilbert W. Gabriel, "Playgoing," TA, XXXIII (April, 1949), 15.

8 Woolcott Gibbs, "A View from the Bridge," NY, XXI (Oct. 8, 1955), 94.

9 Clurman, p. 27.

and stretch and contract for the sake of the thing to be said."[10] He seems to have meant it to be beautiful only insofar as it is true and wanted its power over the audience to issue primarily from the force of its moral truth.

10 "Introduction," p. 31.

CHAPTER V

THE MORAL FORCE OF THE PLAY

That Death of a Salesman does achieve considerable power over its audiences has been attested by critic after critic. John Mason Brown calls it "the most poignant statement of man as he must face himself to have come out of our theatre."[1] Clurman attributes its "tremendous import" to the fact that "it makes the audience recognize itself."[2] Perhaps the most significant question in a discussion of the play's dramatic form, however, is whether or not its structure contributes anything to this distinct moral force.

Downer observes: "By refusing to sacrifice the sense of conviction that accompanies realism, Miller retains the immediacy of a social document. This undoubtedly explains in part the stunning effect of the play upon its audiences."[3] In juridical terms--which recall Miller's

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1 Brown, p. 198.

2 Clurman, p. 26.

3 Downer, p. 75.

explaining drama as "a species of jurisprudence"--Gassner also attempts to locate the source of its power:

> All the discoveries in this drama are essentially self-discoveries by Willy Loman and the son he miseducated. Yet the play was charged with suspense, since Miller was trying a man for his faults and follies. The fact that Willy Loman shared these with a great many ordinary men, a fact that gave Death of a Salesman a good deal of its meaning, was not allowed to exempt him from judgment.[4]

And Clurman, in the same vein, says that the play "stirs us by its truth, the ineluctability of its evidence and judgment which permits no soft evasion. . . . We cry before it like children being chastised by an occasionally humorous, not unkindly but unswerving father."[5] Willy's agony of self-discovery, his gradual realization that he has made a commitment which by now is almost irrevocable, is somehow our own.

In large part, this immediacy is due to the psychological reality permitted by the play's structure. We are observing Willy inwardly as well as outwardly at every step. Possibly, as Downer has hinted, Miller's chief motive for using a basically realistic style was to allow the play this deep-reaching emotional force. In that case, his combining with the realism enough expressionism

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4 Gassner, p. 346.

5 Clurman, p. 27.

to show what happens in Willy's mind was probably meant to provide an equally deep intellectual penetration.

Willy's story undoubtedly would lose some of its impact if it were presented in any one dramatic style. In a piece of thorough realism, his past would have to be either hinted at in the present action or told by means of flashbacks; and neither treatment would reveal the ironic divergence between his delusions and reality as effectively as does the play's present contrapuntal form. It seems rather certain, too, that Willy as a simply realistic character would arouse no emotion save pity--since the fact that he has, so to speak, prepared his own trap would lose much of its appalling pertinacy if it were relegated to the dramatic past. But a thoroughly symbolic version of the play, on the other hand, would retain irony only at the expense of immediacy. There are many ways in which the story could be done in abstract form--even, for instance, as a ballet--but any one of them would allow it only the single dimension of the morality play.

Morality is, of course, Miller's fundamental concern in Salesman. That would be apparent even without his statement that he set out in this play not to "write a tragedy" but to show the truth as he saw it.[6] In giving

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6 "Introduction," p. 31.

his testimony to truth, however, he did create a tragedy classical in scheme and experimental in style: modern domestic drama raised to the power of world tragedy by the combined use of realism and expressionism.

Bourgeois tragedy. Ostensibly Death of a Salesman is domestic tragedy, a dramatic type which has developed since Renaissance times to become the predominant tragic genre of the modern theatre. It can be defined as serious prose drama dealing with the everyday conflicts of more or less commonplace people. Of late, as Miller has pointed out, this sort of play--like the novel, the foremost type of prose realism--has tended to give itself over to naturalism, to depict human lives as if they were determined by emotions, inherited dispositions, and prevailing social codes. As a consequence, domestic tragedy has come to be identified with pathos.

This, as we have seen, is one way of looking at Willy Loman. John Mason Brown, for instance, speaks of Salesman as the story of "a 'little man' who is sentenced to discover his smallness rather than a big man undone by his greatness."[7] But Oedipus, Lear, and other kingly heroes of tragedy can just as well be described as "sentenced to discover their smallness" and Willy "undone by his greatness." Oedipus, Lear, and Loman may seem to be strange

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7 Brown, p. 195.

companions, but they are alike both in their hybris--their exaggerated opinions of themselves--and their hamartia--fanatic resistance to any indignity which might make them appear small.

More than most critics would like to admit, Willy's story resembles that of Oedipus, the outstanding tragic hero of classical Greek drama. His problem, like the Theban king's, begins as "Who is responsible for this catastrophe?" and changes during the course of the play to "Who am I?" Like Oedipus he goes toward self-discovery fearfully, with a gradually increasing knowledge which he tries to conceal even from himself. In their respective dramatic situations both the American salesman and the Greek ruler are led to realize that their own seemingly acceptable actions have ruined their careers and unbalanced relationships within their families. The ironic contrast between the hero's pretensions and his limitations is exploited continuously in both plays.

Of course, there are differences between Oedipus and Willy, due primarily to the opposing styles of their tragedies and secondarily to the dissimilarity in their societies. Being an heroic character, Oedipus is not delineated in detail. Outside of the events by which he became ruler in Thebes, we know nothing of him personally except that he is proud, intelligent, and energetic.

About Willy, on the other hand, we know almost everything--the details of his mannerisms as well as his dreams.

As Miller has observed, the styles of characterization differ because social causation predominates in the Greek play and psychological causation in his own. It would be incorrect, however, to deny that Willy's society has been an influence upon his personal motives; for only in a competitive industrial economy could he have become what he is. This is the second point of contrast between his characterization and that of Oedipus: although both of their tragedies are possible only in their particular positions in society, the status of the Greek ruler is far more peculiar than Willy's. Whereas his success has been almost without peer, the salesman's is somewhat less than average. Were he not in a society which claims to offer equal opportunity to all, Willy would have fewer reasons to think so highly of himself.

The heroic downfall. Though it cannot be said that Willy's play is classical in style as well as in scheme, he is able to hold his own as an heroic figure. Like the kingly protagonists mentioned above, he too, after he has seen his folly bring suffering upon others as well as himself, takes on a rather misguided atonement for his guilt and achieves a sort of tragic victory in his death. His breakdown is in many ways that of a very big man. He has

a flaw which makes him foolish, but he is brave enough to question all society in his demand for what he conceives to be his rightful status.

What particularly shows Miller's artistry as a playwright is the expressionism he uses to give this extraordinary "common man" symbolic stature. For Willy could not have achieved his present significance in a purely realistic drama; his pride would seem unwarranted and his questionings amount to no more than the peevish clawings of an animal upon its cage. Miller had to make him much larger--and at the same time no larger--than life.

In Willy's course toward self-discovery, his memories and dreams function very much like the chorus in classical Greek drama--explaining, lending significance, and hinting at the truth about this man, notwithstanding what he says about his own motives and actions. Thus Miller gives to a modern experimental form a classic function: he uses expressionism to make of an ordinary man a tragic hero, to reveal his gradual tortured self-discovery, to point up the ironic contrast between his actions and their unexpected but logical outcome, and to provide a deeper realism than conventional dramatic form would have allowed.

APPENDIX

LITERARY INFLUENCES ON MILLER

Following Ibsen, most modern tragedians have continued in the style of stage realism and gradually diminished the number of affirmations which it is fashionable for dramatic characters to make. In Death of a Salesman, however, Miller has achieved heroic effect by both departing from the realistic and exposing the ineluctable workings of moral law. The play's experimental form differs significantly from even the disguised symbolism of Ibsen's later plays, and--as Krutch has emphasized--its moral necessarily presumes both the existence of conscience and the power to make a choice. Nevertheless, Miller's work is in the Ibsen tradition.

His close dramatic integration of the past and present, his awareness of "the process by which the present has become what it is," is very much like what he calls Ibsen's basic intention: "to assert nothing he had not proved, . . . to cling always to the marvelous spectacle of life forcing one event out of the jaws of the preceding one and to reveal its elemental consistencies with

surprise."[1] Besides this recognition of the "evolutionary quality of life," there is more in Ibsen's craftsmanship which Miller admires: his acceptance of the strength of social forces and the purity of his dramatic technique. He, Miller says, "could make a play as men make watches, precisely, intelligently, and telling not merely the minute and the hour but the age."[2] But it was "not because he wrote about problems, but because he was illuminating process," that the Norwegian dramatist spontaneously interested Miller. "Nothing in his plays exists for itself," Miller explains, "not a smart line, not a gesture that can be isolated."[3]

If we judge by his own statements, however, the chief influence upon his work has been neither Ibsen nor any other playwright but rather the novelist Dostoevski. He has often referred to The Brothers Karamazov as a book which changed his life. "I picked (it) up," he says, "I don't know how or why, and all at once believed I was born to be a writer":

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1 "Introduction," pp. 21-22.

2 Preface to Arthur Miller's adaptation of An Enemy of the People by Henrik Ibsen (New York, Viking, 1951), p. 12.

3 "The Shadows of the Gods," p. 37. An almost identical comment has been made about Miller's work by Gerald Weales in "Plays and Analysis," Commonweal, LXVI (July 12, 1957), 382.

> This was after I had graduated from high school, and was working in a warehouse on Tenth Avenue in Manhattan. On the subway to and from work I began reading, and concurrently saving my money to go to school, for our family fortunes had gone with the boom.[4]

Dostoevski's book, together with the national economic depression, occasioned Miller's belief in the hidden order of the world. The novel gave him no answers to his questions, he says, but it did show that he was not alone in asking them, since it "is always probing behind its particular scenes and characters for the hidden laws, for the place where the gods ruminate and decide, for the rock upon which one may stand without illusion, a free man."[5]

Some years afterwards, when Miller had written several prize-winning plays at the University of Michigan and gone on to do a Broadway "flop" called The Man Who Had All the Luck, the book again made a significant change in his life. He had always been "in love with wonder," he says, and in the play which failed he had tried to grasp it, "to make it on the stage." But wonder had betrayed him; and so he decided to take an opposite course, looking for "cause and effect, hard actions, facts, and the geometry of relationships," holding back any tendency to express an idea

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4 Twentieth Century Authors: First Supplement, ed. Stanley J. Kunitz (New York, Wilson, 1955), p. 669.

5 "The Shadows of the Gods," p. 37.

unless it were literally forced out of a character's mouth. Having again taken up The Brothers Karamazov, he had found on its most colorful pages the thickest concentration of definite facts and consequently came to realize that his play had failed because of his having felt too much and understood too little. He determined to try one more play and, if it too turned out to be impracticable, go into another line of work. During the ensuing two years he wrote his first success, All My Sons.[6]

Probably the characteristic in which he most resembles the Russian novelist is his intense interest in character. Even this early in Miller's career John Mason Brown noted as chief among the virtues of All My Sons "a blazing emotionalism." Brown could easily have been writing about Dostoevski when he said, "Although Mr. Miller's climaxes are angry and anguishing, their power comes from quite another source than his willingness to let his characters shout. Long before his people explode, their inner tensions make themselves felt."[8] Another critic finds that Miller's dramatic power lies precisely in this "understanding of and compassion for human beings in their most

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6 "Introduction," pp. 14-15.

7 Twentieth Century Authors, p. 670.

8 "New Talents and Arthur Miller," SRL, XXXII (Feb. 26, 1947), 23.

personal relationships--with the members of their family or with themselves," adding that "Miller knows how to show two people working to hurt one another when the genuine impulse of each is to offer love."[9] Before he created the particular structure of Death of a Salesman, Miller had declared his irritation with the many people who were then talking about new form: "This to me is an evasion of the problem of playwriting, which is a revelation of human motives regardless of form."[10] The fact that he went on to make an innovation in dramatic technique must not be taken to mean that he came to place characterization second, since--as we have seen--Salesman's structure cannot exist apart from its hero's peculiar psychological state.

When Miller said a few years ago that his aim has always been "to bring to the stage the thickness, awareness, and complexity of the novel,"[11] he undoubtedly had Dostoevski's work in mind. Perhaps someone eventually will do a comparative study of the two writers--or of The Brothers Karamazov and Salesman--and find further parallels in their works.

The third literary figure whom Miller has especially

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9 Gerald Weales, "Plays and Analysis," Commonweal, LXVI (July 12, 1957), 382.

10 Virginia Stevens, "Seven Young Broadway Artists," TA, XXXI (June, 1947), 56.

11 Twentieth Century Authors, p. 670.

cited as having influenced his artistic theory is Chekhov, whom he admires principally for his dramatic balance. He points out that, although Chekhov's overwhelming interest was in the spiritual lives of his characters, his plays are not "mere exercises in psychology." The informing principle of every one of them is a very critical point of view, not only toward the characters but toward the social context in which they live.[12] We remember Miller's defining an organic aesthetic as "a tracking of impulse and causation from the individual to the world and back again."[13] To him balance is all; and he believes that any play which does not counterpoise social forces with psychological causation must by that very fact fail to achieve symbolic stature.

A student of any one of Miller's plays will find in it something reminiscent of each of these writers: Ibsen's sense of the past as a determining factor in the moment of the present, Dostoevski's elevation of personal conflict from the psychological to the moral level, and Chekhov's integration of psychological and social forces as they work upon human life. The evidence of these influences again suggests the traditionalism in Miller's modernity: his study of timeless morality as it asserts

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12 "The Shadows of the Gods," p. 39.

13 Ibid., p. 43.

itself in contemporary society, with man's ideals and impulses springing out sometimes with and sometimes against the currents of social acceptance.

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